

WORK IN PROGRESS SECTION

BIPOLAR WORLDS OF NATION AND STATE IN MONTENEGRO

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Abstract

Throughout centuries, state and nation building in Montenegro have been marked with constant identity shifts, defining the role and the position of the republic (i.e. sometimes a state/entity) amongst its Balkans neighbors/ counterparts. After 1997, the political scene in Yugoslavia at the time faced the tendency of an augmentation of discourse concerning the statehood of Montenegro, which would lead to its eventual detachment from Serbia. Yet, due to the tensions within the country, and the potential 'domino effect' that an eventual referendum on Montenegrin independence might have caused, the EU sponsored Belgrade Agreement (2002) introduced a three years' moratorium on the issue of independence. The 2006 referendum epitomized the long-standing fissure among the population over the questions of Montenegrin v. Serb nationhood, and independence v. union with Serbia, with the pro-independence bloc's narrow victory. In the light of the aforementioned, this research seeks to outline how external and internal factors contributed to the conflict over national identity and statehood in

Montenegro, and how this struggle was transposed to the popular level through the reinvention of tradition and the instrumentalization of national minorities. The paper presented here is only a small portion of the author's research for MPhil and PhD degrees at the University of Cambridge.

1. Introduction

The conflict in the former Yugoslavia sparked a proliferation of academic debates on state and nation-building processes. Through such debates, the revivals of statehood were contextualized within the wider schools of nationalism. However, due to the small size of Montenegro and the absence of conflict on its territory, few scholars focused on the problems associated with the diverging nature of state and nation in the republic. Authors such as Lukic, Cross and Komnenitch analyzed the problems of identity and politics in Montenegro, while viewing it as a constituency of varying Yugoslav formations.¹ Although these scholars

¹ Reneo Lukic, "From Yugoslavia to Serbia and Montenegro" in *Serbia since 1989*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Vjerran Pavlakovic (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005), 55-94; Sharyl Cross and Pauline Komnenich, "Ethnonational Identity, Security and the Implosion of Yugoslavia: The Case of Montenegro and the Relationship with

provided very respectable analyses of Montenegrin position within the Yugoslav federal structures, their works did not entail a detailed account of the internal political struggles and their effect on national identity. Accordingly, the most noteworthy substantial publications dealing with Montenegro alone (as opposed to examining Montenegro as a part of Yugoslavia) are Bieber's *Montenegro in Transition*, and Roberts' *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro*.² While the book edited by Bieber provides an insightful analysis of the political, economic and identity milieu in contemporary Montenegro, the analysis is restricted to the period before 2002, thus lacking reference to the most recent events surrounding the quest for statehood. Conversely, Roberts' book represents the first general history of Montenegro written in English language since 1912. As such, it contextualizes the contemporary vulnerability of Montenegrin identity within a historical narrative, which created enough ambiguity for the polarized interpretation of nationhood in recent years. That said, one of the

aims of this paper is to contribute to the scholarly work on Montenegro through an analysis of the origins and the channels of the socio-political divide in the country. It will complement the major works in the field by a focus on recent events in Montenegro alone, by an analysis of the effect of external and internal factors in the process of identity change, and by the scrutiny of the underlying interplay between the statehood question and national identity.

As noted in Roberts' book, throughout the history of Montenegro, the concepts of state and nation have adversely affected one another, resulting in the long-standing fissure among the population over the questions of Montenegrin v. Serb nationhood, and independence v. union with Serbia. In the period after 1997, power-struggles among the ruling Montenegrin elite have caused the politicians to revive these older splits, drawing upon the rhetoric of earlier times to mobilize support for their contemporary conflicts with their rivals. The gradual disentanglement from the federal institutions, leading to the increased demands for independence by 2001, caused the transformation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. While the resurgence of elements of Montenegrin statehood in the new common state augmented the demands within a portion of the population for full independence, within another portion, it invigorated the idea of the preservation of the union with Serbia.

Serbia" in *Nationalities Papers* 33/1 (2005):1-25.

² See: Florian Bieber, ed., *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003); Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007); Also: Dr. Kenneth Morrison has recently written a PhD thesis (still unpublished) on the elitist reconstruction of nationhood in Montenegro.

This rift, which rested in incongruent perceptions of the state and national identification in the country, was crystallized into two diametrically opposite socio-political camps: the pro-independence/pro-Montenegrin camp and the pro-unionist/pro-Serbian camp. This was subsequently confirmed by the narrow victory of the pro-independence bloc in the May 2006 referendum.

In the light of the aforementioned, this paper analyzes the origins and catalysts of the divide between the two camps, with an emphasis on the significance of internal political struggles and of external factors in the quest for Montenegrin statehood since 1997. It seeks to assert that both domestic elites and other countries affected the contestation of statehood and nationhood, and that consequently the divide was transplanted to the popular level through the reinterpretation of tradition and symbols, and the instrumentalization of minorities.

In a small community, such as Montenegro, domestic political and intellectual elites as internal factors have continually exerted substantial influence on the political and national orientation of the population. Consequently, the division of these elites into two camps – one stressing allegiance to Montenegro and the other commitment to the common state with Serbia – manifested itself through the emphasis on two different national identities, reverberating the historical divide among the population over Montenegrinness and Serbianness.

Similarly, economically and politically feeble Montenegro has historically been affected by the influences of wider geopolitical forces, given its position at the crossroads between Eastern and Western Europe. The predominant external factors, such as Venice, Austro-Hungary, Russia, Serbia, and more recently the US and the EU have perpetually shaped the orientation of the elites towards statehood and nationhood, and as such contributed to the rift in Montenegrin socio-political life. Usually, the domestic elites would associate their claims over statehood and nationhood to the support of these factors, in order to increase the legitimacy of their contentions in the eyes of the public. As a result, the elites and the external factor related to them would become antagonized with the competing portion of the population, thus deepening the divide in society. Far from being entrenched only in the elitist discourse, the debate over statehood and nationhood in Montenegro was catalyzed through the revival of tradition, yet interpreted in accordance with each camp's claims. Accordingly, polarized tradition and political life resulted in the instrumentalization of minorities in the quest for independence and their antagonization in the attempts to preserve the common statehood. However, this study does not take a deterministic account on the nature of identity in Montenegro, and as such it does not seek to contextualize the recent socio-political rift throughout history in order to justify the existence of one camp or the other. Rather, it

focuses on the reasons behind the contemporary divide, and seeks to overcome any bias that might stem from this author's interpretation of facts.

Consequently, state and nation are viewed through a multi-level prism, which allows for a more comprehensive analysis. The research approves Connor's view of the state as the "major political subdivision of the globe, easily conceptualized in quantitative terms."³ Through such a definition the state gains the dimension of a territorial unit, conceivable in terms of the "distribution of a national group."⁴ In the context of Montenegro, "state" also refers to an institutional unit that exercises power over its subjects. Accordingly, the notion of state-building in Montenegro is perceived as a progressive propensity towards instituting rules, norms and procedures that enable the functioning of an autonomous administrative unit.

Furthermore, in accordance with the writings of Renan and Mazzini, nation is viewed in the context of "the will of the people," so as to determine the level of congruity amongst the population in terms of establishing a nation through "actual consent."⁵ In the case of

Montenegro, the polarization of the political life was materialized through the evolution of two identity camps, in which common heritage was actualized through the daily hustle of politics, which continually attracted the population to one pole or the other. Consequently, the "actual consent" to belong to either the pro-independence or the pro-unionist camp became an essential ingredient of modern Montenegrin identity. Additionally, some of the recent developments related to the perceptions of nation in Montenegro take into account the writings of Anderson and Hobsbawm, where this concept is regarded as a social construct originating from a historical unity of people, an aspect of which is resurrected in the aestheticization of political discourse.⁶ In particular, such an approach to the concept of nation in terms of this analysis proves useful when scrutinizing the revival of tradition and the impact of symbolic politics on the Montenegrin divide.

In terms of structure, the paper consists of several chapters, each dealing with a specific topic in order to outline the

³ Walker Connor, "A Nation is Nation, is a state, is an ethnic group..." in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36-46.

⁴ Connor, "A Nation," 39.

⁵ Giuseppe Mazzini, *Selected Writings* (London: L. Drummond Ltd, 1946), 105-141; Ernest Renan, "Que'est-ce qu'une

nation?" in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17-18.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, "Nation as invented tradition" in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 76-83; Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 89-95.

factors and processes that contributed to the evolution of the bipolar worlds of nation and state in the country. While the first three chapters outline the factors that instigated the change in Montenegrin socio-political life, the last two sections of the paper aim to illustrate that how the process was felt among the population. The aim of the following chapter is to provide the contextual information on the position of Montenegro from the fall of the self-management until the split of the major political party in 1997, so as to illustrate that even in the preceding period nationhood and statehood have been affected by the orientation of the elites. This chapter also sets the stage for a more comprehensive analysis of domestic politics in the subsequent portion of the paper. The third chapter deals with internal power struggles, and the role of political parties in the gradual evolution of the quest for statehood, and its relation to the problems of national identity. The fourth chapter scrutinizes the impact of the external factors in deepening the divide in Montenegro, in order to enhance the argument that the process was not solely dependent on domestic political elites. Rather, the evolution of the two camps also entailed simultaneous identifications with and differentiations from Serbia, the US, and the EU as the major players at the various stages of the development of the divide. Chapter five examines the process of identity change and the instrumentalization of minorities in the rift. It is followed by the final chapter, focusing on the advancement of

polarized interpretation of tradition, which contributed to the orientation of the respective portions of population either towards the pro-independence or the pro-unionist camp. Finally, this study employs qualitative methods in examining its variables. Thus, the analysis is conducted through the combination of context and limited discourse analysis, the former being used in the examination of the factual situation; the latter in reference to statements of political entrepreneurs.

2. Montenegrin Mists

In order to understand the socio-political change that took place in Montenegro after 1997, it is essential to outline the main characteristics of the politics in this republic during the process of Yugoslav disintegration. To that end, the following sections aim to provide for a background for the analysis of the vulnerability of the post-crisis Montenegrin identity and the status question. It is also important to note that the following text does not deal with differentiating or assimilating Montenegrin and Serbian national identity, since that would entail a longer historical survey, which has already been provided in detail in Roberts' book. Rather, it systematically analyzes the questions of nationhood and statehood in the late 1980s and the early 1990s by reference to the internal political scenario and the relations with Serbia.

In 1988, during the "anti-bureaucratic revolution", which installed Slobodan

Milošević in power in Serbia, the Montenegrin socialist leadership was faced with massive demonstrations. Although Montenegro initially resisted pressure from Belgrade by increased police intervention, the renewed protests in January 1989 gave rise to a new set of political elites led by Momir Bulatovic and Milo Djukanovic. Subsequently, the political scenery of Montenegro during the wars of Yugoslav disintegration was marked by the predominance of the Communist Alliance of Montenegro (Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) since 1990). Since these elites initially remained loyal to Milošević's politics, Montenegro was faced with distinct dynamics between nation and state, which gradually manifested itself as cleavages between political parties. In fact, two ethnically-dominated factions appeared in the republic: the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (LSCG), a Montenegrin nationalist Movement; and the People's Party (NS), which emphasised the Serbian origins of Montenegrins. Unlike most of the nationalist movements that had proliferated in Central and Eastern Europe - and especially in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Communism - the LSCG was oriented towards democratic principles and abstained from the use of force.⁷ The

NS, conversely, while initially supportive of Milošević's politics, gradually detached itself from Serbian nationalism, although it retained its premise on the Serbian descent of Montenegrins.

Accordingly, the internal polarisation in Montenegro led to a 300% increase in the portion of population declaring themselves as Serbs between 1981 and 1991.⁸ At the same time, the percentage of Montenegrins or Yugoslavs declined by a margin of roughly 10%. This, in part, is a sign of an important turn in how a part of the population was defining itself, rather than a manifestation of changes in common demographic trends (natality/mortality rates). Such census figures are also indicative of the effects of the collapse of Communism and the wars of Yugoslav disintegration on the popular understanding of national identity. Owing to the influence of the media, church and politics, the perception of nation in Montenegro during the disintegration of Yugoslavia developed predominantly under the umbrella of Serbian nationalism, encouraged both by the Belgrade and the local media.⁹ In effect, the collapse of Yugoslavia involved both the Montenegrin government and a vast share of the population in support of the operations of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA)

⁷ Živko M. Andrijašević, *Nacrt za ideologiju jedne vlasti* (Bar: Kulturni centar, 1999), 16; Florian Bieber, "Montenegrin politics since the disintegration of Yugoslavia" in *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, ed. Florian Bieber

(Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003), 18.

⁸ Federal Statistical Office, *Population Census 1981, 1991* (Belgrade: FSO, 1992)

⁹ Andrijašević, *Nacrt*, 11-25.

on the territory of Croatia in 1991. Influenced by the media, Montenegrin soldiers in the JNA attempted to revive the myth of heroism. The “enthusiastic participation of Montenegrin soldiers”¹⁰ in the attacks on Croatia resonated back to the domestic political scene and resulted in a renewed display of the old tensions over whether Montenegrins were a separate nation or “Serbian Spartans”.¹¹

Similarly, Montenegrin statehood during the first stages of Milošević’s rule was dominated by the politics of Yugoslav disintegration. In line with the recommendations of the European Community Arbitration Committee for the former Yugoslavia (the Badinter Commission), Montenegro was granted the right to self-determination along with the other Yugoslav republics. Consequently, the referendum of 1 March 1992 was aimed at resolving its status, since Yugoslavia was “in the process of dissolution.”¹² The plebiscite, on which 95.4 % of the 66.04 % turnout (the minorities and LSCG boycotted the referendum) voted “Yes” prompted the adoption of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia (FRY) on 27 April 1992. One of the factors that contributed to such a result in the referendum, along with the outlined identity shift was also the nature of the referendum question. The wording of the 1992 question, “Do you agree that Montenegro, as a sovereign republic, should continue to exist within the common state – Yugoslavia, totally equal in rights with other republics that might wish the same?”¹³ was imprecise. At the time the referendum was conducted in Montenegro, the republics of Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia had already held their referenda in which overwhelming majorities supported independence. Conversely, the plebiscite in Bosnia and Herzegovina was conducted simultaneously with the Montenegrin one, although this country had already submitted an Aide Memoire for recognition, and held the referendum in order to satisfy the Badinter criteria.¹⁴ Hence, the lack of clarity in wording implies that a portion of population associated the vote with the preservation of the former Yugoslavia, rather than with the establishment of the FRY. As such, the 1992 referendum was ambiguous, since by the time of the popular vote in Montenegro the perpetuation of Yugoslavia became a fiction.

In the light of the upcoming analysis, it is also important to note that even during the wars of Yugoslav

¹⁰ Bieber, “Montenegrin politics,” 16; Andrijašević, *Nacrt*, 16.

¹¹ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 44.

¹² Badinter Commission, “Opinions of the Arbitration Commission” in *The International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia: official papers*, ed. B.G. Rancharan (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1997), 1261.

¹³ Lukic, “From Yugoslavia,” 56

¹⁴ Badinter Commission, “Opinions of the Arbitration Commission,” 1261.

disintegration, Montenegrin leadership made some minor attempts to preserve some elements of statehood. The outcome of such policies was the gradual eruption of tensions with Milošević and the following split among the ruling elites. In turn, this caused the open polarization of Montenegrin society, over the question of the status of the republic, and accordingly, over national identity. In fact, during the first round of elections in the new state, Milošević, disappointed in the DPS endorsement of the EC-sponsored peace talks in Geneva 1991 (where Croatian and Slovenian independence were recognised), supported Branko Kostic, Bulatovic's rival in the Montenegrin presidential elections.¹⁵ Likewise, Montenegrin elites supported Milošević's reformist opponent Milan Panic in the Serbian elections, reflecting the tendency of preserving some elements of republican sovereignty during that period. However, the failure of Panic to win the elections, the military pressure from Belgrade, Bulatovic's fear of dismissal, and the economic difficulties at the time of hyperinflation and international embargo, all contributed to the temporary relapse of Montenegro into Yugoslavia.¹⁶

However, the non-sustainability of federal structures and occasional tensions between Belgrade and (a part of) the Podgorica leadership initiated a gradual "divorce" from Milošević's

Yugoslavia. Progressively, the struggles for power in Montenegro came to revolve around the isolationist politics of Serbia in the 1990s and the latter's refusal to enter international institutions. This induced open attacks against Milošević by a faction of the DPS in Montenegro led by the Montenegrin Prime Minister - Milo Djukanovic - and the Head of the Assembly - Svetozar Marovic - early in 1997,¹⁷ causing confrontation within the DPS. The party split into two - Djukanovic's DPS, which remained in power; and Bulatovic's Socialist People's Party (SNP) that was to become the main opposition party, promoting the preservation of the common state with Serbia.

As a consequence of the outlined events, the political life of Montenegro suffered a gradual polarization in which there was a revival of the old tensions between factions that pushed for an independent statehood and the ones who strove to preserve the union with Serbia. This polarization manifested itself through the internal power struggles that after 1997 became a battlefield over statehood and nationhood in Montenegro.

3. Internal Power Struggles and the Question of Sovereignty

The following analysis is aimed at illustrating how the internal power struggles gradually manifested

¹⁵ Bieber, "Montenegrin politics," 22.

¹⁶ Ibid. 24.

¹⁷ "Zajednicko breme," *Pobjeda*, February 22, 1997, Politics Section, 3.

themselves through the quest for independent statehood with a portion of Montenegrin elites, while the preservation of the common state with Serbia remained the main focus of the other portion. This resulted in the crystallization of the pro-Montenegrin/pro-independence and pro-Serbian/pro-unionist camps in the period from 2000 until 2006.

The persistent pressure from the federal government spurred the demands for the sovereignty of Montenegro, which were manifested through a political struggle in mid-2000. Milošević's introduction of changes to the Constitution in July 2000 entailed a shift from the delegation of deputies to direct elections to the Federal Parliament, as well as for the Federal Presidency. This reduced Montenegro to a mere electoral unit, due to its small size in relation to Serbia. Accordingly, such changes undermined Montenegrin equality within the federal institutions, a point accentuated by the DPS.¹⁸ By referring to the loss of status through these constitutional changes, the governing coalition refused to take part in the September 2000 elections, calling for a boycott among the population in Montenegro. In the international media, such a decision was often described as an "understandable," yet "politically unwise" move of Djukanovic, who was therefore not helping the demise of the

regime in Serbia.¹⁹ The controversial elections, which eventually resulted in the ousting of Milošević after the October coup in Belgrade, foreshadowed the future realignment within Montenegrin political life. Owing to the discrepancies in the attitudes of political parties towards the new Belgrade government, the relationship with Serbia continued to be a catalyst for the internal divides in Montenegro.

The signing of the Belgrade Agreement on 14 March 2002 marked the decay of the FRY, and its replacement with the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. For over a year and a half before the signing of the agreement, the restructuring of the last Yugoslavia was in a political deadlock caused by the discrepancies in the "federalizing" Platform of the Belgrade government and the Montenegrin opposition, and the "loose confederation" one proposed by the Montenegrin government. The new state, far from creating the framework for the redefinition of relations between the two constituents in the light of their transition to democracy, gave wider scope to the debate on the revival of Montenegrin statehood.

The Agreement on Principles of Relations between Serbia and Montenegro within a Framework of a Union of States (the Belgrade

¹⁸ "Čiljevi jasni, rokovi ograničeni," *Pobjeda*, July 2, 2001, Politics Section, 3.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Roberts, *Serbia-Montenegro-A New federation?* (London: Conflict Studies Research Centre, March 2002), 6.

Agreement) envisaged the change of the state name from “Yugoslavia” to “Serbia and Montenegro” as well as the possibility for a state constituent to initiate “proceedings for a change of the state status, that is, withdrawal from the state union after three years”.²⁰ The former change was described by the Montenegrin government as the fulfilment of their promise of the “revival of statehood” by reiterating that, “this is the first time, after an entire century, that Montenegro will be internationally recognisable by its own state name.”²¹ The temporary nature of the agreement for the Montenegrin government was an indication of the ‘ex ante acceptance of the outcome of the referendum [in three years].’²² At the same time, the pro-unionist Montenegrin opposition “greeted the preservation of the joint state and the debacle of Djukanovic’s separatist policy”,²³ believing that it would lead to an “ever closer union between Serbia

and Montenegro”.²⁴ Consequently, within the smaller constituency of the union, the status issue was given precedence over all other political issues over the next four years.

In a society as polarized along ethnic lines as the Montenegrin one, the outcome of the referendum on independence in 2002 would have been rather difficult to predict, which was an argument used by Djukanovic in signing the Agreement.²⁵ Moreover, the interpretation of Articles 2, 117, 118 and 119 of the Montenegrin Constitution of 1992 (later abolished by the Constitutional Court decision of 26 February 2002) required the ratification of the referendum results by a 2/3 majority in the Parliament. Given the composition of the republic’s Assembly, this made it virtually impossible for any result to be approved, providing an additional impetus for Djukanovic to “decelerate and shortly delay the independence idea.”²⁶ This caused considerable frustration among the coalition partners of the Montenegrin government, who

²⁰ *Sporazum o principima odnosa Srbije i Crne Gore u okviru državne zajednice* (Beograd, March 14, 2002), 1.

²¹ “Djukanovic: Nakon jednog vijeka Crna Gora vratila svoje državno ime,” *Vijesti*, March 7, 2002, Politics Section, 2.

²² “Djukanovic: Sporazum cemo realizovati sa SDP i LSCG, ne dolazi u obzir savez sa srpskim strankama,” *Vijesti*, February 13, 2002, Front Page Headline, 1.

²³ Darko Šukovic, “Montenegrin reactions to the Signing of the Agreement on the Union of Serbia and Montenegro,” *Transitions Online*, February 18, 2002, <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/trae/archive/data/200203/20323-001-trae-pod.htm> (accessed May 26, 2006).

²⁴ “Serbia and Montenegro: Closer than Ever,” *Transitions Online*, April 22, 2003, <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=45&NrSection=16&NrArticle=9336&search=search&SearchKeywords=closer+than+ever&SearchMode=on&SearchLevel=0> (accessed May 26, 2006).

²⁵ “Djukanovic: Nikada nijesam rekao da je referendum jedini put za obnovu državnosti,” *Vijesti*, March 27, 2003, Politics Section, 1-2.

²⁶ “Djukanovic: Nakon,” 2.

based their support for the DPS on the promise of a referendum in 2002. Hence, the “painful birth of the new state,” proved to be a major point of friction in the political life within the republic, dividing the population into supporters and opponents of independent statehood and a separate Montenegrin national identity.²⁷

4. *Economy and External Intervention*

Economic pressures stemming from the federal level pushed Montenegro towards adopting a series of economic policies leading to its gradual detachment from the FRY and its greater dependence on international financial aid during 1998-1999. Consequently, the support for westernization during the Kosovo/a crisis crystallized the attitudes of the two camps towards state and nation, leading to a deepening of the divides in Montenegro. Additionally, international concerns over regional stability played an important role for deferring the referendum in Montenegro in 2002, and in establishing the rules for the one in 2006.

The severe financial difficulties for Montenegro in the 1990s, followed by the increased pressures from Belgrade (aimed at keeping the “minor partner”

obedient), resulted in the adoption of a series of economic policies through which Montenegro attained a de facto autonomy. The introduction of the Deutschmark as a parallel currency to the Yugoslav dinar in 1998, and its full adoption in 1999, points to an economic basis for the partial revival of the Montenegrin statehood by its disengagement from Yugoslav institutions. The cessation of transactions between the Montenegrin and the federal budget in 1998 was followed by an emphasis on the necessity for the formation of a separate Montenegrin monetary system.²⁸ Accordingly, the ban on imports of goods from Serbia, enforced by the Serbian police during 1998 and 1999, drove the Montenegrin government towards the establishment of economic links with Slovenia and Croatia, progressively loosening its ties with the federal structures.²⁹ As the dependence on imported goods required international financial assistance, the government increasingly shifted towards the West, which provided Montenegro with the financial means to counter Milošević’s policies. It also allowed for the switch to the Euro as the official currency in 2002 (the republic is not bound by the convergence criteria, owing to the

²⁷ Reneo Lukic, “The Painful Birth of the New State- Union of Serbia and Montenegro” (paper presented at the conference: Southeastern Europe Moving Forward, Ottawa, Canada, January 23-24, 2003), 90.

²⁸ Beata Huszka, “The dispute over Montenegrin independence” in *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, ed. Florian Bieber (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003), 54.

²⁹ “Independence?” *Economist* 353/8148, April 12, 1999, Europe Section, 51.

currency board), as an offset to the regime in Belgrade.

The “spill-over” from this Montenegrin “westernization” in the late 1990s was the adoption of the policy of “creeping independence,”³⁰ which entailed a progressive re-emergence of autonomous administration. Milošević’s threat of intervention in Kosovo and Montenegro in 1998 augmented tensions between the officials of Podgorica and those of Belgrade.³¹ The presence of the Yugoslav Army in the Montenegrin territory increased the fears of war in the republic, which led to the establishment of a Montenegrin police force of 20,000 men aimed at counterbalancing the presence of federal troops in 1998 and 1999.³² Such a political move of the government was an attempt to resist the “growing efforts of the Yugoslav Army to take control of the republic at the rise of a civil war,” since NATO was uneasy about interfering in Montenegro.³³

Despite the shift of the political discourse in Montenegro in favor of independence, after the departure of Milošević from power in Belgrade, the preservation of the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro had its implications for regional stability. Given the status of

Kosovo/a under the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1244, and the conflict between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians in spring 2001, geopolitical concerns led to the involvement of the international community in post-communist Yugoslavia’s process of transformation. Since the independence of Montenegro was expected to “provide ammunition to Kosovar Albanians seeking self-determination for Kosovo and to Serb nationalists wishing to reunite the Bosnian Serb entity, Republika Srpska, with Serbia”.³⁴ the international community pushed the Montenegrin government to remain within “a more devolved and democratic FRY”.³⁵ The international involvement, headed by the EU, resulted in the Belgrade Agreement, which simultaneously led to an increase in claims and counter-claims regarding the question of statehood. As such, it exacerbated the identity problem in the republic, whereby the supporters of the common state with Serbia increasingly identified themselves as Serbs, and the proponents of independence as Montenegrins.³⁶

In an environment filled with disparagement between the two blocs, even the final political contest – 2006 referendum -- between the pro-independence and the pro-union camps

³⁰ Roberts, *Serbia-Montenegro*, 6.

³¹ Bieber, “Montenegrin politics,” 33.

³² Elisabeth Roberts, “Memorandum” in *Select Committee on Foreign Affairs- Appendices to Minutes of Evidence* (London: House of Commons, 2001), 4.

³³ Lara Santoro, “From Baptism to Politics, Montenegrins Fight for Identity” in *Christian Science Monitor* 91/103 (1999): 8.

³⁴ Elisabeth Roberts, “Memorandum,” 2.

³⁵ Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Montenegro” in *Select Committee on Foreign Affairs-Fourth Report* (London: House of Commons, 2001), 4.

³⁶ CEDEM, *Montenegrin Public Opinion in 2002* (Podgorica: CEDEM, 2002), 9-10.

occurred in a framework established by the international community, above all the EU. The EU mediation provided for an acceptable, yet complex formula for determining the statehood issue in Montenegro. The 55% threshold was a result of awareness of the deep polarization in Montenegrin society and means of avoiding the boycott of the opposition, which would thereby make any outcome difficult to legitimize. Subsequently, the 55% formula for independence initiated the debate on the “grey zone,” i.e. the case when the numbers of “Yes” votes would fall within 50 and 54.99%. Whereas in such a situation the pro-independence block claimed that the “majority could not be a minority”³⁷ and that the restructuring Serbia and Montenegro into a union of independent states would be necessary, the opposition considered the “grey zone” as an outright failure of the referendum.³⁸ Thus, the EU proposal resulted in a situation in which every single vote was of utmost importance, reflecting the divide in Montenegrin society.

Therefore, economic and political pressures from the external factors have played an important role in the Montenegrin divide. The orientation of the government towards the West

during the Kosovo crisis instigated increased demands for independence, and as such antagonized the opposition which disapproved of the NATO intervention and supported Serbia. Moreover, in the process of transformation of the last Yugoslavia into Serbia and Montenegro wider regional concerns had to be taken into consideration, which, under the influence of the EU postponed the resolution of the status question. In turn, this further polarized the Montenegrin socio-political life. The major proof for such a claim was the 2006 Montenegrin referendum, which given the 55% threshold, outlined the significance of every vote in the divide over statehood and nationhood in the republic.

5. Identities, Symbols and Minorities

Surveys and public opinion polls indicate that attitudes towards statehood were often closely related to individuals’ political and national affiliation. The divide into two camps, which diverged only slightly in the number of their supporters, induced the instrumentalization of symbols and minorities in the conflict over state and nation in Montenegro.

During the years when Montenegro was a part of the State Union, most of the government supporters affirmed the need for holding a referendum on independence after the expiry of the Belgrade Agreement, whereas the opposition was against it. A survey - on the bonds of the population towards

³⁷ “Nema zajednice dok je jedan više za nezavisnost,” *Republika* II/449, February 20, 2006, Politics Section, 7-8.

³⁸ “Makljaža do Portoroža,” *NIN*, April 26, 2006, <http://www.nin.co.yu/index.php?s=free&a=2887&rid=3&id=6054> (accessed June 21, 2006).

Serbia and Montenegro versus towards Montenegro alone – showed that among the supporters of the pro-independence government the bond towards the State Union has suffered a decrease over 2002-2005, while the tendency among the pro-unionist opposition was to identify more firmly with the common state.³⁹ The identity conundrum, which allowed for this shift, was in part a product of distinct interpretations of Montenegrin history and tradition.⁴⁰ However, as discussed in the previous sections, such a clear polarization in recent years was catalyzed through the internal power struggles and through the impact of the external factors, which attracted the population towards two poles of the identity-statehood nexus.

The aforementioned was apparent in the 2003 census, according to which, 40.6% of the total population declared themselves as Montenegrins, whereas 30.02% were Serbs.⁴¹ Compared to the 1991 census, the data shows a decline in the portion of population defining themselves as Montenegrin by 30%, whereas the number of Serbs increased by 200%. The public opinion polls, conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights throughout 2002-

2005 indicate the dependency of national affiliation on party politics and the statehood issue. Whereas 68.4% of the supporters of the government coalition tended to define themselves as Montenegrins, 73.8% of the opposition members defined themselves as Serbs.⁴² Accordingly, the majority of the supporters of the government endorsed the revival of Montenegrin statehood, as opposed to the lion's share of the opposition who were against it, indicating that "political choice and national identity are closely intertwined in Montenegro, reflecting the complexity of Montenegrin identity".⁴³

Moreover, as the "implicit meanings" of the aesthetic elements of the state, such as the flag, the coat of arms, or the national anthem, have been historically connected to the nation's past, they proved to be important symbolic rallying points in the polemic surrounding state and nation in Montenegro.⁴⁴ The discourse over these symbols showed the discrepant attitudes of Serbia and Montenegro towards the State Union.⁴⁵ The officials of the two constituents of the Union disagreed over the historical

³⁹ CEDEM, *Social Identities, Collective Symbols and Montenegrin Statehood Issue* (Podgorica: CEDEM, 2004), 21-23.

⁴⁰ See: Banac, *The National Question*; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*

⁴¹ "2003 Population Census of Montenegro," *YU Survey*, April 2003, <http://www.yusurvey.co.yu/products/ys/showSummaryArticle.php?prodId=2023&groupId=4780> (accessed June 15, 2006).

⁴² CEDEM, *Montenegrin Public Opinion in 2002*, 9-10.

⁴³ Florian Biber, *The Instrumentalization of Minorities in the Montenegrin Quest for Independence* (Flensburg: ECMI, 2002), 2.

⁴⁴ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, (London: Penguin, 1975), 14.

⁴⁵ Srboľjub Bogdanovic, "Zastava sljezove boje," *NIN*, March 16, 2003, <http://www.nin.co.yu/2003-01/16/26894.html> (accessed April 23, 2006).

connotations of the shades of the colors on the flag, the shapes of the national emblem, and the choice of the song for the hymn, since the prevalence of the Serbian or the Montenegrin version would imply the dominance of that option over the other.⁴⁶ Owing to the lack of agreement, the union remained without official symbols up to its dissolution in mid-2006. Instead, a separate law on Montenegrin national symbols was passed in 2004, indicating another push towards the revival of Montenegrin statehood. Consequently, supporters of the government endorsed the Montenegrin Law on State Symbols, whereas the opposition generally believed that there was no need for changing the existing symbols of Montenegro (i.e. the ones of FRY), emphasizing their commitment to the common state.⁴⁷ Such tensions in the relation between the state and nation, accompanied by disagreements both at the union level and at the level of Montenegrin politics, encumbered the cohabitation of Serbia and Montenegro, and created strains within Montenegro itself.

In such an environment, the national minorities (Albanians, Bosniaks, Croats, Muslims, and Roma), which according to the recent census represent

⁴⁶ Tamara Skrozza, and Nebojša Grujicic, "Simboli Državne Zajednice Srbija i Crna Gora," *Vreme*, February 13, 2003, <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=332936> (accessed June 10, 2006).

⁴⁷ CEDEM, *Political Public Opinion in Montenegro: September 2004* (Podgorica: CEDEM, 2004), 31-33.

over a quarter of the population of Montenegro, became increasingly instrumentalized, owing to their support for the pro-independence cause. Although there was a general consensus that minorities in Montenegro were treated better than in the neighboring countries, the opposition tended to antagonize them by emphasizing that "any referendum won with the votes of minorities alone would not be considered legitimate."⁴⁸ Moreover, the pro-unionist newspapers (Dan, Glas Crnogoraca) often accused the Albanian minority of secessionism, and engaged in "hate speech towards minorities."⁴⁹ Such promulgations were appealing to the part of the population which supported the opposition bloc, as according to public opinion polls, the index of social distance towards the minorities (especially non-Christian, i.e. Albanian and Bosniak/Muslim) was considerably higher among the members of the pro-unionist opposition than among the supporters of the government.

Hence, the instrumentalization of minorities and state symbols became a part of the process through which the pro-independence and pro-unionist claims were transmitted to the population. Such transmission was facilitated by the fact that in the complex Montenegrin socio-political milieu individuals' statehood and nationhood were entrenched in the

⁴⁸ Bieber, *The Instrumentalization*, 4.

⁴⁹ Bieber, *The Instrumentalization*, 5.

cobweb of their political orientation, as outlined in the above surveys.

6. Epiphenomena of Politics: Revival of Tradition

Contemporary academic debates on Montenegro often make references to the epiphenomena of politics, i.e. the revival of tradition as a by-product of the political struggles.⁵⁰ In order to understand the mechanisms through which these debates were transmitted, it is essential to revert to the role of religion and tribal life in contemporary Montenegro. Given the strong patriarchal tradition in the country, the post-communist revival of tradition crystallized into poles of attraction for the pro-independence and pro-unionist blocs.

The frictions between the Serbian (SOC) and Montenegrin (MOC) Orthodox churches served as a point of reference for the population in terms of displaying its national identity and attitudes towards the state. The MOC, which was taken over by the SOC after Yugoslav unification in 1918, was resurrected in the early 1990s. The restoration of the MOC was viewed by many as a political move. The tensions that existed between the two Orthodox Churches resulted in the SOC labeling the MOC as a “sect.”⁵¹ Similarly, while

the Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church claimed that “Montenegrin identity is a historical fiction. Serbs and Montenegrins are the same people, the same nation,”⁵² the clergy of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church emphasized the distinctiveness of the Montenegrin nation.

The attitude of the SOC resonated strongly with the members of the opposition block who, according to the polls, identified primarily with this church, implying that the Metropolitan Amfilohije was the person of greatest confidence in Montenegro.⁵³ Conversely, within the pro-independence camp, the role of the church was viewed in two distinct ways. The MOC was fully endorsed by the parties promoting the independence of Montenegro since the early 1990s, such as the social-democrats and liberals. Yet, the role of the church among the supporters of the pro-independence DPS was not emphasized to the same extent as among the opposition members, which points to the complex role of religion in constructing national identities.⁵⁴ The supporters of the DPS, which advocated for the revival of the Montenegrin state,

University of Westminster, London, United Kingdom, March 06, 2006).

⁵² Metropolitan Amfilohije in Santoro, “From Baptism,” 8.

⁵³ CEDEM, *Public Opinion in Montenegro: February 2005* (Podgorica: CEDEM, 2005), 22-23.

⁵⁴ CEDEM, *Political Public Opinion in Montenegro: May 2005* (Podgorica: CEDEM, 2005), 6-7.

⁵⁰ Cross and Komnenich, “Ethnonational,” 11.

⁵¹ Srdjan Darmanovic, “Montenegro on the Threshold” (lecture at the Bosnian Institute:

often identified themselves with the SOC rather than MOC. Since the opposite was highly unlikely among the pro-unionists who define themselves as Serbs, “the struggle for the church [became] essentially the struggle for statehood.”⁵⁵

Additionally, in Montenegrin society, where mentality is closely associated with the tribe, a concept historically grounded in the collective memory, the revival of a new form of tribalism also served as a channel for the political divergence over the notions of nation and state. According to Popovic, neo-tribalism in Montenegrin society was a means for Milošević’s followers to “build some new, alternative, however false, source of legitimacy” after their political defeats in the previous years.⁵⁶ The reinvented tribes, subsequently, started affiliating with the Serbian ideology. In turn, this provoked the creation of pro-Montenegrin neo-tribes as a counterweight to the supporters of the Yugoslav idea.

Neo-tribalism also emphasized the geographical dimension of the struggle over statehood and nationhood. The southern tribes, associated with Old (dynastic) Montenegro, had a propensity to identify themselves with the idea of the revival of Montenegrin statehood and the separateness of Montenegrin nation, owing to their

historical association with the struggle for preservation of independence against the Ottomans. Consequently, the number of supporters of the governments’ pro-independence policy was higher in the southern areas, as demonstrated by the elections results in recent years.⁵⁷ Conversely, the northern tribes that bordered Serbia included a number of clans that had shifted from Serbia to Montenegro during Ottoman rule in the Balkans.⁵⁸ As such, these tribes displayed the tendency to affiliate with the idea of the preservation of the common state with Serbia, and Serbian nationhood, endowing thus the opposition with their voters’ support.

Thus, in an environment of history and reinvented tradition, the strong patriarchal culture in Montenegro was revived in order to mobilize support behind the pro-unionist (pro-Serbian) and pro-independence (pro-Montenegrin) causes. Both religion and tribal life served as reference points and through them the two poles aimed at transmitting their ideas of nationhood and statehood.

7. Conclusion

By scrutinizing identity and politics, this paper provided for an interdisciplinary approach to

⁵⁵ Dajkovic in Santoro, “From Baptism,” 8.

⁵⁶ Milan Popovic, *Montenegrin Mirror: Polity in Turmoil 1991-2001* (Podgorica: Nansen Dijalog Centar, 2002), 23.

⁵⁷ See: Bieber, “Montenegrin Politics”

⁵⁸ Andrei Simic, “Montenegro Beyond the Myth” in *Crisis in the Balkans: Views from the Participants*, ed. Constantine Danopolous and Costas Messas (Boulder: West view Press, 1997), 124-131.

understanding the origins, nature, and channels of the interplay between state and nation in Montenegro, with an emphasis on the significance of internal political struggles and of external factors in the quest for Montenegrin statehood in recent years. The antagonizing versions of statehood and nationhood ultimately stemmed from traditional divides, which reverberated in the contemporary discourse through the revival of tradition, and the instrumentalization of symbols and national minorities.

Given the economic and political instability in the country, external factors, such as the US and the EU affected the opportunities and the constraints for the actions of the domestic elites. Through the affiliation with a portion of the elites, a particular external factor became antagonized in the eyes of the other portion. Hence, external factors indirectly affected the division among the population on the questions of statehood and nationhood. Surveys and other opinion polls indicate that this was apparent at the level of the society as well, since there was a clear demarcation of the external factors that the supporters of the pro-independence and pro-unionist blocs would identify with. All of these issues gradually gained heightened importance, since individuals' national affiliation became inextricably connected to their attitude towards the emergence of independent Montenegrin statehood.

After the crack within the DPS proper, the internal political struggles

progressively triggered the creation of two political blocs: pro-independence and pro-union. In order to elucidate the process of how the two camps crystallized the study took into consideration several internal and external factors. Given the repressive nature of Milošević's politics, the orientation of a portion of Montenegrin political elites towards the West after 1997 pushed the government towards the policy of "creeping independence," leading to Montenegro's gradual estrangement from the federal institutions. While such a policy acquired the dimension of the quest for statehood on behalf of the government, it also caused distress for those who strove to preserve the union with Serbia.

Additionally, since one faction of the domestic leadership oriented itself towards the western values after 1997, while the other remained a follower of Milošević's politics, the two overarching national identities became fairly affiliated with two diametrically opposed external centres – the West and Serbia. This discrepancy was most apparent during and after the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, when one set of the elites was faced with economic and political pressures from the West (the US 1999-2001; the EU 2002-2006), while the other portion remained highly impacted by the Serbian political milieu. This rift was felt among the population, who identified the influence of the external factors in line with the ideas

proliferated by either by the pro-independence or the pro-unionist bloc.

By 2001, the future of the Montenegrin relationship with Serbia came to the forefront of the political discourse after the demise of Milošević. Consequently, the internal Montenegrin debate was channeled through amplified demands for independence on behalf of the government, and increased interaction of the opposition with the new Serbian elites which sought to preserve the union. Given the level of discord, both within Montenegro itself and in its relationship with Serbia, the external factor, notably the EU, proved to be an important factor in the transformation of Yugoslavia into Serbia and Montenegro. Through the establishment of a transitory framework for the continuation of the State Union, the EU affected the dynamics of political polarization in Montenegro.

This fissure was channeled towards the population through the epiphenomena of politics, which revived tradition as a catalyst to the solidification of the internal divide. As such, religion and neo-tribalism transplanted the political struggle to the level of national identity. Owing to the prevalence of the discourse on the future of the common state, the internal divide put national minorities at the centre of the political debates, purporting their instrumentalization and antagonization in the quest for Montenegrin statehood. State and nation in Montenegro since 1997 have, therefore, been subject to and affected by a internal and external

factors, and catalyzed through the reinvention of tradition and the instrumentalization of minorities. Subsequently, this essay contextualized and analyzed the multifaceted and complex factors that have affected, most recently, the formal creation of the state of Montenegro. As such, this research enriched an understudied area through a small contribution to the scarce literature on contemporary Montenegrin politics.

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