

## **Understanding Balkan Nationalism: The wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time**

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It could be convincingly argued that during the past decade most nations that lived in the former Yugoslavia - Bosnian Muslims and Serbs, Croats and Albanians, and others (to a lesser degree) - as well as the members of the minority groups such as Roma, Goranci<sup>1</sup>, Jews, Ukrainians and others, have shared one common feature: *EXODUS*.

Volumes of scholarly and journalistic works have been produced in recent years in order to try to explain the reasons behind such a massive demographic change in the Balkans.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of their points of analytical and methodological departure, those authors have reached similar conclusions. The reason (we are told) behind such drastic and forced movements of population were the revival of expansionist nationalism and renewed calls for national homogenization. In other words, it was ghosts from the past that were once again haunting the peoples of the Balkans. Those who died in the conflicts, as well as the refugees and displaced persons, and those rounded up by camp wire were seen to be the product of an ancient conflict - continuous war for territories, identities, and ideologies.

Not disputing the factography of history or the methodological apparatus employed in such analysis, I would go even further in characterizing the reasons for the recent demographic movements in the former Yugoslavia. I would argue that some 3 million or so of refugees that are scattered throughout their former country and throughout the world were the wrong people being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were the products of Balkan nationalistic disequilibria. This is not to suggest that they had been the victims of the unforeseen historical circumstances or that they were unable or had been prevented from confronting the causes for their suffering in later decades. On the contrary, this is meant to indicate the continuity of nationalist sentiments among the population on the one hand. On the other hand, such continuity speaks clearly about the nature of the communist government, its mechanism of manipulation, and of its adoption/modification of nationalist ideology. The fact is that the climate of ethnic and religious intolerance that allowed for the latest conflict to occur has been in existence for decades. Given the past models of governance in both Yugoslav states - the one established in 1918, and in particular, the one established in 1945 - and the principle of *unity in diversity*, upon which they were both created, it seems that the destruction of the second Yugoslavia was difficult to avoid.

The former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) inherited earlier unresolved issues of an incomplete process of national definition and determination of its constitutive elements, and the feelings of mutual intolerance that existed along these lines. It seems plausible to suggest that the elite in the republics of the former Yugoslavia, the structure and the model of governing, and the religious institutions in their respective communities, played a crucial role in conditioning the dissolution of the country. The appearance of unity and tolerance in the former SFRY was primarily of a representational character and had the strong overtones of the communist ideological umbrella. The communist authorities claimed that South Slavs and other nations living in the region managed to unite upon solid foundation only because of the political guidance and had done so under the ideological premises of brotherhood and unity. The rhetoric

of such claims consisted of a curious mix of negative references to the past and rather enthusiastic and positive prognosis for the future. National aspirations as a mode of cognition and perception of reality were characterized as negative and backwards, and as an attitude that would jeopardize further progress of society. On the other hand, during the early 1960s, the communist rhetoric of a necessary change in the society was intended to convey the message of hope and have a soothing effect upon the population. Above all, it meant to grant more credibility to the efforts of the communist authorities in their alleged pursuit of a more just and humane society. What was aspired to was the creation of the *Yugoslav supranationality*. It was advocated that such an achievement would make the nationalist claims of local oligarchies obsolete. It could be argued, however, that the federal communist authorities did not adopt the idea of creating *supranationality* solely because they intended to minimize the threat of the local and regional nationalism. Preserving the power of the central authority was another strong motive. Moreover, I would argue that advocating the idea and the notion of the *Yugoslav supranationality* was an attempt of the federal communist authorities to modify the old type of nationalism and use it to their own advantage. This *new nationalism* was the curious mix of traditional nationalistic notions of home and belonging, on the one hand, and the ideology of the *separate road to socialism*, on the other. Such positioning of the opposites served as justification of the rhetoric of a constant change in the society.

In the process of creating a *Yugoslav supranationality* during the 1960s and early 1970s, the communist authorities attempted to structure the society that would function according to the principle of *unity in diversity*. Six republics of the former Yugoslavia had been perceived as somewhat distinct, but still as constitutive elements of a larger unified and essentially uniform structure. The Coat of Arms of the former SFRY, with six separate flames joining together in one fire, is just one of many representations of such a construction. On the political terrain this construction manifested itself in equal representation of nations and ethnic groups within the governing bodies on the local and federal level.<sup>3</sup> However, it should be said that such *unity in diversity*, and the early Balkan version of the contemporary principle of *multiculturalism*, served the purpose of sidelining, at least temporarily and superficially, the issue of nationalism in the former Yugoslavia.

Achieving these two principles often meant suppressing the voices calling for national identification and differentiation, and marginalizing the elements of national distinctiveness, culture, and tradition. This was accomplished through positioning these voices onto the level of harmless folklore, popular festivities with strong ideological overtones, and exotic museum exhibits. It could be argued that the authorities in the former Yugoslavia felt comfortable in their irresponsibility in regards to the issue of nationalism. Reasons for such a political attitude might be found in the process of cumulative radicalization of the internal dynamics of the Yugoslav political landscape, and in the nature of the process of making an ideological compromise between the communist elite in the former Yugoslavia and the nationalist forces. Such a compromise resulted from the fact that nationalist sentiments and aspirations were never far from the surface of daily political life of the country.

I would argue that the process of completing this ideological compromise in the former Yugoslavia went through four distinct phases. The period from 1945 until the late 1950s represented the first phase in which the Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ) exercised an absolute control over all aspects of life in the country. The confrontation with Stalin in 1948 and the subsequent threat of the potential political annihilation of the KPJ in this conflict served as justification for exercising full control over the domestic affairs in the country. Moreover, the threat of a possible military confrontation with the Soviet troops was the homogenizing factor in the former Yugoslavia. These threats served yet another purpose: that of establishing the cult of a leader and removing all dissonant voices from the political scene.<sup>4</sup> On the economic front, the First Five Year Plan for rebuilding the country and strengthening party control was almost an exact copy of the Soviet model. Politics in the agrarian sector and the creation of the Peasant

Working Communes also represented the full adoption of the Soviet model.<sup>5</sup> Political discourse was dominated by Josip Broz Tito and the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Tito and the members of the Central Committee displayed many of the characteristics of Stalinist attitude and methodology in their work. All spheres of public life were put under the watchful eye of various party committees and associations such as the Propaganda Office (AGITPROP), the Antifascist Women's Front (AFZ), and the Union of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ), as well as the Socialist Union of Working People of Yugoslavia (SSRNJ), and the Union of Communist Writers of Yugoslavia (SPKJ), to mention only a handful. These organizations had the purpose of not only representing its members but also acting as ideological and political watchdogs on behalf of the federal authorities. This atomization of the ideological and political hierarchy in the former Yugoslavia of the period created the mechanism of control that showed little tolerance for the public expressions of the existing nationalist sentiments and aspirations of the republics.

The 1960s represented the second phase of the process, when the pressure upon the party apparatus was somewhat lessened by the fact of the political and, later, economic reconciliation between SFRY and the Soviet Union. However, the communist elite still played a crucial role in the process of decision making in the country. With regards to the foreign policy, the Yugoslav communist authorities and Tito himself embarked upon the new course. They worked towards establishing the basis for the future Non-Aligned Movement. Tito worked on creating this political corset for two purposes. First, to internationalize and elevate SFRY and its *separate road to socialism*. Second, to strengthen his grip on power within Yugoslavia, as well as to try and sideline the issue of rising nationalism in the country by shifting the focus of public attention to his foreign policy actions. What disturbed the balance of the communist rule in the former Yugoslavia were echoes of the political changes happening throughout Western Europe in the late 1960s. Echoes of the idea of liberalization of the society manifested itself in the former Yugoslavia in the form of student movements and demands for establishing models of controlling the party in power. Even though the party apparatus managed to suppress the student protests in 1968, the demands for further liberalization of the Yugoslav political landscape maintained its prominence on the domestic political scene.

The early 1970s marked the beginning of a downward trend in regards to party control over the public discourse, and the ten years that followed represent the third phase of the process of making a compromise with the nationalist oligarchies in the republics, as well as the gradual disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. The Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party and the federal government in Belgrade were faced with the demands from the republics for more independence in the process of decision making and had to modify their tactics in order to accommodate those demands. That was also the time of renewed calls for the transfer of power from the federal level to the level of the republics. The acknowledgement by the federal authorities of the need to induce such transfer gradually led to the decentralization of the country. Moreover, the issue of national self-determination in the former Yugoslavia came into focus. It could be said that 1970s were the time when the local communist elites acquired a considerable maneuvering space within the Yugoslav political landscape, and the expressions of regional and ethnic nationalism were on the rise.

The Constitution of 1974 marked the beginning of the substantial changes in the nature and structure of the Yugoslav system of governing and in the relations between the republics.<sup>6</sup> This constitutional framework allowed for a considerable weakening of the federal authority, while it enhanced the powers of, and the rivalry between, the republics. This legislated confederalization of the former Yugoslavia was, among other things, an indication of two major shortcomings of the Yugoslav model of the *separate road to socialism*. First, it was an indirect admission of failure on the part of the federal communist authorities to maintain the positive image of brotherhood and unity. Second, it was an admission of the fact that the communist elite adopted the logic of nationalism and embraced the issues of the nationalist policy in their

respective republics.<sup>7</sup> This new form of nationalism in the former Yugoslavia shared the basic premises with the earlier model of the late nineteenth century Balkan nationalism. The novelty was in the level and mode of its expression, as well as in it being curtailed by the rhetoric of the communist ideology and the idea of Yugoslavism. Having this in mind, it seems that modern day nationalism in the former Yugoslavia could not be entirely equated with the old forms, nor it could be characterized as the continuity of the nineteenth century nationalist thought. Many analysts of the Balkan political landscape argue that the communist authorities had tried to keep the lid on the *powder keg* of Balkan nationalism and that, once Tito was gone, the entire protective mechanism dissolved. Such discourse is based upon the presupposed notion of a non-nationalistic nature of the Yugoslav communist elite. I would argue that the communist elite in the former Yugoslavia was as nationalistic as their royalist predecessors had been but the manifestations of their nationalist sentiments had acquired new ideological frameworks, thus, creating a new form of nationalism that combined the elements of the old nineteenth century nationalist thought together with the new ideology of the *Yugoslav supranationality*.<sup>8</sup>

The 1980s marked the beginning of the fourth stage of the ideological compromise between communists and nationalists in the former Yugoslavia. Respective republican oligarchies acted more in accordance with the principles of regional nationalist politics than along the lines of proclaimed principles of the communist ideology. After Tito's death the federal authorities in the former Yugoslavia had fallen under the nationalistic spell despite the persistent rhetoric of Yugoslavism and brotherhood and unity. The Central Committee of the party and the federal government acting together became more of a broker and a peacemaker in the disputes between the republics in an effort to preserve the image of a united power structure. The idea of the *Yugoslav supranationality* was still a part of daily political vocabulary, but it was obvious that the centripetal forces of the local and regional nationalism were gaining ground and that the communist elite had fully adopted a nationalist agenda. However, such an attitude should not be immediately equated with the nationalist politics of the elite in the former Soviet Union or of any other communist country in Eastern Europe. The specificity of the Yugoslav case lies, among other things, in the fact of its proclaimed *separate road to socialism* and in the creation of sophisticated mechanisms of adoption and adaptation in dealing with the national question. The system allowed and controlled descent along these lines only to be able to project the false impression of its strength, flexibility, and its democratic character. Adopting and adapting the nationalistic policies became the means of preserving power and ultimately resulted in the destruction of the country.

The issue that is open for discussion is the manner in which the destruction of the former Yugoslavia occurred and the brutality of the breakup. In this respect it seems necessary to point out that the brutality (on the individual, as well as on the collective level) of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was not so much the product of being violent, as it was the result of the process of becoming violent. This is to say that the argument about the inherited violence among the peoples in the Balkans is nothing more than yet another negative stereotype that overlooks the changes on a larger scale which, paired with the radicalization on the local level, ultimately led to bloodshed. People in the Balkans could not be branded as narrow-minded savages who are prone to violence and whose actions are not predictable. Recent historical writings on the Balkans offer ample evidence of such a misconception.

It is also interesting to notice that numerous authors who wrote on the Balkans viewed the recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia as products of centuries old religious and ethnic hatred. What escaped the attention of many analysts was the necessity and the opportunity to emphasize the distinction between the motives for hatred in the past against those existing at present. Those motives did significantly change over time, and were manipulated for the sake of particular political agendas and ideologies. It seems that the forces of nationalism, and religious and ideological intolerance in the Balkans had played itself out on the political scene only for the past hundred years or so. For example, openly expressed animosity between the Serbs and the

Croats along ethnic, national, and religious lines could hardly be traced back in time to earlier than the 1900s. In the case of Albanians and their uneasy relationship with the Serbs, that time line could be pushed back to the late 1870s.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, one could point out the fact that many Albanians took part in various military actions against the Serbs, as soldiers for the Ottoman armies. Some Serbian historians would go so far as to claim that Albanians were given in possession the *Serbian ancient lands* in Kosovo as the reward for their military service for the Ottomans. Such an argument is nationalistic in its core and feeds on the myth of Kosovo being *the cradle of Serbian civilization*. Moreover, it implies the existence of the centuries old resentment and hatred between the two nations and analyses these sentiments within the nationalist parameters. This methodological apparatus is not appropriate simply because one could not apply the logic of distinguishing along the lines of national belonging in the periods before such concept even existed. In this respect, I tend to agree with the view expressed by Noel Malcolm.<sup>10</sup> Namely, he argued that with the advent of ideology of national awakening during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the character, the intensity, and the motives for the conflicts in the region have acquired a specific framework. Only with the emergence of the political construct that was defined as *the need for national homogenization*, did the nations in the region began confronting each other because of their respected ethnic and religious prerogatives (Christians against the 'Turks' /Muslims/; Serbs against Croats or Serbs against Albanians and vice versa). People in the Balkans have lived alongside each other for centuries and cooperated on many levels and on many occasions. They have also fought each other through centuries, and have done so for various reasons and on behalf of various empires. However, only since the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century have those conflicts acquired a distinct ethnic, national, and religious character. Reasons for such a change might be found in the overall ideological concepts of regional nationalism (Serbian, Croatian, and Albanian) of the time and in stereotypes according to which people were taught to define themselves and their neighbors.

The Balkans variant of nationalism does not differ in its basic premises from the general trend of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European nationalism but it displays certain characteristics that set it aside from the main body of nationalist ideology. These specificities consist of several elements. First, there is the peripheral character of the economic structure in the Balkans in comparison to the rest of Europe. Another important factor is the level of influence the religious affiliation has upon the process of self-definition of the people in the region. The third important element is the manner in which the national, ethnic and religious, as well as cultural differences are being expressed. These lines of differentiation rose to prominence due to the lack of the structure of a civil society and an inappropriate model of governing in both of the Yugoslav states (the one created in 1918 and the one created in 1945). In the case of the former SFR Yugoslavia the element of one's religious affiliation served as strong catalyst for hatred, while the notions of desired, but not yet achieved, territorial gains provided the modus for rationalizing such hatred. On both sides of the divide (Catholic Croats vs Orthodox Serbs) nationalist elites promoted the idea of a merger between one's religious beliefs and one's national identity. Constructing, and later emphasizing, the alleged connection between Orthodoxy / Catholicism on one side, and the Serbian / Croatian heritage and tradition on the other, reinforced the stereotypical differences between the two. Popular infatuation with the self-image in a distorted mirror of religious beliefs was encouraged and justified in the media. As the Serbian writer Momo Kapor wrote in *Borba Daily* in August of 1999

Even the cosmonauts have noticed from the space how our sacred places, such as the Patriarchy of Pec, together with the Hilandar monastery are illuminated by some strange light. That is the positive energy, which is ours, eternal and indestructible.<sup>11</sup>

Religious institutions in the former Yugoslavia can not evade raising the issue of their responsibility in the process of the destruction of the former Yugoslavia. Viewed as institutional frameworks for the notions of a collective spirit of the nations, each institution (the Catholic Church in Croatia and Slovenia, the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as the Islamic religious institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) had, in various ways and to various degrees, contributed to the creation of the general climate of intolerance. One could also talk about curious interdependency between the State and the Church in this particular case. Respective national elites had merged their interests with that of the religious leaders and institutions (modifying them both in the process of pragmatic daily politics), thus, managing to find a convenient and convincing justification for the crimes committed, and for rationalizing the expansionism and the war for ideologies as the *holy war* for the preservation of the national spirit, heritage, and tradition. Examples of such justification could be detected in the statements about the need to repossess the *ancient Serbian /Croatian land*, as in the cases of Krajina, Vukovar, or Mostar, or the statements about the *cradle of Serbian civilization/ ancient Albanian land*, in the case of Kosovo.

Recent wars for ideology and territory in the former Yugoslavia and the expulsion of large segments of population have been justified with such rhetoric. What was important for the aggressors were the territories and not the people living in those territories. During the recent wars in Croatia and in Bosnia, some humanitarian workers argued that the refugees from these regions were as much the product of the war in the former Yugoslavia as they were the reason for its start.<sup>12</sup> This controversial argument suffers from the basic causality problem, since these modern day refugees from the former Yugoslavia were put in such a position because of the war. However, from the point of view of expansionist nationalism, it is obvious that in order to gain territory populated by an unwanted group it is necessary to eradicate that group. Continuous territorial claims on the part of various nationalist elites constituted the call for the cleansing of those unwelcome and unwanted. Within the context of the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia, I would say that displaced segments of the population (Bosnian Muslims, Serbs, Croats, Albanians), as well as those who were born into mixed marriages and constituted the results of the experiment with the *Yugoslav supranationality*, represented the case of the wrong people that lived in the wrong place at the wrong time. As Mihailo Djuric noted some time ago, they were "the supra national nomads of the present world."<sup>13</sup> From the nationalistic point of view, Serbs living in Croatia and Croats living in Serbia, as well as Bosnian Muslims living on the so-called *ancient Serbian lands*, and Albanians populating the region known as the *cradle of Serbian civilization* were considered for decades to be the wrong people living in the wrong place. These *others*, had been branded as foreign elements within the otherwise healthy religious body of the nation. What turned them into refugees were the timing and the intensity of change of ideological and political circumstances in the region. With their fingers raised high up in the air as a sign of their religious and spiritual base, the *knights of darkness* moved swiftly and mercilessly against the innocent and helpless civilian population, while claiming that they were the defenders of the people and of the faith, and that they were carrying the light into a heathen darkness. By parading dead bodies of famous people and ancestors, and by organizing their ceremonial reburials, nationalist forces tried to justify their territorial claims. This was, at the same time, a reminder of one's connection to the past and a confirmation of one's ethnic, national and religious belonging.<sup>14</sup> The prime motives for such claim were ignorance and fear, and the need to contain it. Fear of the *other* that was based upon the past negative experiences (from the Second World War), and the religious coloration of it, could be detected on various levels. The writing above the entrance of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the village of Glina in Croatia is the striking example of such climate of fear and mistrust: "Sacuvaj nas Boze kuge i Hrvata!" ("God! Save us from the plague and from the Croats"!)<sup>15</sup>

It is also possible to view such cooperation between the elite and the Church as the expression of the so-called *Well Intended Deception*. That is the definition of particular

manipulatory tactics employed during the Middle Ages by both civil and religious authorities in order to advocate a given political agenda or a set of beliefs. It seems that we are witnessing the contemporary Balkan version of *Pia Fraus*, where murder and expulsion is rationalized through, and justified by, the alleged necessity to protect sacred values of one's national, historical, and religious being. Proclaimed need for protecting and preserving the *Lebensraum*<sup>16</sup> was paired with the over-emphasized fear for one's religious and national identity. The reasons, the passion, and the ferocity behind the ethnic cleansing of the *infidels* could be understood fully only if one takes into consideration the view of the events seen through this kind of magnifying glass.

Many had failed to notice that the similar type of ethnic and religious, and even regional animosities (less costly in human lives) existed and can still be detected within the Western and Central European context.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, the comparison between regional nationalistic movements in Western and Central Europe on the one hand, and the Balkan nationalism on the other, might not be entirely appropriate since it could be made only on a superficial level. In Western and Central Europe such feelings did not result in armed conflicts of such magnitude as it did in the case of the former Yugoslavia, nor did it trigger an exodus of such proportions. This difference seems to be the product of the nature of Western and Central European system of governance and the character of civil society, and partly the legacy of relatively well-defined notions of national and cultural identity of many Western European nations. If we accept such argumentation it is then plausible to think along the lines of Maria Todorova's assessment of the Yugoslav crisis as being the final act of the Europeanization of the Balkans.<sup>18</sup> Stereotypes of the *other* are usually of a negative kind and could be easily detected upon the closer examination of any given group. The process of construction of the national consciousness and the stereotyping of oneself and of the *other* induces the notion of superiority that is commonly referred to as the *national pride*. The other side of that self-reflecting mirror could be defined as the *national prejudice*. Those two notions are interdependent and could hardly exist without each other. In other words, in order to define who you are and to what national *body of evidence* you belong, it is necessary to define first who you are not and where you do not belong. The most recent expression of such differentiation in the Balkans goes along the lines: "We are Europeans! You are not!" or "We belong to the European cultural frameworks! You are part of the Byzantine and Oriental cultural space!"<sup>19</sup>

The arguments about the thousand-year old Croatian culture were being used by the Croat nationalists to reaffirm the alleged continuity of European connection and to emphasize its Western structure, and mode of behavior, and cognition. On the other side of this modern nationalistic and political divide, the Serbian nationalists are evoking the good old days of the Middle Ages and stressing the level of sophistication of the Serbian aristocracy of the period. In an attempt to castigate their opponents they would argue that "at the Court of the Serbian Tzar Stephen Dusan the golden cutlery was used for every meal, at the time when Western European kings and queens were licking their fingers after dinner". This evoking of the fictitious past is aimed at enhancing one's alleged civilizational achievements and supremacy. Moreover, constant references to, and praises of, the Serbian medieval knights and their struggle against the Ottoman invaders are an attempt to position the Serbs as defenders of the *Old Dame* Europe against the Ottoman forces. Insistence upon mythologizing the past in this manner implies the status of a nation that sacrificed itself for the sake of protecting Europe, thus becoming the victim of the unfortunate historical circumstances. The facts that the Ottoman armies had much of Eastern and Central Europe under their control at the time, and that Sultan's soldiers had laid siege to Vienna do not count for much in this type of historical equation. This mythologizing of the past and the constructing of negative imagery of the *other*, as the case of the former Yugoslavia shows, resulted in confrontations of those two solitudes along the already established lines of national, religious, and ethnic intolerance.

The contemporary Balkan version of this intolerance could be categorized within the framework of the so-called *Complex of My Private Jew*.<sup>20</sup> One could clearly distinguish between

the intensity and reasoning behind the intolerance on an individual level and on the level of a group. Quite often, the person belonging to a particular nation, ethnic or a religious group (Albanian / Serb / Croat) would openly, and with a degree of passion, castigate all members of another nation, ethnic or a religious group, while at the same time display a remarkable sensitivity towards a friend or a neighbor who happened to belong to the same condemned group. The arguments against a particular nation would stay on the general level of insults and stereotypes such as barbarians, backward, two-faced, dirty, secretive and so forth. On an individual level, however, a person would praise the virtues of his/her friend or neighbor, and genuinely wonder how is it possible that he/she is of particular ethnic or religious background. Such extraordinary manner in which an individual is being singled out from his/her peer group could indicate a number of things. The most obvious are the lack of knowledge and the lack of will to interact and learn about the *other*. I am of the opinion that the insufficient knowledge of that *other*, poor level of communication and exchange between the different groups in the region constitute the core elements of nationalistic fear and hate.

This phenomenon could also point out the possible avenues for change of the culture of self-importance, the lack of knowledge, and tolerance toward others that generally characterize all types of nationalism. Learning about oneself and about others means stepping out of the allegedly protective umbrella of one's national spirit. It means crossing the boundaries of one's own backyard and refusing to be oppressed by fear. The act of crossing such boundaries presupposes flexibility. No matter how spacious it might appear, that gilded birdcage of nationalism is still a cage. Naturally, one should not forget where one comes from but should refuse to be limited by the sweet confinement known as the *homeland*. The concept of *homeland* seems more and more like the conservative myth created with the purpose of keeping people immobile.

This is, of course, a long and arduous process that encompasses several stages. The initiation of the process itself is preconditioned by the inward oriented examination. Such self-examination should encompass the issues of expansionist nationalism and the perception of *other*, as well as the issue of guilt. Attempting to personalize these issues is a convenient tactic that is aimed towards freeing the group in question of any responsibility. This approach raises at least a couple of important questions. If we accept the suggestion that a leader is to be blamed for the policy and its negative results (Milosevic, Tudjman, Izetbegovic, Mladic, Karadzic, Bulatovic, etc.), are we then to believe that the population did not have any impact whatsoever upon the creation and the implementation of the policy? Furthermore, are we to assume that the population was refused any agency in the process of political decision-making and implementation? The argument that the leader/leadership was entirely responsible, and that the population represented only fellow travelers on the road to political suicide, does not seem very convincing. This is especially true if we remember that the majority of the population in all the republics of the former Yugoslavia not only praised the policies implemented by their respective national leaders, but also supported the means by which their policies were implemented. I am of the opinion that the electorate body, even within the most oppressive and totalitarian system of governing could, if it desires to do so, exercise at least some measure of control and influence over its political structures. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, with a very few exceptions, such exercise of the popular will went along the lines of nationalist policies of the elite. Exceptions to this rule were seen at the time not only as an atavism on the healthy national body, but as examples of high treason. Naturally, the political movements of 1991 and 1992 in Belgrade, as well as the latest successful attempt to get rid of the dictator in Serbia, serve as examples of the electorate's body ability to introduce political changes in the society. However, one should exercise caution when assessing the current political climate in the region of the former Yugoslavia. Nationalist agendas and sentiments are the driving force behind the elites in power in the successor states of the former SFRY. Recent political changes in Croatia and Serbia should be viewed as the first important steps in a long process of dismantling the totalitarian structures of power and of



creating the elements of a civil society with democratic methods of governing. This is the process in which the international community could and should help.

The international community should be directing its assistance to the issues vital for the domestic political scene in the former Yugoslavia also. Facing difficult task of assessing one's own responsibility should be the first step towards establishing the climate for a potential reconciliation among the nations of the former Yugoslavia. Similar experience of other nations dealing with the issues of guilt and reconciliation in the recent past could serve as models and guidelines for approaching such problems. This is necessary despite the fact that the people of the former Yugoslavia are the one who should make the crucial step forward. All nations and ethnic groups living in the region of the former Yugoslavia have to take a step closer towards the mirror and face their misgivings and their demons. This is a painful, but necessary experience since the future modes of cooperation in the region must be based upon a clear past.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Goranci are the ethnic group of Serbian descent living in the region of Kosovo. During the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup> century, they had adopted Albanian language, costumes and customs, as well as first and last names for their families and their members. Goranci converted to Islam. It seems that conversion came as the result of this group being relatively shielded from the rest of the Serb population in Kosovo, and being in constant interaction with their Albanian neighbors. However, Goranci still maintain their ethnic connection with the Serbs. While describing a particular family tradition and their family tree all of the local people that had been interviewed stated how their "great great great great grandparents were of Serbian blood". Srdja Pavlovic, "Research Notes on Goranci (1980-1981)", Research project: *Traditional Culture of Albanians in Yugoslavia*, Archive CANU, ISN.21/81. Titograd, 1981. Unpublished.

<sup>2</sup> A number of books and scholarly articles had been devoted to the break up of the former Yugoslavia. Here, I will indicate some of the major works on this subject such as Noel Malcolm's *Bosnia: A Short History*, London, 1994. Macmillan, and *Kosovo: A Short History*, London, 1998. Macmillan; Branka Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, London, 1993.; Bogdan Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia*, Minneapolis and London, 1994.; Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia; The Third Balkan War*, London, 1992., and *The Balkans 1804 - 1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, Granta, 1999; Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, London, 1995; James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, Columbia University Press, 1997; Leonard Cohen, *Broken Bonds: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia*, Westview Press, Boulder CO, 1993.; Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Wladimir Fischer for pointing out this particular example and for elaborating further on the question of nationalism of the communist elite in the former Yugoslavia. I have greatly benefited from our conversations on this topic. (Personal communication).

<sup>4</sup> Cleansing of the party apparatus in the former Yugoslavia was thorough and far-reaching. Many activists and high ranking party officials served lengthy prison terms in the special camps on the islands of Goli Otok and Sveti Grgr in the Adriatic sea, as well as in the prisons of Stara Gradiska, Lepoglava, and Bogdanov Kraj. See: Branislav Kovacevic and Rifat Rastoder, *Crvena Mrlja*, Titograd, 1989. *Pobjeda*. For a more general analysis see: Rajko Danilovic, *Upotreba Neprijatelja: Politicka Sudjenja 1945 - 1991 u Jugoslaviji*, Valjevo, 1993. Vijenac.

<sup>5</sup> Melisa Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside 1941 - 1953*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998. p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> See: Denison Russinow, "Nationalities Policy and the National Question," in *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, (ed) Pedro Ramet, Boulder Co. 1985. Westview Press, pp.136-7.

<sup>7</sup> Nationalistic sentiments were on the rise in many regions of the former Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. That was the time of an intense campaign on the part of Albanians living in Kosovo for more autonomy and the establishment of the bilingual education system in the province. In Montenegro, nationalist forces took, for a short period of time (1970 - 1973), the central stage by publicly denouncing the communist ideology and advocating the ideas of the Chetnik movements. In Croatia, the movement known as the Croatian Spring (1972) represented the first

serious test for the central government in Belgrade and the Yugoslav Communist Party. In Serbia, early 1970s were the time of the ideological and political cleansing of the communist elite and of intellectuals at the universities in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Ideological aspect aside, what these movements had in common was their strong expression of the regional nationalistic sentiment (Serbian, Croatian, Albanian) paired with the demands for more power for the republics and a more open system of governing. For a more comprehensive account of the political cleansing in Serbia of the period see: Aleksandar Nenadovic, Mirko Tepavac: *Sjecanja i komentari*, Beograd, 1998. Radio B92.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postcolonialist Change*, New York, 1998. Columbia University Press, p. 40. Also see: Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey*, Roma, 1995. Edizioni "Orientalia Christiana"

<sup>9</sup> The first significant event that indicated the worsening of these relations came as the result of the mass expulsion of Albanians and other Muslims from the areas conquered by Montenegro and Serbia in the period between 1877-8.

<sup>10</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, London, 1998. Macmillan, p. xxviii

<sup>11</sup> *Borba Daily*, Beograd, 14-15 August 1999

<sup>12</sup> This view was advocated very strongly by the Swedish actress and human rights activist Liv Ulman in late 1993, and by the British human right activist Sally Becker in early 1994. (Personal communication).

<sup>13</sup> Mihailo Djuric, *Anali Pravnog Fakulteta u Beogradu 3* (1971), pp. 116-117. Quoted in Dejan Guzina's article "Socialist Serbia's Narratives: From Yugoslavia to a Greater Serbia," p.32. Translation: D. Guzina. Unpublished. Quoted with the permission by the author.

<sup>14</sup> Reconfirming these connections and reevaluating the national past were the main purposes behind parading the bones of the medieval Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanovic, or behind reburying of the last Montenegrin King Nikola Petrovic. The most recent example of the political usage of dead bodies is the reburial of the famous Serbian nationalist poet Jovan Ducic. For a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon in the former Yugoslavia, see: Katherine Verdery, pp. 95 – 127

<sup>15</sup> Glina is the Croatian village with mainly Serb population. During the Second World War, the Ustasha regime ordered the cleansing of the entire region of all non-Croats. The entire population of Glina, with the exception of two individuals had been rounded up by Ustasha soldiers, locked inside the village Orthodox Church and burned alive. Shortly after the WWII, the village church was rebuilt and this sentence was inscribed above its front entrance.

<sup>16</sup> Even though the political platforms of the nationalist elites in the former Yugoslavia displayed similarities with that of Fascist Italy, the term *Lebensraum* (associated with the Nazi Germany) could be used in respect to their territorial claims. The Balkan version of the notion of protecting and expanding *Lebensraum* differs from the old original policy only in terms of geography. For the Serbian nationalists this meant the geopolitics of western expansionism. For the Croatian nationalist, the notion of expanding the *Lebensraum* referred to potential and desired territorial gains in Western Bosnia and South-Eastern Herzegovina (Croatian State of Herceg-Bosna).

<sup>17</sup> As examples of these animosities one could mention tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and ETA's radicalization of the issue of ethnic, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness in the Basque region of Spain, as well as resentment between Corsicans and French. Moreover, in Western Germany (region near Rhine river) in 1920s, separatist movement developed and its leaders advocated the secession of the region from Germany and its inclusion into France. I am indebted to Dennis Sweeney and Wladimir Fischer for pointing out the examples from Germany and Austria (personal communication).

<sup>18</sup> Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, 1997. Oxford University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Danilo Kis, *Homo Poeticus*, Zagreb, Globus/Beograd, Prosveta, 1983. p. 84

<sup>20</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of this concept see: Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, New York, 1998. Oxford University Press, pp. 38 - 43