Concluding Remarks

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The South Slavic idea was born of the Enlightenment. The ideals of progress, humanism, reason, and science nurtured the concept of a commonality of Croats and Serbs and directed the desire for self-determination, participation, and prosperity toward a concrete political program: the formation of the state of Yugoslavia. Not only elite groups but many ordinary people held high hopes in this project, which in the nineteenth century still felt utterly utopian. So, although the founding of the state only came about as a consequence of the First World War, it was not an "artificial" creation.

However, unification in 1918 came late, too late for the various identities that prevailed among the South Slavic peoples to merge into an understanding of the Yugoslav nation as the synthesis of different cultures and historical traditions. Although the different populations spoke similar dialects or languages and shared many cultural characteristics, their sense of belonging was based in each case on different criteria. For the Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks, a major source of ethnic identity and distinction was religion, for the Slovenes and Macedonians it was language that counted, and for the Montenegrins it was a specific historical-political heritage. Because various foreign powers had long dominated the Balkans, no consensus emerged about what it was that united a nation. Was it a common language and culture (as in Germany and Italy) or the tradition of the state (as in France)? In a way, the South Slavic lands appeared to be a laboratory for competing and sometimes even contradictory concepts of identity and national ideologies.

The peoples of Yugoslavia were unequally involved in the conception and construction of their state. Nation building did not occur synchronously in the South Slavic regions. In the run-up to the First World War, the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs had a fairly well-established ethnic self-awareness, whereas the Muslims, Montenegrins, and Macedonians only developed this decades later. This time lag may also account for the failure to consolidate an integral South Slavic understanding of nationhood—a Balkan version of the melting pot—either before or after the founding of Yugoslavia, despite linguistic and cultural ties, traditions of ethnic coexistence, and the active steps taken by the state toward nation building. If the masses failed to seize upon the overarching

Yugoslav identity offered to them, it was because their different forms of collective awareness were already too solidified, the social barriers erected by tradition too high, and expressions of collective interests and political cultures often incompatible.

Enormous historical-political and socioeconomic disparities intensified the diversity of living conditions, experiences, and interests. This led to more conspicuous divisions and conflicts, especially during crises. Yet at all times it was a Herculean task to reconcile the various local conditions and traditions: Central European features emanating from Slovenia and Croatia; Ottoman-Balkan ones from Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia; and the Islamic heritage that marked Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both Yugoslav states, each with its own unique approach, floundered in the attempt to offset this diversity.

A powerful motive for South Slavic unification from the nineteenth century onward was the desire to overcome backwardness. The elites in Zagreb and Belgrade were completely under the spell of the European model of progress and sought to imitate Western developmental strategies. Politically they promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and liberalism, but the highly agrarian nature of their societies meant that they lacked the requisite societal structure. This is why elements of a modern constitutional state, economic policy, and governance are oddly mixed together with older traditions, identities, and values. In other words, the ambivalence of Southeast European reform policy did not result from anti-Western attitudes but from the effort to harmonize tensions between a need for cultural identity, on the one hand, and rational progressive thinking, on the other.

At the turn of the twentieth century the long march toward modernity began. For the first time, one could see signs of the fundamental transformation that was to come in the economy, social relations, cultural expression, mentalities, and everyday life. Around 1900, the essential tracks were laid for the development of an industrial society even in the South Slavic agrarian regions. The first areas of industrial concentration were formed; large-scale migration ensured that cities grew and were transformed; new methods of communication, such as the distribution of printed matter, led to social mobilization and the spread of critical self-reflection, one of the key characteristics of modernity.

Yet these processes did not develop fully until after the Second World War. A mixture of optimism about progress, planning euphoria, and modernizing furor catapulted the Yugoslavs after 1945 into a period of epoch-making, sociocultural innovation in employment and social stratification, in lifestyles and everyday living, in the role of the sexes and generations, in attitudes and values. It took until the 1960s for these innovations to permeate all spheres of human life, aided not least by modern social policy, the revolution in education,

the spread of technology and the media, and the changing aesthetic standards of modern art, literature, architecture, and film. Admittedly, as in other southern European states, remnants of older social interrelationships persisted, such as patronage and cronyism. Still, within a generation, Yugoslavs were literally "up to speed." The desire to make up for lost time and catch up with the more developed world was no longer confined to the political and intellectual classes, but encompassed almost the entire population.

The Yugoslav model of socialism combined a variety of ideas and concepts, originating from nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers, social reformers, and politicians on ways to cope with the challenges of modernity. The notion prevailed that entire societies could be designed and constructed on the basis of reason—one of the basic intellectual assumptions of modernity. Socialism committed itself explicitly to the attempt to achieve justice and modernity by way of comprehensive social intervention. On one hand, its ideals were inspired by the Enlightenment and nineteenth- and twentieth-century reform movements that emphasized values such as rationality, efficiency, education, hygiene, prosperity, and social security. These ideas fit into the Europe-wide context of a world permeated by science and technology. On the other hand, its ideals were substantially influenced by communist dogma: the Marxist ideology, a radical humanism, atheism, collectivism, and patriotic virtues such as friendship between peoples and "brotherhood and unity." Last but not least, the Yugoslav social model also incorporated liberal-bourgeois values, principles, and practices into its modernizing strategies, including—within limits—the market economy and private property, consumer goods fetishism, and the free movement of labor. The system even tolerated the fact that a segment of its citizenry submitted themselves to the laws of capitalist wage labor by working abroad. So Yugoslav modernity after 1945 consisted of a particular combination of various norms, values, and practices, on the basis of which the multinational state formulated its own unique response to the challenge of the new age.

As varied as the preconditions were at the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe and as contrasting as the various blueprints for a social order became as time wore on, by the end of the century a strong degree of uniformity existed across the entire continent in terms of the social and occupational structures, family types and gender roles, ways of life, attitudes, and values. Fundamental long-term processes such as industrialization, secularization, the advance of technology, urbanization, and the development of critical self-reflection began later in Yugoslavia, progressed at a different pace and along somewhat different lines than in the West, but in the long run followed the trend toward inner-European convergence. Tito's system favored and fostered close exchange relationships with foreign countries and thus a

constant transfer of goods, knowledge, and values. International connections, for example in the form of labor migration and tourism, even served as major pillars supporting this model, which is why the social and attitudinal differences between Yugoslavia and Western Europe never ran as deep as they did between the capitalist and the Eastern bloc countries.

Independent of the evolving political, social, and economic parameters, four long-standing structural phenomena influenced the development of Yugoslavia in the twentieth century: first, ethnic and religious diversity, which repeatedly cast a new light on the question of a fair reconciliation of interests and of the legitimacy of the political system; second, a striking backwardness compared to West and Central Europe, which put the economy at a competitive disadvantage; third, exposure to rival Great Powers influences; and fourth, regional disparities that caused persistent feelings of discrimination. These four factors, exacerbated by global economic crises, repeatedly narrowed the political leeway, which in turn reinforced doubts about the legitimacy of the state and its ability to fulfill its promises of progress.

Therefore, internal conflicts were not predetermined by questions of ethnic, cultural, or religious identity but arose primarily from diverging interests, worldviews, and political persuasions. They were caused particularly by the tensions resulting from the dynamics of sociocultural transformation in general and recurring crises of modernization in particular. The battle over the best model of government did not necessarily take place between Serbs and Croats, but first and foremost between bourgeois liberals, right-wing nationalists, and communists. Sometimes it was separatists fighting unitarists, sometimes federalists against centralists. One ongoing confrontation was between the defenders and reformers of the constitution. The battle lines cut right across peoples, regions, and republics. Yet with the development of mass society and the mass media in the twentieth century, the politicizing of differences became a main contributor to political strife.

As everywhere on the Continent, large-scale change in the twentieth century led to a hostile backlash in the form of hostility toward science and rationality, a kind of civilization criticism. The proliferation of lifestyles and the encroachments of the modern state resulted in deep insecurities and even in an entrenched anti-Western stance. Because the sociocultural transformation of South Slavic societies took place over a much shorter period and at a faster pace than in the West, the mental, psychological, and social shocks were particularly severe. Exclusivist nationalism, ethnic fervor, and fundamentalist religion flourished particularly in times of historic upheaval, such as the late 1930s and the 1980s.

The ongoing European crisis of the interwar period aggravated the Yugoslav structural problems of diverse legacies, social plight, and ethno-

political confrontation. The lack of legitimacy and the teething troubles of a young parliamentary system, exacerbated by the syndrome of backwardness and the shock waves of the world economic crisis, narrowed the scope for compromise and compensation between the various political camps and interest groups, entrenched the blockades on decision making, deepened internal contradictions, and undermined the acceptability of a state whose optimistic promises collided all too brutally with the bitter reality of the crisis. New social experiences turned enthusiasm into anxiety. In contrast to more developed European countries under quite similar conditions, however, the societal soil was not fertile for the germination and growth of the extremist ideologies of fascism and bolshevism; they never became widely attractive as alternatives to the liberal bourgeois model. It is true that other undermining factors were also at work here, such as the experience of the world war, the weaknesses of the parliamentary political system, burgeoning class warfare, and cultural pessimism. But unlike its neighbors, Yugoslavia did not provide advantageous conditions for these extremist ideologies. In the countryside, deep-seated religious, family, and social affinities left few possibilities for a radical critique of society. Unlike in Italy, Germany, and Spain, the conservative and monarchist forces in Yugoslavia did not enter into power-sharing compromises with the radical right. If Hitler had not invaded the whole of Europe and subjected the Balkans to his inhuman scheme for a New World Order, it is unlikely that either the fascist Ustasha or the communists would ever have had a chance to gain political power. The most popular alternative to the bourgeois-capitalist model of development at that time was the agrarian movement.

Only by way of what were—in every respect—the revolutionary upheavals of the Second World War, coupled with the experience of years of marginal existence in a society struggling to survive, could the communists rise to power in Yugoslavia in their own right. Under the firm control of Tito, they succeeded in bringing under their wing a very diverse spectrum of milieus and motivations for the fight against occupation, exploitation, and terror, while the established power groups, such as the bourgeois classes, the monarchists, and the nationalists, compromised themselves through collaboration. With their backs against the wall, the communists also made the most spellbinding promises. Their program brought together the three existential questions that had constantly bedeviled the South Slavic lands: addressing the existential concerns of peasants and workers, ending exploitation and foreign domination, and achieving national reconciliation through "brotherhood and unity," something that acquired paramount significance in the age of fascism. Against the backdrop of terror and mass violence, a fundamental historical shift was in the making. It was facilitated by the complete collapse and irretrievable loss

of respect for the old system, shaped by the rapid and radical transformation in social conditions, and facilitated by a new international environment.

In contrast to the Eastern bloc countries and despite the limitations imposed on individual liberties, Tito's rule possessed genuine legitimacy. It sprang from three sources: the successful war of liberation, the defiance of Stalin, and Tito's personal integrity and authority. The relative stability of the regime resulted from a number of internal and external factors: Tito's skillful balancing act between East and West, which earned his policies a great deal of international recognition and made a name for Yugoslavia in its own right with regard to foreign affairs; a complex state model combining federal rights with the principles of ethnic power-sharing that helped curb nationalist infighting; and a socialist system that did not eschew elements of a free market economy, cultural liberalism, or civil rights and garnered international prestige. The average citizen harbored the illusion of living in an everlasting consumer wonderland and was particularly glad to have escaped the clutches of the Soviet Union. In short, Tito breathed new self-confidence into this deeply traumatized and humiliated nation.

Abroad, Yugoslavia was also widely viewed as a bearer of hope, because its system of self-management rejected bolshevism and its politics of non-alignment represented a clear counterpoint to the Cold War. Especially in the so-called Third World, high expectations were pinned on the former Balkan no-man's-land, which prominently propagated such global issues as decolonization, disarmament, and the fight against poverty at the United Nations. Yugoslavia's international reputation helped cover up both the country's incomplete modernization and its internal divisions.

By the early 1960s, a shadow was already growing across the unbridled faith in progress that characterized Yugoslavia's development during the postwar decades. Changes in society and political reforms since the 1950s accelerated the complexity of social stratification, lifestyles, and values; increased the range of interests and opinions; and strengthened centrifugal forces that challenged one-party rule. Inadvertently, socialist modernization acted as the catalyst for a new nationalism. First, it served to deepen regional disparities rather than level them out. Second, the revolution in education, the structural changes in the economy, and geographical mobility produced upwardly mobile social groups, who would end up being the ones to actually complete the process of nation building among Muslims, Albanians, and Macedonians. Third, this created new competition for advancement, status, power, and resources between the Yugoslav peoples. Fourth, mass media and mass society provided new means of communication and political mobilization that new elites could use for their nationalist cause, thereby enabling a growing alienation from the Yugoslav mainstream to take root.

Tito ruled the country with his charismatic leadership style until his death in 1980. Under the specific historical circumstances of the Second World War, his exceptional political ability took him right to the top, earning him unquestioned loyalty and legitimacy among the political class and enormous, emotionally laden popularity among his fellow countrymen. He represented the most important and sometimes sole guarantee of the political compromise hammered out by the leaders of the nationalities during wartime. It is hard to overstate how important his role as a referee was to the survival of the system, a reality that the elites accepted until the very end, if often with clenched teeth. But even if Tito had been granted immortality, he could not have held back the internal erosion of the Yugoslav system. Ever more complex realities, together with the increasing pluralism of Yugoslav society and growing dependence on the world economy, diminished the value of talents that had been ultimately important in wartime but counted for little in a global industrial society. From the 1960s onward, the forces demanding more freedom of speech, democracy, and civil rights multiplied.

The 1970s—here, too, there are parallels across all of Europe—signaled the onset of a profound crisis of modernity and modernization that marked an epochal turning point. Old industrial sectors of the economy went into decline during these years and thereby undermined the foundation of Yugoslavia's postwar boom. Its industries were chronically underfinanced, technologically backward, and overly bureaucratized. The negotiated economy, built on privileges, showed no capacity to adjust to the changed global context. Declining industrialization in the 1970s brought on a crisis of the system. Planning for the future became impossible, and the *raison d'être* of socialism was rendered null and void. The Yugoslav state lost its inner logic and its structure. Consensus was replaced by doubt, disengagement, and demoralization.

As republics and nations drifted ever further apart in socioeconomic terms and the unifying political ideology of communism became obsolete, the supposedly undisputed legitimacy of Tito's regime came under pressure even while he was still alive. The people's democracy promised "brotherhood and unity" by invoking the ideals of the French Revolution to weld the nationalities together on the basis of a socialist order. But by foregrounding the equality of nations and nationalities, the communists reduced the triad of "liberty, equality, fraternity" to a question of nationality. Tito's Yugoslavia was based by definition on a compact between its peoples and republics; that is to say, on collective and not individual rights. As a result, the central premises of the liberal era—liberty and democracy—went by the board. Because the one-party system only knew mechanisms for reducing social pluralism to national interests, it strengthened the trend toward the affirmation of national affiliation. Especially after 1974, federalism and proportional representation

for nationalities institutionalized competition and conflicts between peoples and republics, rather than along political and ideological lines. What could be more obvious than to discover that regional elites compensated for a lack of democracy with nationalism?

In the 1980s, Yugoslavia slipped into the deepest economic, political, and social-psychological crisis in its history, resulting in disorientation, insecurity, and a fear of the future. Economic plight and a reform backlog contributed to a growing loss of legitimacy, sense of purpose, and confidence, while the intransigence of the republics robbed the central government of its last vestiges of governance. As the crisis became more complex and comprehensive, the adversaries became more unyielding, the compromise more unstable, and the strategies proposed to deal with the situation less convincing. The political system proved to be structurally incapable of adjusting to changing social and world economic conditions without abolishing itself in the process. Thus, a growing discrepancy evolved in these years between expectations and reality, which threw into flux the life plans of many people.

This crisis was total in its dimensions and impact, particularly because it chipped away at roles, values, and identity. The more communism lost its power of conviction, the more tempting it seemed to escape into faith, ethnic identity, folk culture, and history. Yet the aim was not to revive the past but to renegotiate the troubled relationship between state, politics, and society. In this context, many remarkable ideological hybrids emerged, such as Milošević's brand of socialist market-economy nationalism or the Bosniak variant of a secular-religious Islam—a paradox only on the surface. These new nationalisms did not bring down the system themselves but were rather the unwanted product of it.

The 1980s marked a turn to nationalism in all the republics, from which new political parties profited the most. They created a new sense of purpose in the ideological vacuum that followed disenchantment with socialism. All types of conflict were now declared to be genuine national differences. The new aggressive and overbearing nationalisms in the republics all had similar roots, defined themselves in contrast to one another, and used similar rhetoric in their arguments. The tragic conclusion is that, as so often in ethnically diverse states, democratization acted as an accelerant in the process of polarization and disintegration. In such difficult times, many people felt the only acceptable leaders were those who, with the aid of mass nationalistic agitation, upheld a pretense of democratic legitimacy that never actually existed, perhaps because the new party structures now controlled the public domain, above all the media.

Why Yugoslavia broke up and why this happened through military force are two distinct questions that need to be analyzed separately. The collapse itself can be attributed to two sets of causes. First, the state was burdened from

its inception with structural problems of the *longue durée*, particularly the large discrepancies in socioeconomic development, the ethnic rifts between the peoples that were never quite overcome, and disparate political-historical traditions. Sources of friction were reduced through major and fundamental historical compromise, such as the one agreed upon in 1917 by the leaders in Corfu and renewed in 1943 in Jajce. However, in times of crisis the scope for compensation narrowed, and a sense of disadvantage and discrimination emerged. Besides these structural factors, a second set of causes is made up of situational factors. Against the backdrop of Tito's death, a profound economic and sociopolitical crisis in the mid-1980s, and the ensuing existential concerns and anxieties people had about the future, many Yugoslavs turned to language, nation, and religion for their main sources of identity. With the ideological turn initiated by *perestroika*, followed by the downfall of communism all over Europe, central integrating forces disappeared, the first and foremost of these being the unifying socialist ideology but also the Soviet menace as the *ultima ratio* of a stable polity. The end of the East–West conflict marked the collapse of the "third way" of workers' self-management and international nonalignment, two fundamental pillars of Yugoslav state identity. In other words, under very specific historical circumstances, certain economic, socio-cultural, and power-political conflicts came to a head. Faced with changing conditions in global politics and radicalized by a dramatic crisis in state and society, these conflicts were reinterpreted into ethnonationalist contexts. The erosion of political order, the disintegration of a multiethnic space, and the loss of the state monopoly of force left a dangerous vacuum at the end of the 1980s.

So why did Yugoslavia implode with military violence, when Czechs and Slovaks parted company on peaceful terms? In both countries there were structural conflicts, but in Yugoslavia the internal tensions appeared incomparably deeper and all-encompassing. On one hand, they were driven by power-political and socioeconomic antagonisms, which steadily increased after 1945, instead of gradually fading away, as they did in Czechoslovakia. On the other, these tensions were permanently underlaid by a history of bloody conflict that was ever accessible for update and reinterpretation, with the Second World War serving as its chief point of reference. Czechs and Slovaks had never fought each other in a cruel civil war.

The constellation of the main players was also specific to Yugoslavia. With its republics, the country had created competing rivals roughly equal in strength and in possession of all the features of a sovereign state, includ-ing military power. This ostensible symmetry was particularly dangerous during the period of Yugoslavia's dissolution because there was a clash of irreconcilable interests—interests that were perceived by the opposing par-ties as vital. While the renegade republics and provinces saw no alternative to independence, for the Serbs the collapse of the state posed a threat to their

core national priorities. So a conflict ensued from which it was only possible to emerge either as the winner or the loser, a typical "zero-sum" situation.

Still, the decision for or against war was not made by structures, but by people. In the end the decision on how to handle the deep fissures in the relationships between the republics was a political one. If there must be a divorce, then let us make it a peaceful one, said the more judicious and prudent participants, who had recognized the dangers early on of an all-or-nothing approach. But too many players on each side were determined to assert supposedly higher nationalist interests by any means and at any cost. As the last vestiges of the Yugoslav state system, such as the party, the presidency, media networks, and security sector, vanished in 1990/1991, no checks and balances were left to steer the process of disintegration. Identities and loyalties were redefined, and well-established mechanisms of power-sharing and mediation were cast aside. Neither the political will nor any institutional mechanism existed to unlock the internal stalemate.

In the final analysis, the likelihood of escalation into war arose only because the state monopoly on the use of force folded with the demise of state institutions. In the resulting vacuum, those presidents, politicians, and generals with a political will to make war were joined by other influential agents, such as warlords, criminal networks, and diaspora circles, who stood to gain also financially from armed conflict. In a functioning state polity such groups could never have influenced the course of events as greatly as they did in ex-Yugoslavia after 1991/1992.

The much-cited Balkan culture played actually only a minor role in the final act of the Yugoslav drama. The traditional glorification of violence, the bloodthirsty folk epics, the cult of arms, and patriarchal customs formed the backdrop for strategies of communication and ways of acting in warfare, but they do not explain its deeper causes. Structural phenomena, including experiences, events, and memories, were never static variables but were constantly being reinterpreted and reconstructed as conditions changed. The invocation of symbolic language helped activate the resources of history, culture, and religion, mobilize people, and legitimize the power of certain authorities. The media and nationalistic propaganda created a climate of violence but did not cause an automatism of reaction. At literally every point in historical development there was latitude for individual decision making. No one can use anthropology, structure, culture, or the inherent dynamics of violence to excuse themselves from their responsibility for war and crimes against humanity. Nothing was irreversible, nothing was inevitable.