

Fernando Veliz

The Politics of Croatia-Slavonia 1903–1918

Nationalism, State Allegiance
and the Changing International Order

Harrassowitz Verlag

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For Victoria, Bruno and Mario

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List of Main Political Parties and Politicians

Main political parties and actors in Croatia-Slavonia mentioned in the text

Hrvatsko-srpska koalicija (Croatian-Serbian Coalition or Serbo-Croat Coalition)

Short form: the Coalition

Main Actors: Frano Supilo (until 1909), Svetozar Pribićević

Čista stranka prava (Pure Party of Right)

Short form: the Frankists or the *frankovci* (part of the *pravaši*)

Main actors: Josip Frank, Vladimir Frank

Starčevićeva stranka prava (Starčević's Party of Right)

Short form: the *milinovci* (part of the *pravaši*)

Main actors: Mile Starčević, Ante Pavelić

Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka (Croatian People's Peasant Party)

Short form: the Peasant party

Main actors: Stjepan Radić, Antun Radić

Other political parties mentioned (not exhaustive)

Narodna stranka (National Party)

Short form: the *mađaroni* or the Magyarones

Srpska radikalna stranka (Serb Radical Party)

Short form: the Serbian radicals

Srpska samostalna stranka (Serbian Independent Party)

Short form: the Serbian independents. Member of the Coalition 1905–1918

Hrvatska napredna stranka (Croatian Progressive Party)

Short form: the Progressives. Member of the Coalition 1905–1909. Merged with the Croatian Party of Right in 1910 to form the Croatian Independents, also part of the Coalition 1910–1918

Hrvatska Stranka Prava (Croatian Party of Right)

Short form: the Party of Right. Member of the Coalition 1905–1909. Merged with the Croatian Progressive Party in 1910 to form the Croatian Independents, also part of the Coalition 1910–1918.

Stranka Prava (Party of Right)

Short form: the Party of Right United front of the *pravaši* in the 1911 elections. It was also the original name of the *pravaši* party founded in 1861 by Ante Starčević

Socijaldemokratska stranka (Social Democrat Party)

Short form: the Social Democrats

Map of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia

- I. — Županija (Komitat) Lika-Krbava
- II. — „ „ Modruć-Rijeka
- III. — „ „ Zagreb
- IV. — Glav. grad (Hauptstadt) Zagreb
- V. — Županija (Komitat) Varaždin
- VI. — Grad (Stadt) Varaždin
- VII. — Županija (Komitat) Bjelovar-Križevci
- VIII. — „ „ Požega
- IX. — „ „ Virovitica
- X. — Grad (Stadt) Osijek
- XI. — Županija (Komitat) Srijem
- XII. — Grad (Stadt) Zemun



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po stanju od 1. siječnja 1915.

nach dem Stande vom 1. Jänner 1915.



Preface

This book is the edited version of my doctoral thesis which was defended in Florence in 2010.

I would like to express my gratitude to the institutions that have provided financial and administrative support for its completion and eventual publication: The British Granting Authority and the European University Institute between 2005 and 2009 and the Chair of South-East European History at the Humboldt University in Berlin between 2010 and 2012.

Two things motivated me to start researching and eventually writing this book. The first was a dissatisfaction with the narratives that had emerged about the creation of the first Yugoslavia (the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) and the consequent application of these narratives to try to interpret the break-up of the second Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The dissatisfaction stemmed from the fact that the debates seem to gravitate between those who saw Yugoslavia as inevitable and those who saw it as inherently unfeasible from its very outset, seemingly ignoring the inherent complexity of any process of state destruction and creation. In addition to this, most of the narratives seemed to concentrate on the high state politics of the Great Powers and Serbia or on the politics of the exile community from the Monarchy that had left at the beginning of the First World War. Little had been done to incorporate the experience of the local elites in Zagreb during the last fifteen years of the Habsburg Empire into the narrative of its eventual collapse and the creation of Yugoslavia after the war. The second factor was an interest in the dynamics of the formulation of nationalist claims and how they relate to the international normative context in which they are produced. The literature of nationalism studies seemed to be obsessed with inward looking debates that either sought to generalize from a limited set of case studies or remained trapped at the other extreme where historical experiences are so particular that any potential for comparison is rejected. At the same time, the literature of international relations tends to consider nationalism as a problem that does not seem to concern the discipline, even though nationalism constitutes the main legitimating agent for the present international order of territorial states.

This book has the objective of trying to address the specific problems of state destruction in Austria-Hungary and state creation in Yugoslavia through the study of a specific region of the Empire while at the same time making a contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of how nationalism relates to the international order in which it operates. In the first instance, I hope, by showing how contingency and external events shape nationalist claims, to produce a re-interpretation of the local politics of Croatia-Slavonia that will sit uncomfortably with the grand narratives that have emerged about the creation of the first Yugoslavia, be it those which see it as inevitable or those which see it as inherently bound to fail from the outset. The sec-

ond objective is to suggest a way to study the formulation of nationalist claims as an essentially internationally dependent event. It is the norms that regulate the interaction between nations and states at a specific point in time which dictate and limit the possibilities of what nationalists may claim and achieve. The book will not formulate a new theoretical paradigm to analyse this phenomenon but will suggest an analytic approach that incorporates history and temporality as fundamental factors in the theoretical understanding of the essentially contingent event of state destruction and creation.

Beyond the institutional support I received during the process of researching and writing this book, I would also like to thank specific individuals who have read my drafts and taken the time to stoically endure my initial formulations and thoughts. Michael Keating, Arfon Rees Christian Thauer were very important in helping me cope with the complexities and challenges of writing a dissertation at the EUI in Florence, often adding a good dose of healthy humour to very complicated and stressful completion deadlines and requirements. Hannes Grandits also played a crucial role, first from Graz and then in Berlin, in making me understand and elaborate my arguments and also acted as constant source of inspiration and encouragement through the last four years of this process. I would also like to thank my fellow researchers at the EUI and my colleagues at the HU Berlin for their support and patience during this process.

Finally, I would like to mention my wife Victoria who has supported me at every stage of this journey, just as she has done for the last twenty years we have been together. Her patience and love have allowed me to complete this work while at the same time embarking on our parallel and wonderful journey of parenthood. Having mentioned and thanked those who have supported me and contributed during this process, I clearly state that I am solely responsible for any errors, omissions and inaccuracies in this book.

Fernando Veliz
Berlin, June 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 Subject Definition and Research Questions

On 2 December 1908, the first two pages of the daily newspaper *Novosti*, published in Zagreb, were dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the rule of Emperor Franz Joseph I. The paper offered a reflection on the long reign of the monarch by contextualising the enormous change that took place during this period. It also offered an historical analysis that focused on the absolutist outcome of the Revolutions of 1848 and the consequences of the defeat by Prussia in 1866. After reflecting on why the constitutional reforms of the monarchy remained incomplete, the article focused on the political opportunities brought about by the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the summer of 1908. The conclusion refers to Franz Joseph I as the “most constitutional monarch who becomes the first truly popular king” and ends by congratulating him with the sentence “Long live our ruler, Croatian king Franz Joseph I”.¹

Novosti was a newspaper published in Zagreb with close association to the Serbo-Croat coalition, the leading parliamentary group in the Croatian *Sabor* (Parliament) at the time.² It is telling that a group that supported a programme of cooperation amongst South Slavs and potential hostility to the crown still emphasised the possibility of achieving an answer to the political problems of the Monarchy within the constitutional framework of the state. Beyond the fact that it would not have been possible to openly question the loyalty of Croatia to the Monarch, the article accurately represents the prevalent feeling at the time of most politically active parties and ideologies in Croatia. The emphasis of the need to unify all Croatian lands peacefully under the protective umbrella of the Habsburg Monarchy is justified by the historical rights of the Croatian state, which remained the backbone of any political program in Croatia until almost the end of the First World War.

Ten years later, on 1 December 1918, a delegation of leading Croatian politicians representing the *Narodno Vijeće Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba* from Zagreb (National Council of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs) was received in Belgrade before Regent Alexander of Serbia. Dr. Ante Pavelić³ delivered a declaration drafted in Zagreb on

1 “K šestdesetgodišnjici vladanja Njegova Veličanstva, Šestdeset godina najnovije povijesti (1848–1908)” *Novosti*, Zagreb, 2 December 1908, number 334.

2 Zagreb was the administrative capital of Croatia-Slavonia (*Krajevina Hrvatske i Slavonije*). This region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was ruled by the Croatian *Ban* (governor) appointed directly from Budapest.

3 Dr. Ante Pavelić was born in Gospić in 1869 and died in Zagreb 1938. He was a Croatian politician and dentist by profession who should not be confused with his namesake Ante

24 November 1918 in which the representatives of the *Narodno Vijeće* officially requested the unification of the State of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs with Serbia and Montenegro⁴. The document started by congratulating King Petar I, of the Karađorđević dynasty, for his victory during the First World War and his success in liberating Serbia. It then expressed the will of the South-Slavs of the former Habsburg Monarchy to join in a state union under his majesty's rule and subscribed to the principle of national union that could preserve the ethnographic frontiers as indicated by the principles established by President Wilson and the Entente powers⁵.

It is clear that the new paradigm for political organisation is based on the principle of national self-determination and represents a complete departure from the traditional way of argumentation formulated during Habsburg times which was based on historical claims rather than ethnographical borders. There is no mention of Croatian state right and the very definition of the nation is extended to include all South Slavs. The same elites that had congratulated the King of Croatia in 1908 were now asking for protection to the Serbian king. This fundamental change in allegiance, political claims and their respective legitimating arguments is the main topic of this book.

The narrative will be developed within the theoretical framework provided by the literature produced in the study of nations and nationalism but it will also seek to contextualize the specific case study of Croatian nationalist claims within the international context in which they developed. From a temporal point of view, the analysis will focus on the period between 1903 and 1918: from the change of dynasty in Serbia to the end of the Habsburg Monarchy.

The debates in the field of nationalism studies over the last thirty years have produced a rich body of literature that has attempted to deal with one of the fundamental problems of politics in our contemporary world. But the complex nature of these debates has not resulted in any consensus in the academic field; it has mainly degenerated into a zero sum game of opposed and essentially normative paradigms. The starting point of this thesis is that there is a need to transcend these inconclusive debates by adopting a different approach that neither seeks to formulate a new synthetic theory of nationalism nor to construct an empirical study that subscribes to one of the main paradigms and is used as evidence to criticize the others. This is not to say that these debates can be ignored; it is inevitable to have a normative position informed by a theoretical framework. But this does not mean that a valid and interesting analysis can not be produced if it attempts to go beyond them.

Pavelić who was born in Bradina in 1889 and died in Madrid in 1959. The latter was the leader of the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War and was not related to the former.

4 The State of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (*Država Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba*) declared independence from Austria-Hungary on 29 October 1918. Its executive was represented by the *Narodno Vijeće*.

5 "III. Delegati Narod. Vijeća pred Regentom Aleksandrom" published in Šišić, Ferdo *Dokumenti o postanku kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914–1919* (Zagreb, 1920) pp. 281–282.

The main controversial points in the field of nationalism studies revolve around several questions that are almost impossible to resolve with a definite answer. Whether nations are present in every stage of history or are the product of modernity has resulted in a battle between primordialists and perennialists on one side versus modernists on the other. While both sides deploy a plethora of evidence to support their claims, seldom do they find any agreement. The matter is further complicated by the second main controversy about the objective or subjective nature of the concept of the nation itself. Once again, seldom is any agreement found over this controversy and the very nature of the main concept that informs the debates is contested. Finally, whether nationalism is an end in itself or a proxy for other political interests completes the landscape of intellectual debate.

The analytical approach suggested by this book is based on a belief that these debates are bound to be inconclusive. The difficulty in trying to define the very concepts that should inform any further analysis hints at the impossibility to objectively observe nations or nationalism without making reference to the context in which they operate. This book suggests analysing nationalism as a political practice that emerges out of a specific temporal and geographical context. This context is not only provided by the institutional framework of the state in which it emerges but also takes place within a wider international order at a precise point in time.

But given that the present international order of states is also the product of a historical process and not a reflection of any natural arrangement, there is a need to analyse nationalism as a form of politics that operates in an ever fluid landscape that has never been static and never will be. Thus, the approach suggested moves away from theories that seek to generalise from a restricted set of particular cases, which are bound not to fit the complexities of any specific historical example. At the same time, it is also important to avoid the other extreme of accounting for nationalism: the belief that each case is so exceptional that cannot be placed within a theoretical framework. There is also a need to shift focus from trying to define what nations and nationalism are to trying to understand what nationalists actually demand at a specific point in time. This book will focus on the politics of nationalism rather than the logic of nationalist discourse, its main focus will be the claims of nationalist parties and politicians and to study how those claims have changed over a period of time.

Conceptualising nationalism as a form of politics implies also situating it within the specific political alignments present in a society at a precise point in time. As Keating highlights, these alignments emerge out of the structuring of societal and ideological divisions by political parties constructing ideologies and programmes that reflect and aggregate attitudes and interests. Nationalism should not be divorced from the existence of cleavages based on material interests nor should it be reduced to them.⁶ Nationalism cuts across divisions created by interest politics by adding the element of national identity into the equation. Thus, different political factions with

6 Keating, M. *The Independence of Scotland* (Oxford, 2009) p. 6.

different ideologies could accommodate nationalist rhetoric within their programmes, as our case study of Croatia-Slavonia will illustrate.

Ideology will be conceptualised during this analysis as a set of principles that inform political action, “broad views of the nature of ‘the political’, and of the good society”.⁷ But political claims derived from any ideological position cannot be divorced from political practice. That different actors who deploy an ideological label (be it conservative, liberal, communist, nationalist etc.) disagree on particular principles and particular political objectives, adds to the difficulty of deploying ideology as the sole basis for interpreting political claims.

The main argument that will emerge throughout the book is that ideologies are important in the decision making process but that there is a difference between a certain disposition that stems from an ideological understanding of reality and the claim that a political actor makes. The decision of an agent to produce an outcome (be it a claim, an action or a political program) is not just the product of a disposition. To derive a conclusion that an outcome simply stems from that disposition is the equivalent to the deployment of an explanation based on a specific cultural setting; it is essentially a tautological explanation that could account for any outcome. The theoretical position that this book endorses emphasizes the necessity of combining both dispositions and circumstances for a satisfactory explanation of any decision making process.⁸

Elite strategies are not simply the product of an ideological commitment but are also conditioned by the need to mobilise public opinion for electoral support and the changing nature of reality borne out of political interaction. Political claims formulated by these elites need to reflect the shifting nature of interests and attitudes while at the same time creating and contributing to a coherent understanding of reality. This means that political action is a combination of political opportunism and shifting understandings of what desirable political outcomes are. As this book will try to highlight, there is always a high level of contingency in political outcomes and politicians do not always succeed in their gambles and calculations. But it is important to understand how political positions change. Seldom do claims stay the same and seldom do the arguments for the legitimacy of those claims remain the same. Thus, ideology in itself is also redefined by political practice, just as political claims. Nationalist claims, in this sense, are no exception.

Nationalist claims and the very arguments that underpin those claims are constructed *against* an institutional framework, both at domestic and international level.

7 Schwarzmantel, J. *Ideology and Politics* (London, 2008) p. 25.

8 Watkins, J.W.N. “Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences” in Martin, M. & McIntyre, L.C. (eds.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science* (London, 2000) pp. 456–457. For a discussion of the dynamic nature of culture as a practice, see Hörning, Karl H. and Reuter, J. (eds.) *Doing Culture: Neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Kultur und sozialer Praxis* (Bielefeld, 2004).

Changes taking place beyond the realm of local politics play a crucial role in influencing and conditioning the actions of local elites.⁹

State allegiance is also directly linked to the changing nature of the international order. We have grown accustomed to see independence as the ultimate goal for any nationalism movements, but it would be prudent to consider that this conception is firmly rooted in the experience and outcome of the settlement after the First World War. Before then, and as our case will illustrate, several claims were produced in the name of nationalism that did not necessarily entail separatism or secession. Several other forms of organisation could accommodate the political autonomy desired without the need to create new states. In fact, it was the lack of application of the political rights and privileges granted to the Croatian parliament that constituted the main grievance of the elites in Zagreb, not necessarily the granting of new ones. And this is the dimension that this book would like to bring to the fore when focusing on the specific case study of nationalist claims in Croatia-Slavonia during the last ten years of the Habsburg Monarchy.

The analytical approach of the book also seeks to concentrate on the politics of a region rather than those of a state or a nation. By exploring the problems of dissatisfied local elites who demanded further autonomy on the basis of nationalist arguments, the analysis will explore how these elites reacted and interpreted the changes taking place around them and modified and adapted to the new normative environment. The decision to focus on a single case study does not mean that the interest of this book is purely restricted to the history of Croatian nationalism. It is simply the result of the reflection formulated above about the need to focus on specific examples of nationalism in action rather than in theory. Although the narrative will focus on the politics of Croatia-Slavonia, the nature of the analytical approach suggests that constant reference will be made during the text to contemporary events outside our region and the Monarchy.

The analysis will also have a comparative dimension in its research design. The narrative will follow and compare several political groups during a period of time and will seek to better understand the changes taking place within the different variants of Croatian nationalist claims. And this is why the Croatian case is interesting for the further field of nationalism studies. During the years leading to the break-up of Austria-Hungary, several variants of Croatian nationalist programmes competed within the political space. Not only were their claims different but also the arguments about the legitimacy for those claims and the very definition of who constituted the Croatian political nation.

9 A recent book dealing with the problems of loyalty in the late Ottoman Empire suggests focusing on three related dimensions when analysing the actions of local elites: the possibility of multiple and competing loyalties, a discrepancy between times of peace and war, and the influence of the “power apparatus” in mediating loyalty relations. For a detailed discussion, see: Grandits, Hannes, Clayer, Nathalie and Pichler, Robert *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building* (London, 2011) p. 5.

The politics of Croatia-Slavonia during the period of our study were dominated by the “Croatian Question”. In this book, this question is understood to be a variant of the generic concept of “the nationalities question”. I would adopt a definition of it as “the issue of politically conscious national movements without their own state”¹⁰. In our specific case, it refers to the issue of politically conscious Croats in search of political autonomy during the last ten years of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Croatian question could be conceived as part of a larger South Slav dissatisfaction within the Habsburg Monarchy and much of the confusion stems from the realisation of some of the political elites in Croatia-Slavonia that there could not be any answer to the Croatian problem, due to a lack of numbers and influence, without a wider Yugoslav framework. But this also portrays just one part of the political spectrum and not the totality of responses possible to the Croatian problem.

In this sense, the work of famous influential foreign scholars who devoted their attention to the problem at the time has been paramount in shaping our perception of the issues at stake during the Habsburg Monarchy. R. W. Seton Watson and W. Steed framed the problem of governance and unfair distribution of power out of their travels, perceptions and interactions with several of the politicians, intellectuals and statesmen of their time.¹¹ But their framing also resulted in a partial glimpse at the political landscape. Their sympathies undoubtedly lay with the oppressed populations rather than the German or Hungarian dominant groups but they also subscribed to a certain type of understanding of the problem based on the idea of cooperation between Serbs and Croats (as initially formulated by Strossmayer) and the way Vienna and Budapest perceived the situation. The equation of Serbs and Croats as the same “race” in much of the writing of this time is a testimony to the level of fluidity that remained not only in international circles but also at local level about how to conceptualise these peoples. The choice of focusing on the Croatian rather than South Slav question stems from a belief that by adopting the language deployed by Croats at the time of our events, we will be able to understand better the different alternatives and changes in claims that took place during 1903–1918. By considering that there was a Croatian problem first and then a wider South Slav one, we will be in a position to better assess the nature of Croatian national claims.

The Yugoslav solution was one of the possible ones on offer at the time and a narrower focus on the politics of Croatia-Slavonia is the focus of this inquiry. The

10 McGarry, J. and Keating, M. *European Integration and the Nationalities Question* (Oxford, 2006) p.1

11 For example see: Seton-Watson, R. W. *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy* (London, 1911) and another book published under the alias Scotus Viator *The Racial Problems in Hungary* (London, 1908) and Steed, W. *The Habsburg Monarchy* (London, 1914). These accounts are extremely important in shaping international opinion on the subject at the time. It is also worth noting that Seton-Watson’s views were also subject to change over time. For a more detailed analysis, see: Péter, László “R.W. Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy and the European Balance of Power” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 82, 3 (2004) pp. 655–679.