Foreword

This is a book about injustice, the injustice of Serbs toward Muslims, and the injustice of the Communist Party toward honest people, rewarding informers regardless of competence and punishing integrity. At a more personal level, it is about the injustice perpetrated by Derviš, the man the author thought she might marry, toward the woman to whom he once promised marriage. It is also a record of how one woman coped with injustice and survived—without seeking revenge and without allowing herself to be crushed by bitterness. What apparently kept her going was her refusal to be crushed, her spirit of defiance. That spirit was just as evident in her dealings with Derviš as it was in her refusal to work as an informer for the Communist Party. Through her eyes, we relive the history of Yugoslavia from the interwar kingdom to the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia. In the kingdom, she recalls, Muslims of the Sandžak and of Bosnia-Herzegovina had the paradoxical experience simultaneously "of belonging and alienation."[1] It was their country insofar as they made their life there; but they were alienated insofar as the Serbian establishment claimed Muslim songs and other cultural artifacts as their own while excluding the history of Islamic culture in Yugoslavia from the school curriculum. But that was officialdom. At the local level, in her native town of Prijepolje, Serbs and Muslims, though living in separate neighborhoods, interacted in a normal way. The Serbs of Prijepolje even showed their respect for Muslim traditions by refraining from eating in public during Ramadan and by not selling pork at the shops.

In fact, in the author's account, her early years in Prijepolje emerge as the most "normal" time in her life, and, for that matter, for the Muslims of the Sandžak, at least during the past eighty years. The traditional setting of town life was governed by clear rules of behavior in which even the details of courtship were tightly prescribed. One knew at all stages of life how to behave—what constituted proper behavior and what was improper. Propriety, in turn, assured a certain amount of predictability or security in life. The outbreak of World War II began the process of shattering that ostensibly secure world. The author remembers Chetnik depredations against Muslims—depredations that destroyed some towns altogether, moved populations around, and left survivors to deal with the legacy of the annihilation

of the traditional setting in which the traditional codes of behavior had been sustained. What World War II did not destroy, the communists often attacked, as in their 1950 campaign against female veiling. There were other pressures, too, in communist times, including of a political nature. Some Yugoslav Muslims, including members of the author's family, responded by declaring themselves Turks in order to gain refuge in Turkey. The old traditions were forgotten after a generation in Turkey, and members of the second generation came to regard Turkey "as their only homeland."

Although Hadžišehović is not concerned with analyzing the reasons for the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia, her story throws some light on this issue. Readers will look in vain for any evidence here that the breakup resulted either from "ancient hatreds" or from constitutional "blueprints" drawn up in Slovenia and Croatia. Nor does she present the breakup in 1991 (or rather, 1987–2002) as the final stage of World War II, or even of a rekindling of its embers. The collapse of socialist Yugoslavia was instead a failure of the socialist system itself, in which, among other things, disaffected professionals "without prospects or social status" were mobilized by nationalist rhetoric that tapped into their discontent, directing it toward members of other ethnic groups. In the mid-twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger challenged people to live "authentically." That "authenticity" embraced integrity, an acceptance of the responsibility entailed in one's own freedom, however limited one's choices may sometimes be, and the courage to do what one thinks is right. If that concept of authenticity may be considered as definitional of *existentialism,* then one may characterize Hadžišehović's book not only as a series of reflections about forms of injustice, but also as an existential personal history.

Hadžišehović's account unfolds against the background of huge political upheavals in the land of the South Slavs. The country was born under dubious circumstances. In 1918, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire was falling apart, Yugoslav politicians declared the creation of a state consisting of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs under the authority of a national council. This council, operating as a provisional government for Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, sent a delegation to Belgrade to negotiate terms of unification with the kingdom of Serbia. Instead of negotiating, however, the delegation—worried about the threat of an Italian military incursion into Slovenia and Croatia—asked the Serbian regent to proclaim unification without any conditions. Although the delegation had exceeded its mandate, there was no turning back. Even the warnings of Stjepan Radić, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, that the union would not be stable until it reached a consensus on the internal organization of the state, were ignored. In fact,

no such consensus was reached. The leading Serbian parties—the Radical Party and the Democratic Party—were bent on taking the centralized form of government used in Serbia as the model for the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, as the new state was called. They therefore were opposed to either federalism or any form of autonomy. Nonetheless, the Croatian Peasant Party, Croatia's largest party, favored a federal or even confederal arrangement for the state. The Yugoslav Muslim Organization, the leading political party in Bosnia-Herzegovina, wanted autonomy for Bosnia-Herzegovina and special autonomy for Muslim religious institutions. The Slovenes preferred a federal arrangement ideally, but were prepared to reach a deal with the Serbs. Other national groups, specifically the Macedonians and the Montenegrins, were not recognized as nationally distinct, which meant that Macedonian children—whose parents spoke a form of Bulgarian—were taught to speak Serbian rather than their own language in the schools. Kosovar Albanians were treated the worst of all: they were discouraged from attending school at all. Moreover, the Belgrade government seized more than 150,000 acres of Albanian land, turning much of it over to Serb "colonists," and negotiated with Turkey for the emigration of up to forty thousand Albanian families.[2]

The "Vidovdan" constitution of June 28, 1921, was not the product of consensus, and it was never accepted as legitimate by Croats, let alone Macedonians or Kosovar Albanians.[3] In 1928, Radić was shot by a Serb deputy while attending a session of the National Assembly; Radić himself thought that Prime Minister Vukićević had known in advance of the plot to shoot him and had given his approval. Radić's death a little over a month later had an enormous impact on Croats. It also made clear just how dysfunctional the Vidovdan system was.

Rather than addressing the sources of the system's dysfunctionality, King Aleksandar Karađorđević decided to abolish the constitution and the parties and take all power into his own hands. Thus, on January 6, 1929, he declared a royal dictatorship. He had some of the leading political figures in the country, including Radić's successor as Croatian Peasant Party leader, Vlatko Maček, arrested and incarcerated, and imposed strict censorship on the press. By 1931, the king had concluded that he could not maintain his authoritarian system without creating a formal party structure. As a result, he issued a constitution and the Yugoslav Radical Peasant Democracy—a party whose name was designed to appeal to all major interests—was subsequently created. In the meantime, however, the radical fringe of the Croatian political spectrum had gone into exile in Italy, Hungary, and Belgium, creating the Ustaše movement. Headed by Ante Pavelić, the erstwhile head of the Croatian Party of the Right, the Ustaše organization made

several attempts on the king's life before finally killing him on October 9, 1934, while he was visiting Marseilles. The new king, Petar II, was under age (eleven in 1934); so the deceased king's cousin, Prince Pavle, became regent. Within two months, the regent had removed the ruling clique from power and had put his own man, Bogoljub Jevtić, in the prime minister's office. But Jevtić lasted barely six months, and in June, 1935, Milan Stojadinović, who had worked efficiently as minister of finance, became the new prime minister. Stojadinović remained in office for almost four years—by far the longest continuous term served by any prime minister in interwar Yugoslavia. He is best remembered today for having adopted some of the external trappings of fascism (among other things, having crowds of uniformed followers chant "Leader! Leader!" in the Italian style), and for having failed, in spite of his best efforts, to obtain passage of the concordat the Roman Catholic Church had been seeking. Meanwhile, the Croatian Peasant Party was organizing a paramilitary force known as the Croatian Peasant Defense, obtaining weaponry from revisionist states in the region. By 1939, the regent felt that the unitary (centralized) system of government had become a complete absurdity and looked for a prime minister who would prioritize the solution of what was coming to be called "the Croatian question," because the Croats were the most vocal in demanding changes. In February, 1939, Dragiša Cvetković (a moderate member of the Radical Party) became prime minister and, after several months of negotiations, reached an agreement with Vlatko Maček, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (in August, 1939), creating a large *banovina* (governate) of Croatia, which was granted extensive autonomy. Portions of what had historically been Bosnia-Herzegovina (including Brčko, Derventa, and Travnik) were assigned to the *banovina* of Croatia, provoking angry protests throughout Bosnia. The Bosniaks, in particular, demanded the creation of a comparable *banovina* of Bosnia-Herzegovina, to which the alienated lands would be restored.[4] In fact, the creation of the Croatian *banovina* fell so far short of what might have satisfied most citizens (namely federalism) that it could scarcely be said to have solved the problem.

This was the Yugoslavia in which Hadžišehović grew up. It was an overwhelmingly peasant society, with up to 85 percent of the population working in agriculture. Illiteracy was also high in most parts of the country. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, illiteracy stood at 80.5 percent in 1921. Only Macedonia had a higher rate of illiteracy in the Yugoslav kingdom.[5]

If interethnic and interconfessional resentments had been growing in the years after 1918 (or, in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, after 1878), the experiences of World War II deepened them profoundly, sowing deep hatred among its peoples.[6] The country was broken up into several parts, with Ger-

many, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Italian-occupied Albania taking over portions of the country outright. The Axis also created two quisling states: Croatia and Serbia. Ante Pavelić headed the Independent State of Croatia (NDH)—which is somewhat a misnomer as it was not independent at all—and Gen. Milan Nedić, who had previously served as the Yugoslav kingdom's minister of war, led the Nazi satellite of Serbia. Both quisling regimes collaborated with the Nazis by liquidating Jews, rounding up and killing communists, and attacking other perceived enemies. The Pavelić regime, which also targeted Serbs for annihilation or expulsion, is generally considered to have been the more brutal of the two "Yugoslav" quisling regimes.

The Yugoslav Communist Party organized the "Partisan" resistance to the occupation, under communist leader Josip Broz Tito. A Serbian colonel, Draža Mihailović, organized a rival force called the Chetniks, who pledged their loyalty to the Yugoslav government-in-exile in London and hoped to restore the kingdom on the basis of unambiguous Serb hegemony. The Chetniks also hoped to make the restored kingdom as homogeneously Serb as possible.[7] Although the Chetniks advertised themselves as an anti-Axis resistance force, they decided after the first few months that this posture was counterproductive, that the Serbs' real enemy was the increasingly multiethnic Partisans. The Chetniks therefore began collaborating with the Italians, receiving weapons and supplies both from them and from Milan Nedić's quisling government. Despite the slaughter of Serb civilians by the Ustaše, and the slaughter of Muslim (Bosniak) and Croat civilians by the Chetniks, the Croatian Ustaše and the Serbian Chetniks had a common enemy: the Partisans.[8] By June, 1942, NDH authorities had established collaborative relations with several local Chetnik leaders, including Momčilo "Duke" Djujić.[9]

Altogether, some 1,027,000 Yugoslavs died in the course of the war—most of them as a result of slaughters or combat, although a typhus epidemic in Chetnik ranks in January, 1945, contributed to the number of Serbian dead. In absolute numbers, the groups with the largest wartime losses were the Serbs (530,000 dead), the Croats (192,000 dead), and the Bosniaks (103,000 dead). In proportional terms, the groups with the largest wartime losses were the Jews (80 percent of all Jews killed), the Bosniaks (8.1 percent), the Serbs (7.3 percent), and the Croats (5 percent).[10]

After the war, Tito's communists were by far in the strongest position, and quickly snuffed out rival parties that tried to reestablish themselves. The communists, taking the measure of the kingdom's failure, established a federal system made up of six republics, with borders largely reflecting historic frontiers. An exception was made in the case of Croatia, which was compelled to give up most of eastern Srijem to Vojvodina because the majority

of the local population was by then Serbian. The borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina corresponded closely to the borders fixed by the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The communists now recognized five "nations" in Yugoslavia—the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins—with other groups being called "nationalities" (a term that gave them lesser status). The Bosniaks were not recognized as a nation for more than two decades, and on census forms could choose among three possibilities: "Serbs of Muslim faith," "Croats of Muslim faith," and "nationally undecided." Under the circumstances, many Bosniaks declared that they were "undecided." In February, 1968, however, the eighteenth session of the League of Communists of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared that Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslims constituted a sixth nation in the Yugoslav community of nations.[11] This declaration was subsequently endorsed at the federal level, and in the 1971 census Bosniaks were given the option of declaring themselves "Muslims in an ethnic sense."[12]

To a foreign audience, Tito seemed awe-inspiring. He had defied the Soviets in 1948, cofounded the nonaligned movement, and set up a system of workers' councils that he called self-management and which attracted considerable interest and attention around the globe. There were problems at home, however, and, as in the case of the interwar kingdom, some of them had to do with the perspectives shared by the members of certain national groups. In Croatia, for example, there was widespread discontent—expressed openly in the Croatian countryside—after Tito removed the liberal leadership of Mika Tripalo and Savka Dabčević-Kučar in December, 1971. Serbs were upset about the 1974 constitution for a number of reasons, but above all because it declared Kosovo and Vojvodina to be "federal units" and enhanced their status and autonomy. They remained provinces of Serbia, but in Kosovo, Albanians, who by 1971 constituted 73.3 percent of the province's population, comprised 61.7 percent of the membership of the Central Committee of the Kosovar Party organization in 1973, and 62.5 percent by 1974.[13] Although the Albanians were proportionally underrepresented in the organs of power, local Serbs resented their gains and wanted to reverse them. Albanians, for their part, felt that they remained the victims of discrimination and rioted in 1968 and again in 1981.

As for the Bosniaks, there were currents of opposition that came to the surface in August, 1983, when the communists put eleven prominent Bosniaks on trial on charges of having plotted to eliminate the Serb and Croat populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to establish an Islamic state there. Among the accused was Alija Izetbegović, the future president of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The eleven were, in the course of things, found guilty and sentenced to prison terms averaging eight years in length. A key document for

the prosecution was an "Islamic declaration" written by Izetbegović a number of years earlier, which, according to the prosecution, outlined the program for a militant Islamic state. Izetbegović, for his part, disputed this interpretation both at the time and later. In the meantime, Tito had died (in May, 1980), and within a few years the combination of economic deterioration (which began in the late 1970s), crumbling faith in self-management and other institutions of state, and rising currents of nationalism, especially among the Serbs, brought Yugoslavia to the edge of collapse.[14] However, it was the rise to power of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia that pushed the country over the edge. Milošević and his collaborators violated the constitution and laws of the land on repeated occasions;[15] organized mass rallies to destabilize and overthrow the governments of Vojvodina, Kosovo, and Montenegro; made plans for a war against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina through which they hoped to create a "Greater Serbia"; and sat down with Croatian president Franjo Tuđman in March, 1991, to decide on the partition of Bosnia. More than twenty thousand persons were killed in the course of the war in Croatia, whereas about 215,000 persons lost their lives in the Bosnian war of 1992–95.[16] Quite apart from the loss of lives, the legacy of the war included revived hatred and intolerance; the displacement of 2.7 million persons, only a minority of whom have been able to return to their prewar homes; the destruction of much of Bosnia-Herzegovina's economic infrastructure; and the eradication of many historically and culturally important places of worship and other cultural landmarks.[17]

As I have already noted, Hadžišehović's book takes up the twin themes of justice and injustice. Injustice takes various forms. There is the injustice of personal betrayal (exemplified in this book by the character of Derviš); the injustice of misrepresentation with malice; the injustice of discrimination and prejudice; the injustice entailed in hypocrisy, when affirmations of noble intent and of principle are betrayed in the event; and there is the kind of injustice that colors an entire system, subverting it, one might say, from its soul outward. This was the kind of injustice with which Plato was concerned when he praised justice as a form of social proportion (in *The Republic*) and demanded that the laws of a state be in accord with the (higher) Natural Law (in *The Laws*). It is also the kind of injustice that plagued Yugoslavia in all three incarnations—the interwar kingdom (1918–41), the communist system (1945–91), and the nationalist rump state dominated from its inception until October, 2000, by Slobodan Milošević (1992–2002). To cure a state of this kind of "injustice of the soul" would seem to require a thoroughgoing political "exorcism." But what form would such a "political exorcism" take? Rewriting the constitution? Staging elections? Replacing the

incumbents? Ultimately, the foregoing "solutions"—which to many minds may seem like the obvious remedies—are usually not adequate to the task unless they are accompanied by that most-essential nostrum of all: a comprehensive reorientation of the educational system to move the next generation away from the value system that underpinned an unjust system (whether a Serb-hegemonic system or a collectivist system disrespectful of individual rights or a nationalist regime committed to a program of "ethnic cleansing"). Such a reform of textbooks and educational curricula has been under way recently in most of the postcommunist states of Central and Eastern Europe, including Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[18] Among the Balkan states (including Greece), a preliminary review undertaken by experts found, evidently without exception, tendencies toward national self-glorification, and toward de-emphasizing the sufferings and perspectives of other nations while stressing the sufferings and perspectives of one's own nation.[19] In other words, the textbooks were found to be suitable for preparing the younger generation for future wars against neighbors, and had the side effect of stimulating intolerance toward local members of ethnic minorities. Churches have also had ideas for educational reform, centering on getting denominational religious instruction in the state schools as a regular (that is, not after-hours) subject. Given that some of the religious associations in the area have been active in promoting sexual, religious, and ethnic intolerance, the establishment of a religious presence in the state school curriculum is not necessarily a boon. On the contrary, it may actually render the process of building a stable and legitimate system far more complicated. Justice, then, has something to do with some rather definite values—chief among them being tolerance of all that does no harm, and a respect for fundamental human equality.

Americans have three typical illusions about justice: (1) that there are no higher standards of justice at all, that everything is relative, so that one ultimately does not even have a basis for condemning, let us say, the mass murder of Bosniaks at Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces in the summer of 1995; (2) that justice does not matter because it is no more than "good wishes" (a perverse point of view that opens the door to a far-ranging cynicism in which neither truth nor life is respected); and (3) that ordinary citizens cannot make a difference and that they therefore have no responsibility, not even the responsibility to speak out. These illusions were specifically championed by some Western apologists for Karadžić and Milošević (who, in defending the Serbs' demons, imagined that they were somehow on the side of "the Serbs") during the Serbian Insurrectionary War of 1991–95. Politicians rarely appeal to mere convenience or even to mere security requirements in justifying wars and conquests, however. On the contrary,

there is often some "principle" cited—such as the doing of God's work (for the Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century and for other European colonizers later), or the notion of intrinsic national superiority (as in the case of the Nazi doctrine of "*Deutschland über Alles*"), or the Serb nationalist conceit that all Serbs should live within a single state (a "right" that was not extended to other peoples but which became the unofficial motto of the Milošević regime). The Yugoslav case illustrates the principle that the farther a state deviates from universal values of tolerance, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights, the more vulnerable it becomes to decay and collapse.[20] Values matter not only in themselves, but also for rather practical reasons as well.

—Sabrina P. Ramet

Notes

1. The most useful English-language books dealing with the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina are: Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1994). Among the many fine works written in Bosnian, Mustafa Imamovic's *Historija Bošnjaka,* 2d ed. (Sarajevo: Bošnjačka zajednica kulture, 1998), is especially useful.
2. Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 299–300; and Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 285–86.
3. The most useful English-language books dealing with the interwar kingdom are: Banac, *National Question;* Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croatian Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); J. B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Frank C. Littlefield, *Germany and Yugoslavia, 1933–1941: The German Conquest of Yugoslavia* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1988); and James J. Sadkovich, *Italian Support for Croatian Separatism, 1927–1937* (New York: Garland, 1987). For a concise and clear-headed summary of interwar Yugoslav politics, see Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), chap. 5, "Yugoslavia."
4. Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću* (Sarajevo: Sejtarija, 1998), 107, 111, 113–26.
5. Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1999), 105.
6. The most useful English-language books dealing with Yugoslavia's experiences in World War II are: Philip J. Cohen, *Serbia's Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996); Milovan Djilas, *Wartime,* trans. from Serbo-Croatian by Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Walter R. Roberts, *Tito, Mihailović and the Allies, 1941–1945* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974); Jozo Tomashevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975); and idem., *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).
7. Cohen, *Serbia's Secret War,* 44.
8. Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Četnici u Hrvatskoj, 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 149–150.
9. Ibid., 110.

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