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LITERATURE REVIEW

The Disintegration of Yugoslavia
A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches

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There are seven major types of arguments on the reasons for the collapse of Yugoslavia in recent literature:

1 the economic argument;
2 the 'ancient ethnic hatred' argument;
3 the 'nationalism' argument;
4 the cultural argument;
5 the 'international politics' argument;
6 the 'role of personality' argument; and
7 the 'fall of empires' argument.

With the exception of the 'ancient ethnic hatred' argument, all approaches offer useful elements for explaining the reasons for the disintegration of Yugoslavia. However, they sometimes tend to reduce its complexity to a single cause. They also neglect the subjective, that is, the perceptions of the relevant political actors, as expressed through ideology. It is argued in this article that the disintegration of Yugoslavia had many causes, not a single one, and that only by analyzing the perceptions of all these elements by the relevant political actors, can one understand the events that followed.

The article first critically examines the existing analytical approaches to explaining the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In the second part, a tentative alternative framework for analysis will be suggested.

A Critical Assessment of the Existing Approaches in Analyzing the Disintegration of Yugoslavia

The Economic Argument

The economic argument is based on the assumption that the economic crisis that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the widening gap between the

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developed and under-developed regions (republics, provinces) made the further existence of Yugoslavia impossible. The most developed republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, demanded independence for reasons of their further development. They also opposed attempts to limit the achieved level of economic autonomy, as provided by the 1974 constitutional compromise. Kosovo and Slovenia, although being at the two opposite poles on the scale of economic development, both came to the point of seeing no incentive for remaining further in Yugoslavia. In 1987, for the first time, Slovenian public opinion indicated that Slovenia would have better economic chances outside Yugoslavia rather than within (Tos, 1987). Kosovo, however, saw no economic benefits for further remaining in Yugoslavia when its GDP, although permanently increasing in absolute terms, when measured per head had fallen from 47 percent to 26 percent of the Yugoslav average in the postwar period.

One can certainly accept that economic factors played a significant role in creating the context to which the narratives of political leaders were forced to respond. As Woodward (1996) argues, the economic crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s triggered constitutional conflict, which resulted in the crisis of the state itself. Yet economic crisis in itself would not necessarily have resulted in state disintegration, had it not been used to destroy the constitutive concept of Yugoslav socialism (formulated primarily by the main ideologue of socialist self-management, Edvard Kardelj) and to replace it with several others. As Bojicic argues, 'the intensity of collapse in the Yugoslav region does not follow from the scale of the economic and political troubles in which they found themselves at the end of the 1980s' (1996: 77). Contrary to the arguments of the economic-based explanations of the collapse, Yugoslavia in fact disintegrated at the moment when the economic reforms of Ante Markovic's government were showing their first positive results, accompanied by the elimination of inflation and a sharp increase in the personal income of Yugoslav citizens. As Plestina points out, the resignation of an ineffective government in December 1988 and the selection of the new market-oriented prime minister, Ante Markovic, in January 1989 were signs of hope for the future of Yugoslavia.

> The inflation rate, which for the month of December [1989] had climbed to 56%, had by the end of January [1990] fallen to 17.3%; by February it was down to 8.4%, by March to 2.4% and for April it registered only 0.2%. Foreign-currency reserves which amounted to US$5.4 billion in December [1989] were strong enough to permit the convertibility of the dinar, had increased by January [1990] to US$6.5 billion and by May [1990] to US$8.5 billion. Industrial productivity has also increased and foreign loans have been secured to aid the restructuring of the economy . . . Markovic has managed to galvanize a degree of support and energy after a decade characterized by cynicism and apathy. (Plestina, 1992: 166)

Yet what seemed to be 'hopeful like a new beginning was but a very brief lull before the proverbial storm' (Plestina, 1992: 155). It was at this moment, when the first hopes for a democratic and economically stable society emerged, that the state collapsed. The economic argument has failed to explain this paradox.

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The political reforms of the federation during the 1967–74 period were even less motivated by economic failure. On the contrary, to a large extent they were boosted by economic success which promoted Yugoslav self-management as a possible alternative to both state socialism of the Soviet type and capitalist societies, which both faced deep crises in 1968. In the same way, the economic factor did not play the main role in the last phase of negotiations about the future of the country, when the three main leaders of the Yugoslav republics (Milan Kucan, Slovenia; Franjo Tudjman, Croatia, and Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia) declined an offer by the European Community to find a political compromise in return for substantial economic support. Instead, they decided to continue their uncompromising policies, which resulted in the economic failure of all the post-Yugoslav states, with the partial exception of Slovenia. It is clearly fair to say that in an economic sense as well as in the sense of modernization processes, the disintegration of Yugoslavia was, as Hobsbawm argues, a 'purely negative event' (Hobsbawm, 1996). In terms of modernization, despite the significant setback of the economic and political crisis, socialist Yugoslavia was neither a disastrous failure nor did it have to collapse. Economically, and also politically, it was the most advanced case of all East European societies. Economic factors were not important per se for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but in the context they provided for political leaders, who used them to argue that their ethnic and/or political group was disadvantaged in Yugoslavia. The economic element, true, played an important role in causing differentiation between different parts of Yugoslavia which, ultimately, resulted in growing demands for changes both from within the political elite and from the population. However, economic reductionism can never explain political phenomena completely, because it leaves out human agency, that is, the perceptions and actions of political actors.

The 'Ancient Ethnic Hatred' Argument

The 'ancient ethnic hatred' argument is very popular in not strictly academic debates, such as in the media (Bishop, 1999), with politicians, soldiers (Rose, 1998) and writers (Kaplan, 1994). It is perhaps best summarized by the US president, Bill Clinton, who justified the military intervention against the FR Yugoslavia (March–June 1999) by saying: 'Under communist rule, such nations projected a picture of stability, but it was a false stability imposed by rulers whose answer to ethnic tensions was to suppress and deny them. When communist repression lifted, the tensions rose to the surface, to be resolved by co-operation or exploited by demagoguery' (*The Sunday Times*, 18 April 1999).

Regardless of its popularity, the ethnic hatred argument ought to be rejected in any form. The Yugoslav conflict did not begin as an ethnic conflict. Ethnic hatred was not ancient and ever existent, but had to be created before what started 'very far from the level occupied by the average citizen of any of the nationalities' was transformed into an ethnic war (Oklobdzija, 1993: 92; see also Pavkovic, 1997; Woodward, 1995). It is far from accurate to say that Yugoslavia was held

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together by a brutal political dictatorship or pure suppression of national sentiments. But once the constitutive concept of the Fourth Yugoslavia started to disintegrate, there was a tendency (initiated primarily by nationalist groups within both the intellectual elite and the population) to revert to stereotypes and behavior characteristic of an earlier period, that is, the Second World War and before. Once the previous 'others' to which the elite referred (such as 'class enemies' within the country, and both East and West outside the country) disappeared as a realistic danger, other 'others' had to be invented.

As numerous public opinion surveys conducted in the last years of the 1980s demonstrate, political protests in Serbia and Slovenia were in their first phase primarily concerned with injustice and the bureaucratization of the political elite. But the elite successfully redirected them against the new 'others'. The Serb demonstrators were worried about the disintegration of the country, for which the 'others' (Slovenes, Croats, various international institutions, etc.) were made responsible. The Slovenian intellectual elite and media also argued that the 'others' were responsible for Greater-Serbian expansionist demands, for the economic exploitation of Slovenia and for unitarist suppression of the national identity of the Slovenes. By redirecting popular protests towards the 'others', the political elites in Serbia and Slovenia survived at the cost of undermining Yugoslavia.

The ethnic hatred argument, therefore, perhaps can explain some of what happened in the post-Yugoslav wars, when the nationalist political elites succeeded in promoting hatred among the population. However, as an explanation of the actual disintegration of Yugoslavia it is as irrelevant as it is inaccurate (Duijzings, 2000).

The 'Nationalism' Argument

While the ancient ethnic hatred argument – although popular in current debates – can be easily dismissed as inadequate, it is certainly more difficult to object to the nationalism argument, which was widely present in academic debates on the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Nationalism, here defined as the primacy of the national over any other interest in political activities and as a doctrine which has the creation of a homogeneous nation-state at its core, does not always develop into ethnic hatred towards the other. While ethnic hatred between Yugoslav nations did not exist to any extent greater than within other multi-ethnic states, nationalism was always present as a political doctrine in its many forms. As Djilas (1995) argues, nationalism in Yugoslavia was stronger than liberalism, and hence the main alternative after the fall of Communism. Occasionally, such as in the 1967–72 period with the 'Croatian' or – as Burg (1983) names it – the 'Yugoslav' crisis; or with the 1968 and 1981 protests in Kosovo, nationalist doctrines and actions caused ethnic tensions and the instability of the country. However, it is difficult to accept the somewhat fatalistic conclusion that nationalism and hatred had to prevail over other doctrines, once communism was defeated. In its most dangerous form in which it emerged in the late 1980s, nationalism was created

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by the intellectual elites and then accepted by certain elements within the political elite, primarily in Serbia and Slovenia.

The causes of nationalism in Yugoslavia were indeed many, historical, economic and cultural differences being among the most important. Yet, for most of the period since the Second World War, it was the ideological narrative that made the nationalism of Yugoslav nations (including the Kosovo Albanians) both weak and strong at the same time. The weakness of (Yugoslav) nationalism was the result of the anti-statist ideology on the basis of which Yugoslavia was restructured following its 1974 constitution. This ideological concept projected self-management as an alternative to the state. More than other socialist states, the Yugoslav state was – at least at the ideological level – in the process of withering away. The anti-statist rhetoric had enormous consequences for the (de)construction of Yugoslav institutions and of Yugoslav 'high culture', to use Gellner's term (1993). The complex system based on the anti-statist ideology of Kardelj made Yugoslavia economically and politically atomized. It prevented a fast and decisive response to economic and political crises when they appeared in the early 1980s.

At the same time, however, in real terms, Yugoslavia was still united by its ideological narrative, formulated by Kardelj and accepted by other members of the political elite. It was Kardelj's narrative, not the ethnic similarities among the Yugoslavs (South Slavs) or the political equality of its citizens, which the elite saw as the glue that bound Yugoslav differences into one whole. Paradoxically, therefore, the Yugoslav *state* itself was based on an *anti-state* ideological conception. This paradox lies at the heart of the crisis of the Yugoslav state in post-1974 Yugoslavia.

By treating Yugoslav constitutive nations as completed (as Kardelj formulated it in 1970), and their republics as sovereign states (as formulated in the 1974 constitution), the ideological narrative of Yugoslav communism in practice shielded and promoted nationalism in its constitutive nations. At the same time as Yugoslav nationalism and the Yugoslav state were being weakened, the nationalism of the constitutive nations was getting stronger. The same concept that kept Yugoslavia together by consensus between its leaders held in itself also a destructive and disintegrative potential. This trend was in fact also the result of Kardelj's concept, which was constructed as a radical alternative to both interwar Yugoslav unitarism and Soviet *statist centralism*. Being based on a fragile political compromise between segments of the elite, Yugoslav unity after 1974 depended more on the interpretation of the real meaning of this concept than on formal procedural rules and effective representative institutions. As Goati argues (1997), it is within the Yugoslav political elite, therefore, that one needs to look for the seeds of the collapse of Yugoslavia.

By promoting a non-ethnic base for Yugoslav unity, the elite made nationalism the main rhetorical antipode to the dominant ideology of the regime. At the same time, by declaring everyone who opposed the regime a nationalist, the regime in fact promoted such nationalism as the main alternative. By excluding nationalism from the public sphere Kardeljists both weakened it in public and made it stronger underground. The weakening of the state made nationalist

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demands for a strong state (whether Yugoslavia, or separate nation-states of constitutive nations) plausible. This is how one can explain why nationalism (and not, for example, the liberalism of the minimal state) grew as the main alternative to the self-managing system. Contrary to popular interpretations which link the existence of strong states run by Communists with people's demands for strong (nationalist) states after Communism, one can safely argue that it was the weakness of the state that provoked an alternative. Post-Communism (as anti-Communism) was about establishing the state that was missing, not about preserving one that already existed. In the case of ethnically homogenized states (such as Hungary, Poland) the 1989 revolution meant establishing themselves as states by liberation from the Soviet patronage. While the Hungarians and Poles perceived the Soviet Union as the main obstacle to creating a proper state, the Croats, Slovenes and Albanians in Kosovo perceived Belgrade as this obstacle. Yugoslav independence from Moscow thus proved to be a disadvantage for preserving the country's unity, since there was no possibility of blaming an external power for the crisis.

The demand to establish a proper state that did not exist (due to the anarchic self-managing society) was what the Serbs, Slovenes, Croats (and others) in Yugoslavia shared. But they disagreed on the definition of the constitutive nation that should create this state. Since its creation in 1918 the same question had appeared in Yugoslavia again and again. Were the Yugoslavs one (political) nation or not? Were the (ethnic) Serbs one (political) nation or not? Were the Croats a nation or not? And the Albanians? The lack of a single Yugoslav cultural space and of Yugoslav political institutions that would represent the citizens of Yugoslavia (especially in the period after 1974) was the main obstacle to creating a Yugoslav nation. The separate cultural systems, recognized and further developed after 1967 in the six Yugoslav constitutive nations, resulted in creating six political nations and – ultimately – their independent states.

In its new form, as public protest, open nationalism at the end of the 1980s was a result of the country's democratization. The minority rights of the Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins united the democratic and nationalist segments of the Belgrade opposition, the strongest in the country. The elite was facing massive protests from the Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins, as well as public demands for political reforms from the Slovenian and Serbian critical intelligentsia. At the same time, fear of becoming a minority in Yugoslavia, in which they had been treated as a constitutive nation, united Slovenian public opinion. These fears were the result of the country's democratization, which demanded a new set of rules and a new constitutive concept for Yugoslavia. The leaders in Slovenia and Serbia decided not to use force against the demonstrators and intellectuals, but to accommodate their demands. This is how they – despite their originally anti-nationalist intentions – became tolerant of nationalism, causing a split in the LCY and the Yugoslav state. Although neither Milan Kucan nor Slobodan Milosevic were originally ethnic nationalists, their political pragmatism and the context in which they acted led them to act like 'someone who has jumped on to the tiger of nationalism and is finding it difficult to get off again without the tiger eating him' (Owen, 1995: 129).

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Of course, it did not have to happen this way. For as long as they remained committed to the Kardeljist concept, political leaders in Yugoslavia rejected coalition with ethnic nationalists and sought an intra-party compromise. They even hesitated to criticize the members of the elite in other ethnic groups and republics. Once this rule was abandoned, another set of rules had to be invented to keep Yugoslavia united. But it was difficult, if not impossible, in circumstances in which the political elite developed entirely different notions of democracy and of the political unit to which it should be applied. While the Slovene option in the late 1980s argued in favor of democratization within republics, but not at the federal level, the Serbian option argued for majority rule at the federal level too. Consequently, if successful, the Serbian demands would have led to the emergence of a Yugoslav (political) nation. Additionally, the two options also differed on how they understood democratization, and on how to secure a link between socialism and democracy in the new circumstances. These insurmountable differences divided the Yugoslav political elite and the country in general.

Finally, what the nationalism argument fails to explain is the growing sense of Yugoslavism among the population at the same time as ethnic nationalism was increasing. Two parallel processes characterized the last period before the country's collapse (1974–90): first, the (re)-emergence of a Yugoslav culture (for an overview of the Yugoslav rock scene see Ramet, 1992/96; Gordy, 1999) and the first demands to establish institutions of representative democracy, which would result in the creation of a Yugoslav political nation; second, the reaction of ethnic nationalists and conservative Communists (the defenders of the constitution, mostly in Slovenia and Croatia) to this. The struggle between the forces of integration and of polarization was what the Yugoslavs witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s. This new Yugoslavism was in the first place a reaction against the general trend of fragmentation in the last 20–30 years of Yugoslavia. A Yugoslav culture was emerging in the young and more educated generation. A direct result of this was a significant growth of declared ethnic Yugoslavs in the decade between 1971 and 1981, from 273,000 to 1,219,000. The share of Yugoslavs in the total population increased from 1.3 percent to 5.4 percent in this decade, while the share of all constitutive nations (except Bosnian Muslims) decreased: Serbs from 39.7 percent to 36.3 percent; Croats from 22.1 percent to 19.8 percent and Slovenes from 8.2 percent to 7.8 percent. The Croatian historian and politician Dusan Bilandzic estimated that the share of the Yugoslavs would further increase in the decade between 1981 and 1991 to approximately one-fifth of the total population, a trend that displeased and worried ethnic nationalists in all the Yugoslav nations.[2] The (realistic) chance of Yugoslavia becoming a member of the European Union (then EEC) in the foreseeable future, in which case national identities would have found themselves under two supra-national lids (Yugoslav and European) additionally mobilized the sense of being endangered among the ethnic nationalists. In its essence, the nationalism that emerged in various Yugoslav countries was largely anti-urban (Vujovic, 2000; Colovic, 1997; Zanic, 1998), anti-European and to a certain extent motivated by romantic and anti-rationalistic ideas. It was based on fears (primarily among the intellectual

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and political elites) that the status of their ethnic groups would be decreased from one of completed constitutive nations (as recognized by the 1974 constitution) to one of a minority in the new democratic structure of the country (Horowitz, 1985). Consequently, the nation-states were seen as not only desirable, but as a necessary protector against this trend.

Although it correctly points out the importance of nationalism for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the nationalism argument often overlooks the ambivalent relations between Communism and nationalism. It also tends to underestimate the complexity of the situation in which the members of the political elite found themselves in the late 1980s. Finally, it neglects the importance of personal beliefs and perceptions by the elite and the population. Arguing that it has always been present, only somewhat frozen during the times of socialism, the nationalism argument denies the importance of the subjective. This is what an alternative approach should aim to correct.

The Cultural Argument

In various attempts to explain the collapse of Yugoslavia, it has been argued that the diversities of the traditions and cultures of the Yugoslav nations (based on the ancient divisions between Eastern and Western Christianity, as well as between Christianity and Islam) played the major role in the failure to constitute a Yugoslav culture, nation and state. The argument relies on John Stuart Mill's discussion of nationality in his *Considerations on Representative Government* (1865). Representative government, Mill argues, is best established on 'the sentiment of nationality', whose existence is 'a prima facie case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart'. Thus cultural diversities (primarily religious and linguistic differences) made nations and promoted their desire to live separately from others in their own states. Cultural, religious, economic, linguistic and historical differences between the Yugoslav nations were simply too large to allow the creation of a Yugoslav nation, which permanently destabilized the Yugoslav state. Fragmentation of the country was hence inevitable and somehow natural (for an overview of cultural theories of nationalism, see Kedourie, 1993: 48–52).

In its recently most famous version, the cultural argument has reappeared in Huntington's *Clashes of Civilisations* (1996) thesis. Although his book focuses on international politics after the end of the Cold War, it was much used by nationalist politicians in the post-Yugoslav states (especially by the Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, in 1997) to legitimize and justify not only the break-up of Yugoslavia but the more recent conflicts between Croats (Catholics) and Bosniaks (Muslims) in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Even if one were to accept this argument, one would not have immediately explained why the Yugoslav mosaic of diversities survived for at least 45 years after the Second World War, only to collapse so suddenly after the end of the Cold War, when cultural diversities in the world, including in Yugoslavia, were decreasing, rather than increasing. Yet, the cultural argument proves to be closer

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to assisting us to understand the collapse of Yugoslavia than many other approaches. It certainly does recognize the importance of people's beliefs, which were largely created by opinion-makers and ideologues, yet in much of current literature remained largely under-estimated.

A different type of example of relying on cultural factors to explain the collapse of Yugoslavia is Wachtel's study of the relationship between the Yugoslav idea and the creation and disintegration of the Yugoslav state (1998). Wachtel's analysis is based on the correct assumption that the collapse of Yugoslavia (like the collapse of states in general) must be analyzed primarily through the collapse of the constitutive concept (as I call it here) or 'the concept of a Yugoslav nation' (as he says in his book (1998: 4). One can only share Wachtel's view that: 'the collapse of multinational Yugoslavia and the establishment of separate uninational states . . . were not the result of the breakdown of the political or economic fabric of the Yugoslav state; rather, these breakdowns, which manifestly occurred and have been copiously documented, themselves sprang from the gradual destruction of the concept of a Yugoslav nation' (1998: 4).

To a certain extent, one can accept his conclusion that the 'various causes that have been cited for the collapse of Yugoslavia were secondary to the disintegration of the very concept of the Yugoslav nation, and it is to that cultural process we must turn if we wish to see how existing deep-seated rivalries and hatreds were at various times overcome and encouraged and how they re-emerged triumphant' (1998: 17).

Yet exclusive reliance on cultural factors often results in underestimating the contextual framework in which the concepts (including the concept of Yugoslavism) emerged defeated or triumphant. While one should point to the importance of the 'text' of a narrative, at the same time one should not neglect the fact that many factors in real life strongly influenced it. Constitutive concepts are not once-and-for-all fixed sets of beliefs and ideals, but flexible compositions of elements. It is for this reason that one cannot take the concept alone in attempting to explain action. One always needs to see what (other) 'objective factors' influenced it. In Quentin Skinner's words, one needs to 'exhibit the dynamic nature of the relationship which exists between the professed principles and the actual practices of political life' (1988: 108) by asking what the actors were doing while they were saying something. One always needs to situate ideas in their practical context. My argument here is that it was precisely because the existing constitutive concept (as interpreted by its main representatives) was incapable of providing an adequate response to the challenges of the 'objective factors' that Yugoslavia ultimately collapsed. Consequently, new constitutive concepts were created in reaction to both economic and political crises in the 1980s.

It is, therefore, inadequate to analyze the concept and its context separately. True, the economic and political crises were to a large extent the results of attempts by the political elites to see their constitutive concepts implemented at any costs. But they were also catalysts for the further revision and, indeed abandonment, of certain elements of the ideology. It is the dynamics between the two that one should examine. It is because of these dynamics between ideas and

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practice that it is somewhat difficult to accept Wachtel's idealist conclusion that a nation is 'not a political entity but a state of mind'. We can certainly accept that the narrative indeed ultimately defines a nation at any given moment, but this still does not imply that 'no matter how heterogeneous a group of people might appear to an observer, there is a level at which its members could choose to see each other as belonging to one nation' (1998: 2). Nations are neither fixed communities defined once and for all by linguistic, anthropological, political, economic, etc. factors, nor are they simply imagined from nowhere by intellectual and political elites. If anywhere, then this is obvious in the Yugoslav case. The attempts in Yugoslavia to create or imagine a nation despite the reality, by neglecting or underestimating the importance of already existing differences, generated political tensions, and – within a certain context – set up a framework in which the break-up of the state was possible.

The cultural argument is a good basis for the analysis of the Yugoslav collapse but only when certain elements of other explanations are also applied in order to explain the context in which culture operates.

The 'International Politics' Argument

The international politics explanation of the collapse of Yugoslavia insists on the importance of one or several factors on the international arena in the rise and fall of Yugoslavia. It is argued that Yugoslavia was created (both in 1918 and in 1945) with significant help from or even as the creation of the great powers, whose balance of power substantially helped Yugoslavia to preserve its existence and independence. Yugoslavia's strategic position between the two military-political blocs in postwar Europe, and its politics of equidistance in both ideological and political terms, could not survive the collapse of bipolar structures at the end of the Cold War. Yugoslavia was the victim of the fall of the Berlin wall. In a strategic sense, it lost its importance when compared with other areas of the world, and consequently was no longer able to attract economic and political support from the West. The insensitivity of the western world to the new position of Yugoslavia was evident, as Woodward (1995) and Zimmermann (1996/9) argue, in its failure to support the economic reforms of the Markovic government (in 1988–91). Even worse, the pressure on Yugoslavia from the IMF, already in the early 1980s, made the Yugoslav reformist elite incapable of performing its functions and opposing growing social disorder. The economic hardship produced a constitutional crisis, which in turn helped ethnic nationalists to undermine what was – even by western standards – a rather stable and plausible project. As Woodward argues, Yugoslavia collapsed neither because of ethnic hatred, nor because of the break-up of some political dictatorship, but because of the disintegration of the international order, by which Yugoslavia was strongly influenced.

> Critical to its breakdown was change from the outside, in the foreign economic and strategic environment on which the country's stability had come to depend. Contrary

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> to the myth that has formed since Yugoslavia's demise, the cracks in the system were not the fault lines between civilizations that came together in the Balkans, but those that defined the country's domestic order and internal position during the socialist period. (1995: 22)

A similar argument has been often voiced in Yugoslav domestic debates on the causes of the disintegration. The former Yugoslav defence secretary, General Kadijevic (1993), argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union left Yugoslavia vulnerable to pressure from the West, which encouraged anti-Communist and nationalist forces in traditionally western-oriented areas (Slovenia, Croatia) to increase their demands. The failure of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe undermined the country's (and especially the army's) ideological basis. Kadijevic saw the new world order as the ultimate danger for Yugoslavia's independence and survival.

Although international factors always played a significant part in Yugoslav politics, one should not exaggerate their importance in the last phase of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was not a member of either of the two military-political structures. Promoting self-managing rather than statist (Soviet) socialism, its leaders saw *perestroika* and *glasnost* as a victory, rather than a defeat for their own model of socialism. With very few exceptions, the Yugoslav Communists welcomed the policy of detente between East and West, seeing it as yet another recognition of the success of the Yugoslav road to socialism. The reforms in Eastern Europe were not seen as a threat, and the Yugoslav leaders by no means felt endangered by these changes. Neither did the Yugoslav political elite exactly follow the IMF's instructions. On the contrary, the party leadership was successful in blocking the attempts of four successive federal prime ministers (Djuranovic, Planinc, Mikulic and Markovic) to implement a program of serious economic reforms, as demanded by the IMF and other foreign creditors. The prime ministers, not the party leaders, regularly lost these intra-elite battles, being either marginalized (Djuranovic and Planinc) or forced to resign (Mikulic). Being a leader of the non-aligned group of countries, Yugoslavia had a fairly independent foreign policy. While this proved to be the main reason for the country's favorable position during the Cold War, in the late 1980s it somewhat blinded the political elites, making them unaware of the immediate and long-term consequences of political changes in Eastern Europe.

Instead of seeing the collapse of East European socialism as a danger for its own international position and internal cohesion, the Yugoslav leaders and citizens concluded that with the collapse of the Brezhnev doctrine the most serious threat to Yugoslavia's security was eliminated. The western states certainly did not want Yugoslavia to disintegrate, and even less did they wish to see instability in the turbulent region. Yugoslavia was considered to be the first East European country which would join the European Community and already in the late 1970s it had signed the first documents on co-operation with the EC. At the moment of its disintegration Yugoslavia had very few, if any, enemies in the international community. It is therefore inadequate to argue that the intervention by the western states and organizations was the main reason for the collapse of the

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country. True, when it reacted, the international community demonstrated its incompetence on a large scale, contributing to further disastrous developments in the Balkans. But, Yugoslavia was already at a very advanced stage of its disintegration when (in July 1991) foreign involvement took place for the first time. Even then it was hesitant and, as Gow (1997) has noticed, showed a lack of will. Yugoslavia was, as Perovic (1993), Lukic and Lynch (1996: 113) and Djilas (1993: 109) argue, 'defeated' from within, not from the outside.

The 'Role of Personality' Argument

Many authors emphasize the role of personalities in the collapse of Yugoslavia. Two personalities are often mentioned in this context: Josip Broz Tito and Slobodan Milosevic.

In short, the attempts to explain the collapse of Yugoslavia focusing on Tito's personality emphasize that Tito was the only real decision-maker, the real sovereign in Yugoslavia. He identified the state with himself, and concentrated all real power in his own hands. During his life, Tito was the key arbiter in political disputes. It has often been argued that, despite the formal decentralization of the country following the 1974 constitution, Yugoslavia remained united and centralized due to Tito's personal role. He was above the law and outside the law. This was especially the case after 1974, when the constitution declared Tito 'President of the Republic without limitation of office', therefore outlawing any attempt to replace him for as long as he was alive. He was no longer just the supreme politician, but the state itself (Tepavac, 1997). The main areas of state politics (such as defense, foreign affairs and state security) were considered to be his personal domains. His cult of personality was never so omni-present as in the last couple of years of his life. Furthermore, the constitution prevented anyone from replacing Tito after his death. When he died in May 1980, there was no one to reconnect the broken bonds and to take decisions in the conflicts of interests within the country. Yugoslavia, weakened to one person – Tito himself – died together with its ruler.

The other person who decisively influenced Yugoslav politics was Slobodan Milosevic. Many authors see the Serbian leader as a person who wanted to replace Tito by occupying the empty space of power vacated after his death (Vejvoda, 1993). By doing so, Milosevic distinguished himself from the other post-Titoist leaders, who continued marching along Tito's path, favoring collective leadership, as constructed by Tito himself. It was Milosevic, they argue, who disturbed the newly achieved balance between republics and provinces, and who destroyed the tranquillity of Tito's moribund successors. At the same time, Milosevic introduced the masses into politics, using them as a source of pressure in the intra-elite conflicts. Although many authors share this conclusion, perhaps none has explained it better than Lukic and Lynch: 'Had Slobodan Milosevic not emerged as *Duce* in Serbia, Yugoslavia might have evolved gradually after the end of the East-West geopolitical division of Europe into an asymmetric federation or confederation' (1996: 114).

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Josip Broz was certainly the central figure of Yugoslav postwar history, in the same way that Slobodan Milosevic is certainly the most important character in the post-Yugoslav drama and the one whom any scholar of this discipline must study. One needs, however, to be wary of being trapped into the other extreme. Yugoslavia did not exist or collapse because of one person only, even if its politics has often in the past been largely determined by the will of a single strong man. Both Tito and Milosevic (and any other political leader) can be understood only within the context of the political processes that brought them to power and enabled them to influence politics in such a powerful way. They were just as much products as they were initiators of political trends. They had to take into consideration the interests of other participants in politics and to find a compromise between their own views and those of others. It is the complexity of intra-elite politics that one must not neglect when analyzing Yugoslav politics. The role of personality argument often does exactly this.

Milosevic came to power as a representative of the main trends in Serbian politics before him, and in crucial issues he largely followed a policy of continuity with his predecessors. The historical context in which Milosevic emerged as the undisputed leader of Serbia is often underestimated. This neglect has resulted in the failure to properly understand his intentions (as demonstrated, for example, during the 1999 war in Serbia). Failure to do so, I argue, is due to several methodological mistakes, such as – for example – the ideal type mistake, the prolepsis hypothesis, the coherence hypothesis, etc. as explained by Skinner (1988; see below).

The 'Fall of Empires' Argument

The fall of empires argument formulated by Eric Hobsbawm (1996) argues that instead of becoming a nation-state constructed by liberals (as was originally planned, following the idea of the self-determination of nations), Yugoslavia developed as a multi-ethnic empire, much on the model of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires that had before its creation included its main regions (see Kedourie, 1991). The concept of an empire was much more successful in the postwar period under Tito, 'the last Habsburg' (as A.J.P. Taylor called him), who was much less identified with any ethnic group than King Alexander, due to the internationalist ideology he professed. As a Communist, to whom national allegiance was secondary to ideological affiliation, Tito became a supra-national arbiter in inter-ethnic conflicts. Legitimized by the internationalist ideology and not in parliamentary elections, Tito was not a representative of any existing group, but of a specific vision of the future. The gradual replacement of the ideological leadership with more representative leaders of republics and provinces meant the abandonment of this supra-national position at the top of the empire. Unlike Tito and Kardelj (in the ideological sphere), the rulers of post-Titoist Yugoslavia could not be seen as impartial arbiters but more as representatives of their segments of society. Without an impartial arbiter in both ideological and political conflicts, the stability of Yugoslavia was undermined. The transition from an empire-like

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ideological structure to a fragmented semi-confederalist system was institutionalised by the 1974 constitution, which treated Tito as a constitutional exception. The 1974 constitution was to large extent the beginning of the de-Titoization of Yugoslavia, which in real terms started only after his death six years later. The system was projected to prevent anyone else becoming a new arbiter in the post-Titoist period. Tito was in this respect, indeed, not only 'the last Habsburg' but 'the only true Yugoslav'. Milosevic's ambition to replace Tito in the late 1980s was indeed impossible, since the space of power occupied by Tito was now not only empty (Vejvoda, 1993) but non-existent in constitutional terms too. In order to become the new Tito (which is how his supporters initially saw him), Milosevic had to change the constitution and destroy the existing political system of semi-confederalism. But unlike Tito, Milosevic could not have been seen as impartial. He did not profess an ideology that would make him supra-national. On the contrary: identifying himself too closely with only one ethnic group (the Serbs), he antagonized the others. Just like King Alexander (but unlike Tito) Milosevic was a representative of the Serbian political elite and not a person without links with any separate ethnic group before his (potential) accession to the Yugoslav throne. Milosevic was hence a Tito in reverse. In order to become a real Tito, he needed to turn the whole system upside down. When he attempted to do this, the others decided to leave.

Although the fall of empires argument links various elements of other approaches (such as the weakness of nationalism; the role of personality; modernization and democratization; the role of ideology, etc.), it is difficult to see how Yugoslavia can be compared with real empires, in which there generally was a dominant nation and which used colonial expansion in order to lower tensions inside the metropolis. Yugoslavia was perhaps an ideological empire, but similarities with real empires of the past are certainly exaggerated in this approach.

Towards a New Explanation: a Multi-factored Subjective Approach

Although all the approaches analyzed above (with the exception of the ethnic hatred argument) have added some valuable contributions to our understanding of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, they have sometimes neglected the missing link between the 'objective factors' (such as economic crisis, ethnic structure of population, international politics, etc.) and the perceptions of these elements by political actors themselves and their resultant actions. It is this missing link that one ought to analyze in order to understand the Yugoslav crisis. Much of the misunderstanding of the Yugoslav conflict is the result of the underestimation of the importance of the subjective in politics. Politics is a field of human interaction and not just the reflection of some external, 'objective' elements, such as economic, demographic, geopolitical, etc. trends. Although political actors normally do not act entirely independently of these 'objective factors', the way they perceive them and how they react to them depends on

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their beliefs, perceptions of interests, values, personal characteristics, etc. These subjective factors are exposed to permanent change and are thus unstable.

This is especially the case when one analyzes the Communist systems and their collapse. In Communist systems political actions were attempts to implement a set of ideas in political reality. Politics in Communist-led societies was – to use Voegelin's expression (1952: 70) – a 'representation of truth', defined by certain texts and interpreted by the party (the subjective force of socialism) just as much as it was the representation of certain interests or preferences of its main participants – the political elites. Communist politics is about the realization of the truth, in which the party – as Kardelj explained – has the role almost of a scientific institute. It is a collective intellectual.

The intellectual debates within the political elite were in fact, if not the main acts of politics, then certainly the most suitable medium of real political struggle. As Irvine argues, 'control over the actual meaning of language became essential to those regimes' ideological and symbolic sources of legitimation' (1997: 6). Political conflicts in the socialist societies of Eastern Europe were often expressed as a linguistic debate over the correct interpretation of Marxism (on the importance of language in Communist politics, see Waller, 1972; Bogdanovic, 1988; Havel, 1992). The main idea behind these conflicts was that there is only one correct way of understanding Marx's message and that the party was entitled to act as an arbiter between conflicting interpretations when they occurred. In reality, however, many interpretations emerged, struggling for the status of the official one. The level of 'liberalization' of a Communist system was indicated by the presence (or absence) of alternative (non-official) interpretations of Marxist ideology. Since no other (non-Marxist) ideology was allowed to compete with Marxism, the intra-party debate on the real meaning of Marxism covered a much larger spectrum of issues than an observer in an ideologically pluralized society would expect. In stricter times, when liberalization was in retreat, defeat in the struggle for the correct interpretation resulted in expulsion from public life, or even persecution, under the label of revisionism.

If one really wants to understand the rationale behind the actions of the Yugoslav Communists, one needs to take their beliefs seriously. What is relevant here is not whether these actions make sense to us but whether they made sense to them, to those whose actions we analyze and to the relevant segment of the political body upon whose approval the stability of the regime depended. It should not be our aim to judge the actions taken by the Yugoslav elite in either favorable or unfavorable terms, but to explain them by understanding the reasons the actors had for them. In doing so, I would suggest to rely on Skinner's theory of analyzing the meaning and understanding of words and actions in their mutual interaction (see Skinner, 1988).

Skinner warns about two extremes in analyzing intellectual history – one linked to overestimating the context in which a text occurs, the other doing the opposite – neglecting the context by arguing that the text itself can be understood without much reference to the context. Those mistakes are often committed by those who have analyzed the collapse of Yugoslavia so far. The *myth of coherence* is an attempt

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to find a coherence in one's ideas and actions at all costs. Coherence may be found horizontally or vertically in time. Horizontally, coherence is sought in actions across members of the same group, even if they differ in most relevant matters. Vertically, coherence is sought in actions of the same actor over time. The myth of coherence therefore neglects or underestimates changes that occur over time and denies plurality within social groups.

The *myth of the ideal type* is an attempt to reconstruct the meaning of intentions and actions in accordance with previously constructed ideal types, categories such as 'nationalists', 'Communists', 'liberals', 'democrats', etc. that have been defined in certain ways by social scientists. Ideal types are constructed on the basis of more or less exact observations, but can also be influenced by stereotypes and prejudice about certain groups and actors.

Both types of myth use the methodological apparatus of mainstream social science (especially of scientific naturalists, as Ricci names them, 1984: 92) in order to construct generally applicable models of analysis. In doing so, they more often than not blur our understanding of a particular event. For example, once we label a person X a nationalist, there is a danger of attempting to retrieve the meaning of what he said, or did not say, from what one expects a nationalist to say or not say. The two mistakes (of coherence and ideal type) are the basis on which controversies or changes of mind are often dismissed as just a tactic, while there is a real (and often hidden) agenda that in fact determines people's actions. Therefore, for example, when a person X attacks nationalism – regardless of how strong this attack might be – many are still inclined to believe that this is only because he or she had to hide his or her true beliefs, not because he or she really meant what was said. Even if one does something contrary to what is expected from a certain ideal type this would be taken just as a tactical move, not a real indication of change. Although these analysts focus their research on the subjective, they still make the mistake of not looking at changes over time and of trying to situate actors within certain ideal-type categories.

Another methodological mistake often committed by the analysts of the Yugoslav disintegration is identified by Skinner as the *myth of prolepsis*. This mistake is committed when one relies for one's interpretation on events that happened after the political decision was taken, assuming that there always was a causal link between the action and its result. The assumption here is that the result of somebody's action was always intentional, and that once we know the results (or even, more precisely, only then) we can fully understand the real intentions, the real meaning of the words and actions that caused such results. If the break-up of Yugoslavia was a consequence, then it had to be the result of the intentions of the main political actors. Or to take Skinner's example, if totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century claimed they were based on Rousseau's writing, then his writing was somehow responsible for totalitarianism. Intentionalists would claim that very few, if any, event in history happened unless it was part of someone's intentions.

The analysis here, however, suggests a different conclusion. An in-depth analysis of the speeches and actions of the main Yugoslav politicians in the fifteen years

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before the actual disintegration of Yugoslavia shows that not many political actors (and especially not many of those within the political elite) really wanted Yugoslavia to collapse. On the contrary, most of them intended to save it by either reforming or preserving various elements of its constitution and political practice. To most of the political actors, as to many analysts, the disintegration of Yugoslavia came as a surprise, not as an inevitable result of their premeditated actions. Yet once it happened, many claimed they knew it would happen, or even that they had wanted it to happen. Sometimes, when reminded of historical sources (such as speeches or actions by politicians), the radical intentionalists would claim this was only a public statement, while real intentions were something else.

Finally, there is still another set of methodological mistakes, that Skinner calls the *mythology of parochialism*: attempts to apply our own criteria to another culture, without sufficient effort to approach the meaning of actions from within the context in which they happened. This was perhaps the most frequent mistake of western policy-makers in the Yugoslav crisis. The assumption that Yugoslavia would not disintegrate, because its disintegration would be irrational from the point of view of the main participants, was based on the pure extension of our understanding of rationality to an area in which different criteria of rationality were valid. It is always a mistake to neglect the actual context in which an action takes place. And it would be an even greater mistake to understand this context incorrectly.

The first step towards analyzing the disintegration of Yugoslavia should be to follow the interaction between Kardelj's interpretation of Marxist ideology and the political context in which this concept was implemented. As Tully (in Skinner, 1988: 5) argues, to place the text in its political context means to treat it in interaction with 'the collection of texts written or used in the same period, addressed to the same or similar issues and sharing a number of conventions'. Such an interaction will help us to reveal the intentions of the political participants when they spoke or acted in a certain way. It is only within their context that one may understand the actions that followed.

In saying this, one must be aware that no explanation of people's real intentions can be perfect if by intentions one understands the thoughts of the political actors. Political analysts, surely, do not hold the key to actors' minds. But, as Skinner concluded, 'when we claim to have recovered the intentions embodied in texts, we are engaged in nothing more mysterious than this process of placing them within whatever contexts make sense of them'. It is not that we try to reach peculiarly inaccessible mental causes operating in the privacy of the mind, but only to explain the reasons behind behaving in certain ways, 'to exhibit certain skills and capacities in conventional ways' (1988: 280).

For Skinner some intentions really may be irrecoverable, but this is simply on account of there being insufficient information about their context to permit an ascription of intention in a particular case: 'some utterances are completely lacking in the sorts of context from which alone one can hope to infer the intentions with which they were uttered' (1988: 280).

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The fact that sometimes we have to admit that there is something we cannot explain since the actors themselves often cannot explain their own actions, should not prevent us from approaching this aim as closely as possible. Not even the most radical positivist approaches to the study of politics would claim we can explain everything. The point made here is that we are more successful when avoiding these methodological mistakes.

Without an understanding of this concept, one would fail to understand the actions that followed. We would then, consequently, fail to understand why the breakdown of the ideological consensus within the Yugoslav political elite during an extended period of almost two decades in given circumstances brought about the actual disintegration of the Yugoslav state.

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