

PETAR GRUBIŠIĆ

Internal Migration and Self-identity in Socialist Yugoslavia: The Case of Dalmatian Colonists in Stanišić (Vojvodina)

PETAR GRUBIŠIĆ

GHENT UNIVERSITY

PETAR.GRUBISIC@UGENT.BE

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Internal Migration and Self-identity in Socialist Yugoslavia: The Case of Dalmatian Colonists in Stanišić (Vojvodina)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the socialist government in Yugoslavia was actively pushing the policy of brotherhood and unity. Unlike the interwar integralist version, the promotion of socialist Yugoslavism was envisioned as a building block of togetherness. The agrarian reform and colonisation, which spanned from 1945 to 1948, completely transformed land ownership relations and allowed an unprecedented level of social mobility. This paper explores the impact of internal migration on nation-building through a case study of the colonist settlement of Stanišić, located in Vojvodina, populated by settlers from the similarly multicultural region of Dalmatia. The colonisation effort primarily targeted Partisan fighters and their families. The settlers officially declared themselves Croats or Serbs and represented the two largest ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, but during the colonisation, they were classified by the government as Dalmatians. Consequently, they are a prime example of blurred lines between regional, national, and transnational identities. This paper analyses the impact of internal migration on identity formation within Stanišić over the following decades and examines how it correlates with the rest of Vojvodina. It explores the different layers of colonists' identity, their position and influence on Serbian nationalism and Yugoslav multinationalism, as well as the fluidity of the said stance.

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KEYWORDS:

internal migration, colonisation, homogenisation, countryside socialisation, groupism, regionalism, nationalism, Yugoslavism

Agrarian reform and colonisation in socialist Yugoslavia took place between 1945 and 1948 on both the federal and republican levels. This reform addressed long standing issues of land ownership and rural quality of life that had persisted throughout interwar Yugoslavia.¹ The leadership reached a consensus that the peasants should possess the land they had been granted, while concurrently recognizing that ultimate ownership rested with those who cultivated it.² Priority was given to Partisan fighters, as well as war victims and disabled veterans from the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and the April War of 1941. This policy was an organised internal migration, and this paper covers the case of the village of Stanišić, which alongside Riđica, formed a Dalmatian enclave in Vojvodina. The colonists, mostly consisting of Partisan families, made up more than two-thirds of the village population, and they played a central role in shaping the local identity, especially in the case of emerging Yugoslavism in the 1970s. Over the decades, census data for Stanišić show a continuous population decline. Despite this the villagers gradually abandoned both Croatian and Serbian identity in favour of a Yugoslav one. The village followed the general trends in Vojvodina with one notable exception: in the census of 1991, there was a sharp drop in the number of residents identifying as Yugoslavs, at the same time when the autonomous region experienced its peak in declared Yugoslavs. The rise and subsequent decline of Yugoslavism in Stanišić are closely linked with its colonist population and their descendants, as well as their interaction with the local population.

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The research examines the emergence of Yugoslavism in Stanišić, drawing upon a range of archival sources, primarily those held in the Sombor City Archives, as well as state censuses. These findings are complemented by newspaper articles, secondary literature and semi-structured interviews. Recorded interviews were conducted in September 2022 with five first-generation colonists and two second-generation descendants. In consideration of the subjects' advanced age, the interview questions were designed to be straightforward and did not encompass sensitive topics, unless the interviewee elected to address them. Further inquiries were conducted with other villagers who were reluctant to be recorded. Their statements, however, corroborated the previously recorded interviews.

The study is composed of two distinct sections. The first addresses the circumstances in which colonists arrived in the village and how they shaped village life during the immediate aftermath of the war and the intensive promotion of Yugoslav identity in the following two decades. The analysis examines the influence of environmental and cultural adaptation, the top-down socialisation of the village by the state, and the external threat posed by living close to the national border. The second section utilises census data up to 1991 to present the anomaly of Yugoslavism in Stanišić, at a time when the state had largely abandoned its promotion, by comparing it

¹ Marijan Maticka, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj od 1945. do 1948.* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga 1990), 16.

² Marijan Maticka, "Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj od 1945. do 1953," *Sociologija i prostor* 125-126 (December 1994): 193.

to nearby colonist settlements of Kljajićevo and Bački Brestovac, and the city of Sombor.

The question of identity becomes more complex when considering regional and ethnic dimensions. Regional, national, and transnational identities are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and individuals can feel a sense of belonging to all of three through shared language, religion, or kinship. As Rogers Brubaker states, the potential for any of these identities to become dominant is always present, but whether it surfaces is dependent on each specific case, with internal and external factors both playing a role. More often than not, such dominant identities form as a result of rising political and ethnic violence.³ American anthropologist Robert Redfield, conceptualises the village nucleus as a distinct "little tradition" that constantly interacts with the "great tradition" of the city or state, resulting in changes to both. The little tradition tends to be stable and resistant to swift change, while the great tradition is more susceptible to shifts and determines the way forward for the country in general.⁴ In Stanišić, the everyday interaction between locals and colonists was, in effect a clash of two distinct little traditions, which were simultaneously influenced by the evolving great tradition of the new state. This complex interplay forms the framework for understanding the development of villagers' identity over the decades.

The collected data are analysed through the four reasons for acceptance of Yugoslavism proposed by Sekulić, Massey and Hodson: modernisation, political participation, demographic factors and majority-minority status. The degree of modernisation in a given society is typically measured by levels of urbanisation, education, and media influence. The level of political participation was influenced by various factors, including active membership in the Communist Party or the holding of office within organisations affiliated with government bodies or enterprises. Demographic analysis predominantly focuses on mixed marriages, where the objective was to achieve compromise for the sake of offspring. Majority-minority status is evident among individuals who have adopted a Yugoslav identity as a means of evading assimilation and protecting themselves from allegations of national allegiance.⁵

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Dalmatia and Vojvodina: Migration Opposites

Dalmatia and Vojvodina are regions that possess distinct geographical and historical backgrounds. Their geographical boundaries were established during the period of Austro-Hungarian rule, a time the two regions underwent significantly distinct historical trajectories, despite both being situated on the periphery of the Empire and possessing borderland status. Dalmatia received minimal support from the Austrian government, a situation compounded by agrarian overpopulation and a scarcity of fertile

³ Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without groups," *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (August 2002): 166; 168.

⁴ Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1960), 41-42.

⁵ Duško Sekulić, Garth Massey, and Randy Hodson, "Ethnic intolerance and ethnic conflict in the dissolution of Yugoslavia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 5 (2006): 85-86

land. Consequently, it became a region of emigration, primarily to overseas destinations, though it later experienced spontaneous internal migration.⁶ By contrast, following the Ottoman retreat, Vojvodina remained sparsely populated and became a focal point for settlement during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Habsburgs initiated a series of colonisations in Srijem, Bačka, Baranja and Banat, resulting in the settlement of numerous ethnic groups from across the Empire. Petsinis argues that this colonisation was part of a broader strategy to decrease Hungarian influence in these regions.⁷

The distinct heterogeneity observed in both regions can be attributed to their borderland status. In Dalmatia, an attempt at regionalism evolved towards nationalism, manifesting as the Slavo-Dalmatian identity, a blend of Slavic and Latin (Italian) heritage. The movement, however, never gained significant traction and was ultimately eclipsed by the stronger national movements of Croatia, Serbia and Italy.⁸ On the other hand, the influx of colonists in Vojvodina resulted in the establishment of a pluralistic society, characterised by significant ethnic and religious diversity, effectively mirroring the complex cultural and religious composition of Austro-Hungary or the Balkans in miniature.⁹

A common factor shared by both regions was their status as disputed territories once they had become part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). Conditions in Dalmatia did not improve during the interwar period. However, Vojvodina became even more important in colonisation projects, particularly the settlement of war veterans, primarily of Serb and Montenegrin origin. During the Second World War, significant parts of Dalmatia came under Italian rule, while Vojvodina was divided among Hungary, the Independent State of Croatia, and the puppet state of Serbia. The programme of expulsion and Italianisation in Dalmatia was brief and swiftly curtailed due to the inherent instability of Italian rule. In the case of Vojvodina, most local residents were expelled and replaced primarily with Hungarian or Croat settlers.¹⁰

The village of Stanišić was subject to Hungarian occupation, supported by a German minority, at the expense of the local Slavic and Jewish populations. As the war progressed, Hungarian inhabitants were conscripted, while Serbs were sent to forced labour in Hungary under the designation of "munkaš." During the occupation, the village did not have an established Partisan cell, and it was not placed under Partisan control until it was liberated by the Red Army without a fight in October 1944.¹¹ The liberation of Vojvodina would have significant ramifications for the ethnic German population, many of whom were expelled and placed into detention camps

⁶ Aleksandar Jakir, *Dalmacija u međuratnom razdoblju 1918.-1941.* (Zagreb: Leykam 2018), 23.

⁷ Vassilis Petsinis, *National Identity in Serbia: The Vojvodina and a Multi-Ethnic Community in the Balkans* (London: I. B. Tauris 2020), 35-36.

⁸ Jakir, *Dalmacija u međuratnom razdoblju*, 31.

⁹ Nada Raduški, "Etničke migracije na prostoru Vojvodine u drugoj polovini 20. stoljeća," *Migracijske i etničke teme* 18, no. 4 (December 2002): 340.

¹⁰ Srđan Milošević, "Agrarna politika u Jugoslaviji (1945-1953)" (PhD diss., University of Belgrade 2015), 119.

¹¹ Milenko Beljanski, *Stanišić* (Senta 1985), 88; 93-94.

as the war drew to a close. This animosity was followed by two Yugoslav regulations in 1948 that stripped the remaining German minority residing in Yugoslavia of their citizenship.¹² In the case of Stanišić, the majority of its German residents were interned in Gakovo or Kruševlje camps, as well as in surrounding "salaš" (ranches), totalling up to 17,000 people, gathered from multiple surrounding districts.¹³ These actions effectively paved the way for the implementation of Agrarian Reform and Colonisation, with Dalmatia serving as a region of departure and Vojvodina as a region of settlement.

Arrival of Colonists in Stanišić

The Agrarian Reform implemented in Yugoslavia was part of a broader process of homogenisation and land redistribution carried out in the aftermath of the Second World War, mostly at the expense of German minorities across Eastern Europe.¹⁴ It also represented a culmination of land reform efforts started during the interwar period, which had never been fully implemented. Vojvodina was granted the status of an autonomous province within Serbia due to its multiethnic composition and distinct historical development.¹⁵ The forced expulsion of the German population resulted in a situation in which not only houses, but entire tracts of arable land were left unattended. At the same time impoverished rural populations of Yugoslavia, such as those in Dalmatia, western Bosnia, as well as Lika and Kordun in Croatia, were grappling with issues of overpopulation and food insecurity resulting from a scarcity of fertile land. Consequently, settling of Vojvodina with surplus population from those regions was seen as a means of alleviating demographic pressure while simultaneously filling the labour vacuum created by the German expulsion.¹⁶

The postwar colonisation effort resulted in a profound transformation of the ethnic composition of Vojvodina. Prior to the First World War, the three largest ethnic groups were Serbs, Hungarians and Germans, roughly in equal number. This balance was first altered by the interwar settlement of Serbian war veterans and subsequently, with numerous organised transports of primarily Serbian but also Croatian and Montenegrin settlers in 1945 and 1946. This mass migration is estimated to have involved up to a quarter of a million people. By 1948, Serbs accounted for approximately half of Vojvodina's population, largely as a result of the disappearance of the German ethnic group. In contrast, the Hungarian population experienced only a modest decline.¹⁷ The colonists were represented within the administrative decision-making process, with guaranteed positions at both municipal and district levels.¹⁸

¹² Igor Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav States: One Hundred Years of Citizenship* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2015), 62.

¹³ Beljanski, *Stanišić*, 105-106.

¹⁴ Dražen Živić, "Suvremene tendencije u razvoju stanovništva Hrvatske," *Diacovensia: teološki prilozi* 11, no. 2 (September 2003): 72.

¹⁵ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 55.

¹⁶ Vojin Radomirović, "Politika kao komponenta transformacije našeg sela," *Sociologija i prostor*, no. 34 (September 1971): 8.

¹⁷ Raduški, "Etničke migracije na prostoru Vojvodine," 340-341.

¹⁸ Marijan Maticka, "Sudjelovanje Hrvatske u saveznoj kolonizaciji 1945-1948. godine," *Zbornik*

The new government prioritised the inclusion of Partisan fighters and their families in the colonisation process. This policy was motivated by two key factors. First, it aligned with the established tradition of honouring and rewarding war veterans. Second, it served as a strategic measure to secure political support from these beneficiaries in rural areas. The settlement of Partisan veterans and their families made it easier to introduce socialist policies within rural regions, since the government could rely on them to support state policies.¹⁹ Land allocation was determined by several criteria, with the average applicant receiving between 8 and 12 cadastral acres. Certain groups, however, including war heroes, army officers, and large families, were granted up to 30% more land, while non-agrarian applicants typically received around 3 acres.²⁰ The government did not implement strict ethnic settlement quotas, partly because the initial wave of colonists consisted primarily of Partisan families. Nevertheless, priority was given to settling of individuals whose ethnic or religious affiliations did not differ significantly from one another.²¹

The prospect of participating in the colonisation of Vojvodina generated considerable interest in Dalmatia, where 4,533 applications were submitted. Following evaluation, the government authorised a quota of 2,000 families from the region. Although the government sought to increase the proportion of Croats among Dalmatian colonists, many of applicant localities had Serb majority populations. Exact figures distinguishing Serbs and Croats are unknown, as colonists were categorized primarily by region and place of origin, rather than ethnicity²² Establishing these numbers would require going through each individual family within the request form, but those numbers could still be inaccurate due to post-settlement attrition.

Following the visit by representatives from Dalmatia, colonisation formally commenced at the end of 1945 and continued until the summer of 1946.²³ Settlers from Croatia were directed to the Bačka region, specifically to the districts of Apatin, Odžaci and Sombor. Dalmatian colonists were concentrated in the Sombor district, where the commission allocated 1,330 family spots for Stanišić and 670 for Ridica, effectively creating a Dalmatian enclave there.²⁴ . The settlers were granted approximately 11,500 acres of arable land, with each family receiving between 6–8 or 10–14 acres, depending on their status as colonists. The remaining 608 acres were allocated to the local Hungarian, Serbian and Croatian populations.²⁵ According to

Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti 11 (January 1982): 295.

¹⁹ Petar Grubišić, "Agrarian Reform and Colonization as the Foundations for the Legitimate Rule of the Yugoslav Socialist Government: The Gateway towards Collectivization in Slavonia and Vojvodina," *Dilemmas: Review of Slovene Contemporary History* 6, no. 2 (December 2022): 146.

²⁰ *Zakon o Agrarnoj Reformi i Kolonizaciji*, Zagreb 1945, 7.

²¹ Nikola L. Gačeša, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija 1945–1948* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska 1984), 288.

²² Maticka, "Sudjelovanje Hrvatske," 299–300.

²³ Beljanski, *Stanišić*, 110–113.

²⁴ Maticka, "Sudjelovanje Hrvatske," 301–302.

²⁵ Mario Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata u saveznoj kolonizaciji Vojvodine 1945.–1948," *Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja* 2 (2010): 166.

documented sources, 1,029 families, comprising 5,430 individuals, arrived during this period. Together with the pre-existing local population, which consisted predominantly of Serbs and Hungarians, the total number of villagers reached 7,741. Although a number of colonists left the village before the census, either returning to Dalmatia or settling elsewhere, Dalmatian settlers nevertheless constituted about two-thirds of Stanišić's total population.²⁶

Before Yugoslavism: Local and Colonist Coexistence

The fact that colonists constituted the majority in Stanišić significantly facilitated their adaptation. In cases where newcomers formed a minority, local prejudice often resulted in more challenging circumstances for the newcomers.²⁷ Conversely, this also meant that they were not assimilated, but instead shaped the trajectory of the village. Research conducted by Borislav Dimković in unspecified colonist villages in Vojvodina less than two decades after settlement has presented valuable insight into relations between locals and colonists.²⁸ His survey indicates that, prior to the settlement, the colonists held a favourable opinion of the local population. However, after the initial period of reception, this opinion was challenged, and it became evident that the colonists' felt that they had not been welcomed as anticipated. This perception persisted even after the twenty-year period. The local population expressed a less than enthusiastic welcome to their new fellow villagers, although they did assist the colonists in the process of acclimatisation. It is probable that a degree of residual resentment persisted among local residents, who may have perceived themselves as having been wronged by the colonists. Nevertheless, locals asserted that they maintained a cordial relationship in the fields, though without much interaction between the two groups.²⁹

In general, the primary directives of local institutions were to foster positive relations between colonists and indigenous residents.³⁰ Despite these efforts, the latter frequently referred to newcomers as "novodošeljenici."³¹ In Stanišić, this division remains discernible today, as locals refer to colonists as "dođoši," while colonists, in turn, call them "meštani."³²

Social relations in Stanišić can be divided into two principal categories: first, the relationship between locals (Serbs, Croats [Bunjevci] and Hungarians) and newcomers, and second, the relationship among the various colonist groups who were suddenly required to share the same living space. Although locals and newcomers, with the exception of the Hungarians, shared a common language, in a wider sense, significant cultural differences created friction during the initial period. The terms used to this

²⁶ Beljanski, *Stanišić*, 130.

²⁷ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 172.

²⁸ Borislav Dimković, "Međusobni odnosi i uticaji starosedelaca i kolonista posle II svetskog rata," *Sociologija i prostor*, no. 5-6 (July 1964), 100-109.

²⁹ Dimković, "Međusobni odnosi i uticaji," 106-108.

³⁰ Maticka, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija*, 134.

³¹ Petsinis, *National Identity in Serbia*, 68.

³² Interview in Stanišić 2, 13.9. 2022.

day to designate a member of the other group are a testament to these divisions. The local population was concentrated in the poorer, southern part of the village. The toponym "Jamrtal" is a derivative of the German word "Jammer," which signifies "the valley of sorrow or moaning."³³ Therefore, it is not surprising that, prior to the arrival of the colonists, the local population attempted to settle in abandoned German houses but were forcibly removed by local authorities, with the exception of Partisan fighters. Nevertheless, locals greeted the arriving colonists cordially, offering them food and drink.³⁴ Consequently, this also entailed the continued separation of the local population and the colonists, who adhered to the previously established separation lines delineated by the German population.

Differences also existed among the colonists themselves. Dalmatia is geographically divided into three distinct areas: the islands, the coast, and the hinterland. The phenomenon of population shifts has resulted in the formation of homogeneous communities while the region as a whole has maintained its heterogeneity.³⁵ The geographical borders of the region also played a significant role in the naming of its inhabitants. Islanders were collectively referred to as "Boduli," coastal inhabitants as "Fetivi," residents of the hinterland as "Vlaji," a term derived from Vlach and historically employed in a derogatory manner. These separations were not predicated on ethnic or religious lines but solely on place of residence. Most colonists originated mostly from the hinterland, primarily the districts of Sinj, Split, Knin, Metković, and Šibenik. Smaller numbers arrived from other Dalmatian districts, including seventy-two families who had been settled in Macedonia during the interwar period, but were expelled by Bulgarian authorities in 1941.³⁶ Although these internal distinctions initially existed, they were quickly subordinated to the broader division between colonists and locals. The only group consistently singled out as different were the interwar settlers from Macedonia, referred to by other colonists as "Makedonci," with some disputing that they had any connection to Dalmatia at all.³⁷

The impact of the newcomers was evident in the alteration of the name of one street to "Dalmatinska." In contrast to the colonists from other regions, Dalmatian settlers were not housed according to their area of origin, but were instead mixed.³⁸ Initial settlement was primarily determined by a first come, first served policy, as incoming organised transports rapidly populated the village. However, certain exceptions were made for Partisan heroes and large families, who received better housing. Nevertheless, there were instances in which familial units were required to share accommodation. Claims were made that either Croats or Serbs were favoured in housing allocation, but there is no data to suggest that ethnicity played a role in

³³ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 165.

³⁴ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 164.

³⁵ Dejan Stjepanović, *Multiethnic Regionalisms in Southeastern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2018), 110.

³⁶ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 164.

³⁷ Momčilo Popadić, "S Dalmatincima po panonskom moru," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, January 26, 1989.

³⁸ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 166.

distribution.³⁹ If it had, this would be easily visible in placement patterns, which instead show that both ethnicities were intermixed.⁴⁰

The role of colonists as agents of the great tradition is most clearly reflected in the formation of peasant cooperatives, alongside the destruction of religious monuments. The Communist Party was cautious in its initial approach to socialist policies in rural areas, as evidenced by the establishment of four distinct tiers of agricultural cooperatives. The least intrusive resembled interwar family cooperatives. The Party assumed that peasants would more readily cooperate with siblings or compatriots than with strangers.⁴¹ Although no formal compulsion was present, a significant proportion of colonists in Stanišić relinquished their land and joined cooperatives. Their enthusiasm, bolstered by their wartime background, led to the adoption of the name "Tito's Eighth Offensive" for the entire endeavour. The *Bratstvo i Jedinstvo* cooperative was established by individuals hailing from the Knin District, while *Krka* was formed by residents from the Šibenik area. The foundation of *Jadran* was initiated by islanders from Korčula, whereas *Napredak* was meant to unify other islanders.⁴²

The first true test of coexistence in Stanišić occurred during the height of the Cominform conflict. Suddenly, suspicion fell on the Hungarian population due to escalating hostilities that led to the establishment of armed village patrols, resulting in the death of one individual near the border. The local Party was concerned with the possibility of Hungarians being influenced by Radio Budapest propaganda.⁴³ Notably, the decision of three hundred young colonists to join the village Hungarian culture organisation, which was facing the prospect of dissolution following the demise of its founder, should not be interpreted as merely symbolic but a calculated political act. Subsequently, the local Party sought to encourage a greater number of Hungarians to participate in their initiatives as a means of integrating them into the political life of the village. Despite this, their participation remained low even in the late 1950s.⁴⁴

One of Cominform's criticisms was directed at Yugoslav economic policy, and more specifically, land distribution to private individuals, after which the government opted for rapid collectivisation.⁴⁵ While colonists accepted the establishment of peasant cooperatives and the process of collectivisation, they were firmly against land consolidation, a policy implemented poorly.⁴⁶ Their opposition stemmed from the fact that this policy required not only the reorganization of land, but also the reallocation of households. Resistance took various forms. This included verbal

³⁹ Interview Stanišić, September 15, 2022.

⁴⁰ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 169.

⁴¹ Melissa K. Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941-1953*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1998), 66-67.

⁴² Beljanski, *Stanišić*, 138.

⁴³ Istorijški arhiv Sombor, F-221 Sreski Komitet SKS Sombor.

⁴⁴ Istorijški arhiv Sombor, F-221 Sreski Komitet SKS Sombor.

⁴⁵ Jeronim Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9, no. 2 (2007): 58.

⁴⁶ Vjenceslav Medić, "Devedeset godina komasacija u Hrvatskoj," *Sociologija i prostor*, no. 119-120 (June 1993): 111-112.

denunciation, refusal to sign the necessary documentation, and non-attendance at meetings regarding the matter. The commission typically overruled their objections, and land consolidation continued, citing the individual's alleged misconduct or disloyal political inclinations.⁴⁷ Though the policy was concluded in 1953, it generated numerous legal disputes concerning land ownership, prompting corrective measures initiated with the Second Agrarian Reform of 1953 and the Law of Land Consolidation in 1954, with the objective of resolving the issues of contested land in the village.⁴⁸ Collectivisation also had an impact on political participation among the peasantry in Vojvodina, with about half of them leaving the Party by 1953.⁴⁹

A further consequence of the dispute with Cominform was a second wave of returnees to Dalmatia, driven by concerns about the possibility of an impending war. Fear was also spreading that the Germans might return and repossess their homes. The proximity of work camps for German expellees in Gakovo and Kruševlje contributed to this sentiment. An initial wave occurred in 1948, precipitated by challenges in adapting to novel terrain and agricultural practices. The returnees were primarily coastal inhabitants and islanders from Šibenik, Korčula, as well as from the more inland town of Metković (Bara 2010, 168-169).⁵⁰ By 1956, only 867 families remained, consisting mostly of colonists from the Dalmatian hinterland (Bara 2010, 166).⁵¹ Consequently, it is unsurprising that the term "Vlaj" disappeared from local usage. Notwithstanding, by 1958, the Party (renamed the League of Communists) expressed concern over emerging localism, which was perceived as disruptive to village harmony.⁵² Moreover, colonists retained subtle features of *otherness* connected to their point of origin which, in combination with familial ties to Dalmatia, created an entry point for the emergence of nationalism.⁵³ They maintained close ties with their fellow communities in the region of their origin, and also forged strong relations with the nearby village of Riđica, which was also settled by Dalmatian colonists. Later, a certain type of local patriotism emerged, and even antagonism against others, irrespective of nationality.⁵⁴

Yugoslavism from Great to Little Tradition

Socialist Yugoslavism sought to avoid the mistakes of its interwar version. The government hoped that a federation of equal republics would gradually encourage a natural spread of Yugoslav identity through social mixing and improved living conditions.⁵⁵ Additionally, the Constitution of 1948 enshrined the principle of self-declaration. In the 1953 census, respondents were given the option of declaring themselves either as "Yugoslav-uncommitted" or "national-uncommitted." That same year, the

⁴⁷ Istorijski arhiv Sombor, F-150, Narodni odbor opštine Stanišić (1944-1962), box 123.

⁴⁸ Medić, "Devedeset Godina," 112.

⁴⁹ Dimković, "Međusobni odnosi," 41-42.

⁵⁰ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 168-169.

⁵¹ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 166.

⁵² Sombor, F-221 Sreski Komitet SKS Sombor.

⁵³ Interview Stanišić, September 15, 2022.

⁵⁴ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 170.

⁵⁵ Sekulić, Massey, Hodson, "Ethnic intolerance," 86.

Party declared that the national question had been resolved in perpetuity and that the foundations for cultivating a Yugoslav socialist consciousness had been laid. Furthermore, it was asserted that a unified Yugoslav community would eventually prevail over the existing national consciousness.⁵⁶ The "National Yugoslavism" project, implemented from a top-down perspective, endured throughout the latter half of the 1950s.⁵⁷ The utilisation of socialist Yugoslavism as a supranational connecting tissue for nations was not intended to provide a supplemental structure, but rather to cultivate a robust sense of belonging. Accordingly, efforts for a common standardisation of the different language variations were initiated in 1954, and the trajectory of socialist Yugoslavism was substantiated at the Seventh Party Congress in 1958.⁵⁸

One of the primary factors fostering solidarity was the confrontation with the Soviet Union, which mobilised the population in support of the Yugoslav Communist Party. The successful resistance to external pressure, coupled with economic growth strengthened public support for Party programmes and gradual liberalisation through worker's self-management. Grandits argues that the Party also responded to the movement "from below" by promoting "socialist Yugoslavism" as a form of "national feeling" in the period following the weakening of centralised control, which led to the further federalisation of the country.⁵⁹ The Eighth Party Congress in 1964 advocated for the decentralisation of power, which ultimately led to the dissolution of Yugoslavism as a unifying political and cultural project for South Slavic populations, at least from a top-down perspective.⁶⁰ Decentralisation has been identified as a pivotal factor in the resurgence of the "national question." Consequently, the concept of socialist Yugoslavism was replaced by the concept of the unity of the Yugoslav nations and nationalities.⁶¹

However, the public did not always follow the government's proclamations, and an increasing number declared themselves ethnationally as Yugoslavs. Their number grew from 273,000 in 1971 to 1,219,000 in 1981, representing an increase from 1.3% to 5.4% of the total population.⁶² The most significant increase occurred in 1981, when the number of declared Yugoslavs increased fivefold, with the largest concentrations found in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vojvodina. The geographical focal point of this phenomenon was identified in urban centres and border regions.⁶³ Štiks argues that, despite the renunciation of Yugoslavism by politicians and intellectuals, the concept persisted through its deep-

⁵⁶ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 59.

⁵⁷ Hannes Grandits, "Dynamics of Socialist Nation-Building: The Short Lived Programme of Promoting a Yugoslav National Identity and Some Comparative Perspectives," *Two Homelands* 27 (January 2008): 16.

⁵⁸ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 91.

⁵⁹ Grandits, "Dynamics of Socialist Nation-Building," 21.

⁶⁰ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 92.

⁶¹ Grandits, "Dynamics of Socialist Nation-Building," 23.

⁶² Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 95.

⁶³ Snježana Mrđen, "Narodnost u popisima. Promjenljiva i nestalna kategorija," *Stanovništvo* (January 2002): 89-90.

rooted acceptance among the general populace.⁶⁴ From this perspective, Yugoslavism was slowly becoming more part of a little than great tradition, at least when viewing people vs. state.

Rise of Yugoslavism in Stanišić

The status of republic belonging and citizenship assumed an increasingly significant role within the political sphere of Yugoslavia. Individuals who self-identified as Yugoslavs encountered difficulties in terms of recognition and representation. As Štiks argues, the Yugoslavs never possessed any territory that could be considered exclusively their own. He identifies internal migrants as the sole demographic capable of being designated as Yugoslav, as they were able to utilise the advantages of Yugoslav citizenship to its fullest extent.⁶⁵

The process of confederalisation in Yugoslavia in 1974 granted Vojvodina a level of autonomy which was effectively on par with that of the republics, including its own League of Communists. Non-South Slavic ethnic groups were also guaranteed equal rights. In Vojvodina, the most prominent minority group were the Hungarians, who were permitted to use their language in public institutions.⁶⁶ In a culturally and ethnically diverse region such as Vojvodina, the adoption of a unified Yugoslav identity functioned as a mechanism for mitigating cultural and interpersonal tensions. Embracing it, therefore, entailed a dissociation from the nation's past, and alignment with a progressive socialist society. This stance has its origins in the Partisan movement and was subsequently adopted by state institutions and workplaces. For younger generations, Yugoslavism offered a form of self-expression that diverged from the behaviours and values of their predecessors, thus further denouncing the nationalist past associated with wartime suffering.⁶⁷

Following the turbulent first decade, tensions in Stanišić gradually subsided. This is evident in request by individuals, previously expelled due to presumed Cominform sympathies, to rejoin the local Party. ⁶⁸ Moreover, efforts were made to reach out to the Hungarian population, especially after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.⁶⁹

Census data from National Structure of Population in FNR (SFR) Yugoslavia⁷⁰ between 1961 and 1981, reveal ethnic identity fluctuations as well as the level of acceptance of Yugoslavism within the village (Graph 1). In 1961, declarations mostly followed ethnic lines. Only eight villagers registered as Yugoslavs, while 4,464 declared as Serbs, 1,814 as Croats, and 1,019 as Hungarians. Even intra-party declarations in the 1950s show an absence

⁶⁴ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 96.

⁶⁵ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 81.

⁶⁶ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 73.

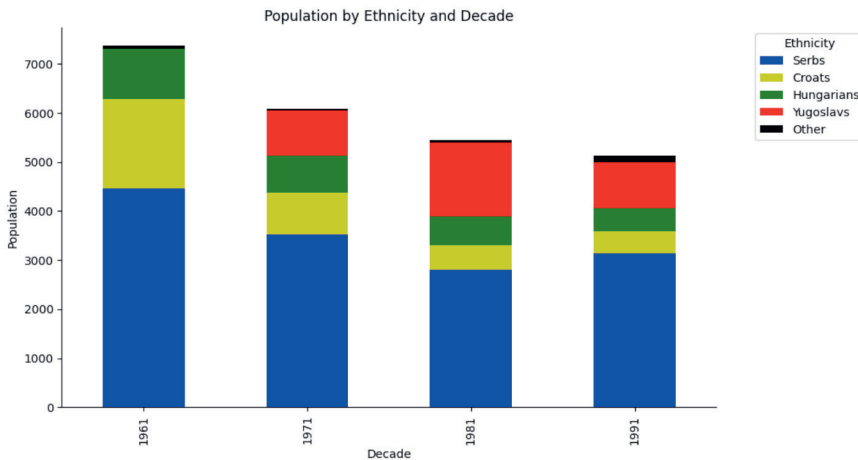
⁶⁷ Sekulić, Massey, Hodson, "Ethnic intolerance," 85-86.

⁶⁸ F-221 Sreski Komitet SKS Sombor.

⁶⁹ F-221 Sreski Komitet SKS Sombor.

⁷⁰ National Structure of Population in FNR/SFR Yugoslavia: Data on Localities and Communes, Population, Households and Dwellings Census 1961; 1971; 1981, Federal Statistical Office of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

of declared Yugoslavs in the village.⁷¹ By 1971, the number of Serbs fell to 3,526, Croats to 845 and Hungarians to 758. Although this can partially be explained with a drop in total population of the village from 7,521 to 6,156, a contributing factor was certainly the fact that the number of Yugoslavs rose to 918. By 1981, despite a further population decrease to 5,476, the number of Yugoslavs nearly doubled, reaching 1,512, accounting for more than one-quarter of the population of Stanišić. This change cannot be attributed to a single ethnic group since the number of Serbs declined to 2,804, Croats to 492, and Hungarians to 585. At this point, most first-generation colonists had passed away, indicating that the Yugoslav identity was being declared by their children and grandchildren. On the surface level, there is a clear absence of regionalism since there is no significant presence of declared Dalmatians in any census. Vojvodina offered an opportunity for people to declare themselves regionally, unlike Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they would be entered as undeclared.⁷² In the case of Stanišić, only four people chose this option.⁷³



Graph 1. Population of Stanišić by Ethnicity and Decade (Federal Statistical Office)

Graph 2 gives us a comparison of Stanišić within the Bačka region and broader trends in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The comparison presented in the second graph is clearly indicative of the anomaly of Yugoslavism in Stanišić when compared to other colonists villages of Kljajićevo, where 800 families from Lika were settled, and Bački Brestovac, colonised by 850 families from Kordun.⁷⁴ The maximum percentage of the population identifying as Yugoslavs recorded for Stanišić was 27.79%, whilst the highest percentages recorded for Kljajićevo and Brestovac were 8.82% and 10.66%, respectively. Data from the city of Sombor and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina further illustrate this phenomenon. It is evident that

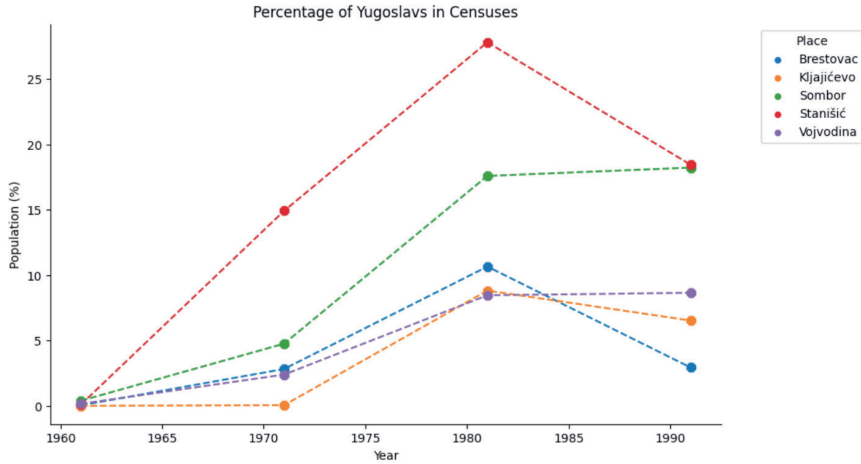
⁷¹ F-221 Sreski Komitet SKS Sombor.

⁷² Mrđen, "Narodnost u popisima," 84-85.

⁷³ Beljanski, *Stanišić*, 175; 184; 188.

⁷⁴ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 162-163.

the city of Sombor, an urban centre in which Yugoslavism was expected to be the most pronounced, did not catch up to Stanišić until the 1991 census, when it reached 18.21% Yugoslavs compared to Stanišić's 18.44%, while Vojvodina stood at 8.65% at the time. Additional evidence linking this peculiar case of Stanišić to Dalmatian origins is provided by the nearby village of Riđica, also settled by Dalmatians, which followed a similar trend of rising Yugoslav identity.



Graph 2. Percentage of Yugoslavs in Censuses in Vojvodina (Federal Statistical Office)

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As previously stated, Sekulić, Massey, and Hodson identified four reasons for the emergence of Yugoslav identity: modernisation, political participation, mixed marriages and minority-majority status.⁷⁵ The hypothesis that the modernisation process, primarily improvements in living standards, acted as a catalyst for Yugoslavisation is partially substantiated in the case of Stanišić. The Colonists who settled in the village came from some of the poorest regions of Yugoslavia, making the move itself a modernising event. Though the village was initially impoverished and undeveloped, it underwent significant infrastructural development in later years and decades, beginning with road paving and the gradual process of semi-urbanisation by the late 1980s. Population growth and infrastructure improvements effectively elevated Stanišić to the de facto status of a small town. Education, rather than infrastructure, played a more significant role in the acceptance of Yugoslav identity. The availability of short courses was instrumental in facilitating hitherto unprecedented social mobility among colonists. Younger generations attained even higher levels of education and later dispersed throughout Yugoslavia.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Sekulić, Massey, and Hodson, "Ethnic intolerance and ethnic conflict in the dissolution of Yugoslavia," 85-86.

⁷⁶ Interview in Stanišić 1, 13.9.2022.

Political participation is most visible through the Partisan legacy brought by the colonists. This legacy manifested most prominently in an antireligious stance, which eradicated the previously established religious boundaries between Dalmatian Croats and Serbs. Upon arrival in Stanišić, colonists proceeded to dismantle religious statues in their area of the village. There was minimal response from the local population as the actions did not take place within their immediate vicinity. The establishment of a joint graveyard can be interpreted as a reaffirmation of the colonists' anti-religious stance rather than a symbol of communal unity.⁷⁷ Their political activity was also evident within the peasant cooperatives. One was initially called *Generalisimus Staljin*, only to be renamed *Edvard Kardelj* after the Cominform Resolution of 1948. Some colonists also believed that accepting Yugoslavism would give them an advantage while climbing the Party ladder.⁷⁸

It is reasonable to conclude that demographic factors played the most significant role in the spread of Yugoslav identity in Stanišić. A significant proportion of mixed marriages between Serbs and Croats deviated from the customary agnatic determination of ethnic affiliation for their offspring. Instead, these unions recognised cognatic lineage, most clearly articulated through the concept of Yugoslav identity. Furthermore, in certain instances, parents would ultimately adopt Yugoslav identity, perceiving it as an organic choice. Regarding unions between locals and colonists, initially, it was predominantly male colonists who took local women as wives, rather than the reverse. Furthermore, numerous unions between colonists of Stanišić and Riđica have been documented.⁷⁹

The concept of minority-majority status does not emerge as a significant factor in the formation of Yugoslav identity in Stanišić. While Croats in Vojvodina adopted Yugoslav identity as a defensive measure against nationalists, it is more probable that the populace of Stanišić embraced it as a form of protest during the rising tensions of the 1960s and as a gesture of support for the state during the 1970s, although interviews did not explicitly state that events like the Croatian Spring influenced the shift.

Decline of the Yugoslav Phenomenon

Štiks argues that Yugoslavism remained relevant in the post-Tito period, predominantly as a reaction to rising nationalistic sentiments and the distancing of the republics. Yugoslavism became a way to preserve its community and the state from disintegration. But he also highlights its main weakness: "Yugoslavism went through transformations that eventually emptied it of almost any cultural and mobilizing political content. [...] Clearly, these various definitions did not aim at formulating, and could not have formulated, any coherent or mobilizing political platform for Yugoslavia in its final decade but rather a specific intellectual and political attitude."⁸⁰

This structural weakness proved inadequate to resist the resurgence of nationalism that ultimately led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. During

⁷⁷ Miljenko Smoje, *Skitam i pitam*, Slobodna Dalmacija, November 27, 1985.

⁷⁸ Interview in Stanišić 2, 15.9.2022.

⁷⁹ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 170.

⁸⁰ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 94-95.

the 1991 census, Yugoslavs were under considerable pressure from both the media and nationalistic political parties to abandon their identity in favour of an ethnic identity. The act of identifying oneself as Yugoslav became a social taboo within the newly emerging nation states. However, it is noteworthy that Vojvodina recorded 70,000 more declared Yugoslavs when compared to 1981.⁸¹ Stanišić's contribution to this number is absent, and instead exhibited a significant decrease in the number of Yugoslavs. Going back to Graph 1 and adding the 1991 census data⁸² the village continued its demographic decline, falling to 5,131 residents. Unlike previous decades, this time the number of Yugoslavs almost halved, going from 1,522 to 946. At the same time, the number of Serbs rose from 2,804 to 3,140, while Croats experienced a minor decline from 492 to 454, and Hungarians from 585 to 459.

The decline of Yugoslavism in the 1990s can be attributed to two external factors. The primary factor is evidently the general disintegration of the Federation, while the secondary factor is family ties. The Partisan heritage of the colonists, or more precisely, their role as adherents of state policies in the village, should not be disregarded. The colonist population of Stanišić had demonstrated a strong tendency to align its politics with the state, which meant that they were unlikely to resist changing political narratives. Just as the older generation of colonists had been staunch supporters of the Party and of its regulations, the younger was more susceptible to the rising climate of nationalist tensions, once it became the dominant ideological narrative of the state. This interpretation is further substantiated by the observation that colonist villages in Vojvodina frequently served as focal points for political protest, while non-colonist villages exhibited greater cohesion and demonstrated a more robust response to the evolving political landscape.⁸³

Another contributing factor were the enduring ties to the home region of Dalmatia. The connection between the two regions never truly ceased, and the arrival of a visitor from Dalmatia was met with a modest celebration within the household.⁸⁴ Despite geographical distance and political divisions, the connections between the two groups remained strong even as late as 1989, Families often sent their children for summer vacations to Dalmatia, or even owned property on the Adriatic coast.⁸⁵ These bonds were sustained through a variety of means, including regular visits, telephone conversations, and the exchange of local products and letters. Despite the process of acculturation and modernisation that took place in the village, the Dalmatian identity survived in some forms, like "ikavica," a dialect feature specific to that region.⁸⁶ They also kept some culinary traditions like "brudet," cod, and Swiss chard and were playing "balote," "briškole," "trešete" and "šijavica."⁸⁷ However, this cultural identity also served as a constant reminder

⁸¹ Mrđen, "Narodnost u popisima," 90.

⁸² Census of population, households, apartments and agricultural holdings in 1991, Federal Statistical Office of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

⁸³ Petsinis, *National Identity in Serbia*, 86.

⁸⁴ Dimković, "Međusobni odnosi," 107.

⁸⁵ Interview in Stanišić 1, September 13, 2022.

⁸⁶ Momčilo Popadić, "S Dalmatincima po panonskom moru," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, January 26, 1989.

⁸⁷ Mijlenko Smoje, "Skitam i pitam," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, November 27, 1985.

of the separation between Croats and Serbs. Growing ethnic antagonism in the Dalmatian hinterland stood in opposition with Yugoslavism.

Once ethnic tensions intensified under the influence of nationalist rhetoric from competing political elites, Yugoslavs were among the first to be marginalised. The outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars and the establishment of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina [Srpska Krajina] in Croatia in 1991 compelled some Croats to vacate the village, either due to external pressures or, in some cases, bomb attacks on their houses.⁸⁸ According to Raduški, in 1996 Vojvodina hosted some 260,000 Serb refugees from various regions affected by war, whose presence can be partially attributed to family ties from centuries of Serb settlement in Vojvodina. Some of them settled in houses abandoned by Croats. The post-Yugoslavia landscape triggered more ethnocentric migrations, with populations gradually relocating to their respective national states. Still, more than 90% of municipalities in Vojvodina have an ethnically heterogeneous population.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The manifestation of Yugoslavism in Stanišić represents a distinctive paradigm, not only for Vojvodina, but for the broader context of Yugoslavia. The combination of hardships endured during Partisan resistance, in addition to the challenges encountered in adapting to the new land, were further compounded during the confrontation with Cominform. This confrontation led to the initiation of collectivisation, resulting in upheavals and, ultimately, the establishment of a resilient core of colonists who embraced the Yugoslav concept. Although not immediately apparent, the combination of factors that led to the promotion of Yugoslav supraculture laid the foundations for its flourishing in the 1970s. The primary catalysts for this phenomenon was a combination of modernisation, political participation based on Partisan background as well as mixed marriages. Sharing a common Dalmatian heritage while being distant from traditional divisions, rendered them ideal candidates. Nevertheless, this inclination to align with state policies resulted in a paradigm shift that became evident in the 1990s, when, in a manner consistent with other colonist villages, Yugoslavism was abruptly abandoned. This phenomenon was driven by external pressures, compounded by the younger generation's diminished sense of affiliation with the home region and Partisan legacy. Moreover, due to their familial connections, they were exposed to divergent narratives regarding the concept of Dalmatia, which were either Croat or Serb-centric.

In the contemporary context, Stanišić's identity is characterised by the near absence of both Croatian and Yugoslav ethnic elements. During the Yugoslav wars, the Croatian population was largely displaced, primarily due to the actions of radicalised Serbs. This has resulted in a decline in the number of Croatians to less than a hundred, with their demographic being replaced by distant relatives of the Serbian colonists, who were being expelled from Dalmatia at the same time. On the other hand, the Yugoslavs

⁸⁸ Bara, "Sudjelovanje Hrvata," 183.

⁸⁹ Raduški, "Etničke migracije na prostoru Vojvodine," 342; 345.

gradually disappeared following the dissolution of the state to which they were affiliated. They lacked a stabilising factor. The most significant factors contributing to the dissemination of Yugoslav identity, namely education, political participation, and mixed marriages, succumbed to the influence of nationalism. This is particularly evident in the retrospective reassertion of agnatic ancestry, whereby the children of mixed marriages were reassigned to their fathers' nationalities. Village toponyms underwent a process of Serbisation, resulting in the erasure of the majority of Yugoslav and Croatian elements. One notable exception remains the elementary school named after the Croatian poet and Partisan Ivan Goran Kovačić. The legacy of the colonists is also preserved in the nomenclature of the streets, as evidenced by the name "Dalmatinska." In contemporary society, the older generation often reflects nostalgically on lost harmony and unity, and there is a palpable sense of sadness regarding the separation. In contrast, the younger generation has been observed to adopt either an indifferent stance or to perceive the entirety of the past seventy years through the prism of events that transpired during the 1990s. Despite the evident passage of time and the subsequent demographic changes that have taken place in the region, both Serbs and Croats from Stanišić continue to regard Dalmatia as their ancestral homeland. The prevailing sentiment among the populace is one of nostalgia for a bygone era, accompanied by a sense of uncertainty regarding the potential outcomes had circumstances been different.

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