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SERBIAN SOCIETY AND GUN CULTURE

Srpsko društvo i „kultura oružja"

APSTRAKT *Ovaj tekst istražuje da li je „kultura oružja" jedna od karakteristika srpskog društva. Prvi deo rada obrađuje neke teorijske pristupe i bliže predstavlja šta se podrazumeva pod pojmom „kultura oružja". Analizirano je nekoliko različitih pristupa ovom pitanju. Koncept korišćen u radu sadrži tri osnovne komponente kulture oružja: sistem pozitivnih verovanja; socijalni simboli otelovljeni u oružju; agenti nosioci kulture oružja. Drugi deo papira predočava rezultate iz istraživanja o malom i lakom naoružanju, sprovedenom 2004 u Srbiji. Rezultati su analizirani prema teorijskom okviru predloženom u prvom delu rada.*
KLJUČNE REČI *kultura oružja, nasilje, srpska kultura, stavovi prema oružju, malo i lako SALW*

ABSTRACT *This paper questions whether one characteristic of Serbian society is a gun culture. The first part of the paper deals with some theoretical concerns and closer explanation of what is understood by the term gun culture. Few different approaches to the issue are analyzed. The concept used has three main components of the gun culture: system of positive beliefs; social symbols embodied by the gun; agent 'bearers' of gun culture. The second part of the paper presents results from Small Arms and Light Weapons survey conducted in 2004 in Serbia. The results were analysed within the theoretical framework proposed in the first part of the paper.*
KEY WORDS *gun culture, violence, Serbian culture, attitudes toward guns, SALW*

Part of the legacy of the most recent Balkan wars occurring at the end of the twentieth century, that steered the beginning of Yugoslav transition and it's later flow, thus differentiating it from the post-communist transition of other Eastern European countries, was armed conflict with all the attributes this kind of conflict carries: proliferation of arms, media propaganda, suspension of many cultural values societies held in peace time, not to mention immeasurable loss in terms of lives and property, etc. A cynical observer of those events could say that the war was bound to happen, it was a potential awaiting materialisation, bearing in mind the violent past

and present nature of Yugoslav people. However, not all republics were affected, or involved in the conflicts to the same extent, and only Serbia was involved in every one of them, including the last one, the conflict with NATO. This exceptional situation leads us to one major question: what were underlying factors that led events in Serbia[1] to such a violent outcome? It would be naïve to believe that this can be explained with one or two major factors, since political, economic and social processes in transition countries involve usually very complex interplay between different actors, intentions, actions and circumstances beyond anyone's control. In addition, these processes, even when they do not involve armed conflicts, are often very volatile and unpredictable. Even though brief and general, this introduction gives broad context which led to circumstances and outcomes I will be dealing with in the following paragraphs.

However, in this paper I attempt to investigate further one factor in particular that may have contributed to violence in Serbia, namely the cultural aspects of SALW[2] related issues in Serbian society more than a decade after the break up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The main source of data used in this paper is a household survey conducted across the territory of the republic of Serbia (excluding Kosovo) in summer 2004[3]. There are certain limits to the findings and conclusions of this survey since the questionnaire was not designed primarily for thorough analysis but for preliminary informational feedback on the pre-detected problems. As a result, many of the findings should be taken mainly as indicators and input for potential further research, and not as definitive.

The main question I tried to answer is to what extent the proliferation[4] of arms and arms-related violent behaviour during nineties was facilitated or helped by the existence of specific cultural characteristics or models which favoured SALW in any way, and to which extent they are present in Serbian culture now. Hence, the first part of the paper presents some theoretical concerns related to what often is called 'gun culture' in an attempt to clarify what we are actually looking for, and what is meant by the term gun culture. The second part of the paper presents some findings

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[1] Even though this paper deals with the situation in Serbia, the discussion and some conclusions are also relevant to other former Yugoslav republics, taking into consideration 70 years of common history and shared cultural traits.

[2] Small Arms and Light Weapons.

[3] The research was conducted by Saferworld and Strategic Marketing subcontracted by UNDP for conducting a SALW Survey of the SALW Situation in the Republic of Serbia. Between June and October 2004 the research included a household survey, focus groups, key informant interviews, media coverage analysis, and desk review.

[4] 1,056,314 pieces of registered firearms in civilian possession and 46,986 pieces in possession of legal entities and security companies, MUP Register of Firearms; Illegal civilian possession is estimated to more than 900.000 pieces.

of the research and draws conclusions about the relation of culture to the presence and use of SALW in Serbia.

It is a truism to say that Serbian (and as well broader Yugoslav) society did not have effective conflict resolution mechanisms to help the process of partition of the state – if these had existed the extent of damage resulting from the conflicts would not be so grave.

Gun Culture, Culture of Violence, Social Context

The term 'gun culture' is most often used as a vague concept to describe cultural elements that for any reason or purpose favour presence, possession or use of guns among groups or communities within a population. Most often, it is used to describe positive attitudes towards firearms. However, not all approaches to the issue have incorporated a positive valuation of SALW by a culture. In addition, another closely related concept or term often used alongside the term gun culture is a 'culture of violence,' which may or may not be relevant for positive SALW attitudes. "On a basic level, gun culture can be defined as the widespread acceptability within a society of the use and possession of firearms. Such a 'gun culture' may or may not be based on traditional use and possession of firearms, but where such historical traditions exist they may provide a reference point which can make the trend seem more acceptable or explicable. It is important to make a distinction between 'gun culture' and a 'culture of violence'. While there may indeed be an overlap between the two, in many societies which are described as having a 'gun culture', the use of such weapons for violent purposes is strictly forbidden. A good example of this is provided by Finland, where a population of 5 million possesses about 1.5 million firearms, yet the crime rate is very low." (Saferworld and BICC, 2003: 39) A footnote of the same publication provides a further definition: "Dr Sami Faltas defines gun culture as a system of values and beliefs in which the availability and possession of firearms is considered appropriate and commonplace. (ibid.) While the first definition is more precise in terms of the aspects of gun culture that could be characterized as passive (possession) and active (use), the second is limited to only passive aspects but formulates gun culture as a system of values and beliefs. In that way it relates guns to other aspects of culture and values which can exist without guns as instruments which when used, help to perpetuate these specific cultural models. For example, in some cultures guns are symbols of masculinity, but in others are not, as shown by research among U.K. and U.S. women with a male control group included. "The same tendency was true of the ATGS[5] findings, in which the gender effects in the U.S. sample were not

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[5] Attitude to Guns Scale by N. R. Branscombe, J. A. Weir, & P. Crosby

matched by similar gender effects within the U.K. sample – that is, the preference for guns attributable to masculinity in the U.S. sample did not appear in the U.K. sample." (Cooke, Puddifoot, 2000) These findings also show that in some or even many cases the differences between national cultures are much more significant than those between genders within national cultures.

However, there is another approach to the problem which is basically characterized by acknowledgment of a gun culture as a broad spectrum which on both ends presents attitudes that are in direct opposition on the issue of regulation of gun ownership, use, and rights. "We consider the gun culture to include people who view guns as a significant part of American life, both those who support the right to possess firearms and oppose government interference in this right, and those who wish to restrict firearm ownership and use. However, the term is not dichotomous; there are instead many positions along the continuum, and boundaries are indistinct. Nonetheless, we shall speak of the 'pro gun' and 'pro control' forces, as their supporters do, realizing that doing so may obscure more subtle differences in beliefs. (Utter,True, 2000) A further note reveals another important aspect of this approach: "…each of these groups regards itself as representing the mainstream of American politics and as having authentic historical and mythic ties to the core values of early American society." (Ibid.) In addition to what can be called the 'technical aspects' of gun culture the authors here point to another important thing, namely, efforts to present history in a particular way, in order that it provides historical legitimacy to contemporary advocates of specific ideas, framing those cultural values in the context of tradition.

This traditional aspect is very interesting when we look at the Serbian case, showing that it is not particular only to the US, even though the situation in these tow have nothing in common. Serbian political establishment being faced with lack of legitimisation was forced to search for mechanisms to compensate for this lack and homogenize population behind common politics of the ruling party. Mythologization was used to establish the party and its politics as historically embedded and grounded in an epic historical role of the party (Brankovic, 1999). Drawing from its epic and just past (where Serbia was often depicted as defender of good against evil in an eternal struggle between good and evil, and where Serbs were presented as good warriors throughout history) new historical mission was to secure continuity into the future. To that aim, Serbian media had to be put into use and controlled to prevent any dissonant messages that could question, compromise or present an alternative to these myths. Extending even further this picture of the warrior was used to create modern myths for everyday use with certain characters from urban and especially suburban environments.[6]

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[6] 'Tough guys' was a term often used in Serbia during the nineties to describe people from criminal circles whose *credo* could be described as: live fast and intensively, grab whatever you can, because

However, the division on pro gun and pro control forces seem to be somewhat ambiguous or confusing since it assumes that if someone is in favour of control they are against weapons *per se*. The division obviously blends together issues of the desired level of weapons control with positive and negative attitudes and feelings towards guns, resulting in a blurred and indiscriminative analytical tool for research on gun culture. Even those with pro-gun attitudes can believe that ownership requires a high degree of regulation. Those with negative gun attitudes can believe that there is no need to control the possession and use of guns, because no gun is desirable in a society, or, only a necessary minimum of people should be allowed to possess it, and these people should be trusted for self-control and judgement for using guns, since there are laws which set the context for gun use or display[7]. In addition, this approach also excludes people or groups who have no opinion on the issue, whether this lack of opinion is a result of the inexistence of guns in their environment or simply because gun-related issues are very low on their priority ladders or out of their perception for whatever reason. Even though this approach may not be directly relevant for Serbian case, it still has conceptual and theoretical value for the paper.

A key question is whether a gun has instrumental value, such as for hunting, protection, or simply fun, or has also intrinsic values which a gun carrier adds to their own characteristics or descriptors as constituents of personal identity. "Gun culture is the cultural acceptance of gun ownership in situations where the principal motivation or justification for it is not for utilitarian or economic reasons but because their society has a set of values and norms that deem it acceptable behaviour. A simple example would be when a man carries a gun, primarily not for hunting or for protection, but because his 'culture' interprets his behaviour as a sign of masculinity and status" (SEESAC, 2006:1). 'Gang' cultures are a good illustration for this, where gang names, such as for example 'Daggers' or similar present a weapon as one of the main constituents of a group identity. An individual's skills in using a weapon can earn him or her respect and a better position on hierarchy ladder within the group, and represents one of the mechanisms for social promotion within a group. The tendency to ascribe or acquire personal characteristics and define our identity through objects we buy or use is quite common in today's pop culture and one of the most blatant examples is the MTV 'Pimp My Ride' show, where young persons whose car has been 'pimped' often comment that the new style adds up to their personality, or changes it, or simply

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you may die tomorrow. Guns and violence, expensive cars, money and young girls were trade mark of these characters.

[7] A robbery or a murder are criminal acts regardless of whether they involve guns use or not, as well as public display and threats are the same in their essence regardless of 'instruments' used. What I argue for here is the fact that guns may be regulated as any other dangerous objects such as guns for example hence; there is no need for separate gun regulation.

brings it to another level. This case of media-promoted creation of personal identities, or at least of some of important personal traits, through external objects can explain some aspects of gun-related behaviour in the Serbian case, to which I will come later.

As with many other parts of a cultural complex, gun culture is not an independent and self-sufficient set of values and attitudes, but rather a component embedded in a broader socio-cultural complex. Any particular facet of this broader context can be very important since it can define, prescribe and evaluate gun possession and use in relation to individuals. In many societies specific cultural elements prescribe the presence and role of SALW in such a way that guns are closely tied to bigger organizations or collective institutions, and fully prohibited outside of these. This is the case with police, army or security and protection services. For example, SALW are often treated more as instruments to achieve some other goals, such as protection or peacekeeping, than they are valued by themselves. Within these organizations though, guns may have additional attributes that are not merely instrumental and can support part of group identity, but from the outside, broader society may only see the guns' instrumental values. Furthermore, possession and use of guns by individuals can be legally or socially prohibited and sanctioned, which in some cases may even have stronger consequences. In this case SALW are positioned as functional and relevant in a collective social context, and as dysfunctional and irrelevant for an individual. Hence, discussion about gun culture would not be complete without taking into account the institutional embeddedness of SALW-related set of cultural elements.

To summarize this discussion about the term 'gun culture,' there are a few elements that should be included in the description of the phenomenon. Firstly, discussion about gun culture should be based on the observed presence of a system of beliefs, values and attitudes that prescribe rules defining accessibility to, possession and use of guns. It is justifiable to assume that the term gun culture represents a particular positive approach to guns, meaning that beyond certain limits to use or availability, guns are ultimately considered, by the members of a group, to have a positive function in a society or parts of a society. Secondly, which gives more substance to the above mentioned definition, is the symbolic value that a gun carries in addition to its obvious functional role (such as for example protection, hunting or fun). Often, guns are symbols of masculinity and serve to define gender roles. Finally, regarding the primary social agents that are carriers of gun culture, we can distinguish between individual and collective agents. The way gun culture is institutionalized, formally, or informally as a part of social customs may have a significant effect in situations of considerable social changes or transitional

processes[8]. These three elements – system of positive beliefs – social symbols embodied by the gun – agent 'bearers' of gun culture – are used in this paper to analyze the findings of the research conducted in 2004.

Gun culture is normally of interest to researchers, policy makers and other professionals working in post-conflict or conflict-burdened societies that embrace violence, or more precisely social and cultural propensity to violent behaviour. Specific gun culture in such settings is one of the manifestations of a culture of violence which 'is expressed as real or imagined action, with words or without words, with physical exertion, with damage caused to ourselves or others, in ways society or community approve or not, where the victim is aware or is not'. (Shelling, in Kokovic: 2001). As forms of violence vary, it is logical to assume that under different circumstances and over time one form of violence can transform or shift to another, non-physical to physical for example, changing the way of its manifestation depending on political, social, or other circumstances, sanctioning positively or negatively violent behaviour directed at the subject of violence, whether this is other groups or persons belonging to those groups, or just random individuals in situations where violent behaviour is a part of communication practice within a group. Although the roots of violence can be argued to lie partly in human nature as a biological predisposition, it seems that much more important are the 'historically structured socio-cultural frameworks of one's life and action' (Tripkovic: 2001).

What significance does the above mentioned have for the case of Serbia? The period after the Second World War was very turbulent in terms of social and cultural changes. "Post war urbanization and internal migrations brought together people from geographically different areas and from different cultural backgrounds. However, lack of knowledge on the side of planning authorities resulted in problems that became to visible only in the nineties. 'Precisely the fact that our cities were expanding in uncontrolled manner, and that economic and structural planning was not paying sufficient attention to that fact, it happened that transition period begun with a large number of unassimilated and maladjusted, unemployed, and people that were unable to cope with turbulent times. However, this itself is not sufficient lead for the claim that certain political, economic, or broader social circumstances 'produced' an individual which is ready to pursue aggressive behaviour, to the extent of violence" (Pusic, 2001: 74).' The same author mentions some of the origins of violence including "existential disorientation, breakdown of system of

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[8] It is not unreasonable to assume that if gun culture in Serbia (or even in Yugoslavia) was institutionally tied to individuals rather than to collectives, the consequences of the conflicts would not be so grave. The rationale behind this hypothesis is that bearers of gun culture, the army, the police, territorial defence, become compromised or collapsed, which opened the way for redefinition of gun culture on a completely different level. Individual agent bearers of the gun culture would presumably have been much less affected. Unfortunately, I was not able to prove or disapprove this thesis from the findings of the research.

values, social anomies, sub-cultural models, collective behaviour and mass psychosis, etc." In what used to be one country civil war broke out, in an addition to the mentioned existing origins of violence, and Serbia was only one of the involved parties in the conflicts. In addition to this, there is significant evidence that a specific culture of violence was promoted by the authorities, mainly through the media, in order to maintain the mobilisation level necessary for war. This role of the state was not unique for the Serbian case or unknown in practice: "The state creates situation in which it has monopoly over violence, and in the case of war there is a program of socialization which has the role to prepare for war, as was situation in Germany before the Second World War (Kron: 2001)."[9] This observation sheds specific light on the gun culture in Serbia which was evident even in the former Yugoslavia, but which had a significantly different meaning and social and cultural role. Gun culture at that time was connected with the anti-fascist struggle and socialist order, but on an individual level had little importance in terms of social promotion outside of legal and formal institutions (war heroes, army officers and police were the selected few whose professional and social promotion depended in a way on arms and weapons). In such a setting gun culture did not have a destructive role because it was embedded in broader structure which controlled manifestations and use of guns. The break down of that system and with it the structures that were prescribing the use of guns opened the way for redefining the role of SALW in the life and daily practice of citizens, paving the way for a destructive potential to develop.

Since gun culture does not carry negative connotation *per se*, it can actually impose strict rules and prevent gun use, we should look for other circumstances that could result in practice involving guns use in a harmful and destructive way. It can be said that in the case of Serbia gun culture would not present a problem or a threat if it was not accompanied and supported by culture of violence. The main question is: does the majority of the population of Serbia succumb to the models of aggressive behaviour which rely on gun culture, or did the relative social success of aggressive, and previously marginalized social groups, managed to impose itself as a standard for majority? The answer to this question would have to be derived from the observed existence or non-existence of cultural elements, values, beliefs and attitudes that are characteristic for gun culture. Another related question would be: what are the indicators that would give us answers?

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[9] For more on this kind of socialization in the former Yugoslavia and the role of media in the war see Mark Thompson's book Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Results

The first challenge in interpretation of data was organization of, to a large extent, impressionistic information gathered by the survey. The most general findings are grouped in five broad categories in order to set the interpretative context. Even though the questionnaire was designed to cover these broad categories some of the questions within the categories had to be left out due to lack of explanatory role within this framework. Following are the categories:

perception about the most important social problems

trust in institutions

perception of safety

personal experience with guns

attitudes towards guns

1. Perceptions of the most important social problems

The main purpose of the research was to collect data that would help UNDP to formulate SALW country policy, with one focus being on public perception and individual experiences and opinion of Serbian citizens. We were interested in the relative importance of SALW-related problems as seen through citizens' eyes. However, among the most important problems SALW-related issues appear to be below the threshold of perception of the average Serbian citizen. The most important problems were: unemployment 73%, low incomes 54%, poor facilities for youth 33%, corruption 28% (respondents were allowed to give more than one answer, percents presented are cumulative results of the total number of respondents who mentioned a specific problem). Only 11 respondents mentioned crime as an important problem that they face living in Serbia, which does not have to mean that respondents were victims of crime or have witnessed crime. It may rather mean that respondents perceive crime as a result of some other, for example economic or social circumstances which if changed would affect the crime rate, or, on the other hand that crime related problems are within the boundaries of acceptable or reasonable. As the most frequent crimes respondents point to: fights 48%, burglary 41%, drunken disorder 33%, drug distribution 20%. Among these four most frequently mentioned, only two are intended to bring material gain to perpetrators, and the other two, 'drunken disorder' and 'fights' are rather on the level of excess than on premeditated crime (although, in the case of 'fights' this may not be always the case, especially when it comes to revenge). In addition to this, when specifically asked if availability or use of firearms is a major concern in the place they live only

10% strongly agree, and a further 20% somewhat agree with the statement. What is possible to conclude from these results is that Serbian citizens are predominantly concerned with economic issues and opportunities for their families and offspring. Threats posed by guns become important only when people are specifically asked about them. However, there was not sufficient amount of information to interpret this occurrence in a satisfactory way. Having in mind that 92% of respondents perceive their economic status as average to poor, and only 7% above average, with only 8 rich respondents (out of the sample 1641 large), there is also a possibility that firearms problems are somewhat underestimated or unseen by people whose perception is affected by economic hardship.

2. Trust in institutions

As a broader social setting trust in institutions is important as an explanatory factor to people's assessments and attitudes that also affect actions. On local level, within communities the most respected individuals are business leaders with 32%, followed by older citizens with 22%, and religious leaders with 12%. This result corresponds to the assessment of the most important problems being of an economic nature, saying, in other words, that persons who are the most respected are those who may be able to create jobs and incomes.

How much trust you have in institutions?

Distribution is given in percents.	police	local politicians	local government	army	gendarmerie	citizens	courts	media	republic government
Do not trust at all	11	29	23	5	10	6	23	17	20
Mainly do not trust	17	23	22	9	10	11	23	21	21
Cannot tell	33	27	31	22	21	26	27	35	33
Mainly trust	23	10	14	29	20	29	14	17	13
Trust completely	14	5	7	29	17	23	6	6	6
N/A	2	6	4	6	22	5	7	5	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

As it is evident from the table Serbian citizens predominantly have no trust in institutions. The only two institutions which citizens trust to are the church (which is not in the table) and the army. However, this survey was conducted before the event in one of military facilities where two soldiers were found dead, and the circumstances under which they died remained unclear, which seriously damaged reputation of the army. It seems that nowadays only the church has positive reputation, or is trusted by citizens (see for example SMMRI omnibus public opinion poll from April 2006 that can be found at: http://www.smmri.co.yu/code/navigate.asp?Id=62). In general, Serbian society is characterized with very low level of trust in formal and official institutions, which has significant implications on public support for any potential action or initiative that would involve citizens and official institutions. Genuine support for the authorities and their activities can be expected from relatively slim part of the population.

3. Perception of safety

The issue of respondents' perception of safety was covered with several questions which seem to provide quite well picture about citizens' feelings regarding the issue. Even 87% of respondents feel safe working and living in their communities, and more than 75% feel safe walking home after dark, or feel safe at home after dark. In addition to this 87% of respondents think that the levels of security has improved or remained the same. Interesting data is that even 90% of respondents feel that their community is at least as safe, or even safer than other areas in Serbia. In terms of worries related to firearms there were two questions: How often do you worry (fear) that either you or someone close to you might be injured with firearms? To which the answer was: never 40%, sometimes 45%; How often do you worry (fear) that either you or someone close to you might be killed with firearms? With the answers: never, 55%, sometimes 36%. However, while analysing these data we should keep in mind perceptual framework of respondents, or in what relative position firearms related problems have in people's everyday life. The findings show that the main problems for people are: economic uncertainty, unemployment, prospects for children, in this particular order. Firearms related issues are far below perception threshold and arise only when respondents are specifically asked about. However, this set of questions gave us very coherent data about safety, and gun related issues as seen by respondents.

4. Personal experience with guns

One of the main factors affecting general attitudes towards guns is how often people have first hand experience of guns in they day-to-day life. Two questions

were aimed at getting this information: How often do you see people that carry firearms (excluding police or army officers) in your community/town? The answer to this question is: never, 51%, and less than once in a month, 29%; Have you ever witnessed the use of firearms personally? To which 45% answered yes. In the context of Serbian, post-conflict society these figures may be surprisingly low, but they are suggestive in terms of how widespread and common use of guns is. It can be argued that the fact where 45% of respondents witnessed use of guns is quite high, but important point is also that frequent or repetitive patterns of gun use or presence in the society seems not be present.

5. Attitudes towards guns

Finally, one set of question had to deal with what citizens of Serbia think of firearms, or what their attitudes are. The most obvious and straightforward question was: Do you think there are too many firearms in Serbian society? To this, 78% of respondents answered yes. In addition, 65% of respondents expressed that, even if legally possible they would not like to own a firearm. Another question is indicative for reasons behind this answer: Do you believe that possessing firearms makes a person safer or less safe? More than a half or 51% answered that arms possession makes no difference, and 21% think it makes a person even less safe. Consistent with these results is the main reason of respondents to actually own a gun, by far at the top there are two answers: to protect myself/my family, and my property/my business. There are significant indications that the last answers are telling more about potential use of firearms rather than elaborated idea and perception of what a firearm would mean as an object in every day life (instrumental rather than symbolic). Also, 65% of respondents think that increased control and tighter conditions for registration and licensing for firearms possession would increase the security. Somewhat at the odds with the above mentioned appear the following information: What do you think is an appropriate age to start handling firearms? 45% of respondents think above 21, and 35% said older than 31 year of life. Would here be reasonable to conclude that this answer is indication of the system where army service is obligatory and 21 to 30 is the age when young men in Serbia usually get engaged with the army? The fact is that even knowing how to use guns does not mean that people want to have one or want to use it.

Conclusion

Observations presented in this paper are based mainly on the results of perception survey meaning, what we got as answers are respondents feelings or thoughts regarding the issues we asked them about. Hence, their answers do not

necessarily reflect or coincide with evidence from official sources such as police, hospital, social or other services. Nevertheless, perceptions, feelings and individual assessments are building pieces of attitudes and opinions, including attitudes and opinions towards firearms, and often facilitate actions of individual and collective actors.

Reality as seen by an average Serbian citizen is defined by problems to find or keep a job, small incomes, and lack of opportunities for children and youth. In other words, the citizen is occupied by finding ways, or worrying about providing enough means for satisfying essential existential requirements. At the same time, citizens do not have trust in formal official institutions, and capability of these institutions to make life easier for common people. However, despite the lack of trust towards formal institutions people do generally feel safe, so security is not an issue, or people do not feel unsafe, at least not beyond reasonable extent (this reasonable extent is defined by citizen's contextual framework, therefore it is rather subjective assessment than an objective observation or an indicator). It is also obvious that unofficial display of firearms (carried by other citizens) is fairly low, but still, vast majority of respondents believe there are too many guns among ordinary citizens. It should not be forgotten that firearms related issues are generally below perceptual threshold of an average respondent. This last one may be the result of good safety situation in communities, or a result of increased tolerance to displaying and use of firearms, which was at a significantly high level during the nineties, and appears to be in decline since.

Very interesting finding is that despite the lack of trust in institutions respondents generally do feel safe. This finding suggests two possible things: first, it may mean that despite the lack of trust in the police or judiciary these services are performing good; second, there are some other alternative mechanisms in place that compensate for the underperformance of the mentioned institutions. High level of observed trust to people from respondents' immediate communities, may suggest that the second option, existence of alternative mechanisms, is more probable. These alternative mechanisms would include confidence that majority of people from immediate surrounding share the same understanding of basic community rules and behave accordingly, maintaining a level of certainty that escalation of violent or other safety related incidents will not occur.

There is one specific line of reasoning that can give us some insight into whether some sort of gun culture is present or characteristic for Serbian society in general. People generally believe that there are too many guns in the society. However, the main safety or security issues and incidents do not involve firearms, and firearms related issues are below perception threshold of an average citizen. In addition, major reason for owning a gun is personal protection or protection of family and business, meaning that the role of firearms is hypothetically instrumental

and does not bare significant symbolic value. Having in mind all the above-mentioned it can be concluded that the gun culture does not exist in Serbian society, or at least common people cannot be recognized as the bearers of the gun culture (some groups such as criminals or hunters are usually characterized by separate subcultures different from what can be called general cultural model). What can be noticed though is that only minority (less than 10%) of respondents believes that people should not learn how to use guns ever, showing that the attitude towards guns is not one of complete rejection: one should know how to use a gun even though it should not use it. Explanation for this may be found in the fact that army service was obligatory for all adult and healthy men in Yugoslavia/Serbia, and in this case collectives such as the army or police seem to be bearer agents of the gun culture.

In order to clarify further this conclusion we should look back to recent history, before the nineties. Post Second World War Yugoslavia has cultivated specific cult of anti fascist fight and the army (narodna armija, people's army) as one of the main constituents of modern Yugoslav societies. The role of the army, its legitimization and symbolic meaning was, among other means, created and perpetuated by the media, including numerous TV series and films, some involving even high profile foreign actors. All these series and films promoted some sort of gun culture, within a collective framework, e.g. popular struggle against fascism or for freedom. With the introduction of political pluralism and the beginning of '90s, new political establishment needed a base or ideology which would provide its legitimacy and justify politics of the ruling parties. A solution was found in nationalism and retraditionalisation, promoting pre-socialist past of Serbia as the source of inspiration and a model for present and future. This involved creation and reinforcement of historical myths with two dominant messages: Serbia was able to win something or move towards prosperity only in wars (what we win in wars, we lose in peace); within global framework which was a great stage where forces of good and evil wage their war, Serbia, even though lonely, was always on the side of mythical good, justice and truth. Translated to language of everyday reality, it promoted a model of Serbian warrior which was indistinguishable from Serbian army or people. However, this was not all. Mobilisation for the wars in '90s was only possible if it was possible to homogenise (Brankovic, 1999) population and encourage violent models of behaviour in a hope that these models can be controlled and channelled. Mass media and especially TV was particularly good for this purpose[10], and creating myths about criminals was quite common practice[11]. Once

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[10] For more information about use of the media for mass manipulation in the former Yugoslavia see 'Forging War: the media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina'.

[11] Many printed magazines, newspapers and TV shows were dealing exclusively with criminal groups describing events and depicting main actors and characters as role models. In the situation where almost all existing channels for social promotion and recognition based on merit or education for example were obstructed having a gun and using it had its appeal to at least some social circles. In

the wars were over, these 'heroes' of city streets were returned to margins of the society, and together with them cultural models they represented, which opened the way for recovery of the old cultural models which did favour firearms in daily life. Popular support for a significant reduction in the number of guns in Serbia therefore significantly outweighs the power of 'tradition' (SEESAC, 2006:34), and suggests that the gun culture was result of intensive campaigning and effort to create one.

Applying the model presented in the first part of this paper it is possible to conclude that: a) there is no negative connotation of firearms in Serbian culture, however, significant positive connotation cannot be identified either; b) predominant perception of guns is based on instrumental function, rather than on symbolic, a gun for an average individual does not represent much more than just an object designed for specific purpose of protection or hunt for example; c) gun culture is cultivated and maintained in the army, or generally speaking within a collective framework, where guns have positive value for its function, but also have somewhat more emphasized symbolic 'weight.' It appears that proliferation of arms and support for war on the side of Serbian population was not facilitated or supported by any recognizable model of gun culture. The role of media was significant in shaping popular feelings and opinions, and the media policy had obviously found leaning points in some elements of Serbian culture. However, dataset from this survey was insufficient for making any further conclusions in this direction.

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short terms perspective this violent model, being the only ostensibly successful, seem to have worked.

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