

Mastering Future, Changing Past:  
History, State, and Education in Post-World War II Croatia

by

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## Preface

It is not an exaggeration to say that the idea for this thesis first came to me on a summer afternoon in 2010. That same summer, a book called *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Language and Nationalism) appeared on the shelves of Croatian bookstores and immediately attracted a lot of attention.<sup>1</sup> For one, it was because summer is what Croats traditionally refer to as the “pickles’ season,” so any news besides the number of tourists entering the country is welcome news. More importantly, however, *Jezik i nacionalizam* was among the first comprehensive scholarly works that openly discussed all political, linguistic, and social ramifications of the practice of the “purification” of Croatian language. In short, the author Snježana Kordić, a linguist, argued that language had been misused for the purposes of “daily politics,” as Croats like to refer to the visceral political discourse that dominates the public arena. It was the pungent and eloquent critique of this linguistic madness that prompted me to think that Croatian history could be addressed in a similar way.

In light of the issues that this thesis discusses, namely the mechanisms and implications of the relationship between history and politics, it is my duty to acknowledge my own motives in undertaking this project. Issues surrounding the interpretation of dominant historical narratives in Croatia haunted me from my own school days. Being raised in an ethnically mixed marriage during the 1990s in Croatia made the theme of history, politics, and identity a very personal endeavor. Exposure

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<sup>1</sup> Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010).

to conflicting narratives from school, public discourse, and home caused much confusion and self-doubt. I saw in this project an opportunity to meaningfully raise issues surrounding history, politics, and education, without resorting to base nationalist argumentation. As I said to my mentor Professor Bruce Masters during one of our first conversations about this project, this was both a personal catharsis and a scholarly contribution.

The next step towards the realization of this project occurred during my Historiography class in the fall of 2010. The semester-long research project helped me clarify my ideas, although my whole approach to the topic changed considerably over the course of the following year. In addition, material learned in this course proved indispensable in conceptualizing and critically assessing the process of history writing, and its implications outside academia.

In the spring of 2011 I left for Jordan on a study abroad program, but I managed to apply and win the Davenport Study Grant. Applying for the grant pushed me to rethink my whole approach to the topic. I realized that I would not only have to look at Croatian textbooks, but compare them to Yugoslav ones, and that I would have to get a better grasp of both Yugoslav and Croatian political, social, and cultural history in order to properly contextualize my questions. Most importantly, it became clear that the scope of my work would well exceed the education system. This became even clearer during my stay in Zagreb during July of the same year, when I confronted all the material and possibilities presented in the Educational Museum and the Croatian National Library.

To a large extent, my life in the last year and a half revolved around history, textbooks, and political writing. I tried to understand how it is that such seemingly simple matters can acquire such immense proportions, and have such serious consequences. At times it was enjoyable, at times frustrating, most of the times both comical and saddening. In any case, this endeavor would have been impossible without a number of wonderful people who in their ways, made it possible for me to carry it out. In no specific order, I want to thank my professor, advisor, and mentor, Bruce Masters, who fully supported me in all stages and aspects of this project, and who patiently corrected my English articles. Talks with Professor Masters often exceeded this thesis, and I am grateful for all the insight and humor he has shared with me. From my earliest days at Wesleyan, Professor Masters shared his knowledge and appreciation for the history of the Ottomans and the Middle East, something that according my Croatian history education, I was supposed to detest. This, in turn, opened many new doors in both my personal and academic life.

I would like to thank Professor Magda Teter who encouraged me to apply for the Davenport Grant and offered insightful comments during the application process. Professor Teter is someone I greatly admire and for whose teaching, guidance, and support during my time at Wesleyan I am grateful for. I am also grateful to Professor Nadja Aksamija from the Art History Department, who corresponded with me on my topic, took time to read through my draft, and offered invaluable comments about how to strengthen my work.

I am grateful to the Davenport Study Grant Committee for making my stay in Zagreb possible. I am also grateful to the staff of the Croatian Educational Museum,

and especially to Ms. Štefka Batinić, who introduced me to the arcane educational material, and often went out of her way to keep the library door open for me. Special thanks also go to the faculty at the History Department at Zagreb University, Professors Ivo Goldstein and Snježana Koren, who found time to talk to me in the middle of the busiest time of the academic year. I am also grateful to Maja and family friends, Dragica and Dado, whose help hosting, making dinners, drinking beer, and navigating the Croatian bureaucracy made my stay in Zagreb much more pleasant. Hvala!

Perhaps most importantly, I want to thank my family and friends who each in their own way encouraged me during this project. Thanks to Marie Mencher for her editing work. Thanks to Antoine for the last-minute reading and corrections. Thanks to Hira who was there whenever I needed her. Thanks to my dear friend Alexandra without whom my life in America would not be the same. Finally, thanks to my beloved parents, Adriana and Mićo, for their endless support, and for teaching me to love, not to hate. Volim vas.

## Introduction

### History Written by Politics

During the summer of 2005, the tenth anniversary of the end of the war in Croatia, another history-related story made the newspaper headlines. That year, the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport (MZOS) planned to publish a special *Supplement (Dodatak)* – a history reader additional to the regular textbook for the eighth grade of the elementary school, covering specifically the period of national history between 1989 and 1997.<sup>2</sup> Namely, in 1998 Croatian government regained jurisdiction over eastern Croatian provinces, until then governed by the United Nations Authority in Eastern Slavonia (UNAES). In order to facilitate the peaceful reintegration and coexistence between the Croats and the Serbs in this conflict-ridden area, Croatian authorities signed the agreement with the UN that students of Serbian nationality would not learn about the most recent history for the next five years, starting in 1998. This agreement was subsequently known as the *Moratorium*, and as its expiration was approaching in 2003, the MZOS issued a call for submissions for writing the special supplement of Croatian history from the Yugoslav collapse till the late 1990s. At first, it was meant only for the Serbian students, but later on, the Ministry claimed that it would be used by all eighth graders in the country. Three professional historians from the Zagreb University – Tvrтко Jakovina, Snježana Koren, and Magdalena Najbar-Agičić wrote the supplement and, during the first half

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<sup>2</sup> Tvrтко Jakovina, Snježana Koren, Magdalena Najbar-Agičić, "Dodatak udžbenicima za najnoviju povijest," in *Jedna povijest, više historija*, ed. Maja Dubijević (Zagreb: Documenta, 2007).

of 2005, the text was sent for professional revision to various experts. However, before the revision period was over, the *Hrvatski institut za povijest* (Croatian History Institute) published negative review of the work in a Croatian daily paper *Večernji list*,<sup>3</sup> which in turn prompted fierce polemics about the meaning and content of Croatian history among the authors, politicians, the Ministry, and various other parties for several months.

In short, the authors attempted to cover the issue of Yugoslav disintegration and the ensuing war that followed in a balanced, sensitive way, putting it into perspective with the Cold War and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. Additionally, they posed questions about the Croatian actions in the war, instead of automatically ascribing all blame to Serbian hegemony, as was the practice in standard Croatian textbooks. It is not my intention here to analyze the content of this particular *Supplement*, but rather to draw attention to the kind of reactions this unusual interpretation of history provoked in the Croatian public and political arenas. The authors were villified and accused of political subversion by prominent historians, politicians, veteran groups, newspaper columnists, and others. Among the objections to the *Supplement* was its inadequate description of the war, incongruent with the recently penned and parliament-approved *Deklaracija o Domovinskom ratu* (Declaration on the War).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it was accused of portraying the war as a civil war,<sup>5</sup> that it tried to divide the blame for the war proportionally, that it did not

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<sup>3</sup> Zvonimir Despot, "Agresija na Hrvatsku postala građanski rat," *Večernji list*, July 27, 2005, Zagreb.

<sup>4</sup> Tihomir Ponoš, "Napisi u novinama su preradikalni," *Vjesnik*, July 28, 2005, Zagreb.

Note: This and all subsequent translations from Croatian into English are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Official Croatian name for this war is *Domovinski rat*, which implies that it was an act of outside aggression on the homeland (*domovina*), rather than an internal conflict.

portray Vatican role in Croatian independence accurately enough, or, that it included an image of Slobodan Milošević laughing.<sup>6</sup> Some simply summed it up as “rubbish.”<sup>7</sup>

Although my thesis focuses on the dynamics between politics and history during the second half of the twentieth century, this relatively recent example of discourse generated by a school history text is symptomatic of a peculiar and enduring relationship of history and politics in Croatia. As this short example suggests, the two have been intertwined and dependent on one another. The moratorium on history teaching to a minority group was a political decision made in order to facilitate the transition of power in a conflict-ridden area. The need for such a text highlights the centrality and sensitivity of historical interpretation in political decision-making. The polemic over the text also casts a light onto the fact that the Parliament actually drafted the Declaration on the War. This was an example of a politically sanctioned version of the most recent history, which also suggests that any other interpretation, such as that found in the *Supplement*, raises questions of legal or subversive histories and how they support or threaten the state itself. Finally, the story of the *Supplement* shows how symbols of the state are inscribed in the historical narratives, and consequently, challenging those narratives puts at stake national identities, political legitimacy, and state authority.

The interrelationship between history and politics provides a wider framework for this thesis. I explore ways in which history and political legitimacy supported one another in Croatia between the end of the World War II and the end of the twentieth

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<sup>6</sup> Tvrtko Jakovina, “Hajka po Staljinovom modelu,” *Feral Tribune*, August 26, 2005, Split.

<sup>7</sup> Zvonimir Despot, “Povijest koju piše politika,” *Večernji list*, July 28, 2005, Zagreb.

century. As I will argue, history and politics maintained a symbiotic relationship, where political legitimacy overwhelmingly relied on historical interpretation, and at the same time, history writing was dictated by politics. For post- World War II regimes, writing history to their own advantage played a major role in their legitimizing strategies. As the *Supplement* illustrates, even the most benign attempt to discuss history in a non-orthodox way became identified with anti-state activity. It can be said that by controlling the past, the state sought to control its present, and secure its future.

While the relationship between history and politics is an underlying theme of this thesis, I specifically focus on national history taught in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades of elementary schools since 1945. Education in general was viewed by Yugoslav and Croatian authorities as one of the main means of controlling society. Within this framework, the teaching of history in school was especially important, as it was the primary instrument for distributing sanctioned narratives of the past to a wide range of the population, and thus shaped their world-view from an early age. Both Yugoslav and Croatian regimes emerged in complex, uncertain, and war-ridden socio-political circumstances without an unchallenged claim to power. I therefore see the teaching of history as a nexus between the state and the society, a place where the state controlled and inaugurated its interpretations of the past in order to present itself as natural, historically necessary, and legitimate.

At this point, I would like to bring in my personal experience, as my family and I were raised and taught in this educational system, notably under different regimes. When I attended elementary school during the second half of the nineties, I

often witnessed expressions of disapproval by my parents, educated during the sixties at the zenith of Tito's Yugoslavia, who could not believe what children "nowadays learn as history." To them and other people wary of the enthusiasm and new historical "truths" promulgated by the new regime, these narratives seemed like a blatant distortions of their own historical truths.

This awareness of radical discontinuity in the teaching of history was among the motives to undertake this project. Accordingly, I concentrated my questions around the curricula and textbooks for elementary school history teaching between World War II and the end of the twentieth century in Croatia. I wanted to see how each regime framed and implemented the teaching of history, what were the continuities and discontinuities within the narrative of national history, and how these narratives and their changes related to the specific socio-political context. Based on my research of history textbooks and curricula which I undertook in July 2011 in Zagreb, I argue that the teaching of history from the earliest days of the second Yugoslavia to well after the democratic transition in Croatia served an identical purpose: to legitimize the regime. Both regimes mobilized political institutions to organize and supervise the teaching of history, and to provide state-sanctioned versions of national history. Furthermore, they continuously framed the "tasks" of history in schools to be in the service of the state. It can be said that the independent Croatian regime almost adopted Yugoslav patterns verbatim, with respect to the function and presentation of school history.

There is, however, one important discontinuity – the narrative. Namely, the way that certain historical events were interpreted changed considerably during the

Yugoslav period itself, and a major shift occurred in the early nineties with the collapse of the Yugoslav state. Nevertheless, these discontinuities do not represent deviation from my argument; on the contrary, they reinforce it. As I try to show, the important breaks in the narrative occur simultaneously with political change. Essentially, each socio-political change required a corresponding historical adjustment. While the content of the narrative periodically changed, the basic principle behind it – history as a narrative of state legitimacy, remained static.

A comparison of textbooks, curricula, and various documents of the Ministry of Education in pre - and post - independence periods suggests that notions of “bad new history textbooks” are equivocal. Regardless of the ideology, the state continuously relied on the teaching of history to legitimize itself. Changes within the narrative illustrate neither a different past nor different functions of history. On the contrary, they show that historical narratives reflected contemporary political dynamics. Finally, they highlight the fundamental argument of my work: the interdependency of history and politics and the notion that the Croatian political agenda relied on historical legitimization, and at the same time shaped historical interpretations. The presence of history in the public and political arenas, and the influence of politics on the teaching of history illustrate the extent to which they both permeated the society. Specifically, it is possible to see these arenas as adult and children spheres and note that the symbiotic relationship of history and politics was a multilayered process, occurring at all social and demographic levels. Moreover, adding the temporal continuity of this interrelationship to its social distribution highlights the complexity and multiplicity of ways in which the historical and the

political merged and influenced one another during the second half of the twentieth-century Croatia.

The topic of history textbooks in Croatia is not new. The issuance of textbooks periodically appears at the center of public attention, not only because of its political ramifications, but also because of the lack of serious long-term planning by the Ministry of Education. This results in frequent, but insubstantial changes in the curricula, and lots of frustration on the part of schools and parents. In terms of scholarly interest, a number of works focused on stereotypes prevalent in Croatian textbooks,<sup>8</sup> and many explicitly related the methodological shortcomings of the material with its service to political goals.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, these critics have focused on specific aspects of textbook writing. Often they addressed issues of misrepresentation of the “other,” usually national minorities, for example, without fitting it into a larger picture of history and politics and their role in the Croatian public discourse. There is also a lack of comparative work between pre- and post- independence history curricula and textbooks. Only Snježana Koren undertook such an analysis, exploring textbooks and the discourse surrounding them in the late eighties and early nineties.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, my work differs with respect to the existing literature. Rather than looking at the particulars within the textbooks, or limiting the analysis to strictly

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Damir Agičić, “Slika naroda jugoistočne Europe u hrvatskim udžbenicima povijesti za osnovnu školu,” *Radovi* 31 (1998).

<sup>9</sup> Ivo Goldstein, “Od partijnosti u doba socijalizma do revizionizma devedesetih,” in *Hrvatska historiografija XX stoljeća: između znanstvenih paradigmi i ideoloških zahtjeva*, eds. Srećko Lipovčan and Ljiljana Dobrovšak (Zagreb: Institut Ivo Pilar, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Snježana Koren, “Slike nacionalne povijesti u hrvatskim udžbenicima uoči i nakon raspada Jugoslavije,” in *Historijski zbornik* 60 (2007).

pedagogical ramifications, I seek to fit the concept of teaching of history into the larger context of the relationship between history and politics. In other words, I use textbooks and curricula as a lens through which to explore what ideological underpinnings history narratives provided for the Croatian political imagination, and through what technical means the state implemented these narratives. Conceivably, there is a need to highlight the extent to which the state has been defining and legitimizing itself based on its “historic rights,” rather than political competency or democratic processes. At the same time, it is necessary to relate this to the role played by seemingly common knowledge of history in facilitating these political practices. Most importantly perhaps, it is necessary to trace this interrelationship as a historical process itself. This is not something that only originated after Croatian independence as a result of heightened nationalist sentiments. On the contrary, it is a practice that haunted Croatian, as well as Yugoslav, state and education since the very beginning of the second Yugoslavia in 1945. I hope that this thesis will illustrate that – contrary to the voices of new Croatian nationalist enthusiasts, as well as the nostalgists for the good old days of Yugoslavia, political manipulations of history, and centrality of historical myths for the regime, have long been a reality.

The first chapter discusses some theoretical notions that inform my work. Most prominently, it focuses on discussions of the phenomenon of nationalism. Nationalism and the nation-state as dominant political phenomena of the modern age are particularly prominent in the countries of former Yugoslavia. In Croatia, especially since World War II, the issue of defining the nation and realizing the nation-state, or solving the national question, has dominated political discourse.

Furthermore, defining different theories of nationalism sheds light on the way history as a body of knowledge is crucial to its function. I make use of Alex Bellamy's analysis of the relationship between the contemporary Croatian nationalism and the narrative of Croatian historic statehood upon which it is based. With it, I argue that between nationalist agenda on the one hand, and historical narrative on the other, the educational system, and history in particular, were a platform upon which the state disseminated these narratives into the society.

The second chapter covers some of the most important, and at times controversial, moments in the history of Croatia. The events that I discuss are based on standard textbook narratives, as well as the Preamble to the Croatian Constitution, which makes them a prominent historical outline in all social arenas. The discussion is primarily meant to highlight the complex and competing narratives that dominate the historical discourse in Croatia, as well as to help the reader navigate a labyrinth of names and events largely unknown to those not familiar with the region or its history.

In the third chapter I focus on the pivotal importance of historical narratives and interpretation for Croatian politics. I argue that especially from the nineteenth century onward, history was central to Croatian nationalist imaginings. The in-depth discussion of the Preamble to the Croatian Constitution, drafted almost in its entirety as a historical chronicle, as opposed to a political document, highlights this point. Additionally, the chapter includes the discussion of writings by the first president of independent Croatia Franjo Tuđman, who was a politician and historian active in both Yugoslavia and Croatia, exemplifies some of the main ways in which history became a focal point of Croatian political discourse.

The last two chapters focus entirely on the teaching of history and in what ways the regimes framed and implemented history in classrooms. In the fourth chapter I explore history curricula for elementary schools between 1946 and 1995, as well as pertinent documents and publications from the Ministry of Education in order to map the language and concepts with which the authorities approached history as a school subject. Arguably, the sources suggest that education, and history education in particular, was among the leading devices of the regimes to legitimize themselves in society, and as such the teaching of history was subject to total political control. History was continuously framed as a subject whose task was to ensure love, loyalty, and understanding of one's own country. The teaching of history imposed on the textbook authors and educators was a typically historicist narration, with a goal to simply, or "plastically" tell the story of the past in order to explain and justify the present.

Finally, the fifth chapter centers on history textbooks. More specifically, I look at the narratives of national history in elementary school textbooks and analyze how they change over time, and how these changes relate to and reflect contemporary political events. Textbook narratives, more subtly than curricula, convey the state's desired image of itself, and at the same time, disclose ruptures between its ideologies. In Croatia, there was a narrative framework of telling history that persisted throughout the sixty years covered by this thesis. However, elements and emphases of the narrative altered in relationship to major political and ideological upheavals. Therefore, the simultaneous persistence of narrative frameworks and mutations of the narrative content testify to the well-established reliance of the state on historical

justification, and the equally entrenched practice of historical-writing accordant not with past realities, but with contemporary politics.

# I

## **Theoretical Background: Concepts of Nationalism in Mapping State-History Relations**

In an attempt to address the topic of the relationship between the teaching of history and politics in pre- and post-independence Croatia it is crucial to discuss nationalism and the role and use of history in political discourse. There are two reasons for this: one is the fact that the socio-political dynamics in both pre- and post-war Yugoslavia, and subsequently Croatia, revolve around the “national question.” The other is that history as a scholarly discipline developed under the umbrella of the nation-state in the nineteenth century Europe and is therefore crucial to the development of nationalism as well. As the following discussion will show, I posit my research at the conceptual nexus between the state and society; the regime and education, or more precisely history education because of history’s potential to adopt, adapt, and transfer legitimizing narratives. The interaction between the two can be seen as a part of a larger process of creating a national identity and solidifying the nation-state. I borrow and adapt the theoretical framework established by Alex Bellamy who studied the formation of the Croatian national identity at the beginning of the 90s.<sup>11</sup> Bellamy’s research advanced the traditional theory of nationalism and concentrated on its deployment within society, rather than concentrating on its origin or its historiography.

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<sup>11</sup> Alex Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003).

In the following pages, I briefly outline the importance of nationalism in Yugoslav and Croatian history. I also outline the main approaches to nationalism in general and further suggest why I chose to rely on Bellamy's framework. Finally, I discuss the peculiar relationship between history and political power and suggest why history education is a telling indicator of the dynamics of state power.

Virtually all scholars who study the history of different aspects of Yugoslavia and Croatia agree that the "national question" has been the underlying factor in all socio-political developments. Perhaps most familiar to a wider Western audience have been media reports written in the aftermath of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina which popularized the concept of a "centuries old struggle" and placed the national boundaries of the former federal states at the center of Yugoslav collapse.<sup>12</sup> In fact, this has been a phenomenon pertinent to the entire history of the Balkans where all that happens has been interpreted in the light of virtual nationalist conflicts.<sup>13</sup> However, even more perceptive scholarship on Yugoslav history has operated within the nationalist framework. One of the most prominent Yugoslav historians, Ivo Banac, born in Croatia and educated in the US, wrote an entire book with the revealing title "National Question in Yugoslavia."<sup>14</sup> Banac argues that when Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes entered the Yugoslav union in 1918, they already had well defined, and highly divergent nationalist agenda which would remain a

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<sup>12</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts : A Journey through History*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Updated Edition ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia : Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

stumbling block to national unity until the very end of the state, as well as to continue into the post-Yugoslav period.

Similarly, Yugoslav political elites themselves constantly invoked the “national question” in one way or another. For example, the claim that only the communist party managed to resolve the “national question” with the implementation of the self-management of socialism is a mantra that regularly appears in Yugoslav history curricula as a definite historical fact, thus suggesting that the distinct nationalisms had been lingering in the social and political consciousness of the people. On the other hand, all the political opposition directed against the Yugoslav regime was, at least nominally, launched by those with nationalist aspirations. Finally, it needs not to be specially emphasized that nationalist voices took over the political discourse before and in the aftermath of Yugoslavia’s disintegration.

Many scholars have noted that in the Yugoslav Federation, social and economic life was regulated along national-ethnic lines, and some even suggested that this feature allowed for the access and success of the national-minded elites in political arena. Sabrina Ramet argues that the political dynamic in Yugoslavia much resembled the international arena where the “balance of power” among the nations was the main regulatory factor.<sup>15</sup> When it came to nationalism per se, however, she noted that many things were indeed effects of nationalist discourse, but she also stressed that it “is important to remember that cultural and communications elites may

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<sup>15</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962 - 1991*, Second ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

have a vested interest in fueling cultural nationalism.”<sup>16</sup> This is a valuable insight because it reminds us that nationalism has been used as a political strategy, rather than arising from some primordial ethnic ties. Nevertheless, Ramet also shows that regardless of whether nationalist impulses were dominant or not, the entire situation has been framed within the discourse of nationalist politics and identity. Accordingly, rather than reassess the whole concept of politics and power solely within the former Yugoslavia, I propose to place my discussion within widely recognized nationalist discourse and analyze the role that history education played in it.

When discussing traditional theories of nationalism, it is useful to address them within the framework of the “Warwick Debate,” as Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith, representatives of the two opposing theoretical approaches, debated their views at Warwick University in 1995. The opposing views, subsequently also called “a great divide,” are “primordialism” and “modernism.” Briefly, the primordialists claim that national identities are manifestations of pre-modern, for some of them literally primordial, kinship ties. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz for example spoke of “the overwhelming power of the primordial tie attributed to the givens of human existence, namely, congruities of blood, speech, custom, religion, and territory.”<sup>17</sup> Anthony Smith’s understanding appears more sophisticated as he argues that national identities were most likely formed within the modern context, but they are nevertheless conditioned by notions of the ethnic and the “belief” in the common descent and shared myths. For Smith and other primordialists, ethnicities are the main

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 5.

paths to nation formation,<sup>18</sup> and history and culture surrounding from them are a firm basis for “solidarity” within the nation.<sup>19</sup> Within this framework, the primordialists reject the notion held by modernists that culture, or “invented traditions” as Eric Hobsbawm put it, for nationalism is mainly a means for mass mobilization.<sup>20</sup> Rather, it is the heritage that gives genuine basis to the national identity, although they concede that this heritage needs to be mobilized by the members of the intelligentsia.<sup>21</sup>

Modernists, on the other hand, are united in the belief that nationalism is a strictly modern phenomenon, one that emerged out of the social and bureaucratic changes beginning with the nineteenth century. For the most prominent advocates of modernism, nationalism is inextricably linked to the emergence of the modern state.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, they claim that mobilization of the national identity is chiefly politically motivated. Perhaps the most famous and influential catchphrase of the modernist approach to nationalism is Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities;” this term illustrates the relatively novel origin of nationalism and its deeply political implications.<sup>23</sup> The term “imagined” emphasizes its imaginary nature, as opposed to ethnicities, and it explains how this imagining creates “a deep horizontal

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction " to *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm Eric Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

comradeship” between essentially unrelated people which is central to the function of the modern state.<sup>24</sup>

Although primordialists and modernists stand in opposition to each other, they also share some basic similarities. Namely, both seek to provide large, overarching theories about the origin of nationalism. They are also structuralist in their approach, as they focus on large-scale processes, like economics for example, which facilitated nationalism. Finally, and closely related to the latter, their approach is historical; they tend to analyze how nationalism originated but not how it operates. These are some of the concerns that encouraged other scholars to start looking at a “great divide” as a problem in itself, and shift their attention from the origin of nationalism to its actual deployment.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to outline simply these new approaches, as they all reject overarching theories when it comes to nationalism. Nevertheless, they emphasize that nationalism and its implications are not a one-dimensional product of a historical process, but an everyday event, that is constantly being reproduced. In the words of Michael Billig, nation is “flagged” into the people, and nationalism is “not an intermittent mood in established nations, but it is the endemic condition.”<sup>26</sup> This is perhaps implied in Anderson’s concept of “imagined community” where we are to assume the existence of certain structures and processes that promote the “comradeship” between people, but it is nonetheless crucial to focus on how exactly nationalism operates on a daily basis.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>25</sup> Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 6.

Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood focus on the other end of the process, the internalization of nationalism. According to them, the defining factors of national “imagined communities” are “the struggles over defining nation and identity through which different groups and institutions express their collective subjectivity and political projects.”<sup>27</sup> In their view, nationalism is not a monolithic reality that shapes societies, but an assembly of strategies that are daily performed and internalized by people to different extents, and therefore also in conflict with one another.

These new approaches take nationalism as a complex, ongoing process. This is perhaps best summarized by Katherine Verdery who states that nationalism should not be seen as “already defined” phenomenon but should be approached in terms of its functions and effects in the society.<sup>28</sup> In his theoretical and methodological conceptualization of Croatian national identity, Bellamy relies on these new approaches. Among the main concepts he adopts is the notion that nations are an ongoing process, and certainly not permanently defined by their history, descent, or anything else. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of the “function these terms are fulfilling and in what context they are operating.”<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Bellamy developed a threefold approach to the way in which Croatians imagine and reproduce their national identity. He framed this in three central questions: what are the narratives that shape the imagination of the nation, how are these narratives used by various intellectual and political elites, and how are these narratives internalized within the

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<sup>27</sup> Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, *Rethinking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

social fabric?<sup>30</sup> Arguably, these questions are helpful for studying states like Croatia which does not have a history of actual statehood within its present borders. An overarching, enduring national identity imagined in the terms of the “great divide debate” is therefore hardly applicable; it is more useful to look at nationalism as a phenomenon that occurs continuously on multiple levels, involves multiple factors, and is internalized in multiple ways.

Bellamy’s framework is particularly suitable to my topic – the relationship between teaching of history and political regimes; it highlights the direct link between the regime as an operator of national narratives, and these national narrative encoded in history. However, it would be useful to extend this conceptualization a little further and introduce a nexus between the regime and the society contained in the education itself. A historical narrative that according to Bellamy constitutes ideological funds for the regime to draw upon does not exist independently outside of the political realm. The main ideas about Croatian history and its historical goals have been articulated within the agenda of various political elites. Education on the other hand is an activity controlled by the regime, but at the same time one that is deeply imbedded into the social fabric and can be understood as a linking point between regime mobilization and social internalization. Accordingly, within the operational framework of nationalism suggested by Bellamy, the teaching of history is a nexus – channel between the state and the society, or in other words a venue where the regime inaugurates narratives that not only induce the feelings of common identity among the people, in the classical nationalist sense, but also legitimize the political actions and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

present the regime as a natural, historically conditioned and therefore necessary government.

Work by Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos further elaborate this idea. They insist that nationalism and its manifestations are primarily political phenomena. They claim that nationalism is “premised on the activation of the social and cultural relationships and emotional investments among the potential members, as well as on strategies for the pursuit of interests, and attainment of power by individuals and collectivities.”<sup>31</sup> They add that nationalism’s main characteristic is the “articulation of the national to political discourses and practices.”<sup>32</sup> Their idea is that nationalism and the invocation of national identity are strategies to obtaining power, which is also supported by Billig who claims that “the aura of nationhood always operates within the context of power.”<sup>33</sup> In effect, if nationalism is a strategy for securing political power. I therefore place an emphasis on its tactics. Because, the mobilization of historical knowledge for the purpose of creating a national identity appears to be precisely this – a tactics to regime legitimacy.

It is now important to turn to history itself. How does history, both as a scholarly discipline and a school subject, fit into the nationalist discourse and what makes it so susceptible to political uses and abuses? Theories of nationalism partially answer these questions, as history plays an important role in all of them. Since history is inextricably connected to the passing of time, Anderson’s concept of a

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<sup>31</sup> Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos, "Nation and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: A Theoretical Perspective," in *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos (New York: Routledge, 1996), 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>33</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 4.

“homogenous, empty time” marked by “temporal coincidence and measured by clock and calendar” is critical because it points at the fundamental change that occurred in social understanding of time.<sup>34</sup> Instead of seeing time “simultaneously,” where the past, present, and future were merged into a messianic vision, clearly facilitated by religion, time began to be perceived as an empty space along which the nation could be progressively moving.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the shift in temporal perception led to a historical consciousness within a given society and as such history was important in imagining, explaining, and legitimizing socio-political conditions by a people.

Anthony Smith sees history as central to nationalist imagination. He states that “what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage and the ways in which the popular living past has been, and can be rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it is the idea of a common past and concepts of identity together termed as history that fuel the nationalist identities and legitimize nationalist regimes. According to Smith, the notion that something comes from the past, that there is a history, among other factors, accounts for a “profound popular emotional appeal and how the possibility of imagining the nation turns into the moral imperative.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Smith notes that nationalism is itself defined in historicist terms, “it sees the world as a product of the interplay of various communities, each possessing a unique character and history, and each the result of specific origins and developments.”<sup>38</sup> Theoretically at least, the

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<sup>34</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

conclusion can be made that history as a practice is inextricably involved into nationalist political processes, and this is especially important observation in a world where nationalism is a de facto model of political organization.<sup>39</sup>

A very particular relationship between history and nationalist politics is recognized even on the less abstract levels of analysis. Georg Iggers who focuses on the historiography of the twentieth century writes that “history has over and over again been used and misused to help create collective memories whether in the service of aggressive nationalism, religious intolerance, communist dogma, economic and cultural imperialism, or more recently ethnic particularism and radical feminism.”<sup>40</sup> In this impressive list of history’s abuses, its political dimensions stand out. Italian historian Nicola Gallerano emphasized the fact that “political power has always approached the control of the past as a means to control the present.”<sup>41</sup> His insight is important because it juxtaposes the notions of past and present, as well as future, thus reaffirming Anderson’s observation that modern notions of progressive time flow are crucial to political imagination, and so is history.

Finally, as suggested above, education in a nation-state is a nexus between the regime and the society, a space where the regime enforces its narratives and the social body internalizes them. While the internalizing aspect of regime narratives is a contentious and by no means complete process as suggested by Radcliffe and

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<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Georg Iggers, "Historiography in the 20th Century," in *The Misuse of History*, eds. Georg Iggers and Laurent Wirth (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2000), 21.

<sup>41</sup> Nicola Gallerano, "Storia e uso pubblico della storia," in *L'uso pubblico della storia*, ed. Nicola Gallerano (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1995), 22. Translation from Italian into English is my own.

Westwood,<sup>42</sup> as well as Bellamy,<sup>43</sup> history in the classroom has a powerful impact. History textbooks are not “solely an object of the public discourse, but its active participants” and significantly shape the historical consciousness of a people.<sup>44</sup> Given the amazing potential malleability of history by politicians, history education provides a prime arena of political legitimacy.

There is seemingly an inexhaustible body of literature on the topic of nation-building and history education. To begin with, political bodies comment on it themselves, and the UNESCO committee on the revision of history textbooks is a useful example. UNESCO is aware of the political dimensions of history education and its impact on national and international relations. They note a direct relationship between “xenophobia and stereotypes” which when presented in educational history material can have a significant impact on world politics.<sup>45</sup> The mission of the textbooks’ revision project is continuously developing and the committee is determined if its “practical consequences,” emphasizing therefore that history teaching and the state-society nexus is not an imaginary concept.<sup>46</sup> It involves “highly controversial” matters as well as national interests.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, in order to underline the “practicality” of history teaching for political regimes it is worth noting the observation made by Dubravka Stojanović, a Serb historian with a long experience in researching history textbooks in the former Yugoslavia; hasty history

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<sup>42</sup> Radcliffe and Westwood, *Rethinking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 95.

<sup>44</sup> Stefano Petrunaro, *Pisati povijest Iznova: Hrvatski udžbenici povijesti 1918 - 2004* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2009), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Falk Pingel, *Unesco Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, vol. 103, Studien Zur Internationalen Schulbuchforschung (Hannover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1999), 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

textbook revisionism that took place in all the countries of the dissolved state was not a part of ideology, but it represented “the need to adjust history to current historical events.”<sup>48</sup>

In order to better illustrate the palpable effects of history education with respect to nationalist politics, I briefly mention three examples that show history’s impact, past and present, outside the classroom. The first one is the famous study by Eugene Weber about the nationalization of France at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite seemingly firm connection between the French state and the nation, Weber noted that large parts of rural France, or roughly everything lying outside of Paris, were living in extremely difficult social conditions and hardly identified with being French. French authorities embarked on a massive project of nationalization and acculturation in order to create loyal Frenchmen out of a scattered, impoverished population. Schools played a leading role in the project, and Weber particularly noted that there seemed to be no “better instruments of indoctrination and patriotic conditioning than history.”<sup>49</sup>

To bring the subject closer to home, it’s worth mentioning Charles Jelavich’s study of the South Slavs and history education in the period preceding the World War I. Jelavich focuses on language, geography, and history education in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia before they entered the Union of SHS (Serbs, Croatia, and Slovenes) in 1918 which later became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He argues that the state could

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<sup>48</sup> Dubravka Stojanović, "Construction of Historical Consciousness: The Case of Serbian History Textbooks," in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: New York University Press), 327.

<sup>49</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870 - 1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 333.

not (and did not) survive because the elites educated within the various school systems could not imagine a common identity for the three peoples.<sup>50</sup> In each subject, and in history in particular, none of the nations could recognize or incorporate other's history as a means to create a common identity. This in turn facilitated political conflicts and divisive political agenda. Therefore, history education played a key role in legitimizing the nation-state; while in France it helped create a politically and culturally homogenous society, the first Yugoslavia, and perhaps Yugoslavia generally, failed because its education did not achieve this same effect. While these assessments are somewhat simplified, in France education was not the only means of nationalization, and Jelavich stressed the roles of Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Churches, they nevertheless point at the important role of history education in imagining and organizing a nation-state.

Lastly, I want to address a contemporary example of how history and politics interact. Namely, a "Joint History Project" initiated by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South Eastern Europe (CDRSEE) is a long term attempt to define and educate about the abuses and political consequences of ethnocentric history taught in post-communist South Eastern Europe.<sup>51</sup> Historians participating in the project recognize that the treatment of the Balkan history and the representation of the "other" have continuously contributed to the political and ethnic conflict. They state that in the Balkans historians are to be held politically responsible and that "historical discourse has to foster critical thinking and civil society" which is not presently the

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms--Textbooks and Yugoslav Union before 1914* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 263.

<sup>51</sup>"Joint History Project," *Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South Eastern Europe*, <http://www.cdsee.org/jhp/index.html> (accessed March 20, 2012).

case there.<sup>52</sup> Or, as Professor Snježana Koren, who participated in the project, told me during our interview: “It has too often been the case that many history textbooks transmit messages of hatred.”<sup>53</sup> The Joint History Project holds that improving history teaching standards in collaborative manner and by “introducing supranational elements” to the curricula would also improve international and interethnic relationships in the Balkans.<sup>54</sup> In other words, they see the direct relationship between nationalist rhetoric and conflict, and historical interpretations in education. It has to be noted however, that the participants do not envision the project as yet another “historiography,”<sup>55</sup> or another layer in already politicized history, but as an attempt to “interpret each national history based on shared cultural and institutional legacy.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Christina Koulouri, "Introduction," to *Klio Na Balkanu*, ed. Magdalena Najbar - Agičić (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 1995), 27.

<sup>53</sup> Snježana Koren, interview by author, Zagreb, July 28, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Koulouri, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

## II

### “From the Seventh Century on...”

History in Croatia is deeply intertwined with politics and nationalist imagination, and writing the history of Croatia is inevitably a political act. Historical events and their interpretations have become associated, if not coterminous, with political ideologies, and, the political discourse, often coated in nationalism evokes the question of identity. Given the multiplicity of ways in which history has been integrated in political and public discourse, I want to provide an overview of the major historical events and developments which shaped Croatian socio-political life and continue to do so.

It needs to be emphasized that this outline is not based on any original research; rather, I seek to provide dates and events that have become focal points in the discourse of modern nationalism. Not only is the following historical outline based on contentious points of Croatian history, but on narrative lines commonly espoused in school history textbooks, discussed at length in Chapter Five. Additionally, since the 1990, this has been the “official” version of the national history as outlined in the Constitutional Preamble of the Republic of Croatia. The Preamble to the Republic of Croatia Constitution (*Ustav*) was declared in December 1990 by the Parliament, just months before announcing its definite secession from Yugoslavia. Virtually the entire Preamble narrates the history of the Croatian state and highlights historical moments that determined the fate of the nation; the dates

mentioned are signposts that signal the historical progression from the medieval Croatian state, and led to its sovereignty in the 1990. The dates chosen by the Constitution go back to the seventh century when it is said that first Croats reached their new homeland. This is followed by the Croatian medieval kingdom which formed the foundation for claims of political sovereignty by later states. Following these are the dates including the years when Croatia *samostalno i suvereno* (independently) joined the Hungarian Kingdom, and later the Habsburg Empire, through the end of the World War I when Croatia illegitimately joined the Union of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (*Država SHS*), later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as it was not ratified by the *Sabor*. The list of dates continues to establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) at the beginning of the World War II, the first and second Croatian constitutions within Yugoslavia, and finally the year 1990. In 1997, the list was completed with the year 1995 as the marker of the end of the *Domovinski rat*, or the end of the war.

While the content and significance of the Preamble are critical for the discussion of history in Croatian political imagination in the next chapter, they are a springboard to address historical events from the early period of the Croatian presence in the Adriatic coast in roughly seventh century to relationship of Croats with Hungarian, Ottoman, Habsburg, and Venetian rule, and their position in the first and second Yugoslav state until Croatia's Declaration of Independence in 1991. Finally, I am unable to distance myself completely from this narrative, and my overview will inevitably be biased, if not overtly political. To that I can say that to an extent, all professional history bears the marks of personal and political convictions

of its authors so I am no exception. In fact, one of the fundamental implications of this thesis is the place, function, and discursive power of history as a discipline within the social context. Accordingly, my historical outline should primarily be read as an appendix to help the reader follow some of the points in the coming chapters, and not as an attempt to point to any historical truths.

When discussing history of Croatia, several points are worth bearing in mind: Croatia in its present borders existed only after 1945, when it joined Tito's Yugoslavia as People's Republic of Croatia. What was referred to as Croatia for the most part of its history was an area centered around its modern capital Zagreb and the central provinces around the mountain of Velebit. Nonetheless, virtually all Croatian historians, whether nationalist or otherwise, treat modern territories like Dalmatia, Istria, Slavonia, and even Bosnia and Herzegovina, as integral part of historical Croatia; they refer to them as the *hrvatske zemlje* (Croatian lands). However, this is an anachronism; an attempt to project present political and territorial reality onto what seems to be a region with fluid borders and under a typically medieval dynastic rule.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the same seems to be true for identity. The name *Hrvati* (Croats) first appeared in a charter by the Duke Trpimir in the mid-ninth century but was scarcely used throughout the middle ages. John Fine, whose polemical work on ethnicity argues against the ethnic meaning of the term Croat until the nineteenth century, examines sources published in the late medieval period which suggest that

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<sup>57</sup> John Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans*, 4th edition ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 69.

the word *Hrvat* was fluid, and often interchangeable with the more generic term of “Slav.”<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, when talking about Croatian history, especially in its earliest, late-medieval phase, it is important to bear in mind that Croatia as a clear-cut geopolitical entity is a highly implausible notion for the earlier historical periods.

It has become a conventional wisdom among Croatian historians to ascribe the beginnings of Croatia as a nation to the seventh century. During the period of large migrations in the aftermath of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, Slavic tribes started moving southwards, and the “Croatians,” together with the Avars, reached the Adriatic coast which was largely controlled by the Byzantine Emperors. The prevailing version of these events, espoused in the *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Croatia*, and by the majority of Croatian historians, maintains that Croatians distinguished themselves as an ethnicity from other Slavs and eventually founded the Croatian Kingdom.<sup>59</sup> In this view, the original Croatian lands stretched from the river Raša in eastern Istria to Duklja, what is now Montenegro, and they are referred to as White and Red Croatia. The Croatian State thrived under the Trpimir dynasty (*Trpimirovići*), founded in the middle of the ninth century. Male descendants of this family continued to inherit the right to rule, often in conflict with one another, until the year 925 in which Tomislav was crowned King of Croatia, and when he united Croatia-Dalmatia with Pannonia, or what will later be referred to as Slavonia, eastern part of modern Croatia between Sava, Drava, and Danube rivers. This is one of the most important moments in Croatian history as it “proves” the historical unity

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Stallaert and Jeannine Laurens, "Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Croatia," (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1995).

of the territory that corresponds to the modern Croatian borders. After Tomislav, several other kings ruled, until the death of the last king, Zvonimir in 1089, who was killed in a plot set up by a pretender to the throne Petar Svačić in Knin, now a town in southern Croatia, during one of the parliamentary sessions of the *Sabor*. Until the present time the *Sabor* persists as a name for the Croatian parliament, and its almost proverbial existence throughout the centuries became a cornerstone of Croatian political thought. After years of unrest and uncertainty as to who should ascend the throne, the Hungarian Arpad dynasty annexed Croatia to their kingdom in 1102 in a charter known as *Pacta Conventa*. The *Pacta Conventa* has been a much discussed document as it purportedly proves that the nature of Croat-Hungarian political relationship was a “personal union;” a political relationship in which Croatia recognized the Hungarian crown but maintained its sovereignty.

With respect to conventional narrative lines, this first phase of Croatian history ends with the year 1102, the first event that endangered the sovereignty of “Croatian lands.” This is also a good moment to address some criticism of this line of historical interpretations. Firstly, there is the obvious problem of terminology; is it plausible to refer to the Slavic tribes, especially as early as the seventh century, as Croats? This has been much contested, and it is helpful to illustrate a couple of historiographical claims about the issue: Fine offered an extensive analysis of the medieval sources which strongly suggests that Croatian ethnic identity, as well as Serbian, Bosnian, or Bulgarian, did not exist. These people were primarily Slavs. In that he differs from Banac who, while maintaining that nationalism is a nineteenth-century ideology, firmly claimed that ethnic consciousness of Croats and Serbs was a

real phenomenon from very early on.<sup>60</sup> Another modern, and by Croatian standards controversial historian, Nada Klaić however claimed that “they did not, nor could they, feel political borders in the way that current historians do ... it is going much too far, and is irrelevant, to pose questions of the ‘national belonging’ of the great nobles in the Middle Ages ... they were ‘ours’ as much as they were ‘theirs’ [Hungarian].”<sup>61</sup>

In addition to the question of identity, there is the problem of historical oversimplification. Politically, socially and culturally, Croatia was not a clear-cut entity. The territory in question was constantly changing, and so were its borders, rulers, and identities. Byzantium ruled much of Dalmatia until the year 1000 when the Venetians seized most of the coastal cities. Even before the rise of La Serenissima, Germanic groups like the Longobards and Franks ruled parts of the Adriatic coast, especially the Istrian peninsula. After the Venetians seized the coast, their influence had expanded throughout the centuries until the eventual collapse of the Republic in 1797; their rule however was far from constant, as it was constantly challenged by Hungarian, Slavic, Byzantine, and Ottoman intrusions. Therefore, it should be clear that the political and social circumstances of Croatia have throughout most of its history been markedly dynamic. As such, nationalist historiography that stresses the existence of a Croatian Kingdom at best greatly simplifies historical developments, and at worst ignores historical reality.

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<sup>60</sup> Ivo Banac, "Nacionalizam U Jugoistočnoj Europi," in *Raspad Jugoslavije: Eseji o nacionalizmu i nacionalnim sukobima*, ed. Nenad Popović (Zagreb: Durieux, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkans*, 121-22.

In the period after the annexation of Croatia to the Hungarian Kingdom, Croatia proper comprised territories of what are today Lika in central Croatia, the area around Zagreb, mainland Dalmatia, and the bay of Kvarner. In addition to that, there was Slavonia which really existed in its own right. Hungarians appointed two dukes (*ban*) who ruled in the *Sabor*, and most political life in Croatia essentially revolved around a line of twelve aristocratic families. In fact, Fine argues that it was only they who essentially carried the name of Croatia, Croatia thus having an exclusively political meaning.

The Ottoman invasions, starting in the fifteenth century, brought a new dynamics to the area, and according to a prevailing opinion, forever changed the national picture of Croatia. Official historiography marks the year 1463 as the conquest of Bosnia, although in reality it took the Ottomans much longer to establish complete control over that territory. The next big confrontation between the Croatian army and the Ottomans occurred thirty years later in what is known as Battle at Krbava, which together with the Battle of Mohacs in 1526 allowed the Ottoman conquest of more than half of Slavonia, Lika, and inner and parts of coastal Dalmatia, while the city of Dubrovnik became an Ottoman satrapy.

In the aftermath of the Ottoman presence, the Croatian nobles recognized the Habsburg house as their kings, and the Military Frontier was established in the mid-sixteenth century along the lines that roughly correspond to the modern border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The period of the Frontier finds an echo in the present era in multiple ways. Firstly, it is asserted that the Military Frontier irreversibly altered the ethnic composition of Croatia. Namely, the Frontier

was overwhelmingly manned by Vlachs, people drafted from the Ottoman territory who were Orthodox Christians. They were stationed in numerous garrison villages along the border and were answerable directly to the Habsburg officials, who financed and maintained the entire enterprise. There is a tendency to overemphasize fiscal privileges that were given to Vlachs by the Habsburgs, who later were referred to as Serbs as they eventually formed minority in Croatia, and relate them to the present political disagreements between Croats and Serbs.

Secondly, the Military Frontier was under the direct jurisdiction of the Habsburg military elite. In other words, the Croatian *ban* completely lost control of the area in 1578. This, as many scholars indicate, provoked serious grievances among the Croat nobles who could not extract taxes from the land, especially because the Vlachs as militiamen were not obliged to pay taxes. For a rather small area, Croatia had its fill of feudal lords; according to Barbara Jelavich, their numbers in the seventeenth century soared up to nine thousand. Comparatively, in Slavonia, an adjacent territory, they numbered only 314.<sup>62</sup> Modern nationalist historiography tends to ascribe political, rather than economic significance to these events, and it interprets it in the light of the loss of control over exclusively Croatian territory, thus once again projecting present political circumstance onto past events. At the same time, modern political discourse stresses the period of the Military Frontier, especially of Croatian association with the Habsburgs, as a proof of the continuation of Croatian political sovereignty, or self-consciousness, through the centuries.

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 143.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries much of what is now central Croatia was ruled by the Habsburg court, Slavonia was under the Ottomans and Venice solidified its rule along the Adriatic. It was nevertheless an unstable period, with no fixed borders, as the Military Frontier, and the area of the Ottoman influence constantly fluctuated. Venice actually expanded into Dalmatia; after the Peace of Karlowitz in 1699, and especially after the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 which stopped Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. Similarly, after the Ottoman army retreated from Slavonia, the Habsburgs incorporated it into their dominion.

After the fall of Venice in 1797, Napoleon's army marched down the Adriatic coast and established the province of Illyria in all the former Venetian holdings until 1813. Napoleon's administration established public education in Dalmatia and encouraged the use of the local, what was to become Croatian, language, which has been interpreted of the beginning of a distinctly Croatian national consciousness in Dalmatia. Subsequently, the congress of Vienna in 1815 annexed all the former Illyria, including Dalmatia and Istria, to the Habsburg Empire and it was this nineteenth-century Habsburg context that defined the course of Croatian social, political, and cultural developments for a century.

Jurisdiction over Croatia in the nineteenth century shifted between Vienna and Budapest. Although the authority of the *Sabor* was constantly challenged, and at times completely nullified, it was the time of the beginning of political life in Croatia. Until the beginning of the century, the purveyors of power had been the landed nobility, who were mostly interested in their privileges and rights to taxes. However, with the rise of post-Enlightenment ideas of liberalism and especially romantic

nationalism, which was sweeping over the Balkans, students from lower classes began articulating different political visions and shaping nationalist discourse, resulting in the appearance of the first political parties. The most famous movement in the first part of the century is known as Illyrian Movement, which emphasized the unity of the Southern Slavs, called for a “national” language, inspired by the Serb reformer Vuk Karadžić who codified Serbian language and who was subsequently accused by historians like Banac for providing a secular basis for hegemonic claims of the Serbian nationalist elite. The Illyrian movement published the first newspaper in the Croatian language and showed strong opposition to both Vienna and Buda. In part, this was due to the fact that Hungarians had passed a law that abolished Latin as the official language and introduced Hungarian as the administrative language in Croatia. In 1848 after the failed Hungarian revolt against the Habsburgs, Vienna introduced a strong centralized government and imposed German as an official lingua franca of the empire. These developments hint at the reasons why language acquired major political significance.

After the Illyrian Movement was banned for its anti-government activities, it transformed itself into the National Party which would play one of the most important roles in the following century in creation of the State of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS), subsequently known as Yugoslavia. In fact, it was Bishop Juraj Strossmayer, one of the leaders of the National Party, who coined the term Yugoslavia (*jug* – south) after dropping the name Illyria. The National Party was not alone as an actor on the emerging political scene. Various *bans*, members of the nobility, were appointed to the *Sabor*, with a varying degree of success in negotiating with both

Vienna and Hungary. There was also a Unionist Party which propagated full allegiance to the Hungarians. Finally, there was the Croatian Party of the Right (HSP), founded by Ante Starčević, a renegade from the Illyrian Movement, who called for the full independence of the Croatian lands, based on the alleged historical continuity of Croatian political sovereignty. Starčević is regarded as a main designer of the basic blueprint for modern nationalist claims based on the historic Croatian statehood. As such, his legacy will be discussed in the following chapter.

Despite a curious collage of political opinions, one thing was certain: the idea of the unity of the Croatian nation was becoming increasingly prominent. This is especially supported by the nominal, and short-lived, unification of “Croatian lands” by *ban* Josip Jelačić, who is additionally remembered for his alleged suppression of the Hungarian rebellion against the Habsburgs in 1848. This memory reflects the success of a Croatian army against Hungarian hegemony, but it is not entirely correct, as it was the intervention of the Russian army that put Hungary back under Habsburg control. Despite growing anti-Hungarian sentiments in Croatia, it should be noted that the rising nationalism closely followed Hungarian patterns. Namely, during the entire nineteenth century, the national movement in Hungary negotiated its relationship with the Habsburgs, demanding anything between the autonomy and full independence. More importantly, their justification was founded on claims of historical rights and Hungarian statehood, which was indeed realized in 1867 when the famous *Ausgleich* (compromise) was signed. With it the Habsburg monarchy split into Austria-Hungary. The Croatian political narrative was developing along the same lines, placing historical statehood rights of Croatia at the center of the discourse. Interestingly, just

one year after the *Ausgleich*, the Croatian *Nagodba* (settlement) followed, where the *Sabor* negotiated the terms of its autonomy with Hungary. This suggests that the ideology of national unity and subsequent developments have their roots in the romantic nationalism and events of the nineteenth century, much more than in a medieval state.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, and certainly thereafter, Croatian political and cultural history becomes increasingly intertwined with the Serbs. As noted above, the Illyrian Movement and later Yugoslav ideology saw the alliance with fellow Slavs as a form of resistance to Hungarian and Austrian control. After all, even what was considered Croatia proper had a significant Orthodox population, which was under the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially following Serbia's independence from the Ottomans. The Orthodox began seeing themselves as separate people. However, many scholars maintain that newly formed Serbian state from the very beginning expressed hegemonic pretensions; the desire to unite all the Serbs under one state inevitably presupposed immense territorial expansion. Presumably, the future contentious dynamic of Yugoslavia dates back to that period – while Croatia wanted to assert its jurisdiction over its historic lands, Serbia too sought control over territory populated by Serbs. At any rate, the political dynamic between the two has never left the discourse of Serbian hegemony and Croatian historic rights.

Croatia remained under the Austria Hungary until the end of the World War I, but the envisioning of some sort of a union of Southern Slavs began earlier. The first definitive steps towards political union were taken at the island of Corfu in 1917,

between the Serbian government in exile and the Yugoslav Committee which represented Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from the Habsburg lands. The Corfu Declaration, as it is known, very vaguely stated that after the fall of the Monarchy, the two would unite in the common state, and national rights would be granted to all. It has been commonly asserted that the Corfu Declaration was a desperate measure of the Yugoslav Committee to ensure a back-up against the Monarchy, as they already sensed the dangers of Serbian hegemonic tendencies. At any rate, late in the 1918 the National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was proclaimed in Zagreb and ratified by the *Sabor*, and later that year in the Belgrade National Council and Serbian government under Serbian Prince Aleksandar Karađorđević announced the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and the Slovenes. A detail that points to the contentious and potentially unproductive political union is the change in the order of nations in the name of the state, which placed the Serbs at the start.

Generally, many historians agree that this state, which came to be known as the First Yugoslavia<sup>63</sup> was primarily characterized by “political paralysis” and a “constant deadlock” between the Serbian and Croatian sides.<sup>64</sup> Issues of national control disabled virtually all effective parliamentary actions, especially after the change of the constitution in 1920 which disregarded the vague Corfu Declaration and based itself on the Serbian constitution of 1903. Throughout the decade things continued to deteriorate, so much so that Croatian hero of the time, Stjepan Radić, the leader of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party and a deputy in the Belgrade Assembly was assassinated by a Serbian colleague. Radić’s ideology was constantly

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<sup>63</sup> The First Yugoslavia became known under this name only in 1929.

<sup>64</sup> Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia: A Concise History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

shifting, and it is hard to pin him down as a republican, nationalist, or anything else. His rhetoric was constantly directed to his peasant supporters and against the Serbian supremacy in Croatia, often in the form of peasant rallies and charismatic speeches. Finally, in 1929 the king Aleksandar abolished the parliament altogether and introduced royal dictatorship.

Mainstream Croatian historiography marks these years as a period of darkness. In this view the South Slavic union did not advance the Croatian national situation in any way, but it threatened even the little existing sovereignty that Croatia had enjoyed. In addition to the hegemonic claims and from the Serbian side, the treaty of Rapallo in 1920 gave much of the Dalmatian coast: the city of Rijeka, and the Istrian peninsula to Italy, so Croatian lands were once again split apart. In a word, it was a period that set the course towards the even worse evil, the Second Yugoslavia, and was finally vindicated only in the creation of the Republic of Croatia. Some historians explain this dysfunctional socio-political circumstance in terms of fundamental differences in nationalist imagination of the Serbian and Croatian elites.<sup>65</sup> Others point out that this was still the time of making a nation, rather than acting on its behalf, and they emphasize multiple gaps in the overall society between the elite and overwhelming peasant masses.<sup>66</sup>

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia fell after the German attack on Belgrade in April 1941. What ensued is among the murkiest episodes in the history of the area, one that still needs to be properly explored and explained. Needless to say, the period of the

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<sup>65</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia : Origins, History, Politics*.

<sup>66</sup> Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia : A Concise History*.

World War II is for the modern Croatian historiography, and politics and society in general, the most sensitive historical issue. It is particularly so as it needs to explain some contradictory and highly controversial events; namely, just few days after the fall of Belgrade the *Ustaša* regime was established in Zagreb marking the beginning of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). NDH was headed by Ante Pavelić, a former follower of Starčević's nationalist ideology, trained by Mussolini, and backed by both Italy and Germany in his vision to set up ethnically clean Croatian state: free of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and any other "anti-national" elements. In the words of Leslie Benson, NDH was the main slaughterhouse of the former Yugoslavia during the war.<sup>67</sup> Territorially, it included almost all of present-day Croatia except Istria, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina in its entirety. Dalmatia and the islands were under Italian control, although nominally belonging to the NDH. Accordingly, nationalist historiography interprets this period as a successful, although admittedly twisted, expression of the millennial struggle for Croatian political sovereignty. In other words, there is a strong tendency to relativize, if not banalize, the radicalized politics and war crimes of NDH in order to present it as some kind of a precursor of the new independent state in 1990.

At the same time that Pavelić's *Ustaše* were implementing Nazi politics, Tito's *Partizans* were gaining momentum. Tito had been a functionary of a Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ) since its formation in 1919. In the midst of the war, while directing a number of offensives of scattered guerilla fighters across Yugoslavia, he proclaimed himself the commander in chief. This will later translate into the

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

commander in chief of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), and in 1974 he was named a president for life. A Communist Anti-Fascist Council in Jajce, a town in central Bosnia, proclaimed the formation of the Second Yugoslavia in 1943, which was accepted by the Croatian Anti-Fascist Council (ZAVNOH) in the following year. The Croatian Council notably for the first time announced the annexation of Istria and the islands into Croatian lands. With the help of increasingly strong *Partizan* attacks against German positions, Italy's capitulations, and Allied assistance, the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) was established in 1945, with its first constitution following in January of 1946.

The political borders, allegiances, and even identities for all of subsequent six Yugoslav republics were far from clear-cut even after the formation of the new state.<sup>68</sup> Contrary to the years of Yugoslav historical propaganda, the Communist Party did not "naturally" ascend to the presidency of Yugoslavia. Moreover, the formation of Yugoslavia took a lot of political and social engineering, control, and repression in the years immediately following the war.<sup>69</sup> In summarizing the World War II and the formation of Yugoslavia, I find Benson's conclusion poignant: "First, Yugoslav slaughtered each other in greater numbers than they killed the Axis occupiers. Second, the guerrilla war in the Balkans was, from the point of view of grand strategy, a sideshow. Third, the Communist Party seized power at the war's end by force, and thanks to the Stalin's patronage."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History : Twice There Was a Country*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: New York, 2000), 231-32.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-64.

<sup>70</sup> Benson, *Yugoslavia : A Concise History*, 73.

Balancing the national question is the most prominent issue in the history of the second Yugoslavia. Although it appears that the majority of the issues were economic, social, and political in nature, they were permanently coated in nationalist rhetoric. Arguably, it was the Communist Party that framed the discourse in such a way; it never missed a chance to proclaim itself a panacea for the national questions that supposedly ruined the previous Yugoslavia, so the discourse of national division was always in circulation. Furthermore, the entire state apparatus was run along national quotas where everything, from production to state administration, was assigned national percentages. Banac referred to this phenomenon as a “bureaucratic nationalism,”<sup>71</sup> and Ramet pointed out that Yugoslavia was in fact run not as a federation but as an international system.<sup>72</sup> Simultaneously however, the Party was struggling between its centralizing tendencies and republican claims for autonomy and secession. Therefore, at the highest level of power there seems to have been an inherent contradiction between acknowledging and disregarding nationalist tendencies.

Croatia at that time assumed its present territorial boundaries. Many have however said that Croatian leadership, and society at large, did not see communism as the preferred form of government.<sup>73</sup> The republic was in an awkward situation because it had to deal with its Nazi past; many families have been involved in *Ustaša* movement, and those who did not support the regime were accused of collaborating with it. Communist reprisals were harsh and it is possible that many contemporary

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<sup>71</sup> Banac, "Nacionalizam u Jugoistočnoj Europi," 28.

<sup>72</sup> Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962 - 1991*.

<sup>73</sup> Benson, *Yugoslavia : A Concise History*, 87.

grievances have their roots in the post-war period. In addition to getting rid of all the “nationalists,” when in 1948 Tito split with Stalin, he also got rid of all hitherto “good communists,” sending massive numbers to the notorious prison at Goli otok (barren island) for years of hard labor. It seemed clear to Croatian historians that from the beginning of Yugoslav state Croatia was again being a victim of foreign oppression. As the state apparatus enlarged itself, increasing number of Serbs entered state administration, especially in the army ranks, helping to fuel a Croatian-Serbian conflict.

Grievances increased during the sixties when a seeming economic boom (really based on foreign loans) and tourism started pouring foreign currency into the country, Croatia which served as the tourist Mecca of Yugoslavia sent most of those revenues to the federal reserve. The leadership in Zagreb, backed by that in Ljubljana, Slovenia, as the most industrialized part of Yugoslavia, started raising complaints about the centralist economic policies and the need for liberalization of the country. Very soon it escalated into a nationalist issue and spread to the other republics, which resulted in constitutional amendments at the start of the seventies and the new constitution of 1974 which nominally granted more autonomous rights for the republics. It also officially recognized Bosnian Muslims as a separate nation, and confirmed Kosovo and Vojvodina as autonomous provinces.

In Croatia, it was a time when the nationalist leaders of the nineties first appeared, among them the future President Franjo Tuđman who was jailed, along with a growing number of intellectuals, in 1971 for his pro-national orientation. In the late sixties, the language issue was set forth, when the group of intellectuals

demanded the clear separation and recognition of differences between Croatian and Serbian. Matica Hrvatska, a nationalist-oriented publishing house started publishing nationalist, anti-communist texts, as well as calling for the acknowledgment of Croatian cultural and political autonomy, and its public support was growing in unprecedented numbers. The culmination of what came to be known as Croatian Spring occurred in 1971 when students from the University of Zagreb organized mass demonstrations and Tito personally had to intervene, dismantling the leadership of the Zagreb Communist branch and ejecting thousands of people from their Party memberships and positions.

What ensued were the so-called years of “Croatian silence” when the economic situation in the country seriously deteriorated and the communist leadership, deeply divided and opportunistic, was in decline, especially after Tito’s death in 1980. The Croatian nationalist intelligentsia was either in prison, abroad, or banned from public life, so their Serbian colleagues took over the role of nationalist provocateurs. When Tito died in 1980, a series of “historical” publications appeared, some from Tito’s former comrades, with an aim to expose the regime, and increasingly, how the Serbs were its biggest victims. Slobodan Milošević appeared on the scene and adopted the discourse of Serbia’s victimization and called for a constitutional revision which would again “unite” Serbia’s lands, in turn causing major unrests in Kosovo where there were clashes between Serbs and Albanians. At the same time, Slovenia was pushing for economic liberalization, and even “threatened” secession from the Republic. Behind all this was an unprecedented inflation, which certainly facilitated nationalist rhetoric, and which in Croatia created

space for the reappearance of Tuđman, now backed with financial and moral support from the Croatian émigrés in the West, who often belonged to the extreme right wing. Tuđman founded his HDZ party in 1989, and the first elections were held in 1990, just some months after the historical congress of the Communist Party in Belgrade where Slovenian and Croatian delegation marched out in protest. The HDZ overwhelmingly won, and the first Parliament session was held in May of the same year. That was the sign of a definite end of Yugoslavia, Slovenia had already withdrawn, and Bosnia and Macedonia were to follow suit.

In August 1991, the Serbian minority, feeling threatened by the new Croatian leadership, blockaded the roads in Dalmatia, and established the region they called Krajina, supported by militarily and economically by Milošević's regime. While parts of Croatia were claimed by the native Serbian population, JNA occupied parts of the country during 1991. After that, a series of stalemates and occasional attacks lasted until 1995, while the major fighting moved to neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the midst of the war, Tuđman and Milošević even considered splitting and dividing Bosnia as a way of resolving the situation. In conclusion, Croatia in the nineties suffered a great deal of material and economic destruction, but the regime nevertheless optimistically claimed that this was almost a necessary sacrifice for the fulfillment of the millennial dream. Politically, the nineties were characterized by Tuđman's autocratic rule over the country; he erected an ideology based on historical idea of Croatian statehood, as well as the ethnic idiosyncrasy of Croatian people.

### III

#### **Fulfilling the Centuries-Old Dream**

Commenting on the surge of historical revisionism in the 1990s in both school curricula and academia, Ivo Goldstein summarized the situation with a brief phrase: “In Croatia, history has become politics, and politics has become history.”<sup>74</sup> It is a catchy phrase. But it sounds better than actually explains the situation. Nevertheless, the phrase highlights the fact that in Croatia, politics and history have been intertwined, they exist in a symbiotic relationship. More precisely, since the middle of the nineteenth century when visions and theories about the Croatian nation and the state consolidated, political rhetoric has mobilized historical knowledge in order to articulate and legitimize different political agenda. It can be said therefore that history has been central to Croatian political thinking, that it is its main premise and source of its legitimacy.

This phenomenon has a reverse side, which is the intrusion of political agenda into history. In other words, in a similar way to which history is central to political agenda in Croatia, politics dictates the interpretation of history. This is especially true in education where regimes can directly control how students will conceptualize history and its relationship with the present. These two notions fit into the conceptualization of history education as a sphere where the regime exerts its power over society by being at the same time defined by history and the definer of history.

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<sup>74</sup> Ivo Goldstein, "Srpsko - hrvatsko pomirenje u historiografiji: pretpostavka ili posljedica političkog pomirenja," *Radovi*, no. 31 (1998): 181.

At this point, it is worth elaborating on Croatian nationalism and national identity a little further. Many have observed that the Croatian nationalist narrative is essentially political; it is based on the notion of “a continuous line of statehood.”<sup>75</sup> The statehood narrative is based on the idea of the Croatian Parliament – *Sabor*, as an embodiment of the nation. The fact that the *Sabor* has been convening through ten centuries despite Croatian territorial and political fragmentation and subjugation to other states putatively proves the continuity of national consciousness and political and territorial legitimacy. Even when discussing the earliest expressions of national imagination in Croatian political circles, Banac concluded that “the Croats never felt safe enough with strictly national – linguistic and cultural – arguments in favor of their autonomy and statehood. They clearly believed that the rusty weapons of historical and state right were most effective in the struggle against the Habsburg and Hungarian centralism.”<sup>76</sup> While Banac is extremely keen on developing minute nationalist taxonomies, with various types and subtypes, his observation confirms that Croatian nationalism is closely related to political imaginings and power.<sup>77</sup>

Jenkins and Sofos maintain that “nationalism is inextricably linked to political modernity...which means that nationalism constitutes a form of ‘political imagination.’ Nations can be said to exist only insofar as they have acquired or manifested some sort of aspiration to achieve statehood.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, according to Billig “theorizing [of a nation on its own identity] or common sense sociologizing is

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<sup>75</sup> Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia : Origins, History, Politics*, 74.

<sup>77</sup> ———, “Nacionalizam u Jugoistočnoj Europi.”

<sup>78</sup> Jenkins and Sofos, “Nation and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: A Theoretical Perspective,” 19.

not abstract, but is rhetorically and politically directed.”<sup>79</sup> The historical background of nationalist programs corresponds precisely to that “theorizing,” it is an instrument to established political power. Nationalist narrative, or any nationalist history, is therefore not history in its own right, but it needs to be studied with respect to its relationship with political agenda.

In this chapter I focus on history’s role in the formation of Croatian nationalism. More specifically, I want to show the extent to which historical consciousness defines nationalist political thinking. I begin with an outline of the aforementioned Constitutional Preamble, which can be seen as a culmination of the narrative of Croatian statehood, as well as the ultimate act of the political adoption of historical narrative. Furthermore, I briefly outline the main visionaries of the nation that led to the narrative enshrined in the Preamble. I finish with a discussion on President Tuđman, independent Croatia’s first president who, as a historian by training, adopted and further transformed the narrative of statehood.

### **State-Sanctioned History**

In discussing the importance of historical consciousness in Croatian political thought it is helpful to reverse chronological order and start with the Preamble to the Republic of Croatia Constitution. As stated in Chapter Two, the Preamble outlines events of Croatian history. In Croatian, the Preamble is also referred to as *Izvorišne osnove* (original foundations), thus establishing a connection between the “original”

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<sup>79</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 64.

past and the legitimacy of the state inscribed in the rest of the Constitution. The Preamble is a prime example of the symbiosis of history and state in Croatia; it is a very unusual, if not unique, example of the constitutional sanctioning of history. The Preamble reads as follows:

Croatian people demonstrated their determination and willingness in founding and preserving the Republic of Croatia, as an independent, sovereign, and democratic state, which is a realization of millennial national identity and continuity of its statehood, confirmed in the continuity of history in various political forms and preservation and development of statehood narrative about Croatian historic right to its full sovereignty.<sup>80</sup>

What this convoluted formula actually says is that the proclamation of independence is a necessary result of historical developments. It claims that the secession from Yugoslavia borders on a messianic moment that was realized after the “millennial” course of history that preserved and carried forward the right of the Croatian nation-state to exist. The entire text asserts that the constitution and declaration of independence are the result of “millennial inalienable, indivisible, non-transferable, and non-expendable” right of statehood and finally declares, in a couple of lines almost as an afterthought, its commitment to democracy and civil and human rights.

The course of history as outlined in the Constitution fits into the concept of the “historical statehood narrative” which Bellamy defines as “abstract claims to historical identity.”<sup>81</sup> The text is crucial for several reasons as it highlights the centrality of history for politics and its social implications. Firstly, it is an example of the paramount significance of history for the political realization of Croatian nation-state. In fact, history here is not merely central to politics as their meanings become

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<sup>80</sup> Ustav Republike Hrvatske, Izvorišne osnove.

<sup>81</sup> Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 32.

interchangeable. The function of a constitutional preamble is to lay out founding principles and values for a state, and Croatian constitution substitutes historical necessity for political principles. Secondly, this text is a legal document and therefore suggests the legalization of history. As such, it raises the question of whether countering its historical claims constitutes the actual resistance to the state itself. With it, history ceases to be a scholarly enterprise and becomes a part of the state apparatus. Among other things, this echoes Georg Iggers' observation that nineteenth century historiography was subservient to the state.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, by singling out and arranging certain historical moments, the Preamble creates a historical consciousness, the "empty homogenous time" mentioned by Anderson, along which the nation progressively travels. It fosters a particularly historicist conceptualization of progressive history.<sup>83</sup> The pitfalls of such formulations are many, and particularly with regards to the political performance of the regime. Arguably, what we have here is not simply a narrative; it is essentially a political justification. Its focus on picking and tracking historical events creates the notion that things in the world occur not as a result of random actions, but rather "naturally," as the constitution in question literally states. Such formulations subtly, but nevertheless effectively, banalize the whole process of statesmanship, not to mention democracy, by removing the emphasis from actual political responsibility. Politics is transported from the realm of human agency to a nearly supernatural sphere where history, bluntly put, just takes care of things.

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<sup>82</sup> Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 82.

<sup>83</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

Two points have to be made about this; one is that by explaining political reality as a consequence of history, “a mystical link between people and its land is detectable.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, notions of statehood and nationhood take on a religious significance, which the Preamble reflects in its eschatological tone announcing the fulfillment of the “thousand years’ dream.” In a way, this is a method of creating the “imagined community;” creating an emotional, and mystical appeal that can provide a sense of social unity in an environment where people cannot otherwise know each other.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, it can be seen as a political phenomenon typical of modernity, where divine authority has been reformulated in secular terms. In Billig’s words, “the national community has descended from heaven to earth.”<sup>86</sup>

The second point refers to the accountability of the regime to its people. Namely, on historical narrative as a core value of a state creates space for all kinds of political manipulations and abuses. Conceptually, the attention shifts from the present to the past. The importance of the present and future conditions of the state and its people are overshadowed by the glorious accomplishments of its past. For example, President Tuđman repudiated “all those who only talk about problems, about so-called negativities” in the country, clearly referring to those who were courageous enough to pinpoint numerous abuses of power by Tuđman’s ruling elite.<sup>87</sup> Instead, he emphasized that people should be satisfied that the day had come when they “hold

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<sup>84</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 77.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>86</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 77.

<sup>87</sup> Franjo Tuđman, "Odajući poštovanje Anti Starčeviću učvršćujemo temelje svoje hrvatske slobode, svoje hrvatske državne nezavisnosti," in *Govori i izlaganja 1998. - 1999.*, eds. Nevio Šetić and Djuro Vidmarović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni zavjet, 2007), 82.

their own destiny in their own hands.”<sup>88</sup> In very mundane terms, historicist conceptualization of history and its fusion with political goals serves as a smokescreen for actual politics occurring on the ground.

Novelist Dubravka Ugrešić, in her subtle critique of the social and political climate during the early nineties observes a very similar thing. She suggests that “by turning words into deeds the ex-Yugoslav peoples have moved into a new dimension, into ‘mythic time’ in which the borders between existing and non-existing worlds have been erased.”<sup>89</sup> Ugrešić comments on the inflammatory rhetoric that led to the horrors of war, as well as on the uses and abuses of historical narratives. Texts were transposed from the “mythical time” to reality, from the past to the present. Furthermore, this transposition from the literary sphere to reality is comparable to a metamorphosis as a stylistic device.<sup>90</sup> Metamorphosis is “the transformation of a poetic trope into a poetic fact” or a generator of literary content by the use of metaphor in the text. In ex-Yugoslavia however, the metaphor stepped out of the text and became a major generator of real events.<sup>91</sup>

The extent of this metamorphosis, the narrative taking hold of reality, is perhaps best illustrated in Slobodan Milošević’s infamous speech in 1989 on the occasion of six hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. He said that “it is difficult nowadays to tell what is true and what is legendary about the Battle of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Dubravka Ugrešić, "The Realisation of a Metaphor," in *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 55-56.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

Kosovo. Nowadays, that does not even matter.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, history was there to legitimize political agenda regardless of the facts of history, and Milošević’s agenda was only the worst among many.

Billig on the other hand actually explains how blurring the boundary between the real and the imaginary, or framing political agenda in historical terms, makes perfect rhetorical, and demagogical, sense. By recalling the thousand years of history, “no historical details” actually have to be mentioned. “No details have to be specified, nor arguments advanced.”<sup>93</sup> In that sense, history seems to possess a special asset; it does not matter so much if what it tells is true. What matters is its tremendous emotional appeal that can unquestionably justify and legitimize present actions. Hence, the Preamble of Croatian Constitution easily refers to the medieval Croatian kingdom as the real beginning of Croatian state. The notion is so vague that it is hard to challenge, and it is at the same time a source of pride that grants legitimacy to the state regime regardless of its actual ability to govern efficiently.

Jenkins and Sofos comment on the relationship between the nation-state and civil society. They write that “contemporary nationalism in its historical setting ... is first and foremost political phenomenon and not ‘fated’ to happen.”<sup>94</sup> They imagine that the nation-state system would eventually be superseded by “citizenship models of nationhood” which would imply “democratic participation and accountability at

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Ivo Banac, "Rat prije rata: Raspad jugoslavenske historiografije," in *Cijena Bosne: članci, izjave i javni nastupi, 1992. - 1995.*, ed. Jusuf Žiga (Sarajevo: Vijeće Kongresa bošnjačkih intelektualaca, 1996), 56.

<sup>93</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 72.

<sup>94</sup> Jenkins and Sofos, "Nation and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: A Theoretical Perspective," 29.

diverse levels of decision-making.”<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the Croatian Constitution is almost entirely framed in terms of historically granted legitimacy and as such it has an opposite effect than that proposed by these authors. Tying politics with history subverts democratic participation because of the subtle implication that it is not the people but history that propels political changes and that the state runs along some imagine historical path, and not along well functioning institutions.

The Preamble to the Croatian Constitution is an example of merging state building and history, where the statehood narrative is embedded in the proclamation of the independent nation-state. What follows is a brief description of the formative path of this narrative, which points to its different stages and most of all, it suggests how historical thinking has been wedded to political agenda.

### **From Political Polyhistorians to Historian-Politicians**

Ivo Banac traces the beginnings of nationalist imagination of Croatia to the sixteenth century and observes that among the Croatian ideologues two frameworks of national imagination were constantly at work: one is the advocacy for panslavism, and the other is the “maintenance of separate Croatian identity.”<sup>96</sup> Among the earliest visionaries of Croatian political identity was a theologian from the southern Croatian island of Hvar, Vinko Pribojević, who constructed a history of Slavic people as descending from Illyrian tribes. His idea was that Croats and other Slavs, as heirs to mighty ancestors, should overthrow all those who oppressed them in the sixteenth

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia : Origins, History, Politics*, 72.

century.<sup>97</sup> The first one who merged the two frameworks, the pan-Slavic and exclusively Croatian, was Pavao Ritter-Vitezović, whose arguments are “both historical construct and political program.” Vitezović wrote his piece titled “Croatia rediviva” in 1700 where he protested against the dismemberment of “Croatian lands” between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans after the 1699 Peace of Karlowitz. He imagined a Croatian territory and sovereignty based on the writing of Constantine Porphyrogenetius’ *De administrando imperio* as well as on the sovereignty of Croatian medieval state and King Krešimir.<sup>98</sup> Vitezović additionally reconciled this exclusivist understanding of Croatian statehood with pan-Slavism by extending the Croatian identity to all Slavs.<sup>99</sup>

This framed narrative that combined political agenda and historical continuity was not confined only to the intelligentsia. On the contrary, it started permeating the political sphere as well. For example, one of the declarations of the early eighteenth century *Sabor* sessions maintained that “Croatia as a kingdom was joined with Hungary, but without establishing common citizenship. We are not compelled by force to join Hungary. We accepted only her king, and not the kingdom...we are free citizens and subjects to no one.”<sup>100</sup> This was written in response to the claims of the Hungarian crown to Croatian territory, and it is essentially an appeal and expression of allegiance to the court in Vienna against Budapest. This declaration is yet again example of placing history at the center of political arena and legislative practice.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 38.

In the wake of nineteenth-century nationalist revivals, Croatian political imagination started gaining momentum. While the Illyrian movement from the beginning of the nineteenth century received and continues to receive lots of attention, mostly because of the impact it had on the standardization of the language, it was a cultural movement that soon died out under Hungarian repression, only to reemerge during the second half of the century as a movement calling for Yugoslav unification. Nevertheless, central to the statehood narrative are Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik, a duo that produced an “integral Croat national ideology” in the second half of the 1800s.<sup>101</sup> Their framework is a further elaboration of the existing statehood narrative and it voiced grievances with respect to Habsburg and Hungarian rule; it held both of them responsible for breaking historical contracts with Croatia, which entered into “personal Union” with Hungary, thus never really giving up its political sovereignty.<sup>102</sup> Starčević in particular, framed the issue in terms of “Croatian right,” meaning the right for independence that Croatia based on its medieval sovereignty and the continuity of its parliament *Sabor* through history. The narrative draws from and expounds on the premises already posed by Vitezović. For example, Starčević also envisioned extending the name of Croats to other Slavs, and in the political moment in which he was active, that meant primarily Serbs and Bosnians. He also based his claims on Porphyrogenetius’ work on the Balkan Slavs.

Starčević and Kvaternik materialized their project in the formation of the Croatian Party of the Right (HSP) which remains active to this day. The party initially promulgated political nationalism. It claimed that Croats were primarily a political

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<sup>101</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia : Origins, History, Politics*, 85.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

people, defined by their statehood tradition. However, the party itself went through many splits and upheavals and at the beginning of the twentieth century it took on increasingly ethnic overtones. This was however, according to Banac, a common phenomenon at the time, when all Balkan nationalisms were imagined along homogenous ethnic lines.<sup>103</sup> Specifically in Croatia this culminated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the politics of Franjo Tuđman who drew heavily from the statehood historical narrative defined by Starčević. The phrase “thousand years’ dream of Croatian people” became his mantra by which he referred to the Croatian medieval state and its millennial struggle to reclaim its sovereignty.

Tuđman deserves special attention. Ironically, Tuđman was a historian by training and it is not an overstatement to say that his academic and political thinking are imbued with the notion of history and its centrality to the nation. He was not a new face on the political scene in the 1989 when he illegally formed his HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) party. Tuđman fought in the World War II at Tito’s side, after which he enlisted into the *Jugoslavenska narodna armija* (JNA - Yugoslav People’s Army) where he acquired the position of a Major-General. He then left the army to dedicate himself to his scholarship, and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the topic of the crisis and collapse of the First Yugoslavia. He founded the *Institut za povijest radničkog pokreta Hrvatske* (The Institute of the History of Croatian Working Movement), from where he was fired after he got involved in the nationalist controversies that marked the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies in

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<sup>103</sup> Ivo Banac, "Kako odrediti Hrvatsku državu?," in *Cijena Bosne: čanci, izjave i javni nastupi, 1992. - 1995.*, ed. Jusuf Žiga (Sarajevo: Vijeće Kongresa bošnjačkih intelektualaca, 1996), 286.

Yugoslavia.<sup>104</sup> He was also twice imprisoned for his nationalist, anti-Yugoslav activities, in 1972 and 1981.

Tuđman's national imagination was relatively novel. He envisioned Croatia as a space exclusively belonging to the Croatian nation, where all strands of ideologies that had long divided the "Croatian national being" could again come together, united in the nation. Banac observes that Tuđman's idea of a nation is primarily ethnically based and homogenous, which Banac criticizes as a deviation from Croatian statehood tradition: "Tuđman forges the history of Croatian national integration."<sup>105</sup> Moreover, he accuses him of "demolishing the Croatian political tradition" and even acting "in an anti-historical fashion" in his political agenda.<sup>106</sup>

It needs to be pointed out here that Banac himself is a historian, an ideologue, and a politician, as well as a firm believer that the historical statehood narrative is a legitimate basis for Croatian independence. Nevertheless, Banac is right in his claims that Tuđman deviates from the political definition of the Croatian people, as he believes in an organic, ethnically based "national being." Banac's claim that Tuđman is "anti-historical" is however dubious, both with respect to its relevance to Tuđman, and its validity per se. Tuđman was certainly all about history. But he was anti-historical for Banac because Tuđman understood history in a different way. For Banac, the historical development of a political thought, starting with Ritter-Vitezović, and later Starčević, was a primary source of Croatian state legitimacy. For Tuđman, on the other hand, legitimacy emanated from a certain national essence.

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<sup>104</sup> See Croatian Crisis in Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962 - 1991*.

<sup>105</sup> Banac, "Kako odrediti hrvatsku državu?," 286.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

Nevertheless, one is left wondering what being “historical” actually means, and why and how being “historical” is better than being “anti-historical.”

The statement that Tuđman was not making use of the statehood narrative is hardly correct. He employed it heavily during his years in the presidency, where the aforementioned slogan of the thousand years of history comes forward. When speaking at the Second General Assembly of HDZ in 1993, he emphasized that the party had been founded on the original thought of Starčević. Five years later, when speaking at the anniversary celebration of Starčević’s birthday he declared that “Ante Starčević and we, his grandchildren, have completed our historic mission.”<sup>107</sup>

Tuđman, however, combined the political statehood narrative with his theory of the natural formation of nations. Before his presidency, during the years spent in Yugoslav “political and intellectual underground” he developed his theory of nationalism, and one of the passages that particularly highlights its main points is found in his book “National Question in Contemporary Europe:”

No force in history has ever been capable to form new nations in an artificial way ... [nations] are formed naturally, in an objective and complex historical process, as a result of development of all those material and spiritual forces that shape national being of nations, based on blood, linguistic, and cultural similarities, as well as on mutual interests and destiny of ethnic communities with common territory, historical traditions and goals ... no nation can give up its own interests and goals as this would mean giving up life itself<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Tuđman, "Odajući poštovanje Anti Starčeviću učvršćujemo temelje svoje hrvatske slobode, svoje hrvatske državne nezavisnosti," 81.

<sup>108</sup> Franjo Tuđman, "Nacionalno pitanje u suvremenoj Europi," in *Nacionalno pitanje u suvremenoj Europi. Državnost nacija ključ mira Europe*, ed. Dubravko Horvatić (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1990), 266-7.

Esoteric and convoluted as it appears, Tuđman claims that nations are natural, organic, blood related communities, connected both to their history and to their future. In fact, the nation for him is almost oxymoronic, an entity defined by its simultaneous relationship with the past and the future, with history and destiny. When discussing the national situation in Yugoslavia, he notes its failure to provide “favorable conditions for continuing historical development” for each of the nations.<sup>109</sup> The history of the nation therefore is not only what is left behind, but its present and future are a part of fulfilling a certain historical task. It is here that the term anti-historical can be helpful if understood in the sense that Tuđman transposes history to the future and talks about it as something that still has to occur. For example, in his speech in the *Sabor* at the second anniversary of the proclamation of independence he announced that “it is our task to fill out new, brighter pages of Croatian history.”<sup>110</sup>

There is yet another way in which Tuđman employed history in order to proclaim the legitimacy of the Croatian nation-state. The history in question was cultural history, and its political aim was to distinguish Croats from Serbs. Mainly, Tuđman promoted the view that Croatia had always been part of Western civilization, formed on its values, and that it had defended the border of Western Christendom, as well as contributed to its achievements.

Examples of his imaginings of Croatia’s past are numerous. During the official visit of the Greek president in 1998, Tuđman proclaimed that “the

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>110</sup> ———, “Ostvaren višestoljetni hrvatski san,” in *Zna Se: HDZ u borbi za samostalnu Hrvatsku*, ed. Ivan Bekavac (Zagreb: Izvršni odbor Središnjice HDZ, 1993), 32.

relationship between our people reaches all the way back to the Greek classical civilization.”<sup>111</sup> For him, the notion of civilization was paramount; it was the ultimate proof that Croats and Serbs were two different “national beings” and thus bound to embark on separate political tracks. He claimed that the Serbs “belong to the East. They are eastern peoples like the Turks and Albanians. They belong to the Byzantine culture...despite similarities in language, we cannot be together.”<sup>112</sup>

In his exaltation of “civilization” and inevitably contrasting it to all things “Byzantine” and “Turkish,” Tuđman’s thinking is not unique. Maria Todorova observes that phenomenon of “unanimously describing [former Ottoman world] as bearers of essentially alien civilization” is widespread among the Balkan nation states, all of them heirs to “Ottoman legacy as perception.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, despite their attempts to alienate themselves from the “East,” Balkan national historiographies and politics all share the legacy of denigrating the Ottoman Empire and holding it accountable for impeding their historical progress. At the same time, writes Todorova, “most Balkan nationalisms are essentially defensive, and their intensity is the direct result of problems of unconsolidated nation-states and social identity in crisis. This nervousness about identity accounts among other for unique preoccupation with ethnogenesis in the Balkans.”<sup>114</sup>

The other end of this process implied strong identification with the West. Tuđman would, in a manner of an exemplary historian, cite examples from the past

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<sup>111</sup> ———, “Korijeni grčko-hrvatskih veza sežu u davnu prošlost,” in *Govori i izlaganja 1998. - 1999.*, eds. Nevio Šetic and Djuro Vidmarović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni zavjet, 2007), 128.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 68.

<sup>113</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 182.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-3.

that illustrated Croatian indisputable rootedness in Western culture. At the New Year's banquet in the Ministry of Financial Affairs he reminded the audience that a native of Dubrovnik, a certain Benedikt Kotruljević, was the author of the "first European systematic work on commerce and accounting," which in his view was proof of Croatian ingenuity and contributions to the West, even when "no one wanted to recognize us as a sovereign and free state."<sup>115</sup> On another occasion Tuđman wanted to emphasize Croatian contribution to European art, so he compared Renaissance Croatian writer Marko Marulić to Moliere and Shakspeare.<sup>116</sup> All of this served to prove Tuđman's point that "we have always, in all our national being, in our history and our culture, been an integral part of the Mediterranean and Central Europe, while this same Europe has been exiling us to the Balkans."<sup>117</sup>

The historical narrative that is central to theories of Croatian nationalism is based on the idea of medieval Croatian kingdom which subsequently granted legitimacy to Croatian sovereignty. Throughout the complex socio-political developments of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Croatian political thought became intricately bound up in history, culminating with its centrality into Preamble of the Constitution. As discussed above, history is not simply supplementary to political theorizing, but it has become almost interchangeable with the formation of state. It creates political discourse which blurs the lines between mythical imagery of the state and real political accountability, which in turn creates the space for political

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<sup>115</sup> Franjo Tuđman, "Budimo ponosni na svoj narod, na svoja dostignuća," in *Govori i izlaganja 1998. - 1999.*, eds. Nevio Šetić and Djuro Vidmarović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni zavjet, 2007), 18.

<sup>116</sup> ———, "Ukupno hrvatsko nacionalno biće razvijalo se u okvirima zapadnoeuropske civilizacije," in *Govori i izlaganja*, eds. Nevio Šetić and Djuro Vidmarović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni zavjet, 2007), 152.

<sup>117</sup> ———, "Po svom nacionalnom biću, po svojoj povijesti i kulturi sastavni smo dio Sredozemlja i Srednje Europe," in *Govori i izlaganja 1998. - 1999.*, eds. Nevio Šetić and Djuro Vidmarović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni zavjet, 2007), 108.

abuses. President Tuđman, as a figure who emerged as a leader in the late 1980s, partly due to his fame as a historian, is an example of how that discourse has been adopted and modified to fit the particular socio-political context of Yugoslavia's dissolution, where mobilization of historical consciousness and memories was used for political maneuvering.

## IV

### **State Legitimacy and History Curricula**

“History needs to teach students how to correctly understand the present”

The role of a history teacher is particularly delicate and important because it teaches the subject which influences the formation of consciousness, or worldview of our youth; it influences national, patriotic, class and other feelings. Precisely at the moment when nationalist actors attempted to poison the consciousness of our young generation in order to falsify and falsely interpret our history, we, the educators, have deemed it fit to gather and discuss our calling which is the strongest resistance to nationalism ... this is not a political gathering, but it inevitably has political dimensions.<sup>118</sup>

This excerpt is the introduction to the symposium of history teachers held in Novi Sad, Serbia, in 1972 to discuss the role of education of history in Yugoslav schools. 1972 was a significant year in Yugoslav history; in the previous year, Croatia witnessed the apogee of more than half a decade of nationalist and liberal challenges to the Communist regime. It was followed by Tito’s purges of the “nationalists” on the one hand, and the constitutional amendments that accommodated nationalist demands on the other. The teaching of history in this particularly sensitive period was in dispute as well. As the quote clearly suggests, educators saw history as a crucial agent in ensuring stability and loyalty to the political leadership, in this case “Yugoslavism” and socialism. The quote spells out the argument of this thesis: the teaching of history, and to a large extent history as a profession, have been informed by the political agenda and served as a means of legitimizing political rule. The previous chapter focused on the centrality of historical interpretation to Croatian

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<sup>118</sup> Simo Vujović, "Simpozijum o nastavi istorije dio programa saveza društva istoričara Jugoslavije," in *Prvi jugoslovenski simpozijum o nastavi istorije* (Novi Sad: Društvo istoričara SAP Vojvodine, 1972), 9.

political discourse. It is the aim of this chapter to point out how the regime actively shaped and utilized history in schools in order to render itself legitimate, natural and historically conditioned.

In discussing questions of the instrumentalization and control of school history by politics, I distinguish two aspects of the existing sources: direct political instructions as to history pedagogy, on the one hand, and the narrative found in textbooks, on the other. Namely, school curricula provide an array of definitions and instructions as to what the purpose of history education was, how it was to be taught, and what topics had to be included. Therefore, curricula, together with other sources from the Ministry of Education indicate how the regime shaped and controlled history through direct, technical, and bureaucratic means.

On the other hand, there is a narrative. The historical narrative, prescribed in curricula and polished in textbooks represents an ideal imagining of history by the state. The narrative is powerful, and complex because it prescribes an entire worldview, a set of truths and falsehoods within which society operates. At the same time, it is seemingly innocuous and uninteresting, as it is incorporated in the framework of the academic discipline of history. Moreover, it is espoused by historians whose prestige as experts is often undisputed. It can be generally argued that the regimes before and after Croatian independence were heavily involved in the educational system and used it for their own legitimizing purposes. Moreover, in this respect the regimes were very similar and it can be said that teaching of history continuously served to support the state.

## “Tasks and goals” of the Teaching of History

Snježana Koren noted that in Croatia, history as a subject had never been envisioned for purely educational purposes, but rather for the acculturation of students to a political regime,<sup>119</sup> despite the fact that the Ministry of Education classified it as a subject that “requires intellectual engagement.”<sup>120</sup> Acculturation is an approximate translation of the Croatian word *odgoj* which makes up the phrase *odgoj i obrazovanje* (acculturation and education). This phrase is regularly used to describe the school system, and particularly its role in the society. The very notion of how the school is envisioned and described indicates that it is meant to serve as a platform through which the state “acculturates” the society, thus making it compatible with its own ideas of power. Significantly, the curriculum published by the Ministry of Education in 1958 stated that the purpose of school as a state institution is to “establish an intimate relationship between schools, home, and socialist organizations,”<sup>121</sup> and this was reiterated in further Ministry publication as the need “for the organic ties between the school and socialist society.”<sup>122</sup>

It is also important to point out that the word *odgoj* has a rather sentimental, emotional connotation that is not obvious in the English translation. It is, for example, used in the context of intimate situations like raising children. Therefore, classifying school and history as *odgoj* suggests a special emotional and thus all the more powerful, way of framing political involvement in the social fabric.

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<sup>119</sup> Snježana Koren, interview by author, Zagreb, July 28, 2011.

<sup>120</sup> “Opći i nastavni plan i program osnovne škole,” *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, August 21, 1972, Zagreb.

<sup>121</sup> *Osnovna škola: programatska struktura* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1958), 201-02.

<sup>122</sup> *Osnovna škola: odgojno obrazovna struktura*, (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1960), 5.

The aim of the following examples is to show how the school system, and thus history within it, has been under the utmost political control in both Yugoslavia and Croatia. Institutions, from the Ministry to more “professional” experts and historians, consistently promulgated the view that it is the primary purpose of history to teach younger generations to value their country and to adopt a “correct” worldview. Importantly, the way in which authorities phrased this purpose varied with respect to the larger socio-political dynamic, which in turn substantiates the idea that history complemented and reflected efforts to assert political power.

The new Yugoslav communist authorities issued their first curriculum in 1946, immediately after the end of the war in 1945.<sup>123</sup> It was a thin, pamphlet-like booklet which outlined the compulsory subjects, their purposes, and the main points teachers of each subject were expected to rise. The years immediately following World War II were formative ones for Yugoslavia. The Constitution was drafted and adopted in 1946, and then revised in 1953. The Five Year Plan was drafted in 1947 and failed soon after, and in 1948 so did the Yugoslav connection with the Soviet bloc. Society and its infrastructure were in complete disarray, and so was the school system. A uniform eight-year program for elementary schools was not introduced until 1958. Between 1945 and 1958, each year saw a different organization of lessons and curricula. Among the most important projects immediately after the war were the literacy campaigns, as shown by the archive of the Croatian Ministry of Education.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, the Ministry made an effort to ensure that classes for all levels were

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<sup>123</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Narodnoj Republici Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, 1946).

<sup>124</sup> Hrvatski školski muzej, A2119 Narodna Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo prosvjete.

held. Between 1946 and 1958, the Ministry published five curricula for elementary schools, adding more material and elaborating on the goals and expectations of education with each coming year.

The regime was determined to use schools to assert its power. Already in 1945, Tito declared that “the teachers have an honorable duty” in building the state<sup>125</sup> and in 1948, he “appealed to the youth to study diligently, as the state needs loyal cadres.”<sup>126</sup> Moreover, he made a reference to history and stated that “in the history of our people there are great moments, and everything that is positive needs to be implanted into the soul of our young generations, while all that is negative needs to be surrendered to oblivion. Only in this way will we remove all the problems.”<sup>127</sup> By placing the responsibility for state-building and state-legitimization on the educational system, Tito set the agenda of educational institutions for decades to come. Additionally, he established the pattern of historical memory and forgetfulness, with an enduring implication that history only consists of that which is good for the state.

In 1948, the Ministry of Education issued its first official publication *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, a weekly newspaper with all the information and directives that had to be implemented in schools. The article from the same weekly suggests that the Ministry took this publication seriously, stating that “there are indications that educators do not follow the *Vjesnik*, to which they are bid by the law,” and

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<sup>125</sup> “Deklaracija o proglašenju FNRJ,” *Narodna prosvjeta*, November-December 1945, Zagreb.

<sup>126</sup> Sofija Jović, “Poboljšati političko-ideološki i kulturno prosvjetni rad – osnovni uvjet daljnjeg razvitka organizacije narodne omladine,” *Narodna prosvjeta*, January-February 1948, Zagreb.

<sup>127</sup> “Deklaracija o proglašenju FNRJ,” *Narodna prosvjeta*, November-December 1945, Zagreb.

introducing new measures aimed to force all school personnel to follow and abide by governmental instructions.<sup>128</sup> Besides that, the Ministry was in total control of teaching posts, and the early archival material reveals lists of teachers who were regularly circulated from town to town.<sup>129</sup> The regime envisioned the school as one of its main instruments in solidifying its rule and establishing the right ideological climate. Words directed to the high school teachers by a member of Croatian Communist Party (KPH) in 1949 illustrate the mixture of practicality and sentimentalism that determined the role of education in both Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav periods: “We are building socialism ... Schools need to provide our youth with a clear perspective of social development of our country – it needs to provide them with characteristics of a socialist citizen. There should be no student finishing high school that hasn’t been deeply nourished with love for his socialist homeland.”<sup>130</sup>

There appears to be little doubt that in such a relationship between the school and the state, history acquired a special role. Although no textbook on national history existed until roughly 1952, and an amalgam of literary works, oral history, and Russian translations were used instead, the regime had a well-defined idea as to what they wanted from history. Curriculum published in 1946 clearly spells out the task (*zadatak*) of history classes: “teaching students about the history of our peoples (*naših naroda*) and our Yugoslav homeland; developing love and loyalty for our homeland and its peoples; strengthening our peoples and all the events (*tekovine*) of

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<sup>128</sup> “Čitanje i proučavanje Prosvjetnog vjesnika,” *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, November 1948, Zagreb.

<sup>129</sup> Hrvatski školski muzej, A2119 Narodna Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo prosvjete.

<sup>130</sup> “Govor drugarice Anke Berus člana CK KPH,” *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, April 1949, Zagreb.

the Popular Liberation Struggle (NOB); nurturing students in irreconcilable hatred towards the enemies of the homeland.”<sup>131</sup>

The aggressive tone of this formulation was in line with the general sentiment of the years after the war, characterized by repression and political reprisals.<sup>132</sup> The tone nevertheless changed over the years, but the essential purpose of history remained the same. History was there to produce loyal citizens. Curriculum from 1948 added that “history lessons need to be realistic and interesting, lively and imaginative. History material needs to be taught in such a way to make an emotional impact on students.”<sup>133</sup> In addition, it stated that history lessons “build historical thinking, develop interest in history of peoples and homeland, and sustain conscious love towards the homeland,”<sup>134</sup> showing the instrumentality of history for the state, which still sought to establish legitimacy within its own borders.<sup>135</sup>

In 1950s, the issue of the curriculum appeared even more complex, but most importantly, it reflected the increasing orientation of Yugoslavia towards the international community. The idea that the task of history is to implement “the irreconcilable hatred towards the enemy” was coupled with the statement that history had to “demonstrate to students just and unjust struggles of all progressive peoples, as well as our own struggle for equal socialist relationship in the world; to nurture in them love for all that is progressive and humane in history, and hatred for all that is

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<sup>131</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Narodnoj Republici Hrvatskoj*, 16.

<sup>132</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 236.

<sup>133</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole*, (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, 1948), 22.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 236-37.

reactionary and inhumane.”<sup>136</sup> The call for equal socialist relationships was especially evocative of the Yugoslav-Soviet split, as Yugoslav leadership used similar lines of argument in negotiating the relationship with the USSR during the fifties.<sup>137</sup>

It is evident that in the early fifties, the regime was eager to transform the country, especially its political and economic structure. This decade saw a transfer of governmental authority to the local committees, thus creating an ambiguous division of power between local committees and central authority headed by Tito. Economically, a better relationship with the West after 1948 meant substantial funds from the US.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, the authorities introduced the concept of Self-Management Socialism. Therefore, yet another curriculum published in 1951 stressed that this edition was specifically drafted in cooperation with “a team of experts.”<sup>139</sup> This revealed both that previous curricula were entirely composed by Party personnel, and that the authorities took the role of the school in building their own socialist country even more seriously.

During the same year the Ministry of education’s newspaper published a list of mandatory material to be used, as there was not yet a comprehensive list of textbooks. Accordingly, the Ministry ordained the use of historical journals, daily print, and literary works. Also, they recommended “folk epics and oral history” (*narodna građa i predaja*) about “the Turks” to supplement the study of the Ottoman

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<sup>136</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osmogodišnje škole i niže razrede gimnazije, osnovne škole i produžene tečajeve*, (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, 1950), 25.

<sup>137</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 268.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-60.

<sup>139</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osmogodišnje škole i niže razrede gimnazije*, (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, 1951).

period.<sup>140</sup> The most important part of “history” was undoubtedly World War II, and already in 1948 the same newspaper published an “appeal” for the collection and preservation of the documentation on the war for purposes of “preserving historical truth.”<sup>141</sup> Therefore, the 1951 issue stated that “in order to correctly teach most recent history it is most important that teachers are thoroughly familiar with works of Tito, Kardelj, and Djilas.<sup>142</sup> ... History will become most clear for students if they observe and study historical monuments, events, and Partisan insurrections in their local communities.”<sup>143</sup>

In 1958, the first comprehensive curriculum was drafted along with the decision to implement a mandatory eight-year elementary school program.<sup>144</sup> This curriculum reconfirmed the notion that the “moral and social aspects of *odgoj i obrazovanje* are work awareness, contribution to the socialist community, and social development which does not preclude individual development.”<sup>145</sup> The section listing the tasks and goals of history removed phrases about “the irreconcilable hearted of the enemy” and introduced instead universal and national aims: “uninterrupted development of humans ... conviction of man’s characteristic struggle for a better, more beautiful life and the sense of belonging to progressive forces; familiarizing one selves with basic periods of human development, with peoples and struggle for liberation, patriotic consciousness, and basic historical terminology.”<sup>146</sup> Arguably, this is a reflection of Yugoslavia’s increasing orientation towards the international

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<sup>140</sup> *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, June 1951, Zagreb.

<sup>141</sup> *Narodna prosvjeta*, April-May 1948, Zagreb

<sup>142</sup> Edvard Kardelj was the main ideologue and drafter of Yugoslav constitutions.

<sup>143</sup> *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, June 1951, Zagreb

<sup>144</sup> *Osnovna škola: programatska struktura*.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

community, which culminated in 1961 when Tito participated in founding the Non-Aligned Movement. The Ministry rephrased the effect that history was to have on the students in accordance with new political aspirations, now less focused on enemies and turning instead to international relations.

A new wave of curricular changes occurred during the 1970s which were generated by nationalist challenges to the central government, notably from Croatian nationalists. The so-called Croatian Crisis peaked in 1971 after which Tito expelled roughly one thousand “dissident” members from the Croatian Communist Party together with its leadership. During the early 1970s the state leadership structure was yet again restructured, balancing between the centralized and local levels of government, as well as nationalist and communist, and liberal streams. This all culminated with a new constitution of 1974, which according to some, was drafted mostly as a “conflict resolution.”<sup>147</sup>

Despite the fact that the conflict stemmed from economic grievances, it manifested itself as an issue of ethnic-nationalist politics. Nationalist-oriented intellectuals recognized their moment and began to openly advocate separating Croatian history from the history of other Yugoslav republics. Historian Ivo Perić, the author of a modern history textbook, expressed his wish to introduce “content from Croatian national past and with Croatian national spirit.”<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, Perić suggested that the history of other Yugoslav nations needed to be reduced, while lessons on Croatian history had to demonstrate “how determined Croats had to be in

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<sup>147</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 312.

<sup>148</sup> Ivo Perić, “O nastavi povijesti u našim školama,” *Školske novine*, May 18, 1971, Zagreb.

order to remain on their own soil, how much they suffered, died, produced, and actively participated in world events.”<sup>149</sup> Among intellectuals advocating for the separation of Croatian history was Franjo Tuđman, who stated that Yugoslav authorities intentionally reduced the amount of Croatian history in the curricula, and interpreted it “as lacking national perspective” in order to “denationalize” Croats.<sup>150</sup>

The Ministry of Education and other state institutions responsible for education responded to this challenges. The response was twofold: on the one hand the *Zavod za unaprijeđvanje osnovnog obrazovanja* (Department for the Development of Elementary Education) issued a set of instructions, to be implemented immediately in order to “develop national consciousness in students to a greater degree than in previous years, ... and to teach them about the need for living in the same state with other nations.”<sup>151</sup> Specifically, for history, the emphasis had to be “on teaching Croatian history and learning Croatian cultural heritage.”<sup>152</sup>

On the other hand, the *Prosvjetno-kulturno vijeće* (Committee for Education and Culture of the Croatian Parliament) organized urgent meetings prompted by “the surge of nationalism, chauvinism, separatism, and other counterrevolutionary, anti-self-management and anti-socialist phenomena.”<sup>153</sup> The Committee specifically noted that the “main target of [nationalists’] attack was higher education and media, although [the nationalists] did not spare other areas of educational and cultural

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> “Povijest u našoj školi,” *Školske novine*, May 18, 1971, Zagreb.

<sup>151</sup> Ivica Podgorski, “Upute,” *Školske novine*, October 12, 1971, Zagreb.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> “Zaključci Prosvjetno-kulturnog vijeća,” *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, April 17, 1972, Zagreb.

activity.”<sup>154</sup> To “counter nationalist tendencies,” the Committee therefore decided that there was a need to monitor “all the actions in the realm of education...for the purpose of identifying, eradicating, and preventing the counterrevolutionary activities.” Specifically, they ordered a prompt revision of history textbooks in order to “identify nationalist, unscientific, and contradictory political speculations as well as their perpetrators.”<sup>155</sup> They also ordered the urgent delivery of a new curriculum which appeared in August 1972, followed by a call for the submission of new history textbook drafts in December.

As in the constitution, the response in history pedagogy in schools was a sort of “conflict resolution.” In a way, nationalists’ claims were acknowledged, but in another sense they were to be warded off. How this reflected on history itself is best shown in textbook narratives, which I will address in the following chapter. Here, however, suffice it to say that during the seventies, school history was at the forefront of political debates, and it reflected political crises and different responses to it. This is perhaps best illustrated in the 1971 statement by the *Hrvatsko povijesno društvo* (Croatian Historical Society) which said that “the position of Croatian historical science with respect to sources, and intentions of recent attacks is nothing short of paradoxical; on the one hand history is accused of being ‘anti-national,’ while on the other history is described as ‘conservative’ and ‘bourgeois-nationalist.’”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> “Apel Povijesnog društva Hrvatske,” *Školske novine*, November 23, 1971, Zagreb.

The curriculum itself first appeared in 1972<sup>157</sup> and was published separately as a book in 1974.<sup>158</sup> It is significant for two reasons: firstly, it continued the established practice where the state responded to socio-political changes by intervening in the production of school textbooks. The curriculum stated that changes occurred based on “justified societal demands.”<sup>159</sup> Specifically in history, the curriculum continued the practice of instructing students to “develop affection towards their own and the rest of our peoples, understanding of our interests and the necessity of interconnectedness of our peoples...to develop solidarity with abused classes, and in recent history with the working class.”<sup>160</sup> Additionally, history needed to teach students “the historical necessity of mutual liberation struggle, of ‘brotherhood and unity’ and the necessity of their mutual cooperation.”<sup>161</sup>

At the same time, the curriculum reflected the nationalist dynamic within the state. Although on multiple occasions the Ministry of Education condemned “nationalist and Chauvinist elements,” the mere wording of the curriculum indicate that the authorities in fact conceded to nationalist demands. Specifically, until that time, curricula spoke of the history of “our people” (*naši narodi*), while the new one presented a new phrase of “Croats, and other Yugoslav peoples.” At the same time, the curriculum stated that the task of history education was “to demonstrate the historical necessity of their brotherhood and unity and their cooperation.” This shift in wording could indeed be read as an indication of a growing tension between attempts

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<sup>157</sup> “Opći i nastavni plan i program osnovne škole,” *Prosvjetni vjesnik*, August 21, 1972, Zagreb.

<sup>158</sup> *Naša osnovna škola: odgojno obrazovna struktura*, (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1974).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

to preserve centralized control over the state, and local pressures voiced in ethnic nationalisms.

It is significant that along with the new constitution, Bosnian Muslims officially acquired nationality status in the Yugoslav context, while provinces adjacent to Serbia, namely Kosovo and Vojvodina, became de facto autonomous. During the fifties and the sixties, Yugoslavia was concerned with its international economic and political relations, the seventies exposed the fragility of its internal order. The prescribed tasks of history education reflected new kinds of political concerns; the emphasis of school history shifted from universal “progressive” forces to the necessity to demonstrate the historical need for unification of “Croats and other Yugoslav people.”

After Tito’s death in 1980, growing economic and socio-political problems exacerbated the situation between the republics in Yugoslavia, and in 1990 the system collapsed. Croatia proclaimed its own Constitution in 1990 and already in January 1991 the Ministry’s weekly, *Glasnik*, published a newly approved Law of Elementary Education, signed by President Franjo Tuđman, and classified as a matter “of special social interest” (*djelatnost od posebnog društvenog interesa*).<sup>162</sup> The law established basic “goals and tasks” of elementary schooling, and stated that it was the task of the Ministry to design and approve curricula, while it was the obligation of the school to strictly abide by the instructions. In the following months, the Ministry of Education issued a list of approved textbooks, and due to the lack of time to compose new

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<sup>162</sup> “Zakon o osnovnom školstvu,” *Glasnik Ministarstva prosvjete i kulture Republike Hrvatske*, January 22, 1991, Zagreb.

history programs, it ordered the revision of existing textbooks. The revision of old material caused uproar in some circles; after a series of newspaper polemics that centered on the new (in)adequate interpretation of the history of the World War II and Yugoslavia, the case made it to the newly formed *Sabor*, or parliament. There, the deputy of the Minister of Education Nedjeljko Mihanović presented his own analysis of the textbooks and called for them to be changed as they represented “subversive” and “Yugo-communist” historical views.<sup>163</sup> Mihanović criticized in particular the fact that one of the textbooks suggested that historically, the Croatian name was not shared by all the people comprising the modern nation: “Emphasizing such national disaggregation is historically wrong.”<sup>164</sup> He continued by enumerating all of the historical instances in which the Croatian name appeared, thus proving the long existence of its nationhood. In doing this, Mihanović revealed the fact that reinterpretation of history and its implementation in schools was considered crucial for justifying the new state. Moreover, the deputy’s invocation of national chronology and sacred historical moments strongly resembled the Constitutional Preamble, and complemented Tuđman’s rhetoric of the “centuries-old Croatian dream.”

Immediately following this discussion, Minister Vesna Girardi-Jurkić announced the withdrawal of all disputed textbooks. She justified her decision by stating that the textbooks, even after their revision, “retained the spirit of historical interpretation which does not correspond with the return to the natural political and economic system of the free world and Western Europe, to which Croatia

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<sup>163</sup> “Udžbenici pred temeljitim promjenama,” *Školske novine*, June 9, 1992, Zagreb.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

belongs.”<sup>165</sup> Girardi-Jurkić’s statement builds on Tuđman’s understanding of Croatian nationalism, which emphasizes historical and cultural ties between Croatia and Western civilization.

Such rhetoric coming from the Ministry confirmed that they adopted and perpetuated a practice of control over historical interpretation. This occurred despite the widespread call to “depoliticize” history in the wake of putative democratic changes. Some for, example, stated that “history [in Yugoslavia] was transformed into a servant of political agenda, not a free intellectual activity.”<sup>166</sup> The same author, however, intimated that “one of the important parts of changing the teaching of history is spiritual liberation from the totalitarian regime. These changes are integral part of the overall liberation of Croatian nation.”<sup>167</sup> The idea of depoliticizing history was in fact synonymous with using it for different political purposes, namely substituting socialist and Yugoslav discourse with an exclusively Croatian nationalist one. As a matter of fact, an employee of the nationalist-oriented publishing house Matica hrvatska expressed fears that “in Croatia, depoliticizing schools really means replacing one ideology with another.”<sup>168</sup>

A new curriculum was published in 1991, a hastily done revision of the one in the mid-eighties. The curriculum referred to a “traditional, and reactionary system” that needed to be replaced, and justified the changes that would be implemented as the “logical course in the time of democratic changes,” a phrase reminiscent of earlier

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<sup>165</sup> Vesna Girardi – Jurkić, “Povlačenje udžbenika,” *Školske novine*, June 9, 1992, Zagreb.

<sup>166</sup> Miroslav Brandt, “Teror unitarizma i boljševizma” *Školske novine*, December 10, 1991, Zagreb.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Krešimir Brlobuš, “U slobodnoj državi novi udžbenici,” *Školske novine*, April 7, 1992, Zagreb.

Yugoslav formulations.<sup>169</sup> The history curriculum was adopted from previous years, but purged of all the “Marxist” phraseology. Marxism itself was to be referred to as “a new utopianism.”<sup>170</sup> The curriculum simultaneously retained the phrase “our peoples” and specifically instructed that “special attention was to be given to Croatian national question and the people who sought to resolve it.”<sup>171</sup> Yugoslavia was referred to as “hegemony of social life,” and was to be studied in the context of “contradictions of socialist development.”<sup>172</sup>

Although the 1991 curriculum was intended to be “temporary,” a new one did not appear until 1995. It entirely abandoned phrases reminiscent of past decades, but the essential purpose of history remained. The “task and goal” of school history was to “teach students to acquire ethical norms and worldviews by truthful interpretation of history; to help students to develop their personality and “healthy patriotism” (*zdravo domoljublje*), their respect and understanding for historical heritage, and their diligent advocacy for truth and justice.”<sup>173</sup>

The curriculum explained that there had to be “truthful, i.e. objective interpretation of history,” followed by a comment that “history lessons have to be impartial, in other words - they have to teach the truth, and the truth only, be it sweet or bitter.”<sup>174</sup> This insistence on historical truths was certainly not a novelty, as phrases like “correct interpretation of history” were essential part of Yugoslav

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<sup>169</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Republici Hrvatskoj*, (Zagreb: Zavod za školstvo Ministarstva prosvjete i kulture, 1991), 7.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>173</sup> *Okvirni nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Republici Hrvatskoj*, (Zagreb: Škoske novine, 1995), 80.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

curricula. Moreover, in 1989 the journal *Nastava povijesti* published an article “Purpose and significance of history teaching in elementary and high schools” where it highlighted that value judgments in history, “good and evil, true and false,” were something necessary to “emphasizes the examples of humanity’s ups and downs, and the beauty and tragedy of man’s existence.”<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, these particular phrases were a part of a larger discourse that was symptomatic of the early nineties.

### **History, State, and Historical Truths**

There was wide repudiation, if not outright rejection, of everything that represented the “truth” in Yugoslavia, and especially among popular historians and political actors. Historian Tvrtko Jakovina referred to this as an “acute phenomenon of Croatian historiography,” where history is interpreted in the light of “authentic Croatian historical truth.”<sup>176</sup> In the late 1990, the weekly *Školske novine* published a special issue with a picture of nineteenth-century Croatian duke Josip Jelačić, on the front page where it stated that Croatia had returned to its “historical truth.”<sup>177</sup> Even Mihanović, during his speech on textbooks in the *Sabor* in 1992, stressed the need for “authentic truth” in Croatian history. This quest for historical truth fit within a wider political effort to delegitimize past social, political, and cultural experiences of society and impose the new political order. Referring to history with terms like “truth” and “lie” placed a fundamental moral significance on the way history was

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<sup>175</sup> Milenko Miladinović, “Smisao i značaj nastave istorije u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi,” *Nastava povijesti*, no. 4 (1989): 220.

<sup>176</sup> Tvrtko Jakovina, “Dodatak za najnoviju povijest u medijima ili kako čitati sekundarne izvore u 21. stoljeću,” in *Jedna povijest više historija*, ed. Marija Dubijević (Zagreb: Documenta, 2007), 78.

<sup>177</sup> Ivo Klarić, “Povratak bana,” *Školske novine*, October 16, 1990, Zagreb.

interpreted and indicates the aggressiveness and insecurity of a new regime. At the same time, interpreting history as a moral dichotomy between true and false was reminiscent of the Yugoslav curricula where a similar concept was used, that of hatred of the enemy and love for the nation. In that sense, the call for the unveiling of the true Croatian history was an instrument of political legitimacy.

In one of his addresses, President Tuđman referred to the teachers, and, as did Tito some forty-seven years earlier, congratulated them for their service to the nation. He even commented on the confusion around the history textbooks and curricula, but he reminded everyone that this whole issue was about “changes in overall spiritual condition, about rethinking the historical trajectory of the Croatian people ... the changes in century-long circumstances are surely not easy, but we have crossed Rubicon forever.”<sup>178</sup>

Tuđman’s victorious speech in the central square in Zagreb that “no one but the Croats themselves will rule Croatia anymore” presents the possibility for drawing further parallels between political rhetoric and education.<sup>179</sup> Four months later, the Minister of Education Girardi-Jurkić declared in a newspaper interview that no one but ethnic Croats could teach Croatian language and history.<sup>180</sup> This is not to claim that Tuđman’s words directly impacted the Minister’s statement. However, I am suggesting that the political climate of the newly independent Croatia was exclusively nationalistic and, as such, it permeated all spheres of society. Pro-nationalist historian

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<sup>178</sup> Franjo Tuđman, “Prešli smo Rubikon,” *Školske novine*, May 19, 1992, Zagreb.

<sup>179</sup> Franjo Tuđman, “Izgradimo sami svoju Hrvatsku,” *Školske novine*, Maz 26, 1992, Zagreb.

<sup>180</sup> Vesna Girardi-Jurkić, “Prosvjeta mora imati počasno mjesto,” *Školske novine*, September 8, 1992, Zagreb.

Miroslav Brandt, in his discussion on the new horizons of history education in independent Croatia highlighted the problem of teachers. He concluded that it is “necessary (*neophodno*) to install people of our [Croatian] nationality to universities and institutes, ...along with that it is necessary to stop any further infiltration of pro-communist or pro-unitarist [Yugoslav] cadre on all levels. This measure cannot be interpreted as discriminatory, but as a sheer self-defense.”<sup>181</sup> In this environment, history played the role of the guardian of national purity and, consequently, in the justification of government’s discriminatory practices.

The eagerness with which the new government approached schools and history is indicative of its intentions to use history to assert itself. It intended to legitimize its own ascension to power by vilifying the previous regime. It also promulgated the idea of modernizing and democratizing schools, not unlike the previous Yugoslav ideas of a clear link between progressive socialist society and history. However, schools remained under state control and continued serving a political function in a familiar fashion. Given the persistence of the political function of history, coupled with constant announcements of change and depoliticization, Stefano Petrunaro’s observation that Croatian “educational structure, curricula, and textbooks seem to exist in a state of permanent deferral, anachronistic and removed from the general events” seems apt.<sup>182</sup> Petrunaro was right to notice the anachronistic characteristics of history education, clearly drawing on previous practices. It should be noted, however, that Petrunaro suggested that those formulations could somehow be differentiated from the rest of the socio-political

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<sup>181</sup> Brandt, “Teror unitarizma i boljševizma.”

<sup>182</sup> Petrunaro, *Pisati povijest iznova: hrvatski udžbenici povijesti 1918 - 2004*, 89.

climate. Arguably, the opposite is true. They were the mirror image of what was happening in the society at large and especially in politics. As I suggested in the previous chapter, history was a central theme in many of president Tuđman's speeches, as well as in his theories about the Croatian nation and state. At the same time, Croatian nationalism became the central point of history.

In addition to the fact that both pre- and post- 1990 regimes in Croatia actively intervened in, and defined, the teaching of history for political purposes, there was a markedly historicist understanding and interpretation of history in the larger society. There was a particular way of historical interpretation at stake, historicism, which assumed an uninterrupted, progressive, and teleological flow of history at the center of which was the state. In other words, in order to support the underlying claim that the regime is historically and naturally conditioned, the definition of history itself had to correspond to the notion that events in history do not occur randomly, but according to a specific principle, in this case national unification. As theorists observed, it is the idea of "empty homogenous time" that fosters nationalist histories of a uniform national trajectory through history. History taught in schools in Croatia has been decidedly historicist and there are numerous examples suggesting that the authorities prescribed this particular line of historical interpretation. Additionally, this historicist interpretation of history extends into the future. Specifically, it implies that events occurred according to the laws of the nation in the past, it therefore assumes that they will play out similarly in the future. This gives the subject of history an even more important political significance as it prescribes the future by recounting the past,

along the line of Tuđman's idea that the history of the nation somehow determines its future actions.<sup>183</sup>

Pedagogical manuals that were sometimes published together with textbooks and designed to serve teachers recommended a historicist view of history, where “every historical fact is at the same time a consequence of a combination of causes and consequences.”<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, they portrayed history, and history lessons, as a meeting point of past events and future tasks. The 1968 manual stated that history is “a leading thread – knowledge for understanding, understanding for acting.”<sup>185</sup> The former manual from 1987 was more concrete. Discussing the relevance of medieval history, it stated that “medieval, together with the early-modern experiences lead to the realization that Yugoslav peoples could achieve their independence only within the mutual community ... which was confirmed in the most recent history.”<sup>186</sup>

Instructions in the history curricula prescribed the same teleological interpretation of history. In 1948, the history curriculum demanded that “history lessons teach students to correctly judge their present.”<sup>187</sup> Ten years later, the curriculum elaborated on this idea by stating that “lessons have to be taught clearly, plastically, simply, and they have to highlight the basic progressive trajectory.”<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, “the path of the new Yugoslavia has been the only possible solution for

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<sup>183</sup> Tuđman, "Nacionalno pitanje u suvremenoj Europi," 114.

<sup>184</sup> Ivo Makek, Stjepan Siroglavić, and Božena Legan, *Metodički priručnik za nastavnika uz udžbenik povijesti* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1987), 28.

<sup>185</sup> Marija Vrbetić, *Nastava povijesti u teoriji i praksi* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1968).

<sup>186</sup> Makek, Siroglavić, and Legan, *Metodički priručnik za nastavnika uz udžbenik povijesti*, 25.

<sup>187</sup> *Nastavni plan i program Za osnovne škole*, 21.

<sup>188</sup> *Osnovna škola: programatska struktura*, 83.

the lives of our peoples and for overcoming historical backwardness.”<sup>189</sup> In 1974 the curriculum mentioned “the laws of historical development” and the need for “meaningful relationships between historical events.”<sup>190</sup> Finally, in the nineties, the teaching of history was described as facilitating a “trajectory to the future.”<sup>191</sup>

Croatian authorities actively participated in making the education system their mechanism of support. Namely, schooling was envisioned as a mechanism to educate society in a way that best supported political legitimacy and the agenda of the regime. In this framework, history education occupied a top position. The evidence from the curricula and other sources suggests that the authorities saw history education as providing “historical” justification for their rule, and thus they defined history as such – history as a subject – as an uninterrupted, teleological passing of time. The official interpretation of history ignored historical complexity, as problematizing historical events, or at least avoiding direct connections between the past and the political present, that would call into question the regime’s legitimacy.

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>190</sup> *Naša osnovna škola: odgojno obrazovna struktura*, 154.

<sup>191</sup> *Okvirni nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Republici Hrvatskoj*, 80.

## V

### **Stories of the Past – Mirroring the Present, Directing the Future**

Alex Bellamy referred to the historical narrative of the Croatian state as political ideological fund.<sup>192</sup> He suggests that narratives provide a framework of the nation used by the state to shape its rule. The historical narrative as political material is inseparable from the state, and the narratives of historical events in Croatia do not exist in a vacuum, but they are incorporated into political agenda, and change accordingly.

The interplay between the state and the narrative is complex, more so than straightforward instructions found in curricula. The narrative of national history reveals multiple layers of the socio-political dynamic between the state and society, and essentially illustrates how the state incorporates itself into the society. The promulgation of a certain version of history by the state subtly constructs a conceptual framework which defines the society, as well as supports and perpetuates the regime's claims to political legitimacy. Such narrative frameworks, coupled with moral and authoritative concepts of "truth" and "expertise" as observed in the curricula, recast state actions from mere political agenda to a supposedly self-evident, natural order of things.

The content of the narrative not only reveals state ideals, but also their discontinuities. In the same manner that the narrative creates the notion of a long,

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<sup>192</sup> Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries - Old Dream*, 27.

continuous, and logical historical trajectory, it can point towards ruptures within the state and its legitimizing narrative, thus reflecting a crisis of power. In Croatia, historical narratives at times reflected both the supporting and subversive versions of national history. Authors specifically examining Yugoslav state-society relationship noted that “discontinuity in the cohesive consequences of certain regime strategies reflects the changing nature of state-society relations.”<sup>193</sup> However, these same discontinuities over time – in interpreting and teaching of history, corroborate the supposition that historical narrative transforms along political changes. The teaching of history therefore became a platform upon which the state supported its legitimizing narrative, and at the same time an intersection between the state ideology and its social internalization and resistance.

The state asserted its legitimacy and power through a historical narrative, which served to create self-evident temporal conditions for current political circumstances. In other words, referring back to Anderson once more, the narrative created an “empty homogenous time” in which the events smoothly and naturally lead to the present. Or in the words of the philosopher Isaiah Berlin, the narrative constructed by the regime rested on deeply-rooted notions of “inexorably fixed time order – ‘the river of time’ on which we float and we must willy-nilly accept.”<sup>194</sup> Importantly, though, contrary to a static understanding of history, the historical narrative was constantly being transformed in order to accommodate political change.

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<sup>193</sup> Jill Irvine, "Introduction," to *State-Society Relations in Yugoslavia, 1945 - 1992*, ed. Jill Irvine, Melissa Bokovoy, and Carol Lilly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>194</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific History," *History and Theory* 1, no. 1 (1960).

The discussion of historical narrative and its function in history education is linked to the discussion of nationalism. The theory of nationalism is a fruitful framework for studying the interrelationship of history and politics because of the symbiotic relationship between the two concepts, or because of the way that both notions inform and influence each other. Specifically, political and nationalist imagination in Croatia has been informed by historical notions, and at the same time history has been informed by politics. The stories of nation and nationalism, as suggested by Jenkins and Sofos, are always related to power dynamics, so it can be said that narratives of Croatian national history directly relates to politics.

Here, it is necessary to introduce and highlight the notion of Yugoslav nationalism. As I discussed in previous chapters, Croatian nationalism is a concept that has evolved and transformed throughout at least two centuries, culminating in the 1990s with the proclamation of Croatia as a state of Croatian people and a realization of their reputedly centuries-old dreams of sovereignty. Conversely, Yugoslav nationalism is significantly more contested and complex. The notion of Yugoslav nationalism is not even acknowledged by many; most of the scholarship considers Yugoslavia to be some kind of political and social experiment, although the ideas of the unity of the Southern Slavs date back to the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, the communist regime explicitly condemned and denied “nationalism” as a harmful phenomenon, but it “codified nation and nationality as a fundamental social classification.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation : Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 12.

Nonetheless, the ambiguity in the classification and treatment of the idea of nationalism by Yugoslav authorities did not exclude the possibility of the Yugoslav regime having some coherent nation-building strategies. Andrew Wachtel, for example, argues that the Yugoslav state collapsed because of the collapse of the idea of a Yugoslav nation,<sup>196</sup> suggesting at the same time that during Yugoslavia there existed a nationalist imagination of Yugoslav people. The same author states that Yugoslav authorities had a nation-building agenda, and education was one of the venues where they tried to implement it.<sup>197</sup> The fact that Yugoslav national ideology did not survive does not imply that it did not have natural essence of a nation; alternatively, it supports arguments that nationalism as a phenomenon is not a fixed, stable idea, but a reversible and competitive process between multiple nationalist visions.<sup>198</sup>

The analysis and comparison of the historical narrative prescribed by the pre- and post-1990 regimes shows that Yugoslavia attempted to construct national history in order to enable the formation of Yugoslav nationalism. Radcliffe and Westwood defined nationalism as competitive and transformative.<sup>199</sup> In other words, nationalism is a fluid and multifaceted phenomenon, existing simultaneously along with other “nationalisms.” In this vein, when speaking of Croatia in the Yugoslav community and during the years preceding its independence, one observes competing nationalisms: one promoted by the socialist authorities, and the other by Croatian nationalist “dissidents.” The trajectory, continuities, and discontinuities of history

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>198</sup> Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), 15.

<sup>199</sup> Radcliffe and Westwood, *Rethinking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America*, 25.

interpretation in textbooks reflected those competing political dynamics and ideologies within the state.

When commenting on history and education during the last sixty years, Snježana Koren observed that the interpretation of national history, as opposed to world history, had been nationalist.<sup>200</sup> More precisely, Koren meant that in both socialist and democratic regimes, the national history emphasized common, distant past; common historical struggles and survival; common “other,” and an ideal imagined community – projected into the future, based on the present, and defined by the past. This observation is particularly pertinent to Croatian history in the Yugoslav state; while some academic historiography sought to take a Marxist approach to history in line with official state politics, school history never fully incorporated Marxism in teaching the national history.

This is, however, not to say that there were no Marxist references present in the narrative; to the contrary, certain events were often classified as “class struggle” or “bourgeoisie subversion.” However, they all fit into a larger nationalist framework, as the aim of the narrative was not the revolution or the “withering away of the state,” but the creation and preservation of the Yugoslav state. The use of typical Marxist phraseology does not construct a Marxist interpretation of history, suggesting that both regimes, more or less successfully, defined and justified their claims to political power based on teleological notions that they were the necessary result of historical developments.

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<sup>200</sup> Snježana Koren, interview by author.

In this chapter, I explore the narrative of national history from the formation of the Second Yugoslavia to Croatian independence. Important questions address the ways that official narratives and themes in national history transformed throughout the years and more importantly, the ways in which these changes addressed and reflected contemporary political challenges. What did the content of the narrative reveal about the power relations and agenda within the state? I argue that the historical narratives in question represent a subtle instrument of political self-legitimacy, of the regime constructing a world-order in its own image. As such, narratives of national history in Croatia in the past sixty years are a testament to political visions, ideologies, and contradictions.

### **Textbooks Narratives – Between Frameworks and Content**

There has been a quiet, but ongoing criticism by a narrow circle of history scholars starting in the 1990s, mostly regarding the inadequate treatment of national history, minorities, and mythological elements present in textbooks. A collection of essays was published on the topic of mythology and history on the Balkans stating that the analysis of the myths present in schools contributes to the understanding of political processes.<sup>201</sup> They also identify three types of myths that make up nationalist history – *sui generi* (uniqueness), *antemurale* (bulwark of Christendom), and *antiquitas* (ancient traditions). While this is not an analysis of mythological archetypes, it indicates that there is a discernible pattern in narrating and teaching

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<sup>201</sup> Pal Kolstoj, "Procjena uloge historijskih mitova u modernim društvima," in *Historijski mitovi na Balkanu*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2003), 12.

history in schools. For my purposes, it is possible to identify three elements in the narrative of national history in both pre- and post-independence textbooks. They are the emphasis on the medieval core state, struggles and hardships with the “other”, and a culminating and defining moment in recent history. The narrative about medieval statehood links medieval political communities to the modern nation and paints this distant past as a national “golden age” to which the nation should logically return. This is followed by a narrative of struggles, trials, and victimization, a stretch of history that ended the “golden age” and put the nation to the test. It is a narrative of preserving self-consciousness through history, primarily through depicting confrontations with various “others.” Finally, there is a narrative of the most recent events, mainly the “war,” which functions as a cathartic moment.

As suggested, the combination of these three narratives was present from the very beginning of the Second Yugoslavia’s attempts to mold the teaching of history in its classrooms. The first real textbooks covering national history for elementary education did not appear until the early 1950s, but the 1940s curricula defined patterns for all subsequent textbooks. The earliest curriculum from 1946 emphasized the study of “the migration of the ancient Slavs, their common history and ancestry,” and the “beginnings of their political life,” the “collapse of the South Slavic medieval states,” their “liberation struggle,” and finally the “Peoples’ Liberation Struggle (NOB) and accompanying significant dates.”<sup>202</sup> It defined the early-modern period in the context of “slavery of our peoples under Turks, Venetians, Hungarians, and

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<sup>202</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Narodnoj Republici Hrvatskoj*, 16.

Austrians” and the “liberation struggles of our peoples.”<sup>203</sup> As it turned out, these hasty instructions to the post-war history teachers became the basis for narrating the story of national history. With the passing of years, and socio-political changes, the actors and foci of these narratives changed, but the framework and function of the narrative remained. All textbook narratives have been organized to delineate the development of a nation from its inception to the present day, and often time to prescribe its future. Therefore, the extremely politicized, and often criticized, historical narrative from the post-independence Croatia was not a novelty, but a continuation of patterns established in the early Yugoslav years. In the words of Wolfgang Hopken, what happened with history pedagogy was just a switch in “monoperspectives.”<sup>204</sup>

In the following section, it is my goal to provide examples of each of the three narrative types from various textbooks from both Yugoslavia and Croatia. By tracing the narrative over time, I want to show how these narratives persisted, and suggest that they continuously functioned primarily as state legitimizing narratives. Besides drawing attention to subtle changes in the details of the narrative, or noting concepts that were included and excluded, I also pinpoint discontinuities in the narrative. These examples are particularly valuable, because they relate to specific crises within the state, highlighting the extent to which the teaching of history depended on politics.

### *The Narrative of the National Origin*

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Wolfgang Hopken, "Između građanskog identiteta i nacionalizma: udžbenici povijesti u postkomunističkoj Europi," in *Demokratska tranzicija u hrvatskoj: transformacija vrijednosti, obrazovanje, mediji*, ed. Davorka Matić and Sabrina Ramet (Zagreb: Alinea, 2006), 144.

With regards to the narrative of the national beginning and core state, throughout most of the fifties and sixties curricula described the beginning of national history under the phrase “Slavs” and “our homeland.” As instructed in the curricula, Yugoslav people shared the same origin and the same territory from the beginning of their history. Curricula and textbooks did not elaborate this early history any more than that; for one, what is known about the Slavs, their original homeland, and migration to the Balkans is very patchy. Additionally, further elaboration on “the Slavs in their new homeland” would only complicate the clear-cut picture of origin that the narrative sought to portray.

Curriculum and textbook from 1974, right after the “Croatian crisis” and the new constitution, followed the same narrative pattern, but exhibited a shift in emphasis and, consequently, political meaning. Namely, textbooks retained the narrative of the common Slavic origin in the early middle ages, but they simultaneously stressed the separate origin of Croats. For example, the narrative juxtaposed shared original South Slavic culture based on literacy and the Christian mission of the two Greek missionaries Cyril and Methodius,<sup>205</sup> and the textbook for the first time mentioned *pleter*, or interlace design, found on some of the medieval Croatian stone reliefs, as a specifically Croatian political symbol.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, the textbook recounted that “the King Tomislav expelled the Hungarians across Drava and united Croatia, which from then on occupies the territory from the River Drava to

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<sup>205</sup> Ivo Makek, Blagota Drašković, and Olga Salzer, *Narodi u prostoru i vremenu 2* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1974), 20.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

the Adriatic Sea,” which unequivocally evoked the narrative of Croatian statehood that became fully developed during the 1990s.<sup>207</sup>

Amidst the tensions between nationalist demands and the Yugoslav communist authorities, the textbooks separated the exclusively Croatian history from Yugoslav history. This is an example of discontinuities within the narrative, where the emphasis on the national origin does not follow a straight line, but vacillates between the Yugoslav and the Croatian. Consequently, this is also an example of competing nationalist ideas; that of the Yugoslavs as legitimate historical nation, and the Croats. The fragmentation and discontinuities of the narrative reflected two competing definitions of Yugoslav state in a charged political moment.

The main changes occurred after 1990, both within the state and the historical narrative. The textbook *Povijest* from 1997, which was used throughout most of the decade, entirely rejected the narrative about the unity of the Southern Slavs and replaced it with the one about the seven Croatian tribes that, together with the Avars, arrived at what is now Croatian territory.<sup>208</sup> The Croatian arrival to the Adriatic coast was described as “historical,” using romanticized language to describe the first Croats as “mighty people” (*kršni ljudi*).<sup>209</sup> This textbook adopted the narrative about King Tomislav and the Croatian royal dynasty, and furthermore developed the statehood narrative, adding that during Tomislav’s rule, Croatia was an important military force in the European context.<sup>210</sup> The narrative of the statehood was expanded with the

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>208</sup> Ivo Makek, *Povijest 6: Udžbenik za šesti razred osnovne škole* (Zagreb: Školska kniga, 1997), 15.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 33.

section about the ascension of the Hungarian dynasty to the Croatian throne and explained as the “personal union” where “Hungary and Croatia functioned as separate states related by the common royalty. In the middle ages it was common for dynasties to replace one another; therefore, 1102 did not see the collapse of the Croatian state nor a discontinuity of its existence.”<sup>211</sup>

The political independence of Croatia entailed a corresponding historical independence, where Croatian history was separated from the history of other Southern Slavs. The narrative of national origin incorporated the politically crucial notion that Croatian nation had always been sovereign in its own territory. Evidently, the narrative became a counternarrative and equally politicized; the function of the teaching of national history was to establish historical links with contemporary nation, not to merely recount historical facts.

#### *The Narrative of Hardships and Victimhood*

The part of the narrative about national hardships and victimhood was equally political and it underwent changes at moments of political crises in the same way as did the narrative of national origin. In 1946 curriculum assigned the theme of “our peoples in Turkish, Venetian, Hungarian, and Austrian slavery,” and described various battles and rebellions throughout history as a “freedom struggle.”<sup>212</sup> The term “freedom struggle” was applied to unrelated events throughout nearly one millennium in order to connect Yugoslav peoples in a common historical experience against an “other.” For example, the same narrative equated the 16<sup>th</sup> century peasant rebellion

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>212</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole u Narodnoj Republici Hrvatskoj*, 17.

near Zagreb to the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellion in Macedonia against Ottoman authorities. Arguably, what is at stake here is continuity between the historical and the present-day experiences of the Yugoslav nations.

The dominant element in the “struggle narrative” is the Ottoman conquest, where the “Turks” were portrayed as enemies par excellence. The textbook from 1953 focused extensively on the relationship between “our peoples” and the conquest. It stated that “our people, oppressed by the Turks, immediately rebelled,”<sup>213</sup> “our peoples never voluntarily accepted foreign power, so they did not accept the Turkish one either,” and “not even impaling nor mutilation perpetrated by the Turks could discourage our people from fighting for freedom.”<sup>214</sup>

Interestingly, the same textbooks mentioned “the existence of Croatian statehood” when discussing the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but emphasized the struggle between Croatian nobility and the Habsburgs in the context of the loss of Croatian sovereignty. For example, “the actions of the Habsburg court undermined Croatian sovereign rights.”<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, “the peace of Karlowitz removed the Turks from the area, but the court at Vienna conspired against Croatian sovereignty,”<sup>216</sup> and “during the reign of Maria Theresa, Croatia completely lost its sovereignty.”<sup>217</sup> Croatian statehood was recognized as a part of the Yugoslav peoples’ struggle, but its political significance was at the same time downplayed. In other words, the idea that Croatia had been historically sovereign did not fit into the historical framework where

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<sup>213</sup> Olga Salzer, *Povijest za sedmi razred narodne osmogodišnje škole i treći razred gimnazije* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1953), 57.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

all Yugoslav peoples realized their political rights only within the common Yugoslav state, rather than separately.

A different type of “struggle” is concerned with the “national revival” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is presented as the awakening of “national consciousness” in the face of Habsburg and Hungarian hegemony.<sup>218</sup> However, here the national consciousness is shared by the “Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs,”<sup>219</sup> and based on the teachings of Pavao Ritter -Vitezović and Vuk Karadžić. I mentioned Vitezović earlier as the thinker who formulated the link between the Croatian historical political institutions and the Croatian nation. Karadžić, on the other hand, was a Serb who worked on the revival of the idea of the Serbian nation after the Ottomans, and who, according to Banac, secularized the notion of Serbian nationhood by transferring its central ideas from the Orthodox Church to Serbian language and folk culture.<sup>220</sup> Even the textbook used throughout the 1960s interpreted romantic national revivals during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “the prototype of the Yugoslav idea” and under the title “the struggle for independence of our peoples in the Habsburg Monarchy.”<sup>221</sup> Accordingly, the romantic national movement in the context of Habsburg and Hungarian resistance was presented as a common South Slavic project, emphasizing common inspiration, actions, and goals. It only later became seen as an exclusively Croatian national project.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>220</sup> Banac, "Nacionalizam u jugoistočnoj Europi," 21.

<sup>221</sup> Olga Salzer, *Prošlost i sadašnjost 2* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1972), 78.

In discussing the history in the Habsburg Monarchy, textbooks treated it as exclusively Croatian history, and not “our peoples in the Monarchy.” For example, the textbook mentioned “the desire to unite all Croatian lands.”<sup>222</sup> Interestingly however, this notion was interpreted in Marxist terms. Namely, the “desire” for Croatian independence from the Habsburg Monarchy was ascribed to the “bourgeois” circles, and therefore interpreted as a matter of economic practicality, instead of being attributed to nationalist “centuries-old dreams.”<sup>223</sup> This is another example of how in a particular moment, historical narrative simultaneously acknowledged and downplayed Croatian nationalism. On the one hand, it identified a historical struggle as exclusively Croatian, but on the other it denied it any significance that could bolster contemporary nationalist claims. At the same time, this is an example that demonstrates that Marxism in history pedagogy was not a dominant line of interpretation. Rather, it was used occasionally in order to navigate between historicist-nationalist and historical focus.

There is also the narrative about the anti-Austro-Hungarian struggles and the political unification of the Southern Slavs after World War I. One of the themes in historiography of this period is the political disagreements between the Croats and the Serbs, both in the young Serbian Kingdom and Croatia proper. Early textbooks acknowledged these conflicts, but also deemphasized them by attributing to foreign instigation. For example, some inter-ethnic clashes from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Olga Salzer and Rene Lovrenčić, *Naši narodi u prostoru i vremenu 3* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1974), 35.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

century were explained as the result of Hungarian political manipulations.<sup>224</sup> Similarly, the textbook called Serbo-Croatian conflicts primarily economic and highlighted the otherwise close relationship between the Croats and Serbs. Regarding specifically the formation of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs (SHS) and the “national question” in 1918, which was a very complex and contested event, the textbooks conceded that it was not “founded on national equality,” but it was nevertheless “a change that provided the most appropriate political framework for all Yugoslav people.”<sup>225</sup>

Therefore, amid the political crisis in the early seventies, which especially in Croatia manifested itself as profoundly nationalist in character, the historical narrative reflected the discourse of national imbalance in Yugoslavia. The narrative both acknowledged and muffled the issue of ethnic tensions that had continuously haunted the state. At the same time, similar tensions dominated political and public discourse, where the nationalists accused the authorities of “national imbalance” in state administration and economy, while the authorities tried to counter those complaints.

The textbooks from the 1990s introduced fundamental changes into the struggle narrative, but as in previous examples, its function remained the same. The national history described broke completely with the community of Southern Slavs and emphasized a separate Croatian national development. At the same time, both the organization and the purpose of the narrative were adopted from the Yugoslav textbook framework. One element that remained the same is the narrative of the

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

hostile and devastating Ottoman conquest. The narrative entirely adopted pejorative terminology when referring to the Ottoman authorities in Bosnian lands, referring to the army and the mercenaries as “*akindžijski čopori*” (packs of akinci-irregulars in the Ottoman army), as well as overemphasizing the violent nature of the Ottoman invasion.<sup>226</sup>

However, the textbook added a new layer to Ottoman history in the area. It stated that the “Turkish conquest” was of “faithful consequence” for Croatia.<sup>227</sup> Namely, the narrative established a direct link between this event and present political circumstances in the country by emphasizing the role of the Military Border – the frontier zone between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs - and framing it in the discourse of current territorial claims and conflicts between the new Croatian regime and its Serbian minority.

For example, the narrative mentioned the Vlachs, people from the Balkan hinterlands who migrated before the Ottomans and whom the Habsburg authorities hired to guard the Military Frontier. Here, Vlachs became synonymous with the Serbs, and were portrayed as being “outrageously inhabited by the Turks” and as the people who “altered the religious and national composition of the Croatian lands.”<sup>228</sup> Additionally, Vlachs were “opportunistic,” ready to “loot Croatian villages,” and “forcing Croats to covert to Orthodoxy.”<sup>229</sup> The Ottoman conquest here became the Serbian conquest and mirrored the territorial and political disputes between the two

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<sup>226</sup> Makek, *Povijest 6: udžbenik za šesti razred osnovne škole*, 74.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-99.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

groups that flared in the aftermath of the Yugoslav collapse. The narrative described the territory as “historically” Croatian and portrayed the Serbs as the illegitimate outsiders. While commenting on the Treaty of Karlowitz and the territorial partition between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans at the end of the seventeenth century, the textbook contended that the “contemporary irregular shape of Croatia reminds us of this historical injustice.”<sup>230</sup> By drawing a parallel between historical and present conflicts, the narrative additionally emphasized the long history of national struggle, and defined the present conflict not as a contingent, power-related issue, but as a historical necessity.

The narrative about the Austro-Hungarian resistance and national revival in post-independence textbooks was also thoroughly altered. There was a continuation of the negative portrayal of the Hungarians, but it was the Serbs who became the ultimate enemy. Previous Yugoslav textbooks, especially after 1972, acknowledged Serbo-Croatian disputes in the Austro-Hungarian state, but muffled them at the same time by overemphasizing their mutual cooperation in the struggle against foreign rule. Here, however, the national revival was described as the “movement which would establish modern Croatian nation,” and interpreted as an exclusively Croatian national historical phenomenon, ignoring its significance to the development of the idea of the political unity of Southern Slavs.<sup>231</sup>

As I suggested, the Serbs were introduced in the new textbooks as the main source of conflict within the Croatian nation. For example, the narrative praised Duke

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>231</sup> Dragutin Pavličević and Filip Potrebica, *Povijest za sedmi razred osnovne škole* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1994), 56.

Jelačić, who in the mid-nineteenth century saved Croatia from “Hungarian domination,”<sup>232</sup> but immediately asserted that in the aftermath there appeared to be “another danger for Croatian people – the Serbs.”<sup>233</sup> This statement is preceded by a map of the Serbian state after its secession from the Ottoman Empire and a question accompanying the image that reads: “look at the map and answer: did Serbia expand?”<sup>234</sup> In comparison with previous versions, this narrative continued the tradition of historical struggles that were supposed to give historical justification for contemporary conflicts, but it introduced new characters, and consequently, new morals to the story. Serbs were no longer the “brothers,” but enemies and trouble-makers. The reason for such a narrative shift is not newly found historical facts or some unearthed “truth,” but changed political authority and ideology. The shift reflected the attempt to contextualize historically and justify a political conflict by showing that Croatian nationalist claims and actions were a product of historical occurrences. In fact, the narrative itself communicated its own purpose explicitly: the conflict is still ongoing. The Serbian side creates conquering agenda, and the Croatian side answers to it only with the defense of its national being.”<sup>235</sup>

#### *The Narrative of the Immediate Past*

Finally, the last part of the narrative in the textbooks covered the more recent history and portrayed it as the crucial part of overall national history. The immediate past represented a culmination and explanation of all previous events and tied them to

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

a coherent whole; it was imagined as a logical conclusion of history, proof that the past was not a depository of random events, but a teleological flow.

In both Yugoslav and Croatian case, the most recent history was manifested in the war with major destructive consequences – displacement of people and destruction of the infrastructure. In both cases, this recent “history” was hardly a matter of the past: rather, it was deeply embedded and experienced in everyone’s everyday life. The story of the most recent events had to justify the present; it had to explain the reasons and outcome of traumatic war events. Additionally, the narrative had to disqualify possible competing and challenging narratives of the past. Here, more than anywhere else, the adage that history is written by the winner is appropriate

The defining narrative of recent history in Yugoslav textbooks was undoubtedly the Liberation Struggle in World War II. The Communists’ transition to power at the end of the war was not smooth, nor logical to many people. It was therefore in the interest of the state to construct a narrative that rendered the Communist Party as a “winner” and legitimate power-holder. Textbooks on the modern national history therefore produced a narrative that made a twofold connection: it identified the state with its history, and the state with the Communist Party.

A textbook published in 1977, the only Yugoslav edition on modern history I was able to consult, made the following statement as its central argument: “The KPJ

acquired the only correct attitude towards resolving the national question.”<sup>236</sup> The narrative centered on the issue of modern Yugoslav history instead of settling the national question, or national balance and equality – essentially between the Croats and the Serbs. It covered the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the common South Slavic state. It also focused on the “national imbalance” and Serbian supremacy in that state. This national imbalance was, however, merged with Marxist terminology, saying that it was the “people” who were deprived “of absolutely everything”<sup>237</sup> thus reformulating the ideological nationalist issue into the class struggle where “Serbian and other bourgeoisies fought for political supremacy.”<sup>238</sup> In such atmosphere, Tito “returned home [from Russia] in the mid 1930s” and it became evident that only the Communists could deal with national and class issues.<sup>239</sup>

The period of the existence of the First Yugoslavia therefore set the stage for the rise of the Yugoslav Communist regime. World War II and the fighting on domestic fronts were treated in the textbook as elements within a universal struggle against “the terrible evil of fascism,”<sup>240</sup> (*strašna avet fašizma*) which ultimately not only defeated the evil, but also created conditions where the KPJ could “forge the brotherhood and unity of our peoples.”<sup>241</sup> Although the war is placed in the larger context of the global struggle against fascism, the textbook contended that “the goal of the occupying forces was clear: to concoct a bloody fratricidal war ... to prevent

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<sup>236</sup> Ivo Jelić, Radivoje Vukadinović, and Dušan Bilandžić, *Narodi u prostoru i vremenu 4* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1977), 41.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

our peoples from uniting ever again.”<sup>242</sup> In this way, the war was transformed in a ground zero of history, a temporal dimension that absorbed all the previous history, reformulated it and bestowed upon it a new historical and political meaning.

The fascist rule of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was portrayed solely as a puppet regime in the hands of Hitler and Mussolini<sup>243</sup> with no real support from within Croatia.<sup>244</sup> In contrast, Partisan “resistance” was “a completely natural process” in which the people were “strongly related to their army.”<sup>245</sup> The textbook attempted to create a narrative that would solidify Yugoslavia as a political community, and it added that the “main goal of the NOB was the creation of the second Yugoslavia.”<sup>246</sup>

There is an obvious discontinuity within the narrative as to what exactly the war was about. Was it the struggle against foreign occupation, for the formation of Yugoslavia, or the struggle for a “socialist revolution”? Conceivably, such discontinuities highlight the regime’s sense of urgency about constructing legitimizing narratives on the basis of their own political agenda, rather than systematic historical evaluations. These divergent interpretations of World War II, in themselves discontinuities within the narrative, suggest that the history of the war had to fulfill different functions for the state. It had both to legitimize itself as a socialist state, as well as being capable of juggling ethnic-nationalist tensions within its own borders.

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

After Croatian independence in 1990, historical narrative of the most recent past changed, as was the case with the narratives of national creation and historical struggles. Nevertheless, in this case the change was more drastic than in previous cases because for Croatian state, it was Yugoslavia that represented the most recent past. As a result, there is a complete reversal of values: while Yugoslav textbooks aggrandized its own state-formation as the only possible political solution, new Croatian textbooks treated the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century as a calamity. Perić wrote that by “becoming a part of the State of SHS (*Država SHS*), Croatia lost its statehood which it had managed to preserve for more than a thousand years.”<sup>247</sup> With this statement, the textbooks treated the recent past as the anomaly of the entire national history, where even the earlier hardships seemed better than the Yugoslav experience. The entire Yugoslav period was summed up (within the story of the murder of Stjepan Radić in 1928) as “this [murder] revealed to the whole world how [Yugoslavia] was an uncivilized and morally corrupt environment.”<sup>248</sup>

Contrary to the Yugoslav narrative of World War II, the history of the NDH was a big part of Croatian textbooks. All historiography agrees on the very negative impact that the NDH had in the area, being responsible for some of the most serious persecutions and killings in the concentration camps. However, the new Croatian mainstream and school historiography attempted to recuperate this period and portray it as an honest attempt to regain Croatian national independence. This was mostly because the whole concept of history that President Tuđman employed - the idea that NDH was a legitimate expression of centuries-old Croatian aspirations for national

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<sup>247</sup> Ivo Perić, *Povijest za osmi razred osnovne škole* (Zagreb: Alfa, 1996), 13.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

independence. NDH was therefore a necessary reaction to Serbian/Yugoslav coercion of Croatian nationhood, it was an answer to the “Croatian question” – a situation where Croatian nationhood was all about “to be or not to be, to survive or to perish,” (*biti ili ne biti, opstati ili propasti*).<sup>249</sup> NDH-fascist crimes are mentioned in a short paragraph and in the context of German and Italian control. The apologetic compendium summarized the NDH as follows: “When talking about the NDH, we have to differentiate between the *Ustaša* regime and the desire of Croatian people to have their own national state. Many Croats did not support the *Ustaša* regime, but they supported the need of the Croatian nation to preserve its state, independent of Yugoslavia which was being set up by the communists.”<sup>250</sup>

The period of the second Yugoslavia was introduced in light of communist reprisal crimes. Whereas these crimes were never mentioned in Yugoslavia, in independent Croatia they were overemphasized. In this way the narrative provided a platform for the delegitimization of an entire period, stating that “the communists hated everything that was Croatian and Catholic,”<sup>251</sup> and that Croatia had found itself in the “Yugoslav yoke.”<sup>252</sup>

Two major themes within the narrative of the Second Yugoslavia are the privileges given to the Serbs, and the mistreatment of the Catholic Church. As much as the Yugoslav textbook asserted that the most recent history showed the necessity for the Croats and Serbs to be politically united, the Croatian textbook portrayed

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<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Serbs as villains - “Serbs were favored over Croats. Privileges given to the Serbs were obvious all across Croatia, and Croats were forced to, in the name of the so called ‘brotherhood and unity,’ endure their own inequality.”<sup>253</sup> Economically and administratively, the country was invaded by Serbs, so “only the minority of people in the public sector had real working and moral skills.”<sup>254</sup> Croats were also culturally exploited, with the “serbianizing of the language in the everyday life.”<sup>255</sup> The text concluded that “in such political community, the [Croatian] people were economically and nationally oppressed, and more or less constantly exposed to Serbian inclinations to destroy them.”<sup>256</sup>

The discourse and actions of Croatian government after the independence constantly revolved around the “Serbian question.” Namely, how to gain independence from Yugoslavia, and how to deal with the significant Serbian minority given the strongly nationalist political discourse? Arguably, vilifying the Serbs through historical narrative was a way of delegitimizing their right to a political voice in the new political arena. By portraying them as a Croatian nemesis, the new regime attempted to justify their ascension to power as providential and unproblematic to all, so the opposition of the Croatian Serbs in such a framework seemed completely unjustifiable. There seems to be a clear parallel between the portrayal of Serbian domination over Croatian people preceding the independence in Croatian textbooks, and the portrayal of the mission of Yugoslav communist forces during World War II in resolving the national “imbalance” in Yugoslav textbooks. They both used the

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 112.

narrative of defending historical national rights and identifying the “enemy” or the “other” in order to veil the possibility that the rise to power of respective regimes was not necessary, natural, nor obviously legitimate.

As the Catholic Church was one of the pillars of the new Croatian national identity, significant attention was given to its conflict with the communist regime. Where scholars have recognized a complex relationship between the church and the state,<sup>257</sup> new Croatian textbooks emphasized brutality – “in Croatia, the communist regime brutally treated all religious communities, and particularly the Catholic Church.”<sup>258</sup> Moreover, the textbook criticized the Yugoslav atheism and associated it with attempts to “de-nationalize” Croatians; “separating the Church from the state, by stressing that religion is a private matter of an individual, the communist regime attempted to spread and establish ‘*bezboštvo*’ (disbelief).”<sup>259</sup> This notion clearly indicates the importance of “belief” and Catholic support for the new state. In one of his speeches, Tuđman made a clear parallel between the Croatian state and Catholic Church: “Croatian nation could realize its thousand-year dream of the resurrection of the independent state in unison with its Catholic Church.”<sup>260</sup>

The final section of the textbook recounts the most recent event, the civil war. However, while the content about the war itself is limited, made up of statements like “Croatian émigrés help fund the war,”<sup>261</sup> the majority of the text was the propaganda

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<sup>257</sup> See Pedro Ramet, “Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia,” in *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham, Duke University Press, 1984).

<sup>258</sup> Perić, *Povijest za osmi razred osnovne škole*, 101.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Franjo Tuđman, “Stepinčevom beatifikacijom odaje se priznanje istini i njegovoj žrtvi,” in *Govori i izlaganja*, eds. Nevio Šetić and Djuro Vidmarović (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni zavjet, 2007), 117.

<sup>261</sup> Perić, *Povijest za osmi razred osnovne škole*, 118.

of Tuđman's party, the HDZ. The HDZ "supported an independent and sovereign Croatian state, free enterprise, free and equitable private, and state ownership, multi-party democracy for reconciliation of all the Croats - equality of all the citizens, respect for human rights, permanent integration of Croatia into the Western civilization, where it has always belonged."<sup>262</sup>

The way that stories of the past are framed reflects notions and values with which the state wants to underpin its present and future. Specifically in Croatia, it is possible to follow a relatively static narrative framework of national past on the one hand, and dynamic changes in interpretation of specific events on the other throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This continuities and discontinuities of the narrative of Croatian history highlight the argument that history and politics were interrelated. The major continuity is contained in the fact that regardless of ideologically different regimes, the use of historical narratives for political legitimization remained. In that sense, the discontinuities within the narrative, contained in changes of interpretation along with political developments, are also continuities that highlight the close relationship between history, state, and political crisis.

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<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

## Conclusion

“The future is an apathetic void of no interest to anyone. The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past.”

Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

The aim of this thesis was to explore some of the notions and implications of political and educational culture in Croatia. At the center of this discussion is the symbiotic relationship between politics and history, and the way political thought in Croatia constantly framed and justified itself in historical terms. In the same vein, Croatian historiography was saturated with political connotations; in fact, it was deeply implicated in political context. This relationship is especially evident in the teaching of history in curricula, textbooks, attitudes and the discourse of politicians and historians. Indeed, they all reflect a high degree of state interest in controlling the content and the form of history classes, and consequently, in using them to provide an ideological paradigm for various political agenda. It is important to note that contrary to popular opinions, this phenomenon is not characteristic only of the nationalist atmosphere of the post-Yugoslav politics. Alternatively, it is in itself a historical process, fully developed by the early Yugoslav authorities and adopted by the Croatian democratic nationalist regime, despite its pledges to “depoliticize” schools.

The effects of this interdependency are detrimental for both politics and history. As this thesis attempted to show, political processes in the country lacked seriousness and credibility, as they built legitimacy largely on fragile and fluid historical narratives. It can be said that the state relied on the past in order to secure

its future. While there was much more than just history that contributed to the social and political instability of the post–World War II Yugoslav area, the obsessive focus on history by regimes was symptomatic of their incapacity and insecurity.

The same seems to be true for history. There was a lack of detachment between serious scholarship and political discourse. Prominent historians and other scholars in the country were often divided along the lines of their political stances, and sometimes among the main advocates of various political programs. In effect, historical scholarship was not a product of an intellectual, but politically motivated endeavor. Moreover, as in the book from the beginning of this work, *Jezik i nacionalizam*, which describes how the purity of language became everybody's expertise and a mechanism for simultaneously expressing and enforcing political *podobnost* (fitness), it can be said that participants involved in discourse on history greatly outnumbered actual scholars. In other words, just as Snježana Kordić observed that even in a butcher shop one could be reprimanded for the lack of national sentiments for using the “wrong” word, one could be called out for believing the “wrong” history. In a politically charged society where ideologies were conveyed through various versions of the past, everyone could be a self-proclaimed historian, and narratives were subject to political, not professional scrutiny.

Milan Kundera's observation from the beginning of this section hints at the visceral and powerful appeal that the notion of past has to human lives. It also highlights interconnectedness of the past and the future. However, if I am allowed to add to the words of the famous bard, I would suggest that this relationship is not strictly one-directional. The desire to change the past is not the only reason people

want to “master” the future. On the contrary, the future is as appealing as the past, and the reason people want to change their past is to master their future. It can be said that politics and history and their mutual dynamics fit at the intersection of fundamental human notions of future and past.

This theme influences many arenas, among them political credibility, the credibility of professional historiography, history pedagogy, and national identity. State-building based on purported historical rights lacks integrity and commitment to creating an inclusive, democratic society. Questions can also be raised about the meaning of independent scholarship and relegating the study of history to mere political functionary. Undoubtedly, this extends to the educational realm and poses questions about whether the whole aim of school history is the production of a loyal cadre for the state.

In addition to all these questions, something more profound is at stake: the ability of society to reject old narratives and internalize new ones, to process constant shifts in the representation of its past and consequently shifts in understandings of its own experience and ultimately its identity. The ex-Yugoslav, and therefore Croatian, society constantly adopted and recast notions of what was and what was not, of truth and lies, and this was mainly facilitated through political and history-related discourse. The major shift occurred in the early nineties: overnight, politics, history, and identities changed dramatically.

Assuming that the relationship between historical narratives and the state facilitates these larger social phenomena, I would like to end with Dubravka Ugrešić's

poetic sensibility and sharp insight about the role of symbols, historical notions and memories in the ex-Yugoslav context. She refers to it as “the culture of lies,” paradoxically obsessed with the notion of truth.<sup>263</sup> More than anything else, Ugrešić is struck by everyone’s eagerness to forget the reality of yesterday and to collectively embark upon the project of building a new truth. People were ready to forswear the fact that they indeed lived in a multinational socialist state and to declare all existing values mere lies. The armed conflict during the nineties was a culmination of this mission. In her own words, “what was there is destroyed – cities, ideological notions, bridges, criteria, libraries, norms, churches, marriages, monuments, lives, graves, friendships, homes, myths. What will become the new truth is rapidly built in its place.”<sup>264</sup>

The subject of political legitimacy embedded in history before and after the nineties is therefore an aspect of a more general trend; for nationalist imagination the truth was interpreted as historical truth, and it had to be realized just as history had to be fulfilled. Snježana Koren noted that in Croatia, on both political and scholarly levels, no one could imagine history as anything less than truth, and as such it becomes a value-laden subject with powerful resonance in society. The Constitution speaks of “historical facts” with the implication that these facts are not subject to interpretation. A number of intellectuals spoke of the depoliticization of history after the fall of the communist regime, but what they were really referring to was the need to replace the “ideology” with truth. Even a historian like Ivo Banac, who never misses the chance to emphasize professionalism in his scholarship, concluded on one

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<sup>263</sup> Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies*.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

occasion that historians and not ideologues determine the truth. As this thesis attempted to point out, the state regularly employed the notion of truth within a historical discourse. Accordingly, changes in political legitimacy consisted in a reinterpretation of the past, presented in the morally charged language of truth.

As for the transition period of the early nineties, a particularly volatile socio-political moment, history acquired the meaning of truth and consequently a high place on the national value scale. In the moment when everything was falling apart, it had an almost therapeutic effect on the society. The reality behind it really did not matter, because “even if this were not the case, they [the people] know that every newly established lie eventually becomes the truth.”<sup>265</sup>

This last observation poignantly calls to mind a quote by Slobodan Milošević mentioned in the third chapter: “it is difficult nowadays to tell what is true and what is legendary about the Battle of Kosovo. Nowadays, that does not even matter.”<sup>266</sup> This illustrates how easily notions of history can be abused, packaged into the discourse of morality and identity, and mobilized towards the realization of questionable, even destructive, political agenda. It is these topics of social control, collapse, and violence that underscore the fusion of historical narratives and political agenda. Besides purely political and pedagogical implications, more scholarly attention should be directed to the visceral effects that stories of the past have on social and human self-understanding.

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Banac, “Rat prijete rata,” 56.

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