

## Yugoslav Socialism and its Aftermath as Viewed Through the Lens of Personal Experiences in the Balkans, 1953–2004

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### Introduction

In this brief essay I plan initially to focus on how Yugoslav government policies affected my research. At the same time, through this approach, I wish to explore the much more important question as to the ways in which the Yugoslav variety of socialism, as developed in a centralized communist and ideologically bound state, affected the everyday lives of the people in that country. The time frame I am considering is some four decades beginning with the early 1950s. The events recounted here from memory are not intended as the established view of the past, but rather as selected reflections on happenings now long past.

As I came to know it, the Yugoslav communist system was far from as brutal as in Albania, where there was, for example, an attempt to abolish religious institutions. Nor was it as dogmatic as in Bulgaria, which had a dominant orientation, based on its unswerving allegiance to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav system was, in essence, based on an autocratic organization of power and privilege using the Stalinist idea of democratic centralism. Thus, in my view, ultimate power always resided with the police and the army as directed by the Party. (Milovan Djilas, of course, first publicly discussed these ideas in the early 1950s, first in a series of articles and, subsequently, in several books which he had significant time to create during his multiple jail terms imposed by his wartime colleague Tito.)

This did not mean necessarily that Yugoslav government policy as developed by the Communist Party was always uniformly interpreted and implemented in this historically and ethnically diverse country. Early in my work I was impressed, for example, by the diverse manifestations of state policy I encountered at the Foreign and Interior Ministries and their local manifestations in my daily experiences in places as different as universities and villages. In this perspective I only suggest that, while there were to me seemingly different worlds of the public face of the government and the reality of local manifestations, there was, on the one hand, the official world of constructing “new” political forms of political organization as in constitutional revisions and the formal experimenting with social policy as in Workers’ Self Management. But, on the other hand, in all the years that Tito and his associates were in power there never was anything resembling a free public opinion – to say nothing of steps toward a truly democratic system where competing ideas, ideologies and programs were linked to a meaningful electoral process. Even the manifestations and consequences of official policies always had a strong regional difference. Thus while the formal political policies were essentially the same in Slovenia and Kosovo, the manifestations were vastly different.

Writing from North America in the year 2005, four years after the experiences of 9/11 in New York City and Washington, D.C., the American invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the Madrid bombings, and other violence encounters one cannot, of course, be complacent and distanced in our analysis of the failures of Yugoslav socialism. In the United States with the subsequent creation of a new governmental Department of Homeland Security after 9/11 it is obviously necessary to not be simply moralistic about differences, as they existed between “West” and “East” in the latter part of the 20th century. That said Western democracies do not act in the same ways as totalitarian states – witness the status of radical Muslims and Muslim communities in Western Europe and in the U.S. after 9/11 and in Europe after the Madrid bombings and the public killing in the Netherlands, etc., witness the restrictions on the actions of security forces. Most important, the inadequacies and brutalities of socialism in Yugoslavia are minor compared to the violent conflicts, large scale killings, and widespread destruction that characterized the struggles of the 1990s in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo as the Yugoslav state disintegrated. But there can be little question that the “democratic centralism” of socialist Yugoslavia played a significant role in setting the stage for these tragedies.

I mention these matters because in the 1950s in Yugoslavia the security forces of the Interior Ministry, then known by their initials as UDBA, were omnipresent in everyone’s lives even though their actions were less severe than in Stalin’s time in the Soviet Union. In Western Europe, of course, the shadow of the Nazi past was much present in the 1950s. America too had its security manias in this time of the manic U.S. Senator McCarthy whose tentacles reached into the U.S. diplomatic community in Belgrade when his henchmen came looking for “Communist books” in the U.S. Information Service Library in Belgrade. Fortunately their provinciality and stupidity confined their passions. They were, however, a challenge nevertheless.

### The Establishment of Yugoslav Socialism

Yugoslav socialism clearly came into existence as a result of the victorious partisan struggle in World War II against the Nazi invaders along with the destruction of the pre-existing Yugoslav state. Of course, there was simultaneously a brutal and very bloody internal civil war in which there were victors and the vanquished. The partisan victors created the “new” Yugoslavia as a socialist, Communist state. Using as their sense of legitimacy and absolute justification and rationale for all state action their defeat of the invaders, they memo-

rialized their victory endlessly throughout the country. These monuments were exclusively for the victors. The vanquished opponents in the civil war were banished from history. Their names were on no monuments, nor were their views given any voice in the torrent of publications memorializing the NOB, the People's Liberation War. It surely is an irony of history that when in the 1990s the Serbian army gunners surrounded Sarajevo and purposely targeted the National Library, the priceless Ottoman era manuscripts were destroyed while somehow the literature of socialist Yugoslavia survived because of its location in the library. Also destroyed by the Serbian gunner was the museum of Gavrilo Princip, the assassin of the Archduke Ferdinand.

Tito's image was omnipresent – there were the expected portraits in public offices and front pieces in schoolbooks. But there was a whole iconography of Tito in various media – in bronze busts, wood carvings, and portraits – the benign father for children, the fearless warrior for the military, the statesman for the foreign ministry, the devout apprentice for the workers, the thoughtful leader as an inspiration for the intellectuals. Fittingly much of this imagery now resides on a humorous Web site.

To make the system work it was, of course, necessary, first, to suppress all potential political opposition that might endanger the system. This necessitated the execution of primary opponents and the imprisonment of those who were deemed less of a threat. His former close associate Milovan Djilas has given a useful view of this process in its initial stages since he was complicit in the securing of power. Thus the slogan "Brotherhood and Unity," continued to be officially espoused long after it had lost its essential meaning. This suppression of conflict both actual and potential between national groups was one reason that the system ultimately disintegrated so rapidly and so completely amidst the mass killings of the 1990s.

This comment, of course, begs the question as to why some former communist states like Czechoslovakia were able to peacefully split into national components without violence. A portion of that explanation certainly lies in the historic conflicts between Rome and Byzantium, between Orthodoxy, as manifested in churches linked to a national heritage, and the universality of the Catholic Church. To this must, of course, be added the significance of the presence of Islam in Europe, a question hardly resolved in Europe today in countries outside of the Balkans.

The events of the 1990s and the subsequent breakup of Yugoslavia and the emergence of new states did, however, create a new time frame, which bracketed the existence of Yugoslav socialism. In all my experiences in what was Yugoslavia from the 1950s through the 1980s, life courses of people of my generation were always bracketed by the time frame, "*pre i poslje rata*" (before and after the War, i.e. World War II). Now, of course, there are whole sets of new meanings attached to this expression, the before and after obviously referring to the wars of the 1990s. The well-known events after World War II do, however, provide an indispensable background for my personal exploration of the impacts of Yugoslav socialism.

### Yugoslavia as Research Area

The thrust of this essay is an attempt, by means of an abbreviated memoir, to explore how Yugoslav socialism impacted everyday life in the former Yugoslavia. My observations derive from my periods of intermittent residence from the early fifties into the 1980s. Initially I resided for approximately a year in the Serbian village of Orašac, but also spent considerable time in Belgrade and also traveled widely in all of the then Republics. Subsequent stays in the succeeding decades varied from summers to multiple residences of six months to a year or more. In the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century visits were of shorter duration but did involve travel in war zones.

It cannot be too strongly stressed that when we (my wife and I) first arrived in Yugoslavia in the summer of 1953 it was the height of the Cold War. Given my age (I was born in 1929) I was then barely 24. Although I had had a bicycle tour of Western Europe in 1949 and had traveled extensively in North America, this was my first visit to a Communist country. Also I had no overt family ties to Europe as my ancestors had all migrated to America by the beginning of the 20th century. But in education I was very much a product of this Cold War. In the late 1940s, while an undergraduate majoring in history at the University of Michigan, I had become interested in Eastern Europe and what was then the Soviet Union. As a graduate student while I was engaged in the Ph.D. program in anthropology at Columbia University; I also took courses at the Russian Institute at Columbia. These courses dealt with Russia and the Soviet Union – its economy, legal system, history, and literature. I had a somewhat unique and challenging education in a mix of courses that I designed for myself. In a given semester I would have courses in human evolution, physical anthropology, and at the Russian Institute, Marxian economics; similarly there was anthropological theory and the international relations of the Soviet Union; or Russian literature and kinship systems etc. It is a wonder I survived with a coherent outlook and that my graduate career was not destroyed.

Overall, there were consequences of this being then the height of the Cold War. As noted in the United States, this was the period of the rabid red baiting by Senator Joe McCarthy. He ultimately died in disgrace, but not before he had inflicted much damage on American society. He also caused great difficulties for many Americans who were loyal citizens. Some years ago, I explored the Columbia University Archives and found ample evidence as to how this period affected my professors, who were among the most prominent in the study of Soviet and East European affairs in the United States. Many were engaged in extensive consultation with their personal lawyers should they ever be brought before a congressional committee of inquiry!

At the time, I was very much involved in my studies and not politically active. But this is not to say that I was totally unaware of the world around me. For one thing Columbia University was in New York City with its long history of political radicalism. Of course, the headquarters of the American Communist Party were in New York City. More directly intruding on my

scholarly preoccupations was the fact that practitioners of the politics of the Old Left (i.e. from the 1930s) were still very much in evidence around Columbia.

I clearly remember befriending an older man, for me then he was a fascinating anthropological linguist. He had been an instructor in anthropology at the nearby City College of N.Y. (now part of the City University of New York). I was not sophisticated enough to realize that our conversations on linguistics and related anthropological topics had an instrumental focus. One day we went for a long walk and he broached to me the idea that I might be interested in joining the C.P. USA. I knew that he had recently been dismissed from his untenured position at City College because of his Party affiliation. This was, of course, a daring invitation given the tenor of the times. I do not remember being fearful of exploring this course of action, but was simply disinterested. (He subsequently resumed his career at the University in Mexico City).

These events took place in 1952 and McCarthy's downfall was then some years off. It should be noted that in addition to intellectual activity there was one academically related individual who was brought to trial as a Soviet agent and convicted. This was the case with one anthropologist, who was an academic associate of one of my professors, Margaret Mead. He wrote about East Central Europe but he had a research position and not a university appointment. Finally, one of my anthropology professors was dismissed from Columbia. Her specialty was African studies. I do not know if she was an actual member of the Communist Party, but she publicly charged that the U.S. forces in Korea were using germ warfare as a tactical weapon (a claim then made by the North Koreans, Chinese, and Soviets). She was subsequently dismissed from the Columbia faculty for these actions. (Like the anthropologist who taught at City College she also subsequently but later resumed her career teaching at a smaller and less well-known University in the New York metropolitan area and had a reasonably successful career).

Anthropology in the 1950s was then much oriented toward the notion of fieldwork in non-Western cultures as a way to validate one's professional status. But given the then nature of the Soviet Union and its attitude toward foreigners generally and Americans in particular there was no chance for me at that time to undertake fieldwork in that country or, with much effectiveness, elsewhere in Eastern Europe. But Yugoslavia was different. Yugoslavia, of course, had had in 1948 an ideological break with the Soviet Union revolving, in part, about the ability of an Eastern European communist state to pursue an independent path to socialism (communism). This led to a severing of communist party relations between Yugoslavia and the USSR in 1958.

Although as of 1953 Yugoslavia was still an orthodox communist state, its break with the Soviet Union made it a desired setting for U.S. policy makers to expand American influence. Thus at the time of my initial visit there in 1953–54 there were very extensive United States civilian and military assistance programs by the U.S., then operating in Yugoslavia. Subsequently by the 1960s the extent of American food and economic

aid to Yugoslavia had become enormous. During that decade the accumulation of local currency by the American embassy had become enormous, for all food aid as well as other aid was paid for in local currency. During that time, I was told by personnel at the American embassy that their bank account held about 10 percent of the value of all Yugoslav currency in circulation, an obviously intolerable situation. As a result the major part of this bank account went for public works projects like the Dalmatian coastal highway. But there were also, relatively, huge amounts of funds for academic research by U.S. and Yugoslav scholars working jointly as well as almost unlimited amounts for American libraries to buy copies of all books printed in Yugoslavia (this was the case even though funds set aside for this purpose were less than 1 percent of the total value of U.S. assistance.). But all these developments were in the 1960s, then very much in the future. It should be carefully noted that I have gone into all this detail because a significant portion of my researches in Yugoslavia in the early 1960s was supported by these funds.

My professor of international relations at Columbia, Philip Mosely, had, in addition to his academic role as a founder of East European Studies in the U.S., been very much involved in U.S.–U.S.S.R. relations. He also had been an advisor at key conferences between the U.S., the U.K., and the U.S.S.R. He had participated in conferences at the foreign minister level during the war in Moscow. In the immediate post-war period he had attended the Potsdam conference between Truman and Stalin and Churchill (and later Atlee) as an advisor to the American delegation. In sum, he had extensive experience in negotiating with the Soviets during and prior to the period.

With respect to Slovenia Mosely had also been one of the principal U.S. representatives at the treaty negotiations, which eventually ended the Trieste conflict between Yugoslavia and Italy. This dispute was finally concluded only in the 1950s when we were already in Yugoslavia. But from my personal point of view, most significant was the curious fact that in the immediate prewar period, in the late 1930s, he had been encouraged by an American research foundation, the Social Science Research Council (New York) to undertake social science field research in the Balkans. As a result Mosely engaged in extensive field researches on the extended family unit, the *zadruga*, within Yugoslavia but also in neighboring Balkan countries as well.

In the course of that research he met Milenko Filipović who became one of the leading Yugoslav ethnologists, particularly with respect to the study of Serbian areas. In 1952, when I was ready to do field research for my doctorate he introduced me to Professor Filipović who was then in the United States under a Rockefeller Foundation grant. He had received a fellowship from this organization on the eve of World War II, but did not accept it because he chose to remain in his homeland even though conflict was then clearly inevitable. After the war Mosely helped Filipović renew his grant. My fate was then decided. I was to do my research in Serbia under Filipović's sponsorship.

### Arrival to Yugoslavia

We took a Yugoslav freighter from New York and landed in Dubrovnik in June of 1953. Our first introduction to the system was in our contact with University students in Belgrade with whom we exchanged English for Serbian lessons. At that time visiting foreign students, especially those who wished to undertake research in rural areas, were something of a rarity, so we had to make our own way through the system. A series of small events set the stage for our initial understanding of part of the dynamics of Yugoslav socialist society.

I also detail all this background to illustrate the fact that my selection of Yugoslavia as a research area was very much embedded in the political context of the time. However, for my research I had to use my personal family resources since no financial assistance was forthcoming. Thus in this respect, despite the context of the times, my initial research in Yugoslavia was independent of any organizational impetus. In June 1953, when we first arrived in Yugoslavia, despite the large existing American aid program and the earlier break with Stalin, that state was still very much an orthodox communist system operating in a relatively poor and marginal country with a significant part of its economy peasant based. The massive program of industrialization had not yet really begun and the large-scale migrations to the cities were still getting under way.

The significant achievements of Yugoslav socialism in building a modern industrial economy were in prospect, but communist state power was already consolidated. An aspect of the confirmation of state power entailed the techniques for the purposeful manipulation of public opinion to support the implementation of state policies. Such manipulation, which had its limitations, was played out in many ways. A local example of that purposeful manipulation took place in the early part of our initial stay. Viewed from an early 21st century perspective the long-lasting significance of the events described below can be seen as, at best, marginal to the historical record. However, from a personal perspective, they were overwhelmingly significant to me and nearly ended my work in Yugoslavia.

By the fall of 1953, we had settled in the central Serbian village of Orašac, south of Belgrade, where I had begun my doctoral research focusing on a community study approach. One day the village council president invited us to accompany him and some other local officials to a "meeting" (rally) in the nearby rail and market town of Mladenovac. It also then had a few nascent industries. Something presumably important had happened and we did not know quite what. Our household lacked a functioning radio and they did not get a daily newspaper (this was, of course, in the days before TV had begun to make its appearance in rural Serbia).

We left the village the next day at dawn to arrive in time for the rally. There were no private automobiles in the village then so we went by horse carriage (fiacre) of the kind I had seen only used in the village for weddings. The site of the gathering was a huge, open field adjoining the rail junction. As we approached the

site I noticed long lines of boxcars which I later learned had been used to transport peasants and workers to the rally from various places in Serbia. While the relatively short ride was a bit uncomfortable given the state of the springs of the carriage the discomfort did not seem to exceed that of riding on a crowded urban bus at rush hour with windows closed. It was not until a decade later that the Yugoslav economy had matured to the extent that buses could be used.

In any case, people were arriving in a large stream, pouring out of the boxcars and onto the open fields. We kept close to our village friends but I also had a camera and ventured a photo of some of the placards. At that point a senior police official came by and suggested that my wife and I accompany him to headquarters. There he asked for our passports and proceeded to enlighten us about the crisis and the reason for the rally. He began by inquiring if I knew that the Americans were responsible for excluding Yugoslavia from their claimed territories in the region of Trieste? Our village friends had, of course, mentioned nothing about this, only indicating that we might enjoy a visit to a "meeting" which we naturally assumed would be combined with a large local market. It seemed apparent that the official was quoting from the most recent edition of the communist party newspaper (*Borba*), which was invariably found in good supply in all the official offices we visited.

I did recall that my Columbia professor had been the American representative on that boundary commission but, of course, I said nothing. Following the lecture he suggested that we would need protection from the genuine outrage of the workers and peasants who were attending the rally. I did not protest his decision but only expressed my appreciation. Neither my film nor camera was confiscated. I put my camera away and we were assigned two officers who proceeded to follow us around for the rest of the afternoon. They were apparently good friends since they held hands, as good friends do in parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. They seemed self-absorbed and the day passed without further incident. The planned part of the gathering commenced with the eventual arrival of the minister of the interior, Aleksandar Ranković, who delivered a speech of "outrage" to programmed cheers. We had heard in Belgrade that he was famous for his tailored suits, but we did not get close enough to check this out. On the way back our village hosts said nothing about our encounter with the police, but since we were in the village under official auspices with a formal letter of introduction there was no outward evidence of their concern.

### Encounters with Socialism

After some fifty years this incident would seem to have merited little more than a mention as a small detail of our stay. But that did not turn out to be the case. It has often been remarked that youth is stupid and certainly young apprentice anthropologists are no exception to this rule. After this encounter I was determined to return to Belgrade immediately. In retrospect

my time would have been much better invested in pursuing my ongoing fieldwork. But there was no stopping me. The next morning we boarded the narrow gauge train in a neighboring village and then transferred to a standard gauge train at Mladenovac for our trip to Belgrade. We made the trip of approximately 100 km in just under six hours because we managed to catch an express train to Belgrade at our transfer point.

Although determinedly curious about the context of the rally about Trieste, once in Belgrade I was so self possessed and pleased to return to our urban apartment that it never occurred to me that there was any danger to my person and to vary my usual urban routes. Therefore I first visited some of my favorite bookstores to browse for research materials and then walked over to the U.S. library anticipating getting the embassy news bulletin and reading recent American papers to see what they were reporting of these events. Of course, I might have first checked the local press.

The American library was located in downtown Belgrade near the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the University. As I crossed the lot adjoining the library (made vacant by German bombing during World War II) I suddenly felt a pinprick and then another and a mob surrounded me. I broke free and started to run. As I entered the main street fronting on the Student Square I noticed a woman being herded by a jeering mob. On her back was a sign reading in Serbian: "One who takes the American embassy bulletin." Just about that time a waiter called out to me from a nearby restaurant to get the sign off my back. I rounded the corner and in panic headed back to the U.S. information library collapsing at the feet of an American journalist. As I got up the journalist Helen Thomas (who later was the senior correspondent at the White House becoming a fixture there for decades) proceeded to interview me. She explained that her story would be front page news in the U.S. the following day but that my name would not be used. (Present readers will find this part of my story quaint, as there once was a time when an American student being beaten up by a "foreign mob" would have been a major news story.)

At that time at the height of communist red baiting led by McCarthy there really was a market for nasty articles about all aspects of communism. Only a few weeks before, two assistants of that American senator had visited Belgrade and "inspected" the American library for "subversive communist" literature. (The American diplomat who guided them around "helped" them reach the conclusion that such evidence was lacking.) The fact that Yugoslavia was a functioning communist state, then in an alliance of mutual convenience with the United States, apparently escaped these "guardians" of American virtue. After the interview with the journalist two American diplomats escorted me to my apartment. On our walk there they told me stories about how they had closed down the American consulate in Shanghai in 1948 after the victory of the Chinese communists. Unintentionally, they nicely set the stage for what was to follow. They left me at the door apparently unaware that we had been followed. As I stepped inside a group of Yugoslav police in plain

clothes, masquerading as "outraged citizens" began to beat me. I first shouted to them in Serbian and then as the beating intensified I switched to English. The instructions issued to the organized demonstrators and widely disseminated were that foreigners were not to be harmed. They then left, apparently convinced that I was indeed a foreigner.

I do not remember great pain and my injuries were not serious but they had significantly bloodied me. Later I was given refuge in the nearby apartment of a friend from the American embassy. I could hear the organized demonstrators on nearby Marshal Tito Street shouting the by now familiar refrain - "We will give our lives but not Trieste." Later, when I made a visit to the embassy, I was told that they would protest on my behalf but that this would be the end of my work in Yugoslavia. I chose not to complain. Later, at a cocktail party I met an American colonel with the U.S. Military Assistance Group to Yugoslavia, they had a large building in the center of Belgrade. He told me that prior to the demonstrations a colleague on the Yugoslav army's general staff told him that there would be no demonstrations in front of the building housing the U.S. military. There were none.

Certainly this tale of minor events long ago has few surprising aspects. Neither the duplicity of the Yugoslav state, or for that matter, the many faces of the American government are surprising. Nor, it should be added, was the total indifference of the local population unexpected. Finally, it should be noted that despite the cries of the organized demonstrators then marching through downtown Belgrade, the whole matter was subsequently settled relatively quietly through diplomatic negotiation. Yugoslavia gave up claims to certain areas near Trieste. The fate of the city itself had, however, never been in question, it always remained under Italian jurisdiction.

But there is another factor involved and that is and was the extreme national and historical divisions within the territories that composed the Yugoslav state. Slovenes were and are, of course, concerned about their borders with Italy and their other neighboring states and the people of Slovene nationality who live there. Clearly, these concerns were not shared with people in Serbia, just as more recently Slovenes early on uninvolved themselves in the wars accompanying the disintegration of Yugoslavia. One could go through a long list of such regionally manifested concerns. The communist slogans of the past, including that of "Brotherhood and Unity," were clearly an illusion from the beginning.

My bloody head massage was clearly minor, but what about the situation of the poor woman whom I had seen being paraded before the organized mob? Obviously the international press had not bothered to report her situation. Her situation appears to me to relate to a visit I paid to the police station in Arandelovac, the market town for the village in which I was working. I mistakenly opened the wrong door and saw an older peasant being beaten. Or, on the first day of our arrival in the village, my wife and I were seated in the village café awaiting arrangements about our housing. A local woman had heard about our arrival. She came

to the café and told us about her brother in Chicago. She demanded of us as to why, when there are so many nice places in Yugoslavia, had we come to this poor and backward village, which she soon hoped to leave. Subsequently, we learned that she was absent from the village for some months. When she returned, we never had the opportunity to speak to her again, nor for her sake were we anxious to do so. This incident must, of course, be seen in a broader reality. We later learned that her brother had been killed in a robbery of his Chicago restaurant.

Much more important to our research was an event associated with the local elementary school. I had thought that it would be nice to sponsor an essay contest in which the children could write about the village and their aspirations for the future. I even offered some modest prizes. The director of the school and the teachers cooperated and I received a significant number of essays. Very fortunately neither the school principal nor the teachers made any effort to read the pupils' work prior to turning over the papers to me. I took the school essays to Belgrade and went over them carefully. Most of the student essays were about the glories of Serbian history, the modernization of the village, and the partisan heroes. Some of them obviously based on the school textbooks, but a few were obviously original and described the actualities of village life. But one essay was different. In the words of the pupil the partisans were not liberators but destroyers for they had burned part of the village. I determined to leave this essay out of my ethnographic account. The student described how her family's home had been burned and provided a color illustration. What to do with the student's material? It seemed obvious to me it could cause trouble for the parents and for the child as well. It would also have made life difficult for the teachers and school principal who had helped me. I destroyed the essay and drawing and to this day I remember burning it. I tossed the ashes in the toilet bowl and flushed away the remnants. I was glad to protect the student but I was also ashamed of my censorship. I had accommodated myself to the system through this self-censorship.

### **A Socialist Consumer Society**

**B**ut what exactly was the system to which people were accommodating? In this essay I cannot do more than give a brief explanation. First, it is important to observe that enormous changes were under way throughout Eastern and Southern Europe during the second half of the 20th century quite apart from the dominant ideological system in a particular country. Overall, there were the ongoing processes of industrialization and urbanization and with it technological modernization. This was taking place at a rapid rate not only in Yugoslavia but also in all the non-Communist countries that bordered on Yugoslavia such as Italy and Greece.

For us the early 1950s provided a kind of baseline against which to measure future change. Communism, of course, put something of a special face on these

changes, but the long-term transformations made that centralist ideology increasingly irrelevant. A small but significant indicator of the changes was the changes in the types of garbage that the society produced. We observed in the village in the early 1950s how virtually nothing was thrown away including used tin cans. These were turned into receptacles and even cooking utensils of various kinds.

There was also real poverty in this period. People were accustomed to wearing patched old clothes, especially in the villages. I well recall the minimum tableware we had then in the village. There were badly made aluminum forks and spoons that broke and bent easily. These contrasted with the sturdy homemade wooden spoons when there was a greater degree of isolation and self-sufficiency in the village economy. I recall asking myself as to how it was possible for a people who could not even produce useable basic household items such as cutlery to have defeated such a technologically superior foe. We were reminded of this every evening at dinner time when mixed in with the poor quality aluminum tableware were the remnants of a German soldier's field kit which included a stainless steel knife and fork. Therein, of course, lies the primary justification for, and the ultimate legitimization of the regime.

The Communist partisans had won both against their civil war opponents, the remnants of the royalist government in Serbia, as well as, at the same time, the struggle against the Nazi invaders and their fascist associates in Croatia. The other justification for the regime was that its socialist form of government would bring an equitable form of modernization. But the initial changes resulting from these processes of change, although widely shared, also brought with them a hierarchical, entrenched bureaucracy with a monopoly on the methods of innovation that were always imposed from above. From the outset people were primarily not inspired but coerced. This happened despite the enthusiasm of some youthful cadre who contributed unskilled labor to road and railroad construction. There was also the constant drumbeat of propaganda about social ownership, and worker participation in a so-called shared self-management system along with every few years a new constitution touting these and other new forms of political participation.

I began by focusing on garbage, or rather the lack of it. Peasant villagers and urban workers began to experience the throwaway culture of plastic beginning in the 1960s. It is certainly true that life did improve in a material way for most everyone. But this achievement did not bring lasting satisfaction. This occurred despite the fact that Tito successfully transitioned from wartime leader to acceptable father figure. In the fifties there were then no plastic items to speak of, just as newspaper was used more often than the less available toilet paper, and acceptable hand soap was not easily obtainable. It was a time when women on boarding a bus would carefully arrange their skirts before sitting down so as not to put much stress on the fabric. Burlap sacks and crude paper bags were used to carry home the few items purchased from the limited inventory in the state stores. Within a decade, however, the throwaway

plastic culture began in earnest. The 1960s saw the cautious beginning of this mass consumption culture along with the innovation of the supermarket and TV. Now there was a mass of cheap items on the market designed for immediate use and not for long-term retention. Did the transitions in consumer goods, mass marketing, mass consumption in a way relate to transitions in the political culture that was also concerned with novelty, innovation, and mass appeal? Yesterday's versions of both were certainly discarded rather than recycled in the decades to come. These matters can more easily be measured in the villages, the countryside, than in the towns. For in the latter there was trash collection that, of course, was unknown in the village. Thus village homes began to accumulate less perishable detritus in their surroundings. Rotten vegetables, spoiled meat, old wooden implements could all be counted on to slowly return to the soil but not plastic.

The appearance of the private automobile in the socialist state was also a transforming force. With its increasing use came greater mobility not only within Yugoslavia but across international borders. The Tito regime did little to restrict free movement. It was in the sixties that there began the mass migrations of Yugoslav workers to a then labor short Western Europe. Their remittances were certainly economically useful to the regime. Just as the family had been useful to the state in allowing it not to be too concerned about social support services when these could be, at least partially, taken care of in the context of agricultural based households.

Thus in households where both parents worked in state enterprises, a relative, often a grandma (*baba*), could be counted on to provide for the necessary child care. Folk sayings were coined to celebrate the fact that parents had to make sure about the presence of a *baba* before they had a child. In retrospect the frozen ideology of the Party prevented the growth of a vibrant domestic economy. Thus the massive remittances of those who worked abroad were not invested in the domestic economy but rather in private household construction that strengthened family ties and regional affiliations. From the 1960s to the 1980s the housing stock of rural Yugoslavia was transformed. A uniformity of reinforced concrete, stucco, tile, and brick replaced the historically entrenched rural variation based on local resources. These structures were of enormous symbolic significance to the individual and his family. But while one can easily appreciate this aspect, their economic wastefulness was also readily apparent. For often the worker, and frequently his family as well, remained abroad and much of this newly constructed housing was underused.

At the same time for those who stayed behind there were massive symbolic government investments made in an attempt to appease growing national regional interests. Thus to parallel the private sector's overly robust housing stock in rural areas, which were exporting part of their work force, there was the felt political need for every republic to have its very own uneconomical major industrial enterprise such as a steel

mill or auto plant. Meanwhile the quality of items such as auto production became an international joke. This was the case with the Yugoslav licensed Fiat. Its shoddy construction hastened its achievement of junk status both on the international market and domestically.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, worn-out cars were beginning to clutter up rural byways. This at the same time that the first generation of manufactured wood and electric stoves and small refrigerators also began to wear out. At least in central Serbia, no effective garbage collection functioned, so behind individual homesteads the piles of discarded stoves, TVs, and refrigerators began to pile up. This development raises interesting questions for the ecologically oriented concerning rural water supplies, e.g. do the freon and other chemicals as in the florescent tubes get into the ground water? As a further example, how is the used crankcase fluid from cars and tractors disposed of? The pride of a Yugoslav worker driving his new Mercedes to his home village for the first time was a frequent sight in the 1970s and 1980s and individually owned rural repair shops began to appear.

These problems are, of course, not unique to the former Yugoslavia. Countries such as the United States are well advanced in the ways in which its industries have created numerous examples of widespread pollution of water supplies. But, of course, it is necessary to view this matter in some perspective. Ecological devastation in Yugoslavia and its health consequences seem to pale in comparison to places like the former Soviet Union and the massive transformation of landscapes in areas such as Central Asia. The irony of the mystique of the eventual return of the migrant worker and his family to their home village to enjoy their newly built home in bucolic surroundings was, to a significant degree, contradicted by the increasing pollution of the countryside.

### Spy or Serbian Peasant?

Does this all seem too distant, too objectifying it seems appropriate to describe how my personal image came front and center, briefly, and in a not so minor way, on Serbian TV and in the public press. Beginning in the 1960s, on several occasions in the public press in both Belgrade and Sarajevo I was denounced as a CIA agent. Other American researchers were also identified in this way. But since I had done fieldwork in Yugoslavia for a longer time and researched most intensively in rural areas I was a natural target. This was because the security authorities, even in their more relaxed phases, want to control access to those areas that they could not easily supervise. After each article appeared, I made a point of writing to the Yugoslav ambassador in Washington that the charges were untrue and were libelous. In the fullness of time I always received a reply saying that I would be welcome to return to Yugoslavia to continue my researches and that there would be no problem about a visa. It was quite clear that the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior were not operating in concert, a not unfamiliar situation in the U.S.

Then in 1986, through the good offices of a colleague at Belgrade University I was introduced to a Serbian TV personality. He made a specialty on his program of discovering odd things in remote places. Clearly, my long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a Serbian village qualified. His TV program had a folksy ambience, even its title was people friendly, "By the Way (*Uzged budi receno*)". In no time at all my wife and I plus a film crew were ensconced in "our" village. They remained on site for several weeks and the production of an hour-long film resulted. Unlike American TV there were not many outtakes. That summer my wife and I lived out Andy Warhol's dictum that everyone would be famous for fifteen minutes. The program was broadcast not only in Serbia but nation-wide throughout what was then Yugoslavia. Thus when we left the village that summer after the filming we were recognized most everywhere even as we tried to vacation in Dalmatia. There were "serious" consequences – waiters recognized us in a restaurant and insisted on feeding us "real peasant food." At that time we were more than middle-aged and our diet tended to be strong in vegetables and occasional chicken and fish. But here our plates were being piled high with greasy, roasted meat!

But our "fame" was to last for more than 15 minutes. And there were other consequences. First, the American embassy's glossy propaganda magazine, intended primarily for the intelligentsia, featured a long article about our work with many color photos from our time in Serbia. Among the photos was one of the two of us taken in Orašac in 1954 of "the Halperns in peasant dress". Actually the idea derived from another American couple that visited us in the village and we followed their example. Our hosts were most cooperative even if some of the costumes were no longer worn, especially pertinent to women's folk dress, and being saved for burial. It should be added that back then our village family was most curious about our clothes and had tried them on when we had been away. Thus from some points of view, this was a fair exchange. The photos were then put away for more than 30 years and only surfaced again in their use in the film. At the time we thought that would introduce an element of humor that was in consonance with the theme of the production. In any case, the editors of the embassy magazine gave this photo very prominent play in their article and combined it with a long caption about our personal history.

Surprise! Four years later we revisited Serbia in 1990 and one of our Belgrade friends showed us a copy of an article that had recently appeared in a Serbian weekly. I quickly looked at the article. It was all about spying in Yugoslavia and was actually a revisit with a book written by a British embassy press attaché in the late 1940s, who subsequently became a wellknown British novelist. It had the catching title "White Eagle Over Serbia". The theme of the novel was a tale of rural based espionage in Macedonia. But no matter, photos from Serbia would give it just the right peasant flavor. As the journalist involved subsequently told a colleague of ours, he saw the photos in the American embassy magazine. They seemed appropriate and he used them without, of course, payment of royalties. I was listed as the pho-

tographer of my own photo (a not impossible feat) and there were several of my other photos of Orašac there as well. The photo spread also included pictures of another photographer. A truly well-known art photographer, German by origin, but recently deceased, a Hollywood publicist name Helmut Newton. His most famous work, I later learned, was a massive actual coffee table sized volume entitled "The Nude and the Refrigerator".

Our photo in peasant dress was captioned "True Serbian peasants – a barrier against communism" (see photo caption). Alongside were other of my photos which had appeared in the Embassy magazine.

*Zdrav seljački element: brana za komunističku diktaturu (Snimio Joel M. Halpern)*



These were of a poor but picturesque old couple posing in front of their house, bunches of grapes hanging from the rafters. Another one was of teenage twins who were making decorations for light fixtures to celebrate the introduction of electricity to their home in Orašac, as well as other shots of life in the village. Helmut Newton's photos focused on the activities of "British Agents in Belgrade", no refrigerators here, just "congenial" soft porn. One agent was "investigating" the crotch of a large, bare breasted model. Another shot featured an obviously dissolute, but curious intellectual looking up from his book at the bare bottom of a local lady, if that is quite the appropriate term.

Earlier I had spoken of the introduction of plastic discards as the nature of garbage production changed in a modernizing society. Orašac in 1953–4 had been an experience with a still vibrant oral tradition in which elder males would perform epic poetry and women would create individualized mourning chants to memorialize the deceased. But contemporary Serbian TV with its massive programming features an almost infinity of little remembered moments and our 15 minutes of fame according to the Warhol dictum had long since expired. That is the journalist who stole the photos from the American embassy magazine must have assumed that his readers would not remember the TV film about “The Halperns in Orašac”, and even less the photo of them posing in peasant dress. It is fitting that now at 76 I can look back on a truly “memorable” career, one in which I “evolved” from a youthful and ignorant stranger to a CIA agent, to my final apotheosis as a “true” Serbian peasant boldly preserving Serbian society from the contamination of communism. Perhaps that had been my goal from the beginning? And, how appropriate for an anthropologist, to be concerned with preserving the “soul” of a nation. I scarcely suspected I had had that much talent. But, after all, were one to take these comments seriously one would need to repeat these experiences again, from the beginning. But I must confess I like playing with these pseudo-theatrical elements by way of “attempting an approach to these comic proportions inherent in the human dependencies. The impression I have from the third party with whom I communicated about the mailer was that the “journalist” was simply “earning” his living by consciously creating a scene of momentary sexual interest with overtones of nationalism and espionage – a potent brew but suitable to line one’s garbage can the following morning. The reader will surely agree that I had more than the fifteen minutes of fame to which I was entitled. Perhaps the best that can be said for such matters is that there was no tragedy or deadly violence involved.

### **The End of Yugoslav Socialism and of Yugoslavia**

It is certainly true that a modern state in terms of infrastructure and economy, however incomplete, was created during the years of socialism in Yugoslavia. (I have documented the processes involved in many of my publications.) But it was a hollow structure that its inhabitants were only too ready and even eager to rip apart even if this was done in a very bloody way. There are images in my mind and in the photos I took of the drastic consequences of war in Yugoslavia. These images were from my visits in the early 1990s, especially to Bosnia and Croatia. The massive destruction of urban areas was all too visible, particularly in Bosnia as well as in some towns in Croatia. Particularly vivid for me was my winter 1996 visit to Sarajevo and Mostar. Fighting was just ending and the scars of war were very recent and real. But it was not only the destroyed factories, the blown up villages and the burned out blocks of modern apartment houses – it was the new graveyards. Then

they were everywhere – in Sarajevo’s Olympic soccer field, in the city’s parks, in the small gardens in front of the surviving apartment houses – most were not the graves of young soldiers but of old men and women and the children.

Even in the next decade, the potential for future conflict has not been eliminated from what was once Yugoslavia, especially in Kosovo but also in Macedonia. In the spring of 2004 I visited communities that I had previously studied in southern Macedonia in 1962, both Muslim Albanian and Orthodox. The words that I heard were not those of peaceful coexistence. Although I do think that the current Macedonian leadership of both groups is anxious to find an equitable solution, the perceived injustices of others still fester. Trust to build a fully viable society is lacking.

Complex matters have been painted with a broad brush in this essay. Yugoslav socialism was not a fascist state built on death camps and ethnic hatred, nor was the ideology of socialism built on conquest and inequality. Yet by its authoritarian rule it helped to facilitate much of what followed its demise. But one cannot say that Yugoslav socialism was simply a hollow structure, although the deceptions of the state were abundantly evident. Further, it is not possible to assert that a regime that lasted almost half a century, or something over two generations, did not enjoy a degree of legitimacy. After all there was the crucial role the partisans played in defeating the German invaders and there was the reality of modernization without drastic and crushing class inequalities. One only has to now look at the modernization process in much of the developing world today to see the consequences of unrestrained, socially irresponsible capitalism. Some have noted that the Yugoslav state did enjoy at least a degree of real legitimacy, not only because of modernization, but also because many people subscribed to the basic ideological tenets of socialism. Certainly the state was able to insert at least some of its ideological tropes into the life-courses of its citizens. But was there ever a real commitment on the part of rural peoples, who were initially the majority of the population, to worker participation and socialist development? Or, conversely, did the peasants and the new groupings of peasant-workers have only a very instrumental relationship toward this socialist/Yugoslav state? Thus did they just enjoy the growing material achievements during the 1960’s and 1970’s and when the economy turned sour and could not satisfy the growing consumer demand in the 1980s were they then most ready to part with the Yugoslav state? What role did consumerism have in de-legitimizing the socialist state? Was there, in fact, a generational gap in the attitudes towards the Yugoslav state? Was the older generation which had experienced poverty and war more keen supporters of socialist normality? In terms of the younger generation, did they increasingly see the Yugoslav state and its socialist framework as obstacles to their wish to make full use of their abilities? Certainly the lack of free elections and the monopolization of state power by the Party prevented these questions from ever being raised effectively in a public forum.

It is uncertain whether these vital questions

have definitive answers, and certainly they cannot be answered in a brief introspective essay. But perhaps some very general reflections are a place to begin. It is first necessary to explore the relationships between personal identity, national affirmation, and ideological association. It is a commonplace to now observe the limited view of some intellectuals who sought to affirm before World War I that the workers in Germany on one side and France and England on the other would not willingly murder each others in brutal trench warfare because they shared a common class interest. Even to recall this thought at the beginning of the 21st century seems, at best, quaint. One World War later when German troops were nearing the gates of Moscow and Leningrad Stalin did not issue an appeal to save the Soviet system, but rather he temporarily revived the Orthodox church and appealed to Russians in terms of their national and religious interests. Clearly the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia cannot be isolated from the breakup of the Soviet Union. But the question is certainly not a simple one of comparing Russian nationalism to Serbian nationalism. Or, on another level, is it one of trying to assess the commonalities, if any, of Slovenes and Albanians, on the one hand, or Ukrainians and Uzbeks in the Soviet setting. Perhaps, more directly it is appropriate to consider, why did the Czechs and Slovaks end their state in peaceful separation? At the same time, nearby, for those once known as the Yugoslavs, their common state ended with a tragic and bloody finale, in every sense of the word, a horrible mess.

I think on this point, and in keeping with the spirits of this essay, I would like to end with some personal reflections 31 years apart. Both of these reflections center on Bosnia. First, in 1964 I did research in the multiethnic town of Maglaj and its surrounding rural area. In this region Moslems, Serbs, and Catholics then lived in close proximity both in the town of Maglaj and in the surrounding villages. A walk through the marketplace would see these groups actively trading with one another while in Maglaj factories they worked in the same enterprise. How did this seemingly established co-existence turn into warfare and massive destruction? Platitudes about ancient hatreds do not suffice to explain the evidence of death and destruction I saw in Sarajevo and, even more directly, in Mostar and its surrounding area in 1995. I emphasize the latter city because, unlike Sarajevo, the Serbs were not directly involved in the final fatal years. While places like Srebrenica and Sarajevo demonstrate the brutality of Serb forces, in Mostar the fight was between Croats and Moslem militaries. The Serbs have been eliminated from the region earlier in the fighting.

What conclusions can I draw? It seems to me as my career enters its final phase I wish I had not followed the herd and been so wrapped up in the illusions of modernization and urbanization as some kind of fixed point of achievement in the human condition in the Balkans and elsewhere. Modernization was, in this sense, a profound illusion and post-modern ideas a fantasy. Neither will see us into the future. Contemplating the ruins of Mostar in 1995, can one say that this was Tito's heritage? Perhaps, because a political entity that

has a president for life has, by definition, no future, no way of effectively resolving conflicts as exemplified by a favorite slogan of his time, "Brotherhood and Unity". Pairing that with Socialist Yugoslavia one can easily see how the pairing is programmed to mutual self-destruct. One can even imaginatively diagram the process.

As any visitor to parts of former Yugoslavia today can testify – the whole country was not blown up in the internal wars, only selected places as in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, some of which have now been repaired. But in most of the country, especially in the rural areas, the countryside was transformed by massive building of private homes. This new housing was, in effect, both a monument to a fading familism by those who lived abroad or in cities (they are rarely occupied fully on a round the year basis). Yet this housing absorbed resources that were never invested in productive activities. Unfortunately this process continues in what were the poorest areas of Yugoslavia. This use of personal funds for private purposes represents a profound aversion to public interests. New research questions need to be asked that involve individual motivations and how institutional structures than can adjudicate conflict can come into being. Another question that cries out for some considered reflection has to do with the ability of human societies to destroy that which they had so painfully created for ideological purposes. The ruins of villages and towns in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo and the mass loss of civilian life in the 1990s and overlapping even into the 21st century were not created by foreign invaders but by inhabitants who had formerly lived peacefully together. The uninhibited destruction of private and public structures along with large-scale murder of the defenseless cannot be attributed only to the Serbs. Decades of construction were obliterated and the mutual destruction of historical monuments involved all of the dominant ethnic groups. Why? We need to examine carefully motivations for destruction and killing at the same time as we consider how construction was accomplished and reconstruction is planned and implemented and populations nourished.