

# The Arrest of Ratko Mladić Online: Tracing Memory Models across Digital Genres

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the digital rhetoric triggered by a ‘memory event’ – the May 26, 2011 arrest of Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladić, a fugitive convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague (ICTY) for war crimes in Bosnia. Surveying the verbal and visual rhetoric used across online genres and platforms to describe Mladić after his arrest, the authors focus on the most oppositional and historically fraught viewpoints: a dominant anti-Mladić narrative and the fierce, if fringe, pro-Mladić narrative that emerged in response.

Our primary goal is to examine a memory event captured and created by digital culture, and to map the emergent rhetorical models across an overview of digital genres by tracing cultural associations. The second level of research is comparative, as we find that the depiction and perhaps even understanding of Mladić’s arrest shifts according to genre, medium and platform. As we are studying a perpetually shifting digital terrain, our methods are experimental and heuristic; we hope our overview may suggest new directions for research to other scholars of digital rhetoric, historical memory models and the rise of twenty-first century nationalism.

**Keywords:** Ratko Mladić, arrest, memory models, digital genres, social media, nationalism.

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The arrest of Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladić on 26 May 2011 was at once a historical, media, and memory event.<sup>1</sup> Mass media worldwide and across the former Yugoslav spaces reported that ‘one of the world’s most wanted men’ had finally been apprehended by the Serbian police (‘As It Happened’ 2011). The elusive fugitive of nearly sixteen years, ‘wanted for the Srebrenica massacre of Bosnian Muslims’, was at last to be turned over to the Hague International Criminal Tribunal (‘Ratko Mladic Arrested’ 2011). Online, the news triggered wide-ranging responses across genres, media, and platforms: a series of secondary

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<sup>1</sup> We follow Alexander Etkind’s definition of a memory event as ‘a re-discovery of the past that creates a rupture with its accepted cultural meaning. Memory events are secondary to the historical events that they interpret, usually taking place many years or decades later’ (Etkind 2010: 4).

and tertiary rhetorical waves found expression in varied forms of digital culture. Certainly, the arrest provoked memories of the most recent 1990s Yugoslav wars and of the Srebrenica massacre, but it also appeared to trigger more distant cultural memories – most prominently from World War II.

Our research begins with a study of the verbal and visual rhetoric used to describe Ratko Mladić after his arrest. International and local sources depicted the same event as a triumph or a tragedy, and Mladić himself as a genocidal war criminal or a nationalist martyr. While mainstream Serbian news did not endorse the rhetoric of the extreme nationalist minority, for the sake of our study, we focus on the most oppositional and historically fraught viewpoints: a dominant anti-Mladić narrative and the fierce, if fringe, pro-Mladić narrative that emerged in response.

The digital rhetoric employed by each side in such memory wars follows traceable patterns.<sup>2</sup> ‘Western’ media and the mainstream of public opinion appear to interact regularly, transferring rhetorical comparisons and memory models back and forth across media and online sources. Meanwhile, a Serbian nationalist counter-culture finds space online to cast Mladić, and the ‘Serbian people’ by metonymic linkage, as a martyr hero in an ongoing anti-imperial struggle. Such rhetoric, in turn, garnered some international sympathy as an anti-Western hegemony stance; for example, we found expressions of solidarity on Russian online forums.<sup>3</sup>

Our project has no claims to access what Bosnians or Serbs ‘really think’, but is instead meant as an inquiry into how digital genres and platforms shape particular kinds of discussion, focusing on the historically comparative epithets, tropes and memes associated with Ratko Mladić after his arrest. We use this case study to explore how rhetoric works online, where it is produced and disseminated at exceptional speed; and where it is shaped by the limitations and potentialities of platforms, from the 140-character tweet to lengthy and carefully montaged *YouTube* videos.

We recognize that we are living in, as the authors of the recent volume *Digital Humanities* have put it, ‘one of those rare moments of opportunity for the humanities, not unlike the other great eras of cultural-historical transformation such as the shift from the scroll to the codex, the invention of moveable type, the encounter with the New World, and the Industrial Revolution’ (Burdick et al. 2012: vii). Our South Slavic case study provides not only linguistic and historical complexity, but also an insistent reminder of the ethical dimensions of humanistic scholarship in the digital age.

## Overview: Mladić’s layers

Our inquiry into the digital cultural production inspired and provoked by the arrest of Ratko Mladić (born 1942) uncovers the traces of multiple memory models on both sides of the

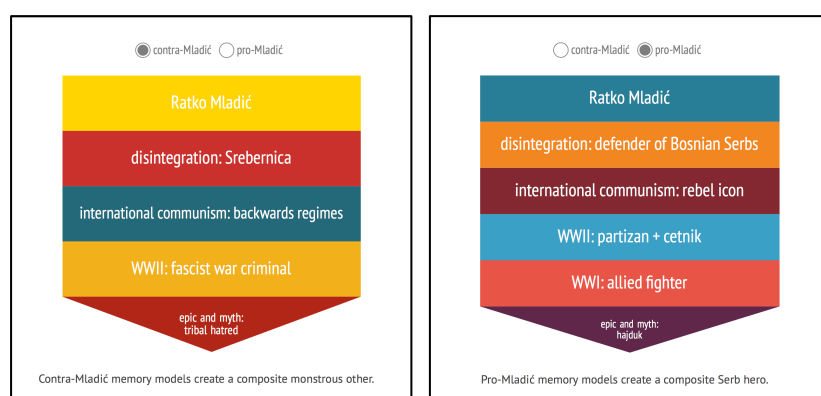
<sup>2</sup> We use the term ‘West’ with reservations and always implied quotations, but following the perceived divide central to so many of our sources.

<sup>3</sup> The materials collected for this study are primarily based on experimental collective research conducted in 2013.

Mladić ‘web war’ (Rutten, Fedor and Zvereva 2013). The most prominent, direct, and expected layers of memory discourse emphasize Mladić’s associations with Srebrenica and genocide. The next rhetorical move across many online genres is to make implicit or explicit comparisons with Nazi war criminals, relying on emotional associations with World War II and the Holocaust and thus, from the point of view of Western European or NATO forces, with the ultimate ‘just war’ of intervention. Another layer of memory discourse stresses the collapse of international communism, comparing the remnants of the former Yugoslavia with backwards ‘holdout’ regimes doomed by global progress towards democratic (neoliberal) peace. Still older layers reach to World War I; to nineteenth-century struggles for national independence; to cultural memories of Ottoman rule; or even to mythic times, stressing ancient (that is, primitive) ethnic or tribal hatreds as the motivation for the most recent and incomprehensible bloodshed in the Balkans.

The two competing Mladić narratives rely on corresponding tropes and images reflected in the media portrayals of Mladić after his arrest (as a fascist war criminal, a communist militant and a primitive non-European other) and finding new life online. What we call (necessarily reductively) the pro-Mladić rhetorical strategies turn to the very same historical models but invert the ethical positions: for example, it is not the Bosnian Serbs but rather their allied opponents who are ‘like’ fascists. In essence, Mladić-sympathetic sources respond with combative memory models to recast Mladić as a historical hero: the *partizan* (anti-German and anti-capitalist) incongruously hybridized with the *chetnik* (anti-Communist, monarchist, Christian Orthodox) of World War II. Though profoundly contradictory, the latter two memory models are recurrent components of the multi-layered re-imagining of Mladić as a Serbian national hero (see Griffiths 2003, Wood 2006, Ramet 2007, Anastasijevic 2008 and Bošković 2011). Other rhetorical moves cast Mladić as a rebel icon along the lines of Che Guevara, or even an epic *hajduk* (anti-Ottoman bandit-hero).

**Figures 1 and 2.** Historical layers of memory

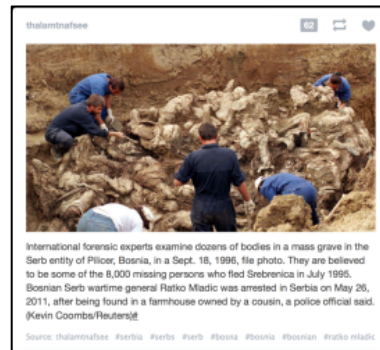


Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

The sheer number of competing cultural models suggests that Mladić’s arrest was a significant historical sense-making moment, marking the symbolic end of the Balkan wars, and thus an opportunity to summarize and shape a politically strategic narrative about the fall of communism and the future of Europe.

**Image 1. (Digital) Forensics**

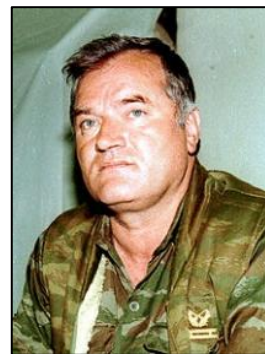
Source: <http://testament25.blogspot.de/2011/06/ratko-mladic-killing-3500-christians.html> (accessed 23 July 2014)

**Image 2. (Digital) Forensics**

Source: <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/srebrenica-massacre> (accessed 26 March 2013)

**Image 3. Communist militant**

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/29/serb-nationalists-rally-for-ratko-mladic> (accessed 23 July 2014)

**Image 4. Communist militant**

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko\\_Mladić](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko_Mladić) (accessed 10 September 2013)

**Image 5. Partizan**

Source: Anderson 2011 (accessed 23 July 2014)

**Image 6. Chetnik**

Source: 'Clashes Erupt' 2011 (accessed 23 July 2014)

Like other memory events, Mladić's arrest inspired reductive models – monstrous hybrids of past and present – that help professional and amateur cultural producers alike make sense of, and manipulate, a complex and contingent present. We liken the layering of cultural memories provoked by Mladić's arrest to a palimpsest, sometimes digitally and sometimes bodily inscribed, and experience our own research as an archeological dig.

Moving from the recent to the distant past, the memory layers invoked by Mladić's arrest begin with the Yugoslav civil war, and draw on Srebrenica as a site of mourning. From here, we excavate layers of the past in the visual and verbal rhetoric of digital cultural production, to find allusions to the downfall of international communist regimes.

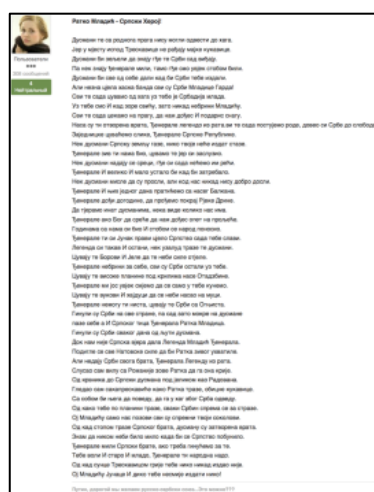
The dominant anti-Mladić narrative next focuses on the international tribunal as a 'new theater of historical remembrance' (Winter 2006, 7). Pro-Mladić portrayals also view current events through the lens of World War II, but reverse the positions: they cast Mladić as a resistance soldier taking on a fascist European alliance. Visual and verbal rhetoric across genres, platforms, and media depicts Mladić sometimes as a communist *partizan*, more often a monarchist Christian Orthodox *chetnik*, and sometimes an unlikely and ahistorical hybrid combination of both.

Image 7. Twenty-first century hajduk



Source: <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/140415/Hajduk-21-veka>  
(accessed 28 March 2013)

Image 8. Twenty-first century hajduk<sup>4</sup>



Source: <http://forum.senica.ru/index.php?showtopic=793&st=380#entry118075>  
(accessed 28 March 2013)

Digging deeper, we find earlier allusions to the *chetniks* as monarchist freedom fighters – who fought on the 'correct', Allied side in World War I before collaborating (or being cast by *partizans* as collaborating) with the occupying forces in World War II. Some sources even make of Mladić a *hajduk*, the anti-Ottoman bandit hero of Serbian oral epics.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The poem from Image 8 can also be found on 'Srpski heroji'.

<sup>5</sup> Working in a higher-brow cultural sphere, the Bosnian-American writer Alexander Hemon repeated this rhetorical move in reverse in a 2008 article for the *New York Times*, where he suggested that Serbian anti-Ottoman epic poetry was partially to blame for contemporary ethnic hatreds (Hemon 2008: 205).



**Image 9.** ‘Ancient tribal hatreds’

Source: <http://ejc.net/magazine/article/photo-essay-mourning-and-reburials-mark-srebrenica-massacre-anniversary#.U8-j0rFTA85> (accessed 23 July 2014)

**Image 10.** ‘Ancient tribal hatreds’

Source: <http://srebrenica-genocide.blogspot.de/2011/05/serbian-fascists-protest-ratko-mladics.html> (accessed 23 July 2014)

Next, the frequently reproduced and reposted images below depict Bosnian women mourning the victims of Srebrenica, and nationalist supporters at a pro-Mladić rally. Both images emphasize their female subjects as non-European Others, choosing to focus on older women whose clothing or appearance will seem most foreign to urban Western audiences. Relying on a form of Balkan Orientalism, such images readily lend themselves to narratives of ancient (primitive) ethnic hatreds in the Balkans.<sup>6</sup>

**Image 11.** ‘Serbian Taliban’

Source: <http://kasetomanija.wordpress.com/category/bosnia-herzegovina> (accessed 23 July 2014)

**Image 12.** ‘Serbian Taliban’

Source: <http://www.nwnprod.com> (accessed 28 March 2013)

Finally, it is worth mentioning a contemporary but utterly unexpected comparison that has emerged in more recent visual and verbal memes: mostly darkly humorous allusions to the ‘Serbian Taliban’, which suggest some sense of identification with radical Muslim resistance to American imperialism and late capitalist hegemony.

<sup>6</sup> See Bakić-Hayden 1995 and Todorova 1997.

The digital archeology sketched above finds historical models that promise to reveal to readers and audiences the ‘real’ Mladić: in the contested terrain of the former Yugoslavia both the victims and perpetrators of crime were hidden from the public eye, although sometimes in plain view, and ideologies underwent rapid reversal. The discourse around Mladić relies on metaphors of forensic identification; the language of doubles, shadows and avatars in turn is redoubled by online forms of communication. Identity is always in question, as Mladić himself was well aware, according to the reports of his arrest. The first words he spoke when arrested were to claim his own identity: ‘Ja sam Ratko Mladić’ [I am Ratko Mladić].<sup>7</sup>

### Sources and methods

Our sources predominantly draw from non-professional cultural producers, combining ‘born digital’ and remediated materials. While we are less interested in professional media coverage, the digital sources themselves borrow heavily from professional and offline sources. We begin with comparative readings of multi-author *Wikipedia* article entries, using a mix of close and distant reading; analyses of news forums as well as discussions on popular blogs; readings of photos and visual memes (rallies, uniforms); responses to Mladić arrest on the popular social media sites *Twitter* and *Facebook*; and close with one striking sample of audio-visual material found on *YouTube*. As we are studying an open system, a perpetually shifting digital terrain that employs very new platforms and genres with imperfect and limited tools, our methods are experimental and heuristic; our hope is that our overview and preliminary hypotheses may suggest new directions for research to other scholars of digital rhetoric, historical memory models, and the rise of twenty-first century nationalism.

Our methods are primarily and fundamentally qualitative. The goal is to examine a memory event that was captured and created by digital culture, and to map the emergent rhetorical models across an overview of digital genres by tracing cultural associations. The second level of research is comparative, as we find that the depiction and perhaps even understanding of Mladić’s arrest shifts according to genre, medium and platform.<sup>8</sup>

We began with an overview of the available sources, using narrower historical models as examples. Where there is enough material to do so, we concentrate on depictions of Mladić as linked to World War II – the most politically and emotionally charged comparison. The main narrative casts Mladić as a genocidal war criminal, finally extradited and eventually brought

<sup>7</sup> Cited in news article on Mladić’s arrest, this admission was posted and re-posted, tweeted and re-tweeted across genres and platforms. See for example ‘Odmah priznao’ (2011).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ‘New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts’. (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 19). See also BBC journalist Paul Mason’s summary of the functions of the information tools used by contemporary activists in what he termed the ‘revolutions of 2009–2011’: ‘Facebook is used to form groups, covert and overt – in order to establish those strong but flexible connections. Twitter is used for real-time *organization* and news dissemination, bypassing the cumbersome ‘newsgathering’ operations of the mainstream media. YouTube and the Twitter-linked photographic sites – Yfrog, Flickr and Twitpic – are used to provide instant evidence of the claims being made. Link-shorteners like bit.ly are used to disseminate key articles via Twitter’ (Mason 2012: 75).

to international justice (the narrative typically includes the familiar difficulties of finding suitable punishment for a 70-year-old moral monster). The counter-narrative responds by re-fashioning Mladić from a World War II villain into a hero: an ageless *chetnik*, *partizan* or *hajduk*. Many tropes ‘translate’ and can be traced across multiple textual and visual genres; others thrive in longer-form genres only.<sup>9</sup> Working across multiple digital genres, members of our collaborative research team use digital tools, distant reading and quantitative analyses of large swaths of data for broader surveys of information across many producers. Finally, we return to qualitative and comparative critical analysis to contextualize our findings and formulate preliminary working hypotheses. Our approaches may thus be said to hover between digital humanities and digital social sciences; our focus throughout, however, remains on rhetoric.

### Findings by genre: *Wikipedia*

Our first case studies are the *Wikipedia* articles on Mladić in Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, English and Russian for international comparison. What changes across articles and languages? How do the articles refer to the events of World War II in particular? How do they change over time, or show evidence of interaction between writers and editors? Despite *Wikipedia*’s regulations for writing and editing articles, the representations of Mladić differ dramatically according to national cultures and traditions in the Balkan countries and in the English and Russian pages. The pages show collective discourse – in this case, multi-authored digital texts – taking shape in relation to key events in twentieth-century history: World War II, *partizan*/*chetnik*/*ustashe* traditions and confrontations, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and subsequent civil wars.

Even a preliminary reading of the *Wikipedia* entries on Mladić demonstrates significant variations in size, structure and the usage of external links and references. The Bosnian *Wikipedia* article is unexpectedly short and omits all details about Mladić prior to his military career during the 1990s. The Serbian and Russian articles are lengthy, covering Mladić’s early life, education, military career, role in the civil wars and subsequent downfall; they inform on the attempted arrests prior to 2011, his actual May 26 arrest, extradition to the ICTY, and the trial itself. The Bosnian and Croatian articles focus on recent Balkan history and on Mladić as a Serbian military commander. The Serbian and Russian articles thus appear to humanize Mladić by describing his entire life, in effect weakening his symbolic image as a war criminal. The Serbian article, in fact, does not pass *Wikipedia*’s regulations regarding sources, references and objectivity.

<sup>9</sup> See Todorova 1997, Longinović 2011, Levi 2007 and Kujundžić 2008.



The articles in Serbian, English and Russian give different accounts of the death of Mladić's father in 1945 (the Bosnian *Wikipedia* article omits the story entirely):

- *Serbian*: 'Оца Ратка Младића, Неђу (1909–1945), убили су усташе у близини Иван седла.'<sup>10</sup> ['The father of Ratko Mladic (1909–1945), Nedja, was killed by *ustashe* near Ivan-Sedlo'.]<sup>11</sup>
- *English*: 'Mladić's father was killed while leading a partisan attack on the home village of Ustaše leader Ante Pavelić in 1945'.<sup>12</sup>
- *Russian*: 'Его отец, Неджа Младич командир партизанского отряда, погиб в бою с хорватскими усташами в 1945 году'. ['His father, Nedzha Mladic, the commander of a partisan troupe, perished in a battle with Croatian *ustashe* in 1945'.]<sup>13</sup>

The English article emphasizes the active participation of Mladić's father in World War II as a member of the Yugoslav *partizan* movement, as does the Russian article. The Serbian article, like the Russian article, includes the father's first name, but stresses the personal information and gives the location of his death, while obfuscating the fact that he died as an active soldier fighting on the side of the Communist movement. In the Serbian article, Mladić's father died not as a *partizan* soldier, but simply as Nedja, a Serb, at the hands of nameless *ustashe*. This personal emphasis indicates that twentieth-century political narratives are still used as a dominant memory discourse about shared local history; for example, the *chetnik* associations with Mladić elsewhere may have prompted the *Wikipedia* writers to obfuscate the fact that his father was actually a *partizan*.

Qualitative and quantitative comparative analyses across the six *Wikipedia* articles in Bosnian, Croatian, English, Russian, Serbian and Serbo-Croatian uncover further telling differences.<sup>14</sup> The Internet Archive *Wayback Machine*<sup>15</sup> accesses old snapshots, allowing us to compare articles and changes made in content, structure and categories over time.<sup>16</sup> One simple point of interest is the size and scope of the articles, before and after Mladić's arrest, and at the time of our study (the dates below refer to when these screenshots of individual pages were taken).

<sup>10</sup> We have chosen not to transliterate the Serbian Cyrillic throughout the article – as is customary in *Digital Icons* publications – as the different uses of Latin and Cyrillic alphabets are part of our argument.

<sup>11</sup> Source: [http://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ратко\\_Младић](http://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ратко_Младић) (accessed 29 March 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko\\_Mladić](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko_Mladić) (accessed 29 March 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Source: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Младич,\\_Ратко](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Младич,_Ратко) (accessed 29 March 2013).

<sup>14</sup> The URL addresses of these pages are, respectively: [http://bs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko\\_Mladić](http://bs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko_Mladić), [http://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko\\_Mladić](http://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko_Mladić), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko\\_Mladić](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko_Mladić), [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Младич,\\_Ратко](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Младич,_Ратко), [http://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ратко\\_Младић](http://sr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ратко_Младић), [http://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko\\_Mladić](http://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratko_Mladić) (accessed 30 March 2013).

<sup>15</sup> See <http://archive.org> (accessed 30 March 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Rogers's and Emina Sendjarevic's essay, 'Neutral or National Point of View? A Comparison of Srebrenica Articles across *Wikipedia*'s Language Versions' (2012) influenced our thinking about this topic and provided a partial guide for our own research.

**Table 1.** Word count of Mladić Wikipedia articles by date

Wiki resource	Pre-arrest page	Post-arrest page	26 March 2013
<b>Bosnian</b>	<b>778</b> (April 9 2011)	<b>843</b> (Sep 4 2011)	<b>1,057</b>
<b>Croatian</b>	<b>530</b> (Sep 13 2006)	<b>802</b> (Oct 12 2011)	<b>1,005</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>3,102</b> (Aug 30 2010)	<b>5,766</b> (Jun 7 2011)	<b>5,457</b>
<b>Russian</b>		<b>2,388</b> (Sep 13 2011)	<b>2,739</b>
<b>Serbian</b>	<b>2,576</b> (Apr 3 2011)	<b>3,397</b> (Sep 12 2011)	<b>3,221</b>
<b>Serbo-Croatian</b>	<b>296</b> (Sep 8 2008)	<b>1,738</b> (Aug 10 2011)	<b>2,376</b>

Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

Both the English and Serbo-Croatian articles show significant changes in word number, although all articles grew in size after the news of the arrest was made public. The two longest articles, the English and the Serbian, had been cut down at the time of analysis (26 March 2013) by 309 and 176 words, respectively, while others expanded after the time of the arrest, most notably in the case of the Serbo-Croatian article. We conjecture that after the news of Mladić's arrest, both English and Serbian articles grew to include new information, while the texts continued to be edited in accordance with *Wikipedia* standards and policies.

Editors tag every *Wikipedia* article with categories conveying content. These categories vary in number and classification system across all Mladić articles, most dramatically between the English and Bosnian or Croatian versions. The majority have a separate category for Mladić's indictment for 'war crimes' and/or 'genocide' (in English), but not all: the Croatian article, interestingly, has no such category. The differences correspond fairly predictably to national interests: the Croatian article emphasizes Mladić's role in the war in Croatia ('Zapovjednici u srpsko-crnogorskoj agresiji na Hrvatsku' or 'The military commanders of Serbo-Montenegrin aggression on Croatia'); the Bosnian article speaks of his origins and biography connected with Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the Serbian article focuses on Mladić's Serbian ethnicity as well as his military biography (for instance categories like 'Генерали Војске Републике Српске', 'Српске војсковође' and 'Срби' [Generals of the Army of Republic Srpska, Serbian military commanders, Serbs]). The English and Russian articles emphasize his military career, but in very different ways: while the English article concentrates on the war in Bosnia and Croatia and Mladić's ICTY indictments, the Russian includes the numerous medals and honors awarded Mladić during his long career. Thus, even the relatively small differences between articles with claims to objective summary allow space for clear political stances and rhetorical manipulations – a Mladić guilty of crimes against humanity in the most recent genocidal European war; and a storied military commander Mladić with a long personal history of Serbian suffering.

**Table 2.** Occurrence of top 20 relevant words and phrases (excluding Cyrillic)

Bosnian	Croatian	English	Serbo-Croat	Combined
ratka mladi (12)	ratka mladi (8)	yugoslav people (16)	radio (6)	ratka mladi (20)
optu (8)	bih (7)	february (12)	mladost (5)	Yugoslav people (16)
beogradu (6)	beogradu (6)	srebrenica (12)	stana (5)	Knin (14)
srba (5)	knin (5)	january (12)	komandi druge (4)	february (12)
knin (5)	srba (5)	croatian war (11)	crne gore (4)	srebrenica (12)
vanjski (4)	vip ulaz (4)	bbc (10)	reference (4)	january (12)
u junu (4)	boris tadi (4)	in november (8)	un official (4)	Beogradu (12)
predmet ratko mla- di (4)	ratko mladi (4)	second military	oca ratka mladi (4)	Pdf (12)
vojske rs. U (4)	jna i komandno- (4)	district headquar- ters (8)	bia i mup upu (4)	jna u sarajevu (12)
jna u sarajevu (4)	operacije peru (4)	united states (8)	vlade srbije (4)	croatian war (11)
vip ulaz (4)	milorad komadi (4)	pdf (8)	predmet ratko mla- di (4)	bih (10)
komandanta vrhov- nog (4)	republici srpskoj (4)	main staff (8)	komandno- (4)	srba (10)
jna je (4)	hrvatske po mladi (4)	in july (8)	bia otvorila (4)	bbc (10)
jna iz bosne (4)	jna u sarajevu (4)	judge fouad riad (8)	jna stupa (4)	in november (8)
creative commons attribution (4)	pdf (4)	daily telegraph (8)	opn (4)	second military
vrs-a (4)	komandanta vrhov- nog (4)	jna forces (8)	odeljenja (4)	district headquar- ters (8)
reference (4)	vojske rs. U (4)	in june (8)	komandu tre (4)	indonesia (8)
jugoslavije (4)	vrs-a (4)	deputy commander (8)	creative commons attribution (4)	jawa (8)
isto (3)	jna je (4)	washington post (8)	kov. u skoplje (4)	glavnog (8)
kao (3)	jna iz bosne (4)	december (8)	bramerca beogradu (4)	in july (8)
		european union (8)		washington post (8)

Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

**Table 3.** Wikipedia Edit Scraper and IP localizer (within two weeks of Mladić's arrest)

BS – 23 changes, BiH 1, Croatia 2, Germany 1
EN – 403 changes (209 changes in the 24 hours from the news)
<b>10:21</b> , 26 May 2011 94.195.48.12 (talk) . . (25,455 bytes) (+71) . . (→ <b>Indictment by the ICTY</b> )
<b>10:23</b> , 26 May 2011 Jdhowens90 (talk   contribs) . . (25,690 bytes) (+235) . . ( <b>Possible capture</b> )
... [4 various changes and updates]
<b>10:45</b> , 26 May 2011 Cruks (talk   contribs) m . . (25,934 bytes) (+122) . . ( <b>birth day correction</b> )
... [7 various changes and updates]
<b>11:03</b> , 26 May 2011 Samuel Salzman (talk   contribs) . . (26,352 bytes) (+187) . . (→ <b>Videos of Mladić: moving position of possible arrest</b> )
... [14 various changes and updates]
<b>11:39</b> , 26 May 2011 ClueBot NG (talk   contribs) m . . (26,814 bytes) (-7) . . ( <b>Reverting possible vandalism by 188.2.36.250 to version by X201. False positive? Report it.</b> Thanks, ClueBot NG. (436417)
Address: <b>[188.2.36.250 Pancevo Serbia RS 44.870820.6403]</b>

Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

Comparative word frequency analysis (excluding articles in Cyrillic script) suggests that, aside from the name Ratko Mladić, the most frequent terms are ‘Yugoslav People’s Army’, ‘Knin’ and ‘Srebrenica’, as expected. Srebrenica appears most frequently in the English article, while the Bosnian and Croatian texts focus on Knin (and subsequently on the war in Croatia). This observation suggests that the sources of these two articles are similar.

The internal editing of *Wikipedia* articles allows us to see how the editors affect the tone, particularly just after the breaking news of Mladić’s arrest in the media. Using two tools for analyzing *Wikipedia* articles, Edit Scraper and IP localizer, we find that the English article saw 403 changes in content in the two weeks following the arrest, 209 of which took place in the first 24 hours. Other articles were edited far fewer times, suggesting that the most politically contested terrain was the English language article, followed by the Serbian to a far lesser degree (23 changes in the same two weeks). Extrapolating from *Wikipedia* edit logs, we find that the English text changed 29 times in the course of one hour and 18 minutes. During that short stretch, other editors noticed and corrected the ‘vandalizing’ in the text. The revealed IP address shows that the computer used in the cyber attack was located in Serbia.

### Findings by genre: news fora commentary and blog posts

Online discussions in the commentary sections to news fora and blogs offer another rich source for analyzing the responses to Mladić’s arrest. After a survey of the most popular fora and blogs available through Google searches, we chose to focus on two popular sources with rich activity in the comments section: the Serbian news page b92.net, comments posted on the very day of Mladić’s arrest, and discussions from the Croatian forum.hr (posted between May 26, 2011 and June 5, 2011). We begin with b92.net, expecting commentators on the site to either share or strongly disagree with the station’s predominantly liberal politics. For the initial quantitative searches through the commentaries, we use the Issue Discovery Tool.

**Table 4.** Word Frequency b92.net

crime (zločin): 24

hero (heroj): 18

criminal (zločinac): 6

Youth Day (Dan mladosti): 4

genocide (genocid): 4

[[http://www.b92.net/info/komentari.php?nav\\_id=514604](http://www.b92.net/info/komentari.php?nav_id=514604)]

Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

Looking at the most frequently used words and epithets in these blog discussions, we find that the term ‘genocide’ occurs far less frequently than ‘crime’ across the posts, and that, initially, the term ‘hero’ seems to outnumber ‘criminal’. Closer readings of these tagged passages,

however, reveal that the word ‘hero’ is mostly used ironically, with the dual purpose of not only discrediting Mladić, but also those who use such language in earnest. For example, the commentator Jabilondo writes: ‘I koji je to heroj? I koga je on branio? Pa još u Srebrenici?’ [‘What kind of hero is he? And who was he defending? And in Srebrenica of all places?’] (‘Uhapšen Ratko Mladić’ 2011). A less frequently used word here (but found in other platforms) is ‘butcher’, associated with a cluster of terms such as ‘ethnic cleansing’, ‘genocide’ and ‘*chetnik*’. Overall the discussion is critical of media coverage on both sides and is self-reflexive.

The unexpected repeated invocations of ‘Youth Day’ prompted us to look more closely at the tagged forum posts, only to find that the community of participants was interested in *when* the news of Mladić’s arrest occurred in Croatian and Serbian media, respectively. Commentators suspected that Mladić had probably been arrested on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, but that local politicians had refused to announce the arrest on a date that had had considerable political currency in the former socialist Yugoslavia. Since 25 May, Josip Broz Tito’s birthday, had been commemorated as ‘Youth Day’, the discovery and arrest of Mladić could not be ‘allowed’ to take place on that day: the competing narratives contradict and leave no room for one another. The symbolic erasure of the post-WWII Yugoslav holiday by the contemporary media spectacle of Serbian war crimes – of Tito by Mladić – would have been an undesirable implicit narrative for the local political structures. While further inquiry into Croatian and Serbian official media websites fails to confirm the bloggers’ and commentators’ suspicions about which media first aired the news or to prove a delay in the news of Mladić’s arrest, the online rumor remains of interest as it suggests the bloggers’ awareness of the two embattled narratives.

**Table 5.** Word frequency forum.hr

Hague (Hag): 89
Srebrenica: 189
genocide (genocid): 86
Ante Gotovina: 206
[ <a href="http://www.forum.hr/printthread.php?t=646134&amp;pp=60">http://www.forum.hr/printthread.php?t=646134&amp;pp=60</a> ]

Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

A word count overview of the Croatian forum.hr suggests that these forum posts focus on the topics of The Hague, the Srebrenica genocide (following the rhetorical choices of the news reports) but also of Ante Gotovina, the Croatian general on trial in The Hague at the time. A closer look reveals that bloggers commented on the fact that both arrests – of Mladić and of Gotovina – happened at times when European Union representatives were present in Belgrade. Thus, one interesting and unexpected element, particular to the genre of news fora commentary, is the focus on the chronology of Mladić’s arrest. We conjecture that this feature of forum commentary is shaped by the particular temporality of ‘news’. Overall, the news fora demonstrate the most self-aware uses of rhetoric, relying less on clear historical

parallels and questioning how information is presented and by whom; this difference in tone may reflect the relative education and sophistication of active participant news consumers.

### Findings by genre: visual images and memes

Visual memes circulate rapidly across a number of platforms; we also see interaction between offline and online sources in this genre especially, as photos of rallies become internet memes, only to become graffiti and t-shirts. Many of the most popular visual memes of Mladić after his arrest echo, often vaguely, memories and associations with a post-War Europe, shaping their portrayals of Mladić through backdrop and costume.

Image 13 shows Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić as ‘most wanted’ criminals. In 2002, when these posters were put up in the streets of Belgrade, the reward offered by the U.S. State Secretary for their arrest was \$5,000,000. Photos like the one above emphasize an occupation/post-war atmosphere in the streets of Belgrade and the ongoing international hunt for the hidden war criminals.

Image 14 shows the first page of the printed edition of the daily newspaper *Politika* on May 26, 2011. The strikingly simple headline, ‘Ratko Mladić arrested’, tops a visual juxtaposition of Mladić in the mid-1990s and Mladić on the day of his arrest. A smiling general in uniform (with recognizable Republika Srpska insignia on his hat) pairs with a much older, seemingly frightened man in civil clothing. The effect is complex: on the one hand, *Politika* seems to humanize the image of the Serbian general by showing his vulnerability and emphasizing the passage of time. On the other, the juxtaposition – even the repeated key motif of the front-billed hat – draws an equation sign between the two photographs. Once more, identification appears crucial: today’s victim is the same person as yesterday’s perpetrator. We suspect this is why the most popular photo of the arrested Mladić *had* to include a hat: the visually literate makers of the later image understood that, because of the earlier circulating memes of Mladić as a military leader, the hat had become part of the forensic process of identification.<sup>17</sup>

Image 15 shows a Belgrade graffiti scene: a spray-painted image celebrating Ratko Mladić by one anonymous graffiti artist has been ‘adjusted’ by another anonymous participant in the urban sphere. The adjustment turns the hero into a vampire, and reveals the processes of hero-ization and demonization as coexisting, competing and evolving in the same sites. In turn, all of these images, while originating offline, have been photographed and turned into memeproductive online content (Leskovec et al. 2009).<sup>18</sup>

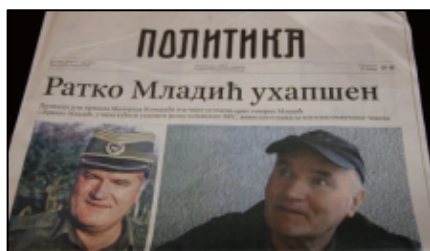
<sup>17</sup> An article from *Blic* online news demonstrates the importance of identification and self-identification to the new of the arrest (see ‘Odmah priznao’ 2011).

<sup>18</sup> According to Limor Shifman, meme is a ‘selfish’, ‘ambiguous’, ‘content’ and ‘viral’ (Shifman 2013) Web ‘einfache Form’ (Andre Jolles), with three important features: 1) it passes cultural information person to person yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon; 2) it is reproduced by various means of imitation (remix and mimicry), and 3) is diffused through competition and selection (Shifman 2013). Shifman further suggests treating people ‘not as vectors of cultural transmission, but as actors behind this process’ of diffusion.



**Images 13, 14, 15. Ratko Mladić as World War II villain**

Source: [http://media.salon.com/2011/05/whos\\_next\\_on\\_the\\_list.jpg](http://media.salon.com/2011/05/whos_next_on_the_list.jpg) (accessed 23 July 2014)



Source: <http://a-place-to-stand.blogspot.com/2011/05/ratko-mladic-arrested.html> (accessed 23 July 2014)



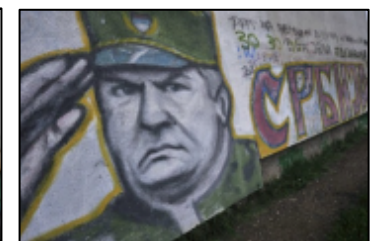
Source: <http://www.avaz.ba/vijesti/iz-minute-u-minutu/71755-u-beogradu-preradjen-mural-zlocinca-ratko-mladic-naslikan-kao-vampir.html> (accessed 15 September 2013)

**Images 16, 17, 18. Mladić as World War II *partizan* and *chetnik***

Source: <http://www.owain-thomas.co.uk> (accessed 23 July 2014)



Source: <http://www.startbih.info/Novost.aspx?novostid=8450> (accessed 23 July 2014)



Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/26/ratko-mladic-war-crimes-suspect> (accessed 23 July 2014)

Image 16 shows online illustrator Owain Thomas's depiction of Mladić as a stylized Yugoslav People's Army soldier, nearly indistinguishable from heroic depictions of *partizan* resistance fighters following World War II. English-language text accompanies the image online: 'Ratko Mladic appears at the International Criminal Tribunal. Ex-Bosnian Serb army leader Mladic was arrested a week ago after going into hiding for the past 16 years and is charged with atrocities committed during the Bosnian war'. Thomas's popular stylized illustration and similar images hint that the international tribunal constituted not only judgment for Mladić, but also for Yugoslav socialism: it is as if the very uniform of the Yugoslav People's Army soldier has been placed on trial.

In image 17 we see Mladić in the same Yugoslav Army uniform and hat, embracing an orthodox priest. This particular image initially appeared in an online news article from Bosnia, to discredit the priest caught on camera with Mladić (Vasilije Kačavenda) by reminding readers and viewers of his role in the Yugoslav wars of dissolution. Linking the Yugoslav People's Army to the tragic events of the 1990s, here, as in the discussion on forum.hr, turns what positive associations the *partizan* or Youth Day may have had in Yugoslav cultural

memory into the very opposite – a transformation evidenced in the retouched graffiti (Image 18) as online.

### Image 19. Mladić as *chetnik* and martyr



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYeaAOudTE8&> (accessed 23 July 2014)

Finally, Image 19, pulled from a *YouTube* video, offers an entire iconostasis of new Serbian ‘martyrs’. Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, Draža Mihajlović (the leader of the *chetnik* movement during the German occupation in World War II) and Slobodan Milošević keep company with Orthodox Christian saints. The implications are clear; the English-language news clip from the *Russia Today* channel in turn presents this image as visual evidence of Serbian nationalism and support for Mladić and Karadžić.

### Findings by genre: social media

Social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* offer very different forms of digital cultural content around current political events. Via *Twitter*, we find mainly factual responses to the news of Mladić’s arrest, and then a gradual drop-off in tweets about Mladić. A number of tweets seem suggestively linked to memory models, but only in very abridged form. On *Facebook*, we see many groups and pages devoted to Mladić, most created well after his arrest. We can collect and analyze the publically available information on these groups to deduce how many were pro-Mladić, how many contra-, when they were founded and the size of their respective memberships.

#### *Twitter*

Due to the number of tweets and the patterns observed (a rapid drop-off in international *Twitter* exchanges on the subject of Ratko Mladić; sporadic continued tweeting in Serbian Cyrillic but in inconclusively low numbers), we limit our research of the *Twitter* response to the day of Mladić’s arrest, May 26, 2011. We use *Twitter*’s search tools and limit the timeframe from May 25 to May 27. (This way, we also more or less ensure that the searches for Mladić return



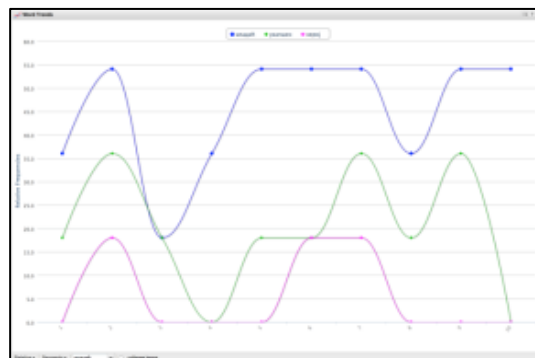


sentiments about the reasons for the arrest and the promise to deliver Mladić to international justice (Figure 7). One more *Voyant*-derived chart (Figure 8) shows the relative frequency of the terms ‘Младић’, ‘ухапшен’ [arrested] and ‘херој’. The word ‘hero’ recurred nearly as frequently as the word ‘arrested’, demonstrating that of those users who did choose to tweet the news of Mladić’s arrest in Serbian Cyrillic, nearly one-third included the epithet hero.

**Figure 7.** Word cloud of tweets (3)



**Figure 8.** Frequency of selected words



Source: Marijeta Božović, Bogdan Trifunović, Aleksandar Bošković

Reading sample tweets reveals the choices behind the figures above. Some popular English-language sources who tweeted about Mladić’s arrest used strong emotional tags and epithets, referring to him as the ‘butcher of Bosnia’ or the ‘war criminal and genocidal butcher’, as in the examples of @left\_the\_stars and @buffalopundit:

@left\_the\_stars\_26 May 11 Profile of career soldier Ratko #Mladic, who became ‘butcher of Bosnia’ <http://reut.rs/k1Z9s5> (@left\_the\_stars 2011)

@buffalopundit\_26 May 11 Ratko Mladić Apprehended?: Serbian and Croatian media are reporting that the war criminal and genocidal butcher ... <http://bit.ly/mvWf66> (@buffalopundit 2011)

While we find that *Twitter* as a social media platform and the 140-character digital genre of tweets do not allow for the layered memory-modeling of other online genres, such short tags and epithets fit overall associations with genocide and war crime.

Croatian tweeters used similar language, and reinforced tweeted news about the arrest with references to foreign and local news. For example, a tweet from @057info (an account linked to the Croatian radio channel 057) reads:

@057info\_26 May 11 Uhićen Ratko Mladić: Srpski mediji prenijeli su informaciju da je uhićen ratni zločinac i haški bjegunac Ratko Mladić. <http://bit.ly/jY2BAm> [Serbian media informs that the war criminal and Hague fugitive Ratko Mladić has been arrested.] (@057info 2011)

The tweet includes reported confirmation by ‘Serbian media’, a reference to Mladić as a fugitive from the international justice of The Hague, and includes a link to the online news source



of the Croatian station. Finally, the Serbian Cyrillic tweets depart dramatically from all the others. @dssarandjelovac reports Mladić's arrest with the preliminary qualifier:

@dssarandjelovac 26 May 11 Херој за једне, злочинац за друге: ухапшен Ратко Младић <http://nblo.gs/imye2> [Hero for some, war criminal for others: Ratko Mladic arrested.] (@dssarandjelovac 2011)

@ejmi\_\_ more dramatically attests: 'Сви смо ми Ратко Младић' ['We are all Ratko Mladić.'] (@ejmi 2011). Meanwhile, @MirkovicMilan in all capitals writes simply: 'СРПСКИ ХЕРОЈ РАТКО МЛАДИЋ!!!' ['Serbian Hero Ratko Mladić!!!'] (@MirkovicMilan 2011).

### Facebook

An overview of the responses to Mladić's arrest on *Facebook* reveals a number of pages, 'people' and groups devoted to the subject. We use *Facebook*'s search function and sort findings by hand, given the limited accessibility of this social platform's big data sets. Here, narrowly limiting temporal restrictions makes little sense: *Facebook* offers far fewer individual results than *Twitter*, and in many cases, it is impossible even to ascertain when 'closed groups' were started. For this platform and its subgenres, we rely on initial counting and sorting for a sense of the general discussion of Mladić and his arrest on *Facebook*, before zooming in on the most popular, striking or generically indicative examples.

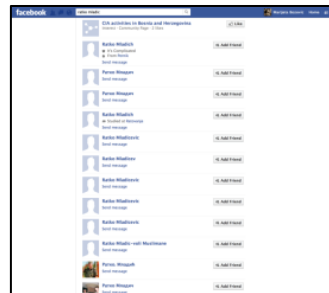
### Images 20, 21, 22. Facebook search results



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/search/str/ratko%2520mladic/pages-named> (accessed 23 July 2014)<sup>20</sup>



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/search/str/ratko%2520mladic/users-named> (accessed 23 July 2014)



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/search/str/ratko%2520mladic/users-named> (accessed 23 July 2014)

Our *Facebook* search for 'Ratko Mladić' returns information in Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, showing that the *Facebook* search engine links the name in both alphabets. We confirm 156 individual results, with a great degree of certainty, to refer to the 'correct' Ratko Mladić and not to innocent and unfortunate namesakes. In most cases, information on the page, in the section 'About', or other signs quickly indicate relevant pages. Of the 156 results, 74 were

<sup>20</sup> Similar pages can be found by searching 'People named "ratko mladić"'.



registered ‘people’ on *Facebook*, often with job descriptions including ‘warfare’, professions like ‘government’, ‘official’, ‘politician’, ‘monarch’ and many absurd or black humor comparisons, such as ‘Chuck Norris’.

Images 20-22 are screenshots of our *Facebook* search results. The first shows the relative diversity of *Facebook* pages, people and groups devoted to Mladić; the second and third demonstrate the relative dearth of information or activity associated with most of the Mladić avatars in particular. Many of these pages, we conjecture, were used only once or twice before being effectively abandoned by the creators.

As *Facebook* lists the number of members for both open and closed groups, we see that many groups have relatively small numbers, ranging from tens to 100 or 150 members, with only one closed group ‘Ратко Младић Српски Херој’ [‘Ratko Mladić the Serbian Hero’] numbering 456. The next largest group, ‘Ratko Mladic srpski junak’, with 151 members, is fortunately open. The title translates exactly the same way, but is written in Latin script and uses the synonym ‘junak’ for hero. (The borrowed Latinate cognate ‘heroj’ proves far more popular across all media than the Slavic-rooted word ‘junak’, regardless of the nationalist and anti-Western sentiments expressed.) The images below offer some picture of the information available on these two closed and open pro-Mladić groups, as well as a comparatively large open group calling for Mladić’s immediate execution.

#### Images 23, 24, 25. Facebook search results



Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/230341470316728/>  
(accessed 23 July 2014)<sup>21</sup>



Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/ratko.srpski.junak>  
(accessed 23 July 2014)<sup>22</sup>



Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/235210699938824/>  
(accessed 23 July 2014)

Of the 26 groups, 4 open and 11 closed groups are pro-Mladić, whereas 6 open and 2 closed groups of much smaller size are anti-Mladić. Three are too comical, snide or absurd to attribute any political stance. In comparison, the community and political figure pages have only two results that show numerically significant views. The page that first reported the news of Mladić’s arrest and included ‘good day for BiH’ in the title had, unsurprisingly, 1654 ‘likes’. However, the wickedly comical ‘Ratko Mladić is now friends with Vojislav Šešelj and Radovan Karadžić’ page received even more ‘likes’, as many as 1795.

<sup>21</sup> The initial source, accessed 28 March 2013, has since closed.

<sup>22</sup> Initial source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/191194847687357> (accessed 28 March 2013; closed).

Finally a search across all the titles and available information (including location, profession and label) reveals that the only words repeated with any frequency were ‘heroj’ or ‘junak’ (on one occasion, ‘orao’ [‘eagle’]), appearing 11 times in page or group titles; whereas ‘war criminal’, ‘bloodshedder’ or simply ‘criminal’ appear only three times. Finally, the vast majority, if not nearly all of the pages, people and groups related to Mladić on *Facebook* were written in some form of B/C/S, and most often in the Latin variant.

### Images 26 and 27. Facebook search results



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ratko-Mladić-is-now-friends-with-Vojislav-Šešelj-and-Radovan-Karadžić/229018740447663> (accessed 23 July 2014)



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Uhapšen-Ratko-Mladić-Historijski-dan-za-BiH/168477309879658> (accessed 23 July 2014)

*Facebook* users who took the time to open Mladić pages or Mladić avatars seem to have done so for brief and limited usage, with the exception of one or two pages that conveyed information about the arrest – including a video clip of the actual arrest. *Facebook* offers more space for memory modeling than *Twitter*, but users did not go into the depth and detail of blog and forum commentators, *Wikipedia* page producers or as we shall see, *YouTube* video producers. We also find – by far – the most black humor here, including the use of historical parallels, which may speak to the way *Facebook* users relate to the platform.

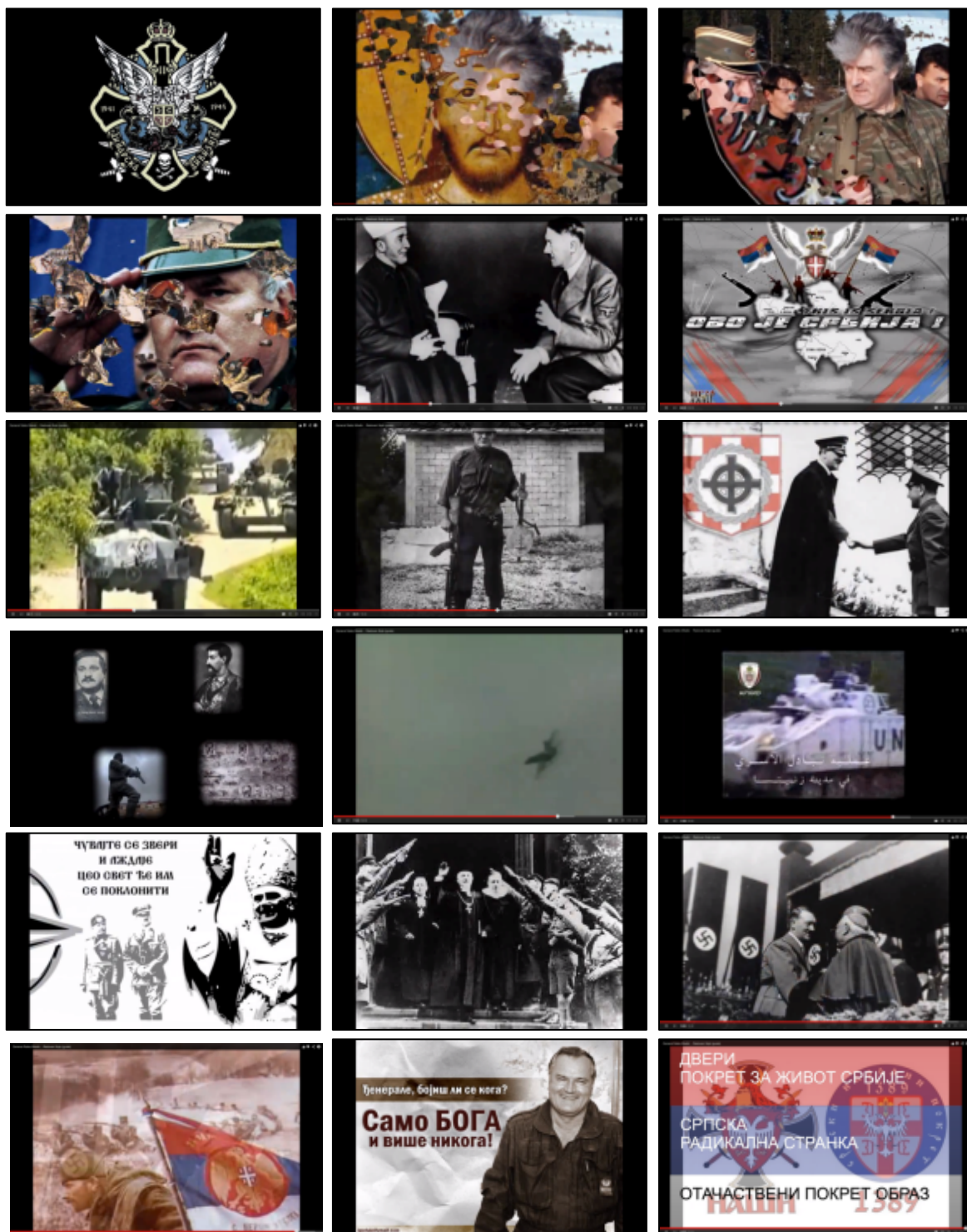
### Findings by genre: *YouTube*

We close with one final example from the social media platform *YouTube*. The audio-visual possibilities of the giant platform and its many genres (video and commentary) warrant separate study, but we selected one particular Serbian-language clip as a coda to our overview. This audio-visual depiction of Mladić as a composite Serb hero circles obsessively around the very darkest World War II imagery, creating shocking and drastic identity confluences. The time alone its producers must have spent on the project, uploaded in 2010, makes this *YouTube* clip stand apart from all of our earlier examples.

The clip, ‘General Ratko Mladić’, is in essence a 15:15-minute homemade music video of extreme Serbian nationalist sentiment. An original composition for the *gusle* performed by

Radovan Šojić plays over an extended slideshow of historical photographs and new clips, and the entire montage is dedicated to Mladić.

**Images 28-45.** Stills from ‘General Ratko Mladic – Radko Sojic (gusle)’



Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lsvad5gaq1A> (accessed 15 September 2013)

The *gusle* are the instrument of Serbia's (as well as Montenegro's and other local) epic oral tradition – the famous last remaining European oral epic so lovingly studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the early and mid-twentieth century (see Milman Parry 2012). Here a 'newly composed epic' spans the entire history and territory of 'greater Serbia', telling of the various foes that threatened the Serbian people throughout its history, and of the heroes and martyrs who rose up against them.

The savvy cultural producers of this video have appropriated all of the historical tragedies experienced by the Serbian people (borders loosely defined) to forge a story of timeless and nearly universal oppression and militant local opposition. The recurring refrain speaks of both the Ottoman yoke and the fascist threat, metonymically linked to contemporary events and more local rivals (Bosnians, Croats) as well as their allies (Americans, Nato, the UN). Ratko Mladić is depicted as the ultimate composite hero, a Franken-Serb stitched together from all of the important historical memory models: anti-Ottoman *hajduk*, WWI *chetnik* hero, anti-Nazi World War II fighter (again incongruously combining Communist *partizan* and Royalist/Orthodox *chetnik* signifiers) and thus the ultimate synthesized hero needed in Serbia's most recent crisis. The man known to others as the 'butcher of Bosnia' here becomes a pious martyr for his people and for God.

As of September 15, 2013, the clip has been viewed 50,856 times and has 195 likes and only 10 dislikes. Top comments include declarations from poster BurekSaSirom1: 'И ја сам ђенералов јатак'! ['I too am the general's *yatak*' (helper, archaic)]. The user Kassadin TheRealOP adds praise of the guslar Radovan Šojić: 'Радоване брате свака ти је златна и на месту. Фукаре што га издадоше неће умањити херојска дела Народног хероја ђенерала Ратка Младића, живеће вечно као херој' ['Radovan, brother, every word of yours is golden and to the point. The *fukara* (scum) who betrayed him will not lessen the heroic deeds of the People's hero, General Ratko Mladic, he will live forever as a hero'.]

The authors of this paper find this video the most insidious example of digital rhetoric used for nationalist propaganda purposes across the Mladić digital cultural productions.

## Preliminary conclusions

While we can predict that an event like the arrest of Ratko Mladić inevitably triggers an avalanche of fraught online responses, the memory models employed by both mainstream discourse and the oppositional fringe offer a number of insights. What is at stake in these competing epithets, memes and tropes is the narrative of the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia – what will emerge as the dominant narrative, and who will determine it. History, as we know, is written by the victors; but what does that mean in the case of the former Yugoslavia, where so many have lost so much? The real stakes in the story of Yugoslavia's dissolution involve the future of Europe: the dominant narrative explanation of the recent Balkan wars has significant implications for the reunification narrative of Western and Eastern Europe, offering additional motivation for the many echoes of World War II in media and digital cultural responses to Mladić's arrest.

Our research experiment tries to serve two purposes: to think about this historical event from the perspective of digital rhetoric; and to offer a contextualizing overview or flightmap of the kind of work that might be done with digital genres. Our preliminary investigation uncovers multi-layered historical memory models and considerable differences in the ways these models are expressed across online genres; serious investigative work remains to be done within every genre.

All of the online genres that we examined bear traces of earlier media: digitally disclosed, in the case of the posted *hajduk* poem; or displaying offline and online genre hybridity, as in rhymed blog comments and tweeted puns. Regardless of origin, however, when transposed and remediated into certain new genres or platform, such as *Facebook*, blogs or *YouTube* commentary, digital cultural production begins to generate discourses all its own. Such discourses – whether enforcing a dominant, even hegemonic narrative or providing environments for sharing and proliferating extreme nationalist bitterness – urgently call for historically and theoretically informed scholarly attention.

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