

# numb(er)ing the nation the everyday life of maps and statistics in the post-Yugoslav wars

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To be presented at: *Rencontres de l'Association française d'études sur les Balkans*. Paris. Dec 2002.

Classic studies of nationalism have demonstrated how the discursive framework of nationalism is inextricably linked to patterns of modernity<sup>1</sup>. While involving a variety of conflicts on different levels, the post-Yugoslav wars included a clash of incompatible nationalisms, centred upon 'very modern' (Sorabji 1995) technologies of power/knowledge such as numerical data about the nationality of the population and maps of 'ethnic distribution'. In this text I refer to the discursive node where such maps and statistics converge as 'national numbers'. On the basis of over three years of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork<sup>2</sup> I explore how the reliance on such national-demographic knowledge has become the lynchpin of a modern, nationalist 'regime of truth', suppressing a whole range of other differences. This text critically examines the sometimes brutal workings of national numbers in official discourses of local and international governance, in everyday life practice amongst citizens of the post-Yugoslav states and in discourses aiming to know, understand, explain and represent the violence.

## 2. war-mongering by numbers

There is little doubt that territorial haggling with land and people characterised the negotiation process by which the violence in Bosnia<sup>3</sup>, the most lethal of the post-Yugoslav wars, stuttered to a halt. Arguably, a similar preoccupation with national numbers in the dying years of the federation accompanied the descent into violence. The rise of nationalist parties around 1990 was premised on the perceived injustice of diverging statistics. Serbian nationalists pointed to the allegedly genocidal programme of Albanian separatism, 'politically motivated' high fertility rates and the strategic purchase

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Anderson 1991, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990, Bauman 1991, 1992. See also Jansen 1999.

of Serbian-owned real estate (Blagojević 1996). In a morbid retrospective exercise, Croatian and Serbian nationalist ideologues deployed a bewildering diversity of estimates of the national distribution of the WWII death toll to their political advantage (Hayden 1994). Non-Serbian resentment of Serbian/Montenegrin overrepresentation in the military and in the police grew (Gow 1991:302), as did discontent with economic imbalances. It was mainly by tapping into such grievances that the first Yugoslav round of elections resulted in resounding nationalist victories in all republics. In the case of Milošević's rise to power in Serbia, this involved a contradictory and poisonous rhetorical mix of Serbian nationalism and Yugoslav multiculturalism.

Even before the first bullet was fired, then, it was clear that national numbers would be crucial to post-Yugoslav politics, whatever shape they might take. They took, we know now, the shape of war. The collapse of the Yugoslav federation was carried out through a series of endeavours to enforce national order upon a hybrid matrix of terrain and population, and national numbers were crucial to its implementation and legitimisation. Most importantly, the point where nationality statistics and territory met was the key to the infamous strategy of 'ethnic cleansing'. It was on the basis of national numbers that war participants could engage in the creation of 'cleansed territories', often involving brutal violence<sup>4</sup>. Although the levels of calculation were not equally prominent in the decision-making of the various regimes, they came to share, whether by design or by default, a belief in the paramount importance of national numbers.

Whatever shape or form it takes, the practice of 'ethnic cleansing' is premised on at least two claims to knowledge: knowledge about nationality (who belongs to which nation) and knowledge about territory (which territory rightfully belongs to whom). Despite the frequent absence of visible or audible markers of national difference in the post-Yugoslav context, the presumption of a clear understanding of, and a

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<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork periods in Serbia (1996-1997), in Croatia (1997-1998), in Bosnia and amongst displaced Bosnians in Serbia, Australia and The Netherlands (2000-2001, financed by the Toyota Foundation and the Leverhulme Trust) and in Kosovo (2002, financed by the Nuffield Foundation and the University of Hull).

<sup>3</sup> In this article Bosnia stands for the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Silber & Little 1995; Glenny 1993; www.hrw.org (Human Rights Watch); www.amnesty.org (Amnesty International); www.intl-crisis-group.org (International Crisis Group).

relative consensus about, the lines between supposedly discrete national groups was a precondition for those involved in wartime decision-making. Only within such a framework can we understand the narratives about the outbreak of war that I collected during my fieldwork. For example, people in Northeast Bosnia remembered that in 1992 the Yugoslav People's Army handed out weapons to Serbian villagers, and to Serbian villagers only. Likewise, informants in Lika recalled that in 1991 Serbian and Croatian paramilitary groups prepared 'their' respective populations for war. Both examples imply a clear consensus on who was who, and how many of 'us' there were.

### **3. maps, statistics and experiences of 'ethnic cleansing'**

#### ***seeking safety in national numbers***

While the importance of national numbers in the military-demographic strategies of 'ethnic cleansing' is well documented, there has been much less documentation of how they functioned within the survival strategies of the persons cast as its victims. Those who were expelled usually (but not always) fled to territory that was considered safer precisely because of the national composition of its population, i.e. 'majority' pockets or, in the case of Croats and Serbs, their supposed 'mother-states'. The dominance of nationalist discourses and the concomitant violence produced a fairly clear-cut logic around the dualism of majority/minority and security/insecurity. At least initially, when given the chance, most people looked for safety in national numbers.

The functioning of this logic was not limited to what is usually seen as the war period, nor was it only a factor in displacement by violent means<sup>5</sup>. The axis majority/security provided a crucial element in everyday practice of displacement, return and relocation. For example, many moved pre-emptively to a 'majority area' before the first concrete acts of physical violence in their place of residence. Others participated in (self-)evacuation co-ordinated as part of the population engineering efforts of their own presumed leaders, both before and after the military campaigns. Still others engaged in what became

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<sup>5</sup> I have explored this in-depth and demonstrated how considerations of territory and nationality were the key to strategies of war-related displacement both long before and long after the actual military violence in Jansen 2003c.

known as the strategic purchase or sale of real estate, giving rise to a strong nationality bias in the housing market and therefore in patterns of residence. And when it came to decisions about moving back, very few people in the post-Yugoslav contexts actually returned to their pre-war homes if this implied they would be part of a local national minority.

This indicates that even those who were not militarily expelled engaged in movement that was clearly war-related and that such displacements should be seen as an integral part of any understanding of the wars. Of course, very few amongst the millions that left their homes in the post-Yugoslav context had actually wanted to leave prior to the conflict. These were displacements aimed at security for oneself and one's family through minimising potential exposure to violence and to the risks associated with living together with national others. In this sense, nationalist discourses achieved a very high degree of hegemony: they were established as part of the *doxa* of everyday life even amongst those who would not have dreamt of thinking in those terms prior to the 1990s.

### ***looking back in anger: the retrospective numbering of nations***

In 2001, a survey found that British people thought that 24% of their country's population belonged to an 'ethnic minority'. The official figure was 7.1%<sup>6</sup>. Such survey findings indicate that lay knowledge about the composition of populations tends to reflect fluctuating moral panics and political scaremongering rather than census statistics. This contrasts sharply with my own experiences during the same period amongst Bosnian refugees in Serbia, the Netherlands and Australia, and amongst displaced persons in Bosnia itself. My fieldwork alerted me to the precision, be it of a selective kind, of the national-demographic knowledge that many people displayed about the areas they had been forced to flee. When informants told me about their plight, this would frequently entail an unsolicited run through the national statistics of their hometown—explicitly setting the scene for the rest of their story. In the Bosnian context this usually meant just one sentence along those lines: 'Before I go on to tell you about it, Stef, you should know that, before the war, we had X% Bosniacs, Y% Serbs and Z% Croats'.

People referred to pre-war figures only as the post-war situation needed no spelling out for someone who knew the basics of Bosnian geography and war.

The frequent reference to national statistics demonstrates that, if nationalist politicians had charted their ruthless course on the basis of maps and stats in their heads, they had also aimed to spread this mode of representing the conflicts onto the people involved in or subjected to their activities. Over the years I learned that most of their respective victims found it impossible to make sense of their plight without such resort to national numbers—a tragic measure of the success the nationalist 'regime of truth'. As a result, with many people keen to point out previous nationality statistics in order to underpin their particular nationalist interpretation of the wars, I expected controversy about these numbers. Surprisingly, notwithstanding the occasional blatant falsehoods, this was hardly an issue. Since a copy of the 1991 census statistics has become standard equipment for anthropologists in the region, I checked and found people's information was very often exact. Still, there were clearly a number of problems related to this retrospective 'numbering' of the nation, particularly in terms of selectivity. I now look briefly at some of these.

People rarely disputed the stats of others directly; rather, it seemed possible for most to find a territorial scale on which the pre-war numbers worked *for them*. Usually they demarcated an arbitrary piece of territory on the basis that it had contained a majority declaring 'their' nationality prior to the war. This was then advanced as the basis for defending currently 'held' territory and for incorporating 'lost' lands. Hence, when legitimising their majority claim, people could refer to the whole of Yugoslavia, to a republic, to a region, to a municipality, to a town or to its surrounding villages, or even to a hamlet. In this way, the rather precise knowledge of pre-war statistics was marred by selectivity, since local narratives of the past included diverging majorities and minorities, configured by simply adjusting one's 'zoom' on the territory<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Median answer. Special Section on 'Race in Britain' in *The Observer*, 25/11/01.

<sup>7</sup> While these problems with retrospective national numbering are relatively well-known with regard to cities like Sarajevo, it is worth pointing out that they also pertain to other places (for a Lika-based case-study see Jansen 2002, 2003b).

A related frequent problem of selectivity with the retrospective imposition of national numbers was the refusal to account for non-exclusive categories, such as the not census-recognised but widely employed 'Bosnian' label or the previously officially available 'Yugoslav' category. In my work amongst displaced persons in and from Bosnia, for example, people would list the previous proportions of Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats but rarely would there be a mentioning of the fourth most numerous census category: Yugoslavs. In 1981, 5.4% of the Yugoslav population ticked this box in the census, with 7.9% in Bosnia and local peaks towns such as Tuzla with over 20% (Sekulić et al 1994:95; Garde 1992:116; Alispahić 2000:196). The absence of the Yugoslav category in many people's recollections reflected a retrospective imposition of the current context, in which this label had been discredited, onto the pre-war situation. Likewise, in my fieldwork in Lika disputes about the previous existence of so-called mixed marriages were structured by opposing post-war nationalist discourses (Jansen 2002).

### ***national disambiguation of the past***

Maps and stats were central to people's fate, to their survival strategies and their understandings of these, but let us not assume that detailed knowledge of national statistics and their towering significance in the post-war context did necessarily imply that such data had been well-known or considered important prior to the conflict. There were even indications that the campaigns of 'ethnic cleansing' had acknowledged this. While nationalist programmes had resonated with existing resentments amongst the Yugoslav population on one level, their implementation also implied a sustained effort on another level to decisively break with previous experiences of belonging and hybridity. In Sorabji's words:

The violence is central to an effort to alter local understandings of the abstract, and modern, category of 'nation'. Brutality is aimed at humiliating, terrorizing and killing the 'enemy' population in order to remove it from the territory, but also at transforming the assumptions held by both victims and perpetrators about the very nature of identity groups and boundaries in order to prevent any future return of the exiled population. (Sorabji 1995:81)

My research points out that, on the whole, this brutality was frighteningly successful. After the wars, national-demographic data provided the basis for a particular discourse of historicity in representations of the wars. Hence, explanations of events and situations relied on making them national and numbered, with regard not just to today's context but also to the previous one. As a result, the war itself was then retrospectively explained with reference to these national numbers.

The fact that most of my informants engaged in retrospective numbering based on exact, if selective, data does not make up for a more deep-seated problem: the data provided to help explain the conflicts were derived from a discursive framework that was partly a *result* of those conflicts. Furthermore, no context was provided in which to place the relative importance of these statistics. Hence, what was most significant to me was not the occasional manipulation of nationality figures but the very fact that national numbers were seen as a, or *the* constitutive element in the violence (compare Urla 1993:820). Retrospectively, they were given the status of social facts that *made* reality (see Rabinow 1986). This had serious implications for my work with victims and/or perpetrators of ethnic cleansing. I had to take into account that the past was often constituted as meaningful through the narration itself. This involved a marked tendency to disambiguate the entire history of humanity into a theatre with nationally discrete and easily identifiable actors: historically all-encompassing and conflicting nations, each playing a nicely set-out part.

#### **4. national numbers, foreign intervention and the politics of representation**

In his study of political discourses on the Bosnian war David Campbell (1998) analyses a wide range of public statements about the conflict from local politicians, international mediators, journalists and academics. He convincingly argues that, despite their radically opposed views in some respects, these representations of Bosnia implicitly relied on the shared postulate that 'the political possibilities [had] been limited by the alignment of territory and identity, state and nation, all under the sign of "ethnicity", supported by a particular account of history' (1998:80). Hence, while foreign analysis and intervention

was ostensibly dismissive of the various local nationalisms, on the whole they problematised Bosnian events through a similar mode of representation. As a result, most Bosnian peace deals proposed by foreign mediators were based on the above approach to territory/identity. This was partly pragmatic: in the effort to stop the violence and save lives, negotiators dealt with nationalist politicians and military commanders and acknowledged their 'terms'. However, the consensus on the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995b) led to a paradoxical situation<sup>8</sup>. My fieldwork pointed out that most foreigners working for NGOs or foreign organisations (military or civilian) in Kosovo and Bosnia wished to see their efforts precisely as antidotes to ethnic cleansing. But they found themselves continually reinforcing the imposition of maps and stats upon the post-Yugoslav terrain by dealing with issues that were almost invariably problematised in terms of population figures and territory.

For example, many people involved in reconstruction felt that the likelihood of their project proposals to be awarded funding was ultimately dependent on the national composition of its beneficiary group. Hence, funders' anxiety to be fair and non-nationalist had the unintended consequence of highlighting the importance of nationality and the distribution of stats upon maps, so crucial to the wars. There was a particular preference for 'minority returnees'. Clearly, on a basic level this simply reflected a laudable desire to redress the ravages of war. But sometimes there was a plain tendency to what I would call minority fetishism, which in turn encouraged the inflation of return statistics. Because of the logic described above, maps and stats of refugee returns became a measure of success for many reconstruction projects and for the foreign intervention in Bosnia as a whole. The question 'how many returned where?' meant really 'how many people of which nationality returned to territory under control by people of which nationality?'. In tandem with minority fetishism, returnee national numbers thus functioned as trophies in the efforts to evaluate and justify the foreign presence.

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<sup>8</sup> This paradox worked on many levels. For example, during my research in Bosnia in 2000-1 and in Kosovo 2002, foreign soldiers policed the display of national symbolry. Interestingly, this was only applied to locals. With the military presence mostly organised in national units, UN troops consistently flew their own national flags on vehicles, checkpoints, bases and uniforms. Moreover, the governments involved in the intervention forces clearly had their own particular take on where to draw the line with principles of national-territorial sovereignty (think, for example, of the UK, Spain, India or Belgium).

Another example was provided by the scrupulous policies of equal opportunities that most organisations deployed in order to balance the national composition of their local personnel. While aimed at fairness, the enormous weight attached to the nationality of potential candidates indicated once more the importance of national numbers. An implicit consensus existed on their significance: ignoring them was considered dangerous, insensitive and simply *not done*.

Let me elaborate a little more on the paradoxical effects of such a 'regime of truth', based on an example encountered during my fieldwork in Bosnia: the row surrounding Ivica Osim. The post-Dayton legal framework, imposed and enforced by the foreign presence in Bosnia, stipulated that one deputy mayor in Sarajevo had to be a Croat in order to provide a national balance in the City Hall. In 2001, Osim, then the manager of the football team Sturm Graz, was elected for this post. In response, HDZ, the party that won by far the largest amount of votes amongst Bosnian Croats, issued a press release stating that

Osim does not feel Croatian. He has repeatedly declared that he is a Bosnian and has also said that Croats live in Croatia. The question emerges whether such a person can occupy a place which should go to the Croats according to the Statute of the City of Sarajevo. [...] It is distasteful that a well-known professional in the world of sport allows himself to be used as a tool in alien [*tudim*] hands. [...] Yet again, it is confirmed that the only people who qualify to be representatives of the Croatian people are those who have no Croatian roots, those who renounce their Croatian-ness, and thereby insult its legitimate and legal representatives. (*Oslobođenje* 03/03/2001 p13 - my translation)

In Bosnian common sense, Osim's name and family suggested a Croatian national background, but he consistently identified as a *Sarajlija* (Sarajevan) and a Bosnian, a non-exclusive category unacceptable to the new nationalisms.

This case is the more ironic when juxtaposed with another one: the HDZ reaction against the election of Ibrahim Mujić as a Croatian representative in the Unsko-Sansko Cantonal Parliament. Mujić had both Bosnian and Croatian state citizenship as a result of a regional war-time policy of the Croatian Tuđman regime. When a journalist referred to his easily recognisable Bosniac name, Mujić said he had always felt Croatian and that he was therefore perfectly capable of representing the Croats (Lovrenović

2001:24). Following the HDZ logic against Osim above, one would expect them to see this as a reasonable argument, but their protest was just as vocal this time.

Such outcry was part of a much wider campaign carried out by HDZ's *Staffs for the Protection of Identity and Croatian National Interests*, attacking individuals occupying the reserved 'Croatian' seats in official organs. Depicting them as unreformed communists, traitors, failed politicians, pets of the 'international community' and *janjičari* (men who served as Ottoman soldiers during Turkish times), the HDZ increasingly made clear that the only Croats they considered sufficiently Croatian were those in and around their own party... To a certain degree, this pattern was replicated in the activities of the other nationalist parties, each of which ruled more or less in their own, ethnically cleansed fiefdoms. The point here is that while the HDZ case was clearly part of its attempt to preserve the empire it had built during the war, it was also tightly interwoven with the policies of the foreign intervention in Bosnia. Aimed at peaceful, fair and balanced decision-making, the post-Dayton framework revolved in effect entirely around the *national* representation of Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats, the collectivities in whose name the war was fought. The resulting balancing act set the three national categories in concrete, leaving little room for non-exclusive, ambiguous or alternative options.

## **5. national numbers and academic analysis**

The prominence of national numbers also became central to local and foreign academic writing about the post-Yugoslav conflicts (see Campbell 1998:55-81). Retrospective national disambiguation provides the logic described above: if scholars are to understand the reasons for the war, they have to understand the pre-war situation. And what do they look for in that pre-war situation: national numbers, because of their centrality during and after the wars. Particularly in the case of less sophisticated analyses this often results in a critique of the horrors of war without an acknowledgement of problematic aspects of other, say Western, nationalisms, and indeed of the underlying nationalist cosmology. Even critical writings demonstrate that it is very difficult to write about the post-Yugoslav

wars without referring to the linkages between nationality, population figures and territory. The language we have to work with does not allow for representing many of the complexities and ambiguities of a hybrid reality.

When looking back, of course, few people would dispute the role played by discourses of nationality and territory in the post-Yugoslav wars. However, if one wishes to explain them solely or mainly in terms of pre-given nationality and territory, this requires that the past be retrospectively disambiguated. It is therefore not a coincidence that almost all academic work on the post-Yugoslav wars includes a table of census data on nationality, usually per republic. Rarely does one find statistics on such factors as urban/rural residence, occupation, income, literacy, cultural capital, regional belonging or gender—all elements considered crucial in local non-dominant understandings of the conflicts<sup>9</sup>. National numbers have thus become the centrepiece of a widely accepted technology of power/knowledge that puts severe limits on possible ways of understanding and representing the wars.

I now propose a closer look at one particular instance of such a technology of power/knowledge: the ubiquitous maps of 'ethnic distribution in Yugoslavia', usually based on 1981 or 1991 census statistics [see fig.1; *displayed during presentation*]. Ostensibly, these maps serve to clarify the situation for an outsider and, on one level, the vivid splatter of colours and patterns on the maps of the 'ethnic distribution in Yugoslavia' does evoke the complexity of the pre-war situation. Hence, when contrasting them with present patterns, such maps testify of the bloody processes by which territories were homogenised nationally. However, despite its value as a reminder of pre-war complexity, the image these maps put forward, that of a mosaic of 'ethnic' territories, is extremely misleading. Mosaic models present such an over-simplified sketch of reality that they result in false clarifications: they have come to serve as a substitute for explaining the violence. Unforgivably, many of those maps, like the one above, don't even mention the fact that the coloured fields represent so-called *majority* territories. But, even assuming that that is what is represented, what does it mean when an area is coloured in and

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<sup>9</sup> See Jansen 1998a/b, 2000, 2001a/b.

labelled, say, 'Serb'? It means that census agents in that area, upon asking a member of the household, ticked the box 'Serb' for 'nationality' with regard to more than 50% of the individuals living there. Perhaps 99%, perhaps 51%. On some maps they are not even absolute majorities, so it could be under 50%. On other maps areas with no 50+% majorities of any nationality are left blank, which could be considered an improvement, but creates 'a misleading sense that homogeneity is the norm and that any areas that have to be represented as heterogeneous are atypical' (Black 1997:57).

In any case, focusing on making more precise maps of 'ethnic distribution' diverts us from more serious problems. As Harley (2001) has demonstrated in his Foucault-inspired work on cartography, map-making cannot be seen in isolation from struggles for power/knowledge. Map-makers make choices about what to show and what not to show, particularly when they create an overlap between statistics and territory. Maps of Yugoslav 'ethnic distribution' show only one thing: majority census declaration of nationality. The uncritical use of such maps therefore reflects a dangerous tendency to accept the modes of representation imposed by those who built their power on the wars, and who, themselves, almost without fail have such maps on their office walls. While most authors writing about the post-Yugoslav wars are abhorred by ethnic cleansing, the unquestioned use of maps of 'ethnic distribution' unwittingly perpetuates the legitimacy of the blueprints of those who aim to guarantee that it will indeed *become* possible that 'ethnic' maps can be drawn with clear lines and full colours. In this way, pre-war maps and statistics do not simply represent the previous situation, as they claim to do, but they are deeply implicated in the conflicts themselves. They form, in Campbell's words, 'a discourse of self-legitimation produced by the violence [they] appear to merely represent' (1998:86).

So what do they (mis)represent? In order to shed a critical light on this question and on the uncritical use of retrospective national numbers, I now present a quick look at the context and the significance of nationality in Titoist Yugoslavia.

## 6. the paradoxical life and times of national numbers in Yugoslavia<sup>10</sup>

### *modern categories and Yugoslav nationality policies*

In 1945, Tito's communist government installed a Yugoslav federation under the plurinational banner of 'Brotherhood and Unity'. Based on the founding moment of the Partisan anti-fascist victory, the Yugoslav regime institutionalised a multilayered model of national rights as part of a complex balancing act<sup>11</sup>. Particularly towards the end of the Titoist period, ever more deals were deployed between the republican elites in order to secure a Yugoslav status-quo. Locally, official nationality quota were implemented and, far beyond that, a set of unspoken rules governed the precarious balance of nationalities with regard to jobs and favours. In this climate, not unfamiliar to me (I grew up in Belgium), when in competition for a particular job, it was sometimes more effective to draw the attention to the allegedly inappropriate nationality of competitors for the overall balance than it was to address their (in)competence. Paradoxically, then, while underwriting the cause of multinational co-existence, in certain matters, socialist Yugoslav nationality policies made it very attractive to imagine a community along national lines.

The statistics on which this nationality policy hinged were collected every ten years in a population census which included national categories and the label 'Yugoslav, nationally undetermined'<sup>12</sup>. Note that, in terms of the census, the 'Yugoslav' option on the forms was also a 'category', a contradictory attempt to allow for ambiguity while at the same time wanting to contain it in a neatly demarcated box. In this way, the Titoist regime represented a typical project of modernity, a 'quest for order' (Bauman 1991:1-17; 1992). Anderson refers to this tendency as

the census-makers' passion for completeness and unambiguity. Hence their intolerance of multiple, politically 'transvestite', blurred, or changing identifications. Hence the weird subcategory [...] of 'Others'—who, nonetheless, are absolutely not to be confused with *other* 'Others'. The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions. (Anderson 1991:166)

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<sup>10</sup> For a fuller discussion see Jansen 2001a.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Garde 1992; Cohen 1995; Ramet 1992; Singleton 1976; Rusinow 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Even from a statistical perspective these census data suffer from several obvious problems, especially when used in

In this way, based on census declarations, large parts of the Yugoslav public sphere rested on an articulation of nationality from an 'element' of difference into a 'moment' of political discursive practice (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

### ***Yugoslavia and past everyday life: nor prison, nor paradise***

From the narratives of Yugoslav life that I collected over the years it transpires that the official story above was not necessarily how it had always been experienced by those 'fitted' in the categories. The label that was picked from the census list could function as an answer to an administrative question, a sense of territorial belonging, a claim to a national tradition, an ideological stance, a strategic move, or perhaps nothing more than a joke. Of course, it could also evoke a combination of two or more of these possibilities. With regard to the 'Yugoslav' box, even if one was allowed to tick one option only, it appears that a sense of Yugoslavness had not necessarily been incompatible with a simultaneous sense of, for example, Croatian-ness or Serbian-ness, and a whole range of other positionings.

Most people remembered a sense of national belonging that had been lived, acknowledged and reproduced, but that, in a wide range of pre-war everyday contexts, had constituted a largely unarticulated difference in discursive practice. In Yugoslavia as everywhere, national dividing lines had only been one type amongst a whole range of differences. And, for most people, in many spheres of life, national lines of differentiation had not been the most important ones on an everyday level, and even if they sometimes were, they certainly weren't always<sup>13</sup>. Antinationalist practice in the 1990s struggled precisely to retain or re-establish this ambiguous nature of nationality as a largely unarticulated moment in everyday life (Jansen 1998b, 2001a).

I found that many people remembered a wide variety in the way nationality had been experienced in pre-war everyday life. While some recalled it as a well-defined and important aspect of daily practice, this contrasted with assurances of others that they 'hadn't known who was what' [typically: '*nije se znalo*']

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longitudinal studies: e.g. the set of categories changed over the years (see also Anderson 1991:165; Cohn 1987:224-253).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Bax 2000; Bringa 1995; Jansen 1998a, 2000, 2001a/b/c, 2003a; Maček 2000; Sorabji 1995.

*ko je šta, to se nije gledalo*']. The latter would then often proceed to blame the current situation on the ambitions of politicians, including those of their own nationality. As opposed to explanations of the war in terms of primordial nationality and the impossibility of co-existence, they would also point out the local and global gains of war profiteers and other interested parties.

Hence, I believe there are good reasons for rejecting depictions of Yugoslavia as a mismatch of national communities oppressed by Stalinism. This image of the former state as 'the prison of the nations' is the dominant representation in the various post-Yugoslav nationalisms but it is contradicted by the extensive system of national rights that was central to the Titoist model. Moreover, this view accords pre-war national differences a significance completely out of proportion with their previous everyday role and misrepresents them as always discrete and natural. Instead, we need to point out that their meaning has always been relative and that they are often the product of recent forcible boundary-drawings in a hybrid Yugoslav context. As we have seen, maps of 'ethnic distribution in Yugoslavia' cannot dream to represent this adequately.

Having said that, while emphasising the inadequacy of the 'prison of the nations' image and the discrete mosaic-views of the former Yugoslav situation it is based on, let us also be wary of those who now depict the former context as an exemplary hybrid, non-national one. Even during Titoist times, due to its paradigmatic in-between position in the Cold War, some foreign scholars sometimes tended to simply legitimise rather than critically study Yugoslav politics (see Allcock 1993, 1994). More recently a mythical version of multicultural pre-war Sarajevo became the object of a passionate love affair in certain Western intellectual and artistic circles<sup>14</sup>. Rather than throwing a critical light on the conflicts, these smug and usually ill-informed representations of the former country as one in which national differences didn't exist at all or blended into a feel-good Yugoslav melting-pot may tell us more about the desires and limited contacts of those outsiders (with an urban elite fluent in foreign languages and keen on establishing its European-ness). Instead of the counterproductive downplaying of differences

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<sup>14</sup> For example Rushdie 1994; for a critique see Žižek 1992.

within Yugoslavia, we need to understand that much of the flavour of life in the former state was characterised precisely by the very existence of national and other differences within. Thus, let us point out the *relative* importance of pre-war national differences in the context of many other distinctions. This allows us to start understanding something of everyday life in the former state without subscribing either to idealised visions of a non-national Yugoslavia, or to retrospective impositions of the post-war reality upon the Yugoslav past.

### **7. national numbers and a modern 'regime of truth'**

The material in this text demonstrates that nationality statistics and maps played a central role not only in the hegemonising projects of various post-Yugoslav nationalisms, but also in technologies of power/knowledge deployed by ordinary people and seemingly antinationalist actors such as humanitarian workers, foreign representatives, journalists and scholars. The significance of national numbers is thus reinforced throughout policy, everyday life practice and symbolic representations of the violence and its causes and consequences (see Urla 1993:819). We have seen how the large majority of local and foreign interpretations of the post-Yugoslav wars are based on an implicit ontological framework which argues that national communities can be identified on the basis of the national numbers of maps and stats. My research pointed out that for local nationalisms this model was a necessary condition to legitimise their war activities with reference to the right to sovereignty on a demarcated territory. But many others, critical of the wars, relied on a similar underlying belief in this order of things.

As a result of the numbering of nations, those presumably belonging to these nations are numbed into accepting their paramount and natural importance to the organisation of social reality. While few would dispute that national numbers have to be taken into account in any understanding of the post-Yugoslav wars, this has too often lacked the critical perspective it calls for, perhaps because that exercise would

imply a need to question some implicit concepts and practices that are central to modernity in a wider sense (Urla 1993:819).

Classic studies have pointed out how nationalism relies on the notion of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991), usually related to certain territories. This can range from extreme versions of *Blut und Boden* policies to more benign versions. While such nationalist discourses often rest largely on pragmatic considerations of power, they are legitimised on a mythico-historical basis. This, of course, is not acknowledged within those discourses themselves, relying as they do on a blind spot with regard to their own contingency. While Anderson has inspired many critical analyses of nationalism, what is often overseen is that the global effort to territorialise nationally imagined communities rests on the condition that the nation-concept itself is considered as a central building brick in the representation of the world in the first place. This is far from an anomaly isolated in Chechnya, Kashmir or Bosnia. The idea of nations as discrete and therefore countable bounded units is the bedrock of the hegemonic view of the human population as distributed amongst a 'family of nations' (Malkki 1992, 1994, 1995a/b). Such a view is inextricably related to modern paradigms of humanity<sup>15</sup>: the planet is then seen as naturally divided into an all-encompassing set of nations, limited in number. To a certain extent this family is considered to be embodied politically in the United Nations Organisation which presumably consists of their representatives. Therefore, put bluntly, in the post-Yugoslav context, ethnic cleansing of one form or other was the extreme but not illogical outcome of attempts to enforce modern national order on a particular slab of territory. While many of the actual events were outrageous in their brutality, the underlying ideas were not out of line with the principle of national self-determination, enshrined in the UN-charter.

Seen from a critical perspective, the distance between the brutal, seemingly pre-modern scenes of Srebrenica and modern assumptions about nationhood as a global phenomenon is much smaller than is usually imagined. Of course I would not want to engage in absurd accusations that every analysis of

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<sup>15</sup> For a critique from a political philosophy angle, see Connolly (1991a/b).

the post-Yugoslav wars which includes a map of 'ethnic distribution' or a table of nationality statistics is therefore complicit in 'ethnic cleansing'. I mean to argue that the extensive and unquestioned use of these national numbers reflects a deeply problematic representation of the world as a nationally ordered family which is not limited to discourses we would usually call 'nationalist'. In many ways, even many liberal ideologies such as socialist internationalism or liberal multiculturalism draw on the 'family of nations' model, with the solace that they aim for harmonious and peaceful relations within the family. The main overall problem, in my view, is the pretence of discreteness: a human being is either part of this nation or of that nation. Even though people may sometimes be allowed to feel a sense of being part of more than one nation, this goes only to reinforce the underlying idea that there are clear lines that demarcate nations in the first place. In most cases, non-nationality, whether as a simple absence of a national sense of belonging or as a form of conscientious objection, is not an option. During my fieldwork, I was very frequently targeted for being a 'Westerner', but the worst anger directed at me by an informant was due to my inability to answer his question about my ultimate national loyalty amongst the ones that were 'genetically' thrust upon me (Belgian? Flemish? Dutch?). Furiously, he accused me of being a hypocrite, for 'how could I love other nations if I didn't even love my own?'

Rather than providing a critical voice of opposition, the social sciences have often reinforced this mode of representation. In anthropology, we should point out the discipline's historically entrenched complicity with the mosaic-model: each culture rooted in its own land. Thankfully, recent work has sought to question the notion of the bounded, homogeneous, cultural unit that was so central to classical anthropological fieldwork<sup>16</sup>. It should be noted that the strategic usefulness of more conventional anthropological insights, particularly encyclopaedic-type knowledge of cultural differences, has not been lost on nationalist intellectuals in the post-Yugoslav context. They have taken what was originally the emancipatory discourse of cultural relativism and reterritorialised it as an oppressive legitimisation for 'ethnic cleansing'.

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<sup>16</sup> Clifford 1997; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Olwig & Hastrup 1997. Also Oliver, Heller & Jansen 2000.  
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**"Etudes balkaniques : état des savoirs et pistes de recherche",**  
**Paris, 19-20 décembre 2002**

Only a resolutely anti-essentialist approach can do justice to the lived experience of national belonging, by highlighting the significance of national differences where relevant while never losing sight of their contingency, overdetermination and contextual meaning amongst a whole set of other differences. A useful way of including national numbers in analysis but indicating their relativity is provided by Fatmir Alispahić's book *Tuzland* (2000:196-7). He acknowledges the relevance of national belonging or background to understanding current life in the Bosnian town of Tuzla by providing some nationality statistics. However, alongside this, the same list includes a range of other figures that are relevant to those who live there: gender, religiosity (including the absence thereof), number of households, DP or local status, etc. This example represents a possible alternative to the dominant tendency, whether explicitly (as in the case of the post-Yugoslav nationalist regimes) or implicitly (as in the case of many critics of the latter), to conceive of the world as a prairie neatly divided up into a set of corrals, each providing for its own type of cattle.

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