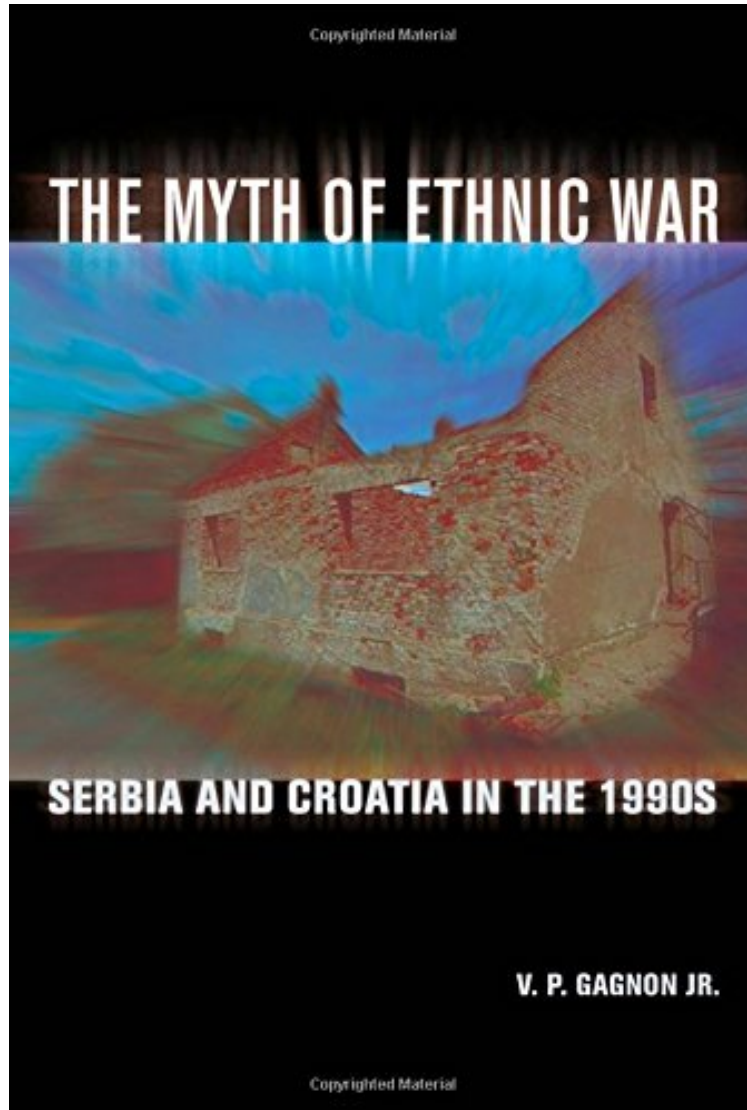


(Download pdf ebook) The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s

## The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s

*V. P. Gagnon Jr.*

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#1235928 in Books V P Gagnon 2006-03-01Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.98 x .65 x 6.10l, .73 #File Name: 0801472911240 pagesThe Myth of Ethnic War Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s | File size: 29.Mb

**V. P. Gagnon Jr. : The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. 3 stars for effort, but -By R. L. Huff- still misses the mark. Gagnon is essentially correct that "ancient ethnic/tribal hatreds" as explanation for this Balkan bloodshed are a copout by the lazy and the smug of Western Europe. That said, it's revealing that ethnic hatreds can be used to mobilize/demobilize people at all. Professor Gagnon's explanation really doesn't account for the whys, ultimately explaining little.In the

first place comes the contradiction between mobilization vs. demobilization, the latter defined as a diversionary tactic. Yet the two seem used interchangeably when addressing ethnic rabble-rousing. Perhaps a better term might be counter-mobilization, along a different agenda than the one Gagnon prefers. But how does that differ from mobilization per se? Nationalism as a counter-mobilization theme is at least a century old, used to neutralize the appeal of socialism. As such was it used in pre-war Yugoslavia, and (ironically) in "reforming" post-Communist Yugoslavia. But if patriotism is a vessel for emptying politics of meaningful content, that also applies to regimes besides the post-Communist authoritarian type. Secondly, he posits the bureaucratic apparatus vs. the reform-minded masses, a typical anti-Communist trope that really seems out of place in analyzing Yugoslavia, where Balkan localism was already enshrined in federal decentralization and workplace (semi) self-management. The local elites were, in fact, embracing liberalizing reforms, as in Slovenia. Or even Serbia - Milosevic did get his start as a banker, after all. This raises the question of liberalization as the root cause of instability, with reform and nationalism equally embraced by both masses and leaders as assertions of post-Communist identity. Moreover, the economic instability unleashed by liberalization has historically been tied to ethnic/race wars. An economy of scarcity - downsizing, high unemployment, deficit reduction through reducing the public sector, market competition, land "shortage" - have always heightened tribal and localist chauvinism. "Keep the jobs for us, and let \*them\* go elsewhere." Such competition nearly always engenders violence. The bulldozing of blacks by poor whites in the US South is one example; driving Serbs out of the Croatian marketplace, or Bosnians off land needed by these same displaced Serbs, falls into the same pattern. Thus I don't feel Gagnon has really stated his case, and much other evidence suggests completely opposite conclusions. He is to be commended for trying to go beyond the smug Western consensus, but he still so desperately wants market liberalization to be the "good guy" here. That case has yet to be proven.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Straight-forward if Somewhat Repetitive By MRPSV.P. Gagnon present a refreshing analysis of the breakdown of state structures in Yugoslavia and the rise of so-called "ethnic wars". It is a much needed diversion from the heavily skewed and highly inaccurate appraisals of Balkan societies as portrayed by Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* or even Mischa Glenny's *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, in which the journalist-writers portray the entire region as a place awash in ancient hatreds, pre-modern superstitions, and primitive tribal communities. One strong element of Gagnon's book is his clarity. If you come away from this book not knowing that the conflicts in Croatia and Serbia were the result of elites in power purposefully "demobilizing" the greater population by constructing images of external threats and provoking violence along ethnic lines so as to shift political discourse away from issues of reformist change, you were making a concerted effort to not pay attention, as Gagnon repeats this claim on almost every fifth page. His argument is supported by social scientific polling data taken in Croatia and Serbia at the time, which indicates a continued trend towards favoring democratic development and multi-ethnic communities, even during the most violent periods of inter-ethnic warfare. However there are some apparent weaknesses of his work. The most important is that while he alludes to elites resorting to casting the "other" as aggressive and violent against one's own "innocent" community, Gagnon does not explain why the images and historical references chosen were used towards the larger audience. In other words, elites didn't simply make up stories and myths of past aggressions; they had to, at the very least, create images of the "other" that their own communities could recognize, identify with, and accept. Likening Tudjman's HDZ to the Ustasha regime of WWII could only work if 1) Serbs still collectively remember that era as a time of extreme ethnic oppression against them, 2) Some members of the HDZ actually likened themselves to the Ustasas and 3) Tudjman did not openly play into extreme elements of Croat nationalism. Likewise, the Serbs could not have been cast as aggressors if extremist elements under Milosevic's control did not seek to carve out territorial elements within Croatia. In short, Gagnon's argument is valid, but dismisses historical memory too quickly - something he argues needs to be taken into account from anthropology and culturalist studies of the region. Finally, he attempts to liken his elite demobilization model in the last few pages to U.S. Cold War policy and the policies of the Bush Administration following September 11. While there are some parallels that could be found in sidelining any opposition to the Bush Administration's positions, the fundamental difference is that attempts at elite demobilization were made AFTER the 9/11 attacks, and were not a pre-planned nor pre-orchestrated plan before any hostilities as was argued in Serbia and Croatia. In addition, the opposition, did not, and has not, presented an opposition platform that voters might gravitate towards, something the Croat and Serbian opposition parties did have. Moreover, he ignores the rather lopsided positions taken by the Clinton Administration's policy of "Good Croats" and "Bad Serb" lumping that was so prominent in the foreign policies of both Warren Christopher and Madeline Albright, blaming Serbia for the same strategies of political manipulation that an exonerated Croatia similarly practised. However, these are only small problems Gagnon has, but this does not take away from the overall clarity and specifics of his work in the former Yugoslavia, and he should be commended for providing an intelligent and honest assessment of a series of events that have been so horribly misunderstood in Western medias.

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A start By cronston Gagnon's book is an essential source of information on and serious analysis of the role of elites in manufacturing nationalist "hysteria" in Serbia and Croatia. The only major flaw is the book's untested assumption that Yugoslavia was poised for a smooth transition to liberal democracy, which was derailed by a nationalist "de-mobilization". This claim seems facile in lieu of a serious analysis of what exactly it was

that nationalists were trying to suppress. Would Yugoslavia be merely another Poland today if the nationalists had failed, or something radically different? Writers like Gagnon tend to overlook that Yugoslavia was never a communist bureaucracy in the tradition of the Soviet puppet states, but an experiment moderating elements of socialism with a relatively open market. It is too easy to chalk it up as just another repressive communist authoritarian structure which bred a popular movement for liberalization. Nonetheless, Gagnon is to be commended for moving far beyond the typical "ancient ethnic hatred" explanation for conflict in the Balkans.

"The wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in neighboring Croatia and Kosovo grabbed the attention of the western world not only because of their ferocity and their geographic location, but also because of their timing. This violence erupted at the exact moment when the cold war confrontation was drawing to a close, when westerners were claiming their liberal values as triumphant, in a country that had only a few years earlier been seen as very well placed to join the west. In trying to account for this outburst, most western journalists, academics, and policymakers have resorted to the language of the premodern: tribalism, ethnic hatreds, cultural inadequacy, irrationality; in short, the Balkans as the antithesis of the modern west. Yet one of the most striking aspects of the wars in Yugoslavia is the extent to which the images purveyed in the western press and in much of the academic literature are so at odds with evidence from on the ground."from *The Myth of Ethnic War* V. P. Gagnon Jr. believes that the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s were reactionary moves designed to thwart populations that were threatening the existing structures of political and economic power. He begins with facts at odds with the essentialist view of ethnic identity, such as high intermarriage rates and the very high percentage of draft-resisters. These statistics do not comport comfortably with the notion that these wars were the result of ancient blood hatreds or of nationalist leaders using ethnicity to mobilize people into conflict. Yugoslavia in the late 1980s was, in Gagnon's view, on the verge of large-scale sociopolitical and economic change. He shows that political and economic elites in Belgrade and Zagreb first created and then manipulated violent conflict along ethnic lines as a way to short-circuit the dynamics of political change. This strategy of violence was thus a means for these threatened elites to demobilize the population. Gagnon's noteworthy and rather controversial argument provides us with a substantially new way of understanding the politics of ethnicity.

"V. P. Gagnon challenges some widespread notions about the dangerous linkage between ethnicity and the upsurge of violence in the post-Cold War world, and he does it crisply and with plenty of carefully marshaled data."Foreign Affairs "Gagnon presents an impressive and very original 'social constructivist' analysis of the recent wars in Bosnia and Croatia. In refuting approaches that assume deeply felt ethnic hatreds, the author contends that Yugoslav elites responded to the end of the Cold War by pursuing strategies that would ensure their hold on power and privilege. . . . This is a must-read for those who want a deeper understanding of the conflict processes in the former Yugoslavia."Choice "Beautifully researched and written . . . This is an excellent volume that makes an important and timely contribution to our understanding of the collapse of Yugoslavia."International Affairs "This book is going to make waves for all the right reasons. The argumentthe use of nationalism by leaders to demobilize publics, especially those supporting democratic reforms is original and important. Basing his arguments on considerable evidence, V. P. Gagnon invites us to think seriously about demobilization, which is critical in all kinds of political settings, and he challenges the assumption that nationalist leaders invariably have large numbers of nationalist followers."Valerie Bunce, Aaron Binenkorb Chair of International Studies and Chair of the Government Department, Cornell University "Although the Dayton accords were signed years ago, the conflict among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims remains one of the central cases for those studying conflict and identity issues. With its inclusion of many primary sources, I believe *The Myth of Ethnic War* is the best of the social constructivist treatments of the Yugoslav wars and engages the current state of the study of ethnic conflict."Roger Petersen, Massachusetts Institute of Technology "Other books on the subject of the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia could be described as partial or polemical. V. P. Gagnon adds the crucial dimension of a sustained analysis of the internal political dynamics of nationalism. His powerful argument has important implications well beyond narrow regional studies: contrary to the common view, which depicts nationalism as a euphoria of patriotic ecstasy, Gagnon introduces the productive and suggestive concept of demobilization, by which nationalism operates as a political strategy to empty political space of concrete content and offer license to authoritarian regimes."Eric Gordy, author of *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*About the Author V. P. (Chip) Gagnon, Jr., is Chair of the Department of Politics at Ithaca College.