Serbia's Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution as Manipulation? A Cultural Alternative to the Elite-Centric Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Serbia's "anti-bureaucratic revolution" was 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 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 certainly one of the main links in the chain of events that eventually led to the tragic outcomes of the 1990s.

Despite some important recent contributions (notably Vladisavljević 2008), our understanding of Serbia's anti-bureaucratic revolution remains 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 (ibid.: 2–4). And indeed, Milošević was 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 pursing political power, Milošević and the circle around him were manipulative and Machiavellian. However, we must follow this up by asking the key question of why the manipulation was so successful? This article critiques the elite-centric perspective and offers a cultural one instead. The appropriate question is not, "Was there manipulation?"—there certainly was—but rather, "Why did it work?"

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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 link. 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 drawn a parallel with overtly undemocratic or fascist political forms, with Maliqi describing it as "some sort of mixture of young communism and extreme Serbian nationalism, which logically blended into a Serbian version of militant national socialism or fascism" (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 to answer these questions. I contend that certain "elective affinities" brought Serbian nationalism and Leninist socialism together. I analyze these affinities as cultural "schemas" (Brubaker 2004), that is, as implicit and tacit forms of knowledge that help organize cognition. They are: (1) the emergence of bureaucracy as a "floating signifier" that 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 schema "borrowed" energy and legitimacy from the other. Unlike nationalism and socialism, the weak and nascent liberalism present was not organized around these three elements, and it therefore 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 stark picture of deep-seated animosities between the various ethnic groups in the Balkans. Most scholars of the Yugoslav break-up determined 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, Galijaš, and Archer 2014).

This is only natural, and here I do not suggest that elites were unimportant. Yet, such a singular focus on elites obscures the wider relevance of cultural forces. Elites may wish to create this or that outcome, but they must work

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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 instance, Pavković writes that Milošević was "the first communist politician to make use of the re-emerging nationalist ideologies" (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" (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 (2008: 14). It is easy to agree that Milošević was power-hungry and ruthless, but what is less clear is why so many went along with him. 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. He emphasizes the violence perpetrated by paramilitaries, starting with the conflicts in Croatia in the early 1990s (2004: xv–xviii). Violence solidified nationalist sentiments in each republic and blocked attempts at cross-ethnic solidarity. This cannot explain prior events like the anti-bureaucratic revolution that took place in the 1980s, though. When he turns to the late 1980s, Gagnon suggests that Milošević managed to "co-opt the national in order to subvert the economic" (2010: 31). In his 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" (ibid.: 31). This is not empirically wrong, but again, why was there so much support from below?

Gagnon offers no answer to this question since he unequivocally presents popular actors as forces for the good. He argues, "By the end of the decade the wider population was mobilizing for fundamental changes in the structures of political and economic power" (ibid.: 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

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the empirical story in terms of both 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" (2010: 29). Gagnon dismisses the protests of other popular actors, such as the Kosovo Serb activists, as inauthentic since they were "stage-managed and organized from Belgrade" (2004: 67). On the side of elites, some rather old-fashioned and rigid party functionaries, such as the Vojvodina leadership of the late 1980s, Gagnon generously reclassifies as reformist (2010: 30, 32).

    This version of the elite-centric argument is more ambitious. It suggests that the political use of nationalism was something that elites imposed upon the Yugoslav public. According to this view, Yugoslav citizens were essentially pro-democratic and pro-reform. Thus, one alternative history would have been for the Yugoslav party to morph into a social democratic option (Gagnon 2004: 183, 187; 2010: 32). This suggests that, instead of resonating with popular opinions and attitudes, nationalism was forced on the people and they resisted it for 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 here seen as opposed to nationalism, and nationalism to liberalism. This view is appealing since it reestablishes the division between the good guys (the people) and the bad guys (Milošević). It also separates nationalism, which caused so much evil in the former Yugoslavia, from the Yugoslav socialism to which many left-leaning academics are still understandably sympathetic.

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

TOWARD 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 an 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

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strike roots in mass sentiments, apprehensions, and aspirations in order to succeed" (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 (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" (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" (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" (2004: 432). In other words, invoking manipulation is not wrong but is insufficient, and we must also ask why so many supported the manipulation so enthusiastically; that is, why, In Čolović's words, people "followed them while singing" (2011).

Of course, I do not claim to be the first to have added culture to the study of Yugoslavia (see, among others, Wachtel 1998; Anzulović 1999; Čolović 2000; 2002; 2011; Živković 2012; Perica and Velikonja 2012). Several authors have proposed multi-causal explanations for the Yugoslav break-up (Lukić and Lynch 1996; Ramet 2005). Yet, none of these contributions has addressed 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, during the period of populist mobilization known as the anti-bureaucratic revolution.

The argument I develop here is a cultural one that focuses on the discursive compatibility of nationalism and socialism. The main proposal is that a new idea must "strike a chord"—it must harmonize with other ideas already present. An ideology that was previously constrained, such as nationalism in the Yugoslav case, may enter the public sphere if those who police the boundaries of that sphere allow it. Yet, whether the new ideology resonates does not depend solely on them, since it must also strike a chord with cultural repertoires already in place.

In the Yugoslav case, this means the Yugoslav version of Leninist socialism, which in 1988 still enjoyed wide appeal (Bunce 1997: 347; Jović 2009: 300). Unlike other protests in Eastern Europe, those in Serbia in the late 1980s were not aimed against socialism, and indeed protesters repeatedly showed their loyalty to the regime (Vladisavljević 2008: 197). Even in 1990, opinion polls revealed that the public in general and the working class in

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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, he suggests that nationalism and socialism shared certain "elective affinities," what he called a shared "combat ethos" (ibid.: 384). Weber took the term "elective affinity" from Goethe, who used it to refer to chemical reactions (on this concept, see Howe 1978; McKinnon 2010). It is meant to capture the tendency of certain substances to combine more with some different substances than with others. The phrase is apt since it captures the non-deterministic, probabilistic nature of the connection: the likelihood of combination is what is at stake, but different combinations are nevertheless possible (Howe 1978: 381–82; McKinnon 2010: 119–20). 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 most readily traceable product of culture.

We can locate three discursive affinities of nationalism and socialism, three ways of thinking and talking that nationalism and socialism shared and that separated them from the liberal alternative. The first is the emergence of "bureaucracy" as a floating signifier (Laclau 2005), as 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 the nationalist and communist discourses. In the former, the enemy is defined as an ethnic "other," in the latter, as the class enemy. At times this can veer toward conspiracy theorizing. The third and final 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 discourses to be characterized by certain traits of anti-intellectualism. In both cases, this entailed a rejection of discussion, compromise, and due process—in both nationalist and socialist discourse, action is preferred to words. This sometimes meant an insistence on "one truth" and the rejection of the possibility that the truth can be viewed from different perspectives.

These three elements can be seen as "schemas," as Brubaker understands them (2004: 74–75). Schemas can be defined as culturally shared mental

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constructs that guide perception and interpretation, which function without conscious awareness and process information in an automatic, implicit, and rapid manner. They provide a form of tacit background knowledge that helps people 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 people to communicate since they provide the implied meanings on which successful communication depends (Wodak 2009: 46–47). As Berger and Luckmann have noted, "The fundamental legit-imating explanations are, so to speak, built into the vocabulary" (1966: 112).

Before moving on to my empirical analysis, I need to define the main "isms" featured in it: nationalism, socialism and liberalism. Serbian nationalism in 1988 had not yet become the exclusionary nationalism of the early 1990s (Vladisavljević 2008: 199). Serbian nationalism of 1988 emphasized the sup-posedly unequal status of Serbia in the federation and the abuse allegedly suf-fered by Serbs in Kosovo. As Brubaker (1996: 411) argues, nationalism is a type of lament: the interests of some nation are not being adequately addressed. In the Serbian case, one finds this theme of national victimization already in 1988. Missing, however, was the more aggressive component that developed over time. Exclusionary rhetoric was still relatively restrained, at least in com-parison with what came afterward. Furthermore, this version of nationalism was still formulated as compatible with Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism (Pavković 1998). It was not yet the nationalism of Vojislav Šešelj or even Vuk Drašković, though it was a step in that direction.

Socialism refers to the Yugoslav take on Leninism (Jowitt 1992); that is, a system built around the vanguard party that rules in the name of the proletariat. The Bolshevik party is not a place of democracy, but an organizational weapon (Selznick 1960). That said, it is important to note that Yugoslav socialism enjoyed more legitimacy than socialism elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Commu-nists 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 fifteen million was less than half of France's or Italy's (Jelić 1979: 160–64). Later political devel-opments, 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

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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 as follows: Two sections are devoted to a closer examination of the elite-centric approach. I ask what one should observe empirically if the elite-centric thesis is true. I examine the "least likely" nationalists: 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. Three sections follow that are devoted to the three cultural schemas outlined earlier: emergence of bureaucracy as a floating signifier, the search for enemies, and anti-intellectualism, respectively. Another section is devoted to the weak liberal alternative and how it differed from both nationalism and socialism, and the strength of the three cultural schemas is assessed. I conclude 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, certain things should be observable 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 was 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 that 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 we find is that all of them 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; and 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 toward a defense of free speech. They organized the "Committee for the defense of free thought and expression," an informal body that 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 when its infamous memorandum cataloging supposed injustices suffered by Serbia was leaked to the press (SANU 1988). This memorandum became a key document for the resurgent Serbian nationalist agenda. Therefore, the main thrust of the Belgrade intelligentsia that 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 interwar Serbian unitarism and centralism (ibid.: 87). He also engaged in the counting of World War II casualties, a typical nationalist concern, and suggested that Serbia's losses were higher and more important than others. He argued, "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*, 1 Mar. 1988: 8). The constitution, which gave extensive autonomy to the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, was seen to have 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*, 15 Sept. 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 those a typical nationalist might express. He talked of "the expulsion of the Serbian population from the province" and called it "the new great migration of Serbs" (1986: 166). He said that Serbs were "surrounded by a flood of raw hate, discrimination and lawlessness" (ibid.: 187). Such strong imagery and explosive language was to be expected from committed nationalists, but it was ironic, and even tragic, that it should come from Tadić. Though he tried to warn others of the

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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, he himself 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 him from adopting the same nationalist rhetoric that circulated in the Serbian public sphere in the late 1980s.

When Jovanov turns to the problem of Kosovo he, 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" (1989: 97). Jovanov uses the highly charged word "genocide" and other 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 him, the divide that defined all conflicts in 1988 was between "the bureaucracy" and practically all other social groups. The bureaucracy "exploited" and "stripped the rights" of the following groups: workers, the unemployed, Roma, pensioners, Serbs and others in Kosovo, peasants, students, artists, journalists and even guest-workers living in Western Europe (ibid.: 94–97). 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" (ibid.: 55). He lists the various types of bureaucracies in an ever-expanding way: political, military, state-political, state-administrative, economic, financial, para-state, false-self-managed, and so forth (ibid.: 56–59). This makes the list of potential enemies of the people practically infinite.

Neither Tadić nor Jovanov should be seen as Milošević's henchmen. Tadić would later become a founding member of the Democratic Party, which opposed Milošević throughout the 1990s, and Jovanov, too, became 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

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combination of nationalism and socialism. This only serves to demonstrate how easy it was to bring socialist and nationalist themes together and how un-resistant 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 that 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—large media companies—and *Večernje novosti* belonged to Borba's publishing house. 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 written for educated elites, while *Večernje novosti* had a much more popular approach. Of the three, *Večernje novosti* catered most clearly to the mainstream of Serbian society.

Večernje novosti's stories about the protests, which began to gather momentum in the summer of 1988, quickly adopted the fiery rhetoric of the protesters, especially of Serbian activists from Kosovo who traveled to other towns in Serbia to organize protests. For example, one of its articles about the Albanian violence that Serbs in Kosovo allegedly suffered described "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" (10 July 1988: 4). The paper portrayed the protests in exalted terms, praising the hospitality of towns in Vojvodina for welcoming the Kosovo Serbs (24 July 1988: 4). Its coverage of larger protests featured a centerfold with extensive photography that emphasized emotional scenes such as people crying at the sight of the Kosovo Serbs (ibid.: 12–13). This all occurred before Milošević formally and publicly endorsed the protests in early September of 1988, and so there was little outside pressure on *Večernje novosti* to report on the protests in the way it did.

It was not only what the paper said, but also what it ignored. One way to see how nationalist rhetoric had infiltrated *Večernje novosti* is to look for less palatable details of nationalist protests and compare the paper's coverage of them with that in other sources. Had these things become more widely known, it could have delegitimized the protests. For example, in its coverage of one event, *Večernje novosti* made no mention of the presence of bearded

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men who resembled Chetniks, Serbian fascist collaborators during World War II (mentioned in *Borba*, 24 July 1988: 4; 25 July 1988: 1). Neither did the paper tell of the presence of alcohol in the crowd. These aspects of the event, if widely known, would have undermined the alleged dignity of the protesters and diminished public support. The paper's coverage of another protest failed to mention that one speaker tried to attack Tito (as covered in *Dnevnik*, 14 Aug. 1988: 7). In its stories about another event, *Večernje novosti* told nothing of the songs sung at the protest, despite their extensive coverage elsewhere. They 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" (recounted in *Borba*, 22 July 1988: 3). We can attribute the nationalist rhetoric that infiltrated *Večernje novosti* not to outside intervention, but rather 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 it existed, it could be located in Rakovica, an industrial suburb of Belgrade. The place 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*, 5 Oct. 1988: 4). Rakovica was the site of several large manufacturing firms that in the 1980s employed about twenty thousand workers (*Politika*, 30 Apr. 2013). In other words, if there was one segment of the working class that should have cared only about class concerns and that should have been resistant to nationalist appeals (if socialism and nationalism are indeed incompatible), it was 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*, 8 Oct. 1988: 7). Yet, even they were concerned about Kosovo. They explained, "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*, 16 Sept. 1988: 3). Therefore, nationalism was unavoidable even among Rakovica workers, the working class vanguard. For instance, they used the phrase "counter-revolution," used originally for the Albanian protests of 1981 but subsequently extended to all potentially destabilizing Albanian activities.

The demands of the Rakovica workers also suggest a dose of anti-intellectualism, which can be observed in their desire to spread "the truth" about Kosovo to workers in other republics. A few days before they went to the Federal Assembly, the workers held a protest in Rakovica and argued, "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, much as the working class of Kosovo, the non-Albanian population, and honest Albanians do not have all their rights" (*Borba*, 1 Oct. 1988: 3). The phrase "honest Albanian" is interesting since it implies that Albanians generally could not be trusted and it calls to mind the favorite communist catch-phrase "honest intelligentsia." Both groups were viewed as essentially disloyal to the regime.

Once they arrived at the Federal Assembly, the Rakovica workers demanded that Milošević address them. If a manipulation occurred, the workers willingly walked into it. But it seems a stretch to view the interaction between Milošević and the workers as a manipulation, intended to turn the workers toward nationalism. His speech had the more immediate goal of calming them down so that they could be persuaded to return to Rakovica, which they did. There was little nationalism in the speech and his references to Kosovo were mostly platitudes (*Politika*, 5 Oct. 1988: 1). This was the same language that the workers had used a few days earlier.

This event was later interpreted as one in which the protesters "came as workers and left as Serbs" (see the critical discussion in Musić n.d.). Yet, a politician who was with Milošević that day recalls, "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.' 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 he made no attempt to indoctrinate them with nationalism.

Milošević ended his speech with the suggestion "that we all return to our tasks," and workers responded with applause (*Borba*, 6 Oct. 1988: 5) and shouted, "We trust Sloba" (*Večernje novosti*, 5 Oct. 1988: 4). Milošević demonstrated here that he had both the desire and the skills to become a populist leader and the workers expressed their wish for such a leader. Even before this interaction they had already proven themselves un-resistant to nationalism. 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. What I have written here should not be read as placing a special burden of guilt on the Rakovica workers—they were simply a mirror of the wider society.

ELECTIVE AFFINITY I: BUREAUCRACY AS FLOATING SIGNIFIER

Rather than the elite-centric approach, this article develops a cultural argument. Yet my purpose is not to trace the amalgamation of nationalism and socialism to some mysterious trait of the Serbian "national character." Such arguments have

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a long lineage in the former Yugoslavia (Cvijić 1931; Tomašić 1937). Although it might seem tempting to trace the anti-bureaucratic revolution to some deeply ingrained trait of the mystical Balkan mindset, the flaw in such arguments is always in their failure to spell out what empirical data would support their explanations. In this article, I turn instead to discourse and suggest that the overlap between nationalism and socialism can be empirically observed in specific ways of thinking and talking about the social world. In other words, while I emphasize the tacit knowledge that underpins discourse, there is no need to resort to arguments about mentalities.

Mobilization cannot emerge, at least not en masse, until boundaries between the people and the elite are drawn. For Laclau, this process is aided if there emerges some "empty signifier"—a term that is open to multiple meanings—that articulates this divide (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), and the latter 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 (ibid.: 132–33). During a crisis, the most fundamental concepts of a political regime may float toward 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 people to problems in Yugoslavia was to blame them on the "bureaucracy," the main "counter-class" to which ordinary workers and citizens were opposed (Puhovski 1990: 178). Keep in mind that Yugoslav socialism was built around worker self-management, the idea that workers should run the companies they work in, which represented 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 had failed because the bureaucracy had usurped it. They talked of the bureaucracy as the "Achilles' heel of our revolution" (*Borba*, 16 Sept. 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*, 1 June 1988: 5). All deviations could be blamed on the bureaucracy.

Could the word "bureaucracy" really be so flexible? For help, we can consult the word's definition in a "dictionary of self-management" that Petar Sorić, a private citizen, compiled and wrote to make official communist language more intelligible to ordinary workers. Sorić's compilation of this four hundred-page volume was a remarkable feat, paralleling Raymond Williams' more academic *Keywords* (Williams 1976). According to this dictionary, bureaucracy is "the class of professional managers," but also "the system of

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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 be seen everywhere. Neca Jovanov's definition of the bureaucracy, 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 are liberal grievances: nobody was asking for multi-party elections, political pluralism, or civil society.

Most people's suspicions of bureaucracy had a solid basis in reality. For example, an interesting calculation of the taxation system by Serbian journalists 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 a worker as direct producer, they calculated that, after various taxes and fiscal contributions were subtracted, they were left with only 25 percent of their earnings (*Politika*, 9 June 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 toward nationalism. For example, nationalists like the writer Dobrica Ćosić also used the term. Ćosić attacked the ruling "bureaucracy" of both of Serbia's autonomous provinces, Vojvodina in the north and Kosovo in the south. He condemned Kosovo's elite as the "bureaucratic clan of Šiptars led 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?" (1988: 31). For Serbian nationalists who wanted to recentralize Serbia at the expense of Vojvodina and Kosovo, this anti-bureaucratic language was very appealing. It was possible to employ the word in both socialist and nationalist manners.

Conflict between various party factions was 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

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to recognizing somebody else's bureaucrats, somebody else's armchair politicians" (*Politika*, 16 July 1988: 2). The same rhetoric could be heard at rallies, where protesters repeated many of the phrases and arguments they heard from politicians. For example, one speaker at a protest 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*, 5 Sept. 1988: 5). This protester names the bureaucracy as the enemy. The regime's long-standing obsession with the bureaucracy was now being mobilized by popular actors: 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 assertion 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 grounded 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 a setting that was especially conducive to this type of reasoning. Inflation, in particular, wreaked havoc with economic calculation and led many to speculate about the benefits that some were supposedly extracting from the rapid rise 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*, 10–11 Sept. 1988: 4). This statement carries 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 up.

The high degree of organization of the "enemy" was accepted as fact. It was naive to assume otherwise. 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 World War II], *chetniks* [Serbian fascist collaborators from World War II], *ballistas* [Albanian fascist collaborators from World War II] and other emigres outside of Yugoslavia? Is it Albania, our neighbor and 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*, 9 Sept. 1988: 2). Although the beginning of this quote expresses standard communist fears 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 not only a socialist direction, but also a nationalist 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*, 6 June 1988: 4). Here, Kosovo shopkeepers, presumably of Albanian nationality, are accused of speculation and abusing socially owned property. Therefore, the practices described are objectionable from both a nationalist standpoint (cunning and deceitful Albanians) and a socialist one (abuse of social property).

Another example of the search for enemies concerns the sale of Serbian houses to Albanian buyers in Kosovo. Questions arose in the Serbian public regarding their sources of the money, asking how poor Albanians could afford to buy Serbian houses. Some 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*, 9 June 1988: 12). This quote again shows an overlap of nationalist and socialist

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sentiment: it was socialist since there were suspicions of unearned wealth, and nationalist since it was Albanians who were viewed with a skeptical eye. Supposedly, money from the Albanian mafia was being 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 had the opposite effect (Maliqi 2014: 143).

Demographic trends were yet another area where some saw a strategic Albanian ploy to overtake Kosovo. The number of children born to Albanian and Serbian women was about the same in the early 1950s—6.3 versus 5.9, respectively. By 1991, the number born to Serbian women had 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 birthrates were "the classic Muslim expansionist weapon" (Lučić 1988: 87).

The label of "enemy" was applied most often to Albanian nationalists. For instance, at one protest, questions were asked 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*, 2 Sept. 1988: 5). The search for Albanian separatists, every now and then, led to results. For example, people were arrested for distributing leaflets that promoted Albanian nationalism (*Borba*, 2 Sept. 1988: 3). But in reality the size of the Albanian nationalist network was probably rather modest. One overview listed only seventy participants in six illegal groups (*Politika*, 9 June 1988: 12). In other words, 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, anti-intellectualism has often been linked to McCarthyism (Hofstadter 1963). In this respect, it is connected to the search for enemies and conspiracy theorizing. The irony of Serbian anti-intellectualism is 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: 116–17; Živković 2012: 225–50).

There were many signs of anti-intellectualism in the Serbian public sphere in 1988. Some of these were socialist in type, while 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 not in daily contact with factory machines, including that of 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*, 1 June 1988: 5). This quote lays out the standards that (supposedly) existed for workers and asks if they were being applied in an equal manner to those at the top.

Workers, too, accepted this view, 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 that a functionary 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*, 12 June 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 he is not really a "working man." In fact, the idea that workers immediately felt consequences of their mistakes was not fully accurate. Not only was it difficult to fire workers, but absenteeism and slowdowns were common problems (*Borba*, 28 July 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 still more forcefully when it came to various aspects of the Kosovo crisis. For instance, one debate centered on the number of Albanian emigres who crossed the border from Albania into Kosovo. Yugoslavia had tense relations with Albania for much of the postwar period. Therefore, it was felt the presence of a large number of uninvited Albanians might pose a threat to the regime and the country as a whole. The figures offered in the press differed wildly, from seven hundred to three hundred thousand (*Politika*, 17 June 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 four hundred people entered Yugoslavia from Albania, but the majority continued on toward Western Europe (*Borba*, 17 Oct. 1988: 6). Nevertheless, high figures of alleged Albanian emigres became conventional wisdom and were used as if they were unproblematic.

Most of the media preferred to play up the drama. When discussing the migration of Serbs from Kosovo they highlighted its 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*, 19 Aug. 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 their readers' emotions.

Another text echoes this sentiment. In a discussion of the position of Albanian women in Kosovo, it 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" (*Politika*, 14 Nov. 1988: 6). This topic of the position of women in Kosovo and the higher fertility of Albanian women was tackled frequently. One article in *Politika* attacked 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*, 18 Nov. 1988: 17).

Again, this quote 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 difficulty reaching consensus on any contentious issue. 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' that cannot be so elastic as to include eight versions" (*Politika*, 18 Aug. 1988: 8). The quote is interesting in its suggestion that political organizations can establish what the truth is. Even more explicit is a 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*, 2 Sept. 1988: 1). For communist politicians, establishing the truth was a prerequisite for action. Unless the official line was accepted as truth, how could one know "who is with us and who is not?"

A better understanding of the Kosovo issue was especially handicapped by the insistence on a single 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*, 13 Sept. 1988: 4). Yet this was a minority position, and within Serbia it was much more common for people to insist on its opposite. 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 et cetera" (*Politika*, 6 Oct. 1988: 7). Albanian politicians were no exception: "Everyone has had his truth about Kosovo," said one, "and 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*, 19 Aug. 1988: 1). This speaker connected the requirement of "one truth" with the struggle against "the enemy." Action was preferred to discussion.

THE WEAK LIBERAL ALTERNATIVE

Throughout the late 1980s, and before, liberal arguments did occasionally appear. They were largely absent from the mainstream and the media. Here I will discuss 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 they preferred direct democracy to political parties, and democratic planning to the market. Liberalism was 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 toward social democracy. In the late 1980s, the most conspicuous liberal was the Western-educated Zoran Đinđić. After completing 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 Ludwig von Mises, the staunch Austrian defender of free markets, employed in his book *Bureaucracy* (1944). A liberal or libertarian version of "anti-bureaucratic" discourse is certainly possible. Raymond Williams, for example, defines liberalism in opposition to bureaucratic control (1976: 181). Something akin to this combination arose even in the former Yugoslavia. In Slovenia in the 1980s, a kind of "civil society" emerged, which targeted ideological and political rigidity in general and the dogmatic and old-fashioned Yugoslav People's Army in particular (Mastnak 1992). But in Serbia, there was no link between liberalism and any sort of "anti-bureaucratic" attitude. Even among economists one could find no such link, and even those with strong

liberal reputations argued that the free market ideal of the nineteenth century was a myth and advocated social democratic statism instead (Pjanić 1987). Political liberals, though few and far between, also avoided 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 required an infrastructurally capable state apparatus (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 uninterested 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" (ibid.: 322). This shows how the "liberals" saw politics, not as "us versus them," but instead 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" (ibid.: 25).

Nor did the "liberals" engage in much conspiracy theorizing. For example, Perović writes that she is interested, "Not [in] 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" (1991: 10–11). Here Perović explicitly rejects conspiracy theories as immature and irrational, presenting an argument similar to Karl Popper's attack on them.

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 insightful comments regarding this phenomenon: "When we talk of Albanian nationalism, there is a widespread 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, or a unified tactic, and it is not refined in its activity" (*Borba*, 23 Sept. 1988: 13). This was a clear counterpoint to the Serbian mainstream.

Regarding anti-intellectualism, of the three ideological currents considered here, liberalism was perhaps the least susceptible to that trend. Nikezić was portrayed as "sophisticated, compromise-prone, philosophical, and in love with European civilization" (Đukić 1990: 116). Perović was, in turn, described with the following bullet-points: "general pragmatism, technocratic-bureaucratic orientation, opportunism in politics, an attitude of compromise

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toward 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 she notes, "Each of these books is possible. Of course, none, no matter the intention, contains the whole truth" (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" (1990 [1969]: 96).

A tolerance for multiple perspectives on the truth also required more tolerance for discussion as an activity. But, as Tadić observes, "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'" (1986: 212). Liberals feared that without a more positive attitude toward 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 that 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" (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, but by then the anti-bureaucratic revolution had already taken place, setting in motion many of the subsequent events and strengthening the centrifugal tendencies present in Yugoslavia.

The story I presented here is obviously simplified. 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 (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 was combining his liberal ideas with a concern for Serbian national issues. For example, in a book from 1989 he cites John Milton favorably and discusses the ideal of free speech, but then argues, "From the numerous problems with which we are faced, most attention should be given to the national question" (1989: 274–77). His work with Vojislav Koštunica, 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 and Čavoški 1983). Koštunica became a well-known

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advocate of the Kosovo issue while Čavoški was even involved in a party that sought to reinstate the Serbian monarchy.

What are the implications of this for the thesis I have laid out here, namely, that liberalism was much less likely to combine with either nationalism or socialism? I should reiterate 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. And yet, 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 had 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 led to the consolidation of nationalism. In other words, my 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 has offered 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 the 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 general importance, or that of Slobodan Milošević in particular. Though elites are indeed significant, they are insufficient to explain the combination of nationalism and socialism that marked 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). This is not very unusual in itself, and few elites would not attempt something along those lines. The key question is, "Why did it work?" I have presented 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), few have tried to investigate the broader resonance of nationalist ideas beyond the circle of Belgrade's

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nationalist intelligentsia. Here I have examined 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 having been 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 in this work is that the Yugoslav people had the "right" instincts—they were pro-democratic and pro-Yugoslav—but they succumbed to nationalism because elites manipulated them (Gagnon 2004; 2010). The appeal of this view is that it places blame on several universally reviled figures, most notably Milošević. Nobody in their right mind would want to defend him, given the plentiful evidence of his ruthless political tactics, but such an account fails to explain 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 counterfactually, he could have chosen to "play the liberal card." Yet, that this option was never seriously considered, and that it sounds so unusual now, show 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 largely unexplored the cultural factors that underlie all action, including elite action. As one step in building such a cultural analysis of Yugoslavia's final years, I have 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, and it therefore could find no ideological allies or create broader resonance.

Such an interpretation raises questions about the role that Yugoslav socialism played in the rise of nationalism. The character and popularity of socialism has had 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

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anything, they were protests for more socialism, not less: 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 were 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. 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 that developed in much of Central-Eastern Europe was the opposite: a more rigid version of socialism made extrication easier. Countries there had "a good 1989," while Yugoslavia had "a bad 1989."

Finally, one might read 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 a critique of socialism as such. The Leninist version of socialism is not the only version of socialism that one encounters 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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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 interconnected "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.