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Split and The Disintegration of Yugoslavia: The *Vlaji* Ascendancy and The Affirmation of Croatian Nationalism

Abstract

This thesis considers the city of Split and how it experienced a drastic economic, social, and political transformation starting in 1979. What was once considered a very Yugoslavian city with an industrial workforce, a multicultural population, and a strong communist base became a city controlled by HDZ-loyalists and a hotbed for Croatian ethnonationalism. Split's development throughout the 20th century paralleled the trend of urbanization in Yugoslavia wherein people from the countryside migrated to the big urban centers in search of work. In the case of Split, these migrants were known as the *vlaji*, and came from the rural areas of the Dalmatian hinterland. As Yugoslav national debt and inflation began to soar in the 1980s, tensions rose between Slovenia and Croatia, whose economies were more export-oriented, and the federal government in Belgrade, whose centralization policies sought to collect and redistribute the two republics' wealth to the less developed republics. It is within this context that a Serb nationalist movement formed, first in Kosovo and later in the Serb-dominated areas of Croatia. In Split, the *vlaji* responded to the Serb nationalism with a Croatian nationalism of their own. In the country's first multiparty elections, Split's *vlaji* helped to usher into power Franjo Tudman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Once the HDZ was in power, Split underwent a period of economic privatization wherein many HDZ-loyalists were given cushy positions in both the private and public sectors. These sweeping changes occurred simultaneously as Croatia was fighting its war for independence. The *vlaji*, who had for decades been socially and economically outcast in Split, had thus taken over the political and economic positions of power and transformed the city into a denizen of Croatian ethnonationalism. The capstone of this transformation came in 2007 when Željko Kerum was elected as Split's mayor, a conservative construction worker who ran a campaign based on Croatian nationalism. Such a reality in Split would have been unthinkable in 1980. By examining the city's evolution, this research adds a local perspective to the current narrative of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Diese Masterarbeit befasst sich mit der Stadt Split und deren drastischer wirtschaftlicher, sozialer und politischer Transformation ab 1979. Was einst als eine zutiefst jugoslawische Stadt mit Industriearbeitern, multikulturellen Bevölkerung und starken kommunistischen Grundlage galt, wurde zu einer von HDZ-Loyalisten kontrollierten Stadt zu einer Brutstätte des kroatischen Ethnonationalismus. Die Entwicklung von Split im 20. Jahrhundert verlief parallel zum Trend der Urbanisierung in Jugoslawien, bei dem Menschen vom Land in die großen städtischen Zentren abwanderten, um Arbeit zu finden. Im Fall Splits waren diese Migranten als *vlaji* bezeichnet und stammten aus den ländlichen Gebieten des dalmatinischen Hinterlandes. Als die jugoslawische Staatsverschuldung und die Inflation in den 1980er Jahren immer weiter zunahmen, kam es zu Spannungen zwischen Slowenien und Kroatien, die eine eher exportorientiert Wirtschaft hatten und der föderalen Regierung in Belgrad, welche mit ihrer Zentralisierungspolitik versuchte, den Reichtum der beiden Republiken zu sammeln und an die weniger entwickelten Republiken umzuverteilen. Unter diesen Umständen bildete sich zunächst im Kosovo und später in den serbisch dominierten Gebieten Kroatiens eine serbische nationalistische Bewegung. In Split antworteten die *vlaji* auf den serbischen Nationalismus mit einem eigenen kroatischen Nationalismus. Während der ersten Mehrparteienwahlen des Landes trugen die *vlaji* von Split dazu bei, die Kroatische Demokratische Union (HDZ) von Franjo Tudjman an die Macht zu bringen. Sobald die HDZ an der Macht war, begann in Split eine Zeit der wirtschaftlichen Privatisierung, in der viele HDZ-Loyalisten sowohl im privaten als auch im öffentlichen Sektor bequeme Positionen erhielten. Diese tiefgreifenden Veränderungen fanden zur gleichen Zeit statt, als Kroatien seinen

Unabhängigkeitskrieg führte. Die vlaji, die in Split jahrzehntelang sozial und wirtschaftlich ausgegrenzt waren, übernahmen nun die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Machtpositionen und verwandelten die Stadt in einen Ort des kroatischen Ethnonationalismus. Der Höhepunkt dieses Wandels wurde 2007 erreicht, als Željko Kerum zum Bürgermeister Splits gewählt wurde, ein Bauarbeiter und Kriegsprofiteur, der unverhohlen einen Wahlkampf auf der Grundlage des kroatischen Ethnonationalismus führte. Solch eine Realität in Split wäre 1980 noch undenkbar gewesen. Durch die Untersuchung der Entwicklung der Stadt fügt diese Arbeit dem aktuellen Narrativ über den Zerfall Jugoslawiens eine lokale Perspektive hinzu.

Table of Contents

1. Abstract	
2. Introduction	
a. Methodology	1
b. Thesis Statement	2
c. Structure	3
d. Background	4
e. Opening Scene	7
3. Chapter 1: Split 1979 – 1985	11
a. Political Atmosphere	14
b. Demographics	15
c. Political Structures	18
4. Chapter 2: Split 1986 - 1990	23
a. Response to Serb Nationalism	30
b. 1990 Multiparty Elections	32
c. Economic Downturn & Beginnings of Privatization	36
d. Social Changes	38
5. Chapter 3: Split 1991 –	43
a. Political Changes – A Surge Towards Nationalism	44
b. Economic – Privatization	47
c. Social – A City in Flux	58
6. Conclusion	64
a. Bibliography	67

Methodology

To understand Split's evolution on a personal level, the author conducted interviews with people who lived in the city throughout the various time phases: Yugoslavia, transition, contemporary. Personal testimony from Split's citizens sheds light on the social attitudes, participation in traditions, and important events throughout the city's history. This thesis will thus add to the oral history of Yugoslavia, Croatia, and Split.

Interviews are supported by research and analysis of primary and secondary sources including journal articles and historical documents as well as the historical literature regarding Yugoslavia and its breakup.

Thesis Statement

Split underwent a major transformation at the end of the 20th century. In the 1970s and 80s, Split was still considered by many to be a liberal, metropolitan, and multicultural city. By the end of the century, the city had become a conservative hub for Croatian nationalism. This grand change had its roots in the city's demographic evolution. Namely, this took the form of rural peasants moving from the *Zagora* hinterlands in Dalmatia and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina into Split as part of a wider trend of urbanization within Yugoslavia. This migrant population had been historically more disposed towards harboring Croatian nationalist attitudes. When hyperinflation hit the Yugoslav economy, Serbian nationalism began to take root in Kosovo and the *Krajina* region of Croatia. The relatively new citizens of Split responded in social, political, and economic terms, drastically changing the corresponding landscapes of the city.

Structure

This thesis is structured chronologically into three chapters. Within each chapter there is an analysis of the city in terms of its social, political, and economic developments. Each chapter also contains content from interviews that the author conducted with various people from Split (*Splićani*) who lived in the city at that time.

The first chapter considers Split's circumstances in the years between 1979 and 1985. It describes the communist political structures as they stood in Split – most of them originating either from the beginning of postwar-Yugoslavia or from the new 1974 constitution. It is in this chapter that the social groups are also identified.

Chapter two covers the years between 1986 and 1990. These are the crucial years when there is hyperinflation in Yugoslavia, nationalism is on the rise in Serbia, and the young people in Split are becoming disenchanted with Communism. Croatian nationalism begins to rise out of a response to the events in Kosovo and Knin.

The third and last chapter details the crucial years from 1991 until 1995 when the HDZ (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*) first came to power in the Croatian parliament and marched the country to independence. As Yugoslavia was disintegrating along ethnic lines, so was the city of Split coming to terms with its own political differences. It is within this timeframe and under the HDZ government that Croatia's economy endures privatization.

Background

Yugoslavia's success was in no short part thanks to Josip Broz "Tito". From 1945 until his death in 1980, he was Yugoslavia's benevolent dictator who guided the country through an era of prosperity. Under his one-party system, Tito led through a policy of Brotherhood and Unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). While *bratstvo i jedinstvo* helped Yugoslavia by attempting to create a "Yugoslav" identity, it also firmly suppressed the ethnic divisions that had previously torn the country apart in WWII. Any would-be champions of nationalist rhetoric were thrown into political prisons such as the infamous Goli Otok. The state's attitude against nationalist rhetoric was on full display during the Croatian Spring or "Maspok" – short for *masovni pokret*, which lasted from 1967 until its leaders were jailed in 1971.

Croatian nationalism and Serb nationalism were the two forces that had the most potency and the greatest potential to tear Yugoslavia apart from the inside. For the issue of Serb nationalism, they were the largest ethnicity within Yugoslavia. Serbs formed a majority in and occupied many of the strategic positions in the police, the armed forces, and the Communist Party. There was an ethnic population that was spread throughout the central territory of Yugoslavia, including significant parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in parts of Croatia such as northern Dalmatia.

In Yugoslavia, Croatia was known as the "Silent Republic". There had always been a fear, especially among the Serb population, that a more powerful, independent Croatia would bring back the Ustashe government that had so ruthlessly governed the state during the Second World War. There were two distinct instances when Croatian nationalism appeared in the postwar 20th century. The Croatian Spring (1967 – 1971) was the first instance in the postwar Yugoslavia wherein the Croatian leadership challenged the centrality of Belgrade's authority. It is important to understand how the Yugoslav Federal government responded to the Croatian Spring, as it helps to explain how a second wave of Croatian nationalism could find fertile ground in Split.

Maspok/Croatian Spring of 1971

Postwar Yugoslavia's internal economic problems centered on the fact that its various republics had wildly different levels of development, infrastructure, and industry. To solve this problem, Tito employed a highly centralized system of redistribution. In

effect, there was an economic and developmental North-South division. Belgrade systemically took upwards of 90% of the profits from export enterprises, most of which were located in the republics of Slovenia and Croatia and redistributed them to the poorer areas of Yugoslavia, such as Kosovo and Montenegro.¹ It was the Croatian students at the University of Zagreb, who, having been inspired by the various student movements in the United States, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere, began to demand economic reforms. Their political leadership consisted of Savka Dabčević-Kučar, who was the head of the Croatian Communist Party, and Miko Tripalo, who represented Croatia at the level of the Yugoslav Federal Presidency. Dabčević-Kučar articulated the movements two main points: 1) there were too many Serbs in the police, army, and positions of strategic importance within Yugoslavia, and 2) more of the money that was earned in Croatia should stay in Croatia. They were greatly assisted by the Matica Hrvatska or “Croatian Bee”, a Croatian cultural association whose recent new members included important Communist Party officials such as former Partizan general Franjo Tuđman and former mayor of Zagreb Većeslav Holjevac. Matica Hrvatska published a weekly newspaper called *Hrvatski tjednik*, which garnered a wide audience and helped to push the movement’s ideas throughout the territory of Croatia.²

The movement had virtually no Serb participation, with some rural Croatian Serbs even arming themselves for fear that it could be the rebirth of the feared Independent State of Croatia, *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*.³ Albeit there were a few flashes of Ustaše paraphernalia, these fears of a resurgent NDH were widely overblown. Tito was slow to quash the movement, and it was only after the Zagreb students staged a 30,000 person-strong strike in the waning days of November 1971 that the Yugoslav president decided enough was enough. Although the students had called an end to the strike, it was too little too late for them. They had pressed too hard on the national sensitivities of Yugoslavia and were thus silenced by the regime. Dabčević-Kučar and Tripalo, were gave groveling speeches and were forced into retirement. Tuđman, on the other hand, was sentenced to

¹ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A History from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, Fourth edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 191,192.

² Tanner, 190.

³ Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia: A History* (C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1999), 179.

two years in jail – something that would earn him political points with Croatian nationalist voters 20 years later.

The central government's response to the Croatian Spring was a major blow to the Croatian national movement within Yugoslavia. However, the justice that was doled out from the top came in the name of *bratstvo i jedinstvo*, and was fair, if not widely understood to be in line with the *raison d'être* of the Yugoslav state. The Croatian Spring was in part successful since it helped usher in a new constitution in 1974, which handed many competencies over to the federal republics and reformed the economic regulations in regards to acquiring foreign loans.⁴ Yet with the death of the Croatian Spring, the Yugoslav government had set a precedent that it would not tolerate political rhetoric based on ethnic division – even if the demands were of a primarily economic nature. When Slobodan Milošević began to drum up Serbian nationalism in Kosovo in the late 1980s, Croats immediately drew comparisons between the federal government's soft handed response and the sweeping detentions and condemnations which were made in response to their earlier Maspok movement.

⁴ Mate Babic and Emil Primorac, "Some Causes of the Growth of the Yugoslav External Debt," *Soviet Studies* 38, no. 1 (1986): 69–88, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/151992>.

Opening Scene

6 May 1991 SPLIT – It is a Monday morning and the Brodosplit workers are gathering in the shipyards that run along the northern shore of the Split peninsula. Their plan is to march through the peninsular city's streets, winding their way through the industrial facilities of the Jugoplastika factory, continuing towards the *Slobodna Dalmacija* headquarters, then making their way down the Marmontova street and along Split's main coastal promenade. Their endpoint is the Banovina building, where the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) has its naval command center. At 10:00, the trade unionists left the southern entrance to the shipyards and began their march.

The Brodosplit workers are marching through the city waving Croatian flags, carrying signs, and singing the Croatian national anthem "Lijepa naša". Along the way, they pick up workers from the various industries that they pass and the movement swells to 40,000 people. When the movement finally reaches the Banovina building, the energy is high, and the tension thick. Inside, there are Yugoslav conscripts from other parts of Yugoslavia – Slovenians, Macedonians. The JNA soldiers have parked an armored personnel carrier (APC) in the alleyway next to their building to serve as a deterrent in case the protests get out of hand. In between the Banovina building and the protesters there is a line of police who are tasked with preventing the situation from spiraling out of control. The thunderous crowd is chanting "Hrvatska! Hrvatska!". The tension is escalating. For situations like the one unfolding, the JNA could normally call in a patrol boat armed with a water cannon that would disperse the crowd. However, in solidarity with the Brodosplit workers and the Croatians in Kijevo, the captains of the Jadrolinija passenger ferries have set up their own blockade around the Split port, and they are not allowing any of the JNA Navy boats to enter.

The protestors climb on top of the APC and begin pulling at whatever loose objects that on which they can get their hands. One man is able to pry the machine gun from its mount on the APC's turret. He is chased down by police, who retrieve the massive gun from his hands and toss it back on top of the APC. The scene on the waterfront is reaching a boiling point as the protestors are preparing to enter the building. The men who have clambered on top of the APC are now attempting to pull the JNA soldiers from the vehicle, strangling one of them as he tries to resist. A group of JNA

soldiers exit the building and their commander fires several shots in the air, demanding that the protestors get off the APC. Then there is another burst of gunfire and suddenly a 19-year-old JNA conscript from Macedonia, Saša Gešovski, lies mortally wounded on the ground. By 5:30pm, order is restored to the city and the news crews are busily editing the footage that they had just recorded – preparing to share the story that they had just witnessed with a tumultuous Yugoslavia and the rest of the outside world.⁵

The fact that this scene unfolded in Split is the subject of this thesis. During World War II, the city of Split and the surrounding islands were home to many of Tito's partisan fighters. This partisan spirit characterized the city as it developed throughout the decades in postwar Yugoslavia. Split experienced a boom in population and economic output, completely transforming the city. Despite this population influx from the agrarian hinterland of Dalmatia, the city kept its reputation as "Red Split". In a sign of the progression of its economy, the number of privately owned cars in Yugoslavia skyrocketed during the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the number of private cars in Croatia in the 1970s was twice the number of telephones.⁶ Large infrastructure projects, financed with international loans, furthered the communist credo of urbanizing its population.⁷ What had once been a sleepy peninsular town in the 19th century had by 1979 become a city with massive concrete apartment buildings, a giant sports stadium, and a kilometer-long tunnel which ran underneath the Marjan hill. Split thus shared an economic and demographic trajectory of the country at large.

The Story

Contemporary Split is a city that revolves almost entirely around tourism. In the summer months, the sun-splashed limestone walls of Diocletian's Palace enclose a labyrinth that is bustling with chic restaurants, souvenir shops, and gelato dives. Tourists from nearly every country in the world wander the old palace walls and treat themselves to fresh and delicious Dalmatian cuisine. However, this city has a story to tell, which many tourists do not experience inside the old city walls.

⁵ "UZAVRELI SPLIT," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, May 7, 1991, 14523 edition.

⁶ Goldstein, *Croatia*, 176.

⁷ Tanner, *Croatia*, 207.

If one were to walk outside of the historic old town traveling northwards on Ulica Domovinskog Rata, one could look to the left and see painted on the side of a large concrete building a red “Dalmacija” sign that has been faded by years under the Croatian sun. The building is the headquarters of the local newspaper, which produced high-quality independent journalism for nearly 50 years, and was famous throughout Yugoslavia. Crossing Vukovarska Ulica, one could peer through the buildings on the left side of the street to catch a glimpse of the Joker Mall. The modern glass-and-steel complex was the work of a firebrand conservative construction worker, Željko Kerum, who Split elected in 2007 as its mayor. What one does not see is the old Jugoplastika factory that occupied the same place from the 1970s until its destruction in 2003. Continuing on Domovinskog Rata, one could see the Brodosplit shipyards on the northern side of the Split peninsula. In the 1960s and ‘70s, Croatia had a mighty shipbuilding industry. On some accounts, it was considered the 3rd largest producer of ships in the world.⁸ Nowadays, Brodosplit still continues to produce a modest annual tonnage, but nothing compared to its glory years.

Lastly, towards the end of Domovinskog Rata, as it connects the peninsula with the mainland, one would be able to simultaneously observe two wildly different styles of architecture. The first is the Split 3 neighborhood, which runs along the “start” of the peninsula. It is a massive, concrete, brutalist conglomeration of buildings built in neat rows that run at an east west orientation and stretch up to 10 stories high. In the Yugoslav days, these buildings housed many of the Yugoslav navy officers and their families. Nowadays, the concrete buildings are still full with families, albeit a much higher percentage of ethnically Croatian families than during the previous era. Diverting one’s gaze towards the southeast, one could see a hilly landscape that stretches towards the foothills of Mosor mountain. Throughout these hills are packed thousands of small residences, some of which are in varying levels of completion. The streets in this section of Split curve and dip at odd intersections. There is rebar sticking out of the structural foundations and corners of buildings, which can be used as tie-ons for additional floors in case the building’s owner would like to add another layer to his or her property. There is

⁸ Goldstein, *Croatia*, 189.

certainly no “Yugoslavian” architecture in this area of Split. In fact, of the buildings that are completed, they look quite new and modern. The houses that are unfinished have exposed walls that show red brick and mortar. This section of the city began to develop in the late 80s/early 90s, right when Split was experiencing one of its largest cultural changes of the 20th century.

This is the story of Split and the story of Yugoslavia. The city evolved in many of the same ways that the country did. When I asked the long-time residents of Split if they could have ever considered their city as a “Yugoslavian” city, the answer was always a resounding “yes”. To anyone who is familiar with the political life of contemporary Split, such an answer might seem strange. The city today is well known for its conservatism and many of the *Splićani* would like nothing to do with the Yugoslavian past. After all, it was Yugoslavia’s JNA naval ships that fired upon the city in 1991, and its MiG jets whose engines roared into the Dalmatian night, pummeling the nearby hinterland. For those who lived through the attacks and through the war in general, it is not difficult for them to conjure up memories of the country’s homeland war when they hear the term “Yugoslavia”. However, that is not to say that the city did not have a strong connection with the country prior to the war. In fact, it was during the Yugoslav years when the city experienced its largest growth, modernization, and its most multicultural era.

Chapter 1: Split 1979 – 1985

Split in the 1980s was a city that experienced a slow decline in terms of industry and political life, while simultaneously experiencing an influx of migrants moving from the countryside or *Zagora* into the city. Throughout the 1950, '60s, and '70s, Tito and his government created a unique identity: the Yugoslav. It comprised several languages, each with its own dialects, religions, and customs. Although this Yugoslavian identity was implemented by a Communist government in a socialist structure, it was an identity that stood adamantly non-aligned during the years of the Cold War. This “Yugoslavism” was very much a central part of Split at the beginning of the 1980s, yet this spirit of the city gradually evolved as the city’s and the country’s economies experienced a slow downturn.

The beginning of this era starts with Split hosting the 1979 Mediterranean games. Split’s long history of athletic achievement is a central and enduring part of its legacy, particularly the city’s passion for its football team, NK Hajduk. To host the Mediterranean games, however, Split would need a massive infrastructure upgrade. The completion of these large infrastructure projects was the swansong of the Yugoslavian chapter in Split. It also served to finalize a process of urbanization and industrialization that had been, literally, building since the end of the Second World War.

The financing for the construction of the stadiums, pools, and other buildings for the 1979 Mediterranean Games were divided into three parts. According to Nikola Horvat, who has worked for the tourist board of Split since the mid-80s, one third of the total cost of the projects was financed by the city of Split, the next third by the government in Zagreb, and the last third was financed by the Yugoslavian government from Belgrade. However, in the latter half of the 1970s, it was clear that the projects would not be completed based on the current timeline and the available manpower. The army was brought in to efficiently finish the remaining projects in time for the games. “[The JNA] did not do it for nothing!” Horvat told me during an interview. “They secured their special favors, and they were allowed to build their skyscrapers and buildings in Split as a result.”⁹ The experience of finishing these projects with the army’s

⁹ Nikola Horvat, April 6, 2023.

help came in handy when five years later the same tactics were employed to build the infrastructure in Sarajevo for the 1984 Olympics.

However, much like in the rest of Yugoslavia, these massive infrastructure projects depleted many of the funds that Split would have otherwise used to construct housing later in the next decade. The city's population increase by roughly 13% in the 1980s, adding 24,000 citizens, according to the census data. The housing shortage in Split was thus of crucial importance.

In Split, the process reveals a special relationship that the city had with the armed forces of Yugoslavia. Many of the best flats in prime areas of the city were owned either by the JNA naval officers, or other JNA officers who had served elsewhere in Yugoslavia and had chosen to retire by the seaside in Split. Moreover, as part of Tito's broad *bratstvo i jedinstvo* policy in Yugoslavia, JNA conscripts were intentionally sent to places outside of their home regions to complete their service. Importantly, the ethnic composition of the JNA was a more pronounced expression of the ethnic composition of Yugoslavia as a whole. The Serbs were the major ethnicity in Yugoslavia and they had an outweighed presence in institutions such as the police and the armed forces. This difference was less pronounced in the Air Force and the Navy, although the special status of the navy officers in Split, and the fact that many of these men were not ethnically Croatian, would prove to be one of the city's flash points as Yugoslavia began to break up in the early 1990s.

After the 1979 Mediterranean Games and Tito's subsequent death in 1980, there were alarming signs that the Yugoslav economy was entering a decline. Yugoslavia's economic growth and successes in 1960s and 70s were in large part fueled by international loans from institutions such as the IMF, which were increasingly difficult to service. Geopolitical factors such as the 1973 oil crisis further accelerated Yugoslavia's balance of payments problem and the national debt rose dramatically from \$5 billion in the early 1970s to \$20 billion by the end of the decade. However, the state authorities refused to admit that their economic reality was changing. Only in the fall of 1981, and with inflation at a whopping 50%, did the federal government of Yugoslavia set up a commission to address the crisis. Based on the commission's recommendations, the federal government made the decision to cut spending to fight the growing inflation. One of the most important consequences regarding Split's economy was the federal

government's decision to pass a law in 1983 that would appropriate 76% of the hard currency generated by export firms. For the federal republics of Croatia and Slovenia, whose economies were much more industrial and export oriented than the other republics, this law hit their economies particularly hard.¹⁰

For postwar Split, industry, particularly that of ship building at the Brodosplit shipyards, had been the economic backbone of the city. Split was also home to factories such as Jugoplastika in which roughly 9,000 women worked, and which produced a wide variety of plastic-based products for domestic and international markets. Split had steel, cement, and chemical industries – all of which were important for both domestic consumption and export markets. In these factories worked many of the economic migrants who had traveled to Split during Yugoslavia's postwar industrialization phase. They were thus the population that bore the brunt of the consequences of Belgrade's hard currency reforms. This would further explain the vitriol directed against the central government as the decade wore on and the economic conditions failed to improve.

Yugoslav socialism operated on a unique economic system of "self-management", meaning that the workers in the factories were also the owners. As owners of their firms, each worker had been entitled to his or her own housing and had guaranteed vacation. The Yugoslav market was also heavily protected from outside competition. Yugoslavian self-management proved to be a slow, inefficient system that was incapable of dealing with the worsening economic environment. The frustration caused Yugoslavians to demand political change. The economic downturn within Yugoslavia led to a rise of various nationalist politicians – first in Serbia, then elsewhere. The interplay between Belgrade and Split and the surge of Croatian nationalism in response to developments in Pristina and Belgrade is central to understanding the ascendancy of a nationalist minority to political power in Split.

In political terms, there was an inherent compromise between the communist governments in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav citizens: there will not be multi-party elections and the communist party will stay in charge, but in return, the party would provide stability and guarantee employment. Although this system had worked in the immediate

¹⁰ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War; Third Edition*, Third edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 207.

postwar years, it experienced a decline after Tito's death in the 1980s. In Split, party membership either stagnated or shrank year-on-year, especially in the communist working bodies of the various industries that Split housed. Moreover, there was a growing sense of apathy towards the communist party, especially from younger generations of Yugoslavs. This ensured that the influx of new ideas and a sense of dynamism faded away from the party. As the high-level party leaders of the various republics struggled to come to terms with the problems facing their country, the local leadership in Split also struggled to address issues such as the rising cost of living and housing shortages.

Political Atmosphere

When Tito died in 1980, the entire nation of Yugoslavia stopped. Football games were paused mid-game, television and radio programs were interrupted as the broadcasters made their announcement that the man who had led the country for more than three decades had taken his last breath in a hospital in Ljubljana. There was a famous saying that made the rounds at that time: After Tito, Tito (*Nakon Tita, Tito*). It underscored the centrality of Tito's position in Yugoslavia as well as the uncertainty of what a future in Yugoslavia looked like without him. For an older generation of Yugoslavs, the man embodied a life that they had built together from the rubble of the Second World War. They were the witnesses that saw their country industrialize itself, oppose both the east and the west, all under a centralized, one-party socialist system. However, there were several tradeoffs that this generation made with Tito and his system of one-party rule. The government would supply jobs, housing, and paid vacation, while the people would accept a one-party system, a melding of interethnic unity, and a dampening of nationalist fervor and rhetoric.

For a city like Split in the 1980s, the political leanings of the people shifted from being a very strong communist base to one veering towards Croatian nationalism. This chapter will identify why that came to be. By understanding the political climate in Split and how different elements of society experienced the political changes both within the city as well as throughout Yugoslavia as a whole in the 1980s, it will provide a deeper grasp for the sources of the many chaotic episodes and nationalism that occurred in the city in the 1990s.

Demographics

In the immediate post-war years, Split had a population of roughly 40,000. Within one generation, that number had exploded to 160,000. Such an influx meant that after the 1950s, Split needed to import all its additional workforce. The new work force flooded in from the Dalmatian countryside. Specific terms developed in the Split lexicon to describe the original Splićani, *fetivi*, and the new crowd, *vlaji*. The *fetivi* were the people whose families had lived in Split for centuries. They could recall the Italian occupation of their city, and the allied bombing at the end of the war. The partisan, anti-fascist spirit of resistance lived well with the *fetivi*, and they used this unifying spirit to rebuild their city in the 1950s. A Split-based journalist Ivica Profaca offered a more in-depth explanation of the terms when I interviewed him in Split. “Split is a closed community” he said. “The *fetivi* know each other, and they tend to live in the older parts of Split - the *Varoš* neighborhood, the areas immediately to the north and east of the old town, and so forth...” He explained that he and his family are considered *fetivi*. “Growing up, a lot of my friends had weekend houses (*vikendici*), because they had family that originated from outside of Split. We never had that!” he laughed. He then began to explain the term *vlaj*.

“*Vlaj* can be a person or an attitude. The people who immigrated to Split starting in the 60s, they brought a lot of other things.” said Profaca. “Many of them had family connections to *Gastarbeiters*, and they brought money and an awareness of a more capitalist lifestyle.” Although some of the newcomers hailed from outside of Croatia, many of the new immigrants to Split came from the rural Dalmatian hinterland or *Zagora* (See Figure 1). Specifically, they came from places such as Imotski, Sinj, and Vrgorac. These parts of Croatia had a much stronger connection with traditional Croatian institutions i.e., the Catholic church, than did the *fetivi*. It was also in these rural areas where there had been more support for the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), the Croatian Nazi puppet state during WWII.

Figure 1: 1 – Before the Second World War; 2 – up to 1970; 3 – up to 1990; 4 – since 1990¹¹

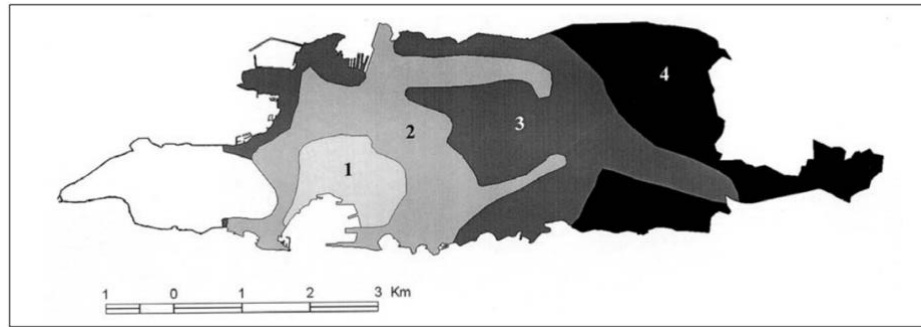


Figure 2: Dalmatian Hinterland or Zagora

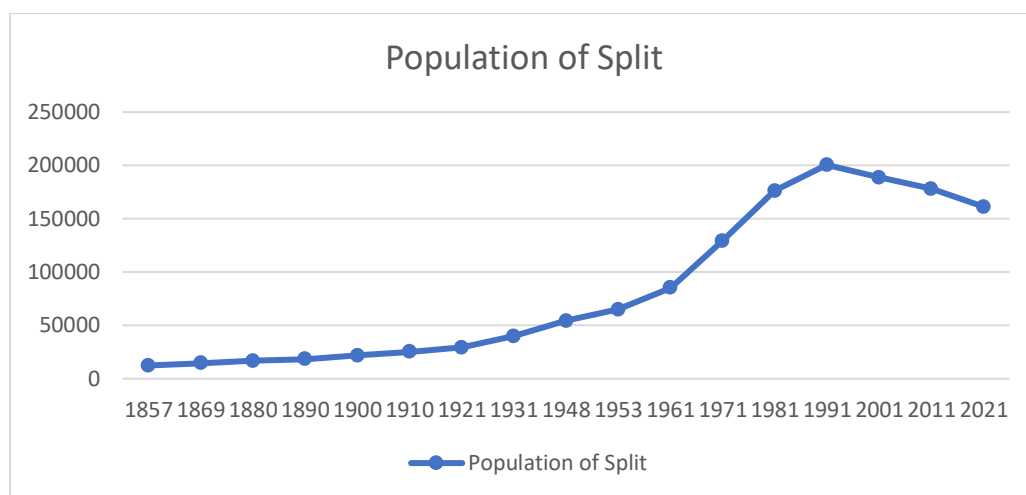


Source: Wikimedia Commons

Up until the 1980s, the main problem facing the incoming population in Split was that the city lacked the physical infrastructure to house them. Over time, the city expanded from its small enclave surrounding Diocletian's palace eastwards towards the mainland and into the nearby towns of Solin and Kaštela. This reflected a pattern that was happening throughout Yugoslavia – the urbanization of the population and the industrialization of the economy.

¹¹ Sanja Klempić, "Razvoj stambenih naselja Splita nakon Drugog svjetskog rata," *Hrvatski geografski glasnik* 66., no. 2. (December 1, 2004): 99, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/clanak/27260>.

Figure 3: Population of Split from 1847 - 2021¹²



In the mid-1950s, Yugoslavia underwent a series of reforms which opened its economy and society. During these reforms, Tito had opened his country's borders for and allowed Yugoslavians to leave the country and seek work abroad. This movement was known as the German *Gastarbeiter* or "guest worker" movement, because so many of the Yugoslavs who left went to West Germany and Austria. The *Gastarbeiter* phenomenon had myriad consequences for Yugoslavia. Economically, the *Gastarbeiters* were a significant source of foreign currency earnings. Moreover, many of the *Gastarbeiters* came from the rural Dalmatian hinterlands, and thus many of the Split *vlaj* had family connections in these rich, western countries. The *vlaj* often used the remittance money from their *Gastarbeiter* family to build lavish second homes, buy new Mercedes-Benz automobiles, designer clothes, and they introduced a more consumer capitalist lifestyle to Split. In fact, the *Gastarbeiter* movement was such a prevalent force in the nearby town of Imotski, that there was a movement in contemporary Imotski to build a monument of the Mercedes-Benz 115 to commemorate the wealth that befell the locals because of the movement.¹³ With this emerging class of *vlaji* in Split, there arose a haughty Croatian nationalism, which would later be used as fuel for Franjo Tuđman's HDZ.

¹² "Croatian Bureau of Statistics," Državni zavod za statistiku, accessed January 19, 2023, <https://podaci.dzs.hr/hr/>.

¹³ "Croatian Town to Showcase Mercedes Love Affair with Monument," *Reuters*, May 19, 2019, sec. Emerging Markets, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-croatia-mercedes-idUSKCN1SP0LT>.

Political Structures

The political structure in Yugoslavia in the early part of the 1980s consisted of a chain of command that began with the alliance of Yugoslav communists (*savez komunista Jugoslavije*) and worked its way down to smaller “working groups” that led down to the various cities and counties. The top level of the Croatian communists was labeled the SKH (*savez komunista hrvatske*), whereas the lower level of communist members organized themselves in “basic organizations”, or OOSK (*osnovne organizacije saveza komunista*). The OOSKs were the implementation forces for the higher levels within the communist party. Their duties included executing the party’s decisions as well as progressing the socialist ideologies by means of preparing rallies and organizing events. Each OOSK was comprised of various Communist party members and could range in size from only a few to more than 100 members. In Split, the largest OOSK had 30 members. Membership in an OOSK entailed attending meetings, paying dues, and various acts of volunteering. In 1980, Split had a total of 690 OOSKs, which included more than twenty thousand members.¹⁴ As a share of the total population of Split, members of the Communist party accounted for roughly 14% Split’s population. They were thus an integral part of the city’s political identity, but by no means were a majority of *Splićani* members of the Communist party. Much like the ethnic composition of the police and the JNA, the ethnic Serb population in Croatia made up a disproportionately high percentage of Communist party members, often occupying positions of leadership.

As Split’s population continued to grow throughout the 1980s, the geographical boundaries of the municipality of Split also evolved. Many of the large factories and producers, including Brodosplit, Jugovinil, and others were located a short distance from the Split peninsula in the smaller towns of Kaštela and Solin, yet they were still considered to be in the district of the Split municipality. In 1986, the Split municipality divided into three separate entities: Kaštela, Solin, and Split. These municipalities were then incorporated into a new City organization of the Alliance of Croatian Communists. Whereas before there was the SKH Conference of the Community of Split

¹⁴ Nikica Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sotonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma* (HRVATSKI INSTITUT ZA POVIJEST, 2019), 8.

Municipalities, it had transformed in 1986 into the SKH Intermunicipal Conference for Dalmatia.

Figure 2: Number of members of the Communist Party of Croatia in Split municipality from 1979 to 1986.¹⁵

Year:	Number of Communist Party members:
1979	23,126
1980	24,690
1981	24,974
1982	25,371
1983	25,251
1984	25,191
1985	24,957
1986	24,866

Except for the Maspok movement (1967 – 1971), which had started in Zagreb, the Communist Party (*Savez Komunisti*) in Croatia had been the sole avenue of political life in Split in the 1960s and '70s. As Yugoslavia was a uniquely non-aligned European power, there was a sense that the country could reject the bourgeois capitalism of the west, while also implementing its “Yugoslavian self-managed socialism” (*jugoslavenski samoupravni socijalizam*) that was distinct from its Soviet version in the east. Yet beginning in the 1980s, the appeal to Communist party membership began to decline, as is evidenced by the shrinking numbers of party members throughout the decade. Moreover, there arose a fear of “techno-management” i.e. – managers of firms who took a more direct, executive approach to their roles. According to the new 1974 constitution, managers of firms were elected to 4-year terms by a public tender and were tasked with managing the business operations of the works council as well as executing the decisions of the council.¹⁶ For a country in the grip of an economic crisis, the balance between

¹⁵ Barić, 19.

¹⁶ Barić, 90.

holding true to a Yugoslavian self-management ideology and the need to quickly adapt business practices, aka “techno-management” became a focal point of contention. According to the notes from a meeting of the SKH Split Municipal conference in 1983, the problem of “technocratism” was one of the main threats that the party faced:

The danger of technocratism is all the greater today, if, on the one hand, it relies entirely on self-management phraseology, and, on the other, on the still existing coupling of managerial and political structures - often justified by the need for professional and efficient solutions to problems that workers "don't understand."¹⁷

To add to the threat of “techno-managers”, Split’s managerial problems also included the dangers of nepotism and opportunism within the party as well as a general unwillingness for competent SK members to take on managerial positions. The combination of these problems either led to common instances of SK members being promoted to manager positions over more qualified candidates, or incompetent managers being reelected for multiple 4-year terms. Despite the fact that the Split Municipal Committee had identified these phenomena as a problem in the early 1980s, the party failed either to bring competent workers into managerial positions or to kick out the incompetent managers.¹⁸

To be sure, many of the day-to-day business dealings within Split firms were passed away with hours of various meetings. As was standard for Communist countries, Yugoslavia had a political architecture with an expansive system of bureaucracy. There were committees for the alliances of Communists of Croatia, working groups for various industries, committees for the provision of housing, etc. These alliances and committees had regularly scheduled meetings. On one hand, the meetings were necessary, not only because of the decisions that were made, but also for the optics of control. Meetings showed that the workers of the country were actively participating in the decision-making

¹⁷ Barić, 90.

¹⁸ Barić, 90.

process of their company, their country, and their society. Yet this, in turn, led to a problem wherein meetings and paperwork could take up one's entire day. In a light-hearted poem written in 1977 by Nikola Trgovčević, he describes the extent to which meetings have taken over his life:

Meeting and mountains of paper

*Today, like every day,
I will be "sold out" again:
As soon as the dawn breaks
A group of working people is waiting for me
Behind that, it is known
I have a SK meeting
After that, for at least an hour and a half,
there will be a meeting of workers' control.
Then, in the very next hour,
there will be a trade union meeting
Behind the union meeting of the organization,
the delegation meeting will be waiting for me.
Not a single hour will pass
And already – the OOUR meeting
Immediately after, run, hurry
All OOURs meet
After a short rest
Coordination committee meeting
Five minutes later
Housing commission meeting
After a series of meetings
SIZ also meets
Then (said by my friend Nena)
I will have to speak about the active women*

Before lunch, instead of an aperitif
Youth active meeting
At lunch with the main course
Discussion on the formation of some bodies
And so the whole day (meetings are contagious)
Forgive me my workplace – another "miscellaneous point".¹⁹

The bureaucracy and meetings kept the system slow and resistant to change. As the economic crisis worsened in Yugoslavia, the response was not that of rapid, radical change to industry or the political system, but rather it was one of slow-paced and gradual change, if any change at all. If the economic elite wanted to make bold changes to their firm's business strategy, they might be cast aside as a "techno-manager". To be clear, the *vlaji* were not typically the techno-managers, nor were they the ones constantly sitting in meetings.

Between 1979 and 1985, Split's economic and political situation experienced the start of a decline that would later pick up in speed and intensity by the latter half of the decade. Its burgeoning tourism sector continued to be a key source of revenue for the region and the country. Yet for many of the *vlaji*, they had been moving from the countryside into a city that was no longer able to house and employ them. The few who did have money often had *Gastarbeiter* relatives and would use their wealth to flaunt and thumb their noses at "Red Split" and a resentment began to grow.

¹⁹ Barić, 116. Trans. Matthew Moyers

Chapter 2: Split 1986 - 1990

In 1986, a paper by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) leaked to the Serbian newspaper *Večernje Novosti*. Known as the *Memorandum*, it decried Yugoslavia's politically decentralized structure as one that disadvantaged the Serbs at a time when the country was enduring a period of IMF-imposed austerity. The memorandum made alarmist claims about the ethnic situation of the Serbs living in Kosovo and Croatia. It stated that what the Serbs were enduring in Kosovo amounted to genocide, and that the Serbs in Croatia were living in a state of unprecedented danger. Although the Yugoslav government officially condemned the paper, its contents nevertheless made its way throughout Yugoslavia and would provide potent fuel for a rising Serb nationalist, Slobodan Milošević.

In the latter half of the 1980s, the *vlag* in Split had formed a reactionary version of Croatian nationalism to match the Serb nationalism from Belgrade. In both republics, the communist party failed to produce adequate economic reforms to address the growing crisis of inflation and unemployment. However, while the communist party in Serbia failed to reign in its nationalist elements, the first free, multi-party elections in Croatia in 1990 brought to power a fiercely nationalistic Croatian party led by Franjo Tuđman. Integral to both nationalist developments were the deteriorating ethnic situations in Kosovo and Knin.

By the mid-1980s, the Communist party in Split was hemorrhaging members, young people were generally disenchanted with the party, and it faced efficacy problems in its OOSKs. While the Yugoslavian economy in the mid-1980s struggled to provide the same growth and output that it had done in decades prior, Split's population continued to grow, worsening the housing shortage in the city. For a country where there was only one political party, the responsibility to address these issues fell squarely on the shoulders of the Communist leadership, who would then pass the blame downwards, where it would eventually settle at the OOSKs. Yet what had been heretofore unprecedented was the openness with which the Communist party was criticized in the media. In the various republics, there were different publications that led the charge of criticism. In Serbia, it was the magazine *Student*, in Slovenia the youth magazine *Mladina*, and in Croatia the

magazine *Start* led the way.²⁰ In April 1987, in an article published in the weekly *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, workers at the Brodosplit shipbuilding factory put in plain words their disdain for the Communist party's handling of the economic crisis:

The League of Communists itself is to blame for the situation, and it is a delicate question whether the Communists with such a Party can regain the lost trust of the people. Today, it is by no means pleasant to be a member of the League of Communists. You are there to be spat on, because any guilt of any member is transferred to the back of the entire League of Communists.²¹

If the workers at the Brodosplit workshop needed any reason to antagonize the communist party, this “passing of the blame” attitude was more than enough. While the criticism of the party became more commonplace as the decade dragged on, there began the mixing of party criticism with blunt nationalism. In February 1988, the journalist Vjekoslav Krsnik published an article in the *Omladinska Iskra* youth newsletter entitled “Split is ruled by professional amateurs”, which lampooned the Communist leadership in Split for their incompetency. His article spoke to a greater dissatisfaction that the Splićani were feeling in the latter half of the 1980s. In his argument against the Communists, Krsnik wrote that the city was not experiencing the economic successes it had enjoyed in the ‘60s and ‘70s, because many of the leaders of those times were sacked due to their having been affiliated with the 1971 Croatian Spring. Furthermore, the article mentioned that Split was the most ethnically Croatian of the large cities in Croatia, citing the 1981 Yugoslav data which showed that Split’s population was 83.1% ethnically Croat. By analyzing Split in its level of Croatian-ness, Krsnik had opened a dispute on one of the touchiest subjects unique to Yugoslavia: that of ethnicity.

One of Split’s most prominent journalists, writers, and prominent *fetivi*, Miljenko Smoje, fervently rebuked the article. An open spat occurred between the two writers as

²⁰ Tanner, *Croatia*, 2019, 208.

²¹ Quoted in Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sotonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 60.

they took to the opinion pages of *Slobodna Dalmacija* to challenge each other's claims about the city. Smoje, who was a common contributor to the paper and a beloved playwright, defended Split as a Yugoslavian city and warned Krsnik that he was taking too nationalistic a tone. In one corner, a writer for the youth of the city was decrying the stagnating economy, blaming the city's leadership, and making sly implications about the ethnic construction of the city. In the other corner, an icon of the city's unique character and a master of its distinct revolutionary history defended the city as a bastion of Yugoslavianness. Smoje criticized the young Krsnik and the youth for lacking an appreciation of the city's rich multicultural and partisan history.²²

The two writers talked past each other, hurling creative insults, and escalating the debate about Split's leadership and internal structure. Milivoj Mazić, writing in a Sunday edition of *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 1989 further criticized the city's leadership for failing to provide opportunities or resources for the city's youth:

Tell me, what has Split gained in the last ten years? Let's look only from the aspect of youth. What did the youth in this city get? Even after fifteen years, the Youth Center has not been built, almost fifteen thousand unemployed, the increase in drug addiction, juvenile delinquency... Look at what the schools where the youth are educated look like, then what is the student and student standard! What is the municipal arrangement of the city, where is our vision of its development, the development of the region... I think that the city has received very little. It only increased in number of inhabitants, and thus the problems multiplied because the growth of the population was not adequately monitored with certain infrastructural measures that would allow us all to live normally in one city, which the ruling structures call touristic, university, sports, cultural and yet no center.²³

²² Miljenko Smoje, "Zar i Nacionalna Liga Najgradova?," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, April 10, 1988.

²³ Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sotonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 98.

By the Spring of 1989, the numbers of the members of the communist party had dropped down to 19,500, working within 580 OOSKs. The problem of the decline in party membership was two-fold: fewer people were joining the party as new members, and a higher number of existing members were leaving the party. In the case of the latter phenomenon, there were basically three ways in which members left the party. They either 1) committed a crime or were involved in other nefarious activities and were kicked out by the party, 2) they were taken off the official lists for failure to pay dues or show up to meetings, or 3) they arbitrarily chose to leave the party. Members who were kicked out of the party for the reason of having committed a crime represented a negligible amount of the total number who left. More often, members left because they failed to pay their dues or show up for meetings. Many of the people who left the party under these circumstances were workers and young people.²⁴ The general apathy towards the party, however, also included those older party members who felt that the party had “lost its way” and was failing to live up to its ideals. There was a general sentiment that the Communist party was not doing enough to address the pressing issues within Split’s society. In a copy of the Brodosplit newspaper in November 1988, there was open criticism of the party leadership:

Does this Party know where it is going, what it wants and how it will achieve it? This is roughly how the question of an average confused member of the League of Communists looks when faced with the real facts of the Yugoslav economic and political sea. Namely, the experience of nearly half a century has taught the membership of the League of Communists that the Party always has the answer and the power to cut through all debatable situations, and therefore it is now asking the Party for a recipe to “fix” the existing situation. Of course, there is no such recipe because it was considered that the best possible one had already been found.

²⁴ Barić, 20.

A completely new dilemma is on the agenda, which someone jokingly described: our way or the right way? Many members of the League of Communists, offended by the degradation of former ideals to the simple, basic need for more (black and cheap, popular) bread and work, disappointed by the "spur" that has accumulated in all parts of society and from which even the top of the vanguard was not spared, depressed by their impotence and, finally, overwhelmed by the effort to stretch the dinar from the first to the first, they react by returning the red booklet.²⁵

Interviews gathered by the Split Municipal Committee revealed more about the individual cases for why members were leaving the party. They shared their opinions openly about the communist party and how it is not what it used to be, how the member dues were too high, especially during an economic crisis, and that they are very dissatisfied with the direction in which the party is going. The following are excerpts from the 1987 issue:

FABJANOVIĆ DAMIR, born in 1955, member of SK since 1980, electrician by profession, employed at "Marjanfilm". He leaves the membership with the explanation: "I leave the SK membership because I am unable to influence changes in society, I am disappointed with the overall situation today, and my personal income is so low that it is not even enough for my basic existence".²⁶

BARTULOVIĆ, Špira VESELA, born March 6, 1930, member of the SK since December 13, 1951, economist by profession, retired today. OOSK Dalmacijaturist informed the Committee on December 30, 1986, that Bartulović Vesela retired on June 30, 1985. The invitation sent by the Committee was returned by the post office with the note "the recipient at the indicated address is absent". She received the second invitation

²⁵ Barić, 23.

²⁶ Barić, 22.

sent by the Commission for unaffiliated members, and on the basis of it she responded by phone, when she promised that she would come to the interview, but that she would not join the party. She subsequently came to the Committee and repeated her earlier statement regarding party affiliation and says: "I retired disappointed in relation to today's situation, especially the leaders. I do not want to connect, and at the same time I am returning the party booklet. The pension I receive is not enough for my existence".²⁷

These interviews present a bleak outlook of the ordinary members of the Communist party in Split towards the end of the decade. Increasingly, there were calls for multi-party elections to be held throughout Yugoslavia. In Split, there were several professors at the Faculty of Economics who attempted to diagnose the structural problems within the Communist party. Marin Buble, a professor at the university of Split and a member of the Central Committee of the Alliance of Croatian Communists, concluded that the Communist party had been fighting a problem for which it was poorly designed to handle. Whereas the communist party had excelled at organizing workers and taking on problems that required a collective response, it was ill-prepared to solve issues that affected citizens as individual entities. In an interview with *Nedjeljno Dalmacija* in November 1989, he explained:

We understood self-management as a model opposed to bourgeois democracy. On this basis, we built a vertical system of delegations, from OOUR [basic organization of joint work, or *osnovna organizacija udreženog rada*] to the federation. The basis of this system was not the worker, as is often thought, but OOUR. Otherwise, our entire political system is built on connecting collectivities, and never individuals. Therefore, it is understandable that we did not have a citizen as a political subject of the political system, and as a result, we did not have developed civil liberties and rights.²⁸

²⁷ Barić, 22.

²⁸ Barić, 26.

For a younger generation of *Splićani*, there was a growing appeal towards a more nationalistic identity. In 1967, Professor Srđan Vrcan of the University of Split conducted a survey of high school students with regards to their “lifestyle and ideological-political profile”. A similar survey was then conducted on Split’s high school students in 1984. The results showed a jump in the percentage of students who identified as religious, as well as a corresponding fall in those who identified as “atheist”. In 1967, the respondents replied with an equal distribution of students who identified as religious, indifferent, and atheist. However, by 1984, the share of religious students in Split had risen to over 50%, while the number of atheist students fell to less than 20%.²⁹ The rise of the religious identity in the Split youth was a symptom of a larger rift that was present in the city throughout the 1980s.

The increasing unemployment rate, particularly among young people, meant that there were lots of time for idleness and wandering around the city. Reflecting on this time and these changes attitudes, Boris Hrepić, a *Splićani* musician who played bass in the group *Daleka Obala*, remarked about the divergence in young people:

So, we, lovers of progressive western music, opponents of traditionalism and conservatism, and admirers of seemingly casual clothing and hairstyles, ruled part of the front of "Bobis", together with the associated palm trees, benches, and coastal strip. Everyone else simply called us “hippies”. The central part, up to St Frane, which we called Hollywood, also belonged to our generation, but to a completely different one, with a pronounced preference for expensive brand clothes and music with cheap messages, which we called “make-up artists”. Make-up artists avoided the coastal belt, probably because of its specific acrid smell of sulfur that clashed with the smell of their carefully selected perfumes. In

²⁹ Barić, 63.

the far part of the Riva, from St Fran, we rarely visited Matejuška. If you were just a little more transparent hippie, your reckless wandering around that area would be accompanied in the mildest form by a bunch of various insults and imaginative comparisons, and if you then accidentally showed your displeasure because of the mental pain caused, that pain would be replaced by another, much more tangible one in no time. Namely, a simpler youth lived there, rather uninterested both in the influence of B.B. King or Peter Green and in the latest spring fashion collections of “Lacoste”. We called them – *vlaji*.³⁰

Outbursts of nationalism became more frequent in Split throughout the 1980s. However, the instances were not of a uniform character, where a young, unemployed person was taking out their anger on the socialist system by reverting to nationalism. In fact, many of the perpetrators of nationalist outbursts came from well-off families and were not disenfranchised by the socialist system. This troubled the authorities of the juvenile delinquent centers in Split, as they sought to find a common trend. They were confused as to how and why this nationalism appealed to young people. In an interview that I conducted with Ivica Profaca, he suggested that the nationalist rhetoric and eventual violence was a phenomenon that had started in Belgrade, which other cities, including Split, then adopted.³¹

Response to Serb Nationalism

The *vlaji* had been coming to Split in droves since the years immediately following the Second World War. Their presence in the city had changed the social and political aspects of the city in respect to what the *fetivi* had known. There had been a Croatian nationalist movement in the early 1970s, but it had its roots in Zagreb and was equal parts an economically charged as much as a nationalistically motivated movement.

³⁰ Barić, 45.

³¹ Interview with Ivica Profaca 5 April 2023

Why, then, was the upsurge of Croatian nationalism so acutely present in the early 1990s?

One main factor was the relationship that Split had with Belgrade and the *vlaji*'s response to the Serbian nationalism which started there. The employment of nationalist rhetoric in Kosovo by Slobodan Milošević supercharged the ethnic tensions across Yugoslavia, with Milošević often would decrying any act of violence or slight against any Serb as an act carried out against "the entire Serb nation". As Kosovo was the location of many of the most important Serbian Orthodox monasteries and churches, Milošević could easily use this political narrative to show that his goals represented those of the greater Serb nation, wherever they lived. His rhetoric had significant implications for the Serbs living in northern Dalmatia, and Serb opportunists in places like Knin were eager to join their political causes with Milošević. As the Serbs in Croatia grew bolder with every Milošević speech, the *vlaji* in Split responded by ratcheting up their Croatian nationalist rhetoric to match.

Knin

Knin is a small mountain town in northern Dalmatia that occupies a strategic position on the railway line between Zagreb and Split, connecting the Dalmatian region to the rest of Croatia. Empowered by the resurgence of Serb nationalism in Kosovo, the Serbs living in Croatia's *krajina* or "frontier" region, a term developed during the Hapsburg rule regarding the frontier to the Ottoman Empire, garnered political support and began to form a new, Serb political identity. It is important to clarify the distinction between the Croatian Serbs living in the *krajina* and those living in Croatia's metropolitan areas. Of the 581,000 ethnic Serbs living in Croatia, almost a quarter of them lived in Croatia's four largest cities – Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, and Osijek. Many of these Serbs, while opposed to Tuđman's Croatian nationalism, did not have separatist ambitions. However, in the more rural areas such as Knin, where the Serbs formed a majority, the Serbian nationalist rhetoric resonated.

The *krajina* Serbs were in some ways a political reflection of the *vlaj* in Split – less educated, conservative, and staunchly religious. During Croatia's 1990 parliamentary elections, the *krajina* Serbs formed their own political party, which they called the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). Many of the more metropolitan Serbs, or rural Serbs

who lived in ethnically mixed districts, while they had distaste for Tuđman's HDZ, voted for the party of reformed communists instead. The Knin Serbs, some of whom had either experienced the horrors of the NDH themselves, or had close relatives who had, were adamant about their party and their autonomy. They chose for their leader a psychiatrist named Jovan Rašković. Lacking a coherent political agenda, the only political point that the SDS could articulate was summarized in a quote from Rašković: 'For every step that Tuđman's government takes to separate itself from Yugoslavia, we will take a step to separate ourselves from Croatia.'³² Rašković's political entourage included two Knin citizens who would play significant roles in leading their political cause to open conflict: Milan Babić, a dentist from Knin, and Milan Martić, a police inspector from Knin. Their strategy of pushing, without compromise, for Serbian autonomy within Croatia, resulted in the declaration of an independent state of Serbs within Croatia (RSK), and an ensuing political and military confrontation.

1990 Multiparty Elections

By 1989, the Communist party in Yugoslavia was experiencing a freefall of credibility. Political developments in Belgrade were distinctly worrisome, as Slobodan Milošević continued to stoke ethnic tensions in Kosovo, thus breaking one of the forbidden principles of Tito's *bratstvo i jedinstvo* policy. With the economy faring poorly and the party's mismanagement lambasted in the press, it was announced 1989 that the first open, multi-party elections would be held throughout Yugoslavia in 1990. Political parties formed immediately thereafter. In the summer of 1989, Franjo Tuđman, a Croat nationalist politician who played a central role in the Croatian Spring of 1971, formed the Croatia Democratic Union, or HDZ (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*). The party stood as an opposition power to the ruling communist party, and a strong, nationalist rebuke to the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević's rhetoric in Belgrade. The blatant nationalism employed by Tuđman colored the HDZ's campaign as being an extreme right-wing party. Many speculated that because of this, the HDZ would lose to the party of the reformed communists (SDP). Under normal circumstances, the SDP would have won Split handily. Yet given the growing ethnic tensions within Yugoslavia

³² Goldstein, *Croatia*, 217.

and the *vlaji*'s ability to mobilize around Tuđman's message, the city was in for a heated political battle.

In Croatia's first multi-party democratic elections, which were held in 1990, the results showed that Split was a very tightly contested area. The Croatian parliament in 1990 was a tri-cameral body, consisting of the Social-Political Council (80 seats), the Council of Municipalities (116 seats), and the Council of Associated Labour (160 seats).

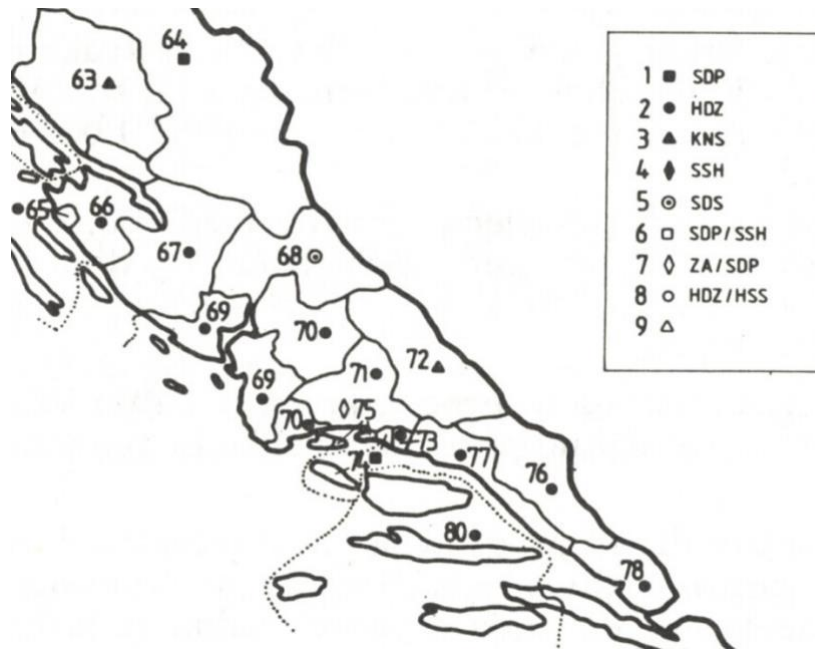
As Split was one of the larger population areas in Croatia, it had three distinct districts for the Social-Political Council elections: Split I, Split II, and Split III. They were Croatia's 73rd, 74th, and 75th districts respectively (See Fig. 3). In the first round of elections, Zvonimir Marković, who represented HDZ won the Split I district outright, taking 56% of the 40,623 votes cast. The boundaries for Split I encompassed the part of the Split peninsula that connected to the mainland. This would have been a *vlaj* stronghold as it was the more recently inhabited part of the city compared to the western part of the peninsula, which included the old town, Split III, and Marjan Hill. Neither the Split II nor the Split III neighborhoods produced a winner in the first round. In both districts, the battles were between HDZ and the party of the reformed communists, SDP (*stranka demokratskih promjena*). However, the second round of elections produced wins for the SDP candidates in both districts.³³

While it may be considered that "Red Split" sent two SDP members out of its three elected officials to the Croatian Sabor's Social-Political Council, the SDP candidates needed a second round of elections to secure their victory, and they were both strongly contested by HDZ candidates. Far from being a "red stronghold", it was clear that Split was undergoing a transformation that favored a new political orientation. Moreover, in the elections for the Council of Municipalities, the Council of Associated Labor, and, particularly, the local elections, HDZ was clearly the favored party.³⁴

³³ Arhiva izbora Republike Hrvatske <https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/#/app/parlament-1990>

³⁴ "Arhiva Izbora Republike Hrvatske," accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/#/app/parlament-1990>.

Figure 4: Election districts for the 1990 Council of Municipalities Elections. Split's districts for this election are Nos. 73, 74, and 75³⁵



Council of Municipalities Elections

The elections for Split's representative in the Municipal Council in the Croatian Sabor saw the HDZ candidate, Dr. Branko Božinović narrowly beat the SDP candidate, Jadran Marinković. The elections took three rounds, and Božinović won the last round by only 541 votes out of the 106,037 votes cast.³⁶

In the elections for Split's Municipal Assembly, there was a much more decisive victory for HDZ. The voting patterns between HDZ and SDP also took on an east-west geographical division. Writing about this in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, the journalist Robert Žaja remarked on the general differences between the western side of the city, in which many of the *četivi* lived, and the east side of the city, which did not have the same type of centralized infrastructure development and was comprised of the *vlaji*.

³⁵ "Arhiva Izbora Republike Hrvatske."

³⁶ "Arhiva Izbora Republike Hrvatske."

Thus, when the results of the voting in all 37 local communities are compared, Split was divided into two parts - the western part, in which the victory was mainly won by the "left" and the eastern part, where the "right" had absolute supremacy, and as a kind of Berlin wall between the two ideological sides, Sutjeska Street stretches on the opposite sides. The western part, however, is not as single-party colored as the eastern part, because in the three local communities of Grad, Lučac-Manuš and Varoš, the electoral victory was achieved exclusively by HDZ candidates (...). It is quite certain that for those who know the history of Split, the biggest surprise is the triumph of the HDZ in Varoš, the former symbol of "red Split", but this can probably be explained by the fact that the natives there were almost completely replaced by immigrants. Supporters of SKH - the Party of Democratic Changes, after all, also blame the victory of the HDZ in the eastern part of the municipality, in the first place, "the people of Split without roads".³⁷

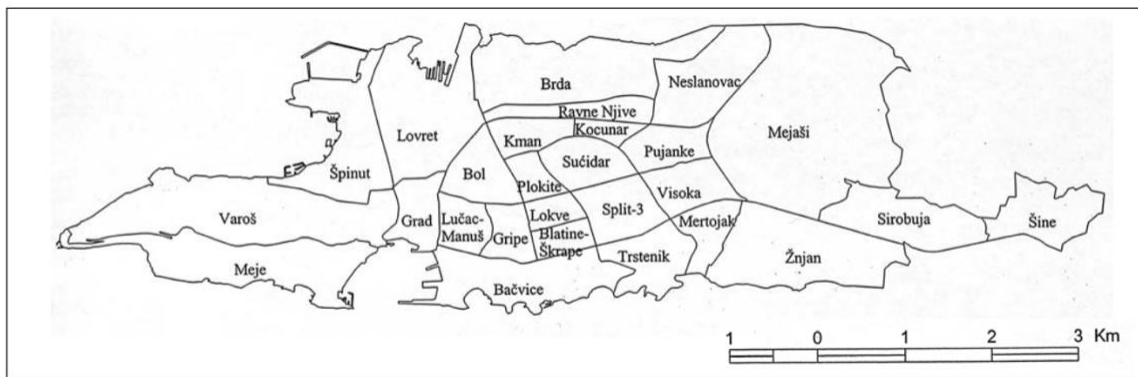
Figure 4 shows Sutjeska Street in red, which has since been renamed Velebitska Street. The Varoš neighborhood is circled in blue. Everything east of Sutjeska Street is what Žaja refers to as the "Split without roads". Figure 5 shows the various neighborhoods in Split.

³⁷ Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sotonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 665.

Figure 5



Figure 6³⁸



Economic Downturn & Beginning of Privatization

The economic situation in Yugoslavia in the 1980s experienced a downturn, which compounded the country's social and political realities in the latter half of the decade. This downturn contrasted with the strong growth that the Yugoslav economy had experienced in the decades prior. Large infrastructure projects in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, such as the building of highways and housing projects, provided employment opportunities for young people and gave the citizens a feeling that through their hard work and cooperation, they could build their own country from the ground up. Young

³⁸ Klempić, "Razvoj stambenih naselja Splita nakon Drugog svjetskog rata," 99.

people moved from their provincial hometowns to the bigger cities to get an education, after which a job was surely waiting for them on the other end.

In Split, its industrial base included producers of plastics, cement, clothes, toys, steel, and chemicals as well as a large shipbuilding industry. *Jugoplastika*, *Brodosplit*, and *Jugovinil* were some of the largest firms in Split, with each company having its own newsletter and *Jugoplastika* sponsoring a world-class basketball team. Split could not expand fast enough to accommodate for the influx of workers and students as they migrated from the provincial areas of Dalmatia.³⁹

However, as the economic situation in Split declined, fault lines began to form within the internal structure of many of these firms. The unemployment rate increased, and young people became frustrated with the lack of opportunities for upward mobility.⁴⁰ This resulted in an increased apathy towards the socialist ideals and government. To compound Split's economic dilemma, the city's population continued to grow throughout the 1980s, causing a further strain on the housing supply. The political shifts within Split's society to that of a more conservative bent accentuated the opportunities for nepotism and favoritism.

As mentioned previously, the internal structures of Split's firms were based on the principle of Yugoslavian self-management. During the transitional years from 1991-1995, there were several factors that contributed to a change in firms' makeup. Primarily, managers who were either ethnically Serbian or Croats who were not loyal to the new HDZ government were replaced with party loyalists, regardless of whether they were qualified for the position or not. Although this phase of transition is known as "privatization" (*privatizacija*), the process often involved the Croatian state taking over enterprises and replacing the leadership with HDZ party loyalists. As the conservative *vlaži* were much more inclined to vote for the HDZ, the enduring effect of this transition was that the composition of Split's decision-makers and economic elite went through a rapid change to a more conservative, HDZ-loyal group. Ironically, many of the original managers of firms had been the ones who were pressing for the most liberal, market-oriented policies prior to Croatia's independence.

³⁹ Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sutonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 676.

⁴⁰ Barić, 57.

The transition from self-management to the market system had a prevalent effect not only on Split's business elite, but a similar transition occurred in the public sphere. Clientelism in the doling out of public offices such as judgeships, city officials, replaced competent public authorities with HDZ party loyalists. Ultimately, this meant that Split's economic and the political leadership transitioned in unison towards a pro-HDZ government. The Split *vlaž* had thus ascended to both economic and political power within less than five years. While this process took place throughout Croatia, its sudden occurrence in Split was a dramatic sign which showed just how authoritarian the Tuđman government was and the effectiveness it had in infiltrating and cleaning out the political and economic elite, replacing them their own people.

Social Changes

This section will identify the basic elements of Split's social atmosphere from 1986 to 1990. The changes in social life in Split throughout this period were multifaceted and dynamic. They included political, generational, professional, and geographical divisions within the city, many of which overlapped with each other. Split continued to attract economic migrants from the Dalmatian hinterland, despite increasingly not being able to provide jobs or housing for these people. Yet many of these newcomers to Split could afford to live in the city, due to the fact that they had relatives in Germany and Austria who had found work and made good money there as *Gastarbeiter* and would send remittances back home. However, along with their remittance money, they also brought a more conservative, religious, and nationalist way of thinking as well as an awareness of a more capitalist way of life.

A separate issue of drug use began to rise in Split throughout the 1980s and in to the 1990s. Although this problem never turned into a full-blown epidemic, it was a notable part of specific geographical areas within the city, such as in the old town. As Split evolved socially, it did so within the context of a Croatia and a Yugoslavia that were changing in similar ways.

According to the 1981 Yugoslav census, Split had a population of 176,30 of which 83.1% identified as ethnically Croat. Split was also home to the naval headquarters of the Yugoslav National Army, or JNA, *jugoslavenska narodna armija*. The armed forces of Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic institution, and thus many people from the

various republics in Yugoslavia lived in Split while they served. This included a lot of Serbian officers, since many of the ethnic Serbs held the higher positions within the JNA. The JNA as an institution operated independently from the rest of the city's population – a fact that did not always sit well with the rest of Split society. For instance, the JNA had its own formal differences, such as its own hospital, and many of the JNA officers were given flats in the newly constructed Split III complex. Boškovića Street, which ran in a north-south orientation through the Split III neighborhood, had some of the nicest flats in Split. They were exclusively reserved for JNA Navy officers. Informally, the officers normally stuck together and would frequent specific bars and restaurants. Lastly, the officers who retired with the JNA could choose anywhere in Yugoslavia for their retirement home, and many chose Split.

Those who had grown up in the postwar Yugoslavia, who had come of age under Tito's *bradstvo i jedinstvo*, and who had helped to build the very country in which they lived made up Split's older generation. Many of them had grown up in or at least were born in the rural *zagorje* region of the Dalmatian hinterland and were thus accustomed to the hardships that such a life entailed. What is more, as Yugoslavia was in the midst of rapid industrialization in the 1950s and 1960s, there was always a need for their labor. Young people in the early years of Yugoslavia were put to work for one project or another, whether that was for constructing new housing, such as the Split 3 neighborhood, reconstructing the *Brodosplit* shipyard, or working a long shift at the new *Jugoplastika* or *Jugovinil* factories.

On the other side of Split's generational divide were the younger *vlaji*. Those who came of age in the late 1970s and 1980s, had realities were drastically different from that of their parents. These young men and women had access to education, the comforts and amenities of a more modern life, and the benefit of growing up in a country that had recovered, at least physically, from a destructive world war. Their new reality, however, also presented new problems. Whereas their parents had labored away under grueling circumstances (and who were often quick to remind them of this fact), the lack of employment opportunities for young people in Split in the 1980s was a beast of a different nature. The self-managed socialism that their parents had used to construct the city and the country also kept those same workers in paid positions at the same factories

and firms. The younger generation felt that this stifled their opportunities to progress in, or to even start their careers.

Regarding ethnicity, Split's older generation was familiar with the dangers that such rifts could provoke. For this reason, there was a great hesitancy among the older generation to confront uncomfortable questions that stemmed from the war. These included addressing the number of victims killed at the various NDH concentration camps, such as the one in Jasenovac, which had always been a controversial topic.⁴¹ The younger generation was overall more willing to embrace the symbols and traditions of national identities. For example, two social scientists, Drs. Nikola Kuvačić and Boris Vušković conducted surveys of Split high school students in 1985. The students were asked questions which would gauge their religiosity and their views on the world outside of Yugoslavia. For the question "who are the well-known public figures with whom you would most like to identify?" the number one answer was Mother Teresa, with Pope John Paul II finishing third.⁴² The backlash in the pages of *Slobodna Dalmacija* included commentators who accused the researchers of carrying out their work in shoddy circumstances. The research offered a key and foreboding insight into what was to come in future years. Nikica Barić describes one of the most profound findings of the research:

Vušković also repeated for *Danas* what he considered the most significant and dangerous in the conducted research. This was not an increase in the religiosity of young people per se, but the fact that young people who declared themselves "very religious" also gave negative answers about the social system, which indicated that the mentioned type of religiosity also has a certain "negative social charge" which Vušković described as nationalist and anti-communist.⁴³

⁴¹ Tanner, *Croatia*, 2019, 205.

⁴² Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sutonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 64.

⁴³ Barić, 65.

The Split public did their best to brush off the alarming results of the study. Yet the place where some of the most intense and outwardly expressed nationalism occurred was on the bleachers of the Poljud stadium during Hajduk soccer matches.

NK Hajduk

One of the most central elements of Split's identity is its football club, NK Hajduk, *nogometni klub Hajduk*. Throughout most of the Yugoslav years, the professional soccer players were not allowed play outside of Yugoslavia until they were 30.⁴⁴ Thus, the country was able to keep its world-class talent within its own borders. In the Yugoslav league, the league championship almost always went to one of four teams – two of which were from Serbia: Red Star Belgrade and Partizan; and two were from Croatia: Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split. What is more, each football club had its own fan base, with its own songs and traditions. For Hajduk Split, their fan base was established in 1950, calling themselves Torcida after having been inspired by football fans at the World Cup in Brazil of that same year.

Football matches were one of the places where the young men of Yugoslavia could go to blow off steam and cheer on their favorite club. Until 1979, Hajduk used to play at a small stadium located near the center of the old town. Yet when a new stadium was built for the 1979 Mediterranean Games, Hajduk began holding their matches there, which changed the dynamic of the fans and the players, as there was now an Olympic-sized running track that separated the field from the stands. It was also at this time when the tensions between the clubs' fans, sometimes on nationalist grounds, began to escalate.

As the clubs were geographically based, the games also became a place where nationalist chants, songs, and later, physical confrontations would take place. Beginning in the 1980s, the Torcida fan group began to take a more nationalist tone regarding its chants.⁴⁵ In the pages of the *Omladinska iskra*, the youth newspaper, there were several articles that decried the atmosphere at the Hajduk games:

Today, people are reluctant to go among "Torcida". There are a lot of bad stories about these young people without

⁴⁴ *Croatia: Defining a Nation*, Documentary (FIFA, 2022).

⁴⁵ Ivica Profaca, April 5, 2023.

school or profession, with low, undeveloped moral awareness, who come from mostly broken families, and who look for and find a way out of that everyday grayness in alcohol and "Hajduk". Very often, under the influence of alcohol, their activities precede all riots in the stadium.⁴⁶

Although there was no love lost between the Split and Zagreb teams, there was an added element of animosity whenever a Serbian team came to play a Croatian team, especially if it was a game wherein the police had to get involved to separate a brawl between the two fan clubs. For the young *vlaji*, Hajduk and Torcida could have offered an escape for a reality that had a progressively bleak outlook. Although Torcida had not been an historical institution of nationalist sentiment, it quickly became one in the late 1980s.

On May 13th, 1990 in a match played in Zagreb between Dinamo and Red Star Belgrade, and amid growing ethnic tensions between the two republics, a massive brawl broke out. Red Star fans rushed towards the Zagreb fans and began ripping out the plastic seats of the stadium and hurling them at the opposing fans. When Dinamo fans sought to retaliate, the police stepped in and brutally beat them back. As many on the police force were ethnic Serbs, the event was seen as an epic clash of rival nationalisms and a sign of things to come.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sotonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 527.

⁴⁷ *Croatia: Defining a Nation*.

Chapter 3: Split 1991 –

Croatia's experience during the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, which Croatians call the "homeland war", took place in three distinct parts of the country: Eastern Slavonia, northern Dalmatia, and Dubrovnik. Although it was in these places where the booms of the artillery guns could be heard, the effects of the war were also strongly felt in cities like Split. The seaside city had been a growing hub for tourism. When the war started, the tourism industry took a nosedive. As Split was home to a large manufacturing which made products for domestic consumption in places like Serbia, the war severed ties to these markets and forced Croatian firms to look elsewhere for new customers. Split also hosted the headquarters for the Yugoslavian Navy. As was typical for the federal armed forces in Yugoslavia, the navy had a multiethnic composition with many of the high-ranking positions going to ethnic Serbs. Additionally, the Yugoslav Army had had a level of special treatment in Yugoslavia and in Split throughout its existence. For instance, there were separate facilities – hospitals, housing, bars, and clubs that were reserved exclusively for members of the armed forces. These facilities were oftentimes in prime locations and were the source of much ire from the civilian population in Split.

The JNA navy shelled Split on a few occasions, but that is not to diminish the impact it had on the city and its collective memory of the homeland war. For Jelena Novak, who at the time was still a little girl and lived in the small village of Tugare outside of Split, she clearly remembered the early morning explosions as the sounds reverberated up the Cetinje canyon. "It felt like I was in an action movie. I remember waking up to these loud 'booms' and walking outside with my grandma." The explosions that she heard were the sounds of JNA's planes and destroyers, firing on the city on 15 November 1991. Later, the MiG jets that swooped through the Tugare valley and rattled the windows of her house were those en route to support the breakaway Serb rebels in the areas north of Split.

Jelena also recalled the rapidly changing social atmosphere in the years leading up to and during the war. "You could just feel that something was off... there was an 'impending darkness.'"⁴⁸ Indeed, the impending darkness would come to take on a much

⁴⁸ Jelena Novak, April 4, 2023.

more physical element in Split, as the city rapidly transformed into an ethnonationalist stronghold for the HDZ. By the end of this chapter of Split's history, the city had completed a transition from a bustling, industrial hub with a multidimensional economy, to that of a singular economy focused almost solely on tourism. Furthermore, the city became more ethnically homogenous as the non-Croat ethnicities left the city.

Political Changes – A Surge Towards Nationalism

The war in Croatia, which occurred between the Fall of 1991 and the Winter of 1995 claimed tens of thousands of lives and produced hundreds of thousands of refugees. Croatia, which at the beginning of the onslaught, had no international allies, few heavy weapons, and a nationalist Serb population in pockets of northern Dalmatia and in Slavonia near its border with Serbia. The war effectively tore Yugoslavia apart along ethnic lines despite the decades of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* that had attempted to downplay and excuse these divisions. Yet when Tito died in 1980, there was an opportunity for a new style of self-aggrandizing politics to take charge. In the mid-1980s, Slobodan Milošević, then the Communist Party of Serbia's deputy vice president, began to employ a hyper nationalist rhetoric in the autonomous province of Kosovo. His impassioned speech at Kosovo Polje in 1989 further stirred up nationalist sentiment in Yugoslavia more broadly. What grew out of Milošević's rhetoric was the Serbian National Movement (*Srpski nacionalni pokret*). The movement proved to be particularly potent in the areas of Yugoslavia that were less ethnically homogenous such as in the autonomous region of Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Dalmatian hinterland. As much as the leadership of the Communist party of Yugoslavia tried to quell such populism, the movement had already sparked other nationalist movements in response to the Serbian Nationalist Movement.

"All of that nationalism started in Belgrade and then came here," journalist Ivica Profaca told me during an interview. He explained how Split had a rich history of support for the partisan movement that began during WWII, which was evident in the most charismatic element of the city's identity – the Hajduk Split football club. During the Yugoslav years, the team's logo sported a large star around which encompassed a blue circle with the words "Hajduk" and "Split" written on the top and bottom. There had even been a suggestion to rename the club's stadium from "Stadium Poljud" to "Stadium Tito"

immediately after Tito's death.⁴⁹ The club's diehard fanbase, known as *Torcida*, had been an integral part of Split since its inception in 1950. "I remember in the late 1980s, Torcida began to sing a few nationalist songs, but it was nothing major."⁵⁰ Recalls Profaca. In 1990, the Hajduk Football Club changed its logo from the red communist star to that of the traditional Croatian red-and-white checkerboard, or *šahovnica*, which was a clear signal that showed a more nationalistic attitude emerging in Split.

Figure 7: Hajduk's logo from 1960 – 1990 (left), Hajduk's logo from 1990 – (right)



Source: Wikimedia commons

The Croatian nationalism also had an economic element that accompanied it. Whereas Yugoslavia had been experiencing an economic decline throughout the 1980s, the effects were felt differently in the various regions of the country. In Croatia, specifically Dalmatia, the growing tourism sector generated profits— profits which were then sent on via taxes to Belgrade and redistributed to poorer parts of Yugoslavia. "The thinking in Slovenia and Croatia was 'why should we support other parts of Yugoslavia?'" said Profaca. The economic inequality and the unequal levels of industriousness within Yugoslavia in the late 1980s were severe and problematic for the Yugoslav central government. According to historian Tony Judt, the Federal Republic of

⁴⁹ Telegram.hr, "Naletjeli smo na mali povijesni ekskluziv; Hajduk je 1980. htio da se Poljud nazove po Titu," Telegram.hr, accessed May 28, 2023, <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/iskopali-smo-mali-povijesni-ekskluziv-poljud-se-1980-trebao-preimenovati-u-stadion-tito/>.

⁵⁰ Profaca, interview.

Slovenia, in which lived roughly the same percentage of the population of Yugoslavia as Kosovo, was responsible for 29% of Yugoslavia's net exports. Kosovo's direct contribution to Yugoslavia's net exports equated to just 1%.⁵¹ With the economic situation in Yugoslavia deteriorating and nationalist sentiments on the rise, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia called for an extraordinary congress of the parties in January of 1990, known as the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, *Četrnaesti vanredni kongres Saveza komunista Jugoslavije*. Although the meeting was supposed to calm the tensions that had been rising between the republics, the result was the complete opposite. The Slovenian delegation, which had been pushing for reforms within Yugoslavia, walked out of the session after all their proposals had been rejected. When the Serbian delegation, led by Slobodan Milošević, suggested to continue the 14th congress without the Slovene delegation, the Croatian delegation protested and walked out as well. The repercussions of this diplomatic failure were significant and timely, as Croatia was scheduled to have its first multiparty parliamentary elections in April of 1990.

Dr. Nikola Visković, a professor of law at the University of Split, was one of the most critical voices of the unfolding political movements in the late 1980s. In an article of the Sunday version of *Slobodna Dalmacija* in January of 1989, he described his assessment of the current events. He was particularly concerned with the Serbian National Movement and the effects that it would have on subsequent nationalist movements within Yugoslavia and in Split. He noticed the similarities between the Serbian National Movement of the late 1980s and that of the "Maspok" Croatian Spring movement of 1971. While many of the Maspok leaders had been arrested in the 1970s, Visković suspected that the Yugoslav Communist leadership in Belgrade lacked the political courage to call out and condemn the Serbian Nationalist Movement. He predicted that this would eventually help to enflame Croatian nationalist passions in places like Split.⁵² He was not wrong.

⁵¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 670.

⁵² Barić, *SPLIT 1980-Ih: Društveni Sukobi u Sutonu Samoupravnoga Socijalizma*, 612.

After the 14th extraordinary congress, the political events within Croatia and Yugoslavia quickly escalated. In the country's first democratic multi-party elections in 1990, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won a majority of the parliamentary seats, defeating the reformed communists (SDP-SKH). The HDZ electoral wins had been particularly shocking in what had been the urban communist stronghold of Split.

Economic – Privatization

The economic transition in Croatia in the early and mid-1990s was by far the most drastic and enduring change. Between 1991 and 1995, Split underwent a period of rapid transition that was called “privatization” *privatizacija*, although many of the firms became state-owned and were then made private. The majority of this process took place under the careful watch of the HDZ government. The enduring effect of *privatizacija*, therefore, was that many HDZ loyalists became the owners of large enterprises almost overnight and many HDZ supporters benefited from the privatization strategy. It is important to note that most of the transition process occurred in the context of Croatia's war for independence. The new Croatian state had to raise capital to fund its efforts to defend itself from Serbian aggression. This chaotic time effectively took the social and political resources away from the proper managing of privatization. What is more, many of the most lucrative firms, such as those in the tourism and export industries, were being privatized at a time when their revenues and assets were at an all-time low. This section will start with an overview of the privatization process and then analyze how the model applied to specific firms in Split such as Slobodna Dalmacija and Jugoplastika. The new owners of these firms included wealthy and well-connected individuals, wealthy diaspora, private industries, banks, and international investors. Firms were sold off to the highest, or as was often, the best-connected bidder, despite protests from the workers. Many of these firms were later liquidated.

Already in 1988, the Act on Enterprises first allowed for commercialization. The following year, the 1989 Act on Social Capital, which was amended in August 1990, opened ways to privatize social firms. Yet perhaps the most significant law passed regarding privatization was the 1991 Law on the Transformation of Socially Owned Enterprises. What emerged from this law was a two-stage plan to privatize socially owned firms in a “hybrid” way. The Croatian Agency for Development and

Reconstruction and the Croatian Development Fund, which would merge in 1992 to become the Croatian Privatization Fund (CPF), were the direct authorities that oversaw the privatization process. In the first stage, socially owned enterprises would have from April 1991 until June 1992 to submit privatization plans to the Croatian Agency for Development and Reconstruction. If the enterprises failed to do so within the allotted timeframe, they would automatically become property of the Croatian state. In the second stage, the CPF would sell all the state-owned enterprises in the form of shares via the Zagreb Stock Exchange, public trade deals, and credit swaps. The firms' workers, who for years had also owned their company, were given priority pricing.⁵³

Throughout this process, the HDZ government was at the critical junction points and operating without much oversight, albeit with much criticism. Several moves, which were implemented in December 1992 and February 1993 caused considerable damage to the legitimacy of the privatization process in the public perception. These included: 1) The disbanding of the enterprises' workers' councils and the appointment of temporary business boards, 2) The postponement of privatization of enterprises in the war-affected areas of Croatia, 3) The distribution of free shares to war veterans and families of fallen soldiers amounting to DEM 20,000 per person, and 4) A cap of 50% on the equity that was allowed to be owned by insiders. The beneficiaries of these policies tended to be groups of people who were more inclined to favor the HDZ such as military families, people living in war-affected areas, and wealthy Croatian diaspora. Importantly, the CPF could appoint members to the business boards, which opened a wide possibility for nepotism, and clientelism to HDZ-loyalists.⁵⁴ Combined, these factors either made it easier for HDZ supporters, whether it was the *vlaži* in Split, conservative Croatians in the countryside, or wealthy Croatian emigres to conglomerate equity during the privatization process.

Although the government was desperate to pay off its debt and earn revenues, and despite the aforementioned avenues for privatization, by 1995 the state had majority ownership in 270 large firms, which accounted for 40% of equity that could be made

⁵³ Vojmir Franičević, "Privatization in Croatia: Legacies and Context," *Eastern European Economics* 37, no. 2 (1999): 5–54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4380172>.

⁵⁴ Franičević, 11.

private and 30% of total employment.⁵⁵ Holding on to so much of Croatia's equity during such a turbulent time, the HDZ government showed that they did not want to lose its grip on the nation's national resources. Instead, it preferred to hold on to hold on to its position of economic power, doling out ownerships, board seats, and management positions to HDZ-friendly characters.

Examples of Privatization

To understand how the economic privatization of Croatia affected the city of Split in the 1990s, this section will take examples of Split-based firms and analyze how they changed throughout the last decade of the 20th century. The first example is Jugoplastika, a manufacturing plant that produced things such as aircraft and automotive plastics, jackets, sneakers, bags, sports balls, toys, and boats among other things. The second example is Brodosplit, which built both naval ships for the Yugoslav National Army as well as merchant marine for the international market. The last example is the privatization of Slobodna Dalmacija, the city's flagship newspaper that was founded as a partisan newspaper during WWII. Each of these firms had a significant importance to the character of the city, and each would undergo a unique transformation during the privatization process.

Jugoplastika

Jugoplastika first registered as a company in Yugoslavia in 1952, when the city's population was just shy of 65,000 inhabitants. Throughout the 20th century, the plastics producer employed thousands of *Splićani*, primarily women, as well as workers from all over the former Yugoslavia. The firm had four factories set up throughout Dalmatia – including a main location in the Brodarica area of Split, as well as a location in between Split and the town of Solin. What is more, Jugoplastika sponsored Split's basketball team, which was very successful both in the Yugoslav domestic league as well as in the EuroLeague, where it won the EuroLeague title for three consecutive years from 1988 – 1991. The firm therefore had a strong connection with the city's cultural roots. The fact that the main Brodarica factory lay in a heap of rubble after it was demolished in 2006

⁵⁵ Franičević, 13.

would have been an unthinkable for the people who lived in Split and worked at the factory in the late 1980s.

When Croatia entered a phase of economic privatization and political independence, Jugoplastika employed roughly 12,500 people. Reflecting on the company in an article published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 2010, Zoran Milas, who was one of the last managers of the plant, reckons that Jugoplastika had an income in 1990 of \$350 million.⁵⁶ The company had a wide distribution range within Yugoslavia – with four large clothing distribution centers in Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Skopje, and Nis, as well as stores in all the capitals of the federal republics. The firm had over 3,000 products and produced many articles for famous western brands such as Adidas, Salamander, and Rondino. Although the firm produced automotive plastics for external markets such as Citroen, Renault, and Volkswagen, a large portion of its auto plastics went to the Yugoslavian-produced Zastava, which was manufactured in Kragujevac in central Serbia. Jugoplastika had an effective monopoly on the Yugoslav automobile plastics market since the Yugoslav state had taken measures to protect this sector from outside competition. Yet as tensions between Croatia and Serbia rose in 1990, Zastava began to boycott Jugoplastika, which severely hurt the firm's production while they looked elsewhere for other markets.⁵⁷

In 1993, Jugoplastika started its privatization process. The various factories were sold off as separate entities and its workers council was disbanded. The CPF installed HDZ party apparatchiks, such as Šime Đodan, as the president of Jugoplastika's Supervisory Board. Đodan had been one of the primary actors alongside Franjo Tuđman in Matica Hrvatska during the Croatian Spring of 1971. What is more, Jugoplastika changed its name to "Diokom" in an effort to distance the Croatian firm from any hint that it was associated with "Yugoslavia". Milas had the following to say regarding the privatization of his firm:

⁵⁶ "OJ GOSPODO JEL' VAM ŽAO 'Jugoplastika' je mogla opstati i hraniti 12.900 radnika," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, March 20, 2010, <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/oj-gospodo-jel-vam-zao-jugoplastika-je-mogla-opstati-i-hraniti-12-900-radnika-92726>.

⁵⁷ Bruno Schönfelder, "The Impact of the War 1991-1995 on the Croatian Economy: A Contribution to the Analysis of War Economies," *Economic Annals* 50, no. 166 (2005): 7–31, <https://doi.org/10.2298/EKA0566007S>.

Everything went downhill when the new Croatian government took "Jugoplastika" as its property and when politics made important decisions about the company's leadership. Can you imagine that Šime Đodan became the president of the Supervisory Board in 1993?! They changed the name of the company to "Dioko", and that name meant absolutely nothing in Europe. Nothing. Zero. The French and Germans wondered why a brand was suddenly changing its name. Well, some geniuses canceled its name because, apparently, it smelled of Yugoslavia, and they forgot that "Jugoplastika" is located in the south of the country and that it produces plastic... - tells us Jukić, who gave 35 years of his life to "Jugoplastika ".⁵⁸

By the year 2000, the Jugoplastika (Diokom) had gone bankrupt. In 2004, Jugoplastika's main factory in Split was leveled and the Joker Shopping Center, a project started by a controversial business entrepreneur and future mayor of Split Zeljko Kerum. AD Plastik, which was the spinoff of Jugoplastika's "autodijelovi" or "autoparts" sector is the only remaining element of the Jugoplastika factory that survived into the current times.

Slobodna Dalmacija

Slobodna Dalmacija had its beginning during WWII in Croatia. The publication had originally been a newsletter for Tito's partisans, but later grew to be one of the largest media publications in Yugoslavia. Operating under the model of Yugoslav self-management, the journalists, graphic designers, editors, and other staff of Slobodna Dalmacija were also the owners of the paper and managed the firm via workers' council. Slobodna Dalmacija had both a daily and a weekly publication, known as *Nedjelja*

⁵⁸ "OJ GOSPODO JEL' VAM ŽAO 'Jugoplastika' je mogla opstati i hraniti 12.900 radnika." *Slobodna Dalmacija*, March 20, 2010. <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/oj-gospodo-jel-vam-zao-jugoplastika-je-mogla-opstati-i-hraniti-12-900-radnika-92726>

Dalmacija or “Sunday Dalmatia”. Known for its opinion pieces and humor, the paper garnered a large circulation in Dalmatia, Croatia, and throughout Yugoslavia. One of the paper’s most beloved contributors was journalist and playwright Miljenko Smoje, who often weighed in on the political and cultural topics of the day. Another beloved element of the paper was a political satire section in *Nedjelja Dalmacija* called *Feral Tribune*. “Feral”, for short, was the creation of three *Slobodna Dalmacija* journalists: Viktor Ivancic, Predrag Lucic, and Boris Dezulovic. Throughout the privatization process, *Feral Tribune* became a point of contention with the Croatian government. Its satirical digs, shocking covers, and investigative journalism were the causes of many disagreements with the Tuđman administration.

In 1992, the HDZ government began proceedings to privatize *Slobodna Dalmacija* through the Law on the Transformation of Socially Owned Enterprises. Yet the way in which the newspaper was privatized ultimately allowed for a Bosnian Croat, Miroslav Kutle, to purchase the newspaper at a cut rate. Knowing that the process of privatization would mean the death of the paper’s independence, many of the journalists, editorial staff, and graphics workers resisted the process as best they could. Meanwhile, the HDZ government did everything in its power to either physically intimidate *Slobodna Dalmacija* or shape public opinion against the newspaper. The story of how *Slobodna Dalmacija* experienced the privatization phase offers an excellent insight into Split’s tumultuous political times in the early 1990s.

When the HDZ government took over in the spring of 1990, *Slobodna Dalmacija* had published some scathing reviews of the party and its members. That is not to say that the newspaper was hell bent on destroying the HDZ. In fact, it was the policy of the editor in chief, Joško Kulušić, to publish a wide variety of views in the paper’s opinion section. Much of the press in Croatia at the time had fallen in line with the HDZ government, especially as the war raged in northern Dalmatian, eastern Slavonia, and Dubrovnik. The fact that *Slobodna Dalmacija* remained a force of independent journalism caused its circulation to grow and that many journalists from around Croatia came to work for *Slobodna*. The paper set up a Zagreb office with twenty full-time staff members to accommodate for the increase in demand. Vesna Roller, a journalist who worked at *Hrvatski Radio*, explained why she joined the Zagreb office at *Slobodna*:

I quit my job at Croatian Radio and came to work in *Slobodna* because it was the only unoccupied space. That was the time when journalists publicly declared that when the guns are roaring, professional journalism should not be silent, because it is normal to lie in the interest of the state. There were others who believed that for the welfare of the people it was necessary for them to have complete information. It was a clash of two types of patriotism or national interest, and we belonged to this other current that advocated for credible information.⁵⁹

By reading *Slobodna Dalmacija*, which had a daily circulation of 100,000 in 1993, Croatians could inform themselves on authentic political debate in a news environment where such an occurrence was quite rare. For example, there were several articles published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 1992, such as “The Case of Citizen Đ.K.”, which detailed the abuse of a Split citizen at the hands of the Croatian military in Split’s Lora prison complex. The article’s author, Zvonimir Krstulović, recalls the public’s reaction to his piece: “The text sat in a drawer for a few days, and I wasn’t sure it would be published. After it was printed, *Slobodna* was flooded with calls, and there were also direct threats to the editor on his home phone.”⁶⁰ The piece was one in a long line of critical articles of both the armed forces as well as the HDZ leadership. There had been plans and attempts to intimidate the journalists at *Slobodna Dalmacija* even as early as 1990. Speaking with the publication *Lupiga* on the condition of anonymity, a former union worker described how there were attempts to rally the workers in the shipyards to march over and break into the editorial offices of *Slobodna Dalmacija*.

⁵⁹ Lupiga, “KAKO JE PROPALA SLOBODNA DALMACIJA: “Mogu lajati još do 11-og, a onda će na lanac”,” Lupiga, accessed June 8, 2023, <https://lupiga.com/vijesti/kako-je-propala-slobodna-dalmacija-mogu-lajati-jos-do-11-ozujka-onda-ce-na-lanac>.

⁶⁰ Lupiga.

I was invited to a meeting that took place late in the evening somewhere in Blatine. The soldier came for me and brought me to the apartment where the union representatives and HDZ leaders were. They asked me to let them into the editorial office the next day when they come. I refused. Later, a high-ranking government official told me that he was losing his head for that.⁶¹

Several times in the early 1990s there were protests in front of the *Slobodna Dalmacija* headquarters that were instigated by the HDZ. These protests contained HDZ-friendly workers who had been bussed in from companies such as Dalma and Prerada to intimidate the newspaper staff; bomb threats were a common occurrence during these protests. Additionally, the HDZ instructed their supporters not to buy the paper.

Under the Marković privatization plan in 1990, the *Slobodna Dalmacija* became two joint-stock companies - one called *Slobodna Dalmacija – Novine* and the other *Slobodna Dalmacija – Infomrativa*. Yet as *Slobodna Dalmacija*, particularly its political satire wing *Feral Tribune*, continued to pump out HDZ-critical articles, the new Croatian government took a much more aggressive tack to silence its critic. On 15 June 1992, the Croatian Agency for Development and Reconstruction named new board members to both of the *Slobodna Dalmacija* companies. The value of *Slobodna Dalmacija – Novine* at the time was estimated to be roughly 10.4 million DEM. According to the Law on the Transformation of Socially Owned Enterprises, the workers were supposed to receive 50 percent of the ownership of the company. Although the new board of directors contained HDZ-friendly members, the Agency's head Zlatko Mateša who would later become the Prime Minister of Croatia from 1995 - 2000, halted the process and declared that the privatization process had to abide by new Croatian rules. He then persuaded three of Croatia's banks: Splitska, Privredna, and Dubrovačka Banka to activate former debts against the company amounting to 4.6 million DEM, which were taken during the Yugoslavian times, and which *Slobodna Dalmacija* had used to buy a new printing press.

⁶¹ Lupiga.

This resulted in the value of the paper dropping dramatically, and the banks obtaining a majority ownership, while the workers were left with a mere 25% share. Soon thereafter, a new management board was assigned and new director, Ante Bušić, who had previously worked for Jugoplastika, became the HDZ-friendly acting director.

By October 1992, the new board of directors were suggesting that *Slobodna Dalmacija* change the color of its famous letterhead from red to blue, the color of HDZ. In response, *Slobodna Dalmacija* came out with a black letterhead and the words “The state administration above the heads of the journalists, therefore the letterhead is black.” By the end of 1992, there had been a movement to draw in journalists and other support from around the world. Things were gearing up for a showdown between the *Slobodna Dalmacija* staff and the HDZ government.

On Monday 8 March 1993 at 3:00 pm, journalists, graphic artists, drivers, sellers, and other employees of *Slobodna Dalmacija* went on strike. They listed their demands on the front page of the Monday edition of *Slobodna Dalmacija*. They were as follows:

- to stop the imposed and one-sided form of conversion.
- to immediately pay the full royalties for the months of January and February to all external collaborators of the paper.
- to withdraw the board of directors.
- to remove the acting director.
- to enable an international assessment of the legality of all previous conversion procedures.

Although the demands included some fiscal points, such as the fulfillment of backpay, the real reason for the strike was to keep the independent nature of the paper. Moreover, many journalists and editors in places like Zagreb showed support for the striking *Slobodna* workers. Ilija Maršić, who was the deputy editor-in-chief, was voted to become the leader of the strike. Anto Bušić did his best to undercut the movement, bringing in strikebreakers, the police for the purposes of intimidation, and launching a smear campaign against the striking workers. On printed pamphlets, which were passed around to all of the *Slobodna* employees, Bušić implored them not to join strike,

comparing the strikers to the Knin Serbs who had set up roadblocks in the Plitvice National Park.⁶²

The strike ultimately failed to stop the HDZ government from taking over the paper. *Slobodna Dalmacija* ultimately fell into the hands of Miroslav Kutle, who turned the paper into one that peddled only pro-HDZ rhetoric. For the young political satirists of the *Feral Tribune*, the paper's privatization was a line that they could not cross. They decided to break off from *Slobodna Dalmacija* and start an independent publication. Little did they know the attention that they would garner from the public as well as their favorite subject: Franjo Tuđman.

Working out of a small room near the Split coastline, *Feral Tribune* published scathing critiques of the new Croatian government. They were staunchly critical of the new wave of nationalism that had taken over Croatia and that had arisen in Split in the early 1990s. *Feral*'s first cover was entitled “Ante Pavelić Found Alive”, which was a satirical jab at the Tuđman administration's embrace of nationalism as well as the rising nationalism in Split.

Figure 8: (left to right) *Feral Tribune*'s first cover, which reads “Ante Pavelić Found Alive!” (left). A cover of *Feral Tribune* depicting HDZ leader Franjo Tuđman in bed with Serbia's leader Slobodan Milošević with the title “Is This What We Fought For?” (middle). The last cover is similar except with the addition of Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović and the title “Is This What We Argued About?” (right).⁶³



64

⁶² Lupiga.

⁶³ Sven Milekic, “The Turbulent Times of Croatia’s ‘Feral Tribune,’” *Balkan Insight* (blog), July 2, 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/02/the-turbulent-times-of-croatia-s-feral-tribune-06-29-2018/>.

On the cover of their most famous issue, there was an edited image of Franjo Tuđman and Slobodan Milošević who appear to be half-naked, hugging each other in bed. The title below the image reads: Is this what we fought for? (*Jesmo li se za to borili?*). Predictably, the issue did not go over well with the Tuđman government. In retaliation taken against the founder and editor-in-chief Viktor Ivančić, on 31 December 1993, Croatian military officers showed up to the doorstep of *Feral Tribune* with papers drafting Ivančić into the Croatian armed forces.⁶⁵ Ultimately, Ivančić only spent a few nights in an army barracks and completed a short military training. An agreement that the Croatian Publishers had with the Croatian Defense ministry protected journalists from being called up to the armed forces of Croatia. Yet the message was clear: *Feral* had crossed the line and the HDZ government was taking active measures to silence their critics.

In a 2018 interview in *Balkan Insight*, Ivančić reflected on the atmosphere of Split at the time when *Feral* was most active:

In Split, we had always felt as if we have fallen from Mars into that city; we didn't have anything in common with it... There was a dark atmosphere in Split. It was a version of 'Casablanca' – you're not on the front line, but there are arms and drug-smugglers, dark demi-monde dragging around the war. Besides that, you have the massive theft of military-owned flats, with an aggressive right-wing atmosphere.⁶⁶

Feral Tribune continued to be a critical voice of the Split government into the 2000s. The Croatian government had repeatedly sued the newspaper and set high taxes on the publication, which caused financial havoc for the small newspaper.

⁶⁵ Milekic, "The Turbulent Times of Croatia's 'Feral Tribune.'"

⁶⁶ Milekic.

Social Changes – A city in flux 1991 - 1995

Split held a unique cultural position within the former Yugoslavia. It was a city famous for its citizens' athletic achievements, its reputation as a city of workers, and the defiant attitudes of its inhabitants. Such an attitude can be summarized in the song "Ništa kontra Splita" sung by the "Croatian king of funk" and Split native Dino Dvornik. The chorus goes "You can say anything against me, against the entire world, but I don't want to hear anything against Split." The song was a huge hit for Dvornik and won the main award at the Split Music Festival in 1995. It was a tune that encapsulated the city's defiant attitude, and for which the city had a rich history of defiance tracing back to its partisan days in WWII. However, the "Ništa kontra Splita" attitude took on an entirely new political meaning when the security situation in northern Dalmatia began to deteriorate at the hands of the ethnic Serb minority that lived there, and with the help of the JNA. In response to the growing Serbian nationalist movement that had been developing in Belgrade since the situation in Kosovo, Split began to see a surge in nationalist fervor which had been heretofore unprecedented.

The Croatian nationalism that had arisen in Split in the early 1990s was of a completely different nature than that of the Croatian Spring in 1967 – 1971. The reformists of the Croatian Spring of 1971 had been supported primarily by students. They called for reforms to Belgrade's economic policies regarding hard currency, as well as changes for a more federalized system. And while there were several ethnic-specific demands such as Croatian writers wanting to preserve what they saw as their own language, or the return of Josip Jelacic's statue to Zagreb's central square, they stopped short of demanding that Croatia become an independent state. Ethnic Serbs living within Croatia simply did not attend those "maspok" movements. The Croatian nationalism that emerged 20 years later was a much more potent and ethnically charged force. Due in large part to the developments in Belgrade, such as Milošević's "anti-bureaucratic" revolution, and the publishing of an incendiary document by the Belgrade Academy of Sciences, the Croatian nationalists living in Split reacted in kind.

March on Banovina – 6 May 1991

The changing political attitudes and the rise of a firebrand Croatian nationalism in Split brought into sharp focus one of the divides that had long lived under the surface of

the civic society. Namely, this was the division between the civic society and that of the JNA, whose naval headquarters were in Split and whose officers lived in many of the nicer neighborhoods in the city. Moreover, many of the best positions within the Armed forces were given to ethnic Serbs. When the ethnic Serbs of northern Dalmatia – particularly those living in the Knin area – began to revolt against the independence moves of the newly elected Croatian government, the Serbs received military assistance from the JNA. One of the ways that the relationship between Croatia's Serbian population and the JNA manifested was through the blockading of small Croatian villages on its border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. By shutting off the water and electricity as well as preventing goods and people to transfer in or out of the village of Kijevo, which was an ethnically Croatian village, the JNA had effectively taken sides against the Croatian government.

In response to the JNA's blockade of Kijevo, workers on the 6 May 1991, led by those from the Brodosplit shipyards marched through the city to the JNA's naval command center. As the protest weaved its way through the city, the movement picked up support from the workers of Jugoplastika, Bobis, Promet, and Jadratrans. The movement swelled to a size of roughly 100,000 protesters. Despite threats from the JNA, the protestors gathered around the Banovina building, which was located on the west coast of the city's riviera, only a few meters from the sea. The JNA was equipped with ships on which water cannons were attached, but these ships could not enter the Split harbor as the Jadrolinija ferries had constructed a blockade around the port. The movement reached a climax when one of the protestors fired a shot that struck and killed a Macedonian JNA officer.

Heni Erceg, a Croatian journalist who had been at the protest with her news crew to cover the event, reflected on what she had seen in 2021 interview with *Balkan Insight*. "According to our estimates, it was some 30,000 to 40,000 people which is a huge mass, amid which there was no problem producing chaos," she remarked. "This cannot be called a peaceful demonstration as they called it, if they sent a mass [onto the street] among whom were people who had weapons. When you carry a weapon, it'll get fired at

some point,” she said. In the interview, she blamed the escalation on Tuđman and his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party.⁶⁷

On the day prior to the march, Tuđman had taken the first ever flight of “Croatia Airlines”, Croatia’s flagship domestic airline, from Zagreb to Trogir, which is where the Split airport is located. Upon his arrival, the Croatian leader gave a speech regarding the significance of the creation of Croatia’s new airline, how it would be a conduit that would bring Croatia closer to Europe and to the world. Afterwards, he went to the Medena hotel in Trogir to address a group of his fellow HDZ party members regarding the ongoing situation in the northern Dalmatian town of Kijevo. Parts of his speech and many of his talking points were published the following day in *Slobodna Dalmacija*. Tuđman’s speech at the Medena Hotel was widely regarded as being a “green light” for the HDZ members to start their marches against the JNA in Split.

Personal Recollections

Jelena Novak, who in the early 1990s was a teenaged girl and lived in the nearby Tugare Valley, recalled the changing political sentiment in Split at the time. Although she lived in a small village near to Split, she commuted to Split every weekday, as her school was in the city. She was very active in her church, attending often and participating in the youth choir. “You could feel that something was happening. You could feel it in the air,” she said. “I remember that our choir was used to perform for political rallies. I didn’t know what was going on at the time, but things were changing all around me. I remember specifically when our priest at the church was changed for one who would more fully support the politics. It was a shame, because everyone liked him, and nobody wanted to see him moved.” When asked if she noticed changes to the city’s population during the 1990s, she answered, “Yes, of course! Those people who moved to Split, they came from places like my village.”⁶⁸

Novak continued, bringing up a more sinister side of the social transition that occurred throughout Croatia’s war for independence. “There were families who lived in Split III who fled during the war, probably because they felt unsafe. There were rumors

⁶⁷ Anja Vladislavljevic Marusic Sinisa Jakov, “Mystery of Macedonian Conscript’s Death in Croatian War Unsolved,” *Balkan Insight* (blog), May 6, 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/06/mystery-of-macedonian-conscripts-death-in-croatian-war-unsolved/>.

⁶⁸ Novak, interview.

of a few instances wherein members of HOS (*Hrvatske obrambene snage*, a Croatian paramilitary group) came to certain flats and demanded that the people leave.” she said. One account, which she recalls clearly, was the murder of a schoolteacher and her husband in the nearby town of Žrnovnica. “The case is still open, but I am sure that there are people in the village who know exactly who did it.” The case to which Novak was referring occurred in February of 1992 when a couple, Vesna and Đorđe Gasparević, who were a mixed Croat-Serbian couple, were taken from their home in the middle of the night and murdered in the street.⁶⁹ Such outright violence against Serbs was a rarity in Split, although, according to Novak, there were several instances of intimidation which caused people to flee the city.

Drug Scene

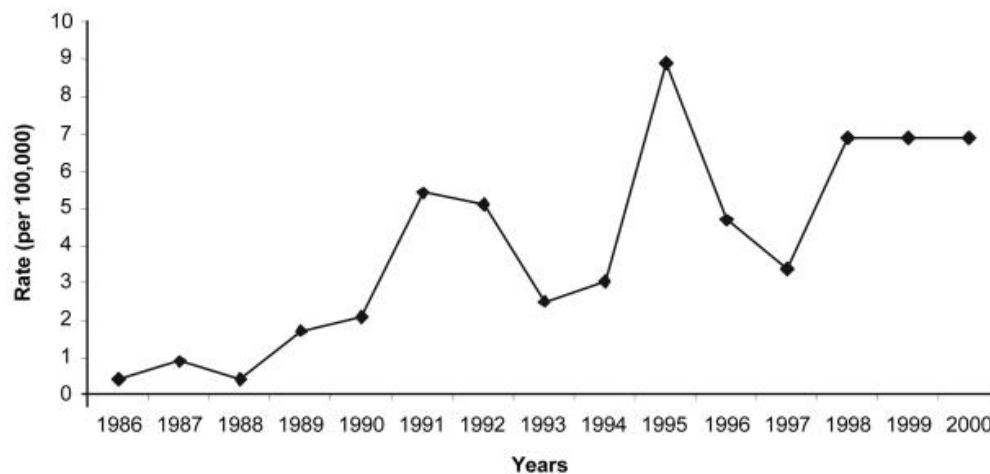
Another changing element that affected the social scene in Split was the rise of drug use in the years from 1986 until the 2000s. The war in Croatia compounded this problem, as there was an increase in the number of drugs that steadily flooded into the city. What is more, there was a qualitative change to drug use as well. Narcotics, particularly heroin, made their way into the more economically depressed areas of the city. The Croatian government was poorly equipped to handle the new wave of drugs, and they often relied on HELP, a non-governmental organization (NGO) to deal with the effects of drug addiction in the city.

“There were drugs in the city already in the early 1980s, I mean, they weren’t hard to find,” recalls Profaca. “You could tell who the drug dealers were, because they would be playing with those pocket chains in the old town, which was known as the *ghet*, which was short for ‘ghetto’.” However, when the war broke out in Croatia, the drug use really took off. “The state didn’t know how to handle people who were addicted to heroin, they just arrested them,” said Profaca. “I remember the main drug inspector Evelin Tonković, we called him ‘ET’.” According to a report done by the National Library of Medicine which studied drug use in Split-Dalmatia County, there was a significant rise in cases of both drug addiction and drug overdoses in the war and post-

⁶⁹ “Siniša Gašparević - Video - Croatianmemories.Org,” accessed June 7, 2023, <http://www.croatianmemories.org/en/video-archive/sinisa-gasparevic/>.

war period than there had been during the pre-war period. Most of the deaths occurred in Split.⁷⁰

Figure 9: Specific mortality rate of drug-induced deaths in Split-Dalmatia County between 1986 and 2000⁷¹



In this way, Split gained a reputation in Croatia for being a sort of “drug capital” of the country. “The area around Diocletian’s Palace, where today there are all of the restaurants and bars, that used to be a pretty dodgy place,” said Profaca. “It was the organizations like HELP that got rid of Split’s image as a drug city.”

Split in the years after the Homeland war were a continuation and finalization of the political and economic processes that had been in motion since the 1980s. Demographically, the city had changed to become more one-dimensional in terms of its economy, its ethnic composition, and its political orientation. Split after the war was unrecognizable as “Red Split”. Between 1991 and 2001, approximately 21,000 people left the city, many of whom were ethnic Serbs. A more conservative brand of Croatian nationalism, which had its roots in the Zagora region in the Dalmatian hinterland, had taken over the city in its entirety. The capstone of the Croatian nationalist, populist movement came in 2007 when the *Splicani* voted to elect as their mayor Željko Kerum, a

⁷⁰ Ivana Marasović Šušnjara et al., “Influence of War on Quantitative and Qualitative Changes in Drug-Induced Mortality in Split-Dalmatia County, Croatia,” *Croatian Medical Journal* 52, no. 5 (October 2011): 629–36, <https://doi.org/10.3325/cmj.2011.52.629>.

⁷¹ Marasović Šušnjara et al.

construction worker who rose to power during Croatia's chaotic privatization era. Such a character as the mayor of Split would have been an unimaginable possibility for the city pre-1980s.

Conclusion

According to my interviewees, Split used to be a “Yugoslavian city”. I perceive that they meant this in a positive way – that the city was a multicultural hub that boasted an impressive industrial foundation built on the basis of Yugoslavian self-management. However, the city is also Yugoslavian in the sense that its changing social and political demographics gave birth to a brand of nationalism that embraced the ethnic divisions which had been started in Belgrade. Of course, this evolution occurred within the context of an economic crisis, a rising and uncompromising Serbian nationalism, and a political system that was slow to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances. However, the Croatian nationalism would not have resonated in the city had it not been for the large influx of rural migrants, the *vlaji*, who had made their way into the city throughout the previous decades.

The 1980s were an economically tough time for Split, Croatia, and even more so for Yugoslavia. Having taken out massive loans from the IMF and facing economic headwinds including high oil prices and unemployment, the federal government attempted to steer its way through austerity measures. However, as inflation continued to climb along with the unemployment rate, there was less money to spend on direly needed infrastructure projects in Split, such as public housing. Frustrations mounted in the various republics as living standards failed to reach the same levels that they had in the 1960s and 70s. It is within this context that the nationalist rhetoric began to rise – first in Serbia, and then to Croatia. “It’s easy to get along when things are going well,” said Željko Bremec, a Split resident. “But when money gets tight, you can look over at your neighbor and say, ‘How did he get that new car? How come they have such a nice flat? Maybe it’s because their Serbs or Bosnians or Croats!’” In this way, the economic decline of Yugoslavia compounded people’s frustrations. One of the results was that the more nationalist elements of the country came to the fore.

The *vlaji* had lived as second-class citizens in Split for decades. They usually took blue-collar jobs and/or received assistance from wealthy family members who had worked abroad as *Gastarbeiters* in Germany or Austria. What is more, although there were not many Serbs in Split, the few that were there were likely to occupy many of the positions of authority in Yugoslav Croatia, such as the police, the military, and the

communist party. The *vlaji* had come from more ethnically homogenous villages in Croatia, where the shared memories of past events, namely WWII, did not mix well with the *fetivi* in Split, who were proud of their city's partisan past. Thus, when Slobodan Milošević lit the fuse of Serbian nationalism in Kosovo and later in Knin, the *vlaji* were quick to throw their support behind Franjo Tuđman and his HDZ.

When Franjo Tuđman's HDZ won a majority of Split's votes in the 1990 parliamentary elections, it was a clear sign that the city, as well as the country, had changed. The HDZ presided over Croatia during a time of great economic upheaval. Much of the current narrative about the breakup of Yugoslavia follows the various steps, negotiations, military actions, and treaties made at the highest levels of government within the former Yugoslavia. However, a closer look at the local history shows how the new Croatian government used its sweeping powers to both reward party supporters, and silence those who were critical of its actions.

Today, Split's nice weather, polished limestone riviera or *riva*, and the laid back, *pomalo* attitude of its inhabitants could give the impression that the city has been a holiday destination for centuries. Yet hidden behind the walls of Diocletian's Palace and under the sprawling shopping malls there is a story of a bustling, industrial, Yugoslavian city.

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Source Discussion

Primary sources include articles from local newspapers including *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Balkan Insight*, and books such as *The Death of Yugoslavia* by Laura Silber and Allan Little. Nikica Barić's book *Split 1980-ih* offers a multidisciplinary insight for the city in the 1980s. Barić draws from a wide range of primary sources including newspaper articles, personal interviews, and communist party and working party meeting notes. However, this book is only available in the Croatian language and its passages must be translated to English. Secondary sources include Marcus Tanner's *Croatia: A History From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, Ivo Goldstein's *Croatia: A History*, among many others.

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On my honor as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

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Vita

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