Radicalization of Nationalism

Diana B Kontsevaia
Radicalization of Nationalism:
Civil Society in the Disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia

By
Diana Kontsevaia

POLI 431
Prof. Hudson Meadwell
December 12, 2011
“People who live in the post-totalitarian system know only too well that the question of whether one or several political parties are in power, and how these parties define and label themselves, is of far less importance than the question of whether or not it is possible to live like a human being.”

- Václav Havel; first president of the Czech Republic

“I feel responsible because I prepared for this even if not in terms of military preparations. My party and I lit the fuse of Serbian nationalism”

- Jovan Rašković, founder of Serbian Democratic Party of Croatia (SDS).

The topic of the disintegration of the multinational states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia has been discussed endless times. What happened in Yugoslavia that was so different from Czechoslovakia? Arguments vary from things like “the process did not spontaneously begin from within the ranks of the masses” to the disintegration not being “a result of the decision and actions of a few bad leaders.” So neither the masses nor the elites are at fault. What accounts for the violence following the Yugoslav disintegration and the ensuing peace in Czechoslovakia? If neither the elites, nor the masses can be blamed, are the ancient hatreds to be blamed instead? Most explanations for the catastrophic events following the Croatian declaration of independence and those that address the peaceful divorce in Czechoslovakia have left the discussion of civil society untouched. This is due to the widespread assumption that there simply was no salient civil society at the time in

---


Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia. Civil society, however, did exist in these circumstances, though weak and illiberal. A closer look at the characteristics of the public institutions in these two cases can thus be used to identify in which cases the nationalist sentiment was radicalized. The relationship between civil society and nationalism should therefore be explored. In Yugoslavia, the civil society at first emerged in opposition to the Yugoslavian state (which made it a civil society in the first place), but after the events of 1989, the elites took advantage of this infrastructure to satisfy their own political goals. In Czechoslovakia, the civil society emerged alongside the creation of the new states, which limited the leaders from radically nationalizing the civil society and allowed for a more peaceful solution to a multiethnic process of state disintegration. When strong civil society merges with nationalism, it loses its independence as well as its power to change and to influence the state.

More precisely, in the face of a collapsing multinational state, the existence of weak civil society institutions causes political elites to manipulate less nationalist sentiments. The characteristics of civil society in multiethnic nations matter, as they identify whether a civil society is strong or weak. This then indicates whether the masses are easily radicalized along nationalistic lines. When examining a civil society in a state, therefore, it is imperative to look at (1) strength and development of civil society, (2) Relationship of the civil society with central authority (the state), and (3) timing of formation or relative liberalization. It is first imperative to explore the place civil society occupies within the nationalism discourse and to provide an operational definition of civil society. Next, a closer look at the public institutions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia helps establish the characteristics of their respective civil societies. Finally, the characteristics of the two civil societies will lead the

---

4 Ibid. pp.213
discussion of how the strength of the civil society affects nationalization and radicalization of the masses.

*Civil Society and the Discourse on Nationalism*

Civil society discourse is generally set apart from that of nationalist, authoritarian countries, because it is mostly associated with liberal democracy.\(^5\) Voluntary public institutions, however, are still likely to exist even in illiberal settings. Civil society discussion seems to be absent from these discourses, yet it remains a good vehicle to understand how nationalism occurs in the local population. Without this understanding the discussion becomes very theoretical. Although having a theoretical understanding of social phenomena is important, it is just as important to have an understanding of how nationalization, and subsequently radicalization, happens on local level.

In his discussion on nationalism, for example, Gellner presents a very deterministic theoretical view of society. Indeed, he outright states that nationalism is something that *happens* to people, it is not something that they can control.\(^6\) While elements of his theory are useful in understanding nationalism, the deterministic aspect of his argument does not explain how nationalism arises and becomes radicalized in a short period of time. While a case can be made using Gellner’s theory to explain the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, it will lack the detail that a more profound discussion of their respective societies would provide. For things do not just *happen* in a society; there is a process to how ideas spread, apart from the control of the state and the elites. In other words, a theory does not necessarily fit in the description of day to day life.

---


The more salient theory to use in the case of these two states would be Fearon’s commitment problem. Civil society, however, only loosely ties into part five of his five factors that influence the severity of the commitment problem.\(^7\) His commitment problem concentrates on the ability of states to commit to the promises they make to minorities. While he states that “individuals in both [minority and majority] groups face difficult decisions,”\(^8\) he lays out a model that is still largely void of the influence of the public sector of a society.

Yet the banal moments of everyday life – such as the interactions at the store, the annoying neighbors next door who play loud music past 2AM, the attitudes towards elections, the opinions of the town’s mayor, these moments make up the core of society. These monotone actions, then, allow people to associate with others and create public institutions in accordance to their interests.\(^9\) Individuals, along with the associations they form, are thus sacrificed and are treated as “unitary actors” in order to fit into a model.\(^10\) Theories are without doubt valuable. Yet, in trying to elucidate how a state’s disintegration ends in violence, while the other does not, or how nationalism becomes radicalized, it is perhaps just as valuable to look at the local civil institutions to illuminate the answer.

**Defining Civil Society**

To proceed with the discussion of civil society, it is first important to provide an operational definition. Civil society is a concept that is widely used and defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this paper it is important to cast a wide definition of civil society

---


\(^8\) *Ibid.*


\(^10\) Fearon in Lake and Rothchild. 1998.p. 124
in order to find how it operates under oppressive conditions. Thus, this paper will regard civil society as:

“a sphere of voluntary action that is distinct from the state, political, private, and economic spheres keeping in mind that in practice the boundaries between these sectors are often complex and blurred. It consists of a large and diverse set of voluntary organizations – competing with each other and oriented to specific interests—that are not purely driven by private or economic interests, are autonomously organized, and interact in the public sphere. Thus, civil society is independent from the state and the political sphere, but it is oriented towards and interacts closely with them.”¹¹

Accordingly, civil society will be regarded as a voluntary public sector, which is apart from the state, though it also interacts with it closely. It is oriented towards its own interests, but these interests are not necessarily liberal.¹² Although civil society supposedly only occurs under democracy, “civic engagement is shaped by and responds to material and political conditions—to constraints and opportunities. It isn’t just ‘there’ or ‘not there’.”¹³ Civil society, therefore, should not be viewed as fixed or as always aiming for a liberal goal. It reflects the interests of the society and the way voluntary institutions behave in the public sector. In addition, while it stands in opposition to the state, a civil society cannot exist without the state.¹⁴ Thus the civil society in this paper will largely have to do with voluntary, (and sometimes ad hoc) expressions of the public sector, that often stand in opposition to the state, albeit with own interests.

While civil society occupies an oppositional role to the state, its relation to the nation is not as resistant. State does not need a nation to become a state, and a nation does not need

---

¹² Carapico in Penner Angrist. 2010. Pp. 92  
¹³ Ibid.  
a state to consider itself a nation. Yet a nation often wants a state of its own, which is especially apparent in multinational states.\textsuperscript{15} If there is a dominant group within a nation state, the more dominant nation will face opposition from the less dominant nations as they attempt to assert their own independence.\textsuperscript{16} As such, a nation will use its local civil institutions to oppose the state.\textsuperscript{17} When it does so, the strength or weakness of the civil institutions will indicate how easily the nationalist sentiment is be manipulated. The weaker civil institutions are likely to have less nationalist sentiment, leading to sufficient polarization, which creates a demand for more autonomy (it develops “autonomy nationalism”).\textsuperscript{18} The stronger civil institutions, on the contrary, have more potential at mobilizing the nationalist sentiment. These sentiments are easily radicalized by elites. Radicalization of nationalist sentiment subsequently creates greater demands on the state (develops “secessionist nationalism”\textsuperscript{19}), and leads to demands for secession.

\textit{Czechoslovakia}

The existence of civil society in former Czechoslovakia is perhaps easier to defend than that of Yugoslavia, especially after the events of “Prague Spring” of 1968. In 1968, with the election of the Slovak president Alexander Dubcek, a series of liberalization policies were passed in order to improve the economic and social standard of living, guaranteeing things such as freedom of press and political commentary. Of course, following a number of years of economic stagnation, the Czechoslovak people were glad to voice their concerns.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17}Paal Sigurd Hilde. 1999. "Slovak Nationalism and the Break-up of Czechoslovakia". Europe Asia Studies. 51 (4). Pp. 646.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
Dubcek’s “Action Programme”, published in April 1968, stressed the need for civil rights, fair elections, checked power of the state, and equality between minorities. At some point the Programme even states that “the status of all nationalities in Czechoslovakia should develop in a way to reach the consolidation of unity of the state, self-development of nations and nationalities, and in a way that meets the needs of socialism.”

This statement indicates the state’s resolve to resolve the issues of minorities, and the continued influence of socialism. The Programme was viewed hopefully as a groundbreaking way to re-orient towards a form of liberal socialism. It signaled that a unified identity can be created, though in practice that never happened. Above all, it showed that the state was willing to tolerate some autonomy and increase in civil institutions, while remaining centralized.

Being a client state of the USSR, however, Czechoslovakia’s reforms quickly ended when in August 1968 the forces of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia and all reforms were reversed under the newly installed Gustáv Husák. As a consequence, the Czechoslovak state maintained centralized control over the society until the weakening of the Communist Party in USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, without giving any minorities much autonomy. For example, taxes continued to be paid to the central government rather than to localized parties. Thus, even though Czechoslovakia might have been “institutionally weak, [it was] politically strong” in the beginning of 1990s.

---


21 Ibid.


That, however, does not indicate that the people stopped disagreeing with the system. They were simply banned from public discussion of the issues—and thus prevented from forming meaningful civil institutions in balance of the state. The secret basement conversations against socialism and the USSR dominance, however, continued. In fact, they intensified in nature – producing a secret yet widely-shared dislike of the socialist rule.\(^{25}\) Therefore, when the time to start forming civil societies came, people were finally free to bring all those conversations up from the basements and to openly criticize the socialist rule. The shared dislike of the Communist Party became blatantly apparent in the Velvet Revolution demonstrations in Prague, the support for which grew from November 17\(^{th}\) until December 29\(^{th}\) 1989, when over 200,000 students protested. This movement, while centered in Prague, was state-wide, as it included a state-wide two-hour general strike on November 27\(^{th}\).\(^{26}\)

Consequently, two competing alternatives emerged to the communist party: the Czechoslovakian Civic Forum, led by Václav Havel, and the Slovakian Public Against Violence. While the Civic Forum was politically oriented, it had its roots in 1980s literature, and indeed was led by Havel – one of the writers.\(^{27}\) Taken along with the demonstrations of 1989, it can be seen as a form of public opinion of the time. The Public Against Violence was allegedly independent and is perhaps the better example of a newly formed civil society institution.\(^{28}\) While it was formed with political intentions, it stayed largely a civic movement until 1991, when several factions split off and formed actual political parties (Movement for

---

28 Shepherd 2000.
The disagreements between the Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence played a key role in the eventual outcomes of the Velvet Revolution, as they both mobilized the sentiments of the public sector.

As mentioned, the civil society that emerged after the wave of liberalization was widely anti-Soviet, but there was also a considerable anti-Czech sentiment emerging (or more appropriately, pro-Slovak). The Slovaks over the years developed resentment towards the largely Czech-run government, and after liberalization, the Public Against Violence was formed precisely in opposition to the Civic Forum to voice the concerns of the Slovaks. They felt that they were not an equal part of the federal government, and that many of the resources given to Czechoslovakia were never received by the Slovak half. When the Czechoslovak government proposed economic reforms, the reforms were seen as helping the Czechs, while hurting the Slovaks. Since the reforms promoted faster capitalist development and limited the export of military goods to Third World countries, the Slovak people began to protest, as the heavily industrial military sector was at the heart of the Slovak economic production. The economic problems began to fuel the Slovak aspiration for more autonomy and to create one of the polarizing points.

Moreover, the previous resolve to create a unified identity under a socialist state was no longer there after 1989. “The key difficulty for Prague was resolving the aspiration for self-determination among Slovaks within a constitutional structure that allowed for a continuation of a viable Czechoslovak nation-state.”

---

29 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
came as a large surprise to the Czech public, who saw the rise of Slovak nationalism as a strange ungrateful occurrence for all the help the Czechoslovak government gave them. Instead of resolving the new institutional structures, the Czech loyalties began to nationalize in opposition to the Slovaks.\textsuperscript{34} Up to that point, their goals largely necessitated the movement away from communism and promoted economic development for Czechoslovakia as a whole. When the time to re-negotiate the new federal set-up of the system came, therefore, the two halves had different agendas. Václav Klaus supported Czech economic development at any cost, while Meciar wanted more power over decisions involving Slovaks and hence more autonomy within the Czechoslovak state. After the tensions became clear, however, it was apparent that the Czechs did not need the Slovak lands in their pursuit of economic development.\textsuperscript{35}

The civil society in post-communist Czechoslovakia emerged and immediately started to demand its independence from the original oppressor – the Communist Party. The popular movements eventually turned into political grievances, and in some cases, even into political parties. While the civil institutions of the time simply demanded better economic conditions and relative freedom, during negotiations, the political parties had to generalize and simplify ideas in order to reach a consensus. Thus the Czech elite solidified its stance around economic development, while the Slovak stance was solidified around autonomy. To reach that goal, Slovaks began highlighting national differences in the Slovak society (and thus creating “autonomy nationalism”). The radicalization of autonomous and economic interests led to the disintegration of the state. The issue of nationalism, however, was not

\textsuperscript{34} Hilde 1999. Pp.658.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.} pp. 663.
radicalized because the nationalist civil institutions were weaker, and therefore less usable by the elites of the time.

Given this background, the civil society in Czechoslovakia had the following key characteristics before the Czechoslovakian disintegration in 1989:

1. It was relatively weak, as the institutions were substantially oppressed from 1971-87 due to the Normalization policies, following the Prague Spring of 1968.

2. The institutions viewed the Czechoslovak state as considerably legitimate, especially if it was allowed to follow the liberal socialist path it prescribed in 1968.

3. The time of relative liberalization and creation of civil society is especially important in comparison to Yugoslavia. Since liberalization was first oppressed by the Communist party, the institution-building after the fall of the Communist Party was immediately pro-capitalist or wanting equal distribution of resources within the state, rather than nationalist.

**Yugoslavia**

Yugoslavia followed a comparatively different trajectory. Under Joseph Tito’s regime, Yugoslavia managed to stay quite independent from USSR’s direct policies, implementing instead a “self-management” policy which promoted workers’ control – especially apparent in the management of factories and readjustment of tax policies. As taxes were no longer paid to the state; control was now at a more local level.\(^{36}\) The decentralization of the Yugoslavian state prior to the complete weakening of the communist ideology, therefore, allowed for the formation of civil societies that were against the

Yugoslav state precisely because they were localized. The policies led to decentralized institutions, which, however, were still held in check under Joseph Tito’s power. After his death in May 1980, the Communist Party experienced unprecedented weakening as the communist ideology seemed less and less appealing to the liberalized public and competing leaders emerged to take Tito’s place. The period of 1980 to 1990 can thus be seen as a period of increasing liberalization and institution formation as the communist party was losing its grip on the public.\footnote{Allcock. 1999. Pp.78.}

Despite claims that civil society did not have time to form in Yugoslavia,\footnote{Paul Mojzes in Bokovoy 1997. Pp. 212.} and that violence erupted before any substantial institutions could be formed, it would be illogical to assume that no voluntary public sector activities existed during this time. Kids still went to school. Writer’s still wrote. Workers still protested low wages. The element of public life found in civil institutions should not be lost when explaining the events in Yugoslavia. Since the Yugoslavian state previously gave autonomy to institutions such as local neighborhood associations, these associations continued to produce their own ideas at the time of relative liberalization.\footnote{Allcock 1999. Pp.75.}

Perhaps the most influential product of the civil society during this period comes from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, when they decided to write a memorandum regarding the current political, economic and social cleavages in Serbia. As the Serbian “Academy’s Statute requires it to remain aloof from politics,”\footnote{Kosta Mihailovic and Vasilije Krestic. Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts , "Memorandum: Answer to Criticisms." Last Modified. April 23, 1993. http://www.rastko.rs/istorija/iii/memorandum.pdf. p. 12. This text was translated 1995. It was written by the presidency of SANU as a defense on the actions taken by the academics while writing the Memorandum. As such, it is likely that it is not without bias. Still, it is a worthwhile exemplar of Serbian civil society.} it is a viable example of a
civil institution. The academics decided to submit a document exploring the current conditions of the deteriorating condition in Yugoslavia and perhaps suggest possible solutions. It was not meant to be politically charged.

The document, which was leaked before it was published, was the Memorandum of 1986. It was never completed due to the public’s highly controversial reactions to the leaked draft. The academics who wrote the Memorandum intended to submit it to high offices as an internal study of two parts: the economic situation of Yugoslavia, and the status of Serbia within Yugoslavia. The most controversial part of the document seems to be the fact that it specifically addresses the Serbian issues as opposed to Yugoslavian issues. It thus brings the myth of a unified Yugoslavian identity to an end. The physical product of the Serbian civil society was not received well by Yugoslavian authorities, as they interpreted it as a challenge to the current regime, rather than a suggestion, since it “did not follow the strictly codified rules of behavior in the one party system.” The Memorandum was later analyzed by the UN as placing “the imprimatur of Serbia's most prestigious intellectuals on the cause of militant Serbian nationalism.” Therefore, when the time came, the elites (specifically the Serbian Krajina region of Croatian Serbs) saw nationalism as a fruitful platform since not only was it a solution to the dissolving federalism, but it was also ‘approved’ by the Serbian academics.

As liberalization progressed, and institutions grew increasingly attached to their own ethnicities, documents and sentiments (like those expressed in the Memorandum) became an attractive way for ambitious politicians to gain ground. The decentralization of the state

---

41 Ibid. pp. 13.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid. pg. 20.
along ethnic lines proved to be a tremendous opportunity for the various leaders of the fragmented states to take advantage of the power vacuum. “The most extreme nationalist leaders used the new media outlets and political process created by ‘civil society’ advocates in order to quash less nationalistic voices.”\(^{45}\) This is how, in the 1990 elections, Franjo Tuđman ran largely on a nationalist platform, and saw his Croatian nationalist party win against communist and the less nationalist parties.\(^{46}\)

During the parliamentary elections in 1990, cooperation and negotiations became impossible. Despite the negotiations that were held between Tuđman and Jovan Rašković (founder of Serbian Democratic Party of Croatia (SDS), the nationalist party in the Serb Krajina region), no compromise could be reached because both parties were legitimate only as far as they could manipulate the nationalist sentiment\(^ {47}\) (which was in the first instance be created by the civil society, and the radicalized by the party platforms.) Any negotiation was at that point seen as treason. Indeed, by playing up on Rašković’ s assumed ‘weakness’ in trying to negotiate a solution with the Croats, his mentee Milan Babić was able to turn the party against Rašković in order to become the head of the SDS and later the president of Srpska Krajina. This move only further radicalized the party. By creating such opposing forces, however, they also stifled the power of the voters, as the voters had no choice but to vote for their national party, or else they would also be seen as traitors.\(^ {48}\) This sped up the

---


\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Ibid. pp. 7.
process of radicalization, and most of the remaining civil institutions – instead of opposing the state – became the vehicles for further radicalization.

The nationalist sentiments, however, were not an invention of the politicians; their platforms were inspired by the small grievances of the respective ethnic populations that were manifested in the civil society institutions. It can be (and has been) argued that these manifestations of civil society are simply nationalistic phenomena. But there is absolutely nothing that precludes a civil society from being nationalistic. A public can feel and create activities that are nationalistic. In fact, it was the growing sentiment of the civil society formed around a national sentiment that gave rise to nationalism in Yugoslavia (especially in the case of the Memorandum). The politicians saw an opening to further inspire the preexisting sentiments within the society, and unfortunately, to bring these sentiments to a completely new (and violent) level. Those same neighborhood associations were now headed by radicals like Babić, who used the nationalist sentiment to attain power within the region.  

It is also important to note that not all of the public sectors blindly followed the nationalizing leaders. While the process of pushing away non-nationalistic parties left people with no choice but to vote for their nationalist party, not everyone agreed. Many other political and civil actors were sidelined by the emergent nationalism, believing that it might lead the country into a senseless war. This is why, for example, there was a protest on March 9th 1991 in Belgrade where over 100,000 people showed up to protest the nationalist rule of Slobodan Milošević. The protest was suppressed, and news of it was fairly hard to find. Thus the nationalist sentiment, at first seen as an inherent part of forming the civil

society institutions (precisely because they were formed in a decentralized, local setting), was used by the elites to gain political momentum and eventually triggered a chain reaction of nationalist movements across Yugoslavia. The strong civil society institutions, harboring nationalism and encompassing enough of the society, that they were used as vehicles to gain nationalist momentum. The elites subsequently polarized the population in order to demand secession from the state.

The civil society in the years prior to the Balkan wars therefore had the following characteristics:

1. It was fairly well developed following the weakening of the communist party in 1980, albeit it was formed in the local ethnic communities.
2. The decentralization of the state put more trust in the ethnic communities as opposed to the Yugoslavian state, further delegitimizing the central authority.
3. Because central power was weakened and its communist ideology was increasingly delegitimized, alternative political platforms began to form out of the public’s desire for safety in their community. Since multi-party elections were formed precisely because there was no centralized government, future centralization did not seem feasible, especially if nationalist parties were gaining support.

Civil Society and the Two Nationalisms

There are then two cases of multinational state disintegration. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the civil society was fairly weak, following a brutal suppression of any anti-Soviet activities. The perception in Czechoslovakia, however, was that the communist
ideology lost its legitimacy, not the central authority itself (without the USSR, the
Czechoslovakian state could fulfill those rights described in 1968). Since liberalization was
followed by a long period of suppression, once the Soviet grip loosened, civil society
institutions formed in response to the communist ideology, with the goal to re-create a liberal
society. After 1989, the sentiment was anti-communist rather than nationalist.\textsuperscript{51}

In contrast, in Yugoslavia, the institutions were relatively strong because of the
faltering power of the Yugoslavian Communist party after Tito’s death in the period from
1980 to 1990. Civil institutions, such as local neighborhood or labor associations, were
already allowed to form fairly independently because of the decentralizing “self-
management” policy. During the liberalized period, therefore, the institutions simply
continued to integrate local ideas and sentiments into their activities, largely disregarding the
central authority. Lastly, this all happened right before a decentralizing moment of the
Yugoslavian state: multi-party elections were allowed in 1990, which enabled the nationalist
parties to take public sentiments and re-make them into their platforms. The virtual
domination of the nationalist parties, however, was still not encompassing everyone in the
society, as there were descending voices prior to the bloody disintegration. What remains is
to connect the characteristics of civil society to the possible implications for nationalism and
radicalization.

The Czechoslovakian state demonstrates that a weak civil society, which was created
in opposition to a strong state, and which developed fairly closely to the disintegration, will
not immediately develop nationalist sentiments, as those take time to create. Therefore the
elites in those societies will also tend to create platforms inspired by other, already existing
sentiments in the society. Nationalism was only invoked after the socialist sentiments did not

\textsuperscript{51} Shepherd 2000.
work as proper mobilization of the Slovak demands. Even when they were invoked, however, they merely wanted more autonomy within the federation, rather than outright independence. Therefore, after the public sentiments were collected and political elites started their negotiations, the difference in the national goals was different, and the best solution was to disintegrate.

On the other hand, elites facing a strong civil society, created under a decentralized state, and allowed a fair amount of time to develop ethnic institutions will see sufficient nationalist sentiment around which they can build their platform. Strong civil institutions built around ethnic lines, therefore, have the potential for nationalizing and radicalizing politics. Additionally, when the state is fairly decentralized, violence may occur, as there is no longer anyone other than the national party to guarantee security. Yugoslav thus had a different fate from Czechoslovakia. Their strong civil society institutions, created in opposition to a decentralized state, and a ten-year period of institution-building produced a considerable amount of nationalist sentiment (at first without the intention to disintegrate from the central state, but merely as a suggestion to fix their specific areas).

Perhaps one of the most important distinctions is that two different kinds of nationalism emerged. The sole fact that Slovak and Czech leaders negotiated the new rules of conduct signifies a milder level of radicalism. The Slovaks did not secede. They developed “autonomy nationalism”—in which differences are drawn only to become visible to the other parts of the state and to gain influence, not to secede. Some manipulation of the nationalist sentiment by the elites did happen, but it could not reach the extreme levels of Yugoslavia because it was limited in the amount of nationalism it could inspire. The constraint came

---


from the limited amount of existing civil societal institutions built strictly along ethnic lines to focus towards nationalism. Their separation was the most logical consequence resulting from the negotiation process. They were willing to negotiate because at the time of liberalization, the people merely emphasized more autonomy within the highly centralized Czechoslovak state and its constitution.\textsuperscript{54} The Yugoslav emergent nationalism, on the other hand, was of the “secessionist nationalism” type, where people wanted to secede.\textsuperscript{55} The separate nationalities did not consult the central state because they already had the civil-national support to become a nation state. The used the infrastructure of the public sector to inspire nationalism, which in turn dissolved the civil society.

\textit{Radicalization of Nationalist Sentiments}

The outcomes of the two civil society structures thus differ in relation to nationalism. Since a weak civil society gives only little incentive to use the national platform, the likelihood of it producing radicalized nationalism that would lead to violence is fairly small. The Slovaks had not devolved that much from the state in the time allotted between liberalization and disintegration; they did not disregard the state as the main authority. The centralization of the Czechoslovak state after Prague Spring of 1968 had the traumatizing effect of suppressing any civil society institutions. As a result, the Czechs identified with Czechoslovakia – not the “Czech nation” – in the immediate aftermath. Whereas the Slovaks, who enjoyed considerably more freedom due to a separate Communist Party, which promoted Slovakia’s participation in the Czechoslovak system,\textsuperscript{56} began to identify themselves as Slovaks because they realized the institutional inequalities of their federal system. After

\textsuperscript{54} Griffiths 1993. Pp. 27.
\textsuperscript{56} Griffiths 1993. Pp. 28.
the wave of liberalization in 1989, they began to demand greater power within the state of Czechoslovakia. Yet there were no strong civic institutions in place, as they were all previously outlawed. The initial weak structure of the civil society in Czechoslovakia, therefore, did not allow for manipulation of the population towards “secessionist nationalism”, but rather towards “autonomy nationalism.” This development in turn separated the Czech population from the Slovaks and assisted the eventual resolution of the multietnic problem peacefully with a “Velvet Divorce.” This is different from the events of the Yugoslavian disintegration. Stronger institutional basis for civil society coming from a history of independence from the USSR, imposition of the “self-management” policy and the decentralization of the Yugoslav state itself meant that in the early 1990s, the civil society formed largely along ethno-national lines. This gave the local leaders of the time an attractive opportunity to manipulate the already ethnically entrenched institutions to their advantage, and thus combine the effects of civil society and nationalism.

Looking at the characteristics of civil societies in multinational states, can produce an alternative account of how publics become radicalized along ethno-national lines. The important characteristics to examine are their strength or weakness, relation to the central authority, and time of formation as all are important in determining whether it is worthwhile to invoke nationalist sentiments. Political leaders, despite often simply seeking power in office, do listen to the public sector for ways to gain support. The civil society provides a useful tool for politicians to understand what the population is feeling and what interests it is likely to harbor. While weak institutions tend to be organized around more immediate problems, the likelihood of the nationalist sentiment being radicalized using their infrastructure is smaller than when the institutions are stronger and have been in place longer.
It still remains to be seen if this indeed is transferable to other cases, or whether it is specific to the respective cases of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. There is no doubt, however, that examining civil society in its broader sense creates a different way of describing the dynamics between the elites and the public sector. For the relationship is not that of blind sheep led by power hungry hounds. Instead, it is a relationship that is created locally and amplified the opportune moments of history.
Bibliography:


