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## Die Vergangenheit nationalisieren

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## **Creating national pasts - Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia rewrite the shared history of socialist Yugoslavia**

**[English version of ‘Die Vergangenheit nationalisieren: Kroatien, Serbien und Bosnien schreiben die gemeinsame Geschichte des sozialistischen Jugoslawien neu’ published in *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* 2014, special issue on communist memory politics, pp 77-92]**

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The abandonment of Communism in Yugoslavia in 1990 was followed shortly afterwards by the break-up of the Yugoslav federal state and the establishment of new more or less national states out of the formerly federal republics. The establishment of formally democratic nation states led to new demands to history: The class based histories of the Communist period were reputed, and new national histories were to be written. How were these histories to deal with the common Yugoslav socialist past?

This question was often a delicate one, as several of the republics had only distant experiences of independent statehood. The period as fairly independent republics within Yugoslavia therefore constitutes an essential part of their history as states. On the other hand, the new national histories were to contribute to the consolidation of the new states by legitimising both the establishment of new ideological regimes and new national borders. Yugoslavia’s dissolution process was accompanied by years of warfare in various parts of the former federation. Indeed, the replacing of the Yugoslav federation by national states had cost dearly in most post-Yugoslav republics, though in some states much more so than in others. Thus the new histories had to explain a discontinuous and troublesome very recent past.

This article investigates how the common Yugoslav socialist state was represented in the new histories of Croatia, Serbia and, more briefly, Bosnia in the 1990s and early 2000s. The article is based on analyses of schoolbooks of contemporary history and history writing, especially historical syntheses, in Croatia, Serbia and, more briefly, Bosnia. I argue that the early post-Yugoslav representations of Yugoslav history were enveloped in descriptions of internal conflicts, while periods of peaceful coexistence

and relative prosperity were downplayed. History writing and education thus contributed to explaining and legitimising the break-up of the Yugoslav federation and to naturalising new national borders.

### **Yugoslav history in crisis**

The final years of the Yugoslav federation prepared the ground for the construction of the histories of Yugoslav communism in the new republics. Yugoslavia experienced a profound political and economic crisis from the early 1980s. This undermined some of the main sources of legitimacy for the Yugoslav state, namely the relative economic freedom and welfare of the citizens of this country of ‘consumer socialism’.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1980s, Yugoslav historians, writers and artists exposed some of the dark sides of Yugoslav communist history. This included revealing hidden aspects of the late Marshal Tito’s person; scrutinising the brutal and undemocratic take-over of power by the communists in 1945; writing extensively about the prison camps used for suspected political enemies after the Yugoslav break with the Soviet bloc in 1948 and describing the inhuman and arbitrary character of political suppression in those years.<sup>2</sup> These revelations had two types of consequences: Firstly, they led to further questioning and undermining of the legitimacy of the Yugoslav state and regime. And secondly, they led to the realization that history had been extensively manipulated and that official communist history was not to be trusted.<sup>3</sup> The effect was that history was opened for massive reinterpretations, often of sensationalist and nationalist character.

The late 1980s saw Yugoslavia increasingly characterised by tensions among the country’s republics and national groups, not least catalysed by the aggressive centralist and nationalist politics of Serbia’s leadership under Slobodan Milošević. The growing national polarisation of Yugoslav politics was accompanied by national polarisation among Yugoslav historians from different republics, Serbia and Croatia in particular, and by sharp and confrontational historical debates across national and republican lines.

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<sup>1</sup> As it was phrased in Duško Doder: *The Yugoslavs*, New York 1978, p. 131. See also Branislav Dimitrijević: *Socialist consumerism: Images of transition in Titoist Yugoslavia*, unpublished paper presented at the BASEES conference 2004.

<sup>2</sup> See Pedro Ramet: *Apocalypse Culture and Social Change in Yugoslavia*, in: Pedro Ramet (ed.): *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, Boulder 1985.

<sup>3</sup> See also Predrag J. Marković and Nataša Milićević: *Serbian historiography in the time of transition. A struggle for legitimacy*, in: *Istorija 20 veka*, 1(2007), p. 145-146.

In Serbia, particularly, historical debates turned focus towards national grievances. The genocidal campaign against Serbs by the Croatian Fascists *Ustasha* movement during the Second World War became a dominant theme, at times accompanied by claims that these crimes had been deliberately silenced by Croat politicians. In Croatia, the focus on Second World War crimes was initially welcomed, but at the end of the 1980s, the emphasis of Serb victimisation and Croat culpability were increasingly seen as extensions of nationalist politics.<sup>4</sup>

The election of nationalist parties in Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and elsewhere in 1990, the breakdown of the federal state and the subsequent wars only aggravated national enmity and the focus on conflicts and victimhood.

### **The establishment of new national histories**

Unlike popular culture, which was characterised by widespread nostalgia for the Yugoslav communist regime, history as an educational and academic field was less inclined to discuss the history of Titoism and Yugoslav socialism.<sup>5</sup> Whereas confrontations with the problematic sides of Yugoslav communist history were already taking place in the mid-1980s, in the 1990s discussions of the communist past were generally backgrounded by issues of national grievance and sometimes even of national survival. Rather than the communist period, which, though repressive and violent was also characterised by economic growth, relative openness and largely peaceful national coexistence, the new national histories focused on instances of confrontation and warfare among Yugoslavia's national groups. Moreover, whenever communist crimes were seriously thematized, it tended to take place within a framework of national suffering.

Three aspects seem to characterise the new representations of Yugoslav history in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, although to varying degrees: They focused on their own nations, often rehabilitating what could be seen as 'national' elements of history. They

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<sup>4</sup> See Tea Sindbæk: Usable History? Representations of Yugoslavia's difficult past - from 1945 to 2002, Aarhus 2012, p. 161-188.

<sup>5</sup> On nostalgia for Yugoslavia and Tito, see eg. Mitja Velikonja: Titostalgia – a study of nostalgia for Josip Broz, Ljubljana 2008. (<http://mediawatch.mirovni-institut.si/eng/Titostalgia.pdf>).

tended to thematize internal Yugoslav conflicts. And they emphasised national victimization.

Compared to the dominant national issues, the Titoist period received relatively less attention. Still, its history was interpreted and presented in new historical syntheses, but maybe most importantly as part of history teaching material. History schoolbooks, in the post-Yugoslav republics typically sanctioned by the state and republished for every new school year, offer a transparent material for analysing priorities and developments in the official views on history.<sup>6</sup> The general importance of education and school books in modern nation states' formation of suitable citizens has long been recognised. Several studies have emphasised the use of school books for political aims in Yugoslavia and her successor states<sup>7</sup>, and since the early 1990s, historians in Serbia and Croatia have severely criticised what they saw as the new regimes' ideological abuse of history education.<sup>8</sup> Also in reaction to the dominant national interpretative framework in history textbooks, a group of historians from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and other South-east European countries in the early 2000s wrote a series of joint history work books that aim to cross the boundaries of national histories and view South-east European history as shared and regional, including a multiplicity of perspectives.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In communist Yugoslavia and in the post-Yugoslav republics contemporary history was taught systematically in 8<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school and 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade of secondary school. Though the textbook market is increasingly liberalised, the states still have to accept textbooks for use in schools.

<sup>7</sup> Radina Vučetić: ABC textbooks and Ideological Indoctrination of Children: "Socialism Tailor-made for Man" or "Child Tailor-made for Socialism"?, in Slobodan Naumović and Miroslav Jovanović (eds.): *Childhood in South East Europe: Historical Perspectives on Growing Up in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Belgrade 2001, p. 249-263; Wolfgang Höpken: *Geschichte und Gewalt. Geschichtsbewußtsein im jugoslawischen Konflikt*, in *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, 15 (1993), p. 55-74; Wolfgang Höpken: *Von der Mythologisierung zur Stigmatisierung: "Krieg und Revolution" in Jugoslawien 1941-1948 im Spiegel von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischer Publizistik*, in E. Schmidt-Hartmann (ed.): *Kommunismus und Osteuropa. Konzepte, Perspektiven und Interpretationen im Wandel*, München, 1994, p. 165-201; Heike Karge: *Geschichtsbilder im postjugoslawischen Raum: Konzeptionen in Geschichtslehrbüchern am Beispiel von Selbst- und Nachbarschaftswahrnehmung*, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung / International Textbook Research*, 21 (1999) p. 315-37; Wolfgang Höpken: *History Education and Yugoslav (Dis-)Integration*, in: Wolfgang Höpken (ed.): *Öl ins Feuer?*, Braunschweig 1996, p. 99-124; Wolfgang Hoepken: *War, Memory, and Education in a fragmented Society: The case of Yugoslavia*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, 13 (1999) 1, p. 190-22; Pilvi Torsti: *How to deal with a difficult past? History textbooks supporting enemy images in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina*, in: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 39 (2007) 1, p. 77-96.

<sup>8</sup> Ružica Rosandić and Vesna Pešić (eds.): *Ratništvo, patriotizam, patrijarhalnost: analiza udžbenika za osnovne škole [Warfare, Patriotism, Patriarchy: Analysis of elementary school textbooks]*, Beograd 1994; Ivo Goldstein: *O udžbenicima povijest u Hrvatskoj [On history textbooks in Croatia]*, in: Hans Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac (eds.): *Dijalog povjesničara – Istoričara [Historians' – Historians' Dialogue]* 3, Zagreb 2001, p. 15-28; Dubravka Stojanović: *Konstrukcija prošlosti – slučaj srpskih udžbenika istorije [Construction of the past – the case of Serbian history textbooks]*, in: Hans-Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac (eds.): *Dijalog povjesničara / istoričara [Historians' – Historians' Dialogue]* 4, Zagreb 2001, p. 31-44.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cdsee.org/projects/jhp/publications>

Yet, in spite of socialist Yugoslavia's huge importance for the development of the post-Yugoslav nation states, the narratives of the communist period have seen little investigation. The following will offer a review of my analyses of the representations of the history of communist Yugoslavia in the schoolbooks and history writing of Croatia, Serbia and, more briefly, Bosnia between 1990 and the early 2000s.

### **Croatian histories of the socialist Yugoslav past**

The state formation project promoted in Croatia in the early 1990s was of clearly nationalist orientation, redefining the republic of Croatia as a state foremost of the Croatian nation.<sup>10</sup> The independent Croatian state set out to remove the communist dictates from historical narratives. Instead, history writing was often subordinated to the new political projects of Croatian state and nation building. Much of the new Croatian history was profoundly Croato-centric, focusing on the republic of Croatia and her regions and rarely on a Yugoslav community or a common Yugoslav perspective.<sup>11</sup>

More than a handful of histories of Croatia (or of Croatia from a Yugoslav perspective) were written after 1990. This presumably reflects a need in Croatian society to firmly establish the new national entity and to explain how and why it was a natural and desirable development. In several of these books the dominant narrative of Socialist Yugoslavia emphasise abuse and oppression of Croatia under centralism and Great Serbian nationalist hegemony. According to one comprehensive history of Yugoslavia, published in 1998 "The struggle with Great-Serbian hegemonism remained a durable characteristic of the internal political life of the Yugoslav state."<sup>12</sup> According to this book and others, the state's unitarist and centralist construction ensured Great-Serbian dominance and facilitated the exploitation of the economies of non-Serbian

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<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Hayden: Constitutional Nationalism in the Formerly Yugoslav Republics, in: *Slavic Review*, 51 (1992) 4, p. 657ff.

<sup>11</sup> See also Damir Agičić: (Re)Konstrukcija Savremena Hrvatske/Jugoslovenske povijest u pregledima/sintezama nakon 1991. Godine [(Re)Construction of contemporary Croatian/Yugoslav history in overviews/syntheses after 1991], in: Vera Katz (ed.): *Revizija Prošlost na Prostorima bivše Jugoslavije* [Revision of the past in the area of the former Yugoslavia], Zbornik Radova, Institut za Istoriju u Sarajevu [collection of works, Institute for History in Sarajevo], Sarajevo 2007, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Hrvoje Matković: *Povijest Jugoslavije (1918-1991) Hrvatski Pogled* [History of Yugoslavia (1918-1991) The Croatian view], Zagreb 1998, p. 421.

nations.<sup>13</sup> One author claimed that Croatian history can also be seen as an eternal struggle against Serbian dominance, visible in four stages in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; namely in the interwar Yugoslav state, during the Second World War, in Socialist Yugoslavia, and in the wars of the 1990s.<sup>14</sup>

However, two books published in 1999 offer a less Croato-centric view on the history of Socialist Yugoslavia. Both point to the positive aspects of the federation, while especially Ivo Goldstein's *Croatia. A History* emphasise the crimes committed by the Communist regime. According to Goldstein, Yugoslavia's main problem was its lack of democracy, which could have been a way of meeting the challenges of a multiethnic community.<sup>15</sup> Dušan Bilandžić' *Croatian Modern History*, a detailed Yugoslav history with added chapters on Croatia, describes Yugoslavia as the European state most threatened by conflict and offers a narrative of Yugoslavia characterised by continuous crisis.<sup>16</sup>

Initially Croatian schoolbooks adopted the emphasis of repression and national victimization. Chapter titles such as “the subordinate position of Croats and Croatia in FNRJ [The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, T.S.]” or “ever heavier burden of centralism and unitarism” illustrate this view on the Yugoslav state.<sup>17</sup> It was underlined how the proclaimed federalism was fake and replaced by a centralised government, and how Croats were subordinated, under-represented in administrative and powerful positions, and prevented from advancement within the administrative and stately apparatus, while Croat national feelings and culture were suppressed.<sup>18</sup> While books from the late 1990s and early 2000s are less serene in their condemning of the Socialist Yugoslav state as a great-Serbian hegemonist unit, focus remains on Croatia and Croat dissatisfaction. Claims of Croatia's subordinate position are replaced by complains

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 422. Also Hrvoje Matković: *Suvremena Politička Povijest Hrvatske (Priručnik za studente)* [Contemporary Political History of Croatia (Handbook for students)], Zagreb 1993, p. 157, 164-165 and Dragutin Pavličević: *Povijest Hrvatske* [History of Croatia], Zagreb 2007, 478-479, 483-484.

<sup>14</sup> Pavličević, *Povijest Hrvatske*, p. 420.

<sup>15</sup> Ivo Goldstein: *Croatia. A History*, London 2004 (first published 1999), 154-156, 187.

<sup>16</sup> Dušan Bilandžić: *Hrvatska Moderna Povijest* [Croatian Modern History], Zagreb 1999, 204.

<sup>17</sup> Ivan Vujčić: *Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet u XX. stoljeću. Udžbenik za četvrti razred gimnazije* [History of Croatia and the World in the 20th Century. Textbook for fourth grade of gymnasium], Zagreb 1998, p. 198; Ivo Perić: *Povijest za IV razred gimnazije* [History for fourth grade of gymnasium], Zagreb 2003 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, first published 1997, adopted for use in Croatian gymnasias by the Ministry of Education and Sport, March 1997), p. 202, 205.

<sup>18</sup> Perić, *Povijest za IV razred gimnazije* [History. Croatia and the World], p. 202-206; Vujčić, *Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet* [History. Croatia and the World], p. 198-202.

about centralism, pressure, abuse and exploitation of Croatia's economy and oppression of national feelings and culture.<sup>19</sup>

Since 1990, a dominant issue in Croatian debates on socialist Yugoslavia is the so-called "Bleiburg Tragedy", that is, the large scale massacres committed at the end of the war by the Communist controlled Partisan army against captured war enemies. These massacres and their victims, mainly members of the Ustasha militia and Croatian home guard forces, but possibly also civilian refugees, constituted a last truly silenced issue of wartime history. The history of Bleiburg opened a new perspective, which emphasised Communist brutality and made a focus on Croat victimisation possible in connection to Second World War history.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the widespread thematization of Bleiburg and the persecution of the Partisans' opponents at the end of the Second World War, political oppression and crimes committed by Yugoslavia's communist regime against its citizens were described to a varying degree in Croatian history textbooks. Books from the Tuđman period focused mainly on Croatian national suffering and only mentioned regime persecution of political opponents superficially and primarily when the victims were Croats.<sup>21</sup> Newer school books, however, are more detailed in their descriptions of political persecution, including the purges within the party following the break with Cominform in 1948.<sup>22</sup> In most books, much more emphasis is put on Communist repression of the Catholic Church, and on the trial in 1946 and subsequent imprisonment of Zagreb's Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, who was convicted, unfairly according to the books, for cooperation and conspiring with the Ustasha.<sup>23</sup> The Catholic Church is closely associated with Croatian nationalism, as Catholicism and Catholic

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<sup>19</sup> Suzana Leček, Magdalena Najbar-Agičić, Damir Agičić, Tvrtko Jakovina: Povijest 4. Udžbenik za četvrti razred (opće) gimnazije, Zagreb 2004 [History 4. Textbook for fourth grade of (general) gymnasium] (6<sup>th</sup> edition, adopted for use in Croatian gymnasia by the Ministry of Education and Sport, July 1999), p. 241-242; Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, Hrvoje Petrić, Jakša Raguž: Povijest 4. Udžbenik iz povijest za 4. razred gimnazije [History 4. History textbook for fourth grade of gymnasium], Samobor 2004, p. 194, 197, 209, 211; Hrvoje Matković and Franko Mirošević: Povijest 4. Za četvrti razred gimnazije [History 4. For fourth grade of gymnasium], Zagreb 2001, p. 224-225, 235, 239.

<sup>20</sup> See Marko Grčić: Umjesto uvoda [Instead of an introduction], in Marko Grčić (ed.): Otvoreni dossier Bleiburg [Open dossier Bleiburg], Zagreb 1990; Želimir Žanko and Nikola Šolić: Jazovka, Zagreb 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Especially Vujčić: Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet [History. Croatia and the World], p. 195. Also Perić: Povijest za IV [History for VI], p. 199, 205.

<sup>22</sup> Leček et al.: Povijest 4 [History 4], p. 232-233; 241-242; Kolar-Dimitrijević et al.: Povijest 4 [History 4], p. 195, 204.

<sup>23</sup> Vujčić: Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet [History. Croatia and the World], p. 196-198; Perić: Povijest za IV [History for VI], p. 200-202; Leček et al.: Povijest 4 [History 4], p. 235-237.



tradition are among the main markers that distinguish Croats from Serbs, who are mainly Orthodox, and from Muslim Bosnians. Thus, the books seem again to focus on national victimization in relation to a Yugoslav centralist state.

A point of complaint particularly interesting from the perspective of the study of revisions and uses of history is the repeated insistence that Communist Yugoslavia abused wartime history to discredit the Croat nation. Schoolbooks as well as academic writing claim that Croats were forced into a complex of guilt for the crimes of the Ustasha and that these crimes were also greatly exaggerated.<sup>24</sup> To add to the national grievance, it was suggested that Chetnik crimes were silenced throughout the Communist period, while Ustasha crimes were exaggerated.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Croatian national victimisation was emphasised with regard to both the administration and the history politics of communist Yugoslavia, which was presented as overtly anti-Croat. This further emphasised the need to discharge 'old' Yugoslav history writing and adhere to a new one. While it is certainly true that Socialist Yugoslavia overestimated the number of Yugoslav victims of the Second World War, it can hardly be substantiated that the intention was to invest the Croat people as such with a complex of guilt. But obviously, the idea enforced the need for a new Croatian history.

History writing, debate and school books were often more interested in the violent conflicts surrounding it than in the history of socialist Yugoslavia itself. The Second World War, which paved the way for the Communists' establishment of socialist Yugoslavia, and the wars of the 1990s, which destroyed that state, were rather more thematized than the peaceful period in between. There was an obvious tendency to downplay what could be seen as "Croatian" crimes, while victimisation of Croats and Croatia were foregrounded. In descriptions of the Second World War the Croatian Ustashe's persecution and mass slaughter of Serbs were included only superficially, whereas Croatian suffering at the hands of Serbian nationalist forces or the Communist led Partisans were described rather more empathically.<sup>26</sup> The war in Croatia in the

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<sup>24</sup> Perić: *Povijest za IV* [History for VI], p. 202; Vujčić: *Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet* [History. Croatia and the World], p. 198; Kolar-Dimitrijević et al.: *Povijest 4* [History 4], p. 209.

<sup>25</sup> E. g. Vujčić: *Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet* [History. Croatia and the World], p. 179; Zdravko Dizdar and Mihael Sobolevski: *Prešućivani četnički zločini u Hrvatskoj i u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941.-1945.* [Silenced Chetnik crimes in Croatia and in Bosnia and Hercegovina 1941-1945], Zagreb 1999, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Matković: *Suvremena Politička Povijest Hrvatske* [Contemporary political history of Croatia], p. 131-132, 136, 154-155; Matković: *Povijest Jugoslavije (1918-1991)* [History of Yugoslavia], p. 245, 254, 269-270. Less outspoken in Bilandžić: *Hrvatska Moderna Povijest* [Croatian modern history], p. 124-125, 186ff. For a

1990s, referred to as the “Homeland War”, took a prominent position in Croatian textbooks. The accounts of war crimes committed by the Yugoslav army and Serbian paramilitary forces in the 1990s were quite explicit. Some of these books directly linked and compared the wars of the 1990s to Croatian suffering during the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in the Tudjman years especially, Yugoslav conflicts of the past were used as a source of metaphors to explain the present situation.

### **Serbian histories of socialist Yugoslavia**

In many ways, Serbia during the 1990s experienced less of a transition than most other former Yugoslav states. Serbia’s president and former communist leader, Slobodan Milošević, and his Socialist Party of Serbia demonstrated a strange ability to stay in power, mobilising support by using nationalist symbols and agenda, and applying numerous anti-democratic means.<sup>28</sup> Though Serbia was not officially involved in the wars in the first half of the 1990s, Serbia supported the Yugoslav national army fighting in Croatia and Slovenia, the Serb riots in Croatia and the Bosnian Serb Army with elite and paramilitary forces. Serbian public life through the 1990s was largely subordinated to warfare and nationalist agenda.

The developments that characterised Serbian historiography in the late 1980s continued into the next decade. The Ustasha massacres and Serbian national victimisation remained dominant themes in both academic history writing and school books.<sup>29</sup> In the media Second World War history and Serbian suffering were used to

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critical review see Ivo Goldstein and Goran Hutinec: Neki Aspekti Revizionizma u Hrvatskoj Historiografiji Devedesetih Godina XX. Stoljeća – Motivi, Metode i Odjeci [Some aspects of revisionism in Croatian historiography of the 1990s], in: Katz (ed.): Revizija Prošlost [Revisions of the Past], p. 189.

<sup>27</sup> Vujčić: Povijest. Hrvatska i Svijet, p. 228-229; Perić: Povijest za IV, p. 237.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Gordy: The Culture of Power in Serbia, Pennsylvania 1999, p. 8, 21ff.

<sup>29</sup> On academic activities: Rad Instituta za savremenu istoriju u periodu od 1991. do 1995. Godine [Activities of the Institute of Contemporary History in the period from 1991 to 1995], in: Istorija 20. Veka [History of the twentieth century], 2 (1995), p. 171-175; Genocid nad Srbima u Drugom svetskom ratu [Genocide against Serbs in the Second World War], in Istorija 20. Veka [History of the twentieth century], 1-2 (1991), p. 224-227; Jasenovac – sistem ustaških logora smrti [Jasenovac – the system of Ustasha death camps], in: Istorija 20. Veka [History of the twentieth century], 2 (1998), p. 211-212. On books published: Jovan Mirković: Objavljeni izvori i literatura o Jasenovačkim Logorima [Published sources and literature on the Jasenovac camps], Belgrade 2000, p. 297, 323.

describe ongoing events including the war in Croatia.<sup>30</sup> These two conflicts were also connected in the schoolbooks. In the words of a high school textbook from 1994:

“Comparing the events from the period of the war ... with the events from 1991 in the same areas, they irresistibly give us the thought that actors, crimes and instigators are the same.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus, as was the case in Croatia, the history of socialist Yugoslavia was framed on both sides by histories of violent inter-Yugoslav conflicts, which were seen as a returning or even permanent condition.

The lack of transition in Serbia was generally reflected in the history schoolbooks produced in the 1990s. They tended to follow the main narrative line from the Titoist period, but with numerous additions that emphasised Serbian national grievances. Thus the schoolbooks did not actually confront the communist past, but rather corrected it slightly from a Serbian national perspective.

The Partisan war was still a main subject in the textbooks, but it was now also seen as directed against the Chetniks, that is, as a civil war, dividing the Serbian people. Some Communist crimes were mentioned: a new, hitherto unmentioned subject in Serbian school book literature was the Partisan persecution and killing of war opponents and suspected class enemies during, the so-called “left deviations”, in early 1942.<sup>32</sup> Yet, there is no mention of the Bleiburg massacres, which were a main theme in the Croatian schoolbooks. The simple explanation, again underlining the primacy of national themes, is probably that most of the victims of these events were Croats and thus uninteresting.

The descriptions of the communist period were also partly in line with Titoist tradition. Compared to the way one-party rule and political oppression were described in Croatian history books, the Serbian books from the Milošević era were rather positive

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<sup>30</sup> Jazmina Kuzmanović: Media: The Extension of Politics by Other Means, in: Sabrina P. Ramet and Ljubiša S. Adamovich (eds.): Beyond Yugoslavia. Politics, Economics and Culture in a Shattered Community, Boulder 1995, p. 95; Milan Milošević: The Media Wars, in: Jasminka Udovički and James Ridgeway (eds.): Burn this house. The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia, Durham 1997, p. 112f.

<sup>31</sup> Nikola Gačeša, Dušan Živković and Ljubica Radović: Istorija 3/4 za III razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i IV razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera [History 3/4 for third grade of the natural-mathematical line of gymnasium and fourth grade of the general and social-language line of gymnasium]. (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, first published 1992), Belgrade 1994, p. 173. Also p. 265.

<sup>32</sup> Gačeša et al., *Istorija 3/4*, 203-205; Nikola Gačeša, Dušan Živković and Ljubica Radović: Istorija 2 za II razred četvorogodišnjih stručnih škola [History 2 for the second grade of the four year vocational school], (14<sup>th</sup> reworked edition), Belgrade 2003, p. 192-193.

in their evaluation of Communist Yugoslavia, at least with regard to its earlier periods. The efforts to rebuild the country after the Second World War were praised as flamboyant and enthusiastic, and the reaction to the attack from the Comintern in 1948 as honourable and dignified.<sup>33</sup>

The strongest denunciations of communist history seem to rise from national dissatisfactions. Real condemnations of Titoism were in the chapters covering the Brioni meeting in 1966, when Aleksandar Ranković, a Serb, head of the security services and main exponent of a centralist politics in the federation, was ousted from power: “Then began the processes which separatist forces would use to break up the federation.”<sup>34</sup> These processes led to the 1974 constitution, which was described as a disintegration of Serbia itself. Under this constitution, according to one schoolbook, Serbia was oppressed and deceived of its fair share. In Kosovo, Serbs suffered under an Albanian administration that wanted to make the area “ethnically completely pure”.<sup>35</sup>

### **Histories of Yugoslavia in Post-Milošević Serbia**

With the fall of Slobodan Milošević and his socialist party from power in October 2000, Serbia embarked on a more thorough transition to democracy. This paved the way for outspoken confrontations with the socialist Yugoslav past in both history writing and schoolbooks. According to Momčilo Zečević, Serbian historians were driven by national megalomania, and therefore overestimated the national element of history, while at the same time denying any historical feasibility of the Yugoslav idea and state.<sup>36</sup> These tendencies became dominant also in Serbian history textbooks.

In the early 2000s, Serbia initiated reforms of the education system, and efforts were made to liberalise the schoolbook market.<sup>37</sup> Though the break was not immediately visible in the schoolbook material, as some older books were continuously in use after 2000, textbooks written after the fall of Milošević took a significantly different approach to Yugoslav history, the communist period in particular. The focus of the new

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<sup>33</sup> Gačeša et al.: *Istorija 3/4* [History 3/4], p. 251; Gačeša et al.: *Istorija 2* [History 3], p. 229.

<sup>34</sup> Gačeša et al.: *Istorija 2* [History 2], p. 238.

<sup>35</sup> Gačeša et al.: *Istorija 2* [History 2], p. 245-246.

<sup>36</sup> Momčilo Zečević: *O uzrocima jugoslovenske krize u istoriji i istoriografiji* [On the causes of the Yugoslav crisis in history and historiography], in his *Prošlost i Vreme* [Past and time], Belgrade 2003, p. 253.

<sup>37</sup> Sabine Rutar, *Bildungsreform in der Republik Serbien*, in *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, 24 (2002), p. 316-317.

textbooks was strictly Serbian national. Second World War history was no longer a glorious epos of Partisan victories; in what was presented as a largely Serbian civil war between the Communist led Partisans and the conservative and nationalist Chetniks, the Partisans were described as the more gruesome of the two, famed for immediate executions.<sup>38</sup> The Chetniks, associated with excessive war crimes other parts of the former Yugoslavia, were presented as at least as righteous as the formerly so favoured Partisans. This was perfectly in line with the official Serbian rehabilitation of Mihailović and his Chetniks that was completed by law in 2004.<sup>39</sup>

Communism was the main evil in the new histories of socialist Yugoslavia, and Communist crimes were massively thematized, not least in connection to the creation of Socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, with regard to history politics, one high school textbook points out how the communists deliberately distorted the memory of the Second World War, downplayed national hatred and enforced an artificial national balance of suffering and heroism in war history.<sup>41</sup>

Though the new textbooks gives credit to the communists for substantial development of the country and rising living standards, they generally have little good to say about the Socialist Yugoslav state, which is described as a centralised one-party government, controlled by security police and military apparatus.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it is presented as a less than viable construction, beginning its disintegration already in 1966, when Slovenia and Croatia displays a craving for independence, and in the end its break down is not caused, but only accelerated by the political crisis of the late 1980s.<sup>43</sup> However, Milošević is held responsible for a politics that led to enmity towards other republics, long periods of warfare and even endangered the very existence of the Serbian people.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Suzana Rajić, Kosta Nikolić and Nebojša Jovanović: *Istorija 8. za 8. razred osnovne škole* [History 8 for eighth grade of elementary school], Belgrade 2008 (4<sup>th</sup> edition, first published 2005), p. 145-146, 136.

<sup>39</sup> See Tea Sindbæk: *The Fall and Rise of a National Hero: interpretations of Draža Mihailović and the Chetniks in Yugoslavia and Serbia since 1945*, in: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 17, 1 (2009), p. 47-59.

<sup>40</sup> Suzana Rajić, Kosta Nikolić and Nebojša Jovanović: *Istorija 8.* [History 8], p. 152, 172, 174, 177; also Kosta Nikolić, Nikola Žutić, Momčilo Pavlović, Zorica Špajijer: *Istorija 3/4 za III razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i IV razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera* [History 3/4 for third grade of the natural-mathematical line of gymnasium and fourth grade of general and social-language line of gymnasium], Belgrade 2002, p. 217.

<sup>41</sup> Nikolić et al.: *Istorija 3/4* [[History 3/4], p. 217.

<sup>42</sup> Nikolić et al.: *Istorija 3/4* [[History 3/4], p. 235-236.

<sup>43</sup> Rajić et al.: *Istorija 8* [History 8], p. 172; Nikolić et al.: *Istorija 3/4* [[History 3/4], p. 239-240.

<sup>44</sup> Rajić et al.: *Istorija 8* [History 8], p. 181-182; Nikolić et al.: *Istorija 3/4* [[History 3/4], p. 239-240.

Thus condemnation of Milošević became part of a general confrontation with communist past.

Few syntheses of Serbia's Yugoslav history were published in the early 1990s. It may be symptomatic that one of them is a translation of Holm Sundhaussen's *Geschichte Serbiens*, which was published in Belgrade in 2008. This, in comparison to Croatia, small interest in writing new national histories may reflect that Serbia experienced a less clear cut from Yugoslavia, both ideologically and institutionally. Indeed, Serbia together with Montenegro remained part of a rump Yugoslav federation until early 2003.

One such attempt at a historical synthesis is Cedomir Antić's *Short History of Serbia*, which condemns both the communist regime and Milošević's "postmodern dictatorship".<sup>45</sup> Focused on the Serbian state and the Serbian nation's hardships and suffering, there is not much criticism of Serbian nationalism and the crimes committed in its service. Antić is very sceptic of Yugoslavia's communist regime, pointing to the terror, crimes and suppression that characterised its first decade of existence. The stories of Socialist Yugoslavia are generally about crisis and failure, but also about modernisation and a certain public support for Tito. Yet, the failure leads to Milošević, whose maltreatment of the Yugoslav system, abuse of Serbia's democratic structures and plundering of Serbian society, Antić considers even less legitimate than Titoist Yugoslavia.<sup>46</sup> Though Antić's book has already been republished twice, it had a lukewarm reception: one review suggested that the book's second half was probably more of a political statement than history writing. Yet, the reviewer had to praise Antić's courage in embarking on synthesising a large historical period; he had to look back to the 1980s to find successful attempts at syntheses of Serbian and Yugoslav history with which he could compare Antić's work.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cedomir Antić: *Kratka Istorija Srbije* [A short history of Serbia], Belgrade 2004, p. 200. (republished in 2005 and 2009).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177-178; 190-192; 195; 197; 200-204.

<sup>47</sup> Dalibor Denda: Čedomir Antić, *Kratka istorija Srbije 1804-2004* [Čedomir Antić, A short history of Serbia], in: *Tokovi Istorije* [Course of History] (2005), p. 308-309.

## **Bosniak histories of Yugoslavia**

The war 1992-1995 and the Dayton peace agreement cemented the Nationalist division of the multiethnic Bosnian society. Post-1995 Bosnian politics was characterised by the struggle to construct a viable state out of a war-torn, ethnically divided and often externally governed Dayton Bosnia. During the war and the years after it, Bosnia's Croat and Serb parts often identified with the republics of Croatia and Serbia, rather than with multiethnic Bosnia. This counts for history writing and education as well.

The tendency to let ethnicity dominate history interpretations continued in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnian Muslim-Croat federation was divided into cantons with outspoken self-governance. In areas with a Croatian majority population, history education programs were adopted from the Croatian republic. Similarly, in the Bosnian Serb entity, Republika Srpska, history teaching followed the Serbian line often using Serbian textbooks.<sup>48</sup> To Muslims, however, the Bosnian state remained the country of identification. Bosnian Muslim history writing engaged in the project of writing a Muslim national history, parallel to the general nationalisation of history in other former Yugoslav republics. The main protagonist of these histories, obviously, was the Bosnian Muslim community, or the Bosniaks, as they were increasingly called. The new histories tended to ascribe a positive role to Muslims while also emphasising Muslim national victimisation.

In the 1990s, like in Croatia and Serbia, Second World War history was a main theme. Accounts of the Second World War focused on Muslim community's innocence and suffering, especially at the hands of Serbian Chetniks.<sup>49</sup> History school books repeated the tendency to distance Bosnian Muslims from the main perpetrators of crimes, while emphasising Muslim victimisation, particularly from Chetnik terror.<sup>50</sup> The interest in the Chetnik massacres of Muslims during the Second World War was actualised by the crimes committed by Serbian paramilitary units in Bosnia in the 1990s, and it was closely linked to the perception that the massacres of the Second World War were

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<sup>48</sup> Falk Pingel: Einigung auf ein Minimum an Gemeinsamkeit. Schulbuchrevision in Bosnien und Herzegovina, in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 57 (2006), 9, p. 524ff; Branislava Baranović: History Textbooks in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina, In: *Intercultural Education*, 12 (2001) 1, p. 16ff.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Mustafa Imamović: *Historija Bošnjaka* [History of the Bosniaks], (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Sarajevo 1998, p. 537ff; Mehmedalija Bojić: *Historija Bosna i Bošnjaka* [History of Bosnia and Bosniaks], Sarajevo 2001, p. 205ff.

<sup>50</sup> Zijad Šehić and Indira Kućuk-Sorguč: *Historija 4. Udžbenik za četvrti razred gimnazije* [History 4. Textbook for fourth grade of gymnasium], Sarajevo 2004, p. 120-121, 124; Zijad Šehić and Zvezdana Marčić-Matošević: *Historija 8. Udžbenik za osmi razred osnovne škole* [History 8. Textbook for eighth grade of elementary school], Sarajevo 2004, p. 95-96.

renewed in the 1990s.<sup>51</sup> The past was used as a key to understanding the present, and again, like in the Serbian and Croatian cases, the socialist Yugoslav past was enveloped in entangled histories of Yugoslav conflicts.

Nevertheless, the Bosniak history school books from the early 2000s, unlike Serbian and Croatian textbooks from this period, presented a positive image of the communists and the Partisan movement during the Second World War, emphasising the Partisan fight against national intolerance and “fratricidal war”, while ignoring Partisan war crimes or the Bleiburg massacres.<sup>52</sup> Describing socialist Yugoslavia as a one-party system initially characterised by totalitarianism and strong hand government, the schoolbooks do not specifically mention the infamous security police or the prison camps for suspected political opponents.<sup>53</sup> Rather, there are positive accounts of self-management and especially of the economic and cultural development of Bosnia during Titoism.<sup>54</sup> Describing Tito’s death in May 1980, a high school textbook from 2004 reads: “Tito, farmer’s child, war hero and creator of peace was carried to his tomb like a king”<sup>55</sup> The book moves on to celebrate Tito’s period as the only peaceful one in Yugoslav history and to praise Tito himself for always fighting nationalism and enabling Muslims to achieve their deserved status as a nation.<sup>56</sup> Obviously this perspective reflects particular Bosnian Muslim experiences of Yugoslav history. This positive perspective on communism probably reflects the fact that the establishment of a Bosnian republic as well as the recognition of a Muslim national community within it are intimately linked to Titoist communism. Serb or Croat history textbooks would hardly acclaim Tito for his commitment to peace and to fighting nationalism.

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<sup>51</sup> E. g. Šemso Tucaković: *Srpski zločini nad Bošnjacima-Muslimanima 1941.-1945.* [Serb crimes against Bosniaks-Muslims 1941-1945], Sarajevo 1995, especially p. 174; Faruk Muftić: *Foča. Ponovljeni zločin i hronologija zločina 1941/1945 – 1992/1995. godina* [Foča. Renewed crime and chronology of crimes 1941/1945 – 1992-1995], Sarajevo 2001, p. 180-182; on continuation of Serbian crimes: Imamović: *Historija Bošnjaka* [History of the Bosniaks], p. 571; Ibrahim Pašić: *Od Hajduka do Četnika (stradanje i genocid nad glasinčkim Bošnjacima od najstarijih vremena do 1994. godina)* [From Hajduks to Chetniks (suffering and genocide against Bosniaks from Glasinac from the oldest times to 1994)], Sarajevo 2000, 19, *passim*. The idea of repeated crimes of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was also the theme of the Bosnian/French film *Remake*, which cross-clipped between an Ustasha prison in the 1940s and a Chetnik detention in the 1990s and between killing in the Ustasha camp of Jasenovac and in a Chetnik concentration camp near Sarajevo.

<sup>52</sup> Šehić and Kućuk-Sorguč: *Historija 4.* [History 4], p. 123ff; Šehić and Marčić-Matošević: *Historija 8.* [History 8], p. 96ff.

<sup>53</sup> Šehić and Kućuk-Sorguč: *Historija 4.* [History 4], p. 156-157

<sup>54</sup> Šehić and Marčić-Matošević, *Historija 8.* [History 8], p. 124-127; Šehić and Kućuk-Sorguč: *Historija 4.* [History 4], p. 158-161.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*



In two attempts at writing a general Bosnian history the dominant narrative line in the descriptions of the Titoist period is the Muslim community's struggle for recognition as a nation within the Yugoslav state.<sup>57</sup> Both authors give credit to the Titoist regime for providing security and possibilities for development of the Bosnian Muslim community. Yet, both raise criticism: one points out Yugoslavia's insurmountable structural and economic problems, including Serbian dominance, while the other sees Titoism as basically a series of "failed corrections" of the Soviet system.<sup>58</sup>

### **In conclusion:**

In the new histories written in Croatia, Serbia and the Muslim community in Bosnia after the fall of Socialist Yugoslavia, we see three rather national perspectives on their shared communist past. Even the histories of state repression and crimes committed against its citizens were often written from the perspective of national suffering.

In all three cases, the history of the common socialist past, characterised both by a suppressive and at times violent regime and by primarily peaceful coexistence among Yugoslavia's nations, was largely overshadowed by the focus on histories of national threats and conflicts. Though divergent views existed, the dominant lines of narrative most often downplayed the 45 years of peaceful Yugoslav co-existence, making them appear as an improbable incidence within a history generally characterised by national conflict.

Most visibly in the Croatian and Serbian cases, post-Yugoslav representations of Yugoslav history changed in line with political developments, though the main interpretative frameworks remained primarily national. While socialist Yugoslavia's positive contributions to the development of the national republics were somehow recognised, the history of inter-Yugoslav conflict was more useful in supplying arguments for differentiating and distancing the new national units from their former Yugoslav neighbours. Thus the new histories contributed to justifying Yugoslavia's dissolution and solidifying national boundaries also on the mental level.

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<sup>57</sup> Imamović: *Historija Bošnjaka* [History of the Bosniaks], p. 547-548, 562-564; Bojić: *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka* [History of Bosnia and the Bosniaks], p. 226-227, 245-250

<sup>58</sup> Bojić: *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka* [History of Bosnia and the Bosniaks], p. 245-246, 260, 263.