

A Gordian Knot: The Ethnic Relations of the South Slavs

It is likely that the violent war now raging between the south Slavic peoples will be included among the most tragic of the twentieth century. The roots of the animosity extend far into the past. While a solution to today's horrors will have to address the complicated interactions of history, the participants themselves must step outside their attachment to the past and attack the problem from new perspectives.

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By Nicholas Breyfogle

Old Wine, New Bottles

We lived in peace for 50 years. We were neighbors, friends—Yugoslavians. I grew up never hearing ethnic hatred or plans for war. I loved summers in Sarajevo, when everyone would walk along the main street in the evening, stopping at cafés filled with friends and happy laughter. My friends were normal teenagers. We wanted to have fun, go to movies and parties and shop. We didn't choose friends based on whether we were Serbs, Croats or Muslims. (*Newsweek*, March 8, 1993)

So wrote Naida Zecevic, an eighteen year old Bosnian, now a first year student attending college in the USA and a de facto refugee, exiled by the course of events from her family in Sarajevo. Her description fits well with past images of Yugoslavia as a tourist destination replete with startling mountains, lush coastal resorts, and a warm, inviting population who extended hospitality in old European style. Yet, they are strange words to be reading these days. Hardly a day goes by without some further unfolding of the wars that rage between the people of Yugoslavia's successor states. These wars now account for the most terrible fighting Europe has seen since the end of the Second World War—some 50,000 to 150,000 dead, anywhere between two and three million displaced persons, institutionalized policies of rape, and the habitual assortment of torture, slaughter, imprisonment, deprivation, and starvation. It is a war without boundaries in which the line between civilian and soldier, in the true Balkan tradition of brigandage and guerilla warfare, is so blurred and besmirched that it all too often disappears.

The ethnic relations of the south Slavs are like the mythical Gordian knot. For hundreds of years they have struggled to untangle the intertwining chords, proposing different solutions at various times. Recently, however, the solution of choice has become, not for the first time in their history, the forcible separation of the knot by violently hacking the bonds that tie, splitting

chords and spraying rope dust.

Throughout their tangled history, the south Slavic people who came to make up what the twentieth century has known as Yugoslavia have struggled with the forces of history. Their memories reach back to an almost inconceivable degree, to Empires and religious conversion a thousand years ago. They relive their history in the conflicts of today, in stories, political speeches, and radio and television. Each new step is justified by a past step, each claim by a past claim, and each victimization by a past victimization. History has brought them together but it has also torn them apart—sometimes with violence, sometimes with words.

Today, the south Slavs continue to struggle with their past—with religions, with ethnicity, with medieval empires, with the scars and changes made by the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires, with diaspora, with the impact of western notions of nationalism, with the violent breakup of those Empires, with the hungry "Great Powers" who stood at their doors to gobble up the scraps, with different conceptions of the unity of Yugoslavia, and with the approximately eighty years that they lived together under one roof, often squabbling like the members of a family. It was a family, but perhaps only one of convenience—never the best, only the better, solution. When the external threat of conquest disappeared and the economy disintegrated in the late 1980s, the family began to break up—each member now striving to take with them as many of the family possessions, and, in fact, as many of the other family members, as possible.

After centuries, the longstanding questions still remain to be answered. Who shall control the lands of Bosnia and Hercegovina? Will it be the Croats or the Serbs who lead the south Slavs? How are national boundaries defined—by ethnicity or historic precedent, by religion or by language? Who are the south Slavs, one group or many? Who are the Bosnians? Are they all Serbs or all Croats? Will it be a federal or central political structure? Who will decide?

With all this history, the south Slavs are caught in a paradox. On one hand, lasting solutions to the struggle will inevitably

have to come to terms with the causes—causes whose origins lie deeply entrenched in the past. On the other hand, today's participants must escape that very same history—must break the bonds that condemn them to relive the past—so that they may address the contemporary situation with clear and rational minds.

Of Christianity and Empire: The Early History of the South Slavs

The Slavic peoples who now inhabit the majority of the Balkan peninsula migrated to their new homeland during the 6th and 7th centuries and soon thereafter converted to Christianity. Those in the west—the Slavs of modern day Croatia, Slovenia—were converted by German speaking Roman Catholics, those in the east—Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia—by Eastern Orthodox Christians. With the schism that tore the Roman and Eastern churches apart in 1054, the south Slavs were permanently separated one from the other. Bosnia and Hercegovina, situated on the dividing line between the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox, were converted by both and were already a bone of contention between the two sides.

During Medieval history, the south Slav lands developed two important empires—one centered on Croatia, the other on Serbia. Each empire expanded to control lands that today fall under the jurisdiction of other nationalities. The Croatian kingdom, which included parts of what is today Bosnia, began in 924 and lasted for close to two hundred years. The Serbian peoples developed and maintained the strongest of the south Slav medieval kingdoms, uniting the peoples of Montenegro, Hercegovina, and Serbia. The kingdom reached its apex during the reign of Stepan Dusan (1331-1355) who expanded the borders to include all of modern Albania, Macedonia (where Dusan located his capital city, Skopje), parts of Bosnia, as well as a good portion of Greece. In 1389, the Serb army was defeated by the Turks at Kosovo Polje—a battle that has taken on a mystical importance for the Serbian people and which lies at the heart of the Serbian determination to hold Kosovo.

Under Austria and the Ottomans (14th to 19th Centuries): Conquest—Migrations—Conversion to Islam

Today, pockets of ethnic Serbs are found spread throughout former Yugoslav lands—in Croatia, in Bosnia and Hercegovina, in Kosovo, in Vojvodina. This diaspora originated with the mass migrations westward that followed in the wake of the Ottoman (Turkish Muslims) invasions. The mass transfer continued in fits and starts over the course of the following centuries. It brought Croat and Serb together to live side by side and, over generations, they began to develop similar customs, traditions, and language.

Ottoman rule enhanced the power of the Serbian Orthodox Church and religious leaders took on new roles. The Orthodox Church quickly became the vessel in which Serbian tradition and national consciousness was fostered and transported through the ages. Moreover, the Orthodox church acted to bind Ottoman Serbs with the other Serbs spread throughout the Hapsburg Empire.

Ottoman rule served to distance its subjects from the developments in the West. The bureaucratic, administrative, feudal structure of Ottoman rule remained virtually unaltered by capitalism and the development of new classes. The consequence has been a permanent economic lag on the part of the eastern south

Slavs.

The final important result of the Ottoman conquest was the conversion of a significant part of the population to Islam. The greatest incidence of voluntary conversion took place in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Many Bosnians and Hercegovinians had come to adhere to the breakaway Bogomil Christian sect. They welcomed the coming of the Muslims, only too happy to escape the persecution of their Christian brothers. To this day, Bosnian Muslims are resented by the other south Slavs as Turkish collaborators and traitors.

Those Yugoslavs who fell under Hapsburg control—Slovenes, Croats, Serbs—underwent a very different series of changes and developments than their cousins under Ottoman dominion—changes that have left their mark to the present. The Hapsburg Slavs were exposed to German culture and the forces of evolving capitalism. Administratively, the Hapsburg Slavs maintained traditional governing structures through the institution of the *sabor*—a governing assembly—and the *ban*—a governor. Unlike the Ottoman Slav reliance on the church, the Croats and Slovenes relied on these political structures as national rallying points and for the upholding of tradition.

The Nineteenth Century: Intellectuals Debate Nationality

During the beginning of the nineteenth century, the concepts of nationality and nation that had developed from eighteenth century western European romanticism were taken up and applied by south Slavic intellectuals. Language, more than religion, custom, or even ethnicity was considered to be the all important foundation of nationality.

In Serbia, Vuk Karadzic standardized the Serbian language around the "stokavian" vernacular dialect. This act had a significant effect on Serbian-Croatian relations. The majority of the Croats also spoke in the stokavian dialect—a potentially unifying



POLITICAL MAP OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA—Vojvodina and Kosovo were autonomous regions within Serbia, the other countries were full republics. [Electromap, Inc.]

force and basis for a nation state. However, the linguistic issue also served to divide the Croats from the Serbs. Karadzic argued in an article "Serbs All and Everywhere" that all people who spoke stokavian were in fact Serbs—an interpretation that denied the existence of Croats who spoke in that dialect. The argument quickly led to the interpretation that all lands in which the population spoke stokavian should belong to Serbia. Many Croats argued in a similar fashion, everyone was Croatian.

These linguistic debates took place in the backdrop of a pan-Yugoslav ideology that developed in Croatia at the same time—Illyrianism, named for the Roman province of Illyria that covered the land on which the south Slav states later developed. Adherents to the Illyrian view asserted that all Balkan Slavs were descendents of the same tribe called the "Illyrians" and were ethnically united. Distinctions between the Illyrian people existed because of the years of foreign rule. The Illyrians could and should unite in the future.

Coming Together, Breaking Apart Yugoslavism—Greater Serbdom—Croatian Separatism

From the 1850s, movement towards south Slav unity accelerated. Nevertheless, "Yugoslavism" always took a back seat to the stronger and more quickly developing sense of individual national identities. In 1866-67, secret meetings took place between the representatives of the Croatian assembly and the Serbian foreign ministry. A general agreement was reached for the "formation of a Yugoslav state independent of Austria and Turkey." However, almost immediately it became clear that disagreements existed

on most of the specific proposals for unification. At the heart of the disagreement lay two questions which have continued to the present day to plague south Slav leaders—Who would assume the mantle of leadership in the unification of the Yugoslavs? and, related, but equally as important, How would the lands that made up the territories of Bosnia and Hercegovina be disposed of within any future Yugoslav nation?

Serbia became the first south Slav state to gain its autonomy from the Ottomans or Austrians with the establishment of an independent monarchy in 1878. The road to freedom had begun as early as 1804 and followed a tortured path of peasant rebellions and external meddling that left many dead and the final Serbian state frustrated by the interference of the Great Powers.

Within the Croatian political spectrum, three parties emerged during the mid-1800s, each with a slightly different policy on the issue of nationality. The Unionist party believed that Croatia's best interests lay in maintaining historic ties with Hungary and was anti-Serb, anti-Orthodox, and anti-Yugoslav. The National Party espoused the Illyrian idea, believing in the pan-Slavic vision but based around a Croatian nucleus. The Party of [Croat State] Right led by Ante Starcevic stood for an independent Croatia. Starcevic argued that "the entire population between Macedonia and [German-speaking Austrian areas], between the Danube and the Adriatic Sea, has only one nationality, one homeland, one Croatian being."

Two events during the 1870s served to rapidly distance the south Slav groups from one another. First, an educational law was passed in 1874 in Croatia whose mission was to secularize education, shifting control from the churches to the savor and, thereby, to foster a sense of "Croatness" among all Slavic peoples in Croatia. The Orthodox Serbian population under the Monarchy resisted this legal action and demanded that they be exempted from the law. That the law was passed rankled Serbian citizens. That the Orthodox called for an exemption, stimulated suspicions among nationalist Croat leaders.

Second, the Balkans found themselves in crisis from 1875-78 which began with an uprising in the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Hercegovina. At the international Congress of Berlin, the latter were placed under the occupation and administration of the Hapsburg monarchy. Serbs in both Serbia and Austria objected as they considered the lands rightly Serbian. Croat response varied. Some censured the act, considering the lands Croat lands. Others embraced the freeing of south Slavs from Ottoman control and saw in Austrian occupation the promise of a future amalgamation of Croatia with Bosnia and Hercegovina under the Austrian Monarchy.

The antagonism that grew up during the 1870s, increased significantly as the twentieth century approached. In Serbia, extreme forms of national zeal were consciously fostered through the press, church and schools. On the extreme of Serbian chauvinism was an article written by Nikola Stojanovic in 1902 called "Serbs and Croats" in which he argued that the Croats "did not have their own language, nor common customs, nor a strong common identity, nor, what is important, consciousness of belonging to one another, as a result they cannot be a separate nationality." He continued by stressing that the conflict between Serbs and Croats would continue "until either we or you are eliminated. One side must surrender."

At the same time, Croatian nationalism was fed not only by ongoing confrontations with the Serbs but also by the rule of



*Nineteenth century Muslim Bosnian warrior—they need his help now.
[Metro Toronto Reference Library]*

Karoly Kuenen-Hedervay, the Hungarian governor of Croatia. He governed by the principle of divide and rule, pandering to the desires of the Serbian minority on matters religious, economic, and educational in return for their support in the *sabor*. The Croatian Party of the Right, moved even farther to the extreme in their chauvinism and under a new leader, Josip Frank, turned to violence as well as harsh rhetoric. In 1896, Hapsburg Serbs were confronted by Croat nationalists with demonstrations and flag burnings and in 1902, following the publication of "Serbs and Croats," Croats took to the streets beating and harassing Serbs and destroying their property.

In 1905, five Serbian and Croatian parties within the Hapsburg Monarchy came together to form the Croatian-Serbian Coalition. The party believed in the existence of one nationality—Yugoslav—with three names—Serb, Croat, and Slovene. Just as the Catholic and Protestant Germans could make up parts of the same Germany so too could Catholic and Orthodox south Slavs. The party won at least a plurality in each of the succeeding pre-war free elections, indicating support for their "Yugoslav" ideas. However, even this party did not completely agree as to the future of a Yugoslav state. Whereas a vocal portion conceived of a unitary state consisting only of Hapsburg Slavs another section argued that any south Slavic state must comprise the Serbs of Serbia and Montenegro. Moreover, while agreement could be reached concerning opposition to the Austro-Hungarian government, the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained a profound obstacle. Each group laid vocal claims to their historic and ethnic right to the lands, realizing that whoever controlled those lands would in essence have the upper hand in arbitration over south Slav leadership.

Following the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne, in 1914, Croatian ultra-nationalists, taking their cues from Vienna, organized and carried out a campaign of persecution against the Serbian population, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina where Sarajevo turned into a "frenzy of hate." Simultaneously they harangued the leaders of the Croatian-Serbian coalition in the Croatian Assembly calling them "murderers of the Croatian heir to the throne." They sought and took advantage of any opportunity to open a chasm between Serbs and Croats.

Nineteenth Century Nationalism: The Slovenes and Macedonians

The Slovenians gave little serious consideration to the Yugoslav idea until the 1880s and 1890s. Slovene national consciousness was slow to make its way out from underneath the domination of German influences. As such the Slovenes were more interested in the development of their own identity than they were in a south Slav identity. They frequently spurned Serbian advances because they regarded them as both politically and economically backward.

Nationalist sentiments were also growing, although at a much slower pace among the Macedonian population. In 1896 the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was born which struggled to throw off foreign rule. In the Macedonian region that came under Serbian control in 1913 (an area that had formed part of Dusan's Medieval empire), the new Serb masters began a policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation. Macedonians were compelled through threats of imprisonment, torture, and death to change their names to Serbian style by

adding "itch" to the ending.

The First Yugoslavia Is Born, 1918

In 1914, the concept of Yugoslavism nowhere received any more than reserved support from the south Slav peoples. The final creation of Yugoslavia came almost as an accident and was fraught from the outset with internal weaknesses and contradictions.

Wartime meetings between representatives of the Hapsburg Slavs and the exiled Serbian government culminated in the Declaration of Corfu in July of 1917 which agreed in principle to the union of all south Slavs. Despite the enumeration of specific characteristics for the new state—constitutional, democratic monarchy, freedom of religion, use of both alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin)—the issue of a federal or central state structure was not resolved and remains unsolved to this day.

Two threatening forces—one internal, one external—acted as the catalysts for the eventual creation of the first "Yugoslav" state in 1918 (called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes ruled by the Serbian King Aleksandar). On the one hand, the collapsing Hapsburg lands were caught in a spiral of spontaneous peasant unrest that resulted from a combination of wartime deprivations and longstanding hardship. On the other hand, Italian troops were advancing into south Slavic lands. The Italians had been promised parts of Croatia and Slovenia by the Allies at the secret London treaty of 1915 in return for entering the war on the Allied side. When the war ended they came to collect payment.

Circus Democracy and a Police State: Yugoslavia During the Interwar Period

From the outset, internal problems threatened to break the new state apart. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was



ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

—Areas shaded represent regions in which that religion and/or ethnicity formed the majority. (Macedonia and Serbia have separate branches of the Orthodox church.) [Electromap, Inc.]

very much more than that. It was a mosaic that included five Slavic peoples and a variety of minority non-Slavs, three religions, eight historical provinces, three main languages as well as a host of dialects, two alphabets and a plethora of both bad and good feeling that was the legacy of relations during the pre-war years. Moreover, the component peoples found themselves at very different economic and social conditions. The old Austro-Hungarian lands (Croatia, Slovenia, and Vojvodina) were more industrialized. Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina accounted for no more than 15% of the nation's industry.

Serbs viewed the new state as a continuation of the pre-1914 Serbian Kingdom, with its constitution, army, monarchy, and bureaucracy. They promoted Serb-dominated centralization and the slogans, "three names—one people" and "the three tribes of the Yugoslav nation." However, overt forces of division came from Croat separatist movements, the Party of Right and the Croat Peasant Party led by Stepan Radic. By 1930, the Party of the Right (led by Ante Pavelic) had turned into a ultra-nationalist paramilitary terrorist organization (the *ustasa*), finding support in Mussolini who wished to see an independent Croatia that he could pull into his sphere of influence. Radic and the Croat Peasant Party called for a loose confederation of republics and

refused to compromise. They took their complaints to the international community trying to find a backer for their vision of an independent Croatia. These actions smacked of betrayal for the Serb populations who were dismayed that the Croats wanted out so soon.

The south Slavic experience with democracy in the 1920s was one of exasperation and frustration in which little was achieved. The nationwide elections of 1920 returned candidates from a whole spectrum of regionally based parties. The divided parliamentarians vetoed, obstructed and blocked any legislation that came through, struggling to tailor it to the needs of their specific locality. To cap things off, Radic and four other members of parliament were shot by a disaffected Montenegrin politician. King Aleksandar took this opportunity to terminate the unworkable parliament and institute a royal dictatorship. In October, 1929 the name of the nation was officially changed to Yugoslavia. Aleksandar decreed a constitution, proclaiming a centralized state. In an effort to foster a national unity, citizens were henceforth to consider themselves "Yugoslav," all signs and symbols of the old nationalities were removed and all measures were backed with force.

The assassination of Aleksandar in France in 1934—apparently coordinated by the *ustasa* and IMRO—once again remapped the national landscape. By 1939, Yugoslavia was effectively divided into two spheres of influence, one Croatian, the other Serbian. Croatia was made into an enlarged province with special autonomous powers, a separate legislature, and control of fiscal and administrative matters. This looked very much like the loose confederal solution that Radic had searched for during the 1920s. The final boundaries between the two spheres, however, were never specifically defined—the issue of the mixed populations of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained unanswered. This new agreement also entirely dismissed the equality of the other nationalities within Yugoslavia, a fact that they very much resented.

World War II: Yugoslavia Shattered, Genocide and Resistance

Of all the incidents in the past relations of the south Slavs, World War II and the treatment of the Serbs by the Croat *ustasa* government is most often rehearsed and is by far the most incendiary. Following the Axis victory, Yugoslavia was cut up into tiny pieces and divided amongst the victors—Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. In Croatia, a fascist government, led by Pavelic, was erected on the foundation of the *ustasa*. It was the realization of the long desired independent Croat state and included all of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its population of approximately 50% Serbs and 30% Muslims.

The Croat *ustasa* government organized systematic massacres of the Serbs on Croatian territory. The extent and degree of the horror is bitterly debated today between Serbs and Croats. Certain historians have claimed that the destruction of the Serbs ranks second only to the Jewish Holocaust in both ferocity and volume. Others argue that it was the Germans, not the Croats, who carried out the massacres. Some put the number of Serbian victims at 200,000, others at 600,000, still others at more. In one documented case, 1,260 Serbian peasants were locked in an Orthodox church, murdered and incinerated. Moreover, the Catholic church instituted a policy of forcible conversion of Orthodox Serbs that turned some 200,000 Serbs into Catholics.



King Aleksandar—first king of Yugoslavia, 1918-1934.
[Metro Toronto Reference Library]

As World War II came to a close, civil war and anarchy broke out in Yugoslavia. The two primary resistance forces—Mihailovic's *Chetniks* and Tito's Partisans—fought both the conquering Germans, the Croat *ustasa*, and each other (the *Chetniks* tended to be royalists, the Partisans, communists and the *Chetniks* often collaborated with the German forces against the Partisans). Local populations armed themselves against the invaders, against the different paramilitary organizations and against their neighbors. The civil war involved everyone and it left deep scars.

Tito Tries to Solve the National Question

The development of Tito's response to the national question can be seen in four relatively distinct stages. The first stage, until 1948, reflected a Soviet, Stalinist solution to a multi-ethnic society. Five distinct Yugoslav nations, six republics, and two autonomous regions were recognized. Administrative structures were created to support and bolster ethnic complexity but counterbalanced by a highly centralized, single-party dictatorship with a strong police presence and centrally managed economy.

Following the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, the central government took its first steps towards the decentralization of both the economy and the political structure to lower levels and workers cooperatives (thereby beginning the second stage). In Yugoslavia, 'local' means 'ethnic' and the decision to divest the center of its monopoly served to inflame regional animosities and enhance inter-regional competition as they grappled for scarce resources.

That regional allegiances were once again on the rise was shown by resistance to a "Yugoslavism" campaign designed to foster an overarching supranational sentiment that would override the centripetal regional-nationalist forces. The industrially more advanced Croatia and Slovenia, believing that they had received the short end of the stick, lobbied for greater liberalization while at the same time complained that many of the state departments and especially that of security, were dominated by ethnic Serbs. They saw the policy of "Yugoslavism" as a veiled attempt on the part of the Serbian center to re-instate the type of Yugoslavia that had existed under King Aleksandar twenty-five years before. In the face of this negative reaction the "Yugoslavism" program was scrapped and the liberalizers finally swayed Tito to their side. The centralizers were purged in 1966 and Yugoslavia moved on to the third stage of the Titoist national solution.

From 1965, the move towards local "self-management" took

on a new and accelerated speed. Economic reforms were undertaken that, for all intents and purposes, ended central decision making and placed control of investment funds and the banking system into the hands of local ethnic authorities. These bodies quickly came to function only within a specific region or locality in small, inefficient units.

At this time, moreover, the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, technically within the jurisdiction of Serbia, gained official autonomy. In Kosovo, nationalist demonstrations by the majority Albanian population resulted in the flight of large parts of the ethnic Serbs who, filled with resentment, feared for their future. The Serbs considered Kosovo to be the heartland of the old Medieval Serbian state and claimed it on historical grounds. The Albanians rightly pointed to their demographic dominance—approximately 80% of the population—and their historic roots on the land which date back to well into the eighteenth century.

At the same time Croatian leaders were becoming even more assertive in their demands for greater autonomy and overt signs of sovereignty. The 1967 Croatian "Language Declaration" called for the recognition of Croatian as an equal, official Yugoslavian language—to be taught in schools and used in the media—and rejected Serbo-Croatian as an artificial, Serb inflicted "political language."

This period also witnessed the recognition of two "new" nations—the Bosnian Muslim (1968-69) and the Macedonian (1967). For the first time in hundreds of years Bosnia and Hercegovina as well as Macedonia were officially considered ethnically based nations, rather than simply distinct cultural communities.

Tito Steps In

The administration of the country was collapsing and deadlocked in the maze of mutual vetoes built into the constitution. In this atmosphere of growing internal ethnic tension, Tito stepped in (1971), threatening military intervention, to bring the crisis under control.

Tito's drastic measures of 1971-72 inaugurated the fourth phase of the national solution. The federal system remained in place and was even bolstered by the 1974 constitution that left only questions of foreign policy, defense, and general economic direction to the central powers. The greatest difference between the third and fourth phases was Tito who asserted his great personal power to keep a lid on the boiling pot. The new leaders had learned that Tito would no longer tolerate the overt expression of regional interests. Moreover, these same leaders had come to realize that localist sentiment could, if out of hand, act to disrupt other, perhaps more important, components to their

Word Watch

Yugoslavia: from "yugo" meaning south, i.e. nation of south Slavs.

Slav: uncertain origin, either from "slava," word for glory in ancient Slavic tongue, or from Latin word "sclaveni" meaning slave, or derives from swampy area called "Slava" or "Slova" in Poland where the Slavs originally came from.

Balkans: from the Turkish word for mountain, includes former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, parts of Greece and Turkey.

Bosnia: from the Bosna river that flows through it.

Hercegovina: name originated in the 15th century, from the title "Herzog," meaning Duke.

Macedonia: apparently derives from Macedonius, a heretical Bishop of Constantinople in the 4th century A.D.

Montenegro: from the Italian for "black mountain," called Crna Gora in Serbo-Croatian.

Slovenia: apparently derives from the ancient slavic word, "slovo," meaning word.

lives, such as the economy. During the 1970s the economy was on the rise and few people wished to disturb the success.

Despite the relative quiet of the 1970s—a significant rise in the number of citizens who described themselves as “Yugoslav,” rather than as a member of a specific ethnic group, appeared to bode well for Yugoslavia’s future—the regional-nationalist waters continued to boil, shown by further demonstrations and arrests in Kosovo in the mid-1970s. With the death of Tito in 1980, the safety catches on the lid disappeared.

The Succession: From Tito’s Death to Today

The two most important factors that kept Yugoslavia from breaking apart before 1980 had disappeared by the second half of the 1980s—Tito was dead and the economy disintegrated. Foreign pressure, traditionally the other important force keeping Yugoslavia together was incoherent and internally disorganized—the Cold War was over and the European Community, in dispute.

In this environment, regional political leaders—who espoused chauvinist, ethnic, populist messages—combined with the people to work each other into a frenzy. Slobodan Milosevic, who became Communist Party Chief of Serbia in 1986, remains the most prominent of these nationalist leaders but was certainly not the only one. By fostering street democracy and mass rallies, Milosevic started in motion a perpetual backlash between the republics, most especially between Slovenia and Serbia.

Milosevic capitalized on Serb grievances under the federal system. Serbs complained about their lack of influence in federal Yugoslavia where the significance of their larger population was lost in a system that gave equal weight to each ethnicity, and specifically of what they perceived to be their raw treatment in the economic sphere; about the division of Serbia into three parts (Kosovo and Vojvodina) by the Croat Tito and his second in command Kardelj, a Slovene; and about the nationalism and irredentism of the separatist Albanians in Kosovo, which they believed was being fostered by the other republics.

The multi-party elections of 1990 brought non-Communist, regionally centered governments into power in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Macedonia. Just days before the fighting began, they continued to rehash the longstanding issues of federal versus central and the splitting of Yugoslavia into its Ottoman and Hapsburg components. But where would the borders be and how would Bosnia and Hercegovina be dealt with? Fragmentation ran amok as two hundred regionally based parties emerged. All attempts at reform by the Prime Minister Ante Markovic were blocked or undermined by different ethnic parties, reminiscent of the political stalemate of the early interwar years. This time there was no Tito or Aleksandar to restore stability.

Regional nationalism grew like wildfire. Fear of separatist movements soared among Serbs living outside of Serbia and relations between the republics soured. The memories of past



[Kirk Anderson]

conflicts were blown out of proportion for political end. Serbs pointed to the horrors of the independent Croatian state during World War II and, in a highly publicized incident, Croat leaders renamed a square in Zagreb after Ante Starcevic, the 19th century Croatian ultra-nationalist who unfavorably compared Serbs with barnyard animals.

Fear of an independent Croatian government was especially fierce in the Krajina region where the Serbs represented the majority of the population. Milosevic came to the support of the "foreign" Serbs demanding rights and protection for their communities. He did not oppose self-determination on the part of the other republics but asked that the same courtesy be extended to the majority Serb populations within their boundaries. He quietly encouraged the "foreign" Serbs to demand it—this despite his blatant denial of self-determination of the Albanian population in Kosovo.

In the Krajina, local Serbs, not always following Belgrade's lead, took matters and the initiative into their own hands. They armed themselves, blocked roads, and took over local facilities. As pessimism grew, Slovenia and Croatia prepared for a gunfight. The Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) believed in the importance of maintaining Yugoslavia intact (without which they would have no job) and often came to side with the Serbian government and local Serb militias. In June of 1991, following the Serb sponsored blocking of the rotation of the presidency, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. Sabers rattled, leaders misjudged, and both the people and their states accelerated arming. The violent conflict had begun.

Books, Gitanes, and CDs

Over the past two years, the fighting has moved from Slovenia to Croatia to Bosnia and Hercegovina. While Slovenia is now relatively quiet, battles continue to rage in Croatia between the Krajina Serbs and the new Croat government. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbs and Croats—as they have for hundreds of years—are fighting the Slavic Muslims to carve out control of a region that they both claim. Overt violence has yet to sweep Vojvodina, Kosovo or Macedonia. However, these three regions may prove to be the most tragic. Each area includes a large non-Slavic population (Hungarian, Albanian, and Bulgarian and Turkish respectively) and conflict could conceivably drag neigh-



Slovenian peasant in more peaceful times.
[Josephine King]

boring nations into the Yugoslav maelstrom.

George Santayana warned that those who do not remember their past are destined to repeat it. But the south Slavs remember their history all too well and nevertheless seem condemned to relive it. While the forces of history have led to the breakup of Yugoslavia and serve as the wellspring of the violence, if the south Slavs are to come to a resolution of the problem (outside of mutual annihilation), they must forget their past and concentrate only on salvaging the present—a formidable task in Yugoslavia.

As always, however, it should be remembered that this is a war fought by people, not the forces of history. The reasons for fighting are not always as clear as history might make them appear. In a report published in *Harper's Magazine* of March, 1993, "Balkan Death Trip—Scenes From a Futile War," Tony Horwitz relays the personal motivations of a Serb named Zjelko fighting for hometown Sarajevo. It is a painful reminder that war is often about nothing at all, that people continue to fight because they want simply for the fighting to end.

I don't fight for nationalism—I sleep with girls of all nations. I don't fight for religion—God is no place. I fight because I want to go back down there [the downtown house he left months earlier in fear of attacks on Serbs] with my books and my CD player and my Gitane cigarettes.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

- Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia - Origins, History and Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1984)
- Christopher Cviic, "Calm Look at a Troubled Land: the Nations of Yugoslavia" in *Encounter* (May 1990, vol. 74, #4)
- Vladimir Dedijer, *A History of Yugoslavia* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974)
- Tony Horwitz, "Balkan Death Trip - Scenes From a Futile War" in *Harper's* (March, 1993)
- Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms* (Ohio State University Press, 1990)
- Richard Nyrop, ed., *Yugoslavia - A Country Study* (Foreign Area Studies, The American University, 1982)
- Pedro Ramet, *Yugoslavia in the 1980s* (Westview Press, 1985)
- Sabrina Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962-1991* (Indiana University Press, 1992)
- Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (Westview Press, 1985)
- Srdjan Trifkovic, "The First Yugoslavia and the Origins of Croatian Separatism" in *East European Quarterly* (Fall 1992, vol. 26, #3)