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Yugoslav Socialism and its Aftermath as Viewed Through the Lens of Personal Experiences in the Balkans, 1953-2004

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Yugoslav Socialism and its Aftermath as Viewed Through the Lens of Personal Experiences in the Balkans, 1953-2004 by Joel Martin Halpern (All rights reserved)

In this brief essay I plan initially to focus on how Yugoslav government policies affected my research. But, at the same time, through this approach I wish to explore the much more important question as to the ways in which the Yugoslav variety of socialism, as developed in a centralized communist and ideologically bound state, affected the everyday lives of the people in that country. The time frame I am considering is some four decades beginning with the early 1950s. The events recounted here from memory are not intended as the established view of the past but rather as selected reflections on happenings now long past. .

As I came to know it the Yugoslav communist system was far from as brutal as in Albania, where there was, for example, an attempt to abolish religious institutions. Nor was it as dogmatic as in Bulgaria, which had a dominant orientation with historical roots, based on its formal unswerving allegiance to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav system was, in essence, founded on an autocratic organization of power and privilege using, if you will, the Stalinist idea of democratic centralism. Thus, in my view, ultimate power always resided with the police and the army. (Djilas, of course, first publicly discussed these ideas in the early 1950s, he began with a series of articles and, subsequently, in several books (which he had significant time to create during his multiple jail terms imposed by his wartime colleague, Tito.)

This did not mean necessarily that Yugoslav government policy as developed by the Communist Party was always uniformly interpreted and implemented, in what was once, an historically and ethnically diverse country. Early in my work I was impressed, for example, by the diverse manifestations of state policy. As might be expected, I, on occasion, had greatly varying encounters at the Foreign and Interior Ministries. In contrast to officialdom, in my daily experiences in places as different as Universities and

villages I obtained quite other perspectives. . Here I only suggest that there was a seemingly public face of those in control constructing "new" political forms of organization as in seemingly endless constitutional revisions and officially sanctioned experimenting with social policy as in "Workers' Self Management." Great effort was expended by Party intellectuals on these matters. It is curious but today one wonders who would ever bother today having another look at the mountains of publications on this topic, aside from searching for material for a satire.. Much more important, in all the years that Tito and his associates were in power there never was anything resembling a free public opinion. There were no steps toward a truly democratic system where competing ideas, ideologies and programs were linked to anything resembling a free press and a meaningful electoral process. I am not saying that all controversial topics were ignored, rather it was not possible to openly challenge the existing monopoly on state power that was held by the party, police and the army..

Writing from North America in the year 2005 four years after the experiences of 9/11 in New York City and Washington, D.C. and the American invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan and events in Madrid and London, among other places, one cannot, of course, be complacent about the use of state power in the West. In the United States with the subsequent creation of a new governmental Department of Homeland Security after 9/11 it is obviously necessary to not be simply moralistic about differences, as they existed between "West" and "East." in the latter part of the 20th century. That said Western democracies do not act in the same ways as totalitarian states, witness the status of radical Muslims and Muslim communities in Western Europe and in the U.S. after 9/11 and in Europe after the Madrid bombings, the public killing in the Netherlands and the, most recent, tragedies in London. Westerners have now begun to think about the actions of their own security forces in states of emergency. . I mention these matters because in the 1950s in Yugoslavia the security forces of the Interior Ministry, then know by their initials as UDBA, were omnipresent in everyone's lives even though their actions were less severe than in Stalin's time in the Soviet Union. In Western Europe, of course, the shadow of the Nazi past was much present in the 1950s. America too had its security manias in this time in the person of U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy whose

tentacles reached into the U.S. diplomatic community in Belgrade when his henchmen came looking for "Communist books" in the U.S. Information Service Library in Belgrade. Fortunately their provinciality and stupidity confined their passions. They were, however, a challenge nevertheless. Overall when we first arrived in 1953 Yugoslavia was just then merging from its Stalinist mode.

Yugoslav socialism clearly came into existence as a result of the victorious Partisan struggle in World War II. Along with the destruction of the pre-existing Yugoslavia's Serbian dynasty, the epic Partisan's struggle against the Nazi invaders helped insure the fact that this country was not directly liberated by the Soviet Army as was the case in all the neighboring states except for Albania and Greece. . Of course, there was simultaneously a brutal and very bloody internal civil war waged by the Partisans in which the Partisans were the victors and the nationalist Serbs and Croatian fascist state among the vanquished. The Partisan victors created the "new" Yugoslavia as a socialist, Communist state using as their sense of legitimacy and absolute justification the rationale for all state action being their defeat of the invaders. They memorialized endlessly throughout the country their victory. In every town there were monuments and sculptures, the bookstore shelves groaned under the also endless books about the Partisan victory in all its provincial detail. Everywhere there were memorialized lists of heroes. . These monuments were exclusively for the victors. The vanquished opponents in the civil war were banished from history. Their names were on no monuments, nor were their views given any voice in the torrent of publications memorializing the NOB, the People's Liberation War. It surely is an irony of history that when in the 1990s the Serbian army gunners surrounded Sarajevo and purposely targeted the Bosnian National Library the priceless Ottoman ear manuscripts were destroyed while somehow the literature of socialist Yugoslavia survived because of its location. But the Serbian gunner did low up the museum erected in memory of the Serbian assassins of the Austrian Archduke which helped bring about World War I.

Tito's image was omnipresent - there were the expected portraits in public offices and front pieces in schoolbooks. But there was a whole iconography of Tito - in bronze busts, wood carvings and portraits -

the benign father for children, the fearless warrior for the military, the statesman for the foreign ministry, the devout apprentice for the workers, the thoughtful leader as an inspiration for the intellectuals. Fittingly some of this imagery now resides on a humorous Web site.

To make the system work it was, of course, necessary; first, to suppress all potential political opposition that might endanger the system. This necessitated the execution of primary opponents and the imprisonment of those who were deemed less of a threat. His former close associate Milovan Djilas has given a useful view of this process in its initial stages. He was, of course, complicit in the securing of power. Thus the slogan "Brotherhood and Unity," continued to be officially espoused long after it had lost its essential meaning. This suppression of conflict both actual and potential between national groups was one reason that the system ultimately disintegrated so rapidly and so completely amidst the mass killings of the 1990s. This comment, of course, begs the question as to why some former communist states like Czechoslovakia were able to peacefully split into national components without violence. A portion of that explanation certainly lies in the historic conflicts between Rome and Byzantium, There were the opposed views of Orthodoxy, as manifested in churches linked to a national heritages, and the universality of the Catholic Church. To this must, of course, be added the significance of the presence of Islam in Europe. This remains a question hardly resolved in Europe today in countries outside of the Balkans. The events of the 1990s and the subsequent breakup of Yugoslavia and the emergence of new states did, however, create a new time frame, which bracketed the existence of Yugoslav socialism. In all my experiences in what was Yugoslavia from the 1950s through the 1980s life courses of people of my generation were always bracketed by the time frame, "pre i poslje rata" (before and after the War, i.e. World War II). Now, of course, there are whole sets of new meanings attached to this expression the before and after now obviously referring to the wars of the 1990s. These well-known events do, however, provide an indispensable background for my personal exploration of the impacts of Yugoslav socialism.

The thrust of this essay is an attempt, by means of an abbreviated memoir, to explore how Yugoslav socialism impacted everyday life in the former Yugoslavia. My observations derive from my periods of intermittent residence from the early fifties into the 1980s. Initially I resided for approximately a year in the Serbian village of Orasac but also spent considerable time in Belgrade and also traveled widely in all of the then Republics. Subsequent stays in the succeeding decades, varied from summers, to multiple residences of six months to a year or more. In the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century visits were of shorter duration but did involve travel to war zones.

It cannot be too strongly stressed that when we (my wife and I) first arrived in Yugoslavia in the summer of 1953 it was the height of the cold war. Yugoslavia's break with the Cominform was still fresh. As were wartime experiences. I was born in 1929 and so was then barely 24. Although I had had a bicycle tour of Western Europe in 1949 and had traveled extensively in North America this was my first visit to a Communist country. I had no overt family ties to Europe as my ancestors had all migrated to America by the beginning of the 20th century so World War II and its devastating impacts were then more or less an abstraction for me. . But in my education I was very much a product of this cold war. In the late 1940s while an undergraduate majoring in history at the University of Michigan I had become interested in Eastern Europe and what was then the Soviet Union. As a graduate student while I was engaged in the Ph.D. program in anthropology at Columbia University I also took courses at the Russian Institute at Columbia This was part of an area studies program which developed after 1945.. These courses dealt with Russia and the Soviet Union-- its economy, legal system, history, and literature. I had a somewhat unique and challenging education in a mix of courses that I designed for myself. In a given semester I would have courses in human evolutions, physical anthropology, Marxian economics, anthropological theory and the international relations of the Soviet Union among other topics. It is a wonder I survived with any kind of coherent outlook.

It would require a separate essay to contrast the then outlook of sociocultural anthropology with that of the point of view of Soviet area studies. Understandably both perspectives seem somewhat antique now. Certainly in both situations there was either explicit or implicit the idea of the consequences of imperial power. Back then, of course, it was easier for Americans to think of the USSR as an imperial state rather than to look inward. But back then there were the consequences of at that time having the height of the cold war. As noted in the United States, especially, this was the period of the rabid red baiting by Senator Joe McCarthy. He ultimately died in disgrace but not before he had inflicted much damage on American society. He also caused great difficulties for many Americans who were loyal citizens. Some years ago I explored the Columbia University Archives and found ample evidence as to how this period affected my professors. They were among the most prominent in the study of Soviet and East European affairs in the United States. But many were quietly engaged in extensive consultation with their personal lawyers should they ever be brought before a congressional committee of inquiry!

At the time I was very much involved in my studies and not politically active. But this is not to say that I was totally unaware of the world around me. For one thing Columbia University was in New York City with its long history of radicalism. Of course, the headquarters of the American Communist Party were in New York City. More directly intruding on my scholarly preoccupations was the fact that practitioners of the politics of the Old Left (i.e. 1930s) were still very much in evidence around Columbia. I clearly remember coming in contact with an older anthropologist. For me his ideas in linguistic anthropology were intriguing. He had been an instructor in anthropology at the nearby City College of N.Y. (now part of the City University of New York) I was not sophisticated enough to realize that our conversations on linguistics and related anthropological topics had for him an instrumental focus. One day we went for a long walk and he broached to me the idea that I might be interested in joining the C.P. USA. I knew that he had recently been dismissed from his untenured position at City College because of his Party affiliation. This was, of course, a daring invitation given the tenor of the times. I don't remember being fearful of exploring this course of such an action. Basically, I was disinterested in that approach.

Subsequently, he resumed his career at the University in Mexico City. This was about 1952 and McCarthy's downfall was then some years off. It should be noted that in addition to intellectual activity there was one academically related individual who was brought to trial as a Soviet agent and convicted. Such was the case with one anthropologist, who was an academic associate of one of my professors, Margaret Mead. He wrote about East Central Europe but he had a research position and not a university appointment. Finally, one of my anthropology professors was dismissed from Columbia. Her specialty was African studies. I do not know if she was an actual member of the Communist Party but she publicly charged that the U.S. forces in Korea were using germ warfare as a tactical weapon (a claim then made by the North Koreans, Chinese and Soviets). She was subsequently dismissed from the Columbia faculty for these actions. Like the other anthropologist she also later resumed her career teaching at a smaller, less well-known University in the New York metropolitan area and had a reasonably successful career.

. Anthropology was then much oriented toward the notion of fieldwork as a way to validate one's professional status. But given the then nature of the Soviet Union and its attitude toward foreigners generally and Americans in particular in the 1950s there was no chance to undertake fieldwork in that country or, with effectiveness, elsewhere in Eastern Europe. But Yugoslavia was different. But Yugoslavia, was different. After 1948 there was the ideological break with the Soviet Union and its associated communist states in Eastern Europe. This break revolving, in part, about the ability of an Eastern European communist state to pursue an independent path to socialism As a consequence Communist party relations were severed. Although as of 1953 Yugoslavia was still an orthodox Communist state its break with the Soviet union made it a desired setting to expand American influence. At the time of my initial visit there were very extensive United States civilian and military assistance programs by the U.S. then operating in Yugoslavia. Subsequently by the 1960s the extent of American food and economic aid to Yugoslavia had become enormous. During that decade the accumulation of local currency by the American Embassy had become unprecedented. All food aid as well as some other aid was paid for in local currency. During that time I was told by personnel at the American Embassy

that their bank account held about 10% of the value of all Yugoslav currency in circulation, an obviously intolerable situation. As a result the major part of this bank account went for public works projects like the Dalmatian coastal highway but there were also, relatively, significant amounts of funds for academic research by U.S. and Yugoslav scholars working jointly as well as almost unlimited amounts for American libraries to buy copies of all books printed in Yugoslavia. But all these developments took place in the 1960s, then a decade in the future. .

My professor of international relations at Columbia, Philip Mosely, had, in addition to his academic role as a founder of East European Studies in the U.S., been very much involved in U.S.-U.S.S.R. relations. He also and had been an advisor at key conferences between the U.S., the U.K. and the U.S.S.R. He had participated in conferences at the foreign minister level during the war in Moscow. In the immediate post-war period he had attended the Potsdam conference between Truman and Stalin and Churchill, (then Atlee). He had also been one of the principal U.S. representatives at the treaty negotiations, which eventually ended the Trieste, conflict between Yugoslavia and Italy. This dispute was finally concluded only in the 1950s when we were already in Yugoslavia. But from my personal point of view, most significant was the curious fact that in the immediate prewar period, in the late 1930s, he had been encouraged by an American research foundation, the Social Science Research Council (New York), to undertake social science field research in the Balkans. As a result Mosely engaged in extensive work on the extended family unit, the Zadruga, within Yugoslavia. He also worked in neighboring Balkan countries as well. . In the course of that research he met Milenko Filipovic who became one of the leading Yugoslav ethnologists, particularly with respect to the study of Serbian areas. In 1952 when I was ready to do field research for my doctorate he introduced me to Professor Filipovic who was then in the United States under a Rockefeller Foundation grant. He had received a fellowship from this organization on the eve of World War II but did not accept it because he chose to remain in his homeland even though conflict was then clearly inevitable. After the war Mosely helped Filipovic renew his grant. My fate was then decided. I was to do my research in Serbia under Filipovic's sponsorship. The broader context for

Mosely, of course, was that his study of the Zadruga had for him been an interesting interlude in a career that in the postwar period involved negotiating with the Soviets on behalf of the U.S. government.

We took a Yugoslav freighter from New York and landed in Dubrovnik in June of 1953. Our first introduction to the system was in our contact with University students in Belgrade with whom we exchanged English for Serbian lessons. At that time visiting foreign students, especially those who wished to undertake research in rural areas, were something of a rarity. Thus we had to make our own way through the system. A series of small events set the stage for our initial understandings of part of the dynamics of Yugoslav socialist society. .

I detail all this background to illustrate the fact that my selection of Yugoslavia as a research area was very much embedded in the political context of the time. However, for my research I had to use my personal family resources since no financial assistance was forthcoming. In this respect, despite the context of the times, my initial research in Yugoslavia was independent of any organizational impetus. In June 1953, when we first arrived in Yugoslavia, despite the large existing American aid program and the earlier break with Stalin, that country was still very much an orthodox communist state operating in a relatively poor and marginal country with a significant part of its economy peasant based. The massive program of industrialization had not yet begun and the large-scale migrations to the cities were still mostly in the future.

These significant achievements of Yugoslav socialism lay in the future but the communist state was already established. With the confirmation of state power came the techniques for the purposeful manipulation of the population in implementing state policies. Such manipulation, which had its limitations, was played out in many ways. An example of that purposeful manipulation took place in the early part of our initial stay. Viewed from an early 21st century perspective the long-lasting significance

of the events described below can be seen as, at best, marginal to the historical record. However, from a personal perspective, they were overwhelmingly significant and nearly ended my work in Yugoslavia.

We had settled in the central Serbian village of Orasac, south of Belgrade, where I was doing my doctoral research in anthropology. One day, some months after our arrival, the village council president invited us to accompany him and some other local officials to a "meeting" (rally) in the nearby market town of Mladenovac. It was on the main rail line south from Belgrade connecting with Bulgaria and Greece. This town also then had a few nascent industries. Something presumably important had happened and we didn't know quite what. Our household lacked a functioning radio and they didn't get a daily newspaper (This was, of course, in the days before TV had begun to make its appearance in rural Serbia). We left the next day at dawn to arrive in time for the rally. There were also then no private automobiles available locally so we went by horse carriage, of the kind I had only seen used for weddings. The site of the gathering was a huge open field adjoining the rail junction. As we approached the site I noticed long lines of boxcars which were then used to transport peasants and workers over short distances. While the relatively short ride may not have been pleasant the discomfort did not seem to exceed that of a long ride on a crowded urban bus at rush hour with windows closed. In any case, others were arriving by cart, bus and rail car. The latter were actually open boxcars which were used then to transport large groups.

Streams of people poured into the open fields. Local Party organizations and affiliated groups had organized the turnout and appropriate signs had been prepared. We kept close to our village friends but I also had a camera and ventured a photo of one of the placards. At that point a senior police official came by and suggested that my wife and I accompany him to headquarters. There he asked for our passports and proceeded to enlighten us about the crisis and the reason for the rally. He began by inquiring if I knew that the Americans were responsible for excluding Yugoslavia from their claimed territories in the region of Trieste? Our village people had, of course, mentioned nothing about this only indicating that we would might enjoy a visit to a "meeting" which we naturally assumed would be combined with a large

local market. It seemed apparent that the official was quoting from a recent edition of the communist party newspaper (Borba), which was invariably found in good supply in all the official offices we visited. I did recall that my Columbia professor had been the American representative on that boundary commission but, of course, I said nothing. Following the lecture he suggested that we would need protection from the genuine outrage of the workers and peasants who were attending the rally. I did not protest his decision but only expressed my appreciation.

Neither my film nor camera was confiscated. I put my camera away and we were assigned two officers who proceeded to follow us around for the rest of the afternoon. They were apparently good friends since they held hands, as good friends do in part of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. They seemed self absorbed and the day passed without further incident. The planned part of the gathering coincided with the eventual arrival of the Interior Minister, Rankovic, who delivered a speech of outrage to programmed cheers. We had heard in Belgrade that he was famous for his tailored suits but we did not get close enough to observe. On the way back our village hosts said nothing about this encounter. Since we were in the village under official auspices there was no outward evidence of their concern. Through the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreigners we were introduced to the office of the Central Union of Cooperatives which gave us a letter to their local affiliate.

After some fifty years this incident would seem to have merited little more than casual remembrance of the past, if that had been the end of the little saga, but it was only the beginning.. It has often been remarked that youth is stupid and certainly young apprentice anthropologists are no exception to this rule. After this encounter I was determined to return to Belgrade immediately. In retrospect, my time would have been much better served in pursuing my ongoing fieldwork. The next morning we boarded the narrow gauge train in a neighboring village and then transferred to a standard gauge train at Mladenovac. We made the approximately hundred kilometer trip in just under six hours because we managed to catch an express train to Belgrade at our transfer point in Mladenovac (Today the trip takes a bit more than an hour by car.)

Although curious, once in Belgrade, at that time I was so self possessed that it never occurred to me to vary my usual urban routes. Therefore I first visited some of my favorite bookstores to browse for research materials and then walked over to the U.S. Library anticipating getting the Embassy news bulletin and reading recent American papers. The Library was located in downtown Belgrade near the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the University. As I crossed the empty lot adjoining the Library (made vacant by German bombing during World War II) and now occupied by a University of Belgrade building, I suddenly felt a pinprick and then another and a mob surrounded me. I broke free and started to run. Entering the main street fronting on the Student Square I noticed an older woman being herded by a jeering mob. On her back was a sign in Serbian, *Buletenica*, "One who takes the American Embassy Bulletin." Just about that time a waiter called out from a nearby *kafana* (café) to get the sign off my back. I rounded the corner and in panic headed for the U.S. Information Library collapsing at the feet of an American journalist. As I got to my feet she proceeded to interview me and then explained that her story would be front page news the following day but that my name would not be used. (This woman subsequently became the senior member of the White House Press Corps).

At that time at the height of communist red baiting led by McCarthy (as a consequence the term McCarthyism was coined) there really was a market for nasty articles about all aspect of Communism. Just a few weeks before, two assistants of that American senator had visited Belgrade and "inspected" the American library for "subversive" Communist literature. The American diplomat who guided them around "helped" them reach the conclusion that such evidence was lacking. The fact that Yugoslavia was a functioning Communist state, then in an alliance of mutual convenience with the United States, apparently escaped these "guardians" of American virtue. After the interview with the journalist, two American diplomats escorted me to my apartment. On our walk there they told me stories about how they had closed down the American consulate in Shanghai in 1948 after the victory of the Chinese Communists. Unintentionally, they nicely set the stage for what was to follow. They left me at the door

of my apartment house apparently unaware that we had been followed. As I stepped inside a group of Yugoslav police in plainclothes, masquerading as "outraged citizens" began to beat me. I first shouted to them in Serbian and then as the beating intensified I switched to English. The widely disseminated instructions issued to the organized demonstrators were that foreigners were not to be harmed. The beating soon stopped.

I do not remember great pain and my injuries were not serious but they had significantly bloodied me. After calling the Embassy I was immediately given refuge in the nearby apartment of a friend from the American Embassy. His wife quietly handed me a book to calm my nerves. I can still remember the book, it was about appropriate table settings for formal parties. I remember lingering over the section on "Table Settings for Duck Hunters," as I listened to the organized crowd below chanting, "We Will Give Our Lives But Not Trieste." When I made a visit to the Embassy the following day I was told that they could file a formal protest on my behalf but that this would be the end of my work in Yugoslavia. I chose not to complain. Later, at a cocktail party I met an American colonel with the U.S. Military Assistance Group to Yugoslavia. They had a large building in the center of Belgrade. He told me that prior to the demonstrations a colleague on the Yugoslav army's general staff told him that there would be no demonstrations in front of the building housing the U.S. military. There were none. My beating was front page news in the American press the following day. As promised my name was not mentioned. The same day a representative from the State Department visited Columbia University to check on the fact that I was actually a student.

Certainly this tale of minor events long ago has few surprising aspects. Neither the duplicity of the Yugoslav state or, for that matter, the many faces of the American government are hardly surprising. Nor, it should be added, was the total indifference of the local population unexpected. Finally, it should be noted that despite the cries of the organized demonstrators then marching through downtown Belgrade, "We will give our lives but not Trieste," the whole matter was subsequently settled relatively quietly.

Yugoslavia gave up claims to certain areas near Trieste. The fate of the city itself had, however, never been in question it always remained under Italian jurisdiction. But there is another factor involved and that is and was the extreme national and historical divisions within the territories that composed the Yugoslav state. Slovenes were and are, of course, concerned about their borders with Italy and their other neighboring states and the people of Slovene nationality who lived in neighboring countries. Clearly, these concerns were not shared by people in Serbia. One could go through a long list of such regionally manifested concerns. The Communist slogans of the past included that of "Brotherhood and Unity." Clearly it was an illusion from the beginning. In all our time in Serbia I cannot recall such matters ever being discussed in these terms. We did, however, experience racism close at hand in the treatment of local Gypsies who were marginalized and lived in a segregated area in the poorest houses in a nearby town. .

My bloody head massage was clearly minor but what about was the situation of that poor woman who was being paraded before the organized mob? I don't think the international press bothered to report her situation. Her treatment relates to a visit I paid to the police station in Arandjelovac, the market town for the village in which I was working. I was there to inquire about renewing our residence permit which had to be attended to every few months. I opened the wrong door and saw an older peasant being beaten. Sometimes we only heard about consequences. On our first day in the village, my wife and I were seated in the village café awaiting arrangements about our housing. A local woman told us that she had a brother in Chicago Why, she wanted to know, when there were so many nice places in Yugoslavia, had we come to this village, which she now hoped to leave. Subsequently we learned that she was absent from the village for some months. When she returned, we never had the opportunity to speak to her again..

Much more important was an event associated with the local elementary school. After we were well into our work in Orasac I had thought that it would be nice to sponsor an essay contest in which the children could write about the village and their aspirations for the future. I even offered some modest prizes. The director of the school and the teachers cooperated and I received a significant number of

essays. Very fortunately neither the school principal nor the teachers made any effort to read the student work prior to turning over the papers to me. I took the student work to Belgrade and went over it carefully. I particularly remember one of the essays, which was unlike the others. Most of the student essays were about the glories of Serbian history, the modernization of the village, and the Partisan heroes. Some of them were obviously based on the school textbooks but a few were clearly original and described the actualities of village life. But this one essay was different -- in the words of the pupil, the Partisans weren't liberators but destroyers -- according to this account they had actually destroyed the part of the village in which the pupil lived, I decided to leave this essay out of my ethnographic record. The youngster described how her family's home had been burned and provided a color drawing. What to do with the student's material? It seemed obvious to me it could cause trouble for the parents and for the child as well. I destroyed the essay and drawing and to this day I remember burning it in the toilet bowl and flushing away the remnants. In this situation I was glad to protect the pupil but also ashamed of my censorship. Clearly, I had accommodated myself to the system.

But what exactly was the system to which people were accommodating? In this essay I cannot do more than give a brief explanation. First, it is important to observe that enormous changes were underway throughout eastern and southern Europe during the second half of the 20th century quite apart from the dominant ideological system in a particular country. That is the ongoing processes of industrialization and urbanization and with it technological modernization was taking place at a rapid rate not only in Yugoslavia but also in all the Communist and on-Communist countries that bordered on Yugoslavia. For us the early 1950s provided a kind of baseline against which to measure future change. Communism, of course, put something of a special face on these changes but the long-term changes made that centralist ideology increasingly irrelevant.

There was real poverty in the 1950s. People were accustomed to wearing patched old clothes. The minimum tableware we had then were badly made aluminum forks and spoons that broke and bent easily.

These contrasted with the homemade sturdy wooden spoons. But our family also had a very serviceable set of stainless steel knife, fork and spoon recovered from a dead German soldier's field kit. I recall asking myself as to how it was possible for a people who couldn't even produce useable basic household items to have defeated such a technologically superior foe that had produced those stainless steel items. . Therein, of course, lies the primary justification, the ultimate legitimization of the regime. The Communist Partisans had won both their struggle against their civil war opponents, the remnants of the royalist government in Serbia as well as, at the same time, the war with the Nazi invaders and their fascist associates in Croatia. The other justification for the regime was that its socialist form of government would bring an equitable form of modernization. But the fruits of modernization although widely shared were implemented by a hierarchical, entrenched bureaucracy with a monopoly control of innovation with plans always coming from above. From the outset people were not inspired but coerced. This happened despite the enthusiasm of some youthful cadre who contributed unskilled labor to road and railroad construction. There was also the constant drumbeat of propaganda about social ownership, and worker participation in a so-called shared self-management system along with every few years a new constitution touting advanced forms of political participation .

As a counterpoint to the process of planned modernization and the ideological drumbeat that accompanied it focusing on the creation of garbage seems a good way to place these events in perspective. At the time we arrived in 1953 virtually nothing was discarded. Kitchen slops were, of course, fed to the pigs and old tin cans were recycled into containers, flower pots, or sometimes crude cooking utensils. In this village there was no electricity, no piped water and no appliances. Peasant villagers and urban workers began to experience the "throw away" disposable culture of packaging and plastic. Before the consumer oriented society came into being, even in the cities, toilet paper was unusual when there was old newspaper.. Soap was often not easily available, certainly not in public places.

By the 1970s one began to see discarded parts from the first generation of privately owned autos and by the late 1970s and 1980s discarded car bodies could be found along roadsides and in village lanes. In the village there was no garbage collection. Electricity came to the village in the mid 1950s and was followed by piped water with indoor toilets and bathtubs-showers, tiled kitchen and, of course, refrigerators. TV sets appeared in the 1960s, by the late 1970s this first generation of appliances had begun to be discarded behind village houses. A reasonably full consumer society had arrived.

Thus, beginning in the 1960s life did improve in a material way for most everyone but this achievement did not bring lasting satisfaction. This was despite the fact that Tito successfully transitioned from war-time leader to acceptable father figure. The 1950s was a time when women, on boarding a bus, would carefully arrange their skirts so as not to put stress on the fabric. Hand woven bags, burlap sacks and crude paper bags were then used to carry home the items purchased from the limited inventory in the state stores. Within a decade, by the mid- 1960s there was the not so cautious beginning of this mass consumption culture along with the innovation of the supermarket. This happened even in the more economically marginal areas away from the metropolises in Croatia and Serbia. .. Now there was a mass of cheap items on the market designed for immediate use but not for long- term retention. How did the transitions in consumer goods, mass marketing, mass consumption relate to transitions in the political culture which was also concerned with novelty, innovation and mass appeal. Yesterdays versions of both were certainly discarded rather than recycled in the decades to come . But the essential centralization of power remained.

The appearance of the private automobile in the socialist state, first in the 1960s, was a transforming force. With its increasing use came greater mobility not only within Yugoslavia but across international borders. The Tito regime did relatively little to restrict free movement. It was in the sixties that there really began in earnest the mass migration of Yugoslav workers to a then labor short Western Europe. Their remittances were certainly economically and politically useful to the regime. Just as the family had been useful to the state in allowing it not to be too concerned about social support services.

Thus in households where both parents worked frequently a relative, often a grandma (baba), could be counted on to provide for the necessary child care. Folk sayings were coined to celebrate the fact that parents had to make sure about the presence of a baba before they had a child. In retrospect, the frozen ideology of the Party prevented the growth of a vibrant domestic economy. Thus the massive remittances of those who worked abroad were not invested in the domestic economy but rather in private household construction which strengthened family ties and regional affiliations but did not contribute to fundamental economic growth.. From the 1960s to the 1980s the housing stock of rural Yugoslavia was transformed. A uniformity of concrete, tile and brick replaced the historically validated rural variations with their strong ecological influences based on largely subsistence peasant economies.. These structures were of enormous symbolic significance to the individual and his family. But while one can easily appreciate this aspect their economic wastefulness was also readily apparent. For often the worker, with his newly acquired skills, and frequently his family as well, remained abroad. The family house became a secondary vacation residence.

At the same time, for those who stayed behind there were massive symbolic investments made by the federal government in an attempt to appease growing national regional interests. These were the so-called political factories. Thus to parallel the private sector's overly robust rural housing stock there was the felt need for every republic to have its very own uneconomical steel mill. Meanwhile the quality of items such as auto production became an international joke. This was the case with the Yugoslav licensed Fiat. Its shoddy construction hastened its achievement of junk status. Even with new rental cars, the wheels could come off. This was in contrast to the foreign made cars acquired by peasant-workers abroad. Mercedes were often on display in remote villages, reachable only by mountain tracks. At the same time that the first generation of manufactured wood and electric stove and small refrigerators also began to qualify as junk along with the locally produced Fiats. In Serbia, as elsewhere, given the lack of effective garbage collection discarded stoves, TVs, and refrigerators began to accumulate. Even at the end point of the Yugoslav state in the 1990s no effective "Green" movement took hold.. A vision of

values in places such as Serbia can be obtained by visiting a natural history museum as opposed to one dealing with national history or even ethnography. Their exhibits frequently focused on the careers of individual scientists rather than any concern for ecological matters or the natural world in general. Does the freon and other chemicals as in the florescent tubes get into the ground water? What happens to used crankcase fluid from cars, trucks and tractors? The pride of a Yugoslav worker driving his new Mercedes to his home village for the first time was a frequent sight in the 1970s and 1980s. These problems have, of course, not been unique to the former Yugoslavia. It would seem that a fruitful investigation could be done with respect to public consciousness of patterns of changing morbidity as opposed to matters of ethnic identification. Which was the primary concern after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Clearly ecological matters are marginal in the face of the human and material destructions brought about by the wars of the 1990s.

Lest this all seem too distant, too objectifying I would like to describe briefly how my personal image came front and center, briefly, and in a not so minor way, on Serbian TV and in the public press. This goes well with the idea of consumption for the moment, consumerism as processed disposal of goods and the accretion of garbage. My brief and easily processed public persona in Serbia/Yugoslavia fits well into this mode. It also well accords with the oft noted observation of the late American pop artists Andy Warhol to the effect that everyone will or can be famous for 15 minutes and this was definitely documented by my experience. .

I should first note that there were three disconnected aspects of my public image. First, beginning in the 1960's I was noted on several occasions in the public press as a CIA agent. I was not the only foreigner denounced but since I had done fieldwork in this country for a longer time and most intensively in rural areas I was a natural target. This was because the security authorities, even in their more relaxed phases, want to control access by foreigners to the internal workings of Yugoslav society. While it is true that after each article appeared I made a point of writing to the Yugoslav Ambassador in Washington

that the charges were untrue and were libelous. In the fullness of time I always received a reply saying that I would be welcome to return to Yugoslavia to continue my researches and that there would be no problem about a visa. It was quite clear that the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior were not operating in concert, a not unfamiliar bureaucratic situation in the U.S. Looking back on these events now after more than a generation and horrible wars have intervened. The experience now seems rather quaint. Rereading the old press clipping I now see myself as a somewhat romantic figure. An article but one of the more imaginative journalists described me as a spy who disappeared in a “fog.” Clearly, I was unaware of my own potentials.

My second, and most starring role came about in 1986 through the good offices of a colleague at Belgrade University I was introduced to a Serbian TV personality. He made a specialty on his program of discovering odd things in remote places. Clearly, my long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a Serbian village qualified. His TV program had a folksy feel, even its title was people friendly, “By the Way (Uzged budi receno).” In no time at all of us were (my wife and I plus a film crew) were ensconced in “our” village. They stayed long enough to produce an hour-long film, with, it should be added, involved outtakes. In this respect, their way of doing things was very unlike American TV. In any case, that summer my wife and I lived out Andy Warhol’s dictum and we had our 15 minutes of “fame.” The program was broadcast not only in Serbia but nation-wide. Thus when we left the Serbian village that summer after the filming was completed and the initial broadcast made, we were recognized most everywhere even as we tried to vacation in Dalmatia. There were “serious” consequences – a waiter recognized us in a Croatian restaurant and insisted on feeding us “real peasant food.” At that time we were more than middle aged and our diet tended to be strong in vegetables with occasional chicken and fish. But here our plates were being piled high with greasy, roasted meat.!

But our “fame” was to last for more than 15 minutes. And so I began to enter the third phase of my public persona.. The American Embassy glossy propaganda magazine for the literati and others who

were thought to influence public opinion featured a long article about our work with lots of color photos from the film and our past life in the village.. Among the photos was one of the two of us taken in Orasac in 1954 of, “the Halperns in peasant dress.” Actually, the idea derived from another American couple who visited us in the village and we followed their example. Our hosts were most cooperative even if some of the items were no longer worn and being saved for burial. It should be added that back then our village family was most curious about our clothes and had tried them when we were on a city trip. We therefore felt that this was a fair exchange. The photos were then put away for more than 30 years and only surfaced again in their use in the film. At the time we thought that would introduce an element of humor and one in consonance with the theme of the production. In any case , the editors of the Embassy magazine gave it very prominent play in their article and combined it with a long caption about our personal history. Surprise! The culmination of the third phase came four years later when we revisited Serbia in 1990. One of our Belgrade friends showed us a copy of an article that had recently appeared in a Serbian weekly. I quickly looked at the article it was all about spying in Yugoslavia and was actually a replay of a book written by a British Embassy press attaché in the late 1940s with the spy catching title , White Eagles Over Serbia. It was a tale of rural based espionage in Macedonia. But no matter, the editor thought photos from a Serbian village would give it just the right flavor. As the journalist involved subsequently told a colleague of ours, he saw the photos in the American Embassy magazine. They seemed appropriate and he used them without, of course, permission or payment of royalties. I was listed as the photographer of my own photo (a not impossible feat) and there were several of my other photos of Orasac used in the article as well. The photo spread also included pictures of a, German by origin, but recently deceased Hollywood publicist name Helmut Newton. His most famous work, I later learned, was a massive coffee table sized volume entitled, the Nude and the Refrigerator. Our photo was captioned, “True Serbian peasants a barrier against communism.” Among our other photos (from 1953-54) were those of a poor, but picturesque, old couple, teen age twins who were making decorations for light fixtures to celebrate the introduction of electricity to their village home.. Helmut Newton photos, which I assume were also stolen, focused on, “the activities of British Agents in Belgrade,” no refrigerators here

just soft porn . One agent was” investigating” the crotch of a large, bare breasted model. Another shot featured the obviously dissolute but curious intellectual looking up from his book at the bare bottom of “a local lady,” if that is quite the appropriate term. Alas my career as a spy “who disappeared in the fog,” was never discussed in the folk friendly “Halperns in Orasac,” film, Also the thieving journalist who invented the “true Serbian peasants,” had no concern that these same “peasants” had appeared in a nationally televised hour-long film four years earlier which focused on their being Americans. I would not real contest his covert assumption that no one would possibly remember that image from a TV program four years earlier. While yesterday's refrigerators and plastic cups may endure TV images to say nothing of newspaper articles of decades before are instantly disposable. To conclude – maybe someday the spy who disappeared in the fog, the earnest anthropologists and the true “Serbian” peasants will have a reunion in cyber space if I get around to it.

Earlier I had spoken of the introduction of discards as the nature of garbage production changed in a modernizing society. Orasac in 1953-54 had been an experience with a still vibrant oral tradition in which elder males would perform epic poetry and women would create individualized mourning chants to memorialize the deceased. But TV with its massive programming features an almost infinity of little remembered moments and our 15 minutes of “fame” has long since expired. It is fitting that now at 76 I can look back on a truly memorably career, one in which I evolved from a youthful and ignorant stranger, to a CIA agent, to my final apotheosis as a true Serbian peasant. Perhaps that had been my goal from the beginning.

It is certainly true that a modern state in terms of infrastructure and economy, however wanting, was created under socialism in Yugoslavia. I have documented the processes involved in many of my publications. But it was a hollow structure that its inhabitants were only too ready, and even eager, to rip apart in a very bloody way. I have some images of the consequences of war in Yugoslavia from my visits in the early 1990s, especially, to Bosnia and Croatia - the massive destruction of modern cities was

all too real. Particularly vivid for me was my winter 1996 visits to Sarajevo and Mostar. Fighting was just ending and the scars of war were very recent and real. But it was not only the destroyed factories, the blown up villages and the burned out blocks of modern apartment houses - it was the graveyards, Then they were everywhere -- in Sarajevo's Olympic soccer field, in the city's parks, in the small gardens in front of the surviving apartment houses – these were not the graves of young soldiers but of old men and women and young children.

Nor has the potential for future conflict been eliminated from what was once Yugoslavia. In the spring of 2004 I visited communities in southern Macedonia, both Muslim Albanian and Orthodox. The words that I heard were not those of peaceful coexistence. Although I do think that the current Macedonian leadership of both groups are anxious to find an equitable solution but the mutually perceived injustices fester.

Complex matters have been painted with a brood brush in this essay. Yugoslav socialism was not a fascist state built on death camps and ethnic hatred, nor was the ideology of socialism built on conquest and inequality. Yet by its authoritarian rule it helped to legitimize much of what followed its demise. Yet one cannot say that Yugoslav socialism was only a hollow structure. Further it is not possible to assert that a regime which last almost a half century or something over two generations did not enjoy a degree of legitimacy. After all there was the crucial role the Partisans played in defeating the German invaders and there was the reality of modernization without drastic and crushing class inequalities. One only has to now look at the modernization process in much of the developing world today to see the consequences of unrestrained, socially irresponsible capitalism. But as Brunnbauer has noted and raised the question -- did not the state enjoy at least a degree of real legitimacy, not only because of modernization but also because many people subscribed to the basic ideological tenets of socialism?

Was the state able to insert its ideological tropes into the life-courses of its citizens? That is was there a real commitment on the part of rural peoples, who were initially the majority of the population, to worker participation and socialist development? Conversely, did the peasants and the new groupings of peasant-workers have only a very instrumental relationship toward this socialist/Yugoslav state? Thus did they just enjoy the growing material achievements during the 1960's and 1970's and when the economy turned sour and could not satisfy the growing consumer demand in the 1980s were they then most ready to part with this state? What role did consumerism have in de-legitimizing the socialist state? Was there, in fact, a generational gap in the attitudes towards the Yugoslav state? Was the members of the older generation which had experienced poverty and war more keen supporters of socialist normality?. In terms of the younger generation, did they increasingly see the Yugoslav state and its socialist framework as obstacles to their wish to make full use of their abilities?

It is uncertain whether these vital questions have definitive answers, least of all whether they can be answered in a brief introspective essay. Perhaps some very general reflections are a place to begin even if it is at the conclusion of this essay. It is first necessary to explore the relationships between personal identity, national affirmation and ideological association. It is a commonplace to now observe the limited view of some intellectuals who sought to affirm that in World War I that the workers in Germany on one side and France and England would not willingly murder each others in brutal trench warfare because they shared a common class interest. Even to recall this thought at the beginning of the 21st century seems, at best, quaint. One World War later when German troops were nearing the gates of Moscow and Leningrad Stalin did not issue an appeal to save the Soviet system but rather he temporarily revived the Orthodox church and appealed to Russian nationalism. Clearly the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia cannot be isolated from the breakup of the Soviet Union. But the question it seems to me is not a simple one of comparing Russian nationalism to Serbian nationalism . Or, on another level, is it one of trying to assess the commonalities, if any, of Slovenes and Albanians, on the one hand, and Ukrainians and Uzbeks on the other. Rather, more directly, why did the Czechs and Slovaks end their

state in peaceful separation and for those known once as the Yugoslavs, their common state ended with a tragic and bloody, in every sense of the word, horrible mess?

I think on this point, and in keeping with the spirits of this essay, I would like to end with some personal reflections 31 years apart. Both of these reflections center on Bosnia. First, in 1964 I did research in the multiethnic town of Maglaj and its surrounding rural area. In this region Moslems, Serbs and Catholics lived in close proximity both in the town of Maglaj and in the surrounding villages. A walk through the marketplace would see these groups actively trading with one another while in Maglaj factories they worked in the same enterprise. How did this seemingly established co-existence turn into warfare and massive destruction. Platitudes about ancient hatreds don't suffice to explain the evidence of death and destruction I saw in Sarajevo and, even more directly, in Mostar and its surrounding area in 1995. I emphasize the latter area because in the latter city, unlike Sarajevo, the Serbs were not involved. While places like Srebrenica and Sarajevo demonstrate the brutality of Serb forces in Mostar the fight was between Croats and Moslems militaries, the Serbs have been eliminated from the region earlier in the fighting.

What conclusions can I draw? It seems to me as my career enters its final phase my retrospective desire is that I had not followed the herd and been so wrapped up in the illusion of modernization and urbanization as some kind of fixed point of achievement in the human condition in the Balkans and elsewhere. Modernization is, in this sense a profound illusion and post-modern a fantasy. Neither will see us into the future. Contemplating the ruins of Mostar in 1995 can one say that this was Tito's heritage? Perhaps, because a political entity which has a president for life has, by definition, no future, no way of effectively resolving conflicts as exemplified by the duplicity inherent in a favorite slogan of his time. Brotherhood and Unity. Pairing that with Socialist Yugoslavia one can easily see how the pairing was programmed to mutually self-destruct. One can even imaginatively diagram the process.

As any visitor to parts of former Yugoslavia today can testify – the whole country wasn't blown up in the internal wars, only selected places as in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo., some areas of which have now been repaired. .But in most of the country, especially in the rural areas, the countryside was transformed by massive building of private homes. This new housing was, in effect, both a monument to a fading familism by those who live abroad or in cities (they are rarely fully occupied) Yet this housing absorbed resources which were never invested in productive activities. Unfortunately this process continues in what were some of the poorest areas of Yugoslavia, as in Macedonia. This use of personal funds for private purposes represents a profound aversion to public interests. New research questions need to be asked that involve individual motivations and how institutional structures than can adjudicate conflict can come into being, In essence, multi-national socialist Yugoslavia programmed itself for destruction. The values propagated by its “democratic centralism” made possible its violent end.