

**CATHERINE SAMARY**



**YUGOSLAVIA  
DISMEMBERED**

TRANSLATED BY PETER DRUCKER

Yugoslavia  
Dismembered



# Yugoslavia Dismembered

Catherine Samary  
Translated by Peter Drucker



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**For Hubert**

*For your sharp criticisms  
For our fruitful disagreements  
For everything that I have taken and learned from you*

**For Myriam and for Jean**

**I dedicate this book  
to all the men and women who resist,  
to my friends—  
Serbs, Croats, Slovenes,  
Gypsies, Montenegrins, Macedonians,  
Muslims, Albanians, Jews—  
Bosnians, Yugoslavs, "Eskimos" ....\***

\* Many former Yugoslavs who reject nationalist divisions have taken to calling themselves "Eskimos," even on census forms, instead of Serb, Croat, Muslim, etc. The term is meant in an entirely positive sense.



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## Preface

The "ethnic cleansing" in former Yugoslavia continues. First minority communities are expelled. Then children of mixed marriages are attacked, and all the "bad Serbs," "bad Croats," and "bad Muslims": i.e., everyone who tries to elude the tightening net that hinders any expression of diversity of thought, interest, identity, or political choice. In early 1995 the last independent newspaper in Belgrade was brought into line. Croat extremist newspapers have already denounced "leftists, pacifists, feminists, and homosexuals" as anti-Croat. Children of mixed marriages are described as "bastards" in the Muslim fundamentalist press. Everywhere trade unionists who dare to go on strike against the ruling parties' policies are denounced as "fifth columnists."

Given the horrors of "ethnic cleansing," of course, the idea that communities must be separated from one another keeps winning new converts. Wasn't that the point of the war? This idea will keep the war going, too, openly or covertly, so that each miniature country can increase its *Lebensraum*, so that new miniature countries can be created from other ethnically mixed areas, such as Macedonia—or so that the victims of these oppressive policies can resist.

What is the cause of these tragedies? How much responsibility does each side bear for this disaster; how much responsibility does the "international community" bear?

Political analyses of the conflict—and proposed solutions—are at opposite extremes from one other. The media's images of the war, rather than helping us understand, serve to activate emotional reflexes by making false analogies. On one side, Munich, fascism, and extermination camps are evoked in order to rally support for a military intervention against the new Hitler who supposedly rules in Belgrade. The other side responds pell-mell with Croat Ustashe fascism, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, and clashes between all the various

reactionary nationalisms, in order to advocate *de facto* neutrality in the conflict.

Each side can pick and choose from the reality of the crisis the “undeniable” truths that favor its particular interpretation. For one side, these truths are: secret plans for the creation of Greater Serbia; ethnic cleansing carried out by Serb (“Chetnik”) extremists who preach hate; and ethnic separation by means of humiliation, rape, wrecking mosques, razing villages, laying siege to cities, the killings and threats that have made hundreds of thousands of refugees take flight. The other side emphasizes: massive ethnic discrimination in Croatia; Croatian President Franjo Tudjman’s revisionist rewriting of history and rehabilitation of old fascists; policies of ethnic cleansing carried out by Croat militias in Bosnia (who destroyed the Muslim neighborhoods of Mostar); Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic’s Islamic Declaration; Islamic fundamentalist currents, supported by Arab countries, on the offensive in Bosnia; and the violence committed on every side.

Selecting one substantial part of reality hides (and may be meant to hide) the rest. One side denies the *joint* responsibility for the war. The other side minimizes the pivotal role of the Serb question and the disastrous Greater Serbia project in setting off this crisis. One side, in order to focus on (and bomb?) its identified target portrays Bosnia’s past and its present-day society as an idyll of perfect tolerance and centuries-old stability, destroyed by an outside, Serbian aggressor. In so doing they skip over all the aspects of crisis and polarization that affect Bosnian society itself (including the outside, *Croatian* aggressor), particularly ignoring the cultural and social differentiation between city and countryside and fights for power by Bosnian Serb, Croat, and Muslim nationalist parties. This means that in their eyes a foreign military intervention could save Bosnia, because Bosnia itself is not in crisis—there is only one, “clear” target, and it can be bombed.

The other side by contrast relies on a pseudofatalistic chain of supposedly centuries-old interethnic clashes in order to “explain” the Yugoslav crisis and the break-up of Bosnia. In so doing they avoid analyzing the plans drawn up in Belgrade and Zagreb for the partition of Bosnia or the sieges of ethnically mixed areas where people want to live together.

Neither of these two approaches is convincing, whatever the rational kernel each may contain. They converge in their ignorance of the

deep socioeconomic causes of the crisis. Denunciations of "Serb fascism" on one side, or of "interethnic hatred" (or even a "German plot") on the other, makes up for the lack of analysis. The historical analogies they make prevent them from seeing this war's real motive force: "cleansing" territory in order to carve out nation-states.

\* But above all, these approaches do not make clear the factors that are not narrowly "Yugoslav" in this war, factors that this war has in common with other tragedies that are taking place *today*, elsewhere, particularly in the former Soviet Union. We therefore have to shed light on the society in crisis that fosters the nationalism of the "higher-ups" (who wage war over how to divide the cake, with whatever means they have at their disposal) and the nationalism of "ordinary people" (who are afraid of not ending up in the "right country," i.e. the country that would protect their property, their jobs, their identity, their children, and their lives). \*

The break-up of a multinational country, Yugoslavia, is combined with the crisis of a (socioeconomic and political) system, in the context of a world where the "free market" is on the offensive. In this crisis the Yugoslav communities' past obviously makes a specific difference, and the dark pages of their history are highlighted. But the crisis is rooted in the present, chaotic transition from one system of power and property to another. The market and the abolition of redistributive policies have deepened regional divides. Eagerness to join the European Union more quickly made the rich republics Slovenia and Croatia cut loose from the others. The declarations of independence from Yugoslavia aimed particularly at making sure that the selling off of collective resources would benefit the republican governments and their clienteles. This is why the Yugoslav case tells us something about the wars and conflicts in the former Soviet Union and about the break-up of Czechoslovakia.

The free-market policies advocated in the East are a disaster. So why should the "international community"—i.e., the world's most powerful governments—have any legitimacy when they try to impose solutions on the people affected by these policies?

A Yalta II atmosphere prevails in the Balkans: the great powers' (partly divergent) interests count more in the choice of alliances than any analysis of the real causes of the crisis, more than the fate of peoples. What kind of Balkan "order" can be born in this way? The United States has dissociated itself from the European peace plans,

but without putting forward a substantially different approach. The "peace plans" proposed for Bosnia-Herzegovina, whether they are signed or not, will not bring stability to the country or the Balkan region as long as they strengthen exclusionary nationalism by ratifying ethnic partition.

Criticizing our rulers' policies only increases the importance of active solidarity "from below" with the victims of this dirty war. Even if analogies with Nazism are open to challenge, that in no way lessens the need for resistance to rising fascistic and racist forces. We must not wait for something on the scale of the Nazi genocide of the Jews before we denounces crimes against humanity, including "ethnic cleansing," wherever they take place. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic does not have to be Hitler for us to fight against reactionary Greater Serbian policies. But we cannot fight Greater Serbian policies effectively as long as we keep silent about Greater Croatian policies.

Defending the multiethnic, multicultural Bosnian society does not require a rosy portrayal of what it really is, still less identification with whoever makes up the Bosnian government. Rejecting the lying equation "Muslim = fundamentalist," which is particularly false in Bosnia-Herzegovina, does not require us to condone fundamentalist currents that the war is fostering, which also threaten multiethnic Bosnia. Defending multiethnic Bosnia does require, urgently, that we avoid any nationalist "demonization" or "homogenization" of any of the Bosnian peoples (e.g., the Serb or Muslim community), a danger that is exacerbated by alliances formed against one particular people (i.e., the Serb-Croat alliance at the Muslim community's expense, or the Croat-Muslim alliance against the Serbs). It is also essential to denounce any purely "ethnic" portrayal of these peoples. As the author wrote in the beginning of 1993:

If President Izetbegovic is described as representing the third community, the Muslims, then who speaks for besieged Sarajevo and resisting Tuzla? Who represents all the communities that are mixed together in a blend of differences that they claim as a Bosnian identity? Who represents those Bosnians who are in despair at being devoured by the "two demons—one that eats the body and the other that eats the soul"—of Serb and Croat nationalism, which in fact are covertly allied against them? Who represents the Bosnians who know how much denouncing the Croat massacres of Muslims in Prozor will cost the Bosnian refugees in Croatia, because Bosnia's

alliance with the Croatian government means that only one aggressor, the main one, can be named? Who represents those Bosnians who are Muslim in the same way that I'm Jewish: an atheist, "ethnically impure," and proud of it?

Who represents the thousands of Bosnian Serbs (or Serbs elsewhere) who are considered "traitors" to the "Serb national cause" when they resist ethnic cleansing? Who represents the Serbs who sign petitions rejecting the madness of "Greater Serbia"? Who represents the Serbs fighting in the Bosnian army against the policies of Karadzic (leader of the self-declared Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina), who pretends to express their self-determination through massacres, terrorism, and rapes?

Who represents the Bosnian Croats shoved aside by Tudjman's ruling party because they are "too Bosnian"? Who represents the Croats who reject the acts of Mate Boban, leader of the "self-declared Croat Republic of Herceg-Bosna," who speaks in their name? Who represents the Croats who want to defend Bosnia in a Bosnian uniform—not under a Croatian flag, not in uniforms from which no one has even bothered to unsew the German flag?

Who represents those who feel that they are "Yugoslav," who are today being torn apart?

No one can be allowed to say, "We did not know." Prosecution of all those who commit war crimes, including rape, is morally and politically urgent. The freeing of populations under siege should be a precondition for any political agreement. *But we have to say what we know, everything we know.* The distinction between victims and aggressors is necessary. But the distinction becomes perverse if it means not telling the whole truth. (From Catherine Samary's op-ed, "Les mots pour le dire," *Le Monde*, 14 January 1993.)

Two years after this piece was written, three years after the siege of Sarajevo began, the aggressions that are stifling Bosnian society are coming from several sides. They include a current, more and more visibly dissociated from the Bosnian "camp," that advocates an Islamic state: a counsel of despair for some, a fundamentalist choice for others.

So is there still really a multicultural country called "Bosnia" to defend? Yes and no.

No, because Bosnian society has been deeply rent and polarized by the war: that was the war's point. Nor is there any government any more that is recognized by all the different Bosnian communities.

Divisions among the nationalist parties that dominate the Bosnian government could still explode the Croat-Muslim federation.

But *yes*, multicultural Bosnia exists—as an alternative project, relying on those who still resist policies of ethnic cleansing not only in Bosnia-Herzegovina but also in Serbia and Croatia. Because Bosnia's future is organically linked to that of its neighbors. A Balkan explosion is still possible if reciprocal (political and socioeconomic) guarantees are not found to enable peoples to live together in this region. This is not a question of percentages of land.

Stopping the fighting is not the same as overcoming the crisis. Once the fighting stops the governments in power will face the key question: *what kind of society can be built that will not compound destruction by war with destruction by an inhuman social order?* The currents that oppose the dominant nationalisms can only offer *social insecurity*, because they accept the predominant neoliberal economic orientation (which makes populist nationalism seem at least a bit more protective by contrast). The free market without frontiers that they generally advocate offers no solutions to the Yugoslav crisis. It has been one of the factors aggravating the crisis.

This disintegrative process will in turn threaten the newly independent countries: new "autonomous republics" and "nations" will continue to spring up. As we can see in all the Eastern European countries, this territorial fragmentation will be compounded by social disintegration, "third-worldization." This is why people are disillusioned—and why governments are unstable in all the Eastern countries.

Free market policies will give birth to new explosions in Europe as it has in Mexico. There will be no peaceful "new world order" founded on exclusion. Antiliberal and fascist nationalism is the "classical" answer to such crises. Isn't it time to invent other answers, on the world scale on which the problems are posed?

February 1995

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I would like to thank Peter Drucker, not only for his translation but also for his stimulating comments and suggestions.

# BACKGROUND ON YUGOSLAVIA

## **Yugoslavia According to the 1981 Census**

Total population: 22,424,000

— *The “peoples”*

- Serbs 36.3 percent
- Croats 19.7
- Muslims 8.9
- Slovenes 7.8
- Macedonians 5.9
- Montenegrins 2.5

— *The “minorities” (more than 0.5 percent of the population)*

- Albanians 7.7 percent
- Hungarians 1.8
- Roma (Gypsies) 0.7

— *The “undetermined”*

- “Yugoslavs” 5.7



**Tito's Yugoslavia: The Republics and Autonomous Regions of Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1991)**