Identifying with the old or the new state: nation-building vs. Yugonostalgia in the Yugoslav successor states

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ABSTRACT. The article examines to what degree attachment to a former multinational state which breaks up may complicate national consolidation in new states, as was the case in the Soviet Union and Titoist Yugoslavia. In the former Yugoslavia such attachment is usually referred to as ‘Yugonostalgia’, and various opinions have been expressed about its strength and possible political consequences today. Only in 2011, however, was an attempt made to measure Yugonostalgia quantitatively and analyse this phenomenon comparatively in the various successor states. A large-scale survey showed that while Yugonostalgics in some countries were less loyal than other citizens towards the new state this was not the case in Serbia. In Croatia, the number of respondents who felt Yugoslav has gone down since independence far more than in any other state; probably a result of a massive public campaign to discredit continued identification with the former state.

KEYWORDS: nation-building, political loyalty, political nostalgia, Yugonostalgia, Yugoslavia

Introduction

Nation-building can be defined as deliberate efforts aimed at creating a common political-cum-cultural identity among the population to secure their loyalty. All modern states engage in nation-building, one way or another. The preconditions and methods employed have varied, as has the degree of success. While most of the literature on nationalism has centred on what Rogers Brubaker calls ‘state-seeking nationalisms’ among state-less groups (Brubaker 1996: 80), the parallel phenomenon of state-orchestrated nation-building has assumed crucial importance in periods when many new states were created at the same time – as during decolonisation in the 1960s (Deutsch 1966; Emerson 1960; Rustow 1967) and after the collapse of the multinational states in Eastern Europe and Eurasia in the 1990s (Bremmer and Taras 1997; Brubaker 1996; Kolstø 1996, 2000; Smith et al. 1998).
How and why are some governments, elites and policies more successful in attracting support for this undertaking than others? Under what preconditions will nation-building succeed, and by which means? Often the answers to these questions have focused on the ability of state leaders to provide the population with goods, services and security. Nation-building is seen as intimately linked to *state-building*, that is, the establishment of institutions, infrastructure, means of communications and so on (see, e.g. Deutsch 1966). A state that can deliver material welfare, curb crime and defend its territory against foreign encroachments is assumed to be better able to command the allegiance of its citizens than one that does not (Bendix 1964; Rustow 1967). Crucially important are also deliberate schemes for designing symbols and rituals, such as flags, national holidays, commemorations of national heroes, that ‘the nation’ can rally around and identify with (Cohen 2003; Elgenius 2011; Eriksen and Jenkins 2007; Geisler 2005; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Kertzer 1988; Kolstø 2006). Such schemes may be seen as strategies of symbolic nation-building (Kolstø 2014).

As regards identity, the prospective members of a nation do not come with a clean slate ready to be filled with the imprint of the new state leaders. That ‘slate’ is already scribbled full of attachments and allegiances to other social-cultural and political entities – some on the substate level, such as clans and tribes, others larger than the nation-state, such as world religions. During the spate of state-creation in the wake of decolonisation in the 1960s, nation-building theorists focused on tribal and ethnic identities as major obstacles to state consolidation in the newly created states of Africa and Asia (see, e.g. Emerson 1966). It was felt that these barriers were insurmountable and that many new states might never become nation-states in the same sense as the term was used in Europe (Foltz 1966; Rustow 1967).

Also in Europe, during the new wave of state creation that followed the collapse of the multinational Communist states in the 1990s, substate loyalties in many places proved to present immense problems for nation-builders. This was particularly apparent with the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, when ethnic identities were harnessed to the war juggernaut. Also after the wars ended, politicised ethnicities have remained strong in the region. However, not only ethnic allegiances but also suprastate identities are in many places in the ‘new’ Europe a factor to be reckoned with, in the form of continued attachment to the former multinational state on whose charred ruins the new nations were built. Such hankering for the old order under stable Communist regimes, remembered as a time of law and order and steady incomes, can be felt in the former territories of the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, and Czechoslovakia, and not least in the former Yugoslavia (Boym 2001). In the latter case it has acquired a special name: Yugonostalgia.¹

The phenomenon of Yugonostalgia has attracted considerable attention among sociologists, anthropologists and historians who have generally focused on its cultural aspects (see, e.g. Baković 2008: 2–4; Bošković 2013; Lindstrom 2006; Marković 2009; Mijić 2011). There are no intrinsic reasons...
why fond reminisces about old Yugoslav pop songs, TV entertainment or theatre festivals should interfere with the efforts of the political leaders in today’s successor states to develop a common political identity among the population and link this identity to the new state. This may be one reason why Yugonostalgia has been so little discussed in connection with nation-building in the post-Yugoslav states. However, Yugonostalgia often does have also political effects, and it is these possible implications that are the topic of this article. I ask: to what degree and under which circumstances does attachment to the larger, now-defunct state impede the consolidation of a common political identity among the population in the successor states?

This article is intended more as a contribution to the theory on nation-building, than to the literature on (political) nostalgia as such. My ambition is to explore, through an examination of political Yugonostalgia, one potentially complicating aspect of identity consolidation in new states, an aspect often overlooked: how and to what degree the old identity links are retained, or severed. I also ask whether such severance really is a necessary precondition for successful nation-building in new states: is there any reason to believe that political nostalgics are less loyal than other citizens?

Do the Yugoslav successor states really deserve the label ‘new’? In their constitutions and other founding documents many of them refer to centuries-old traditions of statehood: Croatia, for instance, regard King Tomislav in the tenth century as the founding father of the state, while the Macedonian constitution takes as its point of departure ‘the historical, cultural, spiritual and statehood heritage of the Macedonian people and their struggle over centuries for national and social freedom as well as for the creation of their own state’. However, to the extent that such language is more than mere propaganda it is a matter of broken traditions and unfulfilled aspirations; when these states were established/resurrected after the Second World War, it was not as independent polities, but as constituent republics of a federal state, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). They enjoyed many of the trappings of full-fledged statehood, including (substate) parliaments, flags, republican constitutions and so on, and did indeed acquire a political identity of sorts. On the other hand, when they were later accepted as members of the UN, it was as ‘new’ states. This was the case even with ‘rump Yugoslavia’ (Serbia and Montenegro) that sought to inherit the seat of the SFRY but was told to submit an application as a new state. So whatever the past legacy of stateness, international recognition has represented a watershed in their history that justifies their categorisation as ‘new’ states.

Almost all books and articles that deal with political nostalgia in general and Yugonostalgia in particular have adopted a qualitative, often impressionistic, approach. By contrast, this article is based on a large-scale quantitative survey of six Yugoslav successor states. The survey is part of a larger research project on strategies of symbolic nation-building in West Balkan states, and most of the questions were designed to shed light on the strength of the support
for the nation-building programmes pursued in the various states. Three of the questions from this survey are relevant for a discussion of Yugonostalgia as a factor influencing this support and will be presented below.

Various authors operate with different definitions of Yugonostalgia. For our purposes we need a definition that highlights its political ramifications. In this article, then, I take Yugonostalgia to mean continued attachment to the SFRY as a state. Since Yugoslavia no longer exists, this state cannot vie for the allegiance of its former citizens, but it still can attract their affection, in ways that may or may not complicate the consolidation of loyalty towards the successor states.

The imperative of nation-building

As Margaret Canovan (1996) has convincingly argued, a state needs the support of its population in order to survive in the long term. Polities must be able to maintain some degree of unity. ‘A polity which cannot successfully command the loyalty of its members will sooner or later be replaced by one that can’ (Canovan 1996: 22). Taken literally, this claim is somewhat overstated: in every state, however benign and successful it may be, there will be some citizens who for various reasons do not fully accept its legitimacy – but there can be no doubt that all states do need the loyalty of the (overwhelming) majority of their members.

The imperative of nation-building, Bhikhu Parekh claims, is even greater in multicultural societies than in more homogeneous states: ‘Paradoxically as it may seem, the greater and deeper the diversity in a society, the greater the unity and cohesion it requires to hold itself together and nurture its diversity’ (Parekh 2006: 196). Will Kymlicka, a strong defender of minority rights, concedes that multicultural states no less than other states need ‘ties that bind’: social unity and a high level of mutual concern among their citizens (Kymlicka 1998: 173–95). While Western liberal democracies increasingly accommodate the demands of minorities, he claims, these states nevertheless remain ‘nation-building states’ (Kymlicka and Opalski 2001: 49).

Only a few scholars have discussed the effectiveness of nation-building as understood here, and most of them in a cursory, offhand manner only. Philip Roeder (2007: 24, 26) claims (with reference to Dankwart Rustow) that ‘seldom in the founding of nation-states did national unity precede the creation of state authority (…) more frequently, states created nations and popular nationalism, and states created these after independence’. Among researchers who are optimistic on behalf of nation-builders, we find also Joseph Rothschild (1981: 228), who argues that ‘the state does command integrative resources that have enabled it, in a number of historical cases, to mould the demographic raw material of its populations into authentic, organic political and cultural communities, that is, into nations’. Azar Gat (2013) vacillates somewhat. In his overview of nationhood in world history he
concludes on the one hand that ‘once existing, state sovereignty greatly reinforced the ethnic levelling of its realm (. . .). States shaped ethnicity almost as much as ethnicity shaped the states’; on the other hand, he also notes that in many instances states have had ‘surprisingly limited’ success in assimilating alien ethnicities within their realm (Gat 2013: 183).

Some scholars have expressed strong doubts about the possibility of establishing genuine ‘nationhood’ in new states. John Breuilly (1982: 24) represents this pessimistic view: he writes that state-initiated nation-building ‘will have very little effect on the population’, but also admits that this judgement is ‘largely speculation’. Likewise Anthony Smith (1991: 115) finds that the record has not been encouraging: ‘Detaching individuals from their primary loyalties to their ethnic communities, at least to the extent of inculcating a larger, public loyalty to the ‘state-nation’, has been attempted in a number of cases but has had variable results’. Canovan (1996: 109) describes nation-building as being a bit like ‘running up the down escalator’.

The SFRY was not a nation-state: not by self-definition and not in the eyes of its citizens. It was a multinational state which derived its legitimacy from several disparate sources. The preamble of the 1974 Constitution referred to the successful struggle for liberation from Axis occupation during the Second World War, the socialist revolution and the destruction of the old order based on class exploitation, as well as the voluntary unification of ‘the workers and peasants and progressive people of all nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia’ (Ustav 1974). The unofficial, but no less important, cult of the national leader, Josip Broz Tito, manifested itself in, for instance, the annual youth relay races from his native village of Kumrovec to Belgrade, held to celebrate his birthday, 25 May (Kuljić 2011; Velikonja 2010).

If we define nation-building as strategies to secure support for the state among its population, as I do in this article, the Titoist regime engaged in ‘nation-building’ no less than other states (Bertsch 1972). Moreover, it did so from a better starting point than the regimes in most other communist states in Europe. The Yugoslav Communists came to power mainly by their own efforts. To be sure, the Soviet Army had helped the Partisans to clear the country of the last remnants of the Wehrmacht, but the Yugoslav Communist regime was not something imposed on a reluctant population ‘at bayonet-point’, as in many ‘people’s democracies’ in Eastern Europe. The break between Stalin and Tito in 1948 further strengthened people’s perceptions that the regime in Yugoslavia was ‘their own’, and in the 1960s and 1970s the state also shed most of its totalitarian features. There are therefore reasons to assume that, to a greater degree than other communist states in Europe, the SFRY could rely on support from substantial segments of its population.

To be sure, in the end, centrifugal forces linked to ethnicity proved strong enough to tear the Yugoslav state apart. But this does not mean that a once-artificial state has now been replaced by a series of ‘natural’ states. In all of them there remains a tension between an ethnic-cultural and a political understanding of the ‘nation’. When Yugoslavia broke up, most of the
successor states were proclaimed as nation-states in which the state-bearing ‘nation’ was the titular narod. The narod in the traditional meaning of the word is simultaneously a cultural and political concept, as it denotes a cultural group that possesses a political identity linked to a state but is not identical with the entire population of that state. With the exception of Bosnia, the successor states are eponymous with its dominant narod, and this cultural-cum-political group claims the state as ‘its’ nation-state in an exclusive sense. The minorities were granted basic political rights like the franchise, but the symbols and cultural identity of the state were drawn exclusively from the titular group (see, e.g. Hayden 1992; Kolstø 2014). Montenegro, however, was not defined as a nation state in its constitutions of 1992 or 2007. Also Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, both of which received international recognition through NATO intervention, were obliged to adopt constitutions in which no ethnic group or narod was granted any special role in the concept of ‘the nation’.

In the former Yugoslav republics, the main challenge to the consolidation of new nation-states has been the politicisation and mobilisation around narod identities – indeed, in several republics, this has fuelled protracted, bloody wars. However, a potentially important rival for people’s affection also stems from attachment to the multiethnic state that these states replaced. Despite various claims about the strength of such ‘Yugonostalgia’ (see, e.g. Mijić 2011; Velikonja 2010), a systematic comparative treatment of the specific challenges to nation-building in new postcommunist states has been lacking. A first attempt was launched through a large-scale comparative research project on ‘strategies of symbolic nation-building in West Balkan states’ that commenced in 2011. The project, which engaged researchers from seven Balkan countries, combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to nation-building. An opinion poll of 10 500 respondents was conducted in September 2011, surveying attitudes to a wide range of issues. The survey was conducted by the internationally reputed polling bureau IPSOS Strategic Marketing, using standard techniques of random selection of interviewees and face-to-face interviews. The poll encompassed 1,500 respondents over eighteen years of age in each Yugoslav successor state except Slovenia (which was excluded for practical and financial reasons, not on principle). Albania was included in the survey, but since it is not a Yugoslav successor state, it is not dealt with in this article.

Hankering for the past, variations by country

Nostalgia for the large multicultural states that during the 20th century ended up in ‘the dustbin of history’ can be found in many places in Europe, including the successor states to Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union. Putin is on record as claiming that the Soviet collapse was ‘the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century’ (see, e.g. Trenin 2011: 27). Even in parts of the former Habsburg domains, a hankering for the good old days of the Dual
Monarchy can still be found (Porter 2011). Nowhere, however, has nostalgia for the Communist period been more discussed than in the former Yugoslavia.

Political Yugonostalgia may broadly be divided into two categories: ideological and territorial (Hofman 2008). On the one hand, post-Yugoslav citizens may be convinced that the Titoist brand of Marxism was (and remains) a superior social philosophy and deplore the fact that this option has, for all practical purposes, disappeared from the political palette – virtually all successor parties to Tito’s League of Yugoslav Communists have evolved towards either nationalism or Western-style social democracy. Political Yugonostalgia, however, is not necessarily linked to Titoist ideology – which in any case underwent substantial transmutations between 1944 and 1980. Also anti-Communists in the successor states may be convinced that the common but federated state ought to have been preserved, seeing the large former state as preferable to the state they now live in, which they dismiss as ‘petty’ or ‘nationalistic’ (Jansen 2009).

Opposed to Yugonostalgia is anti-Yugonostalgia. One of the earliest manifestations of anti-Yugonostalgia, possibly the first time the term ‘Yugonostalgia’ was used in public discourse, was an article in the Croatian weekly magazine Globus in December 1992, in which five named woman writers and journalists were accused of being ‘Marxist feminists, communist and postcommunist profiteers, daughters of communists, and “Yugonostalgics”’ (cited in Simmons 2009: 458).10 This vicious attack was later repeated in other Croatian media and developed into a ‘witch hunt’ (the women were regularly referred to as ‘the five witches’). In the end, three of them chose to leave the country but continued their journalistic and artistic activity in exile.

Several commentators have remarked that the strength and vector of Yugonostalgia vary among the successor states (Kuljic 2011; Palmberger 2008: 357). Hofman (2008) finds that, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugonostalgia manifests itself as a reaction against unsatisfactory everyday living conditions in an atmosphere of constant ethnic tension. In Slovenia, by contrast, it takes the form of a ‘romantic nostalgia’ that insists on the ‘otherness’ of the object of the nostalgia. Finally, in Croatia, the dominant discourse does not have room for alternative visions of the common Yugoslav past, Hofman claims. However, these and similar observations from other authors are based on a limited number of observations or on general impressions gleaned from the media and public discourse. As such, they rarely move beyond generalisations and vague speculation. Our large-scale survey from September 2011 makes it possible, for the first time, to assess and compare Yugonostalgia as a widespread social phenomenon in the various Yugoslav successor states and to evaluate its impact on the ongoing nation-building processes.

The survey included three questions that in various ways aimed at measuring attitudes towards the now-defunct Yugoslav state:
1. ‘Do you regret the dissolution of the SFRY?’
Those who responded ‘yes’ were asked to state their reasons and were given five response options (in addition to ‘other’): ‘Better economic situation’; ‘Better social programme’; ‘Brotherhood and unity’; ‘There was less nationalism at that time’; ‘Tito was a good leader’.

2. ‘Have you ever felt you were a Yugoslav?’
Three response options were offered: ‘Yes, and I still feel like one’; ‘I did, but not any longer’; and ‘No, I have never felt I was a Yugoslav’. Here it can be objected that people may misremember how they felt 20 years ago. Their memories will be influenced by current perceptions of how life is under the present political regime. That is no doubt true, but it does not invalidate the results of these questions for our purposes. What we are interested in are precisely the attitudes towards that former state in relationship to the current state(s), and while misremembering to some degree may influence the ratio between the response options 1, 2 and 3 in the various states, it will not affect differences among the various successor states. There is no reason to believe that people will remember more correctly in some states than others. And in fact, significant differences were found between the six states in our survey (see Figure 1).

3. ‘What is your opinion about renaming streets that have Yugoslav names?’
Such renaming goes on in all Yugoslav successor states to varying degrees and is often controversial. The underlying intention is clearly dual: to erase...
the memory of the recent Communist past and to make room for the celebration of heroes and events that the new regime wants to be commemorated. Thus, it is an element in contemporary nation-building. The three response options to this question were as follows: ‘The names of streets should not be changed’; ‘The names of the streets should be changed back to their former names’; and ‘The names of the streets should be changed into completely new names’.

This third question is different from the two first ones in that it asks about attitudes towards policies that are, or ought to be, pursued by the state today rather than about feelings about the former state. Street-naming in the new states is often an element in party politics and election campaigns, and responses to this question are therefore susceptible to changes in the political debates at a particular time. An example of this will be shown below. While such attitudes may be a good indicator of support for the particular version of nation-building conducted by the current power-holders in the state, it may be methodologically somewhat problematic to see them as expressions of political nostalgia. Even so, we do see that with some exceptions responses to this question followed the same patterns as we found on the two first questions. The one important deviation from this pattern may be explained by interference from contemporary political debates.

**Street names and nation-building**

In our survey interviewees in countries with a high Yugonostalgic score on one question tended to have high Yugonostalgic score on the two other questions as well. Three countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia and Montenegro – had overall high scores; Macedonia exhibits somewhat lower degrees of Yugonostalgia, while in two countries, Croatia and Kosovo, respondents seem to have weak attachment to the SFRY. The only clear exception from this pattern is the relatively strong opposition to renaming Yugoslav-era street names in Croatia. To be sure, the 47.8 per cent support for the retention of Yugoslav street names in this country was lower than in all other countries except Kosovo, but this result nevertheless represents an anomaly as regards the tendency for respondents to express consistent views on our three Yugonostalgia-related questions.

There are reasons to suspect that the Croat reluctance to urban name changes had very specific causes. Our survey was conducted in the autumn of 2011, and precisely at that time the issue of renaming Marshal Tito Square in downtown Zagreb agitated the Croatian public. Already in 2007 a rather vociferous campaign had been launched for the renaming of this central square. Over the next four years, campaigners collected signatures to several petitions and arranged demonstrations on the square, gathering thousands of participants each time. Demonstrators bore placards mockingly calling the square ‘Criminal Tito Square’ (*Trg zločinca Tita*) (RTL Televizija 2009). At
the end of the day, however, the Tito supporters won out, and in late 2011, it was decided to keep the name unchanged (Jajčinović 2011).

Interestingly, the street renaming campaign in Zagreb was spearheaded by human rights activists and liberal intellectuals rather than by nationalists. Tito was born in Croatia, not far from Zagreb, of a Croatian father and a Slovene mother, and many Croats today regard him as a national leader and nation-builder. When we in another question in our survey asked ‘Which person (past or present) do you regard as the best representative of the values of the people of this country?’, and the respondents could mention any name they wanted, Tito made it to second place in Croatia after former president Franjo Tuđman (see Table 1). Todor Kuljić (2011: 69) has argued that the Croats have created a Tito in their own image, ‘cleansed of yugoslavism, atheism, and Communism’. In Croatia, therefore, Titostalgia is separated from Yugonostalgia, and continued emotional attachment to the late state leader is no impediment to nation-building. Interestingly, when the State Committee for Renaming of Towns, Streets and Squares decided to keep the name of Marshal Tito Square they used nation-building arguments: ‘we owe to Tito what we are today, in that [after World War II] he got our country onto the winning side’ (Jajčinović 2011). And even if Zagreb street names like ‘The Street of the Socialist Revolution’ and ‘The Street of Proletarian Brigades’ did disappear from the city map in the 1990s, we may assume that when we asked about street renaming in this country, what many respondents immediately thought of was the hotly debated issue of Marshal Tito Square. We could therefore surmise that when the Tito Square issue has been put to rest, Croatian attitudes towards street renaming will align more with responses to the two other questions. This conjecture, however, leads us into rather speculative terrain, and rather than pursue this issue further, I will in the following concentrate on the question that addresses the issue of attachment to the former state most directly.

The suppression of Yugonostalgia and the manufacturing of anti-Yugonostalgia

In the tallies in Figure 1 Croatia and Kosovo came across as very similar; in both countries the number of self-declared political Yugonostalgics was very

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Table 1  Tito regarded as best representative of the values of the people of the country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bosnia</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Kosovo</th>
<th>Macedonia</th>
<th>Montenegro</th>
<th>Serbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage support</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tito’s position in ranking list</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closer examination of the responses to the question ‘Have you ever felt like a Yugoslav?’ however, reveals significant differences. It emerges that even if the people of Croatia and Kosovo exhibit similarly low levels of Yugonostalgia today, they seem to have come to this by very different routes. While Yugonostalgia was never a strong sentiment among Kosovo Albanians, the widespread anti-Yugonostalgia in Croatia is a more recent phenomenon: in fact, to a large extent it is the result of a concerted campaign.

Some 16.5 per cent of the respondents in our total sample said they ‘felt like Yugoslavs today’; with weighting for population size in the various republics, the overall figure rises to 17.5 per cent. Support for this option varied from close to one-third in Serbia and twenty-eight per cent in Montenegro, to a mere three per cent in Croatia and two per cent in Kosovo. And among ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, the figure drops to zero (see Tables 2 and 3).

If we add the answers from those who say that they feel like Yugoslavs today to those who say that they once did so, the share of persons who have at some time identified with the Yugoslav state rises significantly. In most republics, this combined figure is three times as high as those who have retained this identity today. In both Serbia and Montenegro, no less than three-quarters of respondents, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina two-thirds, reported that they had identified as Yugoslavs during Communism. Weighted total figures in our survey indicate that roughly fifty-five per cent have identified as Yugoslavs at one point. Again, we find considerable variation across republics, with slightly under thirty-two per cent in Croatia and a mere eight per cent in Kosovo.

Dusko Sekulic et al. (1994: 89) have assessed the degree of common identity among Yugoslav citizens in various republics on the basis of a survey conducted in 1989. They found that at that time the percentage who identified as ‘Yugoslav’ was 9.0 in Croatia, 14.4 in Bosnia-Herzegovina and 4.6 in Serbia.

### Table 2 Have you ever felt you were a Yugoslav? In percentage of respondents in republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republic</th>
<th>Population size in country, in million</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Still Yugoslav</th>
<th>Once Yugoslav</th>
<th>1 and 2 added</th>
<th>Never Yugoslav</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>1498</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>1490</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1516</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1474</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1513</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1559</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>19.655</td>
<td>9050</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These figures are so different from ours that the discrepancy cannot be explained by the time interval; the two surveys cannot have been measuring the same thing. In their article, Sekulic et al. did not reproduce the exact wording of the questions they had asked, but it seems clear that their respondents understood ‘Yugoslav identity’ in the context of Yugoslav census categories. In the periodic censuses held between 1961 and 1981, citizens could tick ‘undeclared Yugoslav’ instead of indicating a specific ethnic identity (narodnost) (Jovic’ 2003: 179). This ‘Yugoslav’ option was not particularly popular: in 1961 only 1.7 per cent availed themselves of it; in 1981, 5.4 per cent. By republics, Croatia had 8.2 per cent self-identifying Yugoslavs; Bosnia, 7.9 per cent; and Serbia, 4.8 per cent – very close to the findings of Sekulic et al. This indicates that very few Yugoslav citizens were ready to forego an ethnic identity and choose a civic identity instead. In our survey, however, we first asked about ethnic identity and only then about attachment to the (former and current) state. Clearly, there is no contradiction involved, logically or psychologically, in identifying both with one’s ethnic group/nationality and with the state where one lives. Sekulic et al. (1994: 95) may well be correct in claiming that ‘a shared identity was not much in evidence as a mediating mechanism sustaining Yugoslavia’, but this is not really a conclusion that can be drawn from their survey data.

According to Aleksandar Pavkovic (1997: 63), by 1964, ‘yugoslavism was dead’. Dejan Djokie (2003) dismisses it as a ‘failed idea’. In contrast, Burg and

Table 3 ‘Have you ever felt you were a Yugoslav?’ In percentage of respondents in selected groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Montenegrins in Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Serbs in Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>45</td>
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Berbaum, writing in 1989, noted that between 1971 and 1981, the numbers of Yugoslav citizens who in the censuses identified themselves as ‘Yugoslavs’ increased 4.5 times and saw this as ‘a clear indication of increased political integration’ (Burg and Berbaum 1989: 536). Seemingly, these various assessments are at cross-purposes, but in reality they concern different issues. The ideology of ‘Yugoslavism’ was one particular strategy of community-building in the SFRY that strongly stressed, and tried to bolster further, the cultural similarities among the various Yugoslav peoples (Haug 2012: 163). This strategy was abandoned in the mid-1960s and gave way to a community-building programme that, as noted above, focused more on the war experience, socialism and the figure of Tito as the constituting elements in the population’s political identity.

With slightly more than half of the population identifying, or having identified, with the former state – albeit with significant geographical variations – we may say that the glass is half full . . . or half empty. Yugoslav community-building was undoubtedly a ‘failure’ in the sense that the Yugoslav state did not survive – but that need not mean that the state had no supporters while it lasted.

**Nation-building and identity in the successor states**

However, while we may gain important information about political identities in Yugoslavia by adding figures in columns 1 and 2 in Tables 2 and 3 for our purposes – to gauge the success of nation-building in the various successor states – it is more important to compare and contrast them. We should certainly not regard the response ‘I once felt like a Yugoslav but do not do so any longer’ as an expression of ‘Yugonostalgia light’. Such attitudes do not, in fact, represent an impediment to nation-building in the new states: quite the contrary, in republics where this figure is high, it testifies to the success of (new) nation-building. They show that it has been possible to wean former Yugoslav citizens away from their attachment to what was once the SFRY. High figures suggest that national identity may be not only actively moulded through nation-building but also dismantled by deliberate ‘nation-destruction’, if we may call it that.

Again, we find major differences among the successor states, with the greatest contrast between Kosovo and Croatia. If in Table 2 we look at column 2 only, ‘I feel like a Yugoslav today’, these two states come out as very similar, but column 4 reveals pronounced differences in the political and attitudinal processes leading up to these outcomes. In Kosovo, according to our survey, there was never any widespread identification with the Yugoslav state in the Titoist period; among ethnic Albanians, it was as low as three per cent. In Croatia, on the other hand, close to a third admit to a past as a ‘Yugoslav’, but 90 per cent of these self-proclaimed former Yugoslavs say that they have now abandoned that identity.
How can we explain these figures? Identification is a two-way process: people normally identify with a group that accepts them as a member. In the case of the Kosovo Albanians, there seems to have been neither any willingness on the part of the (Yugo)Slav majority population to truly include the Albanians into the community of ‘unity and brotherhood’, nor any desire on the part of the Albanians to be included (see, e.g. Judah 2002; Petersen 2002: 242–50). The Kosovars simply ‘do not belong’. Indicatively, in the 1981 census only 0.1 per cent of the population in Kosovo identified as ‘Yugoslavs’, most of them probably non-Albanians. This was fourteen times less than the next lowest score, Slovenia (1.4 per cent).

In Kosovo, therefore, there was never among the Albanian population any Yugoslav identity that had to be eradicated. In Croatia, by contrast, Yugonostalgia came to be regarded as a threat to the consolidation of nationhood. To be sure, this sentiment was not stronger in Croatia than in the other Slavic republics – in fact, according to our survey it was weaker – but a massive public campaign was nevertheless launched to stamp it out. As noted, the very term ‘Yugonostalgia’ was coined in Croatia, and from the very beginning it functioned as a derogatory, hostile label, intended to de-legitimise public interventions undertaken by anyone who bore its taint.

Ivica Baković (2008: 4) holds that Yugonostalgia is still ‘in full blossom’ all over the former Yugoslav space, including Croatia. As our survey shows, however, to the extent that a substantial number of Croats really have maintained Yugoslav tastes or habits today, most of them will deny that this reveals any ‘Yugonostalgic’ proclivities. There is no overt censorship in Croatia today, but any remaining Yugonostalgics do not flag their message: they try to present it as something else. Thus, for instance, left-wing publicist Nikica Mihaljević insists in one of his books that cultural life in Yugoslavia was incomparably better than in today’s Croatia, but still avers: ‘I am not a Yugonostalgic (whatever that term may mean)’ (Mihaljević 2007: 17). Belgian social anthropologist Stef Jansen maintains that, in Croatia, Yugonostalgia is ‘the most mortal of all mortal sins’ (Jansen 2001: 49). In even more graphic – indeed hyperbolic – language, Austrian writer Karl-Markus Gauss claims that the degree of repugnance accorded to the word ‘a Yugonostalgic’ in Croatia is almost at the same level as that of a ‘paedophiliac’ or ‘a desecrator of corpses’ (Gauss 2000: 84).

Perhaps it could be argued that the campaign against Yugonostalgia in Croatia is played out in the public discourse and is not necessarily orchestrated by the state authorities. However, organised attempts to resurrect the Yugoslav state have in fact been made a criminal offence in Croatia. Until 2010, paragraph 141 in the Croatian Constitution declared that ‘initiatives to bring the Republic of Croatia into union with other states in such a way that this leads, or may lead, to the restoration of the Yugoslav community of states, or to any other Balkan state union in any form, are banned by law’.  

Also in other Yugoslav successor states anti-Yugonostalgia can be observed, but nothing similar to the Croatian situation. In the absence of hard
evidence, I can offer only conjectures about the reasons. Macedonian statehood has indeed been contested since independence, but the challenges have come from elsewhere – externally from Greece, and internally from ethnic Albanians. Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia do not express any Yugonostalgia. With five per cent current ‘Yugoslavs’ in our sample, their score is far higher than among Albanians in Kosovo, but considerably lower than among ethnic Macedonians (seventeen per cent) (see Table 3). Perhaps even more importantly, Macedonians remember that they achieved their status as a separate nationality from the hands of the Yugoslav Communists, who also for the first time designated Macedonia as a separate republic.

One might perhaps think that, with forty-eight per cent former and nineteen per cent current Yugoslavs in the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugonostalgia could become a politically sensitive issue in this country, but apparently it has not. Feelings of affection towards the former Yugoslavia may be found among both Bosniaks (eighteen per cent declaring themselves current Yugoslavs) and Serbs (twenty-five per cent) (see Table 3). While most Bosniaks and Serbs have radically different visions for their country, Yugonostalgia is not one of the divisive issues. The Bosnian Muslim leaders around Alija Izetbegović did not push for dissolution of the Yugoslav state: on the contrary, they tried to keep it together as long as they could. Only when Croatia and Slovenia seceded and Bosnia risked being stuck in a Serbian-dominated rump-Yugoslavia did the Bosniak elites opt for secession. Among the major ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is the Croats, unsurprisingly, who are least enthusiastic about the SFRY (see Table 3).

In Serbia and Montenegro, Yugonostalgia is even less of a political issue, even if the populations in these two countries have the highest share of Yugonostalgics. In Serbia, the main reason is probably that the current state is widely regarded as a continuation of the Yugoslav state, just as many Serbs in the interwar and postwar periods perceived Yugoslavia as a kind of Greater Serbia.

Montenegrins cannot see their current state as a Yugoslav continuator state in the same way as Serbs in Serbia can. How can we then explain the seemingly relaxed attitude towards Yugonostalgia? Self-declared Montenegrins today are only half as Yugonostalgic as self-declared Serbs in Montenegro (twenty-three per cent as against forty-five per cent; see Table 3). While the Montenegrin leadership under Milo Đukanović and his successor as premier has doggedly pursued a nation-building policy, they have also done their utmost not to provoke those fellow citizens who continue to declare themselves as Serbs (Pavićević and Đurović 2009). Yugonostalgia, then, is one of the issues that is best not politicised.

Loyalty towards the new state

Based on responses to fourteen questions in our survey, all designed to assess attitudes towards the ongoing nation-building processes in the various
countries, my collaborators and I constructed a fourteen-point index. Responses to each question were coded 1 for full support; −1 for full rejection and 0 for neither backing nor rejection. The chart in Figure 2 shows significant differences between the countries, with Bosnia-Herzegovina as the clear loser. This is obviously linked to the fact that politicians in Republika Srpska (RS), one of the two ‘entities’ in the country, have actively challenged the strategies of national consolidation pursued by the federal authorities in Sarajevo, and most residents of RS tend to follow their entity leaders. However, our scale does not run from 0 to 14 but starts at −14, which means that even in Bosnia the loyalty score creeps just above the neutrality point. Respondents in RS (547 individuals) had a negative loyalty score: −2.89. This means, moreover, that also among respondents in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, loyalty was remarkably low: a mere 2.53, far less than in the other states, which ranged from 4.27 (Montenegro) and 6.94 (Kosovo). That Kosovo with its low standard of living should come out on top was not expected and shows that support for nation-building is not necessarily related to the ability of the state to deliver material goods (Kolstø and Jelovica 2014).

When measuring loyalty to the nation-building project against sentiments of Yugonostalgia (Figure 3), we did not find any unilinear covariation. Even so, most of the results made good sense in light of the above discussions of the preconditions for Yugonostalgia in the various countries.

In three cases – Croatia, Kosovo and Montenegro – Yugonostalgics were less loyal than those who claimed never to have had any Yugoslav identity. In
ethnically polarised Kosovo, the extremely few Yugonostalgics in our survey were also adamantly opposed to the current nation-building project. Also in Croatia, attachment to the previous state complicated the transfer of loyalty to the new state. For Montenegro the results were similar, except that those who had never had a Yugoslav identity were, for some reason, slightly less loyal than those who had, but had later shed it.

A second pattern is evident in Bosnia and in Macedonia. In both these countries, people who claim to have had a Yugoslav identity in the past (but no longer) were most loyal, followed by those who still feel a Yugoslav identity. The never-Yugoslavs expressed the lowest degree of attachment to the new state. I have no good explanation for these figures, but a reasonable conjecture could be that the never-Yugoslav group contains a high number of anti-nationalists who are sceptical to nation-building of any kind. This explanation, of course, gives rise to the question why this group should be more numerous in Bosnia and Macedonia than in the other post-Yugoslav republics.

The perhaps most interesting results came from Serbia. Here, the Yugonostalgics, former as well as current, were more supportive of the new Serbian state than were the non-nostalgics; and those who had retained a Yugoslav identity professed an even higher degree of loyalty than those who had not. This seems to confirm our assumption that Serbian citizens tend to see their state as a reincarnation of the former Yugoslav state, and not a rupture with it.

Figure 3. ‘Have you ever felt you were a Yugoslav?’ comparison of Loyalty scores.
Conclusion

All previous studies of political nostalgia and lingering attachment to defunct multinational states have been qualitative and impressionistic; our 2011 survey was the first attempt ever made to test such allegiances quantitatively and comparatively by means of an attitudinal survey. The same method may be replicated in similar cases such as the former USSR and if the results are analogous, this will enhance the robustness of the findings of this study.

What can this survey-based analysis of Yugonostalgic sentiments in the Yugoslav successor states tell us about the possibilities for active nation-building in new states? The question must be answered in four stages.

First, our survey did not reveal any consistent covariation between Yugonostalgia and support for the nation-state in the various post-Yugoslav countries. Different patterns emerged in different countries, reflecting local conditions. In most cases, these patterns were explicable and reasonable to expect, given the specific cultural background and political history.

Second, the Croatian survey showed that if a state launches a determined campaign to discredit continued identification with the former state, it may succeed to a remarkably high degree. Yugonostalgia has been reduced far more in Croatia than in those Yugoslav successor states where no such campaigns have been undertaken. This finding weakens the pessimistic views on the effectiveness of nation-building in new states expressed by John Breuilly, Margaret Canovan and Anthony Smith quoted at the beginning of this article. It supports the views of Roeder and Rothschild about the possibilities for state leaders, even in today’s world, to mould national identities. It is also in line with Gellner’s general dictum that nationalists create nations, not the other way around (Gellner 1983).

We have also seen that the number of self-proclaimed Yugonostalgics has gone down in all post-Yugoslav countries, not only in Croatia. This suggests, as my third point, that while a campaign against continued loyalty towards the former state, if pursued consistently and ruthlessly, may speed up the process considerably, it is still not altogether indispensable. Simply biding your time may also do the trick. Twenty years after the dissolution of the SFRY, that state is increasingly becoming but a hazy memory, about which one may nourish nostalgic feelings, but which is no longer politically viable. Alternatives that actually exist have a kind of ontological upper hand over hypothetical alternatives (Kolstø 2006).

Fourth, from the above points, should we draw the conclusion that active nation-building is possible, but superfluous? Not necessarily. Even if loyalty toward the former state will inevitably be weakened as this state recedes into the background, that in itself does not guarantee that ex-nostalgics will automatically transfer their loyalty to the new state. They may end up as cynics with no national loyalty, or attach their overarching political loyalty to, for instance, their ethnic group or religious community. This seems to be an impending danger in for instance Bosnia today. States do need the support of
the population in order to survive. The fact that virtually all states engage in nation-building indicates that this is also how the task is seen by politicians all around the globe.

Acknowledgements

Dragana Kovačević, Jon Kvaerne and Vjeran Pavlaković have read and offered valuable comments to draft versions of this article.

Notes

1 Occasionally called Yustalgia. See Mijić 2011.
2 For an excellent discussion of nostalgia, see Svetlana Boym's 2001 classic, The Future of Nostalgia.
4 In this respect they were not unique: many postcolonial states in other continents had also had various separate political institutions prior to independence.
5 There is a much larger literature base on the successes and (more commonly) failures of nation-building in the sense of building state institutions in war-torn or failed states (see, e.g. Fukuyama 2006).
6 Bertsch (1972: 456, fn 1) prefers the term ‘community-building’ due to the multinational context in this country. However, he explicitly identifies this concept with ‘nation-building’ as this term is used in Western Europe.
8 BiH has been obliged to adopt a model of ethnic consociationalism and federalism, while the Ahtisaari Plan prescribes for Kosovo what amounts to the very opposite: a non-ethnic, civil model.
9 Computations of survey figures for this article have been carried out by Vatroslav Jelović, University of Zagreb. The questionnaires and full results of the survey are available at Strategies of symbolic nation-building in West Balkan states: intents and results, Outcomes, http://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/research/projects/nation-w-balkan/
10 The five cultural personalities were Slavenka Drakulic, Rada Ivecovíc, Vesna Kesic, Jelena Lovric and Dubravka Ugresic.
11 Some Croatian cities have even given names like ‘Tito Street’ and ‘Tito Promenade’ back to streets that had been renamed in the 1990s. See, e.g. Večernji list 2007.
12 Many people who ticked this option lived in ethnically mixed marriages or outside their eponymous republic.
14 Some responses that reflected weak support were coded 0.5.
15 Mijić (2011: 765 and 777) claims that Yugonostalgia (or yugostalgia, as she calls it) is on the rise today. She does not, however, offer any figures to underpin this contention, and our survey does not show any such increase.

References


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