

The Yugoslavian Puzzle: Which Nationalism, Whose War, and Other Unsettling Questions

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Leo Kuper, in his article on the prevention of genocide, argues that a heightened salience of plural divisions in society and polarisation of identity claims should be taken as the precursor to genocidal violence.¹ For Kuper, there is usually a superimposition of differences, territorial segregation, and inequality in economic and political participation on ethnic differentiation. Thus, organized ethno-nationalist revivalism in the context of coexistence of minority and majority communities can be identified as one of the most common cases for the conditions of polarization and communal antagonism to reach the saturation point of active participation in organized political violence.

Meanwhile, some communities are vulnerable to be targeted by organized violence more than others without any antecedent deterioration of their relationship with the dominant groups. This is primarily due to their traditional positioning as cultural scapegoats. Regarding the "cultural-others" of a territorial/nation state, the dehumanisation of the victims of genocidal warfare is achieved on the basis of the older beliefs and prejudices implicated on the target group. In other words, it is important to make connections between a deliberate policy of dehumanising victim populations in the process of their annihilation, and the historical roots of the cultural and ideological identification of victim populations as outsiders to a system.

In the case of former Yugoslavia, the enunciation of cultural-others is a very difficult task. Although the main community that is victimised through genocidal warfare is currently the

Bosnian Muslims, the origins of the civil war in Yugoslavia suggests a multiplicity of cultural-others that would have been prone to massacre-oriented armed clashes. Through the escalating levels of violence in Yugoslavia's tragic disintegration, loyalties were short-lived and interchangeable: Serbs versus Croats, Croats versus Serbs in Croatia and Serbs in Serbia, Serbs and Croats versus Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats versus Serbs, etc. This article analyzes the reduction of the multiplicity of Yugoslavia's cultural-others to the singular "Muslim" element. Today, the targeted Muslim community is that of Bosnian descent, and there are strong signs that in a very near future, the Albanian Muslims of Kosovo might be subject to similar atrocities. Therefore, it is urgent that the Yugoslavian case is analysed in a framework which focuses on the problems around Bosnia not simply as an episode of controversial land claims, but as part of a cultural and political conviction towards eliminating the "alien elements" in a national polity.²

Up to the 1970s, Yugoslavia was regarded as a success story in contradistinction to the dim economic prospects that Eastern European Communism seemed to offer. The Yugoslavian model symbolised a Third Way between Soviet-style centralisation and Western market economy. The background for Yugoslavia's different image is the 1948 split between Tito and Stalin, which announced Tito's Yugoslavia as liberated from Moscow's dictum.³ However, as Lendvai rightfully argues, there was more to Yugoslavia's special status on the international platform than the economic novelties of Yugoslav-style communism (Lendvai 1991, 152). Yugoslavia was singularly identified with a working model of federalism which joined together com-

munities with different linguistic, religious and ethnic characteristics. For the outsider observant of Yugoslavian politics, once its signs were there, the collapse of Yugoslavian federalism was therefore expected to take place in a gradual fashion which wouldn't lead into bloodshed. However, the scholars and politicians inside the former Yugoslavia have been issuing warnings of a fatal civil war soon after Tito's death and the practical end of his charismatic power as the unifying force of federalist centralism.⁴

The problems concerning the Yugoslavian model of federalism date back to the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. After the Second World War, Yugoslavia emerged as the only "nation" who liberated themselves from Nazism. It also survived the civil war between Croats and Serbs who were the main antagonists in the prewar union of the "South Slavs." The subsequent re-writings of Yugoslavian national history mythologised the success of the strong partisan movement against the Nazi invasion, and attempted to bring together the "national minorities" of the new Yugoslavia under the rubric of a heroic national spirit. However, the narrative unity of a people named "Yugoslavs" never established a common currency other than for the purposes of referring to people born into interethnic marriages, such as Tito himself, or army officials, members of the party, and state bureaucracy. This paradox of "Yugoslavia without Yugoslavs" can be explained on the basis of four factors.⁵

First of all, the unified narrative of a strong Yugoslavia did not match with the reality of the inter-communal strife between the Croats and Serbs who supposedly stood at opposite sides during the Second World War. In contradistinction with the official narra-

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tives of the history of the state of Yugoslavia, the popular culture of Serbian nationalism emphasises the "guilty consciousness" of the Croats and reinforces depictions of Croats as "a nation under probation" (Lendvai 1991, 255).

Secondly, the original premises of both Serbian and Croatian nationalism were fundamentally at odds with the federalist aspirations of a central Yugoslavian state. The "Greater Serbia" ideal which has emerged out of the ruins of the Habsburg Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century has long dictated that minority communities such as Macedonians, Albanians in Kosovo, Bosnian Muslims and Vojvodinians should be either suppressed or conciliated. Similar projections were spelled out by the "Greater Croatia" ideal which dreamt of incorporating Dalmatia and the greater part of Bosnia-Herzegovina into a new Croatia. Therefore, the six republics sanctified by Yugoslavian federalism were simultaneously designated as the possible preys for a larger Serbia or Croatia.

Thirdly, and finally, related to the stand the larger and stronger republics took in their relations with the smaller ones, over the years, the national minority communities other than the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes developed defensive nationalist agendas as a response to the scenarios of incorporation imposed on them from various sides of the Yugoslavian national polity. The Albanians of Kosovo, Bosnian Muslims, and Macedonians—the population figures of the first two including significant number of Muslims—perceived the Yugoslav state not necessarily as a protector of equal representation and harmonious coexistence. In particular, problems surrounding the national identity of Macedonians were multiplied due to Greece's and Bulgaria's open denial of the very existence of a people called "Macedonians."

If so, how did the grand ideal of Tito for a stronger and unified Yugoslavia survive the long decades of ethnic and communal strife before the actual breaking up caused by the current civil

war? The answer to this question lies in the tensions between the federalist and centralist political trends in the former Yugoslavia and how these trends were operationalized by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY). Despite the systemic centralisation of the Yugoslav state, the battle through the Tito decades (1945–80) over the rights of the units of the federal system put the six constituent republics of the former Yugoslavia in a very precarious situation vis-à-vis their relationship with each other.

Following the suppression of the so-called "Croatian Spring" of nationalist revivalism in 1971–72, the centripetal force of the Yugoslav state, the Party (LCY), had set its tone of voice in favour of ensuring utmost loyalty to the federation by all parties involved. However, at the level of policy making, instead of restraining the separatist undercurrents of Yugoslav politics, the LCY itself became the arena for the staging of savage ethno-nationalist conflicts.

In particular, the referential channelling of funds and investments in the wake of economic and administrative decentralisation heightened the tensions between "rich" and "poor" republics. During the long processes of decentralisation, what was pejoratively named as localism and particularism before became a legitimate political cause for the capturing of competing investment projects. Consequently, the differences between communists and noncommunists, or, bureaucrats and members of the civil society, were completely overshadowed by ethno-national allegiances (Lendvai 1991, 257). In other words, the so-called Yugoslav solution of federalism aggravated the already existing tensions between conflicting truth claims of ethno-nationalist groups within a single party system.

Over the years, the central state was exposed to substantial "Lebanisation" of the administrative apparatus, and the prospects of democratisation were gradually removed from the national agenda with the ascendance of Serbian officials to all the significant offices in

the state bureaucracy as well as in the national army. After Tito's death in 1980, the first episode which signalled the changing character of ethno-nationalist claims was the violent eruption of the demands in Kosovo for an autonomous province and equally violent crushing of these demands. Kosovo wanted not merely *de facto* but *de jure* constitutional status as a republic, and the removal of its formal ties to Serbia. (Lendvai 1991, 257; Denitch 1993, 26–27).

The clash between the Albanian majority in Kosovo and the Serbian-led Belgrade regime promptly fits to Kuper's preconditions for genocidal tendencies in ethnically polarised societies. For Serbian nationalists, the nascent Albanian nationhood was a threat for the memories of Kosovo as the cradle for the medieval Serbian empire of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Concomitantly, the Albanians of Kosovo who were a non-Slav people with different religious and linguistic affinities were identified as dissident elements to be diluted in the federalist political scheme. That is to say, prior to the actual breaking up of the federal system, although the revived hegemonical ambitions of Serbian nationalism were becoming identifiably strong, they were successfully disguised by the idiom of the unity and totality of the state of Yugoslavia.

Here, Enloe, Giddens and Zolberg are cited as the pathfinders of a new theoretical enterprise that is capable of analyzing ethnicity in its social, cultural and historical contextuality.⁶ Enloe's works and those of others that followed the path that she has opened have caused serious controversies across the disciplines. The "discovery" of the role of supposedly obsolescent ethnic communalism in national politics and the belated recognition of the persistent saliency of ethnic attachments has raised unsettling ideological and methodological questions concerning nationalism.

From one point of view, race, minority status, sectarianism, and regionalism can all impinge on the single notion of ethnicity as the new analyti-

cal black sheep. Instead of such a negative loading of ethnicity, Enloe, as well as Ben-Dor, suggests referring to ethnicity as a relational pattern, and thus looks at ethnicity as a dynamic phenomenon.⁷

Secondly, Enloe's and Zolberg's contributions to the field of critical studies of nationalism from the point of view of ethnicity are pioneering in terms of joining two specific lines of inquiry: ethnicity and military studies.

Enloe, Giddens and Zolberg argue that the crisscrossing is ever present outside the domain of authoritarian societies, since it is the underlying factor in consensus building. Concomitantly, the proposition that ethnic identity is a given to which national politics can only *react* is defeated in light of how the army and the police force systemically reshuffle ethnic categories for security and recruitment purposes.

Looking at the same issue from a different angle, we can argue that ethnic differentiation, official reinforcement or denial of ethnic identification, and the place of ethnicity in the larger framework of nationalism are issues that concern the survival of the central state apparatus and its legitimacy over an assumed national polity. In this framework, ethnicity becomes the middle term that is placed between "nation building" and "state building." State-building under the guise of nation-building stimulates a unique kind of historiography which treats the national polity as devoid of ethnic characteristics.

This deletion, however, has never been a matter of ignorance. Rather, it is a choice made in the name of strengthening the accountability of "national citizenry" on the basis of a unified national past. As a result, the tradition of the modern territorial/nation state erodes the location of ethnicity in the semantics of politics and culture. As such, in national politics, ethnicity is primarily claimed to stand for deception, ambiguity and euphemism.

At the surface level, this model certainly does not fit to the case of former Yugoslavia which was by definition a

multi-ethnic federalist state. However, once we start looking at the contingencies of ethno-nationalist essentialism in each of the six republics that made up the federal union, it becomes obvious that ethnic purity was a major concern in inter-republic relations.

While Slovenia was the closest to ethnic homogeneity, neither of the other five republics had the demographics to support their claims of an independent nation-state in a singular nationalist idiom. Particularly in Bosnia, the population distribution echoed the diversity that characterised the totality of the former Yugoslavian state. Consequently, the dynamics described by the thesis of the ethnocultural homogenisation of national history was put into effect in order to clarify the "real" people of Serbia, Croatia, and later Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia. The implications of ethnocultural homogenisation in a multi-ethnic setting are very direct in the sense that the dominant ethnic group defines itself as "the nation" and degrades the other ethnicities into the status of "minorities." This scheme of analysis has explanatory power for both Croatian and Serbian ethno-nationalist revivalism. However, for Bosnia, we need a much more complicated account in order to understand why the Bosnian Muslims' claim to be "the nation" was invalidated by the rival ethno-nationalist movements of the surrounding republics.

Initially the federalist policies of the former Yugoslavia does not seem to qualify for a theory of institutionalised practices of ethnic privileging and/or segregation. However, in reality, the gradual increase of Serbian presence in the central state apparatus and particularly in the national army is very suggestive. In the context of the structural relationship between military development, the strengthening of the police force and paramilitary units, and the utilization of ethnic politics for the political consolidation of an exclusive nationalist agenda, the rise of Serbian nationalism coalesces with the changing dynamics of who had the most powerful offices in the Yugosla-

vian central state before its death. For Giddens and Zolberg, the nation-state model is first and foremost characterised by its absolute command over the life and wellbeing of its members/citizens, and therefore there is an asymmetrical relationship between the central state and civil society.

In the cases of Serbian or Croatian leadership of the post-Yugoslavia era, this asymmetry has reached to a point whereby the territorial aspirations of these new states stripped the dissident elements in targeted areas from their right to live. In other words, during the clashes between Serbs and Croats, Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, or Croats and Bosnian Muslims, mechanisms of control over ethnically diversified claims of identity turned into episodes of war atrocities. As far as the different fractions of the civilian population in Bosnia are concerned, these atrocities in fact assumed a very accumulative and repetitive character, which qualified them for the definition of "ethnic cleansing."

In the wake of the end of totalitarian social and political formations in central-eastern Europe, new forms of nationalist identity claims and strong movements of religious or secular fundamentalism are rapidly filling the void left behind the trans-historical promises of a "new world order." In my view, among other examples, the civil war in Yugoslavia proves most powerfully that the equation of one nation with one nation-state set by the European precedent of nationalism, involves much more than the liberal-democratic idiom of national unity and equal participation. The commonly espoused argument about Serbian, Croat and Bosnian nationalism is that Yugoslavia in particular and Eastern Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa, and South America in general, accommodate anomalous applications of the European nation-state model with disastrous results. Here, I propose that the catastrophic events culminating into totalitarian regimes, civil wars and episodes of ethnic cleansing are actually endemic to the European blueprint for discourses of nationalism.

The nation-state model and the forms of cultural and political domination it accommodates prepare the ground for the nurturing of authoritarian cultural traditions loaded with passion for a utopian future unmatched with the regulated promises of constitutional patriotism and representative politics. In this context, the resistable ascendance of Serbian nationalism can not be seen as an anomaly that sets a cultural precedent for totalitarian expansionism. In other words, the Yugoslav civil war does not necessarily qualify for a case of archaic tribal claims leading into organized murder. Western Europe's own history has ample instances that would provide the background for the aspirations cherished by the orthodoxies of former Yugoslavian politics.

From this point onwards, my purpose here is to elaborate on overlapping cultural precedents of the elements of intolerance and sociopolitical violence embedded in the histories of nationalism in Europe on the one hand, and in the former Yugoslavia, on the other.

In the narratives of national history as well as in their particularist negations based on the revival of excluded identity claims, historical knowledge claims appear to be the battleground for a systematic assimilation of time and space. As such, a rhetorical mastery of the "national time" and "national space" becomes the tool for the hegemonic construction of a specific nationalist ideology. For instance, both Serbian and Croatian ethno-nationalisms revitalise the ideals of ancient Slavic Kingdoms as a historical justification (temporal aspect) for their territorial expansionism (spatial aspect). Consequently, the juxtaposition of time and space horizons—history and territory/historicity and territoriality—is essential for both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms of nationalism for the validation of a selective set of identity claims.⁸ In turn, the forms of the validations of chosenness—if not superiority—have a common relationship to the utilisation of power.

Giddens approaches the central state not as an almighty political form of modernity, but as the centre of circumscribed arenas for the generation of administrative power, and as the locus for the concentration of allocative and authoritative resources. Giddens thus introduces structural and systemic forms of violence into the analysis of the central state.

In this new framework, it is necessary to think about the level of concen-

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tration of allocative resources as derivative of the institutional consolidation of authoritative power. Thereof, the concept of surveillance becomes crucial for understanding communal modes of recording and remembering.

Surveillance is an indirect or attenuated use of violence which bridges military power with policing power. Surveillance can also be instrumental in examining the externalised and systematised character of information gathered for purposes of perpetuation of the authority of the central state.

In the light of the debates on the linkages between institutional and cultural dimensions of nationalism, the attainment of ethno-religious, linguistic, economic and territorial integration during the initial phases of nationalism should be regarded as a geopolitical calculation based on the reflection of authoritarian power relations over allocative ones. The end result of the formalisation of this reflection is a fundamental reordering of the civil society. In former Yugoslavian political unity, this reordering placed the Northern and Christian elements in a privileged position vis-à-vis the Southern and Muslim segments of the federalist structure. As a result, the allocative distribution of resources and funds were dictated by the hierarchy of valid ethno-nationalist claims. So, the structural premises of the Euro-

pean nation-state model implied in an explicitly multi-ethnic and multinational context created the conditions for the explosion of the Yugoslavian federalist system on the grounds of separatist and singular ethno-nationalist claims.

At the beginning of my work, I asked why Bosnian claims for autonomy were degraded to the cries of a people without a history as opposed to the legitimacy attributed to Croatian and Serbian nationalism. I believe the answer lies in the original hierarchy of the units of the federalist system in the former Yugoslavia. Serbs, Croats and Slovenes identified themselves as the true force behind the nation of "Southern Slavs," and the other components of the Yugoslav unity were thus reduced to satellite communities which were pulled to the orbit of Slavic unity. In particular, the Muslim communities were signified as the remnants of the Ottoman imperial invasion which gave rise to a hybrid population lacking the true qualities of the Slavic nations. As such, when the time came for breaking up, the scenario was obvious for the powerful republics of the former Yugoslav unity: those who had access to power and who at the same time possessed the true characteristics of a "Slav nationality" were ready for the glories of the independent singular nation-states, while those who had ethnically and racially mixed population compositions, or those who did not have the prerequisites for a true "Slav nationality" had to be eaten up alive.

To summarise, the ethnic-cleansing of Bosnians in the Yugoslav civil war does not seem to be an anomaly at all if the ethno-nationalist claims of Serbian, Croat and Bosnian nationalism are contextualized. During the years of federalist power-sharing, the Muslim elements were always made to stay at the lower echelons of the allocative and authoritative power relations. After the collapse of the federal, Yugoslavia's Christian and Northern communities have automatically turned against the Southern and Muslim communities based on the justification that