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The Bridges Over the Miljacka: The Long Farewell to Yugoslav Citizenship

Yugoslav communists thought, as Sabrina Ramet summarizes, that they had found a solution to the national question in the *proportionality* in the federal organs (not present in the army), in the *ethnic quota* system (not applied in Kosovo and not always in Croatia and Bosnia), in *massive decentralization* to the point of confederalization, in the mythology of partisan struggle, in international success and in the charisma of Tito (1992: 278). As for the old wartime promise of social emancipation, the answer was the Yugoslav strain of self-managing socialism. If the partisan mythology was intensively deconstructed in the 1980s and the system of self-management did not yield much enthusiasm any more – the economic and debt crisis was increasingly seen as a crisis of self-management as a political-economic system as such – one could say that there was still a cultural-historic argument embodied in *Yugoslavism* as a narrative of identity and belonging of citizens to the common state. But, alas, by the 1980s, it had lost much of its political influence and proved incapable of yet another reincarnation that could have mobilized political spirits and imagination. From various consciously taken or unconsciously held ideological positions (ranging from anarchic sentiments, liberalism to right-wing nationalism), the whole ideological structure of the regime came under attack in the second half of the 1980s. The undermining of the anti-fascist struggle narrative went hand in hand with denouncing the inferiority of self-management as opposed to consumer-oriented liberal capitalism. The attack on historical legacy and the regime's very ideology entailed a further weakening of Yugoslavism. However, back then the relationship to Yugoslavia as identity and project varied from one republic to another, from one generation to another and heavily depended on the concrete political processes (and their perception).

One could even argue that the decentralization of the federal state and the Party would have never occurred, could have never been conceptualized and could have never gained enough political support without the simultaneous

abandonment of the traditionally ‘centripetal’ idea of South-Slavic cultural and political unity. The practice of centrifugal federalism, the federalization of the Party, the progressive decentralization of the economy, industry, culture, media, science and education, the redefinition of Yugoslavism in less cultural, less *national* and less political terms and the perception of Yugoslavia not as a state but more and more so as a ‘community’, ‘organization’ or ‘conglomerate’ – all occurring in Yugoslavia from mid-1960s at a sometimes vertiginous pace – seem to be interactive parts of the same puzzle.

Nevertheless, immediately after the war it appeared that resurrected Yugoslavia and strong patriotism of the national-liberation struggle had given a new impetus to Yugoslavism – this time in a federalist form meant to dissociate the idea from the bitter experiences of pre-war unitarism. Although Yugoslavism itself went through curious re-definitions and had to compete with communist internationalism between 1945 and 1948, socialist nation-building Yugoslavism would be seen and promoted throughout the 1950s as something of uncontested worth. Having described earlier the birth and evolution of Yugoslavism between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War, we should recount here its last chapters.

Yugoslavism: Fading of an idea

One can summarily conclude that the idea met its *political* death much before Yugoslavia disintegrated as a country. Even after the Party abandoned it in its own ranks, the idea still had certain emotional and political value for many Yugoslavs who remained attached to it, or some parts of it, but were incapable of formulating it politically – or of formulating it in a politically successful way – at the critical junction when liberal democracy and its instruments and procedures were introduced in the Yugoslav republics. I explore this junction in depth in the next chapters. For now, let us turn to the days when (federalist) Yugoslavism meant a much better future and the only available exit from ‘fratricidal war’.

The 1943 AVNOJ declaration was an ideological – not yet political let alone military – triumph of federalist Yugoslavism over both the Yugoslav unitarism of the pre-war period and separatist ethnic nationalisms. Nevertheless, the new Yugoslav leadership would soon challenge their proper Yugoslavism through its ideological commitment to communist internationalism. In other words, Yugoslavism was seen in these early post-war days as anti-nationalism (against ethnic separatism and chauvinism), as wartime patriotism and as internationalism (Djilas 1991: 165). Therefore, federalist Yugoslavism could be

part of the higher ideal of communist internationalism embodied in the project of the socialist Balkan federation that, if ever realized, would have included non-Slavs as well. Yugoslavia was supposed to be the centre that would unite Bulgaria, Albania and, possibly, Greece.

The elasticity of federalist Yugoslavism was first put to the test with the project of a common Yugoslav–Bulgarian state. In 1944, Stalin pressed Tito for the creation of a Yugoslav–Bulgarian federation. The Yugoslav leadership feared that what Stalin actually had in mind was to control Yugoslavia with the help of Bulgarians. The Yugoslav counterproposal was a federation of seven republics instead of the dual Yugoslav–Bulgarian state advocated by Sofia (Banac 1988: 31–32). Although the Bulgarian leader Georgi Dimitrov and Tito signed the 1947 Bled agreement on close economic and political ties, the conflict between Moscow and Belgrade soon buried the idea of a Balkan federation. In early 1948, Stalin reiterated to Tito his command to form a federation with Bulgaria. Belgrade, now convinced that Stalin's plans were to take effective control of Yugoslavia via the Bulgarian 'Trojan horse', opposed the idea but refused to renounce Albania. The 'Yugoslavification of Albania' was under way after 1945 and Yugoslavs believed that unification was about to take place with Albania as the seventh republic within the Yugoslav federation (Banac 1988: 32–43). On 27 March 1948, Stalin sent his first letter to Yugoslavia with the intention to discipline its leadership. On 28 June 1948, the Cominform issued a declaration in which it expelled the Yugoslav Party and called for loyal forces within the country to remove Tito and 'his clique'.

Left to their own devices after 1948, Yugoslav leaders started to promote 'socialist Yugoslavism' that did not aim at merging the Yugoslav nations but at building a socialist society that would inevitably result in a strong sense of belonging to a supranational Yugoslav polity. The successful opposition to Stalin and his political and military threat boosted the popularity of Tito and the Party as well as support for socialist Yugoslavism. The practice of publishing separate textbooks, for instance, was seen as promoting ethnic nationalism and weakening the Yugoslav unity that had to be fostered and promoted in culture and education as well. Major Croatian and Serbian intellectuals signed in 1954 the Novi Sad agreement on the single language of Serbs, Croats and Montenegrins (named Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian). In 1958, the Seventh party congress called for the further development of Yugoslav socialist consciousness.

Nevertheless, in the first half of the 1960s, unifying socialist Yugoslavism started to be perceived as contrary to decentralization and was soon abandoned in official policy. Significantly, Yugoslavism and relations between the republics

and the federal state were openly debated in literary circles; and as usual, this anticipated the changes soon to come. In 1961, a debate between Serbian writer Dobrica Ćosić and his Slovenian colleague Dušan Pirjevec provoked a stir. It revealed the old conflict between centralist and federalist Yugoslavism that inevitably brought to the table the question of Yugoslavia's own structure. Ćosić advocated socialist Yugoslavism and the need for Yugoslav unity, whereas Pirjevec defended the idea of Yugoslavia as a federation of full-fledged nations. In the following years, the 'centripetal' period ended and the ideology of brotherhood and unity ceded place – although it did not disappear from official rhetoric – to the 'Yugoslav socialist patriotism' that promoted the more socialist and less South-Slavic features of Yugoslavia (Jović 2003b: 166). When it came to Yugoslavia as a state, more stress was put on its ideological socialist character and its multinational composition.

The Eight Congress of the LCY in 1964 championed decentralization, the necessary flip-side of which was the Party's abandonment of Yugoslavism. Tito himself repudiated the idea of the artificial creation of one single Yugoslav nation, something paramount to 'assimilation and bureaucratic centralization, to unitarism and hegemonism'. For him, 'Yugoslav socialist integration is a new kind of social community in which all nationalities have common *interests*' (partially reprinted in Kobsa et al. 1978: 354–359). Wayne Vucinich observes that 'there is a serious paradox at the core of the Communist nationality program: the attempt to encourage ethnic separateness works at cross-purpose to the desire to foster Yugoslav unity' (1969: 282). As noted above, the Eighth Party congress gave a green light to the decentralization policies that clearly won the day after the removal of their main opponent Aleksandar Ranković and his followers in 1966. It is not surprising then that the following year – indeed, 1967 can be seen as the turning point in the history of socialist Yugoslavia – brought far-reaching constitutional changes and at the same time a strong and possibly decisive blow to Yugoslavism as an idea of strong cultural and political South-Slavic unity almost a quarter of a century before the end of Yugoslavia.

In that same year, on 17 March 1967, the Zagreb-based newspaper *Telegram* published the 'Declaration Concerning the Name and the Position of the Croatian Literary Language', signed by eighteen major Croatian cultural and literary institutions such as Matica hrvatska and the Writer's Association of Croatia. The Declaration openly rejected the 1954 Novi Sad Agreement on the single Serbo-Croatian language and signalled the abandonment of cultural Yugoslavism by the Croatian cultural elite, the very elite that originally formulated and gave substance to the Yugoslav movement and

provided it with numerous high-profile partisans since its nineteenth-century beginnings. The fact that Miroslav Krleža – the most important literary and intellectual figure in Croatia and an open supporter of the Communist party since its foundation – signed the Declaration represented a serious blow to any attempts at a closer linguistic unity or closer cultural unity in general.

Again, because the foundation of the Yugoslav project was linguistic unity and the proximity of the South-Slavic dialects, the declarative abandonment of a single literary language implied the abandonment of the larger cultural and political project as well (Wachtel 1998: 185). In other words, Yugoslavia could no longer be the name for a unifying nation-building and state-building project (whether of a unitarist or centralist-federalist kind), but only for a ‘community’ or a ‘union’ of fully constituted nations, characterized by linguistic and cultural independence and statehood, that should decide independently and among each other the degree of their political unity. A response to the Declaration quickly came from Serbia. Forty-two writers from the Writers’ Association of Serbia drafted ‘A Proposal for Consideration’ requesting – if Croatian demands for linguistic autonomy were accepted – that the Serbian language should be the language of instruction in the Serb-populated areas of Croatia. The Party condemned both the Declaration and the Proposal as nationalist deviations.¹

Over the years, the leading Yugoslav political figures, such as Kardelj and Croatia’s long-term leader Vladimir Bakarić as well as Tito (although reluctantly), started to portray Yugoslavia as a purely socialist multinational union, a common political framework that did not have any particular ethnic base (although the name itself betrayed it as a state of South Slavs). Bakarić, for instance, in a book published also in 1967, interpreted the birth of socialist Yugoslavia in the following terms: ‘Yugoslavia was not united on the basis of slavism, but on the basis of social progress’ (in Kobsa et al. 1978: 60). Yugoslavism seemed to be understood, at best, as socialist patriotism preferably devoid of any (ethno)national content. Yugoslavia itself, unlike the republics (all but one), was supposed to be, to paraphrase a popular slogan, ‘*a*-national in form and socialist in content’.

Yugoslavia: Only a matter of interests?

Edvard Kardelj most influentially advocated for Yugoslavia as an ideological and non-national project, a position that, as we mentioned, Tito reluctantly accepted after the fall of Ranković and during the constitutional changes between 1967

and 1974 (Jović 2003b). For Tito, Yugoslavia as a national project was worth pursuing and he opposed the ongoing abandonment of the idea of South-Slavic unity. For him, Yugoslav socialist patriotism affirmed the multinational character of Yugoslavia and the independent nationhood of its peoples but also stressed the necessity of and preference for the common socialist state. Kardelj, however, repeatedly described Yugoslavia as a matter of the *interests* of its constituent nations: ‘The unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia is not based so much on their ethnic relatedness as on joint interests deriving from a common destiny and above all on their joint struggle for socialist relations among men and nations’ (in Jović 2003b: 170).

He described Yugoslavia as the ‘pluralism of self-managing interests’ (Rusinow 1981: 9). The *interests* for staying together in Yugoslavia were for him concentrated in only three domains: common defence, common goals of a revolutionary transformation of the country and development of a common market area (Jović 2003b: 169–170). Kardelj’s introduction of interests in his definition of relations between the republics and between them and the Federation was confusing. After all, the interests change over time and Kardelj certainly did not give clear instructions about who was supposed to define these interests (after his death). For that matter, it is not obvious what Kardelj meant by ‘peoples’ and whether he defined them by the republics and their boundaries or by ethnic groups. Not to mention that outside his homeland of Slovenia, the republican borders did not coincide with the geographical distribution of ethnic groups; the situation that made any separation – in case there was no more *interests* to stay together – highly explosive.

What Yugoslavism came to signify in post-Tito Yugoslavia – for those who thought that it still held certain cultural and political importance, at least as an attitude in the face of intensifying inter-ethnic and inter-republican conflicts – was aptly illustrated in Predrag Matvejević’s collection of essays and reflections on *Yugoslavism Today* (*Jugoslavenstvo danas*, first edition 1982). In his book, Matvejević, one of the foremost Croatian intellectuals and writers, tried to define what the substance of Yugoslavism should be in the confederated Yugoslavia that had recently lost its only strong centripetal point, embodied in Tito’s person and legend. Matvejević attempted to offer multiple definitions of what Yugoslavism is or should be: Yugoslavism as preservation of the Yugoslav community, i.e. state; Yugoslavism as more than a broader nationality (understood here as a wider ethnonational identity) and more than a shared citizenship; Yugoslavism as anti-centralism in Yugoslavia and in the republics; Yugoslavism as anti-nationalism (equally against Yugoslav and

ethnic nationalism); Yugoslavism as a special internationalist point of view; Yugoslavism as an individual choice based on mixed ethnicity; and, finally, Yugoslavism as a minority position in the situation of nationalistic conflicts (1984 [1982]: 13–14).

Clearly, these various definitions did not aim at formulating, and could not have formulated, any coherent or mobilizing political platform for Yugoslavia in its final decade but rather a specific intellectual and political attitude. And this attitude was far from unusual throughout Yugoslavia in the 1980s. A significant group of individuals declared their ethnicity or ethnonational belonging as *Yugoslav*. The increased number of mixed marriages as well as a general all-Yugoslav political and cultural attitude of individuals from different ethnocultural backgrounds resulted in the sharp rise of ‘Yugoslavs’ recorded in the 1981 census. Between 1971 and 1981 Yugoslavs grew from 273,000 to 1,219,000, or from 1.3 to 5.4 per cent of the total population. The trend that would have likely continued in the following years since the majority of those who identified as Yugoslavs came from urban centres and seemed less attentive to the sirens of ethnic nationalism. Obviously, from the nationalist point of view (shared by many party members loyal to the idea of Yugoslavia as a confederation of *nations* and not as a nation-state as such) this state of affairs openly challenged the ethnic cohesion of the constitutive nations and their respective republics as well as inter-ethnic balances (Jović 2001b: 107).

Nevertheless, from ‘brotherhood and unity’ to calls for ‘togetherness’ in the 1980s (Pavković 2003: 252), Yugoslavism went through transformations that eventually emptied it of almost any cultural and mobilizing political content. Yugoslavia seemed no longer a family house of brotherly ethnic groups but a building divided into quasi-independent apartments whose members – not as brothers or relatives bound by blood, but more as historic tenants and partners – lived under a common roof as long as this was in their *interests*, or as long as the building was able to endure their intensive, more and more aggressive interactions and disputes. ‘Togetherness’, however, still implied that to live *in peace* together *was* in their best interests. And to continue this metaphor, the outcome of the first democratic elections demonstrated either a wish to move out or to redefine not only the building’s pillars, but its internal walls as well.

The rise and fall of Yugoslavism cannot be dissociated from writers and intellectuals. After all, it had been writers who had *imagined* Yugoslavia out of the nineteenth-century’s patchwork of South-Slavic peoples, serving different masters and having diverse ideas about their collective identity and political future.

As in many other Eastern European countries, Yugoslavism, conceptualized and propagated by writers and intellectuals, arrived long before politicians joined the movement and Yugoslavia as such came into existence. No state can exist in the absence of a large majority of its citizens believing that it should exist and that they should live together under the same political-administrative structure. One could claim that Yugoslavia's political and intellectual elites abandoned Yugoslavism – in its various forms – long before its citizens did.

Knowing the influence of writers and intellectuals, one should not be surprised to learn that the political conflict between Serbia and Slovenia that arose after Milošević consolidated his power was reflected – and sometimes conceptualized – in literary circles. The Yugoslav Writer's Union was, similar to Yugoslavia itself, divided into independent republican writers' unions and, similar to the Federation, it declined in importance in the 1970s as individual republican unions began to serve as the main centres of literary life (Dragović-Soso 2003). The debates among writers – as demonstrated by the Ćosić-Pirjevec debate in early 1960s and various quarrels over the language – were highly political and even served as an arena for debating sensitive political issues, which had direct public and political effects. The SANU memorandum, or some of its nationalistic parts, became a rallying cry for Serbian nationalist writers led again by Dobrica Ćosić, a writer who went from being a socialist unitarist Yugoslavist to an ideologue of Greater Serbianism and even a short-term president of Milošević's rump Yugoslavia. He remained, until his death in 2014, influential, though sometimes grotesque 'grandfather' of the nation.

The Kosovo crisis and Milošević's policies exacerbated the conflict between Slovenian and Serbian writers, a conflict that turned on the question of the future of Yugoslavia. Serbian nationalist writers supported the repression of Albanian demands and demanded the recentralization of Yugoslavia, whereas the Slovenian Writer's Union and journal *Nova Revija* promoted a systematic change of the regime and the Slovenian national cause. They insisted on Slovenian cultural and political sovereignty vis-à-vis other Yugoslavs and Yugoslavia, and began branding Slovenia as a Central European nation, one which had more in common with even the furthest former Habsburg lands than with the rest of 'balkanic' Yugoslavia (see Jović 2003a; Wachtel 1998). Drago Jančar, a leading Slovenian novelist, in his essay entitled *Farewell to Yugoslavia* (1999 [1990]) compared the situation in Yugoslavia to a chaotic and violent 'Balkan Inn' – Miroslav Krleža's own metaphor for the history of the region. Jančar, a right-leaning advocate of an independent Slovenia, was only expressing the general tendency among many Slovenian intellectuals inclined towards

secession to emphasize the urgency of leaving the Balkan ‘chaos’ and joining ‘Europe’, embodied in the then popular European Economic Community, more quickly.

In lieu of a conclusion to the long bittersweet marriage between writers and Yugoslavia, one need only refer to the telling chronology of Yugoslavia’s disintegration: the Yugoslav Writers’ Union was dissolved in 1989, as if symbolically paving the way for the subsequent dissolution of the Party and the state itself.

Code red: Turning citizens into enemies

Nationalist ideologues aiming at the total separation of South Slavs and a territorial reshuffle were therefore obliged to cast aside the myth of ‘brotherhood and unity’, a myth inextricably bound up with Tito’s legacy. Carol Skalnik Leff reminds us of another important aspect in the liberalization of communist countries that involves revisions of the ‘blank spots’ in the historical records of multinational states (1999). Abandoning this myth served to reinforce ethnonational identification and mobilization and to undermine the supranational one. In Yugoslavia, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, self-victimization came to the fore. Each nation claimed to be the victim of the common state’s history and revived painful memories of the inter-ethnic killings carried out during the Second World War. These ‘competing narratives of resentment and blame’ – as a large group of international scholars² assembled to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia have called them – portrayed other nations as ‘enemies’ who had committed genocide against them before (the Ottoman conquests, the Second World War) and were ready to do it again (Ramet 2005a). These narratives were usually constructed around a Serbs vs. non-Serbs conflict. In his book on Serbian and Croatian victim-centred propaganda, David B. MacDonald calls these narratives *Balkan holocausts* in order to show how their purpose was to portray one’s own nation as a victim of genocide comparable to the Shoah (2002). As an example, one of the leading Serb nationalist historians, and a close ally of Radovan Karadžić, Milorad Ekmečić declared before the Bosnian war that:

only the Jews have paid a higher price for their freedom than the Serbs. Because of their losses in the war, and because of massacres, the most numerous people in Yugoslavia, the Serbs, have, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, fallen to second place, and today our policy and our general behaviour carry within themselves the invisible stamp of a struggle for biological survival. (Quoted in Ramet 2005a)

Nationalist propaganda and nationalist leaders saturated the channels of mass communication with warnings of the 'dangers' that their nations supposedly faced, including their possible biological extinction by other ethnic groups. The story of 'endangered nations', coupled with demographical statistics and estimations, underlined the imminent threat to a nation's survival and the need for protection. In this situation, to be in the minority position was perceived as extremely dangerous (Jović 2001a). The urgency of the situation justified a 'pre-emptive strike' on the already demonized enemy; this logic commands that the enemy must be destroyed before he becomes capable of destroying you (see Bowman 1997).

The collapse of the communist regime and of the Yugoslav federation, together with the subsequent implementation of conflicting nationalist agendas involving inevitable struggles over the territories of new ethnic states, activated what Slavoj Žižek in a different context calls 'code red' (2009). The functioning of the 'code red' might help us to understand how in a matter of months the former 'brothers', neighbours and partners were turned into fierce competitors and cruel enemies. Žižek actually refers to a Hollywood movie, 'A Few Good Men', in which 'code red' is described as a secret military code which, though illegal, allows the torture of soldiers that break internal rules or endanger the whole group by their behaviour. This 'code red' violates both the law and common morality but reinforces the group's cohesion to the degree necessary for its supposedly endangered survival. In other words, a 'code red' situation transferred to the terrain of ethnonationalist mobilization means that law and order are suspended and that the game of survival has begun, a game that justifies massive violence, massacres and even genocide. Needless to say, the winners of the game were the ones entitled to establish ethnically homogeneous and pure new states, invent new founding myths, cover the traces of monumental crimes and re-write history.

In the last days of Yugoslavia, Yugoslavism truly became, as Matvejević would have never wanted, 'a minority position in the situation of nationalistic conflicts', the position that could not formulate a political programme for preservation of the abandoned state, but only a plea for peace. At the moment when the Bosnian war was about to break out, on 5 April 1992, demonstrators gathered in front of the Bosnian parliament in Sarajevo to protest against the nationalist frenzy of the three main ethnic parties that were clearly taking the country towards bloodletting. Their demonstration was also an act of civic courage against Bosnian Serb paramilitaries ruled by Radovan Karadžić and the remnants of the federal army, a group mostly loyal to Slobodan Milošević at that time, that

deployed its troops in and around Sarajevo. The only symbols and flags they could carry in the situation of imminent ethnic conflict were the flags of socialist Yugoslavia and socialist Bosnia-Herzegovina – a red flag with a small Yugoslav flag in its upper-left corner – and, of course, portraits of Tito. The demonstrators wanted to chase away Bosnian Serb paramilitaries from their outposts around the Parliament. Serb snipers randomly fired at the crowd that gathered at a bridge across the Miljacka river. Two women were killed on the spot, a Muslim from Dubrovnik and a Croat from Sarajevo.

If Yugoslavism was one of the motives behind that finger that pulled the trigger on the Latin Bridge in Sarajevo in 1914 and thus announced the beginning of the Great War and the advent of the common Yugoslav state, it, as the final cry to stop the war among South Slavs, definitively died in 1992 at another bridge over the Miljacka, just a mile downstream. That bridge soon became a demarcation line between the Bosnian government's and Serb positions that cut the besieged city. A year later, as in some devilish *mise-en-scène*, a young couple, a Muslim girl and a Serb boy – 'Sarajevo's Romeo and Juliette' as they sadly came to be known worldwide – tried to cross the bridge and escape the war. Both were killed and their bodies lay on the bridge for days, in an embrace.

