UNMAKING MULTI-ETHNICITY IN YUGOSLAVIA: METAMORPHOSIS OBSERVED

Bette Denich
Boston University

In late September 1989, the Central Committee of the Communist League of Yugoslavia held a special meeting to discuss a proposed amendment to the Slovenian constitution that would claim the right for that republic to secede from Yugoslavia. The following morning, when I turned on the radio in my Belgrade apartment, I found myself listening to the sounds of the roll-call vote being taken to conclude what had been an all-night session. The majority of the Central Committee voted to request the Slovenian parlyament to postpone its vote to allow for further discussion. But later that same morning, the Slovenian parliament disregarded the Central Committee's request, and voted unanimously in favor of Slovenia's right to secede (cf. Hayden 199O). Upon hearing the news of the vote in the Slovenian parliament, I wrote in my notebook: "Today ended the Communist Party of Yugoslavia," meaning that it had lost tits Leninist authority to enforce top- down decisions over what had been subordinate bodies. I then spread out a map of Yugoslavia and, after studying it for about five minutes, saw clearly that secession by Slovenia would mean the disintegration of the rest of the country. Yugoslavia's northwestern republic contained a largely homogeneous ethnic population with a distinctive language, capable of forming a separate nation-state without impinging upon other ethnic claims. Aside from Slovenia, Yugoslavia's five other republics had mixed ethnic compositions, like Siamese quintuplets sharing vital organs, incapable of separation without serious damage. But Slovenia had also been integral to the political balance among other republics whose mixed ethnic composition did not permit "clean" secession. The integrity of the whole depended upon the balances among all its parts. Around Belgrade, in conversations among themselves, people were saying: "But Slovenia cannot secede, because that would mean civil war." The unthinkable could not happen.

At about that time, a popular satirical group from Sarajevo, called "Top List of Surrealists" (*Top Lista Nadrealista*), performed a skit on their weekly television show, seen throughout Yugoslavia. In what seemed hilariously farfetched at the time, they imagined the country partitioned into West and East Yugoslavia, with the boundary running through Bosnia so that Sarajevo was bisected by a Sarajevo Wall. (The Berlin Wall was still intact). The satirists enacted an escape from one side of the wall to the other, while guards pelted the escapees with garbage. In May 1992, fighters in Sarajevo were attacking each other with real gunfire as the civil war that had already ravaged large areas of Croatia inflicted even greater devastation upon what had been the multi-ethnic republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Prior to the wave of post-Communist change that swept through Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, the tripartite ethnic composition of Bosnia-Herzegovina appeared to be yielding a new Bosnian identity, a blending of Muslim, Serbian, and Croatian backgrounds of people who increasingly intermarried and intermingled their contributions in creativity, of which the satirical "Surrealists" were but one example. Bosnia was the test of multi-ethnicity, and also its most vulnerable point. To separate that population into ethnic "nations" portended violence. That was the descent into chaos I foresaw in only five minutes of gazing at that map, but which people generally assumed could not happen; given the assumption that civil war was unthinkable, it wouldn't happen.

Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly* studies how, throughout history, predictions of disastrous outcomes have failed to prevent disasters from happening. In cases beginning with the Trojan horse and ending with the Viet Nam war, Tuchman finds that "rejection of reason is the prime characteristic of folly" (Tuchman 1984:380). Her analyses focus upon leaders, pursuing power where reason would instruct otherwise. As a widely predicted outcome, the descent of Yugoslavia into civil war qualifies for Tuchman's definition of tragic "folly". Yugoslavia was torn apart by leaders who legitimated their actions by near- unanimous support from ethnic constituencies in crucial elections and referenda. Therefore, the source of disaster does not reside only in the leaders, but also among the populations at large. Even foreseeing civil war, people formed themselves into increasingly cohesive ethnic blocs, supporting leaders who pursued increasingly aggressive policies toward each other. Yet all kept pushing toward the brink. What was the appeal of redefining ethnic nation-states that did not coincide with geography? How did otherwise reasonable people let themselves be persuaded by leaders offering dreams impossible to realize without massive violence and destruction? Finding oneself amidst historic change is a special opportunity for an anthropologist, a practitioner

in a field that emphasizes long-term continuities. Between the summer of 1987 and the fall of 1990, my visits to Yugoslavia spanned the final months of the political consensus that constituted Titoism, through the disintegration of the country to the verge of the civil war that broke out in 1991. I thereby became a participant-observer in that society as it underwent radical changes in consciousness linking individuals to public opinion, and impelling the entry of masses into politics. I was finding out about what was going on through the same means, and at the same time, as the public. I participated in the informal circulation of opinion in everyday life, among diverse sectors of the population among whom I came into direct contact, and was swept into the heady atmosphere that accompanies dramatic change. I immersed myself in following the print and tv media, all bursting with energy of the new freedom. (I had known a time of similar energy in the United States during the now-legendary 1960s). The level of intellectual, artistic, and even athletic output was exhiliarating. Communism was going out with a burst. But problems arose with a combustive mixture that counterposed exposes of Titoism both to national revivals and to intellectual currents advocating the specifically Western liberal, pluralistic concepts associated with the code-word "civil society".

Yugoslavia tore itself apart over what are essentially anthropological questions about the nature of cultural identity and the relation between belief and power. What I observed, up close, were transformations of personal identity in response to events being played out on the political stage as leaders redefined their policies and goals in nationalist terms. My ethnography of nationalism developed on an *ad hoc* basis. Without a set of prior hypotheses, I observed day-by-day events and people's responses to them, and filled notebooks with my reactions to both. Those on-site observations provide a rich data source from which to review and reconstruct the process as it unfolded.

As the society and people around me became increasingly caught up in the discourses and perceptions shaped by nationalism, their ways of thinking became increasingly differentiated from mine. In the current self-reflexive mode of social analysis, the differences forced me to think both about how they were thinking and about how I was thinking: what was the logic of each? And what were the intellectual and philosophical premises that we represented? The reflexive process takes place through dialogues, sometimes in open conversation, more often as my own reflections on what I hear around me. The differences between one mode of thinking and the other reveal that there are separate cultural constructions involved: theirs and mine. The problem is to identify the nature and the origins of each: mine as well as theirs. As my perceptions as well as values consistently diverge from the trends around me, the effort is to make specific the origins of the differences in intellectual, cultural, and historical terms.

Obviously, one critical difference in values that separated me from nationalist ideologues was our attitude toward war. If civil war would be required to dismantle Yugoslavia into separate national states, the willingness to wage war was implicit in all nationalist programs. The public at large never voted explicitly for war. Yet, by following nationalist leaders, the public was drawn, step by step, into supporting war, fighting in it, and becoming its victims. In effect, the process of being drawn into rival nationalist causes was starting down a "slippery slope," a logical progression that led rapidly to sharpening confrontations, to polarization. Once that slide began, why was there nothing to brake it?

In the analysis that follows, I shall use my observations to suggest how the cross-cultural methodology of anthropology provides a unique approach to seeking explanations for the precipitous eruption of ethnic conflict that destroyed Yugoslavia as a multi-ethnic society.

Multi-ethnic Realities and Categories of Ethnic Identity:

It is as if the scenario for Yugoslavia's descent into ethnic war were written long ago, and kept in storage to await the proper moment to be put into motion. Foreign observers, both scholars and journalists, have routinely characterized Yugoslavia as an "artificial" creation, with its component nationalities held together only by Tito and the Communist Party, with age-old hatreds suppressed only by the coercive apparatus of the Yugoslav state. Under that characterization, the road to civil war would be both brief and direct. To accept such a simple interpretation, in my view, is to miss the more subtle processes that actually occurred. At question here is the nature of ethnic identity in the multi-national Yugoslav structure, as well as how ethnicity is to be interpreted as a global phenomenon. Is ethnicity to be seen as a fixed quality of particular populations, described as "peoples" or "nations"? Or is it a more malleable concept, capable of reformulation and manipulation within contexts of opportunity, constraint, and power? The Yugoslav reality has been conventionally described in the former terms, taking the categories Serb, Croat, and so on, as literal,

bounded entities. Add to that characterization the long history of conflicts in the distant as well as recent past, and the outbreak of civil war seems to need little explanation. In my view, it is misleading to take the categories of ethnic identity in Yugoslavia as fixed qualities. The challenge is to understand something more complex: how identities were redefined, intensified, and activated over a brief period of time.

The Titoist slogan "brotherhood and unity" was intended to mend the fratricidal divisions of World War II. But if ethnic nations were metaphorically "brothers", they were still conceived of as distinct entities. The underlying ambivalence was over the definition of "nation": would Yugoslavia evolve toward a common national culture, in which Yugoslav identity would supplant the categories of the past? That was the trend during the early Titoist years. As the Communist-led Partisans represented a pan-Yugoslav movement, so did early policies that encouraged mobility and mixing among people of different backgrounds. Insofar as the definitive ethnic differences among Serbo-Croatian speakers are based on religion, the anti-religious tenets of Communism and the secularization of the urbanized society that they led indicated the diminished role of the religious divisions that had distinguished Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Slavic Muslims. Without former religious constraints against intermarriage and with the change from arranged marriage to romantic choices, there was little impediment to marriages between couples from different backgrounds. In regions of mixed populations, and in the major cities, ethnic background increasingly appeared as a personal characteristic rather than a significant marker of identity or social distance.

While ethnic barriers may have diminished in everyday life, it was a paradox of Titoism that national divisions reasserted themselves at the elite levels, among the Communist leaders themselves, increasingly at odds over regional conflicts, particularly over economic policies. In effect, the conflicts that can be expected in any political system undermined the unity demanded by Communist structure. In 1958, the Communist Party program indicated a trend toward "a socialist, Yugoslav consciousness, in the conditions of a social community of peoples" (Shoup 1968:207). However, by the early 1960s, that trend was reversed, as leaders claimed more power to be exercised at the republic level, rather than the federal level, and rejected the concept of Yugoslav nationality (see Shoup 1968:184-226). Instead, for census and other official purposes, as well as for their personal identity cards, citizens were pressured to declare themselves in ethnic categories and discouraged from declaring their nationality as Yugoslav. Far from consulting Marx for these changes, the Communists were reverting to the theories of national identity and rights that developed during the 19th century, and which were anathema to Marx. During the mid-1960s, during my first visit to Yugoslavia, the theme of ethnic identity wafted through conversations over coffee cups and glasses of wine or brandy. As is their wont, people scrutinized the areas of ambiguity and contradiction, in pursuit of absurdity. Wherever there had been intermarriages in current or past generations, ambiguities of ethnic identity abounded. These conversations had a predictable shape, beginning with anecdotes that revolved around the personal details of mixed backgrounds and combinations, pointing to ambiguity, leading to the same conclusion: how can a person of mixed descent not be a yugoslav? People expressed consternation that the official policies were going in the other direction. It didn't make sense. And whatever doesn't make sense would come up over and over again. Where there was pressure to declare identity as Croat, Serb, etc., it meant choosing to omit or deny part of one's heritage, a dilemma that was resented. On the other hand, such people saw no reason to reject the identity they felt as Yugoslavs, which seemed equivalent to French, Italian, and other national designations. Why can't we be a country like other countries, they would wonder aloud, with all citizens being equivalent to each other?

In the policy debates within the Yugoslav leadership during the Tito years, conflicts were increasingly expressed as rivalries between republics (cf. Ramet 1984; Rusinow 1977; Shoup 1968). Insofar as the republics had been conceived as national states of the ethnicities whose names they bore, rivalries were increasingly construed along ethnic lines, as the Serbian vs. the Slovenian position, for example. At the same time, the Party continually used accusations of nationalism to stifle any open discussion of ethnic matters. Since the Titoist system prohibited any voluntary, non-official organizations to develop around the variety of interests that are associated with pluralistic, modern societies (so-called "civil society"), oppositions tended to focus on the forbidden fruit of nationalism, which could be readily found beneath the surface, in literature, history and national traditions which may have been restricted in public, but were always available in private. Paradoxically, the restriction upon freedom of association strengthened that form of opposition that was most dangerous to the Yugoslav state, because it threatened Yugoslavia's very being.

When Communist and intellectual elites began to fracture along national lines during the mid-1960s, the Party acted to ban opinions that were considered nationalistic and to expel offending members, no matter how prominent they had been. Among those censured were the leading Croatian writer Miroslav Krleza and the leading Serbian novelist Dobrica Cosic. By 1971, the Croatian Communist leaders had taken up nationalist demands for the decentralization of powers from the federal government into the republics. While the impetus for these demands was largely economic, nationalist ideological content was provided by the linking of demands for decentralized economic control with the ideological components of nationalism. The demands of the 1971 "mass movement" (*masovni pokret* popularly known by the abbreviation "maspok"), revived the concepts of distinctive Croatian nationhood, particularly focusing on language. Rather than welcoming the trend that was merging varied regional dialects into Serbo-Croatian (or Croato-Serbian) as a single language, the nationalist cause emphasized differences and sought to develop a separate Croatian language. The arguments over culture and language would not have been so incendiary were they not attached to the 19th century theories that defined nationhood and the relationship between a "nation" and a "state." (See Rusinow 1977; Vukovic 1989).

A dialogical methodology that places an American observer amidst the Yugoslav debates must begin with recognizing the differences of meaning that pertain to the concept of the "nation," and therefore, to the "nation-state." In South Slavic languages, the word "*narod*" means both "people" and "nation." Thereby, the "nation-state" is attached to a specific "nation", or "people," conceived as an ethnic population. The essential incompatibility between this concept and American definitions can be illustrated by a recurrent piece of dialogue between myself and Yugoslavs discovering that I was an American. "But what is your nationality," they would ask. "American," I would respond. "But American is not a nationality, only a citizenship. What is your descent (*poreklo*)? Where did your people come from?" Missing is the essential notion of American nationhood: that nationality is an attribute of citizenship, and can even be chosen, regardless of ancestry. The equation between "people" and "nation", contained within the single word "*narod*" provides no allowance for nationhood detached from ancestry. To further defined the "state" as an attribute of a "nation" means that there is also no way to separate the issue of control over the state from ancestry, or from what is encompassed under the term "ethnicity." So-defined, the "nation-state" concept strikes directly at the dilemma that Yugoslavia was designed to resolve: the lack of congruence between ethnicity and territory. The 1971 Croatian "*maspok*" revived the association between Catholicism, the Latin alphabet, and Croatian nationhood. To assert Croatian cultural claims over the republic of Croatia, according to that nation- state theory, would be at the expense of non-Croats on that territory, of which Serbs were by far the largest group, representing some 15% of the population.

While publicly represented by the Croatian Communist Party leaders, "*maspok*" at the grassroots mobilized anti-Communists, including many with Catholic Church and emigrant ties. It was the first open challenge to the Titoist order, and Tito himself orchestrated the counter-offensive "tantamount to a Titoist coup against the system which the Western world calls 'Titoism'" (Rusinow 1974:1). The first stage of this "coup" was the purge of the Croatian Party leadership, in December 1971. The second stage was the purging of the so-called "liberals" who dominated the Serbian party, in the fall of 1972. Considering that the Serbian leaders were explicitly anti-nationalist in orientation, what was involved was a fundamental reorganization of both the Party and the Yugoslav state. (See Djukic 1990; Vukovic 1989) While "*maspok*" itself was defeated, and many of its leaders were tried and imprisoned, the ironic outcome of Tito's "coup" was to actually co-opt nationalist demands in the new Yugoslav constitution enacted in 1974. In formulas that represented a virtual pact with the "devil" of nationalism, the major share of Yugoslavia's state power was decentralized from the federal government to the republics, while the Communist League maintained its political monopoly at all levels. Each republic was granted attributes of statehood, loosely connected by federal bodies within which each republics had veto powers. To maintain the Party's monopoly over politics, Tito was willing to sacrifice the incipient nationhood of Yugoslavia (cf. Golubovic 1988).

Within each republic, people found themselves under more pressure to identify themselves with a specific "nation". Census takers made it difficult to declare Yugoslav nationality. Parents registering the birth of children from mixed marriages were instructed to choose one or the other nationality, rather than registering the child as "Yugoslav." In Croatia, the new republic constitution defined the language as "Croatian or Serbian" rather than Croato-Serbian, adding the stipulation that the Croatian variant and Latin alphabet would be recognized for official purposes, including education. At a practical

level, the 1974 constitution interrupted economic and institutional ties that had been Yugoslavia-wide (see Horvat 1984). Republic leaders took control over their own economic planning, markets were disrupted, and job mobility restricted. People who had worked and lived outside their native republics tended to find their way back home. In terms of my own profession, ethnological research was confined within the boundaries of each republic. Ethnologists wishing to do research elsewhere found it difficult to obtain permission or cooperation from their colleagues in other republics.

The year 1972 represented a watershed. With the purge of the Serbian liberals, Tito consolidated his hold over the Party and prepared the way for the radical changes in the orientation of the Yugoslav system. Until then, changes within the population conformed to "modernization" models, with the expected association between urbanization, education, mobility, and a more universal outlook that included detachment from local origins and "primordial" attachments involved with ethnic identities. These were circumstances that encouraged mobility among the Yugoslav republics, intermarriage, and the emergence of a Yugoslav nationality. Prior to 1972, projections of these trends into the future would have meant further progression along that axis It happened that 1972 coincided with my last visit to Yugoslavia, before an interruption that lasted fifteen years. Having implicitly projected forward the trends observed earlier, I was taken aback at what I found upon my return in 1987. Belgrade in the 1960s was expressly the capital of Yugoslavia, and its intellectual and professional circles included people from all parts of the country, intermingled regardless of ethnic or regional origins, or patterns of speech. Belgrade in the late 1980s was expressly the capital of Serbia. Its reduced federal functions no longer attracted a mixture of people to the federal capital. On the other hand, formerly suppressed elements of Serbian national history visibly emerged in downtown Belgrade. An architectural heritage was revealed by the simple measure of sandblasting and painting what had been grimy facades. Lo and behold, there was a Serbia preserved here from before 1918, before Yugoslavia. Bookstore window displays were increasingly taken up by new editions and new works on Serbian history, literature, ethnology, and national traditions. It seemed that Belgrade was compensating for its loss of status as the capital of a larger Yugoslavia by more intensely expressing the narrower nationhood of Serbia.

On a personal, familial level the trend had also turned in a surprising direction. Through 1972, spatial mobility took people from villages to towns, and from one city to another, and across the boundaries of republics. In 1987, instead of further dispersal among people I had known earlier, I found them reconsolidated in their home territories. Rather than continuing to branch outward, families reoriented toward the villages they had left during the great postwar urbanization process. Among people living in towns, I found that kinship networks had involuted (cf. Milic 1991) and were being ritualized in ways that were anthropologically fascinating. But why had young people who had earlier found work in other republics returned home, while others finishing their education, also returned home to await employment there?

The 1974 constitution had unraveled the fabric of Yugoslavia as a reality in people's lives. There was widespread emigration to find work abroad, but not to find work elsewhere in Yugoslavia, outside one's home region. The family became a focus for widespread connections, spanning international boundaries. But that represented a turning inward in structural terms, deepening and reinforcing particularistic bonds which took on renewed vigor. That trend occurred in the absence of the alternatives to locally- based ties and informal connections, the ubiquitous "*veze*" that were increasingly the only way to get things done. For Slovenians, crossing the northern and westerns borders to Austria and Italy represented daily reality; the rest of the land to the East called Yugoslavia was a place they had less and less motivation to visit or to care about.

This essay so far has shown how ethnic categories were employed as an instrument of the power system, variable according to changing definitions of the state, quite apart from how people "felt" about themselves. Definitions of ethnic identity were not left to personal choice, but employed as an instrument of state policy, variable with the changing definitions of what constituted the state. The shift from the universalizing Yugoslav identity to the traditional ethnic designations raised the problematic of the ideologies from which those definitions had emerged. From the question of personal identity, there is a direct line to nationalism as the theory of the state that privileges a particular ethnic nation, while de-privileging citizens who are not of the dominant nation. The key question revolves around understanding the transformation of ethnic identity from a latent category, its intensity varying widely from person to person, to the eruption of nationalism that mobilized different identities against each other. The Titoist order was undermined through the 1980s by the systemic economic crisis that it was

incapable of resolving, and by increasingly open criticism and public discussion of previously suppressed "taboo themes." Within the Communist establishment, regional economic disparities were a continual focus of inter-republic conflict, with each republic's leadership blaming each other for failed policies. Since republic delegates to federal institutions generally voted as blocs, there was little opportunity for alliances between individual politicians that cross-cut republic lines. Thus, Slovenia, Serbia, and so on were represented as virtually single voices. To the extent that the publics identified with their republic Communist leaders, they increasingly saw them speaking in unison, lashing out against their opposite numbers representing other republics.

In 1986, a new factor appeared uninvited on the political stage in the form of a delegation of Serbian peasants from the Kosovo "autonomous province" who arrived in Belgrade to seek a hearing before the federal parliament. This event may have seemed inconsequential at the time, but it initiated the processes that were to unravel the balances that made up Yugoslavia as reconstituted in 1974. In the actions and reactions put into motion by the appeals of Kosovo Serbs, patterns emerged that can be seen as a prototype for other confrontations to follow. The nominal categories of ethnic identity presented the raw material for manipulation by those who recognized that social divisions were the vehicle to redefining and obtaining political power. But it is one thing for those with political ambitions to latch onto the nationalist labels, and another for the implicit social divisions to be activated, to mobilize, to polarize people who had previously been unconcerned with or opposed to ethnic differentiation.

If two postwar generations of Yugoslavs did, to a considerable extent, accept Yugoslavia as a multi-ethnic society, the question here is how their interpretation of the world, and their identity within it, could be so swiftly, profoundly, altered. The following section of this essay will identify some patterns that can first be detected in responses to the Kosovo Serbs, but then set a precedent for other conflicts that were to follow. A model will be proposed to analyze the processes whereby what had been nominal categories were activated and revitalized.

News media and the dramaturgy of ethnic polarization:

The weakest link in the chain of accommodations embodied in the 1974 constitution was the Kosovo "autonomous province" within Serbia. Autonomous status had been created to accommodate two areas of Serbia with large non-Slavic populations: Vojvodina in the north, with its Hungarians and other residents of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, and Kosovo in the south, where Albanians constituted an overwhelming majority. The 1974 constitution elevated the "autonomous provinces" to virtual equality with the republics, so that both Vojvodina and Kosovo sent their own representatives to all federal bodies and were removed from the authority of the republic of Serbia. Thereby, Kosovo had taken on basic features of what would be the Albanian-dominated republic, that was actively sought by Albanian nationalists. Albanians had a long record of grievances as a minority within Serbia and Yugoslavia. But as the Albanians gained the upper hand in Kosovo, the situation was inverted, so that non-Albanians found themselves in the minority position.

The division of Yugoslavia into republics, each of them identified with its dominant "nation", posed a basic structural problem for those who were not of the dominant group. The test of the system was whether it could make adjustments for grievances on the part of minorities, whether there would be room within the structure for resolving the conflicts which can be expected within a multi-ethnic situation. The 1986 delegations of Kosovo Serbs to the federal assembly in Belgrade challenged the accommodations of the 1974 constitution, demanding redress for their grievances as a minority. Their open form of demonstrative protest went outside the formal channels, gaining media attention, forcing public recognition of the issue. The analysis here will not deal with the merits of these claims, but with the differential responses that were evoked.

By the mid-1980s, steady emigration from Kosovo, combined with the high Albanian birthrate, had reduced the Serbian minority from about 28% of the population following World War II to under 15% in 1981, falling to around 10% by the late 1980s (Petrovic and Blagojevic 1989:1). The Kosovo Serbs complained that they were being forced to emigrate by an organized campaign on the part of Albanian nationalists. Serbs expressed fears that they were being collectively expelled from Kosovo, as part of a long-term Albanian plan of secession from Yugoslavia and eventual union of Kosovo with Albania. They cited, over the years, numerous forms of intimidation, harassment, physical attacks, threats, and property damage. Of special emotional impact were claims of rape by Albanians of Serbian women and girls. The delegations to Belgrade claimed that they could not obtain justice in Albanian-run courts in the autonomous

province, and because Kosovo was no longer under the jurisdiction of Serbian courts, they could only appeal directly to the federal government. Over the course of 1986, several such delegations made the trip to Belgrade, and on one occasion the entire population of several villages began a demonstrative mass migration which was stopped by Kosovo police. (See Misovic 1987).

On the part of politicians and media, there were two kinds of reaction. One reaction, widespread in Serbia, was to believe the claims of the Kosovo Serbs and to feel that something should be done to change the situation. The other reaction was to not only discount the grievances, but to ascribe them to Serbian nationalism. In that interpretation, the emigration from Kosovo was economic in nature as well as reflecting Serbian resentment at their loss of political dominance in the region. Serbian and Montenegrin politicians took both sides of the issue. Slovenian and Croatian politicians and media, on the other hand, generally discounted the claims of the Kosovo Serbs and instead took the occasion to attack Serbian nationalism.

It is important to ask why the Kosovo Serbs were so widely disbelieved. Why should the sincerity be doubted of these groups of people whose dress and physical appearance showed them to be predominantly peasants? Why should not such people, in evident distress, evoke sympathy on the part of the general public? Instead, sympathy was limited to the Serbian public, which became increasingly incensed that the problems of Kosovo Serbs were being ignored and dismissed. The 1974 constitutional structure, with its weakened federal government, did not provide redress for minorities, dissatisfied within their republics or autonomous provinces. The plight of the Kosovo Serbs illustrated that point. But to strengthen the federal government was against the interests of those who benefitted from the decentralization of power into the republics. Not wishing to disturb control over their own republics, Slovenian and Croatian politicians allied themselves with the Albanians in Kosovo. In June 1987, an event occurred that would change forever the nature of Yugoslav politics. When a Party delegation came to Kosovo to investigate the situation, a crowd of Serbs was attacked by police. A Communist official named Slobodan Milosevic appeared before the crowd, proclaiming: "No one has the right to beat you! No one has the right to beat the people!" That moment transformed Milosevic from a Party machine politician to a leader of masses. He pledged to change the situation in Kosovo, and only four months later, engineered a coup within the Serbian Central Committee that made him the leader of the Serbian Party. During the summer of 1988, a new kind of politics burst onto the scene in Serbia. To remedy the plight of the Kosovo Serbs, Milosevic proposed to amend the Serbian constitution to place the autonomous regions under the jurisdiction of the Serbian republic (restoring their pre-1974 status). While this change would give the Serbs redress within their own republic, it would also limit the control enjoyed by the Albanians over Kosovo. By now, a cadre of activists from Kosovo had emerged, who traveled about Serbia to appear at mass rallies. The rallies took on the character of a revitalization movement, particularly since Kosovo was the central location for Serbian national myths, virtually a sacred place, where frescoed medieval monasteries stood witness to the reality underlying the legends of heroic sacrifice and ultimate victimization under the Ottoman Empire, following the climatic battle of Kosovo in 1389. In 1988, Serbs were called upon to defend the right of "our people/nation" (*nas narod*) to remain in Kosovo. The rallies had another thrust, as a protest against the Communist Party leadership who resisted changing the 1974 constitution and were also held responsible for the economic crisis and stagnation. Among the slogans was "down with chair-warmers!" (*dole foteljasi*), meaning self-serving bureaucrats who incompetently monopolized leadership positions. Milosevic posed as a reformer, and the rallies were known as both the "anti- bureaucratic revolution" and the "happening of the people" (*dogadjanje naroda*). Like the earlier Croatian "mass movement," the Serbian revitalization exceeded the boundaries of the Yugoslav Communist political system. The Croatian movement had been stifled by the reformulation of Titoism itself. When mass politics again challenged the system, at this later time, the Titoist system was itself in crisis. While the purges that ended the earlier venture in mass politics had been conducted behind the scenes, the late 1980s saw a virtual media explosion, with television news cameras and print journalists peering into all corners of political and cultural life. Rather than expected to passively adhere to the changes in policy and political structure that had been part and parcel of Titoism, the publics were now viewed as more active participants, whose support was desired even while the political structure was formally monopolized by the Party. However, instead of the earlier unified front, the media of each republic were controlled by its Party, and presented the viewpoint of the republic leadership with regard to the inter-republic debates over economic and other policies. The challenge to the political order represented initially by the protests of Kosovo Serbs, then taken up by Milosevic and the mass

revitalization movement, became the focus of dialogues conducted via the mass media, and thereby involved the public at the intimate level of information and images received in their own homes.

To understand the rapid polarization of public opinion that took place along ethnic lines, it is necessary to view communication processes for which John B. Thompson has coined the term "mediazation," described as follows:

The messages received via television and other media are commonly subjected to discursive elaboration: they are discussed by individuals in the course of their everyday lives, both within the primary reception region and in a variety of other interactive contexts...In this way, mediated messages may acquire an additional audience of secondary recipients...the messages may also be taken up by media organizations and incorporated in new media messages, a process that may be described as extended mediazation. Through discursive elaboration and extended mediazation, messages received via the media are adapted and dispersed to an ever-widening circle of secondary recipients (Thompson 1990:243).

To understand how such mediated communications affect the perceptions and thinking of recipients, involves

...elucidation of the ways in which symbolic forms are interpreted and understood by the individuals who produce and receive them in the course of their everyday lives: this ethnographic moment is an indispensable preliminary to the depth-hermeneutical approach. (Thompson 1990:279)

According to this approach, the mass publics in a modern society, interlinked by communication media, can be observed in the process of symbolic interaction within which mutual perceptions and misperceptions constitute systemic relationships and patterns.

As I followed media presentations and everyday conversations, I was an observer of public opinion formation. Events communicated to the public stirred reactions. And the selection of information skewed reactions in particular ways. Since the Party in each republic controlled the media, information presented to the public reflected the view of its political leaders. In effect, a dialogue was established via mass media, but one in which communication was systematically skewed. The question to be addressed here is how views that were always polemical and partial affected public opinion and were translated into the activation of ethnic identities in opposition to each other. Without going here into the progression of events themselves, the following discussion will indicate contrasting patterns of response to the Serbian mass politics. It shall be limited to the chief protagonists in these conflicts, as expressed in the leadership and public opinion in the republics of Serbia, Slovenia, and Croatia. I have already indicated how the appeals of the delegations of Serbs from Kosovo aroused growing sympathy on the part of the public in Serbia, but indifference and even antipathy elsewhere. As incidents of alleged mistreatment in Kosovo received media attention, there was increasing dissatisfaction about the lack of action on the part of governmental institutions and the Serbian officials. When Milosevic presented himself as "savior," his actions evoked widespread support from the Serbian public.

On the other hand, the Albanian leadership in Kosovo was upheld by Party leaders in other republics, particularly in Slovenia and Croatia. The claims of Kosovo Serbs were generally discounted as fabrications and attributed to Serbian nationalist efforts to regain control over the Kosovo province. Over time, as more and more incidents were reported to the public in Serbia, identification with the perceived victimization of co-ethnics increased. So did frustration over the lack of sympathy that these grievances evoked from non-Serbs. This situation was leading to gradual inter-ethnic alienation, but the advent of Milosevic altered the dynamic into what might be called schismatic communication, along the following lines:

1) In Serbia, news media and leading intellectuals emphasized the grievances of Kosovo Serbs, as well as the recovery of historical memories that had been either de-emphasized or suppressed during the Tito era. The effect was to create a sense of historical continuity and justification for Milosevic's campaign to re-unite the Serbian republic, forestalling what were seen as Albanian efforts to expel Serbs from Kosovo.

2) In Slovenia and Croatia, political leaders, intellectuals, and the media made Milosevic himself the main issue. The rise of Milosevic was perceived as a threat to the autonomy of republics provided by the 1974 constitution. The Serbian revitalization, with its mobilized masses, portended a dangerous, unpredictable element. The "anti-bureaucratic revolution" threatened to stimulate similar movements elsewhere, and to disrupt constitutional stability. The specter of a powerful Serbian leader evoked historical memories of the pre-World War II dictatorial regime of the Serbian royal dynasty, which then ruled over Yugoslavia. The fact that Serbs were the largest

ethnic population, far outnumbering any other single group, gave grounds for fears of renewed domination. Via "mediazation," an interactive process involved publics differentially, each developing its own "narrative" about the same events. And the key to each narrative was its focus on grievances and threats, so that the Serbian narrative focused on the grievances of the Kosovo Serbs (and by implication, to all Serbs); while the Slovenian and Croatian narrative focused on the threat represented by Milosevic and the Serbs themselves. The problematic of this kind of opposition is in the nature of responses that are patterned as each proponent persists in interpreting new material in terms of its own narrative, disregarding the Other's. As Serbian mass rallies proliferated during the summer of 1988, leading to the displacement of the government and Party leadership in the Vojvodina autonomous province, Serbs were perplexed and distressed over their failure to win support for what seemed to them a just cause. Why, they would ask, do the Slovenians support human rights for everyone except Serbs in Kosovo? Viewed from the other side, the larger and more successful the mass rallies, the more they appeared to embody Slovenian and Croatian fears of Serbian domination.

The events of 1988 and 1989 moved rapidly toward televised public confrontations between the republic Communist leadership. With virtually the entire population of the country gathered around television sets, the viewers saw the leaders of different republics attacking each other. On one side were the grievances of Serbs; on the other were attacks on the Serbian Party itself. Viewers were drawn into siding with the leaders representing their own ethnic and republic identities. In Serbia, viewers who otherwise had never supported Communism or the Party, nevertheless identified with the attack on the Serbian Party on the part of other republic leaders, while viewers in Croatia and Slovenia identified with their leaders as standing up against the threat embodied by the Serbian Party. Within this context of opposition, the nominal categories of ethnic identity took on emotional meaning, as viewers aligned themselves with the politicians speaking on behalf of "our people" in opposition to others, perceived as presenting a threat. Bourdieu (1990:138) has pointed out that "The power of imposing a vision of divisions, that is, the power of making visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is the political power par excellence: it is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society." This process was exemplified in the growing Serbian vs. anti-Serbian split within the Yugoslav Party and in the divided public opinion between different republics. Public opinion, in turn, was the matrix within which nominal or latent categories of ethnic identity were aroused and became transformed into political constituencies defined in nationalist terms.

From the viewpoint of Serbs throughout Yugoslavia, the Kosovo "drama" was a metonym for all Serbs living as minorities within political boundaries where other nationalities predominated. The lack of sympathy shown for the grievances of Kosovo Serbs raised an alarm, suggesting that neither could sizeable Serbian minority populations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina expect sympathy for whatever grievances they might experience. In effect, the response of the Yugoslav ruling structures, supported by the polarizing public opinion, indicated that minorities would be sacrificed to maintain the autonomy of republics, under the control of their dominant ethnic groups. The sense of threat to Serbs was encouraged by media presentations, particularly in the extension of the term "genocide" to encompass not only forced emigration but also the disappearance of cultural markers from a territory. The allusion to genocide had the effect of subliminally linking the current troubles in Kosovo to the World War II massive exterminations of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia- Herzegovina at the hands of the Croatian (and Muslim) Ustasha. Thus, the threat to Serbs was perceived as much more generalized than the specific situation of Kosovo.

As the Serbian side of the "media-ized" communication developed a growing sense of threat, the indifference of Slovenian and Croatian media and public opinion grew into more active hostility to the Serbian concerns. But Serbs failed to understand why. Their disappointment grew to hurt, then to outrage. But on the other side, the Slovenian and Croatian publics were also being presented with a threat that was very real to them: the specter of domination by a recentralized federal state, controlled by an authoritarian Milosevic and the Yugoslav Army, with its officer corps of predominantly Serbian ethnic backgrounds. Gregory Bateson (1972) coined the term "schizmogenesis" to describe a communication pattern of increasing opposition as actors mutually respond, over time, to each other and to each other's responses. In cybernetic terminology, "positive feedback" amplification effects lead to polarization as each party assumes progressively extreme attitudes. In the absence of mitigating factors, such progressive differentiation tends toward schism. In the split images that led to schism in Yugoslavia, each side consistently presented itself as victim or potential victim, the Other as threat or potential threat, so that neither party responded to the Other

directly, but only to its own projections of the Other. Each reacts to the Other as a threat, and in its reactions, reinforces the behavior that appears threatening. Nor were these perceptions questioned by those who increasingly identified with their own "people." Victimization appeared to be an all-powerful mobilizer of ethnic solidarity.

What might have been mitigating factors, to have counteracted the rush toward schism? From my vantage point in the midst of the schismatic flow of mass-mediated communications, what was most striking was the absence of what I thought of as "cross-sympathy" between the members of ethnic groups that were in conflict. There seemed to be no mental or cultural category for that kind of concern or empathy. Once an issue was defined in terms of ethnic counterposition, sympathies went to "our" people, without regard for whatever it was that the "other" people were trying to express. Any inter-ethnic alliances were based on mutual self- interest. Thus, Slovenian and Croatian support for Albanian control over Kosovo represented an alliance of convenience in order to maintain the decentralized structure of the 1974 constitution. In the absence of contrary information perceptions on all sides became progressively more exaggerated. In Slovenia, Serbia, andCroatia nationalist causes developed into mass politics, with rallies, demonstrations, and marches coalescing around symbols that represented the ethnic nation, opposing it to others. The crowds embodied the growing sense of opposition among the publics who watched the images communicated by mass media, with commentaries reflecting the viewpoints of the embattled republic leaders. These demonstration projected "the radical reformulations of cultural and mental images that Wallace (1956) associated with 'revitalization movements,' which mobilize massively around symbols and leaders offering change, often without regard for reality checks or consequences." (Tambiah 1989:348)

Historical disjunction and "noble lies:"

Over the course of 1988-1990, I watched the schisms widen between the versions of events presented in different republics. What had been generalized senses of grievance and threat on each side were elaborated with each new episode of confrontation, and with the recovery of "historic memories" that revived the nationalist discourses that had been suppressed under Titoist Yugoslavia. Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia each had intellectual circles where the "tabooed" ideologies of nationalism had been preserved and covertly nourished. However, intellectuals alone cannot conjure up mass movements. The issue I am addressing here is the process of transmission of intellectual discourses into the consciousness of the public at large. In each Yugoslav republic, the critical transmission point consisted in control over mass media, first on the part of the ruling Party, and secondarily on the part of the journalists who were themselves involved with the intellectual circles in their own capitals. With regard to ongoing current events, it was the editorial function that was primary. The same events were reported in completely different ways, reflecting the viewpoint of the republic political leaders who were themselves absorbing the nationalist viewpoints originating with intellectuals. Journalists were in a position to select material, and as the Titoist "taboos" were lifted, they drew more and more openly on nationalist themes, reviving the traditions associated with each particular nation and its historic claims to independent statehood. Control over media in authoritarian political systems does not necessarily mean credulity on the part of the public. But these were extraordinary times in Yugoslavia. It was widely understood that the Titoist system was in crisis,certainly altering the psychological atmosphere in ways that would also undermine the cultural constructions that had defined what people understood to be their world. But what can explain the metamorphosis that created enemies on the basis of ethnicity as a cultural identity?

It was my observation that the narratives of victimization and threat, linking the present with the past and projecting onto the future, had a powerful effect on individuals who previously had been uninvolved with or opposed to nationalist ideas. The appeal of "our people" perceived to be endangered is difficult to resist. It could only be resisted by those with conscious intellectual viewpoints that continually provided reality checks against the claims of grievance. Those who continued to identify with Yugoslavia resisted nationalist claims on all sides, but were swept aside as the tide of nationalism definitively overtook each republic, after the Communist League of Yugoslavia itself disbanded in January 1990.

What began as contests for power within the boundaries of Yugoslavia and within its Communist establishment converged, in the fall of 1989, with the historical collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. In this "disjunctive moment" (see Apter 1987), the parameters of the intra-Yugoslav dispute burst open. The covert nationalist agendas of Communist leadership were displaced by new parties which quickly organized around the spectrum of viewpoints that had been proscribed by Titoism. Most

new parties and programs were not made up ex nihilo, but were literally retrieved from storage. The discovery process was public, as previously proscripted politicians of the past were rehabilitated and republished, and ideas that had been relegated to the historical dustbin were eagerly revived. But this discovery process was skewed by the inter-republic confrontations that escalated through the fall of 1989.

In the rush to reclaim past ideologies, people on all sides were arguing contrary-to-fact propositions as if they sincerely and adamantly believed them. The process of reclaiming nationalist ideologies was tantamount to disregarding the realities of ethnic heterogeneity on the territories that had been traditionally associated with rival national aspirations. Those who claimed the same territories were placing themselves in potential combat with each other. While those advocating such programs formerly had been discredited as extremists, in the "disjunctive moment" extreme programs suddenly gained wide credibility. The schism of communication and polarization of identity along ethnic lines evidently prepared the way for a further suspension of disbelief about the impracticality of nationalist programs, the impossibility of achieving them without mutually destructive war.

In the downtown squares of Zagreb, when I visited in June 1990, souvenir stands were full of nationalist symbols that soon would be made official by the newly elected government, dominated by the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica, known by its initials HDZ). That party had campaigned for an extreme nationalist program, reviving many features of the World War II "Independent State of Croatia" that were directly threatening to the Serbian minority in Croatia. Returning emigrants who had formerly operated in deep illegality flaunted the revival of the World War II Ustasha movement. When the new Tudjman government enacted policies that fulfilled the HDZ party's campaign rhetoric, the entire spectrum of newborn Croatian political parties folded into an apparent consensus, reflected in unanimous and near-unanimous votes in the ostensibly multi-party parliament. Appeals from the Serbian minority in Croatia received no support, except from fellow Serbs. The counterposition that had been first enacted over Kosovo would be p|ayed out in Croatia and then in Bosnia-Herzegovina. (Cf. Denich 1992; Lazic 1992).

While traveling through Dubrovnik in August 1990, I got into conversation with an agent in the airline bus terminal. The conversation began in a usual way, with compliments for my fluency in the language, but then took a new turn. The Tudjman government was enacting language codes that would mark a distinctive Croatian language, separate from Serbo-Croatian, by introducing vocabulary lists and grammar rules that were substantially resurrected from the wartime Ustasha state. My Dubrovnik companion explained why it was necessary to enforce the new language codes. How is it, he demanded, that people who settle in Dubrovnik from outside of Croatia go on using their native language forms? When I countered that after several years of living in Boston, I showed no signs of adopting the distinctive Bostonian dialect, he was nonplussed.

In September 1990, in the garden of friends in Belgrade, talk drifted to the topic of the Serbian nationalist neo-Chetniks peddling their magazines and memorabilia on Knez Mihailova street, Belgrade's glittering, renovated center of fashion and culture. These young people, abrasive in their manner, displayed the long- tabooed symbols of the Chetniks, defeated in World War II, and discredited by their brutality and reactionary nationalist visions. Among the publications for sale on Knez Mihailova was a magazine published by university students in the interior Serbian city of Kragujevac. One of my friends, a World War II Partisan veteran, protested: "How can their center be in Kragujevac, which suffered so much from the Chetniks during the war." Only a few months earlier, he had brushed off the prospects of Chetnik revival: "There isn't a cornfield in Serbia where a throat wasn't cut by Chetniks. Serbia will never want that again." His son-in- law, a physicist, introjected: "How can they print that stuff, when they know it is lies." Out of my mouth popped: "Maybe they want their own lies."

Only after returning to Boston did I come across the following reference:

Myths of foundings, transformations, and redemptions, whether represented in recognizable myths or embedded in accounts of developmental states, correspond to Plato's noble lie (emphasis added)... Such myths of disjunction are the foundation points for all states. (Apter 1987:303)

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