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**Reexamining the “Serbian
Exceptionalism” Thesis**

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Reexamining the “Serbian Exceptionalism” Thesis

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“...almost every [Serbian] generation had its Kosovo. Such were the migrations of the XVII and XVIII centuries, the insurrections and wars against the Turks in 1804, 1815, 1876, and 1912, and the rejection of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum in 1914; the rejection of the military defeat in 1915 and the crossing of Albania by the Serbian army; the rejection of the Tripartite pact with Germany on March 27, 1941; the insurrection against fascism in 1941, and the conduct of war under German conditions of retribution—a hundred Serbs for every German soldier; the rejection of Stalin’s hegemony in 1948...”

—*Serbian Writer Dobrica Cosic, 1980¹*

“The process of migration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo under economic, political and simple physical pressure is probably the last tragic exodus of a European population. The last time such processions of desperate people were seen was in the Middle Ages... But our goal is to overcome this state of hatred, intolerance and mistrust. So that all people in Kosovo can live well. And this is why the first thing I want to say to you, comrades, is that you should stay here. This is your land, here are your houses, fields and gardens, your memories. You are not going to leave your land just because life has become difficult, because you are suffering from injustice and humiliation. It was never in the spirit of the Serbian and Montenegrin people to withdraw in the face of difficulties, to demobilize when it should fight, to become demoralized when the situation is hard. You should stay here both because of your ancestors and your heirs. Otherwise, your ancestors would be ashamed and your heirs disappointed.

—*Slobodan Milosevic, April 1987²*

Students of comparative democratic transition have paid little attention to the case of Serbia. One reason for this lies in the simple fact that Serbia remained the only East European country in which the former communist elite managed to defeat its opponents in a series of competitive if not entirely free elections, and preserve such essential elements of institutional and ideological continuity with the old system as the communist party’s control over the police, army, large state enterprises, and the most important mass media for more than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As one Serbian political scientist has noted, this persistence of the “old regime” made Serbia different even from cases in which the former communists returned to power (Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania), whether because the former communist parties in

these countries had transformed themselves into socialist or social-democratic parties on the West European pattern (Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania) or because they were forced to spend a considerable time in the opposition (Bulgaria, Romania).³

Perhaps even more important than these institutional continuities was the conspicuous role of the Serbian regime in Yugoslavia's violent collapse. The brutal wars of Yugoslav succession accompanied by mass violence against civilians, the destruction of cities, and the repeated mass exoduses of refugees caused by successive waves of ethnic cleansing, have rendered the Yugoslav case different even from other cases of state disintegration (Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia), let alone from instances of the more or less successful transition to democracy in ethnically more homogenous states (Hungary, Poland). Under these conditions, the overriding temptation was to treat the Serbian and Yugoslav cases as unpleasant "anomalies" that need to be *explained away* rather than explained.

There is much that is ironic about this "selective omission" of Yugoslavia and Serbia from comparative studies of democratic transition. It is worthwhile recalling that Yugoslavia was for many decades considered *the* communist country most likely to evolve in the direction of democratization. Yugoslavia's history of decentralization and economic reform, its exposure to Western cultural influences, its growing tourist industry and private service sector, its small-holding peasant class and urban socialist petty bourgeoisie in possession of cars, country homes and foreign currency accounts, and its techno-managerial elite that increasingly made decisions on the basis of market criteria, were all factors that seemed to favor democratization. A leading comparative political sociologist undoubtedly expressed the prevailing consensus in the mid-1970s when he singled out Yugoslavia as the most promising "post-totalitarian authoritarian regime" in eastern Europe from the point of view of its potential for economic reform and the institutionalization of "limited pluralism."⁴ As Susan Woodward has noted, even the political crisis and economic downturn of the 1980s would not have led one to predict the descent of Yugoslavia into political authoritarianism and all-out civil war: "On the eve of the revolutions in eastern and central Europe, Yugoslavia was better poised than any other socialist country to

make a successful transition to a market economy and to the West...Even after a decade of economic hardship and political uncertainty in 1979–1989, the relative prosperity, freedom to travel and work abroad, and landscape of multicultural pluralism and contrasts that Yugoslavs enjoyed were the envy of eastern Europeans.”⁵ Thus, the theoretical and comparative interest of the Yugoslav and Serbian cases lies precisely in the fact that they defy the standard expectation of political modernization theory that higher levels of economic development, industrialization, urbanization, literacy, and “cultural Westernization” favor democratic outcomes.⁶

How, then to explain the Yugoslav and Serbian anomalies? One logical way to proceed is to look for factors that made Yugoslavia and especially Serbia distinct from other East European cases. Indeed, many specialists on Yugoslavia and Serbia implicitly took this path with the result that theories of Yugoslav and Serbian “exceptionalism” have proliferated in the literature. Without entering into larger controversies about the origins of the wars of Yugoslav succession, in what follows I critically reexamine several different arguments about Serbian “exceptionalism.” Next, I offer my own alternative explanation of the non-democratic political outcome in Serbia. Finally, I conclude with some thoughts on the implications of the legacy of the Milosevic regime for the current democratic transformation.

II. THE CASE AGAINST “SERBIAN EXCEPTIONALISM”

The first, and fairly standard argument about Serbian exceptionalism that is often only implicitly made in the literature on Yugoslavia, is that the economically more advanced as well as “culturally Westernized” former Yugoslav republics—Slovenia and Croatia—enjoyed better prospects for democratic transformation than Serbia which, with the significant exception of its northern autonomous province of Vojvodina, was somewhat below the Yugoslav average in terms of standard development indicators.⁷ In other words, since Serbian society was relatively deficient both in some macro-sociological preconditions of democracy (urbanization, literacy, the size of the middle class), and/or certain political-cultural attributes (cultural proximity to the West), it is

not surprising that it more readily succumbed to the nationalist-authoritarian temptation than its Slovene and (admittedly less so) Croat counterparts.

A significant elaboration of this argument is made when Serbia's failed transition is attributed not only to the weakness of the social preconditions of democracy, but also to its traditionalist, authoritarian, and collectivist political culture. A characteristic example is provided by the American historian Nicholas Miller: "Five years after the first free elections in postwar Serbia, the stated aim of most of its political actors there is still a true transition to democracy. The reason for this is simple. Although Serbia has the structures and institutions necessary for democratic government, there is no democratic culture. Instead Slobodan Milosevic, has governed in an authoritarian manner in the name of the Serbian nation."⁸ Although as a historian Miller was sensitive to a number of contextual factors that helped account for the "failed transition" in Serbia such as the legacy of interethnic conflict and the difficulties faced by the Serbian opposition in time of war, he placed the explanatory emphasis on "the failure of Serbia's intelligentsia to embrace a civic culture rooted in respect for the individual as opposed to the nation" and "the inability of the Serbian people to produce a coherent, anti-authoritarian, anti-nationalist opposition to the Milosevic regime." These failures of the Serbian intelligentsia and the Serbian people, in turn, reflected "a collectivist political culture and the aftermath of forty-five years of communism."⁹ Other scholars have seconded Miller's argument, whether by emphasizing the entrenched "patriarchal patriotism" of the Serbian intelligentsia¹⁰ or the deliberate destruction of cultural alternatives to traditionalist *volkisch* authoritarianism by the Milosevic regime.¹¹ Although such factors are often treated as background factors (necessary but not sufficient conditions) that, only in conjunction with some other causes (e.g., lack of economic development, the elite manipulation of nationalism, the legacy of ethnic conflict) help explain the non-democratic political outcome, the clear implication is that political-cultural authoritarianism was entrenched in Serbia in a way that was not true of the "Westernized" Yugoslav republics or some East Central European countries.

The Serbian political sociologist Slobodan Antonic has subjected such arguments to careful empirical scrutiny, comparing the social and political-cultural preconditions of democracy in Serbia with those in neighboring East European countries (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece), former Yugoslav republics, as well as select Western countries.¹² Antonic's conclusions are interesting, for they go against the predominant stereotype in the literature about Serbia's relative social or political-cultural backwardness. Thus, a reexamination of Lipset's standard sociological preconditions of democracy (industrialization, urbanization, literacy), as well as economic development levels measured by GDP per capita, yields the result that Serbia had passed the standard sociological "threshold of democracy" some time in the mid-1960s, and did not significantly differ, in this respect, from most neighboring countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece).¹³ While Serbia indeed possessed a larger rural population and smaller urban middle class (20% of the total population) than some comparable non-communist countries (Greece with 36%), this did not make it (Serbia) significantly different from other post-communist cases.¹⁴ Similarly, Antonic's quantitative historical-comparative analysis demonstrates that Serbia did not lag behind its neighbors in terms of the length its parliamentary tradition.¹⁵ Finally, Antonic successfully challenges the argument about the greater than average mass authoritarianism of the Serbian population as measured by Adorno's classic "authoritarian personality" scale.¹⁶

Antonic's quantitative assessment should be supplemented by the following historical observations: that the advent of constitutional monarchy in Serbia (1903–1914) was the product of the autonomous struggles of Serbian liberals and populists from the mid-nineteenth century onwards;¹⁷ that the Serbian liberal tradition proved its viability during the interwar Yugoslav kingdom (1918–1941) when the Serbian body politic exhibited a considerable degree of political pluralism, measured by the number of political parties and their programmatic differences; that Serbian political parties and the University of Belgrade were centers of opposition to the dictatorship of King Aleksandar (1929–1934) as well as the right-wing authoritarian government of Milan Stojadinovic (1935–1937);¹⁸ and, finally, that the appeal of the only serious indigenous fascist group in the 1930s—the *Zbor* of Dimitrije Ljotic—was very weak (1% of the vote in the

1938 election). In short, despite significant obstacles to liberalism in the form of various authoritarian forces (the monarchy and the army), totalitarian ideologies (fascism), or the broader problem created by the sociological discrepancy between formally democratic institutions and an “inappropriate” social base (the peasant majority as opposed to a sizeable middle class), liberalism occupied an important place in the Serbian political tradition.

Nor did this liberal political tradition die out in the communist period. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of WWII, the remnants of Serbia’s democratic elites stood in the forefront of the liberal opposition to “the dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹⁹ In the 1960s Belgrade University emerged as the intellectual center of neo-Marxist revisionism and student radicalism, and subsequently of neo-liberal opposition to communist orthodoxy. As a result, by the early 1980s Belgrade was, together with Ljubljana, by far the liveliest opposition center in the former Yugoslavia. Not accidentally, it was the Belgrade intelligentsia that formed the Committee for the Defense of Freedom of Thought and Expression, petitioning communist authorities for the release of prominent political prisoners *regardless of nationality*, the introduction of the rule of law, and political democracy.²⁰ It was this liberal-civic current of the Serbian intelligentsia that stood at the forefront of repeated attempts to challenge and overthrow the Milosevic regime throughout the 1990s. If it is indeed true that significant nationalist currents in the anti-communist Serbian opposition greatly harmed the democratic cause by subordinating it to the cause of national unity and thus both directly and indirectly helped Milosevic consolidate power in the late 1980s, a significant logical jump is made when these stances and actions are somehow deduced from Serbia’s long-standing authoritarian tradition.

If the authoritarianism thesis in its pure sociological form is not convincing on either empirical or comparative grounds, another variation on the theme of “Serbian exceptionalism” might appear more persuasive. This thesis posits the existence of a special affinity between traditional Serbian national populism, anti-Westernism, communism, and the weakness of civic-democratic traditions in contemporary Serbia. Much has been made of the Slavophile, orthodox Russophile, and “anti-western” features of traditional Serbian national populism, and the influ-

ence of pan-Slavic ideological currents on the world-view of Serbia's most prominent politician, Nikola Pasic.²¹ Others have made a case for the continuity between old and new forms of Serbian national populism.²² It has been argued that these ideological elements were indicative of a form of "anti-modernism" that survived well into the communist period, providing the cultural foundation of Serbia's contemporary "flight from modernization."²³ Sometimes, the Russophile ideological influences on Serbian national populism are taken as a proof of the anti-liberal and exclusivist character of traditional religious-orthodox Serbian nationalism and contrasted with the more "integrationist" and "Central European" Slovene and Croat national ideologies.²⁴ A further step is taken along the same path when the disproportionate number of "Stalinist Russophiles" of Serbian and Montenegrin origin in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) is partially attributed to these traditional "orthodox-Slavophile" cultural influences.²⁵ Finally, the relative overrepresentation of ethnic Serbs in key state institutions, from the communist party to the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and the Ministry of the Interior in Tito's Yugoslavia, can be adduced as additional evidence of the strong association between communism and Serbia's statist-authoritarian political culture.²⁶

At first glance, this historical version of the political authoritarianism argument seems more credible than its pure "sociological" counterpart. Indeed, during the 1980s a significant transformation of political discourse took place in Serbia with the interests of "the people" increasingly replacing references to class in the speeches of communist cadres, most prominently those of Slobodan Milosevic.²⁷ In populist fashion, this newly achieved "unity" between the leader and the people was interpreted as a "higher form of democracy" that transcended the mundane ways of Western parliamentary procedure. The revival of Orthodoxy as the traditional symbol of Serbian nationhood, and the rise of a new "nativism" whose intellectual carriers demonstrated a considerable ambivalence towards "Europe" and "European values," were complementary parts of this political transformation.²⁸ Nor is there much doubt about the fact that Yugoslav communists appealed to the strong pro-Russian as well as pro-Soviet sentiments of Serbian and Montenegrin communists during WWII.²⁹ In the late 1980s, some of the main carriers of

communist orthodoxy, such as Milosevic's influential wife Mirjana Markovic and founder of the "generals' party" and the head of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) Veljko Kadijevic, placed high hopes on the preservation of socialism, if necessary with the help of the Soviet Union as a strategic ally in the struggle against the "new world order" abroad and separatists within.³⁰ Such "Russophile" sentiments gained a further foothold in Serbian society during the 1990s when the disappointment with the policies of Serbia's old "Western allies" (United States, England, and France) resulted in the revival of the old idea of Russia as the only great power protector of the Balkan orthodox Slavs.

Despite these strengths, the historical version of the political authoritarianism argument can be challenged on several grounds. To begin with the obvious, while the Soviet-Russian sympathies of many Serbian and Montenegrin communists in WWII are beyond doubt, it is well to remember that for more than forty years after the 1948 Tito-Stalin break, Yugoslav communists defined their political identity largely in opposition to the Soviet model. The fact that the Yugoslav population enjoyed higher standards of living as well as much greater social and cultural freedoms than the "subject peoples" of the Soviet bloc was understood as a proof of the superiority of Yugoslavia's "self-management socialism" not only among communists but also among the Yugoslav population at large. In fact, for almost two decades (approximately 1965–1985) Yugoslavia's ideological distance from the Soviet bloc and cultural openness to the West was one of the main informal sources of Yugoslav national pride as well as of the legitimacy and stability of Tito's communist regime.

The argument about the special association between communism and Serbian political culture can also be challenged. It is well known, although rarely mentioned, that the early Partisan movement was predominantly a Serbian phenomenon. As late as the end of 1943, 17 of 27 Partisan divisions were almost exclusively made up of ethnic Serbs.³¹ The causes of this Serbian attachment to communism, however, had much less to do with the "Soviet-Russophile" mindset of Serbian communists, and much more with the persecution of ethnic Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia (which included Bosnia and Herzegovina). In contrast to his strong following

among the peasant refugee Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, Tito's mass base in Serbia remained weak until the very end of the war, with the bulk of the peasantry supporting general Mihajlovic's monarchist Chetnik movement.³² Nor was the popularity of communists much greater in the immediate aftermath of the war when Serbs in Serbia voted against the Communist-sponsored National Front ticket in greater numbers than Slovenes, Croats, or other ethnic Yugoslavs.³³ Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the war Yugoslav communists waged a veritable ideological war against "greater Serbian nationalism."³⁴

Let us finally consider the argument that orthodox Serbian nationalism was both more "exclusivist" and "assimilationist" and therefore more intolerant than its integrationist "Central European" counterparts. The most articulate spokesman for this argument has been the American historian Ivo Banac.³⁵ Correctly directing our attention to the fact that Milosevic's ideological innovation consisted of blending left orthodox-communist and right-wing nationalist motifs in a new and counter-intuitive fashion, Banac traces the elements of this ideology back to Serbia's nineteenth century "linguistic" nationalism which targeted both Croats and Bosnian Moslems as candidates for assimilation and thereby created "the grounds for a permanent conflict between the Serbs and their Western neighbors."³⁶ However, "since assimilation and expansion ultimately could not succeed in creating Serbs where they did not exist, Serbia's vast empire-building projects—first in independent Serbia (1878–1918) and then in Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia—became the source of growing frustration, failure, and fear."³⁷ One result of this failure was the retreat of Serbian "integral nationalists" into a pan-Slavic Orthodox exclusivism that "dulled the assimilationist tradition of the Serbian national ideologies and eased the way for Nazi racism, particularly in regard to the Jews."³⁸ Another manifestation of this exclusivism was King Aleksandar's dictatorship that represented "a variant of fascism of the East Balkan type."³⁹ Finally, "Serbian supremacy" was insured even in communist Yugoslavia. Although communist victory cost Serbia its monarchy, resulted in the suppression of its national institutions (parliament, political parties, the Orthodox church), and officially equalized Serbia with the other Yugoslav republics, Banac argues that Serbs were compensated for these losses by Tito's deci-

sion “to dull the campaign against Serbian predominance through the espousal of centralism and Yugoslav unitarism—the ruling political and ideological antecedents that permitted the revival of Serbian influence.”⁴⁰ The clear implication of this argument is that both in its assimilationist and exclusivist, “greater Serbian and unitarist,” and “centralist” Yugoslav forms, Serbian nationalism was “imperialist” and unacceptable to other Yugoslav nationalities. By contrast, the decidedly “ethnic” cast of Tadjman’s Croat nationalism is a historical aberration insofar as it represents “a significant departure from the statist emphasis that is more typical of Croat national ideologies.”⁴¹

This is not the place to enter into the cauldron of Yugoslav historical controversies. Nevertheless, the empirical and conceptual flaws of the “greater Serbian chauvinism” thesis deserve to be pointed out if only because the argument has become so widespread in the literature.⁴² In the first place, it should be noted that the nineteenth-century project of Serbian unification could be called “imperialist” only with a considerable stretch of the imagination. Even if nineteenth-century Serbian national ideologists claimed Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of “historic Croatia” on linguistic and/or ethnic grounds, it should be pointed out that these were not territories of two independent states with a well-defined national consciousness, but provinces of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires that contained significant Serbian populations. Nor was there anything “ideologically aberrant” about these claims in the nineteenth century age of nationalism. Indeed, such and similar claims were common to most East European nationalisms (including Croat nationalism which claimed all of Bosnia as a part of “historic Croatia”), the key difference being that Serbia backed them up with the force of arms in the Balkan wars (1912–1913) and World War I. Finally, while Serbia’s territorial acquisitions in the Balkan wars (Kosovo, Macedonia) were accompanied by atrocities against civilians and attempts at forcible assimilation (Macedonia), there is little evidence to suggest that Serbian nationalism was any more violent than the nationalism of its other Balkan counterparts.⁴³

It is indisputable that Serbian elites politically dominated the interwar Yugoslav state and selectively used heavy-handed state coercion against Croat, Macedonian, or Albanian “separat-

ists.” This use of state coercion provoked the resentment of minorities as well as constitutive peoples of the state (Croats) in interwar Yugoslavia. Yet a significant conceptual leap is made when the traditional authoritarian regime of King Aleksandar is labeled a “monarcho-fascist” dictatorship along the lines of interwar communist propaganda.⁴⁴ As far as Serbia’s “pan-Slavic nationalists” (the Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic) and fascists (Dimitrije Ljotic) are concerned, their ideas were largely right-wing Russian and/or European fascist imports with little grounding in the mainstream tradition of peasant populism represented by Nikola Pasic and his Radical party.⁴⁵ Not accidentally, during World War II right-wing collaborationists remained highly unpopular in Serbian society, with the majority of Serbs giving their allegiance either to the monarchist Chetniks of General Mihajlovic or Tito’s communist partisans.⁴⁶ Nor was the persecution of Serbian Jews accompanied by the kind of tacit approval that still plagues the collective conscience of some East European nations.

What, then, about Serbian “cultural assimilationism,” i.e., attempts to “make Serbs” out of non-Serbs? Here, aside from the period of integral Yugoslavism (1929–1934), when King Aleksandar indeed attempted to eradicate the historic provinces (including Serbia) in the name of Yugoslav unity, it is hard to find any period in which Serbian political hegemony was accompanied by serious attempts at doing away with distinct cultural traditions, let alone “forcefully assimilating” the Croats or even Bosnian Moslems (considered by many Serbian nationalists as “Serbs” of Islamic faith).⁴⁷ The only significant exception to this rule was Macedonia, where the indigenous Slavic-speaking population was considered an “undefined ethnic mass” which could be linguistically assimilated.⁴⁸ In contrast, Croat and Bosnian Moslem parties were largely successful in protecting their cultural if not political-administrative space throughout the interwar period.

Several observations are also in order about the relationship between Serbian nationalism and Yugoslav “unitarism.” In the first place, it should be noted that the strict “unitarist” interpretation of the Yugoslav idea (the idea that Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were “three tribes” of the same “ethnic” nation) was challenged already in the 1920s, increasingly giving way to attempts

at forging a “synthetic” Yugoslav culture on the basis of the distinct traditions of the “three Yugoslav tribes.”⁴⁹ After the period of “integral Yugoslavism” (1929–1934) Serbian political and intellectual elites moved towards the view that Yugoslavia was a “complex state” made up of three distinct nations (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes). As a result, Serbian intellectuals began reinterpreting the Yugoslav idea in increasingly “statist” rather than “ethnic” terms.⁵⁰ In short, the evolution of Serbian ideas about Yugoslav state and national identities was considerably more complex than Banac cares to admit.

Finally, what kind of proof could be adduced to support the idea of the “aggressiveness” of “imperial” Serbian nationalism? One reliable indicator would be the relative number of Serbian victims in twentieth-century wars as compared to the same proportion among other Yugoslav nationalities. The figures for World War I speak for themselves. The combined population loss figure for pre-1912 Serbia (Serbia’s ethnic heartland without Kosovo and Macedonia) was a staggering eight hundred thousand out of less than three million. Montenegro, many of whose inhabitants considered themselves Serbs, lost another fifty thousand, and it can be safely assumed that among the half a million victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, many were Serbs as well.⁵¹ Even if most civilian losses can be attributed to the catastrophic typhus epidemic, it should be pointed out that Serbia’s military losses alone were two and a half times larger per capita than those of France.⁵²

Undoubtedly, the figures on World War II are much more significant because the legacy of interethnic persecution and warfare is more relevant for explaining current ethnic conflicts. Here the claims of Serbian nationalists that a million Serbs died at the hands of the Croat fascist Ustasa must be considered a gross exaggeration. More conservative and realistic estimates demonstrate that Montenegrins suffered the highest wartime losses (10.4% of the population), followed by Serbs (6.9%), Bosnian Moslems (6.8%), and then Croats (5.4%).⁵³ However, these overall percentages do not give the complete picture as the majority of Serbian losses occurred on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (16.3% in Croatia; 14.6% in Bosnia).⁵⁴ According to a leading Croat demographer, when those Serbs who died in combat and/or as

“collaborationists” are taken out of the picture, the ethnic Serb victims of “fascist terror” on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia number 217,000, i.e., somewhere on the order of one fifth of Yugoslavia’s total wartime losses (estimated at lying somewhere between 950,000 and little above one million).⁵⁵ Here, apparently, the tradition of Croat “integrationism” did little to live up to its historical promise, as the ethnic violence unleashed against Serbian civilians assumed a grotesquely brutal character. Undoubtedly, significant atrocities were visited upon others as well, and especially on Bosnian Moslems by Serbian Chetnik forces.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is obvious that “greater Serbian chauvinism” was hardly the sole culprit in the story of twentieth-century Yugoslav ethnic victimization.

A final version of the “Serbian exceptionalism” argument needs to be considered. This is the fairly widespread view that the main responsibility for the non-democratic political outcome in Serbia and Yugoslavia lies with the Serbian political elite led by Slobodan Milosevic.⁵⁷ The most consistent social-scientific exposition of this argument is that by Vernon Gagnon.⁵⁸ According to Gagnon, who places the Serbian case in the context of broader international relations theory, “violent conflict along ethnic lines is provoked by elites in order to create a domestic political context where ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity.”⁵⁹ The main motivation of elites for provoking conflict lies in their desire to protect their domestic political power from challenger counter-elites. One way to do so in a political environment that precludes the use of large-scale force against domestic opponents is “to shift the focus of political debate away from issues where ruling elites are most threatened—for example, proposed changes in the structure of domestic economic or political power—toward other issues, defined in cultural or ethnic terms, that appeal to the interest of the majority in non-economic terms.” Such appeals to the national interest, in turn, depend on the selective reactivation of “national traditions and mythologies” and the invocation of powerful external threats that can result in placing “the interest of the group above the interests of individuals,” so that ethnicity becomes “all that counts.” This can be best achieved through the monopolization of political discourse through the mass media with the goal of creating “the impression of continuity between past conflicts and current ones,” and

“turning ruling elites into “credible defenders” of national identity.⁶⁰ Gagnon then proceeds to demonstrate that the segment of the Serbian elite led by Milosevic consciously pursued the strategy of the externalization of conflict in a successful bid to defeat both the intra-party and anti-regime opposition.

Gagnon’s argument has the demonstrable advantage of relying not on contestable interpretations of Serbian political culture or history, but on testable empirical propositions about the proximate causes of contemporary conflicts. Moreover, this argument fairly accurately captures the mobilizational strategy of the Serbian elite that consisted of exacerbating ethnic tensions at those critical junctures when it felt most threatened by counter-elite challengers. The vicious cycle of ethnic mobilizations and counter-mobilizations that was thus inaugurated gave many of the real ethnic conflicts that subsequently erupted the character of “self-fulfilling prophecies” and enabled the Serbian elite to rebuild legitimacy and retain power in a hostile international and challenging domestic political context.

Despite these strengths, however, Gagnon’s explanation must be considered incomplete. Most importantly, this explanation does not give us a clear sense of why the “Serbian question” emerged in the context of a communist Yugoslavia in which Serbs were allegedly the “dominant” group, and why elite appeals to Serbian nationalism were credible to the masses (unless the assumption is made that “masses” are inherently gullible). Nor does the “instrumental manipulation” of nationalism school of thought successfully capture the complexity of Milosevic’s appeals to various social constituencies in the late communist period or to the “statist-Yugoslav” in addition to the “ethnic Serbian” sentiments of his followers.

The critical reexamination of various theories of Serbian exceptionalism has revealed a number of weaknesses in them. In what follows, therefore, I advance an alternative explanation that rests on “five pillars:” the distinctive character of the Serbian collective historical experience and the relationship between Serbian and Yugoslav identities (historical legacy); the unintended consequences of communist federalism (institutional analysis); the revival of narratives of “Serbian victimization” by Serbian intellectuals (ideology); the peculiar nature of Milosevic’s

appeals in the period of the terminal political-economic crisis of communism (leadership and social base); and finally, the perceived ethnic threat among Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia (the role of the diaspora). Only such a multi-factorial approach can result in an interpretively adequate and causally plausible explanation of “Serbian exceptionalism.”

III. THE CASE FOR “SERBIAN EXCEPTIONALISM”

Obviously, of all the above mentioned factors, “historical legacy” is the one most difficult to “operationalize.” Not only does a nation’s collective historical experience consist of multiple “layers,” but these “layers” are subject to selective interpretation by political and intellectual elites who choose to emphasize those aspects of the national past that best suit their material and “ideal” (value) interests at any given point in time. Thus, in the case of Serbia of the late 1980s and 1990s, some political actors chose to emphasize the heroic heritage of the Partisan revolution (the generals’ party, Milosevic), while others appealed to the monarchist-Chetnik heritage (the center-right opposition leader Vuk Draskovic as well as the extreme right of Vojislav Seselj), with a third group still attempting to revive Serbia’s liberal-parliamentary tradition (the Democratic Party led by Zoran Djindjic and the Democratic Party of Serbia led by Vojislav Kostunica).⁶¹ Any argument about historical legacy, therefore, must isolate some assumptions about the national experience that are shared by most political actors and intellectual elites across time or at least made explicit at some critical juncture in the nation’s history. Fortunately, in the case of Serbia, we have one such critical juncture in the nation’s development that is completely independent of wartime massacres, the effects of communist nationality policy, or the Milosevic period: the 1939 Serb-Croat Agreement.

The 1939 Serb-Croat Agreement resulted in the creation of a large autonomous Croat unit in the previously unitary Yugoslav state. This concession to Croat national sentiment was seen as a necessary step in the resolution of long-standing Serb-Croat tensions.⁶² From the Serbian national point of view, however, the agreement proved problematic on three counts: first, the

new Croat unit incorporated a large number of ethnic Serbs whose collective rights were not guaranteed; secondly, the agreement incorporated into the Croat unit a significant part of Bosnia and Herzegovina traditionally coveted by Serbian nationalists; thirdly, it was unclear whether Croat leaders understood the new federal unit as a prospective Croat national homeland or as an integral part of the Yugoslav state. Reacting to these problematic aspects of the Agreement, Serbian intellectuals articulated their ideas about the relationship between Serbian and Yugoslav identities, Serb-Croat relations, and the Serbian historical experience more explicitly than at any time in the nation's history. These ideas were recorded in the journal of the newly formed Serbian Cultural Club,⁶³ *Srpski glas* (the Serbian Voice). It deserves to be pointed out that a number of these intellectuals not only participated in the movements for Serbian and Yugoslav unification, but also wrote important histories of Bosnia, Serbia, and Yugoslavia: such was the case with historians Vladimir Corovic, Slobodan Jovanovic, Dragoslav Stranjakovic, and Vaso Cubrilovic. In other words, the opinions of this cultural elite were well rooted in the Serbian and Yugoslav past and can be considered representative of Serbian national thought.

From the standpoint of historical legacies, three themes voiced by these intellectuals stand out in particular: 1) concern with Serbian national unity, and the boundaries of the prospective Serbian federal unit; 2) the self-conception of Serbs as a state-building people; 3) Serbian sacrifices for the common Yugoslav state and the Serbs' special historical mission in its creation and preservation.

A representative sample on the first theme is offered by Vladimir Corovic's exposition of the inconsistencies of the Agreement. According to Corovic, while the Croat side claimed some districts on the basis of their Catholic (i.e., mostly Croat) majorities, it claimed others on the basis of Croat "historic right" or arguments about geographic contiguity. In other instances, the Croat side deliberately disregarded the existence of Orthodox (i.e. Serbian) majorities in districts attached to the Croat unit (Knin, Ravni kotari, Vrgin Most), while claiming other areas (in the Neretva Valley) on ethnic grounds. Such inconsistencies could be forgiven, argued Corovic, if the question was one of drawing "administrative boundaries" in a common Yugoslav state.

However, “it is clear and obvious that this is not just an administrative division, but a pure tribal [ethnic] division. On the Croat side, in any case, it was never doubted that this was the boundary of a national territory and a national state. Naturally, in such a division Serbs cannot remain indifferent to the outcome.”⁶⁴ Because the ethnically mixed character of many districts prevented a clear demarcation along ethnic lines, continued Corovic, the principle of justice demanded that the number of co-nationals left out of their respective units be equal on the Serbian and Croat sides. As it was, however, the number of Serbs in the new Croat unit was twice the number of Catholics (not all of them Croats) in the rest of Yugoslavia. A final reason for concern, concluded Corovic, was the openly expressed view of Croat leaders that the agreement marked just “a phase” in the national struggle. Since the meaning of this “phase” was hardly unclear, Serbs could not be reproached for demanding more unity “in Serbian ranks.”⁶⁵

Many contributors to *Srpski glas* seconded Corovic’s arguments, whether by pointing to the large number of Serbs inside the Croat unit or demanding that majority Serbian districts in Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia, and Dalmatia be given the right to freely decide to which federal unit they should be attached.⁶⁶ Others went much further, openly claiming the Bosnian Moslems for the Serbian nation and most if not all of Bosnia and Hercegovina for the prospective Serbian federal unit,⁶⁷ debunking the “myth” of a separate Macedonian nation, and asserting the “Serbian” character of Dubrovnik and Dalmatia, despite the latter’s solid Catholic majorities.⁶⁸ Still others argued that Serbia was “wherever there are Serbs,” including Kordun, Lika, and parts of Dalmatia and Slavonia—all territories within the new Croat unit. These lands were “Serbian,” asserted one author, because “the ancestors of today’s Serbs successfully defended them from foreign occupiers in the course of centuries, soaking them with their noble sweat and blood. Is not this right of possession sanctified by blood spilled in the past and confirmed by the strength and efforts of those living in the present worth more than pacts and historic rights?! The same is true for Serbian Vojvodina and Serbian Bosnia.”⁶⁹ The clear implication of these arguments was that Serbs had the right to their own federal unit that included most if not all Serbs living in

Yugoslavia, or, if the Yugoslav state were to dissolve, the right to self-determination in all districts in which they constituted majorities regardless of “historic” borders.

The other two prominent themes that figured prominently on the pages of *Srpski glas* concerned the overall significance of the national state in Serbian history and the Serbs’ heroic role in the creation of the common Yugoslav state. Thus, Slobodan Draskovic argued that to neglect the interests of the Yugoslav state would constitute a betrayal of the Serbian state-building tradition: “The best Serbian tradition is: the state above all. Simply because without one’s own national state there is no freedom, no culture, no progress, no life... For Serbs life is worth living only in our own free national state, in which we ourselves are masters of our fate... The whole history of the Serbs can be understood only if this is kept in mind.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Dragoslav Stranjakovic emphasized the colossal price that Serbs had paid for their two independent states—Serbia and Montenegro. These sacrifices were the main reason why the Serbs “always separated the regime from the state. The regime will come and go, but the state must be preserved. A Serb will fight against a regime which he dislikes, but will always take care not to undermine state authority and state integrity.”⁷¹

Others contributors advanced the argument that Serbs had sacrificed the most for the common Yugoslav state as well. As one editorial put it,

it is an indisputable fact that the Serbs bore the greatest sacrifices, and had given most for it [Yugoslavia]. What makes them [Serbs] different from others is the devoted participation of all popular strata in the construction of the new state, whereas in the case of others only a select stratum of patriotic sons took part in this task. This is why in the soul of every Serb, whether peasant or citizen, amateur or intellectual, Yugoslavia is a matter of the deepest feelings, the supreme law of his activity... Never mind how different it might appear from time to time, Yugoslavia is more dear to the Serbs than even their narrower national feelings. All his [the Serb’s] sacrifices were made for Yugoslavia, and he will not refrain from them today if the interests of Yugoslavia so demand. The only concession he asks for is the guarantee that these sacrifices will truly serve the cause of strengthening it.⁷²

For this reason, whoever sins against Serbdom could be forgiven, but the one who “sins against the state is our mortal enemy with whom we engage in open combat.”⁷³ Likewise, Slobodan Draskovic emphasized that “all Serbs from the first to the last will fight for Yugoslavia today just

as they had for Serbia in 1912, 1913, and 1914–1918. Everyone knows this well: Serbs, and Croats, and Slovenes, as well as minorities and foreigners, friendly or unfriendly.”⁷⁴

Enough has been said to reveal the relevance of these arguments for explaining contemporary political outcomes. The idea that the Yugoslav state was the best guarantor of Serbian national unity, and that, short of that, Serbs would have the right to collective self-determination in all districts in which they constituted majorities regardless of the existing “historic” or administrative borders made a dramatic reappearance in the late 1980s. At that time, the right to self-determination of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia was seen as overriding those constitutional interpretations that viewed the Yugoslav republics as the main loci of self-determination regardless of their ethnic composition.⁷⁵

The contemporary relevance of the other two themes—the Serbs’ self-conception as a “heroic” people and the special place occupied by the state in Serbian history—is more difficult to demonstrate. Nevertheless, several observations can be made to illustrate important political-cultural continuities. In the first place, it is well to remember that, unlike their Russian Bolshevik counterparts, Yugoslav communists waged their revolution in the context of Nazi occupation.⁷⁶ Notwithstanding the continued communist campaign against “greater Serbian chauvinism,” and Tito’s attempts to mobilize minorities, the Partisans disproportionately relied on ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins during the first two years of the war. There is little doubt that this successful mobilization had much to do with the long-standing Serbian and Montenegrin tradition of resistance to foreign rule.⁷⁷

Heroic resistance against overwhelming odds was, in any case, an integral part the Kosovo myth as the defining national myth of the Serbs.⁷⁸ By appropriating this myth of heroic resistance for their own purposes, the communists established a latent link between Serbian history and the Partisan movement, and made the postwar Yugoslav communist state a legitimate object of Serbian self-identification. This process of reidentification with the communist state was eased by the repulsion caused by Chetnik atrocities, and the delegitimation of the monarchy as the traditional symbol of Serbian statehood.⁷⁹ The superimposition of the Partisan experience

upon traditional Serbian national identity was confirmed by two Western anthropologists in the conclusion of their twenty-year study of a postwar Serbian village: “To be a Serb is implicitly to be Orthodox, explicitly to celebrate the *slava* and importantly to associate oneself with a heroic tradition of struggle. Here the covert linking of the Partisan struggle against the Germans with earlier struggles against the Turks and later as a nation-state against the Austrians and the Germans is of great significance.”⁸⁰ This, and not “Russophilism,” constitutes the true link between communism, Serbian national identity, and the Yugoslav state.

The second factor that needs to be taken into account in explaining “Serbian exceptionalism” concerns the unintended consequences of communist nationality policy. The main features of this policy are known: for us, the key question concerns the unique ways in which it affected Serbs and Serbia in Yugoslavia. In this respect, the most important departure of Yugoslav from Soviet-style federalism was the extension of federalism to Serbia. This “federalization” of Serbia was meant to underscore the fact that, in contrast to the Soviet case in which Soviet-Russian nationalism acquired the character of a full-blown state ideology, Serbs and Serbia would be equalized with the other nationalities both on the ideological or institutional levels.⁸¹

The reemergence of the Serbian national question almost forty years after the war, however, was largely a consequence of this “equalization,” and especially of early communist decisions about the boundaries between different federal units.⁸² As Walker Connor correctly observed, “Yugoslavia is unique among Marxist-Leninist states in offering an illustration of gerrymandering as a means of weakening the state’s largest ethnic element.”⁸³ In the case of Serbia, this “gerrymandering” involved decisions intended to dilute the numerical preponderance of Serbs in post-war Yugoslavia. The first one of these decisions involved the creation of two autonomous regions within Serbia, Kosovo-Metohija and Vojvodina.

The creation of the autonomous region of Kosovo-Metohija was motivated by the necessity of incorporating the non-Slavic Albanian minority into the new state. As Albanians accounted for 65% of the region’s population in 1948, such a decision seemed logical on ethnic

grounds. Yet, as a Serbian liberal observer noted many years later, in a unified Serbia without autonomies, Albanians would have accounted for only 8.15% of the population, a minority by the standards of any state.⁸⁴ As Kosovo was also the historical cradle of Serbian medieval culture of great symbolic significance in the national mind, its “separation” from Serbia laid the foundations for a lasting Serbian grievance. Even more problematic from the “Serbian national point of view” was the creation of autonomous Vojvodina which, in the aftermath of the large German exodus, contained a narrow Serbian majority of 50.58% (1948), with Hungarians constituting 25.78% of the region’s population. In contrast to Kosovo, however, Vojvodina’s autonomy was justified on historical grounds, but this left unclear why other “historical” regions of the Yugoslav state (Istria, Dalmatia) were not accorded the same status.

One consequence of the creation of autonomous units in Serbia was that more than a million Serbs were left outside of the borders of “Serbia proper” (i.e., without the autonomous regions), which amounted to more than the combined ethnic strength of all minorities in the Serbian republic as a whole. Moreover, the borders of Serbia without the autonomous regions were roughly equal to the boundaries of pre-1912 Serbia, i.e., Serbia from before the Balkan wars. It is hardly surprising that many years later, when the autonomous regions practically gained the status of republics, and the party committees of Vojvodina and Kosovo began coordinating their policies against Serbia, many Serbian nationalists concluded that Tito had deliberately “divided Serbia.”

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a traditional point of contention between Serb and Croat nationalists since the mid-nineteenth century, was more complicated as its creation could be seen as an instance of gerrymandering against both Serbia and Croatia. As in 1948, Serbs constituted 44% of the region’s population and Croats 19%. Bosnian Moslems, however, were not recognized as a separate nationality until the late 1960s. Bosnia and Herzegovina was, in short, a republic without a clear titular nationality in the sense prescribed and imagined in Soviet-style federalism. The creation of autonomous regions for Serbs and Croats (compactly settled in Western Herzegovina) was the logical solution on the basis of the ethnic principle.

Instead, however, Bosnia and Herzegovina was established as a republic on the basis of its separate cultural-historical identity and within the boundaries confirmed by the great powers in the Treaty of Berlin (1878).

Another problematic decision, from the Serbian national point of view, was the absence of an autonomous Serbian region in Croatia for those territories in which Serbs constituted relative majorities, and in which they had been exposed to wartime massacres.⁸⁵ If one reason for the establishment of autonomies within Serbia was the protection of minorities from the potential tyranny of the titular nationality, an even stronger case could be made for Serbs in Croatia, whose wartime record of persecution and resistance presumably qualified them for better treatment than the one accorded the “collaborationist” Hungarian and Albanian minorities. In any case, there also existed a historical precedent for such autonomy in the former Habsburg Military Frontier. Proposals for the creation of a Serbian autonomous unit in Croatia surfaced during the war, but were discarded by the communist leadership for reasons not entirely clear to this day.⁸⁶

A final potential reason for Serbian dissatisfaction was the recognition of Montenegrins as a separate nationality. While Montenegro possessed a separate state existence throughout the nineteenth century, as well as a numerically small, but vocal separatist movement in interwar Yugoslavia, the majority of Montenegrins considered themselves close to Serbs in ethnic terms, and plans for the unification of Serbia and Montenegro predated World War I. Indeed, strong pro-Serbian sentiments in Montenegro were much in evidence during World War II, as manifested in the failure of Italian-sponsored Montenegrin separatism, as well as the participation of a large number of Montenegrins in both the Chetnik and Partisan movements. Despite this, Montenegrins were recognized as a distinct nationality, and Montenegro was established as a separate republic.

The institutional arrangements of communist federalism were in line with the ideological campaigns of Yugoslav communists against “greater Serbian chauvinism.” Many decades later, the similarities between the post-war communist solution to the national question and the pre-war constitutional proposals of some Croat politicians would provide the foundations for a

Serbian version of the “stab-in-the-back legend.” In reality, early Yugoslav federalism was hardly imagined as genuine federalism, nor were the borders between Yugoslav republics thought of as boundaries between independent states. As late as 1971, the year of the adoption of constitutional amendments that effectively turned Yugoslavia into a party-dominated confederation of republics and autonomous regions, Tito stated: “We do not look upon the independence and statehood of the republics in the classical sense. Having decided to overcome federal statism we did not strive, nor do we strive to create polycentric statism...”⁸⁷

Moreover, it should be pointed out that the institutional weakening of Serbia was compensated for by the centralist organization of the party-state and ethnic Serbian over-representation in party and government structures. Thus, in 1971, Serbs and Montenegrins (43% of the population) constituted 70% of all officials in the Yugoslav Ministry for Internal Affairs. However, these overall figures hide the fact that it was Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia, rather than Serbs from Serbia who were over-represented: thus, 63% of all Serbian officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs were Serbs from Bosnia and Croatia.⁸⁸ The relative over-representation of the Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia is also evident from figures on the ethnic distribution of elite positions in party and government structures in these republics. Thus, in 1971 Serbs in Croatia accounted for 14.2% of the total population, but occupied 21% of leading posts in the republican party organization, and 21.5% of those in government and legislative structures. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina Serbs accounted for 37.3% of the population, but comprised 47.4% of leading Party personnel, and 43.3% in government and legislative bodies.⁸⁹ In addition, ethnic Serbs also made up the majority of Yugoslav army officers.⁹⁰

These Serbian “advantages,” however, became less relevant after the passing of the 1974 constitution that de facto transformed Yugoslavia into a party-dominated confederation.⁹¹ If the introduction of “parity” (not “proportional”) representation according to a “republican key” that favored titular nationalities diluted the numerical preponderance of Serbs in federal institutions, the extension of equal status to the republics and autonomous provinces (“one republic one vote”) further underscored the anomalous position of Serbia in the federation. As Walker Connor

has noted: “Equal status in effect gave each republic/province 12.5 percent representation, resulting in a gross underrepresentation for a people (the Serbs) accounting at the time for 40 percent of the population. Moreover, a representative from Serbia proper could not speak for the 42 percent of all Serbs living in Kosovo, Vojvodina, or one of the other republics.”⁹²

The third factor that needs to be taken into account in explaining “Serbian exceptionalism” concerns the reactions of Serbian intellectuals to these developments. Already in 1968, the writer Dobrica Cosic, until then a leading regime intellectual of the Partisan generation, attacked the indifference of the provincial party committee of Kosovo towards manifestations of Albanian nationalism and warned of the possibly tragic consequences of the emigration of Serbs from the region.⁹³ Only three years later, in 1971, when constitutional amendments granted broader powers to the autonomous provinces within Serbia, Mihailo Đuric, a professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Law, argued that the Yugoslavia was already little more than a “geographic entity.” If the constitution was followed to the letter and the radical decentralization of state power proceeded apace, continued Đuric, the Serbian national question would be opened for the first time since World War II. This was because the borders of the Socialist Republic of Serbia were neither “national” nor “historic,” as evidenced by the fact that about 40 percent of Serbs found themselves outside of the jurisdiction of the Serbian republic: this was almost equal to the number of all Croats or, alternatively, to the number of all Slovenes, Bosnian Moslems, and Macedonians combined.⁹⁴

The true national radicalization of the Serbian intelligentsia, however, occurred more than a decade and a half later, when Albanian riots in Kosovo and the inability of party and government structures to halt the continued exodus of Serbs from the region, raised the specter of the final loss of this symbolic heartland of the nation.⁹⁵ This Serbian “national revival” took a variety of forms, from historical tracts attacking Titoism from both democratic and nationalist points of view, the rehabilitation of the Chetnik record in World War II, calls for the recentralization of the federation on a new democratic foundation, and repeated attacks on party policies in Kosovo.⁹⁶

Even more consequential was the emergence of narratives of ethnic victimization in the works of Serbian writers. In his epic tetralogy *Vreme smrti* (A Time of Death), Dobrica Cosic portrayed Serbia's colossal tragedy in World War I, restoring to respectability "reactionary" Serbian politicians like Nikola Pasic and the legendary military commander Zivojin Misic who led Serbian armies to victory against overwhelming odds. In his subsequent novel *Gresnik* (*The Sinner*), Cosic tried to demonstrate how internationalist Serbian communists destroyed the fruits of victory by waging a merciless struggle against "greater Serbian chauvinism under Comintern instructions."⁹⁷ Other authors seconded these themes and revived other aspects of the national past. Thus, in his widely read *Knjiga o Milutinu* (*The Book about Milutin*) Danko Popovic portrayed the tragic plight of a Serbian peasant in the first half of the century and implicitly advocated abandoning "Yugoslav illusions."⁹⁸ Finally, in *NoZ* (*The Knife*), Vuk Draskovic addressed the hitherto taboo topic of the genocide of Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia.⁹⁹

Many of these themes found their way into the *Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences*, a draft document leaked to the press in September 1986, that was widely understood as a new national program.¹⁰⁰ Without going into the broader aspects of the *Memorandum* that have been analyzed elsewhere,¹⁰¹ the main Serbian grievances voiced there can be presented schematically as follows: 1) After 1925, under Comintern instructions, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) explicitly supported secessionist movements and advocated the breakup of Yugoslavia; 2) Even though the CPY later reversed these anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serbian policies, its leader Tito (a Croat) and main ideologist Kardelj (a Slovene), exhibited a consistent anti-Serbian bias; 3) Postwar economic policies favored Slovenia and Croatia at the expense of Serbia, which was forced to support undeveloped regions and simultaneously sell its natural resources to developed ones at subsidized prices; 4) As a result of the 1974 constitution, Serbs were dismembered as a nation, with Serbs in Croatia exposed to "cultural assimilation" and in Kosovo to "physical, political, cultural, and legal genocide." Summarizing these Serbian grievances, the authors of the *Memorandum* concluded:

It is first and foremost a question of the Serbian people and its state. The nation that had achieved statehood after a prolonged and bloody struggle, had created a parliamentary democracy on its own, and which in the last two wars lost 2.5 million compatriots, is the only one which has been deprived of its own state by a party committee after four decades in the new Yugoslavia. A worse historical defeat in peacetime can hardly be imagined.¹⁰²

The fourth factor that needs to be taken into account in explaining “Serbian exceptionalism” is leadership. By 1986, the Serbian *nomenklatura* found itself facing several political challenges: 1) the growing pressure restoring constitutional control over the autonomous provinces, especially Kosovo; 2) the ideological challenge of “Serbian liberalism and nationalism;” 3) the challenge of economic reform combined with latent aspirations for social justice; 4) the resistance of republican and provincial elites with a vested interest in decentralization. It was to these challenges that Slobodan Milosevic found a most peculiar response.

Milosevic, as is well known, made his first big breakthrough in April 1987, when he addressed the grievances of Kosovo Serbs in a completely novel fashion.¹⁰³ Unlike his predecessor Ivan Stambolic who tried to reintegrate Kosovo and Vojvodina into Serbia through party channels by employing standard Titoist rhetoric,¹⁰⁴ Milosevic appealed to the traditional “heroism of Serbs and Montenegrins” and called on them to “mobilize” in the “face of injustice and humiliation” (see the introductory quote to this paper). Despite his repeated emphasis on Titoist ideals, brotherhood and unity, and the continuity of the revolution, this appeal to Serbian and Montenegrin heroism, and “land, memories, ancestors,” was highly non-traditional for a Serbian communist. Moreover, at a time when institutional gridlock was paralyzing the fragile federation and other communist leaders spoke in the frozen language of a half-dead ideology, Milosevic’s appeal to the people over the heads of party officialdom struck a completely fresh chord. It is no exaggeration to say that Milosevic’s April 1987 Kosovo Polje speech almost instantly turned him into a “charismatic hero” in the classic, Weberian sense of that term.

The nature of Milosevic’s “charismatic innovation,” however, has been misunderstood by those who reduce his appeal to “Serbian nationalism” pure and simple. In fact, Milosevic pursued a two-pronged ideological course, promising the preservation of Yugoslavia and socialism

to party officialdom and army officers, and Serbia's reunification and social justice to the "masses." This ideological course had its organizational counterpart in Milosevic's simultaneous mobilization of the "party base" (the ouster of the Stambolic faction in September 1987) and his sponsorship of Serbia's "street revolution" from below. During 1988, the newly formed "Committee for the Defense of Kosovo Serbs" rapidly developed into a parallel structure of power that proved instrumental in deposing the corrupt communist leaderships in Vojvodina (October 1988) and Montenegro (January 1989), and breaking the constitutional deadlock that stood in the way of Serbia's "unification."¹⁰⁵

Even a cursory glance at the major slogans of the "rallies of solidarity with Kosovo Serbs" that shook Serbia and Vojvodina in summer 1988 reveals the complexity of Milosevic's appeals: here extreme nationalism, populist adoration for the leader, frustrated aspirations for social justice and reform, and nostalgia for the glorious days of Yugoslavism were all mixed in new and unpredictable forms. Thus, calls for revenge ("out with immigrants from Albania;" "we will hang Vllasi" the Albanian communist leader) went hand in hand with Yugoslavist slogans ("we don't want civil war;" "down with nationalists"); celebration of the leader ("Slobodan our hero, Serbia will die for you") along with anti-communist sentiments and demands for social justice ("Central Committee, aren't you ashamed to hear the people crying"; "down with the red bourgeoisie").¹⁰⁶

At the same time as he pursued "class war" in party committees and the "anti-bureaucratic revolution" in the street, Milosevic made his first overtures to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the Serbian intelligentsia. Suddenly, books deemed reactionary only a few years earlier could be published, with former class enemies from the "bourgeois right" transformed into *les amis du peuple*. Nor was the technical intelligentsia with meritocratic aspirations left out: for them Milosevic had promises of economic reform. In this fashion, Milosevic attempted to satisfy the latent aspirations of his "articulate audiences" for political participation without turning them into potentially threatening "publics."¹⁰⁷

Milosevic's simultaneous appeal to very different constituencies (not just "nationalism") was key to his political success: Yugoslavia, unity, and Titoism for the party orthodox and army officers; Serbia for the nationalists and state support for the Kosovo Serbs; reform and rehabilitation for the intellectuals, social justice and protection for state-dependent workers and pensioners. It would be wrong, however, to interpret these appeals to different audiences as an indication of the mere "opportunism" of a "colorless apparatchik."¹⁰⁸ If we are to follow Ken Jowitt's lead, charismatic leaders typically reconcile ideological elements and latent political dispositions that previously were perceived as mutually incompatible.¹⁰⁹ The secret of charismatic innovation consists precisely of the creation of a new *Gestalt* that refashions the familiar in unpredictable ways, helping bridge the gap between mutually incompatible or even antagonistic political constituencies.

When analyzed from this point of view, Milosevic appears as the conciliator of the "greater Serbian" aspirations of Serbian nationalists and the Yugoslav orientations of army officers, party officials, and others; of technocratic aspirations for economic reform and workers' aspirations of social justice; and, finally, as an orthodox communist who violated traditional norms of party behavior by giving free rein to mass activity and thereby satisfied the aspirations for political participation of an audience disgusted with the ineffectiveness of institutions without giving it true representation. By engaging in such appeals, Milosevic found an ingenious solution to the central institutional dilemma of communist parties in the period of "neo-traditionalist" corruption and decay: the absence of a credible "combat task" that could provide the cadres with a sense of mission and the party with a novel foundation of legitimacy in an increasingly threatening environment.¹¹⁰

The "Milosevic solution" to this problem was anticipated long ago by Ken Jowitt when he noted that one way for communist parties to offer their "articulate audiences" a sense of political membership without giving up political monopoly was to "proliferate ethno-national combat tasks," elevate the army to the status of a new collective heroic agent, and substitute "the national unity of elite and citizens" for the political equality between them.¹¹¹ Milosevic fits the

bill almost to perfection: his political language overflowed with terms like “mobilization,” “battle,” “heroism,” “differentiation” (“purges” in Yugoslav communist jargon), and “unity.”¹¹² The pervasiveness of these *combat metaphors* conveyed both Milosevic’s true “Leninist determination” in the class struggle and his strong charismatic preference for non-routine crisis politics at the expense of institutionalized procedure. “Unity” on the other hand, was a term that served as a substitute for political participation and citizenship: thus, there was “the unity of all communists,” “the unity of all the citizens and working people of Serbia,” “the unity of all progressive socialist forces in Yugoslavia,” and even “the unified Yugoslav market” as the necessary precondition for economic reform. In all these different forms of “unity” virtually everyone—Serbs and Yugoslavs, communists and non-communists, the party and the people, workers, peasants, and the “honest intelligentsia,” proponents of the central plan as well as market reformers—could find their place. Underlying all these forms of “unity,” however, was the quintessential “unity of the leadership and the people” which served as a functional substitute for citizenship.

Nothing conveys the ambivalence, complexity, and populist character of Milosevic’s appeals better than his speech on the six-hundredth anniversary of the Kosovo battle (June 29, 1989), an event that marked the peak of his “charisma.” Admonishing Serbs to remember the main values bequeathed to them by the legacy of the Kosovo battle—values such as “unity,” “courage,” and “heroism,” Milosevic proceeded to state:

Today, six centuries later, we are once again in battles, and facing battles. They are not armed battles, although the possibility of those cannot be excluded. But, regardless of what they are like, battles cannot be won without determination, courage, self-sacrifice. Without those good traits that were present on the Kosovo field a long time ago. Our main battle today is for the realization of economic, political, cultural, and general social prosperity. For a faster and more successful catching up with a civilization in which people will live in the twenty-first century. For this battle we need courage. To be sure of a somewhat different kind.¹¹³

Milosevic concluded his speech by underscoring that in Kosovo Serbs not only defended themselves, but all of Europe as well. For this reason, all accusations of Serbia’s “anti-Europeanism” were unfounded: Serbia was always in Europe and would remain so, but “on its own terms, with dignity.”

During next two years, Milosevic skillfully tailored “the party line” to the “objective needs of the moment,” always leaving the ultimate question unanswered: whether he was more for reform or for socialism, more for Europe or for heroism. But to those who could perceive the overall trend with any degree of clarity, it was clear that “combat” and “heroism” would prevail, especially once credible domestic challengers appeared on the scene demanding free elections and full citizenship.¹¹⁴

All this “combat rhetoric,” however, might have been insufficient to prevent the final decay of the party-state in Serbia in the absence of *the fifth factor* that helps account for “Serbian exceptionalism:” the threat posed to Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia by the prospect of Yugoslav state disintegration. Even if Milosevic was the first one to begin stirring Serbs in Croatia, the triumph of Franjo Tudjman’s nationalist Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) in the elections of April 1990 must be seen as a turning point in the national radicalization of this prospective Serbian “diaspora.”¹¹⁵ Not only were Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, as we have seen, the collective victims of “fascist terror” in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II; by 1990, “the symbolic revival of genocide” was already well under way,¹¹⁶ with Tudjman’s intolerant posturing giving the ethnic threat a real resonance, and forcing an identity choice on Serbs in Croatia. As one early political organizer of the Serbs in Croatia explained:

So long as Yugoslavia’s federal structure was employed, we didn’t raise questions about national consciousness and national institutions. We considered Yugoslavia to be our state, and the republic boundaries as only administrative. That’s why we considered our nationality to be Yugoslav. But now that there are fewer and fewer Yugoslavs and more Croats, Slovenians, Serbs, Albanians, and so on, we realized that we Serbs in Croatia need to return to our own national identity. In this context, where we are confronted with real dangers and existential fears, it is normal to unite in the framework of the national idea and to use that principle to defend ourselves. If I am attacked as a Jovan and as a Serb, it is only as a Serb that I can defend myself.¹¹⁷

For Serbian communists from Croatia and Bosnia who, on account of their strong war-time record, were disproportionately represented in the Yugoslav army and republican regime structures, this identity-choice had a strong political dimension as well: Tudjman was not only a Croat nationalist but also an anti-communist who was threatening the foundations of that Titoist

Yugoslavia which they had fought for, and which Milosevic ostensibly still was defending. The boundaries between the “class” and “national” enemy were especially unclear to those Titoist army officers whose “revolutionary Yugoslav” self-identification remained strong until the very end.¹¹⁸ The importance of this national and political identity crisis of Yugoslav army officers of Serbian background cannot be underestimated: at a critical point of Yugoslavia’s path to war they felt threatened both as communist Yugoslavs and as Serbs, and both threats decisively pushed them into Milosevic’s political camp.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I advanced what I hope is an interpretively adequate and causally plausible explanation of the non-democratic political outcome in Serbia of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the process, I critically reexamined several theories of “Serbian exceptionalism” in the specialist literature on Serbia and Yugoslavia, pointing out the inadequacy of some one-sided or stereotypical views of Yugoslav history, Serbian society, and Serbian nationalism in their historical development. My goal was to contribute to a more adequate understanding of the advent of a Serbian regime that was responsible for much of the tragedy that befell the former Yugoslavia, not to absolve it from its share of responsibility for that tragedy. Neither the advent of that regime nor the subsequent tragedy that ensued, I tried to demonstrate, can be understood on the basis of one-sided or “reductionist” explanations of the “Milosevic phenomenon,” i.e., without taking into account some long-term factors, such as the special place occupied by the Yugoslav state in Serbian national consciousness, the legacy of ethnic persecution in World War II, the unintended consequences of communist nationality policy that led to the reemergence of the Serbian national question in the 1980s, as well the dramatic identity dilemma faced by Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia in the critical phase of Yugoslavia’s denouement. Only this peculiar constellation of political-cultural, institutional, ideological, leadership, and “diaspora” factors can help explain “Serbian exceptionalism,” i.e., the conditions that allowed the party-state to survive in the face of a remarkably hostile international environment and considerable internal opposition. Thus, the

willingness of a large part of Serbian society to put up with a non-democratic regime for a considerable period of time was not only a consequence of Milosevic's residual if steadily declining charismatic status, his successful monopolization of the media, the repeated invocation of credible ethnic threats which the regime did much to produce, or the "siege mentality" caused by international sanctions, but also has to be understood against the background of a long-term political-cultural factor analyzed above—the special place of the independent national state in Serbian history, the real and perceived collective sacrifices that went into its creation, and the mythology of Serbian "heroism" in the struggle against overwhelming odds.

The failure to appreciate the importance of such factors has had not only unwelcome theoretical, but also dire practical and political consequences. Thus, much of the early Yugoslav policy of the international community could be said to have rested on a false analogy between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—two states that indeed had much in common, from the legacy of indigenous communist revolutions to ethno-territorial federalism and the internationalist ideology of the "friendship of peoples." However, in contrast to the "Soviet idea," the "Yugoslav idea" was neither communist nor "imperial" in any recognizable sense of that term. It is in consequence, therefore, that unlike many Russians who came to view the Soviet state as the pathological superstructure of a totalitarian regime that stood in the way of Russia's own cultural revival and national statehood,¹¹⁹ most Serbs saw Yugoslavia as "their" (but not only theirs) *national* state. When this is taken into account, it was "logical" to expect that Serbia would attempt to hold on to remnants of the Yugoslav state or create an enlarged Serbian national state by incorporating territories inhabited by its co-nationals in the neighboring republics (i.e., Croatia and Bosnia).

This raises the counter-factual question of whether my account does not place too much emphasis on "the burden of history" as opposed to concrete political actors, and of whether my explanation is, in this sense, "over-determined." To this it might be responded that historical factors cannot and should not be sacrificed to the theoretical elegance of social-scientific explanation if one can demonstrate their explanatory significance; and, secondly, that while it can

plausibly be hypothesized that a less “combat-oriented” and less destructive Serbian leader than Milosevic might have found the way to national compromise, the full “confederalization” of the Yugoslav polity along the lines suggested by Slovenia and Croatia would have required “heroic self-restraint” on the part of a democratic Serbian leader, as well as full international guarantees (including military ones) to the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Once the war broke out, however, the vicious cycle of ethnic victimization gave the process of Yugoslav dissolution an irreversible character, and made the prospects of democracy in Serbia unlikely in the short run. That significant segments of Serbian society continued to challenge the Milosevic regime through mass demonstrations (1991, 1992, 1996–1997), electoral competition (1990, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000), as well as through the independent mass media under the extremely adverse circumstances of war, international sanctions, and the internal police state, should be seen as sign of the resilience of proto-democratic forces, not as a sign of the “pathological weakness” of Serbian civil society.

But the development of that civil society and Serbian democracy is still taking place in the shadow of war. It is no exaggeration to say that Serbia’s defeat in the successive wars of Yugoslav succession has been total—military, political, economic, and moral. In a mere thirteen years, Serbia has lost most of the territories it had aspired to since the formation of the national state in the nineteenth century and that were incorporated into the Yugoslav state 1918: these include Krajina and Western Bosnia that were lost to the Croat offensive of August 1995, and Kosovo after 1999. Moreover, the uncertain status of the Republika Srpska (the Serbian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina formed as a result of the 1995 Dayton accords), and the still incomplete process of Yugoslav dissolution (witness the current tensions between Serbia and Montenegro), means that even after ten years of war the Serbian national question has not been conclusively resolved. To these real losses should be added symbolic ones—the ignominious death of the Yugoslav idea and the dishonorable record of ethnic cleansing and war crimes. Serbia’s “transition to democracy,” therefore, is still “exceptional” in the sense of the exceptionally difficult legacy faced by the new democratic regime.

NOTES

¹ Dobrica Cosic, “Jedan pristup istorijskom romanu,” *Stvarno i moguće* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1983), 143. This is the text of Cosic’s undelivered 1980 Oxford lecture on the historical novel.

² Slobodan Milosevic, *Godine raspleta* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1989), 140–147.

³ Ognjen Pribicevic, *Vlast i opozicija u Srbiji* (Beograd: B92, 1997), 13–14.

⁴ Juan Linz, “Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes,” in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, MA and Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1975), III, 175–343. In his classic overview of sub-types of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, Linz (345–346) places the Yugoslavia of the mid-1970s in the category of “democratizing and pluralistic authoritarianism,” i.e., a sub-type of an authoritarian regime in which the institutionalization of group interests is well advanced and in which further democratization (at least on the local and/or factory level) seemed like an imminent possibility.

⁵ Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 1.

⁶ Seymour Lipset, *Political Man* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, enlarged edition).

⁷ For the developmental differences between Yugoslav republics see Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962–1991* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 136–176.

⁸ Nicholas J. Miller, “A failed transition: the case of Serbia,” in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, eds., *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in South-East Europe* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 146–189.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰ Lenard Cohen, *Serpent in Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milosevic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001) combines an analysis of the instrumental manipulation of nationalism with an emphasis on the patriarchal and traditionalist elements of Serbian political culture.

¹¹ Eric Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) pays special attention to the cultural underpinnings of the regime.

¹² Slobodan Antonic, “Drustveni sklopovi, politicki delatnici, demokratski poredak,” in Mladen Lazic, ed., *Racji hod. Srbija u transformacijskim procesima* (Beograd: Filip Visnjic, 2000), 65–171.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69–75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77. It should be remembered that manual workers were the largest occupational group in all eastern European countries and post-Soviet republics at the time of the fall of communism.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81–86. It should be pointed out that Antonic’s quantitative approach included the construction of a composite “index of parliamentarism” on the basis of the length of periods parliamentary, semi-parliamentary, quasi-authoritarian, and authoritarian rule over the last 150 years in Greece, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103–116.

¹⁷ For the evolution of the Serbian liberal and populist traditions see Gale Stokes, *Legitimacy through Liberalism: Vladimir Jovanovic and the Transformation of Serbian Politics* (Seattle and London: The University of Washington Press, 1975); *Idem.*, *Politics as Development. The Emergence of Political Parties in Nineteenth-Century Serbia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹⁸ For the democratic traditions of the University of Belgrade see Dorde Stankovic, *Studenti i univerzitet, 1914–1954* (Beograd: Centar za savremenu istoriju jugoistocne Evrope, 2000).

¹⁹ Vojislav Kostunica and Kosta Cavoski, *Party Pluralism or Monism: Social Movements and the Political System in Yugoslavia, 1944–1949* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Characteristically, this book was first published in Belgrade in 1983, i.e., at a time when liberal opposition to the communist monopoly on political life in Serbia and Yugoslavia was reaching its peak.

²⁰ The most important petitions and documents of the Committee are reprinted in Aleksa Dilas, ed., *Srpsko pitanje* (Beograd: Politika, 1991), 255–288. The list of those defended by the Committee included the future Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, as well as Albanian political prisoners from Kosovo. In addition, select committee members also defended the future Croat President Franjo Tudjman, and the subsequent leader of the proto-fascist Croat Party of Right Dobroslav Paraga.

²¹ For the original arguments about Pasic see Latinka Perovic, *Srpsko-ruske revolucionarne veze* (Beograd: Sluzbeni list SRJ, 1993); *idem.*, *Srpski socijalisti 19 veka. Prilog istoriji socijalisticke misli* (Beograd: Sluzbeni list SRJ, 1995); Andrei L. Shemiakin, *Ideologija Nikoly Pashicha. Formirovanie i evolutsiia 1868–1891* (Moskva: Indrik, 1998).

²² Nebojsa Popov, *Srpski populizam. Od marginalne do dominantne pojave*, *Vreme*, 35, 24 May 1993, 3–34 (special edition).

²³ Latinka Perovic, “The Flight from Modernization,” in Nebojsa Popov, ed., *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 109–123, as well as a number of contributions in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima XX veka* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1994).

²⁴ Ivo Banac, “Nationalism in Southeastern Europe,” in Charles A. Kupchan, ed., *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 107–122.

²⁵ Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

²⁶ For the relative overrepresentation of Serbs and Montenegrins in party and government elites see Lenard Cohen, *The Socialist Pyramid: Elites and Power in Yugoslavia* (Oakville, NY, and London: Mosaic Press, 1989).

²⁷ The official early collection of Milosevic’s speeches is Slobodan Milosevic, *Godine raspleta* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1989). A more recent, albeit poorly edited collection by a group of authors is *Od Gazimestana do Seveningena* (Beograd: Harprom, 2001).

²⁸ See the contributions in Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia*.

²⁹ Milovan Dilas, *Wartime* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977), documents the significance of Soviet-Russian sentiments for Yugoslav communists.

³⁰ Veljko Kadijevic, *Moje vidjenje raspada* (Beograd: Politika, 1993). See also the memoirs of the last president of Yugoslavia’s collective presidency Borisav Jovic, *Poslednji dani SFRJ* (Beograd, Politika: 1995).

³¹ R. V. Burks, *The Dynamics of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 107–130. See also *Vojna enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Vojno-izdavacki zavod, 1971), vol.7, 15–27, for the dates of formation of various Partisan brigades. The brigades carried regional appellations so it is fairly easy to identify their Serbian provenance. The exceptions to this rule were the First and Second Proletarian Brigade largely populated by Serbs from Serbia.

³² For the Chetnik movement see Jozo Tomasevich, *The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

³³ Burks, *The Dynamics of Communism in Eastern Europe*, 127.

³⁴ This was rooted in the interwar policies of Yugoslav communists. See Ivan Avakumovic, *The History of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1962). A more recent treatment that extends to the postwar period is Aleksa Dilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919–1953* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³⁵ See, in particular, Ivo Banac, “Yugoslavia: The Fearful Asymmetry of War,” in Stephen R. Graubard, ed., *Exit from Communism* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1993), 141–174, in addition to *idem.*, “Nationalism in Southeastern Europe.”

³⁶ Banac, “Nationalism in Southeastern Europe,” 115.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, “Yugoslavia. The Fearful Assymetry of War,” 144.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, “Nationalism in Southeastern Europe,” 115.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, “Yugoslavia. The Fearful Assymetry of War,” 145.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, “Nationalism in Southeastern Europe,” 115.

⁴² For some arguments to this effect see Rabia Alia and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Why Bosnia?* (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteers Press, Inc., 1993); BoZe Covic, ed., *Roots of Serbian Aggression* (Zagreb: Centar za strane jezike, 1993); Branka Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* (London and New York: Verso Press, 1993); Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia. A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), and *idem.*, *Kosovo. A Short History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999); Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic, eds., *This Time We Knew: Western Response to the Genocide in Bosnia* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996); Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

⁴³ For atrocities in the Balkan wars, see *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect* (Washington DC: The Carnegie Endowment, 1993).

⁴⁴ For a more balanced conceptual treatment of Balkan and East Central European authoritarianism and fascism see Andrew C. Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 125–218.

⁴⁵ In passing, it should be noted that Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic’s Pan-Slavic “exclusivism” landed him in Dachau during World War II.

⁴⁶ A good guide to Serbia under occupation is Branko Petranovic, *Srbija u drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd: Vojna Stamparija, 1992).

⁴⁷ For cultural policies in interwar Yugoslavia see Ljubodrag Dimic, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd, Stubovi kulture, 1996, 3 vols.).

⁴⁸ For Serbian arguments about Macedonia see Dragoslav Jankovic, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1915 godine* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1973), 30–33.

⁴⁹ Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Branka Prpa-Jovanovic, *Jugoslavija kao moderna država u vidjenjima srpskih intelektualaca, 1918–1929*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Belgrade University, 1995).

⁵⁰ For the evolution of the views of Serbian intellectuals towards the Yugoslav state in the interwar period see Milisav Janicijevic, *Stvaralacka inteligencija medjuratne Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1984). For the new “statist” interpretation of Yugoslavism, see the 1939 lecture of Serbia’s greatest historian Slobodan Jovanovic, “Jugoslovenstvo u prošlosti i budućnosti,” *Sabrana Dela Slobodana Jovanovica* (Beograd: BIGZ, Srpska književna zadruga i Jugoslavijapublik, 1991), vol.11, 567–575.

⁵¹ Jozo Tomasevich, *Peasants, Politics, and Economic Change in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA and London, England: Stanford and Oxford University Press, 1955), 255. For newer estimates see Rados Ljusic, “Doseljavanja, iseljavanja i gubici stanovništva u novovekovnoj Srbiji (1804–1918)” in *Seobe srpskog naroda od XIV do XIX veka* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1990), 77–99.

⁵² Stevan Pavlowitch, *Yugoslavia* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 53, fn.

⁵³ Bogoljub Kocovic, *Zrtve drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji* (London: Nase delo, 1985), 110–111. Similar figures are presented independently by the Croat demographer Vladimir Zerjavic, *Opsesije oko Jasenovca i Bleiburga* (Zagreb: Globus, 1992).

⁵⁴ Kocovic, *Zrtve drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji*, 111.

⁵⁵ Zerjavic, *Opsesije oko Jasenovca i Bleiburga*, 71.

⁵⁶ See Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletic, *Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941–1945* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990). By contrast, the mass liquidation of Slovene “White Guardists” and Croat “fascists” as well as a much smaller number of Serbian Chetniks in the Bleiburg massacres of 1945 cannot be considered to be ethnically motivated in the same way, as these were carried out by Tito’s Partisans. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that in Croat “martyrology” these are often seen as victims of “Serbo-Bolshevik” terror.

⁵⁷ Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (New York: TV Books, Penguin, USA, 1995) is probably the most widely read journalist account that squarely rests the blame on Milosevic’s shoulders for the Yugoslav civil war. Similar but weaker accounts in the same vein are Viktor Meier, *Yugoslavia: A History of Its Demise* (London: Routledge, 1999), and Dusko Doder and Louise Branson, *Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Vernon Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” in Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven Miller, eds., *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: 1996–97), 132–169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 136–142.

⁶¹ For a good overview of these different appeals see Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁶² The best work on the Agreement is Ljubo Boban, *Sporazum Cvetkovic-Macek* (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1965).

⁶³ The Serbian Cultural Club was formed in January 1937 as a broad organization of independent intellectuals and industrialists devoted to examining problems of Serbian national culture in non-partisan fashion and with the aim of fostering an enlightened Serbian patriotism. See Ljubodrag Dimic, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*, vol. I, 506–511 *et passim*.

⁶⁴ Vladimir Corovic, “Pitanje drZavnog preuredjenja,” *Srpski glas*, 23 November 1939, in Miodrag Jovicic, *Jako srpstvo-jaka Jugoslavija. Izbor clanaka iz “Srpskog glasa” organa Srpskog kulturnog kluba, 1939–1940* (Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1991), 18–19. All subsequent references to articles from *Srpski glas* are to this edition.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁶ “Srpska jedinica,” 25 January 1939, *ibid.*, 103–104; “Sporazum ili nesporazum,” 1 February 1940, *ibid.*, 105–106.

⁶⁷ “Jugoslovenski karakter srpsko-hrvatskih pokrajina” and “Cija je Bosna,” 23 November 1939, *ibid.*, 20–22, 28–29; “Bajramski prilog hrvatskog dnevnika,” 30 November 1939, *ibid.*, 40–42.

⁶⁸ For Macedonia see “JuZna Srbija ili Makedonija,” 16 November 1939, 11–12; for Dubrovnik and Dalmatia see “Problem Dubrovnika,” 29 February 1939, 134–138, and “Nasa Dalmacija,” 4 April 1940, 166–172.

⁶⁹ M.M., “Gde god je Srba–tu je Srbija,” 14 December 1939, *ibid.*, 57–58.

⁷⁰ Slobodan Draskovic, “Danasnji poloZaj i zadaci Srba,” 29 February 1940, *ibid.*, 124–128. See also, by the same author “Zloupotrebe srpskog imena,” 21 March 1940, *ibid.*, 156–158.

⁷¹ Dragoslav Stranjakovic, “Hrvati i Sporazum od 26.avgusta 1939.godine,” 28 December 1939, *ibid.*, 90–94.

⁷² “DrZava pre svega,” 8 February 1940, *ibid.*, 114–116.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁴ “U Srbiji nema mesta Srbovanju,” 16 May 1940, *ibid.*, 194–197.

⁷⁵ Robert Hayden, “Constitutional Nationalism in the Formerly Yugoslav Republics,” *Slavic Review* 51, 4 (Winter 1992), 654–674.

⁷⁶ In this respect, the Yugoslav revolution was more similar to the Chinese revolution than the Russian prototype. See Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962). Johnson includes the Yugoslav case by way of secondary comparison.

⁷⁷ Milovan Dilas, *Wartime*, gives a good sense of how this tradition of resistance helped the Partisans recruit among Serbs and Montenegrins.

⁷⁸ The Kosovo myth cannot be discussed here at length. For a good overview see Thomas A. Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha Kosovo, 1389* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), and the collection of essays in Wayne S. Vucinich and Thomas A. Emmert, eds. *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁷⁹ See, in this respect, the excellent contribution by Audrey Helfant Budding, “Yugoslavs into Serbs: Serbian National Identity, 1961–1971,” *Nationalities Papers* 25, 3 (1997), 405–426.

⁸⁰ Joel M. Halpern and Barbara Kerensky Halpern, *A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective* (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1984), 123. The *slava* is a Serbian Orthodox family holiday in celebra-

tion of a Christian saint who serves as the protector of the household. The custom serves as the defining marker of Serbian orthodoxy.

⁸¹For a detailed contrast between the Russian and Serbian cases see Veljko Vujacic “Historical Legacies, Nationalist Mobilization and Political Outcomes in Russia and Serbia: A Weberian View,” *Theory and Society* 25 (December 1996), 763–801.

⁸² The following section is based on Veljko Vujacic “Institutional Origins of Contemporary Serbian Nationalism,” *East European Constitutional Review* 5, 4 (Fall 1996), 51–61.

⁸³ Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 333.

⁸⁴ By comparison, Albanians constituted 17.12% of the population of the republic of Macedonia, but no provision was made for their autonomy. Kosta Civoski, “Jugoslavija i srpsko pitanje,” in Aleksa Djilas, ed., *Srpsko pitanje*, 95–117.

⁸⁵ It must be pointed out, however, the Serb-Croat border in the Srem (Vojvodina) was resolved to Serbian advantage and also that there was no corresponding autonomous region for Croats in Vojvodina. On the other hand, Croats constituted only 2.6% of the population of Serbia, while Serbs made up 14.47% of the population of Croatia.

⁸⁶ Paul Shoup, *Yugoslav Communism and the National Question* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 112–113.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, 226.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 298–299.

⁸⁹ For these figures see Lenard Cohen, *The Socialist Pyramid*, 297–334.

⁹⁰ According to one account, ethnic Serbs accounted for 60.5% of the officer corps in 1972 (Serbs made up 41.7% of the total population), and Montenegrins for another 8% (3% of the total population). In comparison, Croats (23% of the total population) made up only 14% of the officer corps. However, there was more “ethnic equality” in the High Command in which Serbs were under-represented (33%) and Croats over-represented (38%), a clear sign of the regime’s commitment to equalization at the highest command levels. It should be noted, however, that the High Command sample is small. James Gow, *Legitimacy and the Military. The Yugoslav Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 54.

⁹¹ For the devolution of authority from the federal center see Steven L. Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion in Socialist Yugoslavia: Political Decision-Making since 1966* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁹² Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, 336.

⁹³ Cosic’s speech to the Central Committee of Serbia is reproduced in Dobrica Cosic, *Stvarno i moguće*, 27–40.

⁹⁴ *Anali pravnog fakulteta u Beogradu* 3, (May-June 1971), 230–233. It should be pointed out that Djuric’s unorthodox discussion of the 1971 constitutional amendments earned him a two-year prison sentence (subsequently commuted to one year).

⁹⁵ Between 1961 and 1981, the proportion of Serbs and Montenegrins in the population of Kosovo dropped from 27% to 15%. By the time of Milosevic’s rise to power (1987) it was little more than 10%. The 1981 Yugoslav census listed 110,000 Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo living in other parts of Yugoslavia. By 1987, an additional 25–30,000 had left the province. The figures are from Michel Roux,

Les Albanais en Yougoslavie: Minorite nationale, territoire et developpement (Paris: Editions de la Maison de Sciences de l'Homme, 1992).

⁹⁶ For a good overview of Serbian intellectual dissent in this period see Aleksandar Pavkovic, "Intellectual Dissidence and the Serb National Question," in Aleksandar Pavkovic, Halyna Koscharsky, and Adam Czarnota, *Nationalism and Postcommunism* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995), 121–139; *idem.*, "The Serb National Idea: A Revival, 1986–1992" *Slavonic and East European Review* 72, 3 (July 1994), 440–455. For the democratic critique of Titoism see the already mentioned Vojislav Kostunica and Kosta Cavoski, *Party Pluralism or Monism*; for the rehabilitation of the Chetnik heritage see Veselin Djuretic, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna vlada* (Beograd: Balkanoloski institut, 1985, 2 vols.).

⁹⁷ Dobrica Cosic, *Vreme smrti* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1972–1979); *Gresnik* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1985).

⁹⁸ Danko Popovic, *Kniga o Milutinu* (Beograd: KnjiZevne novine, 1986).

⁹⁹ Vuk Draskovic, *NoZ* (Beograd: Zapis, 1982).

¹⁰⁰ *Memorandum srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti* (Beograd: Duga, June 1989). In reality, while the *Memorandum* did express Serbian national grievances in cryptic form, it was not as influential as is widely believed.

¹⁰¹ For this broader context and a balanced assessment of the *Memorandum's* significance see Audrey Helfant Budding, "Systemic Crisis and National Mobilization: The Case of the 'Memorandum of the Serbian Academy'," in Zvi Gitelman et. al., *Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe: Essays in Honor of Roman Szporluk* (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2000), 49–69.

¹⁰² *Memorandum*, 38–39.

¹⁰³ The following section is largely based on Veljko Vujacic "Serbian Nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic and the Origins of the Yugoslav War," *The Harriman Review* (December 1995), 25–34.

¹⁰⁴ Ivan Stambolic, *Rasprave o SR Srbiji: 1979–1987* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988).

¹⁰⁵ In October 1988, one hundred thousand people, led by the organizers of the Committee for the Defense of Kosovo Serbs, surrounded the building of the provincial party committee of Vojvodina, forcing the resignation of the whole leadership. The same scenario was repeated in January 1989 in Montenegro.

¹⁰⁶ Despite its "revolutionary bias," excellent empirical material on the rallies in Vojvodina can be found in Sava Kercov, Jovo Rados, and Aleksandar Raic, *Mitinz u Vojvodini 1988 godine* (Novi Sad: Dnevnik, 1990).

¹⁰⁷ For the distinction between "articulate audiences" and "publics" in the context of late communism see Ken Jowitt, *The New World Disorder* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁸ Aleksa Dilas, "Slobodan Milosevic: A Profile," *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (Summer 1993), 81–96, stresses Milosevic's opportunism but does little to explain his mass appeal.

¹⁰⁹ Jowitt, *The New World Disorder*, 1–50.

¹¹⁰ For the idea of the "combat task" as an institutional requirement of communist parties see Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).

¹¹¹ Jowitt, *The New World Disorder*, 155. Jowitt, it should be noted, was writing about the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

¹¹² An excellent early analysis of Milosevic's "combat rhetoric" is Kosta Cavoski, *Slobodan protiv slobode* (Beograd: Dosije, 1991).

¹¹³For Milosevic's Kosovo battle speech see *NIN*, 2 July 1989.

¹¹⁴ For Milosevic's preference for "direct democracy" and aversion to parliamentary pluralism see his interview to *Le Monde*, 12 July 1989. Translated in *NIN*, 16 July 1989.

¹¹⁵ An excellent analysis of the Serbian diaspora question is Susan L. Woodward, "Diaspora or the Dangers of Disunification? Putting the 'Serbian Model' into Perspective," in Michael Mandelbaum, ed., *The New European Diasporas: National Minorities and Conflict in Eastern Europe* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2000), 159–214.

¹¹⁶ Bette Denitch, "Dismembering Yugoslavia: nationalist ideologies and the symbolic revival of genocide," *American Ethnologist* 21, 2 (1994), 367–390; Robert M. Hayden, "Recounting the dead. The rediscovery and redefinition of wartime massacres in late and post-communist Yugoslavia," in Rubie S. Watson, ed., *Memory, History, and Opposition* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994), 167–185.

¹¹⁷ Denitch, "Dismembering Yugoslavia," 377.

¹¹⁸ See the already-mentioned memoirs of the last head of the Yugoslav army, Veljko Kadijevic, *Moje vidjenje raspada* (Beograd: Politika, 1993).

¹¹⁹ See especially Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991) but also Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (New York: Random House, 1994) Both Solzhenitsyn and Yeltsin, however differently, portray Russia as a victim of the empire.