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**Original scientific article****IMAGINING YUGOSLAVIA  
A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OR/AND AN IDEA WITH THE PURPOSE**Vesko GARCEVIC<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT**

Given its length and other similar works in this field, this essay has a rather limited ambition. It focuses on a particular argument often used in the nationalistic narrative – the argument that Yugoslavia was an artificial state. The work primarily discusses how the Yugoslav idea was born and argues that the process of “imagining Yugoslavia” captured the zeitgeist of the late 18th and 19th century when modern European nations were born. The Yugoslav idea was a reflection of the epoch of national awakening.

Yugoslavia was the embodiment of south Slavs’ dreams and interests to live in one country. It was a social construct much like every other state, and it constructed its identity, myths and collective memory as every other state had done before.

The paper argues that Yugoslavia had difficulty to maintain “mass support” because it was a civic nation organized as a multinational state. Its major challenge throughout its short existence was to keep “national and political unity” in congruence, which is, according to Ernest Gellner, a precondition for a nation to exist.

**KEY WORDS:**

Yugoslavia; nation-building; civic nation; collective memory.

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## **SAŽETAK**

Imajući u vidu njegovu dužinu i brojne radove na sličnu temu, ovaj esej je fokusiran na argument često korišćen u nacionalističkom vokabularu - da je Jugoslavija bila vještačka tvorevina. Rad, prije svega, analizira rađanje ideje jugoslovenstva, tvrdeći da proces „oblikovanja Jugoslavije” odražava duh vremena s kraja 18. i početka 19. vijeka kada su rođene evropske nacije. Jugoslovenska ideja je bila refleksija epohe nacionalnog buđenja.

Jugoslavija je predstavljala otjelotvorenje snova i interesa Južnih Slovena da žive u jednoj državi. Ona je društvena tvorevina isto kao i svaka druga država. Gradeći svoj identitet, mitove i kolektivno sjećanje, ona nije gradila ništa vještačko što ostale države nijesu činile prije nje.

Rad tvrdi da je Jugoslavija imala problem da održi „masovnu podršku” zato što je u osnovi bila organizovana kao građanska, višenacionalna država. Održavanje saglasja između „nacionalnog i političkog”, što je po Ernestu Gelneru preduslov za održanje jedne nacije (države), bio je glavni izazov tokom kratkog života Jugoslavije.

## **KLJUČNE RIJEČI:**

Jugoslavija; stvaranje nacije; građanska država; kolektivno sjećanje.

## **INSTEAD OF A PREFATORY NOTE**

What is the image of Yugoslavia today? Was it an artificial state created by political elites?

Interesting enough, Yugoslavia has always had a good international image. Even today, it is perceived better internationally than locally. Well-received in the American public and highly acclaimed by the art critics, the exhibition of *Architecture in Yugoslavia from 1948 to 1980*, organized in the New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from July 2018 to January 2019, serves as confirmation of its image. Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University hosted the event *Yugoslavia revisited* in September, 2109. In 1999, Time Magazine, 19 years after his death, ranked Tito as one of "100 most important people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century". At the same time, to local nationalists who demonize Yugoslavia, Tito is nothing more than a ruthless communist tyrant whose historical role is to be disparaged.

Was Yugoslavia a "dungeon of nations" as portrayed by nationalists in former Yugoslav states? Was it a brutal communist tyranny, as the former Croatian President refers to it? Or, was it a manifestation of the radical diversity, hybridity, and idealism that characterized the Yugoslav state, as Yugoslavia is described by the organizers of the MoMA exhibition<sup>2</sup>. The debate over what Yugoslavia is never stops and is as vivid today as it was 20 years ago.

Dynamics in the post-Yugoslav space and the continuation of competing memories that existed in the socialist Yugoslavia left little space for objective analysis of what Yugoslavia was, how it was created, and what its achievements and deficiencies were. Such a political and social environment is not conducive for intellectual, objective, and critical examination of Yugoslav legacy.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This essay has no intention to propose an alternative approach to the study of Yugoslav history. The paper neither analyzes popular discourse, nor discusses in detail various historical interpretations. It does not argue that Yugoslavia was the only solution for Yugoslav peoples, nor does it argue that Yugoslavia was a demo-

<sup>2</sup> MoMA New York - *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948-1980*, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3931>

cratic state.

Given its length and other similar works in this field, this essay has a rather limited ambition. It focuses on a particular argument often used in the nationalistic narrative – the argument that Yugoslavia was an artificial state<sup>3</sup>. The work primarily discusses how the Yugoslav idea was born and argues that the process of “imagining Yugoslavia” captured the zeitgeist of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century when many modern European nations were born. The Yugoslav idea was a reflection of the epoch of national awakening.

There is no widely accepted definition of “nation” at expert level. This essay, therefore, relies on the well-known Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Antony Smith and Eric Hobsbawm’s thoughts about the nation building. Smith’s distinction between ethnic and civic nations and Benedict Anderson’s interpretation of nations as “imagined communities” serve as departure points for further discussion.

Hobsbawm outlines three phases in the development of a nation, with the third phase entailing mass support to national movements to sustain. The paper argues that Yugoslavia, once created, had difficulty to maintain “mass support” because it was a civic nation organized as a multinational state. Yugoslavia was the embodiment of south Slavs’ dreams and interests to live in one country. It was a social construct much like every other state, and it constructed its myths and collective memory as every other state had done before. In other words, the state of Yugoslavia was as “artificial” as any other state. It is why the Yugoslav collective memory lives even today although the state ceased to exist more than 20 years ago. However, its major challenge throughout its short existence was to keep “national and political unity” in congruence, which is, according to Gellner, a precondition for a nation to exist.

Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora’s ideas about the importance of collective memory and its correlation with history as well as Hobsbawm’s thoughts about “invention of tradition” inspired the author in the last section of this essay.

Finally, the purpose of the work is not to expound on the concepts that serve as a starting point of the discussion, as the theoretical concepts this work refers to are well-known and well-established across the social sciences.

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3 This was one of the questions raised during the debate on Yugoslavia at Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University <https://ces.fas.harvard.edu/events/2019/09/yugoslavia-revisited-panel>

## **NATION - SCULPTED TO APPEAR OLD?**

How old are nations? It is one of the key questions in the debate about the antiquity of nations and the nature of nationalism. Matt Finkel explains that “the conception of the nation has shifted dramatically, from the proto-jingoist conservatism of the ‘primordial nation’ of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Johann Gottfried Herder and the German nationalist school of thought they represent... to the constructivist ‘imagined community’ of Benedict Anderson and the ‘congruence principle’ of Ernest Gellner” (*Matt Finkel, 2016, vol 8, no 10, p 1*).

For nationalists and conservative thinkers, the nation is immortal. In their view, nations are unique, with their own history, destiny and particular culture. The question of national identity is the question of birth, and the sense of allegiance to your nations is something to be treasured and expected from their subjects.

Similarly, perennialists are prone to mythologize nations and believe that nations can change form, with identities that can be recognized through their history or material and non-material cultural elements.

Conversely, for modernists, nations are the result of human development; they are modern and therefore variable social constructs. Ernest Geller argues that “nations as well as nationalism are the post -1789 phenomena... they are intimately connected to, if not dependent on, even derived from, the processes of modernization, an elastic concept which includes not only industrialization per se, but also political mobilization, secular education, urbanization, and so forth” (Smith, September 3, 2013, p 1). He describes the nation/nationalism as “a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (*Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 1983*).

Rogers Brubaker begins his book *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* with the quote that the word “nation” with the meaning as we know it today was mentioned for the first time by French troops during the battle of Valmy, on January 20, 1792. This inspired Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to exclaim that “this date and place mark a new epoch in world history”<sup>4</sup> (*Brubaker, 1996*).

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4 Brubaker used the quotation from *La Revolution française*, François Furet and Denis Richet (Paris, Hachette, 1965, p 185); and “De l’Ancien Regime a l’Empire: problem national at realites sociales”, Albert Soboul (*L’Information historique*, 1960, p 58)

Is the nation a seamless whole or an à la carte menu? Is it an immemorial deposit that archeology has recovered and history explained or the recent artefact that artists have created and the media chefs purveyed to a bemused public? (*Smith, Gastronomy or Geology: the role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations, 1995 p 3-23*).

Outlining three paradoxes of nationalism, Benedict Anderson explains that while nations are objectively a modern historic occurrence, in the eyes of nationalists they are seen as an antique, ever-living phenomenon. “Barons who imposed Magna Carta on the English King didn’t speak English and had no conception of themselves as Englishmen, but they are firmly defined as patriots in the UK classrooms 800 years later,” states Anderson (*Anderson, 1983*). He details how modern nations (“horizontal societies”) had been developed from pre-modern (“vertical/religious”) society, emphasizing the use of vernacular language for the creation of modern nations.

Eric Hobsbawm shares a similar opinion, connecting nations with modernity. Analyzing the evolution of the meaning of the word *nation* in several European languages, he points out that the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, “whose various editions have been scrutinized for this purpose... does not use the terminology of state, nation and language in the modern manner before its edition of 1884.” It was not until 1925 when it defined ‘nation’ as a “collectivity of persons who have the same ethnic origin”. (*Hobsbawm, 2012*)

Antony Smith likens nations to historic deposits and scholars in this field as the “political archeologists” or geologists. According to Smith, nations are similar to palimpsests. “They are not purely modern creation *ex nihilo*, much less *mélange* of materials constantly reinvented to suit the changing tastes and needs of different generations and elites” (*Smith, Gastronomy or Geology: the role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations, 1995 p 3-23*). Although Smith argues that nationalism draws on the pre-existing history of the “group”, with an attempt to fashion this history into a sense of common identity and shared history, he also recognizes that nations, as we know them, are modern. As modern nationalism arose in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the question is, for him, “shall we understand the relationship between modern nation and pre-modern culture?” (*Smith, Gastronomy or Geology: the role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations, 1995 p 3-23*).

Eric Hobsbawm acknowledges the existence of *protonational bonds* or *proto-nationalism* that can serve as a basis for modern nations. Discussing *protonationalism*, he defines several *bonds* which are needed for the creation of modern nations. They can be categorized as *local bonds*, such as language, ethnicity or ethnic closeness, culture or religion and *political bonds*, such as political ideas, principles and beliefs (Hobsbawm, 2012).

According to Hobsbawm, every nation building goes through three stage process. In the first “embryo” phase, the idea of the nation is purely cultural/linguistic (the issue of vernacular language), folkloric and often romanticized. The next “pioneering” phase asks for the policy formulation and mobilization of peoples living in an imagined community. The third “adult” phase requires mass support for the newly created nation, which can happen either before or after the creation of the state.

Following Hobsbawm’s three-stage nation-building process, we can draw conclusion that national movements in Scotland, Quebec, and Catalonia have just fallen short of accomplishing the third phase of mass support for their national projects. Given deep division in its society over identity issues, Montenegro seems to be going through a challenging period of national corroboration and identity reinforcement, both of which are of critical importance for the success of nation building.

The question of ethnic origin and ethnic homogeneity is often in the center of nationalistic rationale. Ethnic groups are, in the most cases, the primary communities from which nations are formed. Nationalists turn to ethnic genesis to justify the existence of their nations. What determines a nation, according to them, is its definite ethnic physiognomies and relative ethnic uniformity.

But, this is a controversial question, at least for scholars of nations and nationalism. The idea of civic nation was introduced by Ernest Renan, in his renown speech “What is a Nation?” (*Qu’est-ce qu’une nation*). He defined the nation by the desire of people to live together, citing Switzerland and the Netherlands as examples. The nation “presupposes a past; but it resumes itself in the present by a tangible fact: the consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue life in common. The existence of a nation is a plebiscite of every day, as the existence of the individual is a perpetual affirmation of life” (Renan 1882, Paris Presses-Pocket 1992).

Not only Switzerland and the Netherlands, but also Belgium, the US, Canada, Australia and many other nations have been formed by the voluntary union of provinces.

Antony Smith elaborates on the distinction between civic and ethnic types of nations. Civic nations tend to develop from “aristocratic ‘lateral’ *ethnies* through a process of ‘bureaucratic incorporation’ of outlying regions and lower classes into the ethnic culture of the upper classes” (Smith, *The Origins of Nations*, 1989, p 340-367).

Hobsbawm points out that the “problem of the relation of even such an extended but indigenous “nation” to the state remained puzzling... most states of any size were not homogeneous, and could therefore not simply be equated with nation” (Hobsbawm, 2012).

### **A BRIEF LOOK BEHIND NATION BUILDING**

When different groups living in adjacent region(s) organize themselves around their economic, political interests, and if they have some recognizable cultural similarities, this may evolve into the perception of themselves as a single community. Relationships among them might appear loose at the beginning, but if they are able to create a state and organize state institutions, they can develop a set of symbols, sense of common history, distinct collective memory and create material and non-material cultural heritage.

The size of this paper does not allow for a deep case study examination. However, it offers a brief discussion of several cases, which include civic and ethnic types of nations.

It is striking that the relative novelty of the nations discussed juxtaposes the presumed antiquity of some of them. If we take the analogy of palimpsests<sup>5</sup> to describe modern nations, in spite of their more or less distinctive “protonational” (Hobsbawm) elements, or the unique preexisting history, vertical *ethnies* (Smith), what we recognize today is the latest, modern, imprinting. They are the result of the process of modernization and cultural and political emancipation taking place in

<sup>5</sup> Palimpsests is a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain



the last few hundred years.

For example, Hobsbawm, in his eloquent discussion of the French revolution and its enormous importance for the birth of nationalism and modernism in the Western world, argues that the modern French nation was invented during the Third Republic, between 1870 – 1914, through “ethno-linguistic” nationalism, compulsory military service for all, education system and culture, the build-up of sense of glory, national proud and *revanche* against Prussia. “This helped to turn “peasants into Frenchmen”, in Eugen-Weber’s well known formulation” (*Smith, Gastronomy or Geology: the role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations, 1995 p 3-23*).

The paper will, first, briefly examine three cases of “old nations” – Italy, Japan and Switzerland.

Some nations are born as unions of provinces without apparent ethnic component or created on a premise of the distinctive ethnic origin. We will discuss the US as an example.

In both Smith and Hobsbawm’s understanding of nation building, prominent individuals, intelligentsias and advocates of a new political ideas and principles play a key role in the nation building. In this case, the national emancipation was intertwined with the cultural emancipation. Ukraine can be taken as an example.

### Italy

How old is the Italian nation? Did it begin with the fall of the Roman Empire? Did it begin with the creation of the *Repubbliche Marinare* (Maritime Republics) such as Venice, Genova, and Amalfi? Was the Italian nation rooted in ancient times or invented in the past couple of centuries?

In 1344, Francesco Petrarca wrote Canzone 128, lamenting the political fragmentation of Italy. Before him, Dante Alighieri, father of the Italian literature, composed works that, in the eyes of many Italians, constitute the foundations upon which Italian unification was built. However, it took almost five centuries for the ideas of these poets, including the necessity to unify Italy and the question of the Italian language, to serve as the inspiration for the creation of the Italian nation and modern Italy. The proponents of the unification relied on these ideas to awaken “the national conscience?” and galvanize national sentiment. Indeed, part of the success of the Italian unification can be attributed to these “protonational” elements. What

was done during the *Risorgimento* era was, as Hobsbawm explains, “the invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm, 1983) in the sense that the idea of a shared history was romanticized to gain widespread support.

It is important to note that *Risorgimento* alone did not fully create the nation. It was often seen as an aristocratic, bourgeois movement that failed to inspire the masses. What it did, however, was pave the way for Italy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to morph into what we perceive to be Italy today. Amidst the *Belle Époque*, Italy underwent an unprecedented economic transformation, with the advent of the industrial revolution giving birth to a renewed proletariat and bourgeoisie, and from which new political movements and mass social organization emerged. It was at this time that a fundamental period of political, social and cultural mutations began to take place. Surely, the birth of a new nation came with its relative labor pains and the high political price - fascism.

For Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, the nationalization of the masses and the replacement of old institutions, ideas, and values took place during and after World War I. The war proved to be a therapeutic experiment that allowed for the “spiritual unification” of the Italians as they took on the greatest national enterprise in their short history. (Gentile G., 1928)

### Japan

Is Japan an ancient or modern nation? The uniqueness of modern Japan that is layered with a variety of foreign cultures can trace back to the beginning of the modernization process initiated under the Meiji government, known as Meiji Restoration, at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Facing the foreign threat, the Meiji leadership felt an urgent need for industrialization and modernization of society, the military and the economy of the nation. The top-down national reconstruction aimed for the transformation from the former feudal social structure under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate (Bakufu or government) by adopting western knowledge and technology to rapidly modernize. This rapid westernization of the Meiji period was carefully conducted so as not to destroy Japanese traditional customs and practices. The leaders understood that the modernization and acquisition of national strength could not be achieved without ideological national unity and solidarity. As Sakuma Shozan, the Japanese scholar and philosopher described as “eastern ethics, western techniques (Tōyō dōtoku, seiyō

geijutsu 東洋道德、西洋芸術”, the Japanese modernization was based on Japan’s traditional and cultural identity, in which Shintoism, Japanese religion, and the Emperor, as a divine entity, played a significant role. The Meiji Constitution of 1889 declared a constitutional monarchy with the Emperor executing an absolute power over Japan’s people and territory. The Meiji government issued the guiding principle of education called the “Imperial Rescript on Education 教育勅語” that put great emphasis on Japanese traditional values and moralities as well as veneration to the Emperor as the head of the state. These social structures cultivated national unity and generated a nascent nationalism in early modern Japanese society. The simultaneous social restoration process with westernization and the establishment of nationalism created the national structure that constitutes modern and even contemporary Japan.

### Switzerland

Switzerland is one of the oldest European states which has continuously existed for more than 700 years, however, like Italy and Japan, it is difficult to pin the origins of the Swiss nation. The Old Swiss Confederacy (*Eidgenosefschaft*) was created in 1291 (?) as a provisional alliance between cantons (local communities) in the Central Alps to ensure peace among cantons and facilitate trade through the Swiss mountains. As in the case of Japan, searching through historic deposits of Switzerland would be a puzzling task for “national archeologists”. For example, the White Book of Sarnen contains the earliest surviving mentioning of William Tell, the Swiss national hero. However, the book itself did not contribute to the creation of the legend about him. The legend grew steadily over centuries, contributing to the perception of a wider public in pre-modern Switzerland after Aegidius Tschudi’s book about William Tell was published in the late 16th century. However, it was Antoine-Marin Lemierre’s play in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that made the legend popular and established the association of Tell as a symbol of national liberation. Thanks to this piece, Tell became an official mascot of the short-lived Helvetic Republic at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is an example of how myth, fabricated by modern 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalists, was revealed as a historic fact, contributing to the creation of national identity.

Antony Smith writes how the recent research of Swiss historians “revealed that both the official date for the foundation of the Confederation (1291) and... the interpretation of it as a foundation myth were [the] invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. (*Smith, Gastronomy or Geology: the role of nationalism in the reconstruction of*

*nations, 1995 p 3-23).*

### The US

The US was created by the voluntary union of provinces, but its creation is indivisible from its struggle for political emancipation, and its nation building revolves around political ideas and principles that inspired its formation.

“America” can mean two things: a country, geographically, the USA, and the idealistic interpretation of what the United States can be, which renowned film director Wim Wenders described as [the] “American Dream” in 1989 (quoted in Morley 96, p.94). At a broader level, America was established as a civic nation, with The Declaration of Independence serving as their creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These “rights,” particularly the pursuit of Happiness, are distilled into the “American Dream” for consumption by its citizens and by those who seek to join its community. The “American Dream” speaks to opportunity that is only to be constrained by the flaws of individuals. This individualistic pursuit of opportunity, or the notion of humans having control over their own destiny, is one core facet of American “deep culture” as described by Joseph Shaules, and it rests on top of the nested ethnic identities of its people (Shaules, p 21).

It took almost a hundred years marked with the development of material or non-material collective culture, historical dates with a new interpretation, symbols, flags, monuments, memory and remembrance, for the idea to evolve into Pledge of Allegiance, largely devised by Francis Bellamy (1892), Christian socialist minister, and officially adopted by Congress in 1945.

American literature and its historical memory revolve around this romantic chase of opportunity, which in the past was captured by a seemingly boundless American Frontier, the romantic origin story of the Tea Party, as well as the rise against the British. Today it is firmly rooted in the capitalist system with a straightforward bottom line: if you work hard and innovate, you will succeed.

### Ukraine

After the Treaty of Eternal Peace with Poland, the Russian Empire absorbed most of Western Ukraine as well as Southern Ukraine through the annexation of

the Crimean Khanate. At the time, the Ukrainian people were designated as the *malorossy* (*little Russians*), or Little Russians, and their language as *malorusskiy* (*little Russian language*). While Ukrainian was not explicitly banned under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and The Kyiv-Mohyla Academy was established in 1615, it was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the word *Ukrayina*, an old Cossack word for “motherland” was first used by the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius. *Ukrayina* as well as *ukrayins’ka mova* served as unifying terms for the Ukrainian nation. Soon afterward, the Brotherhood was banned and one of their most renown members, Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, was arrested and exiled from Ukraine and banned from writing in the Ukrainian language. Czar Alexander II’s secret Ems Ukaz of 1876 banned the Ukrainian language in books and performances, which only contributed to the struggle to keep the Ukrainian language and thus the imagined Ukrainian community alive.

### **YUGOSLAVIA IMAGINED - AN IDEA WITH THE PURPOSE**

Yugoslavia had the attributes of a *civic (multinational) nation state*, or “wide but shallow” (*Smith*) national organization. Yugoslavia was “a territorialized community with people perceiving territory as belonging to them” (*Smith*) and developed what Anderson calls horizontal structure through the solidarity and equality of its citizens. It was developed on the premise of distinctive local and political community bonds. It created a specific type of culture, including state symbols and other material and non-material elements which made it different than other nations. It also developed particular “vehicles of memories” (*Yerushalmi, 1989*) such as the system of education, commemoration and remembrance (monuments, archives, museums), as well as books, films, and artifacts by which it formed a distinct set of symbols, myths and collective memories.

One can describe Yugoslavia as a belated nation (*verspätete Nation*), as Helmuth Plessner described Germany. The logic of Plessner’s arguments may be helpful to explain the failure of democracy in Yugoslavia, but they cannot challenge the validity of the Yugoslav idea. Furthermore, the problem with democratic deficiency is not pervasive only among so-called belated nations. In other words, the relatively late creation of a Yugoslav state and its short life don’t repudiate the very idea behind it - an imagined community of people with noticeable cultural similarities.

Nationalism comes before nation, or in other words, idea of a community of peoples precede state creation. Though thoughts about the common space of South Slavs had sporadically occurred in their histories, the idea of South Slavic land(s) (*Yugoslavdom*) was not born until the rise of modern nationalism in Europe at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Yugoslavism reflects this epoch of change, modernization and identity diversification in Europe. These ideas contrasted with the hegemony of dynastic states that justified its existence from a top down perspective and who wanted to divert consequences of the “dual revolution”<sup>6</sup> (*Hobsbawm*) initiated by the French revolution. It is no surprise, therefore, that the idea of the imagined space of South Slavs was first conceived by Slavs living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Through German language, they were in touch with the newborn German national romanticism. Inspired by the German concept of “the German land” (*Deutchtum*) and the national-romantic movement *Storm and Stress*, the idea of Yugoslavism is, like many other nations formed at the time, related to common language and political emancipation.

Johann Gottfried Herder, a German romantic philosopher, believed that language is the prerequisite for the formation of nation. “Speak German, O You German”, wrote Herder. Following his pattern, but concerned about Slavic identity in the Monarchy, Jan Kollar, Slovak poet promoted literal cooperation and advocated linguistic closeness among Slavic people, particularly South Slavs.

The cooperation of several Slavic linguists (Kopitar, Miklošič, Rešetar, Jagić) “exerted great influence on the process of the linguistic convergence of Croats and Serbs” (*Roksandić, Yugoslavism Before the Creation of Yugoslavia, 2017*). The process gained momentum when Serbian linguist Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, a close friend of Kopitar, reformed the Serbian language, “radically separating the Serbian language and its Cyrillic alphabet from its Slavic-Serbian tradition, that is, from its organic connection with the Russian language” (*Roksandić, Yugoslavism Before the Creation of Yugoslavia, 2017*). The Vienna literary agreement, signed in 1850, was the key step towards the standardization of the common literary language for Croats and Serbs. It made possible convergence of Croats, Serbs and other Yugoslav

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6 The term dual revolution was coined by Eric Hobsbawm. It refers specifically to the period following the French revolution in Europe. This period was marked by political revolutionary changes in Europe coupled with the Industrial revolution, technological progress and economic development.

nations using the same or similar language, and it separated the Yugoslav linguistic (imagined) space from Bulgarians who had not been included in Croatian and Serbian language reforms (although, in the early stage of *Yugoslavdom*, Bulgaria was imagined as the third pillar of a greater Yugoslav state). When eventually the first Yugoslavia was created, Slovenia became the third corner of the triangle.

The development of Yugoslavism is indivisible from the idea of national emancipation and modernization – first of all Serbs and Croats, and then other nations of the former Yugoslavia. Although the Yugoslav movement can be understood as the result of necessity, or the occasion for Croats and Serbs to accomplish their national dreams and political ambitions, it brought into being the idea of Yugoslav federation or state as a convenient political framework for liberation of South Slavs. One can argue that the Yugoslav identity had been developed through the process, which Hobsbawm denotes as *negative ethnicity*, when groups do not define themselves according to what they (racially) are, but rather as what they are not. In this case, local bonds develop in reference to a neighboring group that is considered to be a political enemy or threat to one's identity (*Hobsbawm, 2012*). Given historical context, the Hapsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire served as catalysts for the creation of the Yugoslav idea.

The Yugoslav political idea had two major forms that had a lasting impact on the relations between the two largest nations in Yugoslavia – the Croats and Serbs. The Illyrian movement “expressed two levels of integrationist impulses, the Croatian and the South Slavic”, (*Roksandić, Yugoslavism Before the Creation of Yugoslavia, 2017*) whereas the name Yugoslavia was more acceptable for Serbs living in the Hapsburg Empire. “When the Croatian national elite accepted the Yugoslav name, it accepted it more consistently than any other South Slavic national elite, but it should also be emphasized that it did so with the support of many influential Serbs, mainly from Croatia, but also – and not too rarely – with the support of the Slovenes” (*Roksandić, Yugoslavism Before the Creation of Yugoslavia, 2017*). On the other hand, for the elite in the newly created Kingdom of Serbia, the Yugoslav idea was often exploited in the form of a romanticized narrative to conceal hegemonic political ambitions.

As our limited but educative case examination confirms, the importance of culture and particularly language (local bonds) as well as political emancipation (political bonds) for the formation and development of Yugoslavism was not an



exception, but the common denominator for the nation building process, and was not limited to modern Europe. The congruence of political and national ideals of peoples living in the two empires and newly created national states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century made Yugoslavia possible.

Yugoslav nations found themselves for the first time in their history living in a state that was created as a result of the Treaty of Versailles in 1918. The constitutive principles of the new state did not reflect political or national interests of all the peoples who became citizens of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. The atmosphere between the two wars in Europe was not conducive for the growth of liberal, democratic ideas even in well-established European nations, let alone in new ones. The interwar Yugoslavia never became a civic state, nor was it a state instituted as a liberal democracy in the full meaning of this word. Since the very first day of its existence, it had a problem with its legitimacy and the royal family lacked the public appeal outside the Serbian national corpus to serve as a unifying factor in a country burdened with economic, social and national problems. The ruling elites failed to deepen the existing pre-Yugoslav energy and continue with an open, inclusive nation-building process. Instead, the Yugoslavism was broadly perceived by other nations as a synonym for Serbian hegemonic aspirations.

As Pieter Troch observes “the ways in which Yugoslavism was formulated and adopted by ruling elites discredited the Yugoslav national idea and resulted in increasing delineation and polarization in the continuum of national ideas available in Yugoslavia” (*Troch, Yugoslavism between the world wars: indecisive nation building, p 227-244*)

Yugoslavism was politically bankrupt at the time of the German attack on Yugoslavia in 1941. The Yugoslav idea was revived during World War II, but not as a project of liberal national elites or groups of Yugoslav intellectuals in the exile. Its reemergence was closely intertwined with the revolution that had the triadic character represented in its overarching socialist ideology: 1) the socialist revolution; 2) the anti-Nazi resistance movement led mostly by partisans; and 3) the call for the restoration of Yugoslavia under new political and ideological circumstances. The revolution leadership understood that Yugoslavia could be restored only if the rights of all the peoples living in it were acknowledged, including those who had been suppressed or not recognized during the first state. Yugoslavism for the second time became matter of national liberation (emancipation) and political ideology,



and again these two principles stood in congruence.

The liberal political doctrine which places a citizen, their freedom and individual rights as granted by the Constitution in the center of the political system stood in the stark contrast with socialist ideology. To build a new Yugoslavia as a state of citizens, the party had to develop a formula which would keep political and national elements in unity and maintain citizens' consent at the high level.

The post-war reimagined Yugoslavia was built upon principles born in the war: socialistic ideology as a legacy of the revolution, the fight for liberation as the foundation for a new collective memory, and the federalism to recognize the rights of all constitutive nations of the state.

## **CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION**

The scope of the paper does not allow us to delve deep into the concepts of social construction of reality and the role of collective memory, but in order to proceed with our discussion of the construction and deconstruction of the second Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism, we must briefly reflect on these topics.

Social order is a human product, and as Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue, only humans can apprehend human phenomena as objective facts of nature or natural or cosmic law, what they called *reification*. (Berger, Luckmann, 1966). Through the process of objectivation, within four levels of legitimization, institutional order is transmitted to new generations. Berger and Luckmann underscore the importance of the symbolic universe, which is created to provide “comprehensive integration of all discrete institutional processes” (Berger, Luckmann, 1966). The symbolic universe gives order to history by linking “men with their predecessors and their successors in a meaningful totality” (Berger, Luckmann, 1966). It creates a collective memory shared by all individuals socialized within this framework (Berger, Luckman, 1966).

Maurice Halbwachs, who developed the concept of collective memory and was the first to discuss different group memories that coexist in a society, draws attention to the importance of “selective memory” (Halbwachs, 1992). According to Halbwachs, history is a never-ending process, it continues to live in a selective collective memory, and it is subject to change. Generations do not write new pages

of history, they rewrite the elements of the past. It is like reading a new book over and over, but with every reading it is slightly altered.

Remembering and forgetting is a deliberate, socially controlled process. For the creation of nations, forgetting is, for Ernest Renan, more important than remembering. He states that “historical error... is an essential factor in the creation of a nation” (*Renan 1882, Paris Presses-Pocket 1992*).

Every system tries to create and transmit its official definition of reality through the process of maintaining symbolic order. Collective memories play an instrumental role in the creation of the symbolic universe. Collective memory can be seen as a result of the dynamic correlation between cultural, political and social components of a society (*Confino, Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method, pp 1386-1403*). In this case, collective memory is result of political dynamics in the society, and it is constructed by political elites in power, along with associated intellectuals. However, this does not take into account the memories of ordinary citizens, which we can call “vernacular memory,” and “their links to [the] everyday level of experience” (*Confino, Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method, pp 1386-1403*). Therefore, there are many collective memories which stand in more or less permanent contention.

Memories live within different social strata and hold unique characteristics that give different meanings to the same historical events. Pluralistic societies allow for different memories to coexist despite every system’s intent to create and maintain one, official, collective memory. The construction of the past is inherently linked to the construction of the future and the legitimization of the existing system. The feeling of shared collectivity is based on a selective collective memory which provides a sense of continuity or permanency. Continuity is established through communication and social interaction. Only groups possess the capacity to re-address the past and give new meaning to historical events. In other words, “the history has become the extension of politics by other means” (*T. Berger, 2012*). As Hobsbawn says, “tradition is invention.”

As P.Berger and Luckmann discuss, symbolic order is often challenged from

within (*as different memories contiguously exist and confront one another*), as there is no single order that is accepted by all group members.

The level of the order endorsement defines the social dynamics within a group. If the degree of disapproval is high, it may cause a revolution which will lead to a new institutionalization, objectification and legitimization. Revolutions entail the collapse of the previous official collective memory and creation of a new one, but they cannot erase all existing group memories, which continue to live in contention with the approved narrative.

As Dejan Jović points out, socialism was a process in which the past and present was deconstructed in order to make space for the construction of the future. Constructed by the vanguard, this bright future was built in opposition to the present and the past. The (socialist) Yugoslav identity had been developed in a negative correlation to the past (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), and others from the socialist East (the USSR). These two Others were antipodes against which the new Yugoslav identity (post-1948) was to be constructed as a “mirror image.” (*Jović, Communist Yugoslavia and Its “Others”, p 277-302*).

It was not just socialist revolution (socialism) defined “by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other” (*Sahlins, 1989*). The deconstruction of the Yugoslav identity was inspired by the same principles and was driven by similar logic to the deconstruction of other systems before. Our identity develops in the close correlation with them – *the others* – through the process of social comparison and negation. As the “socialist vanguard” constructed its narrative and identity, so did “the nationalist vanguards” in former Yugoslavia by conceptualizing its ideology to create the identity of “good members” of their (eternal) nations.

The official narrative of every entity is comprised of government policies across five domains: rhetoric, education, commemoration, compensation and punishment (*T. Berger, 2012*). As we argue, the post-war Yugoslavia narrative was built upon principles born in the war: socialistic ideology as a legacy of the revolution, the fight for liberation, and a new type of federalism to recognize the rights of all constitutive nations of the state.

Building on this, we can argue that the promoters of the new Yugoslavia designed their nation in exactly the same way as other intellectual, cultural and

political elites did for their nations. The narrative had the goal to form a common memory, offer an official interpretation of the (recent) past, and shape up the identity of its people and generations to come. In short, to “objectify” the past and legitimize memory.

New material and non-material objects, historical dates with new interpretations, symbols, flags, monuments, commemorations and remembrances (*lieux de memoire*, as Pierre Nora<sup>7</sup> calls them), were gradually developed. In a hierarchy of memory, new symbols, objects and historic narratives were cast in the limelight. The Yugoslav revolution was glorified by the film industry, academia, schools and universities.

In the myriads of symbols that mark the time of the Socialist Yugoslavia, two of them stand out as particularly important. The first, *Titoism*, is related to the revolution, while the second principle of *brotherhood and unity* was created to justify the Yugoslav federation and the peaceful coexistence of its peoples.

The President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, was the personification of a new Yugoslavia. Tito’s myth was developed as a cultural phenomenon and the official narrative since early 1950s.

Titoism was a political doctrine made to keep “an ideological symbolic universe” vital and alive. Tito was the epitome of the revolution, Yugoslav socialism and Yugoslavia itself. (*Ognjenović, Jozelić, 2016*). Yugoslavia was a social experiment with Tito in the leading role (*Bing, 2016*). His birthday was celebrated as a youth day. A number of activities, including relay race, were organized to show deep, unquestionable respect and adoration of the Yugoslav peoples to Tito. As Ognjenović and Jozelić conclude, this resembled the cults of other socialist countries.

Meanwhile, *Brotherhood and Unity* was a social glue to get Yugoslav nations and peoples together and safeguard the Yugoslav Federation. It meant to serve as “a social bulwark” against the ever-present nationalistic narrative. It was inextricable from the civic (multi-national) attributes of the Federation, which was built on a premise that Yugoslavia was a state of working peoples that shared a common ideology.

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7 Contrary to historical objects, however, *lieux de memoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs. (Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, p 7-24)

Yugoslavia failed to sustain a narrative and subsequent collective memory broadly acceptable for its peoples. However, its undemocratic and often repressive regime was not the biggest difficulty for Yugoslavia to maintain “mass support for a newly created nation” (*Hobsbawm*). If, as “Hannah Arendt believed, terror is the essence of totalitarian rule, it would appear that many residents of Yugoslavia did not perceive it as a totalitarian state despite the one-party rule and rigid social convention” (*Bing, 2016*).

Instead, it turned out to be Yugoslavia’s civic (multi-national) character that made it particularly vulnerable. Although Yugoslavia was criticized for its rigid ideology or lack of democracy, in the eyes of nationalists, its issues were not centered in its ideology but in its multi-national character. The Socialist Yugoslavia was seen as discontinuity to the collective memory of Serbs and Croats nationalists. Today it is perceived as a historical mistake, incident, or “glitch”. Yugoslavia appeared to have been a victim of its civic dispositions rather than its democratic deficiency.

The persistence of irreconcilable national memories articulated in conflicting historical narratives had become an unresolvable problem for the country. It failed to keep its “national and political unity” in congruence. (*Gellner*) The appearance of “the national revival” movement in Serbia, in the late 1980s of 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the beginning of the final season of the Yugoslav sequence.

Serbian nationalists believed that Serbia’s vested interests had never been fully acknowledged in the second Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was the result of their sacrifice during the World War I and was the epitome of Serbian’s political ambition to have all Serbs living in one state. Without Serbia, in their opinion, Yugoslavia would have never existed. The Serbian state, which in the eyes of Serb nationalists included the Kingdom of Montenegro, was instrumental for an idea –*Yugoslavism* – to be converted into a state – *Yugoslavia*.

Croats, the second largest nation in the Federation, had a different memory of how the common state was created. They also believe that their historical rights in the creation of Yugoslavia should be recognized. Mark Biondich outlines that “the most significant factor shaping modern Croat nationalist ideology has been the concept of historical rights, that is, the belief that the medieval Croatian kingdom had never completely lost its independence, despite the union first with Hungary (1102) and then with the Habsburgs (1527)... The second factor shaping Croat

identity and nationalism was the identification with other (Southern) Slavs, which was, as in the case of Czechs and Slovaks, essentially a reflection of Croat numerical inferiority in relation to the Habsburg monarchy's dominant nations, the Magyars and the Germans" (*Biondich, We Were Defending the State": Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Croatia, p 54-109*).

Over time, the system bequeathed by Tito was not just 'the communist system,' but for Serbs was 'the anti-Serb federal system, created by the Croat, Tito. For Croats, it was 'the anti-Croat communist system, dominated by Serbs at the expense of Croats.' For Albanians, it was 'the land of the South Slavs, in which non-Slavs are second class citizens and in which the legitimate rights of the Albanians are quashed.' (*Ramet, The Dissolution of Yugoslavia Competing Narratives of Resentment & Blame, p 26-69*)

It seems that the idea of democratic Yugoslavia never had a real chance to thrive, although the Yugoslav idea was much stronger than it was believed to be at its moment of dissolution. The democratic transformation of the Federation had not been sincerely supported by national elites at the time. Their main goal was not only to delegitimize the ideology or non-democratic nature of Yugoslavia, but to disparage and deconstruct the federal system the state was built on, and to reconstruct the past, redefine the Yugoslav documented anti-fascist role in the WWII, and to create a new collective memory for generations to come.

The frequency of metaphors and attributes used in public discourse in reference to Yugoslavia can prove that democratization was secondary, with the deconstruction of the federation as the primary motive of national political and intellectual elites. Ljiljana Šarić and Mateusz-Milan Stanojević examine the level at which metaphor is important for the constructing of national narratives (*Metaphor, Nation and Discourse, 2019*). As they conclude, "in public discourse, the metaphor is used to create the sense of *sameness and otherness*". Among others, Liljana Šarić examined the frequency of the metaphor "dungeon of nations" (*tamnica naroda*) and its distribution across genres in the Croatian Web Corpus. (*Metaphor, Nation and Discourse, 2019*). She outlines that the metaphor is mostly used in connection to Tito's Yugoslavia, and is broadly used in other nations of the former Yugoslavia, such as Serbia, to describe the Socialist Yugoslavia.

The frequency of the metaphor of the “*dungeon of nations*” corroborates the narrative that narrows the question of democratization to the issue of national and religious collective rights, portraying the Yugoslav federation as a system created to suppress the rights of a particular constituent ethnic group (Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Albanians...). It is how a collectivist system – *socialism*, has been replaced with another collectivism – *nationalism*, which has ultimately led to neglect of democratization of Yugoslav societies.

### **INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION**

The civil war in Yugoslavia ended 20 years ago and new states were created, with some of them having re-emerged on the European map. However, the “break-up of formerly common states” in the case of Yugoslavia “necessarily means the break-up of a constructed shared historical memory. One could call it the Balkanization of memory”. (*Stojanović, September 10, 2019*). As Stojanović further argues, “a new interpretation of the past was offered as a revelation, final realization, and liberation from earlier platitudes on us by enemies” (*Stojanović, September 10, 2019, page 2*).

The Yugoslav state ceased to exist, but the confrontation over its legacy and the clash of its collective memories has continued up to today. As we highlighted earlier, there is one history with many (collective) memories standing in permanent contention<sup>8</sup> to one another. Just as the socialist revolution was not successful in deconstructing the pre-revolution group memories, the ongoing attempts to completely decompose the Yugoslav memory face similar roadblocks.

The beautification of Yugoslavia nowadays endures as a reflection or reaction to the current troubled societies and their nationalistic narratives in the same way as nationalism served as the reaction to the Yugoslav attempt to create a united collective memory. As Holbwachs rightly says, “the great majority of people more or less frequently are given to what one might call nostalgia for the past...” but when we reproduce our past “our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu.” In a sense, “one can escape from a society only by opposing to it another society” (*Halbwachs, 1992*).

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<sup>8</sup> In 1989 – at the time when Yugoslavia still officially existed – a group of intellectuals declaring themselves as Yugoslavs (Dubravka Ugrešić, Dejan Kršić, Ivan Molek) took the initiative to preserve the common heritage of the disintegrating community (Magdalena Reksć, 2016) See also, *Yugonostalgia* in the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* (Bošković, 2016)

However, the end of the Yugoslav state does not mean the end of Yugoslav community, as long as there is a group of individuals to keep it alive through their collective memory. In its essence, this group does not differ from any other imagined community. Furthermore, thanks to new technologies, it continues its existence in the cyber world and presents itself as an equal to other “real” communities of today.



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