Introduction

The closing months of 1991 witnessed the disintegration of two multinational communist federal states with a comparable history of indigenous revolutions and similar nationality policies. Both in the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia, the crisis and ultimate collapse of the state sprang from vocal demands for autonomy, sovereignty, or outright independence on the part of republics opposed to the federal center, and the inability of the latter to contain the process of disintegration. The striking similarity and simultaneity of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia suggest the presence of common causes that were absent in those communist countries in which regimes collapsed without undermining statehood. In the only other comparable case – Czechoslovakia – the "velvet divorce" between Czechs and Slovaks postdated the collapse of communism by three years and was a matter of elite settlement rather than of the expressed will of its constituent nations.[1]

If the similarity of outcomes in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia calls for an identification of common causes, the difference in the *mode of state dissolution* calls for an attempt to isolate those factors that can explain the contrast between the relatively peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia's strikingly violent disintegration. After all, while the collapse of the Soviet state was accompanied by violent ethnic conflicts on the periphery (e.g., between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Nagorno-Karabakh), it did not involve the largest nations (Russians and Ukrainians). By contrast, in Yugoslavia, some of

[1] Unlike the USSR and Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia was a unitary state until 1969, did not experience an indigenous communist revolution, and was a country of two nations without major territorial disputes at the time of the breakup. For these reasons, the Czechoslovak case is left outside this study. For the Czechoslovak breakup, see Abby Innes, *Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). For an insightful comparison of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, see Andrew C. Janos, *Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: Ethnic Conflict and the Dissolution of Multinational States* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1997).

the republics on the periphery (Slovenia, Macedonia) avoided protracted conflict over independence (although there was a short war between the Yugoslav People's Army and Slovenia's Territorial Defense), while violence engulfed the core of the state and its centrally located nations (Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Moslems).

This difference in the mode of Soviet and Yugoslav dissolution can largely be attributed to the different reactions of the elites of "dominant nations" (Russians and Serbs) to the prospect of state disintegration. Unlike Russia's elite, who accepted the borders between Soviet republics, notably those between the Russian Federation (RSFSR), Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, as the borders among internationally recognized states, Serbia's elite challenged republican borders in the name of the national self-determination of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. If Serbia's elite had accepted the Slovenian-Croatian proposal for the transformation of Yugoslavia into a confederation in a manner analogous to the Russian elite's acceptance of the transformation of the Soviet Union into a Commonwealth of Independent States, war could have been prevented, although at the price of acceding to minority status for Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Why did Serbia's elite find a peaceful resolution to the Yugoslav crisis at this cost unacceptable? Conversely, how could Russia's elite accept Soviet dissolution at the price of leaving 25 million Russians in the so-called near abroad? Even if we know that popular support for these outcomes was far from unanimous, why did Serbia's and Russia's respective elites enjoy sufficient popular backing (or at least lacked a critical mass of opposition) that enabled them to pursue such radically different courses of action?

Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia represents an attempt to identify the long-term causal factors that can explain this empirical puzzle. Initially conceived as a comparative-historical background chapter that would identify some of the key differences in historical patterns of state- and nation-building in Russia and Serbia and ascertain the effects of Soviet and Yugoslav communist nationality policies on the way in which the Russian and Serbian national questions reemerged in the 1980s, the "chapter" turned into a book manuscript. The reader may well wonder why such a long excursus into the comparative history of these two nations was necessary in order to answer a question about political outcomes in the early 1990s. The answer is to be found in this book's central claim: that a critical factor in explaining the different reactions of Russia's and Serbia's elites to the prospect of Soviet and Yugoslav dissolution is related to historically deeply rooted collective representations of the role of the state in national life.[2] These representations, in turn, were cemented by recurrent historical experiences that gave

[2] The term "collective representation" is used here in Durkheim's sense, i.e., "as a mode of thinking, conceiving, or perceiving" that is both "socially generated" and "in some sense 'about' society." See Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), pp. 6–8.

rise to very different collective memories and nationalist narratives. Without understanding these collective representations, memories, and narratives, we cannot offer an explanation of the difference in outcomes that would satisfy the criterion of *interpretive adequacy*, that is, account for the culturally specific motivation of political action. This requirement seems especially relevant because the symbolic dimension of social action is of striking importance in nationalist mobilization, and because the appeals of leaders who, as it were, personified the difference in outcomes in Russia and Serbia – Milošević and Yeltsin – were so permeated with symbolic content.

To be sure, neither the appeals of leaders nor the intellectual discourse of the late 1980s can be torn from the immediate political context or the elite constituencies and social groups who were the initiators or targets of nationalist mobilization. But in this historically critical period of the denouement of the two multinational states when questions of national identity moved to the forefront, both intellectual and political elites tapped into the defining historical experiences of the nation and revived collective memories that the respective communist regimes had suppressed. In fact, informal narratives that contradicted communist ideology and challenged official accounts of Russian and Serbian history predated the crisis of the 1980s by decades, providing the essential ingredients of the political discourse that became hegemonic in the years immediately preceding state dissolution.

This is not to argue that political outcomes were caused by political discourse or that they can be reduced to the ideas of relevant political constituencies. All cultural ideals have their social carriers who selectively interpret religious or secular worldviews in ways that are congruent with their status pretensions and interests.[3] Nevertheless, I argue that informal narratives that revived suppressed collective memories and spoke to the defining historical experiences of the nation framed the terms of debate about the Russian and Serbian national questions in the 1980s and exercised an important influence on political outcomes. Even if this influence cannot be measured in strictly quantitative terms, the extent to which these narratives became pervasive across the political spectrum and helped shape emerging public opinion in Russia and Serbia at critical junctures in the political process makes it imperative to understand their emergence, development, and historical transformation.

The main argument of the book can be briefly anticipated. My central claim is that the patrimonial features of Russian autocracy made for, at best, an ambivalent, and, at worst, a negative identification of Russian cultural elites with the state. A positive identification between nation (whether defined in civic or ethnic terms) and state characterizes nation-states. Like other geographically contiguous empires (Ottoman, Habsburg), the Russian Empire rested on the loyalty of multiethnic elites to "throne and altar" and rejected popular

[3] See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 81–97.

sovereignty or ethnic definitions of statehood as a matter of principle. But its *differentia specifica* resided in the whole-scale suppression of society by the state, a process that had begun in Peter the Great's time and culminated under the repressive autocratic regime of Nicholas I (1825–1855), which marked "a parting of ways" between the intelligentsia and the state.[4] This gulf between state and nation found its symbolic expression in what Robert Tucker called *the image of dual Russia* – the crystallization of a collective representation of the state as a conquering and even occupying force in the Russian land and, as such, "alien" to the "real Russia" of the people.[5] Despite various attempts to bridge the state-society gap in the second half of the nineteenth century, the identification between national culture and the state failed to develop in the Russian case. The partial revival of this autocratic pattern by Stalin, albeit in the context of a much more repressive totalitarian state, ensured that the image of dual Russia made a dramatic reappearance in the post-Stalinist period, emerging as a powerful leitmotif in the literary narratives of influential writers like Boris Pasternak, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Vasily Grossman who otherwise held very different views about Russian national identity. The ultimate consequence was that both civic and ethnic Russian nationalists questioned the legitimacy of the Soviet state, even as Brezhnev's officialdom instrumentally incorporated some elements of traditional Russian nationalism as a subsidiary component into the regime's legitimation formula.

In sharp contrast to this Soviet-Russian pattern, Serbian cultural elites identified with the Serbian state in a positive manner and subsequently transposed that positive identification onto the Yugoslav state. Notwithstanding the political and institutional discontinuities between the interwar kingdom in which Serbian elites dominated state institutions and communist Yugoslavia in which Serbs were not allowed to remain a *Staatsvolk*, the positive identification with Yugoslavia remained ingrained in Serbian political culture. This political-cultural continuity owed much to the disproportionate role of Serbs, and especially Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia in the Partisan movement, and the cultural superimposition of the heroic ethos of the National Liberation War upon an earlier Serbian tradition of heroic resistance against the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. This is not to argue that Yugoslavia was just an extended "Great Serbia," or that the majority of Serbs saw it only as "their" state, or that members of other nations did not identify with Yugoslavia as a state: The relationship between Serbian and Yugoslav identities was considerably more complex than simplistic formulas may suggest. However, it is to agree with Andrew Wachtel's idea that the "traditional Serbian attribute of heroism" encoded in epic folk poetry made its way into the culture of Yugoslavism even as it was

[4] Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801–1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

[5] Robert Tucker, "The Image of Dual Russia," in *The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), pp. 121–143.

complemented by cultural elements taken from other national traditions (notably, the tradition of Croatian federalism) and ideologically divorced from its Serbian connotations in the postwar supranational ideology of "brotherhood and unity."[6] Thus, the emergence of Serbian particularism in the 1980s was not caused by the Serbs' alienation from the communist state, but rather by the disappointment of Serbian cultural elites with the fragmentation of Yugoslavia along the lines of socialist republics and autonomous provinces within Serbia (Kosovo and Vojvodina), the state's "excessive concessions" to national minorities (e.g., Albanians), and the realization that the Serbs' historical attachment to Yugoslavia was not shared by the cultural elites of other nations who came to see the Yugoslav state framework as a transitory stage on the road to independent statehood (e.g., Slovenes).

This book, then, is about the long-term historical legacies of state- and nation-building in Russia and Serbia and their impact on political outcomes in the contemporary period. In making this claim about the importance of the *longue durée*, my argument differs from existing approaches to the Soviet and Yugoslav breakup. These approaches have emphasized a variety of explanatory factors, from the "ethnic security dilemma" faced by prospective minorities in contested territories to the institutional features of communist federalism, the instrumental manipulation of nationalism by leaders, and the role of political contention in nationalist mobilization. In my view, all these works contain valuable insights, but none of them offers a satisfactory response to the puzzle of different outcomes in Russia and Serbia, primarily on account of their explanatory reductionism. In addition, most of these explanations fail to take into account critical *political-cultural differences* between the two cases, treating them at best as auxiliary factors or, alternatively, tacitly introducing them into the comparative analysis without making explicit their causal role or weight. By contrast, my approach is explicitly multicausal insofar as it recognizes that only an emphasis on a combination of political-cultural, institutional, and contextual factors (including political process and leadership appeals) can offer an adequate explanation of the difference in outcomes. My main aim in this book, however, is more limited: to offer a convincing argument to the effect that the differences in collective representations, memories, and narratives that arose in response to the defining historical experiences of the nation can be formulated as *a set of necessary causal antecedents* that can explain different patterns of nationalist mobilization in Russia and Serbia *in conjunction* with contextual factors. In arguing this point, I challenge the often poorly disguised materialist bias of contemporary social science and make a case for the autonomous role of ideas in explaining political change.[7]

[6] Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation: Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 38–53.

[7] For a recent Weberian attempt that highlights the role of ideas, see Stephen E. Hanson, *Post-Imperial Democracies: Ideology and Party Formation in Third Republic France, Weimar Germany, and Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Although my

Any argument that makes a claim about the autonomous role of ideas and political culture is bound to meet with some resistance, mostly because explanations based on the allegedly hard facts of economic and political power interests or structures are assumed to be easier to demonstrate and refute. My preliminary response is that the question of the primacy of material versus ideal factors cannot be decided a priori on a metatheoretical level: The relative causal weight of interests and ideas (or values and cultural ideals) is bound to vary from case to case and must be established rather than assumed. Second, my argument explicitly takes into account the differential institutional consequences of Soviet and Yugoslav communist nationality policy on the Russian and Serbian national questions. Finally, the attribution of causal weight will vary depending on our *explanandum*. When the *explanandum* is nationalist mobilization, there are good substantive (i.e., historical) reasons to believe that collective memories and cultural ideals are of special relevance, since questions of national identity and the success or failure of nationalist appeals cannot be easily reduced to material or power interests, even if they cannot be divorced from them either. Even so, there is no denying that arguments about historical legacies and the role of ideas pose some special methodological challenges. Some of these challenges are discussed in the concluding section of Chapter I, but it is ultimately the argument and evidence presented in the whole book that should be assessed before a judgment is passed on whether I have successfully made the case for the importance of collective representations, memories, and narratives in shaping discourse on the Russian and Serbian national questions *before* the legitimacy crisis of the Soviet and Yugoslav federations prompted political actors to engage in nationalist mobilization.

Beyond the particular cases at hand and these preliminary methodological considerations, this book represents a contribution to the comparative-historical and political sociology of nationalism. My approach to the study of nationalism is explicated in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 2), in which I seek to revive Max Weber's idea of the nation as "community of shared memories and common political destiny" based on defining historical experiences and combine it with Reinhard Bendix's, Liah Greenfeld's, and Roman Szporluk's emphasis on the role of perceptions of relative backwardness, intellectual mobilization, and *ressentiment* in the crystallization of national ideologies. I employ this eclectic approach not for the sake of theoretical *l'art pour l'art*, but because, as the subsequent comparative-historical analysis demonstrates, this logically consistent and interrelated set of ideas allows me to account for the emergence of different types of responses (civic, ethnic, and statist) to the state-society dilemma opened by the historical impact of the diffusion of the Western idea of the nation on the European periphery. At the same time, this approach allows me to take into account the way in which various types of modern nationalism

explanatory focus is different, this study shares and, in a certain sense, vindicates Hanson's approach.

were superimposed upon earlier proto-national historical experiences and the collective memories that arose in response to them (e.g., Peter the Great's "modernization through coercion" in the Russian case or the Kosovo myth in Serbia).

Throughout this book, I demonstrate the validity of Rogers Brubaker's emphasis on the protean character of nationalism as a set of cultural idioms (civic, ethnic, and statist) whose boundaries are not always sharply delineated from each other, and that are subject to change and reinterpretation over time.[8] Indeed, as already Durkheim argued, once formed, collective representations can become "partially autonomous realities which live their own life" and can "form syntheses of all kinds," that is, be dissolved into their component parts and reconstituted, thus forming the foundation of new representations.[9] In the case of nationalism, such representations typically are embedded in the founding myths of the nation that both codify group experiences and constitute them on the level of group consciousness.[10] At the same time, founding myths are not frozen in time, but are reinterpreted, reinforced (or weakened), and reconstituted in the light of new collective experiences. Thus, the central leitmotif of the Kosovo myth – "heroic resistance against overwhelming odds" – which can be said to have animated the Serbian army's heroic stand against vastly superior Austro-Hungarian forces in World War I, also inspired Partisan fighters of Serbian and Montenegrin origin in World War II, albeit in the context of a communist ideology that submerged this national motif into a broader official narrative that extolled "brotherhood and unity" and the heroic resistance of "all our nations against the fascist occupier and domestic traitors." Similarly, statist, civic, and ethnic definitions of the Russian nation that originated in the nineteenth-century age of nationalism reemerged in new forms in the Soviet period, albeit with recognizable continuities with past precedents.

This emphasis on the protean character of nationalism is but another way of saying that my aim in this book is to engage in comparison not only across cases, but also across time in each case taken separately. Only by engaging in such a comparison across time can elements of political-cultural continuity in each case be identified, while taking into account the way in which they were transformed by new collective experiences, political interests, and ideologies. If Stalin's official Soviet-Russian nationalism after World War II indeed exhibited recognizable similarities with the "Official Nationality" of Nicholas I insofar as it purported to co-opt the spontaneous patriotism that emerged in

[8] Rogers Brubaker, "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationhood," in John A. Hall, ed., *The State of the Nation: Ernst Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 272–307.

[9] Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, p. 8.

[10] For collective representations as both expressive and constitutive of social reality, see Giovanni Paoletti, "The Cult of Images: Reading Chapter VII, Book II, of *The Elementary Forms*," in N. J. Allen, W. S. F. Pickering, and W. Watts Miller, eds., *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 78–92.

the course of the struggle against the Nazi invader for the cause of the state in a way that was partially analogous to his tsarist predecessor's attempt to subdue the political aspirations for liberty unleashed by the Napoleonic Wars, there is no avoiding the fact that vast ideological differences separated Soviet from imperial autocracy. Moreover, these differences in the respective official nationalisms did not emanate solely from ideology, but were also rooted in the very different developmental, geopolitical, and internal challenges faced by the respective regimes to which these ideological formulations offered a response. Thus, Stalin's official Soviet-Russian nationalism had its origins in the 1930s when it made its first appearance as a messianic ideology of industrialization designed to motivate socially mobilized constituencies in a "backward country" (as Stalin himself recognized in a famous speech), an altogether different task from the perceived political imperative faced by Nicholas I – to subdue the rebel Decembrist generation and respond to the first stirrings of civic (Westernizer) and ethnic (Slavophile) Russian nationalism by incorporating the notion of "Nationality" (*Narodnost'*) alongside "Orthodoxy" and "Autocracy" into the official imperial legitimation formula.

Finally, this book represents a contribution to the relatively understudied problem of the political dilemma of dominant nations in multinational states. Typically, much greater attention is devoted to peripheral nationalisms, which are assumed to have more or less legitimate grievances against a political center dominated by a hegemonic nation. Conversely, dominant nations are assumed to have few reasons to be dissatisfied with arrangements that typically enable their members numerically to dominate central state institutions in a multinational polity. As a result, with some notable exceptions, there are relatively few studies devoted to Castilians as opposed to Catalans, to English national identity as opposed to Scottish or Irish nationalism, to Anglophone Canadians as opposed to the *Québécois*.[11]

As will become apparent in the course of this study, there are conditions under which the political and cultural elites of dominant nations can develop a particularist nationalism and question their hitherto taken for granted commitment to the multinational state. Such conditions may arise when the dominant group is an incomplete hegemon, or when the federalization of a previously unitary state results in a type of decentralization seen as excessively favorable to peripheral nationalism, or when negative historical experiences arouse suspicions among the dominant group about the loyalty of other national groups to the state – as in a variety of historical situations in the Serbian-Yugoslav case. Alternatively, a dominant nation can enjoy indisputable political hegemony like Russians in the Soviet Union, but at the cost of a repressive state

[11] A pioneering effort in this respect is Krishan Kumar, "Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 575–608. The argument was elaborated in Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

apparatus, the dissolution of its cultural identity in a transnational political ideology, and the outflow of economic resources from the core to the periphery. Admittedly, while the discussion here is limited to the Serbian and Russian cases, there are historical instances in which analogous developments resulted in the rise of dominant nation particularism.[12]

A few words are in order about the plan of the book. In Chapter I, I outline the main similarities and differences in communist nationality policy in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, critically reexamine existing explanations of different modes of Soviet and Yugoslav dissolution, and make the methodological case for a Weberian approach to the comparative study of historical legacies and historical causation. In Chapter 2, I engage in an exposition of Max Weber's theoretical ideas about nationalism and imperialism, demonstrate their relevance for the cases, and supplement them with ideas drawn from the contemporary literature on nationalism. In Chapter 3, I thematically compare the different historical legacies of state-society relations, the emergence of national ideologies, and the defining historical experiences of Russians and Serbs in the precommunist period. In Chapter 4, I compare the ways in which communist revolutions, World War II, and communist nationality policy institutionally and symbolically affected the Russian and Serbian nations, reinforcing some of the key elements of precommunist legacies while altering others. In Chapter 5, I explore how Russian and Serbian writers addressed the impact of communism on the two nations and recovered for national memory collective experiences that were heavily downplayed in official ideological narratives. In the Conclusion, I illustrate the relevance of this comparative-historical analysis for explaining the emergence of different kinds of political discourse about the nation in Russia and Serbia in the 1980s and draw out the main theoretical implications of the study.

[12] Some examples include the Hungarian elite's pursuit of assimilationist policies after the *Ausgleich* (1867) in its part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the revanchist syndrome in Hungarian politics after Trianon (1920); the Czech part of Czechoslovakia after Munich (1938) and the establishment of Slovakia as a Nazi protectorate; the Czech elites' reaction to Slovak demands after 1989; the crisis of Spanish ("Castilian") identity after the collapse of empire (1898) and the rise of Catalan and Basque nationalisms; and, nationalist Turkey in the wake of Ottoman defeats.

1

Russians and Serbs in the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

Grounds for Comparison and Alternative Explanations

I. Communist Nationality Policy in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were the only two countries that fully implemented the system of ethnoterritorial federalism. This system was rooted in the nationality policy of the Bolsheviks, who believed in the transitory character of nationalism. Yet, Lenin realized the political potential of peripheral nationalism in the struggle against tsarist autocracy. If prior to the October Revolution the Bolsheviks did not have a clear nationality policy, the right of nations to self-determination became one of the central components in their political strategy. In fact, the successful manipulation of national grievances was one of the main causes of the Bolsheviks' victory in the Russian Civil War (1917–21). The specter of the disintegration of the new Soviet state, however, soon forced communist leaders to reject national self-determination as an unconditional right.[1]

Soviet federalism was shaped, to a significant extent, by the views of the Bolsheviks' main expert on the national question, Joseph Stalin. Stalin saw the overlap among language, culture, ethnicity, territory, and administration as decisive for the constitution of nations and as the main rationale for legitimate political claims to national self-determination. However, as the Bolshevik leaders made clear, once the "oppressed nations" were liberated from the "tsarist yoke," the right to national self-determination could be enjoyed only by the "toilers," and not by the bourgeoisie. Henceforth, socialist nations would march toward the communist future together, while exercising their collective rights within the political confines of Stalin's famous dictum – "socialist in content, national in form."[2] As a result, while the newly formed

[1] Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).
[2] Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1942).