Homeland Calling

Exile Patriotism & the Balkan Wars

Paul Hockenos

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CHAPTER TWO

Reconciling Croatia

When the future Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, visited Canada early in the summer of 1987, he boasted a nationalist résumé second to few in Croatia. His historical work had made him an apologist for the Ustashe's World War II quisling state, and twice he had done time in communist prison cells for his beliefs. But it is unlikely that he anticipated the uncompromising visions and grandiose plans that North America's radical émigrés would whisper into his ear. In Tudjman's mind the program that would later be known as Croatian National Policy—the forging of an ethnic Greater Croatia—was still an amorphous hodgepodge of loose ideas and general ill-defined goals. Its essential outline, though, would become discernible over the course of his visits to North America in the late 1980s.

According to his Toronto host, John Čaldarević, on his first visit Tudjman did not mention the possibility of a Croatian bid for independence or any plan to form his own political party. At York University he lectured to audiences of several hundred people on the interwar Croat patriot Stjepan Radić, and at the University of Toronto Tudjman spoke on "The Question of Nationality in the Contemporary World." Not once in either talk did he explicitly call for Croatian statehood; but the contours of its rationale permeated both presentations.

On June 19, 1987, from behind a simple lectern at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Tudjman outlined his world-historical views to an expectant audience of diaspora Croats. Couched in the convoluted phraseology of Yugoslav academia, Tudjman declared that the ethnic nation was mankind's most sophisticated form of social organization:

> From the earliest knowledge of mankind's history, nationalities or nations have been and remain, with all their manifestations of ethnicity and statehood, the highest social configuration of a human community. The whole of human history has concerned itself with the formation and self-determination of national societies and the creation of states. . . . The self-determination of nations, their freedom from external influences and foreign domination, their sovereignty of state, and at the same time

> the desire for equality and ascendancy in the international arena have been and remain the main characteristics of contemporary historical fluctuation.[1]

World history, he went on, was one long geopolitical Hobbesian struggle of nation against nation. In a barely veiled swipe at Serbia, he admitted that nationalism, although the pinnacle of Western civilization, had occasionally sold out its lofty principles by enabling some nations to subject other worthy nations to tyranny.

No doubt more than a few in the diaspora audience squirmed when Tudjman heralded both Lenin and Tito as great thinkers. But their real genius, he argued, had nothing to do with Marx, wage labor, or class struggle. Their brilliance lay in the recognition of national self-determination as the unstoppable dynamic of "history's forward march." Tito's defiant stand against Stalin and Soviet hegemony should be chalked up as a noble defense of national sovereignty. There were not a few Croat communists, too, Tudjman hinted, who also grasped the "primary objective" of the socialist movement as the liberation of the Croat nation. But socialism ultimately leads the national cause into a blind alley, he admitted. The inherent contradictions of Titoism render the doctrine useless. In time, the God-given nationalistic forces of history will inevitably undermine the foundations of such multinational, one-party states.

"World unity," Tudjman told the Toronto émigrés, "prospers not through the negation but rather through the ever greater respect for national individuality." His example was the European Community. The suppression of the national principle could have dire consequences for Croatia. "In light of our historical experience," he warned, "wherein entire civilizations and many nations have disappeared, among them those of great intellectual and cultural wealth, even the most optimistic among us cannot be completely assured that our own civilization can escape the same destiny." Tudjman concluded that the aspiration common to the late Tito, the early Croat communists, and the 1971 Croatian Spring reformers was a "national democratic political platform," which is as close as Tudjman comes to hinting at the formation of his future party, the Croatian Democratic Community, the HDZ. The Ontario émigrés were so enthusiastic about the lectures, they published them in pamphlet form in English and Croatian, and mailed the booklets to diaspora communities as far distant as South Africa.

It was after the York University lecture several days later that Tudjman first met one of North America's most prominent nationalist radicals, the Croatian National Resistance (Otpor) president Marin Sopta. Sopta's reputation as a political extremist made it imprudent for the two men to meet in public, but in the evening at private residences they chatted late into the

night. The impression Tudjman made on Sopta, as well as Ante Beljo, Gojko Šušak, and John Zdunić, was enormous. Sopta beams at the memory of it. "It's hard to say if it was some kind of instinct within us or just love at first sight," gushes Sopta, sitting outside at the Café Ban, the HDZ favored coffeehouse alongside Zagreb's bustling Jelačič Square. Every few minutes or so, Sopta interrupts our interview to greet friends or shake hands with former colleagues, most of them, in that spring of 2000, abruptly jobless after the fall of the Tudjman regime. After a decade in power the HDZ suffered a lopsided defeat at the polls in January 2000 to a reform-minded center-left coalition.

"Somehow we knew that he was the man, that he would be the leader to finally pull the Croats together," says Sopta, a loquacious, heavy-jowled man around fifty. The days he starred as a striker on Toronto's all-Croat soccer team seem a long way off. When he wasn't on the soccer pitch or in the Otpor headquarters, he worked part-time as a dental technician to pay the rent. He remembers his years in Canada fondly, a part of his life incalculably simpler than that in an independent Croatia, particularly one with the HDZ in opposition. In 1995, after a stint at the Defense Ministry, Sopta took over the directorship of the HDZ foreign policy think tank, the Ivo Pilar Institute for Strategic Research. "He had the charisma of a great leader," Sopta says, referring again to Tudjman, "like Churchill or De Gaulle." What impressed the exiles most about Tudjman was his potential to take charge and lead the nation toward its rightful destiny. Tudjman, the old Partisan general, was prepared to lead, and this group of émigrés was ready to follow.

Not surprisingly, the émigré nationalists and the former communist officer did not see eye-to-eye on everything. During the first Canada trip they locked horns on two issues. For one, Tudjman could not foresee the imminent collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, something the right-wing émigrés had assumed since 1946. He proposed a further gradual devolution of centralized power in Yugoslavia, which, either de facto or de jure, would turn Yugoslavia into a loose confederation of republics. A multiparty system might then emerge, followed by elections, and then independence, perhaps, down the road. "We kept saying that we didn't have time for this," explains Sopta, "that time was running out. We wanted full independence." But, in 1987, Tudjman could not be persuaded. Nevertheless, a fully independent Croatia sooner rather than later was a thought Tudjman would have time to mull over.

Second, there was Bosnia. Both Tudjman and the émigrés believed passionately that the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was an artificial construction and that most of it properly belonged to Croatia. Ethnic Croats made up a total of only about 17 percent of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. But Tudjman and the diaspora activists agreed that the Bos-

nian Muslims were actually wayward Croats, one-time Catholic Slavs who converted to Islam during the Ottoman rule for reasons of convenience and who might one day be reconverted into good Catholics. Even unconverted, as Muslims, the Bosnians could still be loyal Croats—that is, if they *identified themselves and behaved* as Croats! Fantastic as it sounds today, the émigrés extolled the Bosnian Muslims as "the flower of the Croatian nation," as had nineteenth-century Croat nationalists, and the Ustashe's Pavelić, too. Given the bloody campaign directed only a few years later against Bosnian Muslims by these very same men in the Tudjman administration, it is nearly impossible to fathom, in hindsight, that they were sincere at the time. But it seems that they were. In the diaspora media there was no comparison between the vitriol lavished on Serbs and the benevolent indifference with which they ignored the Bosnian Muslims. In fact, attesting to the Croats' sincerity, a number of Croat-behaving Muslims ("Croats of Islamic faith") held high-ranking positions in some of the Croats' most radical émigré organizations, including Otpor.

An unquestioned tenet of the extremist émigrés was that Croatia extended to the River Drina, the eastern border of Bosnia and Herzegovina, just as it had in the NDH. "There was no Bosnia issue," says Zdunić bluntly, "only the Croatia issue." When Šušak first returned to Croatia in 1990 he automatically entered his birthplace as "Široki Brijeg, Croatia." (Technically he was right. When Šušak was born, Široki Brijeg was part of NDH, not Bosnia and Herzegovina or Yugoslavia.) Tudjman's early notions of Croatia's proper borders seem to have fluctuated. On some occasions he openly fantasized about the resurrection of the borders of the 1939 Croatian Banovina, which included parts of Bosnia and even Serbia, right up to the suburbs of Belgrade. At other times he talked about a division of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia. At the very least he certainly saw Bosnia's northwestern Bihać pocket as critical for Croatia's strategic interests, while western Herzegovina and the northeastern Posavina were naturally part of Croatia in demographic terms.

Tudjman and the émigrés parted ways on the proper strategy to acquire those tracts of Bosnia and Herzegovina that they considered rightly Croatia's. They agreed that the majority of Bosnian Muslims would naturally gravitate toward Croatia. But, according to Sopta, Tudjman believed that the Bosnia issue could be solved peacefully, perhaps through some kind of deal with Serbia. The émigrés objected vigorously. "Šušak, Beljo, and I were from the region and we knew exactly," explains Sopta. "We said no way that the problem of Bosnia Herzegovina could be solved peacefully. It couldn't be solved without blood." Whereas Tudjman, who had lived for years in Belgrade, felt that some kind of deal with the Serbs to carve up the area was possible, the fiercely anti-Serb émigrés ruled this out as preposterous. The

émigrés knew that a battle over Bosnia and Herzegovina was in store, and they were prepared to wage it. Quite amazingly, none of them guessed that the stiffest opposition would come from the Bosnian Muslims themselves.

Tudjman's first trip to Canada also presented an ideal opportunity to test the diaspora waters on his grand plan of "national reconciliation." Tudjman was by no means the first Croat nationalist to argue that Croats on both sides of the World War II barricades must shelve their historical animosities and unite as one, undivided nation. By the 1960s most émigré nationalists, with the exception of the oldest-school Pavelić Ustashes, endorsed some version of reconciliation between the left and right. Many Croat Partisans, the argument ran, were, at heart, also good Croat patriots. But at one time they had believed not only in the noble social ideals of communism but also, naively, in southern Slavic "brotherhood and unity." (Others at the time had even touted an independent "Soviet Croatia" that would be separate from Serbia.) But these lapses were excusable. How were well-intentioned Croat Partisans in 1941 supposed to know what a ruthless dictator Tito would become and how he would turn on Croatia? There was also nothing wrong with the essence of socialism, the émigrés insisted. An independent Croatian state should incorporate egalitarian ideals, just as the NDH did. After all, in the end, all Croats are equal. Anti-capitalist, illiberal ideas were not anathema to the cause of Croat nationalism. Various national and social philosophies had been wedded in the past, and could be again, in an independent Croatia.

Tudjman, the Partisan general turned nationalist dissident, not only espoused this plan, he embodied it. He was uniquely qualified to bridge the fractious divide in Croatia between the "sons and daughters of Ustashe," as he put it, and the "sons and daughters of Partisans." The Canadian diaspora was the perfect place to gauge how much distance had to be bridged. People such as Sopta and Šušak were ready to make the required leap of faith. Later that year in a letter to the moderate diaspora newspaper, *The Fraternalist*, based in Pittsburgh, Beljo spelled it out:

> Croatian solidarity—all for one and one for all—is our Croatian motto even more today than it was ever in the past. We are the sons of former Croatian Domobrans [the NDH home guard], Partisans, Ustashe, and who knows what other colors and camps. We respect them as our fathers but refuse to repeat their suicidal fights, no matter how angry some individuals will be with us.[2]

This version of national reconciliation had been a fundamental tenet of Otpor ideology since the group's founders broke with Pavelić in the late 1950s. But, in 1987, others needed convincing.

Older anticommunist Croats, particularly those who fled Croatia at the

barrel of a gun, harbored deep reservations about the strategy. On the Sunday before Tudjman's first Canadian lecture, Sopta recalls, an old Ustashe supporter cornered him after mass at the Franciscan center in Norval. The man had heard about Tudjman's upcoming talk in Toronto and was not pleased. Sopta feigned ignorance. The man continued: "If I find the bastard who's organizing this, I'll kill the motherfucker," Sopta recalls him saying. The man broke out in a wide grin. "And Marin," he said, "I hear it's you."

In a 1996 interview for the Croatian publication *Hrvatsko Slovo*,[3] Šušak tells a similar story about Tudjman's first visit:

> At first, in comparison with [other dissidents like] Savka [Dabčević-Kučar], [Vlado] Gotovac, [Dražen] Budiša, and many others, Tudjman had no chance, especially because of his past. . . . Imagine how hard it was for someone like me coming from Široki Brijeg, who had lost his family, to meet a former [communist] general. It was hard for me to say, "This is the right person for Croatia." During Dr. Tudjman's first visit, only 10 percent of Croat émigrés came to hear him speak, while the other 90 percent condemned me as the organizer for bringing him over. They said, "Who are you bringing here?" However, I talked with the president and asked him about the chances for the future. I realized that he had a vision, a plan, and a program. The question was whether he would find enough people and funds to implement his program. When other Croatian politicians came to Canada later, we were disappointed with them.

At the lectures, older Croats with World War II backgrounds peppered Tudjman with sharp-edged questions. One man stood up and defiantly announced that he had carried a rifle for the Ustashe. "If I had caught you in the forest forty years ago," he assailed Tudjman, "you'd be dead now. And if you had caught me, I'd be dead." The hall stood still. "But whatever the case," he continued with a nod, "I'm behind you now." "Everyone was tense because of who Tudjman was," says Zdunić. "Before, these people couldn't look one another in the eye. But Tudjman insisted that we had all been fighting for the same cause, the Croatian cause, just in different ways."

In addition to national reconciliation, Tudjman sampled the émigrés on another idea key to his emerging program: Iseljena Hrvatska. Roughly translated as "exiled Croatia" or "expelled Croatia," Iseljena Hrvatska implies that all, or at least most, of the Croats not in Croatia proper had been forced out of their rightful homeland—by war, repression, or poverty. This concept of diaspora emphasizes the element of *involuntary* resettlement. The 1945 Bleiburg tragedy, the diaspora's Alamo, was the model example.

When Tudjman looked out over the diaspora in Canada, for example, he did not see the Croat émigrés and their families as "Croatian Canadians,"

Canadian citizens who made up part of the country's rich ethnic composition. Rather, he saw generations of "Croats in Canada," displaced co-nationals who would, or should, eventually return home. For Tudjman and Šušak, this applied not only to the ethnic Croats on other continents but also to the ethnic Croat minorities of Romania, Kosovo, and Vojvodina, people who had lived as constituent peoples in those regions for hundreds of years. Iseljena Hrvatska suggests that all Croats should be living in one nation-state, Croatia. A bit ironically, since Tudjman relied so heavily on the diaspora, "exiled Croatia" implies that the very existence of diasporas is unnatural, an aberration of history that cried out to be corrected.

As unrepresentative as this paradigm was for most people with Croat ancestry living outside Croatia, the notion of Iseljena Hrvatska helps us understand the diaspora worlds of men such as Beljo and Šušak, people who never assimilated into Canadian society. This brand of émigré, not confined to Croats, lived in isolated diaspora communities, like those created by the Croats in Ontario. Ensconced in the suburbs and their ubiquitous shopping malls, they shared little sense of community with their Canadian neighbors or coworkers. Too often their existence was confined to their houses, their cars, and their jobs, on the one hand, and to the subcultural niches of the Croat community, on the other. The content of their stale discourses never strayed far from Croatia: Bleiburg, the NDH, historical Croat heroes, and Serb villains. In contrast to these Babylonian exiles, the majority of Croat émigrés were agreeably integrated into their new societies. They called themselves "Croatian Canadians" or simply "Canadians" and thrived in Canada's multiethnic surroundings. Iseljena Hrvatska represented a small minority that felt marooned on alien shores and vowed one day to return to the homeland. There, awaiting them, was the fortune, happiness, and respect withheld from them in exile.

This vision was taken so seriously by Tudjman that he expected large-scale "returns" of the "expelled Croats" and their families to the homeland. On assuming the republican presidency in 1990, one of his very first moves was to create a Ministry of Return and Immigration in order to expedite the process. The person selected to lead the ministry was Gojko Šušak. The Croat émigrés from Toronto and elsewhere say that Tudjman solicited them to return with promises of high-profile roles in the new Croatia. It was their duty to return, he stressed, arguing that Croatia would desperately need their international experience, investment potential, and business acumen to build a prosperous, independent Croatia.

But Croatia also needed their genes: red-blooded ethnic Croat families to restock a Greater Croatia. Beneath its innocuous surface, the concept of Iseljena Hrvatska suggests much more than the voluntary return of home-sick patriots. It darkly implies an "exchange of populations" and the "reverse

resettlement" of hundreds of thousands of people. As Tudjman and the HDZ later formulated more explicitly, Croatia would be "reconstituted" within its "proper ethnic borders" by biological Croats. The idea of Iseljena Hrvatska foreshadows the mass population movements that took place during the 1990s, though not voluntarily as Tudjman initially forecast. War and ethnic cleansing would uproot more than 500,000 ethnic Croats from Serbia, central Bosnia, and Kosovo who would relocate to Croatia proper and Croat-dominated parts of Bosnia. The 1995 Croat counteroffensives against rebel Serbs would send more than 150,000 non-Croats fleeing eastward out of Croatia. The number of émigrés who voluntarily repatriated from Western countries to independent Croatia was insignificant, no more than an estimated 3,500. During the same period, as Croatia's economy faltered, many times that number *left* Croatia.

In his inaugural speech in Croatia's parliament, the Sabor, on May 30, 1990, Tudjman articulated the plan more clearly, practically announcing sweeping exchanges of populations:

> Among the other successes of the HDZ that have contributed significantly to the hard-won democratic transformation, one must add the unquestioned creation of a spiritual unity between the homeland and exiled Croatia. The new Croatian government, at all levels, should undertake effective steps in order to facilitate the return of the largest possible number of Croat men from around the world to the homeland, as soon as possible. Serious consideration should be given to the possibility of relocating a certain number of Croat minorities to wasted homes in many Croatian areas.

Tudjman's passing reference to transferring ethnic Croats abroad to "wasted homes in Croatian areas" should have thrown up flaming red flags to the international community in 1990. What was a "wasted home," if not a reference to the homes of the 600,000-strong ethnic Serbian minority in Croatia?

"From the very beginning, this concept begged the question of where these thousands of repatriated people will go," says Milorad Pupovac, a professor of philology at Zagreb University and the leader of a moderate Croatian Serb political party. "It implies that these people outside of Croatia belong in places where other people, like non-Croat minorities, live inside Croatia." Pupovac argues that Iseljena Hrvatska was vital to Tudjman's concept of Croatia and integral to the processes that led to ethnic cleansing and war. He argues that while "national reconciliation" was designed to provide the political unity that had divided Croats, Iseljena Hrvatska was intended to bring about demographic unity. These were the pillars of what would be-

come Croatian National Policy, the plan of Tudjman and Šušak to forge an ethnically cleansed Greater Croatia.

In 1988 and 1989 Tudjman returned to Toronto and also visited Vancouver, Ottawa, Norval, Sudbury, Montreal, and many points in the United States, such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. By then he knew exactly what he wanted for Croatia—and for himself. The thoughts he had been pondering had coalesced into an ideological vision. "It was very different than the year before," says Čaldarević, who agreed in 1988 to have Tudjman stay in his home a second time. "He talked only politics. He talked about new states, about political developments in Yugoslavia, and about the future." It was evident that Tudjman, often seen in the company of Catholic priests, had made inroads into influential diaspora congregations, particularly among the Franciscans. The size of his diaspora audiences more than doubled, and his message grew more refined. After North America Tudjman toured Western Europe with the same agenda. The seed of the HDZ had been planted, and the diaspora would help it to flower.

But this second time around Čaldarević and Tudjman openly quarreled over the historian's contacts with the radical nationalists. Tudjman's interest in Sopta, Šušak, and a Franciscan priest by the name of Ljubo Krasić was deeper than Čaldarević had imagined. And to Čaldarević's chagrin, they controlled Tudjman's itinerary. "I told him straight out that I didn't want my house under RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] surveillance, which was bound to happen if he met with these guys," says Čaldarević. So Tudjman made his choice. It was the last time he stayed at the Čaldarević residence.

An element of flattery may have been involved when Tudjman, later in the 1990s, quipped that the HDZ was born in Canada, a remark the émigrés recall proudly. During those years, when not in the diaspora, Tudjman and his diverse allies in Croatia were networking furiously across the republic. But Beljo remembers discussing the name of a national democratic platform with Tudjman in 1988. The words *Croatian* and *democratic* had to be included. But they had difficulty choosing a third term. *Party* seemed too narrow for the world-historical quest at hand, and national reconciliation implicitly cut across all political borders. The name of their organization had to be suitable for a national movement that transcended the political divisions that had cursed Croatia throughout the century. Eventually Tudjman settled on *zajednica*, which can be translated as "community." The Croatian Democratic Community came to life on February 28, 1989, in the halls of Zagreb's Writers' Union, just off Republic Square.

Later in the year the first HDZ North America convention assembled in Cleveland, the U.S. bastion of HDZ support. John Zdunić from Toronto and Ante Beljo from Sudbury were named president and secretary, respec-

tively. By November 1989, when Tudjman made his visit to North America as HDZ president, there were party branches in sixteen North American cities.

With socialist Yugoslavia entering its death throes, the moment was suddenly ripe for Croatia's right-wing émigrés to return in triumph to the homeland. The formal debut for the HDZ émigrés in Croatia came on February 24, 1990, in Zagreb's Lisinski Hall, with all the considerable pomp and pageantry that the young movement could muster for its first official congress. The jam-packed concert hall was draped in red, white, and blue Croatian flags, a donation of the émigré branches from the United States, Canada, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, South Africa, and Australia, which accounted for about one-quarter of the twenty-five hundred participants. Only through diaspora associations could one obtain Croatian flags without the socialist insignia. "We brought as many flags as we could pack," smiles Zdunić.

The émigrés descended on Zagreb from all directions, many in Croatia for the first time in decades. Some had had visas arranged by Josip Boljkovac, HDZ vice president and former interior minister, who put his old connections to work to get the émigrés in. The Ohio-based loyalists secured visas from the Yugoslav consulate in Cleveland, run by a sympathetic Slovene. Others showed up without any visa at all.

Tudjman and Šušak met the émigrés at the airport. Tudjman's move to invite them en masse was an exceptionally bold challenge to the regime. If the dreaded "Ustashe émigrés" could return to the socialist republic of Croatia, anything was possible. "To invite the diaspora back to the homeland for a great meeting," recalled Tudjman years later, "was risky to the point that even those people who were later in my leadership waited to the last minute to see whether they would be arrested or not." Tudjman calls the decision "a turning point in [his] life in terms of decision-making."[4] He dared to test who would blink first. The regime did. Only one person was detained at the airport, an Otpor member from Toronto. The entire congress refused to convene officially until he was released, which happened several hours later.

The raucous, emotionally charged gathering set the tone for the HDZ election campaign. The republic's first multiparty elections since World War II were only two weeks away. Croat hymns and resounding standing ovations punctuated the long oratories of speaker after speaker. "We are Croatia, too," read one of the émigré banners. Tudjman's opening speech underlined the imperative of Croatia's "self-determination in its natural and historic borders," which he declined to define further. Buzzwords such as "self-determination" and calls for the émigrés' return triggered outbursts of

wild applause. Similarly mention of Milošević or "Serb expansionism" elicited piercing whistles. One speaker, a notoriously conservative priest, for some inexplicable reason proposed sending a message of "peace and love" to the Serb minority in Croatia. He was roundly booed, loudest of all by the émigrés, and forced to discontinue his presentation.

Émigré representatives from four continents figured prominently in the congress lineup. First on the overcrowded stage was Zdenka Babić-Petričević from Frankfurt, Germany, who would enter the Sabor as one of the HDZ's "diaspora representatives." Over the next ten years she would define herself as one of Tudjman's most ardent and uncritical loyalists. The twenty-five HDZ branches in Germany, she announced, request that Croats abroad be allowed to vote, an oft-heard desire of many diaspora patriots. But if not, she promised theatrically, they will come to Croatia directly to vote for the HDZ—which, by the busload, is exactly what they did. Shouts of "Long live Croatia!" erupted in the hall.

The next to speak was the Sudbury electrician and amateur historian Ante Beljo, the new general secretary of the North American HDZ. (He, as did Šušak, listed his profession in Canada as "engineer.") After the elections, Beljo would take the top HDZ post in Croatia. Later he established the Croatian Information Center, a pro-government satellite news service, and in 1993 he was appointed director of the influential Croatian Heritage Foundation. For Beljo, his appearance at the congress, the first time he stepped foot in Croatia since 1967, was a vindication of all that he and the Canada émigrés had worked for. In fact, he argued immodestly, the new freedoms emerging in Croatia were the hard-won victory of the émigrés' "struggle for the respect of human and national rights." Political appointments had been as good as promised to the Canadian loyalists, and Beljo reminded Tudjman of his word: "The HDZ is the only organization in Croatia which showed that it cares for emigrants by asking our opinion. Others wanted only our reason, our fiscal potential, and our money, then they gave themselves the right to decide what to do with this." The Canadian émigrés were not prepared simply to be the vehicle for Tudjman's rise to power. They demanded a place in the driver's seat.

For the émigrés, the only conceivable political direction was independence, full speed ahead. While many non-émigré speakers, more attuned to the complex political and constitutional debates taking place within Yugoslavia, equivocated on the future status of Croatia, Beljo did not mince words on the émigrés' behalf:

> The historical right to statehood has to be put into reality. . . . By living abroad we have fully realized that every nation without its own state is a

> nation without a name, a nation not respected by anyone, a nation about which little positive is said and a nation which is condemned to bear unsparingly each and everyone's sins and a nation at which everyone can spit, including its own sons.

This wounded tone persists throughout the speech. It reflects on Beljo as a person as well as a politician: a small, unaccomplished man with pseudo-intellectual pretensions. One could insert the word *person* where Beljo uses *nation* in his speech to begin to comprehend the inferiority complexes of diaspora figures such as Beljo and Šušak. The entire rambling speech is a generic template of the right-wing émigré mind-set. Communism was excoriated as "a Balkan abyss of evil and darkness" and "an unprecedented time of state terrorism." "Many heads fell and thousands of years in prison were arranged for innocent Croat sons and daughters in the homeland and abroad," he proclaimed. In a few gratuitous shots at the Serbs Beljo vents his indignation over the "violence and hatred" coming from Serb intellectuals in Belgrade, and promises "our full support to all the forces engaged in destroying these horrible and brutal methods of barbarians." At the time violence had yet to flare up between Serbs and Croats. That would change when the HDZ came to power.

Even before the Lisinski Hall congress, diaspora connections were employed to get the HDZ on its feet. In Croatia the fledgling HDZ needed cash and organizational competence. Zdunić, as one of the wealthiest Toronto émigrés, was just the man for the job. In the Canada contingent Beljo, Šušak, Sopta, and the Franciscan friar Krasić rounded out the core team. Their task was to initiate a "Western-style" campaign in Croatia and at the same time reach out to the diaspora. Office space was rented, telephones installed, and fax machines set in place, no small feat for a fledgling opposition party in socialist Yugoslavia. "The whole idea was that every village office [of the HDZ] would have a telephone and telefax," says Zdunić, who headed the HDZ coordinating committee in North America. About sixty fax machines arrived in the suitcases and backpacks of North American student volunteers, mostly via transatlantic flights from Canada. Croatian officers in the Yugoslav customs services turned a blind eye, either out of personal sympathy or, more likely, in response to direct orders from above.

The HDZ, less than a year old, mounted a global campaign for office in little Croatia, one republic of six in federal Yugoslavia, with a population of just 4.7 million. In addition to North America, South America, and Europe, the party dispatched representatives to as far afield as Australia to push for the HDZ and solicit funds. One scholar based at the time in western Australia, Dona Kolar-Panov, observed the stream of politicians and popular

folk musicians, as well as Zagreb University's chancellor, who visited Perth's Croat clubs. The same campaign paraphernalia handed out in Croatia, such as posters, stickers, and badges, went like hotcakes in Australia, where in 1990 diaspora Croats were ineligible to vote. The touring HDZ troupes sold videocassettes, T-shirts and raised money through benefit auctions. One fruitcake adorned with Croatia's coat of arms went to the highest bidder for seven hundred Australian dollars, just a drop in the bucket that the Australia-based *Croatian Herald* estimated at three million Australian dollars (about $2 million) collected in the country by the HDZ for the race. Kolar-Panov notes that the unapologetic nationalism of candidate Tudjman and his HDZ provoked indignant cries from some Croatian Australians, who, like herself, identified with multinational Yugoslavia.[5]

By the time the HDZ arrived on the scene, other Croatian parties had sprung up as well—some of them openly courting the diaspora. Early opinion polls in Croatia showed Savka Dabčević-Kučar's Coalition of National Agreement (KNS) well ahead of the pack. Dabčević-Kučar, the popular leader of the 1971 Croatian Spring movement, was a name generally more familiar to most émigrés than Tudjman's at the time. But the KNS had nothing comparable to the HDZ network already in place in the diaspora.

Most observers agree that the émigré contributions to the HDZ far exceeded those to the KNS. Beljo claims that little money was required, given the politically charged atmosphere of the day. Šušak, in an interview with the German press, boasted that he alone orchestrated the flow of "a few million dollars" into the HDZ treasure chest. Sopta, on the other hand, claims that the sums were even higher. He tells of one HOP leader from Australia who contributed one million Australian dollars in cash. He says that unsolicited contributions streamed in from individuals, organizations, and church parishes across the world. Journalists from *Mladina* magazine in Slovenia calculate that the diaspora added as much as $8 million to the HDZ campaign coffers.[6] Whatever the exact figure, money arrived in quantities that in 1989 and 1990 no other party could rival, a testament to Tudjman's foresight. The fund-raising paid off: Tudjman and his HDZ surged to a narrow, first-past-the-post victory in May 1990. In line with Croatia's skewed electoral system, the HDZ's 40 percent of the popular vote entitled it to a commanding majority in the Sabor, and a mandate to push forward.

But émigré money was only one factor, and probably not the decisive one, in the HDZ's stunning triumph, after having trailed in the campaign. The HDZ beat the nationalist drum for all it was worth, not hesitating to play the volatile Serb card. "All people are equal in Croatia," pledged Tudjman, "but it must be clear who is the host and who is the guest." He proudly pointed out, in one grossly insensitive statement, that his wife was neither Serb nor Jewish. The remark made international headlines, and

Tudjman apologized profusely. Nevertheless, the comment contributed to the HDZ stance as the party most ready to disregard taboo in its drive toward independence.

The émigrés' boisterous return during communism's waning days was one of the lead news item in Croatia. The Zagreb airport was witness to joyous scenes of family reunions abounding in billowing red-and-white checkerboards and previously outlawed folk songs. The comparatively wealthy, ostensibly worldly émigrés basked in the limelight, relishing a status they could never have imagined during their days of "exile" in the West. In coffee bars and on television, the returnees shattered four decades of taboo, unabashedly championing the virtues of an independent Croatia. While praising Tudjman and the HDZ to the sky, they also struck out, in terms that had once been against the law, at Croatia's ethnic Serb minority.

Despite the name-calling, neither ordinary Croats nor most of Croatia's six hundred thousand Serbs were susceptible at first to the insidious baiting conducted by their respective nationalists. In Serbia Milošević had steadily cranked up the propaganda volume since 1987 and reached out to stir up passions in Croatia's Serb-populated pockets. But the initial response was remarkably tepid. The sparks did not catch automatically because Serbs and Croats had existed more or less amicably in Croatia for many generations, with the major exception of the violence of the World War II period. Almost every municipality in the republic had included a percentage of Serbs, which totaled 11 percent of the population. The Serbs, admittedly, were proportionately overrepresented in the local bureaucracy, police, and party. But the Croats suffered no tangible disadvantages. Croatian Serbs in the cities were well integrated into the urban fabric, many in mixed marriages. Even in more rural areas like central Croatia, in the so-called Krajina region where there were heavy Serb concentrations, Serbs and Croats spoke the same dialect, ate the same foods, and attended the same schools. Decades of living together had diluted, though not erased, the acrimonious memories of World War II. The daily exercise of balancing ethnic relations created a modus vivendi that most members of both nationalities could accept.

From the vantage point of their split-level duplexes in North American suburbia, the right-wing émigrés had no interest in the complexity of contemporary Croatian society. Some of them, such as Šušak, Sopta and Beljo, did not hail from Croatia and so never experienced living together with the Serbs of Croatia. Others, such as Zdunić, came from Lika, a poor, underdeveloped region where World War II resentments still poisoned relations between Croats and Serbs.

Quite simply, these émigrés had come to demonize all Serbs. It was "the Serbs" who had driven them into political exile, who had butchered their

comrades at Bleiburg and continued to persecute their families in Croatia, to name only a few of the oft-recited crimes. Zdunić, who is otherwise a man of carefully weighed words, positively trembles when the topic comes up over a bacon-and-eggs breakfast in a Toronto diner. He refers to Serbs as "our arch enemies." "We were oppressed by Serbs, by the Yugoslav army, by Yugoslav diplomacy, Yugoslav trade, Yugoslav commerce, the Yugoslav banking system, Yugoslav organizations, Yugoslav domination," he fumes. Under the guise of communism, the émigrés charged, the Serbs in socialist Yugoslavia had already forged a Greater Serbia ruled from Belgrade. The émigrés believed that communism and the "terror machine" of the "bloody dictator" Marshal Tito were simply the means of enforcing Serb domination of Yugoslavia, or, as they called it, "Serboslavia."

For many of these émigrés, their passions and historical time were frozen in 1945 or 1952 or 1971, whichever year they emigrated. Yugoslavia's Serbs were the winners of the war, and they, the exile Croats, the great losers, chased from their homes across the world's oceans. Abroad in isolated communities, this resentment and anger fermented, growing ever more irrational and epic in proportion. If the Serbs of Serbia were the colonial lords of socialist Yugoslavia, those who comprised the Serb minority in Croatia were their agents. At their most polite, the Croat right-wingers referred to the minority Serbs in Croatia as "guests," a euphemism in nationalist jargon for second-class citizens. More often, though, they were castigated as the occupying forces who had invaded Croatia first with the Ottoman Turks, later with the Austro-Hungarians, and then with the Yugoslav armies. Whatever the case Serbs did not belong in Croatia, and the émigrés did. This is exactly the message Tudjman delivered to the émigrés when he visited North America in the 1980s.

When they returned to the homeland in 1990, the émigré radicals finally had a domestic forum for their ideas, and a vehicle, the HDZ, to peddle them. The resurgent Catholic Church was a powerful ideological ally in 1990 and 1991. Although the HDZ émigrés' brand of nationalism was initially foreign to most Croats, it found fertile soil in certain rural regions, particularly among peripheral social groups with mind-sets closest to the radical diaspora. These were rough regions, like the Dalmatian hinterland and adjacent western Herzegovina, where bad blood between Serbs and Croats had lingered throughout the postwar decades. Many émigrés hailed from exactly these parts. Moreover, migration from poor rural areas into Croatian towns and cities had created another strata of resentful, dislocated citizenry that was open to the call of firebrand nationalists.

"This peripheral part of the nation was the driving force for the ethnic tension and momentum toward war," argues Milorad Pupovac. A handsome academic with a thick shock of black hair, Pupovac was one of the many

people working tirelessly in the early 1990s to keep Croatia from fracturing. Although a Croatian Serb, his scathing words for the radical extremists in both ethnic camps earned him a string of death threats in 1990 and 1991. "Without these peripheral elements, which were represented by the diaspora and aided by the Catholic Church, it would have been very, very hard to imagine a conflict between peoples who had lived together for so long," he says. Yet these people (and these ideas) penetrated from the margins of society into the mainstream and eventually took power. After moderates split from the HDZ in 1994, the hard-line factions, personified in the figure of Šušak, assumed undisputed control of the ruling party and, in effect, the country.

Their cause was substantially abetted by Belgrade, whose relentless anti-Croat vitriol enraged average Croats while it eventually radicalized the republic's minority Serbs. Milošević's spin doctors, intent on sowing fear and hostility, shrieked to the Croatian Serbs that "the Ustashe" was on the march again. Their definition of Ustashe was broad: it included the entire political spectrum of reform-minded Croats, not just the hard-liners in the HDZ who were employing terminology the Serbs associated with the old NDH. The Belgrade line was pure demagoguery designed to divide mixed communities and spur the ethnic Serbs in Croatia to take up arms. The reaction of rural Serbs to the Belgrade propaganda, on the one side, and to Zagreb's insensitive use of nationalistic slogans and imagery, on the other, was predictable. The Serb minority witnessed Croatia's new political class resurrecting the symbols linked to Ustashe rule, such as the šahovninca and the new currency, the kuna. (In fact, the šahovninca and the kuna had historical precedents that long predated the NDH.) But to the Croatian Serbs, it looked like the Ustashe, the rhetoric sounded like that of the Ustashe, and the Belgrade evening news swore to them that it was the Ustashe. Before long, no one could convince them otherwise: the Ustashe was back and the lives of the Serbs were in peril.

From month to month, through the latter half of 1990 and into 1991, Croatia lurched ominously toward war. HDZ hard-liners in the new Croatian government, men such as Gojko Šušak, the new minister of return and immigration, seemed at pains to alienate the Serb minority at every opportunity. Their intentions were thinly veiled: increase the ante, bring tensions to a boil, and eventually rid Croatia of its Serbs forever. Among the Croatian Serbs, Milošević proxies had drowned out all voices of reason. Weapons were distributed, militias formed, roadblocks set up, and, in December 1990, the self-appointed rebel Serb leaders proclaimed the Serb Autonomous District of the Krajina, a breakaway mini-state that would eventually subsume one-third of Croatian territory. Yet even at this advanced stage of madness, full-scale war was by no means inevitable. The Croat po-

litical elite still talked in terms of a reconstituted federation or confederation of the former republics of Yugoslavia. European diplomacy was belatedly waking up to the urgency of the situation. A window was there to negotiate a compromise solution.

When exactly—the day, the week, the month—that war broke out in Croatia is impossible to pinpoint. But the events in Borovo Selo, an industrial suburb of Vukovar in eastern Slavonia, marked a critical juncture in the descent into full-scale armed conflict. The old Habsburg city of Vukovar and its Danubian hinterland had long been the site of multiethnic coexistence. For hundreds of years Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, Italians, and, until 1945, Germans—as well as ethnic Serbs and Croats, of course—had farmed the fertile lands. By the late 1980s they enjoyed a relatively envious regional standard of living. But by the spring of 1991 the brewing tension had begun to destabilize the delicate patchwork of peoples that made their homes in the plains of eastern Slavonia.

Serb paramilitary units from Serbia proper, including the unscrupulous killer gangs led by the gangster nationalists Arkan (Željko Ražnjatović) and Vojislav Šešelj, had set up bases in and around Borovo Selo, a predominantly Serb settlement in Croatia's easternmost region of Slavonia. Barricades and control posts marked off Serb and Croat neighborhoods. Bloodshed had been averted, thanks in large part to the young police chief of Osijek, Josip Reihl-Kir, who came from a mixed marriage (German and Slovene) but considered himself a Croat. His selfless efforts to reach out to both communities had kept tempers from boiling over.

But in mid-April Reihl-Kir received an unexpected visit from a group of high-placed HDZ leaders, including Minister Šušak. In *The Death of Yugoslavia*, Laura Silber and Allan Little describe how Šušak leaned on Reihl-Kir to guide him through backroads and cornfield paths to the outskirts of Borovo Selo. Reihl-Kir thought that the idea was crazy and at first objected to the demand, since such a lark could undermine the tenuous peace he was fighting to preserve.

From the outskirts of the settlement Šušak and his men fired three shoulder-launched Ambrust rockets into Borovo Selo. One mortar round hit a house. Another landed unexploded in a field. No one was killed, but the escapade set off a chain reaction—as it was intended to do. The undetonated missile was brandished about on Serbian television, hard evidence of unprovoked Croat aggression against peaceful Serbs. A flurry of recriminations and countercharges followed between Zagreb and Belgrade.

In the poisoned atmosphere, Reihl-Kir continued to negotiate in good faith between the two communities. But, on the night of May 1, four Croat policemen attempted to enter Borovo Selo. Serb paramilitaries, lying in wait, opened fire. Two of the policemen escaped, but the other two were

wounded and taken prisoner. The next morning disaster struck. When news of the hostage-taking made its way to the nearby city of Osijek, a busload of Croat policemen, mostly fresh recruits, set straightaway to rescue their colleagues. The rookie officers drove directly into a gory ambush. Serb paramilitaries rained gunfire on the bus as it entered the village, killing at least twelve Croats and wounding more than twenty.

The massacre sent shock waves through Croatia, pushing the political temperature higher and higher. Some of Tudjman's advisers hailed the attack as the perfect pretext for declaring independence at once. The media jumped on the incident announcing that dozens had been killed and that Croat soldiers had been mutilated and decapitated. The next day Tudjman virtually declared that Croatia was at war with Serbia and called Croats to arms "if that need arises" to "defend the freedom and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia."

In the weeks that followed, Reihl-Kir fought a losing battle to restore mutual trust between the Serb and Croat communities of eastern Slavonia. He complained openly that HDZ extremists such as Šušak had highjacked the political process and were obstructing his efforts to broker between the two sides. On July 1 Reihl-Kir and two associates were gunned down by a Croat reserve police officer with links to the extremist wing of the HDZ. It was an assassination, insiders charge, ordered from above. The killer was promptly spirited out of the country and resettled in Australia. "It is a striking commentary," write Silber and Little, "on the direction in which Croatia was moving during those crucial weeks leading to the outbreak of full-scale war, that Reihl-Kir's moderation, his conciliatory approaches to the Serbs, had cost him his life, while Šušak's activities, stoking tension and provoking conflict, were to win him one of the most prominent places in Tudjman's government."[7]

Two months later, on September 18, 1991, Šušak was named minister of defense, the number two position in the Croatian government.

12. Hubert Butler, *The Sub-prefect Should Have Held His Tongue, and Other Essays* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 275–76, 288–89.

13. Croatian journalists, such as *Nacional*'s star reporter Jasna Babić, have questioned much of Šušak's self-propagated life history. They claim that Šušak's father was never in the Ustashe and that Šušak's house was never burned down. See Babić's articles in *Globus*, July, 29, 1994; July 22, 1994.

14. Butler, *The Sub-Prefect*, 287–90. Today the center is a home for retired Croat priests.

15. Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 29.

16. Mart Bax, *Medjugorje: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Rural Bosnia* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1995), xvii.

17. Čizmić, Miletić, and Pripić, *From the Adriatic to Lake Erie*, 454–55.

Chapter 2. Reconciling Croatia

1. *Otpor*, no. 5 (1987): 24–28.

2. *The Fraternalist*, October 28, 1987. Translated by I. Djurić.

3. Dubravko Horvatić and Stjepan Šešlj, *Hrvatsko Slovo*, December 27, 1996.

4. Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin, 1996), 85.

5. Dona Kolar-Panov, *Video, War and the Diasporic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1997), 104, 110–12.

6. Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The Ending of Yugoslavia* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 269.

7. Silber and Little, *Death*, 144.

Chapter 3. The Avengers of Bleiburg

1. Richard West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), 302.

2. *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1972* (Bonn: Bundesministerium des Innern, 1973), 139. All the mercenaries save one, a seventeen-year-old minor, were killed in battle or executed. The survivor served nineteen years in prison, winning his freedom in 1991 with Croatia's independence. According to Nikola Stedul, who was at the Ministry of Defense at the time, the released prisoner left immediately for the front only to die in mysterious circumstances one week later.

3. "Mord und Terror im Exil," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 4, 1972.

4. John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 289.

5. "Emigranten: Starke Hand," *Der Spiegel*, October 5, 1970.

6. John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2000), 88.

7. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 273.

8. *Hrvatska Država*, no. 183 (May/June 1970).

9. *Stern*, June 6, 1971, 22–26.

10. See *Globus*, January 28, 2000, 91–95.

11. Ian Buruma, *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing* (New York: Random House, 2001), 12.

12. *New York Times*, June 26, 1981, A10; May 16, 1982, A2.

13. *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 30, 1979, 29; "Protest Piglet Rescued," *The Ottawa Journal*, December 1, 1979, 5–6.

14. *Verčernji List*, May 5, 1998, 1.

15. The handful of self-acclaimed "Muslim Croats" was an exception. Their affinity to the Croat diaspora was solely political.

16. The Vatican eventually recognized the Norval parish in 1987.

Chapter 4. Making Baby MiGs

1. President Tudjman was forced to withdraw Rojnića's nomination for the post. This, however, did not stop Rojnića, a textile businessman, from using his close relationship with the