

**Research Project: New and Ambiguous Nation-Building Processes  
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**MONTENEGRIN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND  
NATION-BUILDING 1948-1990**

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## **Montenegrin Historiography and Nation-Building 1948-1990**

Vladimir Dulović

The state of Montenegro as we know it today emerged in 1945 as a result of new communist re-shaping of Yugoslavia on federalist principles. In this and the next year Montenegro became a republic, it got the new capital city and a government, a flag and an anthem, its borders were laid out and amidst them the entire Slav Orthodox population was labeled as Montenegrins. Though the latter act was backed up by an official census in 1951, there was much ambiguity about the definition and constituting elements of the new nation even in the highest ranks of communist ideologists. Who were Montenegrins and what made them specific, what made them different from the neighboring nations? The most obvious solution was to connect their current being and origins with their state, which lived its independent life until 1918. However, this task was not so easy. Although very similar and closely-knit with the rest of Montenegro, the north-east of the Republic – Sandžak - and the maritime region of Boka Kotorska lacked the historical experience of living in the state of Montenegro. Secondly, 19<sup>th</sup> century Montenegro, led by its prince-bishops and princes, presented itself as a spearhead of Serbdom, craggy mountain land of Serbs who never succumbed to Turkish yoke and who were now coming upon the enemy, liberating their fellow brethren. The new nation needed its historiography and it was obvious that it would have to deal with the question of nationality and ethnicity of Montenegrins through history. There was much work to be done to explain how and why the Montenegrin nation came to being.

In the first two decades of its existence in socialist Yugoslavia, little was done to address these questions as both politicians and the scientists declined to break the status quo defined by the authorities through the scholarly interpretation of Milovan Djilas in 1945. In time, however, it became obvious that Montenegro must move beyond this and announce its full-blown national independence. This necessity was pushed not only by internal power struggle in the republic and the emergence of younger post-war generation of communist elite fearful of possible submersion into

Serbia, but even more so by the advancement of other republics which were from late 1960s quickly moving to transform Yugoslavia into a loose confederacy of nation-states. Not wishing to lag behind the others, Montenegro had to follow in their steps and form its own university, academy of arts and sciences, national newspaper et cetera. This was both a precondition of modernity and of use to the republican hierarchy who could institutionalize its power. New advances in technology such as the introduction of radios and TV sets in many Montenegrin homes opened up new possibilities of forging a self-image of the nation. Old practices of using schoolbooks, reading newspapers and leaning on the advances made in other republics (above all in Serbia) were reconsidered as being dangerous to the process or put in the phrase popular at the time were not in accordance with the socialist reality and equality amongst Yugoslav nations. Reality of living in a different, Montenegrin, setting (as opposed to those of the other republics/nations) brought with it changes and these changes gradually started to reflect as well in ways historians evaluated the past. While some cling to old well-known facts and visions, others decided to move in accordance to the new “socialist reality” and assumed a more self-asserting view on Montenegrin nationhood. Both sides had their tutors in the sphere of politics and historiography became a field in which one could observe the political clashes and the emergence of new ideas and practices. With growing possibilities for more open speaking out during the 1980s the debate moved on to involve an ever broader public, enrolling writers, linguists, ethnologist and so forth, spreading further into the everyday lives of “common people” announcing the democratization of speech that became one of the dominant ideas that stood behind the forces wishful of change.

In this paper I will give an overview of how the historiographic production in and on Montenegro evolved in the period between 1945 and 1990. By closer examination of when and under which conditions new works appeared and in which ways these we will also see the driving forces behind them, be it their own views on some subject or a will of some political entity to enforce its view.

The debate was not as potent as it might be judged from reading this paper. Though Montenegrins are very strong minded when it comes to the viewing of the past, the conditions under which the debate (or rather not one but more of them which in a broader scope proved all linked) was evolving were not too benevolent to opinions contradictory to those of the authorities. Therefore, in the first period, not only do we lack a clear position from the state officials but we cannot distinguish it even from

the criticism as there was almost next to none of it. Apart from a few discussants that, by their status had a privilege of ushering some themes, all the others are more than careful not to provoke against the common slogans and not to disclose themselves from the politically correct speech proscribed by the Party. This speech<sup>1</sup> was highly bureaucratic, wrapped up in phrases and unclear statements more and more so as we move up the scale of party hierarchy; one of its most fascinating abilities was not to say anything critical even when criticizing something. This feature makes it highly problematic for historians that need to read between the lines and concentrate on minute details in order to discover the thoughts behind it.

### **Defining a Nation**

A pivotal role in addressing the problems of Montenegrin nationhood was taken by top-ranking politicians. They were the only ones expected and allowed to do so by the Party but also had a grave need to offer their reasons for the creation of a Montenegrin federal unit, a step not so obvious back then as it might seem today and therefore provocative for many. The task was assigned to Milovan Djilas, a top ranking official of the Communist Party originating from Montenegro who was at the time the vice-president of the country and the minister for the People's Republic of Montenegro. In his later, rather regretful, recalling of these events that gave him the title of the "father of the Montenegrin nation", Djilas recalls that he was reluctant about these orders and did not want to create a new nation but rather wanted to bring back alive Montenegro as a political entity that underlined the difference between Montenegrins and the other Serbs. Djilas even claims stating bluntly to Tito that "Montenegrins are Serbs" upon which he got an answer "All right, but now we need a republic" (Djorgović 1989, p. 124). Concluding, Djilas states that "This formula was satisfactory to all the currents existing at the time in the Party" (*ibidem*). Though we might view the details of this recalling with suspicion, Djilas' brings up several important details here. Firstly, the new state and the Party that was controlling it *needed* the new republic. In order to have it they had to have a well argued Marxist explanation of a new republic based on the rights of national self-declaration as proclaimed by the Party and based on the example of USSR. On the other hand, there were some other

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent overview of its use is to be found in Milovan Đanajlić, *Muka s rečima*, Beograd 1990<sup>5</sup>. The first edition appeared in 1977 and stirred up a lot of spirits with its "political intonation" as one of its critics put it.

“currents in the Party” that had a different opinion on the subject and therefore Djilas knew he shouldn’t go too far with the endorsement of Montenegrin nation. The feeling that the new nation was formed without a clear will or consensus from both inside of Montenegro and from some circles in Belgrade continued to pervade in the first two decades of its existence, blocking the wholehearted or even active pursuit of the proclaimed goals.

In the beginning of 1945 the official herald of the Party, the “Borba” daily, brought a series of editorials and articles dealing with the problem of Montenegrin nation. The series culminated on 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1945 with the article entitled “On the Montenegrin national question”<sup>2</sup> written by well educated and very skillful debater Djilas. His main task was to clear up the blurred differences between Montenegrin-dom and Serbdom, often mixed up by partizan communists themselves during the war. Moreover the article was used to discredit the two other parties existent in Montenegro during the civil war - the federalists as separatists and helpers of ustašas, and unitarists as the progenies of the old hegemony and of a “small group of Serbian rich” (*šacice srpskih bogataša*) – implying that the course of the Party is the only one reasonable one. The Party’s stand on the question set the communists in between these two “extremes”: there is absolutely no intention to erasing Montenegrin individuality but there also wont be any separation of Serbs and Montenegrins. The Montenegrin people have their own nationality reflected in national equality with other peoples and the federal position of Montenegro. Standing on the point of Marxist dialectics, and using the “laws of nation-forming” Djilas went one step further and ventured into a historical explanation of the emergence of Montenegrins. “Montenegrins, surely, belong to the Serb branch of South Slav tribe” (*srpskoj grani jugoslovenskog plemena*) but “the roads of development towards a nationhood were different in Serbia and in Montenegro”. In a word, “Montenegrins are ‘Serbs’ differing from all other Serbs” and that is, Djilas claims, a fact felt by all of the people living there (meaning in Montenegro). The words of such an important figure as Djilas set the line to be followed by the others as well. Similarly, Blažo Jovanović, the prime minister of the People’s Republic of Montenegro, repeated Djilas’ phrases at a party meeting in 1948 (Jovanović 1948).

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<sup>2</sup> There also exists a short pamphlet by the same title, probably printed around the same time as the newspaper article

Though at some moments Djilas seems on the verge of falling out of balance in his middle course, in the end his statement is clear: Montenegrins are a nation since they had and again have their national state; “politically” Montenegrins they are ethnically Serbs, from which they emerged. Clear at that moment and for the occasion of forming a new national republic. The problem is however that this statement established the Montenegrin nation as something in between and frozen in the moment, since from this stand adopted by the Party it is not clear how far the emergence of novelties in Montenegrin nation can go and where will that bring it in their position of “Serbs differing of all other Serbs”.

### **A Modest Start**

One of the first steps in forging the new nation after the War was the publishing of the book “The Creation of Montenegrin State and the Evolution of Montenegrin Nationality” (*Stvaranje crnogorske države i razvoj crnogorske nacionalnosti*) written by Jagoš Jovanović and published in 1948. Jovanović was at the moment the head of the freshly founded Historical Institute of the People’s Republic of Montenegro; furthermore he was a first cousin of Blažo Jovanović and a proven communist and partizan fighter (Markuš 2001, 262) – in a word, the most competent but in the same moment also the most reliable figure to be found for this job. We should in addition note that the first book published by the Historical Institute of Montenegro, deals with the “evolution of Montenegrin nationality” which obviously needed urgent scientific recognition and promotion.

The title promises a strong statement on Montenegrin national sovereignty but the contents offer far less as the author basically keeps to the notions of previous historians that dealt with the subject and attacks the “bourgeois” historiography only on its positions on the 1918 unification, the subject with which the book closes. Thus J. Jovanović practically repeats the stand of Milovan Djilas on the matter who argues that the Montenegrin (as well as Serbian) nation emerged with their states in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. from the same, Serb people. Nevertheless, this is the first work dealing with history of all the regions of Montenegro within its borders as proclaimed in 1945. Equally important and articulate is the formulation of the book’s subtitle – “History of Montenegro from the beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> c to the year 1918” - which carries back the name of the state far back into the history even if the name *Crna Gora* was first recorded only in 14<sup>th</sup> c. Though it keeps focus on Montenegro and the states that existed prior to it,

the book has little in common with later pro-independist historiography as it misses all the points later stressed as crucial in Montenegrin statehood: it pays almost no attention to the state of Duklja, has nothing against Stefan Nemanja and the Nemanjić dynasty, disregards Balšićs as state-builders and accepts them only as transitory feudal lords. The author has no problems with Serbs even to the extent of calling the Cetinje printing house “the first among the Serbs”, but generally keeps away from such designations, the fact especially evident in comparison to pre-WWII authors. Jagoš Jovanović’s book is especially important as it was to be the only book on the subject for several decades.

### **The Two Projects**

J. Jovanović’s book remained not much more than an outline based on literature which, with the advance in scientific research, was becoming speedily out of date. Therefore in 1961 the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Montenegro decided to sponsor from the republican budget a large project intended to publish a detailed history of Montenegro. “Istorija Crne Gore” was indeed an awe-worthy project that should have produced eight voluminous books written by leading scientist. The first book (“From the oldest times to the end of 12<sup>th</sup> c”) appeared in 1967, the second (in two volumes, “From the end of 12<sup>th</sup> to the end of 15<sup>th</sup> c”) in 1970 but then the project was almost stopped. The main agenda that could have bothered the new, younger leadership of the Montenegrin party, which gradually replaced the older cadre such as Blažo Jovanović, was that almost all of the authors in the book were from Belgrade. This was, of course, commonsense considering that these were the leading figures in their fields of research and that Montenegro didn’t have the scientists of such capacity to replace them. However, this also meant that the authors were too independent and not at all interested in promoting notions on anything distinctively separate in the history of Montenegro. In a word, the publication was going in the opposite direction from the designated course of the republic, it integrated Montenegrins with(in) the Serbs through their interknit/mutual history. The Party leadership remained nominally benevolent to the project but it sought out to correct its course. When it failed in doing so problems started to appear for the project.

In a session of the Central Committee of the LC of Montenegro in 1970 a decision was reached to order a “Marxist study on the Montenegrin question”. The writing of this book was entrusted to Savo Brković, an older communist (b. 1906), bearer

of the medal of the National Hero, a trustworthy Party cadre for various assignments in Montenegro who held several high positions including the one of a major of state security after the war and a minister in the first post-war government. As Brković was not a historian but held a diploma in law he was to be aided by “assistants from various spheres”. Deducing from the later disagreement on its results and the end of support to S. Brković’s thesis, there surely were some doubts about this project but obviously a stronger current in the leadership prevailed. During the course of the writing Brković started a prolonged debate in “Pobjeda” on the subject of his writings with Dimitrije-Dimo Vujović, a historian of the older generation and the leader of the redaction working on the “History of Montenegro”, the discussion that announced what kind of arguments Brković was gathering.

### **The Pressure of Evolution**

The year 1970 marks also the beginning on the intensified building of cultural, scientific and media infrastructure in Montenegro which barely advanced in previous two decades. Thus, Montenegro was the only republic without a daily newspaper, it didn’t have a TV studio and its Radio Titograd was in poor condition. It remained also the only republic without an Academy of Sciences and Arts<sup>3</sup> and a university which led to the fact that c. 70% of university-educated Montenegrins didn’t return back to their native republic. In mid 1970 the leadership of the republic, led by Veselin Djuranović reported to Tito that the “constituting of a republican socio-political community on the basis of self-management is hardly imaginable and will be so even less in the future without a TV studio” (*Prijem delegacije Crne Gore*, Brioni, 24, 6, 1970, KPR II-2). This was emphasized in the light of the fact that there are already 50.000 TV sets in the republic, which sets the estimate at almost 40% of population as potential viewers. Secondly, they reported that they are working to transform “Pobjeda” newspaper from publication appearing twice weekly into a proper daily. Work on organizing the Academy of Sciences and Arts was also on the way; this would help stimulate the return of younger cadre back to their republic and “bring together all the available forces of scientific workers and cadres from Montenegro and probably from outside of Montenegro as well, and in this way on a long-term basis it would secure the development of scientific research for the needs of economy and social services”

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<sup>3</sup> The Scientific Society of the People’s Republic of Montenegro (*Naučno društvo NR Crne Gore*) as the core of the future Academy of Sciences and Arts was founded in 1950 but was dissolved in 1956

(*ibidem*). Finally, they also notified that the work is on the way on the multi-volume “History of Montenegro” with a remark that the work is done quite slowly “partly because of the funding and partly because of other hardships on the organization of publishing”. They described the project as one of the “especially valuable scientific ventures linked with the cultural affirmation of Montenegro and for giving answers to some unanswered questions which are nowadays posed in the domain of history”. These mysterious unanswered questions were in fact points in history of Montenegro that were not in accordance with the current national policies and thus new, groundbreaking discoveries were expected.

We should not easily be led to the presumption that all of these decisions in founding new institutions were intended solely for the purpose of nation-building. Here we have a process in which the development of other republics and the situation in Yugoslavia established the standards for Montenegro to follow if it intended to remain equal with other members of the federation.

Later that year the 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Committee of the LC of Montenegro concluded that “upon the decisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> congress of the LC of Montenegro and upon the decisions of the 9<sup>th</sup> congress of LCY, the culture and creation have entered a new era, which is of far higher value in many aspects” (*u novo, po mnogim momentima kvalitetnije razdoblje*). Standing on such a position, it gave “full support” to the continued work on the “History of Montenegro” but its aims and intentions seemed to be contrary to that of the project’s redaction. Namely, the Central Committee “pointed out the contemporariness (*aktuelnost*) of the development of scientific critical thought on cultural-historical legacy of Montenegro, which would have a task to make a necessary scientific and historical *selection* of the *real values* and to integrate these values into the current tissue of Montenegrin culture” (*Informacija o 17. sjednici CK SK Crne Gore, KPR II-1*). However, the Committee decided to take a precautionous, middle course on this question stating additionally that the communists are “equally against bureaucratic unitarism which favors larger nations, disrespecting the national differences, individuality, tradition, feelings etc, as well as against a bureaucratic particularism and keeping back in one’s own national frames” and that communists “are equally in opposition to the phenomenon of cultural patronage as well as against the phenomenon of bureaucratic isolation” (*ibidem*). This middle course would thus mean working on a Montenegrin culture and history within the wider framework of Yugoslav unity but not letting it slip into promoting more rela-

tions with Serbs and Serbia than necessary for finishing the task. As in the rest of the period on which this paper discusses, the abovementioned term “national frames” actually means “*republican* frames” while the term “culture” has a wider implication than it might seem at the first look. The answering of the unsolved questions from Montenegrin history would have to take in the account the present-day situation and needs of the society of one self-managing socialist Republic. These can be spotted in the intentions (amongst other already mentioned projects) to include also the work on the history of Montenegrin literature and publishing of the textbooks on national history for elementary and secondary schools.

The selection of the “real values” - of course those in line with the present-day political situation in Yugoslavia - from the bulk of the previously gathered knowledge on Montenegrin past would prove itself to be a task in which the redaction of the “History of Montenegro” didn’t want to be involved. As a consequence, the leadership of Montenegro had to turn to the other side, although it had much to object to its views which were looming on the edge of the open nationalism and dangerously self-contained “particularism”. The next, third book in the “History of Montenegro” (“From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the end of 18<sup>th</sup> c.”) appeared after a lot of difficulties only in 1975 but this is where the project definitely ended. The main dilemma concerned what would come out in the next book that was about to deal with the period starting with metropolitan Petar I who ventured on organizing the Montenegrins into a state. While connections with Serbia and Serbs could have been tolerated up to this moment, advancing into the 19<sup>th</sup> c (in which according to the Marxist thought nations were created on bourgeois bases) with a stand that Montenegro’s statehood was based on a sort of Serb unity was intolerable. As Radoslav Rotković later maliciously observed, the project was “the elongated effect of the science of bourgeoisie to which we in Montenegro, against the clarity of science and our own interest, gave millions of hard earned funds” (*Praksa* 4, 1981, p. 124). If the authors can’t be judged for writing from the positions of what the established scientific view was, there is a place for criticism for not trying to discover something new. This, of course, would be impossible considering their biographies and credentials. The only ones who could get interested in something like this were to be Montenegrin scientists, most of them of younger generation and still unknown in academic circles. The next book in the series (“Montenegro in times of metropolitans Petar I and Petar II”) was actually already prepared but it was never to be published in Montenegro. It appeared only ten years

later in Belgrade in a drastically changed situation and with a clear intention to inflict a blow to Montenegrin nationalists and all those who resented its publication.

### **The Heated Debate Begins**

The long-awaited Marxist study by Savo Brković's appeared in 1974 under title "On the formation and the development of the Montenegrin nation" (*O postanku i razvoju crnogorske nacije*). Though justly underlined as a cornerstone in historiography on the subject (Rastoder 2002) it is so more in its original approach to the subject than to the scientific advance achieved in it. To be precise, Brković is not only a bad historian or Marxist but the overall tone of his work is one of a heated discussion, at moments led barely by reason, not to mention science. In the introductory chapter Brković continues his dispute with D. Vujović calling for an equal right of every man to give scientific contribution (thus disregarding Vujović's objections of his poor scientific qualifications) and disqualifies his opinion as obsolete and rooted in the "bourgeois science" while he, as he points out later in the book, works from the positions of the "liberated science, which is based on materialistic notion of history". Most of the book is in fact a clash with Vujović who has "a paternalistic stand towards those who even today objectively preach great-serbianism (*velikosrpstvo*) in Montenegro". Arguing that the "the origins of the nations and their ethnic belonging (sic!) are no more important in contemporary society" he also criticizes the "transfer of nations to the oldest periods" quoting Krleža and adding that this is the Marxist stand on this question as well. The primary thesis of his work should have been to show that "in the process of historical development, through constant liberation fight, a consciousness of mutual belonging to Montenegrin people, that is to Montenegrin nation, has grown" but, as we shall see, Brković contradicts himself on these postulates in most of his book. The book makes a radical turn in viewing most of the Montenegrin past: Nemanjić Raška state is said to have occupied Zeta, proselytizing Catholics, destroying their churches and books, putting their nobles and peasants into an uneven position for which reason they rebelled; Dukljan historical consciousness lived for centuries after the demise of the state; Zečani (*Zetans*, inhabitants of medieval state of Zeta) were one of the ethnic groups which together with Serbs, Albanians, Macedonians and others lived in the Serbian Empire; the population of Montenegro is autochthonous and does not descend from various regions; when they speak of themselves as "Serbs" Montenegrins of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c. mean "Slavic Christian"; the whole of the

Serbian politics up till 1945 was led by the Ilija Garašanin's "Načertanije" programme intended to create a Greater Serbia etc. Even if the Montenegrin ruling class and bourgeoisie did succumb to the propaganda that they are Serbs, this notion never took any root in the "Montenegrin peasant masses". In his book one of the constant forces present in the history of Montenegro is the one trying to liberate itself from Serbia: in the same way Nemanja occupied Duklja, Serbian army occupied Montenegro in 1918; both occupations provoked a popular uprising. These parallels also speak vividly on the continuity of feelings in Montenegro and of Serbian malicious intentions enduring over a thousand years. While some of these theories have been mentioned before, Brković now pushes them to their very limits. He certainly raises a lot of new questions from the Montenegrin past, many of which more serious followers in his steps have led to interesting conclusions, but in his radical "Serbophobia"<sup>4</sup> Brković also discredits himself and his position with many absurd theses. It is also very important to note that the book follows closely the vocabulary of its era with notions of classes, repressive bourgeoisie, imperialist powers etc. while the adversaries of his views are "against our social reality", "the remains of the defeated Serbian bourgeoisie", who are "smuggling contra-revolution into our social flows".

It is hard to believe that this book is what the Central Committee had bargained for. Though its stand is not as extreme as those of the group labeled as "separatists", Brković's book is certainly pointed out only against one side and its fierce reaction against it brings it therefore much closer to the "separatists". This was certainly not to the liking of some members of the Central Committee but the leadership was beginning to be divided on the subject. Party's official line was still a middle one: criticizing both sides but working on promoting "republican" interests equally in economy and in culture. During his visit to Montenegro in 1977 Tito spoke that "the fight of the Montenegrin people as a basis, common to all our peoples, for national identity and independence got its full logic only when it was connected with a class struggle" (*Poseta J. B. Tita Titogradu*, 25. 2. 1977, KPR II-1). The thesis was respected by both of the sides involved in the dispute but they both doubted that a class struggle in a semi-confederation in which Yugoslavia was turning was a way that offered solutions.

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<sup>4</sup> Following the appearance of this book the term Serbophobia is widely used by the opposing party designating a fear of anything Serb in Montenegrin history, culture or traditions. Its constant use provoked S. Brković to use the term "Ethnogenesophobia" in the title of his next book

Curiously, there is little to no record of what kind of response did S. Brković's book provoke, apart from the obvious answer by Dimo Vujović that turned into a continuation of their debate in "Pobjeda". Considering the amount of new and provocative in the book the only reason for this unexpected silence could perhaps lie in the fact that the sign sent was correctly apprehended: Brković was a man close to the leading figures in the republic and what he wrote obviously had support from these circles. The fury of the response had to wait for six years and the next book that opened the dispute between two sides with great intensity that made even the authorities take notice and respond.

### **Ethnogenesis Steps In**

This book was Špiro Kulišić's "On the Ethnogenesis of Montenegrins" that appeared in 1980 (his adversaries on all occasions noted how luxuriously it was equipped, implying that someone stood behind him). Slim academic credentials of a less known ethnologist didn't stop Kulišić from bold theses, unfortunately rarely based on any real scientific research<sup>5</sup>. The book goes one step further from what S. Brković previously implied – the Montenegrins and Serbs are not only two different nations but have almost nothing in common: the oldest layer of Montenegrin nation are Dukljans who arrived to their Balkans homeland before the Serbs, there was no significant influx of population to the territory of Montenegro during Turkish rule, etc. In a few words with which the author brings his book to conclusion: "As we look more carefully upon the results of older and contemporary research on Montenegro it is becoming evermore clearer that the Montenegrin people represents a separate ethnos, somewhat different from other South Slavic peoples, of course with many similarities with them. These characteristics of Montenegrin nation can be seen in physical type, in language, in traditional culture, especially in older social organization and a number of specific customs (...)"<sup>6</sup>. The fact that the scientist had different opinion lies in the fact that it is the work of our "older bourgeois science" and in case of ethnology work of Serbian scientists Cvijić, Erdeljanović and others. If Savo Brković promoted a continuity of Montenegrin statehood and nationhood from the 8<sup>th</sup> c on-

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<sup>5</sup> Among mistakes pointed out by other authors are misquotations, misinterpretations, quoting out of context, intentional construction, poor knowledge of literature etc.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to mention that Kulišić reaches this conclusion although his book does not deal with all of these subjects. It is one of many unclear places where he reaches conclusions without bringing any evidence on them

wards, Kulišić now tried to prove that this continuity is based on racial and linguistic basis and that it gave birth to a separate culture that also traces its roots deep in history.

If the discussion about Brković's book was deemed as too dangerous or was hushed up, Kulišić, who wasn't a high Party official, received harsh criticism. On the other hand, he also had several sturdy supporters in scientific circles and the stand off between two camps threatened the relative peace of scientific community in the republic. The blows between the two camps were publicized in the daily press and quickly started getting political dimensions. The situation urged even the presidency of the Central Committee to discuss such tendencies. Veselin Djuranović spoke outlining the middle course of the leadership: "If we stand on the viewpoint that nation is a product of contemporary historical events from the epoch of capitalism and socialism and that in these conditions appeared specific political, economical and cultural qualities in the development of society in Montenegro which were crucial to the development of Montenegrin national consciousness, and later to the constituting of Montenegrin national individuality, than these approaches and these positions that want to relocate the whole problem to the past and make the ethnic origin and the arrogation of cultural values the centre of discussion – they can truly undermine the whole position of the League of Communists (...). Preoccupation of individuals with the question of the ethnic origins of Montenegrins – trying thus to establish their ethnic distinctiveness from the Serbs – proving the Montenegrin national individuality, shows not only their weakness to realize the essence of national question on the whole, the character of a nation and especially, to understand the peculiarity of Montenegrin national question" (Jovanović 1989<sup>2</sup>, p. 397). On the other hand, a somewhat different stand was taken by Veljko Milatović who was by this time seen as the most benevolent to - if not the direct tutor - of the ethnic Montenegrin camp<sup>7</sup>. Milatović spoke that there is work to be done against "the indoctrination inflicted by ruling classes or dynasties in the last hundred years in both written or orally transmitted

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<sup>7</sup> As his colleague from these days Radivoje Brajović later observed "He had a distinctive feeling for the national question. On every attempt to endanger the national identity of Montenegrins, their state and culture, he would react decisively, with knowledge and at the right time. (...) Perhaps he felt more and before the rest of us the danger of the awakening of the greatserbian nationalism (...)", Radivoje Brajović, *Povodom godišnjice smrti Veljka Milatovića*, [http://montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/istorija/cg\\_od\\_1945/povodom\\_godisnjice\\_smrti\\_veljka\\_milatovi\\_ca.htm](http://montenegrina.net/pages/pages1/istorija/cg_od_1945/povodom_godisnjice_smrti_veljka_milatovi_ca.htm)

form” and “that when we are dealing with errors of our past (...) we need to be initiators of corrections, of critical rectification and clearing up” and that this needs to be done in historiography, ethnology and in linguistics (*Pobjeda*, 1. 2. 1981.).

The leadership, obviously not too united on the question, decided to take the safe way. It could not, as some implied, and did not, lead the way in the process of ethnic distancing from the Serbs since this would mean breaking the ranks of the party and setting assail to the waters of nationalism. To support the “ethnic Montenegrin” side, certainly favored by some, would shine a light on them as nationalists working against unity and integration; to side with the “Serb” party would mean to undermine their positions as a separate republic and a need for cultural and scientific institutions that were organized, to bring in a new factor that could interfere with their running of things. The Central Committee therefore stood on the position that Montenegrin national individuality should be developed within the notion of closeness to the Serbs (in as much as with the other Yugoslav nations) but remain always independent, safeguarding the reason of Montenegro’s existence. This reflected both the mild attitude of the Serbian leadership which never made any objections to their comrades in Montenegro and the overall Yugoslav view still in perspective. However, during the next decade this middle course would prove itself to be unsustainable. Firstly, since one could not promote an aggressive separate identity but keep it leashed. Secondly, it was only a matter of time when the radical nationalistic party in Montenegro is going to provoke a similarly radical thought in Serbia which is going to promote not only ethnic identity of Serbs and Montenegrins, then also - as a consequence – the national unity of two entities.

The fact that Kulišić’s book was promoted in the Marxist Centre of the Central Committee of LC of Montenegro in Titograd certainly raised some brows and the highest leadership found itself in an unpleasant position. Therefore a discussion entitled “Ethnogenesis of Montenegrins and the Marxist determination of nation” was organized in June 1981 in the same place with leading authorities on the subject from both sides gathered in one place and with some of the politicians as spectators. The discussion was organized by the Party and opened by a high-ranking official Nenad Bućin who explained it as necessary for both “scientific and ideo-political (*idejno-politički*) reasons, since there are diametrically different opinions given on the subject, and which are not always based or motivated by scientific but with ideo-political reasons”. The unsigned introduction states also that the discussion, “neither a promotion

nor the trial to the book” will benefit to “the further research on the conditions of formation, development and affirmation of the Montenegrin nation”. Despite the fact that some of the exposes “included superficial attacks and attacks on cultural-political atmosphere in Montenegro without veritable argumentation” the Marxist centre decided to publish them all in a special edition of their magazine “Praksa” (*Praksa* 4, 1981). In his introductory notes at the beginning of the discussion N. Bućin gives a Marxist definition of a nation continuing to point out some usual “one-sidedness and vulgarizations” such as “the notion on complete complementarity of nation and state, on nation as a biological category and viewing of nation as a cultural phenomenon” as well as “a notion on predominant significance of two factors – ethnic and cultural-linguistic”. Bućin further speaks against the thoughts about the existence of nations of “pure blood”, against projecting of current situation, especially the republican borders, into past times, against registering all the differences and peculiarities “only to make the borders between the nations ‘more reliable’”. One of the speakers, Vukašin Mićunović, pointed out that separating Montenegrins from the Serbs is going to provoke different feelings around Montenegro and that it is bound to divide the nation into two. Perhaps the most precise formulation on the value of Kulišić’s book was given by D. Vujović who said that his book is not worthy of public’s attention but the reactions to it are. Further on he points out that nation and ethnic extraction are not the same and that devaluing Kulišić’s work on Montenegrin ethnogenesis does not mean negating Montenegrin nation. Vujović criticizes several points: giving the priority to historical right and bringing new context in modern frames; the notion that Montenegrin historical memory is being divided from its Serb context while other less known authors from the far past are being promoted as crucial for Montenegro; that the Montenegrin national being evolved in the first centuries after Slavic arrival to the Balkans; the “competition” in being older, greater, better than other nations; the “national segregation” of cultural legacy. As a communist, he points out that no one who fought for the affirmation of Montenegrin nation did not fight against Montenegrin consciousness of their Serb ethnic extraction, since this consciousness did not endanger this affirmation. In his short reflection on the subject president of the presidency of Montenegro Veljko Milatović noted that the ideologisation of every scientific subject leads to a mechanical projection of past into the present which means that different parties are formed around different opinions, bringing it to the level of daily politics and that is unacceptable to the League of Communists. In defense of Kulišić

spoke Vojislav Nikčević who pointed out that the Byzantine sources are too confused to follow, that it is obvious that in 12<sup>th</sup> century there is a Dukljan/Zetan identity conflicted with the Serbian one, that Serbdom of 18<sup>th</sup> c was a way to mobilize forces against the common Turkish enemy on the basis of Orthodox faith while later (in times of King Nikola) it was used with hegemonic aspirations. Radoslav Rotković added that his studies revealed that the forefathers of Montenegrins came from NW of the Old Slavic mass, while Serbs and Croats came from its middle.

Contrary to the wishes of the organizers the break between the two camps was not mended but got even deeper (*Praksa*, 1981, pp. 7-8). Two historical narratives have emerged and both were pushing hard for new evidence of their thesis, very rarely absorbing anything that the other side was trying to prove. If the “Serb” side considered their opponents unqualified, bad scientists that were twisting the facts to their own benefit, the other, “Montenegrin” side held that the other camp was just re-sounding the previous conclusions reached by Serbian historiography which had a tendency of assimilating Montenegrins. It is interesting to note two things from the discussion, two “rules of the game”: the first one is a Marxist approach to the subject which is obligatory, the only difference being how much one knows about it and how much one wants to use it to prove his thoughts. Even if the outspoken ideas were not in line with Marxism it was nevertheless important to bring in a word or two about a “true Marxist stand”. Secondly, the negation of Montenegrins being Serbs is obvious, but no one still dares to negate the Montenegrin nation – one of the characteristics of the post 1989 era.

The institutionalization of Montenegrin culture could not stop half way and logically went further. The Institute for literature and language of the CANU was formed in 1980. From the symposium on the periodisation of Montenegrin literature, populated heavily with “separatist” party (R. Rotković, S. Vujačić, V. Nikčević, B. Banjević etc.) appeared an initiative to start with the writing of a history of the Montenegrin literature (*Uspio naučni skup*, “Pobjeda”, 16. 5. 1981.). If one has an institute for literature and language in *Montenegrin Academy* than it should, all logic implies, deal with Montenegrin literature, if still not openly with language. If one organizes a symposium on periodisation of Montenegrin literature, the next step is to write its full history. Taking action against these acts would involve discussing an ever thinner line of separation from “republican/national” Montenegrism and the “ethnic” one.

### **Encyclopedic Dilemmas**

The next theme in which two camps clashed were the articles concerning Montenegro in the “Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia” published by the *Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod* in Zagreb. The favor of the encyclopedia’s redaction stood clearly with the “ethnic Montenegrin camp” and most of its top promoters got the chance to write an article or two in this prestigious publication. The second book that included the references on Montenegro appeared in 1982, but the really problematic one proved to be the third volume with entries on Montenegrins, their language, literature and so forth, which presented them like every other Yugoslav nation. If this upbringing of Montenegrins to full national distinctiveness (as these were promulgated) alike Macedonians or Croats could be dismally tolerated, the disputes as to whether Njegoš should be included into an entry on Serb literature, as it is already included in the one on Montenegrin literature, infuriated many. One of those who reacted to this was the ever-present Dimo Vujović (*Intervju*, 138, 12. 9. 1986.).

### **The Voice of a Changing Tide**

In the few years following Tito’s death the political situation and intellectual atmosphere in Yugoslavia changed drastically. In September 1986 a book appeared which would herald the change of tide and the resurgence of a harsher attitude toward things going their way in Montenegro. This was Batrić Jovanović’s “Montenegrins on Themselves” (*Crnogorci o sebi*). Jovanović was a Montenegrin communist of older generation (b. 1922), partizan fighter since 1941, Yugoslav ambassador to the UNESCO and, at the time, a member of the federal parliament from Montenegro. Apart from the short note by which the redaction of the publisher “Narodna knjiga” separated itself from all of the author’s opinions, and a lengthy preface by author, the rest of the book consists of quotes of Montenegrins from the time of metropolitan Danilo (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.) to 1941 in which they mention their Serb identity. In the preface, Jovanović reveals pressures by the Montenegrin leadership on the publisher not to put out his book but after its appearance it got a wide publicity and most positive reactions in Serbia. This was in accordance with the atmosphere of the time as Serbia felt incapable of influencing the bad situation in Kosovo and felt greatly underpowered by the federal system and the 1974 constitution. A story of a little known development of events in Montenegro brought up in Jovanović’s preface, followed by self-absorbing thoughts on the Serbdom of Montenegrins could not pass unnoticed. Nonetheless, in

this book Jovanović retains a positive view on the Montenegrin leadership, at least its larger part, quoting Djuranović and others on many subjects, although he also points out that there was no disassociation from either Brković or Kulišić in political forums. This following of the middle route implies that he did not denounce the Montenegrin nationhood – “Today, in case of a vast majority of Montenegrins, there exists a Montenegrin national consciousness but it certainly did not develop in negation of Serb ethnic or national (*narodnosne ili nacionalne*) consciousness of the forefathers of present-day Montenegrins” and that “denying Montenegrin nation is, of course, a great-Serbian stand” (*Intervju*, 138, 12. 9. 1986.). In an answer to this interview stepped out the new fiercest promoter of Montenegrin ethnicity, Jevrem Brković.

### **Rising Worries**

In mid and late 1980s Brković was just one in a long line of nationalists from Montenegro who were writers by vocation or gathered around artistic magazines and associations. Apart from the Zagreb “Okó” which rarely had an issue without an article of Sreten Zeković, Milorad Popović, Borislav Cimeša etc, they also founded in Cetinje “Ars; Journal for Culture, Art and Science” which among its editors and the board included all of the prominent nationalists from the 1990s. Nicely visually equipped, “Ars” brought articles on world, Yugoslav and Montenegrin artists with an obligatory study of some Montenegrin historiographical, literary or other issue, mostly by V. Nikčević or D. Živković. Their favorite target was the Serb Orthodox Church in Montenegro which in the times of rising nationalism they perceived as the spear-head of Serbian influences. The Cetinje metropolitanate is historically perceived as strongest representative of feudalism, the keeper of the Kosovo myth, of medieval imperial ideology of Nemanjićs and of their “state-orthodox great-Serbianism”. On the other hand the “independent history of Montenegrin people” was “not in the ‘service of God’, but of man and of fight for the popular, national, social, individual and human freedom” (*Neki otpori crnogorskoj autohtonoj sekularizaciji*, Ars 2, 1986).

Rising nationalistic tensions led the official party journal “Socijalizam” to dedicate one of its numbers in 1986 to the question of nationalism. The article “Nationalism in Montenegro” was written by Marko Špadijer, curiously one from the board of editors of “Ars” which obviously supported Montenegrin ethnic individuality. However, this fact seems to have influenced his study little and didn’t obstruct his party-orientated views. Špadijer starts with a statement that “Within the major, Mon-

tenegrin people, nationalism comes up in forms of separatism and unitarism, i .e. there exist in the same time Montenegrin and great-Serbian nationalism” (*Socijalizam* 4, 1986, p. 111). The reasons of its appearance Špadijer finds in a difficult economic situation, the impoverishment of the population, unemployment but also in the fact that there is little understanding for the Montenegrin peculiarities. Separatist sentiment “is pushing for the rights but not for the responsibilities of the Republic for Yugoslavia and at its nature lies suspiciousness to the others, considering itself to be withheld and nationally unequal” while the unitarist one “is against the affirmation of the nations and in its most radical variation seeks the solution in national unification and a strong state”. He views the “affirmation of Montenegrin national culture” through institutions as a right move which should develop even faster, since it brings together the educated cadre which can “help solve the problems of modern Montenegrin society in a “scientific and competent way”. The “organized socialist forces were always on the watch that these new institutions would not turn into national leaders and decorum of the Montenegrin statehood” (*ibidem*, p. 112). Incompetent persons got the chance to come up with unargued stands while the animosity between the scientists rose and the institutions closed themselves off. Montenegrin nationalism is reflected in uncritical evaluation of persons and phenomena from the past, selection of historic facts which symbolize conflicts and instigate distrust, propagating of unscientific theories on “genetic continuity of Montenegrin ethos”, particularity of Montenegrin language (...). The lack of “good and works acceptable from the Marxist point of view about the Montenegrin question are favorable to the keeping of mythomaniacal perceptions of Montenegrin past and nationalistic over-exaggerations on the peculiarities of Montenegrins, while the attempts to negate the nation instigate passions, retaliation and other chauvinist reactions” (p. 113). The books, textbooks, encyclopedias etc “describe Montenegrins in the views of the outdated bourgeois science but their revalorization is excepted with lots of problems”. The great-Serbian nationalism which is more and more aggressive considers that the affirmation of Montenegrin culture is done on anti-Serb basis. The Montenegrin culture is in general negated in these circles. The “most extreme and militant” adherents of the great-Serbian nationalists are recruited amongst Montenegrins. Reflecting on why it came to all of this Špadijer says that the LC has been on the defensive for too long and that it left the sphere of nationalism to the liberalism. Communists were not resolute and united in their actions. From his quoting of Marko Orlandić, previously president of the Republic, we

can see that the criticism pointed at the great-Serbian nationalists was based on the fact that they are negating the Montenegrins culture, while criticizing the Montenegrin nationalists it is stated that they are not on Marxist positions and act against the LC; great-Serbian chauvinists are, in the view of the party, enemies of Montenegro on the whole, while the Montenegrin nationalists are only acting against the dictate of the Party. This can perhaps explain while the latter camp was more tolerated. One could almost say that the Montenegrin leadership and the Montenegrin nationalists were moving in the same direction, only on different paces and with different goals. In the end of his essay Špadijer concludes with quoting the decisions reached on the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Committee of the LC of Montenegro that as the valorization of Montenegrin past is one of the questions of utmost importance for the funding of a healthy cultural policy, the LC insists on the realizations of projects such as the Encyclopedia of Montenegro, History of Montenegro, History of Montenegrin literature, Montenegrin bibliography, History of Montenegrin LC etc. One of its further decisions states that the communists should promote through scientific institutions “all that connects this nation with other nations in Yugoslavia”. Trying to connect Yugoslav nations while affirming national culture to the level of separate histories of literature for every republic and nation proved a task, if not contradictory in itself, than impossible for the LC.

### **Arts and Politics**

The same group gathered around “Ars” magazine (M. Lompar, S. Zeković, B. Cimeša) founded a publishing house *Književna opština Cetinje (KOC)*. Set in a context of rising nationalism, Savo Brković’s work was now left more open to criticism and since it was obvious to all where his “answer” to Batrić Jovanović’s book would lead the more reputable publishers (namely those funded by state) stood aside. It was only natural for the *KOC* to step in and publish his work. “Etnogenesophobia – a Contribution to the Critic of Great-Serbianism” appeared in 1988 as another, even more slashing attack on connections with the Serb past and on the propagators of Serb ideas in Montenegro. The author mainly attacks the positions of Batrić Jovanović but there are also parts in which the author brings up the new theories on some periods of Montenegrin history. If his language in the first book was more than harsh for a debate, in 14 years which passed until the publishing of this book it evolved to a pamphlet tone

with many incomprehensible sentences and thoughts<sup>8</sup>. The conceptions and the tone of the book resounded far and wide in the public, so much that its character was analyzed even by the Central Committee of the LC of Montenegro. The Party decided to act, but again inconsistently: for the publishing of the book and the uncritical behavior upon its publishing it held responsible only the president of the *KOC*, Slavko Perović, at the moment also a candidate for the secretary of the local committee of the LC for Cetinje (later founder of the independist Liberal Alliance of Montenegro), but let unpunished all the other actors, including the writer (*Duga*, 21, 6. 1990, *Cetinjski list*, 1. 9. 1988.). Perović was excluded from LC as well as from the local committee. Perović asked several time that the ballot on his exclusion be secret but this was rejected; those who gave him support before the session voted against him (*Duga*, 21, 6. 1990.). Public stance was one thing, private affiliation another and this cracked open the Party. This kind of hypocrisy proved to be one of the decisive elements in the overthrow of Montenegrin regime next year, executed by one of the factions in the Party.

In the period between Jagoš Jovanović's shy beginning to Savo Brković's nationalistic mumble, the Montenegrin historiography evolved together with Montenegrin society. It lacked the courage and potential to lead the processes - the only thing it proved capable to do was to open new subjects and fields where these processes could be observed. Lacking serious scientific achievements it was producing mostly works of interest to broader public, not to the professionals. In general, historiography followed the pace of state institutions and modernization in Montenegro. With the upbringing of state apparatus and institutions most of the politicians and some of the historians found themselves on the same assignment: promoting Montenegro into a national state of Montenegrin people, equal with other national states created at this period in a dissolving Yugoslavia. As visible through historiography as well, the process started virtually from a scratch but the existence of the state and its needs, together with benevolent atmosphere on the "outside", gave it the momentum while people working in Montenegrin schools and university became its best consumers and adherents. In words of Ernest Gellner, men "become nationalists through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however obscurely recognized" (Gellner 1964); "The very

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<sup>8</sup> The first two subtitles in the book are "Reminiscent Arche-Dream or the Program of 'the White Reconquest'" and "The Cries of the Vivisected 'Identical Siamese Twins'".

numerical weakness of an ‘underdeveloped’ intelligentsia is its greatest asset: by creating a national unit whose frontiers become in effect closed to foreign talent, they create a magnificent monopoly for themselves” (*ibidem*). Though even at the end of the observed period Montenegro stands still far from this state of affairs, the goals of its nationalists are leading in that way and Montenegro is a frame in which they think: there is a need for a new, different historiography that cannot be mastered or manipulated from the outside, there is a need for a new history of literature in which the accent would be on Montenegrin writers, there is even a need for the new language, announced in the article on Montenegrin language in *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*. Nationalism of such a small and “underdeveloped” nation needs to invent in order to live, and historiography seems an ideal place to do so.

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