Kosovo in the Yugoslav 1980s

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Producing and Cracking Kosovo Myths. The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Emergence and Critique of a New Ethnonationalism, 1984 – 1990

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Abstract: The author analyses how the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) has gained significance for the new leadership of the League of Communists in Serbia since the mid-1980s. With its authority as a scientific institution, the SANU legitimised the political measures implemented to centralise and consolidate authoritarian rule. The new perception of the Yugoslav crisis, marked by ethnicisation and self-victimisation, used Kosovo as the focus and became the dominant stance on the war and authoritarian rule of the 1990s. However, as the author shows, a critique of these developments needs to be included in the analysis in order to adequately grasp the tense dynamics.

Keywords: ethnonationalism, populism, history of ideas, Serbia, Kosovo

Introduction

In 1980s socialist Yugoslavia there was one crucial document that enabled an institution such as the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (*Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti*, SANU) to take centre stage when it came to the question of responsibility for the intellectual preparation for the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. This was what was referred to as the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The Memorandum, published in 1986, triggered a major scandal and heated debates among the Yugoslav public opinion, not least because it referred to the politically unstable situation in Kosovo at the time. Half a decade later, when the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were raging, the Memorandum was seen by many as the intellectual blueprint of the Serbian nationalists' war aims.

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Taking the Memorandum and another authoritative publication produced by the Academy on Kosovo, the "Book on Kosovo" (*Knjiga o Kosovu*) (Bogdanović 1985) as cases in point, in this study I explore the new forms of perception of societal crisis in Serbia in the late 1980s, which resulted in a new kind of ethnonationalism. This perception, a specific (non-)processing of the experience of domination, was shaped by what the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory referred to as prejudiced thinking (Abromeit 2018), as well as collectivist ideas of social order. I discuss how such thinking was connected to the social and political crisis in Kosovo and how it became the dominant way of perceiving societal crisis, characterised by a victimised self-understanding. In my study, on the basis of the Memorandum, I trace and analyse this constitutive process of self-perception as the victim, the key element of which is the aggressive stigmatisation of an alleged collective of perpetrators which is alien and existentially threatening.

Importantly however, the critique of ethnonationalism observed at that time cannot be dismissed because it indicates that there were opportunities to reflect on the possibility of there being alternatives to the way things actually developed at that historical point in time. Obviously, during the second half of the 1980s, the situation had become fraught with tension. But the emergence of new collectivist authoritarian forms of consciousness cannot be adequately described without considering the critical practice against them—precisely to show how much violence was ultimately needed to enforce the new myth-enshrouded authoritarianism.

Such an approach makes quite clear how inaccurate it is to describe the conflict over Kosovo in 1989 as "archaic"—a description many nationalist protagonists are keen to use, but one which is also just as gladly taken up in the external perception. In their works, many observers adopted a simplistic view of the situation, seeing ethnic communities of destiny engaged in an age-old conflict that had nothing to do with our "modernity". Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* (1994) is the single most frequently cited among such writings. Yet, what significance did an academy of sciences have in the societies of the Balkans? Why, of all institutions, did such a sociopolitically marginal establishment become important in the socialist Yugoslavia of the 1980s?

Strictly Scientific: Academies as Founders of Nations

Describing academies as respectable institutions seems to be a matter of course. Yet the academies of sciences and arts in the Balkans have specific characteristics, and those in Yugoslavia distinguished themselves from those in other socialist states.

Generally, the foundation of learned societies in 19th century Southeastern Europe was of great importance for the formation of ideas, which were on the one hand committed to the European Enlightenment, but on the other sought to consolidate distinctive—and consequently particularistic, that is in contradiction with the principle of universality and cosmopolitanism of enlightened thinking—national communities. General basic research increasingly became a task carried out by Europe's academies in the division of labour with the universities and state-funded academic institutes. However, in the Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Greek contexts, the academies focused on the three classical disciplines of national history, philology and ethnology (*Volkskunde*), on uncovering the "foundations", the "roots" of the national, on determining its essential characteristics and thus also its boundaries. Most of the academies' members were characterised by a self-understanding that their role was to emancipate the nation from its self-"unawareness", which set in motion a specific dialectic between enlightenment and delimitation. The academies' scientists were to have undisputed authority over deciding what comprised the essence of the nation, who was part of it and who was not (Čolović 2002).

After the Second World War, the Soviet model of scientific organisation was transferred to Yugoslavia and all other countries within the Soviet realm. Yet, while elsewhere the academies became national research centres with a high standing along the lines of the Soviet model, in Yugoslavia, after the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, for decades there was uncertainty about the role of the academies. In the Socialist Republic of (SR) Serbia at least, the humanities developed into a kind of niche in which above all the aforementioned classical national sciences (ethnology, philology, history) were cultivated in a very traditional way, still centreing on an essentialist concept of nation. Depending on the perspective, the Academy was thus perceived as old-fashioned or dignified as it was detached from the daily ideological rhetoric (Stefanov 2011).

In the mid-1970s, by way of a generational change, new Academy members with a completely different profile entered this niche for academics. The newcomers were intellectuals who were publicly known, sometimes even famous, and explicitly reached out to the wider public. They had identified with the new socialist order and pursued their career within it, yet at some point had come into conflict with the system. Most of them had been party members since their youth, many had participated in the resistance against the Nazi occupiers on the side of the communist-led partisans. The writer Dobrica Ćosić and philosopher Mihailo Marković stand paradigmatically for this new current. Ćosić (1921–2014) had been active in the partisan resistance and later belonged to the literary establishment, until he increasingly came into conflict with the party at the end of the 1960s over their Kosovo policy, with which he disagreed because it no longer relied on repression and granted the Albanian population more rights. Nevertheless, he remained an

influential novelist with one of the topics he addressed being the ambivalence of resistance and collaboration during the Second World War. His four-volume chronicle of the First World War in Serbia, *Vreme smrti* (Time of Death, 1977), brought him additional fame, and even the title "Father of the Nation". From June 1992 to June 1993 he would be president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Đukić 1989).

Mihailo Marković (1923–2010) in the 1960s and 1970s belonged to a circle known as the *Praxis* philosophers, a group of Marxist intellectuals who took a sociocritical approach. In the first half of the 1980s, together with Richard Bernstein, Marković was co-editor of the newly founded journal *Praxis International*. He then became the chief ideologue of the former League of Communists of Serbia, renamed the Socialist Party of Serbia in 1990, and led, since 1986, by Slobodan Milošević (Rütten 1993). In contrast to their older colleagues, Ćosić, Marković and their peers did not use the Academy as a place of refuge under whose protection it was possible to inconspicuously continue to hold onto concepts of nationalism stemming from the prewar era. Rather, they used the Academy to furnish their political and ideological positions with additional formal authority, turning it into a public platform for their ideas about societal order and historical sense-making.

The dynamics triggered by the new members saw their first "climax" in the Memorandum. At the time of its unauthorised publication, it sparked a controversy with the then party leadership in the SR Serbia. Olivera Milosavljević (1996) has impressively described the subsequent transformations that accompanied Slobodan Milošević's accession to power. By the end of this period of change, there was a quasi-harmonious division of labour between academia and politics when it came to the establishment of the new ethnonationalism. Importantly, the slogans that began to dominate the discourse after 1987 had been already tested in the Academy in the years before, when nobody had listened, or they had been met with a general lack of comprehension and critical rejection. These were slogans of a new ethnonationalist discourse focused on an equally new victim mythology and Kosovo was their centrepiece. Until then, those intellectuals who had whispered about centuries of Serbian misfortune had seemed somewhat odd and old-fashioned. This was the time when the works of Gabriel García Márquez were bestsellers in Yugoslavia and there was much intellectual curiosity about Habermas and other fashionable philosophers.

The combination of the worsening political crisis in Kosovo, in particular, and more generally, the growing unease and disappointment with everyday life marked by inflation, shortages of goods, and worries about the decline in standards produced an atmosphere in which a book that otherwise would have remained enigmatic and obscure could attract significant attention. Publications

that would, at most, otherwise have ended up on the esoteric backlist, acquired a new meaning, fulfilling a compensatory function for many who seemed overwhelmed by the challenges of the crisis. The "Book on Kosovo" (*Knjiga o Kosovu*) by Dimitrije Bogdanović (1985) was one such publication.

The Memorandum and the "True Kosovo"

On 24 and 25 September 1986, under the heading *Ponuda beznadja* (Offer of hopelessness), the Yugoslav newspaper with the highest circulation, *Večernje Novosti*, published excerpts from a "Memorandum on current social issues in our country" written at the Academy, attacking the institution as a "hotbed of Greater Serbian nationalism" (Djukanović 1986). In the weeks that followed, other media as well as political bodies in all republics voiced increasingly fierce criticism, with the result that the Academy was now indeed the centre of Yugoslav public attention, albeit not in the way that a large part of the *akademici* (the official title for members of the Academy) had been striving for. The whole text of the Memorandum was first published in Zagreb by the magazine *Naše Teme* at the beginning of 1989, which abstained from entering into polemics with the authors, and, in an introductory essay, summarised the political discussion about the Memorandum since 1986 (Grupa akademika SANU 1989; Lalović 1989). In the summer of 1990, the magazine *Duga* published a special issue dedicated to the Memorandum. This was the first time that the text was made available to a wider public in Serbia, and was accompanied by interviews with members of the Academy and discussions of the text (Šta se piše, šta se čita u ozloglašenom dokumentu, *Duga*, June 1989).

It is above all the Memorandum that can be attributed with the Academy's renown beyond Yugoslavia and beyond the scholarly public. Since the beginning of the 1990s at the latest, the Memorandum had placed the Academy at the centre of the debate about the causes of nationalism and war in Yugoslavia. It gained importance in the Yugoslav media either as means of legitimising ethnonationalism or in the attempt to reconstruct the reasons for the latter's growing dominance, even going as far as to use the Memorandum as evidence for the planning of destruction and war (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 26–8). Since 1991, the Memorandum has often been considered by the international scientific and political public as one of the first manifestations of a nationalism striving for a "Greater Serbia" (cf. Cohen 2005). The Memorandum and the Academy have become integral elements of the narrative surrounding the rise of ethnonationalism and the violent destruction of Yugoslavia. There are a large number of texts that deal primarily with the question of the extent to which the Memorandum can be read as an announcement of a project to destroy Yugoslavia and create an ethnically homogeneous Great Serbian state

(Magaš 1993; Budding 1998). Studies by Audrey H. Budding (2000, 1998), Jasna Dragović-Soso (2004), Olivera Milosavljević (1996) and Florian Bieber (2005) avoid making a direct link between the Memorandum as a programme and its role as the basis of the destructive practices of Milošević's regime. They place it in different contexts: in the ideological-historical context of Serbian nationalism (Budding); in the context of the Yugoslav intellectuals' dispute about the future of the Federation (Dragović-Soso); and in the context of the establishment of a new Serbian ethno-nationalism (Milosavljević; Bieber). Above all Milosavljević (1996) addresses the issue of the extent to which scientists and intellectuals were responsible for nationalism and war, based on the example of the *akademici*. This more refined approach to the Memorandum does not in any way amount to a denial of its political explosiveness at the time of its publication. On the contrary, scholars emphasise the significance of the Memorandum for the rise of the new Serbian ethnonationalism. It contains a variety of statements from the different intellectual and scientific contexts in which its authors were active. While the first part of the text focuses on the country's failed economic policy, including a series of grievances about Yugoslavia's economic development since the 1960s, its second part describes what it sees as the deplorable position of Serbia within Yugoslavia. As Budding notes, the first section has largely been analytically underestimated, given that it does not focus on national issues but rather criticises the real socialist economic system (Budding 2000, 52). In fact, with few exceptions, such as a chapter written by Ljubomir Madžar (1996), the second section has been the main focus of the discussion.

The first part, on the economy, primarily serves as an introduction to the much-cited second part, and above all has the function of seemingly rationally underpinning the subsequent ethnicising stances. Even if to a large extent they were certainly not advocates of any kind of Marxism, the authors followed the "canonised scheme" of socialist texts: they started out by referring to the economic basis. This part was intended to show that the subsequently formulated criticism of Serbia's unjust situation in the Yugoslav Federation was based on empirical data collected in a rational scientific manner. The first part concludes with four principles that were deemed to be the basis for a way out of the current crisis: integral self-administration, i.e. covering all areas; the universal validity of human and civil rights; the universal validity of rationality as the premise for the organisation of economy and society; and national self-determination (*samoodređenje*). According to the Memorandum's authors, in this scheme, the Serbian nation was denied the right to its own state, and the strengthening of the republics was a disadvantage for all Serbs: "Those parts of the Serbian people who live in other republics do not have the right to use their own language and writing" (Budding 2000, 124). Through this latter postulate, the four universalistic premises took a clearly ethnicising turn. The contradiction between the demand for

universal human rights and at the same time special, particularistic rights for a single nation is obvious.

The alleged failure of Yugoslavia's economic organisation and policy is morphed into a failure which affects Serbia and the Serbian people in particular, rather than the whole country. A collective subject is introduced, which, as the main victim, is at the centre of the Memorandum's description of the economic crisis. As this second part of the Memorandum has already been studied in detail, particularly by Olivera Milosavljević, only those elements that are relevant to the topic of Kosovo will be dealt with here. Firstly, it is stated that three "agonising questions" shaped the current situation in Serbia: the long-term lagging of the Serbian economy; the unresolved constitutional relations with Yugoslavia and the provinces; and the "genocide in Kosovo" (Milosavljević 1996, 126). Thus, through the Memorandum, the word genocide appeared in Yugoslavia's public sphere, introduced by a highly respected institution which was supportive of the state. The polyphonic Memorandum contained nothing new, nothing that had never been said before. The authors had compiled numerous elements of their inaugural speeches in the Academy from previous years. Their tone however was now even more pointed, as precisely the use of the word genocide proves (Sundhaussen 2011, 229). It was the first time that this term had been used outside what had so far been the only legitimate context: the narrative of the anti-Nazi resistance. This was only possible because the self-perception as a victim had been fostered in the years preceding this. In his inaugural speech as a member of the Academy, Dobrica Ćosić introduced the theme of Serbia losing in peace what it had gained in war with the greatest sacrifices, and this stance was taken up in the Memorandum. The tragedy of the "Serbian situation" was thus depicted in a dramatic tone. The Memorandum is critical of the constitutional position of Serbia in Yugoslavia—set out in the constitution of 1974—with two autonomous provinces and what was called "Serbia proper" (Sundhaussen 2011, 133). This critique served as an introduction to the second part of the Memorandum, with an unusual pathos for such constitutional issues: after its great sacrifices in all the wars of this century, in which it lost 2.5 million people, it read, Serbia now suffered its worst defeat in peace, in the form of the loss of its statehood.

The idea that such a peace could hardly be a real peace, was demonstrated in the following passages, which addressed, in various ways, the introductory theme of the Serbian tragedy and the intention to declare war on this false peace. The "truth about Kosovo" (*Kosovska istina*) metaphorically summed up the essence of "Serbian self-denial", a truth the Serbs had so far avoided (Ćosić). It revealed that a permanent war was being waged against the Serbs, and the perpetrators were the Albanian irredenta. The "revanchist policy" against Serbia, which had begun with a strategy of reinforcing the economic backwardness of the Serbian population in

Kosovo, "is now being expressed in genocide" (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 131). The collaborationist forces of the Second World War in Kosovo, the National Front (*Balli Kombëtar*), continued to be present, now donning a new political-ideological disguise as Albanian functionaries. Their "aggression" had "racist, irrevocable goals, which they sought to achieve at all costs and with all means". The Albanian judiciary and police deliberately imposed severe punishments on young Albanians in order to fuel "interethnic hatred" (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 134). For five years, since 1981, an Albanian war had been raging in Kosovo: "The physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian people of Kosovo and Metohija is the most serious defeat since Serbia fought its wars of liberation between 1804 and the uprising in 1941." At this point, the Memorandum made a direct link back to the first, economic part of the document. It explicitly placed blame for the Serbian plight on Slovenia and Croatia, personified in the chief ideologist of the Yugoslav workers' self-management, Edvard Kardelj, and state leader Josip Broz Tito: "The responsibility for this [genocide] lies in the legacy of the Comintern in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia." At that time, in the context of the increasingly overt criticism of the official view of history, there was a major public debate about the Comintern's position on the Yugoslav state in the 1920s. Numerous articles appeared in the culture sections of newspapers, expressing indignant criticism of the fact that the Comintern—the communist movement—had at the time advocated the break-up of Yugoslavia and supported nationalist separatists, for example in Croatia and Macedonia. In this perspective, it was mainly the dominant non-national organisations that aimed to destroy Yugoslavia, such as the Vatican and the Comintern, who were suddenly treated as spiritual brothers (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 275).

Politics in Kosovo was above all about "conspiracy" against the Serbian population (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 135). The use of affective attributions—such as "open war", "crime", "special war", "the remnants of the Serbian people", who were "persecuted" and subjected to "physical and psychological terror" and who were faced with their "final exodus"—was difficult to reconcile with the rational response to the Yugoslav crisis postulated in the first, economic part of the Memorandum (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 136). These expressions represented an unprecedented overstepping of the boundaries of socialist rhetoric, a language hitherto unheard from official institutions, which aroused both astonishment and curiosity among the wider public.

In conclusion, the Memorandum stated that the Serbian people had the right to guaranteed "full national and cultural integrity, regardless of the republic or province in which they are located. This is its historical and democratic right" (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 146). The authors derived this right from the Serbian people's current and historical experience of victimhood:

> After all, the attainment of equal rights and the independent development of the Serbian people have a deeper historical meaning. In less than fifty years, in two successive generations, twice almost succumbing to physical annihilation, forced assimilation, forced baptisms, cultural genocide, ideological indoctrination, the devaluation and abandonment of their own tradition under an imposed guilt complex, intellectually and politically disarmed, the Serbian people have been subjected to all kinds of difficult ordeals […]. The Serbian people must be given the opportunity to find themselves and become a historical subject, to develop a new awareness of their historical and spiritual essence, to become aware of their economic and cultural interests, to arrive at a modern social and national programme that will inspire present and future generations. (Mihailović and Krestić 1995, 144)

The Memorandum's contradictions and lack of coherence correspond to the disintegration of ideology that Detlev Claussen describes as the "everyday religion" (*Alltagsreligion)* that accompanied the crises of the state socialist societies. The Memorandum showcases the types of thinking characteristic of conformist behaviour, especially the way in which critical (self-)reflection is blocked, whether that be critical reflection on one's own actions or on the actions of other social actors. The Memorandum demonstrates in condensed form how prejudiced thinking functions: how individuals react to the need to make sense of complex relationships, of crisis experiences, without at the same time calling into question their own concrete actions (*Handeln*). This simultaneously reinforces the conditions experienced as crisis-like—thus increases the persistence of collectivist thinking. This corresponds to a reflex that can supposedly reveal the secret of one's own powerlessness without calling the existing system of rule into question: the consequences of the economic crisis were borne solely by the "Serbian people", despite the fact that they were not responsible for it, but had in fact ended up in this difficult situation due to the conspiracy of "Slovenes" and "Croats". This is an important characteristic of such an everyday religion that counters social complexity by dissolving it into clear-cut collectives and, in social crises, advancing three basic questions, as Detlev Claussen put it: "Who are we?"; "Where do we come from?"; "Who is to blame?" (Claussen 1994).

At the same time, a tried and tested form of perceiving society as a collective, as practiced by real socialism, remained intact, with the exception of the replacement of the designations "working people" and "working class" with "ethnonational community". The consequence was not only the amalgamation of real socialist and ethnic collectivisms, which ultimately led to the formation of a new kind of ethnonationalism, but rather another decisive factor was the fact that the prevailing authoritarian form of rule could remain untouched.

The discussion about the Memorandum is revealing far beyond the context of mid-1980s Yugoslavia. It can help us better understand the authoritarian dynamics that are being observed throughout Europe today, as it can clearly be seen how the

limits of what could be said, the acceptable figures of speech, gradually shifted. At the beginning the Memorandum was almost unanimously condemned as a "nationalist pamphlet". Then, over the course of 1986, some print media expressed more positive views on the positions of the still anonymous authors, and the boundary shifted further and further towards the acceptance of ethnicist ideology (Andjelić, "Jeretici" mimo jeresi, *NIN*, 28 Dec 1986). Thus the Yugoslav consensus to sanction any kind of nationalism was broken, the foundations of a Yugoslav polity beyond nationalist boundaries shattered. This was summed up by Ivan Stambolić (1988), the then acting party leader of the League of Communists of Serbia (*Savez komunista Srbije*, SKS): "In short, the Memorandum can be transcribed with a clear conscience and much more accurately as an in memoriam for Yugoslavia and for Serbia […]."

An odd situation had arisen: a large part of the print media throughout Yugoslavia was outraged by the nationalism of the Memorandum. The Serbian party leadership labelled its interpretation of the crisis unacceptable. Meanwhile, the Academy insisted that the "text did not exist" and refused to take a position—unless it concerned the illegal act of its publication. Their strategy is echoed today by the practices of authoritarian right-wing populists. Current populist practices also include gradually expanding the space for what had been previously taboo rhetoric with nationalist, racist and hate-filled content (Decker 2019; Bauer and Fiedler 2021). The *academici* in Serbia did just that: they conveyed their way of thinking to the world, but avoided any discussion, claiming they were not responsible, as the publication of the Memorandum had not been authorised.

True Myths, Mythical Truth: The "Book on Kosovo"

A year before the Memorandum, a book was published that helped prepare the break with the "tacit consensus" that the Kosovo crisis was not a matter of ethnicised perpetrators and victims. The "Book on Kosovo" (*Knjiga o Kosovu*) and its author, the literary scholar, theologist and historian Dimitrije Bogdanović (1930–1986), have mostly been neglected in analyses of the rise of nationalism, which may have something to do with Bogdanović's untimely death in 1986. But at the time, his publication was of huge importance because it completely distanced itself from both the real socialist political jargon and the Yugoslav consensus of not referring to the symbols and rhetoric of pre-Second World War nationalism. It appeared in the series of "Special Editions" (*Posebna Izdanja*) published by the SANU presidency, which gave it even more weight (Bogdanović 1985, 1). The book merged all those historical perceptions of Kosovo as the place of Serbia's national fate that were to shape the new ethnonational discourse. The

institutional and scientific context in which Bogdanović was active in the Academy and from which the "Book on Kosovo" originated, illustrates that until then Kosovo had not been a particularly important research topic at the SANU.

Bogdanović's publication was related to the establishment of an Interdepartmental Committee for the Study of Kosovo (*Medjuodelenjski Odbor za proučavanje Kosova i Metohije*) in 1984, which mainly comprised the department of literary studies, of which Bogdanović was a member, as well as the departments of social sciences and history. In 1983, the general assembly had announced that such a committee would be established in view of the serious situation in the province. Bogdanović was among the main initiators, as was the deputy president of the Academy, writer Antonije Isaković. They argued that such a committee was needed to counter the lack of knowledge about the province, which, they said, had become a threat to its existence:

> Only by establishing and spreading objective scientific truth […] can our society defend itself against inappropriate pretensions and hostile propaganda. This propaganda has not been met with a sufficiently comprehensive response. The ignorance of the Serbian people about their own history and especially about Serbian–Albanian relations in the past has grown with each new generation. (Bogdanović 1985, 1)

By establishing this committee, the SANU showed that it took the role it played for the Serbian people seriously. Its tasks were to include historical and archaeological research on Kosovo, monument protection, increased "monitoring" of Albanian publications on Kosovo, onomastic studies to prove the original Serbian character of the province, and finally a smaller "scientifically informative" publication "in our and the world's languages", the "Book on Kosovo" (Bogdanović 1985, 2). In addition, lecture series on the history of Serbian–Albanian relations were planned. The committee comprised prominent members of the individual departments and was largely identical to the committee that would prepare the Memorandum.

The initiator of the committee, Dimitrije Bogdanović, had followed an unusual career path compared with the other *academici*. Unlike many of the economists and historians, neither had he pursued a straightforward career in science and the political apparatus, nor was he one of those writers and social theorists who saw themselves as dissidents and had come into conflict with the party. In the first half of the 1950s, he studied theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, which at that time was already separate from the university. Subsequently, he realised that he would not be able to work in academia unless he studied law. In 1965, he submitted his doctoral thesis to the Faculty of Philosophy, which however did not result in him being employed by the university, but rather by the National Library (*Narodna biblioteka Srbije*). Here, he became a specialist for medieval Serbian manuscripts. In 1974, he obtained an extraordinary professorship for Old Church

Slavonic and Cyrillic Palaeography, which was converted into a full professorship in 1980. Bogdanović worked on the cataloguing and indexing of old Serbian manuscripts, an activity which he continued as a corresponding member of the Academy, a position he was elected for in 1978, mainly as editor of medieval manuscripts (Godišnjak 1987, 522; Samardžić 1994, 221–31). Up to that point, Bogdanović had been neither exceptionally positive nor critical of the Yugoslav system. Rather, as a practicing Orthodox Christian, it was his view on the politics of the church that determined his distance from communist rule. At the time, this was still an unusual phenomenon among the *academici*, not least because of his spiritual proximity to Orthodox bishops. But at no point did he appear to be a recluse. On the contrary, the list of members of the committee showed the importance the Academy assigned to his initiative.

Bogdanović's "Book on Kosovo" primarily portrays the history of and the conflictual relationship between the Serbian and Albanian populations in Kosovo as three hundred years of violence against the Serbs. Thereby, the author contributed to the development of two essential characteristics of the new ethnonationalism of the 1980s: the aforementioned ethnic "collectivisation" of social conflicts and their antagonisation as a result of complex historical processes being reduced to struggles between ethnicised "communities of fate". These resulted in the de-contextualization of the history of Kosovo, as presented in an almost ideal-typical manner by Bogdanović in his "Book on Kosovo".

Firstly, he transformed historical experiences of oppression and persecution of the Serbian population in Kosovo into a timeless characteristic of an unchangeable national collective, placing events outside any temporal framework. In this way, over the course of five hundred years, the Serbian people had permanently experienced self-sacrifice, and this experience had become increasingly intense.

Secondly, Bogdanović de-contextualised and de-territorialised this allegedly perpetuated experience of oppression and sacrifice. He postulated that Kosovo formed the core of "Serbian national identity" and that this "identity" was in danger. Thus, the existence of the Serbian nation would be threatened everywhere if people lost the knowledge of what was and actually is happening in Kosovo. In this way, the specific spatial and temporal context in which the description of the "genocide of the Serbian people" was previously formulated, was dissolved. The actually existing Kosovo thus disappears behind a metaphor of permanent sacrifice of the Serbian people, be it in Croatia, in Bosnia during the Second World War or now, as ever, in Kosovo.

Thus Bogdanović abandoned the codified forms of representing the sociopolitical crisis that had been established by the party, according to which nationalists on both sides were held responsible for the escalation of the conflict in the province. Bogdanović mockingly rejected such "false symmetries" and claimed that the only

issue was the threat to the survival of the Serbian people in Kosovo. This break with political conventions and the rather negative verdict issued by the party officials only made readers more curious. Within a few months, the Academy had brought out three editions of the "Book on Kosovo", which was something very unusual for its publications. The Academy's publishing house enjoyed prestige, but the monographs it published, most of which dealt with specialised topics, did not tend to be of high circulation (Stefanov 2011).

The "Book on Kosovo" marked a turning point in the presentation of the crisis in Kosovo, which until then had been characterised by rudimentary efforts to take a more refined approach to the situation. With this book, the historical legitimisation of Serbian nationalist and exclusivist claims moved to the centre of attention. Its essential characteristic was not only the interpretation of Kosovo as the epicentre of all historical foundations of the Serbian state foundations, but equally the postulate of a lasting experience of sacrifice by the Serbian people and, conversely, the continuous guilt of others, who had thus forfeited any claim to be recognised as a victim. The public discourse on the crisis in Kosovo was reduced to the situation of the Serbian population.

The spell of the collective was not broken, but had shifted from the eroding socialist collective to the national collective. This new-found "everyday religion" relieved individuals of responsibility for their own actions through the power of national destiny, which identified Serbs as victims. Powerlessness disguised as wisdom was nurtured: everyone was led to believe that the miserable social situation, as described in the Memorandum, was the result of a "long period" of oppression of the Serbian people, a conspiracy of other peoples, but about which nothing could be done. The apparent rebellion against the negative reality of the present did not require the individual to break with their prevailing conformism. This "conformist rebellion" became a widespread reflex in the crisis-ridden everyday life of the time and can be identified in the political practice of the *academici* between 1987 and 1992.

The Academy took centre stage and became one of the most important institutions for the "production" of the new ethnonationalism because of the contradictory relationship between its role as a (supposed) critic of previously taboo topics and its close connection with the new upper ranks of the League of Communists in Serbia, under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević. What was hugely important here was the very practical contribution of the Academy's "experts", and in particular, in 1989, their public support for the constitutional changes in Serbia, which principally included support for the revision of the autonomy rights of Serbia's two provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo (Milosavljević 1996, 305–36, 316–9).

Cracking Myths: Theory and Praxis

Attempts were made to crack these myths in Yugoslavia. There was a different perception of what 1989, the year of change in the Eastern Bloc, represented, one that was not reduced to the "suffering" in Kosovo Polje. The unfolding drama in Yugoslavia, especially in late 1980s, was no easy win for the nationalists. They did encounter resistance. The nature of the populist movement initiated by the political forces around Slobodan Milošević, initially referred to as an "anti-bureaucratic revolution", consisted of pressure to "demobilise" the public, a massive cleansing campaign within the party, as well as an attempt to bring as many important media as possible under control. All this illustrates how it was a mix of structural and later also physical violence and repression that transformed the nationalist current into the dominant one (cf. Gagnon 2004, 81–137; Stefanov 2015, 68–89). In the mid-1980s, Serbian media published articles that developed the first fundamental critique of the new ethnonationalism.

Remarkably, one of the first initiatives advocating the establishment of a democratic political organisation referred to the entire Yugoslav political area. However, the initiative faced considerable difficulties when it attempted to acquire legal status. This Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (*Udruženje za Jugoslovensku Demokratsku Inicijativu*, UJDI) was linked to the tradition of the critique of authoritarian rule as had been developed in the context of the aforementioned *Praxis* circle in the 1960s, a circle mostly comprising philosophers and sociologists who with their critique of Stalinism laid the foundations for an undogmatic Marxism. The UJDI brought together many of the eminent intellectuals from the *Praxis* circle, as well as those who sympathised with their cause, from across Yugoslavia. Many from the Belgrade *Praxis* circle were also involved in UJDI. This contradicts the oft-heard claim that the members of the former joined the nationalists. In fact, Mihailo Marković and philosopher Ljubomir Tadić did indeed become protagonists of the new ethnonationalism in the SANU and beyond. Other *Praxis* members, Zagorka Golubović, Nebojša Popov, Miladin Životić, Božidar Jakšić, Andrija Krešić and many others, were active in the UJDI and other similar emerging initiatives (Orlić 2011).

The UJDI was founded in February 1989 in Zagreb. However, the authorities prevented this first initiative as well as a second attempt in Belgrade from acquiring legal status. It was not until the end of December 1989 that the UJDI was registered in Titograd, today's Podgorica (Montenegro), as a Yugoslavia-wide political initiative (Šušak 1996, 532). Its main political goal was for the Yugoslav parliament to vote on a constitutional amendment that would allow federal elections to be held for a constituent assembly, which would then be empowered

to decide the fate of the Federation. In the beginning, the journal *Republika. Glasilo građanskog samooslobađanja* functioned as a kind of forum for the UJDI. It was edited by politician Milorad Pupovac and sociologist Srđan Dvornik, first in Zagreb and later in Belgrade, where it was an important voice for civil society and the antiwar movement, under editor-in-chief Nebojša Popov (2001). (The archive of the issues published since 1996 can be accessed online: http://www.republika.co.rs/arhiva/.)

The first political activities of the UJDI focused on the situation in Kosovo. Roundtables were held first in Mostar on 1 March and then in Pristina on 31 March 1990, in other words a whole year after the peak of the crisis and the move to open repression. In March 1989, the miners in Trepća went on strike; on 2 March 1989, the already stigmatised politician Azem Vllasi was arrested; and constitutional changes were accepted under pressure, culminating in the parliament stripping Kosovo of its autonomy on 24 March 1989.

However, even before the UJDI was founded there had been initiatives to prevent a further escalation and to end the violent dynamics of ethnonationalism. In March 1989, at the University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Political Sciences, an "Autonomous Yugoslav Peace Initiative for Kosovo" emerged. The students wanted to travel to Trepća to mediate between the police and the striking miners, but found no support among the youth organisations in the republics. The influential Belgrade-based weekly *NIN* wrote an ironic article about the "romantic peace activists" who, despite their good intentions, were naïve. In contrast, Božidar-Gajo Sekulić, professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences and former member of the *Praxis* editorial team, who was active in the UJDI, supported the initiative as dean of the Faculty and defended it against allegations from the party that the students were "elitist" and that their initiative was directed against the army. In the end, the students were unable to travel from Sarajevo to Trepća because of the blockade by the university's youth association (Stanišić, Pokret za Mir, *NIN*, 31 Mar 1989, 21).

Attempts at a dialogue on "Human rights and democracy in Kosovo and Yugoslavia" under conditions of a *de facto* state of emergency also achieved only limited success, as the organisers, the UJDI, themselves admitted. In their public statement they insisted, however, on the need for dialogue, as the alternative was violence:

> Based on its desire for Yugoslavia-wide free elections, the UJDI notes that these are simply not possible without holding free elections in Kosovo as well. That is why all those who are interested in a democratic Yugoslavia, at the same time, have a necessary interest in finally abolishing the separate position of Kosovo with regard to democratic processes throughout the country. Only with free elections in Kosovo will there be legitimate partners with whom to discuss the province's future. (Popović, Janča and Petovar, eds. 1990, 153–4)

Working towards a political practice beyond the dominance of ethnonationalised perceptions of conflict required a critical examination of the myth-building around Kosovo that had been entrenched in Serbian society in the preceding years. One of the first studies to do this was "Unravelling or Cutting the Knot of Kosovo", co-initiated by UJDI (Popović, Janča, Petovar 1990). The study showed how political action and academic work could be connected in a completely different way than had been the case with the *akademici*. The publication compiled previous public critiques of the new mythology. Despite the growing "demobilisation" of Yugoslavia's public space (Gagnon 2004, 9), Popović's, Janča's and Petovar's collective volume acquired a degree of importance which has prevailed to this day and remains indispensable for any rational public discussion on the relationship between myth and social reality in Serbia and Kosovo.

The study connected empirical findings from previous social research conducted in Yugoslavia with its own empirical research, thereby providing evidence of the potential inherent in such research for breaking up the increasingly hermetic forms of ethnonational perception. Societies are never defenceless against any ethnonationalism that allegedly magically enchanted them. Liberation from such perception and from conformity begins with an empirically sound critique of ethnonationalism. In Yugoslavia, however, ethnonationalism eventually triumphed, despite the intellectual and political efforts to install alternative solutions. The collective volume examined the core elements of what were then common mystifications about the social situation in Kosovo. It analysed the factors that contributed to the continual creation of new prejudices about the Albanian population. The focus was on the discourse of the "demographic displacement" of Kosovo's South Slavic population, as well as on the existing data on prejudices against Albanians. Lastly, the study analytically examined the column "Echoes and Reactions" (*Odjeci i reagovanja*) in the most important Serbian daily newspaper *Politika*, which played a central role in the diffusion of the new ethnonational populism and the process of its hegemonisation (cf. Mimica and Vučetić 2008). Interestingly, today the latter is attributed to social media networks.

A crucial part of the study with regard to criminal law practice in Kosovo was to provide evidence that stigmatisation is not tied to seemingly eternal, that is unchangeable, patterns of prejudice. Rather, the results of the study show that the criminalisation of political action was closely linked to the form of rule, which generates specific and timebound types of prejudice. The repressive state socialist rule denounced as criminal any political action that went beyond the narrow framework of the discussions in the party committees. Thus, the authors of the study concluded, the abolition of repressive rule, the democratisation of Yugoslav society, was the prerequisite for the decriminalisation of the political actions of Albanians in Kosovo. They saw an opportunity to rationalise the debate on the

future of Kosovo by removing the state-imposed perception that the current Albanian political demands were of a criminal nature.

Drawing on empirical material that ran counter to the widespread prejudices of a virtually "endemic" readiness for violence among Kosovo Albanians, the authors of the study also conducted a critical analysis of the ethnicisation of society, and in particular the relationship between ethnicisation and dehumanisation. Previous studies had focused on proximity or distance to given ethnic groups, showing that the South Slavic population in Yugoslavia harboured strongly consolidated prejudices against Albanians. These already firmly established patterns of prejudice made a decisive contribution to the criminalisation and then dehumanisation of the Albanian population. In the process of the rise of the new ethnonationalism, such dehumanisation was a prerequisite for the legitimisation of violence. But—and this is equally essential—once rehearsed on "the Albanians", the barrier against the dehumanisation of other Yugoslav nations was lowered, as would soon become painfully clear in the war in Croatia and especially in Bosnia.

Conclusion

The SANU Memorandum facilitated the emergence of a new way of perceiving social and political crises. In the five years following its publication in 1986, such perception became dominant, not least through very strict measures to restrict public space for any other forms of reflection. In the political sphere, the Academy's role was to demonstrate the profound rationality of the measures that were implemented, including the far-reaching constitutional changes. Conversely, those *academici* who were nationally oriented were now able to express their formerly marginalised position in the public sphere. In return for their support of the new political leadership, they gained a public presence they had not had before. This also applied to the fragments of ideology, prejudices and conspiracy theories, which I have referred to as an "everyday religion", a concept which helps explain the (non-)dealing with the experience of crisis of Serbian society. "Kosovo", the "truth about Kosovo" (*Kosovska istina*), did not become the focus of attention as a reality, but as a mythologised projection. This occurred in a way that can be described as a conformist rebellion, in which people rebel against conditions experienced as unjust, but at the same time leave them unchanged by externalising (self-perception as victims), shifting (from societies to communities) and thus ethnicising the causes of the crises. Particularly in a respected scientific institution such as the SANU, the intertwinement of rationality and irrationality became visibly more pronounced. Xenophobia and dehumanisation

were "scientifically" explained and justified. An institution that was committed to the Enlightenment was engaged in nationalist myth formation.

Criticism of ethnonationalism as an "everyday religion" was present both in theory and practice. This is a crucial point, and not only in terms of the existence of a critical scientific debate. It is also important for reflecting on the possibilities of acting against the alleged determinisms of ethnonationalism. This experience of the critique of the authoritarian movement in Serbia at the end of the 1980s represents an important blueprint for anyone seeking to analyse authoritarianism throughout Europe today.

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