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The Serbs: Nurtured by Defeat

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Abstract[1]

There are worse things than defeat. If a community has the opportunity to inspect its setbacks its conqueror has stopped short of wiping out the vanquished group's memory and collective existence. If the defeated are a mobile community they might literally look for greener pastures. Sedentary winners and losers, on the other hand, remain in contact, and their paired experiences of victory and defeat affect future actions on both sides.

The Serbs are among those who have developed their identity by moving from defeat to defeat. Enemies have failed to (or refrained from) destroying them, inundating them with non-Serbian settlers, or banishing them to a destructive exile. The iconic battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 remains an appropriate starting point for a discussion of Serbia's relationship to defeat, but the evolution of songs and memories adapted to the task of honing a Herderian nation, not the battle itself, informs the construction of collective defeat. The peripatetic remains of «Tsar» Lazar, continuing references to his heavenly kingdom, and mass commemorative rallies at the battlefield in 1889 and 1989 remain central, contemporary, touchstones. Serb poets and politicians folded defeats of the 18th and 19th centuries into the Kosovo memory. Nevertheless, the retreat of 1915-16—for modern Serbia the apotheosis of victorious defeat—was punctu-ated by a conscious decision not to make a Lazar-like sacrifice, but rather to keep moving across the 1389 battlefield toward what would become the earthly victory of 1918.

For Serbian nationalists, history should have ended on June 28, 1921, when a new constitution celebrated Serbian control over a large regional space. In-stead, the defeat of 1941, destruction of the Chetniks by a decidedly un-Serb Tito, and the Communist regime's systematic dismantling of Serbia's status and pretentions led literary and political keepers of the flame of defeat to move Serbs toward the catastrophes of the 1990s. Those defeats—loss of territory and regional status and demonization by other Balkans peoples and by larger powers whose respect Serbia had come to count on—remain undigested. The assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic in 2003 continues to spark introspec-tive characterizations of a continuing sense of defeat. Serbia's pathology—reflected in its refusal in 2005 to attend the celebration of the anniversary of what the rest of Europe considered victory in World War II—resembles some-what Germany's attitude toward its incomplete defeat in 1918.

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at a symposium on the subject of 'Defeat' held at the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 1 April 2010.

Collective healing would require the hard decision to stop nurturing defeat in favor of a less dramatic, more productive focus on finding a different way to craft a collective future.

Keywords

Serbia, Defeat, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia, Herder, Alexander Karadjordjevic, Tito, Rankovic, and Milosevic

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1. Introduction

The perception of one's own "defeat" indicates an incomplete condition. If a community has the opportunity to inspect its defeat, then a victor—by choice or not—has stopped short of a comprehensive effort to wipe out the vanquished group's memory and collective existence. If the defeated are a mobile community they might well shrug off the setback and—literally—look for greener pastures. On the other hand, sedentary "nations" of our world remain in contact with each other, leading the experience of victory and defeat to affect identities, motivations, and future actions on both sides.

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, in his study of defeat,[2] offers an approach to this issue. He properly distinguishes between the ancient and medieval ethos of martial virtues—in which the honor of individual combat (for victor and vanquished) garners more attention than the collective suffering that has become the experience of modern defeat.[3] Schivelbusch then suggests that "highly developed cultures" do not usually perish when defeated, although he notes that those seeking revenge turn to total war, under which the only option is to "destroy or at least permanently incapacitate the enemy."[4] He generally leaves unanswered the question of whether the avoidance of total nuclear annihilation during the Cold War was a result of this modernity, an artifact of the deterrence dance performed by the United States and Soviet Union, or of sheer luck. Whether Israel—a highly developed society—would perish in case of Arab victory in a future conflict could be a relevant specimen for Schivelbusch analytic microscope.

In any case, moving forward in an atmosphere of defeat means the defeated have been spared the fate of annihilation, exile (which could mean a scattering rather than being permitted the luxury of collective movement), assimilation, or inundation (for example the Han Chinese settlement in Xinjiang that clearly has the purpose of overwhelming Uigher identity).

- These more extreme strategies can be applied in combination, as with the killings, serial exiles, absorption, and settlement policies used to marginalize aboriginal inhabitants in North America.[5] Terminal insignificance of expressions of defiance by residual activists is an

2 *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2001).

3 Ibid., p. 1, 15-16.

4 Ibid., p. 19, 27.

5 For a thoughtful examination of a condition beyond defeat see Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

indication that a community has suffered something more catastrophic than defeat.

- Efforts at forced assimilation can be directed by either victor or vanquished. For example, various local nationalists and fascists in various countries defined themselves as Aryans while under German occupation or influence in World War II, while Communists repackaged local workers as victors or virtuous as part of the effort to design a "progressive" identity when Soviet replaced German occupation. Those imposing these totalitarian forms had mixed success in their efforts to change the focus of victory and defeat from imagined national communities to constructed identities of race and class.[6]
- Mass enslavement, like defeat, is a less-than-final condition. Jews in ancient Egypt and Messenian Helots in the Peloponnesus were left able to nurture collective identity through centuries of suffering, and slaves from various African communities came together in an "African-American" identity via the experiences of slavery and Jim Crow persecution. All these communities eventually threw off their shackles.

Therefore, consideration of collective defeat should take into account the fact that, for the defeated, things could have been worse. The fact that publicists of memory and anger can stoke desires for revenge or otherwise accommodate national distress is testimony to the place of defeat as something other than an end-point on a conceptual spectrum running from domination to destruction.

- It matters a lot who gets to define and describe "defeat." In 1918-19 German Social Democrats basically conceded this crucial function to revisionist publicists who blamed Jews, Communists, and anyone but themselves for the searing experience of humiliating defeat. Hypocritical army commanders—who knew better—went along with these lies, ensuring that too many Germans would think in terms of betrayal rather than responsibility, a pathology that seriously undermined the foundations of the post-Wilhelmian order. At the end of this chapter I will note the specific relevance of this analogue for contemporary Serbia.

The Serbs are among those peoples who have developed their identity as they have moved from defeat to defeat. Various conquerors have neither wiped them out, inundated them with non-Serbian settlers, nor put them through the experience of destructive exile. When Serbs have moved en masse under invitation or pressure from hegemons of the day (as in the trek to Vojvodina in 1690), they often have done so cohesively and in a manner permitting them to declare "here is Serbia," thus sanctifying their new home as an integral part of the collective patrimony. The defeat suffered by Krajina Serbs in 1995 is an exception—Croatia succeeded in reducing a once cohesive, martial community to a so-far docile minority in the new Croatian state.

- The Albanian demographic expansion in and into areas previously dominated by Serbs or other Slavs in southern Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and, to a lesser extent, Montenegro has amounted to inundation, not

6 Despite successive generations of critics, Benedict Anderson's titular phrase remains a powerful description of the nationalizing experience. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

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conquest. Migration preceded force of arms (which, when it came, was largely exogenous) rather than the other way round. In this way, the Albanianization of what is now "Kosova" resembles the pattern of outsiders' mass absorption of the Roman Empire[7] more than the conquest and colonization process modern Europeans inflicted on each other, America, and Africa.

The Serbian constructed memory of nurtured defeat is a problem of modernization, not some expression of "Balkan" primordial, atavistic ethnic hatred. Robert Kaplan did harm when his widely-read Balkan Ghosts[8] led some observers of the collapse of Yugoslavia to believe that peoples in the region were acting out age-old rivalries. Many subsequent academic and popular histories have corrected this impression,[9] but the conflation of perceptions of Serb brutality with general belief in the idea of Balkan backwardness persists as a version of what Edward Said called "Orientalism."[10]

Serbian reflections on defeats and other experiences began with late medieval poetry but coalesced into a social movement only as part of the general European nationalizing pattern of the nineteenth century. Construction of Serbian and other Balkan identities have been part of the larger pattern of defining identity and claiming place in the mixed nationalizing and globalizing context. Contemporary rivals and models, not ancient battles, are the relevant reference points. Ivalyo Ditchev has suggested that this process involves internalizing a Western Other as part of a self-representation that both seduces and defies this Other.[11]

The current trauma for Serbs has been the shift in the view of them by this Other from victim or hero to brutal, even genocidal aggressor. This perceptual change amounts to an experience of defeat over and above the physical defeats of the 1990s. As Serbs revisit tales of past glories and sacrifices, the experiences of both World Wars, the various forms of "Yugoslavia," and the wars of the 1990s, they are attempting to come to grips with uncomfortable international and self-images. Since their condition is one of defeat and not destruction, the Serbs have the opportunity to help shape regional and European futures.

2. 1389 and All That

The battle of Kosovo Polje on June 28, 1389 remains an appropriate starting point for any discussion of Serbian identity, and in particular of the role of defeat in the shaping of that identity. June 28 has remained the Serbs' national day. However, Kosovo was neither the cradle of the Serb nation nor site of the first defeat of Serbian notables.[12] In fact, this seminal battle was not a defeat at all for

7 For an argument that Rome was inundated rather than conquered, see Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

8 Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: Scribner's, 1993).

9 Among the many correctives the reader is invited to consider Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, and Dusan I. Bjelic and Obrad Savic, eds.: *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

10 New York: Vintage, 1979.

11 Ivalyo Ditchev, «The Eros of Identity,» in Bjelic and Savic, *Balkan as Metaphor*, p. 236.

12 For one of many discussions of this, see Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-*

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some of them.

What has made this event iconic has been the use of poetry, painting, and other means of aesthetic expression to subsume this experience of defeat in a mythology of spiritual triumph. This constructed memory of sacrificial heroism set the pattern for subsequent Serbian experiences of defeat—as if each debacle must take place for the sake of a greater and necessary triumph. Today, while international courts judge recent individual and collective Serbian behavior, Serbs still debate their choice between "heavenly" and "earthly" kingdoms—between glorifying their special identity or subsuming it within a collective European modernity.

The medieval Serbian empire developed in the context of a three-cornered competition with residual Byzantine power and a sometimes powerful Bulgarian state. A fourth contestant competed for Balkan supremacy after 1354, when Suleyman Pasha, son of Orhan, himself son of dynastic founder Osman, took Gallipoli and advanced his father's forces into the peninsula. Osman's involvement in Byzantine succession politics eased Ottoman access to the Balkans—it was not clear that Constantinople viewed the Serbs or Bulgars as less threatening than the Muslims.

Serbian princes appear to have been quarrelsome and easily divided (although Rebecca West's Serbian guide during her famous trip to the Balkans in 1937 credited even the weakest of them with having nurtured Serbian identity[13]). They turned on each other following the death of the empire-builder Stefan Dusan in the mid-14th century. Battles against the Ottomans on the Maritza in 1371 and at Kosovo Polje in 1389 saw Serbs on both sides, as some made their deals with the invaders much as Scottish notables repeatedly did with the English. Albanians (who would not have recognized that term), Croats, Bosnians, and Magyars joined the Serbs in fighting at Kosovo Polje, a point largely ignored in subsequent Serbian tales of the action.[14] The Ottoman supremacy established in 1389 was interrupted by Tamerlane's catastrophic defeat of Sultan Bayezed at Ankara in 1402, forcing later Sultans to regroup and to redo their conquest of the Balkans (this time taking Constantinople as well).

Even given the hyperbole surrounding these events, it is clear that the defeat at Kosovo Polje did irrevocable damage to what was left of the cohesiveness of the Serbian princely state. From that point on there is little evidence of any general sense of being "Serb" (as opposed to identity as part of "Zadrugas"—extended families) until the early nineteenth century. Tim Judah has noted that the Orthodox Church took the lead in attempting to ensure that something larger than Zadruga identity remained—under the Ottoman system religious authorities had control over their communities' education and cultural existence.[15]

Orthodox priests of Serbian background probably were instrumental in creating the initial poems and songs that sanctified the meaning of earthly defeat. Whoever wrote these myths turned "Tsar" Lazar, commander of Serbian and associated forces in 1389, into a version of Jesus and the battle into a version of the Passion. A Serb hero named Obilic was credited with killing Sultan Murad during the opening stages of the fighting (the Serbs say they started the day on the offensive—some Turkish sources claim otherwise and state that Murad died

Communist History (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 54.

13 Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (New York, Penguin, 1982), p. 514.

14 John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 315-316.

15 Tim Judah, The Serbs (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 38

while surveying the battlefield after his victory). Meanwhile, Vuk Brankovic, one of those Serbs who cast his lot with the Ottomans, was vilified as the Serbian national Judas, to include having been singled out by Obilic as a traitor at a "last supper" the night before the battle.

Lazar's body was carried from the field and began a series of journeys and adventures that continue to this day. Milica, his widow, reportedly had the body exhumed from its original burial site in 1401 or 1402 and taken to a monastery Lazar had founded at Ravanica[16]. It stayed there until 1689-90, when those priests leading the Serbs to what would become Vojvodina brought Lazar along. The corpse then made its way to a monastery in Srem that likely was named Sremska Ravanica to remind Serbs of their connection to the Kosovo they had chosen to leave. In 1942, to save Lazar's remains from Croatian Ustache fascists, Lazar was taken to Belgrade. In 1987, as Serbs in what still was Yugoslavia prepared for the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje, his body was carried around Serbia and Bosnia. During that anniversary year it was shown at various sites in Kosovo before returning once again to its 15th century home at Ravanica. It remains a reminder of continuing Serbian claims to what now has become Kosova.

- It should be noted that Murad's body had its own adventures, and that the site of his tent at the battle of Kosovo Polje was protected by descendants of his retainers (with some interruption in the 20th century), who were subsidized by Ottoman and Yugoslav authorities down to the turn of the 21st century.

The peripatetic physical remains of Lazar were accompanied by a growing litany of songs and rituals that nurtured a mixed message of defeat and triumph. 15th and 16th century reports exist of these songs and rituals, which became the grist for epic poems that were performed during the Serbian rising against Ottoman rule in the 1870s.[17] The famous poem by Vuk Karadzic (1787-1864), philologist and co-founder of the language constructed as "Serbo-Croatian, painted Lazar as having chosen a "heavenly" over an "earthly" kingdom. In other words, the Serbs could have won the battle but chose defeat to preserve their spiritual purity and to make a sacrifice for the greater sake of Christendom. Rebecca West noted that the decision of Lazar to become a Christ-like sacrificial lamb was meant to indicate the spiritual superiority of Christianity to Islam.[18] From the context of her historical moment, she concluded that Lazar, headless "as defeat should be," was a striking symbol of the heroism of the Serbs, who in 1914 twice staved off the forces of Austria-Hungary, suffered an epic—literally—defeat in 1915-16, but then triumphed in 1918 (and were rewarded with hegemony in the first Yugoslav state).[19]

The nineteenth century was the era of Herderian nationalism; the old poems gave way to modern histories in the context of construction of state and nation. Nevertheless, the songs were still sung about the heroic tragedy of 1389 and newly imagined imagery preserved the notion that Serbia's origins combined physical defeat with spiritual triumph. The iconic painting of a "Kosovo girl"

16 Ibid., pp. 38-9.

17 Ibid., p. 41

18 West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, p. 910.

19 Ibid., p. 1099.

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giving water to a wounded warrior was produced in 1919. The basic idea of Serbs as exemplary victim/heroes for whom defeat was by definition victory would be reinforced during the victories and tragedies of the twentieth century.

- The forms of poem and song were revived at the expense of historical analysis during the wars of the 1990s. Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic was fond of pulling out his Guzla (a traditional Serbian stringed instrument) and singing the old songs about 1389 and Serbian glory. He was not alone.

In Kosovo Polje the Serbs had a tangible site and a national goal. Kosovo did not become part of Serbia until the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, but after the seventeenth century the saga of 1389 would be invoked repeatedly as a rallying cry for oncoming or ongoing fights, and to provide a frame of reference as Serbs sought to understand the meaning of their experiences in the oft-shifting Balkan context. Serbs went en masse to Kosovo Polje in 1889 on the 500th anniversary of the battle to celebrate their modernizing national identity. They returned exactly 100 years later to proclaim preeminence in a Yugoslavia many of them believed they had created and were entitled to.

The physical defeat and spiritual triumph at Kosovo Polje remains a central touchstone of Serbian identity, no matter subsequent layers of modernization. Tim Judah quotes one verdict on the lasting meaning of defeat in 1389 as expressed by Serbian Orthodox Bishop Jovan of Sabac-Valjevo in the context of a speech in the 1980s about the later trauma of World War II:

> "Since Prince Lazar and Kosovo the Serbs, above all, have been creating HEAVENLY SERBIA, which today most certainly must have grown to become the largest state in Heaven. If we only think of those innocent victims of the last war (World War II), millions and millions of Serbian men, women, and children killed and tortured in the most terrible way or thrown into pits by Ustasha criminals, then we can understand that today's Serbian empire is in the heavens."[20]

3. Toward Nation, State, and Modernism

During the centuries of Ottoman rule, the belief in spiritual victory did not assuage the desire of Serbian priests, monks, and a few others to avenge the sting of the physical defeat of 1389. Nevertheless, despite all the singing about the centrality of Kosovo in Serbian hearts, that relatively infertile place was anything but the center of Serbian social and political activity during this time. The wars between Ottoman and Habsburg armies created an opportunity to create a communal identity having more to do with "martial virtue (not then the oxymoron it is in today's Europe) than with being "Serb." Although the priests worked to preserve a sense Serb identity, until the age of nationalism there was only limited awareness among the zadrugas as to where Serbia was or who constituted their community. The popular notions of allegedly atavistic, primeval ethnic hatreds in the Balkans that poisoned the discourse of the 1990s did not then exist.

20 Judah, p. 47.

Although tales of the Ottoman "yoke" gained traction among those claiming Serbian victimhood, the actual Ottoman presence in the Balkans was relatively light.[21] The sultans were supported by a loosely run agglomeration of slave/viziers (often converted Muslims from defeated Balkan communities), pashas, janissary detachments, clerics, and local notables.[22] Communities (or at least their small elites) had a good deal of autonomy, mainly because what had started as a conquering tribal army never managed to develop into an efficient state. Multiple networks of power, patronage, and subsistence developed and established a pattern of informality and—especially from a legal sense—social opacity. Local Big Men, more concerned with patronage responsibilities than with western-style state power remain a central factor in the region's politics and economy.[23]

- Failure to recognize that these networks still matter more than states, constitutions, political parties, and other political forms is a major reason for the—at best—mixed success Western viceroys, bureaucrats, and diplomats have had in their effort to impose "development" on both victorious and defeated social shards of former Yugoslavia.

The eventual development of identity among Serbian and other defeated communities was enabled by the so-called Millet system, under which those groups whose religious authorities were recognized by the sultan controlled their own educational and cultural systems and were privileged with considerable taxation authority. Stafanos Katsikas has pointed out that the academic literature has exaggerated the organizational coherence and depth of this concept.[24] What originally were called "tai'fe (groups) included guilds as well as religions, and until the end of the 18th century clerical authorities often did not control many in their own flock. Local officials, warlords and bandits (often the same people) became (and remain) actors and transmissions belts essential to economic and social activity.[25] Nevertheless, however, incomplete was the Millet system, its stress on religion rather than land or cohesive linguistic community as social marker meant that identity was portable. This was an important factor in the development of Serbian mythology and political action as Serbs sought to square physical movement from Kosovo with spiritual commitment to it as their "Jerusalem.". The solution was to leave the space but nurture the memories of physical defeat and spiritual triumph.

What was immediately relevant to Serbian identity formation was the struggle between the higher Greek Orthodox clerisy and local Serbian (and Bulgarian)

21 This point is made as part of a detailed examination of the Ottoman system in Michael Palairet, *The Balkan Economies c. 1800-1914: Evolution Without Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For an example of the "yoke" metaphor from a well-known source, see Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis* (New York: Scribners, 1923), vol. II, p. 497.

22 See Karen Barkey's two excellent analyses of the Ottoman system, Bandits and Bureaucrats: the Ottoman Route to State Centralization (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

23 David B. Kanin, «Big Men, Corruption, and Crime,» *International Politics*, vol. 40, 2003, pp. 491-526.

24 Stefanos Katsikas, «Millets in Nation-States: The Case of Greek and Bulgarian Muslims, 1912-1923,» *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 37, #2, March 2009, pp. 179-180.

25 For the tale of Ali Pasha, who enjoyed all those roles and had diplomatic relations with the participants in the Napoleonic wars to boot, see K. E. Fleming, The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Fleming took his title from Lord Byron's description of Ali Pasha.

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priests and monks to determine the language of prayer and education.[26] The independent Archbishopric in Pec—in Kosovo—served to preserve the tales of 1389 and the idea of Serbian existence until finally shut down under pressure from the Greek Orthodox hierarchy in 1767. A year earlier the same fate had befallen the Archbishopric of Ohrid, in Macedonia, an episode in the struggle to define Greek, Bulgarian, and Macedonian identity that continues to this day. Bishops in Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem also were brought to heel during this period.[27] In the nineteenth century, when the Millet finally did come to look something like that described in the literature, the Ottomans were in terminal decline, which sharpened the conflicts among Greeks and between Greeks and Bulgarians over "Macedonia."

In the wake of the wars of the 1990s it is easy to forget that Serbs played a smaller role in the "horrors" of nationalizing conflicts a century earlier because then they had managed to carve out their own political path. In part, this was because the Pashaluks of Belgrade and Nis were farther from Constantinople than were Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia, and were home to relatively few Muslims.[28] Serbia was difficult to travel to and through well into the nineteenth century,[29] and thus probably was more marginal in Ottoman thinking than other Balkan spaces (to include more heavily Islamicized Bosnia).

The project that became the modern Serbian state began to take form as a byproduct of wars between the Habsburgs and Ottomans from the 16th through the 18th century. At the end of the 16th century the Austrian authorities invited Serbs to resettle from Kosovo and elsewhere to the fishhook-shaped border area between the two empires, there to live as a virtual military frontier garrison. (At the same time, the Habsburgs also constructed Croatian military units that fought loyally in all of Austria's wars for the rest of that Monarchy's existence.) [30]

The "Krajina", a word meaning frontier (similar to "Ukraine") became a cohesive community proud of its ability to define a military identity that initially was not clearly "Serb." There is little evidence that early modern Krajina Serbs nurtured the epic poems of 1389 or viewed themselves as a Piedmont around which a larger Serbian state could come into being. Their identity remained distinctive even as the political activity of co-ethnics elsewhere and Habsburg railroad projects of the nineteenth century created some ties between these Serbs and the general national project. The Krajina survived even the predations of World War II but was destroyed in a catastrophic—and, in the sense of identity—final defeat and expulsion after a Croatian offensive in August 1995. The residual Serb presence in Croatia today is a defeated minority, not a distinctive community.

One hundred years after the original Krajina settlement Austrian solicitation of a new Serbian settlement in their Balkan territories helped rekindle the Kosovo myth of physical defeat and spiritual triumph. Prince Eugene of Savoy's

26 Palairet, *The Balkan Economies*, p. 129.

27 Katsikas, «Millets in Nation-States,» ibid.

28 Andre Gerolymatos suggests that in 1800, of the 300,000-400,000 people in the Pashaluk of Belgrade only about 20,000 were Islamized Slavs. During the Ottoman centuries Serbia, unlike Bulgaria, never was a target for significant settlement by ethnic Turks. Gerolymatos, *The Balkan Wars: Conquest, Revolution, and Retribution From the Ottoman Era to the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), P. 148.

29 See Palairet, pp. 22, 85-128 and 330-1, for comments on the unproductive Serbian rural economy, low population density, heavily wooded condition of much of the Pashaluk, and underinvestment in railroad development (relative to what was going on in Bosnia and Croatia after 1875) by Serbian authorities.

30 Examples of Croats' military service are studded throughout Peter H. Wilson, The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009,

offensives against Ottomans in retreat from their siege of Vienna in 1685 ground to a halt in battles in 1690 in which Serbs fought on the Austrian side. Their expansion east focused the Austrians on the problem of managing Hungarian magnates who owned huge tracts of fertile land and whose loyalty—well before the 1867 Ausgleich—was recognized by Vienna as both unreliable and necessary. Therefore, as they retreated the Austrians invited Serbs in Kosovo and Macedonia to resettle to lands north of Belgrade and the Sava and Danube rivers and, in effect, to become a communal counterweight to the Hungarians.

The resulting migration of 30,000-40,000 families[31] from Pec, Prizren, and elsewhere created "Vojvodina," named to commemorate the warlords ("Vojvods") at the head of the mass procession. 120,000 more Serbs left Kosovo following a similar Austro-Turkish war in the 1730s.[32] No matter the logic of avoiding Ottoman reprisals for Serb assistance to the Habsburg armies, the fact that so many voluntarily departed this sacred place belied the notion that the site of physical defeat and sacred victory must remain central to Serbian identity—an embarrassing fact that would trouble Serbian nationalists again as co-nationals once more left Kosovo in droves during the last decade of the Tito era.

This may be why later publicists claimed that the priests who accompanied the trekkers of 1690[33] made sure to sing songs designed to tie the Kosovo tales to current events. Archbishop Artemije was said to have led the expedition—a disputed point[34]—and the events of 1690 were celebrated in a nationalistic painting done in 1896 and often paired with the 1919 "Kosovo Girl" picture as images of Serbian heroism.[35]

4. The Serbs Enter Europe

For the next century, there was little direct relationship—and no general commemorations of 1389—between Serbs in Krajina, Vojvodina, and the Ottomans' Belgrade or Nis Pashaluks. Indeed, Serbia remained largely rural, heavily forested, and devoid of regular communication even among villages a few miles from each other. However, this began to change rapidly in the wake of the French Revolution. Even more important was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, a seminal event that led to a (premature) perception that the Ottoman Empire was on its last legs and helped create the notion that there existed a modern, inevitable, invincible globalizing entity called "the West." At the same time, the advancing Slavic empire in Russia attracted some attention among various Serbian and other notables and patronage systems. This created what continues to be a fluid process in which Balkan peoples adjust their interests and identities among a shifting cast of great powers.

31 Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, pp. 153-4.

32 Dennison Rusinow, Yugoslavia: *Oblique Insights and Observations* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), p. 241.

33 A comparison between the Serbs' movement to Vojvodina and the Boers' much-sung about exodus in the 19th century is not unwarranted.

34 Noel Malcolm, a scholar who has studied the Serbs, is quoted as being skeptical in Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, «*The Balkans: A Post-Communist History* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 517. See also Judah, p. 1.

35 For example, Judah, plates 1 and 16 between pp. 110 and 111.

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- The fact that Serbs and other Balkan peoples have not been in position to develop independently of overweening outside occupiers and their various ideologies (to include the current teleology of Democratic "governance") has set in high relief the relationship between perceived and actual victories and defeats and perceptions of self-worth and self-confidence.

The Ottoman Sultan Selim III (ruled 1792-1808) decided to become a reformer, a decision that amounted to a proclamation of a lack of confidence in his system and his faith. He de-legitimized his own power, leading to the perception at home and abroad that his Empire was on the skids, which enabled revolts that made it so. It should be remembered that his problems in the Balkans were contemporaneous with the uprising by a Saudi-Wahhabi partnership that opened the story of the modern Middle East.[36] These two peripheries of the Ottoman Empire have not been stable since, despite serial Western-imposed settlements and "final statuses."

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt was a critical event in this process because this venue of Ottoman defeat was central to Ottoman power, the imperial economy, and to the Sultan's spiritual authority. Selim's ancestors had only become entitled to take the title of Caliph after 1517, when they became guardians of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina by supplanting the Egyptian Mamluks who until then had held this trust. Indeed, it was only as Ottoman power began to wane in the 18th century that the Caliphal title and claim to spiritual leadership had been used much by rulers who had been as careless in their consideration of Islamic orthodoxy as in their practice of practical administration. The French ability to dispatch Mamluk warriors with ease revealed to those watching inside and outside the Empire just how weak it was—Nelson's victory over the French fleet and Napoleon's desertion of his army did nothing to restore faith either in Ottoman authority or in Selim's policies.

The events of 1789-98 had immediate impact in the Balkans. The latest in the continuing series of wars between the Habsburgs and Ottomans led to a new Serbian defeat that once again changed the Serbs' relationship to both imperial masters, albeit in a much less lasting manner than the Krajina and Vojvodina settlements. During fighting in 1790 Serbs in the Pashaluk were counting on the Austrians to roll back the area of Ottoman control and protect Serbian interests in the residual Ottoman space. Instead, the Austrians—who were coming to fear the power of heir Russian allies more than that of their Ottoman foes—ended the war short of a decisive victory. The resulting Treaty of Sistova included an Ottoman promise to respect the rights of their Serbian subjects,[37] but Serbian soldiers and notables were left with a sense that they could not influence events in either imperial court.

Meanwhile, the Sultan's reforming instincts were becoming perceived as a threat by the Janissary troops and local Ottoman officials. Fissures among the ruling elites created opportunities for local ethnic Turkish Big Men, for example, Ali Pasha's sometime rival Osman Pasvanoglu. At the same time, physical and economic dislocation—to include a rapid de-urbanization—created a sense of uncertainty among a small but important class of relatively wealthy Serbian farmers and nascent entrepreneurs. According to Michael Palairet, in 1777

36 Gerolymatos, The Balkan Wars, pp. 143-145.

37 Ibid. and Palairet, p. 85.

Belgrade had 6000 houses (perhaps 30,000-55,000 people), but unrest and deprivation reduced that number to 3000 (25,000 people) in 1800 and only 769 houses by 1834.[38]

Among the local elite was a Serbian farmer/landowner named Karadjordj. By the time he raised his revolt in 1804 the Sultan was a distant figure with little influence on local affairs. Karadjordj's uprising, far from being directed against the Ottomans, involved a plea to Constantinople to intervene against the local Janissary commanders, whose economic predations were as much a part of Karadjordj's complaint as their capricious approach to other peoples' personal security.[39]

Karadjordj probably was not surprised that Ottoman central authorities had little ability to deal either with his enemies or himself, and as his fight with both local enemies and other Ottoman troops dragged on, his search for outside support turned to Russia's Tsar Alexander I. There is no evidence of any movement in Russia or the Balkans for what later became known as "pan-Slavism" before this time, and their behavior then and afterwards indicated that Russian sympathy for the Serbs during various defeats never ran very deep. The Tsar gave some material support to Karadjordj, but abandoned this theater to deal with Napoleon's invasion in 1812. The next year Karadjordj abandoned his army on the battlefield and fled across the Danube. When he later returned to Serbia a few years later he was murdered.

The fact that Karadjordj either ignored or was unaware of Lazar's model of sacrifice in 1389 did not overly concern later publicists of Serb identity, either those who faulted his behavior or others who turned his defeat into a modern form of martyrdom. By the time Rebecca West visited the Balkans, Karadjordj had become "a born warrior," of "superb physique" (if "unstable temperament"); "war was the breath of life in his nostrils."[40] This was no surprise, since the "Yugoslavia" created after World War I was a kingdom ruled by his descendents, the Karadjordjevic dynasty.

For the century between the Napoleonic age and the next general European conflict, whether Karadjordj was a hero or a coward depended on whether his descendents ruled Serbia, or whether they sulked in their opposition to the family of Milos Obrenovic, commander of Serbia's next and more successful revolt. Obrenovic had been an officer in the first uprising and raised his own standard soon after Karadjordj's defeat in 1813. Obrenovic, less physically imposing than Karadjordj, was a much better politician, and was able to make himself a symbol of the overtly "national" uprising that Karadjordj's revolt had become by the time of the latter's defeat.[41]

The Ottomans helped his cause with such actions as the creation of the "tower of skulls" in Nis, a construction whose four sides and 14 rows were made up of the heads of 952 Serbs killed in a battle in 1809. What was meant to be a warning to the Serbs became instead a shrine of triumphant defeat which Serbs could link to 1389 as memories of collective sacrifice and heroism. The Serbs cultivated the site, giving the tower a roof in 1878 and building a chapel on the

38 Palairet, p. 28.

39 As with 1389, there are many accounts of Karadjordj's uprising. See Gerolymatos, pp. 143-145 and Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-1999* (New York: Viking, 2000), p. 12.

40 West, p. 520.

41 Gerolymatos, p. 156.

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grounds in 1892.[42]

5. The Serbs Were Not Alone

By 1830 Obrenovic and some Serbs, like some Greeks, were free of the Turks. The differences between these nascent national movements—and their attitude toward seminal defeat—are worth noting because they would affect the politics and conflicts that continue to keep the region roiled. At the same time Serb chieftains were carving out a national space, Greece also became a state, but one with German kings, political and geographical fractures, and incomplete legitimacy. Many ethnic Greeks lived far from the new country in what had been "Ionia" or along the Black Sea coast. These people would have little contact with "Greece" until resettled there after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. More cosmopolitan urban Greeks, nicknamed "Phanariots" after a largely Greek section of Constantinople, served the Sultan as administrators in the Balkans. Many of these were hostile toward the new Greek state and would help the Ottomans resist further concessions to it (and to other Balkan peoples) until World War I finally destroyed the Ottoman system. Foreign philhellenism gave Greek nationalism a classical patina, but Greeks themselves suffered through what amounted to a civil war throughout the last decades of the Ottoman era (albeit a less intense and violent one than would take place during the 1940s). From the start, this was linked to the general status of Ottoman power and, often, also to the interests of outside forces. The Serbs would not have a similar experience until 1914, when the murder of an Austrian Archduke for the first time linked the Serbian national project to larger European events. In the 1940s both Greek and Serb loyalties fractured in response to World War II and the three-cornered dispute among Democratic, Fascist, and Communist notions about the future.

- The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans was the defining defeat for many Greek nationalists. While foreign Philhellenes praised classical glories, the locals looked for their inspiration to the Christian Byzantine Empire. In 1919—as Greek troops entered the city during the interregnum between Ottoman defeat in World War I and the triumph of Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk) —Greek priests resumed celebrating the mass in the Church of Hagia Sophia at the point where it reportedly had been stopped by marauding Ottoman troops on May 29, 1453.

The Serb diaspora was much more nearby than the Greek—in Habsburg lands and Ottoman Kosovo—and during the nineteenth century undiluted by a significant comprador class. According to Rebecca West, Janissary units invoked Serbian imagery when they defeated an Ottoman army in Kosovo in 1831 in response to the Sultan's decision to dismantle the Janissaries in 1826. These rebels appealed to Serbs to join them in revenge of the defeat of 1389,[43] but there is no evidence any Serbs took them up on this offer. Similarly, unlike Croats, Serbs did not fight in large numbers for the Austrians against the Hungarian rebellion of in 1848-9 (Serbs also liked to remind Croats of their participation in Austria-

42 Judah, p. 279.

43 West, p. 841.

Hungary's invasion of Serbia in 1914). Serb victories and defeats were linked to what their national elites shaped into a sense of purpose, but in the nineteenth century—as opposed to the twentieth—this this was not linked to the ebb and flow of great power interests.

In 1830 the Sultan granted the Serbian Orthodox Church the status of a millet, the separate religious status that conferred identity on non-Muslim peoples in the empire. The new Serbian state included Nis but not Kosovo, and Belgrade would maintain an Ottoman garrison for another generation. Obrenovic became Prince Milos. From then until 1903, he, his heirs, and scions of the Karadjordjevic family engaged in a struggle for authority that had less to do with past defeats than with rivalry over which dynasty would lead Serbia into a new age of European-style monarchical modernity.

The ethos of that era emerged from the revolutions of 1848, after which monarchs increasingly lashed their claims to legitimacy and authority to flavors of nationalism inspired by Johan Gottfried Herder. For Herder and subsequent national publicists, language, not religion defined a people, and the purpose of each people was to define itself fully in a manner that supposedly would lead to a community of fulfilled nations. From Germany east, languages were reconstructed and re-grammared by philologists conscious of their nation-building purpose. Literacy was the agent of national identity. When it came time to give the newly literate something to read, philologists turned to historians, who provided their versions of nationals stories. Unfortunately, in the Balkans and elsewhere, these tales taught people the evils of neighboring Others, whose shortcomings and malevolent acts were the standards against which nascent nations measured their value and strength.

Among Serbs, this meant the Serb Orthodox Church and its "defensive traditionalism"[44] of tending to the memories of 1389 gave way—often willingly—to the poetry and arguments of nationalistic intellectuals. In 1844 Illya Garasanin (1812-1874), published his Nacertanje, an outline for Serbian identity and political expansion in the Balkans.[45] Garasanin wrote off the Ottoman Empire as finished and declared that Serbs had to lead Balkan peoples in resistance to partition by Austria and Russia. Serbia should advance to the Adriatic, resuming the imperial course cut short by the Ottoman conquest. He raised the old defeats as markers of Serbian rights—wherever there is a Serbian grave, he wrote, "there is Serbia."[46] This would remain a battle cry for Serbian nationalists into the 21st century.

Garasanin saw Habsburg power as greater than Ottoman, so he directed Serbs toward Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia (which came under Austro-Hungarian control only after 1878), rather than the rich lands of Vojvodina. Serbs in the latter province were split over whether to join the revolution of 1848. Overall, Obrenovic princes in particular maintained constructive, if not friendly relations with the Habsburgs while they focused on disputes with Bulgarians (who envied Serbia's millet status) and claims to "old Serbia"—Kosovo.

This meshed well with the nationalistic poetry of Vuk Karadzic, who sang songs of 1389 while engaged in a discussion/debate with Croatian and other fellow philologists over how to construct a "Serbo-Croatian" language and create

44 Allcock, p. 348

45 My friend Obrad Kesic is one of those who see a larger Pan-Slavist program in Garasanin's work, but in my view this is a minor key compared to the *Nacertanje's* greater Serb orientation.

46 Ibid., pp. 343-6. See also Judah, pp.57-60.

a south Slavic—Yugoslav—identity. Karadzic, the Croat Ludovit Gaj, and other intellectuals pursued the contradictory aims of creating linguistic unity and separate national histories. The question of whether a single people or several nations inhabit the region would plague the region until the 1990s, when the second version of Yugoslavia fell apart. South of the Sava the question of who people are and what they should have remains open.

Meanwhile, the glories of defeat in 1389 were revisited by Petar Petrovic Njegos, Bishop and Prince in Montenegro (reigned 1830-1851). His song "The Mountain Wreath" celebrated both the Serbs' choice of heroic defeat in 1389 and his own people's stubborn resistance to the Ottoman conquest.[47] For him, the history of spiritual and physical defiance should lead Serbs to be Piedmont for other Slavs (avant la lettre).[48] According to Tito-era intellectual Vladimir Dedijer, Petrovic Njegos gave the Kosovo myth "…a more optimistic character; it became an anticipation of the future."[49]

The tribes of Montenegro are Serbs who pride themselves on never having been fully conquered by the Ottomans. This victory, not the defeat at Kosovo Polje, has shaped a warrior ethos the sharp end of which was felt by Muslims and Croats during the early stages of the 1992-5 war in Bosnia. In the 1870s the Montenegrins sparked a Balkan-wide uprising against the Ottomans and achieved their independence. From 1878-2006 they would move from monarchy to absorption by Yugoslavia and then again to independence. Serbia's current status as villain of the 1990s has reinforced Montenegrin desires to remain separate, but—depending on events and economics, even given the appeal of the European project—public opinion someday could shift once again.

Serbian and Montenegrin variants of nationalism fit well within the pattern of the communal reinventions going on elsewhere from the Baltic to the Black Sea. While some liberal intellectuals looked to England and France as models, the dominant flavors of nationalism stressed martial virtue and national destiny. Milos's son Michael Obrenovic (reigned 1839-1842, and 1860-1868) sought Great Power support to create a powerful Serbian army with which to lead Romanians, Hungarians, and perhaps Bulgarians in a war of liberation against the Ottoman Empire. His assassination in 1868 killed that idea (so did the Sultan's decision in 1870 to grant Bulgaria its own Orthodox Exarchate—and, therefore, de facto independence—in an effort to create a local Christian obstacle to Serbian ambitions). A shadow of the pan Balkan project reemerged in Tito's effort shortly after World War II to convince Stalin to support his talks with Bulgarian Communist leader (and Comintern-days comrade) Georgei Dimitrov designed to explore the possibility of a Balkan federation.

Michael's assassination continues to inspire a strain of thought that defines a series of political murders as defeats of liberalism and multi-ethnic tolerance among Serbs. Rebecca West interpreted his murder as an opportunity lost—a defeat—which she linked with the assassination of King Alexander Karadjordjevic—another allegedly progressive monarch—at Marseilles in 1934.[50] The killing of Serbia's pro-EU Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in 2003 would unleash similar emotions—judging from the massive turnout at his funeral Djindjic clearly was much more popular in death than he had been while alive.

47 Bideleux and Jeffries, p, 474.

48 Allcock, p. 260, Judah, pp. 62-65 and Bideleux and Jeffries, *The Balkans*, p. 474.

49 Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p. 253.

50 West, p. 536.

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The next Obrenovic prince, Milan, went to war against Bulgaria in 1885, losing badly and tarnishing his family's legitimacy as standard bearer of the nation. Milan reacted by making himself king, but he remained discredited and, in 1889, abdicated in favor of his son, Alexander. The defeat of 1885 was not held to be heroic and did not enjoy the panegyrics that accompanied 1389 or 1690 and would be attached to the catastrophe of 1915-16.

On June 28, 1889 the Obrenovic dynasty attempted to shore up its sagging legitimacy by celebrating the 500th anniversary of the defeat at Kosovo Polje. References to the battle peppered speeches and declarations, and symbols of the great defeat now were added to the ruling house's coat of arms.[51] This led to an outpouring of literature and painting on patriotic themes, often highlighting the events of 1389 and the trek of the Vojvods in 1690. There was no mention of anything to do with the defeat suffered four years earlier.

Obrenovic efforts to tie themselves to the spiritual triumphs of archetypal defeat failed. Alexander Obrenovic's profligacy, weakness, unpopular marriage, and perceived subservience to Austria-Hungary led to his bloody overthrow in 1903. Rebecca West claimed one of his sins was that he took from Serbs their dream of avenging the ancient defeat at Kosovo Polje.[52] Petar Karadjordjevic became king, ending the inter-dynastic rivalry.

Ottoman decline, Austria's catastrophic defeat by Prussia in 1866, and the outcome of the wars of the 1870s convinced Serbian nationalists they could unite all the lands in which Serbs live. Kosovo remained one target. In 1911, the great Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic displayed a presentation of Obilic, the hero of 1389, at an exhibition in Rome. It was moved to the main hall of Belgrade's national museum in preparation for a temple to be built at the battlefield of Kosovo Polje. This project did not come to fruition, but heroic architecture and sculpture were completed in Krusevac, Lazar's capital in 1389, and at Karadjordj's burial site.[53]

The Serbian national project of the late nineteenth century proceeded against a backdrop of economic backwardness as well as the memory of ancient defeat—both problems remain relevant in the early 21st century. Serbia was largely rural, and railroad construction lagged behind other areas, most prominently Bosnia-Herzegovina under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Finance Ministry.[54] Competing priorities of great power investors—who cared more about moving goods through the Balkans on their way elsewhere than about providing transportation that would enable local trade and travel—skewed railroad routes.[55]

Meanwhile, from 1878 to 1914 the Serbian population grew from 1.7 to 3.0 million—a rate three times that of Britain and France on the same period.[56] The community needed that growth, given the enormous losses it would suffer during the wars that dominated rest of the century:

- 15,000 in the Balkan wars of 1912-13 (plus a similar number from typhus);
- 275,000 in World War I (40% of all mobilized men) plus 150,000 from

51 Judah, p. 68.

52 West, p. 551.

53 Judah, p. 69.

54 Ibid., p. 330.

55 Allcock, pp. 42-3.

56 Palairet, p. 165

disease and another 25,000 Montenegrins;

- More than a million in World War II, when concentration camp victims are counted;
- Thousands of Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia during the wars of the 1990s, along with the end of a cohesive Serbian community in the Krajina and a long-term exodus of Serbs from Kosovo in the wake of ethnic demographic inundation.[57]

Until 1913 Serbia possessed no lands on which significant members of other nations or ethnicities lived.[58] This would change with the Balkan wars. During 1912-13 Serbia finally gained control of the Kosovo Polje battlefield, "wiping out" the stain of 1389.[59] The Serbs wanted to occupy Albania, an idea blocked by Austria-Hungary. Serbian forces also conquered Skopje, involving Serbs in what until then had been largely a Greek-Bulgarian struggle over Macedonia and the identity of Macedonians. During the second Balkan War in 1913 Serbia and Bulgaria fought over Macedonian territory. The Serb dog in this fight was religious—at this time the Macedonian Orthodox Church remained subservient to the Serb Millet, which in the Ottoman system gave Serbian clerical hierarchs authority over Macedonian identity. At the end of the 1950s Macedonian Slavs received their own Church from Titoas part of his effort to balance communal authority and restrict Serbian influence in his Yugoslavia. The question of who owns the word "Macedonia" and who Macedonian Slavs are remains unresolved.

The Balkan wars distracted attention from the fact that by this time the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the newly hyphenated Austria-Hungary—and the annexation of that province in 1908, which did much to heighten tensions between Vienna and St. Petersburg—had shifted much Serbian attention to the plight of co-nationals in the Dual Monarchy. Several nationalist organizations with violent programs sprung up with the approval or leadership of Serbian generals and other officials. At the same time, during the 1906-9 commercial "Pig War" between Vienna and Belgrade (the latest in a series of trading tensions over pork products) [60] Austria-Hungary failed to punish Serbia for either its low prices or its hostile security policies. For Serbian nationalists, it was time to include in their modernist, nationalist fold not only Kosovo but also co-nationals in Bosnia, the Krajina, and wherever else one could say "here is Serbia."

6. 1915—Apotheosis of Triumphant Defeat

The decision by Archduke Franz Ferdinand to go to Sarajevo (and to take his wife!) on June 28, 1914, the anniversary of the battle of Kosovo Polje, was a decision as avoidable as it was provocative. In the context of the time and place, it is not just hindsight to suggest better staff work and advice from the field should have provoked more serious consideration of the risks of rubbing in the specter of 1389 and of Habsburg control over Serbs in Bosnia. At his trial, Gavrilo

57 Allcock, pp. 155-158.

58 See Palairet, p. 330.

59 West, p. 13.

60 Palairet, pp. 98-104.

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Princip—the assassin—spoke of the connection between the sacrifice of 1389 and his own deed, which he said was necessary to advance the cause of south Slav unity.[61] Another conspirator spoke ominously about the need to drive Albanians out of Kosovo.[62] The great wars of the first half of the twentieth century were on.

At first, the unexpected happened. Serbia, expecting to make another heroic and spiritual sacrifice more than held its own against an assault it was clear Vienna had been planning for some time. In August and again in October 1914 the Serbs took advantage of better leadership and knowledge of the ground to stop Austro-Hungarian invaders (and their contingent of Croatian troops) in their tracks. However, this victory was only the prelude to what would become a new myth of Serbian defeat, a catastrophic retreat that would be embraced as a spiritual victory and a necessary national sacrifice.

In 1915 both the Allies and Central Powers wanted to lure Greece, Romania and Bulgaria into the war. Some on the Allied side hoped Serbia would be willing to make territorial concessions to Bulgaria. Belgrade, unwilling to give up the gains of 1913 refused, leading Winston Churchill to call Serbia "obdurate," "recalcitrant," "stubborn," and "unreasonable." Churchill, angry that Bulgaria's decision to join the other side meant it would not draw Ottoman forces away from their defense against his failing assault on Gallipoli, offered Serbia no sympathy for the trouble that came next.[63] In any case, once Bulgaria made its intentions known there was no way for the allies to do much for Serbia—their closest presence was a tenuous outpost in Thessaloniki in still-neutral Greece.

Bulgaria joined Germany and Austria-Hungary in a three-sided assault on Serbia that left the latter no chance of staving off disaster. By the middle of October Serbian forces were in full retreat, with the aged King Petar, Alexander—his son and regent—and Serbia's political and military commanders in tow. A Serbian officer noted that priests, teachers, students, and women and children also joined what amounted to the nation in retreat.[64]

The withdrawing army passed directly through the battlefield at Kosovo Polje, leading its commanders to consider whether Serbia should stand and suffer an historic, disastrous physical sacrifice for the sake of eventual spiritual triumph. Although Rebecca West portrayed Serbia as fighting "its last stand,"[65] Petar, Alexander, and the others actually decided to choose an earthly kingdom over a spiritual one. They fought only a stalling action and focused on saving themselves and their army.[66] In other words, they chose the limited status of defeat over something more catastrophic and less likely to overcome.

At the same time, the Serbs gathered up the coffins of some of the medieval Nemanja kings, carrying their dead monarchs along with their living ones.[67] The multitude camped near the medieval Patriarchate of Pec, a sacred site that underscored the connection between physical defeat and spiritual commitment in Serbian identity.[68]

61 Gerolymatos, pp. 40-1.

62 Judah, p. 149.

63 Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis*, vol. II, pp. 485-487, 493. See also vol. VI, pp. 339-48..

64 Allcock, pp. 99-100.

65 West, p. 585.

66 Glenny, p. 334.

67 West., pp. 583-87.

68 David Mitrany, *The Effect of the War in Southeastern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1936), pp. 242-7.

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The retreat moved from Kosovo into Albania, where the harsh winter, shortages of food and other supplies, typhus, and attacks by Albanian irregulars created havoc. Whether one blames Albanians for inflicting suffering on an army as haggard as it was defeated or—with Sabrina Ramet—believes the Albanians were merely avenging poor treatment of ethnic Albanians at the hands of the Serbs after they had taken Kosovo in 1913,[69] these incidents amounted to the first organized conflict between two communities that would increasingly come to see each other as irreconcilably hostile Others. Rebecca West quoted an ethnic Albanian cab driver's "hatred" of Serbs for their harsh treatment of Kosovar Albanians once they regained control of the province after the War.[70]

The remnants of this exodus—to include the old King and his son—were evacuated to Corfu by a British warship in March 1916. 120,000 went to Bizerte in North Africa, where they refitted and prepared to strike back.[71] Once Greece joined the allied side, the Serbian army joined the allies at Thessaloniki and took part in the victorious campaign of 1918. In all, Serbia suffered the deaths of an estimated 275,000 soldiers and 800,000 civilians,[72] and overall suffered more casualties as a percentage of its population and a percentage of fighting-age men than any other combatant in World War I.

The retreat of 1915-16 became an iconic triumph of sacrifice. Memories stirred by this triumphant defeat somewhat resembled British pride in the evacuation of Dunkirk. The plaintive song "Tamo Daleko" ("Over There, Far away") entered the national canon. In contrast to the World War II experience, no collaborationist regime kowtowed to the occupiers' administration in Belgrade, and no civil war between Serbs of varying ideological bents sullied the memory of seamless Serbian heroism.[73] (West dismissed rumors that Prince Alexander had considered a separate peace with the Central Powers.[74])

In addition, Churchill aside, many in France and Britain—almost certainly unaware of Serbian treatment of Albanians in 1913-1914—expressed admiration for the heroism of their Serbian allies. International respect for Serbian sacrifice became something many Serbs felt they deserved; they would look for it again with much more disappointing results in the 1940s and 1990s.

In 1936, David Mitrany gave pride of place to this heroic defeat in his study of the effect of the War in southeastern Europe.[75] He quoted Dragoljub Jovanovic, a leading left-wing Agrarian Socialist politician who had participated in the retreat (and would be jailed for a time when King Alexander assumed dictatorial powers in 1929) as referring to the "Bezanja," a disorderly, endless flight that was the "most vivid" Serbian memory of the war.[76] Mitrany devoted a long appendix to Jovanovic's version of these events and referred to the Serbs as a "nation

69 Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 48.

70 West, pp. 1000-1.

71 Judah, p. 100.

72 According to Judah, p. 100

73 However, the German administrative hand was much lighter than in World War II, leading to decent relations between the Germans and the Serbian population («almost to friendship,» according to Mitrany—p. 150) a fact that helped the Nazis gain some traction in the region when they used trade concessions to increase their influence in the 1930s.

74 West, pp. 768-9.

75 Mitrany, The Effect of the War in Southeastern Europe.

76 Ibid., p. 415. Jovanovic

perpetually in defeat and diaspora."[77] Jovanovic's recollections demonstrated that not only nationalists were caught up in the national myths—a precedent suggesting no one should be surprised that contemporary Serbian pro-Western politicians see no contradiction in simultaneously opposing the independence of Kosova and embracing the European Union. In telling his tale, Jovanovic quoted an A. M. Devetcherski (Mitrany's spelling) to make the 1915-1916 Bezanja sound like 1389: "...We were laid low on earth but we wept not at all, we died in silence as a great mourning is silent—silent like the Passion on the Cross at Jerusalem."[78] Jovanovic himself claimed a connection between this triumphant defeat and the earlier time "when the banner of the Crescent appeared on the horizon."[79]

The lasting impact of these events on Serbian identity was brought home to me while I was in Belgrade during the 1990s, and particularly during a visit in October 1994. This was a time when many Serbs felt victimized by the collapse of Yugoslavia and by their having become the objects of widespread international blame for those events and for accompanying atrocities. A film (partly documentary) depicting the heroism and sacrifice of 1915-16 often was played on Belgrade television. While I was there in 1994 it seemed almost to be running as a non-stop loop.

The current international unpopularity of Serbs and Serbia makes it easy to forget just how heroic was their image as the victors in 1919 debated how to replace Ottoman and Habsburg sovereignty in the Balkans. Serb representatives in Versailles contrasted their community's heroic sacrifices to the fact that Slovenes and Croats fought with the Austro-Hungarian enemy. As a result, Serbs—along with Poles and Romanians—were the benefactors of the peace (and were expected by the French to administer large entities capable of helping to blunt German power should the status quo of 1919 not hold). The Karadjordjevic dynasty was granted sway over an agglomeration that included access to the Adriatic along with newly acquired communities of Albanians, Macedonians, and Bosnian Muslims, along with cohesive Slovene and Croatian nations. Serbian attempts to annex Albania proper were blocked by Woodrow Wilson, starting an Albanian love affair with America that only now is beginning to fade. It may have been a kingdom of the "Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes," but only the first of these felt any sense of ownership.

7. "Defeat" Begins to Have a Sour Taste

For Serb nationalists history should have stopped in 1921. That was when the government of the new kingdom promulgated a new constitution on—of course—June 28, the anniversary of the battle of Kosovo Polje. The details of this "Vidovdan" constitution mattered less than the fact that the government chose to use the seminal date to press into the minds of other citizens that wherever they lived "here is Serbia." Belgrade tried to move Serbian colonists into Macedonia to do to that place what Han settlers are doing to Xinjiang, but

77 Ibid., p. 416 and Appendix II.

78 Ibid., p. 247.

79 Ibid., p. 240ff.

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this failed to significantly shift the ethnic balance.[80] What became "Yugoslavia" never was a unified civic state. It should have surprised no one when it fell part in the 1940s and again in the 1990s, and it should not surprise anyone in the future when various inter-communal disputes once again shuffle contemporary post-Yugoslav arrangements (which have continued to shift after the death of Tito's Federation).

The interwar democratic "international community" had to compete with vibrant, attractive Fascist and Communist alternatives, and so lacked the teleological confidence of current transatlantic authorities and publicists. As the Franco-British alliance cracked and the post-Locarno (1925) optimism was shattered by economic catastrophe, few held to the illusion that they had established a permanent order in 1919. There was little sentiment along the lines of the post-1995 single-minded insistence that multi-ethnic integration in civic democracies within unchangeable borders is the only possible road to modernity and prosperity. In the 1920s, continuing restiveness among dissatisfied communities produced experiments in population transfers (for example, between Greeks and Turks in 1923) and plebiscites (Silesia and Teschen come to mind). A multi-ethnic provincial administration under a French general in Thrace more closely resembled the post-1995 vice-regal system, but the Powers quickly realized that this would not work.[81]

This is not to say that there was no effort to create a central and east European economic zone subsidiary to the liberal powers. In 1919, the newly minted Czechoslovakia offered Belgrade a partnership in creating a transportation and trade corridor between the two countries.[82] This was blocked by Austria and Hungary, who had little incentive to play second fiddle to larger entities that controlled territories they had just lost. In addition, the coming to power of Mussolini in Italy soon gave the War's losers prospects for alternative security and economic arrangements.

Serbia's dominant figure focused on internal consolidation even as he basked in the Serbs' international prestige. Alexander Karadjordjevic's problem was to assuage the sense of defeat felt by other communities in his Kingdom—particularly the Croats—a task made difficult by Serbia's celebration of its sense of territorial and political entitlement. Domestically, Alexander played down the Serbian nationalism on which his throne depended and attempted to work out political arrangements with his Croatian critics—even as he repressed them. He coaxed the imprisoned Stjepan Radic, head of the Croatian peasant Party and a leading opponent of the creation of Yugoslavia in 1919, into a political arrangement, only to have that shattered in 1928, when a Serbian nationalist assassinated Radic on the floor of the federal parliament. Alexander then assumed dictatorial powers and attempted to encourage a civic identity by renaming regional spaces to replace historically charged names with terms reflecting local geographic features. This seemed to create more ethnic resentment than civic identity, so much so that Alexander himself was murdered in 1934.

Alexander's assassination in Marseilles (French Foreign Minister Philippe Barthieu also was killed), a plot that had both Croatian and Macedonian nationalists' fingerprints, led Rebecca West (whose visit was only three years later) to claim that a new war in the region was prevented only by Yugoslav

80 Allcock, p. 162

81 Mitrany, p. 260-2.

82 Ibid., p. 177

"forbearance"[83]. When war did come once more it produced immediate defeats for Serbs that were much less spiritually satisfying than the experience of 1915-16 and set in motion serial "defeats" that would accumulate in layers for the next half century.

8. From World War II Through the Tito Years: One Serb's Victory is Another Serb's Defeat.

The crises of 1939-1941 divided Serbian elites and ended the short period in which Yugoslavia was a Serbian-dominated entity. Prince Paul, Alexander's successor, led a regime that curried Croat favor by attempting a Yugoslav variant of the 1866 Habsburg ausgleich, dividing Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia. The interests—and existence—of Bosnian Muslims were largely ignored. This agreement ("Sporazum") would become the basis of a similar initiative in the 1990s that would again have disadvantaged Bosnian Muslims if they had not fought to prevent their marginalization. In 1941, Paul's ministers looked to deal with the Germans, which led other Serbian politicians and generals to revolt. The ensuing chaos induced the German invasion that finished the Karadjordjevic period (in exile, the family would divide—and remain divided—along rival blood lines) and shattered the first Yugoslavia. West noted that Yugoslavs recited the epic poems about Kosovo Polje as they went down to defeat.[84]

What was a defeat for Serbs was a victory for Croats. Local fascists (the "Ustashe") organized the first independent Croatian state since at least the 11th century and extended its writ into Bosnia. The brutality of this regime was something Serbs continue to harp on to this day, but many Croats treated (and treat) the atrocities as less important than this state's reflection of genuine national identity. In the 1990s Croatian President Franjo Tudjman certainly held this view. However, it is worth noting that pockets of anti-Fascist cooperation did exist in Bosnia between Serbs and Croats, if only as a relatively minor exception to the record of hostility and violence that dominated the period.[85]

At the same time, Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo fought their second round. An estimated 10, 000 Serbs died in the violence and—in 1941 alone—perhaps 100,000 Serbs left the province.[86] Some Albanians rose in revolt in 1944 when they came to realize the postwar settlement once again would force them to reside inside a "Yugoslavia." Atrocities committed by both sides created memories that would feed the destructive, visceral hostility that continues to characterize too many narratives and behaviors involving relations between Serbs and Albanians.[87] In 1944, Vasa Cubrilovic, one of the plotters against Franz Ferdinand and a professor at Belgrade University, repeated demands he had

83 West, p. 2.

84 Ibid., p. 1145.

85 See Emily Greble Balic, «When Croatia Needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941-2,» *Slavic Review*, vol. LXIII, 1, Spring 2009, pp. 116-138.

86 Judah, p. 141.

87 See Helena Zdravkovic-Zonta, «Narratives of Victims and Villains in Kosovo,» *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 37, #1, September 2009, pp. 665-692 (and especially 672-278).

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made for years to "cleanse" the area of Albanians and other minorities.[88]

Cubrilovic adjusted his message to take account of the prevailing political wind. He praised Stalin for his policy of moving minorities and even titular majorities to suit his increasingly Russian-centered approach to identity politics. Even by 1944, Cubrilovic likely understood that postwar Yugoslavia would not resemble the Serbian-dominated kingdom created at Versailles. It also is worth noting that Cubrilovic would later become a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and help carry forward Serbian nationalism into the Tito years.

In contrast to the iconic, unified Serbian trek of 1915, during World War II those Serbs who took action split into collaborationists, royalist/nationalist fighters, and Communist partisans. General Nedic, the collaborationist leader, sounded more like France's Petain than Tsar Lazar when he said he came into government to "save the people and keep them from destroying each other… What can we do now?..We are a grain of sand in the agitated global sea."[89]

The royalist Chetniks were not as brutal as the Ustashe, but shared with them a greater focus on sectarian identity than on the implications of how they behaved or who they dealt with.[90] Over time, they became as likely to cooperate with Germans as with Tito's Communist partisans in their effort to restore a Serb-dominated state. Their program existed as a point in the line extending from the Nacertanje (1844) through the triumphant settlement of 1919, on ahead to the 1986 Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences—a lament on the subject of Serb defeat and victimization in the Tito years—and to the revival in the 1990s of the nineteenth century Serbian Radical party, the "Chetnik" name, and other manifestations of nationalist recidivism.

Josip Broz "Tito" was neither a Serb nor a nationalist. His Croat/Slovene background was much less important than the Stalinist identity he adopted while in the Soviet Union between the wars. From the time of his insertion into Yugoslavia, Tito was intent on replacing the Serb kingdom with a Communist state that would subsume national identities but also adapt the blueprints of the various systems that had come before. He assembled a group of lieutenants representing each of the country's major nationalities (except for Albanian and Bosnian Muslim); these figures would run their various "home" regions once the war ended. As Serbs were the country's largest and dominant group (and were the engine of his Chetnik opponents), Tito knew he would have to make a conscious effort to hold down residual Serbian pretentions. What he likely underestimated was how often and how intensively this task would skew his future policies, and how often those policies would refresh Serbian perceptions of suffering repeated "defeat."

From the moment he defeated his Chetnik opponents, Tito made clear his intention to rein in Serbian pretensions to reclaiming their previous status as the dominant community. He executed Draza Mihailovic, the Chetnik leader, drew internal borders so as to put as many Serbs as possible in the republics of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina—where they were handicapped by their minority status—[91] and created a Macedonian republic independent of Serbian control. Ivalyo Ditchev has characterized Tito's policies then and later as an effort

88 Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, Diplomacy on the Edge: Containment of Ethnic conflict and Minorities Working Group of the Conference on Yugoslavia (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), p. 34

89 Ramet, The Three Yugoslavias, p.132.

90 See ibid., p. 145.

91 Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *The Balkans: a Postwar History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 345.

to instill in Serbs a sense that they were an "other" rather than the special, active agent of Yugoslav life.[92]

To be sure, Tito's harsh punishment of Croatian Fascists and the allegedly collaborationist Zagreb Archbishop Alois Stepinac satisfied some demands for retribution against wartime atrocities, but hard feelings concerning the treatment of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (by Muslims as well as Croats) would fester through the wars of the 1990s. In addition, the Partisans' apparent equation of Fascist Croatia and (Serb) royalist Yugoslavia as equally anathema would rankle Serbian sensibilities. Serbs continue to debate whether the Chetniks were fascist or anti-fascist, mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic, heroic or not.[93]

Tito's policies amounted to a series of "defeats" for Serb interests that maintained a balance in identity politics while he was alive, but also stoked the self-destructive nationalism that would help tear the region apart in the 1990s. The creation of Macedonia was followed by the granting of an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church, a nod to Ottoman notions of identity-by-faith that nullified the authority of Serbian clerics over Macedonian souls that had existed since the Sultan had first granted Serbia its Millet.

Meanwhile, internal Communist political jockeying removed the most powerful Serb in the country in a development recognized by all Yugoslavs as a major blow to Serbian communal status. Alexander Rankovic had been with Tito since the earliest days of the anti-Fascist struggle. After the War he not only ran Serbia but gained control over Yugoslavia's security organs. Even though he was Communist centralizer rather than nationalist in personal orientation,[94] Serbs saw him as "their" man in the inner circle—his predilection toward centralism meshed with the nationalists' goal of restoring rule by the country's dominant community.[95] His popularity among Serbs contrasted with the mistrust at least some of them felt toward Edvard Kardelj, the Slovene who was self-styled ideologist of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY, as the Party came to be called after the split with Stalin). Kardelj's wife blamed an assassination attempt against him on "leading Serbs" in the LCY,[96] a likely reference to Rankovic.

It still is debated whether Rankovic fell because he was too devoted to Serbian interests, because his power was coming to rival Tito's, or because he allegedly made the mistake of bugging Tito's private office. In any case, his removal in 1966 lurched Yugoslavia's political pendulum away from centralization and enabled a series of autonomist movements among the country's various ethnic communities.[97]

In turn, these foreshadowed the kind of nationalism among Serbs and non-Serbs that would contribute to the later destruction of Yugoslavia. Rankovic's fall and the fact that Croatian Party boss Vladimir Bakaric had played an

92 Ivalyo Ditchev, «The Eros of Identity» in Dusan J. Bjelic and Obrad Savic, eds., *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 236.

93 For one such debate, see the exchange between Slobodan Vuckovic and Olivera Milosavljevic, «Debate: anti-Fascism in Serbia,» peschanik.net June 28 (Vidovdan!), 2009.

94 I am grateful to Professor John V. A. Fine, Jr. for our discussion on this point during a conference at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver on June 24, 2010.

95 Judah, p. 143.

96 Ramet, p. 218.

97 It also brought to prominence Petar Stambolic, whose role in the removal of Rankovic would rebound against his nephew Ivan when Slobodan Milosevic challenged his leadership in 1987. Ramet, ibid.

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important role in purging him[98] led to a nationalist backlash in Serbia and nationalist assertiveness in Croatia. The next few years witnessed the coming to prominence of nationalists in the Croatian party and outside it—to include General Franjo Tudjman, who would lead Croatia to independence—and the growth of insecurity among Serbs in the Krajina. Meanwhile, Tito's decision to permit citizens to declare themselves "Muslims" in the census of 1971 angered Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

What perhaps angered Serbian nationalists the most was the demand for autonomy by Albanians in Kosovo. Ethnic Albanian press organs had called for Republican status since at least 1965.[99] The Serbian nationalist and novelist Dobrica Cosic wrote pamphlets complaining about ethnic Albanian irredentism and hinted that perhaps Serbs and Serbia might be better off if they were not burdened by the constraint of being part of the larger Yugoslav entity. In 1968, riots in Kosovo spread into largely Albanian parts of Macedonia, leading to concessions to ethnic Albanian demands for wider rights to self-expression and—in a decision that Serbia still does not recognize—to the dropping of "Metohija" (a term linking Kosovo to the Serbian Orthodox Church) from the province's name ("Kosovo and Metohija").[100]

The ferment of the years following the fall of Rankovic—which included squabbles between nationalists (many inside the Serbian and Croatian "Communist" parties) over old Serbian claims to Dalmatia[101]—led to purges led by Tito himself, but the Great Man continued to acquiesce in a decisive tilt toward decentralization. The constitution of 1974 gave Vojvodina and Kosovo, Serbia's two provinces, a status virtually equal to the existing republics. During the life remaining to Yugoslavia, Serbs in Vojvodina and Serbia proper would squabble over resources and Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia would feel they were losing ownership of the ancestral heartland. On the other hand, Kosovar Albanians took control of the local Party structure and of the "commanding heights" of provincial power.

During Tito's last decade of life and after his death in 1980 Cosic bitterly attacked the Constitution of 1974.[102] He, other nationalists, and press organs in Serbia ratcheted up complaints that Serbs and Montenegrins were being driven from Kosovo, presumably by ethnic Albanians.[103] Poor economic conditions likely were as important to this as any inter-communal persecution,[104] but nationalist agitation increased in the province the context of a decentralized system held together by fragile, revolving state and LCY leaderships. Ominously, Vuk Draskovic, a royalist novelist who would turn into a politician, wrote stories of Muslim atrocities against Serbs in Bosnia, drawing attention to a Serbian sense that they could be defeated there as well as in Kosovo.[105]

98 See Rusinow, Yugoslavia: Oblique Insights and Observations, p. 140

99 Bideleux and Jeffries, *The Balkans*, p. 528.

100 Ibid., p. 529.

101 Ramet, pp. 233-4.

102 Sonja Biserko, «Dobrica Cosic and the Last defense of Serb Nationalism,» Pescanik.net, November 11, 2008.

103 See Ahrens, p. 307, for numbers that remain controversial.

104 For example, Bideleux and Jeffries, p. 534.

105 Judah, p. 79.

9. Setting Serbia Up for Defeat

The discontent of Serbian nationalists with their community's status came to a head in 1986. A "memorandum" written by Mihailo Markovic and other luminaries at the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences attacked Yugoslavia's "general process of disintegration" and claimed that "the physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija is a worse historical defeat than any experienced in the liberation wars waged by Serbia from the first Serbian uprising in 1804 to the uprising of 1941." The authors went on to warn that the threat of Serbian assimilation in Serbs in Croatia was akin to Ustashe atrocities.[106]

This document, likely crafted with the 1844 Nacertanje in mind but designed to have a more incendiary impact, drew the conclusion that Serbs would be better off in a smaller, cohesive Serbian state than in the failing polyglot Yugoslavia. Events of the next few years would prove the dangers of getting what you ask for; Yugoslavia would fall apart but neither Serbs nor most other Yugoslavs would count themselves as better off. Slobodan Milosevic, a second-tier Serbian politician/"banker," said little about the Memorandum when it was first publicized,[107] but in 1987 would use a staged defense of Serbian rights in Kosovo to grab power.

Milosevic and more authentic Serbian recidivists failed to see the contradiction in their positions. His efforts to gain control of a majority of votes in Yugoslavia's rickety revolving system merely caused the thing to come crashing down—with dangerous implications for a figure who found himself forced to deal with Serbian nationalist causes in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo that he really did not care much about. Meanwhile, the authors of the 1986 "Memorandum" failed to understand that they could not both achieve the ruin of the Yugoslav system and dictate that all Serbs in the Yugoslav space be included in the "pure" Serbian state they wanted to create.

In short, the paladins of Serbian nationalism did not think their project through. Biljana Plavsic, a Bosnian Serb leader in the 1990s and a convicted war criminal, declared that "we Serbs shall be brazen, determined, inflexible, and never agree to recognize anything. The World will get tired of us."[108] She was wrong. Serbs would suffer a string of defeats in the context of communal scars and dissatisfactions that continue to threaten the current regional quiet Westerners tend to mistake as "final status." Dobrica Cosic, who once had termed Milosevic Serbia's greatest politician since nineteenth century nationalist Nikola Pasic, would come to blame the "Macbeth from Pozerevac" for Serbia's catastrophic defeat.

106 See ibid., pp. 4, 158, and Ramet, pp. 319-323.

107 Ramet, p. 321.

108 Biserko, op. cit.

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10. Defeat and Denial: The Wars of the 1990s and Serbian Self-Delusion

The proximate cause of Yugoslavia's collapse was a budget crisis in Slovenia that had been building since at least 1984, but Milosevic's seizure of control over the votes of Montenegro, Kosovo, and Vojvodina injected centrifugal finality to what originally had been a quarrel among leaders afraid to push things too far. Milosevic was a political tactician without a strategic vision—his narrow-minded political maneuvering succeeded in dividing others but provided neither personal legitimacy nor a sense of communal purpose. He wanted simultaneously to replace Tito as regional strongman[109] and make himself over into the indispensible partner of the so-called "international community"—witness his central role in forging with US officials the 1995 Dayton agreement in Bosnia over the objections of Bosniak leader Alija Izetbegovic. His failure to dominate all of Yugoslavia enabled a pointless process of amputation that piled defeat upon defeat among Serbs throughout the old federal space.[110]

Worse, Milosevic did not understand that he was not particularly popular. He learned nothing from his mismanagement of an effort at local election fraud in 1996 that almost brought him down. His decision to risk an unnecessary presidential election in 2000 was predicated on a notion that NATO's aerial assault against Serbia and Serb forces in Kosovo in 1999 had burnished his personal appeal. In fact, the bombing united the nation against what most Serbs viewed as international aggression. In 2000 Milosevic did not recognize that he had lost the support of the small town working classes and rural workers who previously could be counted on to counter (with disdain) the street noises made by Belgrade students and intellectuals.

In the final analysis, Slobodan Milosevic was more incompetent than brutal. He quickly capitulated to Slovenia's secession from Yugoslavia, never gave more than furtive, limited support to Serbs in Croatia or Bosnia, quietly accepted Serbian defeats in both places,[111] and capitulated in June 1999 rather than permit an army I believe was intact and eager to fight to resist a threatened NATO ground offensive in Kosovo.[112]

This is not the place to rehash the oft-told tale of how the Federation fell apart except to make three points relevant to the theme of "defeat." First, Serbs had much to lose and—despite what I believe is a common tendency among them to deny the fact of defeat—lose they did. Slovenia and Croatia naturally benefitted from a separation that moved them toward Western markets and institutions.[113] Serbia, on the other hand, has found itself stuck farther "east" in terms of economy and social development. Serbs were used to being heroes and were shocked at Western treatment of them as villains; despite clear warnings from US and NATO officials, 78 percent of Serbs responding to a poll run by the

109 Allcock, p. 430

110 Judah, pp. 196-197.

111 Ahrens, Diplomacy on the Edge, p. 253. Krajina Serbs objected to the Austrian Ahrens' leadership of the international negotiating effort in Croatia on the grounds that his fellow «Germans» had behaved abominably in the region during World War II (for example, by allowing the creation of the Croatian fascist state).

112 For other assessments of Milosevic's operational record, see Allcock, p. 495 and Srdja Popovic, «Milosevic's Motiveless Malignancy,» Pescanik.net, March 11, 2009.

113 See Allcock., p. 427

domestic news magazine NIN two weeks before NATO started bombing in 1999 believed the assault would not take place.[114]

Second, the Western mantra that there are no military solutions in the Balkans is demonstrably false. Outside of Macedonia's self-determination (so far) and, perhaps, Montenegro's independence, all of the current political arrangements in the former Yugoslav space were determined by military victory and defeat. From Slovenia's clever 10-day campaign against the Yugoslav National Army, through the reversal of military fortunes that first created and then destroyed the "Republic of the Serb Krajina," the four-year war in Bosnia-Herzegovina that resulted in a partition that belied Western rhetoric about the inevitability of integrated democracy and multi-ethnic integration, and the military campaign that separated some but not all of Kosova from its Serbian masters, "kinetic" victory and defeat largely determined diplomacy, not the reverse.

Third, ad hoc, often confused international recognition of post-Yugoslav successor states based on internal Titoist-era administrative lines marked a signal defeat for the Serbs. Western insistence on multi-cultural teleology drowned out the fact that the Serbs had a point in arguing against the internationals' approach. German, American, and other international mavens blessed Slovenia, Croatia, and the non-Serb communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina when they chose to secede from the collapsing federation, but then arbitrarily declared that cohesive Serbian communities located outside Yugoslavia's Serbian republic could not secede from the new states, either to join greater Serbia or go out on their own. Alone among the competing nationalities, the Serbs were prevented from achieving the 19th century-style nationalizing projects that—despite Western rhetoric to the contrary—dominated political development in all the new states.[115]

In the final analysis, the breakup of Yugoslavia underscored the self-defeating contradiction of Serbian nationalism. Without the federation so maligned by Serbian nationalists, Serbia lost its influence over non-Serbian communities without gaining a space in which wherever Serbs lived "here is Serbia." Srdja Popovic noted that Serbs only had two ideas for their state—greater Serbia and Yugoslavia—and had now lost them both.[116]

The Serbs suffered material loss of territory and resources. Defeat in the field destroyed the 400 year old Serbian martial community in the Krajina—the Serbs who returned to Croatia after the exodus are simply a minority group largely bereft of a communal identity.[117] Wrose, Serbia lost much of Kosova—only north of the Ibar River is the word still spelled with an "o" at the end. Montenegro—which had only been in the same state as Serbia during the Yugoslav decades—went its own way under the leadership of Milo Djukanovic, an erstwhile Milosevic functionary who discovered his democratic credentials in the wake of mirror errors of judgment regarding whether Milosevic would survive the electoral crises of 1996 and 2000.

Perhaps the worst defeat of all was the opprobrium visited upon Serbia by international observers who blamed the Serbs for the bulk of activities once common to military and civil conflict but now termed "war crimes." Serbia, the

114 Judah, p. 327.

115 Ugo Vlaisavljevic, «The South Slav Identity and the Ultimate War Reality,» in Bjelic and Savic, pp. 191-201.

116 Srdja Popovic, «Serb Anomie,» Pescanik.net, January 24, 2009.

117 See Bideleux and Jeffries, p. 198.

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underdog of 1914, tragic hero of 1915-16, and sacrificial space of 1941 became the villain of the 1990s. Serbs' share in the killings, rapes, forced evacuations (grouped under the neologism "ethnic cleansing"), and other acts came under the scrutiny of a "Europe" that carved out ethical distance from its own violence and defeat in the 20th century and reinvented itself as culturally evolved.

Serb spokemen seethed at being thus vilified. In a speech at the reopening of a bridge that had been destroyed in the 1999 bombing one noted that Europe was both the measure and the enemy of Serbia. Milosevic called his homeland the "most European" of countries.[118] Tomislav Longinovic suggested that Western vilification made the Serbs into a new version of Balkan "vampire," monsters whose image stood in sharp contrast to the heroic patina enjoyed by the also-violent Serbs who assassinated Franz Ferdinand in 1914.[119] Serbs certainly bear responsibility for their actions, no matter the record of self-righteous and often incoherent Western interventions. The thoughtless and brutal use of local Serbian firepower in Bosnia and Belgrade's organs of repression in 1990s Kosovo led only to defeat and self-degradation.

While some Europeans—for example French President Francois Mitterrand—reminded their publics about the record of Serbian heroism,[120] to other observers the image of "Serb" morphed from warrior to rapist.[121] The ouster and death of Milosevic did not wipe clean the stain of international opprobrium; the ability of Djukanovic to tip the balance among evenly divided Montenegrins toward independence in 2006 depended critically on Serbia's loss of face in the wake of the debate over "war crimes." Some Serbs still refuse to acknowledge culpability of Bosnian Serb forces in the massacre at Srebrinica—the worst atrocity committed in Europe since World War II. Despite a belated parliamentary resolution acknowledging the crime, too many still either shrug off those killings by saying that the behavior of Serbs was no worse than the behavior of the other post-Yugoslav combatants or attempt to obscure what happened in a legalistic haze.[122] Bosnian Serb strongman Milorad Dodik has continued to speak out against using the term "genocide" regarding what happened at Srebrenica.[123]

It is in this context that the appropriation of old national symbols by nationalists and thugs have contributed to what continues to be Serbia's defeat. Returning émigrés with enough money to make trouble, nationalists and poseurs wearing peaked Chetnik caps, and exchanges of insults with nationalists from other Yugoslav shards have left an impression that Serbs—not just but notably—were engaged in atavistic violence.

Intellectual pedantry has not helped matters. As the wars were winding down a Serbian history professor named Branimir Anzulovic propagated the 1389-esque view that Serbs always have been the victims of others "because of their goodness." The time had come, according to Anzulovic, for Serbs to "act aggressively" to right past wrongs and to become "dominant" in the Balkans.[124]

118 Vesna Goldsworthy, «Invention and In (ter) vention,» in ibid., p. 34.

119 Tomislav Z. Longinovic, «Vampires Like US: Gothic Imagery and the Serbs,» in Bjelic and Savic, eds., pp. 39-59.

120 Ahrens, p. 508.

121 Dusan I. Bjelic and Lucinda Cole, «Sexualizing the Serb,» in Bjelic and Savic, pp. 279-310.

122 For example, YUCOM, «Serbia and Remembrance Day of the Srebrenica Genocide, pescanik.net July 26, 2009, and Nenad Dimitrijevic, «The Past, Responsibility, and the Future,» pescanik.net, August 1, 2009.

123 Agence France Press, July 12, 2010.

124 Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 7.

Serbs should not have been surprised when in 2003 Washington turned down the post-Milosevic government offer of 1000 troops in support of US military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even the desire to assemble an international coalition for its invasion of Iraq was not enough to convince the US to accept partnership with the people tarred as the authors of "ethnic cleansing."[125]

At the same time, relations among Serbs suggested that their community was in poor health. Refugees from Croatia and Bosnia often were treated in Serbia as defeated and dishonored, rather than as heroic victims. In particular, there was no effort to cast Croatian and Bosnian refugees in the mold of the trekkers of 1690. Rather, the economically hard-pressed Serbian government disappointed refugees' expectations that they would be provided new homes.[126] Bosnian Serbs resisted when Milosevic attempted to resettle them in Kosovo—evidence of truth in the cliché that Serbs love Kosovo but very few of them are willing to live there. His wife, Mira Markovic, complained in 1995 that some refugees expected "first class lives" in Belgrade and left only the poor to fight in Bosnia and the Krajina. Press gangs trawled Belgrade's restaurants, scooping up Serb men from those places and bussing them back to the front.[127] Judah summed up the situation as follows:

> "For the Serbs who lost their homes there was no Empire of heaven, just flight and humiliation. These people were Arsenije's children. The Serbs, caught up in Lazar's myth, believe they always stand and fight. When defeat looms, though, they are as prudent as other people. They run."[128]

There was one Serbian victory to come out of the 1990s. Despite Western rhetoric about multicultural democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the 1995 Dayton agreement partitioned that place and legitimized the Repubika Srpska as a Serbian entity with minimal ties to the notional Bosnian state. Successful diplomacy by Milosevic in Dayton assured that Serb battlefield defeats of the previous year would not cost them the 49 percent territorial share that had become enshrined in diplomatic back-and-forth during the time when Serb forces had been ascendant. In effect, the Serb leader and US officials partnered to force the deal on a reluctant Alija Izetbegovic as Croatian President Tudjman—whose war aims had been accomplished on the battlefield the previous spring and summer—largely stood by. This success has permitted Bosnia Serbs to benefit from inertia by simply insisting on preserving Dayton as is in the face of recurrent diplomatic onslaughts by Bosniaks and Westerners demanding "reform."

11. Assassination as Defeat

One event forced painful introspection among Serbs as to the meaning of their defeats of the 1990s. The assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic on March 12, 2003 sparked a mass outpouring of grief and anger well out of

125 Bideleux and Jeffries, p. 306.

126 Judah., p. 287.

127 Ibid., p. 296.

128 Ibid., p. 337.

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proportion to the actual popularity of the deceased politician. Djindjic, one of the figureheads of the 2000 rising against Milosevic, had been in a tug-of-war with Vojislav Kostunica to direct Serbia's immediate future. Kostunica was a legal scholar who was nationalistic, skeptical of the West, friendly toward Russia, and widely considered an honest politician (although some of his associates had less sterling reputations). Djindjic had been a student of Juergen Habermas—a leading philosophical icon of the enlightenment and "Europe"—and wanted to take Serbia into the EU and the West. Kostunica pressed for a new constitution to provide a legal baseline for a new Serbia while Djindjic worked to enact less ambitious legislative changes designed to establish the rule of law.

Vesna Pesic, one of the leading figures of 2000 has argued that Djindjic failed in this effort and in his rivalry with Kostunica.[129] She seconded Sabrina Ramet's view that Serb nationalism was incompatible with stability and the rule of law, and concluded that many Serbs remained trapped by the defeat of their dream for a state that would encompass all Serbs wherever they lived. By the time Djindjic was murdered, it seemed clear that Serbia was not about to disgorge its sense of victimization.

An estimated 500,000 people poured onto the streets of Belgrade on March 15, the day of Djindjic's funeral.[130] What struck me was the general sense of self-disgust, with some of his supporters asking if outsiders were right in believing that Serbs were backward and not ready to join the West (that these people believed outsiders held this view struck me as worth noting).

The feeling of that day remains powerful, at least to some. As the sixth anniversary of the assassination approached, Olga Popovic-Obradovic compared Djindjic's murder to the 1934 assassination of King Alexander Karadjordjevic (the 75th anniversary of that event would receive considerable attention in the Serbian press in the fall of 2009) and the murder of Prince Michael Obrenovic in 1868.[131] Popovic-Obradovic agreed with Vesna Pesic that Djindjic had failed to defeat nationalism and Serbia's past.

12. Conclusion: Can Serbia Emerge From Defeat?

Serbs continue to express a sense of defeat. On May 8, 2005 Serbia chose to stand aloof while the rest of Europe celebrated the 60th anniversary of the victory over Fascism in World War II. According to Dubravka Stojanovic, this was because Serbs considered that day a defeat, not a victory, a representation of Soviet occupation, not liberation. In this interpretation Tito and the Communists had won and the Serbs had lost.[132]

In the same vein, in the fall of 2009 a Bosnian Serb website reprinted a sullen complaint in reaction to commemorations of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The author complained that the newly reunified Germany

129 Vesna Pesic, «The Nationalism of an Impossible State,» Pescanik.net, July 18, 2008.

130 Bideleux and Jeffries, p. 301.

131 Olga Popovic-Obradovic, «The Unity of Evil,» Pescanik.net, February 23, 2009.

132 Dubravka Stojanovic, «Revisions of the Second World War History in Contemporary Serbia,» paper presented to the annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, November 15, 2009 and noted here with the author's permission. See also Stojanovic, «Rewriting History to Cover Up a Crime,» Pescanik.net, May 24, 2010.

pressed for the recognition of Slovene and Croatian independence and, in effect, the collapse of former Yugoslavia.[133] 2009 also was the 10th anniversary of the US-led bombing campaign against Kosovo, and some Serbian politicians and public intellectuals railed against NATO "aggression" and the subsequent separation of much of Kosovo from Serbia.[134]

The defeat in Kosovo was punctuated further in July 2010 when the International Court of Justice answered Serbia's question of whether Kosova's declaration of independence violated international law with a direct "no." Serbian President Boris Tadic said that ruling "fell heavily" on his country. [135] Belgrade attempted to recover from this defeat by proposing a resolution for the UN General Assembly that September that would have re-stated Serbia's denial of Kosova's independence. This only made things worse for Belgrade; under EU pressure the resolution's final language acknowledged the ICJ ruling and made no mention of Kosova's status.[136]

There certainly are many Serbs who do not spend their time licking collective wounds, but a focus on defeats—of the distant past and of the second half of the last century—remains an important theme in Serbian introspection and foreign policy. In a sense, Serbia is in something like the place Germany found itself at the end of 1918, defeated, in denial of that defeat or bitter about it, and ready to blame the events that led to defeat on everyone but itself. Kostunica once worried that "…we are perhaps confronted, for the first time in our history, with the possibility that our political and military defeats could become also our spiritual defeats…" He then shifted to a more defiant voice: "The light of the Serb state and the Serb nation was not extinguished at times of the greatest military and political defeats."[137] He pointed to ancient sacrifices and the "moral credit amidst great losses" of the 1915-16 retreat and—like the intellectuals of 1986—rejected the Yugoslav years as distracting from the Serb national project. In a tone that would have fit well in the post-World War I exchange over who was responsible for the catastrophe of 1914, Kostunica attacked Western policies and admitted to no Serbian wrongdoing in the 1990s.

Kostunica is not alone. Vojin Dimitrijevic recently painted the 20th century existence of Yugoslavia—even the first Yugoslavia—as a defeat for Serbs. The Foreign Minister of the current, pro-Western Serbian government railed against the suffering of Serbs in Kosova as part of his government's adamant refusal to accept that place's independence.[138] Mirjana Miocinovic said Serbs are proud of their history and should not allow foreigners' perceptions to get "us" to see ourselves as they do.[139] In a book with the typically neutral title "Culture and Identity," a developer and writer named Igor Ivanovic called for the construction of a "Balkan Tower" made of Serbian peasants' sandals with a peaked (Chetnik)

133 See Pyotr Iskenderov, «Balkan Shadow of Berlin Celebration,» posted on nspm.rs, November 15, 2009.

134 Ivica Dacic, «Unilateral Kosovo Secession Recognition Continued Aggression,» Tanjug, March 23, 2009, and «Serbia still scarred by NATO Strikes a Decade On,» «Serbia's Tadic Addresses UNSC on Kosovo,» Tanjug, March 23, 2009, Agence France Press, March 23, 2009, and «Serbs Recall NATO Raids With Some Anger in Mood of Self Pity,» balkaninsight.net March 25, 2009.

135 Tanjug, July 22, 2010.

136 Financial Times, September 10, 2010, and www.b-92.net, September 10, 2010.

137 Vojislav Kostunica, «The Serb Nation at the Crossroads,» Pescanik.net, April 2, 2009.

138 This diatribe came under the innocuous title «A Peaceful and European Future for Kosovo» (Vuk Jeremic, Athens, *To Vima*, electronic edition, March 17, 2009)

139 Mirjana Miocinovic, «History as Private Property,» Pescanik.net, April 4, 2009.

cap on top to commemorate Serb sacrifices and underscore the point that Serbia "alone" among Balkan peoples has an "authentic" culture.[140] It should be no surprise that a recent poll of Serbs recorded that 22 percent of respondents described the battle of Kosovo Polje as the most important event in history; only 10 percent gave that label to the uprising and liberation from Ottoman rule. The scholar Dubravka Stojanovic concluded from this that the defeat left a "far deeper

140 Ivan Colovic, «Balkan Tower,» Pescanik.net, August 2, 2008.

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mark" than the liberation.[141]

The analogy with post-World War I Germany stops short of 1919. There has been no Treaty of Versailles to assign guilt and Serbia bears no official mark of international condemnation. Still, the quantitative preponderance of Serbs in the dock during war crimes trials in The Hague is a sore point with even many Serbs who want to slough off the past and join "Europe." Indeed, the main consequence of the post-Yugoslav international legal carnival has been to create a sense of defeat among defendants' home communities, whether Serb, Croat, Bosniak, or Kosovar Albanian.

There are countertrends to this communal sullenness. Neither anger at the events of the 1990s nor the nostalgia for Tito among many non-Serbs in former Yugoslavia is strong enough to undermine the hope of joining the European Union that—at least for now—is the strongest desire throughout the former Yugoslav space. The EU is far more appealing now than was the corrupt, indecisive version of Democracy that existed in central and Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, no attractive Communist or Fascist alternative exists as during the interwar years to challenge the legitimacy of the current governments in Serbia or the other Yugoslav successor states. Finally, the global financial crisis of 2008-9 had nowhere near the impact in the region of the depression of the 1930s.

Demands from the Dutch government, Bosniak groups, and international human rights activists for Serbian acknowledgement of the war crimes of the 1990s remains a daily "defeat" for Serbs, but those calls are weakening gradually and need not be decisive as Serbs look to their future. Some Serbs treated the arrests of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic as further communal defeats, but for others these events provided a welcome close to an awful chapter in Serbian and regional history. The issue going forward will be whether Serbia will choose to follow its traditional path of cultivating a self-perception of serial defeat and victimization, or decides instead in favor of an earthly rather than heavenly kingdom. This would require the hard decision to acquiesce in the loss of that part of Kosovo no longer under its control and subsume its national identity in a Europe that is more than a little self-righteous, but also offers the hope of a more prosperous and less violent future.

141 Dubravka Stojanovic, «The Nicer Truth,» Pescanik.net, November 28, 2010.

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