The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

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From Speech Acts to Conflict: The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

Introduction

The rise of Serbian nationalism and identity formation in the post-Tito years is not as straightforward as one immediately would assume following the major transitions in the Yugoslavian government and society. The causes of ethnic conflict and, more specifically, the reason for ethno-religious identity formation varies with regard to which cases are investigated and which theoretical approach is employed. The causal relationship between structural transitions and Serbian nationalism cannot be established unless the intentions, motivations and entrepreneurial ability of key actors exploiting the political vacuum are explained. Slobodan Milosevic's effort to manoeuvre himself in the Serbian political system from 1987 and onwards exemplifies what role ethnic entrepreneurs/securitising actors play in a mutually constitutive process between political elites, structural constraints and identity formation. This prompts the question: how were the securitising moves and acts performed in Serbia between 1987 and 1991? Furthermore, how was ethnicity related to the process of securitisation?

This paper concludes that the securitising moves and speech acts by Slobodan Milosevic were first and foremost made possible through the means of ethnicity. The securitisation of ethnicity followed a three-way process initiated by Milosevic, each of them parallel and mutually dependent on each other: (1) An external securitising move of protecting the Serb population from other ethnicities; (2) An internal securitising move by ensuring his position within the Serbian government and applying policies based on ethnicity and; (3) a counter-securitising move by the Croatian government and Serbian political opposition which enabled Milosevic to declare a state-of-emergency and complete the process of securitisation. Although not all encompassing in terms of explaining the holistic cause of conflict, this paper shows that securitisation of ethnicity was made possible by the changes in Serbian society. Slobodan Milosevic's securitising moves then again shaped the society enabling fruitful conditions for the securitisation of ethnicity.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: I first give a short review and justification for the theoretical approach of the rather broad spectrum of securitisation theory, which is applied specifically to ethnic entrepreneurs. The next segment provides a short outline of important benchmark dates in Serbian history. The paper then moves into analysing the different securitising moves by Slobodan Milosevic as an ethnic entrepreneur, and at the same time examining the process of ethnic identity formation in the Serbian society.

The Copenhagen School, Sociological Securitisation Theory and Ethnic Conflict

Securitisation theory starts with the premise that security is a speech act. More specifically, securitisation theory it is an approach where one investigates "who can *do* or *speak* security successfully, on what issues, under what conditions and with what effects" (Buzan et al. 1998, p.27). The term "speech acts", originally formulated by John Austin (1962), sought to distinguish different statements of speech from their intentions. Austin distinctively categorised three types of speech acts: locutionary acts which are utterances of observations; illocutionary acts which include utterance of observations as well as an implication of performative action following the speech; and perlocutionary acts which include the two former elements as well as the reaction from an external force (Austin

The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)
Written by Pål Røren

1962, p.101). The Copenhagen school, which transferred the notion from linguistics to the security sphere, starts with the premise of speeches as illocutionary acts (Buzan & Wæver 1997; Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 1995, p.54-56; Wæver 2004, p.8). Different referent objects, whether they are environmental, political, economical, social or military, become included in the "process of 'securitisation' in which the socially and politically successful 'speech act' of labelling an issue a 'security issue' removes it from the realm of normal day-to-day politics, casting it as an 'existential threat' calling for and justifying extreme measures" (Williams 1998, p.435). Security is therefore a social construction dependent on the securitising actor and the environment in which the security threat is uttered.

Eventually, this vulnerable theoretical position came under heavy criticism, similar to that of conventional constructivism, because of what some would characterise as inconsistent epistemological and ontological positions (see Buzan & Wæver 1997; McSweeney 1996; McSweeney 1998; Williams 1998 for debate). A group of scholars built on the initial criticism by exploring the relationship between securitising actor and the identities recognising the security move (Balzacq 2005; Roe 2008; Salter 2008; Stritzel 2007; Taureck 2006b). The Copenhagen School's neglect of audiences in their study has led this group of scholars to focus on the intersubjective process between the securitising actor and his or her audience(s) (see Wæver 2003, p.23 where the school acknowledges this problem). The scholars share the basic presumptions of the Copenhagen school, but take a sociological turn in terms of audiences. Instead of claiming that the acts are illocutionary, the sociological approach uses the perlocutionary speech act as a tool for understanding the intersubjective role of audiences (Balzacq 2005). The responsiveness of the act is of crucial importance, where in order "[T]o persuade the audience, that is, to achieve a perlocutionary effect, the speaker has to tune his/her language to the audience's experience" (Balzacq 2011, p.9).

Ethnic entrepreneurs are individuals who seek power through means based on ethnic appeals that in turn reinforce ethnic polarisation in a community (Kaufman 2001; Lake & Rothchild 1998; Zupanov et al. 1996). The dominant theories of ethnic conflict and identity formation which include: primordialism (Connor 1994; Isaacs 1989; Kaplan 1993; Smith 1986; Van den Berghe 1981); Instrumentalism (Bates 1983; Chandra 2004; Fearon & Laitin 2003; Hardin 1995) and Constructivism (Anderson 1983; Brubaker 1995; Deng 1995; Prunier 1995; Woodward 1995) all embrace ethnic entrepreneurs as a factor in their analyses. However, they vary in their perception of which role these actors take. Instrumentalists are the most insistent on the importance of ethnic entrepreneurs, stating that these entrepreneurs have their own rationalist motivations for climbing the political ladder through the *instrument* of ethnic polarisation (Bates 1983; Fearon & Laitin 2000). Constructivism and primordialism, on the other hand, have experienced a theoretical synthesis in recent years. In constructivist scholarship on ethnic conflict, ethnic entrepreneurs lie close to norm entrepreneurs (Checkel 2012; Finnemore & Sikkink 1998).The primordialist view of ethnic conflict suggests that ethnic conflict is almost destined to surface because of either biological or cultural traits (Geertz 1973; Gellner 1983; Van den Berghe 1996). The synthesis suggests that the ideas of ethnic identity are interpreted by ethnic entrepreneurs and further by highlighting ancient primordial factors. Consequently they construct new realities and cause further ethnic polarisation (Kaufman 2001; Vail 1989).

By moving from illocutionary to perlocutionary speech acts, the sociological securitisation theory becomes more similar to that of constructivist approaches to ethnic conflicts. Moreover, the focus on the relationship between the speaker and the audiences bears striking resemblance to that of ethnic entrepreneurs and society. According to Balzacq (2005; 2010, p.66-67) sociological securitisation theory blends discourse analysis (illocutionary) and process tracing (perlocutionary), subsequently leading to three overlapping levels of analysis: (1) Discourse as text, focusing on the string of statements uttered by the actor; (2) Discourse as action, which focuses on the actor's intention of the speech act, and; (3) The context of production, which focuses on both the internal and external forces that either prohibits or secures an environment of securitisation. This paper will in the subsequent paragraph, apply this method of sociological securitisation focusing on speeches and actions by Milosevic, and the context in which these acts and moves were made.

Benchmark Dates: A Short Empirical Review of Serbia and the Balkans

The Balkans are characterized by linguistic families of Slavic, Albanian, Romance, Turkic and Hellenic, and religious views of Christian Orthodox, Roman Catholicism and Islam. According to Ramet (2002, p.xii), the extreme cultural divergence in the Balkans is a result of it being:

The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

Written by Pål Røren

".. situated at the cultural crossroads of the Old World. The continental crusts of Rome and Byzantium have been colliding here for a millennium. The subcontinent of Islam dashed at the emerging landmass half a millennium ago. There is a Central European belt (Slovenia, northern Croatia, the Vojvodina) and a Mediterranean belt (the littorals of Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro). There is a Muslim belt, and an Eastern Orthodox belt."

Opposite to the orthodox narrative (see Kaplan 1993) there has been relatively little cultural animosity between the ethnic groups in historical terms (Ramet 2002). Certain violent benchmark dates, however, stand out in the discourse of Serbian history and are still symbolically vivid in the Serbian self-image. The Battle of Kosovo on June 28 1398, pictures the fight between Serbian troops, led by prince Lazar, against Ottoman Empire's troops, led by Sultan Murad I. None of the sides were victors as both suffered mass casualties including the lives of the two leaders. 1389 is perhaps one of the most important aspects of Serbian folklores. It is a benchmark date in ancient Serbian history because it symbolises both Serbian nationalism and Muslim oppression (Anzulovic 1999; Pavlowitch 2002).

In the modern age, two dates stand out as reference points for Serb self-image. On June 28, 1921 (the same day as the Battle of Kosovo), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes became a unitary monarchy under the leadership of the Serbian King, and furthermore took several steps toward Serbian Hegemony in the kingdom (Lampe 1994). In 1941 Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis forces, which established the fascist leadership of Croatian Ustashe throughout the region. The Ustashe did not waste any time when in May they proclaimed, "there is no method that we would hesitate to use in order to make [the country] truly Croatian and cleanse it of Serbs" (quoted in Djilas 1991, p.120). The number of deaths at the hands of the Ustashe has been an area of controversy, and has been both over- and under-exaggerated by camps in Serbia and Croatia in recent years (see Todorova 1997; Woodward 1995). From 1948 and onwards, Josip Broz Tito led the communist state of Yugoslavia. Tito suppressed any mention of nationalist ideas other than the Yugoslavian one (Kaufman 2001, p.169). Nationalist sentiments in Kosovo and Croatia grew in the 1960s and 70s, and in 1974, Tito increased the political autonomy of Yugoslavia's republics and provinces (Kaufman 2001). After his death, the nationalist sentiments peaked, and with no 'Leviathan' controlling the republics, political power was up for grabs.

Analysing the Securitisation of Ethnicity

The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Memorandum sparked initial controversy all over the republic of Serbia in 1986. The scholarly memo represented the academic view of the Yugoslavian political history and current system. The Memorandum did not only call for revitalising the harsh centralised system before the 1974 constitution, it did more crucially identify the external enemies of Serb nationality, namely Croatia, Slovenia, and Kosovo (Gagnon 2004). The Memorandum saw the declining status of Serb Diasporas in neighbouring republics as a warning that they could be victims of a genocide similar to that performed by the fascist Croatian Ustashe during the Second World War. In Kosovo, Albanians were allegedly committing "physical, political, legal and cultural genocide" on Serbs (Mihailovic et al. 1995, p.128). The memorandum fuelled the nationalist sentiments in large portions of the Serb population (Dragovic-Soso 2002; Wilmer 2002).

External and Internal Identification of the Security Threat: 1987-88

Milosevic himself did not call directly for nationalism. In the words of Ante Markovic, the last prime minister of Yugoslavia: "Slobodan Milosevic used everything he could to insure power for himself and power for the people. If that was nationalism, he used that" (Armatta 2010, p. 129). In real ethnic entrepreneurial spirit, Milosevic remained ambiguously vague when most of the communist elite discredited and denounced the memorandum (Doder & Branson 1999). It was not until April 1987 that Milosevic would emerge as a potential leader of the Serbs. This also represented the first securitising move toward labeling ethnicity as a security issue. Milosevic was sent to a Serb province of Kosovo Polje, the historic grounds of the Battle of Kosovo. Milosevic faced a crowd in a staged demonstration. In a response to a shout from the crowd claiming Albanian police beat them, Milosevic famously responded,

"No one should dare to beat you again…. This is your land, your fields, your gardens, your memories here… You should also stay here because of your ancestors and because of your descendants" (LeBor 2002, p.82).

The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

Written by Pål Røren

Although these statements have been exaggerated among scholars as being nationalist utterances, they still mark a decisive turn in Milosevic's rise to power (Vladisavljevic 2008). Considering Balzacq's emphasis on perlocutionary speech acts is useful in this respect, because the speech tuned into the audience's experiences and subsequently initiated critical responses from the masses. Indeed, the message "No one should dare to beat you again!" was played over and over again on Serb Television, and became somewhat of a mantra in the Serb communities, especially in the Serb provinces in Kosovo and Croatia (LeBor 2002). Milosevic did well to manoeuvre himself between the Serb communist party on the one hand, and response to the nationalist sentiments raised by the Serb public on the other. His rise was in many ways made possible because of this securitising move. The memorandum may well have laid the foundation for nationalist sentiment, which was a hot topic amongst the Serb population. Milosevic was, however, the first actor to politicise the nationalist sentiments and spark a grand movement following his speech act at Kosovo Polje.

Labeling ethnicity as a security issue to the audiences outside the Serbian territory paralleled another *internal* securitising move. In September 1987, Milosevic launched an attack on Ivan Stambolic and Dragisa Pavlovic by accusing them of corruption. Pavlovic and Stambolic were the two foremost people that suggested the "Kosovo problem" should be dealt with peacefully (Meier & Ramet 1999). Although the assault did not make any reference to the ethnicity issue, it was to become crucial for the later securitising moves.

Milosevic decided to make the 8th session of the League of Communists of Serbia broadcasted, calling attention to the unlawful actions of Stambolic and Pavlovic. In order to remain just, Milosevic uttered: "I sincerely hope, I believe in it firmly, that Comrade Stambolic was manipulated and not guilty" (Silber & Little 1997, p.44). The outcome from the eight plenum was partly a result of the speeches made by Milosevic earlier in which "those who called for moderation and rational approach to resolving Kosovo's issues were attacked for betraying Serbdom" (Gagnon 2004, p.68). In February 1988, Milosevic took official control of the Serbian presidency. Ethnicity became an ever-hotter issue during this period, especially in Kosovo. Milosevic was to become the ally of Serbian nationalism, feeding off of and fueling ethnic sentiments (Djukić & Dubinsky 2001). A month before, the Serbian Assembly under the leadership of Milosevic, started drafting a revision of the Serbian constitution in order to decrease the autonomy of what Milosevic perceived as Serb provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodnia (Ramet 2002). In securitisation terms, the revised draft of the Serbian constitution represents the first emergency measures that are taken in order to secure the Serb population's survival. With the eviction of Stambolic and Pavlovic, Milosevic had the legitimacy and support to take the securitising move to another level.

Social Mobilisation and Re-identification: 1988-90

In order to secure control over the disputed territories Kosovo, Vojvodnia and Montenegro, the Serbian government launched "rallies of truth", later named the anti-bureaucratic revolution (Judah 1999; Tosic 2009) The name was given due to the alleged "atrocities in Kosovo and what was portrayed as bureaucratic corruption and betrayal of the population" (Gagnon 2004, p.69). On October 5, Milosevic staged a mass protest of 15,000 angry Serbs marching toward the Vojvodnia parliament. The protesters shouted "down with the armchair governors" while throwing stones and yoghurt (Silber & Little 1997, p. 60). Following the uprising, Milosevic's allies were put in control of Vojvodnia. Turning to Kosovo, Milosevic staged numerous demonstrations, in which he appeared to embrace the role of protector of the Serb Diasporas. In Belgrade November 19, "the meetings of all meetings" was held where Milosevic intensified his rhetoric from the previous period:

"We shall win the battle for Kosovo regardless of the obstacles facing us inside and outside the country. We shall win despite the fact that Serbia's enemies outside the country are plotting against it, along with those inside the country" (Ramet 2006, p. 348).

The identification of Serbia's enemies (being Slovenians, Croats and Albanians) assured Milosevic's position as the most powerful leader throughout Yugoslavia since the death of Tito (Silber & Little 1997). The audiences saw Milosevic representing the grievances of Serbs all over the Balkans—the same grievances Milosevic initially had spread through his media machinery (Kurspahic 2003). Following a Slovene demonstration in support for Albanian protesters in Kosovo, a mass counter-demonstration turned up in Belgrade on February 28, 1989. Milosevic

The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

Written by Pål Røren

appealed to the masses: "This rally shows that no one can destroy the country because the people won't let them… Nothing can stop the Serb leadership and people from doing what they want". (Silber & Little 1997, p.68). The ambitious rhetoric of Milosevic helped him define a state-of-emergency on the territories outside of Serbia. He had successfully conjured Serb nationalism and re-identified the security threat from April 1987. On March 27, the constitution was amended, ensuring an even more powerful Serbia in the republic.

In Croatia, demonstrations were organised in Serb populated areas by the same people who had orchestrated the "meetings of truth" (Gagnon 2004). Croatia followed a reformist line seeking to differ itself from the politics of Milosevic. However, these reformers were dominated by nationalists headed by Franjo Tudjman, who on February 24, 1990, was voted as head of the nationalist party. Tudjman has received little attention compared to that of Slobodan Milosevic. Although described as a nationalist, a far more accurate picture is that Tudjman, somewhat similar to Milosevic, was an ethnic entrepreneur, using ethnicity as a mobilisation tool. (Gagnon 2004; Sadkovich 2010). In the period after Tudjman was elected, the relationship between the Serb governed provinces of Krajina deteriorated quickly. Milosevic's securitising moves enabled the possibility of rising nationalism in the external environment. In Serb communities, the statements by Tudjman were seen as a provocation, genocidal tendencies and revival of the Ustashe. The leadership of the Serb province of Krajina felt the pressure when Croat leadership replaced the local Serb police force with Croat troops. Thus, a counter-securitising process took place in Croatia which many realist scholars have quite eloquently labelled the 'security dilemma' (Kaufman 1996; Melander 1999; Posen 1995). Although this is somewhat inaccurate with the entire dynamics of ethnic conflict, it serves as a vivid metaphor for the elite-led response by Tudjman.

Self-reinforcing Escalation and Defining Moments of Securitisation: 1990-1991

Back in Belgrade, Milosevic faced a new challenge. Vuk Draskovic and his nationalist party represented the main opposition to Milosevic's government and had been constantly under pressure from Belgrade TV smear campaign during the last couple of years. Growing demands of freedom of press rose amongst the public and Draskovic spearheaded the movement against the government's control of the media. In March, 40,000 protestors took to the streets of Belgrade. Milosevic quickly responded and demanded that the Yugoslav presidency sent in the Yugoslav National Army (YNA). The YNA squashed the attack, which led to the arrest of Draskovic. The following day Milosevic made a television speech:

"Today the biggest asset that our country and people have was endangered in Serbia and Belgrade. Peace was jeopardized… Serbia must oppose the forces of chaos and madness using all constitutional means. I am thus asking and demanding that all citizens of Serbia contribute to peace and the establishment of order, by above all extending aid to state organs" (Silber & Little 1997, p.122).

Not only did Milosevic urge the citizens to fight the rebellion, he also issued a state-of-emergency within Serbia. He had now instigated a securitising move towards the oppositional forces within Serbia. The protest continued the following days, forcing Milosevic to increase the stakes. On March 11, he merged the external threat to the one the government was facing internally in a speech to the Serbian parliament in which he argued that the protestors were "trying to force Serbia to forego Yugoslavia and accept a diktat from the northwest about the disassociation of Yugoslavia into as many states as there are republics" (Silber & Little 1997). Borisav Jovic, at the time President of Yugoslavia and near ally of Milosevic, moved for the YNA to move against the newly established paramilitary forces of Croatia and Slovenia. Unable to receive the needed support of the presidency, Jovic resigned and Milosevic stated they had "ordered the mobilisation of special reservists and the urgent formation of additional Serbian militia units". He continued by claiming that Serbia would no longer recognise decisions made by the Presidency of Yugoslavia "because it would be illegal" (Silber & Little 1997, p.128). By now, Milosevic had justified his move away from normal rules and regulations, calling in extraordinary measures for the security issue at hand in order to preserve Serbia both internally and externally. Thus, by the spring of 1990, the ethnicity issue was on the brink of being fully securitised.

The Krajina Serb rebellion had spread by early spring of 1991. In February, a crowd of Serb nationalists and militia staged a "meeting of truth", opposing the Croatian police. The Croats responded by intervening, and in the battle of

The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

Written by Pål Røren

control the first causalities of the Yugoslavian war occurred – a Croat and a Serb.On May 2, the Croatian police, in an attempt to rescue two policemen from Serb imprisonment, attacked the village of Borovo Selo. The police was overrun by local militia, equipped with arms from Serbia, resulting in twelve Croatian and two Serbian casualties (Marcikić et al. 1993). Tudjman responded the day after, saying that this was an attempt to establish a greater "Serboslavia", and furthermore assuring that "the Croatian government, the Croatian Assembly and I personally, will take all the measures necessary for defending the freedom, democracy, integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia" (Silber & Little 1997, p.143). The Serbs similarly responded, "all responsibility for the bloodshed in Borovo Selo lies with the competent bodies of the Republic of Croatia" (*ibid.*). By 1991, the two republics were in conflict. The societies, along with the leading governments of both republics, were geared toward fighting on the basis of their ethnicity. Thus, in most forms, the securitisation of ethnicity was complete.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Milosevic, a result of his environment, played a pivotal role in the escalating conflict through the means of securitisation of ethnicity. Sociological securitisation enables us to identify the dynamics between actor and environment. It does so partly because we can analyse the speech act through the context of production and are able to locate the relevant audiences and explain their response to the speech act. This identification is also made possible because it enables us to include so many aspects of the dominant theories of ethnic conflicts and it balances neatly between opposing epistemological and ontological views (see Taureck 2006a). Focusing on the securitising actor (i.e. ethnic entrepreneur) and audiences (i.e. society), sociological securitisation theory can identify the motivation behind security measures, the reception these security measures have, and what implications the reception has for the potential escalation of conflict.

This paper asked the following research question: What were the securitising moves and acts performed in Serbia between 1987 and 1991, and how was ethnicity related to the process of securitisation? I have argued that the securitising moves and speech acts performed by Slobodan Milosevic paralleled his successful attempts at securing and increasing his political power in Yugoslavia. The means Milosevic used to obtain political power were through securitising ethnicity, which followed a three-way process, each of them parallel and mutually dependent on each other: (1) Milosevic successfully initiated an external securitising move when he spoke of protecting the Serb population from other ethnicities within Yugoslavia by adjusting the speeches towards the audience's experience; (2) He then effectively manoeuvred and instigated an internal securitising move when he dethroned pivotal state representatives in the Serbian government, ensuring his position and establishing the policy of securitising ethnicity issues; (3) The Croatian government and Serbian political opposition launched a counter-securitising move, enabling Milosevic to declare a state of emergency and complete the process of securitisation.

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The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

Written by Pål Røren

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The Securitisation of Ethnicity in Serbia (1987-1991)

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