



Markovich, Slobodan G. "Memories of Victimhood in Serbia and Croatia from the 1980s to the Disintegration of Yugoslavia." *Genocidal Nightmares: Narratives of Insecurity and the Logic of Mass Atrocities*. Ed. Abdelwahab El-Affendi. : Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 117–140. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 3 Feb. 2016. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501302169.ch-007>>.

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## Memories of Victimhood in Serbia and Croatia from the 1980s to the Disintegration of Yugoslavia

Slobodan G. Markovich

This chapter analyses the development of victimhood narratives in Serbia and Croatia in the 1980s and 1990s by examining historical experiences and narratives developed by influential intellectuals. It explores state-sponsored narratives and popular narratives among Serbs and Croats in royal Yugoslavia (1918–1941), the tragic experience of the Second World War and the subsequent development of communist myths. The development of victimhood narratives among Serbs and Croats is followed both in Yugoslavia and in émigré circles. The contributions and role of three disenchanted Yugoslav Communists is also analysed: Vladimir Dedijer and Dobrica Cosic in Serbia and Franjo Tujman in Croatia. Victimhood narratives are seen as concomitant with the vacuum of values that followed the crisis of communism in Yugoslavia in the 1980s.

Although narratives of oppression appeared only a few years after the first Yugoslavia was created in 1918, they reached their climax in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s. By the 1980s, these narratives were noticeable among all Yugoslav nations but were most widespread among Serbs and Croats. By the 1990s, they also strongly influenced Bosnian Muslims. Narratives of victimhood and genocide against Serbs were strengthened by the Serbian elite, who highlighted the traumatic experiences of the First and Second World Wars. In particular, they focused on the victims of Jasenovac concentration camp, run by the Ustasha Nazi regime of the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War. Croatian narratives, in contrast, highlighted the oppression of Croats by the Serbian bourgeoisie in the first Yugoslavia (1918–1941) and similar oppression by Serbs in the second Yugoslavia. Parallel narratives developed among Croatian émigré circles focused on the Bleiburg massacre, an event that took place at the very end of the Second World War in which Yugoslav Partisans carried out retaliation against Croats.

These narratives have been the subject of several studies. The best documented is a monograph by David Bruce MacDonald entitled *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*.<sup>1</sup> MacDonald demonstrated a thorough knowledge of opposing narratives, collected a substantial

amount of data and provided far-reaching insights. Yet, his lack of factual knowledge of Yugoslav history and his inability to read texts in Serbo-Croat made it difficult for him to adequately frame events in their historical context or to distinguish between relevant and scarcely known participants in the debate. Another valuable insight came from Jasna Dragović-Soso, who provided a detailed and very-well researched intellectual history of Serbia and Yugoslavia in the 1980s. She dedicated a special chapter to 'the theme of genocide' which is of direct relevance to this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I will try to analyse two narratives of victimhood centred on Jasenovac and Bleiburg and put them into the context of the decaying Yugoslav communist state. I will also attempt to analyse the main protagonists who disseminated these narratives and their motives and will endeavour to trace how different and sometime opposite narratives overlapped and fused. To properly set narratives within their historical background, I will also attempt to summarize the findings of historians to enable a full understanding of the narratives analysed.

### Historical background: War trauma and post-traumatic narratives

To understand narratives that undermined Yugoslavia in the 1980s, one has to go back at least to the First World War, of which Yugoslavia was one result. The experience of the First World War ushered in a new era in European history (1914–1945) which the British historian Eric Hobsbawm called 'the age of catastrophe'. The British and the French remember it as 'The Great War', with experiences more traumatic for their populations than the Second World War. In The Great War, half a million British men under the age of thirty were killed; losses were notably high among the upper classes.<sup>3</sup> Although the German Empire and Russia had the highest casualties in absolute figures, Serbia had the highest proportional losses of all belligerents. No other country mobilized such a high percentage of its male population. Almost the entire male population between eighteen and fifty-five was drafted into forces totalling 822,000 men, of whom close to half were killed in the course of the war. Including civilian casualties, the dead approach one million, or a quarter of the total population.

Aldcroft and Morewood concluded that, 'in relative terms human losses in most other countries pale into insignificance'.<sup>4</sup> The bulk of victims were civilians who died as a consequence of the typhus epidemic of 1915. Some froze or starved to death during the Albanian campaign in the autumn and winter of 1915/1916. Many died of hunger and exhaustion during the Austro-German occupation, and some were killed in retaliations carried out by the occupying forces. As the American historian John Lampe put it: 'One way or another, half of Serbia's male population between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five had perished'.<sup>5</sup> The Albanian campaign later turned into an epic narrative and an important part of a foundation myth of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The number of Serbs killed in the First World War has never been the subject of discussion, and most estimates of the total number of Serbian dead are within the

range of 1–1.25 million.<sup>6</sup> The level of suffering was such that it was unnecessary to construct state-sponsored narratives of victimhood. Mere personal memories and reminiscences were enough to keep The Great War in popular memory as a period of utmost Serbian suffering.

In addition to the great losses, another difficult memory remained in Serbia. The bulk of the army, the majority of students and almost the whole political elite spent the last three years of war in a sort of exile in the Hellenic Kingdom, and in areas controlled by Britain and France. This traumatic experience strengthened aspirations among Serbian elites for the creation of a large and strong state of Yugoslavia to guarantee that a similar experience could not be repeated in the future.

After the First World War, a group of new states were brought into being by the Treaties of Versailles. They were the result of the spirit of that age expressed in the fourteen points advocating national self-determination drafted by American President Woodrow Wilson in January 1918. Among the new states were Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later called Yugoslavia). These two countries were notable for their lack of ethnic majorities, since Czechs in Czechoslovakia amounted to 46 per cent of the total population and Serbs in the new kingdom represented just 39–40 per cent (44 per cent if we include Macedonians, whose distinct ethnic identity had not yet been clearly formed). Additionally, 24 per cent of the population of Yugoslavia in 1921 were Croats, 8.5 per cent Slovenes and 5.4 per cent Bosnian Muslims (claimed by both Serbs and Croats). Altogether 'Yugoslavs' (various South Slavs) constituted some 83 per cent of the total population. In both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, common Slavic traditions were emphasized. In the Yugoslav version, this was a South-Slavic tradition from which Bulgarians were excluded (even though in the literal sense, 'Yugoslav' (South Slav) would include Bulgarians). The official position was that Yugoslavia was comprised of three tribes and one nation or 'three named people', a phrase used as early as 1916 by the Serbian Regent and, later, Yugoslav King Alexander.<sup>7</sup> Yet, it meant that non-Slavs, (Germans, Hungarians, Albanians, Turks, and Italians) who comprised at least one eighth of the total population, were excluded from the official definition of the new state. The new ideology was most clearly manifested in the country's coat of arms, which was a combination of historical Serbian and Croatian coats of arms and a design that symbolized Slovenes. The anthem also consisted of four parts, of which the first and the last were taken from the Serbian anthem, *God of Justice*, the second from the Croatian anthem, *Our Beloved*, and the third from a Slovene song.

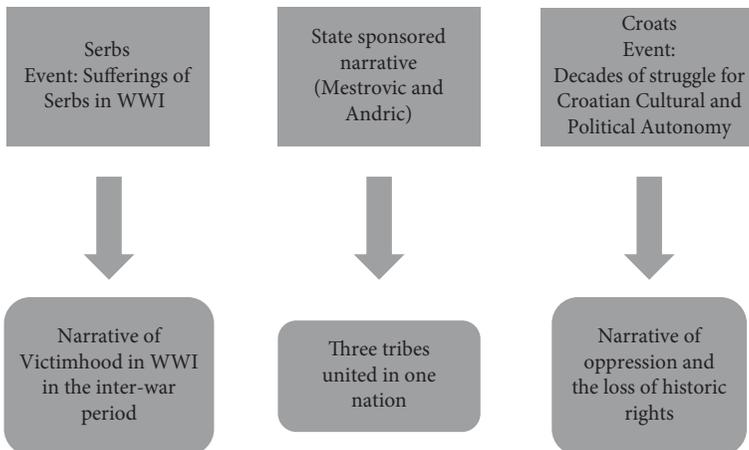
It proved more than difficult to connect 'Yugoslavs' into a unifying history. Two historical narratives, the Serbian and Croatian, clashed just months after the establishment of the new Kingdom in December 1918. There was a highly symbolic Croatian narrative insisting on the historical rights and national autonomy of the Croats, with long-held suspicion of political centres outside Croatia, and there was a narrative of victimhood among the Serbs, insisting that Serbians martyrs had served as the cornerstone for the future state.

The inability of Serbian political elites to accommodate the Croatian narrative provoked mutual national antagonism. The traumatic experience of the First World

War strengthened centralist tendencies in Serbia, and once the memory of Serbian victims had solidified, they entered the realm of the sacred. Any Croatian comment on Serbian victims was certain to provoke Serbian dissatisfaction and even revulsion. As a result, national fervour began which ended in the tragic murder of two deputies in the Parliament of Yugoslavia by a Serbian deputy from Montenegro in the building of the Kingdom's Assembly on the 20 June 1928. The most popular Croatian politician, Stjepan Radic, died as a result of his wounds several weeks later (in August), and the country was riled by nationalist turmoil. Conditions were such that even such an outstanding proponent of the unified state as King Alexander (nicknamed 'the Unifier' for a short time in 1928) considered letting Croatia secede.

Thus, two opposing narratives of Yugoslavia led to the first bitter incident in mutual relations. Needless to say, after his death, Radic was sanctified as a national martyr, while the general rise of right-wing extremism in Europe in the 1930s strengthened authoritarian tendencies throughout Yugoslavia. In the end, a new Serbian ruler, Prince Paul had to ascend the throne and grant substantial autonomy to Croatia in 1939. But this compromise came too late.

Although there was no consistent centrally planned cultural policy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the state's very name was a sort of narrative. Originally it was called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the change of name in 1929 signalled increased efforts to fuse the three national identities into a single Yugoslav one. The problem was that the three separate national identities already existed, and the Croatian identity, as a central antagonist to the state-sponsored Yugoslav identity, was actually strengthened in Royalist Yugoslavia, particularly after the murder of Stjepan Radic. Officially it was claimed in Yugoslavia that there were three tribes that had united in 1918 into one nation. The main cultural protagonist of this new identity was Ivan Mestrovic, an internationally renowned Croatian sculptor. Like Alfonse Mucha



**Figure 7.1** Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1919–1929), Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941/1945)

of Czechoslovakia, Mestrovic drew his inspiration from a distant Slavic past that was seen as common to all three nations and from key events in national narratives of opposition to foreign domination, such as the Kosovo Battle. Additionally, a group of very influential Serbian and Croatian historians such as Vladimir Corovic, Stanoje Stanojevic, Viktor Novak and Ferdo Sisic and a well-known writer, Ivo Andric also disseminated Yugoslavism. Yet, their efforts proved insufficient.<sup>8</sup>

In inter-war Yugoslavia, Serbs clearly dominated administrative structures and the army. For example, in thirty-nine inter-war governments, Serbs occupied the office of prime minister thirty-eight times and Croats, not once. At the same time, 80 per cent of staff officers were Serbs by 1927, and the police force was 60 per cent Serbian. This domination was particularly disproportional in Vojvodina and Bosnia, both of which mainstream Serbian and Croatian societies viewed as their own. Slovenia was an exception, for the administration there was controlled by Slovenes. This explains both the dedication of Slovene elites to Yugoslavia and the increasing dissatisfaction of Croatian elites with the country. Despite the fact that Croatian symbols were fully included in the new state's symbolism; that Croats enjoyed a proportional representation in the Assembly; and that the Croatian language and Latin script were officially used, Croatian expectations were not met. Very soon, and particularly after 1928, mainstream Croatian narratives viewed Yugoslavia as a dungeon of the Croatian people.

For subsequent communist narratives on Royalist Yugoslavia, two features are of utmost importance. The first is that after an early success in elections of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1920, the party was banned in December 1920. When the Yugoslav Minister of the Interior was killed the next year by a communist assassinator, the state began to persecute the Communist Party. Since the police force was mostly Serbian, Yugoslav Communists viewed Royalist Yugoslavia very negatively and saw the Serbian bourgeoisie as the primary culprit in their oppression. For the communist narrative, it was also significant that King Alexander allowed a large number of White Russian refugees to settle in Yugoslavia, sponsored their associations and harboured their army general staff in Yugoslavia.

## The tragic burden of the Second World War

When troops of the Third Reich occupied the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941, the country was already exhausted by inter-ethnic strife. Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy took advantage of this to further fuel national antagonisms by creating an 'Independent State of Croatia' (NDH) out of Croatia and Slavonia (including Srem), Dalmatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ustasha Party, the most extreme of the Croatian political scene, was placed at the head of the new state. What followed was an effort to create, through genocide, an ethnically pure state, cleansed of Serbs, Jews and Roma. Some recent estimates suggest that between 370,000 and 410,000 Serbs were killed in the NDH, along with around 75 per cent of the Jewish population.<sup>9</sup> However, mainstream publications in Serbia put the number of Serbs killed in the

NDH as high as one million. The truth, however, is that no one has ever been able to accurately estimate the number of Serbs or other Yugoslavs killed during the Second World War. Even organizations dealing with the Holocaust have come to contradictory estimates on how many Serbs were killed in NDH. This only fuelled a pamphlet war of competing narratives in émigré circles. The symbolic focal point of these debates became the number of victims killed in the Ustasha run concentration camp of Jasenovac.

In Serbia, additionally, there were two resistance movements, the communist movement under Soviet control, known as the Partisans and the Yugoslav Home Army, based mostly on traditional Serbian identity, and to a lesser extent on Yugoslav ideology. Popularly, but incorrectly known as Chetniks, this latter was led by the royalist Colonel Dragoljub Mihailovich. At the end of 1941, a civil war began between these two movements, ending with the victory of the Communists in the second half of 1944. A bloody revenge followed against ideological enemies, first affecting Montenegro and Serbia, and, in May 1945, Croatia and Slovenia. Many members of the political, cultural and economic elite were victims of this terror, and tens of thousands of Croatian and Serbian political refugees left the country. Additionally, many Serbian officers decided not to return to Communist Yugoslavia but remained in Western Europe. Thus, two great groups of émigrés were created: a Croatian group, notably in the countries that had sympathized with Nazi Germany such as Argentina and Chile, but also in Germany, and a Serbian group, consisting of both pro-Mihailovich and collaborationist forces in Anglo-Saxon countries, notably in Britain, the United States and Australia.

The two terrors: the nationalist one, conducted by Ustashe in Croatia, and the Communist one, conducted against ideological enemies throughout Yugoslavia, left deep scars and bitter memories. Additionally, acts of terror committed by local Chetnik commanders against Bosnian Muslims in Eastern Bosnia left bitter memories in Bosnia. The two émigré communities focused on different sets of events. Serbian émigrés focused on both Ustasha massacres of Serbs and communist retaliation, while Croatian émigrés mostly focused on massacres committed by Communists at the end of the Second World War. Two opposing narratives were created, and émigré propaganda based all their subsequent efforts on them. For Croats, the focal point became the Bleiburg massacre, while for Serbs the central point has remained Jasenovac, and to a much lesser extent the red terror of 1944/1945.

## Communist myths

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which took over the country at the end of the war, developed its own narratives based on a series of myths. Although the Communist Party never went so far as to proclaim its own calendar, as did Fascist Italy, nonetheless, the year 1941 and the beginning of the Communist uprising became year zero. A new ideology was consecrated, and for this purpose five myths were employed and fully developed by the mid-1950s.

1. The myth of merciful revolution in which the majority of Yugoslavia's inhabitants participated and in which no mention of terror at the end of the war could be made, except in very few, carefully supervised publications.
2. The myth of the great personal role of the Yugoslav dictator, Josip Broz Tito in global history, particularly in the non-Aligned world, accompanied by his personality cult.
3. The myth of the outstanding geo-strategic position of Yugoslavia as a bridge between East and West.
4. The myth of the invincible Yugoslav Army.
5. The myth of 'brotherhood and unity', which included the postulation that war crimes were committed by bourgeois elements of all nations and that all national bourgeoisies were to be blamed equally.

All five myths were essentially Yugoslav and comprised the essence of Communist Yugoslavism, an attempt to create a new Yugoslav socialist nation. This attempt had clearly failed by the late 60s, when Croatian intellectuals refused to abandon their own name in a common language that was called Serbo-Croatian. Moreover, with the creation of a self-governing Kosovo and the Albanian political elite that began ruling it in the sixties, even the state's pan-Slavic anthem entitled 'Oh, Slavs' ceased to reflect reality, since one-eighth of the federation was neither populated nor ruled by Slavs. However, two central institutions of the communist dictatorship in Yugoslavia, the Communist Party and the Yugoslav People's Army, continued to exploit these myths. While the first three myths were specifically developed by Yugoslav Communists, the last two were only variations on previous myths of the invincible Serbian Army and one nation consisting of three tribes. The Communist Party insisted that atrocities during the war had been committed by the bourgeoisie of all nations. The Party saw inter-war Yugoslavia along Comintern lines as a dungeon of nationalities where the jail keeper was the Serbian bourgeoisie.

Tito's personality cult was one of the key Communist narratives, together with claims that the Yugoslav political system known as workers' self-management was unique and the most progressive in the world. Similar claims were made by all other communist countries that broke up with the Soviet Union, including Albania and China. Yet, Yugoslavia's openness towards the West led to the acceptance of this narrative by some leading leftists in the West. Moreover, Tito's cult was supported even by some Western countries such as Britain. It is important to note that both Tito and the Partisan movement in the Second World War had official biographies from which many episodes that could undermine the 'brotherhood and unity' narrative were excised. For instance, episodes such as Tito's participation in the Austro-Hungarian Army's drive against Serbian troops in 1914 or contacts with Germans during the Second World War were completely omitted.

These Yugoslav narratives were demolished between the late 1960s and mid-1980s, when two national movements re-emerged (in Croatia and in Kosovo). By the mid-eighties, Serbian nationalism re-emerged as well. This was exactly when narratives on genocide and victimhood started to gain momentum. The most difficult communist

legacy in this field, one that has been felt ever since, is the tabooing of some of the most sensitive issues, including the question of genocide against Serbs, Jews and Roma in the NDH and the massacres of Croatian and other troops at the end of the Second World War. Banned in Communist Yugoslavia, narratives about these episodes were radicalized in émigré circles and through personal memories found ways to be expressed even in Communist Yugoslavia.

### Debating the Jasenovac concentration camp

In Communist Yugoslavia, publishing works on the Second World War was permitted only to historians who were party members and demonstrated an inclination toward Marxist interpretations. Although groups of critically oriented historians did exist (particularly in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Sarajevo), they all had to stay out of any debate on the Second World War. Whatever the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (later called the League of Communists) proclaimed to be the official version of history had to be followed by communist historians, who were rewarded for their discipline by huge honoraria for their contributions. Since state commissions had, immediately after the war, established the official war losses of Yugoslavs, all historians dealing with the Second World War were obliged to use these figures.

The figures were, however, not based on serious research. According to testimony, published in 1999 by a retired professor of Notre Dame University, Vladeta Vuckovic, it was he who, in March 1947, while still a BA student in Mathematics, was put in charge fulfilling a request given to the Statistical Bureau of Yugoslavia. A request was made by top party ideologue Edvard Kardelj to prepare a report on Yugoslav war casualties during the Second World War. Vuckovic hastily (within two weeks) calculated total war losses of Yugoslavs at about 1,709,000. Yet, his calculations included not only casualties but also projected demographic losses (including unborn and missing persons). However, Kardelj, soon to become the leading Yugoslav ideologue, presented this estimation some weeks later at a conference in Paris as fact. There, he simply turned demographic losses into victims. Since no party report could be challenged, as soon as comrade Kardelj pronounced that 1.7 million Yugoslavs had been killed, that became the official estimate. Vuckovic claimed that his estimates were published in twelve copies of a confidential brochure for internal use only. Yet none of these copies has been found, and this prompted an ongoing debate on war losses in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s.<sup>10</sup> The debate, however, had by that time already been going on for decades in émigré circles.

The only serious effort in Communist Yugoslavia to establish the correct number of victims ended in failure. In June 1964, the Federal Yugoslav Commission for the Registration of War Victims was formed. The register of victims was carried out in November 1964 but in such a way that the methodology used excluded victims from military formations of defeated forces. The commission found 597,323 victims. No effort was made to collect data on who had done the killing, which in the opinion of leading Belgrade statistician Srdjan Bogosavljević ‘reveals something of the motives of the then leadership of Yugoslavia: there was an unwillingness to stir up and bring into the forefront

the barely pacified intolerance among nations that had reached its peak during the war.<sup>11</sup> Actually, the result was worrying for Yugoslav Communists. If the official figure of 1.7 million victims was correct, then that would mean that more than one million people from anti-communist military formations had been killed. If it was not correct, then it would mean that official data on the Second World War could be challenged. In either case, the official interpretation of history would be seriously undermined.

The issue of crimes committed against Serbs in the NDH was raised by a prominent intellectual as early as 1948, when an eminent Croatian historian and professor at Belgrade University, Viktor Novak, published a bulky book in Zagreb entitled *Magnum crimen. Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj* (Magnum Crimen. Half a Century of Clericalism in Croatia). It dealt in detail with crimes committed by Croatian Catholic priests during the Second World War. Most of the copies of it disappeared soon after. It was republished in Sarajevo in 1960 but could not be published in Belgrade until 1986. The debate was reopened in Serbia in 1985 when a Serbian political émigré, Bogoljub Kochovich, published his book in Serbo-Croat on war losses in Yugoslavia, in which he claimed, based on demographic calculations, that the number of Yugoslavs killed during the Second World War was 1,014,000. In his foreword to the third edition of his book, Kochovich noted:

On many occasions I have made statements on myths among many so-called nationalists from all of the Yugoslav peoples 'that victims mostly belong to a single nation', or that 'victims were from one nation only'. Speaking on my figures on the actual losses among Serbs and Montenegrins, I have also written the following: 'For many so-called nationalists among the Serbs this will seem a 'scandalously' small figure.'<sup>12</sup>

Some critically oriented intellectuals accepted this figure as a way out of a long-running inflammatory polemic that had the potential to encourage new divisions and conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

Serbian victims in Croatia fall into a completely different category. They found themselves in the midst of the war of narratives in the 1980s and 1990s, and this has continued ever since. Therefore, it is not surprising that Kochovich's calculations have not been generally accepted and discussion continues. Discussion has been further complicated by the fact that many critically oriented historians have decided to stay out of this debate.<sup>14</sup>

In my opinion, there are two major reasons why demographic calculations may not be accepted for the estimation of the number of war victims. The first is that the period between two national censuses that has been used as a basis for the estimation was too long (1931 and 1948). This means that if the birth rate is estimated to be slightly smaller or higher, one will automatically get results differing on a scale of up to a hundred thousand victims (Kochovich himself recognized this fact). Additionally, one cannot positively estimate the number of refugees who left Yugoslavia in 1944–1945. Most importantly, the two censuses were made in two completely different polities. While the first census was organized in the semi-authoritarian Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the latter was organized in a totalitarian polity in which the communist secret police had the right

to eliminate any internal enemy. One may realistically assume that with its resources, the Kingdom was not able to list the whole population, especially in rural areas and among inhabitants without permanent addresses. The second census was conducted at the moment when Yugoslav totalitarianism had reached its peak, and only a few could have escaped the census. In 1931, the census listed 13,934,038 inhabitants of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. If we assume that the first census failed to list only 2 per cent of population, we get 280,000 more people. Had it missed 5 per cent, then the list of missing would include almost 700,000 people. It is for these reasons that demographic calculations can only be taken as opinion, no matter how professional their compiler.<sup>15</sup>

A more sensitive issue is posed by German sources. Some Nazi officials in Croatia complained that Ustasha persecution of Serbs was undermining the overall German policy in South-East Europe, and they compiled reports on Serbian victims in Croatia. For instance, in February 1942, a certain Von Horstenau assessed that, by that point, some 300,000 Serbs had been killed in the NDH, while another official called Neubacher claimed, in April 1944, that 750,000 had been killed. Thus, numbers used by Serbian historians are based on Nazi estimations. Here lies a real political problem. If any Serbian historian supported smaller figures, he would risk being accused of having even less sympathy for Serbian victims than some Nazi officials.

Yet, the problem of methodology has remained. Namely, the only serious way to establish the exact number of victims is to make lists of victims with their names, place and date of their death. Something like this has been done in Kragujevac, where severe German retaliation took place against the local population in October 1941. After two guerrilla movements in Serbia staged separate anti-German uprisings (the Royalists in May, and the Communists in July), an order to suppress the uprisings came from Berlin. On 16 September, Hitler demanded that, in occupied areas, 100 locals should be executed for every German officer or soldier killed, and fifty should be executed for every wounded German. In the period between 1 August and 5 December 1941, German troops killed 11,522 insurgents and executed 21,809 hostages in occupied Serbia.<sup>16</sup> The bloody autumn of 1941 has remained in the memory of the population of Serbia ever since. The most notorious retaliation took place in the central Serbian town of Kragujevac. Communist historians claimed that 7,000 persons were killed in the period 18–21 October 1941. This was based on the testimony of a person who survived execution, Mr. Zivojin Jovanovic. He testified at the Allied Military Court in Nuremberg in July 1947 that around 8,000 were murdered. Communist historians later accepted the figure of 7,000 and for decades it was an untouchable truth, and the Kragujevac massacre became a focal point in communist narratives of the anti-fascist struggle in Serbia. Thus, the Memorial Museum 'October 21' was established in 1953. After decades of carrying out its own research, the museum reached the conclusion that 2,795 hostages had been executed by German forces and that sixty-one persons survived the execution. Serbian and German historians fully agreed on the number of those who were executed in Kragujevac massacre.<sup>17</sup> This episode demonstrates that it is possible to reach mutually agreeable numbers even on a very sensitive issue.

The other good example is very recent. The number of casualties in the Wars for Yugoslav Succession (1991–1999) will soon be known, thanks to the work of three

NGOs from Sarajevo, Belgrade and Zagreb. The original estimation of 200,000–300,000 casualties during the Wars for Yugoslav Succession in Bosnia from 1992 till 1995 was resolved when the Sarajevo Research and Documentation Centre published its findings and established that total number of casualties, including missing persons, is around 97,207.<sup>18</sup> The centre has been able to identify the exact number of persons killed by nationality, region, gender, age and the military unit involved, and it is now very difficult even for nationalists to reject this list, although some have used it selectively.

Similar research could not be done by an independent commission in Communist Yugoslavia on the Second World War victims, since the Communist Party would not allow it. Yet, a commission existed and its findings from 1964 were classified as confidential, as was the case of the file on the Kragujevac massacre, which was only recently disclosed. In the 1990s, when this topic was very much debated, it was impossible to do serious investigation on the topic. Nowadays, too few survivors are left from the Second World War to carry out such research, and both documents and demographic estimates have proven to be relevant, but not sufficient, sources for making estimations. Therefore, one may regretfully say that the opportunity to compile an exact list of those who lost their lives in the Second World War has been missed. Estimations were and have remained estimations only. The absence of exact data in this sensitive field is likely to prolong radical narratives on genocide.

In Communist times, discussion of massacres was a favourite topic in émigré circles. The two principal adversaries of Yugoslav communism were the Serbian and Croatian émigré communities. In contrast to the Croatian post-WWII political emigration, which was more or less unified in defending the legacy of the NDH, the Serbian post-WWII political emigration was, and has remained, deeply divided between the majority of those who supported General Mihailovich (mostly in the United States), and a very vocal minority of those who supported the Serbian fascist movement of Dimitrije Ljotic during the Second World War but remained Yugoslavs and wanted to re-establish pre-war Yugoslavia. Moreover, the Serbian émigré community was hostilely divided between those who supported the Serbian Orthodox Church run from communist Belgrade and those who supported the rival Serbian Orthodox Church independently run from the United States. There were also small groups of pro-Yugoslav emigrants gathered around the journal *Naša reč*, who advocated a new democratic and federal Yugoslavia. Bogoljub Kochovich was an émigré belonging to the latter group.

## Discussions of Bleiburg

At the end of the war in May 1945, there was a massive movement of NDH troops trying to escape towards Austria, accompanied by civilians. They continued to fight for six days after the capitulation of Nazi Germany and thus were the last axis army to surrender in Europe, on 15 May 1945. Other anti-Communist troops and Germans also endeavoured to escape Tito's Partisans. British troops handed them over to Yugoslav authorities. The number of Croats who were handed over was estimated by Croatian émigré sources to be in the hundreds of thousands, and various authors have

suggested figures between 180,000 (Ivan Babic) and 410,000 people. Most German authors assessed the total number of those who were handed over (a broader group including Slovenes, the Yugoslav Home Army and Montenegrin Chetniks, in addition to Croats) at around 200,000. For their part, Yugoslav Communists acknowledged that between 74,000 (of which 24,000 were civilians) and more than 100,000 persons were encircled in the last days of the war, and the Yugoslav Veterans Association provided a figure implying that about 116,000 Croatian troops were captured along with 20,000 members of various Serbian and Slovene formations.<sup>19</sup> Jozo Tomasevich, who studied this affair for years, came to the following conclusion:

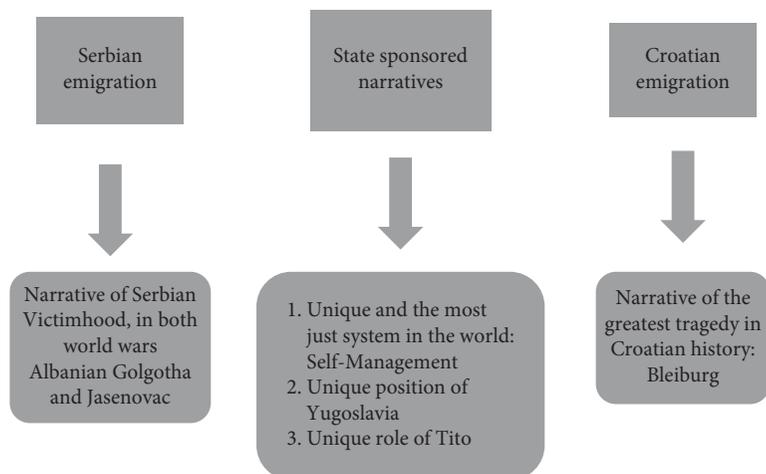
The fact is that it is absolutely impossible to establish the exact number of Croatian soldiers and civilian refugees who tried to flee to Austria but were forced to surrender to the Partisans.<sup>20</sup>

Tomasevich, however, accepts Zerjavic's estimate that, in addition to 10,000 Serbs and Slovenes, around 60,000 Croats were killed at the end of the war, including 50,000 in Bleiburg and 10,000 at Viktring. In any case, 'the tragedy of Bleiburg', or 'the Bleiburg massacre' as it came to be known in émigré circles, was the key propaganda tool of pro-Ustasha émigré organizations during the Cold War and is an issue that still deeply divides Croatian society. A typical example of the passion the debate evoked may be found in Ante Beljo's phraseology. Beljo called Bleiburg the 'Croatian Holocaust'.<sup>21</sup> Beljo's book is mainly a selection of patriotic and jingoist paragraphs from various Croatian authors. A typical definition of the Bleiburg massacre is provided in a book by George J. Prpić (*Tragedies and Migrations in Croatian History*, Toronto, 1973):

In 1945 the same West delivered them in Bleiburg mercilessly to 'Operation Slaughterhouse', the bloodiest orgy in Balkan history. Of all tragedies, Bleiburg was the greatest in Croatian history. It resulted in the death and exodus of over one million men, women, and children. As long as we exist as a nation, Croats will remember this horrible genocide.<sup>22</sup>

Another Croatian émigré, Bruno Ante Busic, published a paper in 1980 on Croatian losses in the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> The importance the Yugoslav Communist Secret Service attributed to this debate can be seen from the fact that Busic was assassinated in Paris on 16 October 1978, very likely by the Secret Service. Since the archives of Federal SDB (Agency of State Security) are still not available, one cannot say how many Serbian and Croatian émigrés were killed by the Yugoslav secret service, but it seems quite likely that it was the Federal Yugoslav Secret Service and its branches in the Yugoslav republics that stood behind most of the murders in the émigré community. This only strengthened anti-Communist sentiments among Croats in exile and gave the impression of an almost everyday war with Yugoslav Communists who were mostly seen as Serbs.<sup>24</sup>

A very important role in this debate was played by the Croatian scholar and former Communist general, **Franjo Tudjman (1922–1999)**. By the late sixties, he claimed



**Figure 7.2** Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1946–1963), Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1991)

that the total real loss of population of Yugoslavia was between 700,000 and 800,000, which was the lowest figure of Yugoslav war losses ever. By the seventies, Tadjman had become a prominent figure in Croatia. In his youth, he had joined the Partisan movement, in 1941. His father died under unclear circumstances in 1945, but family tradition claimed that he was killed by the Yugoslav Communist Secret Service – OZNA. In the late fifties, Tadjman became a leading military historian and, in 1960, he was promoted to the rank of Major General. In 1961, he became the director of the Institute for the History of the Labour Movement of Croatia, and thus joined the ranks of privileged Yugoslav Communist historians, and became a lecturer at the University of Zagreb in 1963. Yet, he became active in the movement known as Croatian Spring from its onset in 1967 and for his nationalistic views was expelled from the League of Communists and arrested in 1971. But apparently Tito himself effected his early release. He was again arrested in 1982.

The obsession of Croatian émigrés with the Bleiburg massacre, and efforts to exonerate Ante Pavelic, the Ustasha Fuhrer, prompted a well-known German leftist political philosopher Ernst Bloch to remark in *Der Spiegel* (3 February 1985): 'Croats who live in West Germany are almost all fascists.' This provoked a very angry response from Franjo Tadjman, and Croatian émigrés.<sup>25</sup> His response firmly established Tadjman's reputation in Croatian émigré circles and facilitated his cooperation with them in spite of his Partisan background. In 1989, Tadjman published his book *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti* (*Wastelands of Historical Reality*), in which he dedicated many pages to what he termed 'Jasenovac's mythical figures.' He also expressed the opinion that estimations of six million Jewish victims in the Second World War were based on 'emotionally biased testimonies.' Among such testimonies, Tadjman included the claim by N. Levin that 770,000 people had been murdered in Jasenovac, of whom 20,000 were Jews 'although it is otherwise stated that Jews from Croatia were by

German request deported to the East, and partially found refuge in the Italian zone.’<sup>26</sup> He also assessed the data on Jewish victims in Auschwitz and Majdanek as ‘unreliable.’<sup>27</sup> Yet, Tadjman, who obviously made a contribution to Holocaust denial, did not try to inflate the number of Croats killed in Bleiburg. As D. B. MacDonald notices:

In reviewing Croatian interpretations of the NDH, we find two conflicting forms of propaganda. One is overtly pro-Ustaša, while the other is cautiously against it, but puts more effort into minimising its importance than into condemning it.<sup>28</sup>

As a former communist general, Tadjman belonged to the latter group. His contact with Croatian émigré circles led to the most bizarre combination of narratives that only a person with his background could produce. Being himself a former Partisan and a person who had been, like Croatian émigrés, persecuted by the Communists for his fight for the nationalist cause, he also has a father who (according to the family narrative) had been killed by Communists. Having a strange admiration for, and protection from, Tito, he struggled to unify all these conflicting personal experiences. In 1989, he was able to connect the three mutually antagonistic narratives into one in his most famous and controversial book, *Wastelands of Historical Reality*. He connected: (1) the inter-war Croatian narratives of suffering in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia that he had previously covered in his PhD thesis; (2) Croatian émigré narratives of massive crimes committed against Croats, and a minimizing of Serbian and Jewish casualties, and; (3) the communist narrative of Josip Broz Tito. Thus, he completed a seemingly impossible task of bringing together, in the same symbolic field, the bourgeois leader of Croatian Peasant Party Vladko Macek, the NDH *Fuhrer*, Ante Pavelic, and the leader of Yugoslav Communists, Josip Broz Tito, all of whom were depicted as carrying out the same task: building Croatian statehood.

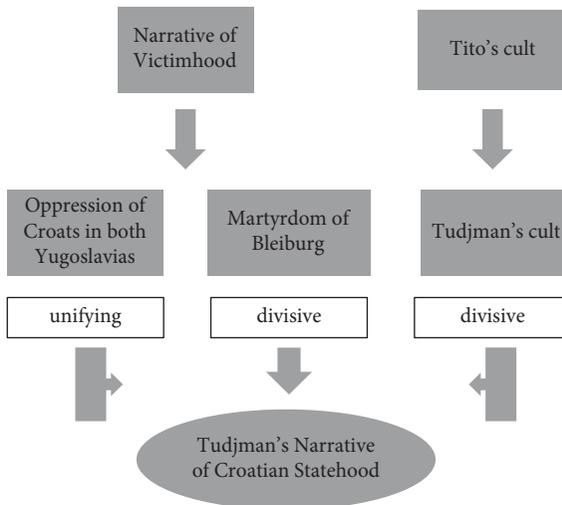


Figure 7.3 Croatia (1989–1999)

Speaking of Croatian émigré narratives on Bleiburg, one needs to acknowledge that the communist tabooing of this subject only made things worse, since, by the outbreak of war in 1991 the lack of a single serious piece of research on the Bleiburg massacre meant that anyone could claim virtually anything.

### The coming of Milosevic to power in Serbia

As a recent study of the rise of Milosevic demonstrated, his coming to power in 1987 did not signal any particular change in already existing patterns of authoritarianism. It also had nothing to do with subsequent nationalist mobilization, which had, as N. Vladislavljjevic put it, 'unfolded principally due to pressures from below'.<sup>29</sup> The pressure from below began to be felt immediately after 1981. In the 1970s, around 50,000 Serbs left the Serbian province of Kosovo subsequent to Albanian political elite taking control of the province after 1966. An equal number of Albanians moved to Kosovo in the period 1966–1986. In 1981, a combination of social and national rallies took place in Kosovo, in which Kosovo Albanians openly displayed their discontent and demanded that Kosovo be made a republic within Yugoslavia. This status, according to the Yugoslav constitution of 1974, theoretically included the right to self-determination. By this time, Kosovo was solidly set as the most underdeveloped region in Yugoslavia – an area that, in 1971, had only 32 per cent of Yugoslav average gross national product, with the gap tending to increase.<sup>30</sup> These Albanian rallies were soon suppressed but led to the re-emergence of grassroots dissatisfaction of Serbian elites in the 1980s. Discontent was encouraged by the deepest economic crisis in the history of Communist Yugoslavia, coinciding with the death of the Yugoslav dictator, Tito, in 1980. The austerity measures implemented to satisfy the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund meant a substantial reduction of a living standard that, in the 1970s, had reached a level comparable to some of the less developed West European countries.

By the early eighties, nationalism had already penetrated all historical narratives. This became most clearly visible in the preparation of a revised edition of the biggest Yugoslav cultural project – *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*. Since 1980, debates on the project had emerged between Albanian, Serbian, Montenegrin and Bosnian Muslim authors. Although Serbian authors' objections were in the mid-eighties principled, by the late eighties they also became nation-centred. The main board of the *Encyclopaedia* finally disintegrated in 1990–1991. In the meantime, Slovenia published its own first volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Slovenia* in 1987, and even the Serbian autonomous province of Vojvodina decided to publish its own encyclopaedia.<sup>31</sup> In other words, before it disintegrated politically in the early nineties, Yugoslavia had disintegrated culturally in the eighties.

Another sign that Tito's cult was cracking in Serbia was demonstrated at the burial of Aleksandar Rankovic in 1983. Rankovic had been a notorious chief of secret police and Tito's deputy who was dismissed in 1966 when he became a real threat to Tito's own dictatorial position. In the popular imagination of many Serbs, the dismissal of

Rankovic took place only because he was a Serb, while Tito was a Croat. Rankovic's funeral was attended by tens of thousands of mourners in Belgrade, and even the state-run Radio Television Belgrade had a report on it despite the fact that the Communist Party in Serbia had wanted to ban reporting on the funeral.

The next indication of popular rejection of the official 'Brotherhood and Unity' policy came in 1985, when the Serbian writer Danko Popovic published a book on an imaginary Serbian soldier, Milutin, who tells a life story which reflects the Serbian discontents of the 1980s. Milutin only followed the Serbian victimhood narrative of the Great War that had never been encouraged in Communist Yugoslavia but had never been forbidden either. Thus, for instance, a great historical spectacle had been made in 1964, entitled *Marsh na Drinu* (A March to the Drina River), to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Serbian victory in the Battle of Tser (Cer) over the Austro-Hungarian Army.

*The Book on Milutin* followed the path paved by another significant Serbian figure, Dobrica Cosic, who will be discussed below. It was supposed to offer reflections of an ordinary Serb who was surprised that those who attacked Serbia in 1914 from the other side of the Drina 'spoke our language'. This was an obvious reference to Croats in general, and more particularly to Tito, whose participation in the Austro-Hungarian Army in 1914 had been kept a state secret for decades. *The Book of Milutin* was published as an unpretentious literary effort in 1985 with a print-run of only 2,000 copies. Yet, in 1986 it became a bestseller, with nineteen additional editions of which three reached 20,000 copies and two 30,000 copies.<sup>32</sup>

Though the opening up of the Second World War traumas was more threatening, it was unavoidable. The fact that the communists had tabooed certain the Second World War events just made them more fascinating and attractive to the general public in the 1980s. Thus, by the time Milosevic came to power, both narratives were already strongly rooted: one speaking of Serbian martyrdom in the First World War, and the other of Serbian victims in the Second World War, with a suggestion that Yugoslav Communists intentionally forbade any discussion of genocide against the Serbs. By 1988, the stream suggesting exoneration of General Mihailovich gained momentum.

Unlike Tadjman, Milosevic, a former banker, was not an intellectual but a technocrat who demonstrated a surprising mastery of political power. Apart from his speeches, he never published a thing. Also, with the exception of the period 1988–1989, when he participated in various rallies, he did not often make public appearances or give interviews. Therefore, one can hardly speak of any narrative of his own. Rather than creating narratives, as did Tadjman, he became a potent symbol of a newly emerging self-confident Serbia, and during his entire career as the most influential man in Serbia (1987–2000), he only touched occasionally on some segments of popular narratives that were constructed by his associates. To understand the narratives that developed, one has to analyse works not by Milosevic but by other prominent Serbs who enjoyed intellectual influence. Here I will analyse two disillusioned Serbian Communists who both advocated the democratization of Yugoslavia; both dealt with Serbian sufferings in the two World Wars, and both had a huge following in Serbia.

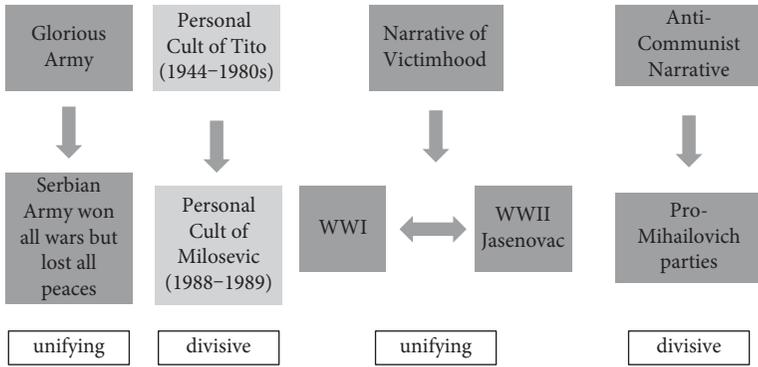


Figure 7.4 Serbia (1985–1991)

The first intellectual I will discuss about is **Vladimir Dedijer (1914–1990)**, a Serbian historian and a semi-dissident figure who published in 1981 his second volume of *New Contributions to the biography of Josip Broz Tito*. Before his clash with the Communist Party, Dedijer had published eulogies of Tito: one in Serbo-Croat, *Josip Broz Tito. Contributions to a Biography*, and the other in English, *Tito Speaks*, both published in 1953. The following year he sided with the prominent Communist Milovan Djilas, who had broken with the party. Dedijer was tried but got only a suspended sentence and left the Party. Initially, in 1955, he was prohibited from leaving the country, but two years later he was allowed to visit Manchester. Later, Tito found him useful in the English-speaking world as a promoter of his policies.

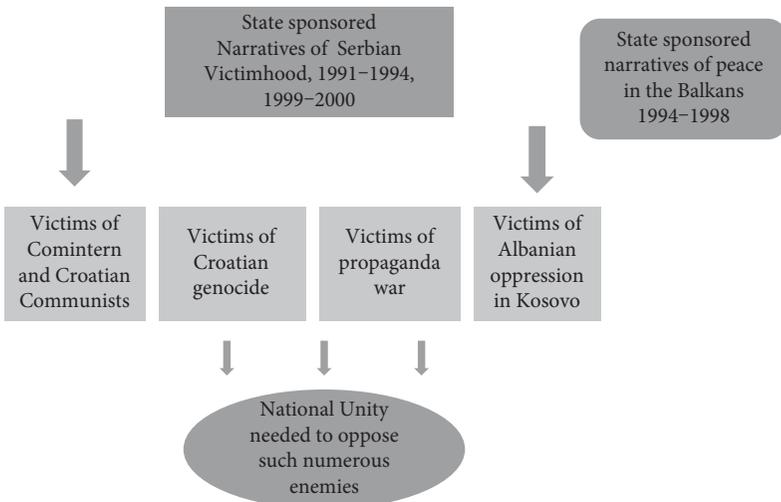


Figure 7.5 Serbia during the rule of Slobodan Milosevic (1991–2000)

Till the end of Tito's life, Dedijer remained loyal to official versions of Tito's biography that was very much based on his own account. Yet in 1981, soon after Tito died, Dedijer revealed that Tito had been a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army in 1914 and also that Communists had held secret negotiations with German troops in Zagreb during the Second World War. Official historiography in Communist Yugoslavia had claimed that, with the exception of the Communists, all other Yugoslav military forces in the Second World War had collaborated with the Germans. This was a huge blow to the cult of Tito, just a year after his death.

Dedijer also claimed that around 700,000 Serbs were killed in Jasenovac. Yet one can hardly accuse Dedijer of a premeditated effort to inflate Serbian figures. He was not so much interested in numbers as in the very phenomenon of genocide. Thus, for instance, in his book on the Vatican and Jasenovac, published in 1987, Dedijer did not offer 'any specific estimate of wartime losses in Croatia or Yugoslavia.' On the other hand, the apparently exaggerated figure of 600,000–700,000 people (mainly Serbs) killed in Jasenovac was provided by Dedijer's associate Antun Miletic, who made the best documented monograph on the Jasenovac concentration camp.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, one might assume that both Dedijer and Miletic really believed these numbers and that both were just following earlier official communist figures.<sup>34</sup>

Dedijer was apparently obsessed with human suffering worldwide and he dealt not only with Ustasha genocide against Serbs but also with genocide in general. While he worked in the Russell Tribunal, he also wrote on the killing of the Vietnamese people:

What I have read about the manner in which the war is being waged in Vietnam, the photographs I have seen, Russell's terrifying documentation on the chemical and bacteriological warfare going on there, led me to the conclusion that once again an Asian nation, a small nation, with an ancient culture is being exterminated by the most up-to-date weapons.<sup>35</sup>

He published, together with Antun Miletic, a lengthy volume on what he saw as Chetnik genocide against Muslims in the Second World War, in which Ustasha also took part.<sup>36</sup> Working in the Russell Tribunal, he became convinced that genocide began in pre-historic times, as soon as the first civilizations emerged along great rivers. He also began collecting, together with Antun Miletic, materials on crimes committed against Bosnian Muslims by the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro after 1912, and he planned to publish a volume on genocide against Slavic Macedonians in the twentieth century. Yet his death in 1990 stopped these projects.

One may, however, still assign Dedijer the responsibility for the establishment of the Tito cult, albeit more for the cult abroad than in Communist Yugoslavia. On the other hand, it was again Dedijer who decisively contributed to the destruction of the cult of Tito, thus personally facilitating, although not at all intentionally, the fusion of Communist and nationalist narratives in Serbia.

The other author to be considered is **Dobrica Cosic (1921–2014)** who joined the Partisans in 1941 and, after the Second World War, became a deputy of the Serbian

and Yugoslav parliaments and a member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia (1965–1968). In this first period of Communism, he believed in internationalism and solidarity. For him, Yugoslavism was a local expression of Communist supra-nationalism capable of transforming and modernizing Yugoslav society. Until the mid-1960s, he viewed himself as a Yugoslav ‘who was prepared to deny Serbianness in the interest of Yugoslavism.’<sup>37</sup>

He gradually and painfully realized in the mid-1960s that neither non-Serbian writers in Yugoslavia nor the League of Communists of Yugoslavia nor even its leader Josip Broz Tito were much interested in strengthening a supra-national Yugoslav identity. This led him to express increasing concerns about the future of Serbian culture and the Serbian nation. In May 1968, at a plenum of the League of Communists of Serbia, Cosic spoke like a sceptical Communist believer. He stated that the national question would ‘remain a problem and preoccupation of future generations as well’, and warned that ‘unless democratic forces of socialism score a final victory over bureaucratic and petit bourgeois forces and deluges, there could flare up among the Serbian people an old historic aim and national ideal – the unification of the Serbian people in a single state.’<sup>38</sup> Two months after his speech, he left the Communist Party, and by that act he became a dissident. He was never arrested after he left the party. Indeed, he gradually became the most popular writer in Serbia.

His reputation as the most influential Serbian writer was firmly established in the 1970s. It was through him that the Serbian narrative of victimhood in the First World War was perfected. In 1972–1979 Cosic published a widely read saga in four volumes entitled *Vreme smrti* (A time of death), celebrating Serbian martyrdom in the Great War. In arguing that death had been built into the very foundations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, he took a familiar Serbian narrative and poured it into a powerful literary form. This narrative became well established not only among Serbian intellectuals but also among the reading public.<sup>39</sup> Not surprisingly, it was precisely in the period when he was creating his the First World War saga that Cosic launched a formula that was, in a simplified form, attributed to him. It is that Serbs win wars but are not able to win the peace. In 1977, in his inaugural speech following his election to membership of the Serbian Academy, he said:

The meaning of the liberation battles and victories on the battlefields of this century were denied in peace; peace has been understood as an opportunity to fulfil various selfish goals under various illusions and excuses.<sup>40</sup>

In the eighties, Cosic was one of key figures of Serbian political and intellectual opposition expressing itself through the Writer’s Club. He led what he later called the Belgrade Opposition Circle. In the eighties, this circle tried to encourage democratization in Serbia and Yugoslavia. Cosic himself attempted to make alliances with similar groups in Zagreb and Ljubljana, but his efforts failed due to his own obsession with the preservation of Yugoslavia.

He reiterated his victimhood narrative on many occasions. In December 1988 he said:

There is no country in Europe for the creation of which (1914–1918) and for whose renewal and transformation (1941–1945 and 1948–1958) more victims have been laid and more hopes have been invested than for Yugoslavia.<sup>41</sup>

Also, on many occasions he mentioned that Serbian victims in the First World War totalled one third of the population of Serbia.<sup>42</sup> Originally a supra-national idealist, he gradually began to be preoccupied with his own nation. As N. J. Miller noticed:

Titoism betrayed his faith in the transformative value of communism, and his response was to shift the object of his idealism from the revolution to his nation.<sup>43</sup>

In 1992, after Yugoslavia disintegrated, Serbia's strongman Slobodan Milosevic agreed that Cosic would become the first president of what was left of Yugoslavia. Thus, Cosic became president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro. He was impeached when he came into conflict with Milosevic in 1993. Yet, he continued to play a prominent role in intellectual circles in Belgrade throughout the nineties and even after the democratic changes in 2000.

In Cosic's case, it was he who unleashed what he had originally feared: the potent weapon of Serbian nationalism through a victimhood narrative. He did it unintentionally, in an internal debate with his own conception of communism.

### Some reflections on genocide and victimhood narratives

The 1990s has been the focus of Western scholarship on the victimhood narratives of Serbs and Croats, or rather the period when the Wars for Yugoslav Succession took place. Yet victimhood narratives developed much earlier. They were fully developed as early as the 1970s by disenchanted Communists who were in search of their own identity, and who in most of cases had no intention of harming any other group. These narratives, for their part, repeated motifs from similar narratives that arose in the period between the two world wars.

Research on the comparative histories of various small Balkan nations has led me to believe that the history of a small nation is by definition a series of traumatic events. These traumatic events have a tendency to become focal points of historical memory. Toward the end of the Communist period, the focus on traumatic past events was facilitated by the crisis of Communist values and the disintegration of the Yugoslav secular religion, Titoism. As soon as the prevailing value system had been shaken, a reinterpretation of history was undertaken as an effort to fill the value vacuum. This task was performed by disenchanted Communists.

From the point of view of the results of the Wars for Yugoslav Succession that cost tens of thousands of lives in 1990s, victimhood narratives seem to have an ominous

potential. Yet, they originally appeared in a different context of peace, mainly as a way to challenge Communist monism and as an effort to neutralize Communist Party-sponsored narratives and taboos.

The breakdown of the Communist value system led to efforts to introduce neo-traditionalism, attempts to re-establish vaguely understood values that existed before but with new interpretations. Once these vague efforts were coupled with victimhood narratives, they led an ethnification of politics: the tendency to see ethnicity as the primary political identity. Naturally, ethnification was particularly powerful in ethnically mixed areas and less influential in urban centres and ethnically homogenous areas. Ethnification in turn facilitated a competition in victimhood narratives between major ethnically defined antagonists – in our case, between Croats and Serbs in Croatia and Yugoslavia; between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and between Serbs and Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

Loaded with historical symbolism, victimhood narratives appeal to deep components of the human psyche. With their focus on victims, these narratives unavoidably raise the issue of the responsibility of perpetrators. Sacralization of victims is coupled with the Otherization of those who are held responsible. The usual simplified division of social reality into 'us' and 'them' may, under certain conditions, facilitate placing whole ethnic groups into those who are responsible for the deaths of 'our' sacred victims. A vacuum of values makes ideal conditions for this to happen. Those 'responsible' are classified as Others. In everyday human categorizations there is, indeed, a hierarchy of Otherness, ranging from incomplete self to the radical (fully dehumanized) Other. Victimhood narratives effectively help this categorization to reach a stage that is as radical as possible, or, in sociological terms, in which ethnic distance becomes as wide as possible.

Once we start to deal with 'our sacred identity' versus dehumanized Others, two new components emerge: insecurity and a sense of mission. The sense of mission is related to our identity which needs to be protected from possible future attacks by the same group that had previously been categorized as responsible for tragic events in the past. Thus, one starts to live in a symbolic field that makes the individual feel insecure as he is constantly under the pressure of historical symbolism focused on his/her own victims and the potential threat that a similar experience may be or is just about to be repeated. The dehumanization of Others strengthens the impression that the threat is imminent. This is exactly what happened in the major ethnic communities in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s, culminating in the Wars for Yugoslav Succession (1991–1995, 1998–1999). Victimhood narratives play an important role in this vicious cycle. Horrible atrocities committed against Serbs during the Second World War, particularly in the NDH, and harsh Communist retaliations against Croats at the end of the war contributed to the full traumatization of Serbian and Croatian communities. Both lived through victimhood narratives, nurtured them and made every possible effort to keep them alive. Franjo Tudjman proved to be an excellent mediator between Croatian émigré narratives and domestic narratives. This meant émigrés' narratives played a stronger role in Croatia than they did in Serbia where there was no need to import victimhood narratives, since influential intellectuals had developed them domestically. What was

gradually imported to Serbia in the 1980s were narratives of the royalist forces, which only divided and antagonized the public and created opposing camps of victimhood narrators. The experience of Yugoslavia indicates that victimhood narratives precede ethnification of politics, but this does not mean that they cause it. They simply seem to be an unavoidable precondition but certainly not the sole cause.

The case of the ex-Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates that the strengthening of victimhood narratives is concomitant with a vacuum in values. It also shows that focusing on victimhood may contribute to serious conflicts and even wars. Still, the causes of wars seem to be more deeply rooted in concrete political, cultural and economic contexts, and victimhood narratives seem only to be a symptom of a more general crisis.

## Notes

- 1 David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocaust? Serbian and Croatian Victim Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- 2 Jasna Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours of the Nation': *Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*, London: Hurst and Company, 2002; see also Jasna Dragović-Soso, 'Intellectuals and the Collapse of Yugoslavia: The End of the Yugoslav Writers' Union', in Dejan Djokic, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea 1918–1992*, London: Hurst and Company, 2003, pp. 268–285.
- 3 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, London: Abacus, 1995, p. 26.
- 4 Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe Since 1918*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 1995, p. 11. Most Serbian sources estimate the death toll at 28 per cent of the total population, or 1,200,000 in absolute figures.
- 5 John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2000, p. 109.
- 6 The recent estimation provided in *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda* (Encyclopaedia of the Serbian People) gives the figure of 1,248,136 Serbs from the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia and 286,753 from the territory of Austria-Hungary. *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda*, Belgrade: Zavod za Udžbenike, 2008, p. 1038.
- 7 Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p. 132. See also Slobodan G. Markovich, 'The Legacy of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia', *Balkanica*, Vol. XL (2009), pp. 201–206.
- 8 The best known work in English on cultural policy in Yugoslavia in the inter-war period is: Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998; see also Andrew Baruch Wachtel, 'Ivan Meštrović, Ivo Andrić and the Synthetic Yugoslav Culture of the Inter-War Period', in Dejan Djokic, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea 1918–1992*, London: Hurst and Company, 2003, pp. 238–251.
- 9 Stevan Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, London: Hurst and Company, 2008, p. 34; Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, pp. 211–212.
- 10 Vladeta Vučković, 'An Introduction: In the Name of Love Among People', in Dr. Bogoljub Kočović, ed., *Nauka, nacionalizam i propaganda (Science, Nationalism and Propaganda)*, Second enlarged edition, Paris: Editions du Titre, 1999, pp. 8–14.

- 11 Srdjan Bogosavljević, 'The Unresolved Genocide', in Nebojša Popov, ed., *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis*, Budapest: CEU Press, 1996, pp. 146–159.
- 12 Bogoljub Kočović, *Sahrana jednog mita. Žrtve Drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji* [A Burial of a Myth. Victims of the Second World War in Yugoslavia], Belgrade: Otkrovenje, 2005, p. iii.
- 13 A leading Serbian émigré publicist of pro-Yugoslav orientation, Desimir Tosic, who returned to Yugoslavia in 1991 was the main advocate of Kochovich's book in Serbia. See also Srdjan Bogosavljević who, in 'The Unresolved Genocide' (pp. 150–151), found Kochovich's and Zervjavić's studies had the best argumentation. Most recently the British subject specialist Stevan Pavlowitch concluded that 'the number of deaths in Jasenovac remains a subject of controversy' but in a footnote on the same page he quotes only those estimations that put the number of deaths around 100,000 and implicitly accepts that number. Stevan Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia*, London: Hurst and Company, 1988.
- 14 The most popular recent history of the Serbs estimates that the most realistic figure for Jasenovac victims is 700,000. It also quoted the findings of the post-war Croatian Commission for the Investigation of Crimes committed by Occupation forces and Collaborationists that established that in Jasenovac between 500,000 and 600,000 people were killed. Dusan T. Batakovic, ed., *Histoire du Peuple Serbe*, Lausanne, Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 2005, p. 314. *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda* claims that at least 500,000 people of different nationalities were killed, but three lines later it says the recent most studies indicate that 982,680 Serbs were killed in Jasenovac. It also quotes German estimations of which one from March 1944 speaks of 750,000 Serbs who were killed in Croatia. *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda*, p. 442.
- 15 One should also note that Serbia launched a public campaign in 2010 encouraging Roma families to list themselves in official registers, such as registers of births. This indicates that even in 2010 some families in Serbia were not officially registered and therefore were not be listed in the census organised 2011. The situation is certainly not better in other parts of ex-Yugoslavia, and one can only imagine what conditions were like in 1931. However, one can also assume that in 1948, out of simple fear, under conditions of a totalitarian polity, far fewer people dared to avoid registration than in 1931, when there were no severe sanctions for failing to participate in the state census.
- 16 Pavlovitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 2008, p. 67.
- 17 Станиша Бркић and Ненад Ђорђевић, 'Крагујевачки октобар 1941', in *Геноцид у 20. Веку на просторима југословенских земаља* [Stanisha Brkich and Nenad Djordjevic, 'Kragujevac October of 1941', in *Genocide in 20th Century on the Territory of Yugoslav Lands*], Belgrade: Museum of Genocide Victims and Institute for Recent History of Serbia, 2005, pp. 143–144. The official site of the Memorial Park – Kragujevac October also states that 2,794 men, women and children from Kragujevac and nearby villages were killed on 19–21 October 1941, <http://www.spomenpark.com/index.php> [accessed 30 April 2010].
- 18 [http://www.idc.org.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=section&id=35&Itemid=126&lang=bs](http://www.idc.org.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=35&Itemid=126&lang=bs) [accessed December 2010].
- 19 Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 757–761.
- 20 Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, p. 763.
- 21 Ante Beljo, *Genocide: A Documented Analysis*, Sudbury: Northern Tribune Publishing, 1985, p. 14.

- 22 Beljo, *Genocide*, p. 299.
- 23 Bruno Busic, 'Demographic Losses: Croatian Casualties in Croatia and Yugoslavia', *Hrvatski list* (Lund), No. 11–12 (1980), pp. 46–53 and 'Population Losses During the War', *Hrvatski književni list*, No. 15 (1969), quoted from Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, p. 794.
- 24 In 1985 the Croatian émigré, Ante Beljo, dedicated his book to the memory of Bruno Bušić and re-published, a list of fifty-seven Croats, 12 Serbs and 4 Albanians who were, in his opinion, killed by the Yugoslav Communist Secret Service. The list was originally published in a book by Hans Peter Rullman called *Assassinations Commissioned by Belgrade* (Hamburg, 1981). Beljo, *Genocide*, pp. 347–348.
- 25 Franjo Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti. Rasprava o povijesti i filozofiji zlosilja*, Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske, 1989, pp. 119–121.
- 26 Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*, p. 156.
- 27 Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*, p.157.
- 28 MacDonald, *Balkan Holocaust?*, p. 138.
- 29 Nebojsa Vladislavljevic, *Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution: Milosevic, the Fall of Communism and Nationalist Mobilization*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 74.
- 30 Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, p. 336.
- 31 Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours of the Nation', pp. 73–77.
- 32 According to the date of on-line catalogue of the National Library of Serbia the first twenty editions were published in a total of 179,000 copies, excluding the 19th edition for which there are no data on circulation.
- 33 Tomasevich, *War and Revolution*, p. 726.
- 34 Another expert who very much contributed to high figures was Milan Bulajic. In 1986 the trial of Minister of Interior of the Independent State of Croatia Andrija Artuković of Zagreb reopened the question of Ustasha crimes against Serbs. Dr. Milan Bulajic, a legal expert on genocide wrote in 1988/1989, a series of four volumes entitled *Ustaški zločini genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. Godine (Ustasha Crimes of Genocide and the Trial of Andrija Artukovic in 1986)*.
- 35 Jean-Paul Sartre and Vladimir Dedijer, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, Spokeman Pamphlet no. 12, The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation.
- 36 Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, *Genocid nad Muslimanima*, Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990.
- 37 Nicholas J. Miller, 'The Nonconformists: Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović Envision Serbia', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Fall 1999), pp. 515–536, esp. pp. 517–518.
- 38 Milan Nikolic, ed., *Sta je stvarno rekao Dobrica Cosic [What Dobrica Cosic really said]*, Belgrade: Draganic, 1995, p. 7. The speech was delivered on 29 May 1968 at the 14th session of the League of Communists of Serbia.
- 39 The novel went through numerous editions in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 40 Miller, 'The Nonconformists', p. 524.
- 41 Nikolic, *Sta je stvarno rekao*, p. 8. A presentation at the round table organized by Knjizevne novine [Literary Gazette] in December 1988.
- 42 Nikolic, *Sta je stvarno rekao*, p. 18. Presentation made in the town of Krusavac in Central Serbia on 19 January 1991.
- 43 Miller, 'The Nonconformists', p. 533.