

THE SERBIAN RIGHT-WING  
PARTIES AND INTELLECTUALS IN  
THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1934–1941

*Edited by*  
Dragan Bakić



INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES  
OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

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## Introduction

This edited volume embarks on an in-depth analysis of the main features of the political ideology and activities of the Serbian right wing from the assassination of King Alexander Karadjordjević in October 1934 to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's destruction in April 1941 during the Second World War. This is a period that constitutes a distinctive era in Yugoslav history, which also coincides with the Europe-wide rise of right-wing extremism, a congruence that justifies the chosen time-frame. In Yugoslavia, the royal dictatorship inaugurated on 6 January 1929 formally continued under the three-member regency council, in which only Prince Paul Karadjordjević, the late Alexander's cousin, mattered. In reality, the regency regime was something of a paradox: it retained the late sovereign's dictatorial legislation but applied it rather liberally, seeking to appease the political tensions left over from Alexander's reign. Central to this was an attempt to find a solution to the Croatian separatism, which had not been subdued by Alexander's firm hand and the officially imposed ideology of integral Yugoslavism – a common identity for all the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes replacing their separate national identities.<sup>1</sup> The national question in Yugoslavia, primarily the Serbo-Croatian conflict, remained a scourge that prevented the country from achieving internal stability and had an adverse effect on the Kingdom's international position.

<sup>1</sup> Stevan Pavlović, *Yugoslavia* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1971); Branislav Gligorić, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva rata (protivrečnosti nacionalne politike)," *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*, 21, 1–4 (1986): 71–97; Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, 3 vols (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), I: *Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914–1941*; Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918–1841*, 3 vols (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1997); Dejan Djokić, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: a History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007).



This brings us to the following point: an essential feature of the Serbian right wing is that it operated in a multinational state – with regard to its ethnic structure, Yugoslavia can best be compared with the First Czechoslovak Republic, although the latter never succumbed to authoritarian rule. For that reason, Yugoslavia’s experience had most similarities with countries that were both multinational and ruled by authoritarian regimes, such as Poland and Romania. The present volume thus takes into account these similarities and embarks on a comparative analysis. The importance of this background is reflected, most notably, in the fact that the (predominantly) Serbian far right/fascist movements expounded Yugoslavism rather than Serbian nationalism as their chief ideological tenet. However, the opposite was the case with the ruling Yugoslav Radical Union (*Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, JRZ), the political development of which was marked by the gradual abandonment, effective if not nominal until 1939, of the one-Yugoslav-nation concept as a way of diffusing national tensions. To better understand this seeming paradox, the volume examines the place of the faltering process of Yugoslav nation- and state-building in the vision and practical politics of Serbian rightists. In addition, it explores how the rightists perceived national minorities and what policies towards them they favored and recommended (national minorities, in this case, are understood to comprise all non-South Slav population in Yugoslavia, mostly Germans, Hungarians and Albanians).<sup>2</sup>

But what of the far-right and fascist tendencies among the Serbian rightists in Yugoslavia and how does a study of them fit in with the existing literature? The study of the far right in Europe in the interwar period has long been a vibrant and contentious field in scholarly debate,

<sup>2</sup> Dušan Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933–1941* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1966); Šandor Mesaroš, *Madjari u Vojvodini 1929–1941* (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet, Institut za istoriju, 1989); Petar Kačavenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991); Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastor-čad kraljeva: nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005); Slobodan G. Markovich, “Ethnic and National Minorities in Serbia and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,” in *Minorities in the Balkans. State Policy and Inter-Ethnic Relations (1804–2004)*, ed. Dušan T. Bataković (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2011), 89–108.

animated by the unprecedented horrors that the fascist ideology and policies brought to our historical experience. The case of interwar Yugoslavia has been of interest to fascist<sup>3</sup> studies primarily because of the *Ustasha* movement, which came to rule the Nazi-puppet Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during the Second World War and was responsible for the genocide committed against Serbs, Jews and Roma.<sup>4</sup> The Serb-dominated fascist movement, embodied largely in the ZBOR movement, led by Dimitrije Ljotić, which lagged far behind the *Ustasha* in terms of its strength and role in the war, has also been a subject of research. Unfortunately, much of the older literature is tendentious, reflecting the apologetic attitude of certain authors (some of them former members of ZBOR) who have often endeavored to exculpate the organization from its fascist ideology and collaboration with the Third Reich or, alternatively, a product of the state-sponsored sort of historiography in post-1945 Yugoslavia, which fixed the image of a fascist

<sup>3</sup> The term “fascist” is used throughout this volume to denote fascism in its generic sense, not confined to the specific experience of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, in keeping with the decades-long historiographical practice.

<sup>4</sup> Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Liber, 1977); Bogdan Krizman’s works: *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1978); *NDH između Hitlera i Musolinija* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983); *Ustaše i Treći Reich*, 2 vols (Zagreb: Globus, 1983); Raphael Israeli, *The Death Camps of Croatia: Visions and Revisions, 1941–1945* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012); Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: the Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Nevenko Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia: Origins and Theory* (Leiden, 2014); Rory Yeomans, ed., *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015); Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016) [translated from Croatian by Sonia Wild Bičanić and Nikolina Jovanović]; Goran Miljan, *Croatia and the Rise of Fascism: the Youth Movement and the Ustasha during WW2* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Gideon Greif, *Yasenovats = Jasenovac: Auschwitz of the Balkans* (Beograd: Knjiga komerc; Israel: Institute for Holocaust “Shem Olam”: Ono Academic College; USA: The Foundation for Holocaust Education Projects in cooperation with the Poland Jewish Cemeteries Restoration Project, 2018); Giorgio Cingolan and Pino Adriano, *Nationalism and Terror: Ante Pavelić and Ustasha Terrorism from Fascism to the Cold War* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2019) [translated from Italian by Riccardo James Vargiu].

ZBOR in contrast to the victorious communists.<sup>5</sup> These crude paroxysms have been remedied more recently in balanced scholarly accounts of Ljotić and his followers, albeit with different interpretations of their ideological outlook.<sup>6</sup> Aside from its notorious role in Serbia under the Nazi occupation, for which it has largely attracted scholarly attention, ZBOR was a negligible political force in Yugoslavia in its own right (winning no more than 1 percent of votes in the 1935 and 1938 general elections, not enough to enter the parliament).

It was, however, the JRZ that underpinned the regime of Prince Paul, the nature of which can best be described, like a number of other regimes of that time, particularly in South-Eastern Europe, as conservative authoritarianism. Unlike the more extreme rightists, the JRZ has not elicited too much interest among historians, in contrast to the prodigious historiographical production relating to most other aspects of Yugoslavian interwar history. To some extent, this can be attributed to the fact that very little of the party archives, that of JRZ or others, survived the turmoil of 1941–1945, but it also reflects the earlier lack of

<sup>5</sup> Ratko Parežanin, *Drugi Svetski Rat i Dimitrije V. Ljotić* (Munich: Iskra, 1971); Dragan Subotić, *Zatomljena misao: o političkim idejama Dimitrija Ljotića* (Beograd: Clio, 1994); Dragan Subotić, *Srpska desnica u 20. veku*, 2 vols (Beograd: Institut za političke studije, 2004–2006); Milutin Propadović, *Dimitrije V. Ljotić, Zbor i Komunistička partija Jugoslavije 1934–1945. Prilozi za istinu o JNP Zbor* (Beograd: Iskra, 2012). For an officially proscribed communist account, see Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića 1934–1945* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Miloš Martić, “Dimitrije Ljotić and the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor, 1935–1945,” *East European Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1980), 219–39; Mirko Bojić, *Jugoslavenski narodni pokret „Zbor” 1935–1945: Jedan kritički prilaz* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1996); Jovan Byford, “Willing Bystanders: Dimitrije Ljotić, ‘Shield Collaboration’ and the Destruction of Serbia’s Jews,” in Rebecca Haynes and Martyn Rady, eds, *In the shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 295–312; Vasilije Dragosavljević, „Ideološki uticaji evropskog fašizma na JNP Zbor (1934–1940),” in Zoran Janjetović, ed., *Istorijska tribina mladih saradnika* (Beograd: INIS, 2013), 93–109; Christian Kurzydłowski, “The early ideological influences of Dimitrije Ljotić: the makings of a fascist and traitor?,” in Dragan Aleksić, ed., *Srbi i rat u Jugoslaviji 1841. godine: zbornik radova* (Beograd: INIS, 2014), 31–57; Zoran Janjetović, “Dimitrije Ljotić and World War II,” *Istorija 20. veka*, 1 (2018): 93–118; Rastko Lompar, “Afera ‘Tehnička unija’ i veze JNP Zbora sa nacističkom Nemačkom 1935–1941,” *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2020): 85–102.

interest in this sort of historical inquiry. Notable exceptions include Dragan Tešić's book and Šerbo Rastoder's MA thesis (another product of the official historiography in communist Yugoslavia) on the organization of JRZ in Serbia and Montenegro respectively, and a number of essays discussing specific events, themes and regions.<sup>7</sup> Despite being organized as a single party, the JRZ was effectively a coalition of the old, well-established, conservative political parties with a considerable following across Yugoslavia, with the noted exception of Croatia. These assembled conservatives consisted of a faction of the Serbian Radicals, the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (*Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija*, JMO), which represented the majority of Muslims (nowadays Bosniaks) from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the clerical Slovene People's Party (*Slovenska ljudska stranka*, SLS). This in itself was an obstacle to creating an ideological platform that would be common to all its constituent parts.

The JRZ has been accused of exhibiting fascist leanings, especially during the premiership of Milan Stojadinović (also the first president of the party), admittedly more often in the public discourse than in the relevant scholarly literature. Such literature that exists on the Stojadinović government has failed to produce a sustained analysis of JRZ's ideological outlook and its fascist trappings in the later phase of Stoja-

<sup>7</sup> Dragan Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica u Srbiji, 1935–1939* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997); Šerbo Rastoder, "Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica u Crnoj Gori 1935–1939. godine" (unpublished MA thesis, Filozofski fakultet u Beogradu, 1987); Ranko Končar, "Formiranje Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice u Vojvodini," *Istraživanja*, 13 (1990): 179–192; Šerbo Rastoder, "Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica u Crnoj Gori i odnos prema fašizmu," *Zbornik radova profesora i saradnika Filozofskog fakulteta*, 1990, 265–276; Šerbo Rastoder, "Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica i opštinski izbori u Crnoj Gori 1936. godine," *Istorijski zapisi*, god. 44, br. 3/4 (1991), 121–136; Vladan Virijević, "Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica u Studeničkom srežu 1935–1941. godine," *Novopazarski zbornik*, 23 (1999): 263–275; Bojan Simić, "Partijski presburo Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice," *Arhiv*, god. 6, br. 1/2 (2005): 73–78; Bojan Simić, "Posete kluba studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice 'Slovenski jug' Italiji 1938. godine," *Tokovi istorije*, 2 (2011): 81–92; Rade Ristanović, "Ideološka orijentacija članova Kluba studenata JRZ Slovenski jug," *Tokovi istorije*, 1 (2016): 143–164.

dinović's term in office.<sup>8</sup> The accusations leveled against Stojadinović were mostly based on the external features of the political style with which he imbued JRZ, most notably during the election campaign in late 1938 – but it has never been suggested that his ideology was fascist. Contrary to conventional wisdom, it was during the premiership of Dragiša Cvetković, Stojadinović's successor as both Prime Minister and the head of JRZ, that signs of genuine political radicalization and even fascistization began to rear their head. It was then that, first, the authoritarian impulse of the regime grew stronger and later led to outright fascistization, as exemplified in the anti-Masonic and anti-Semitic campaign, fascistization of the party youth and the increasing repression against political opponents. These incontrovertible facts have not been appreciated in historiography, which is perhaps not surprising given that virtually nothing has been written about JRZ under Cvetković, as foreign entanglements on the eve of the Second World War seem to have drawn all historiographical attention. This is also unsurprising as Europe's "old", conservative right wing has generally received much less scholarly attention in historiography than outright fascism. Nevertheless, there are some works that focus specifically on the ambivalent relationship between the traditional right, which epitomized the political establishment, and the "new", radical – commonly referred as fascist – (far) right.<sup>9</sup> Marco Bresciani's latest edited volume brings the

<sup>8</sup> Dejan Djokić, "'Leader' or 'Devil'? Milan Stojadinović, Prime Minister of Yugoslavia (1935–39) and his Ideology," in Haynes and Rady, *In the Shadow of Hitler*, 153–168 is a useful work, but still far from an exhaustive analysis of the topic. Todor Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića* (Beograd, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985) is more concerned with the internal and external policies of the Stojadinović government than party politics and right-wing ideology; also, this monograph remained unfinished because of the author's sudden death, which left the most important, latter phase of its topic under-researched. The analysis on which the relevant chapter of this volume is building is in Dragan Bakić, "Mussolini of Yugoslavia? The Milan Stojadinović Regime and the Impact of Italian Fascism, 1937–1939," *Qualestoria. Rivista di storia contemporanea* XLIX, No. 1 (Giugno 2021): 243–267.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber, eds, *The European Right: A Historical Profile* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965); Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives* (London: Routledge, 1990); Martin Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right in Europe, 1919–1945* (London: Longman, 2000).

most recent theoretical insights and empirical findings about the complex interactions between heterogeneous elements of the interwar European right wing, including in Yugoslavia.<sup>10</sup> Given the defining features of the historical era in question, the present volume inevitably focuses on the distinction between different strands of right-wingers, while acknowledging some commonalities in their ideological make-up and policies.

After his fall from power, Stojadinović founded the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS), which became a staunch opponent of the government, especially in respect of their agreement with the Croats, which marked the end of a unitary, centralist Yugoslavia. This new and short-lived party, as it was soon suppressed by the government, seems to have firmly stood at the conservative right wing of the political spectrum and, until now, has never been a subject of serious discussion in historical scholarship.<sup>11</sup> On the far right end of the spectrum, the present volume provides an account of the interesting and under-researched example of the politically irrelevant yet dynamic and flamboyant Yugoslav People's Party (*Jugoslovenska narodna stranka*, also known as *Borbaši*, meaning Combatants) and its charismatic leader Svetislav Hodjera, which expounded integral Yugoslavism and aped fascist methods in their political activism.<sup>12</sup> Once again, the imi-

<sup>10</sup> Marco Bresciani, ed., *Conservatives and Right Radicals in interwar Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021). Mark Biondich's chapter "The crisis of legitimacy and the rise of the radical Right in interwar Yugoslavia" is a useful overview of the Yugoslav case, but it contains no original research.

<sup>11</sup> Branko Nadoveza, *Srpska radikalna stranka Milana Stojadinovića* (Beograd: Srpska radikalna stranka, 2006) has published many of the documents pertaining to the SRS, but his collection falls short of the required scholarly standards. Some of the documents are also given in the valuable diary of Stojadinović's associate Radoje Janković, *Kako je ubijana Kraljevina Jugoslavija*, ed. Danica Otašević (Novi Sad: Prometej, Čačak: Narodna biblioteka "Vladislav Petković Dis," 2021). The only brief historiographical reflection on the SRS is to be found in Bojan Simić, "Granice Srbije u vidjenjima Srpske radikalne stranke pre i nakon Drugog svetskog rata," *Leskovački zbornik* LXII (2022): 301–306.

<sup>12</sup> For useful works providing some background information about *Borbaši*, see Aleksandar Rastović, "Program Jugoslovenske narodne stranke," *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 74 (2006): 125–132; Bogumil Hrabak, "Jugoslovenska narodna stranka 1935. i 1936. godine," *Novopazarski zbornik*, 31 (2008): 73–82; and particu-

tation of certain fascist methods does not necessarily imply an espousal of the fascist ideology, and special reference is given to this problem in relation to *Borbaši*.

In addition, there were also some prominent intellectuals whose outlook and activities informed, to a certain degree, the political climate of right-wing politics in Serbia/Yugoslavia. After having been entirely forgotten in historiography, some of these figures have come into focus over the last two decades because of their role in German-occupied Serbia during World War Two. Historians of the collaborationist government of General Milan Nedić (1941–1944) have encountered them – of special interest here are the radical rightist writers Vladimir Velmar-Janković and Stanislav Krakov – as important officials and propagandists and traced the roots of their collaboration with the Germans, at least partly, back to their extreme right-wing stance in the interwar Yugoslavia.<sup>13</sup> Their fellow writer, Dragiša Vasić, was not a collaborationist; he has drawn attention primarily on account of his significance as a political advisor to General Dragoljub Mihailović, commander of the royalist resistance movement best known as Chetniks. But Vasić was never an extreme rightist and, in fact, had been considered sympathetic to the Soviet experiment in the 1920s before becoming established among Serbian conservatives as one of the leading figures in the Serbian Cultural Club (*Srpski kulturni klub*).<sup>14</sup> No

larly Rastko Lompar, “Politička biografija Svetislava Hodjere,” *Studenti i nauka: Studkon*, 2 (2017): 39–49.

<sup>13</sup> Ljubinka Škodrić, *Ministarstvo prosvete i vera u Srbiji 1941–1944: Sudbina institucije pod okupacijom* (Beograd: Arhiv Srbije, 2009); Aleksandar Stojanović, *Srpski civilni/kulturni plan Vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012); Aleksandar Stojanović, “Ekstremna srpska medjuratna desnica – ideološka osnova srpskih kolaboracionista 1941–1945,” in Zoran Janjetović (ed.), *Istorijska tribina mladih saradnika* (Beograd: INIS, 2013), 111–134; Aleksandar Stojanović, *Ideje, politički projekti i praksa vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2015); Zoran Janjetović, *Collaboration and Fascism under the Nedić Regime* (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2018); Marijana Mraović, *Od surove stvarnosti do alternativne realnosti: Propaganda vlade Milana Nedića 1941–1944*. (Beograd: Medija centar Odbrana, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Kosta Nikolić, “Dragiša Vasić: skica za portret nacionalnog revolucionara,” *Istorija 20. veka*, 1 (1997): 97–106; Miloš Timotijević, *Dragiša Vasić (1885–1945) i srpska nacionalna ideja* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2016).

doubt the most famous among these writers is Miloš Crnjanski, a towering figure of Serbian literature. His wider social engagement, particularly his clashes with fellow literati and renowned publishers, were at their heart political polemics of a nationalist and visceral anticommunist with what he saw as pernicious influences on Serbian/Yugoslav literature and society at large. But it was in his short-lived journal *Ideje* that he revealed his political views most fully. In it, Crnjanski explored, like so many intellectuals and politicians, “the third way” possibilities between the abhorred Bolshevism and the discredited, impotent liberalism, flirting with some of the solutions offered by fascism. Crnjanski’s subsequent service in Berlin and Rome, as well as his reports from Spain during the Spanish Civil War as a journalist of the governmental newspaper *Vreme* (he found himself in General Franco’s headquarters) are the focus of our investigation as indicators of his own convictions.<sup>15</sup> The above-mentioned writers were important right-wing figures in Serbian literary, public and political life in Yugoslavia and, as such, were ostracized from the history of Serbian literature by the new communist authorities after 1945.

Special attention is also dedicated to prominent dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In particular, the volume seeks to address the often-repeated allegations that Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović were sympathetic towards extreme nationalism and even fascism. Another interesting theme concerns the connection, if there was one, between the rise of virulent right-wing nationalism and the fact that, after 1935, both Velimirović and Popović began to abandon the concept of Yugoslavism, which had earlier been central to their political theologies. Their views and activities are subjected to a critical examination usually absent from partisan polemics so typical of most of the writings on these two controversial clerics. In addition, light is

<sup>15</sup> The articles Crnjanski published in various journals and the official reports he wrote while working as the government Central Press Bureau correspondent were recently published in Miloš Crnjanski, *Politički članci 1919–1939*, ed. Časlav Nikolić (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, Catena Mundi, 2017) and Miloš Crnjanski, *Diplomatski izveštaji 1936–1941*, eds Aleksandar Stojanović and Rastko Lompar (Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, Catena Mundi, 2019) respectively.



shed on the emergence of different interpretations of the notion of *Saint Sava* (*Svetosavlje*), a distinctive Serbian variant of the Orthodox Christian tradition, some of which were advanced by their younger associates gathered around the student journal of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, such as Dimitrije Najdanović and Djoko Slijepčević – later prominent ideologues of ZBOR – and which seemed to have come close to fascist ideology.

The general idea behind scrutinizing the work and publicly aired views of these selected individuals, eminent writers and clerics is that it might provide more nuanced and distinctive insights into the complex reality of right-wing attitudes than those obtained from studying the bureaucratic machinery of political parties and government agencies. In order to expand our understanding of their writings and public utterances based on which the conclusions about their right-wing positions tend to be drawn, it is necessary to have a firm grasp of what they did and not just of the historical context in which they operated. To do so more comprehensively, this volume brings a multidisciplinary perspective, including that of a literary historian and a philosopher/theologian (Svetlana Šeatović and Vladimir Cvetković, respectively) and their reading of a number of essential texts, lectures and speeches of the personalities concerned. We hope that such a multidisciplinary approach can broaden the scope of inquiry and allow a more sophisticated differentiation of right-wing attitudes and their expressions in political and public discourse.

In methodological terms, most of the present volume is rooted in historical inquiry as it undertakes an empirical exploration of different strands of the Serbian right wing in Yugoslavia. But since any study of right-wing politics in the late interwar years is bound to reflect on the influence and impact of the most radical, fascist ideology and practice, this volume also examines Serbian right-wing politics in relation to theories of fascism. In this respect, it takes as a starting point the “new consensus”, as Roger Griffin called it, that is to say an approach that prioritizes fascist ideology over structures and points out that generic fascism was a transnational phenomenon, emphasizing the common ground in various fascist movements and regimes (a sort of fascist international) despite their conflicting objectives stemming from aggres-

sive foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> Griffin's influential definition posits that fascism is a revolutionary political ideology "whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism" – in other words, it is the palingenetic myth (professing the rebirth of a nation) that distinguishes fascism from the conservative and radical/extreme far right. Griffin's paradigm is combined with the different yet complementary approach suggested by Stanley Payne, who argues that a movement can be labeled fascist if it meets certain criteria. Those include "common points of ideology and goals, the fascist negations, and also special common features of style and organization."<sup>17</sup> Payne then offers a more succinct definition: "a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization, and the Führerprinzip, positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normatize war and/or the military virtues."<sup>18</sup> In his typology of the authoritarian nationalist interwar right, Payne distinguishes between the fascist right, radical right and conservative right. He tends, just like Griffin, to regard ZBOR as an example of the radical right, at least prior to its full-scale fascistization and collaboration with the Germans during the wartime occupation of Yugoslavia. However, both of these authors came to their conclusions by consulting the scarce literature available in English. This volume challenges their view on the assumption that a thorough examination of primary sources and secondary works in Serbian and their interpretation, informed by the analytical devices of Griffin's and Payne's own theoretical frameworks, can lead to a different assessment of ZBOR's ideological nature.

The scope of the volume and its conceptual framework also means that one of its central themes concerns the dynamics between the "old",

<sup>16</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: The Pinter Press, 1991). For another view that understands fascism primarily as ideology and offers a critical review of more recent theoretical approaches, see Roger Eatwell, "On defining the 'Fascist Minimum': The centrality of ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1996): 303–319. The constraints of space preclude a more in-depth overview of the vast literature in the field of fascism studies.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 6–7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

conservative and the radical, “new” right. In particular, the examination of the relationship between the conservative and fascist right takes its cue from the concept recently formulated by António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis: they view that relationship as fluid and reflexive, involving a (differing) degree of mutual influence and selective borrowing, creating different hybrid forms of right-wing politics according to the specifics of a particular national setting and, ultimately, leading the conservatives towards a radicalization of their attitudes and policies.<sup>19</sup> The main assumption is that such an approach would be a useful tool for an analysis of the Serbian right wing, and particularly the JRZ regime, explaining why some fascist features of style and political activism could be observed in a political party although it was completely devoid of any ideological fascist traits. This is important because, after all, specialists in the field and, even more so, the general public will never stop asking whether this or that right-wing organization or individual were fascist, and terminological clarity is necessary to allow us to make crucial distinctions between various actors on the right-wing scene without obscuring the different shades of right-wing attitudes that resist a clear-cut categorization. This is also the reason why it seems beneficial to apply both Griffin’s and Payne’s concept of defining fascism which, taken together, might provide the most adequate standards for placing Serbian right-wingers in the appropriate sections of the right-wing spectrum. Our analysis of fascist components, or the lack thereof, will resort to a frame of reference immanent to fascist studies: ideology, corporatism, youth organization, fascist style etc. The permeation of far-right/fascist teachings and political activism and their impact on traditional conservative constituencies is highlighted by the selected examples of prominent intellectuals whose personal development and careers might sometimes illustrate Costa Pinto’s and Kallis’s approach in an even more striking manner than an investigation of political organizations. The view is taken here that closer scru-

<sup>19</sup> António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (eds), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Aristotle Kallis, “Fascism and the Right in Interwar Europe: Interaction, Entanglement, Hybridity,” in Nicholas Doumanis (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 301–322.

tiny of these individuals and the trajectories of their intellectual and political engagement can substantially contribute to our understanding of how the elements of fascist ideology and practices penetrated conservative constituencies and, in doing so, blurred the boundaries between the fascist and the traditional right. This might provide a valuable corrective to the previous interpretations, which did not appreciate the complexity of the multi-layered process of diffusion of the fascist ideology and practice and the diverse results it produced in this or that personality, largely for the lack of the (then) appropriate theoretical underpinnings.<sup>20</sup>

Especially with regard to the most radical and fascist right, it is intriguing to see whether the nation-building of the newly proclaimed Yugoslav people corresponds with Griffin's key concept of the paligenetic myth. In theoretical terms, the relevant chapters in the volume are based on Rodgers Brubaker's and Oliver Zimmer's works, which underscore the importance of the relations between the victors and the defeated (or dissatisfied) after the First World War and minority issues as fertile soil for the radicalization of nationalism and the growth of fascism.<sup>21</sup> The model applied here can be visualized as a triangle: the views of the Serbian right wing – the defeated and/or irredentist neighboring countries – Yugoslavia's national minorities and the official attitude towards them. An attempt is made to discuss the Serbian/Yugoslav case in the transnational context by comparing it, for example,

<sup>20</sup> A case in point is the otherwise well-researched Olivera Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma: percepcija fašizma u beogradskoj javnosti 1933–1941*, 2 vols (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2010). Some particularly wild claims on what can be considered fascist are made in Nenad Petrović, *Ideologija varvarstva. Fašističke i nacionalsocijalističke ideje kod intelektualaca u Beogradu (1929–1941)* (Beograd: Zadruga Res Publica, Most Art, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Rodgers Brubaker, "Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1995): 189–218; Rodgers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Oliver Zimmer, "Boundary Mechanisms and Symbolic Resources: Towards a Process-Oriented Approach to National Identity," *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2003): 173–192; Oliver Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890–1940* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

with the similar cases of Poland and Romania (both countries had sizeable national minorities).

On a more empirical note, the volume explores the impact of the international environment on the signs of fascistization of the Yugoslav regime, such as the fascist trappings of JRZ or, even more ominously, the anti-Semitic legislation on the eve of Yugoslavia's involvement in the war. It has already been observed that foreign policy reasons necessitated the adoption of fascist features during the Stojadinović government as a pragmatic response to the overwhelming might of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Yet, such an assertion has never been subjected to systematic analysis and often had an air of dismissal. Therefore, the volume minutely discusses this problem, starting from an appreciation of the international position of Yugoslavia and the pressure exerted by the Axis Powers, emphasizing that the latter was not limited to general concerns such as geographic proximity, potential military threat and economic leverage, but also involved specific demands from Berlin and Rome for Yugoslavia to leave the League of Nations and join the Anti-Comintern Pact, which would draw the country away from democratic France and Britain and align it with the Axis in the international constellation.<sup>22</sup> Toying with fascist trappings under Stojadinović was a device successfully employed for the purpose of cultivating the country's relations with Italy and Germany without having to make a substantial change in its foreign policy direction, such as assuming specific commitments vis-à-vis the Axis Powers. It continued under his successor in a much more pronounced manner, which reflected both the increasingly dominant position of Germany in 1939–1941 and the inherent weakness of the Cvetković government. From this viewpoint, it is argued here that Costa Pinto's and Kallis's approach needs to be broadened to allow the possibility that the radicalization of a conservative authoritarian regime was not driven, at least in this case, just by reflexive adaptations undertaken because of domestic political impulses, but was equally, if not more so, informed by compelling foreign policy reasons.

<sup>22</sup> More emphasis on this important point, usually absent from discussions of Yugoslavia's foreign policy, is given in Dalibor Denda, *Šlem i šajkača: vojni faktor i jugoslovensko-nemački odnosi (1918–1941)* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2019), 479–480.

Of course, political radicalization in the period concerned had its precursors, and the major influence came from neighboring Italy.<sup>23</sup> Most notably, in 1921, the ardent integral Yugoslav youths came together in the Dalmatian town of Split to form what would become known in the following year as the Organization of Yugoslav nationalists (*Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista*, ORJUNA). Communist historiography treated this organization as pro-fascist from its ideological standpoint,<sup>24</sup> whereas more recently certain features of the fascist ideology and practice have been noted from the perspective of modern theory of fascism, and it is debated whether ORJUNA did or did not develop into a fully-fledged fascist movement.<sup>25</sup> There is no doubt that ORJUNA was similar in some respects to Italian Fascists, although the latter were the main external enemies of Yugoslavia: ORJUNA had detachments reminiscent of Mussolini's *squadri*, which were uniformed and used for violent action against political opponents, and workers', women's and students' sections.<sup>26</sup> Seeing themselves as the new generation that would achieve the triumph of radical Yugoslav nationalism, ORJUNA members used violence against both the Croatian separatists, be it the pre-1941 *frankists* or Stjepan Radić's Peasant Party, and the Serbian Radicals, who were accused of Greater Serbian nationalism and the failure to move towards unitary Yugoslavism, as well as against communists and, on occasion, even the gendarmerie. Moreover, there were clear signs that ORJUNA was increasingly anti-liberal in its out-

<sup>23</sup> Milan Ristović, *Mussolini ante portas: italijanski fašizam i jugoslovensko susjedstvo* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Branislav Gligorijević, "Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Orjuna)," *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova*, 5 (1963): 315–393.

<sup>25</sup> Jovo Bakić, "Fašizam u Jugoslaviji," *Nova srpska politička misao*, vol. XI, no. 1–4 (2004): 21–44; Mladen Djordjević, "Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (ORJUNA): istorijat – ideologija – uticaji," *Nova srpska politička misao*, vol. XII, no. 1–4 (2005): 187–220; Ivan Bošković, Orjuna – ideologija i književnost (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2006); Stevo Djurašković, "Ideologija organizacije jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Orjuna)," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 1 (2011): 225–247; Vasilije Dragosavljević, *Ideje fašizma u Kraljevini SHS: Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (1921–1929)* (Beograd: Medija centar "Odbrana," 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Niko Bartulović, *Od Revolucionarne omladine do Orjune: istorijat jugoslovenskog omladinskog pokreta* (Split: Direktorijum Orjune, 1925), 109, 118.

look with the emphasis on the “national community”, nationalization of the economy, and a half-baked scheme for nationalist unions. But the leadership of ORJUNA remained heterogeneous in their views on the ideological direction that the organization should take, which was not unassociated with the fact that Svetozar Pribićević, the leader of a faction of the Democratic Party, which championed integral Yugoslavism, exerted much influence over the organization. The head of ORJUNA in the Vojvodina province, Dobroslav Jevdjević, pushed for a definite break with parliamentary democracy in 1925, but the president Ljuba Leontić and the writer Niko Bartulović refused to go that far. ORJUNA was afterwards in decline until it was banned in 1929, paradoxically after the imposition of King Alexander’s dictatorship that inaugurated integral Yugoslavism as the country’s official policy. The legacy of ORJUNA survived in a few marginal extreme right-wing groups, of which the Yugoslav Action (*Jugoslovenska akcija*, JA), modeled on the much more famous *Action Française*, had the strongest fascist flavor. These minor groups came together to form Dimitrije Ljotić’s ZBOR immediately after the assassination of King Alexander and offered their services to the Prince Regent as representatives of the younger generation intent on continuing the late king’s policy.<sup>27</sup> But they would discover, as the following pages show, that their time had not come.

Reflecting the concerns outlined above, the chapters of this volume are divided into four parts. Part 1 includes three chapters and examines the predominant conservative constituencies of the authoritarian Yugoslav monarchy, the ruling JRZ and its increasing political radicalization and fascistization, and its splinter group that eventually evolved into the SRS. This is the first comprehensive account of JRZ’s ideological outlook, and it offers an assessment of the impact and influence of fascism on JRZ’s profile, with a view to testing Costa Pinto’s and Kallis’s concept of the interwar right wing’s hybridity. This part also provides a background that makes it easier to understand the following ones.

<sup>27</sup> Archives of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije – AJ), Collection of Microfilms (Zbirka mikrofilmova), no. 797, Prince Paul Karadjordjević Papers (Arhiva kneza Pavla Karadjordjevića), reel 11, Njegovom Kraljevskom Visočanstvu Knezu-Namesniku, u Beogradu, 23 oktobra 1934.

The second part deals with ZBOR and significantly adds to our knowledge by drawing upon heretofore unused German archival sources, reappraises the existing accounts of ZBOR and tries to determine whether this movement can be regarded as fascist from the standpoint of Griffin's and Payne's theoretical models. It also sets the record straight about ZBOR's connections with Nazi Germany and does away with many unfounded claims in the process. Another contribution analyzes Svetislav Hodjera's *Borbaši* in much the same way, providing a definite account of this marginal extreme rightist party. Part 3 delves into the Serbian right wingers' perception of the Yugoslav nation-building process and the country's three largest national minorities and offers a panoramic view of Serbian right-wing nationalism in a comparative European perspective. It helps place this case study in a broader order of things on the European right-wing spectrum, thus obviating the peril of focusing too much on what is specific and peculiar. Finally, Part 4 complements our case study with a series of portraits of prominent right-wing intellectuals, sketching their input in the public sphere and adding a more human touch to our analysis. Overall, it is our hope that the volume will fill the void in scholarship by covering the case of the Serbian right wing, which is conspicuously absent from the majority of works that explore this segment of the political spectrum on a European, or even global, scale.

On the other hand, there is no denying that there is much more ground to be covered. Among political parties, it would be interesting and useful to look closely into the Yugoslav National Party (*Jugoslovenska nacionalna stranka*, JNS), which is present in this volume merely as a bitter opponent of JRZ. JNS survived its fall from power in 1935 and continued to play a part in Yugoslavia's political life perhaps more important than meets the eye – the party won more votes in the 1938 election than ZBOR and spoiled, to some extent, Stojadinović's electoral calculation. Strangely enough, it has been poorly served by historians; what little has been written about JNS focuses, not surprisingly, on its role during King Alexander's dictatorship.<sup>28</sup> Even more obviously, the

<sup>28</sup> Milica Bodrožić, "Jugoslovenska nacionalna stranka pod Vladom Bogoljuba Jevtića i petomajski izbori 1935. godine," *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 40 (1991):



group of intellectuals featured in this volume does not include a number of individuals who could and, indeed, should be included in any selection of prominent right-wingers. Their inclusion would also allow a discussion of some important themes integral to right wing extremism, such as the uses and abuses of the pseudoscience of eugenics.<sup>29</sup> The only excuse for not doing so here is that it was impossible to achieve such a wide scope in a single volume deriving from the work of five researchers covering much ground during the two years of the project duration. Hopefully, the findings of this volume will encourage further research that will shed additional light on this complex and often controversial topic, which is of interest not only to scholars but also to society as a whole because of its enduring political and social relevance in the contemporary world.

*Dragan Bakić*

141–169; Milica Bodrožić, “Socijalni oslonci režima Jugoslovenske nacionalne stranke,” *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 44 (1991): 121–142.

<sup>29</sup> For a valuable study of a doctor-politician considered important for eugenics in Serbia, see Milan Gulić, “Dr Uroš Krulj: ljekar i političar,” in Nadežda Pedović (ed.), *Zbornik radova sa V naučno-stručnog skupa “Istorija medicine, farmacije, veterine i narodna-zdravstvena kultura,”* knj. 4 (Zaječar: Istorijski arhiv “Timočka krajina,” 2013). For more details, see Ilija Malović, “Eugenika kao ideološki sastojak fašizma u Srbiji 1930-ih godina XX veka,” *Sociologija: časopis za sociologiju, socijalnu psihologiju i socijalnu antropologiju*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2008): 79–96; Aleksandar Stojanović, “Eugenics and Racial Hygiene in Theory and Political Thought of the Serbian/Yugoslav Extreme Right 1918–1944,” *Acta historiae medicinae, stomatologiae, pharmaciae, medicinae veterinariae*, 34, br. 1 (2015): 18–28.