TITLE: THE PRECIPITOUS RISE AND CALAMITOUS FALL OF MULTICULTURAL YUGOSLAVIA (with Appendix: The Lessons of Yugoslavia's Failure)

AUTHOR: ANDREW WACHTEL, Northwestern University

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH

TITLE VIII PROGRAM

1755 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
PROJECT INFORMATION:¹

CONTRACTOR: Northwestern University

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Andrew Wachtel

COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 810-26

DATE: December 17, 1996

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Individual researchers retain the copyright on work products derived from research funded by Council Contract. The Council and the U.S. Government have the right to duplicate written reports and other materials submitted under Council Contract and to distribute such copies within the Council and U.S. Government for their own use, and to draw upon such reports and materials for their own studies; but the Council and U.S. Government do not have the right to distribute, or make such reports and materials available, outside the Council or U.S. Government without the written consent of the authors, except as may be required under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 5 U.S.C. 552, or other applicable law.

¹ The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, made available by the U. S. Department of State under Title VIII (the Soviet-Eastern European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author(s).
CONTENTS

Summary ................................................................. i

Introduction ............................................................. 1

Linguistic and Literary Education ................................. 3

Political Responses ..................................................... 7
  Croatia .......................................................................... 7
  Other Republics .......................................................... 10
  Serbia .......................................................................... 10

Cultural Polarization .................................................... 15

Fiction as a Medium ...................................................... 17

The Centripetal Force of Absolute Difference .................. 31

The Centrifugal Force of Repetition ................................. 35

APPENDIX: The Lessons of Yugoslavia's Failure ................ 37
The Precipitous Rise and Calamitous Fall of Multicultural Yugoslavia

Summary

The tendency of most writers describing the breakup of Yugoslavia has been to search for relatively short-term political and economic causes. The approach taken here is somewhat different. Starting from the assumption that nation building (and nation breaking) is primarily a cultural project, I examine the role that changing views of the essence of Yugoslav culture had in creating the preconditions for the destruction of Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia moved, in the course of the 1960s, from a pluralist cultural model that tried to balance the cultural diversity of its separate parts with the creation of a supranational Yugoslav culture, to a multiculturalist one in which the cultures of the different nationalities were seen as equal but separate. School programs, which had emphasized a common core in the crucial areas of literature and history from the 1940s until the 1960s, were allowed to grow separate, with each republic vying to incorporate as much of its own cultural material as possible. And I show how these new cultural tendencies were manipulated by special interest groups, first of intellectuals, and then of politicians, for nationalist ends.

Although nationalism was officially crushed in Yugoslavia in 1971 in the wake of the Croatian nationalist crisis, this was carried out only in the political sphere. In the area of culture, separatist trends remained unchecked.

Finally, in the last section of the paper, I analyze a series of literary works by Serbian writers who used the backlash which the nationalisms of the other republics had unleashed to create the moral climate in which suspicion and hate for the “brother” nations of Yugoslavia became the norm. It was this cultural breakdown, I argue, that set the stage for the political breakup of Yugoslavia, rather than the other way around.

Yugoslavia went from being a country with a poorly articulated but vitally important supranational policy to an ungovernable group of squabbling republics in less than thirty years. Federal policies encouraged, indeed almost guaranteed, a revival of nationalism both in the political and cultural spheres. By leaning toward “brotherhood” and away from “unity,” the governing Communist party encouraged citizens of Yugoslavia to see themselves first and foremost as members of a specific national group. The establishment of a “separate but equal” cultural policy allowed certain members of the cultural and political elites to ally themselves with preexisting nationalist undercurrents, destabilizing the compromise that had been in effect since the end of the war. Although it was believed that giving the various nations more autonomy would reduce centripetal tensions in the country, this did not happen. Rather, the separate nations of Yugoslavia simply demanded more and more autonomy at the expense of a rapidly weakening center. Cultural and

particularly educational policies were revised to pay more attention to the specific contributions of
the national group that constituted the majority in each republic. As the various minorities demanded
and received greater recognition, autonomy, and rights, the Serbian plurality felt increasingly
threatened. Ultimately, a number of their elite cultural figures decided to pursue a similar strategy to
the one that had worked so well for the smaller nations—a boosting of national pride at the expense
of supranational institutions. The situation that had obtained in pre-war Yugoslavia was now
reversed. Then, Serbian hegemony had produced nationalist reactions among Croats and
Macedonians. Now, Croatian, Slovenian, Albanian, and Macedonian nationalism elicited Serbian
hegemonic behavior. The result, however, was identical.

Appendix: The Lessons of Yugoslavia’s Failure

Summary

American policies of multiculturalism are threatening to reproduce in this country the necessary
conditions for a Yugoslav-type fissioning. Although the history of the United States and that of
Yugoslavia are radically different, I argue that in encouraging Americans to identify themselves by
race, rather than as citizens of the country as a whole or as individuals, we are increasing the
possibility for separatist splits. In this argumentation, I follow the lead of a number of major thinkers
including Arthur Schlesinger, Junior, and E.D. Hirsch. However, whereas these thinkers, working
with materials drawn from the United States, can only hypothesize, I use material taken from
Yugoslavia to show that this process has already reached a second stage. We are now seeing the
backlash of members of the largest group (white Americans in this case, Serbians in Yugoslavia)
against multiculturalism, which takes the form not of strengthening national institutions, but of
demanding separate rights for themselves. We, however, still have time to rectify the situation, and a
sober look at what happened in Yugoslavia should help us to do so.
THE PRECIPITOUS RISE AND CALAMITOUS FALL OF MULTICULTURAL YUGOSLAVIA

ANDREW WACHTEL
Northwestern University

Introduction
The concept of a centralized Yugoslav culture based not on the a synthesis of the various national cultures but rather on socialist, specifically Yugoslav socialist values was not without its detractors, even in the heady days of national liberation that immediately followed World War II. In particular, Slovenian cultural leaders were disturbed by centralizing tendencies, which they felt were merely a mask for a reimposition of the pre-war cultural and political status quo. Thus, the Slovenian critic Drago Sega, in response to an initiative for the creation of a “single unified Yugoslav evaluative criterion in our literature” sponsored by the Yugoslav Writers’ Association in 1956, noted that the phrase smacked of the inter-war desire for “the integration of Yugoslav literature” and “eventual Yugoslav integration.” Slovenian critics noted as well that most visions of a Yugoslav literary culture assumed the existence of a single literary language, thereby relegating Slovenian (not to mention Macedonian, Albanian, and other “minority” languages) to the margins. Eventually, even the highest echelons of the Communist party came to believe that a centralized culture would not work, and, in 1962-63, Tito “abandoned the idea of Yugoslav integration...He then tried to give greater rein to the federalist tendencies inside the Party and the state.”

As opposed to the first fifteen post-war years, when in the Titoist formula of “bratstvo i jedinstvo” (“brotherhood and unity”) the latter concept had been stressed, the former concept now took pride of place. This turn toward true federalism, as opposed to the pretense thereof which had been characteristic of Yugoslavia in the immediately preceding years, was reflected in the new constitution of 1963. Among other things, this document reaffirmed the right of secession to the “peoples of Yugoslavia” (an article that had been absent in the 1953 Yugoslav constitution), and it gave the republics “the right to engage in cooperative ventures among themselves without any role being played by the federal government.”

Cultural policy changed to meet the new decentralized vision of Yugoslavia as well. Indeed, for the first time in its history, Yugoslavia gradually came to embrace what could be called a multicultural self image. Instead of seeing national cultural differences as something to be overcome,

1 Research for this paper was supported by grants from the following organizations: The National Council for Soviet and East European Research; the US Department of Education, Fulbright-Hays Fellowship program; The International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Department of State under the Title VIII program; and Northwestern University. None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed.
2 Quoted in Gabric, 322.
4 Ramet, p. 73.
by one means or another, it was decided to embrace cultural difference and see it as a sign of strength. The multicultural vision became an important part of Yugoslavia’s external self-advertisement as well. For example, in a report prepared for Unesco, the section on the “Cultural development of the peoples and nationalities” began with the statement: “The right of every people and nationality in Yugoslavia to free development and their own cultural identity plays an extremely important part in the life of the country.”

It is worth noting here that such a formulation implies that there can be no culture other than nation-based culture. That is, individuals are believed to achieve cultural expression only within the framework of their national culture. This view, as we will see, proved quite dangerous, for it practically guaranteed the strengthening of separate nationally-oriented cultural blocks within Yugoslav society.

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, as the power of the separate republics grew steadily, the federal republic lost influence. And although the devolution of power to the republics was conceived as a way to minimize nationalist tensions in Yugoslavia—by assuaging the fears of Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and others that centralization was merely Serbian hegemony in sheep’s clothing—it did just the opposite. Indeed, as Sabrina Ramet has shown, internal Yugoslav relations in this period came to resemble not the interactions of, say, the American states, but rather those of competing countries always ready to “provoke a crisis rather than forego an opportunity to increase [their own, AW] capabilities.” By encouraging each of the republics to look after its own interests first, the federal policy ensured that collective intra-republican initiatives would come to the fore and that inter-republican cooperation would suffer. There had, of course, always been this potential inherent in the federal arrangements by which Yugoslavia was governed in the post-war period. But the monolithic and centralized nature of the Communist Party (and later the League of Yugoslav Communists) was such that particularist tendencies could be and were minimized.

The results of this new policy became apparent quite quickly on the cultural front, particularly in the all-important areas of linguistic and literary education. It will be recalled that in the late 1940s, the central authorities acted quite quickly to ensure that “unity” rather than “brotherhood” would dominate in the educational sphere. Through the 1950s, however, the central government gave increasingly less concern to details in this area, and if we compare the educational plans published in the late 40s with those of 1960, we can see that the latter were already beginning to exhibit marked tendencies toward separation. Most of the curriculum remained similar to be sure, but, for example, in the teaching of history each Republic had already begun to slant coverage so that events unique to it get a bit more space. For example, in the Slovenian program the life of Boris Kidric received more attention than did that of Tito.

---

3 *Predmetnik in učni nacrt za osnovne šole*, Ljubljana, 1962, p. 10.
Linguistic and Literary Education

The most striking difference is in the teaching of language and literature, however, which was always considered the central part of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education of Serbia, for example, provided a full list of texts for use in grades 5-8.⁸ Except for texts devoted to Tito and the war (which are multi-national by definition), the Serbian program provides almost no Croatian authors (the exceptions being excerpts from Senoa's Peasant Revolt in 6th grade, excerpts from Mazuranic’s The Death of Smail-Aga Cengic in 7th). Of the Illyrians, only a bit of Preradovic is provided. Dubrovnik literature of the renaissance is ignored entirely, as is Croatian realism, moderna, and Krleza. Little is provided from Slovenian, although that literature is probably better represented than is Croatian, with excerpts provided from Cankar, Levstik, and Gregorcic (all in translation, by the way).

The Croatian school program for 1964 is practically a mirror image of the Serbian one. The complete list of texts published for use in grades 5-8 is heavily weighted in favor of Croatian authors, with secondary importance given to world and Slovenian literature. Thus, in the fifth grade, students were expected to read oral epic songs, Croatian folk tales, stories by the Slovenians Cankar and Levstik, poems by the Macedonian Mitrov Ljubisa, with a story by the Serbian author Copic, and by the Croatian Prezihov Voranc, as well as texts by Pushkin and Swift. The sixth-grade program was almost entirely composed of foreign authors--Tolstoy, Gorky, Homer. The Croatians, Senoa and Vladimir Kovacic were included, as was the Bosnian Serb Petar Kocic, but there were no other Yugoslav writers. The seventh grade saw the Croatians Ivan Kozarac, Vladimir Nazor, Vjenceslav Novak, Evgenij Kumicic, and Aleckovic. Serbs included Sterija Popovic. Branislav Nusic, Desanka Maksimovic. Finally, the eighth grade program gave students Mazuranic, Senoa, Dinka Simunovic, Dragutin Tadijanovic, Nazor. August Cesarec, Slavko Kolar. Dragutin Domjanic. Goran Kovachic, and Vesna Parun. Serbs were represented only by Andric. Milovan Glisic. Laza Lazarovic, and Svetolik Rankovic and Slovenes by Ivan Cankar.⁹

The Macedonian program provides for an almost identical reading list to the one given to Serbian children, although it does add many Macedonian writers.¹⁰ This meant that students whose native language was Macedonian got a fairly good feeling for Serbian literature as well as the rudiments of Croatian and Slovenian literature. They also studied Serbo-Croatian for 2 hours per week from grades 4-8. On the other hand, students in the Republic of Macedonian whose native language was Albanian or Turkish did not learn Serbo-Croatian at all (only Macedonian, 3 hours per week from the 3rd to 8th grades). They read a tiny amount of Yugoslav literature in Macedonian translation, but would have been almost complete strangers to general Serbo-Croat Yugoslav culture.

---

⁸ Nastavni plan i program za osnovu skolu u narodnoi republiki Serbijii, Belgrad, 1960, pp. 119-122.
⁹ Program was published in Prosvjetni vjesnik Zagreb, (XVII, #5) 17 kolovoza, 1964, pp. 46-47.
¹⁰ Nastavni planovi i programi za osnovnite ucilista vo NR Makedonija, Skopije, 1960.
Slovenians also would not have known very much about the culture of the other peoples of Yugoslavia. As opposed to the Macedonians, Slovenes concentrated almost all their students' attention on Slovene writers. Only the most famous Serbo-Croat writers were to be taught (Vuk, Njegos, Mazuranic, Zmaj, Kovacic, Nusic, Nazor, Andric, Copic, Cosic), “and other important ones if time allows.”

School readers from this period give some idea of how far apart the various republican educational programs had been allowed to grow. If we take the reader that was used for the eighth and final grade of basic schools in Serbia we find that it in some respects it is quite similar to the readers of the 1930s. But there are many subtle differences. Most important, writers are now strictly classified as Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, or Slovenian. The lone exception is Ivo Andric. Although his text is provided in Cyrillic, he is simply called one of “our best contemporary authors.” Poetic Texts from Slovenian and Macedonian are generally provided in the original (prose excerpts are given in translation), although there are fewer of them by percentage, as well as far fewer Croatian texts than there were in pre-war readers. Texts with a strong Yugoslav integrationist message from classical authors are rarely present. What is more, even the ones that are, like Branko’s “Kolo” are given in excerpts that do not emphasize the all-Yugoslav character of the poem. The only exception, however, is a doozy, a “narodna pesna” entitled “Titovo kolo.” It is given in Croatian, with latin letters.

“Lijepo ti je druga Tita kolo: 

takvo kolo kdo ga ne bi volo? 

Igraju ga mladi partizani, 

partizani kô vitki jablani. 

Na glavi im crven-zvijezdablista, 

prek' ramena visi puska cista. 

A iz grudi pjesma an se vije:

Marsal Tito, nase najmilij! 

Ti si voda roda ponosnoga, 

slovenackog, srpskog, hrvatskoga. 

Craogorci, gordi Makedonci, 

pa Bosanci, zatim Hereegovci...

Also present are some Serbian patriotic poems, like “Srbija se budi” (Serbia awakes) by Desanka Maksimovic, that would have certainly been excluded from pre-war readers.

The reader that was to be used in Bosnia in the same grade is extremely different from the Serbian one, indicating how loose centralization had become by this point. It is organized chronologically and thematically rather than by the nationality of the authors, and contains different texts (although there is some repetition of classics). In addition, a far higher percentage of the reader

---

is taken from foreign, especially Russian literature. There are a few texts from Slovenian (all in Serbo-Croatian translation) and none from Macedonian.\textsuperscript{13} This format may reflect the greater importance of Yugoslavism for the mixed republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina as compared with Serbia. The Croatian reader of this period is relatively similar to the Bosnian, although it contains a significantly higher percentage of Croatian authors.\textsuperscript{14}

The confusion that resulted among the public at large as a result of the gradual move from official endorsement of a supranational policy to a multicultural federalist one can be seen best in the responses to a round-table on the subject of “Yugoslav social patriotism”\textsuperscript{15} sponsored by the Belgrade magazine \textit{NIN} in the summer of 1969, under the general heading “The Yugoslav: Who is He?” The first set of answers to be published were from Sarajevo. They give an excellent feeling for the variety of ways in which more or less normal Yugoslavs understood the relationship between nationalism and supranationalism in this transitional period. One of the first respondents, a former partisan, insisted that the experience of the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina should be seen as paradigmatic because Bosnia-Hercegovina is multi-national and therefore a microcosm of Yugoslavia as a whole. \textit{In his partisan unit in 1941, “the majority were Serbs, although there were Muslims as well. But it is interesting that at the head of the unit we had, and we even joked about it, Vajner, Stajner and Fliker.” The former was a Croat, the latter two Jews. “We were all united in the struggle for freedom.”}\textsuperscript{16} This respondent, clearly, is still using an older paradigm in which loyalty to the abstract ideals of freedom (as defined by the communist-led partisans) trumped any separate national identities. While those identities were not absent or ignored, they were clearly felt to be of secondary importance. Many other respondents, particularly from Sarajevo (which was traditionally a center for Yugoslav thought), echoed what could be called cooperationist leaning toward unificatory views.

But there was general agreement that Yugoslavism in 1969 meant something very different from the inter-war concept, because now it was a “class-based idea that could coincide with more traditional national affiliations.” (that is, the “unity” of \textit{communism could balance} the “brotherhood” of separate national identities). A number of participants noted that the concept of “Yugoslav social patriotism” had never been defined (rather surprising since it was one of the ideological slogans on which the post-war country was based), and most found this unfortunate. One said it had to do with “how one worked rather than how one thought,” that it meant “knowing and caring what was going on in all parts of the country.” Other participants took a different, less theoretical tack, and

\textsuperscript{13} Citanka za VIII razred osnovne skole, eds. Bojin Dramusic and Radojka Radulovic, 8th ed. Sarajevo, 1960. with approval of Ministry of Ed. BiH.

\textsuperscript{14} Citanka za VIII razred osnovne skole, ed. Tvrtko Cubelic, Zagreb, 1960 (6th edition) with approval of the Ministry of Education, Croatia.

\textsuperscript{15} The series began in the issue of June 29, 1969 p. 32, and thereafter it ran weekly on pp. 6-7 until October.

described specific instances of cooperation and exchanges among Yugoslav youth in order to show that there was indeed a feeling of the whole in the younger generation.

A later issue (July 20th) printed answers from Vojvodina Respondents there tended to point to some different aspects of Yugoslav life as central to the concept of “social patriotism,” including equality before the law and the right of each nation to cultural self-determination. Those who stressed the latter, however, still expressed conviction that a Yugoslav nation was being built slowly and on the basis of mutual belief in the same ideals. The answer of one young boy, Petko Koprivica, which was published under the telling heading “The Confusion of a Student” is particularly interesting. He says quite openly that the separate but equal policies that existed by this point in Yugoslavia— including education in the mother tongue, as well as radio and television programs in minority languages—were spreading hatred and intolerance rather than equality. Uninfluenced by the remnants of post-war Yugoslavism that prevented his elders from seeing that the new policies were driving the country apart, he recognized that the newfound strength of the separate parts was inexorably weakening the whole. The solution he proposed, however, harked back to the most unacceptable inter-war proposals for cultural unitarism including a single Yugoslav language, and one academy of sciences. This throwback to inter-war unitarism might have been a mark of confusion (and it certainly provided evidence that not all students absorbed what they had been taught in school), but it also revealed what the authorities were loath to admit: that there were serious problems with the way in which the new federal programs were working.

Such comments were rare, of course. Common deviations from official views were, however, frequent. In particular one sees a remarkable number of respondents who call themselves Yugoslavs and reject any national affiliation; that is, it appears that even in 1969, many people still considered that the policies that had been pursued until the early 1960s were the most appropriate for the country. The most strident exponent of this view was one Josip Zuparic from Zagreb (in the July 27th issue), who went out of his way to say that he and many others like him were working for the greatest possible integration with Serbs, particularly in the area of language. He specifically criticized the scholars who contributed to Hrvatski književni list, for hating everything Serb and Yugoslav, and claimed that normal people like he, who used words from the various areas of the country, were the true keepers of the tradition of Serbo-Croatian not the specialists who claimed that it was really two languages. The split between the intelligentsia, which was rapidly becoming nationalized in this period, and more average Yugoslav citizens can be sensed by comparing Zuparic’s comments with those of Bozic Pavlovski from Macedonia (Director and Editor-in-chief of
the publishing house "Misla"), who said bluntly in the August 31 issue: "Among literatures and literati, a feeling of Yugoslavness does not exist."17

In general, one can say that the lower a person’s level of education, the greater the chance that he would express integrationist views of some kind. In some cases, particularly among the Serbian workers interviewed on August 10, what could be called openly hegemonic thoughts were broached, although they appeared only in a context of complaint that the country was falling apart into separate and hostile regions. Workers tended to blame republican authorities for this, and called for, among other things, the elimination of republican boundaries, a common school program, even the use of only one language.

Political Responses

Croatia: Complaints about this set of articles were voiced by Bora Pavlovic in Borba on Sept. 6 and republished in NIN on Sept. 7 under the title "Jugoslovenstvo ili antijugoslovenstvo" (Yugoslavism or Anti-Yugoslavism). Pavlovic took NIN to task for allowing people to say anything they wanted, up to and including the expression of separatist views on the one hand and overly unitarist ones on the other. That is, what NIN had done was to show the wide variety of thought that existed in Yugoslavia on this subject at the time, something that the central government would have preferred to ignore. Eventually NIN was forced to publish (September 21, 1969), with its editorial tail between its legs, the reprimand it received from the Communist journalists of Politika. This was followed on Sept. 28, Oct. 5, and Oct. 12 by the publication of the official word on the subject "The Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the National Question" by Janko Pleterski.

While it proved possible for the central authorities to curb the publication of strongly nationalist views—as well as their inevitable corollary, the overly unitary backlash— in the print media, the situation in the separate republics proved less amenable to control. By the late 1960s central authority was being openly defied in one area of the country after another, with nationalist flare-ups in the Albanian Kosovo region, in Bosnia-Hercegovina, and, most ominously in Croatia. It was in the last of these regions that matters reached crisis proportions. After all, while few people thought that the Albanians or Bosnian Moslems had the potential to destroy the country, full-scale Serb/Croat tension manifestly did. In the course of the late 1960s a number of issues had come together to fuel nationalist sentiment in Croatia—these included the belief that economic planning initiated in Belgrade was skimming the profits made by the lucrative Croatian tourist industry, and

17 This split was confirmed by large public opinion surveys. "In 1966 sixty percent of a large Yugoslav sample proclaimed readiness to accept members of other nationalities in friendship or even marriage and revealed declining attachment to region, dialect and customs. Most people questioned expressed satisfaction with national relations." David MacKenzie, "The Background: Yugoslavia since 1964" Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the Era of Brezhnev and Kosygin ed. George W. Simmonds (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1977), p. 453.
fears that Croatian territory and the Croatian language were being Serbianized. They found their strongest expression, however, among intellectual and cultural figures, particularly those grouped around the major Croatian cultural society “Matica Hrvatska.”

One of the most significant cultural attempts to foster Croatian national feeling was the publication of a “Declaration Concerning the Name and the Position of the Croatian Literary Language” in March, 1967. This declaration was on its face a direct attack on the 1954 agreement on the Serbo-Croatian language that had been signed by leading Serbian and Croatian intellectuals in more unificatory days; but more important, by demanding recognition of the Croatian literary language as an independent entity, it undermined the only remaining historical connection to the original Yugoslav movements of the 19th century. For it was the choice to strive for a unified Serbo-Croatian literary language that had provided the underpinnings to the Illyrian movement. And, however Serb/Croat relations may have fluctuated in the ensuing years, the goal of an integrated literary language had remained. By opening the door to full linguistic separation, the Croatian nationalists thus called all other types of Serbian/Croatian cooperation into question.

In the literary arena, the leading Croatian publications did everything possible to stress the autochthonous nature of Croatian culture: “The emphasis was on things Croatian and on the revival of Croatian national consciousness.” Simultaneously, the Croatian cultural society Hrvatska matica began its ambitious publication of a series of books entitled “Five Centuries of Croatian Literature.” The aim, presumably, was to raise Croatian national pride at the imposing sight of several feet worth of national literature. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the Croatian revival was spear-headed by cultural figures rather than Croatian politicians, who, until early 1970, were divided on this issue. This division was in sharp contrast to the unanimity displayed in Croatian cultural circles of this period.

The most strident presentation of Croatian intellectual opinion can be seen clearly in the proceedings of a conference that was held in Zagreb in 1970. This conference, which was attended by most of Croatia’s leading intellectuals, amounted to a full-scale attack on the previous school program for the teaching of literature, and a call to arms to use literature and culture to create specifically Croatian citizens. “The duty of Croatian schools is to make available to the Croatian student, the future Croatian intelligent, the basic works of value of Croatian literary culture and of Croatian culture in general.” This meant, first and foremost, the separation of Croatian literature

18 For a detailed description of the Austrian situation at this time, see Ramet, pp. 98-107.
21 The conference proceedings were published as Mjesto i polozaj hrvatske knjizevnosti u nastavnim programima za skole drugog stupnja i za gimnazije Rijeka, 1971.
22 Ibid., p. 31, from the speech of Ivo Franges.
from the "literatures of the Yugoslav nations." a sharp reduction in the number of Serbian writers being taught (in this respect. Croatian intellectuals hoped to bring their education program in line with that of the Slovenians, who were admired for basically all-but ignoring the literatures of the other Yugoslav peoples), as well as the elimination of any attempt at demonstrating that such a concept as a unified Yugoslav literature had ever existed.

Although Croatian separatism was officially crushed in December, 1971, the suppression was handled in a fashion that was to be expected in a country in which the role of politics was overvalued and that of culture undervalued. Tito's decision was to remove the Croatian party leadership, and tens of thousands of Croats were eventually punished in one way or another for their support of Croatian nationalism. At the same time, "Tito moved to undercut the popular bases of the Croatian nationalists by granting many of the nationalist demands." 23 Most dangerously, little or nothing was done to change the nationalist orientation in the Croatian schools. If we look, for example, at the educational plan published for the Croatian schools in 1974, we find some amazing things considering the fact that Croatian nationalism had. supposedly been crushed only three years earlier.24 First of all, it is noted that programs provided by the Republic Ministry of Education for all schools in Croatia were mandatory until 1968. From 1968 schools were basically allowed to do whatever they wanted as long as they provided the required minimum number of hours in each subject. This 1974 plan, is described as "normative" according to the appended note signed by Dr. Pero Simlesha, President of the Educational Council of Croatia. It is also extremely specific. The differences between this plan and the ones printed in the 60s and late 40s are immense. Most important is the turn in the overall philosophical direction of education from a focus on Yugoslavia and brotherhood and unity, to one in which belonging to one's own nation in the context of the various Yugoslav republics is emphasized. That is, as Yugoslav sociologists would later put it, there is a turn from an emphasis on salient Yugoslav identity to divided Yugoslav identity. Since it was ideologically possible to combine divided loyalty with straightforward nationalism (while it seemed impossible to combine salient loyalty with this), this was a dangerous tack, and one that would bear important fruits when this generation of children came to full maturity.

The change in policy can be most strongly seen when we look at the stated goals of literary and linguistic education (this field is obviously considered the single most important, and is given double the number of hours devoted to any other subject). Along with the usual desire to develop a love for reading and culture in general, and to train in Marxism, we see that literary education is supposed "to develop a feeling of belonging to one's own nation, its culture, literary heritage and language" right alongside with, and equally important to, a need "to develop a recognition of the

---

23 Ramet, p. 131.
common interests and goals of the Yugoslav socialist unit."

In case there were any doubt about which nation is one's own, the assigned readings and the various amounts of time devoted to them make everything clear. First, Croatian literature is always examined separately, while the same period in the literature of "the other peoples of Yugoslavia" is lumped together. At least five times more Croatian writers than Serbian ones are treated, even in periods when Croatian literature was relatively weaker. Such standbys of the old school program, like Cosic's partisan novel Far Away is the Sun are not even on the recommended list, although some less Serbian partisan novels by non-Croats are included (works by the Montenegrin Mihailo Lalic and the Serb Oskar Davico, for example). The same thing is true of the history topics, where once again, Croatian history is treated separately from that of the "other Yugoslav peoples." For all intents and purposes, the program here is one of full-scale, or almost full-scale Croatian nationalism. And although the language taught is said to be "Croatian or Serbian," no provision is made for a different literary program for schools in majority Serb districts.

Other Republics: A significant nationalist-inspired turnabout can also be seen in the Macedonian education plan for 1974. Whereas, in earlier periods, Macedonian students had read a bit of Macedonian literature supplemented by large quantities of world and Serbian (and to a lesser extent Croatian) literature in Macedonian translation, they now read far larger quantities of original Macedonian and rather little of the literature of the other Yugoslav peoples. In the Romantic period, for example, 5 hours were supposed to be devoted to Pushkin, Lermontov, and Byron. 9 hours to Vuk, Zmaj, Njegos, Mazuranic, and Presern, and 14 hours to Macedonian romantic writers. The 20th-century section is even more extreme: here we have 3 hours for Poe, Baudelaire, and Rilke, 8 hours for Mayakovsky, Gorki, J. London, and Upton Sinclair, 5 hours for all of 20th-century Yugoslav literature and 21 hours for Macedonian writers. Nor was the lack of breadth made up for in the Serbo-Croatian classes that were held for upper classes four hours per week. Here they read the same works they had read in Macedonian in the original (this must have been a prescription for people not actually learning Serbo-Croat). Although the purpose of literary education is not defined, as was the case in Croatia, as leading to a love for one's own nation, this program could not help but accomplish that goal to some extent.

Serbia: Perhaps surprisingly, if the evidence of educational programs is taken into account, the Serbian backlash one might have expected had not yet developed at this point. Indeed, a survey completed in Serbian schools in December, 1971 by the distinguished Yugoslav psychologists, Drs.

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 26.}\]
\[\text{As published in Srednoobrazovanje. Nastavni planovi i pragrami za podgotviteniot period (Skopje, 1973).}\]
Nikola Rot and Nenad Havelka indicates that, at least for younger Serbs, separatist nationalism had not yet become an issue. Although the authors of the survey do not remark on this in their write-up, 1971 was a particularly interesting time to undertake such a survey. It would have been difficult for high-school students in Serbia not to have known about the nationalist unrest in neighboring Croatia that was coming to a head precisely as the survey was being conducted. How this news might have affected their own views on nationalism is not clear, however. It is possible that they would have been more inclined to oppose it, since nationalism had specifically been recognized as a danger to the Yugoslav Federal State. On the other hand, the fact that Croatian students were in the forefront of nationalist unrest might have allowed Serbian students so inclined to push their own nationalist programs. In any case, as the authors of the survey did not ask specifically about attitudes to Croatian nationalism, we can only speculate as to the effect that immediate current events might have had on the responses.

790 high-school students in the capital city of Belgrade and as well as the Shumadian regional center Kragujevac were surveyed. Students were chosen at random from two types of schools (vocational and college prep, we would call them) and demographic information was elicited in addition to their answers to specific questions regarding nationalism. Although both surveys took place in cities, and 86% of gymnasium pupils were of urban origin, only 56% of the vocational school ones were, so the survey covered a reasonably representative sample of the Serbian population. The opinions of respondents were solicited to several series of questions. The first related to their attitude toward nationalism in general. Five basic categories were available, with questions designed to elicit both positive or negative responses from each respondent. The responses could be given on a 1-7 strongly-agree to strongly-disagree scale. The five overall categories were: 1) ethnocentrism; 2) national idealization (or salient national attachment, as the authors' called it)—emphasizing the significance of any national attachment and, accordingly, one's own; 3) divided national attachment—simultaneous attachment to one's own nation and to mankind and co-operation with other nations; 4) attachment to humanity—emphasizing the priority of attachment to the general human community over narrow national importance; 5) the absence of national attachment—denying the importance and value of any national attachment. For all intents and purposes, of course, #3 is what was taught in Yugoslav schools as part of the values program while #1 (especially) and #5 were considered negative. For this part of the survey, of course, no specific national attachment was

---

27 The results were published in 1973 in a book entitled Nacionalna vezanost i vrednosti kod srednjo-skolske omladine (National Affiliation and Values Among Secondary-School Youth) Belgrad: Institute za psihologiju, 1973. From the careful description of their work as well as from the stature of the surveyors, it is clear that this was a serious study conducted to world standards.

28 p. 262.
required. Respondents were asked general questions about the importance of “the nation” which they could interpret however they wanted.

The second part of the survey attempted to focus specifically on attitudes to nation and nationalism in Yugoslavia. Here three basic categories were used. 1. Salient Yugoslav attachment—emphasizing attachment to Yugoslavia as a whole to be more important than attachment to one’s own nation; 2. divided Yugoslav attachment—emphasizing that attachment to the Yugoslav community and to one’s own nation are of equal importance; 3. limited Yugoslav attachment—giving priority to attachment to one’s own national group over attachment to Yugoslavia as a whole. The authors then asked questions using a modified version of a scale invented by E.S. Bogardus in 1925 (pub. Journal of Applied Sociology) to measure social distance from various other national groups—they investigated attitudes towards Slovenes, Macedonians, Croats, Austrians, Germans, Russians, Blacks, Americans (US), English, and Bulgarians. Finally, they investigated the “authoritarian syndrome” as defined and studied by Adorno, et al (The Authoritarian Personality) by looking at attitudes toward the supposed binary pairs of autocracy/democracy, socialism/capitalism, atheism/religiosity, sexual equality/male dominance. This section is the most problematic in that terms like democracy and socialism are defined in a fairly meaningless Yugoslav context.

The results of the survey are striking. In fact, one could say that had nationalist politicians like Slobodan Milosevic read this survey (and it is certainly possible that they did), they could have found a blue print of the groups on whose support they could count, and the themes needed to rally that support. In category #1, regarding nationalism in general, most students followed the line they were taught. Divided national attachment led the pack, relatively closely followed by categories #4 and #2 with #5 and #1 trailing far behind. My guess is that in this rather abstract area, students simply did not recognize what was at stake, and followed the formulas that had been given them in school. Even here, however, there are strong statistical differences between various surveyed groups that point to more important differences a bit later. For example, vocational school pupils (the less well-educated, and, in a highly tracked society, usually the less intelligent) had a much higher attachment to #1 than did gymnasium students. What is more, “residence in towns is in a negative correlation with nationalistic and in a positive correlation with an internationalistic orientation. The father’s education, if it does not exceed the level of primary school, is in positive correlation with acceptance of national attachment to one’s own nation, but in negative correlation with acceptance of divided attachment. When the father has a higher education the correlations are in an opposite direction.”

When we turn to specifically Yugoslav attachment, things get even more interesting. Divided and salient responses were pronounced, with only about 20% of respondents admitted to a limited

---

29 p. 268.
(i.e., solely Serbian) attachment. At the same time, the authors found no correlation between those who answered positively to questions meant to show attachment to divided and salient nationality. To them, this indicated that “these two forms of attachment have a certain independence.” Equally important, they noticed that “a positive, low, but statistically significant correlation exists between divided and limited Yugoslav attachment.” This indicates that those people who exhibited divided attachment could in theory be pulled toward limited attachment in the right conditions, since they contain that potential, while those who exhibited salient attachment were probably immovable. Thus, the large group of respondents who exhibited divided national attachment were, in fact, a swing group that, if they could be mobilized to support one part of their identity, could be turned into limited nationalists. The success of Milosevic in Serbia was guaranteed precisely when he discovered the formulas that tapped into the chauvinistic side of the silent majority of Serbs who, before Milosevic, almost certainly would have been found to have had a divided national attachment.

When we turn to questions of background and schooling, we see that, gymnasium pupils had a slightly higher degree of salient Yugoslav attachment while vocational school pupils had a much higher degree of limited Yugoslav attachment. What this indicates, of course, is that a nationalist-oriented party would have done well to concentrate on the less-well-educated, more rural segments of the populace, something that all the nationalist parties in the former Yugoslavia did in fact do.

As far as distance from certain nations goes, results here were quite curious. Most interesting were highly positive attitudes toward Macedonians and Slovenians, positive attitudes towards the English, Americans, and Russians, acceptable attitudes towards Blacks and Croatians, and dismal attitudes towards Germans, Austrians and Bulgarians. In general, people from the provinces showed greater distaste for strangers than did Belgraders, girls greater distaste than boys. Of particular interest is the fact that in the Kragujevac region support for Croatians was quite low, particularly in vocational schools, the same as blacks, although still above Germans and Austrians and Bulgarians. The dislike of the latter groups can be easily explained by the fact that they were World War I and World War II enemies who always appeared as bad guys in popular media presentations. The greater distaste for Croatians than for Slovenians and Macedonians certainly indicates which group it made sense to fight when Yugoslavia broke up. Unfortunately, no questions were asked about Moslems or Albanians. As far as authoritarianism goes, again we see some interesting things. The authors felt the mean authoritarianism score was “very high.” It was highest among boys in vocational schools and girls in general. Authoritarianism of those from the village and from poorer educational backgrounds was higher than in towns.

---

30 p. 269.
31 p. 273.
Taken together the results of this survey clearly indicate that an autocratic party with strong ties to the church and to traditional values (the capitalism/socialism theme is sort of useless because by the late 1980s socialism as a system had lost its prestige completely) would be able to garner significant support for a program based on Serbian nationalism particularly in the countryside, the provinces, and the lumpen-workers of Belgrade. Anti-Croat anti-German propaganda would work as well. What do we see here other than the base of Milosevic's party and its basic program? The rise of a political movement to exploit these feelings was, however, far in the future.

There was one other curious fact uncovered by the survey. When students were asked about their own nationality, 64% responded Serb and 32% Yugoslav. Among gymnasium pupils, the figure was 53% Serb and 41% Yugoslav, with the rest as others. These are astounding figures, and they demand some explanation. After all, in the 1971 census, only 273,077 people declared themselves as Yugoslav (or something like 2% of the population). One obvious explanation would be that the students surveyed felt pressured, either overtly or merely by the nature of the survey, into declaring themselves as Yugoslav. The problem with this answer is a) there is no evidence that it is true (the survey was scrupulously designed to make it impossible to tell what answers the surveyors wanted, although students were certainly aware that strong nationalist sentiments were officially frowned upon, b) the survey was anonymous, and c) there was and had never been any official pressure not to identify oneself as a Serb, Croat, Macedonian, etc. on demographic forms in post-war Yugoslavia. We are left to consider the possibility that large percentages of young students did indeed see themselves as Yugoslavs first and foremost. If we take into account that on the 1981 census, when many of these students would have been old enough to have been asked questions separately from their parents, some 12% of the country declared themselves to be Yugoslav, we might well come to the conclusion that the surveyors were in fact detecting the beginnings of a sharp rise in supranationalist sentiment, particularly in the best-educated strata of the country. Such a conclusion jibes with the personal recollections of many foreigners, who found that young people from Belgrade or Zagreb were as likely to identify themselves as Yugoslavs as anything else in this period.

What this indicates, it seems to me, is that Yugoslav supranationalist sentiment, at least in Serbia, was becoming stronger in this period, in tandem with a strengthening of separate national identification. Such a conclusion dovetails with the findings of other surveys. "It is interesting that during the early 1970s] survey research also revealed that the majority of young people supported

---

32 Ibid., pp. 113-118.
33 Of course, it is not entirely clear what Serbian respondents meant by a declaration of Yugoslav identity. It has been noted by many writers that Serbs were more comfortable with the Yugoslav concept as it existed than were other groups, primarily because it was to their advantage. While this may have been true of members of older generations, it is not clear whether 15 year-olds would really have recognized this fact.
the notion of nurturing a more 'unified Yugoslav nation.' 34 This conclusion shows what a tragic mistake the Yugoslav government made when it responded to the separatist problem by jailing the leaders but allowing separatism in the cultural sphere. By the early 1970s, there was a strong cadre of individuals who would, when they reached political maturity, have supported the deepening and broadening of the Yugoslav concept. These people, however, never got a chance. The economic crisis of the late 1970s forced many of them into immigration and blunted the initiative of those who remained. And by the 1980s, a new generation appeared that had been effectively educated in separatism. It was primarily from the ranks of these young people that the 20-something soldiers of the most recent Balkan wars were drawn. And they were led, not by the generation that grew up on "soft" Yugoslavism from the mid-50s to the 70s, but by a group who had come of age during or just after the ethnic slaughter that had riven the country during World War II.

Cultural Polarization

What happened in Yugoslavia from the early 1970s on, and what laid the groundwork for the eventual rise of a Serbian nationalist political movement, was the gradual cultural polarization of the country. On the one hand, one group of the population became, if anything, more attached to the Yugoslav solution, while a larger group, particularly in Serbia but also in Slovenia, and, to a lesser extent, in Macedonia and Croatia began to espouse and publicize more and more strident nationalist views. In a series of literary and publicistic works, these nationalist-oriented intellectuals took advantage of the new climate to initiate a gradual delegitimization of the supranational policies that had guided cultural life in Yugoslavia until the early 1960s. Although it was a change in the political climate that created an opening for such moves, the actual work of dismantling Yugoslav unity was carried out primarily in the cultural arena.

Nowhere was this trend more obvious than in Serbia. The first major genre to display the new state of affairs was the war novel. This was no accident. After all, the partisan novel had been one of the central mouthpieces for the propagation of post-World-War II Yugoslav identity. Partisan literature by such writers as Vladimir Nazor, Branko Copic, Dobrica Cosic, and Goran Kovacic had been among the few post-war works to be included in school readers, and they enjoyed a very large audience of low- and middle-brow readers. Perhaps the best way to measure the gradual reappearance of Serbian national sentiment in culture is to survey the career of Dobrica Cosic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Cosic was the writer of one of the most popular and most influential of the partisan novels, Far Away is the Sun. He followed that work with a number of

other critically-acclaimed war novels. In the early 1960s, Cosic was at the center of the discussion regarding the possibility of creating a non-national supra-Yugoslav culture. In a 1961 article, the author railed against the specter of “vampire nationalisms” and claimed there would always be obstacles to significant inter-national (within Yugoslavia that is) mixing “as long as the Republics existed.”

This statement provoked a caustic response from the Slovenian critic Dusan Pirjevec, who accused Cosic of noticing separatist nationalisms but of ignoring tendencies toward a restoration of a form of forced unitarism that would inevitably have Serbian hegemonic overtones. In Cosic’s long rejoinder, an article entitled “O savremenom nesavremenom nacionalizmu” (“On modern unmodern nationalism”), the author strenuously denied the charges that he was in favor of a forced unitarist culture or of Serbian nationalism; rather, he claimed that his view was absolutely in keeping with the founding ideals of the post-war state, which saw the separate republics not as ends in themselves, but as means toward the creation of a single Socialist Yugoslav culture.

Although in his publicistic articles Cosic continued to deny that his Yugoslavism was tainted by inter-war Serbian hegemonistic tendencies, his opponents were not reassured by the subject matter he treated in the novels he published after Far Away is the Sun. In Koreni (Roots, 1954) and Deobe (1961), Cosic attempted to provide a vast panorama of Serbian life from the mid-19th century through World War II. Although he never appears overtly sympathetic to Serbian nationalist ideals in these novels, his deep love for traditional Serbian ways comes through quite clearly, as does his attempt to build a new myth of Serbian culture.

By the late 1960s, however, Cosic’s cultural politics became overtly Serbophilic. Indeed, by 1968, he was kicked out of the Communist party for his outspoken criticism of the party’s policy in Kosovo, where, he claimed with some truth, that Serbs and Montenegrins were being pushed to emigrate from Kosovo, and that the party had failed to take account of “the proper scale of chauvinist bent and nationalist psychosis among the members of the Skipetar [Albanian] nationality.” Although this new phase in Cosic’s career might lead one to think that the critics who had lambasted his earlier Yugoslavism as nothing more than a mask for Serbian hegemony had been correct, I am not inclined to think so. Although he had undoubtedly always had a soft spot in his heart for a certain populist romanticism, there is no reason to disbelieve his strenuous denials when he had been attacked for Serbian nationalism earlier. Instead, I believe that by the late 1960s Cosic came to recognize that the government had indeed truly abandoned its earlier Yugoslav policy.

---

36 Pirjevec’s article appeared in the Slovenian periodical Nasa sodobnost No. 3, 1961.
38 Quoted in Ivo Banac, “Yugoslavia: The Fearful Asymmetry of War” Daedalus (Spring, 1992), p. 148
in favor of a multi-culturalist federalism. This betrayal, as Cosic must have seen it, completely changed the political and national equation in Yugoslavia, and led him to believe that the Serbs would have to assert their own national rights if they did not wish to become second-class citizens in their own country.

Despite his loss of party position, Cosic remained a vocal figure on the Serbian cultural and political scene through the 1970s and 80s. In particular, he became notorious as the main author of a draft "Memorandum" sponsored by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences devoted to the crisis of Yugoslavia. Although the "Memorandum" was ostensibly written to find a way to preserve the integrity of Yugoslavia, its authors spend most of the document proving that Tito’s Yugoslavia discriminated against Serbs in a variety of ways, allowing for its economic subjugation to Croatia and Slovenia, as well as to the "genocide" perpetrated by the Albanians against the Serbs of Kosovo. Eventually, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, Cosic was rewarded for his early embrace of the Serbian cause with his election to the presidency of the rump Yugoslavia on June 15, 1992.

Fiction as a Medium

The gradual shift in Cosic’s views regarding the national question in Yugoslavia can be traced in his fictional work as well. Here, they move from the realm of abstract political and social theorizing and/or active propaganda (areas in which Cosic is less than perfectly trained) to the more subtle, but more effective mode of fictional discourse. As we recall, Far Away is the Sun was quite clear in its condemnation of separatist nationalist movements (both Serb and Croat) whose adherents were equated with the German and Italian invaders. The communists were presented as the only force that was concerned with more than local problems, although national and ethnic diversity as such was not depicted. Rather, the national question was simply passed over and made to seem implicitly irrelevant. Such a position was in keeping with the overall artistic and cultural policies of post-war Yugoslavia.

If we compare Far Away is the Sun with the four-volume epic Vreme smrti (A Time of Death) we will see how Cosic’s perspective on the Yugoslav situation shifted in the course of some twenty years. In terms of literary technique, the writer evolved rather little from the early 1950s to the mid 70s. We find the same basic subject matter—war and the exploration of the psychology of people who are caught up in it. The sweeping epic tone is the same as well, as are the effective renderings of taut battlefield reality. What has shifted, however, is the subject matter and the extent of the

---

39 See Memorandum Srpske Akademije Nauka i Umetnosti (Belgrade, 1986). Cosic was not the sole author of this work, and it is not even entirely clear how much of a role he played in its preparation, but its obsessive concern with the Kosovo question marks his hand, and he is generally given credit (or blame) for the Memorandum’s overall thrust.

40 When this historical novel-epic appeared in English only the second volume was called A Time of Death. The epic as a whole was entitled This Land, This Time.
conversations that fill the time in between the shooting. Whereas these were relatively brief and quite closely related to the action in Far Away is the Sun, in A Time of Death they are expansive and they digress from the immediate concerns of battle to cover a much broader sweep of characters, situations, and events. The primary overt reason for this is the shift in subject matter, from a concentration on a small band of partisan fighters more or less cut off from any larger political and social concerns in Far Away is the Sun to a panorama of Serbian life, military and political, during the crucial years of World War I in A Time of Death.

In the latter novels, Cosic focuses on a father and son, Vukasin and Ivan Katic. Katic the elder had been a rising star in Pasic’s radical party, but broke with Pasic and is now an opposition leader. His son is a young university student who, like so many others of his age, volunteers for the Serbian army at the outset of the war, despite his deep unsuitability for military life. Although a great deal of narrative space is devoted to battle descriptions, as one might expect, the reader senses that they are of secondary importance. They are present merely in order to motivate the discussions between the main characters devoted to whether or not South Slavic unity should occur and if so how. These discussions are the raison d’etre for the novel as a whole, and they serve, ultimately, as a first step towards discrediting the myths of brotherhood and unity on which the post-war Yugoslav state rested. At strategic points throughout the novel, Cosic presents discussions which pit, on the one hand Vukasin Katic, his son and his son’s idealistic colleagues, and the long-suffering Dr. Radic (all of whom believe in the desirability of South Slavic unification) against, on the other, a group of characters who believe that unity is either undesirable or impossible.

Cosic’s narrative technique is quite skillful, and he brings these debates to life without the heavyhandedness that one might fear in what is, in its essence, a novel bent on undermining the supra-national consensus that had underpinned the entire war novel genre in post-war Yugoslavia. Indeed, at first it is not entirely clear which set of characters Cosic actually supports. As one reads further, however, it becomes clear that although Cosic is not entirely unsympathetic to the pro-Yugoslav arguments of the Katic’s, the force of events and the way they are presented forces the reader to see them as utopian dreamers who are unable to recognize a reality that is staring them in the face. And that reality is that there can be no Yugoslav unity because of the differences separating Serbs and Croats (these are the main differences that Cosic explores, but considering that Serbs and Croats were the largest ethnic groups and, in many respects, the closest, if they cannot overcome their differences it should be clear that others will certainly not be able to do so).

Two conversations that are presented toward the end of the third volume of A Time of Death will serve to illustrate both how Cosic presents his arguments and what impression they make on the reader. The first is between the hard-boiled but sympathetic Dr. Radic, a self-sacrificing physician whose efforts to control the typhus epidemic that, more than anything else, defeated the Serbian war effort in 1915, are chronicled in detail by Cosic and Father Bozidar (the name means “God’s gift” in
Serbian), an equally sympathetic Serbian Orthodox priest. Radic begins by expressing his fear that Serbia will lose the war. Father Bozidar counters:

What I'm afraid of, my boy, is that we'll win the war as planned by Pasic and our politicians, by professors and their students. Have you read in the newspapers about us uniting with the Croats and Slovenes? I mean that declaration of the Assembly about the creation of a large state consisting of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes? Three separate faiths, estranged by fire and sword, and divided by blood—but now they're to be combined in a single state! What louse or reptile shot this poison—this death-dealing sickness—into Serbian heads? I often ask myself this when I'm alone, Doctor, I ask it aloud. What kind of union can we have with the Catholics? After all the crimes committed by those brothers of ours in Austrian uniform, can anyone in his right mind believe in unity and peace with them? Why are you silent? You educated people are heading straight for the precipice, by why push this unhappy nation over it, too?

I'm not a politician, Father. I hate politics, maybe even more than you do. The one thing I approve of in the politics of both government and Opposition is the unification of all those unhappy people. I think it's better for us to be together, because then at least the Austrians and Russians won't be able to set one group against another. If we're going to be bruised and smother, at least we'll be doing it to ourselves.  

The first thing one notices in this discussion is the relative weakness of Dr. Radic's position. Against the facts, contemporary and historical, presented by Father Bozidar (which Radic does not bother even to contest), the Doctor can offer only faint hope. Perhaps when all are together and outsiders no longer have a chance to influence them, they will be better off. Even here, however, Radic leaves open the possibility that fratricidal struggles will continue (something that did indeed transpire, as the reader knows).

Against this vague hope we have the fact of two different religions (Father Bozidar does not even consider the Moslems in his equation, but readers easily might have), as well as the fact that in World War I Croatian soldiers played a significant role in the attacking Austro-Hungarian army. Again, although we have to do with World War I and not World War II here, one expects that Serbian readers in the 1970s would have been invited to recall the Ustase terror during the latter war (a subject that was never more or less taboo in Tito-era literature or history), and to question the basis for contemporary as well as historical brotherhood and unity. More insidious is Father Bozidar's identification of Yugoslavism with the educated—politicians and intellectuals. The implication, of course, is that such talk was and is worthless for normal or common people, merely an intellectual fantasy that was imposed on the people, whose good common sense would allow them to see that Yugoslav unity, cultural or political, was an impossible dream.

The same theme is hammered home in a conversation between Vukasin Katic and General Misic that takes place just before Katic is to head off to Paris to promote Yugoslav union among the

---

allies. Misic asks whether the supporters of Yugoslav unity are aware that almost half of the Austro-Hungarian army that is attacking him is made up of Croats. He claims that there is a gulf between Serbs and Croats, unbridgeable because the two do not know or understand each other. Vukasin objects: “The Italians who were united under Cavour didn’t know each other, nor did the Germans united by Bismarck. Even their languages were less similar. But we speak the same language, Zivojin!” Misic replies, “Do we indeed? Only individuals and nations on an equal footing speak the same language. A free people and a subject people do not speak the same languages even when they understand each other. The Croats, to their own misfortune, are a subject people.” (379) It is significant that Misic does not deny the truth of Katic’s claims. However, he wants to stress something else, a fundamental psychological incompatibility between Serbs and Croats, that he believes derives from the differences in their political condition. That Misic’s position is undermined by the fact that the vast majority of Serbs had escaped Ottoman rule for less than 100 years goes unremarked by Katic, and the fact that he does not mention it might legitimately be seen as Cosic’s way of stacking the deck in Misic’s favor.

Whatever their views on the desirability of South Slavic unification, what all the characters in the novel share is a basic belief that the Serbs are a special people, chosen by God, and marked by a love, and an ability to suffer for, freedom. This basic world-view is shared by the narrator as well, who in a historical aside a la Tolstoy, claims: “A long time ago the powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire resolved to crush the small nation of Serbia, a freedom-loving democratic country.”42 Serbia’s qualities, according to General Misic (who is undoubtedly the character in the novel with whom Cosic sympathizes most closely), are hereditary and reside not in intellectuals but rather in the peasants who have worked hard and endured much.43 What is more, Serbia suffers not just for itself, but for all of its allies and even its enemies. “At Valjevo we gave our lives for Paris and the French; on the Kolubara we defended the Dardenelles for the English; at Milovac we shed our blood for the Russians and the Ukraine. And on Bacina we’ve perished at the hands of our Croatian brothers, giving our lives for their freedom.”44

The ideas expressed in A Time of Death were by no means confined to Cosic. Speaking generally, one can say that in Serbia by the late 1970s the war novel, which had traditionally been a primary vehicle for the dissemination of a Yugoslav world view, was just as likely to express Serbian nationalist feelings. One can see something of the same set of beliefs and ideas that inspired Cosic’s epic in the popular Knjiga o Milutinu (Book about Milutin) written by Danko Popovic. Popovic’s novel won the coveted Isidora Sekulic prize in 1985, and went through at least 9 editions in the first year after its publication. The majority of the novel consists of a monologue by the title

42 Cosic, Into the Battle, p. 99.
43 A Time of Death, p. 82.
44 Ibid., p. 125.
character. He has been imprisoned after World War II as a kulak, although he is merely the owner of a small, poor farm. He tells his life story in a thick peasant dialect, we hear about the death of his father and brothers in the Balkan Wars, his experiences as a soldier during World War I, the hard lot of his life as a farmer in inter-war Yugoslavia, and his efforts to save his son who is eventually killed during World War II. The novel ends with a short section narrated by a prison comrade describing Milutin’s death.

As with Cosic’s epic, however, the plot of this work is a pretext on which to hang a litany of complaints and questions, most of which have to do with Serbia’s alleged tendencies to sacrifice its own interests for the sake of others, and the ungratefulness of those for whose sake the sacrifices were made. Milutin’s suspicions about the wisdom of the Yugoslav idea date from before the beginning of World War I, and, as was the case in Cosic’s work, Milutin’s common-sense opposition to unification is shown to be opposed by intellectuals—in this case, the village teacher. After hearing about the “heroic” assassination of Franz Ferdinand, our hero says: “It just don’t seem right to me. I don’t like this empty heroing of them Bosnians, killing off princes and their wives, and afterwards hiding their asses so our peasants have to pay the piper, ain’t that it?...But the teacher just went on. There, he goes, in Bosnia and the other places where our brothers the Southern Slavs live, the uprising has all but burst into flames. From your mouth to god’s ears, teach—and I go out into the fields, but I don’t believe in no Slavs...I hear, our brothers, but my brother already died for some ‘our brother.’”45

As the book continues, Milutin’s rambling monologue provides plenty of fictional ammunition for the standard Serbian anti-Yugoslav claim: that the other South Slavic nations are happy to allow the Serbs to do their fighting for them, something that the grateful, naive, and idealistic Serbs have continually done to their own detriment.46 Furthermore, Popovic’s book brings to the surface what in this context is an even more inflammatory issue: the behavior of the Croatian Ustase during World War II. “Well in those days, my boys, refugees came to our village...I remember that one day Lazar and Vasilij came. They had taken in refugees, and had heard what was happening to the Serbs in Croatia. They told me, but I didn’t want to hear. Don’t you guys tell me this, I say. Pasic and Prince Alexander, Colonel Garasanin and Mladen should hear this, they constructed this big country—I don’t want to hear about this, I want to forget!”47 There is no doubt, of course, that the Communists’ decision to sweep under the rug the crimes committed both by the Ustase and the Cetniks in the name of unity and brotherhood was a major error. The belief that wartime wounds would close if they were ignored turned out not to be true. As it happened, when the issue finally became a permissible subject in Serbian fiction, it was used as a specific weapon in the arsenal of

45 Danko Popovic, Knjiga o Milutinu (Belgrad, 1986), pp. 6-7.
46 See, for example, Milutin’s complaints about the Macedonians (p. 41), and about the Croats and Slovenes (p. 43).
47 Ibid., p. 79.
Serbian nationalism. This is not to say that literary works, even relatively popular ones, were the sole factor in undermining the legitimacy of Yugoslavia—clearly many factors, including political malaise and economic disaster played their part in destroying the country. What works of fiction did, however, was to nurture the belief that the naturally good, kind-hearted, and self-sacrificing Serbs had been taken advantage of, and this belief, together with reminders of the perfidy of other national groups during the war, helped to create an intellectual and political climate in which continued coexistence became impossible.

That at least some readers recognized the message that lay just below the plot surface of novels like Popovic’s, can be seen from reviewers’ comments. The following, which was reproduced as a blurb on the inside jacket of a later edition of the novel (a sure sign that its message was one the author or at least the publishers wished to underscore), makes this clear. “Two structural, thematic lines intertwine in the novel: the first is sketched out as the portrait of the protagonist Milutin, while the second is concerned with crucial problems, opening up to analysis our entire historical behavior for the past two centuries: was it necessary, in such an idealistic and naive fashion, to jump in and get involved in every battle to the point of physical exhaustion, or would it have been better to temper that national romanticism and idealism by rational and pragmatic means, taking into account our true strength.”48 Like the novel itself, this review expresses in coded form, the national self-view that saw Serbs as the sacrificial victims of Yugoslavism, and ultimately provided the moral and cultural justification for the policies that were followed by Slobodan Milosevic a few years later.

While Popovic’s book merely brought up the issue of Croatian World War II guilt in passing, this was the central subject of another novel that appeared just as Yugoslavia’s death agony was beginning. What is more, Slobodan Selenic’s 1989 novel Timor Mortis sees the Croatian massacres of Serbs during the war not as an isolated tragic incident, but as part of a long-term tradition. Before looking more closely that Selenic’s novel, I would like to discuss an earlier work of his, because a comparison of the two will show that Selenic, like Dobrica Cosic, followed an evolutionary path that led from a belief in Yugoslavism (a rather ambivalent one, as we will see) to Serbian nationalism.

Selenic published his Prijatelji sa Kosancicevog venca 7 (Friends from Kosancic’s Crown St #7) in 1980. The book was an immense hit with Yugoslav readers and critics, winning the country’s most prestigious literary award, the NIN prize in 1981, as well as a citation as the most read book in Serbia for the same year. The novel tells a story that is clearly meant to be particular and allegorical at the same time. A middle-aged engineer named Istref sits in his study reading a manuscript that has been sent him by the Serbian Vladan Hadzisladkovic. The time is the late 1970s. The manuscript itself describes Belgrade just after World War II from the idiosyncratic point of view of Vladan. Interpolated chapters, however, allow Istref to review Vladan’s point of view and make his

---

* Zoran Gluscevic, quoted on jacket of Danko Popovic, Knjiga o Milutinu (Belgrad, 1986).
corrections, so that to a certain extent we see the story from both sides. Before getting into the main story, however, we get a prehistory of both Istref and Vladan from which it is apparent that to a certain extent they are meant as allegorical representatives of their people. Istref comes from an Albanian family in Kosovo, a family that loses all its male representatives to a blood feud, leaving only Istref who is too young to kill. The orphaned Istref, who is brought up in an Islamic tradition, eventually makes his way to Belgrade immediately after the War. When Istref arrives he at first lives with other Albanians. They feel very strongly their separation from the world surrounding them. Then one day, Istref accidentally meets Vladan, the scion of a completely degenerate old Serbian family. Vladan more or less adopts Istref, bringing him to live in what has remained of the family home (the rest has been unofficially nationalized after the war).

The story breaks for a long description of the Hadzisladkovic family. It is said to have been involved in much of recent Serbian history particularly the 19th-century insurrections against the Turks. The house itself is interesting because it was built by a fairly traditional Serbian ancestor but it combines Turkish and European styles: the house is thus a symbol of one Serbian cultural self view—a bridge between East and West. By the time we get to Vladan, the family has clearly decayed to the point of total decadence.

The actual relationship between the two protagonists appears to have been quite complicated. At first, Istref looked up to Vladan as to his better. Vladan had been to school in England and knew everything, while Istref, who had grown up in squalor in Kosovo, knew nothing but a few Albanian books, the Koran, and most of How the Steel was Tempered. As time goes on, however, the tables begin to turn. Istref works like a madman, by day as a laborer and in the evenings as a student, and begins to progress. Vladan, however, can do nothing but sit at home lamenting his family's lost past. He hates everything about the new Communist Yugoslavia, of course, while Istref gradually befriends the ideal Yugoslav group that has taken up squatters rights in the rest of Vladan's house—the group consists of a veritable Yugoslav U.N, and they sing communist songs, engage in building socialism.

Vladan's attempts to keep control of Istref become more and more pathetic and futile. At first, they have English tea every evening. Vladan holds Istref's hand (the homoerotic overtones are obvious to all) and tells him the story of his family. Istref eventually refuses to have his hand held, then refuses to come to Vladan's room to drink tea. Vladan begins to come to Istref's room, but realizes that he is losing his younger friend. To avoid this he affects Albanian costume, learns how to play Albanian instruments and translates with Istref Albanian heroic songs. The pull of the present and bright future, however, turns out to be too strong. Istref starts spending more and more time with the agitator Mircetic. The latter hates and despises Vladan. One day he basically attacks Vladan.

---

and Istref must defend his old friend. This is the moment when they realize that defender has become defended and vice versa. The true denouement comes when Istref starts to have sex with a woman named Mara. This infuriates Vladan. He breaks in on them and Istref beats him up. During the following month Vladan suffers until he pulls off his big revenge, the massacre of two pigs which were being kept by the Yugoslav squatters in the yard. After this he disappears to his aunt’s house.

There are two possible ways to read this novel: either it depicts a Serbian attempt at self-renewal through the introduction of Albanian wildness, or it shows Serbia’s civilizing mission vis-a-vis other Yugoslav peoples (a mission for which they get no real credit, simply decaying further in the process while the others, like Istref, become modern and civilized). In either case it is a transparent allegory for the Yugoslavization of Serbia. It does not claim, by the way, that this is a bad thing—after all, Hadzislavkovic is clearly totally decadent, but the book shows how this Serbian family is overwhelmed by outsiders. of their own choosing and of others. At the same time it illustrates the domestication of the Albanian outsider. Istref becomes a perfect Yugoslav citizen through the influence of Serbia and Communism (in the person of Pavel Korchagin). In this sense the allegory is that of the civilizing myth. If the Serbs are willing to disappear to do so, they can create perfect Yugoslav citizens. Ultimately, from the text itself, there is no way to decide which reading to prefer.

In an interview in NIN just after having won their award, Selenic was coy as to what he wanted readers to get out of his book. “I would not want readers to understand the book exclusively as a story of a single instance. I think that the whole work should be a kind of parable with a different meaning. That is to say, it is not only about the a young Albanian and a decadent Belgrader. I wish it to be understood as a story about the meeting of two civilizations, two religions, two world views which are not merely characteristic of 1945 but, it seems to me, of an historical repetition of a certain rhythm. I think that this is a typical relationship characteristic for a change of civilization that is historical necessary from time to time.”

Such ambiguity is, however, completely absent from Timor Mortis. Structurally, the later novel uses the same format that Selenic had employed in Friends. This novel is set in the period just after WWII. The narrator, Dragan Radosavljevic tells the story of his wartime friendship with one Stojan Blagojevic. Stojan, we are told, was one-hundred years old at the beginning of the war. On that fateful day, the narrator’s parents are both killed in the Nazi air-raids, and he finds Stojan at the site of the ruined bomb shelter that became his parents’ tomb. As it happens, he and Stojan live in the same building, one that is soon mostly taken over by the invading Germans. The Dragan and Stojan, adopt each other, for all intents and purposes, and spend the war together after Dragan’s

---

apartment is requisitioned. Along the way we come to know Biljana, the dancer/prostitute who lives next door and with whom the narrator eventually falls in love, as well as Stojan’s long-lost niece whose family is almost entirely murdered by the Ustase.

The novel itself combines the narrator’s recollections of war-time Belgrade with his reconstruction of Stojan’s life, a reconstruction based on Stojan’s own tales, his journals, and some “historical” research. Stojan, as it turns out was a Serb from the Austro-Hungarian empire who lived in Belgrade from 1903 on. In his long life, he was both at the center and at the periphery of Yugoslav political life. As is the case with many post-modernist historical novels, Selenic’s presents itself as a hybrid of literature and history, for the narrator claims to be using real historical documents in order to discover the truth about Stojan’s life and times. Of course, the question of the actual historical veracity of the documents cited is unimportant. What is crucial is the ability of a novel of this sort to seem factually-based, while nevertheless enjoying all the freedom of fictional narration.

As a vehicle for Serbian cultural nationalism, this novel goes much farther than the works of Cosic and Popovic discussed above. In those novels, Serbs were seen as positive figures who fought for the benefit of their Yugoslav brethren. Although in Cosic’s novel the fact that Croats had fought willingly for the Austrians against the Serbs was noted, and in Popovic’s the Ustase massacres were touched on, in neither of these two works was Croatian enmity a central feature. Both can be seen as attempts primarily to raise Serbian self-esteem and self-consciousness rather than as novels whose central feature is to recall inter-ethnic hatred and, implicitly, call for revenge.

Selenic’s novel not only provides graphic descriptions of Croatian atrocities against Serbs during World War II (a subject that by the time of the novel’s publication had become discussable), it presents these massacres not as incidents which arose against the background of Serb/Croat enmity during the interwar years, but rather as part of a longstanding, illogical historical animus characteristic of Croats in general. Selenic leads the reader to this conclusion by his clever juxtaposition of Stojan’s historical experience with war-time descriptions. Thus, on the one hand, we have a description of life for the Serbs in the Austro-Hungarian empire as seen through the relationship of Stojan, a Serbian who believed that his best interests were served by the Magyaron parties (he was an enemy of Yugoslavia, by the way, because he always thought that Serbs and Croats could not live together), and his wife (a virulent Serb patriot who believed that the Croats were out to destroy the Serbs, culturally at least, by folding them into Croatia). On the other, we have a short description of Ustase atrocities as told by Stojan’s niece and a friend of hers. These are clearly meant to be seen as a the modern-day continuation of a policy that had already existed in the 19th century. Croats, the novel tells the reader, desire and have always desired nothing less than the complete disappearance of the Serbs in their midst, a fact that clearly makes coexistence with them out of the question.
In the same year that Selenic's *Timor Mortis* presented Serbian readers with a fictional description of Croat perfidy, a novel by Vojislav Lubarda painted precisely the same picture of Serbian/Moslem relations in Bosnia. This novel, *Vaznesenje* (The Ascension) was the winner of NIN's best novel award in 1990. The novel is set in the imaginary Bosnian town of Carsija with the bulk of the action taking place during World War I. It is narrated, however, by the grandson of the central character sometime after World War II. The World War I story centers on events in the town just after the news of Franz Ferdinand's assassination has been received. Jovo Lukarda (the barely-modified name of the author encourages the reader to believe that the story is based on actual events—an old Tolstoyan trick—which it may or may not be), the leading Serb citizen of the town, founder of the church that was built after the Austro-Hungarian arrival in 1878, goes into town to see what is happening. He is arrested in the courtyard of his friend, Salihbeg Kulas, a Turk (that is, a Bosnian Muslim) with whom Jovo has spent hundreds of hours in defiance of the mutual distrust and hatred of Turks and Serbs. The 85-year-old Salihbeg, we discover later, had nothing to do with the arrest, for he was been confined to his bed. The arrest was instigated by Salihbeg's son-in-law, who has always hated Serbs in general and Jovo in particular. Salihbeg, however, feels that his honor has been forever stained by the arrest of his friend. He cannot save his friend, and eventually takes poison and poisons the son-in-law who is guilty of betraying Jovo. Jovo, naturally, feels he has been betrayed by the only Turk he ever trusted at all, and although we readers discover that Salihbeg was not at fault, Jovo's family never finds this out.

Meanwhile, Jovo has been beaten up badly in prison, under the watchful eyes of Lajos, the Hungarian and Zilavi in the absence of Carsija's commandant, Kriskovic. Lajos, it turns out, has for years been shadowing Jovo by paying off his servant Milisav Bojat. Eventually, Lajos encourages

---

51 The NIN literary awards are one of the best ways to trace changes in literary politics and cultural taste in Yugoslavia. This Belgrad-based journal was founded in 1951 as the first weekly in post-war Yugoslavia. It makes a claim to cover the entire country as well as the world in political, historical, and cultural spheres, and for much of its existence, it was respected for its independent stance and high journalistic quality. The NIN awards for best novel started in 1955 for the best novel written in 1954. At first, in keeping with the unificatory ideals of the time the jury considered not just Serbo-Croatian but also Slovenian and Macedonian novels. Claiming an inability to follow carefully the entire literary spectrum in the non-Serbo-Croatian-speaking republics, the journal soon gave this practice up, so the award was in fact only for novels written in Serbo-Croatian. It nevertheless quickly became the single most prestigious prize awarded for new fiction in Yugoslavia. The first award went to Dobrica Cosic for *Koreni*, followed by Mirko Bozic (a Croatian author, for *Neeisplakani*). In 1957 Oskar Davico got it for *Beton i svici*, followed by Aleksand Vuco (*Mrtvo javke*) and in 1959 Branko Copic for *Ne tugui, bronzana strazo*. In 1961 the award was given to Radomir Konstantinovic for *Izlažak*, in 1962 Dobrica Cosic for *Deobe*, in 1963 to Miroslav Krleza for *Zastave*, in 1964 to Oskar Davico for *Gladi*, and in 1965 again to Oskar Davico for *Taine*. In 1966, the Croatian author Ranko Marinkovic received the award for *Kiklop*, while in 1967 it went to the Bosnian Mesa Selimovic for *Dvris i smrt*. The 1968 award went to Mreze of Erix Kosh in 1969 the Croatian Slobodan Novak won for *Miris, zlato, i tamjan*, while in 1970 the Serbian author Borislav Pekic was awarded for *Houses of Belgrad*. The 1971 prize went to Milos Cnijanski for his *Roman o Londonu* and 1981 award to Selenic for *Priateli*. By the late 1980s, the journal, like so much of the Serbian media, had gone unabashedly over to the nationalist side, so the award to Lubarda was not surprising.
Jovo to ask Kriskovic for permission to go and pray in the church, knowing that the newly empowered Moslem corps that have been armed by the Austrians against the Serbs will do him in. In a climactic scene, Jovo is lynched and the priest Father Jaukovic has his tongue cut out and either jumps or is pushed to his death from the church tower. In flashbacks, we also get the story of the strange friendship between Salihbeg and Jovo (strange because neither understands the other), the story of Salihbeg's family and inter-Turk rivalries.

On a second plane of action we follow the Serbian 2nd army after the breakthrough on the Solon front, particularly the thoughts of Vojvoda Stepa (the army's commander, a kind of Kutuzov figure in Lubarda's novel--the same general, by the way, who is one of the central heroes of Cosic's Time of Death), Mitroslav Suka (whose brother Mifisav remained in Carsija as a kind of outlaw preying on Turks and Serbs alike), and Obrad Jaukovic, son of the murdered priest. We watch as they hack through Bulgarian armies on their way to Carsija, which they liberate. In the climactic scene, instead of getting the revenge he thought he desired, young Jaukovic (who was a priest before he became a soldier), at the request of the heroic fatherly Vojvoda, calls for reconciliation between the Serbs and the Turks. But this reaching out is stained by the murder of Mitroslav by a fanatic Moslem.

The novel's third plane is events in the period 1939 to 41. The narrator's father and the Father Jaukovic are best friends (as were Jovo and the first priest) and we are encouraged to see that during World War II a rerun of the massacres of World War I will take place. This is despite the fact that the narrator's father is well-prepared for the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, the narration ends with the father and two relatives, heavily armed, heading for the town as war is about to be declared. It is clear that they will fall victim to Moslem gangs, in an eternal return of Moslem animus against the Serbs.

The narration is quite complicated. Much of it is filtered through the mind of the post-World War II grandson (who intimates that he was with the communist partisans), some through the stories of his grandmother (the wife of Jovo, who has her own horror stories to tell of how she was treated during the war (she was imprisoned by the Austrians as an accessory to the 'crimes' of her husband-consorting with Serbs like Apis, Princip, etc), and through interior monologues of Salihbeg, etc. The language, particularly in scenes with Turks is highly Bosnianized, much more so that Andric or Selimovic ever used, almost to the point of real incomprehensibility.

The overall ideological point of the novel, however, is to show that the Turks (i.e., Bosnian Moslems) have always hated the Serbs, and that they massacre them every time they get a chance, while the Serbs are good people who are always ready to forgive and forget which they do to their detriment. The Serbs alone created Yugoslavia, which was a huge mistake since it forced them to live with people who hated them. There are, of course, some evil Serbs just as there are some good Turks, but for the most part Turks are evil and scheming, while Serbs are saintly and wonderful. In
the logic of Lubarda’s novel. Bosnia, which had always been seen as a microcosm of Yugoslavia is
not an example of the potentials of multi-culturalism, but rather as a site of unalloyed hatred and
disaster.

It is, of course, a coincidence that Timor Mortis and Vaznesenje should have been published in
the same year, but it is no coincidence that they were both quite popular. In addition to their literary
qualities—and both writers are undoubtedly effective storytellers who have full control over their
material—they tapped into rising Serbian nationalism and so can be said to have been a logical
outgrowth of the Serbian cultural and political situation. At the same time, in spreading the message
that Serbs were not merely naïve and self-sacrificing, but that the people for whom they had
sacrificed themselves had always been the Serbs greatest enemies, ready and indeed happy to stab
them in the back at the slightest provocation, they both helped to create an atmosphere in which the
indiscriminate massacre of Moslems and Croats could be seen as an act of self defense rather than
one of aggression.

In the novels described above, we have seen a clear thematic progression from attempts to
boost Serbian national esteem coupled with a questioning of the possibility of Serb/Croat or
Serb/Muslim cooperation to depictions of Croatian and Moslem anti-Serb animus. Although these
novels did have a readership among the country’s educated elite, their primary target audience was
the mass of low and middle-brow reader. There was, however, one major novel that functioned to
undermine the bases for Yugoslav cooperation among the educated elite who were, for the most part,
the most convinced believers in some version of Yugoslavism. This work, Milorad Pavic’s Khazarski
recnik (Dictionary of the Khazars) operates not so much at the level of plot—indeed, on the surface,
the novel does not seem to be directly related to problems of nation building at all—but is rather a
philosophical attack on the bases of Yugoslavism in fictional form. When the novel first appeared (in
Yugoslavia in 1984, in France and the U.S. in 1988), it was hailed as an inspired and intriguing
work of post-modernist fiction. Although they were fascinated, readers were not quite sure what to
make of it. When asked by the obviously puzzled journalists of NIN to explain his work after it
received their award for best Serbo-Croatian novel of 1985, Pavic, who was at the time a respected
but fairly obscure professor of literature at Belgrade University, indicated that the Dictionary was to
be perceived allegorically. According to the author, it is about “how a nation looks when it stands
between great ideologies but does not belong to any of them.”52 In the context of 1985, this
comment was perhaps ambiguous, but I would venture to guess that most readers would have felt
that the “nation” to which Pavic was referring was Yugoslavia, not Serbia. Following this line of
reasoning, they would have seen the book as an attempt to revisit one of the central post-1948
Yugoslav obsessions: the possibility of finding a unique place for itself as a land between, but not

part of. East and West (refigured in the post-war period as the capitalist countries of NATO and the Soviet Union and its Warsaw pact allies). To be sure, when his novel came to be hailed as one of the key works in the creation of contemporary Serbian national consciousness, Pavic reinterpreted his allegory as referring exclusively to the Serbs, but there is no evidence, other than his own later words on the subject, that he was actually thinking in terms of Serbia when he wrote the book.

Nevertheless, there certainly were Yugoslav readers who saw the book through Serbian glasses from the beginning as can be seen from a review that was published in the leading Slovenian cultural organ Nasi Razgledi. The author of the review, Zvonko Kovac, was concerned entirely with the literary qualities of the novel. But in the final two paragraphs he turned to the national question. “About ideologies and their power to establish false identities, particularities, and peoples, others will speak of more. I need just mention that a specific Khazar national association is being embraced almost euphorically by a Serbian culture that is sensitized to nationalism; we shouldn’t forget about this external factor when discussing the value of this book.” As far as Kovac is concerned, however, such readings are illegitimate, for they ignore what he sees as the basis of Pavic’s Dictionary: “its exaggeratedly ironic rejection of the importation of any actuality in its reception.” Nevertheless, he continues, “other nations will read about the history of the lost Khazars through their own paranoid visions of the future.”

The quotations that appeared as blurbs on the book’s American jacket cover illustrate the initial reaction of Western readers quite well. “All its delights...the structural novelty and the comic inventiveness of the imagery...[are] an ebullient and generous celebration of the reading experience (The New York Times Book Review).” While it is not incorrect to view Pavic’s book in this way, what was lost in placing it solely in the international context of post-modernism was any appreciation for the book’s relationship with the Yugoslav situation. In the wake of his book’s international success, Pavic became something of an international celebrity and, in the aftermath of Yugoslavia’s violent breakup, his virulent Serbophile views have become known. With the encouragement of Pavic himself, a reevaluation of his novel has occurred, and it is now seen solely as a prophetic text directly related to current events. Typical of this reevaluation is an article published in the 1992 “Village Voice Literary Supplement.” The author of the article (who seems to have derived his interpretation of Pavic’s Dictionary solely from conversations with the author), notes that “In the global praise for the book (it is being translated into 26 languages), its political implications tying the fate of the no-longer-existent Khazars to that of the Serbs have gone largely unremarked.” As

53 This self view was very much still part of Yugoslav identity in this period. One evidence for this is the film “Nesto izmedju” (“Something in between”), in which a young and naive American comes to Yugoslavia and discovers for herself the liminal quality of Yugoslav identity.


evidence for this position, he quotes Pavic, who claimed "I am a Khazar too because the fate of my family was very similar and in the end we went back to our original religion." Thus, whereas earlier critics completely ignored the immediate socio-political context of the Dictionary, the revisionists can see nothing but that context. The problem with interpretations like the one suggested by Pavic himself is that they fail to get at what is really salient about the novel. While it is true that there is a group of Serbs who feel that their traditions have been and are being swamped by competing cultures and that, therefore, the analogy between the Khazars (who in the novel are swallowed up by larger, more culturally imperialistic civilizations) and the Serbs is apt, such an allegorical interpretation fails to account for the vast majority of the novel, even at a thematic level. They cannot tell us why, for example, the novel is dominated by cyclical time, what the significance of its cabalistic and dream imagery is, let alone why Pavic should have chosen such an unusual form for his ostensibly simple message?

I propose a rather different interpretation of Pavic's complicated novel. I propose to show it builds on the same set of ideas about the imagined community of Yugoslavia as did the major works of Ivo Andric, but that here these views are rejected rather than endorsed. As a result, Pavic's book is an anti-Yugoslav novel in the same subtle and powerful ways that Andric's novels were pro-Yugoslav. It may be recalled that the central features of Andric's fiction were 1) a cyclical view of time; 2) a recognition that what characterizes Yugoslavia at any moment in time is difference, but difference heightened by the unavoidability of intercourse between seemingly irreconcilably opposed groups; and 3) that difference is potentially surmountable on a mundane level through the actions of people in the world and in literary texts through the ability of the story-teller to unify the world through his work. If we examine Pavic's Dictionary of the Khazars carefully, we will find that it reproduces parts 1 and 2 of Andric's "Yugoslav" equation while completely rejecting the possibility of part 3 (which is precisely the part in which a Yugoslavia is imagined despite all the problems caused, particularly, by part 2).

On the surface, The Dictionary of the Khazars is an extremely complicated text. It purports to be a reconstruction of a book about the Khazars that was initially printed in 1691 and subsequently destroyed. We are given this information in an "author's" introduction that precedes the text of the dictionary proper. The main text of the novel consists of three sections (presented in the form of alphabetically-ordered encyclopedia-like entries) which represent Christian, Moslem, and Jewish versions of the story of how the Khazars changed their religion sometime in the 9th century A.D. as well as the efforts of certain people to investigate (or perhaps recreate) the events of the 9th century during subsequent periods. Because the "plot" elements of the novel are contained in the discrete entries, it is possible to read the novel in any order one wishes, an attribute that is pointed to by the

---

56 Ibid., p. 23.
author in his introduction (p. 11). This aspect of the novel was appreciated by Western critics who were able, because of it, to provide the novel with a genealogy that included Cortazar and Pynchon. In fact, however, the novel’s structure is not nearly as complicated as it seems, because Pavic counts on the reader’s will to order which, he realizes, will ultimately lead the reader to discover a coherent story in the entries provided—and in fact, for all the seeming randomness of the entries, constructing such a story is not very difficult.

Basically, the plot is that of a mystery novel, and there are two mysteries present here—to which religion did the Khazars convert, and why at regular intervals do symbolic representatives of each of the three religions come together in an attempt to solve the mystery? The twist is that there is and can be no answer to part one of the mystery (because, as we will see, the Khazars, far from standing for some actual group, like the Serbs in Pavic’s own interpretation for example, are simply an empty space), and that part two contains its own mystery—why does death and destruction haunt every attempt to reconstruct part one?

The Centripetal Force of Absolute Difference

Let us begin with a consideration of the first mystery—when and to what religion did the Khazars convert? But first of all, why the Khazars? The Khazars were, in fact, a rather mysterious tribe that lived in the steppes north of the Black Sea and disappeared from history (in which they had only appeared vaguely to begin with) sometime around the 10th century. There are legends that they converted, at some point in their history, to Judaism, and these legends of a religious conversion evidently led Pavic to choose the Khazars as his central image. The idea of a contest to determine to which of the monotheistic religions a people should convert is taken not from legends about the Khazars, however, but rather from the Russian Primary Chronicle. The entry for the year 986 (6494 according to the Russian Church calendar) describes a delegation of Volga Bulgars who appear before the Russian Kagan Vladimir and attempt to convert him to Islam. Following them are delegations of Christians from Rome, a Jewish delegation of Khazars!, and finally one from Byzantium. In 987, Vladimir is described as sending his own fact-finding missions to each of the religions, and finally, in 988, he decides to convert his land to Orthodoxy.

Pavic thus retains the polemic between religions found in the Russian chronicle, but shifts it to an earlier period and a different people—Khazars, who left no historical record of their own. The latter shift is motivated primarily by Pavic’s desire to replace the certainty of the Russians’ conversion with uncertainty. This uncertainty is achieved by presenting the story of the conversion not through records of the Khazars themselves, but rather from the points of view of those who attempted to do the converting. And when we compare the accounts of Christians, Moslems, and Jews, what becomes apparent is that we have no idea which religion the Khazars actually chose. More to the point, each religion is convinced that it was chosen. In the Hebrew account under the
heading "Khazar Polemic", for example, we read: "Hebrew sources cite this as the key event in the Khazars' conversion to Judaism....it all took place under the reign of Kaghan Bulan, at the invitation of an angel, right after the capture of Ardabil (around 731). It was then, if this source is to be believed, that a debate on religions was conducted at the court of the Khazar kaghan. Since the Jewish envoy bested the Greek and Arab representatives, the Khazars adopted Judaism under Kaghan Bulan's successor, Obadiah." (260) It will be noted in this passage the characteristic vagueness of Pavic's historical presentation--even when strong claims are made they are almost immediately undercut or placed into doubt. Nevertheless, it would seem clear from this account that one thing is beyond doubt: the Khazars converted to Judaism.

Let us compare this account with that to be found in the Moslem version of the Dictionary. Under the entry "Khazar polemic" we read: "Al-Bakri notes that the Khazars adopted Islam before other religions, and that this was in the year 737 after Isa. Whether the conversion to Islam coincided with the polemic is a different question. It obviously did not. Thus, the year of the polemic remains unknown, but its essence is perfectly clear. Under strong pressure to adopt one of the three religions--Islam, Christianity, or Judaism--the kaghan summoned to his court three learned men--a Jew who had been expelled from the caliphate, a Greek theologian from the university in Constantinople, and one of the Arab interpreters of the Koran." (150) The entry ends with the information that after the Arab's successful presentation, "the kaghan embraced Farabi Ibn Kora, and that put an end to it all. He adopted Islam, doffed his shoes, prayed to Allah." (153)

The Christian version of the story itself contains two variants. Again we hear of a polemic and we are told: "The kaghan then turned away from the Jew and again found the most acceptable arguments to be those of Constantine the Philosopher. He and his chief aides converted to Christianity...According to another source, the kaghan, having accepted Constantine's reasons, quite unexpectedly decided to go to war against the Greeks instead of adopting their faith...He attacked them from Kherson and when he had victoriously completed his campaign he asked the Greek emperor for a Greek princess to take as his wife. The emperor set only one condition--that the Khazar kaghan convert to Christianity. To the great surprise of Constantinople, the kaghan accepted the terms." (83)

We realize, ultimately, that there can be no answer to mystery #1. Each religion is entirely convinced that the Khazars accepted its tenets, and the novel provides no Archimedean point from which it would be possible to tell which source was accurate. The only thing that is not open to question is that the ultimate result of the coming together of three mutually opposed ways of seeing the world led to the disintegration and destruction of the Khazar kingdom. The implication is that different initial expectations will create different truths and there is no possible way to reconcile

57 This latter story is also borrowed from an account in the Russian Primary Chronicle, by the way.
them. In the universe of Pavić’s novel, difference is irreconcilable—no agreement or mutual understanding can be reached among people who begin from different starting points. The novel as a whole does not attempt to mediate between these points of view; rather by separating them and refusing to employ an overarching narrator (as Andric does) it emphasizes their incompatibility. There is no truth to be found by examining the separate narratives, only truths, and the coexistence of these truths inevitably produces violent conflict.

From the point of view of literary and historical technique, such a conclusion is quite interesting. Since the appearance of the so-called critical method in historical studies, one of the tenets of the historian is that when contradictory accounts of the same event exist, it is his responsibility to weigh the available evidence in order to arrive at the most likely reconstruction. As Marc Bloch puts it in his typically blunt way: “The most naive policeman knows that a witness should not always be taken at his word...Similarly it has been many a day since men first took it into their heads not to accept all historical evidence blindly....True progress began on the day when, as Volney put it, doubt became an “examiner”: or, in other words, when there had gradually been worked out objective rules which permitted the separation of truth from falsehood.” 58 Bloch and other historians were aware, of course, that the truth could sometimes be difficult to discover, perhaps even impossible in certain cases, but such difficulties did not relieve the historian of the responsibility for trying. This view of history was not substantially challenged until very recently, and it is still basically accepted. Starting in the 1960s, however, a certain corrective skepticism began to take hold—confidence in the historian’s ability to reconstruct the past became shaken, and doubts began to be raised as to whether this had ever really been the goal of historians.

Works of fiction and their interpreters, until recently, also agreed with this model, at least implicitly. In the vast majority of fictional texts, it is not difficult to sense the presence of what has come to be called the implied author of the text—the controlling presence behind the often complicated narrative facade of a work of fiction. The existence of an implied author is, in a sense, the guarantee of the text’s coherence. The search for a coherent meaning in fictional works was aided by the fact that the most common types of novels employ a third-person narrator whose presence in the text mimics the function of the implied author behind the text; the narrator’s job is, in effect, to tell the reader “what really happened,” to mediate between the conflicting representations of fictional characters. Even complicated novels with untrustworthy narrators such as, say, The Brothers Karamazov, in which much relating to motives, the nature of guilt, and so forth is left open, the solution to the most obvious mystery—who actually killed Fedor Karamazov—eventually becomes clear. First-person texts are, by convention, treated by readers as individual

source texts are by historians—they are recognized as containing a biased view of the world that we may or may not trust, depending on our intuitions about the narrator.

Starting in the 1960s, however, some significant changes occurred both in fiction writing and in reading strategies. Critics had always recognized that certain kinds of texts appeared to contradict themselves, to undercut what they seemed to be asserting. But with the rise to academic ascendancy of the deconstructionist theories of Jacques Derrida, this type of self-undercutting was located in the properties of language itself, leading in its most extreme form, to an assertion of the relative nature of any truth. That Pavic, a leading literary critic in Yugoslavia would have been well aware of these movements is, of course, beyond any doubt. In the context of France and the United States, debates of this sort did not have any direct relevance to the real world. In Yugoslavia, however, where fiction had always played a far more important cultural and political role, the effects of a book like Pavic's cannot be underestimated. In tandem with the appearance of new critical theories, novels began to appear in which authorial control, even implied authorial control seemed to be abandoned. Philosophically speaking, there is, of course a problem with the notion that a text can exist whose truth is that there is no truth. This vicious cycle tends to produce novels which are, first and foremost, annoying illustrations of a college freshman's discovery of skepticism. Again, like more extreme forms of deconstructionist literary criticism, such novelistic forms were basically playthings with no relevance to the world. In the particular situation of Yugoslav literature, however, a work like Pavic's which contains the implicit assertion that there is and can be no way to mediate between different truths had a great deal of effect.

As early as 1973, Danilo Kis, who is often seen as the last “Yugoslav” writer, identified relativism as the philosophical corollary to nationalism. “Nationalism lives by relativism. There are no general values—esthetic, ethical, etc. Only relative ones. And it is principally in this sense that nationalism is reactionary. All that matters is to be better than my brother or half-brother. the rest is no concern of mine.”59 Seen in this light, Pavic’s novel is an illustration of the real-world social and political effects that can flow from seemingly theoretical literary discussions of the indeterminacy of meaning and the thorough-going relativism that it can produce. In Yugoslavia, this sort of thinking had and continues to have consequences, thus showing that while post-modernism may be an amusing and even positive “oppositional” practice in some contexts, it is not always so.

From what has been said to this point, it might appear that Pavic’s novel should simply fall apart. The centripetal force of three separate narratives which describe the impossibility of any reconciliation should lead to three separate novels. That it does not can be attributed to the presence of equally strong centrifugal forces which glue the novel together.

The Centrifugal Force of Repetition

Like Andric’s novels, Pavic’s Dictionary is built on overtly cyclical theory of time (the same thing was true of the novel by Lubarda described above, by the way). Only part of the entries are devoted to a discussion of the events surrounding the conversion of the Khazars. The rest are devoted to telling the stories of those who have tried to solve the Khazar mystery in various periods. There are two such periods—the first is 1698, and the second is 1982. Both are marked by the same event: one representative from each of the religions who claimed to have converted the Khazars is possessed by an irresistible urge to make himself whole by finding, through a complicated series of scholarly actions and dreams, the other two pieces of the puzzle. In each period, the three people do succeed in coming together, but, when they do, instead of finding the truth, they are all destroyed. In this way, the fate of the novel’s protagonists is analogous to that of the Khazars, whose destruction, we now suspect, was caused by the simultaneous presence of the three different religions rather than by conversion to any one of them. It is also analogous to the fate of the texts which have attempted to record the story of the Khazars, most prominently the so-called Daubmannus dictionary of 1691, the work on which this novel is said to be based (it is called the “second, reconstructed and revised, edition). The original dictionary, we are told, was completely destroyed by the inquisition, except for two copies, one with a gold and one with a silver lock. The latter, according to “the editor” of the present edition, has been permanently inaccessible, while the former, which was written in poison ink, has left behind a trail of death and destruction.

Thus, the epigraph to the novel, “Here lies the reader who will never open this book. He is here forever dead,” can be seen as having multiple referents. The initial readers were the Khazars themselves, and their death and disappearance structured the fate of all those who came after them. At regular intervals, all those who were obsessed by the Khazar question have attempted to fuse—and there is the suggestion, made by the logic of the text, that such a fusion would amount to nothing more or less than the recreation of the original state of the world before the fall—their particular knowledge in order to achieve a non-relativized, synthetic truth.

In this respect, it is interesting to compare Pavic’s novel with La disparition (1969) by the French post-modernist novelist George Perec. In Perec’s work, the key to the mystery plot is the absent letter “e”. “It’s a detective novel or at least a whodunit, with this twist: E done it, but we mustn’t ever say that. We can’t. When the characters get close to E, they get written out of the plot (maimed, shredded, fed to the carp).” The difference, of course between France and Yugoslavia, is that in France this plot is clever and amusing, but it would not encourage people to shoot their neighbors. In Yugoslavia, such a plot did not do this either, but novels like Pavic’s did help to spread the idea that ideology was everything and that truth was not only unattainable, but deadly. In

---

this respect. Pavic’s novel can be seen as a work directly in opposition to Andric’s hope that despite difficulties, difference can sometimes be bridged. In Andric’s work, we recall, different faiths are shown being able to come together even if they don’t want to. In Pavic’s work, the situation is reversed; they are compelled by the force of their dreams and ideas to join, but that very juncture proves deadly. And just as the original Daubmannus dictionary, which brought the Khazar stories together caused complete destruction to all who opened it, so this novel presaged the destruction of Yugoslavia.

This paper has, through an analysis of cultural politics and exemplary cultural texts attempted to show how Yugoslavia went from being a country with a poorly articulated but vitally important supranational policy to an ungovernable group of squabbling republics in less than thirty years. Federal policies encouraged, indeed almost guaranteed, a revival of nationalism both in the political and the cultural spheres. By leaning toward “brotherhood” and away from “unity,” the governing Communist party encouraged citizens of Yugoslavia to see themselves first and foremost as members of a specific national group. The establishment of a “separate but equal” cultural policy allowed certain members of the cultural and political elites to ally themselves with preexisting nationalist undercurrents, destabilizing the compromise that had been in effect since the end of the war.

Although it was believed that giving the various nations more autonomy would reduce centripetal tensions in the country, this did not happen. Rather, the separate nations of Yugoslavia simply demanded more and more autonomy at the expense of a rapidly weakening center. Cultural and particularly educational policies were revised to pay more attention to the specific contributions of the national group that constituted the majority in each republic. As the various minorities demanded and received greater recognition, autonomy, and rights, the Serbian plurality felt increasingly threatened. Ultimately, a number of their elite cultural figures decided to pursue a similar strategy to the one that had worked so well for the smaller nations—a boosting of national pride at the expense of supranational institutions. The situation that had obtained in pre-war Yugoslavia was now reversed. Then, Serbian hegemony had produced nationalist reactions among Croats and Macedonians. Now, Croatian, Slovenian, Albanian, and Macedonian nationalism elicited Serbian hegemonic behavior. The result, however, was identical.
APPENDIX: THE LESSONS OF YUGOSLAVIA’S FAILURE

Throughout the entire period of its existence, Yugoslavia was trapped between the Scylla of Serbian unitarism and the Charybdis of separatism. Despite the best efforts of many of Yugoslavia’s finest citizens, all efforts to create a unified Yugoslav culture and a sense of Yugoslav nationalist feeling that would have served to connect and balance the separate national cultures failed, either because the projects were seen (or actually were) overly favorable to Serbian cultural practices or because they were not synthetic enough to overcome the centripetal force of the separate national cultures. After two rounds of bloody and divisive fighting spaced some fifty years apart, it appears unlikely that another try will be made in the near future, although further attempts at Yugoslav (most likely Serb-Croat) integration at some time in the future are almost inevitable. The collapse of the Yugoslav experiment was by no means a foregone conclusion. In its various incarnations, the Yugoslav ideal had the support of a significant portion of the population, and, if they prove anything at all, the results of its breakdown show that those who strove to provide a Yugoslav alternative had good reasons for doing so.

Most commentators on the Yugoslav situation, particularly non-academic commentators from the media, have not seen it this way. Basing their conclusions primarily on conversations with those South Slavs caught up in the maelstrom of conflict, they have discovered the “ancient hatreds” that have always riven the land, and pointed to the “artificiality” of the Yugoslav states in both their post-World-War-I and post-World-War-II models. As a result, there is a widely-held belief that the most recent Balkan wars, though tragic, can teach us nothing. We do not have the kinds of ancient religious and ethnic hatreds so characteristic of Yugoslavia, the argument goes, so what could this tribal conflict among a bunch of barbarians have to do with us. The theoretical problem with this argument, however, is that if one goes deep enough below the surface (and one does not usually have to go very deep) there turn out to be ancient hatreds that could potentially divide almost any nation, and these are quite easy to discover after the fact. For example, German Protestants from the North and German Catholics from the South now live in harmony, but were they, for whatever reasons, to recognize what divides them and begin fighting, commentators would recall the bitter religious wars of the 17th century, the “artificial” way in which Bismarck constructed modern Germany, and so forth. We would be provided with a genealogy of conflict, and would be convinced by the same reporters that it was inevitable, the result of deep-seated hatred that had only been temporarily papered over by unconvincing ideologies.

The point is that if potentials for hatred based on national affiliation can be found in almost any country, they must possess little or no explanatory power in and of themselves. Whether they

---

61 Perhaps the most influential book of this type is Robert Kaplan’s Balkan Ghosts.
lead to conflict or compromise depends on a host of factors, and merely enumerating them provides no special insight. The specious inevitability argument is dangerous for two reasons. First, it has provided us with an excuse to ignore the sufferings of millions of innocent victims: it is this aspect of the problem that has drawn the impassioned attention of most of the more astute commentators on Yugoslavia. Second, and even more disturbing, at least to me, is that by insisting that Yugoslavia’s problems have no counterparts in the civilized West, we have been able to close our eyes to the lessons that the failure of Yugoslavia can teach us for our own country.

Many responsible academic observers (and even some journalists) have noted the fallacies that undergird the “inevitability” argument, but they have failed to make much of a dent in the popular imagination or in the thinking of major political figures. In part, this is because even the most responsible commentators have insisted on focusing almost exclusively on the political causes of Yugoslavia’s failure. Typical is this observation by the Slovenian Slavoj Zizak: “Old ethnic hatreds, of course, are far from being simply imagined: they are a historical legacy. Nevertheless, the key question is why they exploded at precisely this moment, not earlier or later. There is one simple answer to it: the political crisis in Serbia.” Of course, Zizak and his fellow commentators are unquestionably correct in identifying the rise of Milosevic as the immediate cause of the latest round of Balkan fighting. But the problem is that the political focus again encourages Western observers to distance themselves from what is happening in former Yugoslavia. After all, we think, “we have not been governed by ineffective communists, our political system is not in a state of imminent crisis, so there is no reason to search for lessons that would be valuable to us here.” What is more, such a focus encourages the belief that the simple replacement of key political figures will lead to significant change. Just get Karadzic out of office, the thinking goes, and the Bosnian Serbs will begin to behave themselves as we wish them to.

The problem, however, is not primarily political in origin, and it cannot be solved by political means alone. The problems Yugoslavia faced in both its incarnations were ones of nation building, and these are cultural problems. That this is true should not be surprising. There is general agreement among students of nationalism that “nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a

---


63 Among the most energetic in this attempt have been Ivo Banac, Branko Magas, and Misha Glenny.

64 Zizak, p. 239.
particular kind." What Yugoslav governments needed to do and failed to do was to convince the country's citizens that they actually belonged together. This is a problem faced by almost any nation at any time. Although some states may be more and some less homogeneous, every modern state has to do some work to define the national culture (usually only in very broad ways) and to ensure that most of its citizens feel attached to it. An analysis of cultural failure not only allows us to recognize what has been an underappreciated cause of Yugoslavia's collapse, but it also forces us to admit that Yugoslavia's problems are not entirely divorced from our own, insofar as we in the United States must also work constantly at nation building.

This being said, it is nevertheless true that if we turn from the tragic failures of Yugoslavia to the contemporary United States, and ask what if anything we can learn from the wreckage, we are immediately confronted with a problem. The United States is so unlike Yugoslavia in crucial respects that comparisons, while possible, appear at first to be meaningless. After all, as opposed to a country whose unity had to be created from among distinct groups of people living on or around territories that had traditionally belonged to them, the land of United States belonged to no one but the native Americans whose virtual disappearance by disease and violent conquest created the conditions for settlement almost entirely by immigration. While Yugoslavia inherited the cultures of the various empires that had ruled it and had to mediate them, the United States carried no such burden. We were free to invent new solutions for new problems. Each new group that arrived in America shed the vast majority of its traditions, assimilating to a new culture while simultaneously enriching that culture with its own contributions.

It is this last point that separates the United States most distinctly from Yugoslavia. We have been able to create a single national culture, one that connects the various sub-cultures (regional, ethnic, religious, and generational) that exist under the umbrella of American culture. The essence of our national culture is that it is not identical to the culture of any one of the groups that live in the United States. Of course, that is not to say that it has drawn from each of them equally. But the sum of American culture is greater than any of its separate parts. Even more important, American culture as a whole includes at least some elements from each of the cultures that live or have lived in our society. Again, the cultural contributions of a given group may not be proportionally appropriate--unquestionably the English cultural heritage dominates American culture far out of proportion to the number of Americans of English descent--but American society has worked well in part because each sub-culture feels that it can contribute something of value to the culture of society.

---

45 This quotation is taken from what has been undoubtedly the most influential theoretical work on nationalism published in the past quarter century; Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (Verso: London, 1983), p. 13.

46 The process by which this occurs is laid out quite nicely in The Invention of Tradition eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
as a whole. This is because the culture of society as a whole has traditionally been sufficiently
permeable and flexible to allow for, if not encourage, influences from all of its subcultures, even the
most recent arrivals. When I talk of cultural influences here, I have in mind a very broad array of
possibilities, ranging from contributions to our language--American English--to our literature, music,
art, cuisine or fashion. In this respect, it is reasonable to call the United States a multi-cultural
society, if one means by that not a society without a national culture but one whose national culture
contains recognizable elements of the cultures of the innumerable groups who live in it.

The third important tradition that marks American culture as a national culture is that it
includes some elements unique to it. It is not merely the sum of its parts. The cultural interaction
that has been so characteristic here has produced new formations which subsequently can and do
spread through society as a whole. A perfect example of such a formation is jazz, derived as it is
from the amalgamation of a number of separate cultural traditions. Ultimately, it became part of
society's culture while not belonging wholly to any of the individual cultures that make up American
society. Finally, American culture has been marked by an ability to develop and evolve to reflect
changes in the cultures that make it up or to reflect the practices of any new cultures that might
appear, either by processes of immigration or even military conquest. We might call this the
principle of unfinalizability.

The success of American society has not been, however, solely a function of healthy vertical
relations between the ever-changing national culture and the separate sub-cultures from which it is
drawn. It is also predicated on healthy horizontal relationships among the various sub-cultures
themselves. By this, I mean that the various national or ethnic cultures have traditionally been open
to cooperation with and interpenetration by the other cultural groups inhabiting the same territory.
This does not mean that there is not and has not been resistance. Each generation of immigrants, as
it has become accepted into American culture has tended to resist interpenetration by the next groups
to arrive. But despite this resistance, interpenetration has always occurred. It is thus not only true
that, say, Russian Jews were Americanized within a generation, or even that American culture as a
whole was enriched by the Russian Jewish stream. It is also true that other American subcultures
were changed by the appearance of Russian Jews on American soil. And the same could be said for
any other immigrant group of sufficient size. In this respect, it should be noted that American
society, both on the level of its horizontal and vertical cultural relationships has not merely been
tolerant. For tolerance only implies being willing to let others do what they want as long as it does
not interfere with what you want to do, while traditionally in the United States groups have been
willing and able to learn from each other and to change or adapt at least some of their cultural
practices under the influence of their neighbors. It is, of course possible to imagine a United States
in which, say, Hispanic Americans and Laotian Americans live together as citizens without any
cultural contact, but this has not traditionally been our practice.
Nevertheless, certain trends in American society that have become increasingly more visible in the past two decades lead one to fear that even though the starting points and the historical experiences of the United States and Yugoslavia were vastly different, a process of parallel cultural evolution has brought them too close for comfort. If this is true, and I think that it is, the very survival of the United States may depend on our ability to defuse the pressures that ultimately destroyed Yugoslavia. By recognizing why Yugoslavia failed, we may be able to head off our own failure, thereby ensuring that our future will be as different from Yugoslavia’s present as our pasts were. Indeed, in some respects I think that we can see Yugoslavia as an example of what will happen if the multi-cultural paradigm that has dominated American thinking for the past few decades (and the backlash against it) is not replaced by a revised version of the melting pot theory.

The belief that Yugoslavia's disintegration, far from being a unique phenomenon, presages the soon-to-be general collapse of Western (particularly American) civilization, has been advanced most globally by the sociologist Stjepan G. Mestrovic. In his book The Balkanization of the West, Mestrovic claims that the particularist nationalism coupled with religious fundamentalism that has destroyed the former Yugoslavia is a form of post-modern rebellion against the master narrative of the enlightenment, a master narrative that was shared by both capitalism and communism. Although this revolt has begun in the economically and spiritually weakened countries in which Communism held sway, it shows signs of rending the social fabric of the capitalist West as well. “American society still has a long way to go before it reaches the pitch of Balkanization in the former Yugoslavia, yet the existing divisiveness is already tinged with considerable hostility. For example, the celebration of the Super Bowl victory by the American football team, the Dallas Cowboys, in January 1993 resulted in some ugly rioting on the streets of Dallas, Texas. In some instances, African Americans pulled Caucasian Americans out of their cars and beat them up; as revenge for slavery, they claimed. Dallas is not Sarajevo, and it may never become Sarajevo exactly, but disturbing similarities exist already.”

Even if one resists the global arguments of Mestrovic, a look at any one of a number of more focused studies might convince one that American society is looking more like Yugoslavia all the time. Let us take Michael Lind’s The Next American Nation, for example. In Lind’s analysis, the melting-pot concept of a single American nation has, since the end of the 1960s, been replaced by a multi-cultural view which sees a United States composed of five official races: white, black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian. In this society, people are believed to have place and value not as individuals or as Americans, but as members of their specific racial group. Whereas in earlier days immigrants “faced subtle and not-so-subtle sanctions for failing to assimilate quickly; by contrast today’s Hispanic and Asian immigrants are tempted by a variety of rewards for retaining

---

their distinctive identities, even their different languages." As we recall, precisely such a series of moves in the early 1960s in Yugoslavia initiated the slow process of fragmentation, encouraging citizens to identify themselves, first and foremost, as citizens of the national republics rather than as individuals or members of the Yugoslav collective.

The situation in the United States is exacerbated by a fact Lind does not mention, but one that becomes salient if we make the comparison with Yugoslavia. As has been the case in Yugoslavia (and in many other parts of the world as well), the most bitter and intractable conflicts traditionally occurred where two more or less coherent ethnic groups, speaking separate languages or possessing distinct cultures felt that they had a claim to the same land. This was the case in Bosnia, in the Krajina region, and it is still the true in Kosovo. In previous generations in the United States when immigrants arrived, they inevitably left behind physically the lands of their origin. Return home was arduous and in many cases unthinkable, and poor communications guaranteed that contact with the lands left behind would be relatively infrequent. Although they did tend to form enclaves within American cities, these never lasted much more than a generation. as economic success allowed for upward and outward mobility, and new immigrants of different ethnic stock took their place at the bottom of the social pyramid. What is more, even if ethnically similar groups tended to live together, there were generally a number of such enclaves cheek by jowl in any given city, which encouraged émigrés to find a lingua franca and adopt a culture that was not exclusively their own. Thus, in the United States, the pattern of settlement by immigrants, as well as their diverse origins, ensured that they would neither feel nor develop a group attachment to any particular territory.

Now, however, in parts of the United States, for the first time in our history, immigrants are living on territory that is contiguous with lands they have traditionally occupied. When Mexicans migrate to Southern California, for example, they are not in any real physical sense leaving their homeland behind. Modern communications and contiguous borders make it easy to retain strong ties with their cross-border relatives. It would, therefore, in any case be much harder to convince them to assimilate with the larger American culture, even in the absence of multi-cultural practices that discourage assimilation. But present cultural policies make matters far worse. Indeed, what is being encouraged is not the Americanization of Hispanic immigrants, but rather the Hispanicization of Southern California. Eventually, the question of why Southern California--with a primarily Spanish-speaking and culturally Spanish population--is a part of the United States at all will arise. After all, it would make as much sense for such a territory to be an independent country or to join with the culturally more similar Mexicans. The fact that much of the Southwestern United States belonged to Mexico not much more than one hundred years ago makes matters a great deal worse. As has been the case in Yugoslavia, the most intractable problems always involve lands to which different groups

---

can make historical claims. What we are encouraging, therefore, is the creation of at least one area in the United States possessing all the necessary conditions for conflict that successive Yugoslav governments strove unsuccessfully to defuse. They inherited the situation and had no choice but to deal with it. We have no such excuse.

Policies that encourage the abandonment of the melting pot ideal in favor of a multi-cultural salad bowl or patchwork quilt are most evident and have been discussed most frequently in the area of higher education. Although universities initially had affirmative action programs thrust upon them, they have by now begun to encourage multi-culturalism through the establishment of numerous special interest departments—African-American studies, Asian-American studies, Women's studies, Chicano studies. The problem is not, as some would have it, with the legitimacy of courses like these as such. Rather, what is wrong is the belief they encourage that the above groups do not have anything in common, and that American culture is merely the sum of these separate parts. They break down not only the vertical relationship between subcultures and the national culture (which in any case is held not to exist in any meaningful sense), but they are also destructive to the horizontal relationship among the subcultures. The patterns we saw in Yugoslavia from the early sixties are beginning to repeat themselves, albeit more slowly since the soil for their propagation is a bit less fertile. Nevertheless, we see already strong tendencies toward cultural separatism.

Of course, the economic and political stagnation that took hold of Yugoslavia from the late 1960s on helped to stir latent dissatisfaction that then crystallized around nationalist cultural and political figures. But given the concern with stagnation and the dissatisfaction with the party system that is ever more apparent in the United States, we may well be entering a period of similar danger, when dissatisfied groups hearken to hitherto marginal spokesmen and turn their policies from the cries of a minority to the generally-held truth. What is even more disquieting and also reminiscent of Yugoslavia, however, has been the response that multiculturalist and separatist-inclined policies have elicited in the United States. The backlash against such views has rarely taken the form of liberal defenses of the melting pot ideal. Rather, the most common strategy appears to be the promulgation, wittingly or not, of equally separatist programs by the “non-ethnic” Americans who still make up the majority of the population. At their most extreme, these ideas underlie the vitriolic rhetoric (and, sometimes, the violent deeds) of various self-appointed militias. Nevertheless, although in the wake of the bombing of a Federal building in Oklahoma city these groups and their policies have received the lion's share of attention, this are not where the real problem lies. In any society there will be marginal groups dedicated to hate and destruction. What is crucial is whether or not their actions are perceived to be beyond the pale by the rest of society. If they are, such groups

---

remain relatively powerless and, while unpleasant, not dangerous to society as a whole. If, on the other hand, their activities and thought are perceived of as being merely the end of a continuum, the radical but in some sense logical outcome of a way of thinking shared by much of the population at large, the society in question has a major problem.

This was precisely what emerged in Serbia from the early 1970s. As we have argued, Serbs did not begin to kill their neighbors in the early 1990s because they had always hated them (although they may well have in some cases). They did so because the cultural ties that had bound them to their neighbors were undermined by a slow process of elite-led backlash against federalist policies. In this new cultural climate it came to seem reasonable and even morally defensible to move from dislike of difference to active attempts to destroy it. Those who believed in Yugoslavia, at the very least a large minority, were unable or unwilling to fight for it until it was too late. The situation was, to be sure, exploited by political leaders who rode to power on the antagonisms that had been nurtured in popular and elite culture, but they did not and could not have created the conditions for ethnic strife by themselves.

Given this scenario, what seems most worrisome in the United States is not the presence of small, hate-filled nativist groups, but rather the gradual rise of what could be called weak white separatist theory that, if it continues unchecked, has the potential to do precisely what it did in Serbia: encourage a large portion of the population that is susceptible to such pressures to abandon the basic cultural ideals they now hold, albeit weakly and inchoately. What I have in mind are a whole series of responses to the multiculturalist approach, most of them originating on the right, that tend toward the dissolution of the American ideal.

The most disturbing of these is the agitation for the creation of a school voucher system. Billed by its advocates as a way of giving more choice to parents, and supported not only by extreme libertarians but also by many relatively liberal Americans who have turned to private schools and home schooling to avoid the “excesses” that have been instituted in the public school curriculum by liberal multiculturalists, such a system would surely encourage the appearance of schools that would inculcate the “values” of specific groups in our society at the expense of common values. While the public schools are far from perfect, they have traditionally been one of the few places in our society in which young people were forced to mix with others from different backgrounds, belief systems, and ways of life. This was particularly true in urban areas where populations were more heterogeneous. Under the voucher systems most typically proposed, the big winners would be religiously-oriented schools, which would be dominated by people not known for their willingness to work with others who think, look, or act differently. As Michael Lind puts it, “the privatization of American education, unless accompanied by strict government controls over the content of the curricula (extremely unlikely, since it is precisely the controls of various governmental bodies the voucher program attempts to circumvent, AW)...would probably accelerate the fissuring of the
American population into hostile tribes living in radically separate mental universes. These schools are most likely to teach an ossified version of the American canon, turning well-meaning and necessary attempts by educators such as E. D. Hirsch to describe American culture into prescriptive and unchanging cultural dogma.

A similar observation can and has been made about the appearance of gated communities all over the United States. Although the wealthy have always had ways to separate themselves from the rest of the population, American cities have traditionally contained reasonable amounts of public space in which difference was inevitably noticed, if not appreciated by all. By separating themselves from others, the wealthy will ensure that newer émigré groups feel disenfranchised (this will be true even if these communities allow in wealthy members of these groups, representative in skin color but not in culture), disinclined to join what they perceive to be a closed culture, and encouraged in their own tendencies to separation.

It has frequently been noted by American cultural commentators that separatist rhetoric, while quite loud, is confined to a relatively narrow group of self-styled spokesmen, political and cultural. The vast majority of immigrants (as well as the majority of members of minority groups already here) continue to believe in melting-pot ideology. This is generally held to be a good sign and I think that it is. However, the Yugoslav experience shows that it does not necessarily take much time for national advocates to go from isolated voices crying in the wilderness to the majority, particularly if their viewpoints have already become part of the educational curriculum. Dobrica Cosic was almost alone and unsupported in his attempts to raise Serbian national consciousness in the late 1960s. By 1992 he was president of the republic. Or suffice it to recall, for example, Josip Zuparic the Croatian from Zagreb who in a 1969 interview in NIN claimed that ordinary Croats used all sorts of Serbian expressions and considered themselves as much Yugoslav as Croatian. He lambasted a small group of anti-Serbian and anti-Yugoslav intellectuals as being out of touch with the practices of most Croats. By the early 1990s "Serbian" words were being systematically and effectively eliminated in the newly independent Croatia as part of official state policy, instituted by the very intellectuals who had been marginalized not long before.

Human beings in any society have a tendency to fear and dislike others who look, think, and act differently. It is almost certainly easier to avoid internal conflict in a society that is ethnically, 

---

70 Lind, p. 253.
71 In *Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1987), Hirsch himself notes this tendency as it applies to earlier reform efforts. Describing the intentions of the John Dewey inspired report entitled *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (1918), Hirsch comments: "They could not have been expected to foresee that, when their principles were actually put into effect in institutional settings, humaneness would be difficult to preserve." (p. 122) But he is curiously blithe regarding what he recognizes to be the dangers inherent in his list-based method of defining the content of American culture: "How can I deny that such misuse of the list is not only a danger but a near certainty?...Won't the whole project end up just as a large-scale crib sheet for general-knowledge tests?...Maybe, but that won't be the only result." p. 143
racially and/or religiously more rather than less homogeneous. Those countries that contain strikingly heterogeneous populations will always have problems reaching consensus, particularly under democratic forms of government. The relative success of such heterogeneous countries as Australia and the United States has unquestionably come, at least to a great extent, by their ability to treat their immigrant populations as tabula rasa which can be assimilated to an ever-evolving national culture. It is therefore hard to justify policies whose net results would be the recreation of precisely the situations that other, not so historically fortunate societies, have had to face. In the collapse of Yugoslavia we can see, in exaggerated and speeded up form, not only the results of the failure of culturally unifying policies, but the formula by which they happen. First smaller groups are encouraged to move away from the national culture because that culture is perceived as being too closely connected with the largest group in the population. After a certain period of time, members of the largest group begin to feel aggrieved as more power devolves to smaller groups. Instead of pushing for a more inclusive but nevertheless single national (or supra-national) culture, when they press for their own cultural and political “rights” members of the larger group tend to take up increasingly intolerant positions, and cultural conflict results. If the political situation is propitious, it proves relatively easy to turn cultural disagreement into something far more serious than academic conflict. By ignoring the lessons of Yugoslavia, what American leftist multiculturalists and their right-wing critics are doing is creating the conditions for their reproduction here. While Yugoslav leaders could not avoid these problems, we are more or less consciously creating them.

Andrew Wachtel, Northwestern University

---

72 Although he does not speak of Yugoslavia in particular, Thomas Sowell’s analysis of the results of affirmative action programs echoes my analysis of the path by which Yugoslavia gradually dissolved from the 1960s on.

“1) Preferential programs, even when explicitly and repeatedly defined as “temporary,” have tended not only to persist but also to expand in scope, either embracing more groups or spreading to wider realms for the same groups, or both.... (in Yugoslavia we saw the spread of national “rights-based” policies from the republics to the autonomous regions, AW)

2) Within the groups designated by government as recipients of preferential treatment, the benefits have usually gone disproportionately to those members already more fortunate.

3) Group polarization has tended to increase in the wake of preferential programs, with non-preferred groups reacting adversely, in ways ranging from political backlash to mob violence and civil war.”