
Rethinking Yugoslavia: Serbian Intellectuals and the ‘National Question’ in Historical Perspective

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In the Yugoslav lands, as in the rest of central and eastern Europe, the cultural sphere has often acted as a surrogate for politics, and intellectuals have traditionally been at the forefront of debates on questions of both nation and state. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the absence of a large educated class in Serbia ensured that political authorities often recruited intellectuals for a variety of duties, sometimes as state bureaucrats and administrators, sometimes as the ideological vanguard (or at least as the providers of an authoritative endorsement) of state policy. Along with this tradition of reliance on and co-operation with the state, there was, however, another tradition: that of intellectuals acting as the critics of the political powers and their actions. The first half of the twentieth century in particular saw the rise of a fledgling class of – perhaps not ‘free-floating’ – but certainly independent-minded intellectuals as a separate voice on the public scene. The Second World War and the communist takeover temporarily suspended this process, as Yugoslav intellectuals – like their counterparts in the rest of eastern Europe – were either silenced or relegated to a dependent role in the ‘building of socialism’. Yet once again, with the progressive (though not constant, regionally consistent or complete) liberalisation of the Yugoslav public sphere after 1948, many intellectuals did manage to assume a more critical stance without facing the dire consequences encountered by their other east European counterparts.

Within this wider intellectual engagement, the issue of statehood has been particularly important. The rise of nationalism as a political ideology in the early nineteenth century was based on the principle that ‘the national unit and the political unit should be congruent’, as Ernest Gellner succinctly put it, and many Serbian intellectuals – unsurprisingly and unexceptionally – wanted the reality to correspond to this ideal.¹ The ‘Serbian question’ thus arose concurrently with the birth of the small, autonomous Serbian principality in 1830, which left the vast majority of Serbs outside its borders. The goal of liberating Serbs from foreign rule and uniting them in a common state became the overarching national mission of both political and intellectual elites for much of the subsequent period. Yet, with the Balkan wars of 1912–13 and the creation of the first Yugoslav state in 1918, a new reality confronted Serbian elites: the ‘liberation and unification’ of Serbdom inevitably brought with it other

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¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 1.

Balkan peoples cohabiting with the Serbs in these areas.² Throughout the twentieth century and until Yugoslavia's demise in 1991 the 'Serbian question' showed itself to be more complex than simply making the political unit correspond with the national one; it meant conceptualising a state that would be viable despite its national diversity.

This article will examine the last attempt made by Serbian intellectuals to conceptualise a democratic 'third' Yugoslavia before the common state disintegrated into war in 1991. It will do so in the light of both the historical approaches to the issue of statehood in Serbian political thought and the specific context of the 1980s, in which the revival of the intellectual debate on the 'national question' took place. It will assess the nature, viability and significance of the most widely endorsed political platform issued by Serbia's intellectuals during this period – the 'Contribution to the Public Debate on the Constitution' of 1988. Remarkably, this document has been almost completely neglected in scholarship, primarily due to the overwhelming focus on the 1986 'Memorandum' of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Yet in contrast to the 'Memorandum', which was disclosed unauthorised before it was completed and approved even by the Academy, let alone more widely, the 1988 'Contribution' was publicly debated and put to a vote in Serbia's most important cultural and scholarly institutions. Second, while the 'Memorandum' is more accurately described as a repository of Serbian nationalist grievances than as a 'blueprint' for action, the 1988 platform was clearly prescriptive in character, with specific proposals for a new Yugoslav constitution.³ It is thus this virtually unknown document – rather than the much discussed 'Memorandum' – that best represents the Serbian intelligentsia's approach to the common state in the last years of Yugoslavia's existence.

The historical legacy: concepts of the state until 1945

Three concepts of the state emerged from within the ranks of Serbian political and intellectual elites from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century: first, that of a centralised state which would 'liberate and unite' Serbs and which could take the form of either an enlarged Serbia or some sort of wider 'Yugoslavia'; second, that of a more decentralised 'Yugoslav' federation or confederation, with its 'large' and 'small' variants depending on the number of South Slav national groups it was meant to encompass; and third, that of a specifically Serbian national state as an alternative to any notion of South Slav union.

Until the creation of the first Yugoslav state in 1918, it was the first option that predominated in Serbia, initially aimed at extending the small Serbian state westwards and southwards into lands still under Ottoman rule. Serbia's first national

² This was a new dilemma. At the turn of the twentieth century the ethnic composition of the Kingdom of Serbia was still 90 per cent Serb. See John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47.

³ For an elaboration of these arguments concerning the 'Memorandum' see Jasna Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours of the Nation'. *Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (London: Hurst, 2002), 177–95.

programme – drafted as a secret document by its leading statesman Ilija Garašanin in 1844 under the title ‘Načertanije’ (Plan) – thus envisaged the creation of a ‘great, new Serbian state’, which would include Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and northern Albania.⁴ The changes Garašanin made to the original draft of the text – replacing references to ‘South Slav’ with ‘Serb’ and leaving out the sections on co-operation with the Croatian Illyrianists and the promotion of the ‘Yugoslav’ idea within Serbia – indicate his preference for an enlarged Serbia over that of a wider Yugoslav union.⁵ Garašanin did not, however, exclude the idea of such a union at some future time, as shown by his advocacy of contacts with Bulgaria and an extension of Serbia’s influence in the Habsburg lands.⁶ Indeed, in the 1860s, Garašanin’s national programme as expressed in the ‘Načertanije’ was transformed into a broader Yugoslav project, including plans for a future union with Bulgaria and the Habsburg Slavs.⁷ The two goals – the unification of Serbs and a future unification of South Slavs – were thus not seen as mutually exclusive or conflicting. In the dominant stream of Serbian national ideology, they were, however, generally conceived as an extension of the Serbian state, which was to play the role of a regional ‘Piedmont’.⁸

In contrast to this goal of an expanded Serbia, another conception of a more decentralised South Slav state was also beginning to emerge, notably within the ranks of Serbian socialists. In 1872 their leading figure, Svetozar Marković, first coined the term ‘Greater Serbian’ to characterise the attempts of the Serbian regime ‘to create out of the present-day Serbian principality a large, semi-independent or fully independent state, by the simple annexation of neighbouring Serbian lands’ and to impose on them ‘the same legal and economic relations, with all their consequences, that have existed and continue to exist in Serbia’.⁹ Instead, he advocated the creation of a ‘Balkan federation’, based on an indigenous social and national revolution against Ottoman (and potentially also Habsburg) rule, which would guarantee the right of each nation to ‘constitute an autonomous group within the union’.¹⁰ This second, more ‘decentralist’, option also had its advocates in parts of the Habsburg

⁴ ‘Garašaninovo Načertanije’, in Radoš Ljušić, *Knjiga o Načertaniju* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1993), 158.

⁵ The original text was drafted by the Moravian agent František Zach, working for Prince Adam Czartoryski’s Polish émigré organisation seeking to curb Russian and Austrian influence in the region. For the changes Garašanin made to the text, see Charles Jelavich, ‘Garašanin’s Načertanije und das großserbische Problem’, *Südostforschungen*, 28 (1968), 131–47. Both texts can be found in Ljušić, *Knjiga*, 130–65. Garašanin’s motives in making these changes have remained a matter of heated debate in (post-) Yugoslav historiography. Overviews can be found in Ljušić, *Knjiga*, 18–43, and Wolf Dietrich Behschnitt, *Nationalismus bei Serben und Kroaten, 1830–1914* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1980), 267–70.

⁶ ‘Garašaninovo Načertanije’ in Ljušić, *Knjiga*, 155–65 *passim*.

⁷ See notably David MacKenzie, *Ilija Garašanin: Balkan Bismarck* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 289–93.

⁸ Ivo J. Lederer, ‘Nationalism and the Yugoslavs’, in Peter Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer, eds., *Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), 424–5. On the ‘Piedmont idea’ see David MacKenzie, ‘Serbia as Piedmont and the Yugoslav Idea, 1804–1914’, *East European Quarterly*, 28, 2 (1994), 153–82.

⁹ Svetozar Marković, ‘Srbija na istoku’ (1872), quoted in Vasa Čubrilović, *Istorija političke misli u Srbiji XIX veka* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1958), 302.

¹⁰ Svetozar Marković, ‘Socijalizam ili društveno pitanje’ (1874), quoted in Behschnitt, *Nationalismus*, 107.

Serb elite, and progressively even gained ground in Belgrade intellectual circles.¹¹ By the time the Yugoslav unification loomed at the end of the First World War, clear divisions had emerged among intellectuals concerning the question of the internal organisation of the state: one group, close to the dominant Radical Party, argued that Serbia deserved a leading role in the new state thanks to its wartime sacrifices and ultimate victory, and advocated centralism under the Karadjordjević dynasty along the lines demanded by the Serbian government; another, smaller, but prestigious, group of scholars preferred a federal republic, or – as they put it – a 'United States of Yugoslavia'.¹²

Although Serbian intellectuals generally saw the new Yugoslav state as a fulfilment of Serbia's quest for the 'liberation and unification' of Serbdom – which largely accounts for the ease with which Serbs gave up Serbia and identified with the new state – divisions between 'centralists' and 'decentralists' remained throughout the interwar period. Whereas the former adhered to the unitarist vision of the nation (of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as 'three tribes of one nation') and believed that only a centralised state would be strong enough to resist both internal centrifugal pressures and external threats, the latter argued that state centralism would in fact hinder the development of national unity, and – as a 1922 survey by the journal *Srpski književni glasnik* (Serbian Literary Gazette) showed – they generally supported a conciliatory attitude towards Croatian demands and a granting of greater rights to the historic provinces.¹³ Indeed, it appears that in the 1920s it was the 'co-operative' rather than the 'unitarist' vision that predominated among Serbian intellectuals (in contrast to the monarchy and the two leading political parties, the Radicals and the Democrats), and most did not see the centralist 1921 Constitution as a viable way of resolving the dilemma of Yugoslavia's internal state organisation, especially with the opening of the 'Croat question'.¹⁴ In the 1930s many Serbian intellectuals became increasingly critical of King Alexander's reorganisation of the state into nine geographically and economically defined units (*banovine*), which aimed at promoting Yugoslav unity by reducing the number of provinces and fostering economic integration.¹⁵ As this reorganisation failed to achieve genuine unity or mitigate the royal dictatorship, intellectuals began to advocate options that ranged from greater autonomy for the existing *banovine* to the establishment of different units – on the basis of other geographic and economic criteria, or in the form of the historic provinces, or even

¹¹ For the Habsburg Serbs, see Dimitrije Djordjević, 'The Serbs as an Integrating and a Disintegrating Factor', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 3, 2 (1967), 48–82. For Serbian intellectuals, see Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/SKZ, 1986), 259.

¹² Trgovčević, *Naučnici*, 248–82.

¹³ Miroslav Janićijević, *Stvaralačka inteligencija međuratne Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Institut za društvene nauke, 1984), 123.

¹⁴ Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 82, and Branka Prpa, 'Jugoslavija kao moderna država u vidjenjima srpskih intelektualaca, 1918–1929', Ph.D. thesis, Belgrade University, 1996.

¹⁵ Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 165–8.

some form of Serb – Croat – Slovene ‘trialism’ (although this last one was a minority view).¹⁶

The 1930s were primarily marked by an increasing disillusionment with Yugoslavia, not only among non-Serbs, who viewed continued state centralism and the ideology of Yugoslav unitarism as merely a mask for Serbian hegemony, but also among Serbian intellectual elites, who saw Croatian (and to a lesser extent, Slovenian) desires for greater autonomy as a betrayal of the common Yugoslav ideal, for which the Serbs had sacrificed their independent state and had experienced such suffering during the war.¹⁷ The government’s attempt finally to resolve the ‘Croat question’ by the creation of an autonomous Croatian *banovina* in 1939¹⁸ particularly contributed to the intellectual reconsideration of Serbs as a separate national entity whose interests in Yugoslavia now needed to be examined independently. Arguing that the Croatian *banovina* – forged out of the historic provinces of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, with the addition of parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and encompassing 768,000 Orthodox Serbs and 144,000 Muslims¹⁹ – was merely ‘the first phase in the creation of a Greater Croatia’,²⁰ a group of prominent intellectuals gathered around the Serbian Cultural Club, set up in 1937, now began to call for a defence of Serbian interests and the creation of a Serbian territorial unit within Yugoslavia. As the prominent historian and jurist Slobodan Jovanović put it in a 1939 lecture: ‘When a Croatian ethnic unit is defined, inevitably a Serbian ethnic unit must be defined . . . When the Croatian question is raised, inevitably so is the Serbian question, and we must, with united forces, defend what is ours’.²¹ The calls for a Serbian unit did not necessarily translate into a rejection of Yugoslavia, however. While there were some voices within the Club that warned of Yugoslavism as a ‘Trojan horse’ and announced that ‘wherever there are Serbs, that is Serbia’, the majority of Serbian intellectuals continued to defend the necessity of Yugoslavism as a ‘state idea’.²²

The third state concept, of a ‘Greater Serbia’ as an alternative to Yugoslavia, appeared only during wartime and represented a marginal phenomenon that attracted virtually no support. This option briefly presented itself in 1915 following the

¹⁶ I thank Dušan Djordjevich for indicating this point to me. For the range of reactions to the reorganisation of the state under the dictatorship, see Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, *Jugoslovenski federalizam: ideje i stvarnost. Tematska zbirka dokumenata*, 1 (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1987), 317–423.

¹⁷ ‘U očekivanju odluke’, editorial of 29 Feb. 1940, in *Srpski glas*, the journal of the Serbian Cultural Club, cited in Miodrag Jovičić, ed., *Jako srpstvo, jaka Jugoslavija*. *Izbor članaka iz ‘Srpskog glasa’, organa Srpskog kulturnog kluba, 1939–1940* (Belgrade: Naučna knjiga, 1991), 132. For an analysis of this disillusionment, see Marko Bulatović, ‘Struggling with Yugoslavism: Dilemmas of Interwar Serb Political Thought’, in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideology and Identity: Southeastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003).

¹⁸ All areas of public policy other than foreign affairs, military and finance were to be administered by the *banovina*.

¹⁹ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia. The History behind the Name* (London: Hurst, 2002), 132.

²⁰ Editorial, 23 Nov. 1939, in Jovičić, *Jako srpstvo*, 16.

²¹ Slobodan Jovanović, ‘Jugoslovenstvo u prošlosti i budućnosti’, 7 Dec. 1939, in Jovičić, *Jako srpstvo*, 50.

²² ‘Srpska jedinica’, editorial, 25 Jan. 1940; M. M., ‘Gde god je Srba – tu je Srbija’, 14 Dec. 1939; and Slobodan Jovanović, ‘Jugoslovenstvo u prošlosti i budućnosti’, 7 Dec. 1939, in Jovičić, *Jako srpstvo*, 103, 57–8 and 51 respectively.

conclusion by the Entente of the secret Treaty of London with Italy, promising the latter Austrian territories, including all of Istria and Dalmatia, to secure its entry into war against the Central Powers. Although Serbia was not party to this agreement, it was to be given parts of the Adriatic coast south of the 'Italian' Dalmatia and, in spring and summer 1915, Allied diplomats also approached the Serbian government with offers of further territorial compensation for a 'Greater Serbia' (including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Srem, Bačka and Slavonia), in return for ceding Vardar Macedonia to Bulgaria. There is, however, no evidence that the Serbian government seriously pursued this 'Greater Serbian' alternative to Yugoslav unification.²³ As Kosta Pavlowitch notes:

Had [Serbia] set aside the Yugoslav option in favour of a Greater Serbia, it would have had difficulty justifying to the allies the full extent of its territorial claims, thus leaving its national integration incomplete, with many Serbs still living as minorities in Italy, Hungary or a rump Croatia. Neither would it have altogether avoided the national problems that were to plague Yugoslavia, adding large Croatian, Muslim and Hungarian minorities to the Albanian and still undefined Macedonian populations Serbia had taken on after the Balkan Wars.²⁴

Furthermore, the entry into war of the United States, which publicly refused to recognise the secret treaties, effectively cast doubt on whether such territorial arrangements would even be honoured.²⁵

The notion of a 'Greater Serbia' appeared again in more radical form in the circumstances of extreme destruction and suffering of the Second World War, which saw a systematic policy of mass extermination applied against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia.²⁶ This plan for 'an ethnically homogenous Serbia encompassing those ethnic territories inhabited by Serbs' was proposed within the ranks of the Chetniks (but never adopted as an official programme) by Bosnian Serb lawyer Stevan Moljević, a former member of the Serbian Cultural Club.²⁷ It was based on the argument that only the creation of a separate Serbian national unit, accompanied by an exchange of populations, could prevent 'a repetition of the terrible crimes that occurred... on the whole territory where Serbs and Croats were mixed and

²³ Djordje Dj. Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 2nd edn (Zaječar: Zadužbina Nikole Pašića, 1995), 139–71.

²⁴ Kosta St Pavlowitch, 'The First World War and the Unification of Yugoslavia', in Dejan Djokić, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea* (London: Hurst, 2003), 41.

²⁵ Andrej Mitrović, 'The Yugoslav Question, the First World War and the Peace Conference, 1914–20', in Djokić, *Yugoslavism*, 50. Indeed, even Italy did not get all the territories promised by the Treaty of London.

²⁶ Although the figures of Yugoslavia's war losses are disputed, two independent studies undertaken in the 1980s, one by the Croatian scholar Vladimir Žerjavić and the other by the émigré Bosnian Serb statistician and lawyer Bogoljub Kočović, put the total number of war victims for the country at just above one million, approximately half of whom were Serb (487,000 according to Kočović and 530,000 according to Žerjavić). Although the proportional losses sustained by the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in regard to their total population in Yugoslavia were in the same range, in the Independent State of Croatia a substantial difference is clear: Serbian losses were 334,000 or around 17 per cent of their total population, while Croatian and Muslim losses were 203,000 (6 per cent) and 75,000 (8.6 per cent) respectively. Bogoljub Kočović, *Žrtve drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji* (London: Naše delo, 1985), and Vladimir Žerjavić, *Gubici stanovništva Jugoslavije u drugom svjetskom ratu* (Zagreb: Jugoslavensko viktimoško društvo, 1989).

²⁷ For the various Chetnik conceptions see Petranović and Zečević, *Jugoslavenski federalizam*, 821–5.

where Croats and Muslims planned to exterminate the Serbs'. Yet even Moljević envisaged the establishment of this 'homogenous Greater Serbia' as the first step in the creation of a 'federal' Yugoslavia of three units (Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia).²⁸ The idea of Serbia as an *alternative* to Yugoslavia was only articulated in a series of unsuccessful memoranda to the German authorities by members of the pro-German collaborationist Nedić regime and the fascist-inspired followers of Dimitrije Ljotić in occupied Serbia (though not by Ljotić himself).²⁹ With the victory of Tito's Partisans in 1945 this 'Greater Serbia' option effectively disappeared, only to be revived in the circumstances of Yugoslavia's disintegration and wars of the early 1990s.

Communist Yugoslavia and its discontents: the return of the 'Serbian question' and the concept of a 'Third' Yugoslavia

In the communist period – as until then – intellectuals' concepts of the state were developed in reaction to the circumstances in which they took place and the parameters set by the political authorities, usually in the form of constitutional changes that were either being proposed or adopted. As the official concept of Yugoslavia evolved from a more centralised federation to an essentially 'confederal' system of republics and provinces whose borders the Serbs felt disadvantaged them, so did the Serbian intellectuals' vision of that state turn from general acceptance to widespread rejection. In the context of the post-Tito crisis when the common state appeared to be unravelling, critical intellectuals came to elaborate a platform for a 'third' Yugoslavia (the first being the interwar kingdom and the second the communist federation), which would embrace both the principle of party pluralism and a 'democratic' solution to the 'national question'.

Despite their traumatic experience of the Second World War, the vast majority of Serbs welcomed the re-creation of Yugoslavia by the communists. First of all, Yugoslavia did fulfil the traditional goal of uniting the Serbian nation; although the new federation effectively cut the Republic of Serbia to size, leaving over one-third of ethnic Serbs outside its borders and creating within it only two autonomous areas (Vojvodina and Kosovo), these internal divisions were clearly meant to be purely administrative, satisfying the national aspirations of the other Yugoslav peoples without, however, weakening the state. As Tito himself put it: 'These borders, if I may present them thus, are meant to be something like white lines on a marble pillar. The borders of the federal units in Yugoslavia are not borders of division, but borders of unification'.³⁰ Second, although all the upper echelons of power in the state were carefully balanced according to the 'national key', Serbs (particularly from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where their wartime support for Tito's Partisans

²⁸ 'Četnička koncepcija "homogene" Srbije i trijalističke Jugoslavije. Projekat Stevana Moljevića o granicama, društvenom uređenju i spoljnoj politici "Velike Srbije" u obnovljenoj Jugoslaviji', in Petranović and Zečević, *Jugoslovenski federalizam*, 675–7 *passim*.

²⁹ Pavlowitch, *Serbia*, 142.

³⁰ Speech in Zagreb, 21 May 1945, quoted in Predrag J. Marković, 'Odnos Partije i Tita prema jugoslovenskom i nacionalnom identitetu', in Svetlana Ljuboja, Predrag Marković, Laslo Sekelj and Mirjana Vasović, *Identitet: Srbi i/ili Jugoslaveni* (Belgrade: Institut za evropske studije, 2001), 38.

was the strongest) were proportionally overrepresented within the executive and military apparatus and the Communist Party, giving them a stake in the new state's existence and a sense that their interests would be safeguarded.³¹ Finally, the communists' emphasis on the building of a new supra-national 'socialist' Yugoslav identity, that would – if not replace – certainly mitigate existing national differences, also contributed to the Serbs' identification with Yugoslavia.³²

After 1966, the equanimity with which Serbs viewed Yugoslavia was dramatically eroded, however. With the purge of Aleksandar Ranković, Serbia's leading communist and the principal exponent of the 'centralist' line in the Yugoslav leadership, the Party embarked on a new course, marked by the abandoning of 'socialist Yugoslavism' and an increasing condemnation of 'great-state centralism'.³³ The decentralising constitutional changes of 1967 to 1974 raised Serbia's provinces to republics in all but name and progressively turned the country into a de facto confederation of eight 'proto-states'.³⁴ The Serbs' traditional goal of national 'liberation and unification' thus appeared increasingly in jeopardy: over three million now found themselves outside the borders of 'inner' Serbia (without the provinces), amounting to about 40 per cent of their total population in Yugoslavia.³⁵ In addition, the affirmation of other Yugoslav nationalisms that accompanied these changes at times took on distinctly anti-Serbian tones and even gave rise to reports of harassment and discrimination against Serbs.³⁶ Serbs outside 'inner Serbia' thus faced the prospect of becoming a minority in increasingly autonomous and potentially even hostile new 'states'.³⁷ Although criticism of the prevailing trends towards 'confederalism'

³¹ Pavlowitch, *Serbia*, 162. See also Veljko Vujčić, 'Historical Legacies, Nationalist Mobilization and Political Outcomes in Russia and Serbia: A Weberian View', *Theory and Society*, 25 (1996), 763–801.

³² On the application of 'socialist Yugoslavism' in culture, see Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 128–72. On how this affected Serbs, see ch. 1 of Audrey Helfant Budding, 'Serb Intellectuals and the National Question, 1961–1991', Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 1998.

³³ The classic works on Yugoslavia's internal transformation during this period are Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948–1974* (London: Hurst, 1977), and Steven L. Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). On the evolution of Yugoslavia's constitutive concept, see also ch. 1 of Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija: Država koja je odumrla* (Zagreb: Prometej, 2003).

³⁴ Ivan Vejvoda, 'Yugoslavia, 1945–91: From Decentralisation without Democracy to Dissolution', in David Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda, eds., *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth* (London: Longman, 1996), 15. See also Veljko Vujčić, 'Institutional Origins of Contemporary Serbian Nationalism', *East European Constitutional Review*, 5, 4 (1996), 51–61.

³⁵ According to the 1981 census, the total number of Serbs was 8,140,000 or 36.3 per cent of the population of Yugoslavia, of whom 3,275,000 (41.3 per cent) were located outside 'inner' Serbia. *Statistical pocket-book of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Federal Statistical Office, 1991), 20, and Tim Judah, *The Serbs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 313–15.

³⁶ In areas where Serbs experienced their 'status reversal', the perception was, of course, that their overrepresentation in the Party, the state bureaucracy and the security apparatus was simply being rectified. This was particularly the case in Croatia in 1967–71 and Kosovo after 1968. Vujčić, 'Institutional Origins', 57. In addition to Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, and Burg, *Conflict and Cohesion*, on Croatia see also George Schöpflin, 'The Ideology of Croatian Nationalism', *Survey*, 19, 1 (1973), 123–46, and Jill Irvine, *The Croat Question* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 258–72, and on Kosovo Lenard J. Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milošević* (Boulder: Westview, 2002), 61–71.

³⁷ See Dejan Jović, 'Fear of Being Minority as a Cause of the post-Yugoslav Wars', *Balkanologie*, 1–2 (2000), 21–37.

and individual national affirmation of Yugoslavia's federal units had already begun to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the most important expression of intellectual discontent with the new course came in the 1980s, in the context of the deep and all-encompassing post-Tito crisis.³⁸

While the political and economic aspects of the crisis were felt throughout the country and caused widespread disillusionment with the system, in Serbia they were viewed primarily as a symptom of a much more serious problem: the failure of Yugoslavia as a state. In the view of most Serbian intellectuals, the crisis itself had been caused by the rise of particularist nationalism within the Party and the devolution of power to the federal units, and state failure was evident in two ways that concerned them directly: first, in the continuing incapacity of the leadership to find a solution to the 'Kosovo question' and to halt the emigration of Kosovo's Serbs from the province, amid dramatic stories of human rights abuses and appeals for help to the critical intelligentsia; and, second, in the effective disintegration of Yugoslavism on the cultural level, which in the 1980s crystallised around the souring of relations with Slovenian intellectuals.³⁹ Whereas the 'Kosovo question' centred on the issue of the Republic of Serbia's statehood, the relationship with the Slovenes focused the debate on the future of Yugoslavia. Things came to a head when the Yugoslav leadership proposed a new round of constitutional change in 1987.

By the mid-1980s Yugoslavia's leadership had come to realise that the contradictions inherent in the 1974 constitution and the impossibility of dealing with the economic crisis in the existing framework would necessitate a departure from the status quo. As the prospect of constitutional change loomed once again, two distinct positions began to emerge within the leadership – one that aimed at further confederalisation of the state, advocated by Slovenia, and another that called for a degree of recentralisation and a return of some decision making powers to the federal centre, backed by Serbia.⁴⁰ After a period of intense debate, in January 1987 the Federal Presidency finally adopted a proposal for constitutional change. The 'Proposal' represented a compromise, aiming to satisfy both the 'centralists' and the 'decentralists'. It aimed primarily to recreate a unified legal system, bring postal and telecommunications systems and railroads under a central authority and strengthen the federal administration in order to establish monetary discipline and repay the

³⁸ On the post-Tito crisis, see Pedro Ramet, ed., *Yugoslavia in the 1980s* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985); Harold Lydall, *Yugoslavia in Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); and Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 52–7. Its political aspects are also well covered in Steven Burg, 'Elite Conflict in Post-Tito Yugoslavia', *Soviet Studies*, 38, 2 (1986), 170–93. For Serbian intellectuals' responses to the crisis, see Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours', and Audrey Helfant Budding, 'Systemic Crisis and National Mobilization: The Case of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy', *Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe: Essays in Honor of Roman Szporluk*. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 22 (1998), 49–69.

³⁹ These are analysed extensively in Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours', particularly chs. 3 and 4. On the disintegration of Yugoslavism in the cultural sphere see also Jasna Dragović-Soso, 'Intellectuals and the Collapse of Yugoslavia: The Disintegration of the Yugoslav Writers' Union' in Djokić, *Yugoslavism*, 268–85.

⁴⁰ On the debates in the political elite, see notably Jović, *Jugoslavija*, 310–27.

foreign debt. It also included changes that would allow the extension of Serbia's legal and police jurisdiction over the autonomous provinces.⁴¹ The presentation of the 'Proposal' was, however, accompanied by reassurances to those who opposed recentralisation: it was specifically emphasised that there would be no encroachment on the practice of decision making by consensus in the federal centre and on the republics' sovereignty.⁴² As was the practice, the 'Proposal' was then presented for public debate in each of the federal units.

The two most far-reaching reactions to the official 'Proposal' came from the ranks of the Slovenian and the Serbian intelligentsias, which both proposed their own, more radical, alternatives. The Slovenian position had progressively been built up over the course of the 1980s, amounting to an endorsement of Slovenia's statehood, potentially within a loose, confederal Yugoslavia.⁴³ It was both a reaction to the rising nationalist momentum in Serbia and a reflection of the Slovenes' structural reality as one of Yugoslavia's smallest nations (just over 8 per cent of the total population), yet located within a virtually ethnically homogenous 'national state'.⁴⁴ With increasingly diverging interests from the poorer south, the Slovenes feared that any departure from the more 'confederal' structure would reduce them to a minority in Yugoslavia and lead to their constantly being outvoted in federal institutions. In April 1988, Slovenian cultural organisations rejected the official 'Proposal' and adopted their own alternative 'constitution' – one that evoked Slovenia's 'historical right to self-determination, including the right to participation in a union of states or *the secession* from such a union of states'.⁴⁵ In it, there was no mention of Yugoslavia.

In contrast to the Slovenes, Serbian intellectuals still defined their position only within the framework of a Yugoslav state. This was made clear in the most widely endorsed document of that period, the 'Contribution to the Public Debate on the Constitution', which was approved almost unanimously by Serbia's main cultural and scholarly institutions in March 1988.⁴⁶ Noting in the preamble that Yugoslavia was in the throes of an 'existential crisis' and that its model of 'self-management socialism' had resulted in complete failure, the document spelled out in three parts the changes to Yugoslavia's political, economic and federal systems deemed necessary.⁴⁷ In essence, the intellectuals' platform represented both a rejection of the existing, crisis-ridden communist state and a proposal for a new, democratic, 'third' Yugoslavia.

⁴¹ See 'Proposal of the Presidency of the SFRY to Proceed to the Amendment of the Constitution of the SFRY', *Yugoslav Survey*, 28, 1 (1987), 3–20.

⁴² *Danas*, 17 Feb. 1987, 10–11.

⁴³ See particularly 'Prispevki za slovenski nacionalni program', *Nova revija*, 6, 57 (1987). The Slovenian position is examined in more detail in Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours', 189–95, and Jović, *Jugoslavija*, 429–42.

⁴⁴ The Republic of Slovenia encompassed 1,712,445 of the 1,754,000 Slovenes in Yugoslavia and had no significant minorities.

⁴⁵ 'Predlog slovenačkih pisaca: republički Ustav', *Književne novine*, 755 (1988), 17 (emphasis added).

⁴⁶ It was adopted by the Writers' Association of Serbia and by Serbia's sociological and philosophical societies.

⁴⁷ 'Prilog javnoj raspravi o ustavu', *Književne novine*, 751 (1988), 1.

In the same vein as their Slovenian counterparts, Serbian intellectuals called for 'the abolition of all references to ideology, as well as the leading party's monopoly of power and of all forms of party-state'. Instead they proposed the creation of a new system which would be based on 'different political organisations of citizens', free and fair direct elections to all state institutions and the respect of civil and human rights. They also criticised the 'extensive and irrational' interference of the state and the ruling party in Yugoslavia's economy and called for 'equality' between 'social, state and private forms of ownership'.⁴⁸ In this sense, the document 'exuded a clear demand for democratic change', as anti-nationalist intellectuals later emphasised when explaining their endorsement of it.⁴⁹ Indeed, the focus of the debate about this proposal in the Writers' Association of Serbia pitted advocates of systemic change against defenders of the existing socialist model, and the final vote showed the overwhelming preponderance of the former – over three hundred votes were cast in favour of adopting the document and only nine against (with three abstentions).⁵⁰

The 'Contribution to the Public Debate on the Constitution' also included substantive changes to the country's federal system. Unlike the Slovenian intellectuals' 'constitution', this document did not openly envisage the possibility of Serbian statehood outside Yugoslavia and, in this sense, it was firmly grounded within the dominant tradition of Serbian state concepts since the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite its Yugoslav orientation, however, the intellectuals' 'Contribution' contained elements that were clearly aimed at securing Serbian interests within the existing Yugoslav framework. It effectively proposed the concurrent reintegration of both the Yugoslav federation and the Republic of Serbia, which appeared plausible on the surface but was in reality deeply contradictory and inconsistent.

In an effort to counter Yugoslavia's post-1974 'confederalised' order which gave primacy to the federal units over the centre, the 'Contribution' proposed a referendum to decide Yugoslavia's new executive and legislative institutions, including the replacement of the Federal Presidency – which consisted of representatives of Yugoslavia's federal units who reached decisions by consensus – by a single 'President of the Republic'. It also called for the reform of the Federal Council, to include alongside the chamber of the republics a one-man one-vote chamber (abolished by the decentralising constitutional changes of the early 1970s). This reformed Federal Council would thus ensure that 'all citizens be equally represented, and the republics according to the number of their citizens'.⁵¹ Although this change was justified in terms of redefining the system in favour of the individual citizen, in practice it could have put Yugoslavia's larger nations and republics at an advantage depending on the competences of the new chambers. To the opponents of re-centralisation,

⁴⁸ 'Prilog', 1, 4. Nevertheless, in its economic section, the document did emphasise the need for some form of social democracy, based on 'principles of solidarity and the defence of workers from exploitation', which shows a desire to safeguard some of the underlying tenets of Yugoslavia's model of 'workers' self-management'.

⁴⁹ Vesna Pešić quoted in Nadežda Četković, *Možeš ti to, Vesna, možeš* (Belgrade: Krug, 2000), 103.

⁵⁰ 'Skupštinska diskusija', *Književne novine*, 751 (1988), 7.

⁵¹ 'Prilog', 1.

this proposal appeared as a thinly veiled attempt to give the Serbs (who represented over one-third of Yugoslavia's total population) and the Republic of Serbia (which, including the two autonomous provinces, contained over 40 per cent of Yugoslavia's citizens) more say in federal decision making.⁵² Another clause in the document showed more clearly that the underlying goal of Yugoslavia's reintegration was Serbian national unity: the 'Contribution' noted the fact that Yugoslavia's internal borders were not ethnic borders, and it advocated 'complete national, spiritual and cultural integrity of each Yugoslav nation regardless of the republic or province in which it resides'. It called for a guarantee to members of a nation residing in a different republic that they would be allowed 'the creation of independent political and cultural associations and organizations, *ties with their own nation*, education in and official use of their own language and alphabet'.⁵³

At the same time, the 'Contribution' argued that the 1974 Constitution had effectively partitioned the Republic of Serbia by increasing the powers of the provinces, and it demanded the establishment of the republic as *a state* with rights and jurisdiction over its whole territory 'in the same way as other republics making up the Yugoslav union': 'All republics in Yugoslavia must be established on the same principle, as either citizens' states or national states. If the principle of national states is applied throughout Yugoslavia, then Serbia too must be established as the national state of the Serbs.' As an extension of this demand, the document called for the abolition of Kosovo's and Vojvodina's 'state sovereignty' (although maintaining their autonomy to some unspecified degree), which in practice meant the loss of their right to direct representation in the federal centre as well as of their veto power in the republic's institutions. The document argued that the provinces had to be subordinated to the republic, in order finally to abolish the 'political inequality of the Serbian nation in the Yugoslav federation', while the non-Serb 'nationalities'⁵⁴ (mainly Albanians and Hungarians) living on the territory of the Republic of Serbia would be guaranteed all their basic human and civil rights. Finally, the document called for the universal application of the right to territorial autonomy on the basis of either the specific national make-up of a particular region (as in the case of Kosovo) or of its historical specificity (as in the case of Vojvodina), in accordance with the freely expressed will of the population living there. In other words, all republics had to be subject to new constitutional solutions if they contained such ethnically or historically diverse regions – not only Serbia.⁵⁵

⁵² According to the 1981 census, Serbs made up 8,140,000 or 36.3 per cent of Yugoslavia's total population and, in 1989, the Republic of Serbia had a population of 9,833,000 of Yugoslavia's total population of 23,695,000. *Statistical Pocket-Book 1991*, 20 and 16 respectively.

⁵³ 'Prilog', 4 (emphasis added).

⁵⁴ 'Nationality' was the term used to designate those ethnic groups living in Yugoslavia who had another national state and were therefore not entitled to their own republic within the Yugoslav federation. The two largest 'nationalities' were the Albanians (according to the 1981 census, 1,730,000 or 7.7 per cent of Yugoslavia's population) and the Hungarians (427,000 or 1.9%). *Statistical Pocket-Book 1991*, 20.

⁵⁵ All citations from 'Prilog', 4.

The predominant concept of the state embodied by the ‘Contribution’ and endorsed by the Serbian intelligentsia in 1988 was not ‘Greater Serbian’, in that it did not demand the complete abolition of the autonomous provinces and a redrawing of the borders between the republics, as a small minority of more radical intellectuals advocated at the time.⁵⁶ It was also neither genuinely ‘centralist’ nor ‘decentralist’, but most of all incoherent, with references to different and, in the Yugoslav context, mutually irreconcilable principles (national self-determination vs. constitutional rights of the republics, including – implicitly – the inviolability of their borders). Its revival of the idea of a one-man one-vote chamber and a president of the federation, along with its call for the unity of each Yugoslav nation regardless of where its members resided, all went against the ‘confederal’ elements in the constitution – notably the sovereignty of the republics and decision making by consensus in the federal centre. On the other hand, however, the document implicitly endorsed this same ‘confederal’ order and existing republican borders by calling for the establishment of the Republic of Serbia as a ‘state’ with jurisdiction over its whole territory. Finally – to take its contradictions even further – after thus diminishing the importance of the provinces, the document also called for an extension of the principle of autonomy to the other Yugoslav republics.

As long as Yugoslavia still existed and as long as this platform did not translate into policy, its inherent contradictions could remain latent. Although a few intellectuals did note them at the time, their criticisms neither formed the heart of the debate nor did they receive any response.⁵⁷ The dissolution of the common state, which was to take place three years after the ‘Contribution’, still did not appear as a distinct possibility to the vast majority of the Serbian intelligentsia when this document was issued in 1988. Yet a few intellectuals foresaw – indeed, perhaps even desired – Yugoslavia’s demise. One of them was the novelist Dobrica Ćosić the leading figure of Serbia’s intellectual opposition who presented the ‘Contribution’ to the public in 1988 and who – according to his own account – managed to include in it the one point he believed to be the most important.⁵⁸ In the preamble of the ‘Contribution’, hidden within the plethora of proposals for the reform of Yugoslavia, was one clause that allowed a different and more ominous interpretation:

All fundamental questions of Yugoslavia’s social and state organisation, *including the use of the right to national self-determination including secession*, must be decided on the basis of an all-Yugoslav

⁵⁶ The principal advocates of the more radical line at the time were sociologist Vojislav Šešelj and writer Vuk Drašković, whose parties were to occupy the right wing in Serbia’s first multi-party elections in 1990. Once the war broke out in 1991, however, Drašković changed his stance on border changes. For Šešelj’s views in the constitutional debate, see *Književne novine*, 751 (1988), 9; Drašković’s are elaborated in ‘Šta menjati u ustavu’, in Vuk Drašković, *Koekude Srbijo* (Belgrade: Nova Evropa, 1990, 75–6).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Djoko Stojičić’s points in the debate on the ‘Contribution’, in ‘Skupštinska diskusija’, *Književne novine*, 751 (1988), 7.

⁵⁸ Dobrica Ćosić, *Piščevi zapisi (1981–1991)* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 2002), 249. On Ćosić’s vision of Yugoslavia’s dissolution, see notably Audrey Budding’s contribution to this issue.

referendum which would prevent the 'majorisation' of any one nation and would allow the free expression of the political will of all Yugoslav citizens.⁵⁹

Although the document did not elaborate on the way in which such a Yugoslav-wide referendum would be carried out, interpreted or applied in ethnically mixed areas, its aim was clearly to undermine the legitimacy of any republican claim to independence and to reserve the right to self-determination only for Yugoslavia's nations (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims, Macedonians and Montenegrins, but not the 'nationalities' such as the Kosovo Albanians).⁶⁰ By doing so, this clause opened up the possibility of creating nationally defined states if Yugoslavia failed. In other words, by defining self-determination in national as opposed to republican terms, it effectively allowed for the option of a future redrawing of republican borders and the creation of a 'Greater Serbian' state – a state which could potentially encompass both the ethnically preponderantly Albanian province of Kosovo and those territories in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina which contained Serbian populations. When this implicit agenda became explicit in 1991 and when Serbia's leadership resorted to war and 'ethnic cleansing' to achieve these aims, the once united intellectual opposition effectively disintegrated – as some endorsed this policy, others rejected the means employed but not the ends, and others still refused both.

Conclusion

The Serbian intellectuals' attempt to conceptualise a 'third' Yugoslavia on the eve of the disintegration of the 'second' marked the unsuccessful end of a long search for a 'Yugoslav' solution to the Serbian national question. Common sense would have dictated that – in order to be viable – such a solution to the Serbs' national goal of 'liberation and unification' also had to be acceptable to the other Yugoslav peoples living intermingled with the Serbs. The nineteenth-century concepts of a South Slav union as an extension of the existing Serbian state clearly were not, considering the separate national identities of the peoples inhabiting those territories. The interwar kingdom and even the post-1945 federation remained too centralist to satisfy the national aspirations of (at least some) non-Serbs in Yugoslavia. Yet, as became clear with the creation of the Croatian *banovina* in 1939 and again following the 'confederalisation' of Yugoslavia after 1966, any attempt to decentralise the state on the basis of nationally defined territorial entities inevitably also implied the

⁵⁹ 'Prilog', 1, emphasis added. 'Majorisation' was a term commonly used in Yugoslavia to designate the constant and illegitimate outvoting of a specific (ethnic) minority in political and cultural fora. It was invoked in the 1980s notably by the Serbs in Kosovo's institutions and by the Slovenes in federal institutions.

⁶⁰ Who 'owned' the right to self-determination – Yugoslavia's republics or nations – was always unclear in Yugoslavia's many post-1945 constitutions. See Audrey Budding's illuminating discussion of this problem in her 'Nation/People/Republic: Self-Determination in Socialist Yugoslavia', in Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Soso eds., *Rethinking Yugoslavia's Dissolution* (Chicago: Purdue University Press, forthcoming, 2004). Indeed, the clause in the 'Contribution' on national self-determination and an all-Yugoslav referendum was precisely the opposite of the option taken by the international community in 1991–92 to recognise Yugoslavia's republics as independent states, based on separate republican referenda.

creation of a Serbian entity, with all the accompanying dilemmas concerning the definition of its borders and its own internal arrangement. The 'Serbian question' was thus not 'imagined' or 'invented' by intellectuals in the 1980s, but represented a structural reality of the Serbs' dispersal throughout Yugoslavia and the inherent interconnectedness of all the 'national questions' in the region.

The Serbian intellectuals' final attempt to envisage a democratic 'third' Yugoslavia at the end of the 1980s was as unviable as it was late. It was not an explicit call for a 'Greater Serbia' or a change of borders, let alone for 'ethnic cleansing'. It contained a clear endorsement of notions of a pluralist democracy and respect for civil and human rights, as did most platforms emanating from the 'critical intelligentsia' at the time. Yet its liberal and Yugoslav orientation could not disguise a preoccupation with exclusively Serbian interests, which rendered the document contradictory and incoherent and provided a poor basis for ensuring the survival of the federation.

Intellectuals in the former Yugoslavia were important primarily as the carriers of a political alternative to the existing regime in a situation of single party rule and the absence of a political opposition. Were Yugoslavia ever to be reconstituted as a genuinely democratic state, this could only have been achieved through a process of inter-ethnic negotiation and compromise, in which all sides endorsed a coherent set of principles and accepted something less than their maximum demands. The Serbian intellectual opposition and its counterparts elsewhere in Yugoslavia were the natural vectors of such a process, in view of their declared commitment to democracy, civil society and human rights, and their desire for systemic change. When it came to rethinking Yugoslavia, however, despite their rhetoric the intellectuals proved to be no better than the undemocratic communist leaderships that they criticised. That they did not embrace their historical opportunity to act as a genuine democratic alternative to the uncompromising and belligerent policies of their political leaderships thus not only eclipsed the option of a democratic 'third' Yugoslavia but also contributed to the violent disintegration of the socialist 'second' one.