

REFUGEES AS HARBINGERS OF POLITICAL CHANGE IN SERBIA¹

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The recent wars of secession in former Yugoslavia have resulted in the most massive movement of refugees in Europe since World War II. Of all of the republics of former Yugoslavia, it was in Serbia and Montenegro (then still united in the rump Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) that the largest number took refuge. A census conducted in April through June of 1996 showed that there were 537,939 refugees in Serbia and 28,338 in Montenegro (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1996:16). In 1997, the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Serbia estimated that there were about 490,000 refugees in Serbia; of these, 185,000 were from the Bosnian and Croatian Federation,² 49,000 were from Republika Srpska, and 256,000 were from Croatia, the vast majority of whom were Serbs (62-63). While a number of refugees have returned to their homes, moved to Republika Srpska, migrated abroad, or simply are no longer counted, others have been added to their ranks by the more recent exodus of Serbs, Romi, Gorani, Turks, and others from Kosovo Metohija³ subsequent to the NATO attack on Serbia in 1999. Current estimates judge the number of refugees and other displaced persons in Serbia to be between 500,000 and 600,000 (Professor Dušan Drljača, Ethnographic Institute, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Miodrag Božović, Ministry for Diaspora, Belgrade: personal communications, June 2006). These refugees followed in the footsteps of those who had fled to Serbia from Kosovo, Bosnia-Hercegovina, and Croatia during and following World War II, and with whom they shared similar experiences, and to whom many were connected by ties of kinship and other personal relationships.

Regardless of the approximate nature of the above-cited figures, the number of refugees is surely quite large and very significant given Serbia's population (without Kosovo Metohija) of less than 8,000,000.⁴ The presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons in an economically depressed and politically unstable country evokes a number of questions related to the internal stability of Serbia, the direction of political change, and the ramifications for Serbian relations with America and the West.

In this essay, I will focus on these and other related topics as viewed through the eyes of Serbian refugees I interviewed, and with many of whom I interacted informally on numerous occasions in purely social settings during the summers of 2002, 2005, and 2006. The impressions gained from these contacts were further strengthened by the many conversations I had with academics, journalists, and government officials,⁵ as well as with friends, relatives, and people whom I met spontaneously in the course of everyday life. In addition, I regularly reviewed the Serbian press (*Politika*, *Večernje Novosti*, *Danas*, *Vesti* and *Blic*) for reports and commentaries related to this study. In doing so, I sought to become familiar with sources which were contributing to the views of my informants, as well as to those of the Serbian public in general.

The sample for this study consisted of 81 refugees living in Belgrade and in Indjija and Kikinda (in Vojvodina). Of these, 34 were from Bosnia-Hercegovina, 41 from Croatia (Lika, Kordun, and Slavonia) 4 from Kosovo, and 2 from Sandžak. In addition, 17 Serbian returnees (*povratnici*) in two families were visited in 2002 and 2005 in the village of Kolarić in the Kordun region of Croatia. Also, in 2002, a Croatian returnee was serendipitously interviewed in the village of Drenov Klanac in the Croatian province of Lika (Croatia), a village which we thought to be totally depopulated at that time.

Informants were located in a number of ways: through my wife's and my own relatives who were themselves refugees, at a refugee camp in Belgrade, through introductions by friends, and as the result of fortuitous meetings. Even though the sample is neither random nor significantly large, the extrapolation of the results to a much larger population seems justified by the unusually high degree of unanimity of responses. Also, I believe that the respondents were extremely open in describing their experiences and expressing their views because my wife and I were perceived primarily as "Serbs from America," rather than as generic Americans. Moreover, a number of informants were contacted during all three summers, and their responses were not only consistent over

time, but also exhibited a strengthening of the views originally expressed.

Based on the narratives of those interviewed, it is clear that they had arrived at their opinions and concomitant political views in a number of mutually strengthening and reaffirming ways. The basic foundation of their political orientation is undoubtedly their own negative experiences during and following the recent civil wars. These experiences are perceptually frozen in time, and are told and retold with an immediacy as if they had occurred yesterday. At the same time, they are also generalized within the context of Serbian history as a whole. Thus, their personal sagas are not simply understood as a series of unique events, but rather are linked conceptually to their own parents' experiences and even to those of distant, sometimes apocryphal ancestors. In this regard, analogies were particularly drawn to the persecution of the Serbs by Croats and Bosnian Moslems during WW II in the pro-Nazi Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska).

It is significant that refugees, although resettled in many different locations, nevertheless have maintained intense networks of communication and personal contact with others from their places of origin. These networks have the effect of creating a kind of consensus of belief and opinion. This phenomenon has also been noted by Svrđlin among Serbian refugees from the Hercegovinian village of Žitomislić⁶ (2004: 243):

In 1992, our villagers dispersed in all directions.... to Belgrade and other cities....What they had in common was the need to learn as much as possible about each other....Thus, from the very beginning, they knew everything about each other....They spent their last money for telephone calls, and for travel to find out how others were getting along. (my translation)

Another profound influence is the media. Opinions are continually validated and strengthened by reports and commentaries on radio, television, and especially in the press. Of particular impact is the reporting of what may be termed "major reaffirmative events." One example, which caused widespread indignation and commentary in Serbia, was the failure of Serbian President Boris Tadić, who had attended the July 11, 2005 commemoration in Srebrenica of the tenth anniversary of the alleged Serbian

massacre of Moslems, to attend on the following day the commemoration in Bratunac of Serbian victims of convicted Moslem war criminal, Naser Orić. Tadić further inflamed public opinion by sending a wreath with an inscription in Latin characters rather than in the Serbian Cyrillic alphabet (cf. *Politika* 7/9, 7/11, and 7/13/2005). Directly related to the events in Srebrenica, and even more negatively perceived as anti-Serbian bias, was the decision of the Hague Tribunal to sentence Naser Orić, a man whom the Serbs have accused of responsibility for the destruction of more than 100 Serbian villages and the killing of several thousand Serbian peasants in the countryside around Srebrenica, to only two years imprisonment. He was released for time served, and received a hero's welcome on his return to Sarajevo (*Politika* 7/1/2006a). While such highly publicized occurrences have an immediate, dramatic impact on the political consciousness of both refugees and the Serbian public in general, a myriad of less sensational reports appearing almost daily in the press have a similar, though cumulative effect.

For refugees, news related to their places of origin is of particular interest, and very influential in forming their largely negative decisions about repatriation. For instance, there is frequent mention in the press of difficulties and discrimination which Serbs are encountering in Croatia, and the Bosnian Federation. Similarly, articles appear with even greater frequency regarding violence against Serbs and the destruction of Serbian churches and other property in Kosovo Metohija.

Refugees and Political Change

There are strong indications that while Serbian public opinion is sharply divided between those favorably oriented toward the West and those who are often labeled as traditionalists or ultra-nationalists,⁷ the latter group has been steadily gaining ground over the past several years. For instance, on June 25, 2005, in a poll conducted by Belgrade TV, 63% of respondents expressed opposition to President Boris Tadić's "implicit recognition of Serbia's guilt" by attending the commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre. More recently, a poll of 2,000 respondents taken in May, 2006 by Medijum Galop showed a strong shift in favor of the nationalistic, anti-Western Srpska Radikalna Stranka (SRS) which received support from 40.2% of those polled in contrast to President Tadić's Demokratska Stranka which garnered

only 21.1% (*Politika* 6/9/2006a). This same survey also identified Tomislav Nikolić of the SRS as Serbia's most popular politician. Moreover, there are strong indications that political apathy among voters may result in the SRS winning 50% of parliamentary seats, which is described in *Politika* (6/10/2006b) as a "mandate."

The participants in this study have clearly articulated opinions very similar to those of that segment of the Serbian population which supports the SRS and other anti-Western parties. Furthermore, many Serbs with whom I spoke who are not supporters of the SRS, while voicing many of the same resentments against the West and the current Serbian leadership, nevertheless favored reconciliation with Europe and America, believing that only in this way could a more normal and prosperous life be achieved.

The widespread antagonism which I observed among Serbs toward America and the West was frequently expressed in feelings of betrayal by former allies on whose side the Serbs fought in two World Wars, and whom they had previously idealized. This persuasion is continually substantiated and reinforced by events which are reported on an almost daily basis in the media. In the following discussion, I will attempt to identify and contextualize these influences. It should be noted that the viewpoints which I attribute to my informants represent for the most part a general consensus except when statements and/or opinions are ascribed to specific individuals.

America as an Abstraction

Anti-American stereotypes were quite abstract since few of the informants had any significant contact with Americans, and only a few had any working knowledge of English. Only four informants had visited the United States for brief visits with relatives. However, refugee children were studying English as their preferred foreign language. Significantly, a distinction was made between American foreign policy and leadership, on the one hand, and "ordinary Americans" (*obični amerikanci*), on the other. American popular culture still held considerable appeal among the young, and contributed to a romanticized vision of American life. There was also a widely held belief that America was a land of comfort and opportunity. In contrast to these positive images, a number of informants stated that life in America focused exclusively on money, and that people had little time for "social life and friends." Several commented that

America really didn't have a true democracy because "the rich were in control of everything."

The Breakup of Yugoslavia

There was unanimity that America and Germany were largely responsible for the breakup of Yugoslavia and the resultant civil wars. As one former officer in the Yugoslav National Army, a veteran of the war in Bosnia, stated: "We stood by America in two wars, and now the Americans have turned their backs on us. We Serbs had won the wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and America and NATO deprived us of our victory. I cannot understand why America supported the Croats and *Bošnjaci* [Bosnian Slav Moslems] who were the former allies of the Nazis."

Various explanations were offered for the West's role in the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the NATO's attack on Serbia. Perhaps the most frequent comment was that "America wanted to turn the Balkans into a colony to exploit its natural resources and secure a source of cheap labor." A closely related accusation was that the West planned to establish military bases in the Balkans to assure the flow of oil from the Middle East and to oppose Russia. Several informants held that the West regarded Eastern Orthodoxy as an impediment to its hegemony in Europe. Similarly, there were comments that the Roman Catholic Church was complicit in the attacks against the Serbs. As one informant explained: "The Catholic Church has great influence in the West; we Orthodox Serbs have no one to turn to except Greece and Russia, and although they are our best friends, they have not yet been able to help us." As evidence that the West is anti-Orthodox, the perceived "unwillingness" of UNMIK and KFOR to stop the destruction by Albanians of Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo Metohija was cited. There was a unanimous rejection of the idea that NATO had attacked Serbia out of humanitarian concerns because of alleged ethnic cleansing and war crimes committed by the Serbs. As one Bosnian refugee stated, "If this had been true, after the fall of Milošević, whom the West blamed for all these so-called crimes, American policy toward the Serbs should have changed, but it didn't." My informants, who, like many other Serbs, avidly follow world events, were profoundly angered by what they perceived as "the continued demonization of the Serbs and the distortion of events in former Yugoslavia by the Western media."

International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

As was the case with virtually all Serbs with whom I spoke regardless of their political affiliation, my informants were unanimous in their belief that the ICTY was established by the West to punish the Serbs. The previously mentioned case of Naser Orić served to emphatically reinforce this conviction. On the same page in *Politika* (7/2/2006b) as the report of Orić's release, a list was published of 86 individuals from Serbia, Montenegro, Republika Srpska, and Republika Srpska Krajina who had been indicted by the Tribunal. This is only one of the frequent articles in the Serbian press which in one way or another condemn the ICTY for unjustly and disproportionately prosecuting the Serbs. Speaking of what he termed the "alleged court" (*tobožnji sud*), an elderly Bosnian refugee characterized the Hague Tribunal in terms of an old folk aphorism probably dating from Turkish times: *Kadija tuži, kadija sudi* ("The Cadi prosecutes, the Cadi judges"). As a young woman who had fled from Croatia expressed it: "It is not really the specific individuals whom the Tribunal wants to put on trial, but the whole Serbian nation."

Among the most despised and vilified persons mentioned by my informants was Carla del Ponte (Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY), who has often been depicted in grotesque caricatures by the Serbian press. In contrast to the loathing manifested for Carla del Ponte, universal admiration was expressed for Ratko Mladić, who remains a hero not only in the eyes of refugees (especially those from Bosnia), but also in those of many other Serbs as well. Mladić is a frequent topic of conversation, and a number of different theories about him were expressed. To mention but a few: "Mladić is now the commandant of a Russian military school; "Our Ratko has been given a new identity by the Russians"; "He is living in Greece where he has many friends who support him"; "Mladić has had plastic surgery, and freely walks about Belgrade"; "Mladić has a guard of 400, the inner circle of which is instructed to kill him rather than allow him to be captured"; and "The Americans are afraid to capture him because it would bring about the downfall of their puppet in Belgrade [President Tadić]." These tales clearly express pride in the fact that Mladić has so far escaped all efforts of the West to find him, and thus thwarted the Hague Tribunal. In comparison to Mladić, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić is less

frequently mentioned and eulogized. This is perhaps because Mladić is far more often mentioned in the press, and appears to be the one most actively sought by the ICTY. Moreover, his surrender is most closely tied to the receipt of American economic aid and the establishment of closer relations by the European Union with Serbia.

In the case of Milošević, there was a great deal of ambivalence. Only a few described him as a "hero." Nevertheless, he was not regarded as a war criminal nor believed to be responsible for the civil wars in former Yugoslavia. However, the majority did accuse him of corruption and crimes in Serbia, and asserted that he should have stood trial in Belgrade. The greatest anger expressed toward him was because of his withdrawal of military and other support for the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs, and the signing of the Dayton Accord. Like former Premier Zoran Djindjić and President Boris Tadić, he was accused of being a tool of Washington. With reference to this, a refugee from Croatia expressed succinctly what I had heard in varying forms from many others: "By orders from the Americans, Milošević was kidnapped and sent to the Hague by Djindjić to gain political and personal advantage from Germany and America. We all know that Milošević was in the service of the United States, and when he was of no further use, the Americans betrayed him."⁸

Repatriation

Professor Dušan Drliča (Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy) holds that relatively few refugees have returned to their places of origin. For instance, he estimates that although the Croats claim that as many as 80,000 Serbs have been repatriated to Croatia, in fact no more than 20,000 have done so (person communication, June, 2006). In an interview reported in *Politika* (2006, June 17), Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Jovan of Zagreb and Ljubljana, estimated that 300,000 Serbs had fled Croatia, for the most part, to Serbia. He claims that so few of these have returned that soon there will be "more [Orthodox] churches than believers." These contentions regarding the small number of returnees are born out by the predominantly negative responses of my informants regarding repatriation to either Croatia or Bosnia. Although a number had made visits to their former homes, none were at the time of this study considering a permanent return. The Bosnian Serbs expressed somewhat

greater negativity than did those from Croatia. When questioned about the Bosnian Federation, several remarked that they “could never live with Moslems again.” The four informants from Kosovo Metohija and the two from Sandžak emphatically stated that they would never return under the present circumstances due to the uncertainty about the eventual fate of these two provinces. The two informants from the Sandžak⁹ were a young married couple who might be categorized as “anticipatory refugees.” They related that their Serbian neighbors in Sandžak were feeling increasing pressure from local Slav Moslems, who constitute a majority, and that many people were selling their land and leaving. They have advised their parents to make no investments in their farms, and to leave as soon as possible.

Milenko is a middle-aged refugee from Knin, who now owns a successful small business in Belgrade. His views closely reflected those of other refugees from Croatia:

I am religious and have God's love (Božja ljubav) for all nationalities, but I have more for some than for others. There is a great deal of pressure against Serbs who return to Croatia. Although there are agreements about compensation and the return of property, the Croatian bureaucracy does everything possible to prevent this happening. I have bad feelings toward Croats, especially those from the Dalmatian hinterland [Dalmatinska Zagora] and Hercegovina. They are the descendants of Serbs converted to Catholicism; they are the worst of all. I have a real problem with Catholics.

Milan is a Serb from Lika who occasionally visits his native village. In spite of his intention to live permanently in Belgrade, he is nevertheless reluctant to completely break ties with his ancestral home:

My two brothers and I are refugees from Drenov Klanac. The Croats destroyed almost all the houses in our village¹⁰ and desecrated our [Orthodox] church. I will never live in Croatia again. I have been offered money to rebuild the family home, but if I build anything, it will only be a small vacation cottage (vikendica). Our church is being repaired,¹¹ but Serbs only return for a few days in August to

celebrate the village slava (patron saint's day).

Similar to those from Croatia, refugees from what is now the Bosnian Federation expressed little desire to repatriate. Moreover, many were doubtful about moving to Republika Srpska because of indications that there were intentions by the “occupying powers” to eventually abolish it as an independent entity and to integrate it seamlessly into the Bosnian Federation. Statements and measures attributed to Paddy Ashdown, who was until recently the UN High Representative for Bosnia-Hercegovina, have reinforced this fear.¹² For instance, to mention but one of a series of “anti-Serbian” actions taken by the High Representative, in December of 2004, Ashdown ordered that facilities of the Army of Republika Srpska be placed under the control of NATO, and then be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense of the Bosnian Federation (*Vesti*, December 12, 2004). More recently, on June 29, 2006, the Parliament of the European Union in Strasbourg passed a nonbinding resolution regarding constitutional reform in Bosnia-Hercegovina which held that Bosnia’s dual entities should be eliminated (*Politika*, June 30, 2006).

Personal communications from informants’ relatives and others who have returned to Bosnia, as well as numerous articles in the press about the difficulties experienced by returnees have made a profound impact. For instance, it was reported in *Politika* (6/12/06) that the government of the Bosnian Federation is taking no initiative in the restoration of destroyed Serbian housing, and that in the kanton of Livanjsko Polje 800 Serbian houses and 150 apartments still await repair. The article further states that of a prewar Serbian population of 12,500, only 4,600 have returned because of discrimination by the local government (*kantonska vlada*) which is dominated by Croats (*Politika*, 6/12/06). This assertion is further documented by Baroš, who writes the following based on her recent field work in the same region (2005:106):

People are still waiting for houses to be considered for repair. Agricultural machinery is a rarity....Cash income is not even imaginable. The obtaining of pensions is a difficult and slow process, and one cannot even dream of employment. (my translation)

Baroš also observes what several of my informants also mentioned, that is, returnees would be an ethnic minority in areas where they were previously a majority, and that they would be living under the political domination of their former enemies (105-106). As a refugee from Sarajevo explained:

I spent all but the first ten years of my life in Sarajevo. I read recently that not only was Sarajevo becoming an almost exclusively Moslem city,¹³ but that Islamic fundamentalism there was on the rise. I could never live under those conditions. My cousin has for years tried to recover title to her house in Sarajevo with no success; they simply don't want us back.

Refugees from both Croatia and Bosnia cited the lack of economic opportunities and discrimination against Serbs in employment as major barriers to return. For instance, the two families previously mentioned who had returned to the village of Kolarić in Croatia, are still depending largely on subsistence agriculture more than five years later, even though the adults have extensive education, training, and experience in other occupations. They attribute this situation to discrimination against Serbs.

Several informants have called attention to sporadic reports of physical attacks and other aggressive acts against Serbian returnees in Croatia and the Bosnian Federation. Moreover, there are also reports of conflict and occasional violence between Croats and Moslems, especially in Hercegovina's most important city, Mostar, a city which remains a socially and spatially divided community. All this suggests a lack of stability and security, further discouraging repatriation. Thus, it is clear that the majority of Serbian refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina are highly unlikely to return to their original homes in the foreseeable future. In the case of Kosovo, if the province gains independence from Serbia, it is even more unlikely that many refugees will ever return.

“Democracy and Free Markets”

Saša, who arrived in Belgrade with his young wife and infant son during the first months of the war in Bosnia, expressed sentiments which I had heard repeatedly in one form or another from refugees and other Serbs from all walks of life:

I thought that after the wars, and with the end of the Milošević regime, things would

be better, and we would get help from America, but this has never happened. The truth is that the West only wants to humiliate us and reduce us to poverty. Nothing has changed for most of us. My srbjanci [Serbs from Serbia proper] friends and neighbors are no better off than I am. Sometimes I see Americans around Belgrade. Some of them are Evangelicals; we certainly don't need them. People have told me that they offer food to poor people to attend their meetings. This is an insult.

Saša's viewpoint was expressed by others in a variety of ways. A common refrain was that the West's concept of “democracy and free markets” was a fraud, and simply a “propaganda” device to impose “colonial” domination and to exploit the Serbs. For example, consider the statement of Momčilo, a university-educated, former engineer from Osijek (Croatia):

What has happened to our economy is a crime. Corrupt politicians, gangsters, and dishonest businessmen have enriched themselves while the rest of us have nothing and no hope. You see these guys in their big cars and in expensive restaurants; they don't care about us at all. Foreign interests are buying up our industries and resources at bargain prices. I can't tell you how good things were before [under socialism]. We had cheap vacations, free health care and education, our jobs were secure, and the cost of housing and heating was very low.¹⁴ Now, I work as a cab driver, and make about 20,000 dinars a month [a little less than \$300] for more than 60 hours work a week. This is not much when you consider that my electric bill in winter is over 4,000 dinars [about \$60 US].

A retired professor of history, who fled Hercegovina as a child with his parents during World War II, vociferously denounced “privatization” as a “weapon of war against Serbia.” Referring to a page in the June 9, 2006 edition of *Politika*, he commented with considerable emotion:

See what is happening! Every week there are announcements of public auctions of assets which belong to our society [društveni sektor]. I ask you, who is it that has the money to buy these? Not our

people. Foreigners and foreign corporations are the ones who are buying them at bargain prices (za bagatelu). First, NATO bombed our factories, and now what is left is being stolen. Sometimes they simply close down enterprises after taking all they can from them. Thousands of workers are without jobs. Do you wonder why the streets are full of young people at all times of the day? The reason is that they have no work. Even university graduates wait for years for a job. While I blame America and the West for this, I place even more blame on our leaders who have betrayed us. I keep hearing about free markets and democracy. What kind of democracy is it when those with money rule everything?

The topic of democracy was raised a number of times, especially by refugees from Bosnia. There was a general consensus that what had been imposed by the West in Bosnia under the guise of democracy was a fraud. A former policeman from Velika Kladuša expressed what was a common view:

Democracy in Bosnia is a joke. Elections don't make a democracy, especially when elected officials in Republika Srpska are thrown out of office because Ashdown [the former UN High Representative] doesn't like their views. For the same reason, he has closed radio and TV stations. I ask you, what kind of democracy is it when they are trying to force us to live in a country with people whom we don't like, and where we will be a minority among our enemies? [Reference is made here to fears that Republika Srpska will be abolished and integrated into the Bosnian Federation]

There was an unmistakably high level of cynicism about the possibility of “real democracy” ever taking root in Serbia, not only the part of my informants, but also among many other Serbs with whom I spoke. Echoing what Banfield (1958) wrote almost a half century ago about political attitudes in southern Italy, my informants voiced opposition to those in power without expressing positive sentiments about any of those who might replace them. Almost without exception, there was an overarching conviction that it was not possible to negotiate one’s way in Serbian society without personal connections (*veze*). Thus, what I had observed in

Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s, still appears to be largely true today, that is, there persists a pervasive belief that impersonal institutions are incapable of meeting even the most basic needs of everyday life (cf. Simic 1983). Paradoxically, even those who voiced the most outspoken support for a Western-style democracy in Serbia expressed doubt about the possibility of it ever being achieved. Such views were further strengthened by what was seen as the hypocrisy of American rhetoric about the creation of democratic institutions in Eastern Europe. Addressing this, a Serbian academic with whom I spoke at length pointed to “American interference” in Serbian elections (as well as in the recent Ukrainian Orange Revolution) through surrogate NGOs and the infusion of money to support candidates perceived as favorable to the West. He claimed that “millions of dollars were spent to influence the outcome of the September 2000 Yugoslav elections.” Although I believe this to probably be true, the accuracy of this contention is not nearly as significant as the fact that such beliefs about the United States are very widely held.

Implications

It can be argued that it would be very problematic to predict the direction of political change in Serbia based on a sample of 81 informants; consultations with a dozen or so academics, journalists, and bureaucrats; and casual conversations with friends and people randomly encountered in the conduct of everyday life. However, there is solid evidence, such as the Medium Galop poll cited earlier, that these views are representative of a large segment of the Serbian population. It is also significant that the increase in support for the Serbian Radical Party has been a repeated subject of discussion on the pages of *Politika*, a newspaper widely regarded “as pro-Western.”

In a meeting with Tony Blair in London on June 27, 2006, Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica is reported to have warned that “Serbia might break its ties with the West unless the international community takes a more conciliatory approach to its claims to Kosovo and to Serbia’s failure to arrest the war crimes suspect Ratko Mladić” (*International Harold Tribune* 2006, 6/29). One can only surmise that his statement reflects Koštunica’s understanding of the hardening mood of the Serbian public and the resurgence of Serbian nationalism.

What is suggested by the title of this essay is that Serbian refugees constitute a kind of

weather vane pointing in the direction of the winds of political change.

Notes

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² On November 21, 1995, the Dayton Agreement established two semi-autonomous entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina: a Moslem and Croat Federation with approximately 51% of the territory and Republika Srpska with 49%. “Moslem” in this case refers to Slav Moslems known in Serbo-Croatian as *bošnjaci*. Henceforth in this paper, the Moslem and Croat Federation will simply be referred to as “the Bosnian Federation.”

³ Throughout this paper, I have used the more precise term “Kosovo Metohija,” which is sometimes contracted to “Kosmet.” Metohija is derived from the Greek word “ΤΟ ΜΕΤΟΧΙΟΝ” (“land belonging to a religious institution.”) The significance of this for the Serbs is that Metohija is the site of over a thousand Serbian medieval churches, monasteries, and other places of religious significance.

⁴ As reported in *Danas* (2002, June 21), the 2002 census of the population Serbia proper (excluding Kosovo) was 7,478,820.

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⁶ In other places, including the Yugoslav census, the village is referred to in the plural as Žitomislići.

⁷ Gordy (1999: 57) has characterized the traditionalists and nationalists as “older, rural, and less educated voters who do not welcome change in the social order.” While this may have been true in the late 1990s, today, those supporting the Serbian Radical Party represent a far more diverse population.

⁸ Former Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milošević, after being held for three months without trial on allegations of corruption and abuse of power while in office, was kidnapped from a Belgrade prison on June 28, 2001. This was in defiance of an injunction issued by the Yugoslav Constitutional Court. Former Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić is believed to have engineered Milošević’s transfer to the Hague. The mention of Germany in this informant’s statement refers to the fact that Djindjić had lived and studied in Germany, and it is widely held that Djindjić had closely allied himself with the Germans, and was a close friend of former Chancellor Schroeder (cf. Prentice 2002:13). On March 11, 2003, Djindjić was assassinated in Belgrade.

⁹ Sandžak is an area in southwestern Serbia, north of Kosovo Metohija on the border of and extending into Montenegro. The province has a Slav Moslem majority who are increasingly identifying with Bosnian Moslems. There has been a recent report of the appearance of an Islamic fundamentalist sect there (cf. *Politika* 2006, June 10c).

¹⁰ In 2002, 2005, and 2006, we visited Drenov Klanac. In 2002, there were almost no returnees. One exception was a middle-aged Croatian woman who spent only the weekends there, repairing her house. She recounted that, at first, the Serbs destroyed the Croatian houses, then later, the village was occupied by the Croats who destroyed the Serbian houses and desecrated the Orthodox church.

¹¹ The Croatian Ministry of Renewal and Finance reportedly agreed to cofinance with the Serbian Orthodox Church the renovation of 25 Orthodox churches. However, according to the

Serbian Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana Jovan, this number “has been reduced to five” (*Politika*, 2006, June 17). Many Serbs believe that the Croats are supporting some highly visible projects and making public gestures of reconciliation with Serbian refugees simply to enhance their chances of joining the EU. Among other such examples can be mentioned the reopening of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Zagreb.

¹² The 1995 Dayton Accord designated a High Representative with almost unlimited powers to implement the civilian and political aspects of the peace agreement. Ashdown has argued that such powers are “essential to Bosnia’s recent progress,” and draws a comparison to Germany and Japan after WWII, declaring that “states that suffer long wars need a firm hand to help them return to normal” (as quoted in the *New York Times* 2005, November 5).

¹³ This contention is confirmed by a report in *Politika* (6/16/06) citing a warning by the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica) that “Sarajevo is assuming the appearance of an exclusively Moslem city in which Croats are treated as second-class citizens.”

¹⁴ Idealization of former Yugoslavia is so common, especially as people remember it during the 70s and early 80s, that the term *Jugonostalgija* has come into popular usage.

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