

“When society fails, the nation appears as the ultimate guarantee”:

Debunking Kaplan and Yugoslavia’s “ancient hatreds” trope

Abstract

Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* argues that Yugoslavia was destined to experience a civil war because of the existence of “ancient ethnic hatreds”. Kaplan’s primordialism is over-simplistic. This paper argues instead that ethnicity and nationalism are constructs, and should be seen as explanations rather than causes of the conflict. I argue that human agency coupled with weak structural institutions should be considered causes of the conflict. The persistence of the myth of “ancient ethnic hatreds” still exists into the present because the popularity of Kaplan’s book, the appeal of such a simplistic explanation, and the prevalence of a particular type of Eurocentrism which sees the Balkans as the “internal other.” To overcome such false perceptions it is necessary to understand the violence in the former Yugoslavia as an attempt at stability and “catching up” with the rest of Europe.

When it emerged that Robert Kaplan's book *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* was being read by then-US President Bill Clinton the news did wonders for Mr. Kaplan's bank account.¹ However, more intriguing is the effect this news had on society and, indeed, the world as a whole. The main argument in Mr. Kaplan's book can be described as a primordialist explanation for the war that had just begun in the now-former Yugoslavia. Primordialism, as trumpeted by Kaplan, describes the conflict between Serbian, Croatian and Bosniak (Muslim) combatants as the result of long-standing ethnic hatreds which have existed since the dawn of humankind. The news that Clinton was reading this book helped to propagate the "ancient hatreds" myth with not only Clinton's administration adopting primordialism as an explanation for the conflict, but other world leaders, the press, and the masses as well. In fact, the "ancient hatreds" explanation of the conflict in Yugoslavia is still a popular explanation today. Yet Kaplan's view, while forthright and easy to both explain and understand, could not be further from the truth. Serbs, Croats, Muslims and others living in the Western Balkans had been at relative peace for centuries before the 1991 civil war, with the two world wars being exceptions which, as the names suggest, enveloped virtually the entire world in war. To refute the notion of primordialism this paper will first trace the scholarly positions of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. I will then set forth in illustrating that not only was the Yugoslav war not an ethnic conflict, but that ethnicity is a construct and a mere mobilizing means in order to propagate political goals. The paper will then conclude by advancing different

¹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), x; Michael T. Kaufman, "The Dangers of Letting a President Read," *New York Times*, 22 May 1999, accessed 9 December 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/22/books/the-dangers-of-letting-a-president-read.html>.

explanations for the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The constitutional changes of the 1960s and 1970s not only decentralized the structure of the country, but also greatly reduced Yugoslavia's capability of mitigating internal and external strife, much of which was either brought on or exacerbated by the new state structure. One must keep in mind that Yugoslavia's war of the 1990s was conducted against the backdrop of the 'fall' of communism. As such, the population of Yugoslavia, having been under a communist regime for roughly half a century, had no other ideological options other than the one presented to them by elites once communism was removed. In order to steer the masses' attention away from the problems plaguing the country, leaders of Yugoslavia's republics, namely Slobodan Milošević, mobilized the masses towards nationalism. In essence, the environment which existed by the late-1980s led to a hostile internal environment which was uncontrollable by the few state authorities intent on maintaining Yugoslavism. Yugoslavia's collapse, then, was a combination of the right national and international political, social and economic environments. Ultimately, I will show that Yugoslavia's "ethnic" war, and by extension *all* ethnic conflicts, was neither inevitable nor ethnic in any real sense.

A central feature of Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* is ethnicity. Scholars have shown that ethnicity is necessarily tied to the notions of nation and nationalism. In this regard, ethnicity is not ancient. Scholars also struggle to define and make ethnicity palpable. Ethnicity is "almost always connected in some unspecified way with common origin and descent," from which stems a set of common characteristics amongst the members of a

community.² These communities are “imagined” in so far as they are “created,” rather than falsified.³ Notions of “kinship,” “blood” and fraternity are bonding agents for members at the exclusion of others.⁴ The bonds of ethnicity are more cultural than biological; however, culture and biology are usually conflated which makes it seem as if ethnicity is inherited and immutable.⁵ Eric Hobsbawm put the first use of the word *ethnie* in 1896, and means “ethnic” or “nation”.⁶ Paschalis Kitromilides, on the other hand, says that Demetrios Katartzis, a “high official in the court of Wallachia,” first used the Greek word *ethnos* (“nation”) to delineate a group joined by its language and cultural heritage in the 1780s.⁷ Therefore both “ethnic” and “nation” are synonymous. At any rate, the use of the term “ethnic” and its derivatives is rather modern. This also signals that the notion of ethnicity is fairly new. The fact that the creation of the terms “ethnic” and “nation” coincide with the phenomenon of so-called national awakenings, that is the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is quite telling as well.⁸ In other words, terms needed to be conjured up in order to explain the prevailing sense amongst nationalists.

As with nation, ethnicity is “central” to nationalism.⁹ In the late nineteenth century, nationalism took on a distinctly modern form.¹⁰ For the first time, ethnicity and

² Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 63.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

⁴ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 63.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6; Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64, No. 1 (Spring, 2005): 142.

⁶ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 160.

⁷ Paschalis M. Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989): 153.

⁸ For a discussion on “national awakenings” see, *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

language became the central, and often only, criteria for nationhood.¹¹ Having pride in one's "language reflected a deeper pride in the nation."¹² The nationalists needed a term to describe their kin so that their "ethnic group" or "nation" could achieve a homeland. Specifically, for the peoples living in the western Balkans, this meant freedom from Habsburg and Ottoman control. Ethnicity and language, then, are also tied to the other distinctly modern notion of self-determination. Anyone who considered themselves a "nation" could claim the right to a "separate sovereign independent state."¹³ Suddenly, groups which had no previous experience of a political homeland, "unhistorical" nations, could self-determine.¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, Kitromilides and Hobsbawm, amongst others, successfully show that nations and nationalism are performative and a construct.¹⁵ However to say that ethnicity and/or nation are constructed, or "imagined," does not mean that they are not real.¹⁶ Certainly "nation" seems real to nearly everyone.¹⁷

"Nation's" perceived tangibility can be explained by exploring the reasons why so many people enlist to die for their nation. A central tenet to nationalism is the idea that one cannot leave their nation and so it is "felt to be something fundamentally pure."¹⁸ In a large number of instances, nationalism is mobilized after a crisis occurs and often "in a language of self-defence."¹⁹ In other words, notions such as ethnicity, nationalism and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kitromilides, "Origins of the National Question in the Balkans," 154.

¹³ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 102.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 122.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 144.

¹⁹ Ibid., 161.

historical hatred “are mobilized in the respective narratives to support their overall explanation.”²⁰ Put yet another way, nationalism can be used by elites in order to create a sense of anger, panic and fear thus instilling in the broader masses the need to defend their nation and nation-state. Within the context of Yugoslavia, this is precisely what happened.

The president of an entity within Yugoslavia, the Serbian Socialist Republic’s Slobodan Milošević, was able to harness the fear, resentment and nationalist myths in order to consolidate broad political support. Beginning in 1988 Milošević held a series of mass rallies in order to mobilize support for the “reintegration” of Serbia’s two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo.²¹ At the rallies, the belief in the alleged discrimination against Serbs in Yugoslavia, specifically against their minority in Kosovo, was reinforced to create a sense of panic and fear.²² Focusing on Kosovo played on the Kosovo myth which claims the area as the national and religious centre of the Serbs, itself a construct of nineteenth century Romanticism.²³ The manufactured environment of “Serb national revival” was accompanied by a media campaign to further reinforce Milošević’s ostensible saviour-like persona.²⁴

From the Milošević example, we can see that he pulled from a number of nationalist tropes. To begin, Milošević’s campaign integrated the notion of “official

²⁰ Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 61.

²¹ Aleksandar Pavković, “From Yugoslavism to Serbism: The Serb national idea, 1986-1996,” *Nations and Nationalism* 4(4) (1998): 514.

²² Ibid.

²³ Dejan Djokić, “Whose Myth? Which Nation? The Serbian Kosovo Myth Revisited,” *Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages: 19th-21st Century* (June 2009): 1–30.

²⁴ Pavković, “From Yugoslavism to Serbism,” 514; On the manufacturing of nationalist sentiment, see V.P. Gagnon, “Yugoslavia in 1989 and after” *Nationalities Papers* 38 1 (2010): 25.

nationalism” which blends the state with the nation.²⁵ Employing this method is meant to preserve the “imperial-dynastic interests.”²⁶ In other words, Milošević’s “nationalist” campaign was used to consolidate power and to control the state by evoking nationalism to play into fears which he helped to foment. Here, Milošević is choosing to use ethnicity to mobilize the public by using the media to perpetuate “misleading accounts” of other groups in Yugoslavia thereby instilling fear.²⁷ By creating a sense of disorder and panic, Milošević forced the public to take sides in the upcoming conflict.²⁸ Milošević employed these nationalist tactics to ensure the Serbian people felt a “political duty” to their nation, thus “overrid[ing] all other public obligations, and in extreme cases (such as wars) all other obligations of whatever kind.”²⁹ As the decade came to a close, the Serbian public was thoroughly mobilized under the banner of nationalism. The war would begin in 1991.

With “ethnic” conflicts, war is usually a product of weak “institutional arrangements” and Yugoslavia was no exception.³⁰ Yugoslavia was experiencing a financial crisis; it was bureaucratically weak from a series of constitutional changes which allowed for actors like Milošević to not only exploit the system but to harness it to come to power; and, its military was structurally divided.³¹ These three elements taken together — weakness in economies, state structures and military — lead to a higher risk

²⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁷ Michael Banton, “Ethnic Conflict,” *Sociology* 34 (3) (August 2000): 493.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 494. I think it is safe to say that all extreme nationalists invoke these sentiments to achieve their goals.

²⁹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 9.

³⁰ Banton, “Ethnic Conflict,” 495.

³¹ Dejan Jović, “The Disintegration of Yugoslavia: A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 4, 1 (2001): 101–20.

of conflict.³² When a nationalist mobilizer like Milošević is incorporated into the equation the atmosphere is volatile.³³

Much ink has been spilled attempting to trace the ethnic origins of Yugoslavia's war. Yet the ethnic aspect is merely an explanation of how events unfolded, not a cause. In fact, ethnic hatred has only proliferated since the war due to lingering post-war animosities amongst the three main ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia — Serb, Croat and Bosniak. One need only look to modern day Bosnia for an example of such post-war tensions.³⁴ Indeed the popularity of Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* may help to explain why such a wrong and dangerous trope has continued to exist. As one academic put it, "ethnicity is not an ontological feature of human life" and so cannot be "an 'independent' explanatory principle."³⁵ Certainly it should not be denied that ethnic nationalisms were largely responsible for the animosity, but it did not stem from a long-standing hatred. Nor was ethnicity the cause of conflict. Ethnicity was only a factor during Yugoslavia's war insofar as its role in mobilization. To use the ethnic argument is an oversimplification and easy to both explain and understand; in a word, it is lazy.

³²James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97 (1) (April 2003): 88.

³³ Banton, "Ethnic Conflict," 490.

³⁴ Just as two examples, see Refik Hodzic, "Twenty Years Since Srebrenica: No Reconciliation, We're Still at War," *Balkanist*, 29 June 2015, accessed 12 December 2015, <http://balkanist.net/twenty-years-since-srebrenica-no-reconciliation-were-still-at-war/>; Nedim Jahic, "Forgotten Neighbors," *Balkanist*, 16 July 2015, accessed 12 December 2015, <http://balkanist.net/forgotten-neighbors/>. Perhaps the ethnic legacy can be attributed to the Dayton Accords which not only ended hostilities between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, but also created the forms of structure for the country of Bosnia. Dayton's effects have forced a number of academics, professionals, activists and others to appeal to the international community for action: "Open Letter to Federica Mogherini, Johannes Hahn, John Kerry, and the EU Foreign Affairs Council," *Balkanist*, 14 November 2015, 12 December 2015, <http://balkanist.net/open-letter-to-federica-mogherini-johannes-hahn-john-kerry-eu-foreign-affairs-council/>.

³⁵ Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 92.

Instead, I propose a nuanced approach to describing the causes of Yugoslavia's war. Besides the agency of actors like Milošević as previously described, Yugoslavia faced both an economic and political crisis, both of which were being exploited. The two premises are inherently linked.

To start the 1960s, Yugoslavia's economy was amongst the fastest growing in the world.³⁶ However, dating as early as 1948 Yugoslavia's communist elite feared the over-bureaucratization inherent in socialist societies. As well, the country was faced with the challenge of being economically underdeveloped.³⁷ As such, the elite continued to openly debate methods of navigating these two obstacles, even when things seemed to be going well. Just as the economy was appearing to head in the right direction, the elite split into two camps. One camp was mostly made up of "traditional" communists from the Serbian republic intent on centralization, while the other camp, mostly representatives of the Croatian and Slovenian republics, focused on decentralization.³⁸ This gulf between the camps would only increase as time went on.³⁹ By 1965, the decentralizers won the debate and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia adopted measures removing the state from some economic affairs.⁴⁰ By this measure, the republic entities had greater economic power, and Croatia and Slovenia had defeated Serbia on ideological grounds.⁴¹

³⁶ Karlo Basta, "Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 16:1 (2010): 98.

³⁷ This debate was also one of the causes of the so-called Tito-Stalin split of the same year; see, *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁹ For an interesting over-view of this struggle, especially in the 1980s, see Gagnon, "Yugoslavia in 1989 and after."

⁴⁰ Basta, "Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions," 99-100.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 100. Yugoslavia was by this point made up of a number of republics which were created roughly along national (i.e. ethnic) lines. By granting the republic greater control, the ethnicity was thereby granted greater control too; see, John R. Lampe, "The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea," *Studies in East European Thought*, 46:1/2 (June 1994): 86.

Inherent in this process were the implications to republican autonomy. Wanting equal political opportunity for each republic, and so each nation, the decentralizers “couched” their demands within the discourse of economic liberalization.⁴² By not basing their demands on national equality alone, the decentralizers were able to give their position “ideological credibility,” a potential for greater success, and it ensured the autonomy of republics, over the federal level.⁴³ Republican autonomy also meant that no republic could claim unfair treatment and seek independence, thereby, it was argued, creating a strong Yugoslavia.⁴⁴ In 1974, a new constitution was promulgated and entrenched decentralization, thereby making Yugoslavia a confederation.⁴⁵ The status quo was maintained though the debate surrounding (de)centralization remained until 1991 when the country finally ceased to exist as it had.⁴⁶

Rather than strengthening the union of Yugoslavia, the 1974 constitution made difficult the mitigating of crises if and when they should occur. Federal policy had to be determined by consensus, with the federal government no longer independent of the republics.⁴⁷ The animosity which was created around the federal debates developed along ethnic lines as each republic was divided amongst its nations, and made any sort of consensus impossible.⁴⁸ In fact, “[t]he main characteristic of Yugoslavia’s self-management reforms was the fact that it coupled economy and ethnic relations.”⁴⁹ The

⁴² Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 100.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 102; Lampe, “The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea,” 86.

⁴⁶ Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 103.

⁴⁷ Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 103; Lampe, “The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea,” 86.

⁴⁸ Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 103.

⁴⁹ Konstantin Nikiforov, “Modernization Mixed with Nationalism,” *Balkanica*, no. 45 (2014): 449.

opportunity to reform the measures passed as economic pressures mounted. By the 1980s, Yugoslavia was in dire financial straights.⁵⁰ What had once been a strong, booming economy was floundering. The internal environment was conducive to the leaders of the republics taking “increasingly radical options in order to escape their predicament.”⁵¹ Milošević had the firepower he needed to convince the Serbian people of their victimhood. By 1988, Milošević had undermined the constitution by revoking Kosovo’s and Vojvodina’s provincial autonomy, granted to them in the decade-and-a-half old constitution.⁵² The leaders of the other republics were now free to ignore the constitution as well.⁵³

Yugoslavia’s internal catastrophe did not happen in a vacuum. By 1989, communism was on the wane across Eastern Europe. Unable to navigate the self-made weaknesses inherent in the constitution, Yugoslav authorities could not control the tides of internal and external changes even if they wanted to. Rather than entrenching democratic, or indeed any other, ideals into the last two constitutions, the government of Yugoslavia failed to give their people an alternative to a fading idea.⁵⁴ Nationalism presented itself as the only option; it came in the form of Milošević. Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence in 1991, fueled by their own brand of nationalism.⁵⁵ As Miroslav Hroch said, ethnicity is “a substitute for factors of integration in a disintegrating

⁵⁰ Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 103.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁵² Lampe, “The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea,” 86-87.

⁵³ Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 104.

⁵⁴ Lampe, “The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea,” 87, 101; Nikiforov, “Modernization Mixed with Nationalism,” 449.

⁵⁵ Lampe, “The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea,” 87; Basta, “Non-ethnic Origins of Ethnofederal Institutions,” 104.

society. When society fails, the nation appears as the ultimate guarantee.”⁵⁶ Yugoslavia was dead.

Though ethnicity was certainly not a cause of Yugoslavia’s demise, it still persists as an explanation. The reasons for this are several-fold. The media played a key role in the Yugoslav wars. Not only did nationalist authorities of Yugoslavia’s republics harness radio and television to demonize the other, but Western media outlets looked for easy answers to a complex situation. Journalists, perhaps receiving their cues from politicians, found it coherent and concise, and Kaplan can be included amongst them. Some academics took to “ancient ethnic hatreds” as an explanation, perhaps as an opportunity to attempt a grand narrative of human nature.⁵⁷ Not only are these explanations easy to convey and understand, but they are also nihilistic. Yet even despite this oversimplification, much of Eastern European nationalism has been written by outsiders. The roots of exaggerating Balkan nationalism and backwardness are deep and they stretch westward.⁵⁸

At best, the West portrays Eastern Europe’s nationalism as a western export. At worst, it is shown to be a product of great power manipulation and incitement.⁵⁹ This means that the ideas of nationalism were conceived in and for the west and then “adopted, adapted, and accordingly metamorphosed in the new environment [the

⁵⁶ Miroslav Hroch qtd. in Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 173.

⁵⁷ Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 49-78.

⁵⁸ In a clever piece which garnered much attention when it was first written, *Balkanist* editor, Lily Lynch, wrote a satirical piece about travel writing and journalism of Western writers as it relates to the Balkans; see, Lily Lynch, “How to Write About the Balkans,” *Balkanist*, 27 August, 2013, accessed 9 December 2015, <http://balkanist.net/how-to-write-about-the-balkans/>.

⁵⁹ Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness,” 147.

Balkans].”⁶⁰ Therefore, western writing shows that nationalism does not have “organic” roots in Eastern Europe.⁶¹ Even when Eastern Europe is granted agency, it is done in the most disparaging way. An example from Kaplan is most telling:

Nazism, for instance, can claim Balkan origins. Among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentments close to the Southern Slavic world, Hitler learned how to hate infectiously.⁶²

To this point, Vesna Goldsworthy makes the astute observation that “[i]n contrast, no one would think of blaming the hapless Balkans for the triumphs of Austria’s composers.”⁶³

Myths also feature heavily in Western perceptions of Eastern Europe. Even though it is purported that national myths only exist in Eastern Europe, and in fact *define* the Balkans, they exist elsewhere, particularly in the West.⁶⁴ These myths in turn are “inflamed and become operative only at certain periods.”⁶⁵ When the Yugoslav wars began, the characteristics perpetrated by the West “were externalized and, in a totally unwarranted fashion, were rhetorically sold to the political class and to the broad public as Balkan.”⁶⁶

The roots stretch deeply too. The Anglo-Irish author Bram Stoker is perhaps most famous for his novel *Dracula*. Stoker portrayed the title character, Count Dracula, as a backward, bloodthirsty Balkan brute.⁶⁷ Likewise, the West portrayed the actors of the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 148.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*, xxiii.

⁶³ Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, (Yale University Press, 1997).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Richard Wasson, “The Politics of Dracula,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (1966): p. 25.

Yugoslav wars as such. When asked to comment on the level of violence taking place in Bosnia, the British Defence Secretary simply responded “[i]t’s the Balkans,” as if to say it was a foregone conclusion that the Balkans would devolve into such brutal violence.⁶⁸ Such portrayals from the West fit into Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism. Some have even suggested that “Balkanism” be included as a subset of Said’s theory.⁶⁹ All of this is to say that Western Europe views Eastern Europe, and so the Balkans, as not *of* Europe and as the “internal other.”⁷⁰ The Balkans, then, are anything other than European.⁷¹ The West’s representation of the Yugoslav war fed off the historical tropes which began in the era of Romance and have persisted down to the present.

This trend ebbs as well as flows. Eastern European scholars are also guilty of considering nationalism as an import, a “contagious disease by great powers.”⁷² Perpetuating these tropes leads to the notion that there is something different about Eastern European societies, that they are not as formed or even capable of developing the same ideas as the West. All of these tropes taken together are then internalized by Eastern Europe such that they begin to define themselves in such a manner. To explain the Srebrenica massacre, one Serb said “we are Balkan people and we are uncivilized.”⁷³ Indeed, backwardness, like ethnicity, is performative.

⁶⁸ Malcolm Rifkind qtd. in Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 90.

⁶⁹ Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 90.

⁷⁰ Stoyan Vassilev Tchapravov, “The Eastern Question, Western Europe, and the Balkans in Fin-de-Siècle Literature,” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), 47, 1-3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5-14.

⁷² Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness,” 153.

⁷³ Robert Fisk, “Krajina Serbs Put Trust in the UN for Protection,” *The Independent*, September 1995, accessed 12 December 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/krajina-serbs-put-trust-in-the-un-for-protection-1599690.html>. Not all of this internalization needs to have been expressed violently. Some great works of literature have emerged out of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. See, for example, Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, trans.

Rather than seeing nationalism as a Western import, it should be seen as “an almost synchronous rearrangement of group solidarities in human society, as a global social process that is itself a byproduct of...[and] linked to modernity.”⁷⁴ In other words, Eastern Europe, or any other region of the world, is capable of developing the same notions as Western Europe on its own without necessarily needing ideas to be imported.

The Yugoslav wars have since been characterized as the worst conflict on European soil since the Second World War.⁷⁵ Given the continent did not experience a single gunshot in the name of war in the intervening fifty years, this is not surprising. Yet the shock and horror at the crimes during the Yugoslav war are justified. However, the ethnic homogenization which was attempted by the warring Yugoslav parties, particularly in Bosnia, can be seen as an attempt at stability. This stabilization process began in the west of Europe many centuries before sweeping eastward.⁷⁶ Therefore, nationalism and ethnic homogenization were not a western import as much as they were part of a “catching up” process on the part of the former Yugoslavs.⁷⁷ In other words, “Europe’s past is eastern Europe’s organic, not emulative, future.”⁷⁸

Reconciliation between Yugoslavia’s successor states has yet to begin in any real capacity. Serbia and Croatia’s cooperation over the recent refugee crisis shows signs of

Lovett F. Edwards, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); and, Tonu Onnepalu, *Border State (writings from an Unbound Europe)* (United States: Northwestern University Press, 2000).

⁷⁴ Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness,” 149.

⁷⁵ Graham Jones, “Srebrenica: Worst European Atrocity since WWII,” *CNN*, 2006, accessed 12 December 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/05/26/Serbia.Mladic.Srebrenica/>; Alex Lockie and Armin Rosen, “It’s Been 20 Years since Europe’s Worst Atrocity since World War II.” *Business Insider*, July 2005, accessed 12 December 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/20-years-ago-today-europe-saw-its-worst-atrocity-since-wwii-2015-7>.

⁷⁶ Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness,” 154.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 155, 160.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

healing.⁷⁹ However, as long as war criminals go unpunished or are welcomed back as heroes, the wounds will remain fresh.⁸⁰ In Bosnia, demands for secession are strong amongst the Serbian entity of Republika Srpska.⁸¹ The country is crippled just as its forerunner had been three decades before. Throughout the western Balkans, those who were in some political capacity during the war are still ever-present to this day. Facts like this beg the question whether Yugoslavia really collapsed at all. It appears as though nationalisms have only been stoked in light of the war and certainly it speaks to the political power that the ideology carries. Even if another war should break out in the Balkans, and even if everyone says it is so, it will not be as a result of “ancient ethnic hatreds.”

⁷⁹ Matthew Brunwasser, “Serbia and Croatia, in Rare Cooperation, Provide Trains for Migrants,” *The New York Times*, 3 November 2015, accessed 12 December 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/world/europe/serbia-croatia-trains-migrants-refugees.html?r=0>.

⁸⁰ Marija Ristic, “Hague Prosecutor Slams Serbia’s Welcome for War Criminal,” *Balkan Insight*, 10 December 2015, accessed 10 December 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/brammertz-critised-serbia-for-welcoming-war-criminal-12-10-2015>.

⁸¹ Srečko Latal, “Serb Leader Warns Bosnia Could Break Up,” *Balkan Insight*, December 2, 2015, accessed 10 December 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnian-serb-leader-warns-of-breakup-of-bosnia-12-02-2015>.

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