

INTRODUCTION

◆ Charles Ingrao ◆

It was the kind of scene most people would never forget. On 19 March 1988 a car carrying two British army corporals inadvertently encountered a large funeral procession that had gathered outside a Belfast cemetery to bury three slain IRA gunmen. The crowd quickly converged on the men, who were dragged from the vehicle, beaten, stripped, and then hoisted over a wall just out of sight of security cameras, where they were summarily executed. Surely the horrific news footage that flashed on the television screen that evening was not that unusual for British or Irish viewers. But it left this American observer searching for answers. Later that evening I wrote to a dear friend and colleague at the University of Cambridge, who had just arranged for me to spend the following spring there as a visiting fellow. In the letter I advised him that, upon my arrival in Cambridge, I would ask him how the nightmare that had gripped Northern Ireland could be resolved. That moment came ten months later, as we and our wives sat comfortably around the fireplace in his living room. “Okay, Tim, what *is* the solution in Northern Ireland?” Alas, my expectations were dashed by a response that was quick, laconic, and anticlimactic: “That’s just it, Charlie. There *is* no solution!”

Perhaps my friend attributed my optimism to the naïveté that often springs so readily from ignorance. After all, I was a central European historian whose focus on sectarian conflict centers on the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires rather than on a country that takes pride in its historic and cultural exceptionalism. He may have even attributed my search for answers to the maddening syndrome that afflicts so many Americans who believe that there is a solution to *every* problem for those who are willing to invest the time, energy, and resources necessary to achieve it. Indeed, native New Yorkers like me tend not only to demand answers but also to ask plaintively why the problem hasn’t already been diagnosed, addressed, and resolved.

Certainly these were considerations that came to mind during that Cambridge spring and the rest of 1989 as the iron curtain came down, thereby freeing the lands and peoples of central Europe to resurrect the very nationalistic agendas

that had earlier helped bring down the Habsburgs and Ottomans. Whereas the ultimate dissolution of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia may have been inevitable, it was at least possible to discern a cause for the divisions that have promoted the creation of ethnically homogenous states—and the erection of divisions that inure their people against future political or cultural reintegration. Simply put, the peoples of former multinational polities like the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires are divided by a common history. With independence, elites across central Europe have legitimated newly created nation-states by crafting mutually exclusive, proprietary historical accounts that justify their separate existence. Inevitably, each narrative employs a different array of “truths,” many of which are either distorted or blatantly untrue, while carefully excising “inconvenient facts” that promote the utility of multiethnic coexistence and justify the dissonant narrative or political agenda of other national groups. The resulting divergent recitations of history not only unite each new republic’s constituent “state-forming” nationality but also sow mistrust, resentment, and even hatred between them and other peoples with whom they had previously coexisted. This has become true between Serbs and their former wartime adversaries in Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Kosovo.

Yet whereas this volume focuses on competing narratives and memory of the recent Yugoslav conflicts, it is important for us to appreciate the sheer geographic breadth of the problem. Certainly it pervades Habsburg central Europe, dividing Czechs from Germans, Poles from Ukrainians and Jews, and Hungarians from virtually all of their neighbors; it is equally evident at the other end of the multiethnic Ottoman world, pitting Turks against Armenians, Israelis against Palestinians, and Cypriots against each other. But it is also a salient issue worldwide. Seven decades of historical reflection have not bridged the chasm between the Japanese and their Chinese and Korean neighbors’ memory of the rape of Nanjing and thousands of “comfort women.” Nor has a half-century of independence resolved historical disputes between Indians and Pakistanis over why and how their subcontinent was partitioned.

In reality, these disputes have more in common than the immediate trauma inflicted by warfare and crimes against humanity. Aside from the Chinese–Japanese conflict, they also reflect the consequences of nation-state building in a multiethnic world, including the construction of rival narratives designed to justify the process and efficacy of separation. Moreover, all are exacerbated by the difficulty of confronting myths and inconvenient truths in an age of mass politics—particularly in democratic societies. Notwithstanding the many positive attributes of democracy and the almost universal faith that it inspires as an instrument of societal justice and stability, the greater accountability of popularly elected leaders mortgages their ability to confront and reconcile competing narratives. This is not to say that fascist and other authoritarian leaders have not also fastened on divisive nationalist discourse to strengthen their hold on power, only that they

enjoy much greater leeway in suppressing, modifying, or discrediting it altogether. Thus the relative ease with which successive Soviet leaders unmasked the cult of Stalin and the insufficiency of Marxist economics, much as their Chinese counterparts could acknowledge the excesses of Mao's Cultural Revolution and, someday, the thousands of demonstrators killed in Tiananmen Square. Changing six postwar decades of Japanese schoolbooks has proven far more difficult.¹

Thus, we present this volume on the Yugoslav tragedy with the understanding that the events of the 1990s fit within a much broader, two-century-long continuum of mass politics and media. The proprietary national narratives that have emerged have created or intensified tensions between nations and ethnic groups through the insertion of myths and the exclusion of inconvenient facts. Scholars have certainly played a significant role in this process, especially during the initial stages of state creation, to be used by successive generations of elected politicians, whether to ensure their electoral survival or expand their appeal and power. Their contribution is clearly visible in the volume's opening chapter, where proprietary nationalist narratives provided politicians with the wedge they needed to split Yugoslavia into pieces. The ensuing decade of conflict has erected further obstacles through the creation of wartime narratives that have shifted blame to other protagonists. The international community has been particularly critical of the failure of many of Serbia's newly democratic leaders and free media to acknowledge the substantial record of war crimes perpetrated by its military, police, and paramilitary forces. The assertion of some Serbian nationalist politicians that "all sides sinned equally" has done little to mollify either Serbia's critics in the West or its former adversaries. Yet the same can be said of the Bosnian, Croatian, and Kosovo-Albanian media, political leadership, and publics at large, who are reluctant to concede even the smallest point of their narratives of victimization to the Serbian enemy—including the admittedly far less extensive war crimes committed by their own commanders. Nor has a lengthy string of indictments for war crimes and even genocide significantly reduced the public adulation of their wartime military and political leaders—including an unsavory assortment of common criminals.² So long as politicians retain a *de facto* monopoly over public memory, perception, and interpretation, they will continue to discredit and marginalize the few independent voices that challenge them. Indeed, there exist many among the region's political and media elite who privately concede the corruption of their vocal majority's historical accounts but who nonetheless lack the courage to challenge them.

The Scholars' Initiative represents an attempt by historians and social scientists to challenge the tendentious nationalistic narratives that have succeeded so well in dividing the peoples of central Europe by exposing and discrediting each belligerent's myths about the Yugoslav conflicts while simultaneously inserting indisputable but inconvenient facts known to their former adversaries. Its work is

embodied in the research of twelve teams of historians and social scientists, each of which was commissioned to focus on the most contentious issues that impede mutual understanding between the Serbs and their wartime adversaries across the new territorial and cultural frontiers of former Yugoslavia.

That said, this volume does not pretend to be all things to all people. Although the research teams have benefited from the enormous amount of extant documentary evidence and secondary sources, it is impossible to prepare a definitive account barely a decade after the end of the Yugoslav wars; at the very least, that must await the release of additional memoirs, trial transcripts, and above all, official state documents currently under seal. Nor does the book pretend to resolve all of the major controversies that divide the former adversaries and their advocates, especially in the continued absence of definitive evidence. Instead, each team has indicated points of agreement, while highlighting the existence of two or more contradictory explanations or interpretations that require further research. Far from presenting the final word on the Yugoslav conflicts, we view this new edition as a second installment in a discovery process that we hope will continue for decades as more evidence is uncovered.

Given limited financial resources and the need to minimize the volume's size and cost, we do not pretend to present a comprehensive narrative of all the key events, personalities, or other developments that one would expect in a truly comprehensive account. Rather our goal here is to focus on the targeted controversies, presented in a positivist narrative that is readily accessible to scholars and laypeople alike. Readers in search of more lengthy analysis may wish to consult the project Web site,³ which contains rather fuller treatments drafted by three of our research teams prior to their abridgement for inclusion in this volume. Limited space, financial and human resources have also obliged us to bypass or minimize coverage of some controversies. We have, for example, foregone any attempt to focus on the Yugoslav conflicts' pre-Milošević origins, which surely go back to World War II, and could be traced to 1389 or even to the medieval or ancient pedigree of the region's peoples. We have also given only brief coverage to the Bosniak–Croat war, having judged—rightly or wrongly—that its legacy presents less formidable obstacles to reconciliation between those two groups than their respective conflicts with the Serbs. We have also wholly avoided interethnic tensions within Macedonia, partly because international engagement and mediation have limited their domestic impact but also because they are less vested in competing historical narratives.

We do, however, hope to keep pace with the incremental emergence of new evidence relevant to the twelve controversies treated here; thus the inclusion of several pages in this edition documenting the Milošević regime's direction of the war in Bosnia and a wholly new chapter devoted to Montenegro's complex evolution during this period.⁴ Certainly an accounting of crimes committed against

Kosovo's residual Serb minority since 1999 (particularly in March 2004) and the outcome of the ICTY investigation of alleged KLA kidnappings and organ theft need to be incorporated in a subsequent edition. So does some of the bounty of new evidence that will attend the conclusion of the trials of Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, and other indictees. Although this edition mentions the ICTY judgments against Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač, we hope to offer a fuller analysis following the outcome of the appeals process. Similarly, the diary purportedly written by Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić will be incorporated if or when it successfully withstands scrutiny during his trial. Hence our hope to turn to these and similar matters in the future, much as we invite other scholars to devote their attention to them by applying some of the methodologies that we have employed here.

One controversy that does not lend itself to abridgement is the dissolution of the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which has generated far more scholarship over the past two decades than can be handled definitively in a standard book chapter. Hence, at the suggestion of political scientist Lenard Cohen, the project commissioned a special, freestanding volume dedicated exclusively to the subject that could serve as a resource in the chapter's preparation and to which the team authors can refer readers for more detailed information and analysis.⁵ In addition, the same team subsequently generated three articles by historian and political scientist Sabrina Ramet that appeared in two special issues of the journals *Nationalities Papers*⁶ and *Südosteuropa*,⁷ which bundled a dozen case studies and reports by project participants from several teams.

Whereas we have been obliged to be selective in the choice and length of coverage, other aspects of the project have demanded that we place a premium on inclusivity. The number of controversies embraced by each research team reflects a commitment to examining all of those controversies that, in our view, preempt constructive discourse between the former belligerents. The commitment to inclusivity has also extended to project participants. Throughout its course, the project has routinely welcomed any academics, including graduate students, whose curricula vitae presented the semblance of expertise. In the end not a single successor state scholar who has sought to join the project has either been denied admission or been removed. We have, however, felt obliged to make some exceptions to the project's "open enrollment" policy. As a *scholars'* initiative, we have admitted virtually none of the many accomplished Western investigative journalists who have published significant accounts. Given the greater overlap between the two professions within some of the successor states, we have permitted the participation of some journalists from the region who hold advanced academic degrees or university faculty positions. We have also welcomed the

heads of research institutes and repositories who, in some cases, do not have a doctorate in history, law, or a social science. The need to avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest has also prevented us from allowing the active participation of successor state scholars who hold high-level government positions. During the course of our work, no fewer than a dozen participants either entered politics or were named to high-level judicial, diplomatic or foreign policy-making positions, including three scholars who had already contributed significantly to one of the team reports. Although most stayed on board and continued to enjoy access to project correspondence, all were recused from playing an active role in the preparation or criticism of the team reports after they had been nominated for government positions.

Perhaps our single greatest concern throughout the project has been to sustain a universal commitment to scholarly methodologies, most notably the impartial weighing and representation of evidence with maximum transparency. Toward this end, a detailed prospectus was drafted shortly after the project's initial organizational meeting in Morović, Serbia, in September 2001 that clearly enumerated principles, policies, and procedures for posting on the project Web site. Thereafter, key decisions were routinely disseminated to all project participants via e-mail. The research teams first convened in Sarajevo in July 2002 to draft a research agenda. The team leaders reconvened in Edmonton in September 2003 to present the first of what would become multiple drafts of the team reports. Throughout this process individual contributions and successive drafts of reports were routinely discussed at the team level before being passed on to all project participants, each of whom had the right to make detailed comments that ranged from fulsome praise to withering criticism. At the conclusion of each round of criticism, all comments were bundled together and sent in a single e-mail to every project participant so that s/he could check succeeding drafts for mandated revisions. Once a report had finally passed muster, it was immediately distributed to the media and an assortment of regional NGOs, government supporters in Washington, the EU, and the successor states to promote public awareness and discussion.

The pursuit of inclusivity, impartiality and transparency necessitated the aggressive recruitment of scholars from all eight Yugoslav entities, including a large number of scholars from Serbia, which reflects both its higher population and the existence of a distinctly Serbian narrative for all twelve controversies. Moreover, from the beginning, every research team has been codirected by *two* scholars, one of whom was invariably an ethnic Serb or Montenegrin. This preponderance is evident in the comprehensive list of scholars that appears in the appendix, which has been organized by country to document the project's multilateral posture. We have done so, however, with the foreknowledge that our project participants cannot be easily pigeonholed by nationality, particularly the large number who

are fervently antinationalist and highly critical of their regime's actions during the Yugoslav wars—including more than a few American and western European scholars! Moreover, several participants hold dual nationality, whereas others are natives of one country and citizens of another while living and working in a third. Nonetheless, we hope that, by articulating project membership by nationality, we can answer one of the most frequently asked questions that has been posed to us by laypeople, journalists, government officials, and academics in each of the successor states.

Nationality is hardly the only attribute that bears on the claim of impartiality. Funding sources have already been held up to scrutiny and interpreted—or at least represented—by some within the successor states as evidence of bias. Of course, most scholars are aware that public foundations generally give money to proposals they like but never interfere with the compilation of research or the conclusions derived from it. This was certainly the case with our donors. Nonetheless, the long list of acknowledgements includes the names of institutions that will raise eyebrows within the successor states, most notably the Serbian Ministry of Science, the provincial government of Vojvodina, the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).⁸ If certain donors have subjected the project to guilt by association, the lack of adequate funding has posed a problem by limiting the array of languages available for publication and for posting on the project Web site. Although translations are offered online in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS), its evolution into a trinity of three distinct languages has made it impossible to obscure the nationality of the individual translator, in most instances a Serb whose antinationalist credentials have been insufficient to prevent a priori accusations of bias by some Bosnian, Croatian, and Albanian readers. Finally, in representing place names in the text, the editors have taken refuge in the prevailing practice of employing prewar nomenclature (Kosovo rather than Kosova or Kosovo-Metohija; Priština, not Prishtinë; Foča, not Srbinje or other postwar innovations employed in *Republika Srpska*).

The commitment to transparency extends to the presentation of the team reports, which appear here in chapter format and are prefaced by a roster of all team members who enjoyed access to every step of the research and writing process. Because there was a wide variation in levels of participation, the names of those who actively contributed to the process of shaping the chapter are listed in boldface; additionally, the chapter masthead is accompanied by a brief team history that identifies personnel developments, satellite meetings, the apportionment of research stipends, and specific contributions by individual team members. The plenary roster of all project participants posted in the appendix likewise distinguishes between access and activity, while listing the years during which each scholar joined and, in some cases, left the project.

Finally, we should define the meaning of membership because it does not necessarily represent active contributions by each individual listed on the plenary roster or unanimous agreement by all project participants. Rather, it represents the names of all those scholars who enjoyed open access to the process, with the right to see and comment on every draft once it left the team and was posted to the project at large for additional comment and criticism. In reality, many of the scholars listed on the plenary roster were content to observe (and, in some cases, ignore) the intensive discussion of team drafts, even though they did not necessarily agree with everything within them. For sake of greater clarity, we have endeavored to identify as best we can those scholars who did contribute materially, whether by commenting, participating in a team or plenary meeting, conducting interviews or other research, or making a written contribution to any of the successive drafts or collateral SI publications.

By contrast, team membership represented a closer affiliation with the chapters that appear in this volume, if only because members had the right to insist on the inclusion of relevant publications, documentation, or arguments as they inspected every draft. With one exception, the team leaders and principal authors worked hard to accommodate team members' requests, whether by integrating their contributions or by mentioning the lack of unanimity on some issues and listing alternative views. In one instance, a principal author who had successfully pressed for changes in several of the other team drafts withdrew from the project rather than address criticisms and incorporate contributions by fellow team members. As a rule, however, the numerous face-to-face meetings between scholars have been attended by a high degree of mutual respect and collegiality, during which participants have generally achieved a consensus on the evidence that governs most major controversies. This is not to say that individual participants have not sometimes felt uncomfortable about the resolution of one controversy or another that reflected poorly on their country or national group. Although team members had the right to insist that the final report address their concerns by representing their position, perhaps a half dozen chose instead to resign from their team (and, on occasion, from the project) in order to express either their dissatisfaction with an interim draft or their apprehension over the consequences that its eventual publication might have on their career prospects.

The selection of team leaders also requires some explanation. From the very beginning we have recognized and appreciated the role that Western scholars could play in this project, whether in facilitating the interactions between their colleagues from the successor states or in codirecting some of the research teams. On the surface at least, their greater distance from the horrors of the Yugoslav wars suggested that it might be easier for them to withstand both the pull of national loyalties and the pressure of institutional politics. Yet the project has always been committed to maximizing interaction between successor state schol-

ars and to securing public acceptance of the SI's findings within their countries, which would be best served by promoting a greater sense of ownership in the process. Hence, our hope to enlist as many successor state scholars as possible to the point of affording them right of first refusal.

This was not that easy. At the time there were few successor state scholars with established reputations about a war that had just ended; many who had were already invested in nationalist discourse that would be hard to revise or repudiate and, in several cases, committed to careers in government and politics that wholly foreclosed their participation. We were, however, pleased to discover that there were many Serbian scholars eager to strike out on a fresh path in conjunction with their colleagues across the successor states, western Europe, and the Atlantic. Nor was it particularly difficult finding Croatian and Slovenian scholars, whose countries had emerged triumphant from the wars and had somewhat greater access to institutional financial support. Actively engaging Bosnian and Kosovo Albanian scholars proved much more difficult. One reason was that foreign governments, international organizations, and NGOs had established literally hundreds of missions in the postwar Bosnian Federation and Kosovo that offered alternative income sources for well-educated professionals who were conversant in English and other western European languages. The SI could not compete with them with the modest sums at its disposal, with the result that several scholars in the Federation and Kosovo politely declined our invitations to become team leaders or research stipendiaries. Another problem was the devastating human toll that ethnic cleansing had exacted there. From the beginning there was somewhat less enthusiasm for engaging with Serbian scholars, a reluctance among Kosovo Albanians that was abetted by the desire to achieve independence from Belgrade. Hence, whereas we were ultimately able to engage ethnic Serb and Montenegrin scholars to codirect each research team, the final roster of team leaders included prominent scholars from Albania, Croatia, and Slovenia, together with nine from the U.S., Germany, Great Britain, and New Zealand—but none from the Federation or Kosovo. It is difficult to overstate the effort that they have expended and the contribution that they have made in producing this volume. The process of revising and expanding the initial drafts at the Edmonton meeting lasted four years until the approval of the last of the team reports in the fall of 2007, after which some teams undertook additional changes in response to comments by four outside referees. Most reports went through eight to ten drafts before successfully passing through the highly public and sometimes humbling projectwide review that came to be known as the Gauntlet. Four reports needed to be totally rewritten, including one that went through three wholly new drafts, each written by a different team member until it finally passed muster. A fifth needed to be replaced after the principal author declined to incorporate contributions by some team members or carry out changes mandated by the outside referees.

This is not to say that we are as yet wholly satisfied with the product published here. As stated earlier, we offer this edition as a second installment in a process that will surely benefit from further research, pending access to additional funding and the appearance of new sources. At this point we invite the reader to examine what the teams have concluded based on evidence that we have judged valid. Although we seek a consensus, we also expect criticism, which we regard as an integral part of this process. We only ask that the criticism be backed by evidence and logic, not by “patriotic” appeals or special pleading that has no place in scholarly discourse. We also invite criticism of the project’s design and implementation, which was actually the most challenging task we faced in bringing so many scholars together to work toward a common goal.

Nor should other scholars who have not heretofore participated feel that their only recourse is to criticize either the project or its results from a distance. Rather, they should feel free to join the process, not only through constructive criticism but through active participation in the project’s subsequent public outreach—whether by engaging in future public presentations or by joining in the research and writing of later updates, whether on the Web or in later published editions. In return we ask only that their engagement adhere to the same level of collegiality that has characterized our activities to date. This invitation applies especially to scholars from the successor states—and, above all, to those from Bosnia and Kosovo—who we hope will ultimately assume full ownership of every phase of this enterprise. Admittedly, few Western societies have suffered so severely from the tyranny of mythmaking and selective memory that cultural elites have imposed on the public and their elected representatives. Yet we should all feel an obligation to confront it.

Notes

- 1 Charles Ingrao, “Weapons of Mass Instruction: Schoolbooks and Democratization in Central Europe,” *Contexts: The Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 199–200.
- 2 Tihomir Loža, “Honoring the Dead,” *Transitions Online*, 10 July 2007, www.tol.cz, accessed 18 July 2007.
- 3 www.cla.purdue.edu/si.
- 4 See chapter 4, 131–33, 145–46, and chapter 12.
- 5 Lenard Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Soso, eds., *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia’s Disintegration* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).
- 6 Sabrina Ramet, “Explaining the Yugoslav Meltdown, 1: ‘For a Charm of Pow’rful Trouble, Like a Hell-broth Boil and Bubble’: Theories about the Roots of the Yugoslav Troubles,” and “Explaining the Yugoslav Meltdown, 2: A Theory about the Causes of the Yugoslav Meltdown: The Serbian National Awakening as a ‘Revitalization Movement,’” in Thomas Emmert and Charles Ingrao, eds., “Resolving the Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholars’ Initiative,” special issue, *Nationalities Papers* 32, no. 4 (2004):

731–79, republished as *Conflict in Southeastern Europe at the End of the Twentieth Century: A Scholars' Initiative* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

- 7 Sabrina Ramet, "The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Competing Narratives of Resentment and Blame," *Südosteuropa* 55 (2007): 26–69.
- 8 Thus a column suggesting that the SI and its USIP and NED were tools of the U.S. State Department, the Pentagon, Richard Holbrooke, and Wesley Clark. Miroslav Lazanski, "Gnjilane u Virdžiniji," *Politika*, 17 February 2007 (for translation by BBC Monitoring European, see "Serbian Commentary Slams Scholars' Project on 'Rewriting' Balkan History," 20 February 2007, www.cla.purdue.edu/SI/Politika_Article_17.Feb.07).