

Pantheon on a tablecloth: Yugoslav dictatorship and the confrontation of national symbols in Croatia (1929–1935)

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This paper questions the effects of the state- and nation-building that occurred in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the 6 January Dictatorship (1929–1935) and points to the importance of symbols during this process. By using an ethno-symbolist approach and extending it to “banal nationalism,” the article analyzes some of the most prominent and influential symbols from within an everyday environment. Using the Croatian ethnic space as a framework, the article traces the population’s attitudes toward the Yugoslav national flag and representations of King Alexander – two of the most forced symbols in the centralized Yugoslav *one state and one nation* concept of nation-building. The regime possessed all the mechanisms of power necessary to impose these symbols, though most Croats clearly felt no connection to them. Despite severe penalties, they opposed the regime’s plans for national reconstruction of the country by displaying Croatian flags and various symbolic representations of Stjepan Radić – as a martyr of the Croatian nation. By linking this problem to specific studies that deal with the development of nationalism, this paper outlines the struggle between Yugoslavism and Croatianism through acceptance and resistance toward the Yugoslav symbolism.

Keywords: Croatianism; Yugoslavism; national symbols; 6 January Dictatorship; King Alexander; Stjepan Radić

Yugoslavism, Croatism, and symbolism

Many nation-building theorists, especially supporters of ethno-symbolism, such as John A. Armstrong and Anthony D. Smith, have drawn attention to the importance of symbols in shaping the nation and understanding any nationalism (Özkirimli 2010, 143–157). Ethno-symbolists believe that many symbols connected to modern day nations are derived from the prior ethnic and ethno-religious symbols, myths, memories, and traditions among a specific community and that these elements, although subject to change, can resonate among them for a long time, even from before the age of modern nations (Smith 2005, 98). Rogers Brubaker went a step further and underlined the importance of the institutionalization of national categories through, among other things, everyday use of various specific symbols, myths, and narratives (2009, 13–22).

Although scholars generally observe the use of certain symbols in the longue durée, this paper concentrates on a specific segment of the past. It addresses the use of nations’ symbols in Croatian regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the 6 January

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Dictatorship (1929–1935), mainly through analysis of the conflicts among various symbolic objects that could be encountered on an everyday basis. In this Yugoslav context, this paper relies on Michael Billig's theory of "banal nationalism." According to Billig's analysis of nationalism in already established nation-states, national myths and symbols, like flags, are relevant not only in extreme situations, such as military battles or moments of revolution, but can be found all around us. Whether or not we consciously pay attention to them, they are ubiquitous in our surroundings, thus contributing to the construction, reconstruction, and implementation of national identity on a daily basis (Billig 1995, 6). This analysis examines the relationship between the concepts of Croatianism and Yugoslavism through ordinary people's¹ attitudes to the symbolism of the Yugoslav and Croatian flags and two prominent figures of the two distinct national concepts – King Alexander and Stjepan Radić.

The 6 January Dictatorship was a period in the history of Yugoslavia, and Croatia as one of its component parts, in which the new regime began to relentlessly promote its plans. The regime sought, above all, to show itself as a modernizer and the uncontested builder of a single and uniform Yugoslav state and nation.² To create a unified state, the new regime monopolized the idea of Yugoslavism and began to promote the idea of one state and one nation in which the one king (Alexander I) held a pivotal role. This concept was supposed to replace notions of a multinational, or at least multicultural, Serb-Croat-Slovene "Trinitarian" Yugoslavia that had been formally and informally present in political discourse during the state's first decade, i.e. during Yugoslavia's parliamentary period of development, when it had initially been called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Wachtel 1998, 71).

Since the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, state authorities had labored to construct a specific state identity, which was perceived in some parts of the country as a basis of a (supra)national Yugoslav identity. Although this concept was accepted by a handful of intellectuals, shortly after unification, ordinary people of different parts of the country, which had never before lived so closely together, realized that they held different views on various issues concerning their common future (Wachtel 1998, 74). Considering the nationalizing power of almost every state authority in the world (Brubaker 2009, 63–66), as well as the rigidity of Yugoslavia's internal political structure and its unwillingness to recognize the rights to political and cultural autonomy of various established nations via federalization, it comes as no surprise that the concept of Yugoslavism – which was pushed so hard by the government – was rejected by ordinary people, who instead gave their support to various "national" parties in parliament during the first 10 years of the country's existence.

In 1929, the dictatorship was introduced and the regime declared the country's existing (and recognized) nations, i.e. the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, "tribes" of a single Yugoslav nation, undercutting them hierarchically. Soon afterward, the regime changed the name of the country to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. King Alexander and the prime minister, army general Petar Živković, stated that the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia was destined to become a unified country on all levels, regardless of the various cultural, administrative, and economic capacities that existed and the separate national identities that had already been formed (Dobrivojević 2006, 106; Djokic 2007, 74).

The regime did not start its process of Yugoslav nation- and state-building after January 1929 from scratch. In reality, it had to call upon and promote a variety of established myths and symbols from the individual "tribes" in an effort to glue them together and present them as a coherent and inseparable whole. To do so, it used the education system, the media, and public discourse in general as its main nation-building mechanisms. The goal was to create

a single nation, which should be quickly and peacefully but joyously adopted by the entire population (Troch 2015, 26–27).

The regime tried to ensure that its plans went through without any objections. Under the pretext of “prohibiting tribal hatred,” the government officially banned many *old* and particularly national symbols, along with political parties, organizations, and nonpolitical associations that were “acting against national unity” (Dobrovojević 2006, 221–222).³ Rigid centralism and unitarism, demanding obedience to the concept of *one fraternal Yugoslav nation*, began forcing a single set of national symbols that represented the state in everyday life. Some of them, such as state flags, stamps, and monuments, were present in the first decade of monarchist Yugoslavia. They often celebrated a “common history” but, indirectly, were clearly related to the existing state and its dynasty. The regime used them as the exclusive symbols of a unified state and a single South Slavic nation. However, the *nation-builders* soon became aware that Yugoslavia’s various inhabitants found it difficult to accept national symbols from other parts of the country. They just did not feel enough, or even any, connection to them. At the same time, many who had previously used some of these symbols were disappointed that the regime adulterated important aspects of their metaphorical use (Troch 2015, 141–157). The regime often manifested its power daily through violence toward all forms of criticism, even benevolent ones. It failed to pull the country out of its political, social, and economic crisis, meaning that after the first few months of the dictatorship people began to question not only the willingness of the regime to solve the state’s accumulated problems but also its plans for national unification.⁴ The emergence of the Great Depression thwarted the regime’s plans and only perpetuated the agony within the country. It became increasingly clear that the regime had lost the support of the population and that it increasingly relied on crude power and coercion. Simultaneously, the promises by King Alexander and Prime Minister Živković that the dictatorship would last only a few months, until the situation in the state had improved enough to return power to the new, freely elected parliament, were no longer mentioned (Drapac 2010, 127). As discontent grew, some individuals, mostly on their own initiative rather than through organized endeavors, began to express their dissent toward the regime’s plans. Of course, not everyone was against the new Yugoslav ideology, and many who were did not publicly demonstrate their feelings. Nevertheless, during the prescribed *one country, one nation, one king* era, one of the most notable forms of resistance among the population of Croatian regions was to secretly or openly attack the symbols of the state and nation the regime so vigorously tried to impose upon them.

The blue, white, and red versus the red, white, and blue

A national flag is an official representation of a nation that conveys important information about its history and its affiliations. In this capacity, a flag codifies the subjective nature of the nation (“Flags” 2001, 164). The flag was certainly one of the most dominant, but also most contested, symbols of the Yugoslav state and nation. Created after the Serbo-Croatian-Slovene unification in 1918, the blue, white, and red standard of the Kingdom in a way conveyed the country’s intended unity and represented a break with former traditions, i.e. the flags that had represented groups or territories in different regions of the now-united country. Nevertheless, it kept three colors that were present in both of the pre-1918 red, blue, and white flags of the Kingdom of Serbia and Kingdom of Montenegro that had emerged during the nineteenth century. Together with Slovenian colors, in the spirit of Pan-Slavism, they intentionally bore a resemblance to the Russian national flag (Naarden 2007, 241). The horizontally laid red, blue, and white colors were also

present, albeit in a different order, in the banner that was informally used in Croatia from the mid-nineteenth century. They were probably accepted at least as Croatian national colors during the revolutionary 1848, after which many Slavic nations would embrace the variations on the Russian palette for themselves.⁵ Red, white, and blue was also the formal banner of the short-lived State of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs that was created by the South Slavs of the disintegrating Austro-Hungarian Empire, who, in 1918, merged into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes with the Kingdom of Serbia (Jareb 2010, 162–172).

The red, white, and blue banner was again used as a Croatian national flag by many political parties, most notably the Croatian Peasant Party, during the first decade of monarchist Yugoslavia. Following the imposition of the dictatorship in 1929, the regime strictly banned the public display of Croatian and other national symbols, especially flags, arguing that they inflamed tribal hatred. It perceived them as a sign of passive resistance (Nielsen 2014, 123). A famous government statement from July 1930 clearly declared that “tribal flags, with respect, have to belong to the past, because the national future seeks only the Yugoslav national tricolor” (*Politika*, July 5, 1930). Under the new laws, the only legal banner was the state flag.⁶ Blue, white, and red was destined to become the Yugoslav national flag – all the more so because it was widely used by members of various pro-regime associations. Organizations that gladly adopted and emphasized Yugoslav symbolism, such as Sokol (falcon) of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Nielsen 2014, 115–119) and Adriatic Sentinel (Machiedo Mladinić 2005, 138), gave ideological backing to the regime’s nationalization efforts through their work. In return, the government backed their everyday work with substantial funding.

The regime clearly linked the state flag to the new Yugoslav state and its national project. On 6 September 1930 – Crown Prince Peter’s birthday – a special ceremony was performed in Banjica near Belgrade, in front of the gathered loyal crowd: King Alexander “buried” the old, pre-1918 Serbian military colors and presented the various army units with their new blue, white, and red banners (Nielsen 2014, 152). The move was intended to prove that even the king, who was perceived as the victorious Serbian commander in both the Balkan Wars and World War I under the old flag, was relinquishing the glorious past to make room for a better, united future under the new Yugoslav flag (*Politika*, September 6, 1930).

The ruling elite insisted that the state flag become the only banner permitted to be displayed, and bylaws requested its use as often as possible within the public space. Not only did the state flag have to be flown from poles and public buildings such as schools and hospitals but the regime also insisted that “all important citizens” in each community, especially those appointed or employed by the state, fly the state banner in front of their homes for every major national or religious holiday.⁷ Those who refused were often persecuted. Sometimes, however, the government officials who compiled the lists of prominent local residents who did not put out the state flag on a holiday accepted various excuses. Some individuals, for instance, could not acquire the state flag in time for the occasion, some were not at home that day, etc.⁸

Of course, the regime’s measures were not entirely unopposed. During the first few years of the dictatorship, especially during state holidays, overzealous authorities often acted against individuals who displayed “tribal” flags or even black flags as a clear sign of resistance. As the Croatian flags were seized by the authorities, they quickly disappeared from streets and squares in 1929, while their users often ended up incarcerated at least briefly. But as time went by, with the regime showing increasingly undemocratic tendencies, it was no surprise that during the 1930s police forces often found Croatian

flags, usually smaller and of a lesser quality, sometimes even with an inscription such as “Long live Croatia!”⁹ These flags, often made of paper, cardboard, or pieces of cloth, were left anonymously in public spaces overnight. This led to meticulous investigations, often futile, to determine who were the producers and disseminators of such items. In August 1932, the district chief from Kutina concluded in a report to his superiors that the small Croatian flags “in this and neighboring districts only emerged in recent months and they were hung overnight, apparently under the directions and influence of the [local] separatist politicians.” In addition to viewing them as an act of organized subversion against the state, the same district chief concluded that the purpose of these flags lay in “intentionally causing difficulties for the authorities and overloading their work rate.”¹⁰ In reality, in most cases, investigations revealed that the diverse anti-regime actions arose spontaneously and were mostly unrelated to one another.

The regime also punished purposeful violations against the state flag. For example, taking the state flag down and even damaging it was not uncommon in the country’s Croatian regions.¹¹ One of the most common violations, which from a legal perspective could be deemed a form of physical injury to the flag, was the simple act of turning it upside down. In this way, the undesirable blue, white, and red was turned into the preferred red, white, and blue – usually by young Croats emboldened by alcohol.

Of course, some incidents of tampering with the state flag or the emergence of the Croatian flag were spontaneous, driven, for instance, by the drunkenness or puckishness rather than ideological (national) concerns. But in other instances, the preparation required to obtain the necessary materials (and sufficiently tall ladders) to pull down the state flag and set fire to it or make several dozen small Croatian flags, putting them up overnight, suggests at least a dose of premeditation. Cases of state flag violations and the appearance of the Croatian tricolor were registered during the dictatorship in almost all parts of Yugoslavia inhabited by Croats. Many (quite disjointed) archival sources only confirm the premise that this phenomenon should be considered an everyday sign of Croatian ideological resistance, particularly since the regime tended to treat almost all such cases that way. Simultaneously, the Yugoslav banner was clearly used to denote Yugoslav nationhood, to become a banal sign of the nation in the nearest future, a symbol “barely noticed by citizenry freely going about their business” (Billig 1995, 41).

The Croatian flag was often displayed in the most prominent place in villages in the Croatian countryside, such as on the tower of the local church. “Tribal” banners were often used at mass gatherings, such as weddings and village feasts. In addition to alcohol-induced excesses, the accused sometimes pleaded that they had raised the flags at night and had mistakenly turned them wrong-side-up.¹² Penalties were symbolic for both the regime and violators, usually ranging from a few days to a few weeks in prison and clearly meant to teach a lesson. Nevertheless, fines, arrests, and imprisonments, or even the loss of a job or pension if the violator was an active or retired civil servant, did not halt the growing discontent.

Furthermore, many civil servants were also persecuted by the higher authorities – not for possessing Croatian flags, but rather for not reporting the locals who displayed them. Although these officials were often sentenced, they argued that the decision to punish individuals who owned or displayed the Croatian flag was illegal because neither the Law on the Name and the Division of the Kingdom nor the Law on Holidays prescribed specific penalties for such flag-based transgressions. Indeed, although the dictatorship vigilantly kept an eye on such symbols, there was no specific statute that would justify the prosecution of those who owned them. Nevertheless, pursuing this line of argument did little to help the career of a dismissed official.¹³

Even some politicians who were closer to the regime in the first half of the 1930s, as well as almost everyone who opposed it, argued that the 6 January Dictatorship made a mistake in trying to destroy the symbols and histories of Yugoslavia's individual nations. It was counterproductive, at least in Croatian parts of the country. Ivan Pernar, a leader of the Croatian Peasant Party who was wounded alongside Stjepan Radić in 1928, told a rally in 1930 that the Yugoslav flag was perceived among Croats as "a symbol of someone else's supremacy," while Croats "hung their flags everywhere, on the highest peaks and the tips of the trees and atop deadly electrical lines, exposing themselves to the wrath of enraged police officers and apparent death" (Jareb 2010, 253). Indeed, they could not be removed easily or without great danger from such locations. For instance, in August 1932, a large Croatian flag was spotted near Ivanec, a small town in northern Croatia. Someone had left it at the top of one of the highest trees along the road, and then cut down all the branches to prevent anybody from getting to it.¹⁴

Although some complained of uneven enforcement of laws against Serbian and Croatian "tribal" flags, it should be noted that, at least in Sava Banovina,¹⁵ those who flew the old Serbian flag were likewise penalized. Little did it help their defense to claim that they only displayed the red, blue, and white flag with a Serbian cross in front of churches on Serbian Orthodox holidays and that this flag was regulated by the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which the government fully recognized.¹⁶ In the spirit of imposed national unification, the authorities of Sava Banovina prohibited the Serbian Orthodox flag, assessing that it would "inconveniently affect Roman Catholics," i.e. Croats, and that "it can be expected that they will fight back by hanging Croatian tribal flags at their church gatherings and other similar celebrations."¹⁷

Similar incidents had already occurred. In 1932, several young men were shot during a Catholic Church gathering in the Dalmatian town of Omiš. They had entered into a scuffle with local police, claiming they were not bearing the Croatian national banner, but a simple red, white, and blue one with a Catholic motif (the Sacred Heart) for their local religious feast (Jareb 2010, 202–203). Indeed, in addition to prosecution, extreme cases of flag violation even led to deaths.

It must be noted that the government had repeatedly warned subordinated organizations during the 1930s that the law applied only to bearers of the full-size "tribal" flags, not to those who displayed only pieces of them. This was not without good cause, since it sometimes happened that the police would undress Croatian peasants or tear off parts of their clothes, traditional costumes in particular, that incorporated the motifs of the Croatian tricolor on hats, skirts, shirts, pants, etc. (Jareb 2010, 202). Law enforcement officers were also told to avoid direct confrontations with the masses in times of flag violations. To avoid incidents, those who carried the banned flags would be apprehended later, once the masses had dispersed, and only after a properly filed criminal charge had been made.¹⁸ Unprepared, ill-trained, and violence-prone officers, however, often forgot the clear instructions that came from the Interior Ministry regarding what was allowed and what not in the treatment of "tribal" flags and their holders. In nationally charged circumstances, they zealously confronted the masses who carried Croatian flags and were willing to provide physical resistance. Christian Axboe Nielsen rightfully concludes that even during the second half of the Yugoslav royal dictatorship, "daily life remained a struggle between ordinary citizens and state authorities over identity" (2014, 229).

From today's perspective, the regime's paranoia toward the Croatian national flag sometimes reached comic heights. In Dubrovnik, in 1935, a high-ranking government official spotted what he supposed to be a Croatian flag on a large ship and furiously accused the staff of the local maritime office of deliberately allowing the use of the proscribed symbol.

When he was informed that this was in fact a Dutch ship, bearing the banner of Holland, and that it had just brought foreign tourists into the harbor, the official stated that the Dutch should change their flag, at least in Yugoslav territorial waters. The official thereafter acquired a nickname – Vuko the Dutchman [Vuko Holandez] – which was used behind his back as a reminder of this incident (*Novi list*, August 12, 1941).¹⁹

From 1935 onward, the new regime under Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović became somewhat more lenient toward contesting political and national concepts (Simić 2007, 39–40), and the Croatian flag gradually reentered the public space. Although almost all repressive laws from the time of the dictatorship were still valid at the end of the 1930s, Stojadinović's government announced that it would not prosecute individuals who owned or displayed Croatian flags (*Politički vjesnik*, February 1, 1939).

After the Cvetković–Maček political agreement was reached in August 1939 and the Croatian people achieved cultural and political autonomy within their self-governing unit – the Banovina of Croatia – disputes about flag violations became redundant, but persisted. From 1939 to 1941, the Croatian flag became a desirable and legalized symbol. However, the oppression of the early 1930s left its mark. Within the Banovina of Croatia, many individuals still looked upon Yugoslav state symbols (and ideology) with strong aversion. Consequently, various defamations of the state flag and similar symbols continued, along with open attacks against their supporters. Within the territory of Banovina of Croatia, public spaces were more often adorned with Croatian flags than with the Yugoslav state flag (Leček 2005, 239, 245).

Hero(es) of the nation(s)

In national discourse, we can see the ideal of national destiny through the noble sacrifice of great men and women. Their heroism, genius, character, and example are celebrated through verses, paintings, and monuments but are also demonstrated in the “civic religion” of the people through various rituals (Smith 2005, 103). Representations of national martyrs and heroes in everyday public spaces “take their meaning and their emotional power from a presumed and felt collective past” (Smith 1991, 159).

In addition to the flag, another essential symbol of “one Yugoslav state and nation” was the king himself. King Alexander I had been formally or informally at the helm of the country since its beginnings in 1918 – first as prince regent and, after the death of his elderly father, Peter I, in 1921, as king (Gligorijević 2010, 2:107). During that time, Alexander's image and name were used as symbols of the state itself, well before he proclaimed the 6 January Dictatorship. Later, during the dictatorship, the character and the position of the ruler became undisputed, especially in art, literature, and other symbolic representations (Horvat 1984, 298). Strict but vague regulations stipulated that His Royal Highness could not be the subject of mockery, either in words or in images. Offenders faced sentences that principally varied from one to five years in prison.²⁰

The face and name of the king, previously present in public spaces via statues and in names of the buildings, streets, and parks, as well as on stamps and the state's currency, now became almost omnipresent and were in this capacity one of the regime's trademarks. It is no wonder that the government sought to deal with all individuals who, again clandestinely, tried in various ways to damage representations of the king. For instance, high-school students from Koprivnica who destroyed the king's picture in one of their classrooms in 1932 received prison sentences. The school itself was briefly demoted to a lower classification by the Education Ministry (Šadek 2009, 133). Two years earlier, an extensive inquiry had been conducted into who had drilled the eyes of the ruler on a

2-dinar coin discovered in a cash register at Zagreb's main railway station.²¹ In summer 1931, a large memorial board erected in 1922 in honor of King Alexander's visit to the village of Vojnovac near Ogulin was shattered. Authorities characterized this as an act of terrorism and quickly detained three local youths. The young men quickly confessed but later claimed that their confessions had been obtained through physical torture. Among other methods, they said they had been beaten with pieces of the very board they were accused of breaking.²²

The regime retained its position as high arbiter of right and wrong with the symbolic presence of the ruler in public spaces. Consequently, the administrative and police forces in particular were even suspicious of those who were doing something generally positive with the king's image. In March 1931, for instance, the police department in Zagreb revoked three licenses for selling pictures of King Alexander that had been issued by the Education Ministry. They concluded that the three salesmen who had recently been arrested with the king's pictures and matching licenses were members of the Roma population. Police quickly exiled them from Zagreb and informed the Interior Ministry of the "need to prevent Gypsies and other similar persons" from selling such pictures because "it will inevitably damage the reputation of the country as well as the lofty goals of [...] His Royal Majesty."²³

After King Alexander's assassination in October 1934, his figure briefly became even more popular (Gligorijević 2010, 3:315–319). In the months that followed his death, the deceased ruler's face was used by many individuals and levels of government as evidence that they would preserve his legacy and support the earlier course of state- and nation-building. Stories, both true and fictional, spread of the king's generosity, honesty, and kindness, especially toward the common people.²⁴ Several sets of commemorative badges and stamps were published and many large and small towns and villages erected monuments, buildings, or parks named them after the dead king (Rajčević 2001, 1:159–173, 2:51–53). The king's violent death, combined with the country's socioeconomic and political crisis and the ever more complex situation in the rest of Europe, temporarily united the country in mourning. It also "did more to confirm the people's belief that the difficult South Slavs actually needed the firm hand of a dictator than was ever possible in his lifetime" (Drapac 2010, 136). However, as the months passed, the power of the king's symbolism began to fade, especially in Croatian parts of the county. Mass mourning turned into resignation or passivity, mostly because there had been no fundamental changes or improvement in the country after Alexander's death. During this time, in the regions of the state populated by Croats, the figure of Stjepan Radić, as a character whom the regime had tried to suppress for the last five years, emerged even more strongly.

Radić was a man of many contradictions, flaws, and virtues. During the 1920s, he led the largest opposition party, the Croatian Peasant Party, which functioned as a Croatian national party and which arguably led the Croatian national movement in the kingdom (Biondich 2000). A direct result of Radić's July 1928 shooting in the state parliament and subsequent death from his injuries was further political and ethnic polarization, which served as an excuse for the king to declare his dictatorship in January 1929. The violent nature of Radić's death and his grandiose funeral in 1928 were a statement of discontent at the current situation in the country – more so since several months of various demonstrations against the government ensued and the Croatian political opposition unified under his successors in the Peasant Party. The regime of the dictatorship was wise enough to use one of Radić's deathbed statements to justify the introduction of a new system of governance in early 1929 (Nielsen 2014, 111, 141). However, when Radić had said that the only thing that remained intact in the country after his shooting

was the king and the people, he clearly did not think it necessary to declare a dictatorship like the one that was instigated shortly thereafter.

To earn the trust of the citizens for both themselves and the dictatorship, some members of the Croatian Peasant Party who joined the camp of the regime later tried mightily to prove “that the Croat leader [Radić], if he had been alive, would have called on all Croats to work for the good of their Yugoslav homeland and support of the king” (Djokic 2007, 79).

In reality, the dictatorship cared little for Radić. His cause of death only united and strengthened ordinary Croats in their appeals for reshaping the state and for respect for political and cultural autonomy for their nation. Therefore, after the Croatian Peasant Party was banned and the main party executives suffered persecution, the regime devoted considerable attention to the prohibition of all “Croatian separatist” figures in the public sphere. In 1929, the Interior Ministry announced that special permission would be required to erect any statue or public monument (*Sisački Glas*, May 11, 1929).

From 1929 to 1935, the regime treated Radić’s texts and images as a main obstacle in its attempt to create a nationally unified state. It tried to counter Radić’s symbolic transformation into a national martyr and hero among the country’s Croatian population by monitoring the commemorations linked to his shooting and death. They confiscated earlier books, articles, and photos of Radić and members of his family, and forbade the use of terms like “martyr” or “hero” (Nielsen 2014, 141). The authorities monitored Radić’s surviving family members and prominent supporters of the Croatian Peasant Party, opposing their plans for various monuments to the assassinated leader and his brother Antun, co-founder of the party, who had died in 1919.²⁵

The use of Radić’s image therefore became a little more covert and, interestingly enough, was transferred to objects, primarily those that were ubiquitous and had everyday uses. Besides being easy to make and use, these objects could also be hidden. Some were handmade but others were even industrially manufactured. Individuals who produced, sold, and used items such as tablecloths, needlepoints, pencils, mirrors, scythes, or, for instance, chocolates with Radić’s picture were, when discovered, often persecuted as “inflammers of tribal hatred.” The regime implicitly recognized that even a dead Radić had an impact and that could cause the rejection of a single Yugoslav nation. Finally, such mass-produced items were confiscated and their owners, retailers, and manufacturers were investigated, questioned about the reasons behind the use of such objects. For instance, in May 1930, the Interior Ministry sent a memo to the Sava Banovina authorities that it had become aware of a small chocolate factory, Je-Ka, producing chocolates with Radić’s picture on its packaging. The Sava Banovina authorities were instructed to act “according to the law” against all involved in production and dissemination of these chocolates.²⁶ Although buyers of the objects containing Radić’s picture looked at their usable functions, most undoubtedly bought these things primarily because they served as a reminder of their own identity. Over time, these items would have become banal, unconscious reminders of their nationhood (Billig 1995, 41).

Sometimes, Radić’s symbolic image was clearly linked to other illegal Croatian “tribal” symbols. In 1931, on All Saints Day, Radić’s family members and his closest associates gathered at his grave in Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb. There they verbally clashed with police officers who tried to remove the small Croatian tricolor garlands laid on Radić’s tomb. In the end, 11 people were arrested, convicted, and given various fines, prison sentences, and, in a few cases, even periods of exile from the city.²⁷

Finally, from the mid-1930s, the government seemingly came to understand that the battle against symbolism was a war that could not be won and so softened its stance

toward users of the Croatian flag and showed leniency toward Radić's everyday symbolism. Essentially, while the initiative for the construction of monuments, parks, squares, and buildings honoring King Alexander quickly began to fade in Croatian lands just a few years after his death, Radić's image began to become part of the public space in the same capacity.

Today, there is not a single statue, bust, building, street, square, or any other representation of King Alexander in Croatian public spaces. As the 6 January Dictatorship relentlessly persecuted both Communists and Croatian "separatists" during the 1930s, over the next few decades the king's figure became anathema to both the fascist (Ustaša) and Communist authorities that subsequently governed Croatia. It should be noted, however, that, although limited and in a milder manner, the "removal" of the king from public spaces had already started in the second half of the 1930s. After gaining control over most municipalities in Sava Banovina at local elections in 1936, some members of the Croatian Peasant Party started removing pictures and busts of King Alexander from their municipal buildings, often replacing them with pictures and busts of Radić and other leaders of their party (Grgić 2015, 108–109). Nevertheless, most of the symbolic presence of the ruling dynasty remained intact in public spaces until the establishment of the Ustaša-led Independent State of Croatia in 1941. For instance, King Alexander's statue in Varaždin was erected with a great ceremony in 1935. Like many of the other monuments, it was a work by a famous sculptor, this time Antun Augustinčić. After the fascist Ustaša regime came to power, the statue was publicly demolished and dragged through the streets in front of the gathered citizenry in April 1941 (Huzjan 2010, 251).

Although some of the monuments and buildings that once carried King Alexander's image or name could nowadays definitely be restored, particularly those that possessed a certain artistic merit, the perception of the regime that he led remains, to put it mildly, tainted among Croats. That is why no one raises questions concerning the ruler's return to the Croatian public space. On the other hand, Radić's symbolism has remained present. Due to obstruction by the dictatorship, the first of the few major monuments depicting Radić was erected only in 1935 in Zagreb, as one of the best works of the sculptor Mila Wood. However, it did not stay very long in the capital. At the request of party supporters from Petrinja, it was soon moved to that town (Kulundžić 1991, 144–145). Nevertheless, he continued to be widely considered an important addition to the Croatian national pantheon. His role was frequently used ideologically (or misused) by all of the authorities from 1929 onward. The heroism and genius, character, and martyrdom of Stjepan Radić are still celebrated through monuments, paintings, stamps, and other "banal" symbolic representations all over the country, thus assuring him a role as one of the fathers of the modern Croatian nation. For instance, today Radić's image can be found on the Croatian currency, a position that was reserved almost exclusively for members of the ruling dynasty during the monarchist Yugoslavia. Why? Because Radić, like other heroes (alongside other national symbols), reminds "fellow-citizens of their cultural bonds and political kinship through reaffirmations of identity and unity" (Smith 1991, 162).

Conclusion

Everyday conflicts between the images of King Alexander and Stjepan Radić and the Yugoslav and Croatian national flags in public spaces are at least small indications that a Croatian national consciousness was already developed at the advent of the 6 January Dictatorship in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The imposition of rigid Yugoslavism caused the emergence of


otherwise stealthy but sometimes very blunt and open opposition to the Yugoslav state and its national symbolism. Although unprepared and unorganized, otherwise peaceful Croatian nationalists occasionally entered into physical clashes with local law enforcement. Even though the symbolism of the Croatian national flag and Radić as a martyr and national hero was placed outside of the law by the government, it was still attractive for many. Emphasizing Croatian motifs in the 1930s amounted to a statement of disagreement with the regime's state and national policy. The symbolism that the dictatorship so vigorously promoted during the first half of the 1930s began to fade rather rapidly as the second half of the decade drew to a close, increasingly deprived of the pressure that bore the hallmarks of state sanctioned repression. A multitude of examples concerning the presence, use, and misuse of symbolic Yugoslavism and Croatism testify to how Croats clearly felt that the Yugoslav monarchist "one state, one nation, one king" concept was forced, overly exclusive, and therefore – especially in the long run – repellent.

Notes

1. The category of "people" or "ordinary people" used in this paper, if not explicitly stated otherwise, inclusively relates to people of various socioeconomic backgrounds, generally unrelated in terms of education, geography, wealth, etc. – those who accepted or rejected *Yugoslavism* and *Croatism*. I refer to them primarily as the ordinary group of citizens, a faceless mass of inhabitants of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia or Croatia in particular (always clarifying whether I am referring to the Croats or all the inhabitants of Yugoslavia).
2. Concerning the specific objectives of the dictatorship, see Imamović (1992, 58–63) and Nielsen (2014, 79–80). Although Nielsen's book offers a one-dimensional approach to the subject, due to the depth of research and the narrow focus it puts on the time of the Yugoslav dictatorship, it is indispensable and provides a great deal of useful information.
3. This and all subsequent translations between Croatian, Serbian, and related languages into English were made by the author.
4. By that time even prominent pro-Yugoslav foreign observers such as Robert William Seton-Watson, Arthur Evans, and Mary Edith Durham started to notice the violent methods employed by the dictatorship (Drapac 2010, 123–135).
5. Red, white, and blue colors were used nationally among Croats for the first time in May 1848, during the inauguration of Ban Josip Jelačić in Zagreb, which was in more than one way a Croatian national manifestation. Although the pan-Slavic nature of these colors is obvious, some authors, including famous Croatian publicist and culturologist Josip Horvat, later interpreted that the red was derived from the color of the Croatian coat of arms, white (silver) represented Slavonia (a Croatian province), because it underlined its separate crest, and, apparently, blue was included because it also underlined a specific historical crest – this time the coat of arms of Dalmatia (Jareb 2010, 56).
6. "Law on the Name and Division of the Kingdom." § 29. 1929. In *Zbirka Službenog glasnika sv. 36.*, 13. Split: Hrvatska štamparija.
7. "Law on Holidays." § 9. 1929. In *Zbirka Službenog glasnika sv. 36.*, 54. Split: Hrvatska štamparija.
8. Ivanec district chief to KBUSB, 4 December 1929. HDA, Political situation [*Politička situacija*; PS], doc. 1669; Zlatar district chief to KBUSB, 6 December 1929. HDA, PS, doc. 1685.
9. In some cases from the Croatian periphery, flags were seized and sent to higher authorities, like the Royal Banovina Administration of the Sava Banovina [*Kraljevska banska uprava Savske banovine*, KBUSB] in Zagreb. A few can still be found today, well preserved among other documents. For instance, Croatian state archive [*Hrvatski državni arhiv*, HDA], Sava banovina – Department for public protection [*Savska banovina – Odjeljak za državnu zaštitu*; SB ODZ], box 85, 19167/1932.
10. Kutina district chief to KBUSB, 6 August 1932. HDA, SB ODZ, box 85, 18990/1932.
11. Daruvar district chief to KBUSB, 25 November 1938. HDA, PS, doc. 5352.
12. Karlovac police chief to KBUSB, 2 August 1932. HDA, SB ODZ, box 85, 19225/1932; Report of the Pisarovina district chief to KBUSB, 2 March 1933. HDA, PS, doc. 3272.

13. Rescript of KBUSB regarding the case of district chiefs Stjepan Dolušić and Damjan Korda, 8 March 1939. HDA, Personal records of civil servants [*Personalni spisi državnih službenika*], doc. 2682 (Dolušić Stjepan).
14. Ivanec district chief to KBUSB August 8, 1932. HDA, PS, doc. 2863.
15. Sava Banovina was one of the nine regional units into which the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided in 1929. The administrative center (KBUSB) of Sava Banovina was in Zagreb and its territory was populated mostly by Croats. All the Banovinas were centralized, i.e. strictly subordinated to the central state authorities during the dictatorship.
16. According to Article 4 of the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church of 1931, issued on basis of the Law on the Serbian Orthodox Church of 1929, the flag of the Serbian Orthodox Church was defined as a “red, blue, and white tricolor, with a golden Serbian cross.” “Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church.” § 4. 1932. In *Zbirka crkvenih zakona vol. 1*, edited by Vojislav Janić and Milenko Janošević, 53–54. Beograd: Izdavačka knjižarnica Gece Kona.
17. Novska district chief to KBUSB 25 July 1933. HDA, PS, doc. 3260.
18. Order of the Interior Ministry on the use of “tribal flags,” 17 October 1935. HDA, PS, doc. 4142.
19. One could rightly doubt the description of these events, since they were published six years later, when the pro-fascist Independent State of Croatia had already been established. It is also important to understand that due to the strict censorship regulations in the 1930s, Yugoslav newspapers rarely published (objective) pieces related to the flag incidents.
20. “Law on Press.” § 53. 1929. In *Kazneno zakonodavstvo, knjiga 2*, edited by Franjo Agatonović, 29. Zagreb: Themis.
21. Zagreb Police directorate to KBUSB, 20 May 1930. HDA, Sava Banovina – Administrative Department [*Savska banovina – Upravno odjeljenje*; SB UO] box 35, 12446/1930.
22. Minutes from the interrogation of suspect (A.G.) in Ogulin General Hospital, 23 August 1931. HDA, SB UO, box 151, 23984/1931.
23. Zagreb Police Directorate to the Interior Ministry, 23 March 1931. HDA, SB UO, box. 110, 7145/1931.
24. It is difficult to precisely determine King Alexander’s popularity or unpopularity and whether there were differences in the perception of his person in various parts of the country. Even some Croatian nationalist politicians, writing with an aversion to the king, admitted that he enjoyed popular support among Croats. For example, Ivo Pilar (under the pseudonym Florian Lichtträger) in 1933 explained it as a matter of legacy – stating that during the Austro-Hungarian period Croats learned to relate to the particular person of the ruler, while the Serbs on the other hand honored more the concept of monarchy (Lichtträger 1933, 49–50).
25. An overview of various initiatives regarding intended monuments to Stjepan Radić that were blocked by the regime can be found at HDA, Political parties, and associations [*Građanske stranke i društva*], doc. 234.
26. The Interior Ministry to KBUSB, 12 March 1930. HDA, SB UO, box 30, 9861/1930. Two directors of the Je-Ka factory, who were described as “Israelites” in the interrogation file, emphasized that they produced Stjepan Radić chocolates only in the last few months of 1929 and that they destroyed all the chocolate labels immediately after the introduction of the dictatorship.
27. Zagreb Police directorate to KBUSB, 2 November 1931. HDA, SB UO, box 97, 1787/1931.

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- stranke i društva], "Political situation" [*Politička situacija*; PS], "Sava Banovina – Administrative department" [*Savska banovina – Upravno odjeljenje*; SB UO], "Sava Banovina – Department for public protection" [*Savska banovina – Odjeljak za državnu zaštitu*; SB ODZ].
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