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Royalist Chetnik Movement – interpretations in local and international historiography

Abstract

In the postwar Yugoslavia, the history of the interwar Communist movement, the Second World War, and the civil war has been written under the supervision of the Communist party. For the years to come, simplified presentation of the war was aimed to booster legitimating the party's monopoly of the power. At some degree it was designed for the purpose of reconciliation in a multiethnic society. This fact should also be borne in a mind before any attempt of reassessment Yugoslav historiography at the time. Yet in spite of the party's historic orthodoxy, rich and varied well-researched accounts of particular events have emerged. On the other hand interest for the controversial movement in the WW II was raised among foreign scholars. The dissolution of Yugoslavia has brought new trends and obstacles in a reassessing the role of different actors in the Yugoslav liberation and civil war in the same time.

Challenges and Obstacles in Writing History of Yugoslavia – Between Old and New Orthodoxy

It is always write time to question the temptations, validity and achievements in local and international historiography on Yugoslavia and its collapse. The war itself instigated the broad interest on topic and quick response by many, basically journalists and political analysts, but a few scholars. Once in spite of many weaknesses, controversies and gaps in Yugoslav history, healthy balance between past and present was upset to the point where the past became almost unrecognizable. The Yugoslav case confirms once more basic truth that protracted international conflicts often produce more partisans than scholars whereby objectivity is the first scholarly casualty of war. Academic debates on the former Yugoslavia are as polarized as those surrounding the creation of Israel or the partition of Cyprus, with criticism of a study often depending more on whether the work supports the commentator's predetermined position than on the coherence of its theory or the reliability and sufficiency of its arguments. When one side in such a conflict wins politically it usually also wins academically, because analyses that indicate that a politics that won is, in fact, wrong tend to be discounted. Political hegemony establishes intellectual orthodoxy. The cold war legacy, on one hand, and construction of local national identities on the other, influence very much the image of the past. Those elements which give a group's existence direction and duration are filtered out from the flow of events, constellations and protagonists. They shape historical memory on distant and recent past. However, it is not difficult tusk to prove existence of wide discrepancy between collective memory (and narrative) and 'the way it really was'. The historians in successor states are in conflicting and difficult situation. As the members of a community they are contaminated by cultural code, or even were involved in its creation. That fact will strongly influence their attitude towards new relevant evidences (sources) coming daily. The balanced history of what Yugoslavia really was - is somehow jeopardized for the third time in a Century. Twice it was land of reconciliation among nations and peoples belonged to confronted belligerents. That very fact dictated in the name of the future coexistence of those people, that bad things from the common past should be forgotten and the good ones must prevail, even constructed. The 'Party watch-dogs' looked closely to historians who disobeyed imposed rules. After collapse of common state, historians in successor states find themselves in position where newly emerged communities require 'historical proves' for their legitimacy. Usually

it happens at the expense of complex picture of what was common, former state. On international level, unlike many of the works on the Yugoslav wars written during and just after the crisis, new books have emerged that examine issues regarding religious nationalism and interethnic conflict, the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, principle of self-determination, legality and morality of foreign involvement and military intervention without UN sanctions, media coverage and nature of propaganda in times of war, more proper research on responsibility among multiple parties involved in conflict, their mix motives, poor information, bad theories, limited political skill, and malleable principles.¹

The Chetnik movement – Reassessment

Our approach to this scholar challenge is based also on some personal experience since 1979. That experience refers to our research as well as to our attendance to debates on a topic in 1980s and 1990s.²

A possible framework for reassessing our issue must offer, at least in brief, the answers or reviews on the following:

Historiography before 1990

- 1) Postwar historiography in Yugoslavia (The frozen ideological agenda; Old tendencies, innovations, course of disputes; the dichotomies: revolution – counter revolution; liberation war – traitors and quislings; fascists – antifascists; liberalism – fascism - communism)
- 2) Influence of émigré literature and western scholarship

Historiography in successor states – new tendencies

- 1) Revision of the image of the past
- 2) Influence of émigré narratives
- 3) Delegitimation of the communist narrative
- 4) Delegitimation of supranational ‘brotherhood and unity’ narrative
- 5) Using history and historiography for nation and state-building

Public discourse in Serbia

- 1) Reinvention of noncommunist resistance
- 2) National reconciliation
- 3) New politics of memory
- 4) Chetniks – collaborators or resistance movement

¹ M. Bjelajac (ed.), *Pisati istoriju Jugoslavije, viđenje srpskog faktora*, INIS 2007, 5 – 8, 47 – 61; Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragovic-Soso (eds.) *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe, New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's Disintegration*, Perdue University Press 2008, xiii. The editors emphasize that "because the role of the 'memory-power nexus' has been so important in stimulating political mobilization and conflict in the Balkan region – especially by state decision makers who utilized and manipulated inter-group antagonisms – it is especially critical to reassess the historical record in professional and fair minded manner.

² M. Bjelajac, Pregled razvoja i delovanja pokreta Draže Mihailovića-Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini, u: Draža Mihailović, Fifty Years After his Death, Serbian Studies Foundation, Macquorie University, Sydney, 1996, s.14-36. Pregled novije jugoslovenske istoriografije o pokretu Dragoljuba Mihailovića i građanskom ratu, in: Draža Mihailović Fifty Years After his Death, Serbian Studies Foundation, Macquorie University, Sydney, 1996, s. 79-94; Istoriografija o građanskom ratu u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, *Istorija XX veka*, 1/1997, s. 129-144; Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1991. godine - Da li je na prostoru prethodne Jugoslavije moguća emancipacija nauke od politike?, u *Dijalog povjesničara-istoričara*, Pečuh 20.-22. studenoga 1998 (priredili Hans-Georg Fleck, Igor Graovac, Zagreb 2000, str. 35-47; Hrvati u Jugoslaviji – iz ugla hrvatskih istoričara, *Istorija 20. veka*, 1/ 2001, s.131-136; The Military and Yugoslav Unity, u: Dejan Djokic (ed.) *Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1991*, Hurst And Co. London 2002, s.208-221; Iskušenja istoriografije o Jugoslaviji – između stare i nove ortodoksije, u: *Pisati istoriju Jugoslavije. Viđenje srpskog faktora*, INIS, Beograd 2007, s.47-61.

Chetniks' image in Serbian and Croatian historiography and textbooks

- 1) Why two guerrilla movements appeared as early as mid of 1941? Intentions of each one, ideas and practice
- 2) Were the both movements basically Serb-based?
- 3) How two movements soon became the opponents and became engaged in civil war? (The chronology of disputes)
- 4) Was Mihailovic's movement exclusively Serb oriented or Yugoslav?
- 5) The question of Chetniks' victims in Croatia (1941-1945)
- 6) Issue marginalized in Croatia³

In order to remind the readers on short history of the Royal Army Guerrilla Movement, as well as on the other key players in Yugoslav war drama, we find useful to quote some from the recently published work by distinguished British historian Stevan K. Pavlowitch. The following paragraphs, as you will find, deal with many of above listed questions and controversies.⁴

'The founding fathers of the first Yugoslav state in 1918 could not foresee the events of 1941. The founding fathers of the second Yugoslav state in 1943—46 had hindsight but no foresight. They knew what had happened between 1914 and 1941, but they could not imagine what would happen in 1991. Both the founders of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and those of the Federal Peoples' (later Socialist Federal) Republic of Yugoslavia believed that they were building something new for the future. However, the destroyers of Yugoslavia, of the first and of the second, did indeed look to the past; they were allegedly correcting history. To that extent, they were inspired by past experiences. In the 1990s, some wanted to go back to 1914, others to 1941, others still to what they imagined could and should have been done at the end of the First or the Second World Wars.'

'Whereas the First World War had started with an attack on Belgrade, the Second World War came to Belgrade some nineteen months after Germany had invaded Poland. In March 1941 the Yugoslav government gave in to Hitler's firm demand that it should adhere to the Tripartite Pact. No sooner done than an officers' conspiracy proclaimed King Peter II of age, thus ending the regency, and ushered in an all-party government. Hitler attacked on April 6, without a declaration of war but not before he had launched a violent campaign against Yugoslavia, inciting Croats against Serbs. It was 1914 all over again with a vengeance, the Nazi Reich taking the place of the Habsburg Monarchy. Hitler's Austrian prejudices reinforced his anti-Slav racism. He saw the Serbs as disturbers of the European order. He was out to correct history, to forever destroy Yugoslavia, the state that had come out of the defeat of Austria-Hungary and Germany in 1918. Mercilessly bombed, invaded from all sides except Greece, the country was overrun within twelve days. The conquerors considered that Yugoslavia had been destroyed as a state along with its army. Italy, Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Albania helped themselves to territory. Montenegro was formally restored under Italian control. Serbs were singled out as the defeated enemy to be punished collectively. Slovenes were to be Germanized, Italianized, or dispersed; Croats to be brought over as pseudo-Aryans.'

'Almost 40 percent of the Yugoslav territory was set up as the Independent State of Croatia—NDH for short (*Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska*) under the rule of the Ustasa and of their leader, Ante Pavelic, who had returned from exile. Extending across Bosnia and Herzegovina to the gates of Belgrade, the new state contained almost as many "alien" Orthodox Serbs (1.9 million), Muslims, Gypsies, Jews, and

³ Contrary, in the Croat public discourse 'Chetniks' are much more presented: Serbs as collective antiheroes in the past and the present; Transferring of Chetnik image on Serbs in general; Continuity of the 'Great Serbian Programme'; Question of Chetnik's victims

⁴ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, 'The Legacy of Two World Wars: A Historical Essay' in: Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragovic-Soso (eds.) *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe, New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's Disintegration*, Perdue University Press 2008, 75 – 88; See also his: *A History of the Balkans 1804 – 1945*, London – New York, 1999 and *Serbia: the History behind the Name*, Hurst & Co., London 2002

Germans, as it did "pure" Croats. Ethnic Germans were given privileged status. The Muslims were said to be Croats. It was stated that the Serbs would be converted, expelled, or eliminated. "Greater Croatia" the NDH might have been, but it was shorn of most of the coast in favour of Italy and divided between a German and an Italian zone. It was independent only insofar as its leadership, which had spearheaded the secession in the wake of the defeat, was able to exploit the rivalry of its protectors. Set up and run by the Fascist-inspired extreme fringe of Croatian nationalism, it was accepted initially by a majority of Croats with the feeling that the worst had been avoided. Most of the Croatian Peasant Party leadership withdrew into passivity, its right wing having rallied the new regime, and a small part gone with the government in exile.'

'The Ustasas savage fury was vented on Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. Immediate measures were taken against them. Alongside a state-sponsored conversion campaign, mass killings were started and concentration camps set up. Those fortunate or near enough fled to German-occupied rump Serbia or to Italian-occupied coastal areas. The rest took to woods and uplands. What began as a panicked flight to avoid horrible death soon turned to disjointed revolt. A mix of ferocious racialism and farcical inefficiency, Ustasa rule could not extend to the mountainous areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where more than half of the NDH Serbs lived.'

Not surprisingly, resistance was, on the whole, Serb-based, but the reactions of the different Serb communities were fragmented and diverse. Unrelated rebellions in the summer of 1941 followed in the wake of the German invasion of the USSR. The Serbs in the NDH rose in self-defence. In Montenegro there was a general revolt led by Communists and officers against the Italian attempt to set up a separate client state. In German-occupied Serbia, there was an upsurge of rekindled hope. Colonel (later General) Mihailovic had gone into hiding to build a clandestine military organization with officers who did not accept the capitulation. He was pushed into premature action by the Communists' zeal to advance the cause of revolution in expectation of the arrival of a victorious Red Army. Having set up a collaborationist government subservient to their commanding general, the Germans responded to insurgency with punitive expeditions, internment, concentration camps, and the execution of hostages. Their ruthless retaliation turned the popular mood against further confrontations with occupation forces. The ensuing ups and downs of the various insurgencies turned into civil war between Communists and anti-Communists, especially in Serbia between the two movements who alone had some pan-Yugoslav vocation—Mihailovic's officer-led secret army and Tito's Communist Party organization.

The Allies wanted risings to occur when and where it suited their grand strategy, and their interest in Yugoslavia came and went accordingly, but the Balkans were again in the shadow of other fronts. It seemed that there were two rival resistance groups—Mihailovic's Cetnik units, loyal to the exiled government, and Tito's Communist-led Partisans. However, Mihailovic had no political agenda beyond maintaining a symbolic continuity of the Yugoslav kingdom, initially reacting against the mood of defeatism and preparing the ground for a rising when the tide had turned. The few civilians who joined him in 1941 were nationalist Serb intellectuals who were pro-Western but stood outside the main political parties, who blamed Croats and the state establishment for the collapse and who feared the threat posed by their Communist rivals. They thought of restoring Serbia within the framework of a new Yugoslavia to be set up after the war, of ensuring links between Serb-inhabited territories, and of punishing those responsible for the collapse and ensuing massacres.

Initially and wherever they were formed, Serb armed bands called themselves Cetnik, from a word used originally by marauders in the Dinaric mountains and eventually by all armed bands of the central Balkans at the beginning of the twentieth century. They were called Partisans if and when taken over or organized by Communists, after which Cetniks became synonymous with Serb anti-Communist fighters. The conquerors had not only destroyed the Yugoslav state, they had also set its components against each other in an unprecedented way. An infernal cycle of large-scale massacres had been started by the Ustasa. The Serbs of the NDH had risen in self-defence, as Cetniks and Partisans, who went on to do their best, there and elsewhere, to eliminate each other and their supporters in the hope or fear of the arrival of the Red Army or the Western Allies. They also had to face brutal periodic anti-insurgency operations organized by the German army.

Italian territory was, more often than not, a relative haven for Serbs and Jews. It was certainly a base and a source of support for anti-Ustasa and anti-Communist Cetnik bands. Insurgents moved about, were double-faced, changed sides, and fought each other in a complex and ever-changing pattern. In the NDH, they responded with their own terror to the terror of Ustasa fanatics. In Bosnia, the Ustasa authorities also enlisted Muslims, as Austria-Hungary had done during the First World War. In the mixed Serb and Muslim areas of Herzegovina and of the old Sandzak of Novi Pazar, there was ethnic settling of scores. Italian-armed Muslims took their revenge on Serbs who had paid old scores in earlier wars; Serb Cetniks then did their best to clear the region of Muslim militiamen and villages.

Because Mihailovic was based in German-occupied Serbia, even when German pursuits made it too hot for him to remain there, he could not do much. He was obsessed with Serb losses through massacres and repression following on the bloodletting of the First World War. He did not control the proliferation of Serb and anti-Communist groups elsewhere who intermittently acknowledged him. The various Cetniks were a traditional Balkan guerrilla, local and seasonal. Mihailovic was no more than a symbolic authority who followed events more than he could coordinate them. Although he always stressed the legitimist Yugoslav nature of his endeavour, he was in fact almost entirely Serb-based, drawing support from Serbs who viewed change as a threat. Whatever his intentions, he held little or no attraction for non-Serbs.

It was from this complexity that Tito's movement arose once it had found its way to the Serbs of the NDH. It was there that he built the basis from which to liberate, conquer, and restore Yugoslavia on totally new foundations, with the support of Serbs outside Serbia, and the ability to attract non-Serbs. The Communists thrive on the anarchy of the NDH. Mostly Serbs themselves, the Partisans penetrated the leaderless and desperate struggle of the Bosnian Serbs while defending Croats and Muslims from retaliation, thus enabling them to adhere eventually.

The Communist leaders were internationalists who knew how to adapt their discourse to audience and circumstances. They fought a revolutionary war in a constantly shifting pattern with clear aims. They were interested in power over the whole territory of prewar Yugoslavia and more if possible. Only at the head of a patriotic resistance movement could they hope to acquire and retain the support of non-Communist followers, but their object was to destroy all who opposed the transformation of their war of liberation into one for the establishment of Communist rule. Tito was able to coordinate strategy and keep overall control, to manage his public relations, and to find his way in the bloody entanglement of antagonisms and arrangements between the different sides of occupation, collaboration, and resistance. As the balance of war tipped against the Axis, the main reason for Tito's success was the failure of sectional nationalism, which was associated with the Powers that were now losing the war. In the mixed regions that had suffered so much, the Communists' new order, with its slogan of "brotherhood and unity" of communities, was especially attractive.

With the acknowledged failure of unitarist Yugoslavism, a federal reconstruction of Yugoslavia was generally accepted by both Mihailovic and Tito. The Communist leadership had clarified its own idea in November 1943 at its movement's congress held at Jajce in free Bosnian territory. This was to be a community of equal nations within a number of units set up to fit in with the Communists' concept of an ethnic equilibrium. To Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, they had added a separate Macedonia, as well as a separate Montenegro. Bosnia and Herzegovina were kept as a single territory within their old Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian borders to prevent the impossible division of this mixed region in which no ethnic group had an absolute majority, to give the Muslims a territorial base, and to enhance it as a miniature model of Yugoslavia.

The Communists had turned their attention to Macedonia, where they saw the opportunity to benefit from the local populations alienation from both prewar Serbian and wartime Bulgarian rule. They had, from Macedonia, established their patronage over Albanian Communists and Partisans.

The Communists' project countered fears of too large a Serbian unit; it attracted Macedonian aspirations from all over the central Balkans; and it dealt with Montenegrin frustrations. Every nation was given a home unit, but Serbs were acknowledged to be a constituent element in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well. Titos was also a Serb-based movement, but it was not based in Serbia, and

all those who wanted to get out of the enemy's camp or out of the past were turning to it. As a power vacuum appeared and expanded, the Communists filled it.

Most of that was anathema to Serb nationalists and royalists. They too were thinking of a Yugoslavia restored on a federal basis, but one that still needed a strong Serbia. Separating Macedonia and Montenegro was unthinkable to them. Mihailovic's belated answer to Jajce was his own congress held in January 1944 at Ba in free Serbian territory. By now he had the support of a broader spectrum of Socialist-led political advisers. Delegates from Slovenia and some Croats attended the Ba meeting, which adopted a resolution for a reorganization of Yugoslavia as a federation of just three units—Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia.

Mihailovic's own base remained in Serbia. The Partisans had, for all practical purposes, had to withdraw from Serbia at the end of 1941. They fought their way back into it with both Western and Soviet support as the Germans carried out their evacuation of the Balkans through that territory.

The outcome of the Second World War led again to a united Yugoslavia. The victorious Powers supported it from the start. In terms of international law, the second Yugoslavia was the successor to the first as the first had been successor to Serbia.

Party propaganda stressed the joint struggle of all nationalities against the occupation forces and their native auxiliaries. It attributed to that joint "anti-fascist" struggle the greater part of the Communists' success in solving the "national question." One should not underestimate the legitimizing power of the slogan of brotherhood and unity, which contained a large dose of optimism and self-interest. It was needed to hold the party together and to deal with all the problems of reconstruction, for the scale of losses was once again huge. The real total loss of population for the whole territory was about 1 million, of whom more than half were Serbs. They had died in concentration camps; in Ustasa massacres; in action against occupiers and their supporters; in fighting between Partisans, Cetniks, and Ustasas; in retaliations and other punishments. As if the real figures were not big enough, they were inflated both at the official level (to obtain reparations) and at the popular level (to make up for the suffering and to achieve greater glory in greater martyrdom).⁵

The questions of the civil wars within the war were frozen behind a facade of slogans. People did not speak of them. It was forbidden to do so. They evoked wartime memories that many preferred not to pass on to their children. There were more immediate worries. Wartime animosities between Serbs and others, between Serbs and Serbs, Croats and Croats, thus went largely unnoticed in the flush of revolution and reconstruction. Yet the feelings remained to feed the differences, destined in time to be sharpened by the impossibility of fostering anything common to all Yugoslavs other than communism. Disintegrating tendencies would later feed on them.

History was made to serve the revolution and the construction of socialism. It began with the Communist Party. The legitimacy of Communist rule needed a simplified and static memory of its foundation in what came to be known as the People's Liberation Struggle, fixed exclusively on the Partisans. The attempted final solutions in the NDH, the "anticollaborationist" and "anti-insurgent" killings between Serbs, Albanians, and Muslims, the reconquest of Serbia or that of Kosovo, the indiscriminate lumping together of victims of fascism not otherwise specified, the murkier aspects of Communist survival tactics, the eleventh-hour massacres of defeated opponents, and all the other gaps and inconsistencies that lurked under the veil of the official version were partly filled by secret stories.

They all began to emerge as the Communist Party lost its monopoly of public discourse and its control over memory. Throughout the twilight of Tito's long reign, feelings of instability and fears for the future led to ever-increasing interest in the 1940s. People wanted to know what had really happened in those years that had given birth to the Communist regime; they were afraid that they might be on the threshold of a similar period. The professional historians had, on the whole, been too shy, unscholarly, or unimaginative to tackle such hot issues. Initially, they had generally left it to writers outside their ranks who broke out into print after Tito's death. The revelations by all sides of the horrors committed during the Second World War by *them* against *us* went hand in hand with the disintegration of the ruling party into its republican components.

The historiography of the two world wars, especially the second, flowed from Belgrade and from Zagreb in two ever more different directions, stressing the suffering of Serbs and Croats respectively at the hands of the others and of the others' international protectors. Serb-centred interpretations stressed how Croats had fought in the Austro-Hungarian army that had invaded and occupied Serbia during the First World War, and even more so how the greater-Croatian, Ustasa-ruled NDH had massacred Serbs during the Second World War under overall Axis protection before turncoat Ustasa Croats joined the Partisans led by the Croat Tito. Croat-centred interpretations dwelt on the role played by the Serbian army in setting up a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia at the end of the First World War with the support of France and Britain and on the massacre of Croat soldiers by Serb Partisans at the time of the revolution that established a Serb-dominated Communist Yugoslavia.

The experience of the First World War and that of the Second had not been, and could not have been, common experiences for the Yugoslav populations from the Alps to Macedonia, from the Danube to the Adriatic. These populations had been divided by the vagaries of warfare, occupation, resistance, and revolution even more than by ethnic feeling, historical memory, religious adherence, and ideology. All these differences, perceived as they were with the distance of time, could only be magnified when the disintegration process began.⁵

Was it civil war?

Professor Pavlowitch, as well as the most western scholars and contemporaries, acknowledged an existence of the civil war in wartime Yugoslavia, especially between two resistance movements since the fall of 1941.⁵

On the part of Yugoslav (Serbian) scholars or contemporaries there are still some who deny that very fact. Once a public prosecutor in trial of General Draza Mihailovic (1946), Milos Minic, high Party official and minister, remained firm in denying any possibility of a civil war between two movements and has promoted the thesis that one side (Partisans) had fought only national liberation war, in contrast to Chetniks – collaborators and war criminals.⁶ On the part of historians who bear the same mindset one can mention Dusan Biber (Slovene), Dragoljub Petrovic, Petar Damjanovic etc.⁷

In order to endorse a basic thesis they deny or misinterpret some notorious episodes that indicate opposite. They are not willing to take into a scope even German documents that would dismantle their myths on spot.

The victorious Communist movement in a creation of its own legitimacy and processes of reconciliation among the various fractions of the civil war, was not willing to abandon its wartime cliché: Tito's partisans antifascist fighters for freedom on one side, and traitors and collaborationists like Ustasha, Chetniks, the White Guard (Slovenia), Albanian Bali movement, Ljotic's voluntaries, and General

⁵ John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as a History*. Twice there was a Country, Cambridge University Press, 1996; Some of the well known works on this topic include: Walter Roberts, *Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies 1941-1945* Rutgers University Press 1973 (2. ed. Durham 1987); Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint, *Total War*, Penguin 1973 (Belgrade 1987); Matheo Milazzo, *The Chetnik Movement and the Yugoslav Resistance*, Baltimore -London, 1975; Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia the Chetniks*, Stanford 1975; Elisabet Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, London 1976; Mark Wheeler, *Britain and the War for Yugoslavia*, New York 1980; Robert Crampton, *Eastern Europe in Twentieth Century*, 1994; Gerhard L. Winberg, *A World at Arms. A Global History of the World War II*, Cambridge UP, 1994; Lucien Karchmar, *Draza Mihailovic and the rise of the Chetnik Movement 1941-1942*, New York-London 1987; Milan Deroc, *British Special Operations Explored: Yugoslavia in Turmoil 1941-1943 and the British Response*, New York 1988; Simon Trew, *Britain, Mihailovic and the Chetniks 1941-42*, London-New York 1998

⁶ M. Minic, *Četnici i njihova uloga u vreme NOR-a 1941-1945*, Beograd, 1982. Actually, he reprinted his previous article on Chetniks in *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* 1st Edition; See for details in our review on book, in: *Naše teme* (Zagreb) No 12/1982; M. Minić, *Oslobodilački ili građanski rat u Jugoslaviji 1941 – 1945*, Novi Sad 1993.

⁷ Branko Petranović, *Između površnosti i nerazumevanja (povodom osvrta dr Dragoljuba Petrovića na studiju Branka Petranovića Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939 -1945 u časopisu Istorija 20 veka, 1-2/1993)*, in: *Istorija 20. veka* 1/1994, 223-240.

Nedic's detachments on the other hand. Consequently, Yugoslav Government in exile was the traitor one. Instead of a diverse complexity in the wartime past, Party offered one 'black and white' picture.⁸

The more scholarly approach has required a time, but also more flexible attitude of the Communist Party. The problem was – how to challenge myths but in the same time to avoid a risk of jeopardizing Country's unity and common identity.

Discussion on Second World War among Yugoslav scholars has its own history.⁹

Since 1961, it has not been taboo that the first uprisings and clashes took place well before Communist led guerrilla movement was established in July 1941.¹⁰ The second important step was an article on Chetniks in *Military Encyclopedia*, (2nd edition, vol.2, 1971). The authors listed major facts on its history, inclusive all German plans and actions against General Mihailovic and his movement. The historian from Belgrade, Jovan Marjanovic made further step (1979) by referring on émigré sources and literature, foreign (western) scholarship as well as on sources from archives.¹¹

Soon after Tito's death many new book on wartime history have emerged and consequently provoked wide interest among the public and the scholars. The Party 'watch dogs' responded, too.¹²

The most provocative editions were those of Vladimir Dedijer, Branko Petranovic, Velimir Terzic, Veselin Djuretic, Misha Lekovic, Ljubo Boban, Dusan Bilandzic etc.¹³

Professor Petranović was a firm in his suggestion that Chetnik movement was an expression of pro-West Serbian bourgeois. Historian Andrej Mitrovic offered brother framework for understanding all aspect of the war in Serbia, especially clashes between Mihailovic's forces and Ljotic's detachments – liberalism – communism – fascism. In order to explain why Mihailovic adopted strategy of 'waiting for the right moment' and partial collaboration with the occupying forces, Djuretic offered whole set of the new marks. Djuretic claimed that preserving Serbian people from enemy's retaliation in Serbia and genocide in Independante State of Croatia was the most determined factor that influenced strategy. Of course, it provoked instant reactions all over the country and abroad.¹⁴

⁸ Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution 1919- 1953*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp.190-191

⁹ Dj. Stankovic, Lj. Dimic, *Istoriografija pod nadzorom*, Prilozi istoriji istoriografije 1, Beograd 1996; M. Bjelajac, *Istoriografija o građanskom ratu u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945*, *Istorija XX veka*, 1/1997; Kosta Nikolić, *Prošlost bez istorije. Polemike u jugoslovenskoj istoriografiji, 1961-1991*, Beograd 2003; K. Nikolić, O fenomenu naučne regresije u savremenoj srpskoj istoriografiji i publicistici, primer Drugog svetskog rata, *Istorija 20. veka*, No 2/ 2007, 125 – 138; Đ. Stanković, Mediji i kultura sećanja, *Tokovi istorije*, 1-2/2006; Dubravka Stojanović, *Ko je pobedio u Prvom i Drugom svetskom ratu*, *Helsinška povelja 1001-102/2006*; Todor Kuljić, Rat i sećanje, in: *Istorija i sećanje. Studije istorijske svesti*, Beograd 2006, 76-89; K. Nikolić, Kultura sećanja na Drugi svetski rat u Srbiji, in: *Istorija i sećanje. Studije istorijske svesti*, Beograd 2006, 90-98

¹⁰ *Hercegovina u NOB, pišu učesnici*, 'Vojno delo', Beograd 1961. Tito had written a forward (actually signed it) with compliments and recommendation. The second edition, after Tito's death, provoked discussion but not the first one.

¹¹ Jovan Marjanović, *Draža Mihailović između Britanaca i Nemaca*, vol. 1, Beograd 1979

¹² Ivo Banac, The Dissolution of Yugoslav Historiography, in: S. Ramet, Lj. Adamovic (eds.) *Beyond Yugoslavia. Politics, Economics, and Culture in Shattered Community*, West view Press 1995; *Istorija I suvremenost. Idejne kontroverze*, Zagreb - Ljubljana, 1984.

¹³ V. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju J.B. Tita*, Rijeka 1982; B. Petranović, *Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd 1983; V. Đuretić, *Vlada na bespuću, Internacionalizacija jugoslovenskih protivrečnosti na političkoj pozornici Drugog svetskog rata*, Beograd 1983; V. Terzić, *Slom Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1941*, 1983; M. Leković, *Martovski pregovori 1943*, Beograd 1985; V. Đuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama*, 1985; Lj. Boban, *Kontroverze iz povijesti Jugoslavije*, Zagreb 1987.

¹⁴ Lj. Boban 'Srpska ratna drama Veselina Đuretića', in: *Kontroverze iz povijesti Jugoslavije*, 399-442; Stevan K. Pavlowitch, London-Moscow Through the Fog of Yugoslavia's Wartime Drama: Djuretic's Controversial History, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 2\1987, 369-75; 1\1988, 195-213; See also for the course of discussions on the books: K. Nikolic, *Prošlost bez istorije. Polemike u jugoslovenskoj istoriografiji, 1961-1991*, Beograd 2003

In order to respond on 'Belgrade's production' two scholars in Zagreb responded by the books on Chetniks in Croatia, and the Party organized round table to promote the case.¹⁵

What was Mihailovic's attitude towards the Yugoslavism?

He was among some seven thousand Serbian officers who had fought in the First World War. When Yugoslavia was created as a result of the war, Mihailovic was loyal to the new country. There is no evidence to suggest that he was a Serb nationalist during the interwar period. Among his close friends there were both Serbs and non-Serbs. While serving in Slovenia between 1937 and 1939 Mihalovic's anti-German statements led to his being moved to Belgrade by the then Defence Minister General Milan Nedic. Disappointed by the army's conservatism and by anti-Yugoslav sentiments among some non-Serbs, he proposed that the army be reorganized into separate Serb, Croat and Slovene units and be trained for a guerrilla warfare. Because of these views he was arrested by military authorities, spending 30 days in an army prison in the late 1930s.¹⁶

Sir Alexander Glen, British immediate pre-war naval attache wrote to Nora Beloff on impressions that colonel Mihailovic made on him: "The man I had honor to meet, is honest, serious, well informed ... I discovered his wide scope, whereby he was devoted to entire Yugoslavia, not some narrow Serbian hegemony."¹⁷

The embarrassing military defeat of April 1941, left Mihailovic bitter and resentful towards his superiors who quickly gave up fighting, and towards those who deserted the country and the army. But, unlike some other Serbian officers, he did not openly criticise the Yugoslavism of the interwar years.¹⁸ In a 1942 memorandum entitled *Polazno stanoviste*, (The Starting Point) Mihailovic stated that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia never ceased to exist, and that although the first battle had been lost, the war had not been lost yet. As the war minister he called upon all Yugoslavs to obey eventual calls for mobilization by his Supreme Command. He envisaged establishment of secret organizations that would gather all Yugoslav patriots. In a paragraph dedicated to the strategy against the Partisan movement, Mihailovic foresaw gathering of all Yugoslav-oriented and anti-Communist Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In the document there is no mention of Yugoslavia's post-war internal borders, although Mihailovic did talk about the enlargement of Yugoslavia by 'liberation' of South Slavs under the Italian and Austrian rule.¹⁹ While in the initial period of the war Mihailovic was officially unquestionably a Yugoslav, his Yugoslavism became more evident in the last stages of the war, in 1944-5. He renounced German and Ustasa propaganda that Cetniks would undertake mass revenge against all Croats. And he issued more regular calls on Bosnian Muslims and Croats to join his troops.²⁰ In this period Mihailovic came to support the idea of a Yugoslav federation

¹⁵ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Četnici u Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb 1986; Dušan Plenča, *Kninska ratna vremena 1850 – 1946, Knin-Drniš-Bukovica-Ravni Kotari*, Zagreb 1986.

¹⁶ Bojan Dimitrijevic and Kosta Nikolic, *Djeneral Mihailovic. Biografija*, Belgrade, 2000, pp. 82-3. In 1938 Mihailovic's personal involvement in efforts to suppress pro-Nazi demonstrations earned him a recall from the position as Chief-of-Staff of the Drava Division.

¹⁷ B. Dimitrijevic, K. Nikolic, *Djeneral Mihailovic. Biografija*, Beograd 2000, p.89 (after R.Clogg, P.Auty, *British Policy towards Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, 1975 p.469)

¹⁸ For instance General Bogoljub Ilic, Mihailovic's predecessor as the Minister of War, disappointed and horrified by the crimes committed against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, came to believe that the 1939 Agreement (*Sporazum*), which established an autonomous Croatia, must be reconsidered under new circumstances. See his letter to the Prime Minister, General Dusan Simovic, Cairo, 8. Nov. 1941, in: Bogoljub Ilic, *Memoari armijskog generala*, Belgrade, 1995, Appendix No. 2, pp. 236-41.

¹⁹ Milan Vesovic, Kosta Nikolic and Bojan Dimitrijevic (compilers), *Dragoljub M. Mihailovic: Rat i mir Djenerala. Izabrani ratni spisi*, Belgrade, 1998, 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 7-9 (source: *Arhiv Vojno-istorijskog Instituta* CA 16-1-22, 1942). The document also contains Mihailovic's recommendations regarding the punishment of deserters and criminals within the Home Army, and his call for a struggle against the Ustasas by all means. As far as Serbia's collaborationist regime of General Nedic was concerned, Mihailovic ordered that all those who collaborated with it be closely monitored and that records of their collaboration be kept, so that their personal responsibility for collaboration with the enemy can be proven after the war.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-36.

consisting of three units—Slovene, Croat and Serb—thus abandoning a straight return to the old order. At a Congress held in Ba, in January 1944, sponsored by Mihailovic, presided over by Zivko Topalovic, leader of the small Socialist Party, and attended by representatives of most pre-war parties, including the Croatian Peasant Party, a resolution was passed calling for an internal reorganization of Yugoslavia into the three units after the war. The resolution also called for the abolition of the 1939 *Sporazum*. Future borders between Serb and Croat units were not drawn, but it was emphasized that:

In tomorrow's Yugoslavia, which we are adopting as our state and existential framework, the union of all Serb lands must be realized. Serb lands are all those where Serb blood was spilled and where Serb heads fell, because by their very sacrifice they irrefutably marked the boundaries of Serbdom.²¹

Mihailovic, however, never managed to attract mass following among non-Serbs and his movement was eventually defeated. In early stages of the war he was linked with Greater Serbian programs of the lawyer Stevan Moljevic and of young, pro-Cetnik intellectuals who met in December 1942 in Sahovici, Montenegro. The Sahovici meeting called for the establishment of a Greater Serbia. It is not quite accurate to put equal mark between his views on Yugoslavism with those, well-known written by Dr. Stevan Moljevic in early Summer of 1941.²² Also some other programs attributed to prominent personalities or resolutions (Pro-Chetnik young intellectuals, Sahovici, Montenegro, December 1942) or manuals for national propaganda (Dinara division, North Dalmatia, March 1942) can not be attributed directly to Mihailovic's influence.²³ Even People's Congress in village Ba, 1944, and its announced program for the political and social structure of postwar Yugoslavia bore the seal of politicians' influence rather than of military.²⁴

His association with those who openly advocated Greater Serbia was certainly key factor behind his movement remaining predominantly, if not exclusively Serbian!²⁵ - Mihailovic was also perceived as someone who fought for the restoration of the old order, which had been, even before the war, largely discredited, especially among the non-Serbs. Mihailovic furthermore discredited his movement by tolerating collaboration of his commanders with Italian troops in Dalmatia. The government-in-exile was of little help in promoting Mihailovic's as an all-Yugoslav resistance and an alternative to the Partisan movement. All these factors, combined with the Partisans' successful resistance campaign, contributed to both inability of Mihailovic to attract a significant non-Serb support and to his ultimate failure.

²¹ Kosta Nikolic, 'Dragoljub Draza Mihailovic', in Peter Radan and Aleksandar Pavkovic (eds), *The Serbs and their Leaders in the Twentieth Century*, Ashgate, 1997, pp. 219-20.

²² In brief, enormous Serbian unit ("Great Serbia") within enlarged Yugoslavia (see: Tomasevic *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia: The Chetniks*, Stanford, CA, 1975, pp.155-65); Until 1944 no coherent national platform was adopted within Chetnik movement. The Congress in village Ba in late January 1944 which gathered political representatives of Serbs (majority), Croats, Slovenes and Muslims (a few), as well as military leaders, finally adopted new political strategy inclusive a federative form in resolving a national question (Branko Petranovic, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1945*, Beograd 1992, pp. 213-17); For the Congress in Ba see also Tomasevic (1975, pp.355-360)

²³ Petranovic (1992, pp.214, 216)

²⁴ For Moljevic's programme see: Jozo Tomasevich, 1975, pp. 155—65. For the Sahovici meeting and the argument that it was not directly linked with Mihailovic see: Branko Petranovic, 1992, pp. 214—16.

²⁵ Mihailovic established good relations with the Croatian Peasant Party. In mid-1944, the former Yugoslav Generals Matija Parac and Dragutin Kuzmic and Colonel Luka Saric were appointed commanders of the Home Army for Croatia, Slavonia and Bosnia. See Vesovic *et al.* (compilers), op. cit., p. 34. In 1944 there were some 4,000 Bosnian Muslim troops under Mihailovic's command. Slovene troops under major (later on General) Karlo Novak also fought under Mihailovic's command. (See also: S. Kljakić, M. Kranjc, *Slovenački četnici, poverljivi izveštaji vojvode i komandanta Karla I. Novaka*, Beograd 2006)

Episodes

On Partisan – German discussion in late 1942. and 1943

Walter Roberts and its publisher in foreword for the third printing indicated that his book published in 1973, while obtaining general approval in Western publications, was initially received negatively in Yugoslav official circles. Even more, in the summer of 1973, the Yugoslav government filed a formal protest against the book with U.S. Department of State as well as to American Embassy in Belgrade. The main thrust of the protest was that it equated Tito's Partisan movement with Mihailovic's resistance. In Partisan thinking, theirs was a liberation movement while Mihailovic's forces were traitorous collaborators. Walters noted that the book does not equate the two resistance movements; neither does it accepted the Partisan mythology about them.

Only when Djilas in his *Wartime* (1977) confirmed his participation in the negotiations, Tito mentioned it openly in his speech in Jablanica 1978, but avoided to mention the essence of the *March talks*.

For majority of Yugoslavs it was still a secret that U.S. has on disposal all German documents on the matter.

Consequently, the first ever translated foreign book on Cetniks (Joso Tomasevic) in SFRY, appeared without chapter on *March talks*.

For the long time other two participants kept silence on their involvement (Velebit and Popovic).

Wartime high ranking party leader in Bosnia, Ugljesa Danilovic, revealed in his memoirs,²⁶ what really had driven Tito to make that move – March negotiations. Danilovic confessed to his diary that, after he had learned about talks, 'could not believe at a spot'. But he accepted Tito's explanation: 'It is not question of armistice but to hold activities against one enemy until we score another. The Cetniks are the most dangerous, principal enemy now because of the future ... Tomorrow, a fight against them would be much harder.' So in the name of the future, they were ready to make arrangements with the occupiers.²⁷

Cetniks in Croatia

Recently published book on war crimes in Dalmatia 1944, allegedly committed by Cetniks,²⁸ provoked our interest to go briefly through discussion among the scholars on this topic and layout some of testimonies made by the author of the mentioned book.

Josip Majski has written on the crimes that he witness as a boy, escaping fate of the others by miracle. He has noticed that for his life time he followed every anniversary (29. March) and commemoration for the victims, but no word who did it – never. Some 'answers' finally appear under new circumstances. Dr Nedjeljko Mihanovic in his book *Politicki Parnas* (p.21) wrote: 'As in Gate, the Cetniks committed bloodshed killing innocent people in Donji Dolac on March 26, 1944. They slathered and then burned 272 persons, some 103 children out of them. All that is forgotten and covered with a silence in our official historiography,' claims Mihanovic.²⁹ Majski was curious on what

²⁶ U. Danilović, Sjećanja 1-3, (priredio Zdravko Antonić) Beograd 1987. The most important is the 3rd volume – Ratni dnevnik (War diary)

²⁷ Kosta Nikolić, Prošlost bez istorije. Polemike u jugoslovenskoj istoriografiji, 1961-1991, Beograd 2003, 244 (after: U. Danilovic, vol.3, p. 167)

²⁸ Josip Majski, *Istina o zločinima u selima Cetinske krajine 1944*, Razlog, Zagreb 2007

²⁹ J. Majski, p.166

source he had based alleged claim and found that he used a book by Don Frane Mihanovic (*Da se ne zaboravi*). Don Frane mentioned that 7th SS division committed the crimes, but the real executors were actually some 50 – 100 Cetniks. Almost similar story repeats Mate Simundic in his book *Hrvatski smrtni put* (Split, 2001). He enlarged an argument of Cetniks' crime, by stating that it was obvious difference in outlook between SS and Cetniks, dirty, ugly, and unshaved.³⁰

Anything but accurate- writes Majski. All survivors know that all villages were put in blockade by detachments of 396. division (Vrazija), Croat – based under German command. They spent overnight in the villages. The execution was made next day by 7th SS division, Volksdeutcher based unit. The irony was that the villages in question at foothills of a mountain Kamesnica and Mosor were not so 'partisan inclined'. The crime was of the great proportions. Some 1.800 were killed. In Majski's village Vostane 508 alone.³¹ Attitude of the authorities and even Catholic Church provoked him to go into public with his thruth.

What is the rate of Cetniks' crime in Croatia?

A historian Igor Graovac dedicates his whole Ph.D on a matter,³² and has become a strong opponent of a misused calculations in the recent time not only by journalists and politicians but scholars as well.³³

His basic findings and remarks are as a follow:

- 1) The partisan based estimate (1.372) in support for an indictment against vojvoda Momcilo Djujic commander of the Cetnik Dinara division.
- 2) The Croat official data issued by Land Commission for persecuting war crimes – 1.729 citizens³⁴
- 3) Dr Franjo Tudjman in his book (1989) stuck to the figure of 1.372.
- 4) Graovac's own findings, confirmed by the names of the victims- 2.905. The number deals with Croats as well as other nationalities (approximately one third)
- 5) Vladimir Zerjavic (1994) listed that 20.000 Croats and Muslims were killed in the course of the war by the Cetniks.
- 6) Zdravko Dizdar and M. Kujundzic came out in 1995 by approximation of 3.750 victims, putting aside findings of Graovac.³⁵
- 7) Z. Dizdar and M. Sobolevski, suddenly increased the number on 20.000 victims of Cetniks' terror in Croatia and BiH (1999)³⁶

Dr Graovac bitterly remarks that Dizdar even forgot his previous claim dated four years ago (3.750, albeit exaggerated). Even Dr Sobolevski forgot his polemic remarks on Zerajic's writing in 1994.³⁷ Both, Dizdar and M. Sobolevski also determined ethnic origin of the victims as the Croats only. They find 'solution' to explain new 'findings' in 'an assumption' that 'after amnesty and mass mobilization 1944 /1945' many Cetniks took a chance to shift a side and carried out their old practice (killing Croats and Muslims) but since than under new emblem – red star. The authors claim further on that 'Cetniks' crimes of genocide have been forbidden to search on ... but current experience with repeated great

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² I. Graovac, *Žrtve četnika u Hrvatskoj 1941 – 1945. godine*, Sociološki aspekti (1996)

³³ I. Graovac, *Suodnos demografije i historiografije u istraživanjima ljudskih gubitaka*, in: Hans Georg Fleck, Igor Graovac (eds.), *Dijalog povjesničara istoričara*, vol.3, Zagreb 2001 pp. 523- 539; I. Graovac, *Otvora li demokracija mogućnost prestanka manipulacije stradalima? Primjer: razlike u utvrđivanju broja stradalih od četnika 1941. – 1945. u Hrvatskoj*, in: : Hans Georg Fleck, Igor Graovac (eds.), *Dijalog povjesničara istoričara*, vol.4, Zagreb 2001, pp 553-564

³⁴ HAD, ZKRZ Narodne Republike Hrvatske Zagreb 1944 – 1947, box 30 (after Graovac, p. 556)

³⁵ *Doprinos Hrvatske pobjedi antifašističke koalicije*, Zagreb 1995

³⁶ *Presuceni cetnicki zlocini u Hrvatskoj i BiH 1941 -1945*, Zagreb 1999

³⁷ M. Sobolevski, *Pogresno istrcavanje V. Zerjavica*, CSP br.2 (26), Zagreb 1994, pp.352 -354.

Serbian aggression on Croatia and BiH 1991 – 1995 demonstrates that genocide capacity of majority of the Serbian people has not been expired'

Ivo Goldstein writes that in Croatia Chetnik mass crimes against the Croats remained limited to the Dalmatian interior, Knin and a small part of Lika.³⁸ He does not mention other victims but Croats.

³⁸ I. Goldstein, *Croatia A History*, London 1999, p. 145