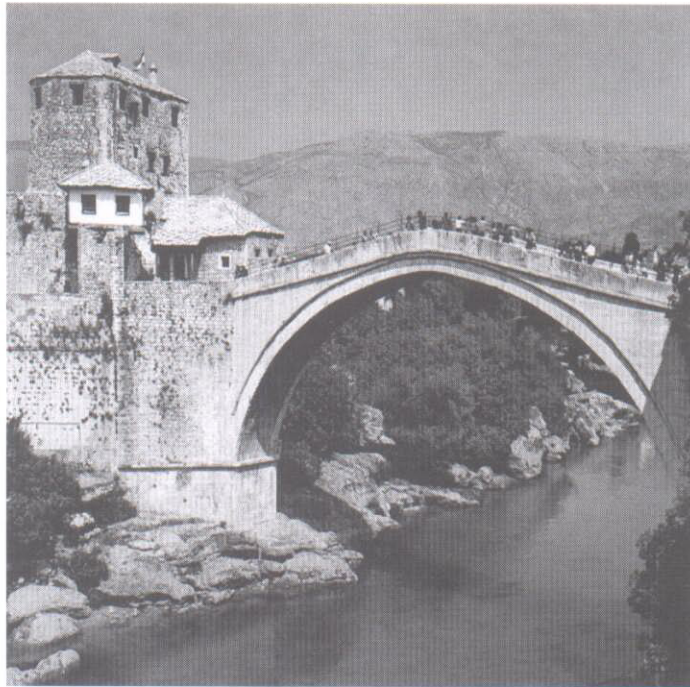


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# ETHNIC AND REGIONAL CONFLICTS IN YUGOSLAVIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA

A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CONTEMPORARY  
ETHNONATIONAL MOBILIZATION

by Ivan Ivekovic



Longo Editore Ravenna

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Via P. Costa, 33, 48100 Ravenna

Tel. (0544) 217026 Fax 217554

e-mail: longo-ra@linknet.it

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## PREFACE

*To my sons, Srdja and Ratko*

I had a personal incentive for writing this book. Born in former Yugoslavia, now holder of a Croatian passport, I had to settle some accounts with others and with myself. Simply put, I wanted to decipher what went wrong, why in the way it did, and where our new nation-states are heading? This volume is the outcome of a painful, yet intellectually exiting exercise, during which I pursued both familiar and unfamiliar trails in a process of self-inquiry. Reading extensively and writing a number of preliminary studies, I collected an abundant documentation that had to be distilled. I produced different versions of the manuscript. The present version is an abbreviated one. Earlier drafts were overloaded with details, and were criticized from different perspectives. One reviewer accused me of “circular thinking”, which is a risk encountered by all unorthodox, multi-disciplinary *bricoleurs* who dare to venture “in an underbrush inhabited by specialists engaged in savage disputes about whether the underbrush is a pine forest or a tropical jungle” (Moore, 1981, p. 9).

Furthermore, I stepped on the feet of those who are fascinated with their new ethnic states, with the allegedly “glorious past” of their nation, its “heroic struggle”, unique “historical destiny” and “paramount national interest”. I certainly do not share their undisturbed enthusiasm with our present ethnocracies, although my orientation toward the past is critical rather than nostalgic.

Another reader asserted that I gave too much prominence to economic developments, neglecting the political dimension of the process of transition. In fact, as the title of the book indicates, my approach is precisely that of political economy, an approach that is badly underrepresented in the current flood of “transitionologist” studies. In taking this approach, I do not negate the relative autonomy of the political process nor the prominent role played by individual

political actors. Indeed, less than one third of the text deals with economic processes. The remainder is an exercise in multidisciplinary analysis.

Some readers of previous drafts concluded that I was using a neo-Marxist approach, a fact of which I was not aware. If it is a neo-Marxist approach, then it is also a rather asymmetrical one. My interpretation of historical developments is certainly a materialistic one and as such it could not by-pass a number of concepts drawn from the legacy of Marxism. Others interpretations, however, are built on Weberian sociological analyses, or inspired by contemporary Development Studies. In fact, as the focus of the analysis changed, I shifted without prejudice from model to model, using the conceptual tools that I found most appropriate for the task at hand. In the end, I have sought to construct a multidisciplinary scaffold for conceptualizing the relationships between the processes of economic development, demographic change and the social drama of modernization, which resulted in a shift of collective loyalties to “neo-nations”. These were, of course, molded out of the pre-existing social, cultural and political material.

Two additional warnings are perhaps appropriate. First, I was born a Croat, but I do not consider that as a result of this natural accident either myself or my nation have been blessed with extraordinary and exclusive privileges. Second, I was a member of the former Yugoslav nomenklatura, in which I reached the rank of ambassador. Although I always worked in the field of international relations and was never a real decision-maker, this may be a stigma in the eyes of some skeptics. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed of my professional engagement, which was always combined with academic research. Besides,

On the eve of the 1989 revolutions in eastern and central Europe, Yugoslavia was better poised than any other socialist country to make a successful transition to a market economy and to the West. It had, after all, been moving toward full global integration since its Communist party leadership broke with Stalin in 1948. As early as 1955, Yugoslavia's borders were open to the movement of its citizens, foreigners, and trade. Since 1949, it had regularly negotiated loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In addition, it implemented marketing and decentralizing economic reforms to satisfy IMF conditions and – between 1958 and 1965 – the conditions of membership in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The consequence was a socialist country with extensive economic liberalization and political decentralization, earning association with the European Community (EC) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) long before the nations of central Europe made their requests. Even after a decade of economic hardship and political uncertainty in 1979-89, the relative prosperity, freedom to travel and work abroad, and landscape of multicultural pluralism and contrasts that Yugoslavs enjoyed were the envy of eastern Europeans (Woodward, 1995b, p. 1).

In short, former Yugoslavia was in many aspects a respectable country, which

is more than can be said for the time-being of most of its successor states. However, I am a realist too. In this book I try to explain that what happened had to occur the way it did, a fact that I certainly regret. The new states are part of reality. Though critical of the present, my real concern is with the future.

Finally, I should note that The American University in Cairo, Egypt offered me a shelter that permitted to settle down and to complete the research on which this book is based. I have taught in this institution of liberal education since 1992 and I would like to thank my colleagues and students for all the support that I have received. I am also indebted to Cairo, my adopted city, which offered me the peace of mind that was necessary for completing this book. It seems, indeed, that a psychological distance based on geography sometimes offers certain advantages (as well as disadvantages).

What follows is in many aspects an iconoclastic analysis of the political economy of contemporary ethno-national mobilization in the regional laboratories of Yugoslavia and Transcaucasia, a term I owe to one of my anonymous reviewers.

*I.I.*