Challenging the Centre-Periphery Model: Nationalist Transitions in Spain and former Yugoslavia

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The 'Spanish model' of transition has been studied in detail both in comparative perspective and as a case study in itself. Moreover, studies of the Spanish transition have abounded both in Spanish and in English from several disciplinary perspectives. Some of them have specifically focused on centre-periphery relations. Overall, Spain represents now a classical model of centre-periphery relations, with the central government gradually yielding power to peripheral actors after recognizing the failure of its past assimilationist policies and in the wake of peripheral mobilization in defence of regional identity.

The contrast with Yugoslavia could not be starker, and precisely for this reason it can be illuminating for comparativists and transitologists alike. Here central elites have repeatedly attempted to recentralize the country. Tito's endeavor to erect a federal structure under the aegis of socialism lasted only until the Communist Party's apparatus could maintain a parvence of centralization. According to some authors, Yugoslavia was acting as a group of semi-sovereign states already by the dawning of its collapse.

This process was the opposite of that followed by Spain during its own transition. From a *sui generis* federation, the state has suddenly recentralized itself under Milosevic's stewardship. The immediate response of the periphery has been to raise the stakes from initial requests of confederation to referendum-based declarations of independence.

However, another element made Yugoslavia's situation even more distinctive (and can therefore account for its violent breakup): contrary to traditional centre-periphery models, a powerful secessionist movements emerged from within Serbia, particularly in Belgrade. The article will illustrate the bearing this development had on centre-periphery relations. It will also show that Belgrade's brand of nationalism was conceived in purely ethnic terms. This
contrasted with the competing peripheral nationalisms emerging as a reaction to Milosevic's crusade: in Bosnia, Macedonia, and Montenegro (but not in Kosovo), republican nationalisms were civically-based and territorially defined, while in Slovenia and Croatia they contained a strong ethnicist emphasis as well.

In contrast, the ethnic character of Serbian nationalism helps to account for the enormous levels of bloodshed which occurred in mixed areas (notably Krajina and Bosnia).

The first part of the paper will chart the re-shaping of centre-periphery relations during the Spanish transition. It will show how peripheral nationalist interacted with, and influenced, central decision-making in the most crucial moments, those preluding to the adoption of a new Constitution.

Spain

Spain's transition to democracy (1975-1986) occurred in the wake of unprecedented nationalist mobilizations. From the death of the dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975) to Spain’s entry into the European Community (1 January 1986), Spain was transformed from one of the most centralized regimes in Western Europe into a quasi-federal monarchy. These changes in the locus of power were matched by a considerable decrease in ethno-political violence. After reaching a peak in the years from 1977 to 1980, terrorist activities slowly waned. These years also witnessed the emergence of Basque and Catalan nationalism as mass movements, once the fall of the dictatorship reinstated free expression.

The entire democratization process as we know it today could not have taken place without the stresses and strains exerted by peripheral nationalism. It was the combined pressure of the Catalan and Basque movements which framed and hatched up the Transition. Basque radicalism utilized violence as a strategy to destroy the old order, while Catalanism urged peaceful mobilization to build a new state framework. Their contrasting but integrated action successfully transformed Spanish politics.

The staunchest crackdown against peripheral identities in Spanish history was adopted in the
immediate aftermath of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9). The winning side under the command of General Francisco Franco introduced a drastic centralism, restraining all forms of regional culture, unleashing a campaign of annihilation of all vestiges of ethno-political distinctiveness.

After a long period of quiescence and resignation, nationalist opposition began to regain strength. In Catalonia nationalist mobilizations took the form of largely cultural gatherings in defence of Catalan culture. A different trend developed in Euskadi (the Basque Country), where nationalist mobilizations had been peaceful since the foundation of the PNV (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, Basque National Party) in 1895. But a new movement, ETA (*Euskadi 'ta Askatasuna*, Basque Land and Freedom), was founded on 31 July 1959 by a breakaway PNV youth group. Although ETA was not initially a violent organization, the underground conditions in which it had to operate pushed it toward the adoption of radicalism. The choice of violence became irrevocable by the mid-1960s at a time when dictatorial measures, coupled with economic boom, produced new strains in Basque society. This phase of the dictatorship was characterized by a relative degree of 'liberalization without democratization'. Hence, it was the stage when contradictions began to surface and the state's legitimacy began to crumble. Since 1963, ETA has adopted the theory of the 'cycle of action/repression/action', a classic insurrectional model of mass mobilization under repressive regimes. The confrontation escalated, expanding into ever larger areas. The more the state repression increased, the more the radical separatists gained support. The more the Basques were harassed in their symbols of identity, the more Basque nationalism spread. In 1970, 16 *etarras* [ETA military activists] were brought before a military tribunal in Burgos. The famous Burgos Trial was an historical watershed for the Basque movement as well as for the entire Spanish opposition. By its end, the Spanish regime’s legitimacy crumbled under the pressure of a powerful public opinion -- abandoned even by the Church. In other words, the Francoist centralization campaign dramatically backfired. Hence, a new pluralist vision of Spanish nationhood was demanded by all the forces pushing for democratic change. The ground plan had necessarily to include some major concessions to the nationalist opposition. But although the regime was at all effects
moribund, we had to wait for the departing of the dictator to unfreeze the process of change. Francisco Franco died on 20 November 1975. Two days later, Juan Carlos de Borbón was crowned King of Spain. The process of democratization which immediately ensued came to be known as the 'Transition' (Transición — n). This term is normally taken to include the period from Franco’s death to the advent of the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Spanish Workers Socialist Party) government in 1982 — although one can extend it to 1986, when Spain officially gained membership in the European Community.

**Elite accommodation and centre-periphery relations**

On 25 November, only three days after taking possession of the throne, the King proclaimed a first general amnesty, and about 15,000 political prisoners and exiles regained their freedom. The previous regime had failed to deliver its historical mission, order and stability. ETA's violent attacks had dismantled this illusion, as well as that of Francoist invincibility. In general, the regime’s decline was spelt by its inability to stay abreast of the radical changes brought about by large-scale industrialization. It was largely a death of its own making, since the Francoist apparatus had put all its weight behind Spain’s economic expansion, but was unable to accept the decentralizing pressures which came in the same package with economic development. At its twilight, not only was Francoism doomed but the Spanish state as a whole was no longer legitimate in peripheral regions, particularly in the Basque Country. This remained the case at least until the late 1980s, well after the Transition had run its course. Nationalist unrest spread throughout Euskadi, with popular demonstrations and demands for general amnesty, while ETA’s violence reached its peak in 1980, when finally an autonomy statute was granted to Euskadi.

The unitary democratic opposition compelled the Spanish elites to confront the Catalan and Basque question. The initiative passed from informal grassroots coalitions to political parties, most of which were legalized under the government of Adolfo Suárez, appointed in 1976 by the King. A Law of Political Reform inaugurating the Transition was submitted to popular referendum and largely approved. This popular support for gradual change pushed the
opposition to discard the previous idea of a 'democratic break' or 'rupture strategy' (estrategia de ruptura). In contrast, the 'rupture strategy' remained dominant in Euskadi where all nationalist parties kept an intransigent line.

Madrid’s initial hesitation to endorse change was cut short by huge mass mobilizations in most Spanish cities. In terms of popular demonstrations and civic initiatives, Catalonia was by far the most mobilised region. The Catalan national holiday (Diada) of 11 September 1977 provided the occasion for the biggest demonstration in postwar Europe, when more than a million people marched in the streets of Barcelona under the banner 'liberty, amnesty, statute of autonomy' (Llibertat, amnistia i estatut d’autonomia) in response to the joint call by the opposition. This gave an unmistakable signal to Madrid that the time for dismantling the centralist apparatus had come. The entire democratic opposition joined to organize the event. Indeed the parties of the the Left, rather than the nationalists, were its main propellers. In a prompt response, a decree established a provisional Autonomous Government (the Generalitat) on 29 September. In October Josep Tarradellas (1899-1980), the head of the expatriate Catalan government, was recalled home from his French exile, becoming the Generalitat’s first President.

In contrast, violence and fragmentation continually disrupted popular events and demonstrations in Euskadi. Much of this was a consequence of ETA's choice of violence as a catalyst of 'national regeneration', -- shared by other movements throughout the world wishing to stress the us-them boundary, in the absence of a clearly defined cultural strategy. In general, similar strategies need to be explained in the light of a theory of nationalism as a boundary-building process.

The regime's rigid and extremely repressive response was determined by its military character. Hence, the advent of democracy could only be achieved by eliminating the influence of the Army in political life. The Monarchy represented the continuity between the erstwhile and the new order and was hence the only institution respected by both the old guard (represented by the the Army) and the democratic forces.

Ensuing the 1977 general elections, the PNV became the second political force in Euskadi, after the more Madrid-oriented PSOE. In Catalonia, the regional Socialists (PSC-PSOE) and the regional Communists (PSUC) won first and second place. The early phase of the Transition,
from Franco’s death to the 1977 elections, opened the way for the most substantial and decisive change of all, the formulation of a new Spanish Constitution. The puissance of nationalist demands and Madrid’s attempt to resist them shaped the entire pre-Constitutional debate and, at the end, provided the key impetus for extensive political changes.

The proceso constituyente (constitutional process) began on 15 June 1977, date of the first democratic elections in post-Franco’s Spain, and ended with the approval of the Constitution, which was passed by the Cortes Generales (Joint Houses of Parliament) in a Plenary Meetings of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate (October 31, 1978). It was then ratified by a popular referendum (December 7) and finally sanctioned by the King before the Cortes on December 27. Although the elections were not specifically designed to generate a constitutional agenda, most elected MPs (diputados) promptly assumed this task. The Parliament exerted a decisive legitimizing role in achieving an orderly and peaceful process -- even though an originally consociational arrangement was modified in favour of stricter majoritarianism. On July 26, only thirteen days after the establishment of the Cámara Baja (Congress of Deputies or Lower Houses) and the Cámara Alta (Senate or Upper House of Parliament), a 36-member Constitutional Affairs Commission was set up, which in turn appointed a seven-member working party with the specific task of drafting the Constitution. The main reason for this quick pace of events was political, intellectual and media pressure. After Franco’s death, the press, the academia, and most political parties had insisted on the need to draw up a new Constitution. Hence, the process really began within a few hours from the installment of the Cortes, at whose opening ceremony, the King announced: “The Crown - by interpreting the Cortes’ aspirations - desires a Constitution which grants space to the individualities of our people and guarantees its historical and actual rights”.

The 1978 Constitution incarnates a difficult balance between two opposite historical trends: federalism and centralism. Although regional differences are seen as enriching the national texture, an essentialist emphasis on Spain's organicity was maintained. Thus, Article 2 of the
The Constitution is based on the indivisible unity of the Spanish Nation, common and indivisible fatherland (patria) of all the Spaniards. It acknowledges and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions which form it and the solidarity among them. But the stress on unity rules out formal federalism.

The crucial point is the recognition of other 'nationalities' (nacionalidades) within a united and indivisible Spanish 'nation' (nación). How was it possible to reach an agreement over such a delicate issue given Spain's long-lasting centralist legacy? Was not there a strong opposition from both poles of the political spectrum? In fact, the term ‘nationalities’ was not swallowed smoothly. The Right vigorously tried to sabotage even its mention, dragging with it most other political forces. However, they were sharply resisted by both the Communists and the Catalan nationalists. The Constitution’s gestation lasted for sixteen months as its original draft (anteproyecto) was object to over a thousand amendments. Most of them attacked or upheld Article 2. The concept of nationalities became the greatest stumbling block and was retained only after lengthy discussion. But in the process Article 2 was thoroughly modified with the goal of underscoring Spain's indivisibility. Compromise was much more easily reached with the Constitution's remaining 169 articles. Jordi Solé Tura, one of the seven 'framers' of the Constitution, acknowledges that Article 2 was a "an authentic point of encounter between different concepts of the Spanish nation.... In it, two great notions of Spain merge”.

Three ‘historical nationalities’ are usually identified within Spain: Catalonia, Euskadi and Galicia (aside from heartland ‘Castile). These are not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. Therefore, each region was left relatively free to apply the same the criteria in its bid for autonomy. Once the constitutional process was accomplished, 17 'Autonomous Communities' (Comunidades Autónomas, or Cc.Aa.) emerged on the official map, some of which were brand new creations. Overall, the process has succeeded in limiting the impact of maximalist nationalism.
The constitution solemnly protects "all the peoples of Spain in the exercise of their human rights, their cultures, traditions, languages and institutions". According to Article 3:

"Castilian is the official language of the State. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it. The other Spanish languages will also be official in their respective Autonomous Communities according to their own Statutes. The richness of the distinct linguistic modalities of Spain represents a patrimony which will be the object of special respect and protection".

An institutionalist approach will immediately notice that the creation of such regional framework led at a later stage to the proliferation of cultural/national, including the adoption of co-official languages, such as Asturian and Aragonese (not belonging to the three original nationalities). Linguistic pluralism is also emphasized in the item related to Parliamentary control of the media:

“The law shall regulate the organization and parliamentary control of the means of social communication owned by the State or any public entity and shall guarantee access to those means by significant social and political groups, respecting the pluralism of society and the various languages of Spain”.

In this way, a traditional benchmark of Spanish centralism was eliminated: the idea that there should be a congruence between state, nation and language, in other words, that a state should have only one language, lest its unity be threatened.

In the Constitution the term ‘nation’ (naci—n) and its attached attribute ‘national’ (nacional) are exclusively referred to Spain. There is obviously some confusion with the term ‘Spanish nationality’ (nacionalidad espa—ola) when it refers to citizenship in the singular, while it refers to historical nationalities in the plural:

Once passed by the Parliament, the Constitution was submitted to popular referendum and was accepted throughout Spain, with the notable exception of Euskadi. Nearly all Basque nationalist forces opposed it, with the mainstream PNV inviting its supporters to abstain. A major reason for the boycott was the failure to explicitly mention the restoration of the fueros (Basque local rights), which had been unilaterally abrogated in 1876.

As generally established in the Titulo Preliminar, Spain is not a federal state, but a unitary state. However, its open character permits a wide gamut of options in the direction of regional autonomy, which may ultimately result in the emergence of a federal system. This openness is assured by the fact that the Constitution can be interpreted in different ways, at least in matters
related to the division of power between the central state and the regions.

In short, the Constitution starts as a defense of Spain’s unity, but it *de facto* grants self-government to the Autonomous Communities, and particularly the full respect of regional cultures. In this way, it opens the door to the possibility of federal arrangements, even though it remains unitarist *au fond*.

The next three sections will track the virtually antipodal, polarly divergent developments which, in a mirror-like fashion, led to the end of Yugoslavia. Three main trends will be recognized: the ethnicization of the state (to wit, the rise of Serbian nationalism in the capital, Belgrade), the anti-Constitutional attack (against the 1974 federal Constitution) and the destruction of the federal skeleton (inherited by Tito). In Spain, significantly reverse events had occurred: de-ethnicization of the state, Constitutionalism and the setup of a quasi-federal structure.

**Yugoslavia: its legacy and demise**

Belgrade has been the capital of Yugoslavia since its foundation as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 1 December 1918 -- renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia only in 1929. Serbia had the obvious tendency to propose itself as the 'Piedmont' or 'Prussia' of the Balkans, launching intermittent assimilationist and expansionist campaigns against its neighbours. Yet, Belgrade had always at the same time harboured secessionist tendencies and a Serbian secessionist under-current has emerged periodically.

According to several authors, Serbian elites sought an ethnically homogeneous Greater Serbia since the mid-19th century. With the first Yugoslavia, the tendency became evident, particularly under the dictatorship of King Alexander Karadjordjevic (Alexsandar I, 1888-1934). From the Chetnik guerrilla movement in the 1940s to the rise and fall of Socialist Yugoslavia, Serbism remained a potent underlying factor, below the surface much like a Saharan wadi or a Karst phenomenon of corrosion. Under Tito, Serbianism began to be detectable again by the mid-1960s. By 1972 “a strange alliance was gradually established between the [Communist Party of Serbia] and the so-called ‘loyal nationalists’. The latter were
allowed to organize themselves primarily through the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts (SANU), and the Serbian Writers Association, and to articulate their positions on social issues in the form of scholarly or aesthetic elaborations of the Serbian national question (again, without open challenge to the regime). Feathers were ruffled occasionally, but the regime was, given its nature, remarkably tolerant”. A focus on the mighty influence of Serbian intellectuals and writers is necessary, since “writers, teachers, and professors [in Serbia] have enjoyed a prestige not always bestowed on their colleagues in other countries”.

Tito made the last historical attempt to rein down the beast of Serbian secessionism. As is known, Socialist Yugoslavia was based on universal supra-national principles which emphasized a common Southern Slav identity united by the overarching value of socialist internationalism. Serbia being the first nation in the Balkans after Greece (1822) to have fully enfranchised itself from the Ottoman ‘yoke’ ensuing a centuries-long struggle (1878), it was also the least likely to renounce independence in the name of Yugoslav principles. As Seton-Watson once asserted, ‘Serbia would not let its strong wine dissolve into the weak waters of Yugoslavia’. Ivo Banac has observed that, during the first Yugoslavia (1918-41), the Karadjordjevic monarchy was seen as “the visible symbol of Serbia’s state continuity”. Since Serbia first became a semi-independent Kingdom in 1813, and since post-1918 Yugoslavia was centered on the Serbian monarchy in Belgrade, the new state was considered by most Serbs as a ‘natural’ extension, successor, and continuation of the old Kingdom of Serbia.

After Tito’s death (May 4, 1980), a long period of gestation was needed in order to take full advantage of the regime’s dissolution and reach the historical goal of Serbian reunification. All ensuing events were conceived with skillful mastery by a relatively small elite of intellectuals and politicians. For instance, since the late 1980s mass celebrations related to major historical events punctuated the political calendar, while the politicians’ agenda was replete with revived historical recurrences. In this way, present-day politics could be publicly perceived as the revival of a millennial history and the re-enactment of an epic tradition of national resistance.

The key date of the breakup should be shifted back to September 1986, with the publication of the first draft of a ‘Memorandum’ signed by the major Serbian intellectuals and rife with secessionist statements - although well concealed behind a veil of unitarism, and even anti-nationalism. The decision to produce the document was passed by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science (SANU) in May 1985. It was the first time that a leading institution was to be openly "engaged in political questions”. The document was immediately ‘attacked’ by all
quarters (significantly including its supporters), presaging that it would spell the death toll for Yugoslavia. The self-confessed awareness of the dangers it posed, may be a further proof that 'secession' and its risks had been carefully evaluated. The Memorandum can be defined as the quintessential document of the Yugoslav intellectual nomenklatura made up of pseudo-dissidents who indeed benefited enormously from the regime’s covert support. By referring simultaneously to Yugoslavia and Serbia, to socialism and liberalism, to dissidence and conformism, to nationalism and anti-nationalism, to unity and separation, these intellectuals were masters in double-speak or, in Bakhtinian terms, 'double-voiced discourse'. The long-term accomplishment of this platform was the metamorphosis of Serbia into what has been suitably described as a “schizophrenic society”. However, the base line in the document was a stress on Serbian victimhood. All the embellished paraphernalia of the classical ethnic secessionist arsenal were exploited, recited, underlined and emphasized countless times in all possible formats and shapes: the Serbs were portrayed as victims of ‘genocidal terror’ by the Albanians, of ‘economic exploitation’ by the Slovenes, of cultural assimilation by the Croats, of religious conversion by the Muslims, of systematic historical impairment by the Titoist regime -- including an alleged attempt to replace the Cyrillic alphabet with Latin script and the supposed stealing of Serbian writers by ‘others’. But the undertone was rampantly irredentist as well: As Noel Malcolm notes, “the fundamental argument of the Memorandum was that the ‘Serb people’ throughout Yugoslavia was a kind of primary entity, possessing a unitary set of claims and rights which transcended any mere political or geographical division.É It was the pursuit of that ‘integrity’ which would eventually destroy Yugoslavia”. For the benefit of foreign audiences, this attitude was justified and framed as a wider civilizational crusade to defend the ‘liberal’ West in its struggle against nationalism, communism and 'religious intolerance' (a code-word for Islam). The core argument of Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ had already been formulated by the SANU document at an embryonic level. Perhaps Huntington’s subsequent explanation of the war in Bosnia as the prototypical ‘civilizational clash’ should credit the Memorandum's architects more generously.

The ensuing step was Slobodan Milosevic’s ascent to power as President of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, in 1987. The ‘official’ date of ‘secessionist re-centralization’ can be put at 1989, when Slobodan Milosevic abolished Kosovo’s and Vojvodina’s provincial autonomy, engendering severe protest in all other Republics. Finally, Serbian secessionism culminated with the approval in 1990 of the Republic of Serbia’s
Constitution, framed with the substantial contribution of Borislav Jovic (at that time number two of the regime). In it, the word ‘Yugoslavia’ is never mentioned once. All these events, occurred well before the international community officially acknowledged the breakup of the country.

Secessionism by the centre was made possible in Yugoslavia by the fact that the dominant ethnic group, i.e., the Serbs, did not constitute a demographic majority. At all effects, except for their international diplomatic projection and their military strength, ethnic Serbs were a numerical minority. As such, Belgrade’s elites were left in charge of a delicate balance of interests and fragile coexistence. According to the latest reliable Census before the breakup (1981), Serbs only made up 36.3% of the overall population of former Yugoslavia. In other words, they could not function as a fully dominant group, at least in numerical terms. A consequence of this minority situation (but not minority status) is that demographic imbalance became an emotionally loaded ingredient and a politically charged factor: As the geo-politically dominant group was not demographically so, the corollary was a sense of demographic ‘threat’.

Among other things, this also explains the powerful feelings and fears unleashed by population figures, in particular as indicated by subsequent Censuses: The Albanian demographic explosion, that is the high fertility and birth-rate of Albanians in comparison to Serbs (3 to 1), exerted a crucial emotional impact on the emergence of present-day Serbian nationalism. In Tito’s years, remarkable economic aid had been channelled into Kosovo making it the most heavily subsidized Yugoslav region, but this development strategy did not result in a change of basic demographic patterns. Moreover, in contrast with other nationalities, the Serbs were indigenous to seven of the eight federal units, hence their territorial contiguity was broken apart by what nationalists perceived as Tito’s ‘imposed’ boundaries. If the Serbs would have made up the absolute majority, perhaps Serbian secessionism would have not taken place, as other roads, such as assimilation, hegemonic control and religious conversion would have been possible in order to secure that dominant position. However, this “fear of demographic decline [was] shared by many ethnic groups”, mostly as a consequence of urbanization, and was strongly felt in Croatia. However, it was only in Serbia that it was systematically and unremittingly used to stir up the flames of radical nationalism.

The ambiguous role of the Army

Our case-study analysis must begin by focusing on a paradox: While the regime was
launching a secessionist campaign, the Yugoslav Army (JNA) remained mostly unitarian -- at least during the earliest phases of the conflict. In other words, Belgrade’s secessionist drive clashed with the army’s primary self-identification as defender of the state’s territorial integrity. How to explain this contradiction?

The army’s role as a strongly unitarist actor needs some theoretical underpinning. In many countries, the military establishment is the sector most prone to use force as an answer to ethnic tensions. By definition, the military see themselves as defenders of the sacred unity of their ‘fatherland’. This quasi-religious fervour renders them often impermeable to the possibility of compromise. Relying on their overwhelming military power, often in terms of super-tanks and sophisticate weapons of mass-destruction against home-made rifles and hand-grenades, the military are generally convinced of the possibility of speedily solving ethnic conflicts by force. Protected by an inner conviction of superiority, the Army may succeed in convincing the higher government spheres to act on its directives. This has been partially Boris Yelstin’ error in Chechnya.

When the military are unsuccessful in convincing governments about the need to intervene with repressive measures, they may increase their pressures with threats of directly interfering or stepping in government affairs. Finally, threats of coups d'etat justified to defend ‘national’ unity are not uncommon in semi-democratic or ‘weak’ authoritarian regimes. Even more frequent is the self-legitimation of dictatorial regimes by the raison d'etat of defending the state’s territorial integrity. Yet, many of these typical unitarist dynamics were conspicuously absent in former Yugoslavia.

In order to persuade the Yugoslav military establishment of the inevitability of secession, the Serbian regime had to launch the army into a rapid and hopeless war. Although there was initially resistance within the army to commit troops for such a task, the regime easily overcame these oppositions. Once the army was persuaded of the feasibility of the task, its main concern regarded the possible international reactions to the use of force. This obstacle was easily overcome with an informal meeting: Slobodan Milosevic and Borislav Jovic, vice-president of Milosevic's Serbian Socialist Party (and, until 1991, President of Yugoslavia) organized a trip to Moscow for General Veljko Kadijevic, then Yugoslavia’s Defense Minister. In the corridors of the Kremlin, it was possible to gather first hand information about the wider international repercussion of a possible attack. Moscow was then perceived by Serbian nationalists as a possible ally or, at least, a trustworthy source of information for wider global matters, including
the likely repercussions of Belgrade’s planned actions. Hence, this Russian trip represented the first momentous ‘green light’ given by the international community to Belgrade for the forthcoming war. The trip’s aim was to allay the army’s fears about possible Western reactions -- and it fully succeeded.

According to Silber and Little, in the secret meeting the Soviet Ministry of Defense briefed General Kadijevic about Western, chiefly American, intentions. The hard line Communists then in charge readily identified American and Western double standards: the key message dispensed to the Yugoslav generals was that US and European warnings’ were empty utterances not to be taken seriously: there was no credible threat to Serbian nationalists from the West. Soon after receiving this crucial piece of information, the Yugoslav army launched its military campaign.

Even though the initial trend was to recentralize the country and protect its socialist system from Western pluralist influences (an option strongly defended by Kadijevic), already by 27 June 1990 a basic understanding was reached among the components of the ruling 'triumvirate' (Milosevic, Jovic and Kadijevic): In his ‘diaries’, Jovic admits his "preference ... to forcibly expel them [the Slovenes and the Croats] from Yugoslavia, by simply drawing borders and declaring that they have brought this upon themselves". Yet, although Kadijevic agreed in principle, only one week later (4 July 1990) he seemed to resist the plan, leading, in Jovic's words, to a state of "incredible instability and indecisiveness". On the other hand, Milosevic questioned "whether the military will carry out such an order". In the end, Jovic succeeded in convincing both Kadijevic and Milosevic about the virtue of expelling the two republics. It is important to stress that the term 'expulsion', instead of 'secession', was used by the leaders, and that it had to be carried out with the use of force. The above described situation of "instability and indecisiveness", with the consequent potential for conflict between the army and the regime, made the choice of diversionary violence nearly imperative. These plans were hence informally agreed upon one year before Slovenia’s and Croatia’s secession.

Following Slovenia’s and Croatia’s declaration of independence (25 June 1991), the army was sent to Slovenia two days later with no effective preparation, nor an overall plan to contrast the expectable Slovenian resistance from the TD (Territorial Defence units). Even though an order of disarmament had been passed throughout the Yugoslav territory to surrender all weapons of the Territorial Defence and other possible challengers to the JNA by May 16, 1990, the order could not be implemented in Slovenia due to several factors. Despite their overwhelming might, the JNA forces were insufficiently trained, scarcely motivated and poorly
organized for the event, while its Generals showed to be utterly unprepared to face the ‘unexpected’ resistance from the Slovene territorial defence. At the same time, Milosevic and Jovic knew well that the Slovenes were prepared to resist, but did not even inform Premier Ante Markovic of the planned attack. More importantly, after the first clashes occurred, no reinforcements were forthcoming from Belgrade. All this seems to point clearly to the fact that the regime ‘sent’ the army to its defeat.

What was the main rationale of this strategy? Perhaps the most important one was the effort to avoid a military coup in Belgrade. Since this likelihood was quite predictable if Milosevic proved to be openly conniving with any form of secessionism (which he tacitly did), the most immediate threat to the regime was averted once the army was defeated by its own unitarist logic on the Slovenian battleground. Hence, whereas the Slovenian debacle became a crashing all-out defeat for the JNA, it also was the first successful secessionist battle towards the goal of an entirely Serbian state. The ‘ten days war’ also served to test the reactions of the international community. Its muted response was a further ‘green light’ for the southward escalation of the war.

The army was dispatched with the perfectly ‘legitimate’ pretext (at least from an international law viewpoint) of having to defend border posts, since Slovenia had not been internationally recognized. As it is known, the war lasted little more than a week, from 27 June to 6 July 1991, ending with a massive withdrawal of JNA forces -- the last Yugoslav soldier leaving Slovenian soil on October 25, 1991. The so-called ‘ten-days’ war convinced the entire JNA staff that defending Yugoslav unity by force was unrealistic. This also gave the regime a new lease of life and new leverage in its further dealings with the army. After conceding an humiliating defeat by the Slovene Territorial Defense, great changes became unavoidable in the JNA leading eventually to a series of a purges in which the most unitarian, less nationalist, elements were promptly dismissed from the army. The first phase of Milosevic’s plan was accomplished and the military were forced to retire to a less ambitious, yet more ruthless, war in Croatia to defend more openly the goal of a Greater Serbia.

While no resistance was in the end opposed to repel Slovenia’s secession, the case of Croatia indicates a wholly different strategy: the main rationale became seizing as much land as possible before eventual external forces would agree on a new international order. However, this choice was determined by the course of events unfolding during the first phase of the war. The initial goal of the army was to destroy all forms of resistance in Croatia and bring it down to
its heel. According to Norman Cigar, "in 1990, in fact, the JNA made an offer to the Croatian Communist Party leader, Ivica Racan, asking the latter to call in the JNA as a means of legitimacy, with the JNA installing Racan (Tudjman's vice) and keeping a Communist Croatia within Yugoslavia". But after the siege of Vukovar, such a task revealed itself to be unrealistic.

The self-declared ‘Serb Autonomous Province of Krajina’, formally recognized by the Serbian government in March 1991, was the first instance of ‘open’ ethnic secession in Yugoslavia. The ensuing war to ‘defend’ ethnic Serbs throughout the territory of Croatia rapidly degenerated into the first fully-fledged campaign of ethnic cleansing (etnicko ciscenje). The latter started in 1991 in Croatia and occurred on a parallel track with the local Serbian secessionist drive. An entirely different military logic was here at work: Whereas the war in Slovenia focused on 'soft' military targets, the war in Croatia concentrated mostly on human targets. This implied considerable changes in military priorities and in the army’s hierarchy itself. Those officials most apt to carry out the new task were subsequently promoted to higher ranks, while the Yugoslavist elements were inexorably demoted. Given the international community’s unconvincing response, secessionism and ethnic cleansing escalated by the day.

In a nutshell, Slovenia could opt, if it so chose, to exit immediately from the ‘federation’, whereas Croatia could only exit after radically changing its boundaries. It is important here to stress the ‘could’ factor: the possibility of accepting external secession faute de mieux as a masquerade for promoting central secession. As we have seen, when the JNA attacked Slovenia, it did so on the ground that it had to protect the frontiers of Yugoslavia, rather than protect a Serbian ethnic minority there. The legitimizing principle was entirely different. However suspicious, it could be presented as a last-ditch attempt to hold Yugoslavia together. In contrast, the attack on Croatia could be more easily identified as a Serbian separatist assault to destroy definitely the remaining ‘federation’ from within.

Interestingly, the term 'secession' was not used by either side in their declarations. The preferred Slovene and Croat code-word was instead ‘disassociation’. In Serbia's highest circles, secession was openly mentioned only as an extreme possibility, the predominant discourse still being aggressively oriented towards the maintenance of the exiting state. There is no clear and open pro-secessionist programme at the top level: it is only tacitly accepted behind the curtains. The reason behind this ‘double-voiced discourse’ are understandable: Which head of state could pronounce public statements leading to the possible breakup of the country without risking his/her own political career? A posturing, two-pronged, Janus-faced idiom, a sort of
‘double-speak’, was hence strictly necessary. In Yugoslavia this was facilitated by the
deep-seated terminological ambivalence contained in a constitutive historical legacy: the very
word ‘Yugoslavia’ had opposite meanings for Serbs (and the international community) and
non-Serbs. While for the latter it was genuinely seen as a federation of all Southern Slav
peoples (except Bulgaria), for nationalist Serbs it represented already an incipient Greater
Serbia, the possibility of which had been curbed and fettered by the ‘enemies of the Serbs’ --
most recently by Titoism. Hugh Seton-Watson points out, for instance, the role of the
“nineteenth century radical tradition which considered centralism to be progressive, and
regarded far-reaching regional autonomies as reactionary and disruptive”. According to this
trend, Serbian cultural and political hegemony, and eventually the final Serbianization of
Yugoslavia, were inescapable concomitants of modernity. Because such an extreme centralist
zeal pointed to the eradication of all differences, we can find in it the roots of coming genocides.
Moreover, this genocidal trend was originated in an urban milieux, which thereby bestowed on
it a free hand in selecting defenseless unarmed peasants and town dwellers as its principal
victims. We can already discern here the tradition of urban de-responsibilization and external
blame which has characterized the entire evolution of the most recent Yugoslav conflict (from
1991 to the present).

Additionally, our Yugoslav example has pointed out that it was rather the international
community that strongly opposed the state’s dismemberment, while the group which seized
control of the state strove for its dismantlement. As pointed out by Alexis Heraclides, "ejection,
like secession, is not tolerated by international law". Such an international abhorrence for
secession, together with a search for internal legitimacy, compelled the regime to conceal its
secessionist agenda. Hence, since the very beginning Serbian nationalism's crucial task was to
hide and occult all possible self-reference to either secession or ejection. It had to develop a
unitary semblance in order to gain internal and international acceptance. In its early stages,
Serbism even succeeded in presenting itself as a form of 'civic' integrative patriotism, as
opposed to the periphery's centrifugal nationalisms.

In general, there is no alternative for a centralizing state than concealing all forms of
secessionism: Even a laissez-faire attitude, such as in the Czech and Russian cases, would
imply at least a facade attempt to preserve a modicum anti-secessionist posture, while
proclaiming the devotion to the maintenance of existing borders.

The two main reasons for this contradictory attitude are an *internal* one (pressure from the
army to maintain a strong unitarian state) and an external one (pressures from the international community not to alter existing boundaries). The interaction between these two trends with the contrasting force of Serbian separatism determined the shape of the events which led to the violent breakup of Yugoslavia.

Central secessionism remained the key principle in the overall strategy of Yugoslavia’s unfolding, from the siege of Vukovar (1991) to the war in Kosovo (1999). For instance, the largest amount of ‘ethnic cleansing’ in a specific area before the Kosovo crisis occurred in the wake of Croatia’s recapture of Krajina, which drove nearly 200,000 Serbs from their homes. Yet, the only ‘protest’ on the part of Belgrade came in the form of rhetorical gimmicks. In other words, the refugee crisis was utilized by Belgrade uniquely to raise the status of victimhood of the ‘Serbian nation’ in general, rather than focussing on the affected people, the refugees. There was no real attempt to find a solution for the refugees and there was no convincing endeavor to put pressure on the international community to allow the refugees’ return. Quite the contrary, the regime’s propaganda had long psychologically prepared the local Serbian population for the exodus, by powerfully cultivating a mentality of siege while convincing the natives that they had no future in independent Croatia and that thereby they should join their ethnic kinsmen in an enlarged Serbia. More revealing of the regime’s cynical exploitation of this plight is the fact that the Serbian refugees from Krajina have not been integrated into a Greater Serbia and have instead remained at its margins as pariahs for years after the exodus.

In other words, there was no desire on Belgrade’s part to see a multiethnic Croatia that would include and accept Serbs among others. All attempts were carefully arranged to tear apart all forms of ethnic coexistence. How was this achieved? How was the strategy implemented? One of the answers lies in nationalism’s mirror-like character: Serbia’s secessionism had its complement in Croatia’s derivative secessionism. Several political analysts, casual observers and journalists have discerned the notorious ‘allocation of tasks’ between Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, Croatia’s President. This has been marked particularly in relation to the breakup of Bosnia -- where both Tudjman and Milosevic supported their ethnic ‘kins’. In many respects, Croatian secessionism under the guidance of Tudjman became a mirror image of Serbian secessionism, even though, given the unbalance of coercive means, the former was partly bombed into existence by the latter. It would be hence incorrect to assume that Croatia’s secessionism was the root cause of Yugoslavia’s dissolution, as originally assumed by first-hour political commentators and nationalists alike. It would also be incorrect to assume
that the two secessions were of the same order and shared the same ethos, so that they are equally accountable for the breakup. As in all violent conflicts involving states and ethnic groups, the crucial factor lies in the hands of those welding the most power and the control of coercive means, that is, state elites.

**Externalization and diversionary war: The regime's fatal mistakes**

In the previous section we saw that Slovenia’s and Croatia’s secessions cannot be identified as the factor triggering the war -- as initially diagnosed by the overwhelming majority of political commentators: Serbia was the first mover and the main secessionist player. The JNA was entangled onto the secessionist path by Jovic’s and Milosevic’s words and deeds, but also by its own guilelessness: it remained imbued with Socialist ideology and strictly tied to the CPY (Communist Party of Yugoslavia). Moreover, it maintained a secretive character and was hence socially isolated. For this reason, it took longer than other East European armies to realize that the demise of Communism was historically irreversible. Also, the fact that Tito’s Yugoslavia had embarked on the road of liberalization and free-market reforms much before any other Communist state led the army to contemplate a sort of special immunity from ‘capitalist’ contagion. Finally, with the fall of Communism, the neutral cement needed to preserve the country together had just dissolved.

The Army’s ethnic composition was a crucial factor in granting its compliance to Milosevic’s orders. Already by 1986, well before the breakup, 60% of the higher cadres and officer corps were ethnically Serbs. Despite Tito’s overall efforts to decentralize the country, the army stood as a forlorn exception and was one of the few institutions to remain heavily dominated by Serbs. This situation made the army easily pliable to nationalist manipulation: It was more facile for a Serbian-dominated JNA to belief at face values Milosevic’s appeals for national unity, his tirades against ‘national chauvinism’ and his muttering over foreign conspiracies to break Yugoslavia apart. Thus, the army openly sided with Milosevic and this proved to be an irreversible choice - at least until October 2000.

Amongst the most notable signs of the army's drift towards secession and ethnic ‘purification’ was the transfer of JNA’s Bosnian Serb soldiers to units in the Bosnian territory. This was arranged well in advance to predispose the Republic’s breakup and the Serbian secessionist drive in Bosnia. In this way, Radovan Karadzic could finally have access to “an army of 80,000 soldiers fully equipped with sophisticated weapons which they used to target civilians with”.

The Army's internal tensions between Yugoslavism and Serbism were overcome with a classical ‘diversionary’ strategy: the identification of domestic and foreign scapegoats. This strategy can be identified as 'externalization'. IN this trend, the ramy was facilitated by was
made easier by Tito’s past politics of international ‘non-alignment’, which had then provided the national glue infusing the entire country with a strong sense of identity and autonomy in the international arena.

As the last bastion of Titoism, the army had never completely abandoned the old vocabulary and ideology of non-alignment. But the impact of Serbian nationalism slowly transformed it into a raving paranoia. Despite their farfetchedness and risible character, each of these external targets proved to be crucial in welding the army onto Milosevic’s regime. They provided both army and regime with a pretext, a non-verifiable justification, and face-saving plea for the successive loss of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia. All this was made paradoxically easier by the international situation created after the end of the Cold War.

As one of the leaders who most emblematically incarnated the schizophrenic tensions between Serbism and Yugoslavism at a personal level, General V. Kadijevic became an outspoken conspiracy theorist. In a dejected attempt to resuscitate the bygone Yugoslavist ideology which had shaped his juvenile Partisan struggle during WWII, Kadijevic also claimed that “All possible enemies of socialism and united Yugoslavia had emerged on the scene, Ustashe, Chetnik, Albanian, beloguardist and other factors. We are fighting against the same enemy as in 1941”. In a far reaching revival of pre-WWI geopolitics, Germany's drive to get a 'warm' port on the Adriatic Sea was uncovered, with implicit the idea that Germany was planning to import oil by train.

At the same time, Belgrade was heralded by Western Ž lites for its supposed self-defense against fissiparous national chauvinism and ethnic secessionism. If order was needed, let it then be by sword and fire. Belgrade’s quasi-sacred task of guardian of the status quo, and its very able propaganda to diffuse this image, elevated the regime above all suspects in international circles. The UN and in particular the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (USA, Soviet Union/Russia, China, France, and Britain) put their weight behind Belgrade’s ‘unitarist’ drive. Serbian nationalist elites took up this role with enthusiastic zeal.

Conclusions

Spain's pattern of elite settlement and accommodation has been recognized by most scholars. It was the compromising nature of the new Spanish elites, and the absence of revanchist anti-periphery nationalism in the centre which set the condition for a long but relatively steady process of transition.

For over a century, Spain’s national unity has been challenged by fissiparous trends in the periphery, mainly in the shape of Catalan and Basque nationalism. The powerful influence of
these peripheral movements has decidedly contributed to transform the Spanish state into its present form.

The transition’s success was due to the state’s ability in tackling the issue of peripheral nationalisms. Among the factors which contributed to this success are the symbolic figure of the Monarchy as an element of cohesion; the neutralization of the Army's influence in political life; and the emergence of an eminently pragmatic, a-nationalist leadership in Madrid. Core-periphery relations became the litmus test for the post-Francoist leadership. The new leaders engaged in the formidable task of restructuring the most centralized polity in Western Europe into a model of decentralization and inter-regional accommodation. The root causes of peripheral nationalism were to be found in excessive centralization, mono-culturalism, and un-representativity, which hence led to state illegitimacy -- highlighted in the self-defeating repressive measures the state adopted to respond to this challenge.

Spain's core-periphery model has been weighted against the Yugoslav case. Yugoslavia's collapse was indeed engineered by the centre, rather than the periphery. Therefore the concept of 'secession by the centre' can be appropriately utilized to describe the dynamics leading to Yugoslavia's breakup. Despite the centre's initial half-hearted attempt to hegemonize the transition process, we finally have the centre's radical withdrawal from an all-Yugoslavia 'project', by a progression of acts and facts clearly leading towards the separation of Serbs from non-Serbs -- a series of events which cumulatively amounted to secession.

One important reason for these contrasting patterns is demographic: the Serbs did not constitute a majority within Yugoslavia. By 1981, they only made up 36.3% of the overall population. At all effects, except for their international diplomatic projection and military strength, ethnic Serbs were a numerical minority. As such, Belgrade’s elites could not exert an hegemonic influence as traditionally postulated by centre-periphery models. This paper has adopted an institutionalist approach -- although in previous works I have theorized the centrality of culture.

There are studies comparing Spain and ex-Yugoslavia (sometimes along with other
countries), trying to disentangle their opposing trajectories. One important approach by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan explains political disintegration, as opposed to political integration, in terms of different 'electoral sequences': In Yugoslavia regional elections preceded general or state-wide elections leading to a pristine ethnicization of politics with an ascendancy of ethnic parties, the opposite sequence (from general to regional elections) took place in Spain. The consequence was a transition process less ethnically polarized.

Another possible interpretation is to disavow the 'federal' character of Socialist Yugoslavia and other Communist countries, because federations require a democratic grounding and thus cannot operate within a democratic deficit or lack of representativeness. Yugoslavia was nominally a 'federal' state, but it is undeniable that it was actually submitted to continuous and powerful centralizing pressures—despite some scholars pinpoint that the system had consociational features, while others describe Yugoslavia as a loose union of semi-sovereign states at least from 1974 to Milosevic’s advent.

All these interpretations can be reinforced by a general rule of the thumb: in any multinational polity, reversal of existing federal arrangements (re-centralization) leads to disintegration. This is the fate incurred by several countries, either actual federations or 'federations by name' only (Ethiopia-Eritrea, Pakistan-Bangladesh, Georgia-Abkhazia and -Ossetia, Nigeria-Biafra, Burma). As federalism is a one-way avenue, it rarely can envisage or sustain U-turns.

Yugoslavia can also be discerned as a sui generis case of 'secessionism by the centre', whereas, beyond the unitary rhetoric blazed abroad to achieve international support, the regime was actually pursuing a campaign of ethnic separation of Serbs from non-Serbs.

Finally, a more sociological explanation addresses the boundary-building character of nationalism in environments distinguished by extreme assimilation, secularization and loss of the local culture. Fence-rising was an intrinsic feature of Serbian nationalism, yet, since visible differences between Serbs and non-Serbs were nuanced, meaningless and even non-existent, boundaries could only be erected by the widespread use of mass violence.

The factors above need to be analysed in the light of comparative evidence drawn from the contrasting
experiences of more successful cases of federalization and democratic transition in multi-national societies.

The relationship between the two case-studies is therefore inverse: the classical centre-periphery model found in Spain sees the former central government as naturally centralizing and the periphery resisting this centralization. Thus, the new elites had to recognize the irreversibility of this trend by adopting quasi-federal solutions. The Yugoslav pattern points instead to the opposite direction: the centre attempted to recentralize the country and impose some form of Serbian hegemony, only to withdraw at a later stage into a secessionist project.

In other respects, Milosevic's' seizure of power on an all-Serbia ticket was a 'revolutionary' act prodded by a group of radical nationalists who spoke in the name of Yugoslavia but acted in the name of Serbia alone. It was revolutionary insofar as it totally subverted the original political order inherited by Tito. Its foundation was an attack on the 1974 Constitution which had granted coexistence and stability until the Milosevic era.

The aim of this article has been to challenge the classical centre-periphery model by proposing an instance of capsized, topsy-turvy relationship, where the centre detached itself from the periphery. This case may prove to be relatively exceptional, yet it is perfectly plausible and replicable, but missing from traditional centre-periphery models. Moreover, Serbia's secession occurred on a purely ethnic basis (Greater Serbia), rather than on a territorial-civic one, that is, based on the existing state boundaries of the Federal Republic of Serbia. Finally, this stress on ethnicity, rather than culture or territory, helps to clarify why so much blood has been shed.