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THE BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA



THE BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA

Martyn Rady



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Conflicts

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Cover: Croatian soldiers defend their position in a ruined house, 1991.

Title page: Sarajevo, September 1992: hurrying to escape Serbian snipers and artillery fire.

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Contents

1. Introduction _____	4
2. Peoples, languages, and religions _____	6
3. The making of Yugoslavia _____	10
4. World War II and the Communist takeover _____	16
5. Tito's Yugoslavia _____	20
6. The rise of Slobodan Milošević _____	24
7. Disintegration and war _____	28
8. The Bosnian tragedy _____	32
9. Rape and refugees _____	36
10. The search for a solution _____	40
Glossary _____	46
Further information _____	47
Index _____	48

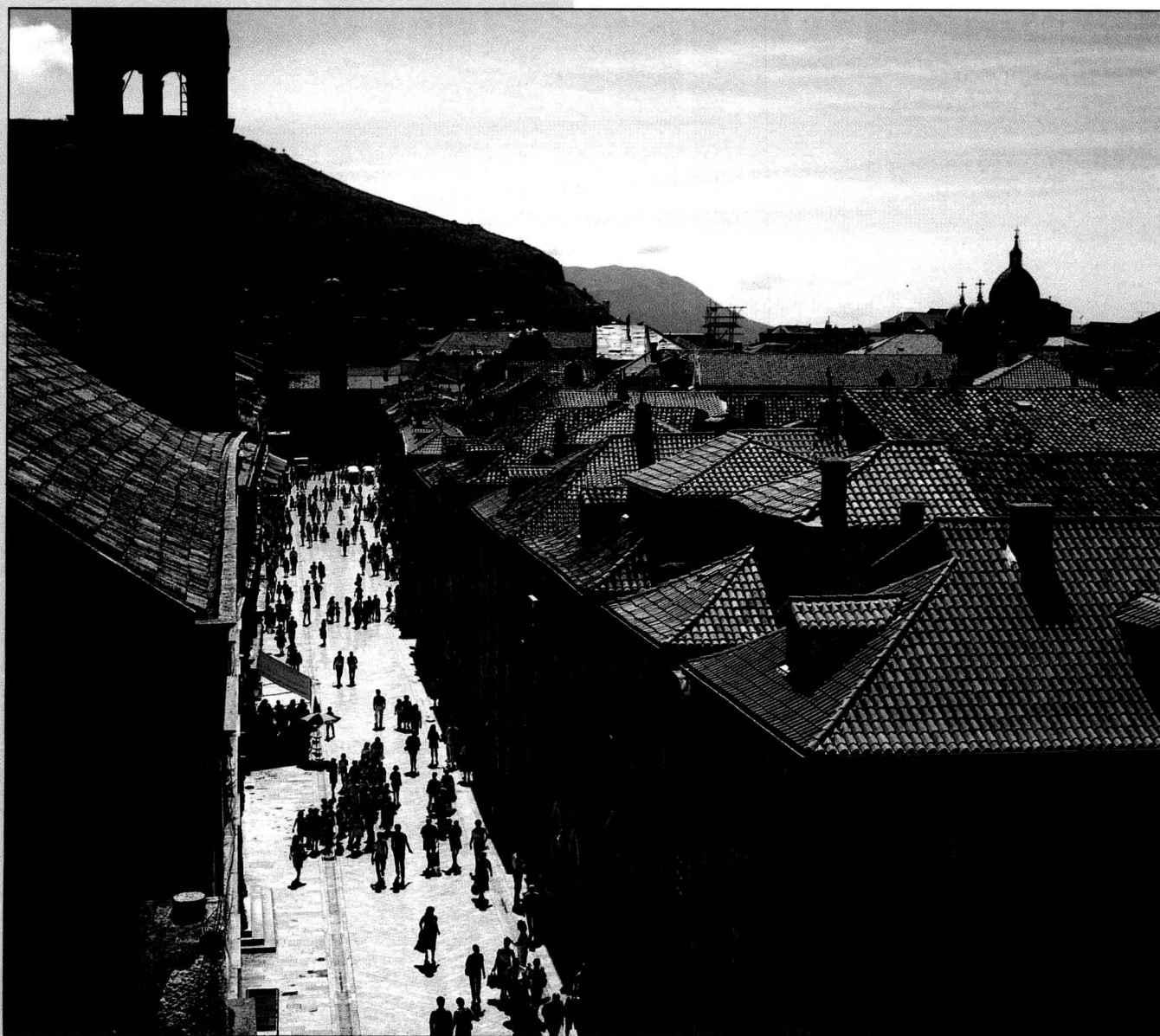
INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s and 1980s, Yugoslavia seemed quite unlike the drab communist countries elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Visitors to its cities noticed the well-dressed people, the busy stores, and the streets bustling with traffic. Tourists who spent their holidays in luxury hotels at one of the resorts along the Adriatic coast were usually full of praise.

Western politicians and diplomats shared this high opinion of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's leaders gave every appearance of being sensible and moderate men. Unlike the rulers of other communist states, they were friendly toward Western countries. Yugoslavia seemed a stable country, well worth supporting.

These appearances were, however, misleading. In reality, Yugoslavia was a police state, where

With its medieval churches and narrow streets, the ancient port of Dubrovnik on Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast was a popular resort for vacationers in the 1970s and 1980s.





The fighting in the former Yugoslavia created a wave of refugees. By 1993 more than three million people had been made homeless. Not all the refugees were able to find safety. For many, like these Bosnian Muslims, the only shelter available was in crowded cities where they remained under attack from Serbian gunmen.

people could be imprisoned for their beliefs. Only one political party was allowed: the Communist party. All the rest were banned. The country's prosperity was largely due to the vast amount of money the government had managed to borrow from abroad. Furthermore, this borrowed wealth was unevenly spread. Although people in many of the cities lived well enough, many people in large parts of the countryside suffered from poverty. In rural areas, especially in the south, Yugoslavia had much more in common with its neighbors in the Balkans—Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania—than with Western Europe.

Most importantly, the peoples of Yugoslavia were divided. Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Macedonians—all of whom made up the population of Yugoslavia—were suspicious and resentful of one another. Bad feelings among these separate peoples began to grow in the late 1980s and suddenly exploded into violence in 1991. Almost overnight, the world's perception of Yugoslavia changed. From being a peaceful, serene, and stable country, Yugoslavia suddenly became a land of murder and refugees.

The chapters that follow will tell you why and how this happened.

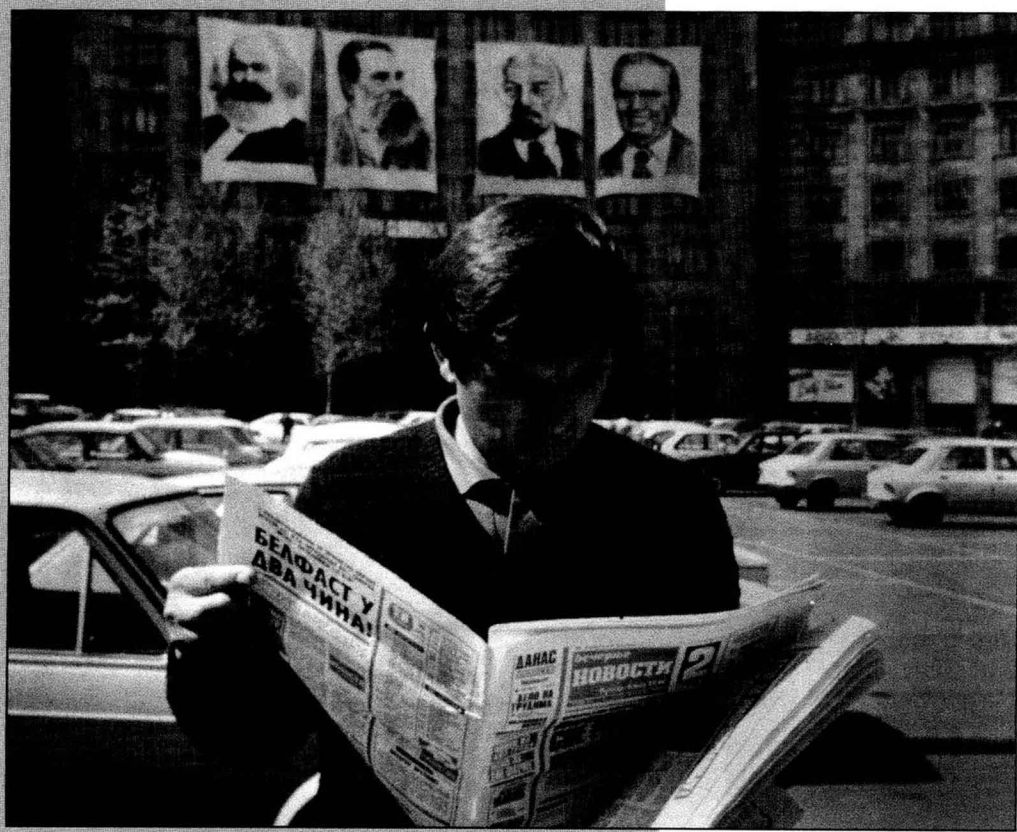
PEOPLES, LANGUAGES, AND RELIGIONS

Yugoslavia means "the land of the South Slavs." Most of the population of the former Yugoslavia are South Slavs: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins. All of these population groups, or "nationalities," speak languages that are closely related to one another, and which can generally be understood by other South Slav speakers. The Serbian and Croatian languages are, in fact, so close that they are often referred to as a single language, called Serbo-Croat.

A federal state

After World War II, in 1945, Yugoslavia was organized as a federal republic, similar to the United States. Although the central government in Belgrade still held supreme authority, an element of home rule was allowed to the six republics that made up Yugoslavia: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro. The powers of the governments of the six republics were greatly extended in 1974.

Among the South Slavs, language is often considered the main mark of nationality, but religious beliefs are probably just as important. Since the Middle Ages, when they were converted to Christianity, the Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians have belonged to the Eastern Orthodox religion. They therefore share the same faith as the Russian, Greek, Romanian, and Bulgarian Christians. As a consequence, they write with Cyrillic letters, as these form the alphabet used in the religious



A man in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, reads a newspaper printed in Cyrillic. The Cyrillic alphabet is used throughout Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.



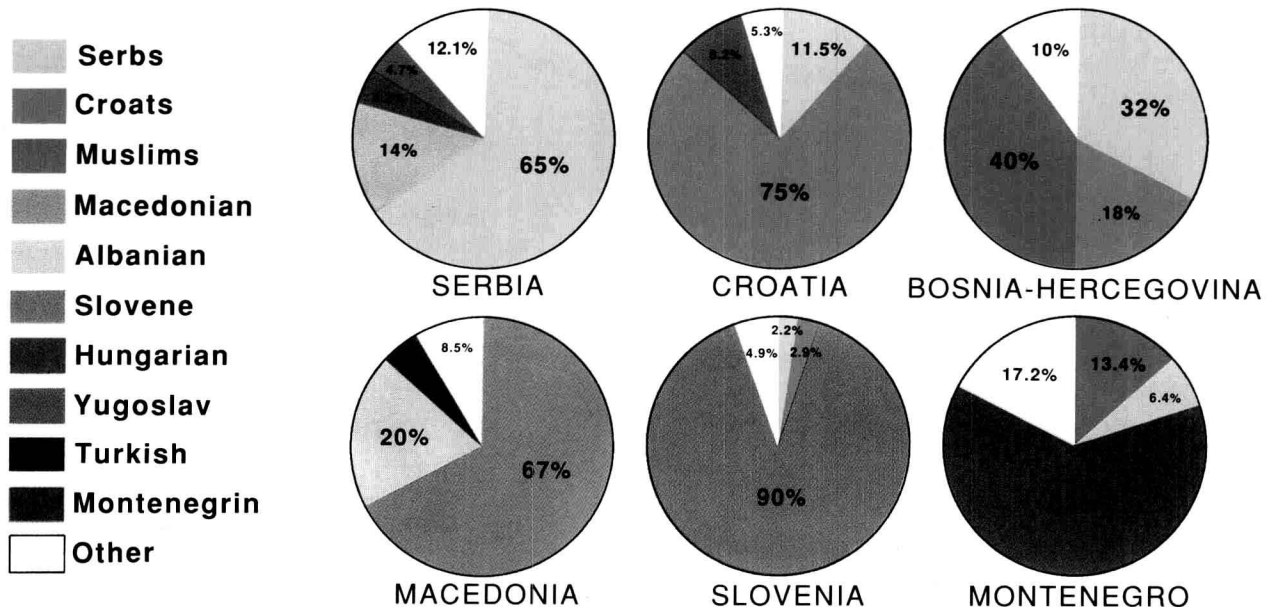
services of the Orthodox church. By contrast, the Slovenes and Croats were converted in the Middle Ages to Roman Catholicism. As a result, they use Roman letters—the alphabet in which this book is written.

For 500 years, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, a large part of Yugoslavia was included in the Ottoman Turkish empire. As a result of the long period of Turkish occupation, about an eighth of the population of the former Yugoslavia is Muslim. Although spread throughout Yugoslavia, the Muslim population is heavily concentrated in two areas: Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In Kosovo, which forms a part of Serbia, Muslims make up the largest part of the population. Most of Kosovo's Muslims speak Albanian, which is not related to any other language used in Yugoslavia. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslims make up 40 percent of the population. Although the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina are frequently referred to as Bosnians, there is no Bosnian language as such. The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina speak mainly Serbian or Croatian, although some use Albanian.

At the end of World War II, the state of Yugoslavia was organized as a federation of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Although Serbia and Montenegro currently remain united in a joint state that still calls itself Yugoslavia, in 1991 and 1992 the other

Republics of former Yugoslavia: Breakdown of populations by nationality



* Children of mixed marriages and Jews frequently called themselves "Yugoslavs." (Source: 1981 census. Note: Although a census was taken in 1991, many Albanians refused to take part and its figures are unreliable.)

republics declared themselves to be fully independent states.

The populations of the republics of Slovenia and Croatia are largely Slovene and Croat. Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia are more mixed. In these republics, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians make up only two-thirds of the population, the remainder consisting largely of Albanian speakers and, in Serbia, of Hungarian speakers as well. Bosnia-Herzegovina has, however, always been a complete hodgepodge where no single nationality forms a majority. The various elements of the population—Muslims, Serbs, and Croats—are intermingled and pocketed throughout the republic.

In the former Yugoslavia, however, the cultural division between town and country has often influenced attitudes as powerfully as divisions of language and of religion. For most of their history, the peoples of Yugoslavia lived on the land. The towns were small and homes only of foreign merchants, government officials, and tax collectors. Although this situation began to change with the onset of industrial growth early



Agriculture in Yugoslavia was carried out on small plots worked by peasant farmers. They often lacked modern equipment, such as tractors, and instead had to use horses for plowing.

A Croatian proverb

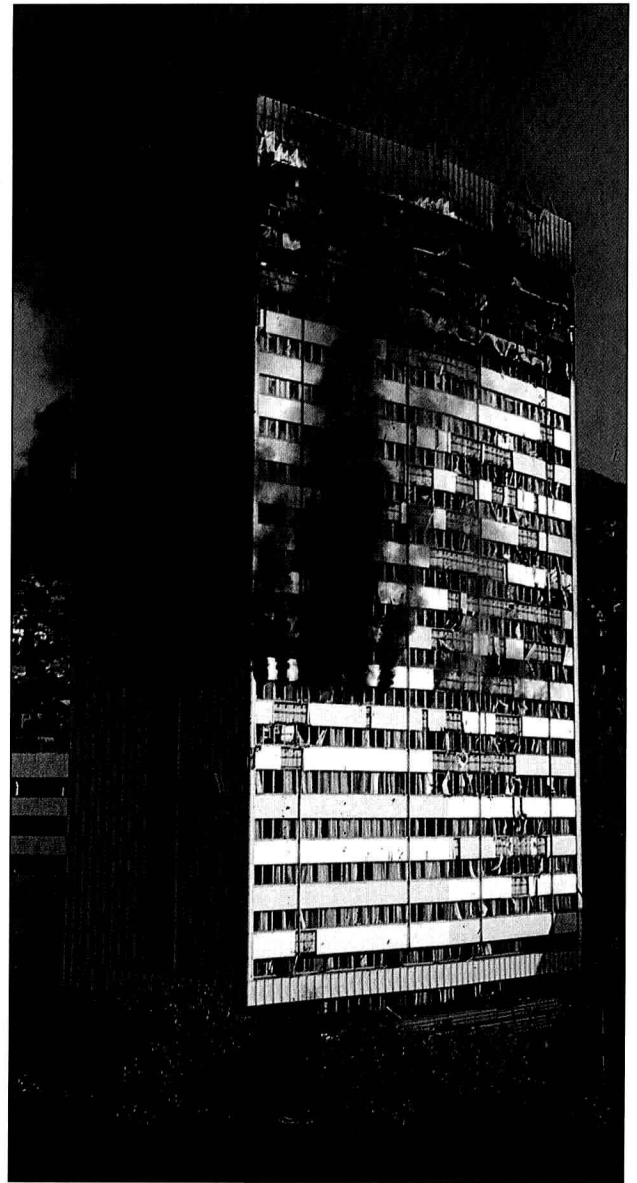
"You can eat with a Serb, drink with a Serb, but you cannot turn your back on a Serb."

in the twentieth century, older attitudes have remained. Country people in the former Yugoslavia still tend to regard town dwellers as money-grubbing, selfish, and irreligious. For their part, townsfolk commonly consider the rural population to be lazy and superstitious.

Conflict among the nationalities of former Yugoslavia was made worse by this traditional distrust felt by country folk for the townspeople. Serbia (particularly in the south), Montenegro, and Macedonia are still heavily rural, and much of their population consists of peasant farmers. Croatia and Slovenia are more urban and industrialized. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the Muslims tend to congregate in the towns, Serbs dominate in the countryside. The fury with which armed Serbian peasants bombarded Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1992 and 1993, and the pleasure Montenegrin highlanders took in devastating the luxury hotels and duty-free shops along the Dubrovnik coast in 1991, had their origin in the peasantry's contempt for city life.

The name *Yugoslavia* thus concealed a bewildering mixture of languages, religions, cultures, and even alphabets. Unlike Italy, Germany, or France, "the land of the South Slavs" was not a nation-state, but a state of many nationalities. Religion, culture, and alphabet served to deepen divisions among the national groups. Language was thus only one part of a very complex equation separating one group of people from another.

Although for long periods the various nationalities of Yugoslavia lived in apparent peace, tensions were always present. At times of stress, ill feelings always had a way of bubbling to the surface. In the early 1990s, as the country moved into deep political crisis, the complex divisions that still separated the peoples of Yugoslavia tore apart the state in which they lived.



Artillery shells hit buildings in Sarajevo.

Hatreds in Sarajevo

"Followers of three different faiths—Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox—they hated one another from the day of their birth to their death. . . . They were born, they grew up and died in this hate, this actual revulsion towards a neighbour of another faith. Whenever, due to some great or calamitous event, the established order was shaken, all the long-suppressed hatreds and secret hankerings for destruction and violence broke to the surface."

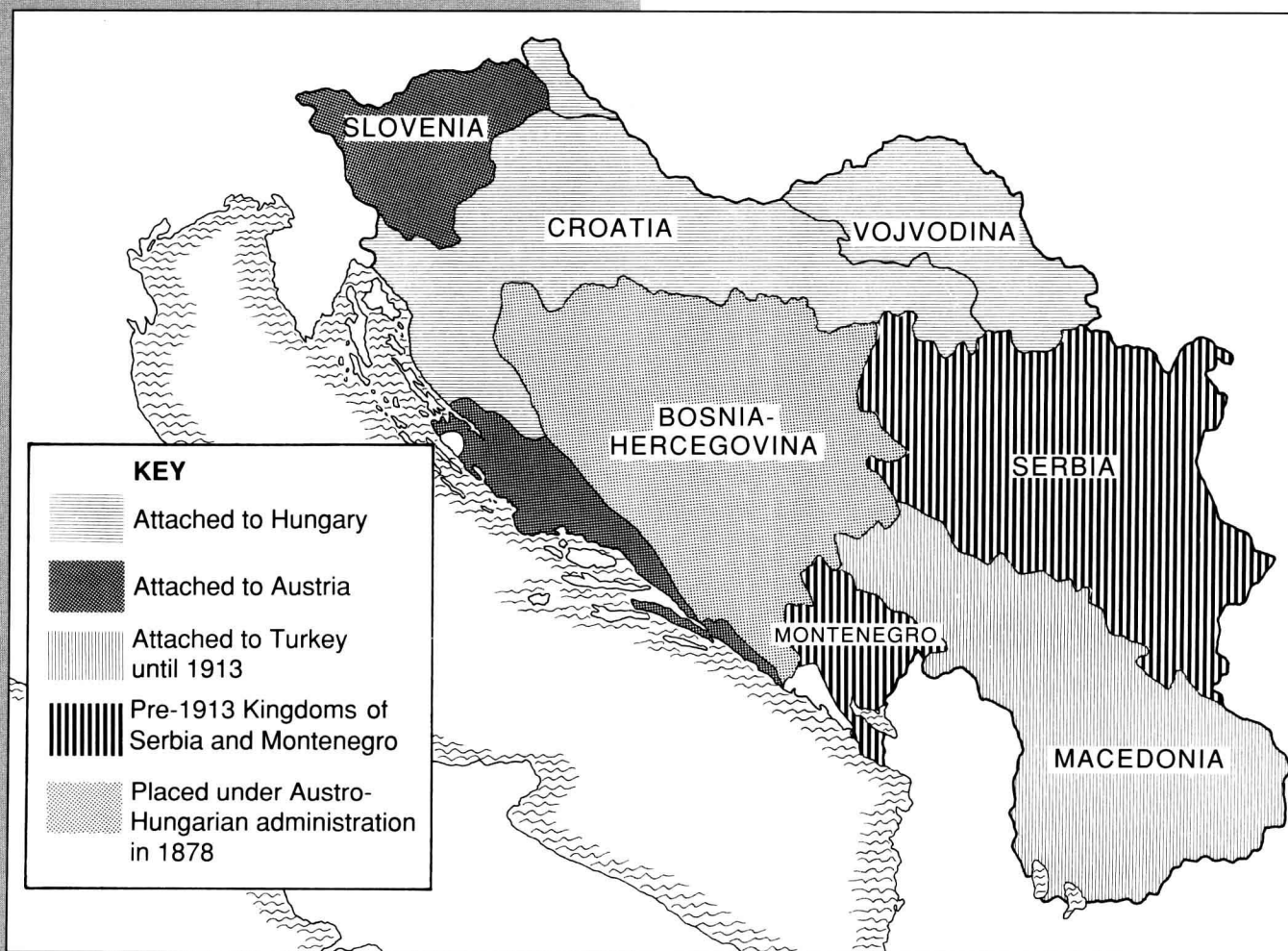
(The Woman from Sarajevo, Ivo Andrić, 1966)

THE MAKING OF YUGOSLAVIA

Until this century, the territory of Yugoslavia comprised a number of separate kingdoms and principalities, most of which were under foreign domination.

Ever since the Middle Ages, Croatia had belonged to the kingdom of Hungary. Hungary itself was part of the Austrian, or Hapsburg, empire. From the late eighteenth century, Montenegro was an independent mountain state ruled over by its own prince. Slovenia, however, did not exist at all; the land in which the Slovenes lived was made up of the Austrian provinces of Carniola and Carinthia. Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia were all parts of the Ottoman Turkish empire.

During the nineteenth century, as the power of the Ottoman Turkish empire declined, an independent Serbian kingdom had been established. The rulers of Serbia were ambitious. They planned to replace the Ottoman empire in the Balkans with a greatly enlarged Serbian



The Yugoslav kingdom was formed from states that previously had quite separate identities.



The Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand and the archduchess Sophie visiting the town hall of Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. Within less than an hour, both were assassinated by a Bosnian Serb student.

kingdom. They coveted, in particular, the Turkish-run territories of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. In 1878, however, Bosnia-Herzegovina was taken over by the Austrians. Serbian interest thus rapidly became concentrated on Macedonia.

In 1903, the Macedonians launched a massive revolt against Turkish rule. The Turks, however, suppressed the uprising with such ferocity that the Austrians and Russians felt obliged to intervene to protect the province's Christian population. Two years later, the Turkish ruler, or sultan, was made to agree both to the division of Macedonia into districts based on nationality and to the presence in Macedonia of an international peacekeeping force.

The international force, which included British, French, and Italian soldiers, failed to stop the violence. Furthermore, as Turks and

Macedonians fought to establish complete control of the districts that they had been given, the conflict became more bloody. As a result of its failure, the international force had to be withdrawn, and Macedonia was briefly returned to weak Turkish rule. (Sadly, the lesson of Macedonia was overlooked by those Western diplomats who in the 1990s tried to impose an almost identical scheme on war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina.) The solution to the Macedonian problem, eventually reached during the Balkan Wars in 1912–1913, was that Macedonia was partitioned among Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, with Serbia taking the lion's share.

The rulers of the neighboring Austrian Hapsburg empire became concerned by Serbia's success. When, in 1914, the heir to the Austrian throne, the archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Sarajevo by a Bosnian Serb, the

CHAPTER 3

Report of atrocities in Macedonia

"During April 1905 an old man, Gheorghe Jantcheff, was killed in the village of Messimer by the [Turkish] soldiers stationed there. To explain their whim, the soldiers declared that they had met him carrying food to the [Macedonian] insurgents. Now not a crumb of bread was found on the corpse nor in its proximity. The soldiers were not proceeded against for their crime."

(Macedonia and the Reforms, Draganof, 1908)

Austrians seized the chance to punish Serbia. By declaring war on Serbia, a country supported by Austria's enemy, Russia, the Hapsburg empire unleashed World War I (1914–1918).

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth

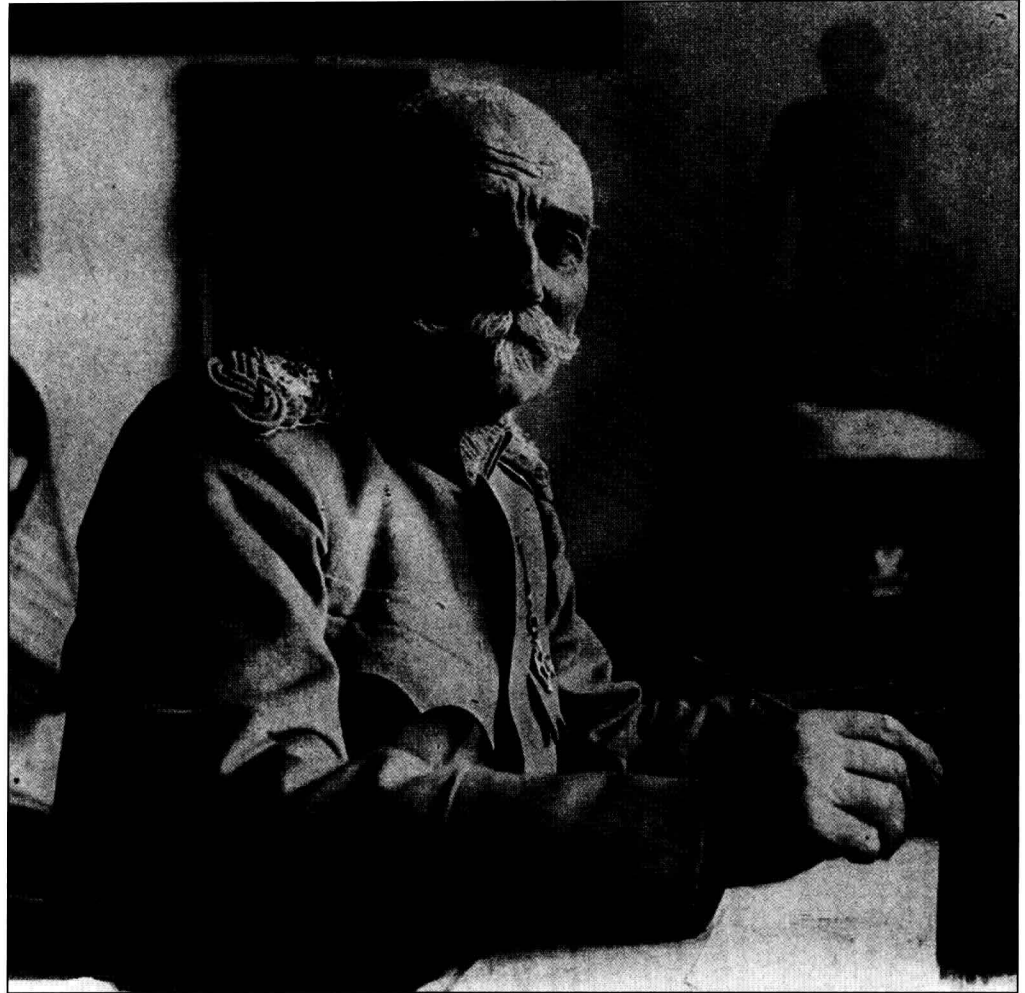
centuries, a sense of common South Slav nationhood had been promoted by politicians and thinkers in the Balkans. It had been argued that since the Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, and Montenegrins spoke similar languages, they formed in reality a single nation and should therefore be given their own united state.

The slogan of *Jugoslavija*—of one Yugoslav state for all the South Slavs—became increasingly popular as the war dragged on, appealing even to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although some Serbian politicians saw in the idea of Yugoslavia a way of extending Serbia's territory, for a short period there was genuine and widespread enthusiasm for the creation of a single state bringing together all the South Slavs.



Using the murder of the archduke Franz Ferdinand as an excuse, the Austrian government declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. In this photograph, taken in Belgrade shortly before the declaration of war, Serbs read the order instructing soldiers to report to barracks. Within a week, nearly all of Europe was at war.

In 1903, Peter I Karadjordjević took power in Serbia following a military coup, during which the previous king and queen were brutally murdered. In 1918, Peter became the first monarch of a united South Slav state.



In 1918, the Austrian Hapsburg and German empires were defeated. With the support of the victorious allies, a new Yugoslav state was founded. The new state united Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, Carniola and southern Carinthia (those parts of Austria where the Slovene population lived), and southern Hungary (where the majority of the population was Serbian). Montenegro, having deposed its ruler, also chose to join the new state.

The new state, proclaimed in 1918, was not at first called Yugoslavia. Instead, it went by the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Although omitting the Macedonians and Montenegrins, the name was intended to make the point that the new state existed for the equal benefit of all the South Slavs.

It rapidly became clear, however, that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes existed

primarily for the benefit of the Serbs. The monarch of the new kingdom, Peter I Karadjordjević, had, since 1903, been king of Serbia; the capital was Belgrade, which was also the capital of Serbia; the parliament was dominated by Serbians; and the powerful army and civil service were largely staffed by Serbian officers and officials. Neither the Croats nor the Slovenes were permitted any form of home rule, to which the Croats in particular thought themselves entitled; all important political decisions were made instead by Serbs in Belgrade.

Croatian politicians, in particular, resented the influence of the Serbs in the new state. As they voiced their criticisms ever more noisily in the parliament in Belgrade, its sessions rapidly dissolved into exchanges of insults and fisticuffs. In 1928, two leading Croatian politicians were shot dead by a Montenegrin member of

Medieval Serbia

In the Middle Ages, there was an independent Serbian kingdom that, in the fourteenth century, controlled most of the Balkans. Although this empire was destroyed by the Turks in 1389, Serbs have always remembered that once they were members of a mighty kingdom. The Croats also experienced a brief period of medieval greatness—back in the tenth and eleventh centuries. None of the other peoples of Yugoslavia has any such independent state to look back on, although the mountain kingdom of Montenegro was never completely conquered by the Turks.

parliament in the middle of a debate. The next year, the king closed down the parliament and took over the running of the country as a dictator.

Peter's successor, King Alexander (1921–1934), genuinely wanted to rule a united kingdom. To try to make his subjects forget their old identities and instead think of themselves as a single people, Alexander changed the name of the state to Yugoslavia in 1929. He established his own political organization, the Yugoslav National party, in which he tried to involve both Serbian and non-Serbian politicians. Entirely new administrative districts, named after rivers, were formed in the hope that people might, in time,



Prince Alexander of Serbia, who became monarch of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1921, is shown here visiting Paris during World War I. Alexander's attempt to create a nation of "Yugoslavs" was destined to fail. He was assassinated in 1934.



Wearing a mourning band in memory of the murdered King Alexander, the regent, Prince Paul (far right), attends military maneuvers in 1935. As it turned out, the Yugoslav army and its generals proved no match for the Germans in 1941.

forget their older national homelands.

Alexander failed to realize that nations cannot be created or suppressed by orders from above. Despite the change of name to Yugoslavia, the king found it impossible to create Yugoslavs. Instead, the peoples of Yugoslavia continued to think of themselves as being first and foremost Serbs, Croats, or Slovenes. Instead of healing divisions, Alexander's government only made them worse, for now it seemed that the king wanted to destroy the special sense of belonging to a historic people.

In 1934, Alexander was assassinated, while on a state visit to France, by orders of extremist Croatian leaders. His successor, Peter II, was only eleven years old at the time of his father's assassination. For this reason Alexander's cousin,

Prince Paul, was appointed regent and took power.

Paul ruled in a far less dictatorial way than Alexander. He tried to reach an agreement with the Croatian politicians, who were the firmest in their opposition to rule from Belgrade.

In August 1939, Croatia was put back on the map and granted home rule. This, however, only angered the Serbian politicians, who saw no reason why Croatia should be given such a privileged position in Yugoslavia. The outbreak of World War II in September 1939 prevented further attempts to solve the national rivalries in Yugoslavia. Instead, the war brought to the surface the seething hatreds that King Alexander and Prince Paul had sought to smother.

WAR AND THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER

In April 1941, Germany invaded Yugoslavia. Peter II, who had just been declared old enough to rule without a regent, fled abroad. Yugoslavia was then broken up by Hitler, and large chunks of its territory were given to Germany's allies. Montenegro was given to Italy, and Macedonia was divided between Bulgaria and Italian-ruled Albania. Hungary received parts of northern Serbia. Slovenia was partitioned between Germany and Italy.

In Serbia and Croatia, Hitler set up puppet governments. Of these, the Croatian *Ustaša*, or fascist government, was the more fanatical. Once in power, the *Ustaša* began an immediate policy of removing the Serbian Orthodox population from Croatian soil. With the slogan "One-third exterminated, one-third deported, one-third converted," the *Ustaša* organized massacres and placed many tens of thousands of Serbs in concentration camps. The exact number of Serbs murdered by the *Ustaša* is reckoned to have been about a third of a million, but Serbs tend to believe the death toll was much higher.

The occupations by the Germans and Italians, and the Croatian *Ustaša*, were both resisted by



These soldiers from a Croatian Ustaša unit celebrate a massacre of Serbian civilians. The Croats were often joined by Muslim fighters. On occasions, however, Croats put on the typical Muslim headdress, the fez, so as to cause hatred between Muslims and Serbs.