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Whose is the Partisan movement ? Serbs, Croats and the legacy of a shared resistance

The Partisan movement of 1941-1945 in Axis-ruled Yugoslavia united Serbs, Croats and members of other nationalities in a common resistance to the occupier. However, the various Yugoslav peoples did not participate in the movement to the same degree or in the same manner; support for the Partisans varied according to region and nationality. Since the birth of this movement there have been conflicting claims, both from among its supporters and from the ranks of its enemies, that it was Serb or Croat in character rather than genuinely multinational. Up until the present day both Serbs and Croats as well as Muslims and others lay claim to some aspects of the Partisan heritage whilst rejecting others; a sign of the complexity of the movement's legacy.

The Titoist regime in Yugoslavia encouraged the belief that all Yugoslavs participated in an equal manner and to an equal degree in the Partisan movement and that they did so on a homogenous all-Yugoslav basis. Since the late 1980s this Titoist interpretation has been challenged by Serb and Croat nationalists seeking to expropriate the legacy of the Partisan movement for their respective national traditions while condemning the Communist 'betrayal' of their respective national interests. Although this involves the substitution of new nationalist historical myths for the older Titoist myth,

the process has nevertheless revitalized a previously moribund historiography, opening up issues that were once ignored or taboo. The three conflicting claims - that the Partisans were a Serb movement; that they were a Croat movement; and that they were a genuinely multinational all-Yugoslav movement - paradoxically each holds a kernel of truth. The Partisan movement was a genuinely multinational movement but the roles played in it by the various Yugoslav nationalities were not equivalent. Contemporary Serb and Croat nationalists have borrowed aspects of the Partisan legacy that support the view that the movement was 'theirs' while treating its 'un-Serb' or 'un-Croat' aspects as evidence that 'their' movement was hijacked or betrayed by the other.

The Partisans were a heterogeneous movement that attracted support among the various nationalities and regions of Axis-occupied Yugoslavia on differing bases. Serbs in Croatia might fight as Partisans to halt the persecution by the Ustashes; Croats in Dalmatia to resist the Italian annexation of their homeland; Muslims out of fear of the Chetniks; townsmen out of leftist sympathies and peasants according to traditional patterns of rebelliousness. Support was not equal from each group; thus Croatian and Bosnian Serbs and Dalmatian Croats joined the Partisans in much larger numbers than the Serbs of Serbia or Croats of Croatia proper. Support for the Partisans was generally stronger among the Serbs of Croatia (outside Dalmatia) and Bosnia than among their Croat and Muslim neighbours, but stronger in Croatia and Bosnia than in Serbia and more nationally balanced in the towns than in the countryside. Such regional, national and social imbalances in the Partisan movement determined the character of the Yugoslav state that emerged from World War II and explain in part its subsequent internal conflicts and ultimate collapse. Today the Partisan movement, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the figure of Josip Broz Tito are perceived differently in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It became fashionable among Serb and Croat intellectuals and politicians in the 1990s to deplore respectively the Chetnik-Partisan conflict in Serbia and the Ustasha-Partisan conflict in Croatia as regrettable departures from the principle of national unity. Yet different aspects of the Partisan legacy are valued in the different Yugoslav lands. Serbia has experienced less vandalism of Partisan monuments than Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina, yet in Belgrade unlike in Zagreb or Sarajevo there is no street named after Josip Broz Tito. Such contrasts are a product of both

contemporary politics and historical factors; they have much to tell us about the different perceptions among Serbs, Croats and Muslims of their shared history.

Serb and Croat participation in the Partisan movement

The Comintern's political strategy vis-a-vis Yugoslavia throughout the interwar period was based on support for the Croatian national movement in one form or another as an ally against the hostile regime in Belgrade. The interwar Yugoslav regime was bitterly anti-Communist and in the 1930s developed close relations with Nazi Germany. The Bolshevik regime, from its inception, viewed Yugoslavia as an enemy and supported the struggle of the non-Serb nationalities - particularly the Croats and Macedonians - for self-determination. This support varied in form but did not change fundamentally until the eve of the 1941 German invasion of Yugoslavia. In 1928 the Comintern, entering its ultra-left phase, came out definitely for the break-up of Yugoslavia and in support of the Croat extremists (Ustashas) against the Yugoslav state. Following the Comintern's adoption of the moderate 'Popular Front' strategy in 1934-35 it shifted its support to the mainstream Croatian national movement and quietly dropped its demand for Yugoslavia's break-up. Meanwhile German influence grew in Belgrade. In the protracted conflict between Serbian and Croatian national aspirations in Yugoslavia, Berlin would back Belgrade and Moscow Croatia until the spring of 1941, the Yugoslav military coup of 27 March and the German invasion of Yugoslavia. The abrupt change of partners thereafter could not change the fact that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) entered the war with an organisation and membership that reflected the past two decades of its Croatian-oriented political activity and the fact that Croatia was the home of the most developed industry and labour movement in the former Yugoslavia. In 1941 Croatia still had more KPJ members than any other Yugoslav land while Zagreb had more than any other Yugoslav town.ⁱ

The Axis invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941 and the establishment of the puppet 'Independent State of Croatia' (NDH), followed by the launch of Operation Barbarossa, changed the relationship of the international Communist movement to the Yugoslav national question. The Soviet

Union responded to these events by supporting mainstream 'patriotic' resistance movements in Axis-occupied Europe, rejecting the concept of a separate Communist resistance strategy that might alienate the Western allies. In occupied Yugoslavia this meant Soviet and Comintern support for the Chetnik movement with the Partisans as their allies in a struggle centred on Serbia. The Central Committee of the KPJ moved from Zagreb to Belgrade on 8 May 1941 as a reflection of this shift. Mass armed resistance to the Axis occupiers and quislings broke out among both the Serbs of the NDH and the Serbs of Serbia much earlier than among the Croats, in the summer of 1941. By the end of 1941 in the territory of the NDH Serbs comprised approximately one-third of the population but perhaps 95% of all Partisans. For the first year of its existence the rank-and-file of the Partisan movement was overwhelmingly Serb and though this numerical dominance lessened as the war progressed the Serbs continued to participate disproportionately in the movement at an all-Yugoslav level until the end of the war. The 1st and 2nd Proletarian Brigades were initially composed predominantly of Serbs from Serbia; the 3rd Proletarian Brigade of Serbs and Montenegrins from the Sanjak; and the 4th and 5th Proletarian Brigades of Montenegrins and Serbs from Montenegro. In Croatia (including Dalmatia) Serbs formed a majority of Partisans until 1943; in Bosnia-Herzegovina they formed a majority throughout the War that was never less than about two-thirds. NDH military intelligence estimated in late 1943 that about 70% of the Partisans' 3rd and 5th Bosnian Corps, that had jurisdiction over most of Bosnia proper, was Serb and that 30% was Muslim and Croat.ⁱⁱ By early May 1944, according to Tito, 44% of all Partisans in Yugoslavia as a whole were Serbs, 30% Croats and 2.5% Muslims.ⁱⁱⁱ This represented the lowest that the Serb numerical share of the Partisan movement ever reached. At the end of 1977, according to the records of recipients of Partisan pensions, Serbs comprised 39.7% of the Yugoslav population but 53.0% of the recipients of such pensions. By contrast, Croats comprised 22.1% of the Yugoslav population and 18.6% of recipients. All other nationalities except Montenegrins and 'Yugoslavs' were under-represented among the recipients. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the Serb preponderance was greater still: overall 64.1% of all Bosnian recipients of Partisan pensions were Serbs, 23% were Muslims and 8.8% Croats.^{iv}

The KPJ's attempt to wage a Serbian-oriented Partisan struggle was nevertheless short lived.

Brutal German reprisals against the population of Serbia drained the Communists of their popular support, while the Serbian quisling and royalist (Chetnik) forces combined with the Germans to drive Tito's Partisan leadership out of Serbia by the end of 1941. The Serb conservative and nationalist reaction against Communist leadership led to a Partisan collapse in East Bosnia during the spring of 1942, after which Tito moved his base to Bosanska Krajina (West Bosnia). This effectively marked a return to a Croatia-oriented strategy. From the second half of 1942 until the arrival of the Soviet Army more than two years later the Partisans would be a principally West Yugoslav movement with Croatia forming the epicentre. Territories in Croatia proper with a substantial number of Serb inhabitants (Lika, Banija, Kordun) formed the most important source of manpower for the Partisans. The Communist organisation built in Croatia during the 1930s coupled with the Serb uprising against the Ustasas combined powerfully. Bosanska Krajina, the centre of the Partisan leadership's political activity, was effectively a hinterland of the Croatian Partisan bastion. The effect of twenty years of a KPJ strategy based upon support for Croatian national aspirations, followed by the genocidal Ustasha campaign against the Serb population of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, paradoxically produced a Partisan movement that was disproportionately Croatian in its leadership and disproportionately Croatian Serb and Bosnian Serb in its mass membership. Zagreb was the hub of the Communists' communications wheel: Tito and the Central Committee were linked to Moscow and the Comintern via a radio station in Zagreb; and from January 1942 their courier link with the Provincial Committee for Serbia also went via Zagreb, as their link with the Communist Party of Slovenia already did. According to Tito, one-quarter of Zagreb's population participated in the Partisan struggle, during which over 20,000 of them were killed.^v 4,709 citizens of Zagreb were killed as Partisan combatants, 15,129 were killed in Ustasha and Nazi prisons and concentration camps and another 6,500 during anti-insurgency operations in the vicinity, amounting in total to 12.5% of the city's population.^{vi} These figures obscure the differences between the fate of ethnic Croats on the one hand and Serbs, Jews and other minority groups on the other; nevertheless all members of the People's Liberation Movement in Zagreb comprised a single, all-Croatian Partisan movement under the leadership of the Communist Party of Croatia. This Croatian Partisan movement formed in turn the largest wing of the Yugoslav Partisan movement as a whole.

The domination of Croatia and Bosanska Krajina within the Partisan movement is shown in Table 1, below. In November 1942 the Communists convened the 'Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia' (AVNOJ) as the all-Yugoslav Partisan representative body. At this time of 31 Partisan brigades 14 were Croatian and 8 Bosnian of which 6 were from Bosanska Krajina, while only 5 were from the eastern half of Yugoslavia (Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia). By the end of 1942, out of a total of 37 Partisan brigades, Croatia was fielding 18 as against 2 originally from Serbia (the 1st and 2nd Proletarian). In November 1943 the Communists convened the 2nd Session of AVNOJ, at which time they formally established the new Yugoslav state. At this time of 93 Partisan brigades 37 were Croatian and 23 Bosnian of which 14 were from Bosanska Krajina, while 15 were from eastern Yugoslavia. By the end of 1943 the figures were 97 brigades for all Yugoslavia of which 38 for Croatia as against 5 for Serbia proper and 5 for Vojvodina. It was only in the autumn and winter of 1944 that the Soviet liberation of Serbia, followed by the mass Partisan conscription of Serbians, Macedonians and eventually Kosovo Albanians, that the balance was restored between the contribution of eastern and western Yugoslavia to the Partisan movement. The number of Serbian Partisan brigades rose from 28 in June 1944 to 60 by the end of the year. In regional terms the Partisan movement was therefore disproportionately West Yugoslav, particularly Croatian, while Serbia's contribution was disproportionately small until the autumn of 1944, i.e. until the last six months or so of the war.

Just as the mass participation in the Partisans of the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs had its origins in their genocidal treatment at the hands of the Ustashas, so those segments of the Croat population that were threatened with national annihilation by the Axis responded with a similar willingness to resist. In May 1941 the Ustasha regime ceded to Fascist Italy the Croatian territory of northern Dalmatia. The Croats of Dalmatia responded by an increasingly massive support for the Partisans. In other parts of Croatia Ustasha and Axis misrule gradually drew Croat support toward the Partisans, but much more slowly than in Dalmatia. Of the 22,148 Partisans of Tito's Main Operational Group who participated in the Battle of the River Sutjeska in June 1943 8,925 were from Croatia (of

which 5,195 from Dalmatia), 8,293 from Bosnia-Herzegovina and only 1,492 from Serbia (including Vojvodina and Kosovo). In ethnic terms, 11,851 were Serbs as against 5,220 Croats and 866 Muslims.^{vii} Relative to population size the Croats and Serbs therefore participated approximately equally in the bloodiest and most difficult Partisan battle. Both Serb- and Croat-majority units were at the forefront of the fighting at the two great battles of the Neretva and the Sutjeska. The forcing of the River Neretva on 6-7 March 1943 was begun by the 2nd Dalmatian Brigade, a unit that was approximately two-thirds Croat and one-third Serb. Of four Croatian Partisan brigades disbanded following the battles of the Neretva and the Sutjeska due to heavy losses, three (the 3rd, 4th and 5th Dalmatian Brigades) had a Croat majority and one (the 16th Banija Brigade) a Serb majority. Taken together, the six Croatian Partisan Brigades that participated in the Battle of the Sutjeska (the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Dalmatian and 7th, 8th and 16th Banija Brigades) were approximately 48% Croat, 47% Serb and 5% other. The six Bosnian Partisan Brigades that participated in this battle were approximately 78% Serb, 9% Muslim, 5% Croat and 8% other. By this time (June 1943) the 1st Proletarian Brigade, originally formed from the Serbian Partisans that had survived the Partisan collapse in Serbia, was in regional terms more Bosnian and Croatian in character. It contained 480 Croats and 1,080 Serbs; 777 of its fighters were natives of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 552 natives of Croatia and 341 natives of Serbia. The Supreme Staff's own escort of 565 fighters included 318 Serbs, 92 Croats and 23 Muslims.^{viii}

Thus even before the capitulation of Italy to the Allies the Serbs and Croats were participating equally in the Partisan main army, relative to their respective population sizes in Yugoslavia as a whole. As the war progressed the proportion of Croats, as well as Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims, within the Partisan movement steadily increased. Of the 18 Croatian Partisan brigades at the end of 1942, 12 had a Serb majority and 6 a Croat majority. Of the 38 that existed at the end of 1943, 20 had a Croat majority, 17 a Serb majority and 1 a Czech majority. Of these 38 Croatian Partisan Brigades, 25 were from Croatia proper (without Dalmatia) of which 7 had a Croat majority, 17 a Serb majority and 1 a Czech majority. All 13 Dalmatian Brigades had a Croat majority, as did subsequently the 14th and last Dalmatian Brigade to be formed during the war.^{ix} The Partisans drew mass support from those threatened with national extermination by the Axis order (Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina;

Croats in Dalmatia; Slovenes generally). Their support among the Serbs of Serbia and Croats of Croatia proper was much weaker. At the all-Yugoslav level the Slovene support for the Partisan movement was much more solid than either the Serb or the Croat; Slovenia was, unlike Serbia and Croatia, not established as a quisling state but was partitioned between Germany and Italy and its population threatened with national extinction. The Bosnian Muslims, for their part, were increasingly drawn to the Partisans by the oppressiveness of Ustasha rule and the threat to their biological existence posed by the Chetniks. Following the capitulation of Italy in September 1943 both Slovenes and Muslims entered the Partisans *en masse*.

The Serbs were always overrepresented in the Partisan movement on the territory of the NDH, but this movement did not comprise a Serb *national* force as did the Chetniks. In the organisational sense all Partisans in Croatia, Serbs and Croats alike, were organized as a 'People's Liberation Army of Croatia' under the command of a 'General Staff of Croatia' and the political leadership of the 'Communist Party of Croatia'. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Partisans of all nationalities were under the leadership of the 'General Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina' and the 'Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina'. The federal organisation of the Partisan forces reflected the federal character of the future Yugoslav state under Communist rule. Furthermore, the Partisans rejected the politics of Great Serb nationalism and appealed instead to Croatian and Bosnian patriotism. Thus in September 1941 the Central Committee of the KPJ issued a proclamation along Croatian patriotic lines directed against the Ustashes as "traitors to our homeland". The appeal stated the Central Committee's belief that the "freedom-loving Croatian nation, that has for centuries struggled against its oppressors, cannot passively endure the degradation, violence, tyranny and plunder of its current oppressors, the fascist occupiers and their faithful dogs - the Frankist [Ustasha] hirelings" and would consequently "expel the fascist occupiers and destroy the hateful puppet government of the traitor Pavelic, so that Dalmatia, Primorje and Medjimurje, which the Frankist traitors have sold the occupiers, be returned to Croatia, which would achieve its true national freedom and independence." The Central Committee promised that "from the ruins of the tyranny of the occupiers and the Frankists will rise a free and independent Croatia in which there will be no trace of the Frankists' and occupiers' tyranny, plunder, evil

chauvinism and racial insanity". The Central Committee appealed in the name of the Communist Party of Croatia rather than the Communist Party of Yugoslavia; its appeal did not mention the word 'Yugoslavia' except in a slogan at the end of its message calling for the "fraternal solidarity of all the nations of Yugoslavia".^x Thus in organisational and political terms the Partisan movement in Croatia – the Yugoslav territory where it was strongest – was a Croatian rather than a Serbian movement.

From the start of the uprising Croats were much better represented in the Partisan leadership than in the rank and file. Across the NDH Croat Partisans played a key role even where most of the rank-and-file was Serb. In the regions of Lika and south-west Bosnia the most important Partisan leader during the early months of the struggle was a Croat, Marko Oreskovic-Krntija. The Romanija Detachment had as its commander Slavisa Vajner-Cica, the Majevisa Detachment Ivan Markovic-Irac, the 1st Krajina Shock Brigade Ivica Marusic-Ratko and the 4th Krajina Division Josip Mazar-Sosa; all four commanders were Croats while their units were predominantly Serb. Mazar-Sosa was deemed by Kosta Nadj to be the most capable Partisan commander in Bosanska Krajina.^{xi} In November 1942 the commanders of both of the only two Partisan Corps were Croats: Kosta Nadj as Commander of the 1st Bosnian Corps and Ivan Gosnjak as Commander of the 1st Croatian Corps. Both corps were majority Serb. The commander and political commissar of the People's Liberation Army of Croatia, the section of the Partisans containing more troops than that of any other Yugoslav land, were Ivan Rukavina and Vladimir Bakaric respectively, both Croats, even though twice as many of these troops were Serbs as Croats. The Partisans were therefore much more Croat in character at the leadership than at the rank-and-file level.

The Partisans as a Serb movement

The claim that the Partisan movement was a Serb movement was first made by the Ustasha regime that sought to portray the Chetnik and Partisan movements as part of a single, "Serb-Communist" rebellion. The Usthas believed their puppet state, the NDH, was Croatia. By contrast the Communist Yugoslav regime installed by the Partisans in 1945 represented, in the view of the

exiled Ustasha 'Commissioner for Public Order and Security' Eugen Dido Kvaternik, a "Serbo-Bolshevik tyranny".^{xii} According to Dinko Suljak's *Croatia's Struggle for Freedom and Independence* (1977), a collection of articles by Croatian émigrés sympathetic to the Ustashas, "the Serbs provided the first fighters for Tito's Partisan brigades. The National Liberation Front, under the guise of fighting against the foreign invaders, became intricately linked with an ongoing war between Serbs and Croats. Tito's Partisans and Draza Mihailovich's Chetniks resolutely attempted to eradicate the Croatian people by burning villages and massacring thousands of innocent Croats."^{xiii} The view that the Partisan movement was essentially Serb was then adopted in the 1980s and 90s by Serb nationalists who lamented the wartime division of the Serb nation between two rival camps. This trait they shared with their Croat counterparts, who for the same reason lamented the division of the Croat nation into Partisan and Ustasha camps. However, the Serb-nationalist identification with the Partisan movement was in some respects specific. It enabled Serb nationalists to believe that their nation alone had resisted the Axis occupiers while other Yugoslav nations had collaborated. This fed the Serbian self-image of a martyred nation surrounded by treacherous neighbours. More concretely, it provided good propaganda for the political goals of the Milosevic regime. Bluntly put, the regime's supporters repeatedly told the Western public and media that since the Serbs had been in the Partisans while the Croats had supported the Germans, Serbia should now (in 1991) be allowed to annex parts of Croatia.

The Chetnik-Partisan dichotomy was nevertheless not viewed in the same way by all Serb nationalists. Supporters of the former Milosevic regime (generally members of the Socialist Party of Serbia or the Yugoslav Left) tend to view both the Partisan and Chetnik movements as Serb in composition and the Serbs as the only Yugoslav nation to have resisted the Axis significantly. Nevertheless, they see the Partisans as having fought for higher principles than narrow nationalism: a unified Yugoslavia in which all nationalities were equal. They continue to recognize the Chetniks as collaborators, perhaps even guilty of crimes against non-Serbs. Mainstream non-Socialist Serb nationalists, by contrast, tend to view the Partisans and Chetniks as "two anti-fascist movements", both of them Serb, which regrettably failed to overcome their divisions to form a unified, national movement capable of defeating the Serbs' enemies. Thus Milan Lazic of Belgrade's Institute of

Modern History laments the fact that the Serbs “seem to be greater slaves to politics and ideology than any other nation”. In his view the Partisans and Chetniks were “different in every aspect although their main objective could well have been the same since they had a common enemy - the invader (German, Italian, Hungarian, Bulgarian)... Had greater political wisdom been employed the existence of a common enemy could have served as a means to prevent dissent but instead the differences in ideology and war plans were emphasized leading directly to civil war.” Lazic criticizes the Communists for having “defended those guilty of committing genocide of the Serbs in 1941 (Muslims and Croats)” and having “pardoned them under the pretext of avoiding another civil war”, implying that a Chetnik-Partisan alliance against the occupiers and against the “Muslims and Croats” would have been a better option.^{xiv} Finally, Serb nationalists of the extreme right do not view the Partisans as having been a Serb movement at all.

The Partisans as a Croat movement

The claim that the Partisan movement was a Croat movement also originated in World War II. Just as right-wing Croats (Pavelic's Ustashas) first claimed that the Partisan movement was a Serb movement and had their claim adopted half a century later by Serb nationalists, so right-wing Serbs first claimed that the Partisan movement was Croatian and had their claims adopted half a century later by Croat nationalists. From 1941 Chetnik propaganda frequently referred to the multiethnic character of the Partisan leadership as proof of its ‘anti-Serb character’, claiming that the Communists were “not of our blood, Serb name and our Serb Orthodox religion” but were “Various Jews, Turks and Croats, of whom some only yesterday were Ustasha soldiers and officers”^{xv} In early 1944 the Chetnik movement held its largest conference in the village of Ba in western Serbia, presided over by Zivko Topalovic, the pre-war Socialist leader. Topalovic accused the Partisans of being an anti-Serb force, claiming that they were recruiting former Ustashas and persecuting the Serbs in retaliation for their absence of support in Serbia. He claimed that “the Communists have, on account of the failure of their insane policies among the Serbs, proclaimed the Serbs - that most constructive and revolutionary Balkan nation - to be a counter-revolutionary nation which must be destroyed”.^{xvi}

Stanislav Krakov, a follower and biographer of the Serbian quisling leader Milan Nedic, writes that the Chetnik-Partisan conflict in East Bosnia in 1942 involved a “joint Ustasha-Communist action against the Serb nationalists”.^{xvii} The Serb émigré writer L. P. Popovic wrote in 1955 that "the Communists have already made preparations, or created the conditions, for the realisation of the Croatian megalomaniac idea. They have to some extent given it legitimation." In order to weaken the Serb nation "a Croat was predestined to be leader of the state, and for his doglavniks [deputy-fuehrers] the most pronounced Serbophobes". In order to support the Croats the Communists "increased their [i.e. the Croats'] territory to a previously unseen extent, united almost the entire Croat nation in a single federal unit, permitted national groups that had never been Croat to declare themselves Croat" and "put furthermore under the government of the predatory Croats around half a million of the remaining Serbs".^{xviii} Finally, the view that the Partisan movement was Croatian, at least in its leadership, was adopted in the 1990s by some Serb former Titoists embittered by the Western recognition accorded to the former Yugoslav republics and their borders. According to the formerly Titoist Bosnian Serb historian Dusan Lukac, Tito's campaign against the Chetniks is proof that he was “blinded by Croat nationalism and Serbophobia”.^{xix} Some Serb historians believe that the Partisan movement combined the "cleverest Croats and the stupidest Serbs" on the grounds that it involved Serb Partisans fighting for Croatian national goals.^{xx} Since the 1980s the charge that Tito as a Croat was following a Croat policy has been used to explain the territorial settlement of 1943-45 that apparently favoured Croatia and penalized Serbia, since it merged Croatia proper and Dalmatia into a unitary nation state while Montenegro and Macedonia were separated from Serbia, Serbia was separated from the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs and Kosovo and Vojvodina were granted autonomy. While supporters of Milosevic claimed that the internal borders of Yugoslavia were purely administrative and not intended as national frontiers, they were contradicted by their non-Communist fellow Serbs who claimed that they were drawn by Tito on an anti-Serb basis.

The Yugoslav Marxist historian Franjo Tujman began his transformation into a Croat nationalist with his efforts to portray Croatian World War II history in a more favourable light,

something that involved highlighting the Croatian contribution to the Partisan movement. Tadjman wrote (in 1982) that during World War II the Croatian nation “gradually declared itself ever more strongly for the People’s Liberation Movement, which already during the War proclaimed the foundation of a federated Croatian state within the framework of the Yugoslav federation. Thus Croatia in both the political and the military sense became a first-rate actor; even the main bastion of the victory of the revolutionary Partisan movement, with its programme for the building of a new Yugoslavia as a federation of equal nations”, something that was “demonstrated by the fact that at the head of the KPJ and the Partisan movement was Josip Broz Tito, and by the fact that Dr Ivan Ribar became President of AVNOJ - as the supreme body of the People’s Liberation Movement of all the peoples of Yugoslavia. Both were Croats, regardless of the fact that they were acting as Yugoslav and not as Croatian politicians, and Tito above all as a Communist revolutionary.”^{xxi} In his notorious work *Wastelands of historical truth* Tadjman wrote that “the People’s Liberation Movement of Croatia had already by 1943, in both the political and military senses, become the principal bulwark for the building of the Yugoslavia of AVNOJ and for the victory of the revolution as a whole (in 1944 on the eve of the final operations five of the total of nine corps of the People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia were acting under the General Staff of the People’s Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Croatia)”.^{xxii} Croat nationalists in the Tadjman era frequently argued that both the Partisans and Ustashas were fighting for Croatian statehood, each in their own way.

The Partisan heritage in the Yugoslav successor states

In Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic the ruling party changed its name from the ‘League of Communist of Serbia’ to the ‘Socialist Party of Serbia’ (SPS) after merging with the Communists’ front organisation, the Socialist League of the Working People of Serbia. The SPS formally permitted multiparty elections, but there was no sharp ideological break with the Communist regime. Several former Partisans held posts under Milosevic or as his allies at either the Serbian or the ‘Yugoslav’ level, including Veljko Kadijevic as Federal Defence Minister; Petar Gracanin as Federal Interior Minister; Mihajlo Markovic as Vice-President of the SPS; and Dobrica Cosic as Federal President.

The Milosevic regime maintained what was essentially a Titoist ideology with ‘brotherhood and unity’ thrown out in favour of Serbian patriotism and xenophobia, but without traditional ideological nationalism. The Chetnik movement and the wartime Serbian quisling regime were not formally rehabilitated, though it became politically acceptable for oppositionists to defend their traditions. In Belgrade there was no widespread dismantling of Partisan monuments or renaming of streets. There is no longer a Belgrade street named after Tito, who is widely hated by Serb nationalists as a Croat who imposed ‘unfair’ borders on Serbia and granted ‘excessive’ autonomy to Kosovo and Vojvodina. The names of the Yugoslav Partisan leaders Ivo Lolo Ribar (a Croat) and Mose Pijade (a Jew) were removed from two streets in the centre of Belgrade, but fewer Partisan street-names were removed than in Zagreb or Sarajevo. Thus under Milosevic streets in the Serbian capital continued to be named after the Croat Partisans Ivan Markovic-Irac and Marko Oreskovic-Krntija. Titoist public holidays, such as the anniversary of the 2nd session of AVNOJ at which the Yugoslav federal state was founded, continued to be celebrated, though the Partisans’ red star was removed from the Yugoslav and Serbian flags. The fall of Milosevic in October 2000 marked a further ideological turn away from the Partisan heritage, but there has been no great drive to rename streets and dismantle monuments and this may be expected to happen slowly if at all.

The trappings of the newly independent Croatian state reflected both the Partisan and the Ustasha legacies, but as in Serbia it was the Partisan legacy alone that continued to enjoy formal legitimacy. Former Partisans played a significant role in the war of Croatian independence and held many of the key posts in the early years of the post-Communist regime; among them Tudjman himself as President, Josip Manolic as Prime Minister, Martin Spegelj as Defence Minister and founder of the Croatian Army and Josip Boljkovac as Interior Minister. Janko Bobetko, a Partisan veteran with the honorary title of ‘People’s Hero’, held the post of Chief of Staff of the Croatian Army in 1992-95. Former Communists, many of them children or relatives of Partisans, dominated the state and ruling Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ) under Tudjman; both the HDZ and the regime initially represented a broader spectrum of political opinion than they did later; and during the war in Croatia of 1991-92 the HDZ shared power in a ‘Government of National Unity’ – all these factors helped to

ensure that there would be no violent break with Croatia's Partisan past. The Croatian constitution promulgated under Tudjman states that the "decisions of the Anti-fascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia (1943), as counter to the proclamation of the Independent state of Croatia (1941), and subsequently in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Croatia" were occurrences through which the "millennial national identity of the Croatian nation and the continuity of its statehood... manifested itself."^{xxiii} The HDZ regime proclaimed 22 June, the anniversary of the launch of the first Croatian Partisan band, to be "The Day of the Antifascist Struggle" and a public holiday. This was a way of reclaiming the Partisan legacy from Belgrade, for under the Tito regime the Partisan uprising began officially in July, when the Central Committee of the KPJ authorized it, and was supposed to have begun earlier in Serbia than in Croatia. The Croatian Partisans who took to the woods near Sisak on 22 June did so on their own initiative, independently of the Yugoslav Central Committee, so the HDZ viewed 22 June as the start of a specifically Croatian Partisan resistance. Throughout Tudjman's presidency one of the central squares in Zagreb remained 'Marshal Tito Square' and a road was named after Andrija Hebrang, the Secretary of the Croatian Communist Party purged and probably killed by Tito following World War II. This reflects the reverence with which Tudjman viewed Tito and the widespread Croatian desire to lift the onus of collaboration with the Ustashas which the Titoist regime pinned on Hebrang. Streets and squares throughout Croatia continue to bear the names of Tito, Vladimir Nazor and other Croat Partisans. Contrary to myth, the checkerboard symbol on the Croatian flag and coat-of-arms was not an Ustasha symbol: it was recognized as an official symbol of state by *all* the full Yugoslav constitutions, both before and after World War II.^{xxiv}

The HDZ nevertheless combined this formal retention of the trappings of the Partisan heritage with the insertion of elements of the Ustasha heritage into Croatian public life. As Croatian President, Tudjman declared it his historic mission to reconcile the Croatian Partisan and Ustasha traditions, something that culminated in his (unrealized) proposal to dig up the bones of dead Partisans and Ustashas, mix them together and rebury them, so as to accomplish their "reconciliation in death". During his rule the Croatian currency was named the 'kuna', as it had been under the NDH and the Jasenovac Museum and numerous Partisan monuments all over Croatia were vandalized or

dismantled, though many other Partisan monuments have remained untouched. Several streets throughout Croatia were renamed after the Ustasha minister Mile Budak on the controversial grounds that he was a talented writer. However, other Ustasha ministers have not had streets named after them in Croatia. The 'Square of the Victims of Fascism' in Zagreb was renamed 'Square of Great Croats' under Tudjman, but under his successor Stipe Mesic its Tito-era name was restored. The entrance to the Croatian town of Udbina, recaptured by Croatian forces in 1995, today boasts a large billboard bearing a giant letter 'U', the town's initial but also remarkably similar to the Ustasha symbol. While Tudjman's regime continued officially to uphold the view that the Partisans, rather than the Ustashes, were the authentic fighters for Croatian national liberation, in practice those who openly identified with the Ustashes earned a place in his circle similar to the Catholics at the court of King Charles I of England - as a fashionably risqué minority. The ideological anti-Communism and anti-Yugoslavism of the Tudjman regime meant that Ustashes were not looked on with the disapproval accorded to those guilty of 'Yugonostalgia'. On the other hand, while Tudjman downplayed his identification with the Partisan movement, the left wing of his regime as well as members of the Croatian opposition have highlighted Croatian participation in the Partisan movement to counter Serbian accusations of Croatian collaboration with the Nazis.

Among Bosnians of all nationalities the post-Communist ideological break with the Partisan legacy has been sharper than in Serbia or Croatia. The regime of Radovan Karadzic's Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in the Serb Republic, unlike that of the SPS in Serbia, had a decisively anti-Communist flavour. This reflected SDS resentment of the fact that the Partisan movement was identified with the defeat of the Great Serb project and establishment of the Bosnian Republic. The SDS regime annulled all decisions of the 'Territorial Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina' (ZAVNOBiH), the Bosnian Partisan representative assembly that formally founded the Bosnian state. The SDS did so on the grounds that these decisions had been reached without the presence of Serb representatives, even though the largest number of ZAVNOBiH's delegates were in fact Serbs. The Serb Republic's 1996 law on the rights of veterans explicitly covers former Chetniks, but makes no direct mention of Partisans.^{xxv} In 1996 the Vraca Memorial Park, a

splendid memorial to the Partisan war-dead and victims of fascism in Sarajevo, was systematically destroyed by Serbian forces as they withdrew from Vraca under the terms of the Dayton Accord. In 1998 Biljana Plavsic, President of the Serb Republic, bestowed an honorary award on Momcilo Djujic, the Chetnik warlord of Knin who collaborated with the Italians and Germans against the Partisans. Meanwhile in the Croat-controlled parts of the Bosnian Federation the HDZ authorities openly identify with the Ustasha movement to a far greater degree than their partners in Croatia: Partisan monuments have been systematically vandalized; units of the Bosnian Croat armed force, the Croatian Defence Council, were named after the Ustasha commanders Slavko Kvaternik and Jure Francetic; and a street in West Mostar bears the name 'Lorkovic-Vokic', after the two Ustasha ministers who attempted to rescue the NDH from defeat in 1944 by an anti-Axis coup. These incidents reflect the fact that Bosnian Croats predominantly supported the NDH against the Partisans and were correspondingly treated harshly following the establishment of the Communist regime.

The attitude of the principal Muslim party, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), to the Partisan legacy has been more ambivalent. On the one hand the top leadership of the SDA in the period 1990-95 contained fewer prominent ex-Communists than the ruling parties of Serbia and Croatia; rather, the dominant figures were former dissidents persecuted by the Communist regime in the 1983 Sarajevo show trial. On the other hand, Bosnia-Herzegovina as a state was reborn in 1943-46 thanks to the Partisan movement, which founded the 'People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina' precisely in rejection of Great Serb and Great Croat claims to Bosnian territory, making the Partisan legacy a politically difficult one for the anti-Communist SDA to reject wholly. Thus up to the present day in the territory held by the Bosnian Army the anniversary of the first session of ZAVNOBiH is still celebrated as the day of Bosnian statehood and remains a public holiday, as does the anniversary of the liberation of Sarajevo from the Nazis on 6 April 1945. A monument to this event still dominates the main street in Sarajevo, which still bears the name of Marshal Tito, though one section of the street has been renamed. Despite having been twice imprisoned under the Communists, President Alija Izetbegovic appealed to the Partisan tradition during the Bosnian war of 1992-95. On 24 November 1993 Izetbegovic proclaimed that, in reference to World War II "then there were Chetniks

and Ustashas. Now they are once again on the scene. Only worse Chetniks than those Chetniks, worse Ustashas than those Ustashas... Now the question is asked: where is the third side ? Then the third side was the Partisans. Today there is also a third side. That is our national Bosnian Army; that does not have that ideological, Communist motif; which is democratic.” Izetbegovic claimed that unlike the Chetniks and Ustashas the Partisans “did not kill women and children. They won because of that. We must remember this well and draw from it the message: We shall win if we earn the reputation of an army that does not kill women and children.”^{xxvi} Nevertheless approximately three-quarters of the well over two hundred streets and squares in Sarajevo named after Partisans or Partisan military units have been renamed during or – more often – since the end of the war.^{xxvii} Frequently the names of Muslim Partisans are retained while those of Serb or Croat Partisans dropped. Thus the street named after the Partisan leader Djuro Pucar, a Bosnian Serb who effectively ruled Bosnia-Herzegovina for over twenty years after World War II, was renamed while those named after his Muslim fellow Bosnian Partisan leaders Hasan Brkic and Avdo Humo were not. This double-standard is graphically illustrated by the fact that under the Communist regime there were streets named after Ivan Markovic-Irac and Fadil Jahic-Spanac, respectively the Bosnian Croat commander and Muslim political commissar of the same Partisan unit, who were both killed in the same Chetnik attack on their headquarters. Under the SDA Markovic-Irac’s name was dropped while Jahic-Spanac’s was retained. Throughout the Muslim controlled parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina Partisan monuments have been torn down and replaced by Islamic objects, though as in Croatia this process has been uneven and dependent on the character of the relevant local authorities.

Conclusion

The regional and ethnic imbalances within the Partisan movement meant that its victory established a Yugoslavia in which Serbia’s position was much less dominant than it had been in the interwar Yugoslav kingdom, but in which the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs were disproportionately represented in the new bureaucracy and security forces. Serb nationalists could resent the Partisan legacy for the establishment of a Bosnian republic, the assigning of Dalmatia to Croatia, the separation

of Macedonia and Montenegro from Serbia and the establishment of autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina. Croat nationalists could resent the Partisan legacy for the reimposition of Yugoslav rule over Croatia, the privileging of the Croatian Serbs, the assigning of Vojvodina to Serbia and the establishment of a Bosnian republic. At the same time Serb nationalists could revere the Partisan movement for its defeat of the Ustashas and reestablishment of Yugoslavia while Croat nationalists could revere it for its defeat of the Chetniks and establishment of a Croatian republic. In this way the Partisan movement forms part of the national heritage of both Serbs and Croats, as well as of Muslims and other former Yugoslav peoples. It represents at the same time a shared tradition of multinational cooperation that may one day help to re-establish friendly relations between the former Yugoslav states.

Table 1: Partisan Brigades according to territory*^{xxviii}

	Slovenia	Croatia (Dalmatia)	Bos.-Herc. (BK,EB,H)	Serbia (SP, V, K)	Montenegro (Sanjak)	Macedonia
1941 December	-	-	-	1**(1,-,-)	-	-
1942 March	-	-	-	2(2,-,-)	-	-
June	-	-	1(1,-,-)	2(2,-,-)	3(1)	-
September	3	8(1)	7(5,1,1)	2(2,-,-)	3(1)	-
November	4	14(3)	8(6,1,1)	2(2,-,-)	3(1)	-
December	4	18(3)	10(8,1,1)	2(2,-,-)	3(1)	-
1943 March	4	21(5)	14(11,2,1)	2(2,-,-)	3(1)	-
June	6	19(2)	14(11,2,-)	5(2,3,-)	3(1)	-
September	22	33(10)	17(13,3,1)	5(2,3,-)	3(1)	-
November	18	37(13)	23(14,6,3)	10(5,5,-)	4(1)	1
December	18	38(13)	23(14,6,3)	10(5,5,-)	6(2)	2
1944 March	19	45(13)	24(15,6,3)	17(11,6,-)	7(2)	3
June	22	49(14)	29(18,7,4)	28(21,6,1)	8(2)	3
September	22	55(14)	31(18,8,5)	45(30,11,4)	10(3)	16
December	23	58(14)	35*** (19,8,5)	60*** (31,15,8)	11(3)	22
1945 May	23	60(14)	39*** (19,8,5)	62*** (31,15,8)	13(3)	24

BK = Bosanska Krajina; EB = East Bosnia; H = Herzegovina; SP = Serbia proper; V = Vojvodina; K = Kosovo.

* Overseas, People's Defence and Foreign Citizens' brigades not included.

** 1st Proletarian Brigade

*** Figures for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia include artillery and armoured units that were not regionally defined.

ⁱ *Zagreb 1941-45: Zbornik Sjecanja* (Zagreb: Skolska knjiga, 1982) p. 186.

ⁱⁱ Croatian State Archive, Collection 487, box 3, doc. 7379.

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 20 (Belgrade: Komunist, 1977-84) p. 60.

^{iv} *Bilten*, Savezni Zavod za Statistiku, Belgrade, no. 1174 (April), reproduced in Leonard Cohen and Paul Warwick, *Political Cohesion in a Fragile Mosaic: The Yugoslav Experience* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983) p. 64. The pensions of dead veterans were received by their families.

^v *Zagreb 1941-45*, p. 6.

^{vi} *Leksikon narodnooslobodilackog rata i revolucije u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945*, vol. 2 (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1980) p. 1219.

^{vii} V. Kucan, *Borci Sutjeske* (Belgrade: Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1996) p. 33.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 36, 105, 115, 751, 793, 901, 981; B. Dubravica, *Vojska antifasisticka Hrvatske (1941-1945)* (Zagreb: Narodna sveuciliste Velika Gorica, 1996) p. 21.

^{ix} Dubravica, pp. 19-23.

^x *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilackom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* pt 4, vol. 1, doc. 208 (Belgrade: Vojni istorijski institut, 1951) pp. 457-458.

^{xi} K. Nadj, *Ratne uspomene ceterdeset druga* (Zagreb: Centar za kulturna djelatnost Savez socijalisticke omladine, 1979) p. 534.

^{xii} E. Kvaternik, *Sjecanja i zapazanja 1925-1945* (Zagreb: Naklada Starcevic, 1995) p. 94.

^{xiii} D. Suljak (ed.), *Croatia's Struggle for Freedom and Independence* (Arcadia: Croatian Information Service, 1977) p. 187.

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- ^{xiv} M.D. Lazic, *Ravnogorski pokret 1941-1945*, (Belgrade: INIS, 1997) pp. 276-277.
- ^{xv} V.Dj. Djuric, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Vojvode Jezdimira Dangica* (Belgrade: "Nova Srbija", 1997) pp. 22-23.
- ^{xvi} Z. Topalovic, *Borba za buducnost Jugoslavije* (Paris and London: Sindikalist, 1967) pp. 178-179.
- ^{xvii} S. Krakov, *General Milan Nedic*, vol. 2 (Belgrade: Nova Iskra, 1995) p. 127.
- ^{xviii} L. P. Popovic, 'Komunisticko pomaganje velikohrvatskih aspiracija', in D. Subotic, *Neugasena Srpstvo: Srpska politicka emigracija o srpskom nacionalnom pitanju (1945-1990)* (Belgrade: Drustvo Srpska Krajina, 1992) pp. 175-176.
- ^{xix} D. Lukac, *Tri genocida nad srbima u xx veku* (Belgrade: SANU, 1998) p. 322.
- ^{xx} In the words of Bosnian Serb historian Gojko Malovic to this author, December 1998.
- ^{xxi} F. Tudjman, *Nacionalno pitanje u suvremenoj Europi* (Munich and Barcelona: Knjiznica Hrvatske Revije, 1982) pp. 133-134.
- ^{xxii} F. Tudjman, *Bespuca povijesne zbiljnosti* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveucilisna naklada, 1994) p. 46.
- ^{xxiii} *The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia* (Sabor Republike Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1991) pp. 29-30.
- ^{xxiv} See 'Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca', *Sluzbeni list Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* 142A (28 June 1921); *Ustav Kraljevine Jugoslavije od 3. septembra. 1931 god.*, (Belgrade: Izdavacka knjizarnica Gece Kona, 1933) p. 5; *Ustav FNRJ i Ustavi narodnih republika*, (Belgrade: Izdanje Sluzbenog lista FNRJ, 1950) p. 120; *Ustav SFRJ - Ustavi socijalistickih republika i pokrajina* (Belgrade: Ustavni zakoni registar pojmova, 1974) p. 290.
- ^{xxv} "Zakon o pravima boraca, bojnih invalida i porodica poginulih boraca", *Sluzbeni glasnik Republike Srpske* (22 July 1996) p. 675.

^{xxvi} A. Izetbegovic, interview in *Armija Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Ljiljan, 1997) p. 8.

^{xxvii} O. Maglajlic, “Sjeca heroja”, *Glas antifasista* 6 (March 1998).

^{xxviii} Compiled from the data provided by *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, 1st ed (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod FNRJ, 1955-71) entry for “Brigade u Narodnooslobodilackom borbu”.