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Historian's Craft Research Paper

Introduction

This paper argues that the separation of the Yugoslavian states into their own sovereign countries had impacted the different Balkan people living in that area and shown that national pride can make people do something they otherwise would not. These factors include; trying to settle the borders for each country and group of people, the effects of the Yugoslavian War, and the dispersion of the Balkan people who did not stay and want to get involved with the conflict in the area. This paper will also have a focus on the Bosnian Muslims and Bosniaks, since my primary sources are people from this ethnic group. With my interviewed people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time, there will be a bias in the eyes of the Bosnian person during this time period. I will have a lot of information from people who were aware and were present of the events of the breakup of Yugoslavian from the Bosnian perspective. That being said, I will do my best to compare with other sources and to be as factual as possible with what I have asked my interviewees. My own personal bias being raised by the interviewed people will be taken into account and I will save all my interpretation of the matter for the conclusion. All these interviews were conducted in the Bosnian language. Growing up being taught Bosnian, alongside English, I have been able to keep this part of the culture from my parents to talk, read, write, and translate Bosnian to English the best I can. Translation for some words can be tricky since they don't necessarily match up with English words at times or there is no translation at all found in the English language. I intend to show what the Yugoslavian War and its effects on the people had, and how this shows the idea of how far national pride can make people do something they otherwise would not without siding on one side or another in a thematic way.

Background

The country of Yugoslavia is located in Eastern Europe. Its geography varies where you go, with fertile lands in the north, ranges and basins to the east, mountains and hills to the southeast, and a shoreline to the southwest.¹ It first became its own nation after the events of world war one, with the government and political changing throughout the time from a kingdom, to the socialist nation it was before the separation of the states consisted of Balkan people. A Balkan person is someone who is from this region of Eastern Europe. In contemporary times, the country has split into seven different countries; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. *Explaining Yugoslavia*, a book by John B. Allcock, has some great maps that show Yugoslavia after World War 2, and the separate nations in 1995.² It does not have further separation seen within the last two decades because the book was published in 2000.

Communism and Yugoslavia went well before the separation. After the Ottoman Empire lost control at the end of World War 1, this left room for the Soviet Union to come in and spread its influence with Communism being that influence. It took its time but eventually, after World War 2, Yugoslavia was the leading state of Eastern Europe, apart from the Soviet Union.³ Josip Broz Tito was the man to thank for this successful communist regime in Yugoslavia. It was not until the 1980s when the reputation of these ideas was under destruction through the internal conflicts in different states.⁴ It was in 1989 when all the Yugoslavian state governments, but the Serbian government, underwent a counterrevolutionary change, ridding themselves of Communism.⁵ From this point, it can be seen why some of the Yugoslavian states decided to

¹ Halima Bosnjak, "Family Life During the Breakup of Yugoslavia". Interview. October 22, 2017.

² Allcock, John B., *Explaining Yugoslavia*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), xxii-xxvii.

³ Jelavich, Barbara, *History of the Balkans*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 314.

⁴ Benson, Leslie, *Yugoslavia: A Concise History*. (NY: Palgrave, 2001), 145.

⁵ Kaplan, Robert D., *Balkan Ghosts*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1993), xxxiii.

separate. Starting with Slovenia and Croatia, causing a chain that would result in all the states creating their own independent nation.

Settling Borders

It was a difficult process and time before these former states of Yugoslavia could be formed into their own country. In 1991, Slovenia was the first country that decided to split from Yugoslavia. This came as a shock to some, but it was also something that people saw coming. Some would even go as far to say that there would be trouble living near the borders of Southern Bosnia.⁶ Some people had different reactions in general where some Bosnians did not think there would be anything from it when Slovenia left.⁷ Croatia was the next to leave and declare independence shortly after Slovenia. Both saw a resulting civil war from independence, but Croatia saw a war for its independence between the Croatian government and the rebel Serbs of *Srpska Autonomna oblast Krajina*.⁸

Seeing as how two parts of Yugoslavia had already fallen out, with Slovenia and Croatia, it would not take long for the other states to fall out. Bosnia was the next state that was to declare independence, but it was not for the same reason as Slovenia and Croatia. “[Bosnia’s] leaders had no particular desire to secede from Yugoslavia, but, once Slovenia and Croatia proclaimed their independence in June 1991, Bosnia faced a choice between remaining within a Yugoslav

⁶ Halima Bosnjak, “Family Life During the Breakup of Yugoslavia”. Interview. October 22, 2017, and Damir Bosnjak, “Serving in the Bosnian Military During the Bosnian Civil War”. Interview. October 14, 2017. Different states of Yugoslavia saw things differently when it came to the independence of other states.

⁷ Selma Bosnjak, “My Experience of the Breakup of Yugoslavia and Bosnian Civil War”. Interview. October 14, 2017.

⁸ Halima Bosnjak, “Family Life During the Breakup of Yugoslavia”. Interview. October 22, 2017. This group consisted of the Serbians who were living in the state of Croatia during the separation would happen, and did not want the Croatian government and people to leave Yugoslavia.

dominated by Serbia or following the other two republics out”.⁹ This would be the start of the Bosnia and Herzegovinian exit, but it would take another 4 years until it was completely independent. Following this desire to become independent, Ravno, in Bosnia saw the first military aggression by Serbians in Bosnia October 1st, 1991. Serbians would continue this aggression and march towards Sarajevo. Here, the Serbians blocked the streets and crossroads of Sarajevo with masked and unmarked soldiers in October 16th, 1991.¹⁰ Military action would be seen in Bosnia following this event, causing internal problems for four years until other nations got involved, but official aggression recognized to be in 1992. The UN, United States of America, and other allied nations would aid Bosnia against the Serbian aggression, but only after years of failed diplomacy and peacekeeping. When the Serbians realized the assisting forces were too great to handle, diplomacy was considered by the Serbians. This is when the General Framework Agreement, also known as the Dayton Peace Accords, for peace in Bosnia signed in December 1995, ending the violence.¹¹ This aggression had lasted as long because of the national pride of the Serbians wanting things to go their way since they were the last majority members of Yugoslavia.

Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced the most aggression by the Serbians. Bosniaks and Bosnian Muslims were the two targets from the Serbians, since they lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A population loss study showed that more than half of the entire casualty count occurred within the first few months, along with about 85 percent of the civilian casualties being

⁹ Dobbins, James, Laurel E. Miller, Stephanie Pezard, Christopher S. Chivvis, Julie E. Taylor, Keith Crane, Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, and Tewodaj Mengistu. "Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Overcoming Obstacles to Peace: Local Factors in Nation-Building*, 93-94. RAND Corporation, 2013. (accessed October 18, 2017).

¹⁰ Halima Bosnjak, "Family Life During the Breakup of Yugoslavia". Interview. October 22, 2017.

¹¹ Dobbins, James, Laurel E. Miller, Stephanie Pezard, Christopher S. Chivvis, Julie E. Taylor, Keith Crane, Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, and Tewodaj Mengistu. "Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Overcoming Obstacles to Peace: Local Factors in Nation-Building*, 94. RAND Corporation, 2013. (accessed October 18, 2017).

of Bosniak or Bosnian Muslim ethnicity.¹² Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo were left after Bosnia declared independence in 1992. Macedonia would soon declare independence the following year, leaving the Serbians and the other states to take on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia title. Although it was not recognized as the former self, it remained that way until the country was renamed to Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro would eventually separate from Serbia in 2006, as well as Kosovo also separating in 2008. It took from 1991 to 2008, but eventually the Yugoslavian states separated into independent nations we see now in contemporary times.

Effects of the Yugoslavian War

There were many effects the war had on all the Balkan people involved. Every single ethnic group that was a part of Yugoslavia would see some suffering, but Bosnians would suffer the most, especially by the hands of the Serbians and their leader Radovan Karadzic. Karadzic was responsible for the aggression against the Bosnians, for all the deaths for all the different ethnic groups that went against the Serbians. After the war, Karadzic would be targeted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for his crimes in the war. Eventually, Karadzic would be captured on July 21st, 2008, by Serbian authorities in Belgrade, Serbia.¹³ With the capture of this man, a relief and tension left was eased between Serbians and Bosnians since the man who organized the aggression would face justice.

Damir told me his experience in the military where he would serve as a part of the Bosnian Resistance cooking for the group he was a part of, otherwise there would be

¹² Milanović, Marko. "The Arrest and Impending Trial of Radovan Karadžić." *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2009): 215. (accessed October 18, 2017).

¹³ *Ibid*, 21.

consequences. Some of these consequences included people being sacked from work if they did not accept military conscription.¹⁴ Although his time in the Bosnian Resistance would not last long and his unit was captured by the Serbians early on, in 1992. Forced labor was what happened to him and the rest of the unit where they would be digging trenches, artillery encampments, and whatever else they wanted.¹⁵ This is what he suffered for 10 months before escaping and fleeing back to Bosnian controlled territory. The effects of this shows what has happened because of the effects of the war, and how the national pride of the Serbians caused it.

While the aggression was being held at different points in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the areas that saw less aggression did what they could to help. There were many different humanitarian groups around at the time that aided those in need. Selma tells the story of how she was a part of two different humanitarian organizations, Karitas and Merhamet, to give food to those in need.¹⁶ Food was rationed, and coupons were given out fairly to all that were in need of some. Religion was important in forming these organizations and giving out food where it was needed, but also to give people hope that there was somebody there to help and give spiritual guidance.¹⁷

There were some negative effects of the Yugoslav War that were not just limited to casualties of war, but through relations afterwards. For example, the Bosnian Muslims who were killed in Srebrenica, over 8,000 Bosnians were a part of a genocide because of their religious

¹⁴ Damir Bosnjak, "Serving in the Bosnian Military During the Bosnian Civil War". Interview. October 14, 2017.

¹⁵ Ibid. This was difficult for myself to hear, as well as him to speak about as it was the first time I heard about this myself. Did not go too into detail about from digging, and did not say more after that as well.

¹⁶ Selma Bosnjak, "My Experience of the Breakup of Yugoslavia and Bosnian Civil War". Interview. October 14, 2017. Karitas was a Catholic organization and Merhamet was an Islamic organization, both aiming to help those in need.

¹⁷ Ibid.

affiliation.¹⁸ This genocide would leave a bitter taste of the Serbians and their actions to the Bosnians for what they had done. The reason for this is because, as Marko Attila Hoare suggests, the genocide was planned and organized to happen in a certain way.¹⁹ With the genocide planned by the Serbians, it is clear to see that this would leave a bitter taste for the Bosnians who have to deal with and remember such a cruel event annually. This is evident with many Bosnians today, Damir is an example of a Bosnian who does not forget what happened. Although he was in Australia by 1995, news spread of the genocide to the Balkan people who had dispersed all over the globe. Initial reactions were of sadness and rage of what the Serbians had done, something that had never happened before in Yugoslavian history.²⁰ Selma and Halima show more sadness towards the event, someone who remembers annually and donates to help those back in Bosnia.²¹ The national pride shown by the Serbians showed how far they would go with the different events in the war, particularly Srebrenica.

Dispersion of Balkan People

The dispersion of the people who did not want to stay and get involved with the conflict had a massive impact on the different Balkan people. Many different ethnic groups, with a heavy influence of Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian, showed what the breakup of Yugoslavia had done. People left throughout different stages of the war, many from the start while others stayed and

¹⁸ Halima Bosnjak, "Family Life During the Breakup of Yugoslavia". Interview. October 22, 2017. Was not in Bosnia at the time of the event, but had friends and family that were there and even killed. Srebrenica is a town in Bosnia and now also known for this horrific event.

¹⁹ Hoare, Marko Attila. 2014. "Towards an Explanation for the Bosnian Genocide of 1992-1995." *Studies In Ethnicity & Nationalism* 14, no. 3: 518. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 18, 2017).

²⁰ Damir Bosnjak, "Serving in the Bosnian Military During the Bosnian Civil War". Interview. October 14, 2017.

²¹ Selma Bosnjak, "My Experience of the Breakup of Yugoslavia and Bosnian Civil War". Interview. October 14, 2017. I remember growing up this time of year, July 11th-22nd, would also show special programs on the Bosnian tv shows we had. Selma would always find donate in some way and encourage other Bosnians we knew to do the same.

tried to help the situation, but ended up leaving anyways. This was the case for both Selma and Damir, it was just a matter of where.

Initially, Australia was not the first destination for Damir and Selma. Both of them ended up in different parts of Europe. Damir went to Denmark to reunite with Halima, and Selma went to Austria to reunite with her sister²² Dispersion had a lot to do with what was available to the refugee, in this case it was family that already fled before the war broke out. Both had family members that left Bosnia and Herzegovina before the aggression would take place, while they chose to stay at the time. Both also thought there would be a better place to go to, to also put some distance between themselves and the place they saw ravaged, this is when Australia came into mind. Australia was open to Yugoslavian refugees, so that's where a lot of people went, and not just Bosnian refugees. Croatians had also come to Australia earlier than the Bosnians since they saw a similar conflict in their country, as well as Serbians who were not interested in the ideas of the Communist members of their group. Australia was among one of the top destinations for refugees during the time of the breakup of Yugoslavia, along with the United States, Canada, and many European countries.²³ All this was because these countries offered to help the refugees settle in. If anything, some places did not have as kind benefits to Serbians since they were the ones believed to be prolonging the war and conflict. This could show how the national pride not only effected the other ethnic groups, but also those who did not want to take part of the aggression seen in the war by the other Serbians.

²² Damir Bosnjak, "Serving in the Bosnian Military During the Bosnian Civil War". Interview. October 14, 2017, Selma Bosnjak, "My Experience of the Breakup of Yugoslavia and Bosnian Civil War". Interview. October 14, 2017. The remaining lines continue to tell the story of how Australia became the destination and new home for them and those who accompanied them. It also tells the options available for refugees.

²³ Halima Bosnjak, "Family Life During the Breakup of Yugoslavia". Interview. October 22, 2017. Remembers being one of the first to take advantage of the benefits given to refugees in Denmark

Conclusion

In conclusion, the separation of the Yugoslavian states into their own sovereign countries had influenced the different Balkan groups of people in many different ways, showing the national pride and how far some people would go for their country and ethnic groups. Starting of as Communist from World War 2 and up to the first independent country, a model of socialism with a human face, Titoism disintegrated amidst the bloodiest nationalist wars seen during the fall of communism in Eastern Europe.²⁴ This would lead to the settling of borders, with Slovenia and Croatia being the first to declare independence from Yugoslavia. The independence from these two new nations would result in the rest of the Yugoslavian states following, with Bosnia and Herzegovina the next to do so. Macedonia would be the last to declare independence before Serbia would take control of the remainder of Yugoslavia, but that was not to last long with Yugoslavia eventually breaking into Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo into their own independent nations. The national pride seen by the Serbians delayed what is the case in contemporary times.

The effects of the Yugoslavian War saw every ethnic group suffer, especially the Bosnians. Karadzic would be responsible for this suffering, and this would see negative relations between the different ethnic groups, particularly with Bosnians and Serbians. There are still negative attitudes towards the whole thing, especially because of the dispersion, but my family and the Bosnians my family associates with generally chooses to move on from the matter and continue living the way they normally would. Some, like Damir, still have friends from different ethnicities also living in Australia and other parts of the world. This could be “because they are

²⁴ Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia: A Concise History*. (NY: Palgrave, 2001), 132.

part of a closely bound human community...”.²⁵ This could be due to those who commit the war crimes are coming to meet justice, meaning that the crimes can start to be forgiven for those who were affected.

²⁵ Jelavich, Barbara, *History of the Balkans*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 446.

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