

# Blind Alleys in Variable Type Explanations of the Downfall of the Former Yugoslavia

SERGEJ FLERE

University of Maribor, Slovenia

E-mail: sergej.flere@uni-mb.si

UDK: 323.1(497.1)

316.48(497.1)

Prethodno priopćenje

Primljeno: 17. prosinca 2001.

*In this paper certain attractive explanations, present in sociological and other scholarship, on the dismemberment of Yugoslavia are considered, by reviewing them in light of certain thus far unpublished survey and census data on the former Yugoslavia, immediately preceding the dismemberment. Particularly one influential, but biased explanation of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia is considered. Books by the sociologist Stjepan Meštrović merit particular attention in the depiction of bias towards the Yugoslav break-up.*

*It is refuted that there was an in-depth incompatibility based on authoritarianism of any nationality, on emotional instability of any nationality, of ethnic stratification, of ethnic distance among the basic groups, which may explain the break-up. Instead, it is proposed that the break-up be explained by a maturation of nationalities, where the former Yugoslavia served as a nation-building institution, but for numerous nationalities.*

**Key words:** YUGOSLAVIA, DISSOLUTION, AUTHORITARIANISM, SOCIAL DISTANCE, ETHNIC DISTANCE, ETHNIC STRATIFICATION, CULTURAL INCOMPATIBILITY, ABUSE OF SOCIOLOGY

## 1. Introduction

The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia has attracted much scientific (not to speak of extra-scientific) attention. Of course, it has attracted the most attention in the very countries in question, and within their “scholarships”, i.e. “national sciences”. This holds true for sociology, as well as for other social scientific disciplines.

It is attractive and challenging to explain political events, particular by those of great magnitude, by clear-cut, simple social and psychological factors, particularly those of a truly or allegedly in-depth nature. The dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia in 1991 would be a likely case for such an explanation. Was dismemberment, possibly even its violent form, imminent, ensuing from the composition of the multi-national state, from the very nature of the nationalities and their inter-relations during the 70 year period of joint life in one state?

The main patterns of bias, even on the part of sociologists, involves the ethnic lines of the two major groups in the post-Yugoslav conflict during the 90s. Croatian social scientists are likely to see the conflict as Serbian aggression, due to the Serb national character (Letica, in Meštrović, 1996; Šakić, 1993), sometimes refined by rational choice as an explanation of Serb behavior (Štulhofer, 1993). Serb sociologists, on the other hand (Pečujlić and Nakarada, 1995:49–71; Obrenović, 1994), stress the global dimensions of the event and the role of the international community, basically as a conspiracy, a world plot against the Serbian people. Both Croatian and Serbian scholars belittle ethnonationalism in their own ranks as “reactive”. Sociologists from other ex-Yugoslav environments have been less active in these explanations (one interesting exception is Hafner Fink, 1995).

We will concentrate in this paper on bias in a segment of the the English language sociological scholarship, where one might have expected greater objectivity, or at any rate lack of bias. The paper focuses on examining authoritarianism, emotional imbalance, ethnic stratification, ethnic distance, all social science variable-type concepts of promising explanatory value.

## 2. Authoritarianism

The major socio-psychological explanation of the dissolution of Yugoslavia asserts a characteristic incompatibility between authoritarianism in one group and the absence of authoritarianism, the tolerant personality – the democratically oriented personality, the loving and caring personality etc. – in another.

The idea of authoritarianism as the cause of the collapse of the Yugoslav state was particularly elaborated by the American sociologist S. G. Meštrović and his associates in their numerous books during the 90s. Meštrović's thesis, following D. Tomašić, an alleged "Weber of Communism" and "Tocqueville of the Slavs" (1993:19). Meštrović combines the idea of authoritarianism (which he understands to be in the original sense of Adorno et al. [1950] Meštrović, Letica and Goreta, 1993:13) with cultural incompatibility particularly between Serbs and Croats. Serbs, who are said to have descended from the Urals and Altaics (1993:50), and have traditionally been herdsmen, are said to have demonstrated a "social character" dominated by authoritarianism (1993:50), which manifested itself in "power hunger, aggressiveness" (1993:51), "autocratic" tendencies (1993:50), "malevolence, deceit, disorderly view of universe", and which made them "emotionally unbalanced, violent, rebellious and (again) power-seeking personality" (63). Furthermore, the "disorganized personality structure or type of social character that preceded Communism" is to be linked to the "chronic alcoholic" and higher suicide rates (1993:64). In contrast to this portrait of the Serb, one may find, according to these authors, among the Catholic nationalities, particularly among the Croats and Slovenians "a universalist base, a tendency towards pluralism, a recognition of values pertaining to human rights, European political values" (1993:36).

Tomašić (1948) makes the comparison between two types of traditional society in the Balkans: the Dinaric *kuća* and the *zadruga* type. He combines of the depictions of the ethnogenetic, cultural, psychological and political traits of the two ways of life. The Dinaric *kuća* is, according to Tomašić, associated with joint and inalienable ownership of real estate and authoritarian power organization, in which males cannot express themselves, bringing about a set of traits including power seeking, emotional imbalance, overindulgence in affection, spitefulness, inclination to torture, inclination to violence, cruelty as a custom, deceitfulness, blood vengeance, hallucinations etc. In contrast to this, the *zadruga* household and society, to be found primarily among land cultivators, is permeated by the following features: "a general spirit of gaiety", "singing", harmony ("avoidance of conflict", 1948:173), dislike of violence, freedom of anxiety and fear, "family control and political power are very limited" (1948:161), the achievement of "well-being of all", the common good, "children are born under happy circumstances" (1948:166), "lack of sharp stratification" (171) etc. Clearly Tomašić formulates two ideal types, which he links loosely to Serbs (in the former case) and Croats in the latter (mentioning some other groups in the Balkans, but not analysing them). His loose linkage would be admissible, if his corroborations were empirically valid. Unfortunately, he does not found his descriptions upon a systematic study of Balkan and Yugoslav society, but mainly invokes antiquated (at the time) ethnography and impressionistic travel accounts. His study of the role of religion is also lacking, as he mainly limits himself to statements such as "...the Catholic Church in the Dinaric regions was instrumental in weakening the clan ties, and in eliminating ancient customs not in accordance with the teachings of Christianity" (1948:86).

Furthermore, studies of the extended family in the Balkans have not found it to be directly linked to one nationality only, but have instead found it to be a mono-type group (known as the *zadruga*), characterised by 1. joint ownership of real estate and other property, 2. inalienability of real estate, 3. the immobility of males (males do not leave the extended family), 4. mobility of females (departure by marriage) and a consequent low social position of females, 5. a relatively low position of children in the family. (St. Erlich, 1971:345). It is a

group distinct to the Slav South, states St. Erlich, and existed there until the beginning of the XX. century (with the exception of Slovenia), withering away at an uneven pace, though everywhere, under the influence of modernisation. Therefore, the basic theoretical mistake of Tomašić is in contrasting *kuća* and *zadruga*: they are both of one basic type, though regional, religious and other variations and degrees of dissolution varied. There is no reason to formulate these differences into two contrasting types. One should speak more correctly of the evolution of the *zadruga*, its uneven disappearance and its regional variations.

This is an assertion which may be tested empirically, though possibly not in the loose sense in which various authors use the term “authoritarian”, similar terms including terms that are allegedly its opponents. What we are in a position to test is the presence of authoritarianism in the classical meaning established by Adorno and associates.

The data pertaining to the 1990–91 period have been taken from the investigation “Level of Living – LOL”, collected by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Ljubljana from a sample of over 14,000 adults (Svetlik, 1991). Conditions for data collection were still allowing in most regions (though Kosovo is doubtful). The data were collected during the years 1990–91, just a few months before the disappearance of the Yugoslav state. The indicator of authoritarianism is composed of three items (“Leaderless, every people [nationality] is as if decapitated”; “There are two major types of people in the world, the strong and the weak”; “The most important thing children need to be taught is obedience towards parents”. A fourth item was disregarded, owing to its lack of fit both empirically and meaningfully (“Superiors need to be obeyed, regardless of whether they are right” – at the time of the study, it would have been unclear whether these “superiors” were to be socialist leaders, new multi-party leaders and business owners, new ethnic populists, petty owners, managers, old aparatchicks etc.).

**Table 1. Presence of authoritarianism in the former Yugoslavia, 1991, by nationality (means)**

Albanians	2.69
Croatians	2.42
Hungarians	2.38
Macedonians	2.60
Montenegrins	2.26
Muslims/Bosniaks	2.48
Serbs	2.44
Slovenians	2.49
Turks	2.79
Yugoslavs	2.17
Average	2.44

(Legend: 1 = total absence of authoritarianism, 3 = total presence of authoritarianism)

The results, as indicated in Table 1, point to a prevalence of authoritarianism in the former Yugoslavia. At the time the prevalence was absolute in all regions, the former republics and provinces. On a scale from 1 to 3, the average presence of authoritarianism was 2.44, indicating a definite predominance. One might argue that this predominance is overblown by the presence of the third item, which could also be indicative of patriarchal traditionalism.

The general prevalence of authoritarianism could be regarded as a product of the circumstance of economic crisis coupled by the delegitimation of the entire institutional system;

it also may have been linked to pre-modern modes of social life (studies of authoritarianism in the former Yugoslavia always found it to be high and prevalent). It forms a favourable socio-psychological background for the action of demagogue politicians, as authoritarians can be expected to be conducive to manipulation, particularly of the kind instigating collective fears.

Among the major groups, we find Albanians and Macedonians to be somewhat more authoritarian. One could further expect authoritarianism to diminish going from the West to the East in the former Yugoslavia, the western-most parts being the first to advance the multi-party system, with the Serbs presented as "the lions" in Pareto's meaning, suppressing changes in the political system. We do not find here any tendency among Serbs to be more authoritarian than the average, as suggested by Meštrović and others: in fact, somewhat surprisingly, Slovenians are slightly above the average and Serbs are slightly below. It may be noted that the presence and intensity of authoritarianism is most clearly tied to the level of schooling, with almost no strong non-authoritarians to be found among the unschooled ( $C = .343$ ). The differences among the nationalities cannot be attributed to educational attainment differences alone. It is to be noted that those declaring themselves to be Yugoslavs in the ethnic sense are the least authoritarian, the sole group with only a slight predominance of a non-authoritarian orientation. It is interesting that Montenegrins are also relatively low on the authoritarianism scale, which is in accordance with the traditional stereotype of their rebellious nature.

Besides pointing to a general predominance of authoritarianism, which may be regarded as fertile grounds for political manipulation (and for the rise of ethnonationalism, xenophobia and populist demagogical politics), these data do not point to any significant differences, particularly not those which could have been expected from claims in scholarly literature on Serb authoritarianism and on authoritarian stands and personality types producing dictatorships. To the contrary, at the beginning of the 90s Macedonians found a peaceful (at the time) way out of Yugoslavia, remained without a charismatic leader in the process. By way of contrast, Serbs and Croats, who have produced more than their share of charismatic leaders and populist ethnonationalist politics in the 90s, do not appear to be more authoritarian. This would mean that authoritarianism is tied more to traditionalism than to what was originally attributed to it (Adorno et al., 1950).

Our analysis of authoritarianism was based on a high level of homogeneity (in the statistical meaning) of the said items (3 statements). But could, nevertheless, an analysis of individual items produce a different picture of authoritarianism before the dismemberment of Yugoslavia? None of the three items points to any surprises.

Other researchers arrived to similar results, studying youth at the time of the disappearance of Yugoslavia (1988). The investigation was a survey of youth. Youth from Croatia were somewhat less authoritarian than the average (37% in comparison to 51%), but those from Serbia did not deviate from the average. (D. Pantić in S. Mihajlović et al., 1990:189).

These findings may be interpreted as pointing to the fact that multi-party democracy and a smooth transition "saved" Slovenia and Macedonia from the possibility of an ethnocentist regime and a politics of conflict (though in Macedonia only temporarily), and they make improbable any assertion of an in-depth cultural basis for democratization. The transition to democracy was not deeply culturally and socially psychologically embedded in any of the ethnic environments, as had been asserted, e.g. by Meštrović and associates. On the contrary, it was mostly an affair within the elite, where tolerant and moderate forces would or would not prevail.

### 3. Emotional Imbalance

On the socio-psychological level, it may be even more interesting to see whether there are indications of *emotional imbalance and personality disorganization*, which is also suggested

by Meštrović (1993:59–81), and in another way by other authors (J. Rašković, based on his psychiatric experience, in a loose treatment of the matter and at a critical moment, linked Croats to the castration complex, Serbs to the Oedipal character, and Muslims to the anal, 1991:128–129). In earlier anthropological literature, St. Erlich (1971) notes of conscripts from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces that they were often diagnosed with psychiatric conditions (1971:383–387), but without specifying the issue of which ethnic groups were at issue.

It follows from Meštrović's argument, that authoritarianism may be linked to emotional instability which manifests itself in heavy drinking, finding alcoholism as an outlet (1993:64). This, again, would express itself in a greater consumption of alcohol among Serbs and in the eastern part of the former Yugoslavia in general. The 1991 survey provides data on that issue. We shall present only data as to daily consumption of alcoholic beverage, indicative of a habit, by nationality:

**Table 2. Percentage of habitual alcoholic beverage consumers among adult population, self-report, Yugoslavia, 1991, by nationalities**

Albanians	4.0
Croatians	20.6
Hungarians	13.7
Macedonians	18.6
Montenegrins	15.0
Muslims/Bosniaks	10.2
Serbs	16.1
Slovenians	19.3
Yugoslavs	8.3
Average	15.4

The data point to characteristic differences, but diverge from Meštrović's assertion: those belonging to the Christian Orthodox religions are not heavier drinkers in the sense of having a greater frequency of regularity and habit. Regular drinking seems to be under the influence of cultural factors: in particular, Islam forbids alcohol consumption and it is characteristic that it has a definite impact upon the behaviour of ethnic Albanians only, but no longer on the behavior of the Muslims/Bosniaks, who were known to be modernised. The impact of social admissibility due to culture upon alcohol consumption and of modernization in general is also discernible. In fact, it is Croatians and Slovenes, two predominantly Catholic nationalities, who diverge slightly upwards from the average. Similar conclusions would result from other measures of alcohol and tranquilizer consumption. Data on reports of anxiety, depression and other psychological problems and troubles, from the same investigation, as to the past 12 months are not revealing either (the average presence of self-reported psychological conditions was 6.8%, undoubtedly less than today).

From earlier findings, we may note those of V. St. Erlich, in her studies of the Yugoslav family from the 1930s. She noted that there were slight differences in the level of heavy drinking among the regions she defined as Serbia (proper), "Christian Bosnia" and continental Croatia. The level is above one half in "Christian Bosnia" only and slightly, pertaining to males only. The other two regions diverge only slightly. She notes that drinking became frequent and heavy among Bosnian Muslims after World War I. Slovenia was not part of her study. (1971:322–329). Neither do her findings lend no support to the theory of "emotional imbalance" finding its outlet in alcoholism among Serbs in particular.

Another, possibly more valid indicator of emotional instability and personality disorganization could be found in the rate of suicides (not suggested by Meštrović and associates). Our insight into the matter emphasizing that during the 80s, the rate of suicide in the then Yugoslavia fluctuated around 1.6–1.8, with a slight trend towards a rise during the period. Croats (1982 = 2.12, 1986 = 2.33) and particularly Slovenians (2.42, 3.42) were above the Yugoslav average, while Muslims (0.94, 0.88) and particularly Albanians (0.02 and 0.02)<sup>1</sup> were the lowest. Serbs and Montenegrins were around the Yugoslav average. (*Demografska statistika 1982*, 1986:227, *Demografska statistika 1986*, 1990:231). These disparities could be explained by religious factors, though it may be easier and more veracious if they were linked to general modernization. These data, however, mask the basic finding that suicide rates were higher in northern areas, particularly the Pannonian belt of the former Yugoslavia, an issue raising many questions, which can be answered mainly in an asociological manner. None of this gives any support for the Meštrović thesis whatsoever.

#### 4. Ethnic Stratification

Another often stated allegation, also of an ideological nature, but to be found in scholarly literature as well (examined by Flere, 1992, asserted by Letica, in Meštrović, 1996: 99–100) is that the dissolution of the Yugoslav state resulted from an inherent not only domination of one nationality, but also its manifestation via social stratification: to put it sociologically, that social stratification had the substance of ethnic stratification.<sup>2</sup> Not only did one nationality have a politically dominant position, but this position is also to be found in the social composition. Letica quotes the findings on stratification of the former Yugoslavia by Lazić.

In an article titled “The Genesis of the Current Balkan War”, Letica considers the social stratification of the former Yugoslavia and boldly states that ethnic stratification had a pattern where “the social status of Serbs was that of a kind of 'ruling nation' in Croatia” (1996:96). Invoking Lazić (without specifically quoting him), Letica underscores that the Serbs were proportionally overrepresented in the then Communist Party of Yugoslavia, “a necessary precondition for upward mobility”, and that “a similar arrangement existed among the elites, in which was concentrated the largest share of political and financial power” (1996:97), adding a special note to the analysis by stating that “the data show that Serbs, and even more so the 'Yugoslavs', obtained state-owned housing with significantly greater ease than Croats.” (1996:98). The “ease” of which Letica speaks is difficult to measure and test, but he was probably trying to say that Serbs and Yugoslavs more often received state housing (“dwelling rights”).

Lazić did in fact conduct an empirical study of stratification in Croatia on the eve of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia (1990–01) He studies both stratification at the time and mobility in the prior decades. He also deals with dwelling, but his findings are completely at variance with the allegations attributed to him. “Croatians live in somewhat larger apartments than Serbs and Yugoslavs (the differences are statistically insignificant), and their apartments were better equipped, but Yugoslavs, along with the Serbs more often received dwelling right apartments” (1994:169). Of course, this is just one detail in the study of stratification, though Lazić would agree with Letica and Meštrović that it is a relevant one.

<sup>1</sup> Reporting for Kosovo may have been lacking.

<sup>2</sup> We will not enter into the allegations with contrary political tendencies, i.e. that in Tito's Yugoslav leadership Serbs were underrepresented and had a subservient position. This does deal with stratification and fits more into the theory of the Yugoslav dissolution as a conspiracy, which was fashionable among Serbian intellectuals.

Nevertheless, Lazić's true findings are completely different from those suggested by Letica and Meštrović: "Neither Croats nor Serbs were significantly more represented (at the beginning of the 90s) neither at the peak nor at the bottom of the social hierarchy." (1994:168). In his detailed analysis, Lazić would not say that the stratification pictures of the ethnic groups in question were totally identical, though they were increasingly becoming so: Serbs were more often agriculturists and unqualified workers, were less educated and were more often in the activity of protection and repression (but he warns, those were mostly jobs of a routine nature, watchers, keepers and policemen). Though Lazić takes a very critical view of the social system of the former Yugoslavia (from a Marxist stand, considering it to be a society dominated by of the class of "collective owners"), he admits that the policy of ethnic parity in the former Yugoslavia produced results in the area of stratification, allowing for somewhat greater rates of upward mobility for Serbs, in view of their relatively low starting position within Croatia (1994:170-1).

It is undisputed that in Croatia Serbs were more often members of the League of Communists. But this fact needs to be analyzed. Firstly, membership itself did not necessarily mean, in fact for the majority it did not mean, any share or stake in the distribution of power, as it was a mammoth organization. To this end, the composition of the elites needs to be taken into account. Secondly, membership in the League of Communists needs to be analyzed on its role as being an instrument extending social protection and a sort of security in surroundings where individuals were in a minority position ethnically. Therefore, in the Yugoslav setting membership in the League of Communists may best be explained as a form of social capital, which would also entail that it enable and foster upward mobility, as well as of social control. Lazić explains this datum particularly in connection with the historical background, Serbs more often taking part in the Partisan Movement (but not in Serbia itself), which led them to leaning towards the Communist Party and using it as a mobility vehicle in a situation where their educational resources were more scarce in comparison to those of Croats, but this process was to have ended at the beginning of the dismembrment of Yugoslavia. (1994:181-184). Lastly, a certain cultural electivity and affinity of Orthodoxy towards Communism needs to be studied, though it is easy to slip towards prejudicial statements in this respect.

As to membership in the League of Communists, ethnic belonging is not as universally structured in the pro-Serb trend, as Letica would have it. In 1991, the Svetlik survey data (1991) indicate that Serbs were overrepresented in League membership, if the Yugoslavia is considered, but within Serbia proper, at the onset of the 90s, the number of Serbs in the League was slightly below average (18.8% in comparison to 19.9% as the average of membership in the Serbian sample), a finding which fits our comments on the social (not cultural) nature of membership in the then Yugoslavia. It could also fit into historical data indicating that Serbs from Serbia proper did not support Tito's Partisans. One should also note that Serbs were always to be found overrepresented among the ex-members, a fact which Letica does not consider either.

In a situation when the number of members of the Communist Party was a major fraction of the active population, other criteria for determining the elite were of greater relevance and indication.

From the 1991 findings it is possible to pursue the ossie of ethnic stratification using better sociological perspectives and instruments. We shall pay attention to a number of dimensions of social stratification.

In 1991, the Yugoslav survey did not indicate any revealing differences. When asked whether their jobs entailed executive competencies (management, leading positions), ethnic belonging did would not demonstrate the systematic privileged position of any ethnic group. The figures are as follows:

**Table 3. Percentage holding jobs with executive competencies, in adult population Yugoslavia, 1991, by nationality**

Albanians	11.5
Montenegrins	9.4
Croatians	11.6
Hungarians	14.4
Macedonians	9.9
Muslims/Bosniaks	11.2
Serbs	9.9
Slovenians	11.6
Yugoslavs	9.1
Average	10.6

No pattern appears. Certain deviations among the lesser groups can be distinguished.

Control by education, in line with the idea of meritocracy, reveals lesser deviations in representation, with Montenegrins, those declared as Yugoslavs and Slovenians being more represented, which is of no assistance not an indication of the assertions.

The above data illustrate, if anything, that in the former Yugoslav state, there was a policy of ethnic parity, which functioned, though without attaining the ultimate goal of ethnic harmony.

Only highly educated Albanians and Montenegrins seem to be less represented as executives (possibly, owing to a smaller share of those with higher education). The other nationalities higher educated shares all have executive positions in more than one fourth of the number of respondents. "Yugoslavs" are to be found among the younger respondents who have not yet attained executive positions.

For a final assessment, we will consider another set of data, those from the 1987 survey ("Class substance", N. Toš, head). That survey had a particularly large sample (15.976). Observing the occupational structure, we focus our attention on two groups in which power can be considered to be concentrated: organizational business managers and political functionaries. In analyzing the structure by ethnic identification we find the following:

**Table 4. Percentage of business managers and political functionaries in adult population, Yugoslavia, 1987, by nationality**

Albanians	0.6
Croatians	1.1
Hungarians	2.4
Montenegrins	2.3
Muslims	1.8
Serbians	1.0
Slovenians	1.2
Yugoslavs	2.2
Average	1.0

Within the same survey, when respondents were asked whether they ever held an office within the self-management and one-party system, significant deviations from the average of 14.8% appeared, with 3 groups slightly deviating from the average upwards (Montenegrins, "Yugoslavs" and Slovenians). There is no indication of a national disparity pattern.

Ethnic stratification as a cause for the dismemberment of Yugoslavia can be flatly refuted, with one possible exception, regarding the "niche" of repressive services (the army and the police), which would not have mattered much when the political system was functioning, but which demonstrated itself during the war, in the fact and mode of dismemberment of the federal army in 1991-92. But this essentially was not a matter of ethnic stratification, but of the political system, allowing the armed forces to remain without a commander in chief. During the functioning of the state of Yugoslavia, this did not in any significant way change the chances for promotion or lack of such chances within any ethnic groups, nor have an influence upon the nature of social stratification. Neither of the two authors dealing with social stratification at the end of the Yugoslav era, Lazić and Hafner Fink, pays any attention to these groups (Lazić, 1987, 1994; Hafner Fink, 1995).

There are no empirical grounds for entertaining an opinion on the existence of a ruling nationality in the former Yugoslavia (we shall not enter into the issue of the institutional arrangement to this end, a very elaborate one). To be sure some nationalities were more numerous in absolute terms, resulting on the fact that the number of managers and functionaries being the largest in the largest nationality. The main disproportions are usually to be found in the overrepresentation of Montenegrins, as was known from common sense experience and the underrepresentation of Albanians, the group educationally and otherwise the most underdeveloped. One may also raise the question as to who were the Yugoslavs, which is beyond the scope of this paper (see Sekulić et al., 1994).

The issue of stratification and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia was treated at greater length by Hafner Fink, on the basis of the 1987 data and with the major available types of statistical analysis. His findings pointed to major differences among the republics and provinces of the former state, primarily due to varying levels of modernization and different cultural traditions, but not to the systematic privileged position of any one nationality. This brought about differences in the size of the varying classes, with the lower being class the largest in Kosovo and the smallest in Slovenia and with a reverse situation as to the upper class. However, as to the type of stratification, Hafner Fink found that only Kosovo departed from the basic in-depth pattern: there was economic status to be found independent of educational and occupational status. That was primarily to be explained by the underdeveloped nature of the province (low level of economic development, high level of unemployment, high illiteracy, extremely high fertility – in comparison to all other units of Yugoslavia), by the existence of the extended family and other defining circumstances. (Hafner Fink, 1995: 66, 125-7). Everywhere else there would have been two basic hierarchies to be found: general social position (composed of educational-occupational status, economic-consumption status and cultural status/style of life) and political status. It is very relevant that the latter was not to be linked to the former, extending a negative answer to the often heard assertion that there was political dominance of the stratification structure in Yugoslav real-socialism. Hafner-Fink would allow only that the dominance of the political sphere would assert itself via general educational indoctrination, giving a picture in which the educational hierarchy is the major stratificational dimension (1995:75-92). However, he does not deal with the issue of cultural incompatibility of nationalities. He concludes that "social cleavages (leading to the dismemberment) do not completely coincide with republic boundaries" (1995:189).

## 5. Ethnic Distance

Another sociological method for to explaining the dissolution of Yugoslavia was to uncover a rise in social distance, both in the manner of behaviour (interethnic marriages) and

by way of social distance attitude measurements. It has been alleged that prior to the break-up, a rise in social distance came about, and that the dissolution somehow followed from this in-depth pattern.

Ethnic distance was a matter of empirical study in the former Yugoslavia, particularly by social psychologists, and in such a way that it is possible to uncover trends: from 1966 onwards, ethnic distance generally fell, whereas in contrast it rose in the 80s. The patterns are characteristic and indicate cultural, denominational, linguistic, historical and other circumstances. In fact, social distance in the latter half of the 80s was clearly on the rise. This could be explanatory as to the dismemberment of the state, as those stating a decided ethnic distance (with respect to marriage) were Slovenians (65%) and Albanians (69%) (the political behavior of these two nationalities could be called separatist or nationally emancipatory), if it were considered a spontaneous and autonomous phenomenon. Among all other groups this was a minority phenomenon, the lowest, of course, appearing among those declaring themselves to be Yugoslavs (22%) (D. Pantić in L. Baćević [ed.], 1991:103). It was a minority phenomenon among all the nationalities to be found in the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among those to be found in armed conflicts, only in the case of Albanians was it a majority phenomenon (in all directions). It should be marked that ethnic distance was below the Yugoslav average in Croatia (29%), and even lower in Bosnia and Herzegovina (figure lacking<sup>3</sup>), both of which show figures below the Yugoslav average of 44%. (Pantić in Baćević, 1991:103-5). By another count, three years earlier strong social distance was expressed in Croatia by 22% and in Bosnia by 31% of adult respondents (Šiber, 1987:82-86). In no case, however, does this follow the pattern of Yugoslav conflicts, nor can it uphold the thesis that the Yugoslav break-down was a spontaneous process, without political intervention and propaganda instigation. At the time of the Pantić and Baćević data collection in 1990, years of not only economic crisis, but also propaganda warfare, ideological instigation and hate speech had already passed.

In another way, Hodson and associates (1994) reject the idea of the existence of an in-depth psychological ethnic conflict as the cause of the Yugoslav break-up, by studying a series of indicators of "ethnic tolerance" in the former Yugoslavia (1994:1554). In fact Hodson and associates lead to the conclusion that ethnic conflict results from the relative size of a certain ethnic group, "preconditions for armed conflict being less present in more homogeneous settings" (1994:1555). Thus, despite relatively low degrees of tolerance Slovenia remained the most quiet and peaceful region.

A detailed analysis of ethnic distance in the former Yugoslavia indicates that larger ethnic groups demonstrated less distance (were more open), that cultural differences from the Serbo-Croatian speaking majority played a role (Albanians and Slovenians expressing greater distance), that the situation was complicated by a certain number expressing themselves to be Yugoslavs in the ethnic meaning (those were the most tolerant, open and universalist, in fact this very declaration had such a latent meaning), and that in the latter half of the 80s, when a general crisis developed, and an authoritarian mode of thinking became prominent, demanding a scapegoat, distance rose. The high figures to be found in Yugoslavia on the eve of the break-up did not meet some of the data reached elsewhere in Eu-

<sup>3</sup> In 1990, according to Pantić, among youths in the then Yugoslavia, in Croatia strong and very strong ethnic distancing was found among 34% of Croatians, 26% of Serbs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, another republic to be stricken by war just a few years later, such distancing was expressed by 49% of Croatians, by 34% of Serbs and by 37% of Bosniaks/Muslims. In contrast, such strong and very strong distancing was expressed by 65% of Slovenians and peaking at a level of 72% among Albanian youth in Kosovo. It was, therefore, much higher in regions not to be lit by war in the following years (if we may to say that the Kosovo conflict erupted almost a decade later) (Pantić, in Baćević [ed.], 1991:104).

rope, e.g. in Finland, two fifths would not be prepared to accept Muslims even as neighbours. Close in expressions social distance are Romanians and Slovaks, with rates of over 30% expressing such an unwillingness ([http://rcul.uni-lj.si/~fd\\_adp/opisi/WVS\\_95-en.XML](http://rcul.uni-lj.si/~fd_adp/opisi/WVS_95-en.XML)).

## 6. Rationalization

This situation indicates that social distance, though increasing in the 80s, could not be considered a factor in the dismemberment of the former state and particularly not as a cause of war, as the latter came about particularly in areas of low social distance (Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Another interesting point in the views of Dr. Meštrović concerns the various levels of rationalization of social life, which are said to have made life in the joint Yugoslav state incompatible. It is known in sociological theory that McDonaldization is taken to be a form of rationalization in Weber's meaning of the term, yet different from bureaucracy. (Ritzer, 1993).

Dr. Meštrović, in his answers as expert witness before the Hague tribunal stated: "There's McDonald's openings in Zagreb and Belgrade but not as many, of course, as there would be in Miami. It's a continuum" (Transcript, June 27, 2000, p. 21621).

In this case, Meštrović, in his prejudice can be found to be flatly wrong. McDonald's was opened in Belgrade, which was Serbian, Orthodox, Communist at the time (1987) almost a decade before it was opened in Zagreb, which was Catholic, democratic, belonging to the cultural West (1996). It is very improbable that McDonald's opened its first outlet in a communist land exclusively out of pure instrumental rationality.

In fact this is indicative both of the way Meštrović chooses his indicators and of his disregard for facts. It is also characteristic of how Meštrović plants indicators into some grand sociological theory, invoking the grandest of sociological classics, but without regard for the rules of logic.

## 7. Conclusion

Sociological and other social science explanations of such complex phenomena are necessary and possible. They are rarely to be found in variable type analyses. Much of the scholarship on the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia was biased, "instant history", superfluous and dictated by immediate conditions. But the work of Meštrović and associates supersedes spontaneous bias and prejudice. It is directly and to a full extent an abuse of sociology. One could mention in passing that any sociological enterprise pretending to explain events and phenomena by preordained characteristics of a nationality is out of touch with contemporary theory which stresses the nature of nationalities as "imagined communities" and "communities of memory".

Attention should be paid to the interplay of the following factors and circumstances:

1. a particular set of historical solutions and events, involving the imposition of coerced political and institutional arrangements (implying that the arrangement never arose from an in-depth consensus), characteristic of the history of Yugoslavia, and out of touch with democratic developments in the XX. century (a problem which we cannot discuss here in particular, but which includes both pre- and the post-World War II Yugoslavia),
2. the post-modern condition in which the state ceases to mean what it did a century ago,
3. the break-down of state socialism, bringing about a general deconstruction and reconstruction of society,

4. the particular role played by hate speech in the media at the end of the 80s in the former Yugoslavia,

5. the cessation of the unique role of Yugoslavia as a buffer zone between the two cold war "camps", removing the external pressure for internal conflicts to activate and manifest themselves,

6. the role of the old and the would be new elites during the late 80s, when it was evident that Communism would break down, at the level of the new states, in their attempts either to retain or to gain power, manipulating and instigating disintegrative processes, i.e. processes of constituting new states (those achieved and those not achieved, particularly "Greater Serbia"). These circumstances are sufficient to explain the Yugoslav break-up, needing elaboration in the matter of depiction of the phenomenal level and explanation of the interplay of factors,

7. the maturing of nationalities, tending towards the formation of nation states, a process whereby Yugoslav nationalities were at the time of the 1980s crisis constituted nationalities and which could not merge into a new nation.

This proved to be the basic underlying fact into which all the others fit and make sense. All forms of crises, geopolitical changes, use and abuse of propaganda, the behavior of old and new elites and leaders and their interactions all of this makes sense only within the supposition that Yugoslav nationalities at the time had matured, had come "of age" and did not in fact need a multi-national political sponsor or protector within which to function. Understanding nationalities to be Durkheimian social facts at the time also helps in sidelining the irrelevancies (the appearances of the greatest conflict being among Slovenes and Serbs, the various daily events and personalities).

The Yugoslav federal state was no longer of much use to them, even had it been a much organizationally better and more legitimate one. During the Yugoslav state, the major ethnic groups grew in cultural, economic and every other way as separate and distinct entities with only the shell of a common state structure. The federal state structure, even though authoritarian throughout, was also polyarchic throughout the period. This polyarchy was of a pluri-ethnic nature, favouring the development of separate ethnic groups and their political entities within Yugoslavia. Tito's policy of ethnic parity worked within this process against the merging of ethnicities, but also against the formation of a consensual and consociational multi-national entity, as the leaders increasingly depended upon their ethnic power bases. The fact that the nationalities were the basic units of Yugoslavia and not the institutional territorial units can be best illustrated by the differences in the fate of the mono-ethnic Kosovo and the multi-ethnic Vojvodina, not to speak of the ensuing wars.

One could note an exception to the otherwise lack of functionality of Yugoslavia for all the major nationalities: Serbs from outside Serbia, a factor which – accidental circumstances aside – is what sparked the major conflict.

The Yugoslav narrative, including the dismemberment, fits into what could today be called modernism in the explanation of nationalities: Yugoslavia was a "nation-building" vehicle for Slovenes, Croats, Bosniaks, Macedonians, Albanians, even for the Montenegrins, less so for the Serbs, definitely not for the lesser ethnic groups. It was so even though they were mostly unaware and thought of the Yugoslav state, for better or for worse, as those existing paramount institution. History was in the making behind the backs of the Yugoslav nationalities. In this peculiar type of nation-making – of many nationalities within one federal state – H. Seton Watson can be considered to have correctly identified them as historically "new nations" (1977).

This was linked to an overall social modernization. From today's perspective the differing levels of modernization of ethnicities and regions can be assessed to have stimulated dis-

integration, though not in its own right, but by enhancing ethnonational identity and comprehending Yugoslavia ever more as “fettters” to one's ethnonational development. The role of religious faith become clearer: in spite of the many clerical declarations on the promotion of tolerance, religion is “not an expressopn or a handle so much as a major part of such (national) identities” (2000:13), as Ruby notes, stressing its transformed primordiality.

The break-up scene could be viewed as a matter of an alliance of ethnic politicians and intellectuals (the so called independent, opposition or dissident intellectuals) who formed a coalition to instigate feelings of ethnic frustration and a need for immediate action (explaining the state of crisis within their nation in terms of the inadequate position of their nationality within the Yugoslav federation). The old elites and the the would-be elites of that time (in some of the countries, e.g. in Croatia, politicians were practically lacking) were using the ideological tools of ethnic hatred, blaming other ethnic groups, as tools in the rationally perceived situation of the break-up of communism and the struggle to form the new political elite. These new elites, (at the level of each newly forming state) used and abused every means of propaganda available, including what is today called hate speech, in its most varied forms, particularly in the form of planting news about events which would spark deep rooted collective fears. The use of television was of the utmost importance, and the Yugoslav drama, starting in the latter half of the 80s, was a drama of simulacra (televised stories, which were not necessarily be true, but functioned in mobilizing the masses not so much Hitler-like, xenophobic propaganda as unbielevable narratives of alleged attocities). The lack of a pan-Yugoslav television system was also a contributing fact, enabling the elites to monopolise “the truth.”

At a deeper level, Yugoslavs of those times were confronted by the impossibility of adaptation of the political and economic system of the former SFRY to changes in the environment, particularly owing to institutional reasons. This meant that the legitimacy crisis could not have evolved into a sustainable transformation of the political system, probably even with major assistance from abroad (with the exception of a protectorate, which, of course, is hardly imaginable).

At the deepest level, a multi-national state could not have functioned indefinitely in the case of Yugoslavia, owing to a history of ethnic conflict (almost exclusively in the XX century), blowing each crisis to dramatic proportions and apocalyptic interpretations on the part of ideologists of each major ethnic group), pointing to the nationalities becoming mature “social facts”.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, Th., Frenkel-Brunswik, R., Levinson, D. J. and Stanford, N. R. (1950) **The Authoritarian Personality**. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Cushman, Thomas and Meštrović, Stjepan G. (eds.) (1996) **This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia**. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Demografska statistika 1982** (1986) Beograd: Savezni Zavod za statistiku.
- Demografska statistika 1988** (1990) Beograd: Savezni Zavod za statistiku.
- Flere, S. (1992) Cognitive Adequacy of Sociological Theories in Explaining Ethnic Antagonism in Yugoslavia, in Rupesinghe, K., King, P. and Vorkunowa, O. **Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World**. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Hafner Fink, Mitja (1995) **Sociološka razsežja razpada Jugoslavije**. Ljubljana: Znanstvena knjižnica Fakultete za družbene vede.
- Hodson, R., Sekulić, D. and Massey, G. (1994) National Tolerance in the Former Yugoslavia. **American Journal of Sociology** (99):1534-1558.
- Lazić, Mladen (1987) **U susret zatvorenom društvu**. Zagreb: Naprijed.

- Lazić, Mladen (1994) **Sistem i slom. Raspad socijalizma i struktura jugoslovenskog društva**. Beograd: Filip Višnjić.
- Meštrović, S. G., Letica, S. and Goreta, M. (1993) **The Habits of the Balkan Heart. Social Character and the Fall of Communism**, Kingsville, TE: Texas A&M University Press.
- Meštrović, Stjepan G. (eds.) (1996) **Genocide after Emotion. The Postemotional Balkan War**. London and New York: Routledge.
- Meštrović, S. G. (ed.) (1997) **The Conceit of Innocence. Losing the Conscience of the West in the War against Bosnia**. Kingsville, TE: Texas A&M University.
- Mitrović, M. (1994) Raspad države i rat u Jugoslaviji. Pokušaj sociološkog objašnjenja. **Sociološki pregled** (XXVIII), 189-203.
- Nakarada, R. (ed.) (1995) **Evropa i raspad Jugoslavije**. Beograd: Institut za evropske studije.
- Obrenović, Z. (1994) Raspad Jugoslavije u svetlu dva državotvorna projekta i pomoć međunarodne zajednice. **Sociološki pregled** (XXVIII), 167-187.
- Pantić, D. (1990) Vrednosti mladih u vreme krize, in Mihajlović, S. et al. (1990) **Deca krize. Omladina Jugoslavije krajem osamdesetih**. Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka.
- Pantić, D. Nacionalna distanca građana Jugoslavije, in Bačević, L. (1991) **Jugoslavija na kriznoj prekretnici**. Beograd (Konzorcijum instituta za ispitivanje javnog mnjenja), 97-109.
- Pečujlić, M. and Nakarada, R. (1995) Slom Jugoslavije i konstituisanje novog svetskog poretka, in Nakarada, R. (1995) **Evropa i raspad Jugoslavije**. Beograd: Institut za evropske studije.
- Rašković, J. (1990) **Luda zemlja**. Beograd: Akvarijus.
- Ritzer, G. (1993) **The McDonaldization of Society**. Thousand Oaks: Pine Sage.
- Ruby, J. (2000) Bitter Icons. **New Left Review** (Series 2:7) 5-15.
- Sekulić, D., Massey, G. and Hodson, R. (1994) Who were the Yugoslavs? Failed Sources of Common Identity in the Former Yugoslavia. **American Sociological Review** (59):83-97.
- Seton-Watson, H. (1977) **Nations and States**. London: Methuen.
- St. Erlich, V. (1971) **Jugoslavenska porodica u transformaciji. Studija u tri stotine sela**. Zagreb: Liber.
- Svetlik, I. (head of research) (1991) **Social Structure and Level of Living**. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana Archives of Social Science Data.
- Šakić, V. (1993) Opći okvir proučavanja srpske agresije na Hrvatsku 1991. **Društvena istraživanja** (21): 217-245.
- Šiber, I. (1987) Psiholgijski aspekti međunacionalnih odnosa. **Kulturni radnik** 82-86.
- Štulhofer, A. (1993) Testirajući teorije etničkog sukoba: Occamova oštrica i početak rata u Hrvatskoj. **Društvena istraživanja** (21):365-378.
- Tomašić, Dinko (1948) **Personality and Culture in Eastern European Politics**. New York: George W. Stewart.
- Transcript of the case no. IT-95-14/2-T**, June 27, 2000, Examination by Mr. Browning, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, The Hague, Testimony of Stjepan Meštrović.  
[http://rcul.uni-lj.si/~fd\\_adp/opisi/WVS\\_95-en.XML](http://rcul.uni-lj.si/~fd_adp/opisi/WVS_95-en.XML)

## SLIJEPE ULICE U RAZLIČITIM OBJAŠNENJIMA RASPADA BIVŠE JUGOSLAVIJE

SERGEJ FLERE

University of Maribor, Slovenia

E-mail: sergej.flere@uni-mb.si

*Članak raspravlja o odabranim "atraktivnim" studijama i objašnjenjima raspadanja bivše Jugoslavije. Za preispitivanje i odbacivanje jedne od najraširenijih hipoteza, one Stjepana Meštrovića – da je raspad bivše Jugoslavije povezan s duboko ugrađenim neskladom među nacijama članicama, a koji se nesklad temelji na autoritarizmu, emocionalnoj nestabilnosti, etničkoj stratifikaciji i etničkoj distanci – koristili smo neobjavljene anketne i popisne podatke. Umjesto te, članak predlaže pretpostavku da bi raspad Jugoslavije bilo moguće objasniti sazrijevanjem naroda, pri čemu je savezna država Jugoslavija poslužila brojnim narodima kao institucija građenja nacije (nation-building).*

**Ključne riječi:** JUGOSLAVIJA, RASPAD, AUTORITARIZAM, SOCIJALNA DISTANCA, ETNIČKA DISTANCA, ETNIČKA STRATIFIKACIJA, NEUSAGLAŠENOST KULTURA, ZLOUPORABA SOCIOLOGIJE