

The Rise of Ethnic Nationalism in the Former Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia:  
An Examination of the Use of History

By

Daniel Ryan Van Winkle

Primary Thesis Advisor: Dr. David Doellinger

Secondary Thesis Advisor: Dr. Narasingha Sil

Western Oregon University

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## Introduction

Yugoslavia existed as federation of six socialist republics since the end of the Yugoslav Civil War (1941–1945) until its violent dissolution in the 1990s. This federation was ruled by one man, a socialist dictator named Josip Broz Tito (1945-1980) under whose broad policy of "Brotherhood and Unity" the ethnic component of the Civil War never officially entered the history books in the former Yugoslavia. Even so, the butchery committed by all parties—the German and Italian occupiers, the Ustasha (Croatian fascists), and the Chetnik and Partisan resistance movements—was not forgotten. The lack of reconciliation in the years after the Civil War drove a wedge between the Yugoslav peoples, and, bereft of any credible information, the Yugoslav public was misled by self-serving politicians during the decade after Tito's death into violent ethnic nationalism, thus splintering the Yugoslav state. A careful examination of the rhetoric employed by former Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, in the years between 1987 and 1992, when compared to recent scholarly investigations into the actual events of the Yugoslav Civil War of the 1940s,<sup>1</sup> will show that the creation of an official history (by Tito's government) that ignored the ethnic dimension of the War left that aspect of the conflict available to be used as a tool for ethnic nationalism after Tito's death in 1980. This maltreatment of history—by Tito and by the nationalist leaders that came to power in the late 1980s—demonstrates the need for reconciliation between the participants of an ethnic war and a balanced scholarly discourse concerning the knowable

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<sup>1</sup> This paper will only include the analysis of those speeches that are available in English-language transcripts. Doubtlessly, however, a closer examination of Serbo-Croatian sources would show similar patterns in Milosevic's rhetoric. Recent investigations of the Yugoslavia during its civil war between 1941 and 1945 have focused on the examination of primary source material that I am unable to access. This material includes, but is in no way limited to, German, Italian and British war archives, personal testimonies of survivors of the Yugoslav Civil War, as well as personal and diplomatic correspondence.

facts of the event. This examination will be preceded by some comments about the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a brief historical overview of the region, and an introductory analysis of the rise of ethnic nationalism before the death of Tito.

### **Context of the Problem**

On March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet Union, thus beginning the disintegration of the socialist federations of Eastern Europe. By August of 1991 most of the former soviet republics had done the same, all with limited violence. On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully divided itself along ethnic lines in what became known as the “velvet divorce.” Therefore, in the early 1990s following the end of the cold war, Yugoslavia was one of the three multi-ethnic, formerly socialist states to undergo division.<sup>2</sup> How then can the violence that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia be explained when the same process was experienced elsewhere with relative non-violence? The mechanisms by which the changes were brought about differ. In the two “peaceful” cases just mentioned, ethnic nationalism surfaced because of the fall of socialism, whereas the research presented in this paper indicates that in Yugoslavia ethnic nationalism actually brought about the fall of the socialist political institutions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gojko Vuckovic. “Failure of Socialist Self-Management to Create a Viable Nation-State, and Disintegration of the Yugoslav Administrative State and State Institutions,” *East European Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1998): 353.

<sup>3</sup> Omer Fisher notes in his chapter of *New Approaches to Balkan Studies* titled “Transition and Disruption in Yugoslavia in Comparative Perspective” that “Of the formerly communist countries that experienced a change in political regime starting from the eighties, all socialist federations broke up, and none of the unitary states collapsed. Furthermore, the disintegration of these federations produced an almost one-to-one correspondence between republics of the federations and new independent states.” In this chapter Fisher examines the differences between the three cases of Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. He concludes that the violent transition in Yugoslavia is due to the particulars of the liberalization phase of Yugoslav politics, the discontinuous nature of this transition, and the “degree of violent center-periphery mobilization.” He provides valuable insights into the nature of socialist federations, but does not address the ethnic dimension of the Yugoslav conflict, the very dimension that I believe accounts for the violent conflict between the Serbian center of Yugoslavia and its multi-ethnic

It is significant to note that unlike other socialist states whose governments carried on after the decline of their initial socialist dictators, Yugoslavia proved unable to weather the transition from Tito to another executive leader or group of leaders. Perhaps this speaks volumes of Tito as a leader of consummate political skill. More likely, however, it attests to Yugoslavia's succession problem and its lack of ideological rigidity even at the highest levels of republican leadership. As a matter of comparison, Soviet socialism, at least until the ascension of Gorbachev in 1985, was associated with a high degree of centralism and party leadership. Even in the later stages of its development there remained a dogmatic element associated with the leader of the Communist Party. The Yugoslav League of Communists (YLC) incorporated no such dogmatism. Gojko Vuckovic, a respected scholar who specializes in international politics, notes that the YLC made efforts during Tito's reign to set policies and pursue socialist ideals, but the "inconsistency in formulation and interpretation of the Yugoslav nation led to the endless adjustment of Yugoslav political and administrative institutions."<sup>4</sup> The most important of these adjustments were permanent revisions of the Yugoslav constitution between 1948 and 1974 that systematically transferred political and economic power away from the central government to the constituent Republics. Essentially, Tito's death marked the end of the last vestiges of a strong central government in Yugoslavia.

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periphery. For more on Fisher's argument, see: Omer Fisher "Transition and Disruption in Yugoslavia in Comparative Perspective" in *New Approaches to Balkan Studies* ed. Keridis, Elias-Bursac, and Yatromanolakis (Everet, Massachusetts: Fidelity Press, 2003), 149-82.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 374.

## Methodology

This study is divided into two parts. The first is a brief overview of the history of Yugoslavia and nationalism in Yugoslavia and the second is a textual analysis of English language transcripts of several speeches by Slobodan Milosevic prior to 1993. The overview draws upon a broad range of secondary source material published by respected authorities in the field of Yugoslav studies. Incorporated into the first part is a more in-depth historiography of Serbian nationalism that focuses on a number of secondary sources published since 1990. This paper does not, however, address most of the sensationalist literature that flooded the market with the outbreak of the worst violence in Europe since the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> The analysis of Milosevic's speeches focuses on identifying how accounts of historical events were used to inspire nationalist sentiments among Serbs. My analysis is predicated upon Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism.

Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>6</sup> This powerful statement includes no less than four important concepts that describe the character of nationalism: imagination, limitation, sovereignty, and community. Anderson explains each of these in turn.

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members...imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries beyond which lie other nations...imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm...[and] imagined as community because, regardless

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<sup>5</sup> The review article “Instant History” by Gale Stokes and some of his colleagues was instrumental in weeding through the mountain of literature that has been published about Yugoslavia in the years immediately following the outbreak of war in the 1990s. Stokes et al discriminate on the basis of the credentials of the various authors and the academic rigor with which they pursued their works. They generally speak poorly of most of the books written by journalists who had no prior experience in Yugoslavia prior to the 1990s. Most of the sources in my historiography of Serbian nationalism were selected based upon the recommendations of this article. Gale Stokes et al. “Instant History: Understanding the Wars of Yugoslav Succession” *Slavic Review* 55 no. 1 (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Norfolk: Thetford Press, 1983), 15.

of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the idea of belonging to a nation is a recent and constructed concept. Integral to this concept is the notion of the “Other,” those that lie outside the bounds of the nation. The Other may be (but does not necessarily have to be) one who speaks another language, one with different colored skin, the people living on the other side of a mountain, or any other arbitrary characteristic. Historically, however, language and ethnicity have been important factors in the defining of imagined communities. Along with Anderson’s succinct explanation reproduced above, one additional aspect of his theory is particularly applicable to the Serbian situation—essentially, nationalism maybe employed—usually by elite members of society—as a means of legitimizing the state.<sup>8</sup> This is known as “official nationalism” and it has been used extensively in Yugoslavia in the latter half of the twentieth-century.

### **Historical Overview**

Yugoslavia is located on the Balkan Peninsula, a region that has been divided and contested for centuries. It marked the geographical division of the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire as early as the fourth-century A.D. Here the dominions of Catholicism and Orthodoxy met, and Islam became a major influence, as well, with the invasion of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth-century. Germans mingled with Slavs, especially in the northern regions of Croatia and Slovenia, and modern Bosnia-Herzegovina marked the uneasy frontier between the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs. More recently still the nation of Yugoslavia stood precariously between the Cold War

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 145.

superpowers (physically as well as ideologically, to a certain degree).<sup>9</sup> Even without any additional information, it would be reasonable to accept that a region divided in so many different ways for such an extended period of time with relatively brief interludes of autonomy would be prone to political and ethnic strife, and many western observers of the 1990s dissolution point to this factor to explain the violence and ethnic cleansing. A more in-depth chronological overview, however, will show that there is no record of large-scale inter-Slavic conflict and that ethnic wars and genocide are a product of the twentieth-century.<sup>10</sup>

Autonomy was first secured in the region by Christianized Serbian principalities that wrested their independence from a decaying Byzantine Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D. At its height under Stevan Dušan (1331–1355), the original Serbian Empire encompassed Macedonia, Albania, Epirus, and Thessaly, as well as parts of Bulgaria and present-day Serbia.<sup>11</sup> Its independence, however, was short lived. On June 28, 1389 (St. Vitus Day) the Serbian Empire lost the Battle of Kosovo to the encroaching Ottoman Empire, under which it would remain until the nineteenth-century.<sup>12</sup> This battle is remembered by Serbs as one of the most important events in their history, certainly the most important to occur before the twentieth century. Many poems and legends depict the Battle of Kosovo as a crushing military defeat, but it is almost

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<sup>9</sup> Dusko Doder. "Yugoslavia: New War, Old Hatreds." *Foreign Policy* 91 (1993): 5.

<sup>10</sup> In spite of these historical divisions most serious scholars do not agree with the "Ancient ethnic hatreds" argument to explain the cause of the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia. Arguing against age-old hatreds are scholars such as Christopher Bennett, Jonathan Gumz, Gojko Vuckovic, and Susan Woodward. For more information see Bennett, Christopher. *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course and Consequences* (London: Hurst & Company), 1995. Jonathan Gumz, "German Counterinsurgency Policy in Independent Croatia, 1941-1944," *Historian* 61, no. 1 (1998): 33-51. <http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=1355044> (accessed April 1, 2005). Gojko Vuckovic, "Failure of Socialist Self-Management." Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Mojmir Križan, "New Serbian Nationalism and the Third Balkan War," *Studies in East European Thought* 46 (1994): 47.

<sup>12</sup> See: Appendix A "Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, and the Ottoman Empire, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries."

universally regarded by Serbs as a moral victory. It is remembered as the battle in which Serbia defended European culture against the Muslim invaders. Additionally, the Battle of Kosovo has become the subject of Serbian mythology through the creation of innumerable commemorative ballads. In the mythological account, the leader of the Serbian armies, Tsar Lazar, was given the choice between an earthly crown and a heavenly one. The former would be his if he allowed his forces to crush the invading Turks, the latter if they willingly accepted defeat. Legend says that he chose the kingdom of the heaven.<sup>13</sup>

As the Ottoman Empire began to decay, Serbia once again managed to secure autonomy with the expulsion of the Turks in 1862.<sup>14</sup> Serbia survived as an independent kingdom until the outbreak of the First World War. Afterwards, Croatian and Slovene desires for independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire loosely corresponded with Serbian desires for the creation of a Greater Serbian Nation that would include all of the region's linguistically similar populations. On December 1, 1918 the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—renamed the “Kingdom of Yugoslavia” in 1929—was created.<sup>15</sup> Although these three peoples were all of the same Slavic race, considerable cultural differences existed. Croats and Serbs shared the same language, but wrote in different alphabets—the former in Latin, the latter in Cyrillic. Additionally, these two ethnic groups had sharply divergent cultural traditions—the Serbs had spent nearly half a millennium under the dominion of a Muslim (Ottoman Turkish) empire, while the Croats

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<sup>13</sup> John Matthias. *The Battle of Kosovo: Serbian Epic Poems* trans. John Matthias and Vladeta Vuckovic (Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1987), [http://www.kosovo.com/history/battle\\_of\\_kosovo.html#s02](http://www.kosovo.com/history/battle_of_kosovo.html#s02) (accessed May 17, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Križan, “New Serbian Nationalism,” 49.

<sup>15</sup> See: Appendix A, “East Central Europe, 1918-1923,” and “Yugoslavia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to 1941.” Also note: “Kingdom of Yugoslavia” is literally translated as the “Kingdom of the Southern Slavs.” See: Helmut Konrad. “Historical Perspectives on Ethnic Conflict in Central Europe,” *The History Teacher* 25 no. 4 (1992): 447.

spent a similar period under Catholic (Hapsburg-Austrian) influence. Perhaps most importantly, however, Serbs were traditionally Orthodox Christians whereas Croats were predominantly Roman Catholic.<sup>16</sup> The Slovenes were conquered by the Hapsburgs in 1278, and thus share a similar cultural history with the Croats even though the Slovenian and Croatian languages are distinct. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia also included substantial regional minorities of ethnic Albanians, Hungarians, Montenegrins, and Macedonians emphasizing the arbitrary nature of the borders drawn at the end of the First World War. In this initial formation of the southern Slavic state, often known as the “First Yugoslavia,” Serbia was the only province that had been an autonomous state in recent times.<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising then that the first king of the new state would be Alexander, the former regent of Serbia.<sup>18</sup>

Trouble soon beset the young kingdom as the opposing political interests of the Serbs and Croats made it clear that it would be impossible to agree upon a constitution. On June 28, 1921 Alexander, in the face of Croatian and Slovene opposition, pushed a proposed constitution through the parliament that provided for a highly centralized

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<sup>16</sup> Currently, in the context of a discussion concerning the peoples of the former Yugoslavia Orthodoxy is synonymous with Serbian as is Roman Catholicism with Croatian, yet this has not always been the case. At the time of the formation of the first Yugoslavia there were in fact Orthodox Croats, Catholic Serbs, and Muslims of both ethnicities. See: Bogdan Denitch. *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 29-30. Additionally, Damir Mirkovic suggests that although the differences in alphabets and religions cannot be denied, factors such as urbanization, industrialization, the availability of secular education and interethnic marriages were blurring the distinctions between Serbs and Croats. Damir Mirkovic. “On Destruction and Self-destruction of Croatian Serbs: a preliminary draft for a study of genocide,” *The South Slav Journal* 20, no. 1-2 (1999): 29.

<sup>17</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia of 1990 justifies the legitimacy of its existence by citing “a thousand-year-long national identity and state existence of the Croatian Nation.” It provides a chronicle of Croatian statehood from the initial creation of Croatian principalities in the seventh century through the constitutions of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (1963-1990) with the intent of justifying Croatia’s claim to full state sovereignty. For a reproduction of this chronicle in English see: “The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia: December 22, 1990” in Gale Stokes ed. *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945*, second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 285-86.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Pintarich. “Yugoslav Sectionalism: Its Past and Reemergence,” *Mankind* 5 (1976): 36. See also: Appendix A, “East Central Europe, 1910.”

government and effectively established himself as a dictator. Little was accomplished under this system because the Croat opposition, under the leadership of Stephen Radic, refused to recognize the king's authority under a constitution that had not been approved by a two-thirds majority. Nevertheless, Serbian hegemony persisted. This conflict gave rise in the late 1930s to the Croatian fascist movement, the Ustasha, which would later be installed as the ruling party of the Independent State of Croatia.

World War II brought untold suffering to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The war in Yugoslavia was not limited to the invasion of and resistance to the German and Italian armies. Civil war also erupted as a result of the removal of the central government. By 1939 German occupation was accepted as an unavoidable reality, but easing the nationalistic tensions within Yugoslavia seemed like the best solution for minimizing the dismemberment of the state. With this in mind, and after much negotiation, Croatia was actually granted independence before the Second World War came to Yugoslavia. The Axis powers finally invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, and the Ustasha under Ante Pavelic quickly established ties with the invaders. The Croatian fascists freely collaborated with both the Germans and the Italians and were installed as the rulers of the Independent State of Croatia, which was expanded to include the Yugoslav province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Hence, beginning in 1941, the Ustasha not only participated in the Nazi program to exterminate the Jews of Europe, but also began their own genocidal program directed at Serbs and other minorities within the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Gumz, a scholar specializing in the field of holocaust studies, suggests that

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<sup>19</sup> German officers stationed in the Independent State of Croatia and occupied Yugoslavia recognized the destabilizing effect that the Ustasha program of genocide had on the Serbian population and did everything in their limited power to stop it—not out of concern for those being murdered, of course, but rather for the sake of the stability of the occupied state. Hitler, however, did not share in his officer's

Not only would the genocide meet the Ustasha's goal of an ethnically pure Croatian nation, but the Ustasha also believed that it would widen their small political power base by making all Croats by virtue of their ethnicity complicit in the genocide.<sup>20</sup>

This process of systematic murder was carried out in concentration camps much as it was in Central Europe. The Ustasha killed some 45,000 to 52,000 Serbs and 8,000 to 20,000 Jews in Jasenovac, the largest of these camps in Croatia. The same source places the total number of Serbs killed by the Ustasha somewhere between 330,000 and 390,000 and Jews around 32,000.<sup>21</sup>

In Serbia another ultra-nationalist group, the Chetniks,<sup>22</sup> under the leadership of Draza Mihailović supported the Serbian government-in-exile. The Chetniks, based their resistance on the Serbian peasantry's traditional pattern of armed self-defense. Village notables were relied upon to carry out resistance activities in the areas around their village. This strategy led to a resistance movement that was intimately acquainted with the local terrain, but ineffective at mobilizing for large-scale resistance activities.<sup>23</sup> At the other end of the political spectrum, Josip Broz Tito led the Partisans, a communist

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concern, and in an often cited statement with General Alexander Lohr maintained that the Croats were "only letting off a little steam" by killing Serbs. Gumz, "German Counterinsurgency Policy," 4. Even more shocking is the evidence provided by Paul Hehn in his article "Serbia, Croatia and Germany 1941-1945" that Hitler may have "partitioned Yugoslavia to deliberately foster quarrels between national groups to enable him to dominate the area more easily." Paul N. Hehn, "Serbia, Croatia, and Germany, 1941-1945: Civil War and Revolution in the Balkans," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 13, no. 4 (1972): 346.

<sup>20</sup> Gumz, "German Counterinsurgency Policy," 2.

<sup>21</sup> Figures on the exact number of Serbs killed in the Ustasha program of genocide vary greatly, and are largely dependent upon the political motives of the source. Typically Serbian sources tend to maximize the casualty figures while Croatian sources minimize them. For this paper I have used the statistics compiled by the United States Holocaust Museum. For more information see: United States Holocaust Museum "Holocaust Era in Croatia 1941-1945: Jasenovac" <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/jasenovac/> (accessed April 14, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> The name "Chetnik" had surfaced in recent times in connection with the Bosnian Serb guerillas operating during World War I, but Mihailović chose it as a name for his forces because of its symbolic reference to the highland guerilla bands that opposed Ottoman rule. These outlaws—alternatively known as *klephts*, *haiduks*, or *haiduts*—terrorized trade caravans, often with the support of local villages, during the Ottoman period and are remembered by rural Serbs as folk heroes. See: John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 201-02. Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. 1, *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 61.

<sup>23</sup> Bogdan Denitch, "Violence and Social Change in the Yugoslav Revolution: Lessons for the Third World?" *Comparative Politics* 8, no. 3 Special Issue on Peasants and Revolution (1976), 467.

resistance movement. The most striking difference between the Partisans and the Chetniks was that while the latter was almost entirely composed of Serbs,<sup>24</sup> the former actively included members of all Yugoslav ethnicities (although Serbs did compose the majority of their ranks) under Tito's communist slogan "Brotherhood and Unity." In addition to being a multi-ethnic resistance group, the Partisans formed a much more mobile force not tied to any particular area. Their leaders were not traditional authority figures, but rather were usually taken from the rural intelligentsia, especially from teachers schools.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the Chetniks engaged in relatively little active resistance compared to the communist Partisan resistance group led by Tito because they took the Germans threats of reprisals (and demonstrations thereof) very seriously.<sup>26</sup> Eventually with allied assistance, the Partisans succeeded in liberating Yugoslavia—including the Independent State of Croatia—from Nazi and Ustasha occupation, and Tito established the YLC at the core of the new Yugoslav government under a plan of enforced national unity and tolerance.<sup>27</sup>

It is widely accepted by many historians that without Tito's charismatic leadership, Yugoslavia, which incorporated deep-rooted ethnic divisions, would not have existed for so long.<sup>28</sup> This argument gains more weight when it is considered that, after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, Yugoslavia was an unaligned socialist state pursuing an

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<sup>24</sup> In addition to Serbs, some Bosnian Muslim guerilla groups fell under the umbrella of the Chetnik movement. For more on this see Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations between Moslems and Non-Moslems," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5 no. 3 (1990): 282.

<sup>25</sup> The Chetniks recognized this pattern of recruitment for the political commissars of the Partisan forces. According to Bogdan Denitch, this "explains the systematic murder by Chetniks of village schoolteachers and graduates of teachers' schools in Serbia and Eastern Bosnia." Denitch, "Violence and Social Change," 467.

<sup>26</sup> Gumz, "German Counterinsurgency Policy," 3.

<sup>27</sup> See: Appendix A, "Yugoslavia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century 1941-1989."

<sup>28</sup> For example see Vuckovic, "Failure of Socialist Self-Management," 374 or Fisher, "Transition and Disruption," 169.

uncharted course of political development.<sup>29</sup> This turned out to be a course leading to decentralization where Tito's personal authority eventually became the only effective remaining element of the central government. Upon his death in 1980, the Yugoslav central government was too weak to contain the nationalist drives of its constituent republics. There had been no provisions made for the succession of leadership, and the presidency shared between the leaders of each of the republics proved completely ineffectual. Faced with the mounting pressures of ethnic nationalism in each of the republics and the reality of complete decentralization, the YLC dissolved itself following the first free elections in 1990 and was followed shortly thereafter by the complete collapse of the central government.<sup>30</sup>

### **Problems of Nationalism under Tito**

During the Civil War of the 1940s, ethnic nationalism had undergone a transformation from the ideological to the violent and militant. This transformation was perhaps the most obvious threat to the stability of the Second Yugoslavia that emerged immediately after World War II. Tito's policies sought to curb Serbian nationalism in particular, but a heavy burden of guilt was also placed upon the Croats for their fanaticism. As a method of legitimizing itself, Tito and the YLC tailored the national memory of the war to fit a strictly bilateral mold. The communist Partisans fought against elements of fascism. No distinction was drawn between the Ustasha, Chetniks, and the Nazis themselves. References to the Partisans use of violence and terror during and immediately after the war—for example, the killing of thousands of Chetnik and Ustasha

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<sup>29</sup> For more information about the campaign to abolish Stalinist forms of rule in Yugoslavia see: Paul Shoup, "The National Question in Yugoslavia," *Problems of Communism* 21 (1972): 19.

<sup>30</sup> Vuckovic, "Failure of Socialist Self-Management," 374.

POWs<sup>31</sup>—was not allowed to be called into question and the media was censored to conform to Tito’s “Brotherhood and Unity” policy. These policies aimed at replacing ethnic nationalism, namely Serbian and Croatian, nationalism, with an all-encompassing Yugoslav nationalism.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, aside from their unsuccessful experiences within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the republics that composed Yugoslavia had no similar history upon which to base a sense Yugoslav national identity.

The failure of the governments of both the First Yugoslavia and the Second to create an enduring Yugoslav nationalism—a sense of nationalism shared by all the citizens of the state—illustrates the relative importance of shared cultural memory as compared to language in the process of fostering nationalism. According to Benedict Anderson by the end of the First World War, “the legitimate international norm was the nation-state.”<sup>33</sup> In Europe nation-states were typically formed in regions where the majority of the population spoke the same vernacular. Coincidentally, these were also regions that shared common cultural traditions (e.g. France, Germany, and later Italy). It is not surprising then that the First Yugoslavia was created out of two regions, Serbia and Croatia, where the majority of the population spoke the vernacular known as “Serbo-Croatian.” The difference between Yugoslavia and other nation-states was that Serbia and

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<sup>31</sup> Records of these murders are sketchy and are a matter of contention between Serbs and Croats. Nevertheless it seems that Partisan forces took charge of opposition forces that had fled to Austria to surrender to the British and disposed of them through a series of death marches. The attention paid in recent years to most infamous of these marches, the Bleiberg march, became a major contributor to Croatian nationalism in the 1990s. For more information on this see: Biljana Vankovska, “Military and Society in War-Torn Balkan Countries: Lessons for Security Sector Reform,” <http://www.dcaf.ch/news/MISO/Biljana.pdf> (accessed May 19, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Wolfgang Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia,” *East European Politics and Societies* 13, no. 1 (1999): 197-98.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 104.

Croatia had very different cultural traditions.<sup>34</sup> Croatia was essentially Austrian in culture, while Serbs had bitterly clung to their medieval heritage under Turkish domination for 500 years. This largely accounts for the instability of the first Yugoslavia. This cultural disparity was further amplified by the events of World War II. Thus, during the period of the Second Yugoslavia, the constituent republics had almost nothing in common besides a language and even that was not shared uniformly throughout the country.<sup>35</sup>

Republican nationalism did not disappear after World War II nor were old grievances forgotten, but in Serbia nationalist sentiments were censored from the media in accordance with Tito's "Brotherhood and Unity" policy. In spite of this censorship, anti-Croatian sentiments smoldered. Popular demonstrations in the 1980s attested to the fact that Serbia as a whole nursed a grudge against Croatia, its more sophisticated, industrialized, and seemingly ungrateful neighbor to the northwest. After all, Serbs remembered that it was they who had sacrificed the most in both World Wars to assure the autonomy of a Southern Slavic State. Many remembered the crimes committed by the

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<sup>34</sup> Yugoslavia also included significant minorities of peoples that did not speak Serbo-Croatian such as the Slovenes, Hungarians, and Albanians. This further contributed to the instability of Yugoslavia as a nation state.

<sup>35</sup> It would be unfair to say that absolutely no one bought into Yugoslav nationalism. According to the census taken in 1991, 3 percent of Yugoslavia's 23,528,230 people declared themselves as "Yugoslavs,"—that is to say that they refused to claim any particular ethnicity. Yet, if Yugoslavs are considered as a minority they outnumber—of the other substantial minorities—only Montenegrins and Hungarians (2 percent each) and are less populous than Muslim Slavs (10 percent), Albanians (9 percent), Slovenes (8 percent), and Macedonian Slavs (6 percent) to say nothing of Serbs (36 percent) and Croats (20 percent). On the other hand it should be taken into consideration that this census was taken after a decade of mounting ethnic nationalist sentiments which would have led individuals to declare an ethnicity other than Yugoslav. Census data from 1971 and 1981 provide at least superficial support for this claim. In 1981 "Yugoslavism" was at a high of 5.4 percent of the total population, which is a considerable increase from just 1.2 percent in 1971. In other words, at least until the time of Tito's death, the concept of a Yugoslav nationality was growing in popularity. Census figures for 1971 and 1981 taken from "Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" in *LaborLawTalk Online Encyclopedia* [http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Socialist\\_Federal\\_Republic\\_of\\_Yugoslavia#Demographics](http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Socialist_Federal_Republic_of_Yugoslavia#Demographics) (accessed June 1, 2005). Figures for 1991 taken from "Yugoslavia: The People of Yugoslavia" in *Encarta Online Encyclopedia* [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761567145/Yugoslavia.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761567145/Yugoslavia.html) (accessed May 29, 2005).

Ustasha and they resented the economic prosperity of Croatia. Furthermore, after the war in which mostly Serbian Partisan forces had secured the liberation of the nation, Serbia was territorially dismembered by the creation of the republics of Montenegro and Macedonia and the two autonomous republics of Kosovo and Vojvodina. Even after the loss of these traditionally Serbian territories, the republic of Serbia was still nearly twice as populous as the next largest republic (Croatia), but in all formulations of the government it would receive representation equal to that of any other republic. Especially troublesome to Serbian nationalism were the abuses perpetrated by ethnic Albanians against a shrinking minority of Serbs in the autonomous province of Kosovo—the most important location to Serbian culture since it was the site of their defeat by the Ottomans in the fourteenth century.<sup>36</sup>

The Croatians, however, enjoyed more liberty during the Tito era, and in the early 1970s in particular there was a surge of Croatian nationalist sentiment. Stephen Anderson writing during this period noted that whereas Serbians were jealous of Croatia's prosperity, "Croats have always chafed at what they consider to be exploitation by the poorer and more backward regions of Yugoslavia—i.e. Serbia Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina."<sup>37</sup> It was due to mounting feelings of ethnic nationalism that Croatia persistently lobbied for republican participation in the central government. Eventually, the Yugoslav Federal Assembly passed constitutional amendments on June 30, 1971 that provided for increased economic autonomy for the republics as well as guaranteeing participation in a joint presidential council that would replace Tito upon his eventual retirement. This constitutional reform sharply curtailed both the power and the

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<sup>36</sup> Alex N. Dragnich, "The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia: The Omen of the Upsurge of Serbian Nationalism," *East European Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1989): 183-97.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen S. Anderson, "Yugoslavia's Future," *Current History* 60, no. 357 (1971): 277.

authority of the federal government, limiting its authority primarily to international issues and relegating it to receiving “contributions” from the republics.<sup>38</sup> Omer Fisher points that after the constitutional reform, decisions on all matters in the federal parliament became subject to the unanimous approval of all the Yugoslav republics, and that even “day-to-day economic decisions relied on the good will of each of the republics and provinces.”<sup>39</sup> The crippling side effect of this arrangement was that the central government was unable to react to economic crises. These changes, however, inflamed rather than assuaged Croatian nationalism and led to even greater demands for control over foreign trade, republican control of foreign currency earned, and outright economic independence. Tito’s speech broadcast from Belgrade on April 15, 1971 foreshadowed the problems that would besiege Yugoslavia with the adoption of the new constitutional amendments:

Many competences will be transferred from the Federation to the republics as a result of the adoption of the constitutional amendments. I think that this is good. However, there are also some people who, to be factual, by invoking the amendments, aim at closing themselves within their borders and establishing a closed market, that is, a market which would not be unified and this is a dangerous thing.<sup>40</sup>

Within two decades, Tito’s fears were more than realized. In the free elections, held in 1990 for the first time since World War II, nationalist parties or coalitions won majorities in all of the Yugoslav republics. Then, in 1991 and beginning with Slovenia, the republics began to declare and forcibly assert their total independence as separate states.

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<sup>38</sup> Shoup, “The National Question in Yugoslavia,” 25.

<sup>39</sup> Fisher, “Transition and Disruption,” 161.

<sup>40</sup> Josip Broz Tito, “Socialist Amalgam for Federal Yugoslavia,” Tanjug broadcast from Belgrade April 15, 1971 in Shoup “The National Question in Yugoslavia” 28.

## **Historiography of Yugoslav Nationalism**

Since the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, there has been a flood of scholarly works published on the subject. A popular point of inquiry—to which the topic of this paper attests—has been the connection between the rise of ethnic nationalism and the disintegration of the Yugoslav state. So far this study has advanced the argument that there is a direct causal relationship between increasingly nationalist republics and the secession of the same. While this is a widely shared position, it is not the only one. The following section gives a sampling of some of the scholarly arguments on this connection

Gojko Vuckovic proposes that the system of “Socialist Self-Management” introduced into Yugoslavia in the 1950s was the primary contributor to the eruption of violent ethnic nationalism in Yugoslavia. He equates the process decentralization with the development of consciously ethno-nationalist republics. In other words, Vuckovic finds sufficient evidence that the process of nationalism began in the 1950, albeit slowly, and that the events of the 1990s are best seen as a continuation of the process of decentralization. The key event in this concept of Yugoslav disintegration is the death of Tito in 1980 at which time the central government ceased to be an effective institution. Vuckovic adds, however, that to this process of decentralization must be attached the additional consideration of an “unfavorable, divided, and inconsistent international community” in order to fully account for territorial breakup of Yugoslavia.<sup>41</sup>

Michael Ignatieff believes that ethnic nationalism in Yugoslavia is an invented concept that creates false distinctions and fosters fear between largely similar groups of people who would ordinarily live in peace with one another. He argues that nationalist

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<sup>41</sup> Vuckovic, “Failure of Socialist Self-Management,” 353.

politicians, such as Milosevic and Tudjman, only adopted the nationalist position because communism stopped working. “Nationalist sentiment on the ground, among common people,” he says, “is a secondary consequence of political disintegration, a response to the collapse of the state order and the interethnic accommodation that made it possible.”<sup>42</sup> In this argument he minimizes the existence of nationalism during Tito’s reign and what he does acknowledge he attributes to the aging generation that survived the Ustasha genocide. To substantiate this claim he points to the growing rates of intermarriage, the uniform application of justice by local authorities, and the status quo of peaceful coexistence in most villages.<sup>43</sup>

Also minimizing ethnic nationalism as the immediate cause of disintegration is Susan Woodward. She argues that “the real origin of the Yugoslav conflict is the disintegration of governmental authority and the breakdown of political and civil order.” She further states, “The conflict is not a result of historical animosities...it is the result of the politics of transforming a socialist society to a market economy and democracy.”<sup>44</sup> Woodward points to the economic crisis of the 1980s as being primarily responsible for the destabilization of the country and considers nationalism to be a “dynamic” of the growing political instability. She considers nationalism to possess an “empty vessel character—[an] absence of program outside the insistence on political power for some imagined community.”<sup>45</sup> Essentially, in Woodward’s view nationalism in the republics of the former Yugoslavia was little more than a banner under which adherents of diverse

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor* (Henry Holt: New York, 1998) 45.

<sup>43</sup> For more, see: Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor*, especially, “The Narcissism of Minor Difference,” 34 – 71.

<sup>44</sup> Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

political ideologies—from both the far left and right—could gather to preserve their crumbling political power.<sup>46</sup>

For Christopher Bennett, ethnic nationalism in Yugoslavia is a concept deliberately manufactured by the media in the 1980s in order to justify Serbia's territorial ambitions. He maintains that a unified Yugoslav state was the best possible arrangement for the southern Slavs, and plays down interethnic tensions in both the Kingdom and Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia. Bennett credits Milosevic with the triggering the disintegration of Yugoslavia by revoking the autonomy of Kosovo in 1989 as part of a program to build a greater Serbia. This is a fairly narrow perspective of the conflict—the position that Serbia, and specifically Milosevic, is at fault for the failure of the Yugoslav experiment—but it represents a fairly popular position in academia, and a very common view held laypersons.<sup>47</sup> For example, Laura Silber and Allan Little fall in line with Bennett with their argument that the disintegration of Yugoslavia is due primarily to Serbian nationalism. Specifically they claim to “trace the origins of the war to the rise of Serb nationalism among Belgrade intellectuals in the mid-1980s, and the subsequent harnessing of nationalist rhetoric by Slobodan Milosevic.”<sup>48</sup>

Closer to the position of this paper is Lenard Cohen. In his study of the break up of Yugoslavia he divides the problem into two specific issues. First, “why the ‘Second Yugoslavia’ (1945-1991) collapsed?” and second, “why [did] the disintegration of the

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<sup>46</sup> Integral to Woodward's book, but somewhat outside the scope of this paper is her study of the disintegration of Yugoslavia as a foreign policy issue for the global political community. She points to differing conceptions of the nature of the conflict (to say nothing of its origins), either “the war was an act of aggression by Serbs against the legitimate government of a sovereign member of the United Nations.” or “that the Yugoslav and Bosnian conflicts constituted a civil war based on the revival of ethnic conflict after the fall of communism.” *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, vii-15.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (New York: TV Books, 1995), 25.

federation [generate] so much violence and suffering?”<sup>49</sup> Cohen, like Woodward, attributes the collapse of the Yugoslav state to the failures of its political leaders to reestablish a functional model for political and economic coexistence among the republics following what he calls the “pluralist revolution” of 1990. Part of this failure consisted of the amplification of an “elite-led ethnic nationalism,” but unlike Ignatieff, Cohen sees a difference between newly created ethnic nationalism and historically rooted ethnic tensions. He also acknowledges the role that foreign powers played in the disintegration, “particularly German and Austrian support for the secessionist goals of Slovenia and Croatia, and the ‘pasted together’ diplomacy exhibited by the United States and European Community.”<sup>50</sup> Cohen’s explanation of the violence associated with the disintegration boils down to the fact that ethnic tensions existed. Without these, nationalist political campaigns would not have sparked the violent conflicts between individual neighbors that characterized the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. He finds his claim for the existence of ethnic tensions on evidence very much like that presented in earlier sections of this paper.

A perspective complimentary to many of the above arguments is that nationalism not only existed as a political policy, but that it was even institutionalized in the constitutions of the former Yugoslav republics. Robert Hayden argues that this “constitutional nationalism” was the solution adopted by the nationalist politicians elected in the free elections of 1990 to solve the problem of “combining practical politics

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<sup>49</sup> Lenard J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 265.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

and nationalist ideology.”<sup>51</sup> This policy allowed the new states to manipulate the institutions of democracy to favor members of an ethnic group rather than the individual citizen, and, as Hayden points out, Croatia and Slovenia employed constitutional nationalism most liberally. This concept of nationalism gives considerable weight to the argument that ethnic nationalism moved through society from the top down—after all, most villagers were not involved in the drafting of the constitutions. Identifying the disintegration of Yugoslavia as a product dictated by the outcome of the 1990 elections further reinforces the idea that nationalist politicians should be considered most responsible.

### **A Brief Account of Serbian Nationalism**

Strictly speaking, the concept of nationalism developed in Europe slowly over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but the nation-state did not become the international norm until after the First World War.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, a discussion of an imagined community among Serbs must begin much earlier. Following their defeat in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, Serbs managed to maintain their linguistic traditions over the ensuing centuries of foreign occupation. What accounts for this is the fact that under the Ottomans, Serbian communities enjoyed the status of *dhimmis*, protected Christian or Jewish enclaves within Islamic states. Also, as Mojmir Križan—another scholar involved in the study of the history of Serbian nationalism—points out, “as a predominantly illiterate peasant population lacking an intellectual and political elite, Serbs did not

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<sup>51</sup> Robert M. Hayden “Constitutional Nationalism in the Formerly Yugoslav Republics” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 4. (1992) 654.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 104.

develop a productive cultural exchange with their Islamic environment.”<sup>53</sup> The Serbs clung bitterly to their language for almost five centuries of Ottoman rule. Thus, even before the advent of formal nationalism in Western Europe, Serbs imagined themselves as a subculture within the Ottoman Empire the defining characteristic of which was their vernacular.<sup>54</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that once they achieved independence as their own state in the nineteenth century the Serbs defined themselves according to linguistic (not geographical) lines, and extended Serbian nationalist ambitions to include the linguistically similar Croatian and Slovene regions of the Hapsburg Empire. A study of textbooks from this period reinforces the concept of language’s central role in the nationalist picture. A popular Serbian elementary history text from 1907, claimed the following:

Nations are recognized by their language. However, many thousands of families who speak the same language and understand one another comprise one nation... But a nation is also identified by something else. For example, if you went far away, you would meet many people who did not speak our language, were not proud of Miloš Obilić, did not praise Kraljević Marko, did not celebrate our glories, did not attend church meetings as we do, and did not lament Kosovo. Frequently, they would not even know about these things. Consequently, people who speak the same language, who share the same national pride, and remember one another wherever they may be, who have identical customs are called a nation.<sup>55</sup>

In his study of South Slavic nationalism, Jelavich calls attention to the linguistic issue, but also stresses the importance of cultural practices and memory. Before proceeding to a discussion of these elements, it is worthwhile to point out that through his examination of

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<sup>53</sup> Križan, “New Serbian Nationalism,” 48.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted, however, that both Serbian identity and language were intimately tied to the epic ballads that recalled the memory of the Battle of Kosovo. For a translation of these ballads, see: Matthias, *The Battle of Kosovo*.

<sup>55</sup> Ljub. M. Protić and Vlad D. Stojanović, *Serbian Reader—Third Volume for the Fourth Grade of the Elementary Schools in the Kingdom of Serbia*. Seventh ed. (Belgrade: Državna štamparija, n.d.) 5; and Sreten Pašić and Milan Šević. *Serbian Reader for the Secondary Schools—First Volume—For the First Grade*. (Belgrade: Državna štamparija, 1902) 21 cited in: Charles Jelavich. “Nationalism as Reflected in the Textbooks of the South Slavs in the Nineteenth Century,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 16, nos. 1-2 (1989): 18.

over 300 textbooks from the period prior to the First World War Jelavich determines that “Serbian textbooks concentrated exclusively on the Serbian nation, with few attempts to inform students about the Croats.”<sup>56</sup> This certainly makes sense because Serbia was an independent kingdom and to annex the linguistically similar Croats would be seen as the creation of a Greater Serbia. His conclusions about the Croats within the Hapsburg Empire, however, communicate the Croatian belief that the best prospect for autonomy lay in the creation of a southern Slavic state in on equal terms with the Serbs. Specifically that “the Croatian textbooks stressed Serbo-Croatian linguistic and literary unity and included basic facts about Serbian history, religion, customs and traditions.”<sup>57</sup> In other words Croats viewed Serbs as separate people and potential partners in the creation of a Serbo-Croatian nation, whereas the Serbs viewed the absorption of the Croats as the next logical step in expanding their existing nation. This is a clear illustration of Benedict Anderson’s concept of nationalism in action. Croatian and Serbian textbook writers both imagined limited nation-states that included both Serbs and Croats, but they imagined the authority of the various ethnic groups in different ways, and as Anderson points out, sovereignty is an integral component of a nation-state. This interplay of vernacular and issues of sovereignty emphasize the dynamic nature of imagined communities and show that these communities are not always imagined in the same way.

Cultural memory has a strong connection with nationalism, not just in Yugoslavia. By making the participation in an event—or on a certain side of an event—by one’s ancestors a requirement for constituency, a nation may further limit the number and type of people that are included in the imagined community. In general, war

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<sup>56</sup> Jelavich, “Textbooks of the South Slavs,” 27 - 28.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 28.

memories, and in particular the way in which a nation remembers its participation in wars, play key roles in promoting nationalism.<sup>58</sup> This is especially true in the case of the Balkans, whose history has sometimes been presented as a continual series of armed conflicts.<sup>59</sup> Over time, most European nations phased out the depiction of war as a glorious and heroic event in favor of a more realistic picture of the human and social cost of wars. This trend was especially strong after World War II. As Jay Winter stated, “After Hiroshima and Auschwitz, the earlier commemorative efforts [of war as a glorious event] simply could not be duplicated.”<sup>60</sup> Even so, the practice of minimizing heroic accounts in educational curricula was not adopted in Yugoslavia to any measurable degree. According to Wolfgang Hoepken, “Military conflicts [in Yugoslavia] remained heroic national liberation wars,” (particularly the anti-Ottoman wars) as well as a means providing legitimacy for the current government as was seen in the case of the Tito and his Partisans.<sup>61</sup> In this way, education was incorporated into the program of official nationalism undertaken by Tito and the YLC—essentially the men running the Yugoslav government sought to build a sense of nationalism around the Civil War, an event in which they featured as heroes.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Mojmir Križan claims that in Serbia during the period of Ottoman rule, epic folk poetry distorted and mythologized history in order to instill in the “illiterate and oppressed Serbs the indispensable level of self confidence.” Even at this early period, distortions of history were used to fortify the Serbs sense of community hundreds of years before the formal advent of nationalism. See: Križan, “New Serbian Nationalism,” 48.

<sup>59</sup> Progress has been made by historians with regards to the examination of cultural memory. In 1999, Wolfgang Hoepken suggested that an anthropological perspective is needed to determine how past wars are viewed in present-day social and political contexts and to what degree this is an exclusively Balkan tendency. Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education,” 191.

<sup>60</sup> Jay Winter *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 9. cited in Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education,” 194.

<sup>61</sup> Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education,” 194.

<sup>62</sup> Benedict Anderson describes official nationalism as “from the start a conscious, self-protective *policy*, intimately linked to the preservation of imperial-dynastic interests...The one persistent feature of this style of nationalism was, and is, that it is official—i.e. something emanating from the state, and serving the interests of the state first and foremost.” Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 145.

Serbia never moved away from the concept of “war as a legitimate expression of politics,” according to Hoepken, and education continued “to show the legitimacy of war to fulfill national interests and to present wars as examples from the past of how to behave and how to defend those national interests.”<sup>63</sup> The concept of legitimating violence applied at the lowest levels of villages and family structures at least as well as it did for the national government, but here it was more a matter of everyday life than of a formal education policy. For the Serbian peasant living in a Turkish empire, the use of violence not only guaranteed his claim to the land that he worked, it was also the best way to ensure that he would remain alive to work it. As Bogdan Denitch notes, “in these areas, which have been subject to prolonged violence, the adaptation of the family structures to the necessities of war and the expansion of kinship networks for the purposes of self-defense lasted into the twentieth century.”<sup>64</sup> Evidence of these kinship networks and patterns of armed resistance are clearly evident in the strategy of the Chetnik (the Serbian nationalist) resistance movement in World War II. This strategy depended upon local leaders to do what they had always done—ensure the security of the local environs in which they lived and worked.<sup>65</sup>

On a related note, the use of language in the Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA) bears mentioning. Despite constitutional provisions to the contrary and balanced recruitment throughout the republics and provinces, Serbian became the only language

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<sup>63</sup> Hoepken, “War, Memory, and Education,” 193.

<sup>64</sup> Denitch, “Violence and Social Change,” 466.

<sup>65</sup> A vivid account of the local impacts of the Chetnik resistance can be found in Charles Sudetic’s *Blood and Vengeance*. This narrative follows the history of the Čelik family living on Mount Zvijezda near Višegrad in Bosnia-Herzegovina from their immediate roots in the nineteenth century through the bloody wars of the 1990s. Sudetic provides compelling evidence that ethnic tensions, specifically memories of Chetnik and Ustasha brutality, were a natural part of life for Bosnian peasants—both Serb and Muslim. In these largely undeveloped regions recent memories of abuses were passed on to children along with the folktales that compose the cultural memory of the uneducated peasant populations. See: Charles Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998).

used by the YPA. The one concession made to the Croats by the YPA on this subject was the uniform utilization of Latin script (as opposed to Cyrillic, which is the traditional script for the Serbian language).<sup>66</sup> This situation was undoubtedly responsible for further inflaming tensions between Serbia and Croatia, Yugoslavia's two most contentious republics. Bogdan Denitch in his book *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* indicates that there was a disproportionate number of Serbs in the officer ranks of the YPA. He attributes this unbalance to the relative lack of economic opportunities available to Serbs as compared to Croats and Slovenes.<sup>67</sup> This partially explains the loyalty of the YPA to Serbia, but it should not be overlooked that it was, above all, an extension of the central government. Omar Fisher notes that "in the pre-collapse phase of the Yugoslav crisis the army was the only state institution capable of functioning, making an armed response virtually the only possible central response to centrifugal tendencies."<sup>68</sup> In other words, it is not clear that the YPA was functioning as a Serbian Nationalist institution, at least not before 1991.

Finally, the most important factor in the contemporary resurgence of Serbian nationalism was the work of the Serbian Academy of Science. In its 1986 *Memorandum*, the mode by which it communicated with the political community, the Academy proposed a nationalist political and economic campaign based upon an enumeration of Serbian grievances. It pointed to the "long-term lagging-behind in the development of the economy of Serbia," the political discrimination against Serbs including under-

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<sup>66</sup> Anton A. Bebler, "The Yugoslav People's Army and the Fragmentation of a Nation," *Military Review* 73, no. 8 (1993): 44.

<sup>67</sup> This trend of over-representation of officers from economically depressed areas of a country is not limited to Yugoslavia. Denitch points out the same trend among "Gascons and Corsicans in France, Highlanders in Great Britain, and Southerners in the United States." Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism*, 41.

<sup>68</sup> Fisher, "Transition and Disruption," 175.

representation and the relative inaccessibility of federal positions, and the “physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija.”<sup>69</sup> Due to its role as a cultural institution, the Academy itself was incapable of directly effecting changes in policy, but nevertheless the memorandum warned,

“It the Serbian People see their future in the family of cultured and civilized nations of the world, they must find themselves anew and become a historical subject...they must put forth a modern societal program and national program, which will inspire contemporary and future generations.”<sup>70</sup>

This memorandum lies at the core of the top-down, elite-led, self-pitying nationalism— noted by scholars such as Ignatieff, Woodward, Bennett and Cohen—that swept through the Serbian masses in the late 1980s. Furthermore, the themes raised by the Academy are almost exactly the same as those adopted by Slobodan Milosevic. This implies that much of the historical consciousness of Serbian victimization evident in his speeches is a derivative of a similar trend among Serbian academics.

### **The Rhetoric of Slobodan Milosevic**

Perhaps the most central figure of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s is Slobodan Milosevic. He is characterized in the both in the western media and in a large proportion of academic circles as a hard-line Serbian nationalist and is blamed for inflaming Serbian hegemonic sentiments among Serbs.<sup>71</sup> It is the purpose of this investigation to neither

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<sup>69</sup> “Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences,” Denison Rusinow trans. in Stokes, *From Stalinism to Pluralism*, 275-77. Note: the second point refers to the fact that in spite of its greater population, Serbia had equal decision-making power in the federal government as each of the other republics. Essentially, this meant that a vote of a single Serbian citizen carried less weight than another Yugoslav citizen in any one of the other republics or either of the autonomous provinces.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>71</sup> As indicated in the section on the Historiography of Yugoslav Nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic is thought by many to be primarily responsible for the rise of Serbian nationalism which they maintain caused the violent breakup of Yugoslavia (See Silber and Little *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*). For this reason as well as charges of human rights abuses, Milosevic is currently standing trial before a war crimes tribunal in The Hague. For a list of the charges see: International Criminal Tribunal for the Former

apologize for Milosevic nor further criticize him for any political, economic, or military aid that he gave Serbian nationalists, but rather to critically assess his use of history in his role as spokesman of Serbian nationalism. This will be accomplished through the analysis of a number of public speeches he made in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

On April 24, 1987 Milosevic, at that time the party chief of the Serbian Communist Party, visited Pristina, Kosovo in place of the Serbian president Ivan Stambolić to meet with local Party leaders. Hearing the news of his visit a crowd of some 10,000 Serbs and Montenegrins gathered to voice their complaints against the ethnic Albanians. They grew unruly, began throwing rocks, and were held at bay by Albanian police wielding rubber truncheons. In an attempt to defuse the situation, Milosevic delivered an impromptu speech, the most memorable line of which, “Nobody should dare to beat you,” became a rallying cry for Serbian nationalists in Kosovo. According to some accounts, this is where Milosevic reputedly launched his campaign for a broader program of Serbian nationalism. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia assembled by the United Nations claims in its indictment of Milosevic:

In meetings with local Serb leaders and in a speech before a crowd of Serbs, Slobodan Milosevic endorsed a Serbian nationalist agenda. In so doing, he broke with the party and government policy which had restricted nationalist expression in the SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] since the time of its founding by Josip Broz Tito after the Second World War. Thereafter, Slobodan Milosevic exploited a growing wave of Serbian nationalism in order to strengthen centralized rule in the SFRY.<sup>72</sup>

According to other accounts, however, Milosevic stumbled into his role as the preeminent Serbian nationalist and that “No one should dare to beat you” was, in fact, an off-hand remark made to the police, but interpreted by the crowd of Serbs as a promise to redress

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Yugoslavia. “Charges” Stuart D. Stein ed. <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/Kosovo/Kosovo-International%20Law12.htm> (accessed May 31, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, “Indictment Section 6,” Stuart D. Stein ed. [http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/Kosovo/Kosovo-International\\_Law13.htm](http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/Kosovo/Kosovo-International_Law13.htm) (accessed May 2, 2005).

their grievances against the Albanians that were steadily forcing them out of Kosovo. This speech did not incorporate references to specific historical events that characterized Milosevic's later speeches, but did include statements such as "It was never part of the Serbian or Montenegrin character to give up in the face of obstacles, to demobilize when it's time to fight," and "You should stay here for the sake of your ancestors and descendants." Regardless of whether this was a stroke of luck or a calculated move by Milosevic, he was enthroned as the protector of Serbs and catapulted to the forefront of the Serbian Nationalist movement.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, Milosevic's famous speech commemorating the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Kosovo, the battle against the Ottomans in which the Serbs lost their freedom, draws heavily on specific historical themes from beginning to end.<sup>74</sup> Even the location where the speech was delivered, the exact field, the "Plain of the Blackbird," where the Battle of Kosovo was fought, was chosen for its historical significance. It is important to note that the speech was delivered in the context of rising tensions between the ethnically Serbian minority and the ethnically Albanian majority in the autonomous province of Kosovo.<sup>75</sup> The occasion itself attests to the importance of cultural memory to the Serbs. The event, a defeat 600 years past, is still cause for commemoration. In the speech Milosevic raises several themes, some of which were ostensibly intended to check

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<sup>73</sup> Good discussions of this event and partial English translations of the speech can be found in both Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, 37-39 and Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 233-234.

<sup>74</sup> "Slobodan Milosevic's 1989 St. Vitus Day Speech," Gazimestan, June 28, 1989 <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/spch-kosovo1989.htm>. (accessed April 2, 2005) Until otherwise noted, all subsequent references to Milosevic's speech are derived from this source.

<sup>75</sup> Mojmir Kiržan indicates that the problem faced by Serbs in Kosovo, namely, an "Albanian demographic expansion over the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, the central area of the defunct medieval Serbian state," was already a problem in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In with this in mind, complaints made by Serbs and calls for Serbian hegemony in the late 1980s can be viewed as a reiteration of the same demands made in the 1930s. Kiržan, "New Serbian Nationalism," 51.

Serbian nationalism. For instance he declares, “Serbia of today is united and equal to other republics ... [it] has never had only Serbs living in it...This is not a disadvantage for Serbia. I am truly convinced that it is its advantage.” He goes on to describe in general terms the successes of other states in the international community that, like Serbia, are composed of “different nationalities, religions, and races.”

Over the course of the speech Milosevic stressed four themes. 1) The liberational nature of the Serbian national character; 2) the prospects for prosperity to be achieved through unity; 3) the national divisions that currently existed in Yugoslavia; and 4) the dignity—lost in their historic defeat—that would be regained by the achievement of national unity. The sub-text to each of these points might be better read as 1) Serbs have been victimized by others along ethnic lines but have not retaliated in kind; 2) Serbs will be more prosperous in a purely Serbian state, or at least a state committed to a Serbian agenda; 3) Serbs should not forget the historical and potential dangers posed by the other Yugoslav peoples, and especially the minorities in the autonomous province of Kosovo; and 4) Serbia lost its position as a European nation (thereby losing its dignity) when it was conquered by the Ottomans, and losing authority over the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo presents the potential for a similar disgrace. A textual analysis supports these claims.

Milosevic admits that it is essentially impossible to know what actually occurred at the battle of Kosovo, but that what is most significant is the way in which the battle has been remembered by Serbs—as a moral victory and as a necessary military defeat suffered by the Serbs in defense of European culture. This glimmer of sensitivity for historical integrity doesn’t stop him from blaming Serbia’s loss on “lack of unity and

betrayal.” This claim allows Milosevic to make a rhetorical leap across the centuries to connect the “lack of unity and betrayal” that plagued Serbia at the battle of Kosovo to the “lack of unity and betrayal” that characterized the opposing Serbian resistance movements during World War II. The association of the two events implies that Serbia also lost the Civil War between the Chetniks and Partisans. This reinforces the remembered feelings of embarrassment and disillusionment felt by many Serbs after the War. The communist party’s policy of “brotherhood and unity” prohibited the emergence of Serbian hegemony in spite of both the numerical superiority of Serbs that participated in the resistance movements during the Civil War when compared to other Yugoslav ethnic groups and their privileged position in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the interwar period. Essentially, the harm caused to Serbia by forty years of maintaining the pretenses of friendship and equality with the Croatia, “in the historical and moral sense, exceeded fascist aggression.”

Embarrassment at the failure of the Chetniks is artfully transformed into the virtue or Partisan victory as Milosevic expounds the altruistic character of the Serbs. This passage is potent enough that it bears reproduction in full:

[Serbian] national and historical being has been liberational throughout the whole of history and through two world wars, as it is today. They liberated themselves and when they could they also helped others to liberate themselves. The fact that in this region they are a major nation is not a Serbian sin or shame; this is an advantage which they have not used against others, but I must say that here, in this big, legendary field of Kosovo, the Serbs have not used the advantage of being great for their own benefit either.

The first sentence shows the historical consciousness common to the Serbian people, that is, the perceived concurrence of ancient, recent, and present events. The second sentence boasts of two facts: First, that Serbia obtained its independence from the Ottomans before attempting to wrest Croatia away the Hapsburgs; and second, that it was the mostly Serbian Partisans who succeeded in expelling the fascists of all types at the end of World

War II.<sup>76</sup> The last lines of the passage are a call to Serbs in Kosovo to resist discrimination and pressures to emigrate coming from the ethnically Albanian majority, and a warning to that majority that those same Serbs have the ability, indeed the moral responsibility to stand up for themselves. Milosevic goes on to declare Serbs free of the “vassal mentality” that was imposed upon them by the Ottomans and later by Tito. His speech omits the words “Ottomans” and “Tito,” but the implication for an audience of discontented Serbs is clear.

Milosevic’s second theme focuses on the economic and social victimization of the Serbian republic within Yugoslavia. While it is true that Serbia historically lagged behind the more advanced republics of Croatia in terms of economic prosperity, especially industrialization, Milosevic completely ignores the fact that Croatia and Slovenia were already more industrialized than Serbia in 1918. This is one of the reasons that Croats and Slovenes have traditionally viewed Serbia as backward which can be construed as means of victimizing the Serbs socially.<sup>77</sup> Essentially, Milosevic is reminding Serbs that they should be jealous of economic favors given to the northern republics by the Hapsburgs that the Ottomans failed to deliver in the south. What follows, however, is difficult to label as outright nationalism and this probably accounts for much of the potential defense for the former Serbian president against charges of rashly promoting nationalism.

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<sup>76</sup> Military historians argue about how successful the Partisan movement would have been in its efforts to liberate Yugoslavia without the help of the Soviet Army. On one hand the very possibility of a communist revolution in Yugoslavia in the midst of World War II required that the allied powers be victorious. On the other hand the Partisans were still largely confined to the mountainous regions of Yugoslavia until the arrival of the Soviets. For an in-depth, balanced discussion of this issue see: Paul Shoup, “The Yugoslav Revolution: The First of a New Type,” *Studies on the Soviet Union* 11, no. 4 (1971): 215-43.

<sup>77</sup> This also accounts for why Croats and Slovenes, in particular, tend to oppose Serbian hegemony so fiercely.

According to Milosevic, Serbia is enriched by its various ethnicities, and the fact that the most developed and prosperous countries in the world are multi-ethnic serves as his supporting evidence. In fact, he suggests that “the only differences one can and should allow in socialism are between hard working people and idlers and between honest people and dishonest people.” This seems to be a departure from the earlier arguments presented, but the possibility that Milosevic is making a legitimate call for the peaceful coexistence of Serbs and Albanians in the autonomous province of Kosovo, as well as the fair treatment of Serbs in the other republics, should not be completely discounted. It must also be remembered that his entire political career had been tied to the Communist Party of Serbia. Given this fact and the date of the speech (June 28, 1989, i.e. before the general dissolution of Yugoslavia’s communist parties following the free elections in 1990), it was to be expected that Milosevic would mix traditional Socialist rhetoric with his relatively new nationalist message. For the purposes of this investigation, however, it is noteworthy that—besides indicating the fact that Serbia has never been entirely populated by ethnic Serbs—Milosevic’s arguments for peace and toleration are devoid of the strong historical links that characterize the more nationalist sections of this speech. This trend is borne out in most his discussion concerning the significant national differences that divided Yugoslavia. At this point, in 1989, Milosevic was at least willing to give lip service to the idea that nationalism was the strongest divisive force that was then threatening the stability of Yugoslavia. It is interesting though that he distinguishes between national divisions and “social, cultural, religious and many other less important ones,” when most accounts of ethnic nationalism in the former Yugoslavia include a

discussion of the social, cultural, and most especially the religious components of that nationalism.<sup>78</sup>

The St. Vitus Day speech comes full circle to the Battle of Kosovo. The closing paragraphs contain perhaps the most ominous messages of the speech, but all are concealed in the subtext. Milosevic reminds his audience yet again that although the true story of the Battle of Kosovo cannot be known, all Serbians remember—or at least should remember—that it was disunity that led to their defeat. This strongly implies a threat directed at the Albanian majority against being disunited with Serbia proper (that is, Kosovar Albanians should abandon any thoughts of seceding from Serbia). This threat is made all but explicit by Milosevic's comment that "Six centuries later, now, we are being again engaged in battles and are facing battles. They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet." The Serbs are thus, in effect, given the authority by their president to engage in armed resistance to discrimination against them. This completely contradicts his earlier rhetoric promoting the virtues of peaceful coexistence and toleration. Finally, by having fought (and lost) the Battle of Kosovo, Serbia proved itself "the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general." This claim is meant to reinforce the legitimacy of Serbian nationalism. It asserts that Serbia is a part of Europe; that Serbia is not culturally inferior to their neighbors to the north; and that, in fact, the rest of Europe owes them a 600 year old debt of gratitude for slowing the Turkish advance into Europe. The themes of this famous speech return in several of Milosevic's later speeches.

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<sup>78</sup> For instance see: Cohen *Broken Bonds* 4-8; Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism*, 29; and Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 22-24.

After the dissolution of the YLC in 1990, Milosevic formed the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS).<sup>79</sup> In his closing remarks at the first congress of the SPS on July 18, 1990 he reiterated points from his St. Vitus Day speech that blamed Tito's reign as well as other historical circumstances for the sorry state of Serbian affairs. These points are enumerated as follows:

bureaucratic arbitrariness, equalization of the state and the party, violence, economic inertia, cultural isolation, aggressive intolerance of a different political opinion, longstanding hostility towards educated people and the new blindness for the concerns of workers and farmers, inclination to nurture the personality cult at all levels, cruel political hierarchy and cowardice.<sup>80</sup>

The first point is a direct and fairly accurate criticism of the manner in which Tito ran Yugoslavia.<sup>81</sup> The second refers to the constitutional reforms of 1974 that granted all the federal republics and Serbia's two autonomous provinces equal representation in the federal government as the Republic of Serbia itself.<sup>82</sup> "Economic inertia" refers to the above-noted historical differences in patterns of industrialization between the Northwestern and Southeastern zones of Yugoslavia. Political intolerance typified the Yugoslav government from its creation in 1918. It further eroded Milosevic's credibility that he suggested that his government would somehow create a solution for this problem, as did his condemning Tito's personality cult, as he was deeply involved in the process of manufacturing his own. The fact that Milosevic drew attention to the issue of "longstanding hostility towards educated people" is more problematic. On one hand this

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<sup>79</sup> A good discussion of the creation of new political parties in all the republics, including the emergence of the SPS in Serbia, can be found in Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 102-07.

<sup>80</sup> "Closing Statement at the First SPS Congress, Speech by Slobodan Milošević – Chairman of the SPS," July 18, 1990. <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/sps1.htm> (accessed April 13, 2005)

<sup>81</sup> Until his death in 1980, Tito maintained the power to personally reconcile conflicts between the republics in spite of the fact that by that time most of the powers of government were supposed to have been turned over to the republics.

<sup>82</sup> The changes enacted by the 1974 constitution marked another substantial step towards the decentralization of political and economic authority, unprecedented in any socialist society. See Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 33.

was likely a promise for improved relations with the members of the Serbian Academy of the Science from whom Milosevic inherited many of the arguments that supported his nationalist program. On the other hand, it alludes to the Chetnik practice of killing the rural intelligentsia (see note 25), and makes sense given that Milosevic is the heir of the communist political tradition—which also accounts for his professed concern for workers and farmers. What is confusing, however, is the invocation of this negative image associated with a Serbian nationalist group, the image of ignorant peasants killing rural school-teachers, in the process of promoting a Serbian nationalist program. This illustrates how Milosevic successfully employed positive Serbian cultural memories of the Chetniks and Partisan to gain support while largely avoiding the stigmas associated with both.

In his address to the Serbian Assembly on May 30, 1991, Milosevic “drew the line” on the Kosovo issue. He refused to engage in further discussion of creating an Albanian state in the province of Kosovo. His exact words were, “I will not agree to justify to anyone why the Republic of Serbia is not allowing the Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo-Metohija to be killed again and why we are not willing to conduct dialogue on the possibility of creating an Albanian state on the territory of Serbia.”<sup>83</sup> In this refusal two separate events occurred. First was the refusal to create an Albanian state, but the second (and more significant for the purposes of this paper) is a declaration that the creation of an Albanian state would necessarily entail the murder of Serbs and Montenegrins. This second point is an extension of the position that initially gained

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<sup>83</sup> “Slobodan Milosevic on the Future of Yugoslavia,” (Belgrade home service, The British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, May 30, 1991) <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/news/milosevic053091.htm> (accessed April 13, 2005). Following quotations are taken from the same source until otherwise noted.

Milosevic his popularity in 1987, as well as a declaration that the future will resemble the past—that it is somehow part of the Albanian character to continue the abuses against the Serbs in Kosovo of the 1980s, the 1930s and even the of the Ottoman Turks in the fourteenth century. Milosevic made his resolve clear on this issue by declaring, “I want to openly say that everyone who demands a deviation from the stands on these issues can only achieve this by bringing down the present leadership of Serbia.” In retrospect it can be said that with this statement Milosevic closed the door to debate and diplomacy and threw the entire weight of the Yugoslav military behind a Serbian nationalist view of history.

In this same address, Milosevic moves beyond the Kosovo issue to the question of Serbs in other Republics, specifically Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in what is arguably one of his most logical arguments and legitimate uses of historical facts and precedents. Until the formal recognition of these two republics by the international community the right of self-determination of Serbs living outside Serbia, at least in those areas where they constituted a local majority was an undecided issue. Milosevic characteristically presented the issue in terms of absolutes. He declared, “It is an undisputable fact that the right of a people to self-determination in a multinational state cannot be territorially limited to existing administrative borders between republics.” What follows this absolute is, at least on the surface, a compelling argument in favor of self-determination.

The borders between the republics within Yugoslavia have never been state borders. It is well-known that they were drawn in the past arbitrarily and without objective criteria - that is, disregarding the ethnic composition of the population, the consequences of the genocide suffered by the Serbian people, or the norms of international law.

The first statement is a point of contention for the Croats (see note 17), but it is true that Yugoslavia in its first incarnation was formed by the Treaty of Versailles—largely without regard for the right of self-determination described in Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” that were supposed to have guided the creation of new national borders following World War I<sup>84</sup>—using existing Hapsburg and Ottoman *administrative* borders. These provincial borders within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, although carried over into the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia, were never intended to be definitive borders between ethnic groups.<sup>85</sup> Milosevic’s reference to the “genocide suffered by the Serbian people” serves as evidence of the evils associated with constructing an ethnically pure state along arbitrary political boundaries. These arguments lead him to conclude,

Therefore, the right to self-determination cannot be reserved only for a majority people in a nationally-mixed republic. If that were so, the interests of those peoples who constitute a smaller number in a part of Yugoslav territory within the borders of individual republics would be violated on the pretext of civil democracy.

Regardless of the actual conduct of the wars in the following years—specifically the ethnic cleansing carried out by Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina—it must be acknowledged that Milosevic, in this case, presented a sound argument intended to safeguard the rights

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<sup>84</sup> Specifically points X and XI. Point X states, “The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.” Similarly, point XI states. “Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.” Woodrow Wilson, “Fourteen Points Speech” in Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 45 (1984), 536. <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/51.htm> (accessed May 30, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> In fact, one of the grievances of the Serbs in the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia was that large numbers of Serbs were deprived of representation because of the way in which the borders were drawn between the republics and, especially, the autonomous provinces within the republic of Serbia. See: Križan, “New Serbian Nationalism,” 54-56.

of individuals throughout Yugoslavia based upon mostly accurate historical information.<sup>86</sup>

By the closing statements of the Second congress of the SPS on October 24, 1992, there were no more appeals or references made to history.<sup>87</sup> The implications of this fact are unclear. It could be that such appeals were no longer effective so far as reinforcing the legitimacy of the Milosevic government was concerned, or simply that the war at hand provided it with more immediate examples of crimes against Serbs with which to promote Serbian nationalist interests.

## Conclusions

It seems almost elementary to state that nationalist rhetoric, like that employed by Slobodan Milosevic, tends to utilize rose-colored histories to link heroic images of the past to the present day, while carefully omitting accounts of wrong-doings committed by the state that might be cause for national guilt. In this case, two specific events dominate the Serbian historical consciousness: The loss of the battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the victimization of the Serbs at the hands of the Ustasha and Partisans during the civil war between 1941 and 1945. Even so, appealing to larger-than-life conflicts in a nation's past in order to win support for contemporary struggles is not a practice unique to Serbia.

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<sup>86</sup> Given the other evidence presented in this argument by Milosevic, it is interesting that he did not draw attention to the Helsinki Final Act (HFA), of which Yugoslavia was a signatory, specifically sections 1(a)III and 1(a)IV that guarantee the Inviolability of Frontiers and the Territorial Integrity of States respectively. On the other hand, considering the gross violations of human rights in Yugoslavia in the 1990s—the defense of which had already become the primary function of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) which was born out of the HFA—and the rampant intervention, both military and political, by foreign powers, it is clear that the provisions of the HFA were almost completely disregarded in dealings with and within Yugoslavia in the 1990s. For a full text of the HFA see: *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: Final Act (1975)* [http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044_en.pdf) (accessed May 31, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> Closing Statement at the Second SPS Congress, Speech by Slobodan Milošević – Chairman of the SPS,” (October 24, 1992), <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/sps2.htm> (accessed April 13, 2005).

What is notable about the case of Serbia in particular is that almost all of its historical consciousness is built around episodes of victimization with a 500 year gap between significant events. Milosevic, however, should not bear the full weight of the blame for creating this victim mentality among Serbs. To a certain extent, it already existed among the largely uneducated masses (like the members of the Čelik family in Sudetic's *Blood and Vengeance*), but its forceful revival must be attributed to politically sensitive and historically aware members of the elite—in other words, people like the members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences. These two groups, essentially characterized by the “Elite” and the “Peasant,” have very different views on history. These views are intimately connected to the problems resulting from the repression of a balanced public scholarly discourse of important events in Yugoslavia, especially the Civil War of the 1940s, and the lack of reconciliation between ethnic groups.

The view of history held by the Elite was capable of cataloguing and analyzing the specific nature of historical events in much the same way as this paper has attempted to do. Memory of specifics—for instance, the progressively anti-Serbian demographic trend in Albania, the relative rate of Serbia's economic growth in comparison to the other republics, or the total number of Serbs killed by the Ustasha—belong to a select group of individuals including the members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences. This group was also capable of tailoring accounts of history to foster nationalism in service of specific political agendas.<sup>88</sup> Slobodan Milosevic was perhaps the best example of this type of individual.

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<sup>88</sup> This sometimes included a redefinition of the imagined limits of the community. For example, by emphasizing the similarities between the various Slavic groups and historical examples of cooperation among the same, Tito attempted to foster a sense of Yugoslav nationalism. In contrast, Milosevic inspired Serbian nationalism by emphasizing historic examples of the victimization of Serbs.

Conversely, for the Peasant history is mostly limited to folk legends and familial experiences. Folk histories generally have heroes, villains, and a clear sense of morality, and it is for this reason precisely that Milosevic's nationalist speeches include accounts of the Battle of Kosovo and the "Serbian character." His rhetoric appealed to the masses because it was devoid of all the ambiguities with which the elite were concerned. An average Serbian villager in Bosnia-Herzegovina was not likely to care about the political differences between the Chetniks and the Partisans if he knew (or believed) that a member of the Ustasha killed his father and uncles. Before these people were bombarded by the media with nationalist rhetoric, they lived with inter-ethnic tensions at the individual level but were unable (or unwilling) to vent them. This is precisely why the political policy of official nationalism became especially violent in the ethnically mixed rural areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Essentially, politics lit the fuse on a bomb of ethnic tensions that had never been defused through a policy of reconciliation following the Civil War of the 1940s. In fact, Tito's "Brotherhood and Unity" policy deliberately turned a blind eye on the issue of ethnic tensions.

From an objective (or at least non-Yugoslav) standpoint it should be noted, that the lack of positive cultural memories shared by a majority of the Yugoslav peoples likely precluded the creation of a viable multi-ethnic state. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Croatia and Serbia, which would become the most contentious of the federal republics, shared no common history. Each had been dominated by a different empire for over half a millennium. By the end of the twentieth century this fact had changed and the two republics shared a history of seventy years of political wrangling for power in the various manifestations of the Yugoslav government. Even more detrimental

to the prospect of Yugoslav unity was the fact that Croatian fascists and Serbian traditionalists fought on opposite sides of a horribly brutal war, a war that both lost to the Partisans who did not allow their victory to be claimed by either national group. Neither Tito nor Milosevic nor any other nationalist politician was ever able to conjure up a convincing account that acknowledged Yugoslavia's multitude of historical tribulations and still tied Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Bosnians, Slovenians, and all the other ethnic groups together in a positive way.

What emerges from this investigation is not so much a caution against omission of national guilt by ideologically motivated politicians or even against the abuse of history, but rather a warning against the naïve attempt to foster nationalist sentiments among peoples who never shared common historical experiences or that share a history of abuse and victimization. This point is particularly relevant when one considers current nation-building efforts that are taking place all over the world today. After all, if Croats, Bosnians, and Serbs cannot share a sense of nationalism that bridges their distinct cultural traditions, cannot imagine themselves as a community despite their ethnic differences, how can the world expect other multi-ethnic states, for instance, Iraq—a state composed of Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites—to succeed?

Appendix A: Maps



Paul Robert Magosci *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* cartographic design by Geoffrey J. Matthews (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 29. fig. 9.



Paul Robert Magosci *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* cartographic design by Geoffrey J. Matthews (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 119. fig. 36.

East Central Europe, 1918-1923



Historical Atlas of East Central Europe

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Paul Robert Magosci *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* cartographic design by Geoffrey J. Matthews (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 126. fig 38.



Paul Robert Magosci *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* cartographic design by Geoffrey J. Matthews (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 139. fig 41a.



Paul Robert Magosci *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* cartographic design by Geoffrey J. Matthews (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 140. fig. 41c.

**Map D**  
**Ethnic Composition in the Former Yugoslavia, 1991**



*Balkan Battlegrounds: A Military History of the Yugoslav Conflict, 1990-1995* vol. I. (Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency; Office of Russian and European Analysis, 2002) Map D.

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