

# What can explain the outbreak of ethnical-territorial conflicts, and which explanations apply to the case of Yugoslavia?



Bachelor thesis in political science

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor's thesis is about ethnical-territorial conflicts with a focus on one of the most dramatic of those conflicts, namely Yugoslavia. The actuality is very present when we see such conflicts and wars happening again and again. My aim with this research was to find out what makes those conflicts break out. I used a literature review to look at the historic and modern roots for the war in Yugoslavia using it as a case. After finding the relevant literature and describing the reasons for the conflict I used several of those theories to describe how the war broke out in each of Yugoslavia's republics. The findings were very similar where a crisis of a break up of a state, new nationalistic leadership, competition between ethnic groups and historical tensions all together contributed to a bloody war. My research is important for further conflict solving and prevention as I use many examples of former research to make my own conclusion on how such an ethnical-territorial war can erupt.

## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	page 1
1.1 Topic and research question .....	page 1
1.2 Structure and build up .....	page 2
2. Theory .....	page 2
2.1 What is ethnicity and nationality? .....	page 3
2.2 Ethnic conflict theory .....	page 4
2.3 Political beliefs as roots to conflict.....	page 5
3. Method .....	page 6
3.1 Yugoslavia as a case study .....	page 6
3.2 Literature review .....	page 7
4. Empirical data .....	page 8
4.1 Background .....	page 8
4.2 Start of the war .....	page 9
4.3 Escalation of the conflict .....	page 10
4.4 End of the war .....	page 11
5. Analysis .....	page 11
5.1 Ethnicity and boundaries in Yugoslavia ..	page 12
5.2 Competition of resources .....	page 13
5.3 Conflict and ethnic domination .....	page 14
5.4 Nationalism and religion .....	page 15
6. Conclusion .....	page 16
7. Literature .....	page 17

# 1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 1990s one of the bloodiest local conflicts in Europe erupted. The state of Yugoslavia was hit by an independence wave from its inner republics, at the same time as the government in the capital Belgrade wanted to create a new and greater Serbia.

(Mønnesland, 2021, p. 58-59). All of this led to a series of conflicts based on ethnical and territorial dispute and the war lasted for more than a decade. With severe loss of life and infrastructure the nation of Yugoslavia split up into 7 new states (Kosovo is not recognized by all nations) Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and North-Macedonia. (Mønnesland, 2021, chapter 12). As these types of conflicts still happen to this day, research is needed on how they develop and why. The initiative in Yugoslavia was that the Serbs wanted to break up the whole state, and to make parts that were inhabited by many Serbs, a part of the new Serbian nation. It was president Slobodan Milosevic's dream. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 58-59). The other member states did not want this, they now wanted independence and claimed their rights on land based on their ancient history.

Historically each of those groups had their own nationality with some of them owning their own territory in the Balkans all the way back to the medieval ages. National pride and finding themselves in a whole new situation where the Serbs wanted to retake what they thought belonged to them, the different groups also claimed their own rights for territory.

(Mønnesland, 2021, chapter 1). The long and rather peaceful period under Tito had ended, and new nationalistic ideas in the Serbian part of Yugoslavia made tensions even worse. The series of wars that took place all together lasted for almost 10 years. Around 140.000 people lost their lives and the dispute about land still goes on to this day. (ICTJ, 2009). As we will see later on, the research of this thesis reflects conflicts that are still happening in our world in the 2020s. Therefore it is needed to understand how such conflicts can be prevented to this day.

## 1.1 Topic and research question

The topic of this bachelor thesis is very relevant both for political science and international conflict solving. This is because of ethnical-territorial conflicts and wars still happening in our world today. An ethnical territorial conflict happens when ethnic groups try to divide land between each other, or if one group competes in rights and status with the other ethnic group. I have chosen this research question for my thesis:

“What can explain the outbreak of ethnical territorial conflicts, and which explanations apply to the case of Yugoslavia?”

The aim of this thesis is to look at why the Yugoslavia conflict happened, and to describe how an ethnical-territorial conflict might break out when there is a disagreement about land. In today's world we have seen examples of such conflicts in Georgia, Karabakh and Ukraine so the topic is very relevant. The new research I bring up here is how such conflicts can start and how they are examples of ethnical and territorial conflicts. Such research is definitely needed when we still see ethnic conflicts or disputes about land to this day which often lead to a lot of human suffering and deaths. We need this research to prevent another Yugoslavia from happening, and to find a way to solve ethnic territorial dispute in a peaceful and diplomatic way. Of course I cannot say that this thesis will give a solution to this, but it will definitely contain useful information about how to prevent wars like this.

## **1.2 Structure and build up**

How this bachelor thesis will be built up is that after the introduction comes the theory part where I will describe the theory that has been used on the topic of ethnic conflicts and how they develop, including an introduction to what ethnicity is. Then comes the method part where I will present a literature review and text analysis method that I will use in this thesis. In part four comes the empirical data, the historical timeline of the war, all gathered from books about Yugoslavia. Part five will be an analysis where I connect the events in Yugoslavia with the model of ethnic conflicts to see how it fits the model. The last section will of course be the conclusion where I make a statement on how these types of conflicts can happen and how Yugoslavia is an example of such a conflict.

## **2. Theory**

I will use theories about what the reasons are for ethnic conflicts, more deeply Yugoslavia. For the Yugoslavia conflict the book “En kort introduksjon til Jugoslavia konflikten” (A short introduction to the Yugoslavia conflict) by Svein Mønnesland will be used to tell the history about the events that happened there. “Land, makt og følelser” (Land, power and feelings) by Frank Aarebrot & Kjetil Evjen is another book that will be used. This is a more theoretical work of literature. An article based on changing borders and population, which is very relevant for this topic, will also be used. It is written by J. Andrew Slack and Roy R. Doyon called “Population Dynamics and Susceptibility for Ethnic conflict: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Here I will show how ethnic conflicts can break out. In the topic about what

ethnicity and nationality is, I will use is Will Kymlicka's "Multicultural citizenship", which can describe the difference between ethnicity and nations. And together with some other articles I will add Mariana Tepfenhart's "The Causes of Ethnic Conflicts" article in addition to "The ethnic-religious nexus: The impact of religion in ethnic conflict" by Jonathan Fox. This is former research on the topic, which describes why such wars can break out.

## **2.1 What is ethnicity and nationality?**

The theory that is very relevant here is Will Kymlicka's book "Multicultural citizenship", which describes ethnicity and nations. He describes ethnicity and what leads to ethnic competition. According to Kymlicka there are 184 independent states in the world, though his book was written in 1995 right in the middle of the Yugoslav conflict. But to describe the proportion of states and ethnicities, at the same time Kymlicka says there are 5000 ethnic groups. (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 1). Each of those groups believe they have a common heritage and many of the same traits, which is the basic description of ethnicity. The diversity of ethnicities gives many issues inside of a nation such as language rights, regional autonomy, political representation, education curriculum, land claims and so on. Many of those factors including job competition were present in the declining Yugoslav state. Finding out of those questions has brought many countries to civil war and protests, and the new nationalistic government that entered with Slobodan Milosevic, made it a recipe for war. (Mønnesland, p. 58-59, 2021). Especially in Bosnia, the competition between Serbs and Bosnians grew when the united Yugoslavia started to get cracks. In a republic where the majority were Bosnian Muslims, the Serbs felt discriminated and suppressed. This can happen when the majority takes advantage of the minority, and if the minority lose some of their rights, hate can easily grow in the suppressed group, which can lead to severe conflict. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145).

An ethnic group is in Slack & Doyon's text described as a group that is based on a presumption of a shared trait or traits that can be anything from genealogy to dressing habits. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 140). The common traits and traditions define this group and this also gives room for different kinds of divisions into groups inside a state.

Kymlicka describes different kinds of states with ethnic groups; multination states and polyethnic states. (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 11). A multination state is the coexistence of more than one nation inside a given state. This can be said about Yugoslavia since there were already several nationalities inside of the big state. They had been developed historically. Another example of ethnicities living together is a polyethnic state. Most modern states can

rely to this because there are not many states that only have one ethnicity living there or even originating from there. Norway for example with the Sami people or the Forest Finns is a polyethnic state. Those groups are not considered as nations because they have never had their own nation. Bosnians and Croats in Yugoslavia had one.

## **2.2 Ethnic conflict theory**

The theory I am going to focus on mostly here is about how ethnic conflicts become reality. Slack & Doyon's text is used in this part to describe a model of the development of ethnic conflicts. They are using the population of Bosnia & Herzegovina as an example on how competition between ethnic groups and disputes about land can end in bloody wars. As you will learn in the empirical part, Serbs and Bosnians came into competition with each other on Bosnian territory after Yugoslavia started breaking up. The theory called "Olzak's competition theory" that describes why ethnic conflicts break out, is located in Slack & Doyon's text. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145). Olzak's theory goes as follows:

- 1) It starts with explaining the term ethnicity as a social construction created by society. An ethnic group is a boundary created by the group itself or the ones that are not members of it. To become a member of an ethnic group a person has to share a) genealogy, b) cultural traits of language, religion, dress, custom or history and c) nationality and regional origin.
- 2) The boundaries of ethnicity are a part of society when there are rules that control inter-ethnic actions. The availability of resources influences conflict levels between ethnicities within the state.
- 3) A society where there are enough resources for a group to survive is by Olzak called a "fundamental niche". The part of the fundamental niche that is used by two groups at the same time is called "realized niche". These are the resources that they both have together.
- 4) Next Olzak says, there might happen a fundamental niche overlap, which is an ecological process that leads to competition between two groups over essential resources. Olzak uses "Gause's competitive exclusion principle" for the following scenario, that when two groups try to exploit the limited resources, one group will try to exclude the other. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145).
- 5) "Both competition and conflict are forms of interaction, but competition is a struggle between individuals, or groups of individuals, who are not necessarily in contact, while conflict is a contest in which contact is indispensable." (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145).

6) When society transforms or there is any social change, competition for resources increases. During an economic decline the amount of resources decreases which only makes people more desperate.

7) Olzak says that when there is a dominant group in this situation, it results in accommodation, exclusion or violent resolution. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145)

This theory is described as the main factor for the conflict between Bosnians and Serbs on Bosnian territory, mainly the competition between positions in the society. As the result suggests in part 7 of this theory, conflict can under such circumstances easily break out.

## **2.3 Political beliefs as roots of conflict**

To make a conflict happen there are always elements of politics. A government or a group in society can create ethnic division. This is based on either insufficient resources or that the groups feel threatened by each other. This is mentioned as the two main reasons for ethnic conflict in Mariana Tepfenhart's article "The Causes of Ethnic Conflicts". (Tepfenhart, 2013). In Yugoslavia nationalism was very present during Milosevic's new government. Serbia wanted to dominate and the Serbs dreamt of a greater Serbia. The state was collapsing as well as its economy, and different political fractions influenced the competition between groups in the different part of the failing Yugoslav state. Serbs on Bosnian territory felt threatened because Bosnians were given the better positions in society, which led to uprising. (Tepfenhart, 2013, p. 3-4). She explains the situation seen from a Serb's perspective; the Yugoslav state had collapsed and the rules that would protect the Serbs were gone in all the lost territories. From now on the Serbs would not be protected by Bosnian or Croat police and would not be prioritized when it came to good jobs. Many Serbs were living on Bosnian territory, they were called Bosnian-Serbs, and they felt threatened when the Muslim party won the election. 85 per cent of them voted to become part of Greater-Serbia. Right after these events the Bosnian-Serbian war broke out. (Tepfenhart, 2013, p. 4).

Another approach to explaining conflict is based on religion, but as we will see later it has not such a big impact on the type of conflicts I am studying as nationalism and competition. The religious approach is explained in Jonathan Fox's article "The ethnic-religious nexus: The impact of religion on ethnic conflict". (Fox, 2000). He describes religion as different things, depending on several approaches to the question what religion is defined as. Both as a simple institution that people follow, or a set of rules that make you take decisions in life where the religion is an essential part of your existence. (Fox, 2000, p. 4-5). He says religion plays a role in ethnicity because an ethnic group is often connected to a specific religion, it can be



Christianity or Islam, which were the two religions in the state of Yugoslavia. Religion is a part of factors that can spark ethnic conflict but is not usually the main reason. It often becomes involved in conflicts where other reasons have sparked the war. (Fox, 2000, p. 19). But it is definitely important to notice that Christian Orthodox Serbs who lived in a Muslim dominated Bosnia & Herzegovina suddenly started to feel like strangers on their own land. Before, power and law came from the central administration in Belgrade, Serbia. Now they had to accept to be ruled from Sarajevo and a Muslim government. All those factors will later explain how this big scale war happened and why it was so brutal.

### **3. Method**

What I am going to do in this bachelor's thesis is to use a method called study of literature for my research. First of all I will use books, both of theory and history to connect those two. Mønnesland's book will help to understand the Yugoslavia conflict, together with Aarebrot & Evjen and Slack & Doyon's works. The last one mentioned here in addition to Kymlicka's book will explain deeper what ethnicity is. Furthermore I will explain what a case study and a literature review is, as those are the two methods I will use in my work. The study of literature will connect empirical data with the analysis, and a case study will be used because Yugoslavia as a case will explain how this war happened and why it can be an example of ethnical-territorial conflicts.

#### **3.1 Yugoslavia as a case study**

The case of Yugoslavia is a very good one to describe the types of conflicts that we are looking at in this thesis. Of course very much has already been said about the war in previous studies, but looking at it when the task is to find out why ethnic conflicts happen, is indeed a very helping hand. Yugoslavia is about all of the factors in such a war, it is ethnicity, competition, land dispute, nationalism and violence. Picking it out as a case is just to describe even further how such events happen.

John Gerring, compares a case study to the process of building a house, in his book "Case Study Research". (Gerring, 2007, p. 1). He says you can either study the construction of many houses or of one particular house. The first way he names a cross-case method, the second one a within-case or case study method. Despite the fact that Yugoslavia will in a few small examples be compared to other conflicts in this thesis, we are going to focus on one single case mainly, and that is Yugoslavia. According to Gerring, using a case study you can study a subject or in our example a conflict, more deeply to understand it. A case study might

mean 1) that it is a qualitative study, 2) that it is research connected to a certain phenomenon or a deep study of it 3) that it gives you a particular set of evidence, for example ethnography or other physical evidence, 4) that the method of collecting data is based on real life, 5) that the topic is very specified to unite case and context, 6) that evidence is based on several sources 7) that it digs deeper into the attributes of a specific observation, and 8) last but not least that it contains research about the parts of a single phenomenon. (Gerring, 2007, p. 17). Since a case is defined as a study of a particular phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over some period of time, according to Gerring, then the topic that you study also has to include a research of the units that you study. (Gerring, 2007, p. 19). If our study is about the war in Yugoslavia, we have to do a case research on the state of Yugoslavia. Logical as it may sound it is a way to describe the goal of case study research. By studying Yugoslavia more deeply we will simply understand the roots of the conflict.

## **3.2 Literature review**

A literature review is a very good method to use to study former research on a specific topic. Mats Persson defines a literature review like this in his book “Hvordan skrive en litteraturgjennomgang” (How to write a literature review); he says that a literature review is a systematic study of existing research of a specific topic or field. (Persson, 2021, p. 13). To do a good research according to Persson, you have to use reliable research where the information is reliable, and not just opinions. You have to learn a topic more deeply to understand its core. Then you can use this information to do further studies. Persson uses what he calls a 6S model. In Norwegian all the parts that the model is made of begin with an S, that's where the name comes from. (Persson, 2021, p. 15). In English they sound a bit different but are used in a particular order. It's ask, search, sort, synthesize, write and systematize. Might sound complicated but it's not. First you ask yourself what is the topic that I want to study. To do a literature review you have to find your specific topic that you want to study, because it is a deep research of a specific field. Then you search for the research that has been done before. A topic has most likely been researched on before but you have to use this old research to make your own new findings. That's where it comes to part three, sorting. You sort out the information that you need for your research, and what you don't need. You are writing your own thesis and you only need information that can answer your question. Part four is about synthesizing, which means to connect everything that you have found to make it make sense. Yes you have information, but you have to make it make sense and to become valid research. Next is all about the writing. A literary review is a written document. You have to write down

what you are interested in finding out and how you are going to do it, then connect it. (Persson, 2021, p. 17). The last part is about systematizing. It means structuring the text, namely how it is build up.

To use my thesis as an example I asked the question what topic I wanted to study. The choice fell on Yugoslavia and how ethnic conflicts erupt. I searched for former research on the topic and found the texts about ethnic-territorial conflicts that I use here. Sorting was a bit challenging but I found the research that was relevant for my thesis. I only needed the parts about how such conflicts become reality. Synthetizing is not so challenging because the information that I found are strongly connected to each other. Yugoslavia is a good example of an ethnic-territorial conflict and therefore relates to the models of what such a conflict is. Writing and systematizing is the biggest and challenging part. But when you have the right information you can always connect it and make a bachelor's thesis out of it. It is the part about how to structure all of the information that is the difficult part.

## **4. Empirical data**

The war in Yugoslavia lasted for more than a decade with a big loss of life and a total break up of a state. The conflict was based on ethnic dispute about land and a Serbia that wanted to put every territory with a big population of Serbs under their control. I will divide this part into the different periods of the war and see how I can connect it to the theory.

### **4.1 Background**

The roots of the conflict can be found far back in time. Before Yugoslavia even became a state and Josip Broz Tito their leader, its former territories were divided into smaller states. Each of the ethnic groups was either part of a state or had their own state. Montenegro had a kingdom (1910-1918) and also Croatia during the medieval ages. (The History Files 1, 2022) (The History Files 2, 2022). Modern Yugoslavia was built up of the same ethnic groups where each of them had a territory or a republic within the state. The groups were Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Kosovo Albanians. Each of those ethnic groups had their own common traditions, dances, beliefs, history of independence and other things that are part of Olzak's description of how to define ethnicity. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145). But the people of Yugoslavia also shared a lot of common things like, same language (except for the Albanians that did almost not share anything with the rest of the Yugoslav ethnic groups) food, music, heritage and ethnic roots. Nevertheless the tensions between Serbs and Albanians were very present, and Kosovo became a territory

of competition between those two. (Bunting, 2017). Albanians believed Kosovo belonged to them, and the Serbs thought that Kosovo was a part of Serbia. When the population was so spread like it was in Yugoslavia, breaking it up into completely separate states looked very complicated. Where not only ethnicity divided them, also religion played a key part. Bosnians and Albanians were Muslims, the rest Christians. Right before the war broke out, Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic had a speech about the battle of Kosovo, where the Serbs lost all their manpower against the Ottoman Empire. (Bunting, 2017). According to Mønnesland Kosovo was the main reason that sparked nationalism in Yugoslavia. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 49). Albanian immigrants inhabited Kosovo in masses, and the territory was deprived of its autonomy. As will be seen in this empirical part, Kosovo was where the Yugoslav war actually ended. But the spark and history of war between the Christian Serbs and Muslim Albanians is said to have been decisive for the outbreak of this war. (Aarebrot & Evjen, 2018, p. 326).

## **4.2 Start of the war**

After Josip Broz Tito's death, Yugoslavia slowly began to break up and historical disputes about what belongs to who started to emerge. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 38-39). The new government of Slobodan Milosevic that came to power in 1989 brought nationalistic ideas back and a dream of a Greater Serbia. Right before the war broke out Milosevic decided to break up the state of Yugoslavia and to extend a new Serbian state with the territories that had a Serb population. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 62). That basically meant taking land from Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina. In 1991 the neighbouring states, but still all part of Yugoslavia, felt threatened of the new Serb nationalistic ideas and decided to separate from Yugoslavia. First out was Slovenia that in 1991 managed to get their own sovereign state without much bloodshed. Milosevic did not make much resistance to this but when Croatia showed military resistance to the Serb Yugoslav army the same year that's when the real war broke out. (Mønnesland, 2021, chapter 6).

Serbian minorities living in certain areas of Croatia felt unfairly treated, as was mentioned in the Olzak's competition theory, and the regions that had a fair amount of Serbian population rioted against the Croatian police and the new president Tudman. During the Croatian war the Serbs bombed and destroyed the city of Vukovar and surrounding cities like Osijek. Vukovar was the biggest victim of the Yugoslav People's Army bombings where 7000 grenades fell and 1700 civilians were killed. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 77). Dubrovnik a big city on the Croatian coast was occupied and bombed by the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) and the

conflict lasted until 1992. The JNA was the army of the Yugoslav state and on the side of the Serbs. The Croats mostly supported independence and were in opposition to Belgrade and the JNA. 15.000 Croatian lives were lost, including 6372 civilian Croats, and 7204 Serbs. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 81). Croatia gained its independence in 1992 and was the second state inside of Yugoslavia to separate from the bigger nation. Tensions then started to rise between Serbs and Bosnians on the territory of Bosnia & Herzegovina. It was going to be the next war in this ethnic conflict leading to even more devastating consequences.

### **4.3 Escalation of the conflict**

After Croatia the attention was turned to Bosnia & Herzegovina, a territory where a lot of Serbs and Bosnians lived together. Milosevic's dream of a Great Serbia did not plan to loose Serb populated Bosnian territories and when Bosnia wanted to separate from Yugoslavia, the Serbs did not want to accept loosing some of those territories. (Tepfenhart, 2013, p. 3-4). This erupted into a new war in 1992. Bosnia asked for independence and the Serb forces started attacking Bosnian territories, which provoked a military conflict. In April the same year Croats and Serbs started bombarding Bosnian cities in a fight to take the parts that had a border to their new republics. (Mønnesland, 2021, chapter 8). City after city started falling and massacres happened. The goal of the Serbs according to Mønnesland was to clean the territories they conquered for Bosnians, and to make them pure Serb populated territories. Like the Croatian scenario the Serbs attacked Bosnian cities located close to the Serbian border. The infrastructure was bombed and the people either killed or sent to flee from their own homes. One can say that the Serbs were afraid that the Bosnians would dominate them in these territories and that job positions and status would be given to the Bosnians over Serbs, the same scenario that had happened in Croatia. (Tepfenhart, 2013, p. 8). Sieges and destruction came to town after town and later on, the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, was sieged and totally controlled by the Serbs. Sarajevo was exposed by intense grenade bombardment every day. Snipers were placed in the taller buildings and mountains and they fired on all the people they could see. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 121-123).

The worst crisis and most memorable one, was yet to come. The city of Srebrenica was a refugee site for Bosnian refugees in the Bosnian-Serb war. For a long period it was protected by UN forces, and the area was considered safe. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 140). In 1995 the Serbs attacked and sieged Srebrenica because the territory would connect the Serb territories in Bosnia together. The population of Srebrenica were suffering, living in hunger and severe poverty. When they started to flee the women and children were evacuated to another site in

Bosnia while the men, both young and old, were caught by the Serb forces. During this period, Bosnian men from Srebrenica were exposed to horrific war crimes. A mass murder of minimum 8372 Bosnian men and boys lasted for several days. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 141).

## **4.4 End of the war**

After the massacre in Srebrenica came the war in Kosovo in 1998-1999. It did not last for long but the moment that one could say marked the end of the whole conflict was the bombing of Belgrade by NATO forces in 1999. During many days NATO bombed the Serbian capital killing at least 205 Serbs. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 161). Around the whole of Serbia bombings took place and military structure in the country was destroyed. But not only military goals were bombed. Hospitals, the news station, houses and other civilian sites became victims of the NATO bombings where a total of 453 civilians were killed. (Mønnesland, p. 161-163). A few other conflicts followed but the break up of Yugoslavia was a fact. Milosevic stayed as the president until he was persecuted and later brought to the court in Hague where he died in prison. The legacy after him was a whole group of new states that needed to start from the beginning. Serbia lost many of its intentional territories and despite the peace that then came, hatred is very common especially between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 181). The conflict may have ended but the ethnic hate remained.

## **5. Analysis**

This analysis will take a look at how an ethnic-territorial conflict might be born and develop, based on Olzak's competition theory. (Slack & Doyon, 2001, p. 145). Also the other reasons for ethnic conflict will be added and we will look at how such conflicts grow from their roots, into a full-scale war. Under Josip Broz Tito's rule, the state of Yugoslavia was united, but after his death in 1980 ancient disputes between the nationalities within Yugoslavia started to break out. What land belonged to who, which group was the most dominant, how should Yugoslavia be governed, and is there even a united Yugoslavia? Those were questions that heated up the debate, and with Slobodan Milosevic leading a nationalistic line, conflict was slowly building up. The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to look at why such conflicts happen. I will divide this chapter into parts where each part is about a specific factor leading to ethnical-territorial conflict, which then becomes part of a broader picture. Yugoslavia will be the focus here, however I will also add a few short examples about modern day conflicts to prove that it is still happening to this day.

## 5.1 Ethnicity and boundaries in Yugoslavia

Olzak's theory describes that ethnic boundaries are made by the people themselves. As we saw before, the groups living in Yugoslavia had much in common but also had their own ethnic traits and traditions. Albanians did especially differ from the Slavic people's. But each group as Olzak described it created an ethnic boundary, because they each thought that their ethnic group was different from the other. This was despite Yugoslavia being what Kymlicka calls a multination state already from the years of Tito. The battle of Kosovo between the Christian Serbs and the Muslim Albanians together with the Ottoman Empire was the history that gave sparks in the beginning of the 1990s where the Serbs talked about being humiliated by the Muslims. The Serbs were a proud nation, and the main government and control of the Yugoslav state came from the city of Belgrade, in the Serb republic inside of Yugoslavia. Now that Milosevic wanted to break the whole state up and build a new "mighty Serbia" many of the smaller republics feared the worst. The control was from Belgrade so the smaller ethnic groups feared discrimination. Slovenia was first out to leave the unity. They were let go without any severe clashes. Everyone suddenly became in opposition to the Serbs and the government in Belgrade, so it was basically the Serbs and the Montenegrins against the rest. Serbia and Montenegro were much more allied than the rest of the republics and were together until Montenegro became an independent state. (Store norske leksikon, 2020). While Slovenia left rather peacefully Croatia was going to suffer a lot when conflict broke out there in 1991. After Slovenia they also wanted freedom, but Serbs living on Croatian territory did not want to separate from the government in Belgrade. They were an ethnic minority in Croatia and feared that the ethnic boundaries would make them "foreigners on their own land", like the example in Mariana Tepfenhart's article, about the perspective from the Serbian side. (Tepfenhart, 2013, p. 4). The Croats wanted to create their own Croat dominated state, which would make them rule over the Serbian minority. So the Serbs saw a different solution, namely to grab the parts of Croatia where Serbs lived under Serbian control. This meant basically taking a lot of Croatian land. An ethnical separatism now grew and the ethnic divisions grew worse and worse.

From a bloody conflict in Croatia followed the even more ethnically violent war fought in Bosnia & Herzegovina. A lot of Serbs lived there and they were even a majority in certain regions in Bosnia. They were called the Bosnian-Serbs and would play a significant role in this conflict. For them separation from the Serbian centre of power would be a disaster. As we saw in Tepfenhart's article the Muslim party won in a Bosnian election and we will look

in the next part how that made the Bosnian-Serbs panic about their future. Serbia found a rather brutal solution to this ethnic problem. They wanted to make certain regions of Bosnia pure Serbian, which eventually led to genocide. This scenario we have seen in today's conflict in Karabakh on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The region has switched from being Azeri and Armenian several times where one group wanted to exclude the other. (Global Conflict Tracker, 2022). In Eastern-Ukraine disputes between ethnical Russians and ethnical Ukrainians has also created tensions where the Russians wanted a stronger alliance with Russia while Ukrainians wanted a closer relationship with the EU and the West. (BBC, 2014).

## **5.2 Competition of resources**

Competition of resources is the key point for conflict in Olzak's theory. While Slovenia escaped this rather comfortably, Croatia became a witch's cauldron of ethnical competition and dispute. Franjo Tudman's new government, like Milosevic's Serbia, became very nationalistic and the Serbs now feared that hate against them would grow in the Croatian population, as well as a Croatian domination in important job positions. Olzak refers to resources as the fundamental niche, which contains money, job positions, food and so on. A Yugoslav state, which was collapsing had a collapsing economy. Uncertainty about everything was looming in the air. The resources, the realized niche, was getting a lot smaller, and in a Croatian dominated Croatia, the Serbs were not going to receive a big part of the cake. The best jobs were taken by Croats, Serbs felt unprotected by the Croat police, the money was spent on building up a new Croatian state. So the Serbs felt no other solution than to fight. The Serbs with the JNA and pro-Serb nationalists did not want Serbs living in Croatia to be discriminated. The same argumentation we can see today in conflicts like in Ukraine, despite that I am not going to use very much time on other conflicts in this thesis. Russia's argument there reminds of the arguments of the Serbs. They mean that the Russian population in Ukraine is discriminated and seized parts of Ukraine. Back to the Serbs, they were afraid of their safety and of loosing the good jobs they had had in Croatia under the existence of Yugoslavia, and a big fight between Croats and Serbs broke out. In cities with many Serbs like in Vukovar it developed into a disaster. The city was bombed to ruins and a lot of people on both side died.

The worst example of this war was, as we know yet to come. In Bosnia there were not only Bosnians and Serbs (Bosnian-Serbs) but also Croats. Both Serbs and Croats wanted their piece of Bosnia and a big Serbian population, that is the reason why they are called Bosnian-



Serbs, in Bosnia & Herzegovina felt threatened by the Muslim party and the Bosnian separatist movement. Again it was about resources and job positions, but this time also a fear of Bosnian Muslim domination. Mariana Tepfenhart describes this in her article. Now Croatia and Serbia were taking the parts of Bosnia that had a border with their republics. In the next part we will see what consequences it had.

### **5.3 Conflict and ethnic domination**

In each part we always start with the first country, which was struck by conflict, but lets leave Slovenia alone from this moment, because the separation was rather peaceful, the Serbs just let Slovenia go. A big problem in the coming conflicts was the idea of ethnic domination and separation. It was also present in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians, but we will mostly focus on the other republics, as the Kosovo war was rather short. Kosovo-Albanians took control over Kosovo and many Serbs felt thrown out of their former home. Kosovo separated in 2008 where Serbia and several other states do not recognize their independence. (Lundbo, 2022). In Croatia fights went on where the Serbs wanted to create their own Serb dominated provinces. That was due to their fear of loosing good jobs and the connection to their government in Belgrade. Ethnic hate accelerated and Croats and Serbs fought against each other. There were serious war crimes committed where one ethnic group had burned down a city or killed people from the other ethnic group. The worst atrocities were believed to be done by nationalists and the governments knew how to use them. Town after town was fought over until Croatia claimed its independence in 1991.

The most grotesque of the ethnic hate, and one of the biggest ethnic cleansing in modern day history, was about to happen in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Slack & Doyon describe the ethnic hate dominated also by Christians versus Muslims, in Bosnia when the separation movement grew there and Bosnia got a Muslim government. Bosnian-Serbs were a majority in several of the provinces in Bosnia, and Serbs saw an opportunity to seize provinces on the border with the new Serbian state. Lead by Radovan Karadzic president of the Republika Srpska, a Serb formed republic inside of Bosnia, and Milosevic's general Ratko Mladic the idea was to clean those provinces from people of Bosnian ethnicity. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 170). This crazy idea lead to mass killings of Bosnians in cities like Brcko, Zvornik and Mostar. The atrocities were committed not only by the Serbs, but by the Croats as well. Basically all the ethnic groups felt threatened by each other. Serbs killing Bosnians and vice versa made the conflict last very long. Rape, killings, bombings, burning down of houses and mass executions dominated the brutality of the war in Bosnia, according to Mønnesland. All of this

hate came from former ideas of separate ethnic groups with separate land, as we will see in the next part about nationalism.

Srebrenica is an iconic name that comes to mind when ethnic cleansing is mentioned. The town was close to what Serbians saw as their border, but it was for a long time protected by the UN forces from 1992. In 1995 however the Serbs made an offensive against the town and seized it. Before this the population of Srebrenica were starved and isolated. Now even more atrocities were about to happen. While women and children, except of teenage boys, were evacuated from the town, the men and young boys were left there. They tried to escape but many were surrounded and captured by Serb forces. The following days in July 1995, the Serbs murdered 8372 men and boys. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 141). It is described as the Srebrenica massacre and referred by many as a genocide of Bosnians.

## **5.4 Nationalism and religion**

The last factor that comes from theory used in this thesis is ideology, like nationalism and religion. To make it very clear, religion did not cause this war; it was just a part of it. The authors I am using here on this topic are Svein Mønnesland and Jonathan Fox. Let's start to clarify the role of religion. According to Fox, religion is often present in areas with ethnic conflict but are only the main cause in 12 out of 105 cases of such conflicts. (Fox, 2000, p. 18). As the approaches he uses in his text about religion as an institution or as the ideology which forms a person's identity are not a key factor that led to the war in Yugoslavia, we will not focus much on it. The only circumstance that becomes clear is that the historic hate of Serbs towards Muslims did not make matters better when conflict broke out.

Nationalism on the other hand was one of the main reasons for Yugoslavia to erupt into a disaster. The speech of Milosevic about the battle of Kosovo, nationalistic formations in the different Yugoslav republics, and propaganda based on fear gave birth to the war. Of course there was nationalism in all the republics where Croats started hating Serbs for example. Nationalistic groups used this and were supported by their government to participate in the war. Arkan's Tigers was a specifically brutal group. (Mønnesland, 2021, p. 71). Seen from a Serb perspective they defended Serbs from being extradited from Croatian and Bosnian territory. However while doing this they committed some of the worst crimes during this war, by ethnically cleansing towns for other nationalities than Serbs. Arkan himself was shot dead after the war had ended but many generals and leaders who committed war crimes were sentenced in the court in Hague for their atrocities. The nationalism based on fear is reflected in Serb war songs from this period. A song called "Alija aljo" about Bosnian president Alija

Izetbegovic has such grotesque content where parts of the text go as follows: “Alija you are a Muslim degenerate”, “How many Ramadans will you have” (about starving Bosnians) and so on. (Mattia von Sigmund, 2022). Calling the opposition in Bosnia like that and the hate that was present in the propaganda was a recipe for the genocide that followed. Srebrenica is the horror example we have mentioned here but there were several massacres during the long lasting conflict. Nationalism is still present in the Balkans and territories of former Yugoslavia and it is difficult to see when it will disappear. The ethnic hate simply has to deep roots to make change come quickly.

## **6. Conclusion**

To summarize it all, the long lasting and devastating war in Yugoslavia was caused by many factors that all together had their influence on why it happened and how it developed. Here we have looked at theories like Olzak’s competition theory, Kymlicka’s ethnical boundaries, Teffenhart’s theory about nationalism and uncertainty, and last but not least Fox’s theory about religious causes. What we can conclude with is that all of those factors, that are indeed typical of ethnical-territorial conflicts, were present in Yugoslavia. The ones that directly caused the war were all of those, except of religion, where religious dispute was added later as a result of the war itself. Many of the reasons for this together with history made the conflict spark out, and the Yugoslav war has been researched many times before. What this bachelor’s thesis adds is that it looks at all the reasons for ethnical-territorial conflicts, so that it can be used to regulate those particular areas of dispute to prevent another Yugoslavia. Of course it is easier said than done, but with such complicated wars you have to see the broader picture. That means to know what leads to such wars that are still happening today like in Karabakh and Ukraine, and to find new ways to solve or prevent them.

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