

Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution as manipulation?

A cultural alternative to the elite-centric approach

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Abstract

Why did nationalism and socialism combine during Serbia's “anti-bureaucratic revolution”? This article critiques the elite-centric approach prevalent in the literature and suggests a cultural argument instead. Three inter-connected “elective affinities” brought nationalism and socialism together and separated them from a weak liberal alternative: (1) the emergence of bureaucracy as a “floating signifier” (2) the search for enemies and a predilection for conspiracy theories and, (3) anti-intellectualism with special emphasis on the search for “one truth.” The elite-centric approach is assessed by looking at actors who, if the thesis is correct, should have been the least likely adopters of nationalist ideas.

Introduction

Serbia's “anti-bureaucratic revolution” is one of the key events of Yugoslavia's terminal crisis. This wave of popular mobilization, which took place primarily in Serbia in the summer and fall of 1988, sharpened the country's political crisis, gave momentum to Serbian nationalism and increased the

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power of Serbia's leader Slobodan Milošević. While the anti-bureaucratic revolution may not have been single-handedly responsible for the dissolution of the Yugoslav state or the outbreak of war, it was nevertheless one of the main links in the chain of events that eventually lead to the tragic outcomes of the 1990s.

Despite some important recent contributions (notably Vladislavljević 2008), our understanding of Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution is still incomplete. In particular, most contributions to the literature emphasize the role of elites and the political use of nationalist grievances by politicians such as Slobodan Milošević (Vladislavljević 2008: 2-4). And indeed, Milošević was certainly an important actor. He exploited the Kosovo issue and amplified Serbian national traumas in order to strengthen his political position. It is easy to agree that, in pursuing political power, Milošević and the circle around him were manipulative and Machiavellian. However, the key follow-up question that should be asked is: why was the manipulation so successful? This article critiques the elite-centric perspective and offers a cultural alternative instead. The relevant question is not “was there manipulation?” There certainly was. The relevant question is “why did it work?”

This question becomes even more relevant in light of the outcome of Milošević's manipulation: a hybridization of Serbian nationalism and Leninist socialism under the umbrella of anti-bureaucratic populism. Of course, to mention nationalism and socialism together brings to mind the fascism of inter-war Europe. And indeed, some observers have made precisely this point. Milošević's amalgamation of nationalism and socialism has been described in a variety of unflattering ways: as “the newly composed national-stalinistic 'patriotism'” (Bogdanović 1988: 109) or “an unseen mutant – an amalgam of vampire communist orthodoxy and unrestrained nationalism” (Pavić 2007: 30). Others have made the parallel with overtly undemocratic or fascist political forms, by describing it as “some sort of amalgam

of young communism and extreme Serbian nationalism, which logically blended into a Serbian version of militant national socialism or fascism” (Maliqi 2007: 79).

Why did nationalism and socialism combine? And why did liberalism remain so weak? This article builds on the work of Vujačić (2003) and presents a cultural argument. It argues that certain “elective affinities” brought Serbian nationalism and Leninist socialism together. They are analyzed as cultural “schemas” (Brubaker 2004), i.e. as implicit and tacit forms of knowledge that help organize cognition. They are: (1) the emergence of bureaucracy as a “floating signifier” which could serve to mobilize both socialist and nationalist sentiments (2) the search for enemies along either class or ethnic lines and a corresponding predilection for conspiracy theories and, (3) anti-intellectualism with a special emphasis on the search for “one truth.” Serbian nationalist discourse shared these three cultural schemas with the Yugoslav version of Leninist socialism. Each “borrowed” energy and legitimacy from the other. Unlike nationalism and socialism, the weak and nascent liberalism was not organized around these three elements. Therefore, it could not combine with either nationalism or socialism and failed to resonate with the wider Yugoslav public.

The elite-centric perspective

The literature on the political crisis and subsequent violent dissolution of Yugoslavia has been heavily focused on elites. This is an understandable reaction to the so-called “ancient hatreds” thesis. In his book *Balkan Ghosts*, Kaplan (1994) painted a very stark picture of deep-seated animosities between the various ethnic groups in the Balkans. Most scholars of the Yugoslav break-up decided to emphasize elite strategies instead, particularly the political use of nationalist grievances. Overviews of the literature typically devote a lot of space to elites (Ramet 2004; 2005; Dragović-Soso 2008; Jović 2009;

Bieber et al. 2014).

This is only natural. The current article does not suggest that elites were unimportant. Yet, such a singular focus on elites may obscure the wider relevance of cultural forces. Elites may wish to create this or that outcome, but they still have to work with the cultural material that is in front of them. The elite-centric approach is appealing since it “pins blame safely on a set of evil actors” (Hayden 1999: 19). And for many scholars, the most important question about the break-up is precisely “whose fault is it” (Ramet 2005: 4-5)? This type of inquiry leads quickly to particular personalities. Therefore, instead of the “ancient hatreds” thesis, scholars have constructed another simplified narrative, what can be called the “paradise lost/loathsome leaders” perspective (Cohen 2001: 380).

Numerous examples can be given of how the elite-centric perspective pervades the literature on the former Yugoslavia. For example, Pavković writes that Milošević was “the first communist politician to make use of the re-emerging nationalist ideologies” (Pavković 2000: 103). Cohen similarly sees Milošević as “the most successful communist functionary to exploit ethnic nationalism as a political resource during the second part of the 1980s” (Cohen 1993: 51). The focus on Milošević is further accentuated by the many biographies of him (Doder and Branson 1999; Cohen 2001; Sell 2002; LeBor 2004). As Dragović-Soso writes, there is a near consensus regarding the role of Milošević in the centrifugal processes of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Dragović-Soso 2008: 14). And it is easy to agree that Milošević was power-hungry and ruthless. What is less clear is why so many went along. Why did his machinations work?

Perhaps the most ambitious and articulated version of the elite-centric approach has been put forward by Gagnon (2004; 2010; for an argument similar to Gagnon's see Lowinger 2009; 2013). Gagnon's

work is mostly interested in the political dynamics of the 1990s. Gagnon emphasizes the violence perpetrated by paramilitaries, starting with the conflicts in Croatia in the early 1990s (Gagnon 2004: xv-xviii). Violence solidified nationalist sentiments in each republic and blocked attempts at cross-ethnic solidarity. Of course, this cannot explain events like the anti-bureaucratic revolution which took place in the 1980s. When he turns to the late 1980s, Gagnon suggests that Milošević managed to “co-opt the national in order to subvert the economic” (Gagnon 2010: 31). In Gagnon's words, Milošević “exacerbated and magnified these ethnic grievances, and used them in order to shift the focus of discontent away from workers’ strikes that threatened the interests of conservatives: Now, the 'enemy', the source of problems, was not the existing economic structures but rather those reformists within the ruling party who were portrayed as responsible for the system’s corruption as well as for anti-Serb policies and outcomes” (Gagnon 2010: 31). Of course, this is not empirically wrong. But why was there so much support from below?

Gagnon does not offer an answer to this question since he unequivocally presents popular actors as forces for the good. He argues that “by the end of the decade the wider population was mobilizing for fundamental changes in the structures of political and economic power” (Gagnon 2010: 23). This outcome was something that was prevented by conservatives in the party who were threatened by the proposed reforms (Gagnon 2004: xv). Such a stylization forces Gagnon to twist the empirical story both in terms of elite and mass actors. For example, workers' strikes, which were numerous but isolated protests that rarely went beyond economic demands, are seen as a movement that “had as one of its goals fundamental changes in the structures of economic power” (Gagnon 2010: 29). Protests of other popular actors, such as the Kosovo Serb activists, are dismissed as inauthentic since they were “stage-manged and organized from Belgrade” (Gagnon 2004: 67). On the side of elites, some rather old-fashioned and rigid party functionaries, such as the Vojvodina leadership of the late 1980s, are

generously re-classified as reformist (Gagnon 2010: 30, 32).

This version of the elite-centric argument is more ambitious. It suggests that the political use of nationalism was something that was forced by elites on the Yugoslav public. According to this view, Yugoslav citizens were essentially pro-democratic and pro-reform. Thus, one alternative history would be for the Yugoslav party to morph into a social democratic option (Gagnon 2004: 183, 187; Gagnon 2010: 32). This account suggests that, instead of resonating with popular opinions and attitudes, nationalism was forced on the people and they resisted it as long as they could. The people were turned into accomplices of the nationalist agenda only when their initial attitudes were somehow reversed. Socialism is seen as opposed to nationalism, and nationalism to liberalism. This view is appealing since it re-establishes the division between the good guys (the people) and the bad guys (Milošević). This approach also separates nationalism, which caused so much evil in the former Yugoslavia, from Yugoslav socialism to which many left-leaning academics are still understandably sympathetic.

In order to assess the merits of this view, one needs to examine more closely the character of Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution. The most comprehensive account of it so far has been written by Vladislavljević (2008). He portrays it as a complex phenomenon, one that contains both top-down and a bottom-up factors. He discusses the mobilizing strategies of local actors, primarily the network of Serbian activists from Kosovo. He also discusses the often uneasy relationship that such movement activists had with elite players like Milošević. Vladislavljević's contribution is important in setting the empirical record straight. Although he too takes issue with the elite-centric approach, he does not aim to construct an alternative cultural argument to oppose the elite-centric perspective. The current article presents a step in this direction.

Towards a cultural alternative

Why are elite-centric arguments insufficient? The main objection is that pointing to elite manipulation does little to explain the mass resonance of some idea. As argued by Horowitz, who has popularized an elite-based argument about “ethnic outbidding”: “Before jumping to an explanation based on manipulation, it would seem incumbent to exhaust all other plausible explanations that do not require such a presumption. For, I presume that if elites pursue a policy of deflecting mass antagonisms onto other groups, such a policy must strike roots in mass sentiments, apprehensions, and aspirations in order to succeed” (Horowitz 2000 [1985]: 105). Brubaker makes a similar argument when he says that for a nationalist group-making process to succeed, it needs to coalesce with the “cultural and psychological material” that surrounds it (Brubaker 2004: 14). Laclau echoes this sentiment: the presence of a charismatic leader can always explain away a particular episode of mass mobilization. The possible existence of manipulation would only tell us something about the intentions of elite actors, “but we would remain in the dark as to why the manipulation succeeds” (Laclau 2005: 99).

Some scholars of the former Yugoslavia have made similar points. For example, Cohen argues that Milošević's political methods in the 1990s relied much more on repression and “electoral chicanery”, while his rise in the late 1980s had much more to do with “the cultural underpinnings, rather than the structural features of the Serbian polity” (Cohen 2001: 80). Similarly, Malešević writes that political elites “certainly instrumentalized the mass media and the education system and manipulated them”, but “new ideas, values and practices had to be molded in the fashion of already existing values and practices” (Malešević 2004: 432). In other words, invoking manipulation is not wrong but is insufficient. We must also ask why so many supported the manipulation so enthusiastically, i.e. why we “followed them while singing” (Čolović 2011).

Of course, this article does not claim to be the first contribution that has added culture to the study of Yugoslavia (among others, see Wachtel 1998; Anzulović 1999; Čolović 2000; 2002; 2011; Živković 2012; Perica and Velikonja 2012). Several authors have proposed multi-causal explanations of the Yugoslav break-up (Lukić and Lynch 1996; Ramet 2005). Yet, none of these contributions address the question posed in this article, namely, why did Milošević's "playing of the national card" work so well in the Serbian public sphere in 1988, i.e. during the period of populist mobilization known as the anti-bureaucratic revolution.

The argument developed in this article is a cultural one that focuses on the discursive compatibility of nationalism and socialism. The main idea is that a new idea must "strike a chord", i.e. work well with other ideas already present. An ideology which was previously constrained – such as nationalism in the Yugoslav case – may enter the public sphere if those who police the boundaries of the public sphere allow it. Yet, whether the new ideology resonates does not depend solely on them. The ideology in question has to strike a chord with the cultural repertoires that are already out there.

In the Yugoslav case, this means the Yugoslav version of Leninist socialism. In 1988, it had not yet lost its wider appeal (Bunce 1997: 347; Jović 2009: 300). Unlike other protests in Eastern Europe, protests in Serbia in the late 1980s were not aimed against socialism. Instead, protesters repeatedly showed their loyalty to the regime (Vladisavljević 2008: 197). Even in 1990, public opinion polls revealed that the public in general, and the working class in particular, had not decisively turned against socialism (Grdešić 2013). Therefore, it seems warranted to say that socialism retained a dose of popularity. As nationalism began to resurface it had to find its place within a political and cultural constellation in which socialism still retained a prominent place.

Vujačić (2003) has provided the central building blocks of a cultural perspective. Borrowing from Max Weber, Vujačić suggests that nationalism and socialism shared certain “elective affinities”, what he called a shared “combat ethos” (Vujačić 2003: 384). Weber took the term “elective affinity” from Goethe who himself used it to refer to chemical reactions (on the concept see Howe 1978; McKinnon 2010). It is meant to capture the tendency of certain substances to combine more with some substances and less with others. The phrase is apt since it captures the non-deterministic, i.e. probabilistic nature of the connection: the likelihood of combination is what is at stake, but different combinations are nevertheless possible (Howe 1978: 381-382; McKinnon 2010: 119-120). Furthermore, for Weber, links such as the one between the Calvinist ethic and the spirit of capitalist enterprise work largely unconsciously with regard to the agents themselves (Howe 1978: 379). This fits well with the notion of cultural schemas, defined below as implicit and tacit knowledge. Searching for such affinities in culture requires a focus on public discourse as the the most readily traceable product of culture.

Three discursive affinities of nationalism and socialism are located, three ways of thinking and talking that nationalism and socialism shared and that separated them from the liberal alternative. The first element is the emergence of “bureaucracy” as a floating signifier (Laclau 2005), i.e. an umbrella term that defined the opponents of the people and served to galvanize popular mobilization. The bureaucracy could be targeted from both a socialist and a nationalist perspective, as either a parasitic elite living at the expense of the working class or as a national bureaucracy determined to divide the people according to ethnic lines. The second element is the search for enemies and a predilection for conspiracy theories (Blanuša 2011; Živković 2012). Seeking out enemies is a common element in both nationalist and communist discourse. In the former, the enemy is defined as an ethnic “other”, in the latter, as the class enemy. At times, this can veer towards conspiracy theorizing. And finally, the third

element is anti-intellectualism with a special emphasis on the search for “one truth” (Milosavljević 1996; Dragović-Soso 2002). It was not uncommon for both nationalist and socialist discourse to be characterized by certain traits of anti-intellectualism. In both cases, this entailed a rejection of discussion, compromise and due process. Instead, in both nationalist and socialist discourse, action is preferred to words. At times, this meant an insistence on “one truth” and the rejection of the possibility that the truth may be viewed from different perspectives.

The three elements specified above can be seen as “schemas”, as Brubaker understands them (Brubaker 2004: 74-75). Schemas can be defined as culturally shared mental constructs that guide perception and interpretation, that function without conscious awareness and process information in an automatic, implicit and rapid manner. They provide a form of tacit background knowledge that helps to process new information. As Barthes (1972) argues, such common-sensical notions can come to seem natural. Yet, no society can function without such presuppositions. They enable communication since they provide the implied meanings on which successful communication depends (Wodak 2009: 46-47). As Berger and Luckmann have noted, “[t]he fundamental legitimating explanations are, so to speak, built into the vocabulary” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 112).

Before moving on to the empirical analysis, the main “isms” featured in the analysis should be defined. How does this article define nationalism, socialism and liberalism? Serbian nationalism in 1988 had not yet become the exclusionary nationalism of the early 1990s (Vladislavljević 2008: 199). Serbian nationalism of 1988 emphasized the supposedly unequal status of Serbia in the federation and the abuse allegedly suffered by Serbs in Kosovo. As Brubaker (1996: 411) argues, nationalism is a type of lament: the interests of some nation are not adequately addressed. In the Serbian case, one finds this theme of national victimization already in 1988. Missing however, is the more aggressive component

which developed over time. Exclusionary rhetoric was still relatively restrained, at least in comparison with what came afterward. Furthermore, this version of nationalism was still formulated as compatible with Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism (Pavković 1998). It is not yet the nationalism of Vojislav Šešelj or even Vuk Drašković, though it is a step in that direction.

Socialism refers to the Yugoslav take on Leninism (Jowitt 1992), i.e. a system built around the vanguard party which rules in the name of the proletariat. The Bolshevik party is not a place of democracy, but an organizational weapon (Selznick 1960). That having been said, it is important to note that Yugoslav socialism enjoyed more legitimacy than elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Communists came to power thanks to their leadership in the partisan guerrilla war. By 1945, Yugoslavia had around 800,000 fighters, compared to France's 500,000 or Italy's 250,000, though Yugoslavia's population of about 15 million was less than half of France's or Italy's populations (Jelić 1979: 160-164). Later political developments, such as Tito's break with Stalin and the introduction of worker self-management, strengthened the regime as it embarked on an independent socialist course. The regime softened, leading to a more permissive social atmosphere, including expanded opportunities for consumption and travel.

And finally, the liberalism that existed in Yugoslavia at the time should not be equated with (neo)liberalism as it exists currently. Liberalism predominantly refers to intellectuals and members of the elite who may be better classified as social democrats, as individuals who earnestly admired the goals of socialism but would have preferred a closer observation of due process, more tolerance in discussion and more critical examination of ideological dogma. They were cosmopolitan in their orientation and did not dismiss out of hand the achievements of Western representative democracy. In Serbia, the best known examples of what “liberals” looked like were the communist leaders Marko

Nikezić and Latinka Perović, purged from the party by Tito in the 1970s (Đukić 1990).

This article proceeds in the following way. Two sections are devoted to a closer examination of the elite-centric approach. These sections ask: what should one observe empirically if the elite-centric thesis is true? It looks more closely at the “least likely” nationalists, i.e. actors that should have acted as bulwarks against nationalism, if nationalism and socialism really were opposites and merged only because of elite intervention. The first section looks at intellectuals, the second at mass and popular voices. Then, three sections are devoted to the three cultural schemas outlined above: emergence of bureaucracy as a floating signifier, the search for enemies and anti-intellectualism. A section is devoted to the weak liberal alternative and how it differed from both nationalism and socialism. The strength of the same three cultural schemas is assessed. The final section concludes by engaging some of the broader issues raised by the article.

The least likely nationalists (I): Ljubomir Tadić and Neca Jovanov

As mentioned earlier, the stronger version of the elite-centric approach suggests that nationalism was imposed on socialism. Serbian nationalism and the Yugoslav version of Leninist socialism are seen as opposites that combined only because elites forced the merger. If this version of the elite manipulation thesis is correct, what should be observed empirically? For the thesis to stand, there would have to be at least some visible resistance to nationalism among those actors most committed to leftist and socialist ideals and most closely connected to the working class. If, on the contrary, there is significant overlap between their views and typical nationalist claims, then it cannot be said that nationalism was forced on them. This section and the next examine those voices who can be considered the “least likely” propagators of nationalism: two leftist intellectuals (Ljubomir Tadić and Neca Jovanov) and two

collective actors (the newspaper *Večernje novosti* and the workers from Rakovica). What one finds is that all put forward nationalist claims quite willingly. In that respect, the stronger version of the elite-centric approach does not find empirical support.

Ljubomir Tadić was a Marxist philosopher associated with the journal *Praxis*. This journal became well known internationally for its research, its critical stance towards the Yugoslav regime, and its connections to Western intellectuals such as Marcuse or Fromm (for introductions see Marković and Cohen 1975; Sher 1977). As leftists, the *Praxis* intellectuals were sympathetic to the Yugoslav regime but attacked it for its inability to live up to its Marxist ideals. Since Tadić and other *Praxis* philosophers often disagreed with the regime, they frequently came under its attack. This led to repression of varying intensity, usually taking the shape of limited career opportunities for those who were labeled as “anarcho-liberals” (see the testimonies in Popov 1989).

This experience pushed Tadić and others in Belgrade's intellectual circles towards a defense of free speech. They organized the “Committee for the defense of free thought and expression”, an informal body which tried to defend dissidents of varying nationalities and diverse political orientations. In that sense, Tadić's political involvement in the mid 1980s was actually quite liberal. The committee included many members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. However, the Academy would in 1986 become embroiled in controversy as its infamous Memorandum, which cataloged supposed injustices suffered by Serbia, was leaked to the press (SANU 1988). The Memorandum became a key document for the resurgent Serbian nationalist agenda. Therefore, the main thrust of the Belgrade intelligentsia which gathered in the Academy, Tadić included, was shifting towards nationalism (Dragović-Soso 2002: 88). Some members of this circle, such as the writer Dobrica Ćosić, always were more vocal about Serbian national grievances. But Tadić's transformation is particularly illuminating

since it shows how weak the defenses against nationalism were and how contagious it proved to be even for those with the strongest leftist credentials.

Though he criticizes nationalism frequently, Tadić also re-enforces some claims typical of Serbian nationalism. For example, he complained of the Party's excessive criticism of inter-war Serbian unitarism and centralism (Dragović-Soso 2002: 87). He also engaged in the counting of WWII casualties, a typical nationalist concern, suggesting that Serbia's losses were higher and more important than others. He argued that “Serbian partisans had given their proportional and numerically decisive contribution to the destruction of the old Yugoslavia” (Tadić 1986: 166). Such claims could only serve to strengthen sentiments of Serbian victimhood.

Tadić attacked the 1974 constitution because of its “continuity of distrust in Serbia” (*Književne novine*, March 1, 1988, 8). The constitution, which gave extensive autonomy to the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, was seen as having ushered in “an obviously unfair political system” which “placed the Serbian national question, in all its forms and with all its drama, on the agenda of historical and political events” (*Književne novine*, September 15, 1988, 5). When it came to the situation in Kosovo and the relationship between the Serbian minority and the Albanian majority, Tadić's views differed little from what a typical nationalist might say. He talked of “the expulsion of the Serbian population from the province” and called it “the new great migration of Serbs” (Tadić 1986: 166). He said that Serbs were “surrounded by a flood of raw hate, discrimination and lawlessness” (Tadić 1986: 187). Such strong imagery and explosive language was to be expected from committed nationalists, but it was ironic and tragic even that it should come from Tadić. Though he tried to warn others of the dangers of nationalism, he only served to re-enforce its main message: that Serbs were victims and that their anger was righteous.

Neca Jovanov is a very different type of intellectual. Unlike Tadić, who belonged to the narrow circle of Belgrade's intelligentsia, Jovanov began his career as a metal worker (Stanojević 2003: 292). Intrigued by the industrial conflicts he saw first hand, he wrote a dissertation on strikes (Jovanov 1979) and became a professor of sociology. In that respect, he is as close as one could be to Gramsci's notion of an “organic intellectual”, with firm roots in the working class. As he admitted himself, he was driven by “a kind of inner pressure of moral responsibility to tell the communist movement, to which I belonged from my earliest youth, the results that I have found in my work” (Jovanov 1983: 25). Yet, this did not protect Jovanov from adopting the same nationalist rhetoric that circulated in the Serbian public sphere in the late 1980s.

When he turns to the problem of Kosovo he, just like Tadić, uses explosive language: “This group of people in Kosovo [Serbs and other non-Albanians] is the most politically disadvantaged, morally degraded and physically threatened. They are suffering a genocide. It is hurtful to publicly describe the resistance of this people to genocide as 'single-nation gatherings', 'extra-institutional pressures', the 'creation of anti-Albanian sentiments' and other negative political labels” (Jovanov 1989: 97). Jovanov uses the highly charged word “genocide” and others expressions that may as well have come from one of the nationalist protests of 1988.

Jovanov also adopts the dichotomy of the people versus the bureaucracy, which characterized the anti-bureaucratic revolution. For Jovanov, the dividing line that defined all conflicts in 1988 was between “the bureaucracy” on the one hand, and practically all other social groups, on the other. The bureaucracy “exploited” and “stripped the rights” of the following groups: workers, unemployed, Roma, pensioners, Serbs and others in Kosovo, peasants, students, artists, journalists and even guest-

workers living in Western Europe (Jovanov 1989: 94-97). And when it comes to defining the bureaucracy, Jovanov adopts an all-encompassing definition that makes it possible to see the bureaucracy everywhere. He argues that the bureaucracy is the “professional managerial layer and the people who perform these functions” but also “a special political and economic exploitative privileged layer” (Jovanov 1989: 55). He lists the various types of bureaucracies in an ever expanding way: political, military, state-political, state-administrative, economic, financial, para-state and false-self-managed etc (Jovanov 1989: 56-59). This makes the list of potential enemies of the people practically infinite.

Neither Jovanov nor Tadić should be seen as Milošević's henchmen. Tadić would later become a founding member of the Democratic Party, which opposed Milošević throughout the 1990s. Jovanov would himself also become a critic of Milošević. It is to their credit that they eventually altered their views. Yet, the fact remains that two very prominent intellectuals with strong leftist credentials held positions that were quite compatible with Milošević's populist combination of nationalism and socialism. This only serves to demonstrate how easy it was to bring socialist and nationalist themes together and how unresistant Yugoslav socialism was to the advance of nationalist discourse.

The least likely nationalists (II): *Večernje novosti* and Rakovica workers

Tadić and Jovanov were intellectuals. What about the voices of mass actors, of the wider public? One difficulty with this question is that the regime did not allow for autonomous spheres of public expression, separate from the party and its wing organizations. There were no larger media outlets that functioned as “subaltern” and “proletarian” public spheres (Fraser 1990; Negt and Kluge 1993). The regime's authoritarianism may have softened considerably by the 1980s, but this particular bridge was

never crossed.

Therefore, we are left with sources which qualify as more or less official. The main newspapers in Serbia were *Politika*, *Borba* and *Večernje novosti*. Both *Politika* and *Borba* had their own publishing houses, i.e. large media companies, and *Večernje novosti* belonged to the latter. As head of the Serbian party, Milošević managed to turn *Politika* into his ally but his reach did not extend to *Borba*, since it was published by federal institutions. *Borba* was a paper for educated elites, while *Večernje novosti* had a much more popular approach. Out of the three, *Večernje novosti* catered most clearly to the mainstream of Serbian society.

How did *Večernje novosti* write about the protests which began to gather momentum in the summer of 1988? They quickly adopted the fiery rhetoric of the protesters, especially Serbian activists from Kosovo who traveled to other towns in Serbia to organize protests. For example, in one of their articles, *Večernje novosti* writes about the Albanian violence that Serbs in Kosovo allegedly suffered: “the graveyards that are desecrated, the fields that are ruined, the women who are dishonored, while the pressures of the Albanian separatists continue unabated, as does the emigration of the non-Albanian population” (*Večernje novosti*, July 10, 1988, 4). They talked of the protests in exalted terms, praising the hospitality of towns in Vojvodina for welcoming the Kosovo Serbs (*Večernje novosti*, July 24, 1988, 4). Coverage of larger protests featured extensive photography placed in the paper's centerfold, emphasizing emotional scenes such as people crying at the sight of the Kosovo Serbs (*Večernje novosti*, July 24, 1988, 12-13). These protests all occurred before Milošević formally and publicly endorsed the protests (in early September of 1988). Therefore, there was little outside pressure on *Večernje novosti* to report on the protests the way they did.

It was not only what they said, but what they did not say. One way to show that nationalist rhetoric had infiltrated *Večernje novosti* is to look for some of the less palatable details of nationalist protests and compare the coverage of *Večernje novosti* with other sources. These aspects, had they become more widely known, could have delegitimized the protests. For example, *Večernje novosti* did not mention the presence of bearded men that resembled chetniks, Serbian fascist collaborators from WWII (mentioned in *Borba*, July 24, 1988, 4; July 25, 1988, 1). Neither did they mention the presence of alcohol in the crowd at the same event. Admitting these aspects would take away from the alleged dignity of the protesters and diminish public support. In their coverage of another protest, they failed to mention that one of the speakers tried to attack Tito (mentioned in *Dnevnik*, August 14, 1988, 7). At yet another protest, *Večernje novosti* failed to mention, despite extensive coverage, some of the songs sung at the protest. This included songs with strong national themes such as “Look who's talking, look who's lying, that Serbia is small” and “The Serbian trumpet can be heard from Kosovo” (mentioned in *Borba*, July 22, 1988, 3).

If nationalist rhetoric infiltrated *Večernje novosti* it can be attributed not to outside intervention, but to the permeability of the socialist mainstream to nationalist themes. *Večernje novosti* was a catch-all socialist newspaper. What about the “core” of the working class? To the extent that such a thing exists, it can be located in Rakovica, an industrial suburb of Belgrade. It always enjoyed special status as “red Rakovica” and its workers were considered “the most conscious part of the working class of this country” (*Večernje novosti*, October 5, 1988, 4). Rakovica was the site of several large manufacturing firms which in the 1980s employed about 20,000 workers (*Politika*, April 30, 2013). In other words, if there is one segment of the working class that should care only about class concerns and that should be resistant to nationalist appeals (if socialism and nationalism are indeed incompatible), it is the workers of Rakovica. In early October of 1988 they walked out of their factories and went to the Federal

Assembly to protest.

They shouted slogans such as “We want higher wages”, “Long live the working class”, “We want to live like people” and “Down with the bureaucracy” (*Politika*, October 8, 1988, 7). However, even they were concerned about Kosovo. They explained that “the causes of the protest are the social problems that workers face, the lack of unity in the country and the activity of the counter-revolution in Kosovo” (*Borba*, September 16, 1988, 3). Therefore, nationalism was unavoidable even with Rakovica workers, the working class vanguard. They used the phrase “counter-revolution”, used originally for the Albanian protests of 1981 but extended afterward to all potentially destabilizing Albanian activity.

The demands of the Rakovica workers also suggest a dose of anti-intellectualism, something that can be observed in their desire to spread “the truth” about Kosovo to workers in other republics. This theme is analyzed in more detail later in the text. A few days before coming to the Federal Assembly, the workers held a protest in Rakovica and argued that: “we are not in doubt regarding the truth about Kosovo, but what can we do to make that truth reach our class comrades outside of Serbia? We do not doubt their class instincts and we do not think that they have no interest in the pain and misery of any national group in our country, but it is becoming evident that they do not have all the information and the full truth, in the same way that the working class of Kosovo, non-Albanian population and honest Albanians do not have all their rights” (*Borba*, October 1, 1988, 3). The phrase “honest Albanian” is interesting since it implies that Albanians as a rule cannot be trusted. In many respects, the phrase is similar to the phrase “honest intelligentsia”, a favorite communist catch-phrase. Both groups are viewed as essentially disloyal to the regime.

Once they arrived at the Federal Assembly, the workers of Rakovica demanded that Milošević address

them. If a manipulation occurred, it was one that the workers willingly walked into. Yet, it seems a stretch to view the interaction between Milošević and the workers as a manipulation, the goal of which was to turn the workers towards nationalism. Milošević's speech had the more immediate goal of calming the workers down so that they could be persuaded to return to Rakovica, a goal which he managed to achieve. There was little nationalism in his speech and his references to Kosovo were mostly platitudes (*Politika*, October 5, 1988, 1). This was the same language that the workers used a few days earlier.

Later, the event was interpreted as one in which the protesters “came as workers and left as Serbs” (see the critical discussion in Musić, forthcoming). Yet, a politician who was with Milošević that day recalls that, “to be honest, Sloba did not tell them much of anything. But in those types of situations, it does not matter so much what is said but who says it. He was unprepared and talked about this and that, but he was convincing. He tells them: 'We will consider your demands.' And I whisper to him: 'Immediately.' And Sloba adds: 'Immediately.' The people applaud and shout.” (Pavić 2007: 26). In other words, Milošević may have enjoyed this event since it demonstrated that the workers of Rakovica saw him as their undisputed leader, but there was no attempt to indoctrinate them with nationalism.

Milošević ended his speech with the suggestion “that we all return to our tasks.” To this, workers responded with applause (*Borba*, October 6, 1988, 5). They shouted “We trust Sloba” (*Večernje novosti*, October 5, 1988, 4). Milošević showed he had the wish and the skills to become a populist leader and the workers expressed their desire for such a leader. They had already proven themselves unresistant to nationalism even before this interaction unfolded. The workers of Rakovica are important since they were seen as the most “class conscious” workers in Yugoslavia, and supposedly cared primarily about pan-Yugoslav worker solidarities. As such, they should have been especially mindful of

nationalism. Yet, this does not seem to be the case. The purpose of this section was not to place a special burden of guilt on the workers of Rakovica. They were simply a mirror of the wider society.

Elective affinity I: Bureaucracy as floating signifier

Instead of the elite-centric approach, this article develops a cultural argument. Though the argument is cultural, there is no need to trace the amalgamation of nationalism and socialism to some mysterious trait of the Serbian “national character.” Such arguments have a long lineage in the former Yugoslavia (Cvijić 1931; Tomašić 1937). Although one may be tempted to trace the anti-bureaucratic revolution to some deeply ingrained trait of the mystical Balkan mindset, the difficulty with such arguments is always in their inability to spell out what we would need to observe empirically in order for their explanations to be supported. Instead, this article turns to discourse and suggests that the overlap between nationalism and socialism can be empirically observed in certain ways of thinking and talking about the social world. In other words, while the emphasis is on the tacit knowledge which underpins discourse, there is no need to resort to arguments about mentalities.

Mobilization cannot emerge, at least not *en masse*, until the boundaries between the people and the elite are drawn. For Laclau, this process is aided if some empty signifier, i.e. term that is open to multiple meanings, can emerge which articulates this divide (Laclau 2005). A linguistic sign is a relationship between “signifier” and “signified”, as defined by Saussurean linguistics. The former refers to the form that the sign takes (the word), while the latter refers to the concept itself. This division makes it possible to make sense of terms that have no immediate empirical referent, nothing concrete to which they refer. Floating signifiers can be viewed as empty signifiers that are undergoing a process of change, most notably during a period of political upheaval (Laclau 2005: 132-133). During a crisis, the

most fundamental concepts of a political regime may float towards new meanings.

Each regime has a few such words that are fundamental to its sense of political legitimacy. The default response and knee-jerk reaction of most in the Yugoslavia was to blame the “bureaucracy”, the main “counter-class” to which ordinary workers and citizens were opposed (Puhovski 1990: 178). It should be kept in mind that Yugoslav socialism was built around worker self-management: the idea that workers should run the companies they work in, a kind of “third way” between Western liberalism and Soviet etatism. By the late 1980s, the initial promise of genuine bottom-up economic democracy was almost exhausted. Politicians suggested that self-management failed because the bureaucracy usurped it. They talked of the bureaucracy as the “Achilles' heel of our revolution” (*Borba*, September 16, 1988, 2) and even more directly, concluded that “self-management had never begun to function and is at this time, not only blocked, but actually hijacked by techno-bureaucratic structures” (*Borba*, June 1, 1988, 5). All deviations could be blamed on the bureaucracy.

Could the word “bureaucracy” really be so flexible? A “dictionary of self-management”, compiled and written by a private citizen, can be consulted for its definition of bureaucracy. This 400 page volume, the goal of which was to make official communist language more intelligible to ordinary workers, is a remarkable feat, one that parallels Raymond Williams' more academic *Keywords* (Williams 1976). According to the dictionary, bureaucracy is “the class of professional managers” but also “the system of social and political relations in which the main role is played by the bureaucracy” as well as the “type of activity of the bureaucracy itself” (Sorić 1981: 21). The first definition is conventional, but the second and third expand the term practically without limit, which in turn means that the bureaucracy can indeed be seen everywhere. Neca Jovanov's definition of the bureaucracy, which was provided earlier, was similarly all-inclusive.

During the protest wave of 1988, anti-bureaucratic discourse provided an umbrella concept that could accommodate the many types of grievances that protesters wished to voice. Everything could be blamed on bureaucrats: “The grievances of Kosovo Serbs, the constitutional reform of Serbia and Yugoslavia, the political deadlock at the federal level, the lack of genuine political participation, the economic crisis and falling living standards, the structural problems and low pay in particular industries, corruption, as well as the alleged unfair treatment of Serbs suffered in socialist Yugoslavia, all now came to be seen as the product of incompetent and irresponsible high officials” (Vladisavljević 2008: 172). Conspicuous for their absence in this long list of demands are liberal demands: nobody asked for multi-party elections, political pluralism or civil society.

Suspicion of bureaucracy had for most people a definite basis in reality. For example, an interesting calculation of the taxation system revealed that the “bureaucracy” had found a way to strip the worker of practically everything that he produced. Starting from an initial amount earned by the worker as direct producer, Serbian journalists calculated that, after various taxes and fiscal contributions were subtracted, the worker was left with only 25 percent of the initial amount (*Politika*, June 9, 1988, 19). This formulation is essentially socialist: the worker is productive and the bureaucracy is exploiting him in a nontransparent but quite tangible way.

Yet talk of “bureaucracy” could float towards nationalism. For example, nationalists like the writer Dobrica Ćosić would also use the term. Ćosić attacked the ruling “bureaucracy” of both of Serbia's autonomous provinces, Vojvodina in the north and Kosovo in the south. He attacks Kosovo's elite as the “bureaucratic clan of Šiptars lead by Fadil Hoxha” (Đukić 1989, 146), using the derogatory term “Šiptar” for Albanians. Regarding Vojvodina's leadership Ćosić writes: “the existence and activity of

Vojvodina's bureaucratic autonomism, really a regressive particularism, has been ignored [...] Can certain communists really still see socialist self-managed Vojvodina as their bureaucratic fiefdom?" (Ćosić 1988, 31). For Serbian nationalists who wished to re-centralize Serbia at the expense of Vojvodina and Kosovo, the anti-bureaucratic language was very appealing. Therefore, it was possible to employ the word in both a socialist and in a nationalist manner.

Conflict between various party factions was thus waged by calling the other side bureaucratic. As one politician from Vojvodina noted: "Our talk of bureaucracy is often talk about the other side's bureaucracy [...] we are prone to recognizing somebody else's bureaucrats, somebody else's armchair politicians" (*Politika*, July 16, 1988, 2). The same rhetoric could be heard at protests, where protesters repeated many of the phrases and arguments one could hear from politicians. For example, at a protest one speaker said: "We will consider as the enemy of this people and this country all those who are comfortably sitting in their armchairs, surrounded by advisers and similar bureaucrats, who turn their head away from what is happening while making sure that their own interests are not touched [...] in difficult times we called them differently, that is by their real names, as traitors of their kin, as collaborators of the enemy, as the fifth column" (*Politika*, September 5, 1988, 5). This protester names the bureaucracy as the enemy, a concern dealt with in the next section. The regime's long standing obsession with the bureaucracy was finally mobilized by popular actors in 1988: it had found its way from top level ideological debates to mass demonstrations of ordinary people.

Elective affinity II: The search for enemies and conspiracy theories

The search for enemies is the second elective affinity between nationalism and socialism. It has already been identified as a key component of socialism and nationalism's shared combat ethos (Vujačić 2003:

384). This search for enemies frequently took the form of conspiracy theories (Dragović-Soso 2002; Blanuša 2011; Živković 2012). Although it is difficult to say how much conspiracy theorizing is normal, most researchers suggest that Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and early 1990s exceeded this threshold. The murky realities of Kosovo and the tense relationships between Serbs and Albanians in the province were an especially fertile ground for conspiracy theories (Mertus 1999).

Conspiracy theories need not always be considered a negative phenomenon, nor need one agree with Karl Popper (1966) and his claim that conspiracy theories are secularized versions of religious superstition. As the saying goes, just because you are paranoid does not mean that they are not out to get you. Conspiracy theories can imply an active citizenry whose aim is to keep those with power accountable. In Serbia, the appeal of conspiracy theories was based in a wider social need to come to grips with the economic and political crisis of the 1980s. Conspiracy theories – already established within the communist worldview – could step in to address this social demand for an explanation.

The economic crisis created an especially conducive setting for this type of reasoning. In particular, inflation wreaked havoc with economic calculation and lead many to speculate about the potential benefits that some were supposedly extracting from the rapid advance of prices. Consider the comments from this interview with a law professor, whose education failed to serve as a break on conspiracy theorizing: “I have said it all if I say that inflation is the biggest evil and that the bureaucracy is only against it on paper. The real truth is that 'their' economy is constantly raising prices since it feeds on inflationary income. – Do you mean to say that they are doing this because it is in their interest? – Yes, definitely” (*Borba*, September 10-11, 1988, 4). This quote has no nationalist connotations and showcases only the socialist side of the search for the enemy. The bureaucracy is profiting from inflation and is consciously pushing prices forward.

The high degree of organization of the “enemy” was accepted as fact. To assume otherwise was to show oneself to be naïve. As one commentator asked: “Who pulls the strings of the counter-revolution in Kosovo? Is it foreign secret services? And they are everywhere from east to west and elsewhere? Is it ustashe [Croatian fascist collaborators from WWII], chetniks [Serbian fascist collaborators from WWII], ballistas [Albanian fascists collaborators from WWII] and other emigres outside of Yugoslavia? Is it Albania, our neighbor and wartime comrade in the last war, or somebody in this country, somebody who hides the truth, somebody who does not care if a child is raped” (*Borba*, September 9, 1988, 2). Although the beginning of the quote is standard communist fear of external intervention, the final sentence expands the definition of the enemy almost without limit. Suddenly, if one was hiding “the truth” or was somehow judged to be indifferent to the suffering of innocent children in Kosovo, one became the enemy.

The economic crisis in general and inflation in particular could lead the search for enemies in a nationalist direction, not only a socialist one: “Kosovo merchants have most to gain from social property since they stand to gain from the constant change in prices of articles of mass consumption. Merchandise is hidden, records are not kept in timely fashion, supplies are stockpiled and sold later at a higher price, and profits are pocketed. Most Kosovo merchants have expensive cars parked in front of their shops, they have houses and vacation homes that they could not afford solely with their low personal incomes” (*Politika*, June 6, 1988, 4). Here, shopkeepers in Kosovo, presumably of Albanian nationality, are accused of speculation and of abuse of socially owned property. Therefore, the practice described above is objectionable from both a nationalist (cunning and deceitful Albanians) and a socialist standpoint (abuse of social property).

Another example is the sale of Serbian houses to Albanian buyers in Kosovo. Questions arose in the Serbian public regarding the sources of the money: how could poor Albanians afford to buy Serbian houses? Some even went so far as to say that Albanians offered large sums in order to make sure that Serbs left the province: “Fantastical amounts of money that Albanians are pressuring Serbs and Montenegrins with in order to buy their houses are public proof that the enemy is active and is achieving one of its main goals – ethnically clean Kosovo” (*Politika*, June 9, 1988, 12). This quote again shows an overlap of nationalist and socialist sentiment: socialist since there are suspicions of unearned wealth, nationalist since it is Albanians who are viewed with a skeptical eye. Supposedly, money from the Albanian mafia was laundered through real estate purchases (Lučić 1988: 6). A more banal explanation would emphasize the way rural overcrowding drove up property prices in Kosovo while demographic decline in southern Serbia lead to the opposite (Maliqi 2014: 143).

Demographic trends were yet another area where some saw a strategic ploy of Albanians to overtake Kosovo. The number of children born by Albanian and Serbian women was about the same in the early 1950s, 6.3 versus 5.9, respectively. By 1991, the number of children born by Serbian women dropped to 2.8, while for Albanian women the figure had remained steady at 6.2 (Blagojević 1996: 235). For Serbian nationalists, demographic trends were signs of conspiracy. After all, high birth rates are “the classic Muslim expansionist weapon” (Lučić 1988: 87).

The label of enemy was most often applied to Albanian nationalists. For example, questions were being asked at a protest about the shadowy organization of the Albanian enemy: “I ask myself if anybody in this country knows who runs the nationalist organization and separatist movement [...] we must find an answer to the question of who leads them and we must deal with them. We must defeat the enemy” (*Politika*, September 2, 1988, 5). The search for Albanian separatists every now and then lead to some

results. For example, people were arrested for distributing leaflets which promoted Albanian nationalism (*Borba*, September 2, 1988, 3). However, the size of the Albanian nationalist network was probably rather modest. For example, one overview listed only 70 participants in six illegal groups (*Politika*, June 9, 1988, 12). Therefore, the Albanian nationalist underground was probably much weaker than was usually suggested.

Elective affinity III: Anti-intellectualism and the search for “one truth”

The third elective affinity between nationalism and socialism is anti-intellectualism. It is usually connected to populist attacks on academic elitism. In Western scholarship, it is connected to McCarthyism (Hofstadter 1963). In this respect, it is connected to the search for enemies and conspiracy theorizing, discussed above. The irony of Serbian anti-intellectualism was that it was frequently intellectuals themselves (by official position) who engaged in the most obvious forms of anti-intellectualism, favoring emotional self-victimizing to rational discussion, myth-making to empirically grounded analysis, pathos to reason (Dragović-Soso 2002: 116-117; Živković 2012: 225-250).

There were many signs of anti-intellectualism in the Serbian public sphere in 1988. Some of these were socialist in type, others were nationalist. One longstanding theme was the socialist glorification of manual labor, especially in an industrial setting, and the corresponding devaluing of other types of labor. The work of those who are not in daily contact with factory machines – including politicians – was viewed with suspicion. As one commentator said: “The worker has to earn his income. If he does not earn his income on the first, second, third, fifth or thirteenth day, he receives his work book and leaves the work organization. He did not fulfill his obligations and he leaves [...] Is this the case with

republican, provincial and municipal bodies, is this the case with us all?" (*Borba*, June 1, 1988, 5). This quote demonstrates the standards which (supposedly) exist for workers and asks if they are applied in an equal manner for those at the top.

Such a view was accepted by workers too, possibly because it was flattering for their self-image. As one worker said: "We are self-managing workers, working people, we have working positions. You do not say for a functionary that he has a working position or that he is a working man. The consequences of mistakes are not shouldered equally by workers and so-called functionaries" (*Politika*, June 12, 1988, 7). In the opinion of this worker, not only is he made to accept responsibility in ways that politicians never are, but the politician is actually superfluous compared to the worker, since the politician is not really a "working man." In reality, the idea that workers immediately feel the consequences of their mistakes was not fully accurate. Not only was it difficult to fire workers but absenteeism and slowdowns were common problems too (*Borba*, July 28, 1988, 3). Yet, this topic was always slightly taboo, given the regime's apotheosis of industrial workers as producers.

The anti-intellectual aspects of public discussion came out even more forcefully when it came to various aspects of the Kosovo crisis. For example, one debate centered around the number of Albanian emigres who crossed the border from Albania into Kosovo. Yugoslavia had tense relations with Albania for much of the post-war period. Therefore, a presence of a large number of uninvited Albanians may pose a threat to the regime and to the country as a whole. The figures which were offered in the press differed wildly, from 700 to 300 000 (*Politika*, June 17, 1988, 7). More careful consideration of the issue suggested that between 1948 and 1953 about six thousand people crossed the border. From 1953 to 1975 migration was negligible, while from 1975 until the late 1980s about 400 people entered Yugoslavia from Albania, but the majority continued towards Western Europe (*Borba*, October 17,

1988, 6). Yet, high figures of alleged Albanian emigres became conventional wisdom and were used as unproblematic.

Most of the media preferred to play up the drama. When discussing the migration of Serbs from Kosovo they highlighted the political aspects. Although they did not ignore the possibility that some Serbs (and Albanians) were leaving because of poverty and the economic situation in Kosovo, they preferred to minimize this angle: “It is true that the current migrations in Yugoslavia are economically conditioned [...] Yet, to represent the data in such a cold manner is nothing else but the minimization of the current life situation of Serbs and Montenegrins and a search for a political alibi for incompetent leadership” (*Politika*, August 19, 1988, 5). They called this the “thin language of statistics.” To present data is to report “in a cold manner.” Instead, they preferred to play to the emotions of readers.

Another text echoes this sentiment. In a discussion of the position of Albanian women in Kosovo, this text bemoans the “rhetorically pointless reference to tables.” It claims that “many of our socio-political organizations perform this type of useless work with no wish to undertake a single measure, action and then show results” (*Politika*, November 14, 1988, 6). This topic, the position of women in Kosovo and the higher fertility of Albanian women, was tackled frequently. One text attacks an Albanian expert because he “explains the high birth rate of Albanians by pointing to economic poverty and the lack of culture, but says nothing about the fact that the highest political functionaries and intellectuals of this nationality have five or more children [...] Is this unemployment, lack of culture, or poverty, professor [...] ? Only after the fifth child do they seem to find out that contraception and abortions exist [...] Isn't this truth bitter? Just as any truth when it is spoken directly, is that not right?” (*Politika*, November 18, 1988, 17).

This quote again resorts to emotional appeals. Furthermore, it suggests that the truth can be established, and a single truth at that, though facts and rational argumentation may not be necessary steps in locating this truth. Since Yugoslavia was a federal state with six republics and two autonomous provinces, Yugoslav politicians always had a hard time reaching consensus on any contentious issue. For example, one commentator, writing after a session of the party, expressed his sense of frustration: “The worst part is [...] the lack of ability and the lack of will on the part of the Yugoslav leadership to have 'one truth' which cannot be so elastic to include eight versions” (*Politika*, August 18, 1988, 8). The quote is interesting in its suggestion that political organizations can establish what the truth is. Even more explicit is the following quote from a politician: “There cannot be three truths, but only one that the Presidium of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia or the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia will establish” (*Borba*, September 2, 1988, 1). For communist politicians, establishing the truth was a pre-requisite for action. Unless the official line was accepted as truth how can we know who is with us and who is not?

A better understanding of the Kosovo issue was especially handicapped by the insistence on one truth. A rare attempt to delve deeper into Kosovo realities was undertaken by Slovenian TV journalists: “Gathering as many opinions as possible, we wanted to hear as many truths as possible. After speaking with many people, we heard that there are many truths to everything here in Kosovo. We did not see the real truth. This is difficult to accomplish, I would say. From all of this the viewer has to make a decision for himself” (*Borba*, September 13, 1988, 4). Yet this was a minority position. Within Serbia, it was much more common to insist on the opposite approach. As one commentator put it: “no one in this country can wash their hands and say that there are many truths, as some say, regarding Kosovo, that we should keep in mind all these truths, since there are, supposedly, things that are unclear, and so things need to be questioned, new analysis has to be made etc” (*Politika*, October 6, 1988, 7). Albanian

politicians were not an exception, they too insisted on a single truth: “Everyone has had his truth about Kosovo, we could not reach a unified truth. And no matter how much we talk about Kosovo, we will keep tripping over these various truths. Only the enemy can benefit from this” (*Borba*, August 19, 1988, 1). This speaker connects the requirement of “one truth” in the struggle against “the enemy.” Action is preferred to discussion.

The weak liberal alternative

Throughout the late 1980s, as well as before, liberal arguments occasionally appear. They are largely absent from the mainstream and from the media. This section discusses the weak liberal current that existed in Yugoslavia, primarily among intellectuals. The same three themes are in focus: bureaucracy, the search for enemies and anti-intellectualism. Did liberalism overlap with either nationalism or socialism when it came to these three schemas?

In Serbia, liberal ideas were sometimes promoted by the philosophers connected to the Marxist journal *Praxis*, though their preference was for direct democracy instead of political parties and for democratic planning instead of the market. Liberalism is also associated with a faction within the Serbian party whose most prominent members were Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perović. Though they cannot be considered liberals in a strict western sense, this group tried to move the party towards social democracy. In the late 1980s, the most conspicuous liberal is the Western-educated Zoran Đinđić. After finishing his doctorate in political philosophy in Germany and working with Jürgen Habermas, Đinđić became the first post-Milošević prime minister in 2001, only to be tragically assassinated soon after.

The more visible strands of liberalism were tied to market-oriented reforms. Liberal attacks on the

bureaucracy could have resembled those that Austrian staunch defender of free markets Ludwig von Mises employed in his book *Bureaucracy* (Mises 1944). A liberal or libertarian version of “anti-bureaucratic” discourse is certainly possible. Raymond Williams, for example, defines liberalism in opposition to bureaucratic control (Williams 1976: 181). Something akin to this combination arose even in the former Yugoslavia. In Slovenia in the 1980s, a kind of “civil society” emerged, aimed against ideological and political rigidity in general and the dogmatic and old-fashioned Yugoslav People's Army in particular (Mastnak 1992). But in Serbia, the link between liberalism and any kind of “anti-bureaucratic” attitude was absent. Even among economists, one could not find the link. For example, even those with strong liberal reputations argued that the free market ideal of the 19th century was a myth and advocated social democratic statism instead (Pjanić 1987). Political liberals, though few and far-between, also did not resort to anti-bureaucratic rhetoric. Zoran Đinđić's book on Yugoslavia as an “unfinished state” suggested not only that the political identity on which the federal state rested was weak, but also implied the unfinished character of the state-building process, which by necessity included an infrastructurally capable state apparatus (Đinđić 1988).

Unlike nationalism and socialism, liberalism was not characterized by a discourse of seeking out enemies. For example, other politicians found the liberals Nikezić and Perović difficult to deal with since they were not interested in provoking conflict and choosing sides. Nikezić was attacked because he “always talked and talked, you cannot confront him directly. He does not want it, he will not do it” (Đukić 1990: 126). Tito saw Nikezić as an “opportunist”, which meant that Nikezić “was not for the use of fists” (Đukić 1990: 322). This shows how the “liberals” saw politics, not as “us-versus-them”, but as the slow process of compromise and coalition building: “the idea was to build bridges with all republics, always engage in discussion, never in confrontation” (Đukić 1990: 25).

Nor did the “liberals” engage in much conspiracy theorizing. For example, Perović writes: “Not who is to blame, but why did it happen the way it happened? In searching for the answer to this question one quickly reaches for conspiracy theories. They are appealing since they remove responsibility. In essence, they represent an incapacity to understand historical processes which is why they do not offer a rational alternative” (Perović 1991: 10-11). Here, Perović explicitly rejects conspiracy theories as immature and irrational, presenting an argument that is similar to Karl Popper's attack on conspiracy theories.

When it came to the problem of Kosovo, intellectuals with liberal views sometimes challenged the conventional wisdom regarding the supposed high degree of organization of the Albanian nationalist movement. The Albanian author Shkëlzen Maliqi offered some insightful comments regarding this phenomenon: “When we talk of Albanian nationalism, there is a wide-spread misconception that it is being run from a single illegal center (which assumes a strict hierarchy and a pyramid of conspiracy), that its activity is coordinated and synchronized, that it has a unified program and so on. I maintain the opposite: Albanian nationalism does not have a unified program, a supreme command headquarters, a unified tactic, and it is not refined in its activity” (*Borba*, September 23, 1988, 13). This was a clear counter-point to the Serbian mainstream.

What about anti-intellectualism? Of the three ideological currents considered here, liberalism was perhaps the least susceptible to anti-intellectualism. Nikezić was described as “sophisticated, compromise-prone, philosophical, and in love with European civilization” (Đukić 1990: 116). Perović was in turn described by the following bullet-points: “general pragmatism, technocratic-bureaucratic orientation, opportunism in politics, an attitude of compromise towards the intelligentsia” (Đukić 1989: 215). Obviously, they were not combative enough for most Yugoslav communists and were willing to

work with intellectuals, even when they disagreed with them.

The notion of “one truth” was also rejected by those with stronger liberal streaks. For example, Perović comments on the various books written about Tito's purge of Serbian “liberals” in the early 1970s and notes that “each of these books is possible. Of course, none, no matter the intention, contains the whole truth” (Perović 1991: 9-10). Similarly, Đilas, who slowly morphed from an orthodox communist into a democratic socialist or social democrat, argues in his later book *Imperfect Society* that one must “approach matters without final and previously established truths” since “violence begins with final truths about society and knowledge” (Đilas 1990 [1969]: 96).

A tolerance for multiple perspective on the truth would also require more tolerance for discussion as an activity. But, as Tadić notes: “It is notable that totalitarian ideologues always attacked discussion and debate ('the party is not a debate club'), advocating 'nourishing' violence as opposed to 'limp' and 'rotten liberalism.’” (Tadić 1986: 212). Liberals feared that without a more positive attitude towards public discussion, the capacity of society to learn would be blocked. As Đinđić argued: “Learning is always connected to the rational evaluation of values and norms which serve as guides for action. If they are not part of critical discussion, if they are metaphysically grounded and institutionally firmly established, social learning hits an external boundary and instead of flexibility results in social neurosis” (Đinđić 1988: 284). Critical discussion was seen as a necessary condition for social evolution. Yet, on the whole, liberals remained few and far between. Left without ideological allies, liberalism failed to resonate more broadly. It began to gain momentum only with outside stimuli, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, by this time the anti-bureaucratic revolution had already taken place, setting in motion many of the subsequent events and strengthening the centrifugal tendencies present in Yugoslavia.

Of course, the story presented here presents certain simplifications. Examples can be found of intellectuals who made both liberal and nationalist arguments. For example, Kosta Čavoški was a legal theorist whose first book dealt with Karl Popper's theory of the open society (Čavoški 1975). He was jailed for his criticism of the constitution of 1974 and later took part in the “Committee for the defense of free thought and expression.” By the late 1980s he combined his liberal ideas with a concern for Serbian national issues. For example, in a book from 1989 he cites John Milton favorably, discusses the ideal of free speech but then argues that “from the numerous problems with which we are faced, most attention should be given to the national question” (Čavoški 1989: 274-277). Čavoški's work with Vojislav Koštunica (Koštunica and Čavoški 1983), whose career shared a similar trajectory, illustrates that a concern for liberal values – such as the value of political opposition and multi-partyism – could lead to a subsequent interest in anti-communist nationalism. Koštunica became a well-known advocate of the Kosovo issue while Čavoški was even involved in a party that sought to re-instate the Serbian monarchy.

What are the implications of this for the thesis laid out here, namely, that liberalism was much less likely to combine with either nationalism or socialism? It should be re-iterated that the discursive affinities between nationalism and socialism are just that: affinities. Therefore, the explanation is less deterministic than probabilistic. The Weberian concept of elective affinity means that the likelihood of combination increases, but it does not rule out exceptions or even alternative paths to the same outcome. However, one would be hard-pressed to find counter-examples beyond Koštunica and Čavoški. This especially holds for the late 1980s. By the 1990s, the rise of nationalism fundamentally altered the political landscape, pushing even some liberals to play to nationalist sentiments. For example, during the war in Bosnia, Đinđić visited Pale to support the Serb leadership. But this took

place in the mid 1990s when armed conflict had already lead to the consolidation of nationalism. In other words, the focus here is on the general thrust of discursive overlap and how it shaped the cultural landscape in the period of the anti-bureaucratic revolution. This period is one of nationalism's ascent, not its consolidation.

Discussion

This article offers a critique of the elite-centric interpretation of Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution. As scholars have noted, a focus on top-down factors, such as elite use of nationalism, has been the dominant approach in the literature (Vladisavljević 2008: 2-4). Political elites matter, and this article does not dispute their importance in general, or the importance of Slobodan Milošević in particular. Though elites are indeed important, they are not sufficient to explain the combination of nationalism and socialism which marks the anti-bureaucratic revolution. Elites may have tried to use nationalism to deflect criticism from their own responsibility for the crisis, especially in light of worsening economic conditions (Snyder 2000; Woodward 1995). In itself, this is not very unusual: few elites would not attempt something along these lines. The key question is: why did it work?

This article has tried to present a cultural alternative to the elite-centric perspective on Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution. While cultural work on the break-up of Yugoslavia is no novelty (e.g. Wachtel 1998; Anzulović 1999; Čolović 2000, 2002, 2011; Malešević 2004; Perica and Velikonja 2012; Živković 2012), no account has investigated the cultural underpinnings of the large protest wave that shook Serbia and Yugoslavia in 1988. Vladisavljević's (2008) account, though important, did not have this goal. And while some culturalist work on the former Yugoslavia has investigated the rise of nationalist discourse within intellectual circles (Milosavljević 1996; Dimitrijević 1999; Dragović-Soso

2002) not many have tried to investigate the broader resonance of nationalist ideas, beyond the circle of Belgrade's nationalist intelligentsia. This article looked at several intellectual as well as popular sources in order to provide a more balanced picture.

Some observers of Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution are content to characterize the protest wave as top-down and offer brief summaries that emphasize elite involvement (Ramet 1992; Little and Silber 1995; Bennett 1995; Cohen 1993, 2001; Pavković 2000). A more ambitious strand of the elite-centric approach has argued that nationalism and socialism combined during the late 1980s because elites forced the merger. The preferred interpretation of this work is that the Yugoslav people had the “right” instincts, they were pro-democratic and pro-Yugoslav, but succumbed to nationalism because elites manipulated them (Gagnon 2004; 2010). This view is appealing since it places blame on several universally reviled figures, most notably Milošević. And indeed, nobody in their right mind would want to defend him, given the plentiful evidence of his ruthless political tactics. What such an account lacks is an explanation of the mass resonance of Milošević's hybrid of Serbian nationalism and Leninist socialism.

Given his popularity in 1988, Milošević could have chosen not to “play the national card.” Thinking counter-factually, he could have chosen to “play the liberal card.” Yet, the fact that this option was never seriously considered – and that it sounds so unusual now – shows that nationalism came much easier to a communist apparatchik like Milošević. And furthermore, it suggests a calculation that nationalism would be more popular with the public than possible alternatives, a calculation that proved to be correct. Nationalism came more naturally to both Milošević and the Serbian public.

A sole focus on elites leaves the cultural factors which underlie all action, including elite action, largely

unexplored. As a step in building such a cultural analysis of Yugoslavia's final years, this article has built on the work of Vujačić (2003) and suggested that scholars pay attention to three “elective affinities” of nationalism and socialism, three cultural schemas that brought them together and separated them from a weak liberal alternative: (1) the attack on the bureaucracy, (2) the search for enemies and conspiracy theorizing and (3) anti-intellectualism and the search for “one truth.” Unlike nationalism and socialism, liberal discourse was not built around these three elements. It therefore could not find ideological allies and create broader resonance.

Such an interpretation raises some questions about the role that Yugoslav socialism played in the rise of nationalism. Indeed, the character and popularity of socialism has much to do with Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution. It also has ramifications for the subsequent difficult transition to liberal democracy in Serbia. Serbia's citizens became trapped in the 1990s in a regime that appealed to both nationalist and socialist sentiments even as it became an international pariah. Unlike elsewhere in Eastern Europe, socialism in Yugoslavia was in 1988 still popular with ordinary people. The Serbian protests of 1988, even when they had strong nationalist aspects, rarely attacked socialism as such. If anything, they were protests for more, not less socialism: for more self-management and for more egalitarian relationships in the economy.

The difficult transition in Serbia and, to a lesser extent elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, also reveals the zig-zag character of progressive social change. Before the revolutions of 1989, Yugoslavia was better positioned to make a successful democratic transition than other countries in the region. Yet, Yugoslavia's revolution of the late 1980s, to the extent that it had one, took the form of Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution. Therefore, when it comes to political development in general and revolutionary turning points such as 1989 in particular, we may need to pay attention to certain “advantages of

backwardness” (Gerschenkron 1962). Yugoslavia was not as rigid as other communist countries and had the benefit of domestic legitimation. Paradoxically, this made extrication from socialism harder, not easier. The picture in much of Central-Eastern Europe was the opposite: a more rigid version of socialism made extrication easier. Central-Eastern Europe had a “good 1989”, while Yugoslavia had a “bad 1989.”

Finally, one may see this article as an indictment of socialism in general and of Yugoslav socialism in particular. After all, socialism seems to have partnered with exclusionary nationalism and produced the ideological hybrid witnessed in Serbia. Yet, this need not be interpreted as an indictment of socialism as such. The Leninist version of socialism may not be the only version of socialism that one can encounter, either historically or prospectively. But in the end, the Yugoslav regime remained deeply marked by the constraints of its Leninist foundations, despite the country's various attempts to pursue a “third way.”

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