3.
Radicalization (1903 to 1912)

The South Slavic “Powder Keg”

In 1903, the entire region experienced dramatic domestic developments. In Serbia, army conspirators led by Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević, known as Apis (“Holy Bull”), murdered the autocratic king Aleksandar Obrenović and his wife. His successor was Peter I Karadjordjević, who enacted the constitution, guaranteed freedom of the press, and thereby heralded a phase that would later be remembered as the “golden era” of Serbian democracy. Following the dynasty change, Belgrade took a self-confident course toward ridding itself of the economic and political hegemony established in 1878 by Austria-Hungary and approached Russia instead.

When negotiations with Austria-Hungary failed in 1906 over a trade agreement that proved unfavorable for Serbia, the dual monarchy closed its borders to Serbian goods. The trade war (“Pig War”) forced the Serbian government to reorient its foreign trade. Within a short period of time, it succeeded in liberating itself from its dependency on Vienna. Austro-Hungarian observers watched with concern as Serbia began, with Russia’s help, to become actively involved in the neighboring regions inhabited by South Slavs. Chief of General Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf, a representative of the “hawk” faction in Vienna, recommended an aggressive offensive strategy: Bosnia-Herzegovina should be annexed and Serbia militarily defeated.

Severe political turbulence developed also in the southern Balkans in 1903 over the “Macedonian Question,” the problematic issue plaguing the area since 1878 about how to divide up the strategically and economically important historical region, including the port of Thessaloniki, between Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia. In 1893, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was formed, a secret organization planning an insurrection against the Ottomans under the motto “Macedonia for the Macedonians.” On 2 August 1903, St. Elias Day, the rebels struck and “liberated” an area in the Republic of Kruševo. Although Ottoman troops quickly put down the revolt, the “Macedonian Question” thereby became internationalized. The
journalist Leon Trotsky noted perceptively that “before igniting the doomsday machine,” the conspirators had given “very felicitous thought about the type of echo this [would] have in the ‘relevant’ European press.” The unrest alarmed Austria and Russia because they feared the power vacuum being created by the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The Mürzsteg Agreement suggested administrative, judicial, and security reforms, supervised by foreign representatives—an early international peacekeeping mission in the Balkans, one doomed to failure from the start. In light of the violent dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, when the Great Powers competed openly for its former European possessions, perceptions developed that were strongly colored by imperialist interests. Clichés and stereotypes about the Orient, such as references to it as the “powder keg,” were also attributed to “the Balkans,” making the region appear overwhelmingly anarchic, violent, and backward and thereby compelling the Great Powers to intervene in order to reinstate order and civilize its inhabitants.

Meanwhile, the dualism of the Habsburg monarchy itself was headed for a new crisis. Vienna and Budapest were constantly quarreling over finances and shared institutions. In 1903, the Hungarian opposition demanded greater independence from Austria and its own army. The Croats exploited the moment to claim their own right to financial autonomy, which the Hungarian government denied with highly insulting arguments. Mass protests broke out in 1903, which spread rapidly from Zagreb throughout all of Croatia and lasted an entire year. Thousands demanded civil liberties, the end of both economic exploitation and cultural Magyarization. Weeks of demonstrations finally brought to an end the twenty-year rule of the acting governor, Ban Khuen-Héderváry. His successor made no concessions to the protesters, but the new “people’s movement” had electrified the country and elevated the “South Slavic Question” to a topic of permanent public debate in the monarchy.

An irrefutable realization was dawning on many groups in the Croat elite: not only did Austro-Hungarian dualism fundamentally violate the Croatian right to self-rule, but Croatian petitions put before the emperor were not being heard. A delegation from Dalmatia and Istria arrived at court, seeking to draw attention to the deplorable situation of their fellow countrymen; it was simply turned away. This marked a fundamental change of attitude. The highly praised, special loyalty of the Croats to the monarchy, still quite evident in 1848, now disappeared.

Against this backdrop, the seed of what would later lead to the founding of the Yugoslav state began to germinate in Dalmatia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Under the leadership of the renowned politicians Frano Supilo and Ante Trumbić, the Croatian Party of Rights in Dalmatia switched to a “new course.” In their minds, it was now clear that the Habsburg monarchy
could not be reformed and that the Croats and Serbs could only effectively resist the German “push eastward” if they worked together. For this reason, they should found a common state.\(^8\) Inspired by the writing of the Czech philosopher and later president Tomáš Masaryk, they saw their future as lying in the “liberation and unification of our peoples . . . from Tyrol to Macedonia.”\(^9\) Supporters of the “new course” were politicians, lawyers, bankers, and entrepreneurs, who also recognized the South Slavic cooperation as a springboard to better counter German-Austrian and Hungarian economic competition. Students were also enthusiastic about the project of unifying the South Slavs.

On 3 October 1905, Croat members of parliament in Rijeka (Fiume) drew up a precedent-setting resolution in which they condemned the “inacceptable parliamentary and administrative conditions” in the monarchy and demanded constitutional rights and liberties, as well as the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia-Slavonia.\(^10\) At the same time, they agreed to cooperate with the Hungarian opposition.

Shortly afterward, on 14 November 1905, Croat and Serb parties agreed to a close cooperation and a shared political program, which included the somewhat paradoxical statement that “Croats and Serbs are one people, each equal in relation to one another.”\(^11\) A month later in Zagreb, they sealed a broad coalition alliance that won the majority of votes in the 1906 and 1908 elections to the diet.

Vienna and Budapest watched the developments in Croatia with growing concern and subsequently, in March 1909, tried fifty-three members of the Serbo-Croat coalition on charges of high treason. When the prosecution presented documents in court that were provably forged, the Habsburg monarchy lost its last shred of moral credibility in Croatia.\(^12\)

**Public Opinion and the Spread of Nationalism**

Starting in the early years of the twentieth century, nationalism spread to include ever more segments of the population until it became a mass phenomenon. There were two reasons for this. First, the creation of a new, politically and nationally conscious public was made possible by the vertical and horizontal mobilization of society, the emergence of new middle classes, and improved means of communication and educational opportunities. The proliferation of press, clubs, organizations, and even bold political actions like demonstrations and strikes underscored patriotic demands all the more. Further, the serious political, social, and moral crisis in which the Habsburg monarchy found itself kindled discontent that could seep down to the lower classes.

Second, clashing interests were being interpreted ever more explicitly as national conflicts, no longer social or political ones. Socioeconomic processes of change undermined existing ethnic hierarchies, and international tensions
such as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/1905 fueled pan-Slavic sentiments. Proof of how closely industrialization, urbanization, and “Slavicization” were intertwined is evident in political life on the Croatian coast, where masses of jobseekers from the countryside migrated to what had been until then the German- and Italian-dominated cities of Slovenia, Istria, and Dalmatia. Once settled, they demanded more rights for political input on the communal level. As the Slovene and Croat parties began to win city council elections early in the century—be it in Ljubljana, Trieste, or Split—public life became “nationalized.” One indication of this was that Italian or German street names were replaced with Slovene and Croat ones.¹³

A new spirit reigned throughout the entire South Slavic region at the turn of the century. The spirit of optimism was reflected in newspaper names like “New Century,” “New Age,” “New World,” and “Change.” Others were called “Democracy,” “Public Life,” and “Republic,” or—with a nod to the patriotic agenda—also “Fight,” “Victory,” and “Defense.” With the spread of the printed press throughout rural regions, the new means of mass communication and thus the nationalist idea reached more and more people. In 1912, several hundred print publications appeared in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, respectively; some of these had remarkably large circulations. The Belgrade Narodne novine (National newspaper) printed about 32,000 copies every day, and even the Slovene Domoljub (Patriot) reached 30,000.¹⁴ The Bosnian Muslims also experienced, somewhat belatedly, their national “rebirth.” Intellectuals emphasized the cultural individuality of a Slavic Islam, and founded magazines like Behar (Blossom) and the cultural institution Gajret (Zeal).

It became increasingly popular to meet in one of the many bustling cafés to read through the newspapers and discuss politics. As Andrić describes life in Višegrad in the first years of the new century: “Till then the townspeople had concerned themselves exclusively with what was near to them and well known, with their gains, their pastimes and, in the main, only with questions of their family and their homes, their town or their religious community, but always directly and within definite limits. . . . Now, however, more and more frequently in conversation questions arose which lay farther away. Outside this narrow circle. . . . When reading speeches and articles, protests and memoranda issued by party or religious organizations, each one of them had the feeling that he was casting off chains, that his horizon was widening, his thoughts freed and his forces linked with those of men more distant and with other forces never thought of until then.”¹⁵

Those who—like the majority of the peasant population—could not read were reached by way of a printed calendar or a small image of some historical icon with great nationalistic symbolism, like that of King Tomislav in Croatia or Saint Sava in Serbia. In the theater and in literature and art, new
heroes appeared on the cultural stage who represented the nation’s pursuit of freedom, such as the early modern Croat peasant leader Matija Gubec or the protagonists in the Serb Battle of Kosovo. The public discovered national flags, symbols, holidays, food dishes, and everything that contributed and encouraged a sense of community.

A good indicator of the ongoing societal mobilization was the rapid proliferation of civil society organizations, parties and social societies, charities, reading groups, choirs, gymnastic clubs, and associations for professional groups, youths, or women. Modeled on the German example, gymnastic clubs were founded to associate physical fitness with an awakening of national consciousness. By way of Czechia, the patriotic athletic club of the Sokol (hawk) movement was introduced into the region, which promoted the idea of pan-Slavic unity. The expansive organizational structure and propaganda network of the Sokol movement helped turn it into the backbone of Yugoslavism in the South Slavic countries before the First World War.

Even the many branches of the volunteer firefighters developed a previously unknown feeling of community. For their part, choirs and singing societies that cultivated the folksong tradition contributed to the popularization and dissemination of the national idea, such as the associations Kolo and Merkur in Croatia or Gusle in Bosnia-Herzegovina. If we are to understand civil society as the space of social self-organization between the state, the economy, and the private sphere, in which societies and clubs, social movements, and media created on their own a sphere of public discussion and pursued these interests, then the origins for these were also to be found in the South Slavic countries.

In the ethnically mixed regions, the public organized itself primarily along ethnic and religious lines. People attended the cultural societies, joined the associations, read the press, and even frequented the coffeehouses linked to their particular ethnic and religious community, which in turn gave rise to parallel and mutually exclusive communities of communication and special advocacy groups. For example, between 1906 and 1908, separate parties for Muslims, Serbs, and Croats were founded in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Athletic clubs, cooperatives, savings banks, and reading societies were also stratified. Except for the socialists and the youth movement, very few political organizations existed that spanned all ethnic or religious groups.

Political agitation by parties also contributed to the gradual politicization of rural society and to the spread of national consciousness in the countryside. The opportunities to express one’s own interests through elections in the political decision-making process were unequally distributed in the region. Following the May 1903 overthrow, Serbia broadened the voting franchise to include at least 70 percent of the adult male peasantry. In contrast, the
Habsburg monarchy continued to enforce a stricter census, so that only 3.5 percent of the (adult male) Croats and about 5 percent of the (adult male) Slovenes enjoyed the right to participate in the democratic process. Although Bosnia-Herzegovina was allowed to have a diet of its own in 1910, this body only had a consultative function and not a legislative one. Moreover, it was subject to the veto power of Austro-Hungarian institutions. From Slovenia to Serbia, nationality politics were almost the sole topic of debate in places where diets or parliaments existed; rarely were economic or social matters discussed. With each new foreign policy crisis, be it the Serbian–Austrian “Pig War” or the crisis of Bosnian annexation, nationalistic tunnel vision became increasingly prevalent.

Starting in the 1880s, political Catholicism in Slovenia appeared as an encompassing movement to raise national consciousness. With a tight network of social, economic, and educational activities, the Catholic Church significantly helped “awaken” Slovene peasants, workers, and small bourgeoisie. In 1905, the Slovenian People’s Party was formed. It became the strongest and most significant democratic mass party existing, even after the First World War.

In Serbia it was the Radical Party, founded in 1882, that politicized the countryside for the first time with social egalitarian and emotionally charged nationalistic rhetoric. Unlike the Liberal and Progressive parties of the bourgeois elites, the Radicals idealized Serbian village traditions and donned traditional folk costumes, quite literally, to mobilize the rural vote. By articulating peasant interests (e.g., in broadening local self-administration) and aversions (e.g., against the modern tax-collecting state), they provided not only a political but also an emotional safe harbor for a peasantry threatened by the storm of social decline. Only a year after it appeared on the scene, the party had 60,000 official members and just as many unofficial ones, quickly to be followed by many more. In 1903, the party won 88 percent of the parliamentary seats—a solid basis for a thorough reorientation of Serbia after the dynastic change.

In 1904, the brothers Stjepan and Antun Radić founded the Croatian Peoples’ Peasant Party, which would become the strongest political force in Croatia after the First World War. They also understood the culture of the rural population (puk) to be the most promising potential for the future, an antithesis to the ruling urban class. In place of a half-hearted industrialization of Croatia, the motor of progress was to be well-developed agriculture, improved by agrarian technology, expertise, and cooperatives. The Peasant Party railed against the growing tax burden, usury, and sinking market prices and declared that only a sovereign state could solve such pressing problems. They mobilized more and more supporters by circulating calendars and their magazine Dom (Home), staging election rallies and literacy campaigns, founding cooperatives, and providing credit. The decisive factor was that they transformed the
problems of rural society into issues of national importance and thus won over broader segments of the population for the goal of creating an independent Croatian or Yugoslav state. This was one reason why they were able to play a key role in the national integration of the Croats.

In comparison, the workers’ movement—essentially imported from Germany—remained weak for lack of a social basis. German, Austrian, and Hungarian artisan journeymen who were underway in the region, or local apprentices who had come into contact with socialist ideas while working abroad, acted as transmission belts for socialist ideas in what was still primarily an agriculturally dominated world. In 1872, the first workers’ associations were founded in Croatia, followed by the emergence of the trade union movement in 1890. In 1894, the Social Democratic Party of Croatia and Slavonia was founded, which merged two years later with their Slovenian comrades into the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party. Starting in 1902, they also cooperated with Serbian socialists.24

As elsewhere in Europe, the South Slavic socialists believed that the national question merely represented a side contradiction of capitalism, which would disappear once capitalism gave way to communism. Linguistic, cultural, and historic differences between the Slovenes, Serbs, and Croats were considered anachronistic or irrelevant. At the first pan-Yugoslav conference of the socialists, held in 1901 in Ljubljana, the existence of a South Slavic nation was declared. However, there was no consensus over the political consequences of such a declaration. Should a federal state be created within Austria-Hungary, or a larger Balkan federation, or a Yugoslav federal state? The party split over this issue. Those favoring an independent Yugoslavia, the founding of which required the destruction of the monarchy, found themselves in conflict with their Austrian comrades, who argued the case favoring a democratic, federal reform of Austria-Hungary. For the time being, the Austro-Marxists were in the majority.25

In the 1890s, a progressive, revolutionary youth movement emerged in the Balkans, as it did in many European countries. It rebelled against things time-honored, sought new concepts and models, and thereby linked criticism of civilization with nationalist ideals of freedom. Supporters of the Progressive Youth, the Young Croats, and the Young Bosnians were politically active pupils from secondary schools. Most came from peasant families and believed in revolutionary ideals, heroism, and sacrifice. They did not have a coherent ideological concept but had recourse to populistic, anarchic, and socialist ideas.

Anticlericalism and social-revolutionary impetus blurred the religious and historical differences that originally defined ethnic identities among the South Slavic peoples. Therefore, most were committed Yugoslavists and
believed that Serbs and Croats formed “a nation with two names,” as could be read in the Croatian almanac *Narodna misao* (National idea). Consequently, nationalism was “the idea of unifying Serbs and Croats,” as one of the Sarajevo assassins later testified in court. These youths impatiently awaited the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and dreamed of founding a democratic South Slavic state. A new generation emerged from the youth movement that no longer merely supported Yugoslavism as an ideological standpoint, but in fact lived it. Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, and Muslims conspired underground and formed a tightly knit community of shared experience. Several people who would eventually become very well-known names in Yugoslavia were politically socialized in this way, including the later Nobel laureate for literature, Ivo Andrić. In 1913, the organizations from the various regions in the monarchy consolidated into one.

The 1908 Annexation Crisis

When Emperor Franz Joseph announced, on 6 October 1908, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which Austria-Hungary had occupied since 1878, a serious crisis loomed once again. The occasion prompting this development was the revolution of the Young Turks, who introduced a constitution and a parliament in the Ottoman Empire. Vienna feared that now the Christian peoples in the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were formally still under Ottoman rule, would convene a constitutional congress and demand their independence. In August, Serb and Muslim politicians had already submitted a memorandum to the government and demanded a constitution.

The coup-like annexation contributed significantly to fanning the fires of nationalism among the South Slavs and radicalizing them. Whereas the Ottoman Empire accepted a compensation of 2.5 million pounds, the Serbs reacted angrily to the annexation. The king’s government saw that Serbia’s chances to fulfill its historic mission of liberation were dwindling, so it started an aggressive press campaign and mobilized the army. Public reaction exploded into anger in Belgrade, and enraged mobs burned Habsburg flags on the streets. Prominent citizens and intellectuals formed the organization Narodna odbrana (People’s Defense) to strengthen Serb resistance to the annexation. They modeled their efforts on the Difesa nazionale of the Italian resistance fighter Garibaldi. Within a short period of time, 223 chapters were set up and tens of thousands of people had been mobilized. At least 5,000 volunteers joined the ranks of the paramilitary “death squads.”

Austria-Hungary mobilized several army units, threatened war, and presented Belgrade with an ultimatum on 19 March. The Serbian government had to declare that it would “abandon the stance of protest and resistance that
it had taken regarding the annexation since the previous October . . . and live in friendly and neighborly relations." Starting in 1909, the Narodna obbrana discontinued its militant rhetoric and limited its activities from that point on to cultural ones.

The annexation crisis prompted Serbia to improve relations with Montenegro, whose head of state Nikola (who had himself crowned king in 1910) had established close ties to Italy, Russia, and Serbia through clever marriages. Suddenly the tiny state, immortalized in Franz Lehár’s operetta *The Merry Widow*, became a factor in international politics that was hard to overlook. For one thing, its drive for expansion into the Albanian region of settlement posed a potential threat for Vienna’s Balkan policy. For another, a political alliance with Serbia would give Belgrade the access to the Adriatic it had sought for so long. At first the Montenegrin political elite were divided over rapprochement with Serbia. While supporters of the “People’s Movement” considered the Montenegrins as ethnic Serbs and approved the fusion of the “two Serbian states,” the monarch and government insisted on the existence of separate historical and political identities—a conflict that would flare up time and again during the twentieth century.

The use of force had indeed enabled Austria-Hungary to consolidate its territorial gains from 1878, but this accomplishment came at the high price of angering the South Slavs, of strengthening the Yugoslav idea, and of intensifying the growing rivalry with Russia. Serbia was humiliated; Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs living under the Habsburg rule were embittered. The annexation crisis reestablished the “South Slavic question” as a major foreign policy issue for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, what was new this time was that the matter was organically linked to the political reorientation of the entire region, thereby making it a very real “European question.”

In the meantime, a real obsession with war took hold of large sectors of Serbian society. As the *ultima ratio* of the annexation crisis, nationalist passions were to be stilled by the liberation of the European part of the Ottoman Empire, namely Kosovo. Gymnastic, singing, and charitable associations, as well as professional organizations, youth groups, and women’s leagues declared support for the war of liberation so fervently yearned for. Commemorations of and references to the Battle of Kosovo were popularized in calendars, almanacs, theater plays, poems, and songs. Even the simplest of peasants was imbued with the belief in a national mission and hungered for the day of revenge, noted a historian at the time, Slobodan Jovanović.

One of the most decisive intellectual developments was the breakthrough in garnering support for Yugoslavism, meaning the idea that Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were all part of one people. In Serbia, the earlier skepticism of a national merger of Croats and Serbs into a single nation gave way to a new
pragmatism. In 1910, Nikola Pašić convinced his fellow supporters in the Radical Party that it was “necessary to abandon the two-people theory. . . . The one-people theory, which corresponds to scientific findings and the actual situation, has all of the merits of a national unification idea and certainly does not prevent the components of this people from cultivating and further developing their respective particularities and historic memories.”

In artistic and intellectual circles, support grew for the concept of a South Slavic unity of culture, language, and politics and for the founding of an all-Yugoslav nation in which each “tribe” was to make its own unique contribution. It seemed logical that the avant-garde for this movement was made up of intellectuals, artists, and the youth movement, including leading scholars and writers like the geographer Jovan Cvijić, the writer Jovan Skerlić, and the historian Stojan Novaković in Serbia; the sculptor Ivan Meštrović, the dramatist Ivo Vojnović, and the writer Antun Gustav Matoš in Croatia; the ethnologist Niko Županić and the literary scholar Ivan Cankar in Slovenia; as well as the writer Ivo Andrić in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Authors, journalists, and painters established close ties in order to advance the cultural unification. In 1909, the Yugoslav Academy in Zagreb, together with their partners in Serbia and Slovenia, initiated a project to produce a “Yugoslav Encyclopedia,” which was not published due to the outbreak of the First World War. “We are the generation of the great national synthesis . . . from Drniš to Niš,” that is, the South Slavic region in its entirety, summed up the Croat writer Tin Ujević in 1912.

In literature, sculpture, and painting, intellectuals and artists discovered they could transpose the heroes and motifs of the Serb national epic to the genre of modern art and thereby use them as a cipher for a Yugoslav national ethos. In 1910 at the Viennese Secession Building, the Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović exhibited the model of a “Vidovdan temple” with a number of large caryatids representing figures from the epic Kosovo cycle in order to honor the Yugoslav idea. Architecture and sculpture were an ideal-type representation of the cultural imagination of primordial Yugoslavism, which was based on the idea of South Slavs as a single nation united by common origin and historical experience. At the same time, such artistic expression served as a catalyst in expressing discontent with the manner in which the national question was being handled in Austria-Hungary. Meštrović’s decision to exhibit this model at the International Exhibition of Art in Rome in 1911 at the Serbian pavilion and not at the Austro-Hungarian one was a political statement that caused international furor. Years before the decisive moment arrived during the First World War to establish a state of Yugoslavia, the artistic and literary avant-garde of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia had formed a consensus on its cultural foundations.
Revolutionaries, Anarchists, Conspirators

Following the annexation crisis, South Slavs across the Balkans increasingly embraced the ideas of Clausewitz and Hegel, posited a century before, that national unification could only be achieved through a war of liberation. The Serb scholar Jovan Cvijić demanded as an ultimatum “that the Serb problem [had to be] resolved with force.” In Croatia, youth at demonstrations cried out “nulla redemptio sine sanguine” (there is no salvation without bloodshed). People wanted to take control of their own affairs. They cultivated a stronger sense of self-confidence and the “belief in oneself, the reliance on one’s own strengths,” as the Serbian writer, critic, and committed Yugoslavist Jovan Skerlić wrote.\(^{38}\)

From the seedbed of the youth movement grew anarchistic and social revolutionary groups that resorted to various means of violence. In 1912, the Nationalist Youth was formed in Croatia. This group wanted to achieve the unification of Serbs and Croats with insurrectionist methods. In June of that year, a Croat student attempted to murder the hated Austro-Hungarian governor in Croatia, Slavko Cuvaj, who had dissolved the diet and forbidden political gatherings in an effort to prevent a government coalition he did not favor from assuming power. As a result, demonstrations and street fighting with the police and the army occurred in many cities, and the Croat student body went on strike.\(^{39}\) In April 1912, the constitution was suspended, and Cuvaj was named royal commissioner, all of which led to a further radicalization and transregional solidarity among students.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina the pressure also grew to use violence to revolt against the foreign regime. In the heated atmosphere of the annexation crisis, more and more teachers and pupils turned to national revolutionary ideologies. According to the disciplinary rules of May 1908 for the middle school, pupils were forbidden to order political publications, to stroll down the street with girls, and to ride bikes.\(^{40}\) Since the authorities did not allow student organizations of any kind, secret societies formed similar to the Russian Narodniki, a social revolutionary, populist, and Slavophile movement.

The supporters of the Young Bosnia (Mlada Bosna) were Yugoslav nationalists striving for the political union of Serbs, Croats, Muslims, and Slovenes. They wanted to shake off foreign rule, overcome the backwardness of their home, emancipate women, and create a thoroughly “new man,” a morally superior type of person. All this was to be achieved through revolutionary action. Literature played an extraordinary role. Nearly all tried their hand at being a literary critic or an author, or translated Kierkegaard, Strindberg, Ibsen, Wilde, or Poe. “If the Serb revolutionary wants to win, then he has to be both artist and conspirator,” summed up Vladimir Gaćinović.\(^{41}\)
The records of one pupil’s trial in 1914 in the central Bosnian town of Tuzla reveal the sources of inspiration for young Bosnians. Tuzla was a small town that must have been considered a provincial backwater even by the standards of the time. However, the youth embracing nationalism were very familiar with Europe’s intellectual canon. For example, Mladen Stojanović, a pupil preparing for his secondary school graduation exams, had read Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Bakunin, Nietzsche, Jaurès, Le Bon, Ibsen, and Marinetti just to that end. Others were influenced by Mazzini’s Risorgimento and the movement Young Italy (Giovine Italia), the rationalism and anticlericalism of Tomáš Masaryk, and the writings of the Russian revolutionaries and anarchists, especially those of Chernyshevsky and Bakunin. Folk mythology, particularly the Kosovo myth and the epics by Prince-Bishop Petrović Njegoš, had deeply impressed them. They saw their commitment to a better future as homage to modernity: a “modern person,” wrote their chief theoretician Dimitrije Mitrinović, “is one who sympathizes with the unrest of our times, who tries to find a solution to the misery. . . . Modern is the person who, in our epoch of democracy and liberalism, feels the full absurdity of an anachronistic system in our country, who senses the lack of justice for our poor masses and fights for bread and freedom for a naked and starved people.”

In order to advance their revolutionary cause, the Young Bosnians established contact in Serbia with the nationalistic secret society Unification or Death. In 1911, Serbian officers had founded this underground organization, also known as the Black Hand, out of their bitterness over the compliance of the Belgrade government toward Austria-Hungary. In this case, too, there were many instances in which these organizations were intertwined with European models, such as the Italian carbonari or the Freemasons. Similar rituals and symbols (skull and crossbones, dagger, bomb, poison) illustrate this. Their “constitution” borrowed wording from the Russian Catechism of a Revolutionary. The Black Hand, which the regicide Colonel Dimitrijević-Apis also joined, supported anarchic-revolutionary activities abroad in order to unify all Serbs into a single state. Although both groups took up the cause of national liberation and later worked together in some areas, there were fundamental differences between Young Bosnia and Unification or Death. For one, the former sought to establish a South Slavic state, the latter a pan-Serbian or Serb-dominated Yugoslav one. For another, the former was made up of atheistic and republican-minded young people, while members of the latter embraced authoritarian, militaristic, and clerical worldviews.

By the eve of the First World War, the basic constellations and dilemmas involving the various national questions had crystallized and would preoccupy the entire South Slavic region for the duration of the twentieth
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century: the dispersion of the Serbs in various states; the unfulfilled right to self-determination for Croats and Slovenes; the unresolved questions of both Macedonia and Bosnia, complicated by the competing territorial claims of neighboring states; the ambivalence of the Montenegrins regarding Serb and Montenegrin national identity; and last but not least, the future Serbian-Albanian conflict over Kosovo. At the start of the century, it was all but clear how these mutually influencing and sometimes competing “national questions” could be solved. Which national ideology should be pursued, an ethnically exclusive one or a South Slavic integrative one? What political framework should be established to guarantee the coexistence of all the peoples of the Balkans?

Even though the Yugoslav idea was never supported by all relevant forces within society, it found more and more resonance in the population starting at the turn of the century. In addition to cultural and linguistic similarities, the large number of ethnically mixed settlements, shared folk traditions and ideals, and irrefutably practical political reasons spoke in favor of a common South Slavic state. Meanwhile, Yugoslavism was both open and inclusive and offered a great deal of interpretative leeway. Alternately it could guide Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian identity and nation building, serve as a synthetic multicultural South Slavic national ideology, or function as a transethnic, political framework. Furthermore, Yugoslavism was anchored neither in one religion or political ideology, nor was it territorially determined. It is possible that it was precisely this vagueness that made it so highly attractive. In an age of ever-radicalizing nationalism, Yugoslavism created space for highly different ideological concepts, political objectives, and societal designs and, more importantly, provided a backdrop against which to project every type of hope, illusion, and aspiration.