3-1-2000

The Children of Cain: Dobrica Ćosić's Serbia

Nick Miller

Boise State University
Nationalism in Central Europe — A Chance or a Threat for the Emerging Liberal Democratic Order?  
Stefan Auer  

The Politics of Memory: Constructing National Identity in the Czech Lands, 1945 to 1948  
Nancy M. Wingfield  

The Children of Cain: Dobrica Ćosić’s Serbia  
Nick Miller  

Party Formation Process and the 1998 Elections in Hungary: Defeat as Promoter of Change for the HSP  
Attila Agh  

Institutional Choice after Communism: A Critique of Theory-building in an Empirical Wasteland  
Michael Bernhard  

Expulsion of Integration: Unmixing Interethnic Marriage in Postwar Czechoslovakia  
Benjamin Frommer  

The East Is Read: The End of Communism, Slovenian Exceptionalism, and the Independent Journalism of Mladina  
Patrick Hyder Patterson
The Children of Cain: 
Dobrica Ćosić's Serbia

Nick Miller

Today Dobrica Ćosić, the Serbian novelist, is most often exploited as a handy caricature, his name a code word for the ill effects of Serbian intellectuals' involvement in politics. But as code word, Ćosić loses meaning and the nature of his influence is obscured. While he clearly did something to inspire the growth and quality of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s, establishing the nature of his inspiration is difficult, given the layers of mythology that have grown up around him. Ćosić's influence appears to have been rooted in his ability and eagerness to incorporate timeless Serbian cultural symbols, his version of the history of Serbs in the twentieth century, and above all his own personal fate under communism into a single compelling vision. According to this vision, he and his Serbian people, treacherous at heart, are plagued by a tendency to betray and kill one another. They are fratricidal. As Ćosić believed he had emerged from the darkness of servitude to corrupt communist masters, he believed that Serbs could conquer their own fratricidal past and eventually save themselves and their nation through revival and consolidation along national lines.

Division, betrayal, self-sacrifice, and fratricide are not novel themes in Serbian culture. Anyone familiar with the Kosovo epic will recognize them. Ćosić's gift was to be able to distill these eternal images of division into a potion that modern Serbian society could understand and embrace. In the process, they became standard components of the nationalist message imbibed by Serbs in the 1980s. In establishing his framework for understanding Serbs' place in Yugoslavia and in history, Ćosić had to authenticate his own credentials as an outsider to the regime (no small feat), fashion his vision of Serbia's fate, and apply it directly as a litmus test for those holding or contending for power in Serbia.

Deobe: The Chill of Isolation

Several days after Tito died in May 1980, Ćosić found himself walking along Terazije in downtown Belgrade as long columns of Yugoslavs moved in procession to visit Tito's casket: "I felt a chill walking along the opposite side of the street from the people; I felt alone, totally separated, the first time I had felt such isolation, that division from the people, from the people of my country." Ćosić viewed it as his task to overcome that isolation, which was a product of the Yugoslavs' deep love of Tito, whom Ćosić viewed as the "greatest enemy of [his] people in the last century." Ćosić felt that he, virtually alone, understood what had yet to dawn on his countrymen: that Tito, and communism, had left a fratricidal imprint on Yugoslavia. One can only imagine how terrifying it must have been for him to possess a truth of such existential import for his nation, yet be unable to overcome the stubborn unwillingness of that nation to perceive it. Ćosić would gradually emerge from that darkness of May 1980 as more and more of his people came to share his conviction that Tito hated Serbs.

But as with much of Ćosić's autobiography, here he invented a little. He actually thrived on isolation, especially when it imparted moral superiority. Years before Tito's death, Ćosić had already isolated himself from power in Serbia. In May 1968, he, a member of the Central Committee of the Serbian League of Communists, delivered a speech at the meeting of that body's Fourteenth Plenum which he knew would result in his exclusion from positions of power and influence in Serbian politics. In that speech, Ćosić warned that the Leagues of Communists of Serbia and Yugoslavia were treading a dangerous path by allowing Yugoslav republics and

---

1. Dobrica Ćosić, Promene (Novi Sad: Dnevnik, 1992), 22.
2. Ćosić, Promene, 19.
provinces more substantial autonomy. After that meeting, the satirical biweekly Jež published on its cover a cartoon portraying Đosić sitting in isolation from his Central Committee colleagues in the meeting hall, with deobe emblazoned across the top. Deobe means "divisions," and also happened to be the title of one of Đosić's novels, the one that portrayed the royalist četniks who fought his communist partisans during the Second World War. Đosić's Deobe concerned a Serbian people divided ideologically and fratricidally. What is more, in his speech Đosić fought against another deoba of the Serbian nation. Here, in May 1968, Đosić himself was isolated either by the Central Committee or by his own will. Đosić might have been forced out (and thus betrayed), or he might well have committed a purposeful act of political suicide.

In fact, Đosić's defiance was purposeful and represented his first act of contrition before a Serbian people whom he believed he had betrayed as a Communist. At this point (1968), Đosić had already concluded that communism in Yugoslavia was a corrupt and failed endeavor. At the Fourteenth Plenum, he acted in accord with this conclusion, cleansing himself morally and absolving himself of responsibility for future communist transgressions against Serbs and Serbia. The cartoonist for Jež was perceptive: in his drawing, not only was Đosić alone, but he also had his back turned to his colleagues. He was not forced out of the party, he rejected it. Đosić has since acknowledged that his separation from the party was his own idea, a result of his disappointment with party policy. And in his speech on the second day of the plenum, he insisted that he would "not accept any political responsibility for the eventual negative results of this plenum." Đosić harbored no hope that he could affect party policy, so instead of remaining responsible for policies he could not support, he sacrificed himself in the name of Serbia.

Administrative changes in Tito's Yugoslavia constituted the backdrop to Đosić's epiphany in 1968. Specifically, territorial division drove him to leave Serbian political life: he had come to believe that being a Communist in Yugoslavia meant supporting the spiritual and spatial fragmentation of Serbia. By 1968, Đosić was convinced that Tito and his regime were actually devoted to the destruction of Serbia. Although he had perceived hints of this divisive intent earlier, Đosić saw the first certain sign of this policy in 1966 with the purge of Aleksandar Ranković, the highest ranking Serb in the Yugoslav leadership, the vice-president of Yugoslavia and the head of intelligence in the state. Following Ranković's removal, the regime gradually Albanianized the administration of Kosovo, a part of Serbia populated mostly by Albanians. In 1963, Kosovo had become an autonomous province of Serbia, a higher status reserved previously only for Vojvodina. Đosić feared that both Kosovo and Vojvodina would thereafter be treated as ever more autonomous states controlled by non-Serbs (Albanians in Kosovo, Hungarians in Vojvodina), splitting them from "Serbia proper" forever. Other events stoked his fears: in 1968 the League of Communists recognized a Muslim nation in Yugoslavia; the Croatian mass movement began in 1967 and peaked in 1971; and finally, Tito purged the Serbian League of Communists in 1972, emptying it of its most capable leaders. All of these processes could be credited to some degree to Ranković's fall and all could be characterized as threatening to Serbs, because they promised to further divide the Serbian community of Yugoslavia.

Many Serbian Communists accepted Ranković's demotion because it seemed to foretell more freedom of speech and thought in Yugoslavia. However, as one Serbian critic of Tito has remarked, that expectation was not met: "It took a minimum of four years passing to see that this liberalization had not resulted in greater protection of individual rights and freedoms, but above all in greater respect for the rights of individual federal units as sover-

3. Jež, 1510 (Belgrade), 7 June 1968.
7. Đosić was not expelled from the party; he remained a member for several weeks before submitting his resignation.
8. For a clear recent statement of this thesis, from one of Serbia's most influential and responsible historians, see Branko Petranović, Jugoslavensko iskustvo srpske nacionalne integracije (Pirot: Grafička, 1993), 113-14.
9. At this point, it seems almost superfluous to note that there were in 1968 considerable Serbian populations in Croatia and Bosnia.
As post-Ranković reforms strengthened the power of regional bureaucracies in territories populated by Serbs or considered vital to Serbian existence, including Kosovo, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia, Serbs came to equate Titoism with anti-Serbianism. As Serbian communities saw walls of bureaucracy and firmer borders built up between them, the proposition that Tito's regime was purposely anti-Serbian grew more tenable.

Čosić saw in the provincial bureaucracies the promise of division—destruction not only of the socialist experiment in Yugoslavia, but of a unified Serbia. In his 1968 speech, he asked plaintively, “Will the Sava and the Danube indeed be for our generation the border between Belgrade and Novi Sad, Mačva and Srem, Banat and Danubia?” In other words, would Serbia be diminished to include only Belgrade and the Šumadijan core? The question resonated deeply among history-conscious Serbs. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Serbian political leaders had favored the creation of Yugoslavia because it was the only feasible geopolitical solution to the dispersion of their community throughout the western Balkans. As long as a Yugoslav state provided for Serbian unity, it was desirable. The fate of Serbs in the Second World War, especially in the Independent State of Croatia, where they were subject to genocide, guaranteed that the imperative to unity would be as strongly felt under the Tito regime. Čosić's interpretation of Ranković's fall and events in Kosovo through the prism of the fear of division was the catalyst for his speech to the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia in May 1968.

Čosić as Outsider

Čosić's speech signaled his move from regime insider to outsider. From that point forward, he could attack the party with the unique authority of the apostate, and he did so with a clear sense of a higher purpose, which he articulated as the search for truth in the face of authoritarian attempts to suppress it. On numerous occasions after 1968 he referred to the writer's role as speaker of truth:


we should have the “freedom [to know] the truth about society and man” (1968);12 “creative freedom ... must include freedom [to seek] the truth and the right to struggle against all types of lie” (1974);13 “in an ideological society, for a decent life and future, the most dangerous thing is the tyranny of lies” (1987);14 “[Tito] persecuted me because of the truth I told ...” (1992).15 Most recently he said:

In my life I have tried to serve my people, but in which way? By serving it as a writer, serving it by interpreting and speaking some truth about its existence. If I somehow helped in that way, then I have fulfilled my human duty. (1997)16

Edward Said recently wrote that the intellectual “speaks the truth to power.”17 By that definition, Čosić was a prototypical intellectual, one of a cohort of East Europeans who from the late 1960s to the collapse of communism in Europe viewed truth as the most virtuous and dangerous weapon against the oppressive state. But where many tellers of truth (Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik) produced a humanistic vision, something went wrong in Čosić's search. As it happens, there was nothing dishonest or consciously manipulative about Čosić's understanding of his role; it was the truths that he chose to tell that foreshadowed Serbia's shattered future. For, as Said also wrote, “Speaking the truth to power ... is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change.”18 Čosić's choices were different from those of Havel and Michnik, and they brought harm to Serbia and to Yugoslavia.

As a public intellectual, Čosić would claim that novelists were most capable of plumbing the depths of a nation's history, producing through fiction a picture more truthful than the factual record. When Čosić was admitted to the Serbian Academy of Arts...
and Sciences in 1977, he delivered a speech that embodied his subjective view of history and the novelist's task.19

The striving for the universally human and lasting is included in the striving for the timeless; in the aspiration to know the unknown and to remember, we conquer our own death. Before such a goal the writer is compelled internally to found and actively create his own form of expression. ... In the multiplicity of its motivations, the historical novel is a search for a lost individual and collective identity, a search through time in which that identity can be found.

Čosić viewed this task as of critical import, quoting Tolstoy: "Write the real, true history of this age! That is life's goal!"20 For Čosić, history becomes revelation, the novelist's task to express a truth that transcends facts and interpretations—a subjective truth emerging from within that captures the essence of human existence.

Thus one of the keys to Čosić's engagement in Serbian cultural and intellectual affairs is his insistence that he never was and still is not political. He has always viewed his work as primarily creative, inspired by a vision separate from and superior to politics. He has always seen himself as an inwardly directed thinker, reluctant to give interviews, perhaps in his mind reflecting his peasant origins in a small village in the Morava valley. Čosić has carefully cultivated his image as a man of few words, sometimes taking it to the point of self-parody.21 Indeed his demeanor has been a subject of derision for many. Draža Marković, one of Serbia's most powerful men in the late 1970s, once referred to Čosić as "unsympathetic, with his pretentious pose and behavior like Buddha."22 Marković could not be expected to appreciate Čosić, but his characterization remains vivid and apt. Twenty years later, after being heckled by demonstrating students during Belgrade's fleeting anti-Milošević movement of November–December 1996, Čosić refused to answer a reporter's questions on the spectacle, claiming simply, "I am a writer!" as though the burdensome task beggared the empathy of outsiders and also protected him from the sort of scrutiny reserved for political figures.23 But whether his activity is or ever has been explicitly political, his intellectual and cultural offerings to his Serbian people have long produced political results.

In his search for and declamation of the truth, in novels, public speeches, and academic essays, Čosić provided abundant examples of his fixation on division, both spiritual and geographic. Čosić would assert that division and fratricide are peculiar characteristics especially of Serbs but also of Yugoslavs. He found his most telling examples of fratricide in events provoked by the twentieth-century ideological extremes of communism and fascism. For instance, in his 1977 speech, Čosić characterized Serbia's recent past:

[Twice in this century ...] unsatisfied sons, who wished to change the world, rose up against their unhappy and disappointed fathers; but for the sons as for the fathers, victories on battlefields were in vain.

The worst example of this rebellion was the Second World War, during which Serbs chose to fight on opposing sides:

at the beginning of the revolution of 1941, political movements arose representing perhaps the deepest spiritual and moral decline for Serbs in recent centuries ... we slaughtered and crushed each other with incomprehensible cruelty in the fratricidal war of 1941–1945.24

But it was not only fratricidal warfare that reflected Serbia's degradation. Čosić believed that in victory Serbs and Yugoslavs were also divided and humiliated, this time by themselves, as victors: "peace was conceived of as an opportunity to ... realize various and selfish intentions in the name of common interests."25 In other words, peace brought to power in Yugoslavia false prophets who would betray their stated ideals in a search for personal enrichment. Again Čosić insists that Serbian history is filled with division and betrayal—here, the betrayal of the very victory over division during the war, this time at the hands of the Communists who won the war but who continued to reinforce divisions among the peoples of Yugoslavia.

Čosić was a part of that selfish generation of revolutionaries that...
he described above. He understood that he was complicit in the most recent betrayal of Serbia, perpetrated by the Communists of Yugoslavia, both Serbian and of other national origins. Titoism, he believed, was the modern demoralizing force that divided Yugoslavs and, more important, divided Serbs within Yugoslavia. So Čosić could claim a peculiar expertise as one of the original Serbian Communists, a wartime partisan, a member of the first post-war Serbian agitprop team and, finally, as a member of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia. Čosić is thus able to this day to provide the most formidable defense possible for his thesis that Serbs and Yugoslavs are fratricidal: he was part of the Titoist machine, guilty himself of betraying his people. Having experienced his own revelation in 1968, he set out to enlighten his fellow Yugoslavs.

Although Čosić's central theme was the fratricidal nature of Serbs, ultimately division and betrayal became highly mobile phenomena. Čosić and others who followed would also identify these tendencies in the relations among Yugoslavs. In so doing, they accepted the rhetoric of the Tito regime, which emphasized the fraternal relations between the South Slavic peoples, as enshrined in the phrase that symbolized the Titoist approach to the national question, *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity). Having been immersed in the rhetoric of brotherhood and unity, many Serbs would later conceive of conflict among Yugoslav national groups as fratricidal, and always directed at Serbs ("Serbophobia" and "genocide" became all-too-common accusations by the late 1980s). In 1987, as mistrust among Yugoslavia's once-brotherly nations simmered, Čosić revisited the theme of fratricide, but also suggested that any attempt to bring nations together was destined to fail:

> Yugoslavia is the political consequence of both world wars; it was created in trenches and across trenches; it was created in fratricidal battles in both world wars, in genocide, religious wars, and civil war.

By this time, Čosić had rejected Yugoslavia altogether—it was a product of historical conditions, but not of any relationship among the peoples of the state. Therefore, given his conviction that Serbophobia was rampant in Yugoslavia, he concluded that fratricide was inherent in *any* multinational state:

> In these "brotherly associations" built on the torment of survival or for ideological reasons, there is not brotherhood; our century and our daily lives convince us that in the dark recesses of any genus, Cain lurks.

This was a powerful image: Cain, the archetypal fratricide, lying in wait to destroy any association of nations. The notion was embraced by most Serbs who, with the able assistance of intellectuals like Čosić, became convinced that their brother Yugoslavs wished their destruction.

**The Children of Cain: Traitors and Heroes**

A critical part of Čosić's cultural bequest to the Serbian people was a hierarchy of traitors and heroes; traitors played on the Serbian tendency to fratricide, heroes resisted it, acting purely in the interests of the nation. At the most basic level, that of the individual Serb, Čosić established a litmus test: if one acquiesced in the gradual creation of semi-sovereign republics and provinces in Yugoslavia, one was a traitor to the Serbian people. But he built upon that foundation of traitors to Serbia a more inclusive structure of historic enemies, those who exploited the Serbs' willingness to betray each other. These historic enemies were the Habsburg monarchy and international communism (Bolshevism), and they provided the context and conditions for individual Serbian acts of betrayal.

In his famous address to the Serbian Academy in 1977, Čosić included Austria-Hungary in a list of perpetrators of genocide against the Serbs. A rather alarming claim in any context, it is especially startling to find it so early in Čosić's progress. His accusation of genocide against the Habsburgs laid the foundation for subsequent portrayals of the Austrian dynasty as fundamentally

---


27. Čosić, "Književnost i istorija danas," 126.


29. However, it must be said that in *Time of Death*, he introduced the theme of Austrian genocide against the Serbs in the specific context of the First World War.
anti-Serbian (as in his earlier novel *Time of Death*). The Habsburgs' crime was to have created persistent borders between communities of Orthodox Christian Serbs: Bosnia, Vojvodina, Croatia, Dalmatia. The Habsburgs of course had worked mightily before 1914 to contain Serbian nationalism and connections between the Serbs of Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia itself. They had engaged in divide and rule policies in order to control Serbs and Croats, and the fact that Serbs often abetted that process only aided Cosić's analysis.

Cosić also fingered the Communist International as an outsider-enemy of the Serbs. He blamed the Comintern for its interwar policy of supporting national movements as revolutionary movements and for labeling the Serbian monarchy and the Serbian bourgeoisie as the primary culprits inhibiting progress in Yugoslavia. Tito exploited the same images of Serbia. After the war, Tito, a Stalinist, had allegedly crushed national sentiment in Serbia while fostering it elsewhere (Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia). The shared crime of the Habsburgs and the Bolsheviks was to have sown divisions between South Slavs and among Serbs: they played upon the divisiveness of Serbs to find collaborators; they capitalized on the divisiveness of South Slavs, and especially hostility towards Serbs, to keep Serbia fragmented.

The ease with which the Habsburgs and the Comintern were not only integrated into the pantheon of Serbia's historic enemies, but equated, was rather stunning and involved a common calculation among Serbs: Tito, a Bolshevik, a Stalinist, was also half-Croat, half-Slovene, and his tactics harkened back to those of Franz Joseph. How, Vuk Drašković (one of Cosić's many heirs) later asked, could Tito help but be a Serbophobe?

Raised in school and in childhood on official serbophobia, as an Austrian soldier sent to the front in 1914 against schismatic and hegemonistic Serbia, and later, as a communist and prospective cadre of the Comintern, given the opportunity anew to listen to the serbophobic lectures of his youth—such a Josip Broz, nonetheless, grew into a great Yugoslav, and perhaps it is improper to doubt the decency of all of his intentions. He probably never freed himself of the virus of serbophobia, but was it—one asks oneself—possible for him to forget overnight that which he was taught for the first fifty years of his life?

Just as important as outsider-enemies, however, were the enemies within, upon whom outsiders relied. Although Cosić's ultimate condemnation for policies dividing Serbia would be reserved for Edvard Kardelj and Tito (that "Stalinist, tyrant, power-lover, hedonist, merciless and corrupt demagogue, skilled tactician ... that status-seeker, ignoramus, careerist, unprincipled statesman ... bureaucratic monarch ..."), he spotted the willingness to destroy Serbia even among Serbs themselves. Those Serbs who favored or acquiesced in the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, including the potential achievement of full republic status by Vojvodina and Kosovo, were supporters of *srbijanstvo*, which in Serbian refers to a Serbianism that reduces Serbia to a place south of the Danube and east of the Drina (thus, not including the Serbian communities of Croatia, Bosnia, and Vojvodina). Those Serbs who were willing to support such a narrow vision of Serbian interests were for Cosić perpetrators of "that shameful cadre and personal policy that follows provincial affinities and criteria"—that is, nepotism, narrowmindedness, and corruption. Since Yugoslavia's federal structure after 1974 reinforced precisely that narrow *srbijanstvo*, Cosić identified those who favored the federalization of Yugoslavia as virtual traitors to the Serbian community.

Those Serbian Communists who survived three tumultuous years—1966 (when Ranković was removed), 1972 (when Tito purged the remainder of the Serbian party), and 1974 (when the 1974 constitution federalizing the state was proclaimed)—come in for Cosić's harshest condemnations, because those were the
years when Serbia’s divided fate became obvious. In his view, “mediocrity and political cowardice” defined them.35 Here Čosić would exhibit a fondness for the historical metaphor: the vast majority of Serbian communist leaders after 1974 were, for Čosić, heirs to the mantle of Prince Miloš Obrenović, whom many Serbs, including Čosić, liked to compare unfavorably to his revolutionary rival Djordje Petrović (Karadjordje). Miloš viewed “politics as skill,” while Karadjordje was “representative of the rebellious, epic, freedom-seeking, revolutionary tradition.”36 Since the skilled Miloš had the freedom-seeking Karadjordje executed in 1817, the purpose of the image is clear—Serbia is plagued with amoral masters always ready to sacrifice Serbia’s true revolutionaries. Post-1974 Serbian leaders, including Petar Stambolić, Draža Marković, Miloš Minić, Tihomir Vlaškalić, and Dušan Petrović Sane, Čosić believed, were interested in power only for the sake of power, even at the expense of the heirs of Karadjordje. Stambolić symbolized “the political and moral ruin of the revolutionary movement and the Serbian nation.”37 Marković was “a representative of the negative in Serbian political tradition, that ‘marketplace Serbia’…of which I am ashamed.”38 Vlaškalić reflected Tito’s “unerring talent for finding political lackeys.”39 These men, nearly universally loathed in Serbia after 1980, were guilty of working with rather than against the federalization of Yugoslavia, and there is little doubt that they were above all political survivors. But they reflected for Čosić the timeless divisions in Serbian society. In working with and not against the 1974 constitution, they contributed to a plot drawn up on high to fragment Serbia and create small states within Yugoslavia’s borders. When Stambolić, Marković, Vlaškalić, Petrović, and others collaborated with Tito and Kardelj, in Čosić’s mind they worked for the destruction of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

As Čosić established his enemies list, he also built a list of modern Serbian heroes, victims of Titoism, whose unifying features were that they were Serbs, they had fallen from grace, and, perhaps coincidentally, they were centralists. For instance, he personally rehabilitated Aleksandar-Ranković. Similarly, Čosić would praise Blagoje Nešković, who was removed from the politbüro of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1949 under accusations of Stalinism, and Slobodan Penezić Krcun, a regime watchdog whose reputation as a defender of Serbian interests grew posthumously (he died in 1964 in an automobile accident). But Ranković must appear at the head of Čosić’s list, as Ranković has long been the subject of polarized opinion in Yugoslavia. The official version accused Ranković of bugging Tito and other leaders, but that accusation was pure theater, designed to demonize the regime policeman. Some have argued that Tito had to be rid of Ranković because Ranković had built himself up as a rival.40 Most likely Ranković had to be removed because he would not go along with more substantive federalization of Yugoslavia when such federalization had become policy for Tito and Kardelj. Whether his resistance was a product of his love of Serbia or his centralist convictions is an open question.

Ranković is hard to picture as a victim of Titoism, given that he headed state security after the liberation of Belgrade in October 1944 and thus was responsible for the purge of Stalinists and others after 1948, the prison camp for “cominformists” on Goli Otok, and the suppression of dissent in general in Yugoslavia. However, by the early 1980s, Ranković had become a cause célèbre for anti-Titoists. As Čosić himself noted, Ranković’s funeral in August 1983 was “above all a nationalist demonstration. It was a true, widely effective gesture, a real nationalist uprising [of] solidarity with a noted Serbian communist who was the victim of a great injustice.”41 The question that begs an answer: Where is the injustice? Why was Ranković’s demise not just another round in the bolshevik game he was playing?

Two reasons explain why Ranković’s demotion was perceived by many Serbs as more than just a bolshevik hatchet job. First, the Tito regime linked Ranković to interwar Serbian hegemonism,
which was an integral part of the Yugoslav Communists' attack on the interwar Serbian monarchy. At the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, convened after the Brioni Plenum that saw the demotion of Ranković, Dušan Petrović Šane remarked that “Ranković and his group are... a living example of the hegemonistic tendencies which they tried to bring to life in Serbia.” When another Serbian Communist announced to the central committee of the Serbian League of Communists following Ranković's fall that he was “ashamed to be a Serb,” he revived language used to blacken the reputation of interwar Serbia: that the Serbian bourgeoisie and the Serbian monarchy had behaved shamefully in the interwar period. Second, as the cases of Kosovo, Bosnia, and Croatia all demonstrate, the demotion of Ranković initiated a period of profound change in Yugoslavia, which could also be viewed as anti-Serbian. Ranković, demonized by those whom Čosić labeled lackeys of an anti-Serbian regime, later prospered as a result of his alleged resistance to the federalization of Serbia, but also, importantly, because of his very demonization. He played the heroic Karadjordje to Tito’s miserable Miloš.

As Čosić progressively concluded that Tito was fundamentally anti-Serbian (by 1980 he was “the greatest enemy of my people in the last century”), he found ever more noble qualities in Ranković. In 1988, Čosić asserted (presumably with a straight face) that he “had never heard anyone accuse [Ranković] of injustice, of vengefulness, of playing personalities, of moral dishonor.” Further, this coarse revolutionary, the head of the state security service (UDBa), had a special place in his heart for writers, personally saving some authors from imprisonment and authorizing others’ publications (as Čosić’s interviewer noted, “such breadth is not often included in the typical picture of the chief of police and organizational secretary”). Ranković, according to Čosić, was only fully understood by the Serbian peasant

(Čosić himself has been credited with an intuitive understanding of the Serbian peasant).

While the intellectuals and the entire party bureaucracy believed that it was good that Ranković fell, the peasants saw in him a man who defended Yugoslavia and represented Serbia at the head of the party, convinced that he was an honorable and statesmanlike man. Ranković was bad, according to Čosić, but “no more cruel or merciless than Tito, Kardelj, Djilas, Kidrić, Blažević.” Čosić’s view was not entirely clouded—he recognized that ideology could not justify the many, many evils which we committed “in the name of good.” Among the first to submit to that judgment, that responsibility, is Aleksandar Ranković. But the tragedy of his fate will remain to writers and philosophers to interpret.

Čosić, writer and occasional philosopher, seeker of transcendent truths, determined that Ranković’s fate was an injustice. Čosić’s attitude to Ranković was founded upon his dual understanding of the function of division in Serbia: Ranković resisted Serbia’s geopolitical division, and both Ranković and Čosić were cast out of Tito’s brotherhood, fratricidally.

Čosić’s Children: The Fratricidal Metaphor Gains Appeal

While much of the fratricidal imagery might seem to have roots in other powerful cultural forces among Serbs, there are qualities to Čosić’s explication that set it apart from other explanations of Serbian victimhood, including those rooted in the history of Kosovo and in alleged Catholic anti-Serbianism. Surprisingly, one searches in vain for any meaningful reference to the battle of Kosovo in Čosić’s written record. Also absent is religion, any substantive mention of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Čosić’s fratricidal metaphor gained appeal precisely because it allowed Čosić to distance himself from the Serbian Orthodox Church and to focus on the larger process of division that he perceived to be taking place in Yugoslavia. Čosić’s Children: The Fratricidal Metaphor Gains Appeal

42. Zoran Sekulić, Pad i čestina Aleksandra Rankovica (Belgrade: Dositej, 1989), 151.
43. Sekulić, Pad i čestina, 186.
44. Čosić, Promene, 19.
45. Džukić, Čovek u svom vremenu, 174.
46. Ibid.
47. As his friend Mića Popović put it, Čosić could be “in the middle of nowhere” and feel at home among the people there (Milo Gligorijević, Odgovor Miću Popoviću [Belgrade: Nezavisna izdanja, 1984], 55).
48. Džukić, Čovek u svom vremenu, 172–73.
49. Ibid., 177.
50. Ibid.
ricidal system is rooted entirely in the modern history of the interplay of nationalism and communism. More to the point, Ćosić has built his edifice upon his personal experience of the twentieth century. He can speak of betrayal because, in his view, he both perpetrated and experienced it. He can point a trail to liberation from the yoke of divisive ideologies because he himself blazed it. His own seduction by communism and by Tito then explains the violence of his reaction when he discovered that Titoism had no place for him. Any perusal of Ćosić's writings of the 1980s reveals a narcissist who reads his own persecution (which was actually minimal) as the persecution of Serbs, his own alleged lack of freedom as a lack of freedom for Serbs. The truth that Ćosić tells is explicitly Ćosić's truth, his personal possession.

Those who came to share Ćosić's vision that Serbs are fratricidal adopted his core beliefs, while expanding, manipulating, and ultimately popularizing his metaphor. A peculiar characteristic of the contemporary fratricidal vision in Serbia is that it has made Serbs willing to admit, even exult in, their own degradation (as has Ćosić), as though the deeper they descend as a people, the greater their redemption. As Vuk Drašković noted, "It is as if we outstrip all peoples and nations in our bearing of pain and misfortune, in that specifically Serbian, accepting [type of] fatalism.... What if we Serbs have already crossed the outer limits of our suffering and honor in bearing pain, such that it is no longer a virtue but a shame, no longer perseverance but humiliation, no longer even meekness before the sword but paralysis and self-mutilation?"

The fratricidal vision of Serbia worked its way into public discourse and political opposition to the League of Communists of Serbia in the 1980s. One critical reason was that Tito died in 1980, which released Serbia and Yugoslavia from the presence of the leader. But the Albanian rebellion of 1981 in Kosovo acted as a catalyst; it provided a stage on which the victimization of Serbs could be demonstrated. The emigration of Serbs from Kosovo in the 1980s became a staple of nationalist symbolism. After 1985, the virtual flood of publications devoted to the question of Kosovo's proper place in Serbia, ranging from the scholarly to the purely and provocatively sensational, was matched by a petition campaign dominated by Serbia's intellectuals demanding protection for the Serbs of Kosovo and the reincorporation of Kosovo into Serbia proper. The discourse was heavily influenced by the fratricidal metaphor, which in the case of Kosovo is at least understandable, given the parallels between the Kosovo mythology and fratricidalism.

The metaphor was varyingly reinforced in Serbian cultural, intellectual, and political life. Serbian historians and others, scholars and non-scholars, followed the lead of Ćosić and those who first enunciated the theory of Habsburg/Bolshevik anti-Serbianism. By the time that the wars in Slovenia and Croatia began, Serbian scholars with solid credentials had produced analyses illustrating some aspect of the consistency of Croatian, Habsburg, and communist Serbophobia. An excellent example of one permutation of the fratricidal vision is Vasilije Krestić's pioneering work, written in the conviction that there should be no taboo themes, "The Genesis of the Genocide of the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia." Put simply, Krestić ascribed a genocidal predispo-

---

51. Draškovic was a novelist who would later lead the Serbian Renewal Movement. This quote comes from a 1986 talk entitled "Are There Limits to Our Degradation?" before the Serbian Writers' Association. This passage, I think, captures the euphoric nature of Serbian suffering: Vuk Drašković, "Are There Limits to Our Degradation?" in Kekude Srbijo (Belgrade: Nova Knjiga, 1990), 13-14. See also the intriguing article by Drinka Gojković, "Trauma bez katarze," in Nebojša Popov, ed., Srpska strana rata: Trauma i katarze u istorijskom pamćenju (Belgrade: Republika, 1996) 365-93, especially the section on "language," 385 ff.

52. Langdon Healy has noted that photographs of Serbs leaving Kosovo and of amassed Serbs petitioning Belgrade mirrored artwork portraying the flight of the Serbs and their patriarch from Kosovo in the late seventeenth century. Healy, "Visualizing the Borderland: Pictorial Images of Serbian Emigration from Kosovo" (paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, Pacific Coast Branch at Fullerton, Ca., 11 August 1994).


Moving Beyond Fratricide

Dobrica Ćosić initiated and established the historicization of Serbian suffering at the hands of enemies who preyed upon a preternaturally divided and divisive people. Admittedly, the notion of the nation as divisive, as suffering betrayal, as victimized by outsiders, is common to nearly all nationalisms, but that should not preclude investigating its sources in individual cases. It took more than the work of one writer to construct a vision of Serbs as a betrayed people. But Ćosić, so often blamed so irresponsibly for so many of Serbia's excesses, deserves attention if only to isolate and evaluate those excesses for which he was responsible. The intention here is not to diagnose all the ills of Serbian society in the 1980s and 1990s, nor (more important) an attempt to reduce all those ills to Dobrica Ćosić's influence. Rather, this article represents an attempt to identify Ćosić's actual contribution to the creation of a Serbian self-image that reinforced the growth of Serbian nationalism and the destruction of Yugoslavia and, sadly and ironically, of Serbia itself. Nonetheless, if Ćosić's influence were merely one among many sources for this world view, I would still argue that his role was paramount among writers, whether novelists, poets, essayists, or historians.

As a final comment, ironic but not meant to be tongue-in-cheek, some of Ćosić's words can stand as a directive to Serbian writers today:

"Today in this country nothing meaningful and great can be done if we do not experience a spiritual renaissance. And it begins with the selection of those national traditions which have the energy for a new era and the establishment of a hierarchy of lasting values for the individual and society. On that assumption it is reasonable that in the ethos of our culture we consolidate also the bravery to tell truth, above all about ourselves."