

The nationalism in the contemporary world politics essay



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This essay will be focusing on the ethnic conflict that erupted predominantly in Eastern Europe as a result of the dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia in the late twentieth century. Attention will be given specifically to Bosnia Herzegovina (Bosnia) to illustrate the on going effects of ethnic conflicts that continue and how autonomy was sought by the Bosnian Muslims in reaction to the strong nationalism expressed by the Serbians and Croats during that time. The situation surrounding Bosnia is a valid example of contemporary nationalism, and as a nation it continues to face ethnic conflict and conquest and the threat of war and domination by the Serbians, who still seek a unified Slavic state.

In assessing Bosnia, this essay will firstly define nationalism and assess how Bosnia can be looked at as an example of both ethnic and civic nationalism. A brief interpretation will also be given to what is meant by ' ethnic conflict' before looking specifically at the causes of the eventual collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia) and how this subsequently gave birth to several new nations, including Bosnia. Focus will then turn solely to Bosnia and at the key issues that led to the outbreak of ethnic conflict and the rise of nationalism within the nation and furthermore, which ethnic groups were involved and what their motives were. Conclusions will then be drawn as to the stability of Bosnia in the present day and why it can be used as a case study to demonstrate the happenings of both contemporary nationalism and of ethnic conflict.

To begin with this examination into Bosnia, it is firstly important to set out the parameters of what is meant when one refers to ethnic conflict, the ideology of nationalism and more specifically the further distinctions made

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between ethnic and civic nationalism. For the purposes of this essay, the idea of nationalism occurring within or against a state is defined as a 'group of people who see themselves as distinct in their culture, history, institutions, or principles and should thus rule themselves in a political system that expresses and protects those distinctive characteristics.' [1] Quite simply, it can be looked at as 'a category of practices as an institutionalized cultural and political form with the aim of building a nation'. [2]

Ethnic or 'Eastern' nationalism is a strand of nationalism that places more emphasis on the creation of a state based on common cultural, religious and linguistic traditions and generally occurred against an existing state opposed to within it. [3] Conversely, civic or 'Western' nationalism appeared to encase a more sophisticated demeanor and was based on the ideals of 'individual liberty' [4] and political ideals with membership to that state being defined purely in political terms. [5] As this essay will later purport to show in its discussion, Bosnia identifies with several parts of the ethnic nationalist ideology, however it also shares commonalities with civic nationalism, particularly in certain areas of Bosnia where there are separate political institutions set up to bring order and civility to those areas.

Ethnic conflict refers to the 'struggle between mobilized identity groups for greater power, whether for equality within an existing state or for the establishment of a fully independent nation.' [6] It should be noted that the collapse of states is more often than not, the cause of ethnic conflicts opposed to the result. [7] In this instance, the dissolution of Yugoslavia as a multinational state resulted in the re-emergence of much older historical identities, religions and ethnicities being used as a mechanism and

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foundation on which to base a nation's claim to autonomy.[8]Consequently, conflict began to erupt between those who were dedicated to the principles of ' state sovereignty and territorial integrity', versus those who clung to their ethnic and religious roots as a means to define an independent state. [9]A more in depth analysis will be given to the role of ethnic conflict and its causal link to the rise of nationalism in Bosnia at a later point in this essay. To understand the relevance of these terms that have now been interpreted, a brief overview must be given of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the birth of Bosnia as an independent state near the end of the twentieth century.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia) emerged in 1943 and comprised of six socialist republics. Those republics were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Serbia, in addition, included two autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. During this period, Josip Tito began his reign as Prime Minister of Yugoslavia and in 1953 he became the President of the state.[10]It has been said that Tito was the ' chief architect of the second Yugoslavia'[11], as he was pivotal to the development and birth of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tito instigated the ideology of socialism throughout Yugoslavia and after the commencement of World War Two in 1945, Yugoslavia became victim to ' peculiarly harsh Communist system.'[12]

For several decades during the mid twentieth century, Yugoslavia enjoyed economic success and prospered as a nation. In the nineteen sixties, Yugoslavia could boast an annual gross domestic product growth of approximately 6. 1 percent, with free medical care, and a literacy rate of 91%.[13]Yugoslavia remained at this point in time, ' the most diverse
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collectivity of societies in the Balkan region.’[14]Political reform began to lose momentum in the early nineteen seventies and was suddenly pushed aside within the pluralist multi-nation in favour of federalization.[15]The push for federalization came as a reactionary movement to the growing Serbian supremacy in Yugoslavia as Tito realized he needed to enforce ‘ institutional innovations that would “ federalize the federation.”’[16]

By the nineteen eighties, Yugoslavia’s once growing economy began to hinder as the international arena was changing from a bipolar sphere to the dominance of the United States of America as a unilateral mega power. There was a growing amount of foreign debt and increasing amounts of Yugoslavia’s GDP were being swallowed by debt servicing. There was also a sudden decrease in Western aid after the Soviet President Gorbachev began to admit defeat to the American and Western Europe.[17]On May 4th 1980, Tito passed away and with this, the strong socialist regime of Yugoslavia began to break down and the process of democratization in the six republics started to ensue. As a result, central state authority became increasingly weaker, and Yugoslavia faced an upsurge of nationalist movements and anarchy.[18]

Tito’s 1974 constitution remained in force during the immediate period after his death and this allowed for a rotation system out of the eight leaders of the republics, for year long presidencies. These short terms of presidencies turned out to be highly ineffective and added to the unstable and increasingly volatile conditions of Yugoslavia. Essentially it left open ‘ a power vacuum’ with Slobodan MiloÅeviÄž gaining steady momentum from the many Serbian nationalists who resided throughout Yugoslavia and <https://assignbuster.com/the-nationalism-in-the-contemporary-world-politics-essay/>

particularly within Bosnia Herzegovina.[19] Milošević began rallying to the many Serbian supporters he had, making reference to Yugoslavia's historical past and the pressing need to unite all the Slavic nations into one centralized government and brotherhood.[20] As a reaction to the strong nationalist Serbian movement occurring within Yugoslavia, both Croatia and Slovenia quickly declared autonomy and independence of state and after a victorious week of fighting by the Slovenes in the 'Ten Day War' the breakup of Yugoslavia had begun.[21]

In 1992, the multi-nation state of Yugoslavia began to break apart and left several nations fighting for autonomy. Instead of these nations clinging to Western liberal democratic ideals to form a state, they fell back on their own older and entrenched religions, ethnicities and national identities to assert independence over one another.[22] Bosnia, compiled of the Croats, Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, was suddenly facing an internal clash of cultures and identities with the Serbians residing in Bosnia wanting to unify with Serbia and the other remaining Slavic nations, against the Croats and Muslims who wanted independence as a state.

There were several factors that contributed to the tensions and ethnic conflicts between the three main ethnic groups residing in Bosnia. Firstly, there were historical hostilities and antagonisms that had existed within the ethnic groups for centuries. There was also the sudden presence and dominance of Serbian nationalist Milošević, who continued to pursue Bosnia as a Slavic nation and part of that sanctity. To add to the fragility of the situation facing Bosnia during the early nineteen nineties, there was an inadequate political institution in place with Bosnia's parliament fragmented <https://assignbuster.com/the-nationalism-in-the-contemporary-world-politics-essay/>

based on ethnicity and was divided into a majority Bosnian faction and minority Serb and Croat factions.[23] In 1991, Radovan Karadžić, the nationalist leader of the Serb Democratic Party, gave a strong and hostile warning to the Bosnian president, stating:

“ This, what you are doing, is not good. This is the path that you want to take Bosnia and Herzegovina on, the same highway of hell and death that Slovenia and Croatia went on. Don't think that you won't take Bosnia and Herzegovina into hell, and the Muslim people maybe into extinction. Because the Muslim people cannot defend themselves if there is war here.”[24]

Bosnia was surrounded by two incredibly powerful and nationalistic states; Croatia and Serbia who both extended equal rights and citizenships to the Croat and Serb Bosnians. Therefore, it was impossible for Bosnia to resolve its national identity without the input of Croatia and Serbia.[25] On the one side in Bosnia, there were the Serbian nationalists who identified closely with Milosevic and their greater homeland of Serbia and thus wanted a unified Slavic state, and to be part of the brotherhood. Others however, such as the Croats and particularly the Bosnian Muslims, wanted to identify with their own individual ethnic groups and stick to the notion of individual opposed to collective rights and the freedom to identify with whom they choose. With Bosnia's demographic structure comprising a population of Serbs and Croats of approximately 50%, and with ' ideas on independence resting with the ethnicities rather than the nation on the whole'[26], control of territory once again became open to interpretation, particularly due to the pluralist and multi-culture nature that existed within Bosnia which led to large sections of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia under dispute as to its proper ownership.[27] <https://assignbuster.com/the-nationalism-in-the-contemporary-world-politics-essay/>

In October 1991, Bosnia joined Croatia and Slovenia in declaring its sovereignty and quickly organized a referendum on independence in March 1992.[28]The general Serbian population residing in Bosnia was encouraged by the Serbian nationalists to boycott the referendum and subsequently, the turnout in the referendum was 64-67% and the vote was 98% in favor of independence.[29]Independence was however officially declared on March 5 1992 by the parliament of Bosnia. However, this merely added and even encouraged the continued surge of nationalism from the Serbs in Bosnia and instant war broke out in Bosnia between the different ethnicities and much to the detriment of the Bosnian Muslims who although made up an estimated 48%[30]of the population, were ill equipped to stand up to the strong Serbian forces who were receiving support from their own nation.

A period of genocide, ethnic cleansing and blood shed occurred over the next three years and was the tragic consequence of the Bosnian War that illustrated a series of failures made by the Western world at large and also at a regional level, the failures of local leaders to intervene and offer any sort of assistance.[31]There was a fundamental breach of human rights during this period and a total disregard for any rule of law or civility. Whilst the Serb Bosnians engaged in a greater amount of ethnic cleansing during this period of trauma, it should be noted that they were also the victims of such cleansing at the peril of the other two ethnic groups.[32]The Bosnian Muslims had really pushed to preserve Bosnia's existence as ' a multi-cultural state'[33]and did not want to see the division of Bosnia. Only a scarce minority of politically significant actors in Bosnia were committed to

trying to mediate a balance between a civil society and competing nationalisms.[34]

November 1995 brought some hope to the Bosnian cause when the Dayton Accord was signed, purporting to end the Bosnian War and the continued outbreaks of conflict in the region.[35]The Dayton Accord had the purpose of compromising between the ethnic groups who sought an independent unitary state, versus those who sought total autonomy from Yugoslavia and the Slavic nations.[36]The institutional part of the agreement created a Bosnian state divided between Bosnia, which is shared between the Bosnians and the Croats, and the ' Republika Srpska'. The Bosnian-Croat federation holds 51% of the territory with the remaining 49% controlled by the Republika Srpska.[37]Each division has their own parliament and presidency.

Fifteen years has passed since the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accord which effectively ended a great proportion of the ethnic conflict and cleansing occurring in Bosnia as a result of the Bosnian War. However, in a contemporary setting, nationalism and consequently ethnic conflict still pursues in Bosnia and there are mounting fears by the United Nations and the international community, that war is still a threat to the Bosnians due to the divided and segregated nature of Bosnia.[38]With the Dayton Accord dividing Bosnia into a Muslim -Croat federation and a Serbian republic, each ethnic group has established their own legislature with ten regional authorities each with their own police force, health system, education system and judiciary.[39]Furthermore as a result of the Bosnian War and the division of Bosnia, there is a huge displaced population of Bosnian Muslims,

Croats and Serbs who were essentially driven out of Bosnia and are now scattered throughout the world with little national identity left in tact.

In conclusion, the situation that occurred in Bosnia during the late twentieth century exemplifies the pivotal role nationalism played within the state and the consequential ethnic conflict that erupted and continues to do so, as a result of three different ethnic groups identifying strongly to their own historical nationalisms and religions. Due to the strong nationalistic tendencies of the Croats and Serbs residing in Bosnia during this time, Bosnian Muslims who historically were not allowed to declare themselves as Bosnians[40] were forced to band together and unite in their own autonomy and form a national identity so as to compete with the much stronger Croats and Serbs. As a result of these competing nationalism, ethnic conflict ensued and was only resolved after the implementation of the Dayton Accord which effectively segregated Bosnia into different regions dominated by different ethnicities. For example, the city of Mostar before the Bosnian War was considered ' the most ethnically integrated city in all of the former Yugoslavia. '[41] Now, Mostar has developed into the most ' divided town in Bosnia' where even a pizza delivery joint will not deliver to the Muslim sector of Mostar across the bridge. This is viewed as a victory for the Croat and Serb Nationalists against the Bosnian Muslims.[42]

The on-going situation in Bosnia Herzegovina really demonstrates a contemporary example of nationalism occurring and further shows the severe impact nationalism has had on the country and how it led to the eventual segregation of the nation as well as pursuant ethnic conflict. Whilst the nationalism portrayed by the Serbs and Croats mostly identifies with the <https://assignbuster.com/the-nationalism-in-the-contemporary-world-politics-essay/>

ethnic strand of nationalism, that is nationalism founded on historical ethnicities, customs and religions, it is interesting to note that Bosnia Herzegovina as a whole, and particularly through the Bosnian Muslims, share many elements of civic nationalism in its attempt to set up order, democracy, and political institutions.

Perhaps the conflict of the two nationalisms also contributed to the volatile nature and confusion that seems to cloud over Bosnia. Whilst it is idealistic and perhaps naïve to hope that Bosnia will one day have unity as an independent state, it is still a vision that many civilians in Bosnia and around the world share. Bosnia has provided the global arena with a strong message and precedent and demonstrates a situation that must be learnt from especially in the overall dangers and effects that competing nationalisms can have on even the most harmonious nations.