

The Missing Democratic Revolution and Serbia's Anti-European Choice: 1989–2008

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Abstract In 1989, as the countries of the Soviet bloc took a turn toward democracy and Europe, Yugoslavia and Serbia plunged into a bloody war and moved in the opposite direction. This article argues that the legacy of that era is still strongly felt in postwar and post-Milosevic Serbia. Now, like then, the choice is not simply for or against Europe. By holding on to the nationalism of the Kosovo myth, which territorializes both the Serbian ethnos and the opposition between Christianity and Islam, Serbia is tracing a tortuous path toward democratization and European integration. In the contemporary context, the Kosovo myth impedes Serbia's recognition of Kosovo as an independent state; it continues to fuel the rhetoric of fractious elites that never cease to tap its capacity for rallying the public; and it provides room for "pro-European" leaders to negotiate EU integration, straddling the fence between Europe's Atlantic propensities and the resurgent power of Russia. This nationalist myth thus plays a normative and an instrumental role, both domestically and internationally. Outside Serbia, it also engages with a narrow and "thick" notion of Europe, which gained traction within Europe itself in the post-9/11 climate of heightened fear of Islam, where cultural identity trumps the values of liberal democracy.

Keywords European integration · Kosovo · Orthodox Church · Serbia

In 1989, the Communist regimes of the Soviet bloc fell under a forceful tide of democratic mobilization—the main engine of this change. Serbia too experienced enthusiastic manifestations of "people power". In Serbia, however, thousands of protesters clamored to defend their rights from the enemy within—whether bureaucrats or Albanian counter revolutionaries—not to "return to Europe" as a popular slogan went elsewhere. The consequences are known. After the fall of Communism, having broken the Cold War barrier between "East" and "West", most of the former Soviet bloc was able to reframe itself as

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European, culturally and politically, by joining the democratic “West”, and institutionally, through integration in the European Union (EU).¹ Serbia’s mobilization began a different dynamic that was incompatible with democratization and European integration. Yugoslav socialism morphed into a nationalist and populist authoritarianism, and in a few years, the country collapsed, but not before plunging into bloody ethnic conflicts that revived notions of the Balkan otherness and directly challenged the modern European narrative of peace and unity embodied by the EU. History never repeats itself in the same manner, but the similarities of the post-Milošević era with the prewar period are evident, as is the lack of democratic reforms. Current political circumstances give reason for some optimism, but also suggest that the course of Serbian politics toward democratization and European integration will take a tortuous path.

The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s ended with the NATO intervention against Serbia, and in the uneasy peace that followed, the EU is emerging both as a lumber room for managing otherwise intractable problems and as a model for nation building. Bosnia became an EU ward, and Kosovo acquired independence from Serbia under a plan that included European supervision (Kosovo Declaration of Independence 2008; Čolović 2002). Among all other successor states of former Yugoslavia, Serbia alone played hardball in negotiating European integration. Of the former Yugoslav Republics, Slovenia is an EU member since 2004; Croatia and Macedonia (FRYOM) acquired EU candidate status in 2005; Montenegro signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA, the contractual framework for membership) in 2007 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2008. The Serbian Parliament ratified the SAA and the Interim Trade Agreement only in September 2008, with the Democratic Party (DS), the SPS, and the Liberal Party (LDP) voting in favor, Kostunica’s Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and the New Serbia Party voting against, and the Radical Party (SRS) abstaining. Until the Parliamentary elections of May 2008, Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica subordinated Serbia’s accession to the EU to the same nationalist project of the Milošević era, which included never relinquishing the former province of Kosovo. Fashioned as a plebiscite on Europe, the elections gave a slight margin of victory to President Boris Tadić’s Democrats, the “pro-European Westernizers”, but created the opportunity only for a motley coalition with the Socialists of the old Milošević Party (SPS). The new government’s first move was indeed to bring indicted war criminal and former Bosnia leader Radovan Karadžić to justice, as long demanded by the EU. The second, in defiance of Brussels’ directive, was to boycott the EU mission in Kosovo and attempt to void Kosovo’s independence, by requesting the International Court of Justice an opinion on the matter.

As I write, the verdict is still out on the success of Serbia’s “pro-European” forces. For example, the 15 September 2008 Report on Serbia by the Monitoring Committee of the Council of Europe still finds Serbia seriously wanting on concrete progress in key fields of democratic functions. The real test for this seemingly pragmatic coalition is how willing its leaders are to dismantle the institutional power structure that supported Koštunica and how ready they are to fulfill the requirements for integration, including the capture of indicted war criminal Gen. Ratko Mladić; without letting go of Kosovo political mythology and without reckoning with the legacy of the war, they will face serious challenges in performing both tasks, despite their apparent gamesmanship.

¹ East, West, and Europe are used here as classifications of geographical, symbolic, and political–institutional spaces, which are not fixed in time, not universal, nor always accepted. The accent is thus on the meanings that specific actors, namely national and international elites, give to these classifications.

Built around the battle that took place in 1389 between a local coalition of forces led by the Serb Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and the Ottoman army, the Kosovo myth is the stuff that modern Serb nationalism is made of. Although the linguistic definition of Serbdom by Vuk Karadžić in the nineteenth century was the secularized ideology that most significantly changed a national identity initially founded on the Orthodox Church (Banac 1984: 70–114), the myth of Kosovo has been essential to the project of Serbian nationhood. Serb monarchic dynasties saw themselves from the start as the “avengers of Kosovo”; the political architects of the institutions of modern Serbia, the Radicals, counted among their main credits the unification of Serbs and the “liberation” of Kosovo (Banac, *ibid.*: 141–169; Popović-Obradović 2007). Certainly not the sole Serb ethno-nationalist myth, the battle of Kosovo has long acquired the pervasiveness of no other through its representation in popular culture, folk songs, literary texts, scholarly essays, textbooks, and political speeches (Čolović 2002).

A story of the battle of Kosovo was variously elaborated and remembered through Orthodox liturgy and regional folklore in the borderlands, where the south Slavs closely faced the Turkish foes for centuries after the 1389 battle. As the main subplot for Serbia's national narrative, it was developed only in the nineteenth century and was elevated to myth: Prince Lazar accepted death over submission, affirming an unchanging loyalty of Serbdom to Orthodox Christianity, to which the builders of modern Serbia and Montenegro added the pledge to never be defeated again (Popović [1974] 1998). It is this legacy that validates Serbia's exclusionary self-image as a territory inhabited by an ethno-nation that was born in Kosovo, the physical and sacred place, which is always referred to as “the cradle of Serbia” (Bataković 2008: 15–33; Blumi 2006a). Serbia has consistently built its centralizing, illiberal policies on Kosovo's political mythology. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the administration of Kosovo itself, where Serbia's claims have always been presented as the only historically verifiable, in opposition to the Albanians' “romantic”, thus false, vision of their autochthony (Bataković 2007: 13). When the Serb Kingdom took Kosovo back from the Ottomans in 1912, it did not acknowledge that Serbs had become a minority in what was called “Old Serbia”; instead, it constituted Kosovo's Albanian majority as a group of alien interlopers to be controlled and suppressed. Belgrade turned the subsequent failure to assimilate Albanians over almost a century of “government as occupation” into a justified mandate for more suppression, or elimination if necessary. In 1989, by appropriating Kosovo political mythology, Milošević gained popular support for inverting the trend inaugurated in the 1970s toward democratization, decentralization, and respect of minority rights; Koštunica made it the centerpiece of his politics and maintained the institutional power structure inherited by Milošević and largely in place today (Anastasijević 2008).

Far from being a marginal disturbance on the path toward European integration, or a simple relic of political folklore, the Kosovo ethno-nationalist myth continues to frame political choices domestically and internationally, playing both a normative and an instrumental role. It fuels the political rhetoric of authoritarian and fractious nationalist elites who use it to lay out the moral and political obligations to the nation and never cease to tap its capacity for rallying large sections of the Serbian public. But, it also provides room for the “pro-European” elites to advantageously negotiate EU integration, as Serbia straddles the fence between Europe's Atlantic propensities and the resurgent power of Russia. In fact, the continuing refusal to compromise on Kosovo has given the EU reasons to facilitate Serbia's integration in large part to avoid further conflict. This, and the backing of Russia, a traditional patron, has placed Serbia in the position less of a pursuer of EU membership and more of a pursued. Finally, the struggle over Kosovo is shaped as a

morality play on Serbia's European identity. Kosovo mythology in fact not only territorializes the Serbian ethnos but also territorializes the opposition between the cross and the crescent, in which the Serb nation stands against the Islamic Orient and its "Albanian-Turk" version, on the side of Christianity. Kosovo is the Serb and European battlefield where Serbia can either win or lose her sacred ground, but cannot lose her soul, which is the same as the soul of a "true Europe", uncorrupted by secularism and individualism.

Kosovo mythology is thus linked to a narrow and "thick" notion of Europe, in which cultural identity could serve either as criticism of or outright opposition to the values of liberal democracy. In this context, for Serb nationalists, an alliance with Russia might mean more than a tactical choice, echoing the traditional bond of loyalty to the Russian Orthodox brothers and a long-practiced politics of populist authoritarianism. Less clear is the ideological outlook of those pragmatic politicians who not only are eager to reap the economic benefits of European integration but are also still constrained by the taboo of losing Kosovo.

Kosovo as the Story Board for Anti-democratic Mobilization

On February 21, 2008, 2 days after Kosovo declared independence, Koštunica and Tomislav Nikolić, then deputy leader of the Radical Party, staged a huge protest rally in Belgrade.² These two nationalist politicians planned to concentrate power and marginalize even the lukewarm opposition of President Tadić, by claiming to have the full support of the "people's parliament". It is a recognizable event, patterned on the "people happenings" (*dogadjanje narodna*) of Milošević time, a link explicitly made by many and approvingly by Russian state TV (2008). The protagonists are known too. Nikolić once was Milošević's deputy. Standing at the helm of the Radical Party on behalf of former presidential candidate and indicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj, he has been suspected by the Humanitarian Law Center of having participated in criminal actions during the war in Croatia (HLC 2005). The chair of the Orthodox Holy Synod who officiated the religious service on February 21 was Bishop Amfilohije Radović, an outspoken supporter of Milošević who once praised Radovan Karadžić for his defiance of the Dayton Accord. A rumor in Belgrade attributed the fiery but lyrical speech delivered by Koštunica to the poet Matija Becković. It could easily be true. Another enthusiastic supporter of Milošević, Becković wrote in a 1987 poem, "Where to walk away with the Visoki Dečani? Where to shift the Peć Monastery?" (1989). In his speech, Koštunica cried out, "Never will anyone hear from us that the Patriarchate of Peć does not belong to us, that Visoki Dečani and Gračanica are not ours!" (Koštunica 2008: 220). Even the nameless crowd of the "hooligans" who later attacked several Western Embassies is unfortunately known. They were not just a random assembly. Ivan Čolović (2002) noticed years ago how seamlessly violence moved from the stadium to the battlefield at the start of the Yugoslav wars, when the themes of ethnic identity and greater Serbia came to dominate the football fans' folklore. As pop celebrities such as tennis champion Novak Đoković and film director Emil Kusturica lent a wide appeal to the

² Tomislav Nikolić has since split from the Radical Party and formed a new group, *Napred Srbijo* (Go Serbia), over a disagreement with the former Party leader Vojislav Šešelj, currently on trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The disagreement was over the vote on the SAA and Interim Trade Agreement, ratified by Parliament in September 2008.

rally, fear spread among dissenting groups of intellectuals and activists who recognized the old prewar scenario.

On June 28, 1989, Slobodan Milošević had sealed his position as top leader, by addressing a carefully choreographed “happening” of about a million people at the battlefield of Kosovo. It was the culmination of a series of mass rallies against the alleged Kosovo genocide of Serbs over the two previous years. Being the minority in an overwhelmingly Albanian province that had gained autonomous status within the Republic of Serbia and the Federal state thanks to the 1974 Constitution, Kosovo Serbs demanded the restoration of central—read Serb—control. Milošević answered their call by assuming the populist mantle of the avenger of Kosovo and leading what the media dubbed the “third uprising” (Magaš 1993: 206); to paraphrase Dobrica Ćosić (1991: 247), the most prominent intellectual involved in the movement, he embodied the spirit of the time. Shaped as an “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, this Serb nationalist and populist mobilization hegemonized the broader social unrest of the mid-1980s and conferred democratic legitimacy precisely to Milošević’s extra-institutional struggle against the Communist leadership. By 1989, Milošević had removed all potential powerful rivals, including his former patron Ivan Stambolić (then President of Serbia’s collective presidency, later assassinated), had toppled the less acquiescent leaders of Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro, and had revoked the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina.

There was a different mass mobilization that unsuccessfully opposed this anti-democratic trend at the start, though occurring within a socialist context. It happened in Kosovo. Sparked by a sit-in strike in the Stari Trg pits called by the miners union, the protest spread to the schools and the streets of the capital Pristina. Its goals were, among others, to obtain the resignation of the provincial leadership illegally installed by Milošević, the defense of the 1974 Constitution, and the repeal of the oath of loyalty imposed on educators as a condition for employment (Maliqi [1989] 1990: 254). These demands were met with the state of emergency by the same leadership that preached democracy and minority rights in Belgrade. Subsequently, Kosovo lived for 10 years under a police state, where Albanians (the majority in Kosovo but the minority under Belgrade rule) lost the right to work in the public sector, to have an education, to use their language, and later became target of ethnic cleansing. The first casualty of political repression was the embryo of democratic pluralism that had begun to emerge in Kosovo, but was quickly absorbed in the ensuing homogenization of the Albanian public under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova and his parallel one-party state: the self-styled Republic of Kosova.

Was this authoritarian turn inevitable? Sabrina Ramet’s (2005: 60–62) polemics with the historical determinism or the psychological reductionism of explanatory theories based on “the national character” is a useful reminder of the perils of such generalization. Arguments in favor of the over-determination of the political and cultural elites’ role in the run up to 1989 should also be used with caution. In this regard, further empirical research offers a more nuanced perspective. A recent revisiting of the Serbian “anti-bureaucratic revolution” (Vladisavljević 2008) finds that the legitimacy enjoyed by the peculiar brand of Yugoslav socialism indeed allowed a genuinely bottom up mobilization. It was the particular structure of the Yugoslav multi-national federation that assigned a different priority to these popular movements, which were otherwise substantially similar to those in other countries of the Socialist bloc: in Serbia, national rights came before democracy. Yet, as Banac (1990: 147) has observed, the issue of national rights was certainly not exclusive to Serbia or Yugoslavia. Since the mid-1950s, all grass-root oppositions throughout the Socialist bloc had the national question if not to the fore, at least as part of their platform. Democratic in their form, these mobilizations against the supremacy of the Soviet Union, or of one

particular nationality within the state, nevertheless carried the potential of restoring the exclusivist prewar nationalist ideologies. What matters is that in Serbia the protesters found an alliance with dynamic socialist elites, in the midst of the deepest crisis of the official socialist ideology, and through this alliance, the old nationalism's ability to homogenize the country around the Kosovo battle cry became uncontested.

Throughout the 1980s, Serbia's former dissident intellectuals had already adopted the rhetoric of rights to lend democratic credentials to nationalist demands: The 1986 Memorandum of the Academy of Arts and Science was the culmination, not the beginning, of a trend (Dragović-Soso 2003) that has not abated 20 years later (SASA (Serbian Academy of Science and Arts) 2006). The Orthodox clergy further reinforced nationalist ideologies with a domestic and international campaign for the restoration of its role as the embodiment and the spokesperson of the nation (Perica 2002: 123–132). Last, but not least, Milošević's political savvy seized the opportunity for charismatic leadership offered by the street protesters and other components of the Serbian elite (Cohen 2001: 43–94). As noted by Banac, the nineteenth century national elite could have never achieved the homogenization of Serbia more effectively than the socialist party state.

With Milošević gone, Koštunica's ascent meant something akin to a restoration, and the narrative based on Kosovo remained the hegemonic story board for the nation. The decisions made by his Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and his very stewardship of the government indicated that he fully shared the nationalist project of Milošević. A DSS campaign letter explicitly stated in 2006 that the removal of Milošević "did not represent a revolution or an overthrow, but rather a continuation" (ICG (International Crisis Group) 2007: 3; Popović and Nikolić 2006: 400–410). Since 2004, Koštunica appointed to senior positions, with a particular care for the media and the judiciary, former Milošević appointees—individuals who are on the EU visa-ban list (ICG, *ibid*: 3–4). Koštunica often relied on the support of the Radical Party, the old wartime ally of Milošević, which was instrumental in the approval of a new Constitution in 2006. The Constitution's main purpose was to inscribe into law Serbia's ownership of Kosovo, but provisions such as limitations to the independence of the judiciary, increased centralization, and weakening of protection for human and minority rights are also included (ICG (International Crisis Group) 2006). Just before Easter 2006, Koštunica proposed and obtained approval for a Law on Churches that enshrines the Serbian Orthodox Church as a state church, a law that was criticized by the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Serbia as "True West"

The overall trend of the post-Milošević era was a move away from Europe, in which the violent end of Zoran Đinđić's brief government is itself a confirmation of continuities with the previous regime. Đinđić was assassinated in 2003 by members of Milošević's security forces, according to the sentencing judge, because of his pro-Western policies and his cooperation with The Hague. The late historian Olga Popović-Obradović noted how Bishop Amphilohije Radović eulogized the Prime Minister with a "diabolical" comparison between his assassination and the murder of nineteenth century pro-Western Serbian king Milan Obrenović: "This is what happens to those in Serbia who try to take her to the West; they always have been and always remain traitors, which is why they represent a legitimate target for elimination" (Popović-Obradović [2007] 2008). Differently from Đinđić, Koštunica maintained a defiant and uncompromising position on Kosovo and the other major EU concern: the delivery to The Hague of Gen. Ratko Mladić and Radovan

Karadžić. Yet, priorities chosen over European integration did not contradict his rhetorical embrace of Europe and democracy. Koštunica was a member of the national intelligentsia that coalesced with the Orthodox Church in the mid-1980s to ride the wave of populist mobilization and has consistently shown a remarkable ability to hide his radicalism behind moderate speech. When he reaffirmed his loyalty to the rule of law and democracy, he really meant by that the reorganization of the federal constitution with the goals of repealing all autonomies and bringing all other Serb entities, such as Republika Srpska, within the Belgrade fold (Koštunica 2002: 194). He could be both democratic and authoritarian, pro-European and against Europe.

During his tenure, Milošević also made an anti-European choice for centralization and against party pluralism, human rights, freedom of the press, and liberal economic policies (Perović 1998: 125). Yet, speaking at the site of the battlefield, he used the legacy of the Kosovo battle against the Ottoman invaders to place Serbia squarely within Europe:

Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion and European society in general. Therefore today it appears not only unjust but even unhistorical and completely absurd to talk about Serbia's belonging to Europe, Serbia is in Europe now just as much as it was in the past, of course, in its own way, but in a way that in the historical sense never deprived it of dignity (Milošević 2001: 10).

Fast forward to February 15, 2008. Speaking at Orašac, the site of the first Serbian uprising in 1804, Koštunica said:

Whoever has heard about Serbs and Serbia knows that Serbia is in Europe and the Serbs are a European nation. And two centuries ago it was not just Serbia who discovered Europe but Europe discovered Serbia as well. And when it did that, it found within Serbia European ideas and values and Kosovo as a synonym for the most valuable contribution made by Serbia to the Christian civilization. Therefore, no one can integrate Serbia into Europe or leave it out, and Serbia should enter the EU in its entirety, just as all its other member countries did (Koštunica 2008: 207).

A similar philosophy was propagated by Bishop Amfilohije Radović in his address to the crowd on February 21, 2008 in Belgrade, where once again he rejected the Faustian bargain offered to Serbia by the West:

We have belonged to this Europe from the very start of our self-knowledge, historical maturity and we desire community with its people in dignity and equality. If the price that the EU, as a community of interests, asks is that we renounce ourselves, our historical memory, the Kosovo covenant that is by its nature a New Testament sealed not with ink but with the blood of our people – we cannot accept. As a people we have never accepted, neither before Prince Lazarus nor after him until 1941 nor today, such blackmail and such calls to trample on our dignity but on the justice that upholds states and cities. Today we are here for the same holy purpose: to defend not only our own honor and reputation, our freedom and dignity but also the dignity of a humiliated Europe. For Europe has never been more humiliated than it is today.

Being more European than Europeans themselves has been an explicit theme in Serbian intellectual, political, clerical, and media discourses, and not only among the elites (Volčič 2005). In support of a document produced by a Commission of the Presidency of Serbia that was critical of liberal democracy, Academician Radovan Samardžić wrote in 1989 that

the Serb people and the intellectuals were not asking for a return of Serbia to Europe, but were rather showing that Serbia and her inhabitants spoke “right from the heart of Europe” (Perović, *ibid*: 129). “Serbia never adopted an overtly hostile position to the Western Europe’s civilization”—noted historian Latinka Perović—but has “determined her links to Europe in relation to a unique need: persuade Western Europe of her truth” (*ibid*: 130). What Perović means by “Serbia” is certainly not the whole country, nor just is its extreme nationalist part. It is the homogenized nation created by the “truth on Kosovo”. Kosovo spiritually legitimates Serbia, the ethno-nation, as a unique repository of fundamental Christian and European values, uncorrupted by secularism and its twin sister, liberal democracy. Historically, it places Serbia on the side of Christianity versus Islam and thus relies on a relentless anti-Muslim/anti-Albanian campaign that has not abated over the years. On the contrary, the connection Albanians–Muslims–*Jihadists* has become the staple of a wide-ranging propaganda against Kosovo as an independent state (Blumi 2006b).

The battle for Kosovo is consistently presented as the lonely struggle waged by Serbia to wrest this embattled territory from “non-European” forces—whether Jihadists, or mafia bosses, or war criminals. Commenting on the newly achieved independence of Kosovo on February 2008, the editor in chief of the newspaper *Politika* Ljiljana Smajlović found the acceptance by Europe of a state “under mafia rule and led by a war criminal” bewildering; Serbs who question this choice are more truly European than any other (HCHR (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia) 2008). That it has come down to this reveals Europe’s moral bankruptcy and her powerlessness vis-à-vis the new face of old enemies. Kosovo here becomes the evidence of Europe’s perversion; how can Europe talk of peace and humanitarianism, complained Bishop Amfilohije (Radović 1999), when she celebrates 2,000 years of Christianity by bombing an ancient Christian nation?

This rhetoric is played forcefully and successfully at the site of the mythical 1389 events. After the war, commemorations of the battle unfold under heavy NATO troops’ protection in a Kosovo that is no longer part of Serbia. They are not mass rallies, as the number of Serbs residing in Kosovo has greatly decreased—the result in large part of a postwar climate of intimidation and violence, and a much more complex phenomenon than the label “reverse ethnic cleansing” suggests (Dobruna 2006). The commemorations today are joint ceremonies, where the highest authorities of the Church and the state preside both at the battlefield and the monastery of Gračanica; this “tradition” dates back no further than the death of Tito, effectively takes off only with Milošević, and has been strengthened by the pious Koštunica. The lay celebration assumes a religious meaning and the religious one has the tone of a political rally. In 2006, Koštunica repeated, “Kosovo has always been and will forever be part of Serbia”. On that same occasion, the Bishop of Raška-Prizren Artemije stated that Kosovo should stay “our spiritual and cultural cradle, our Serb Jerusalem. What Jerusalem is for the Jewish people, Kosovo and Metohija is for the Serbian people” (Kim Info Newsletter 2006). This Church–state partnership reasserts the particularistic definition of Kosovo as Serbia’s ethno-territory, in which the Albanian–Muslim element is foreign, while couching this stand in the universalistic language of peace, democracy, freedom, and human rights. All the while refusing to negotiate with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari on a Kosovo settlement, Kostunica said: “Today from this place, on St. Vitus’ Day, in Gračanica, we have an opportunity to tell the world what Serbia wants. Serbia wants justice, fairness and peace. [...]. The Serbian people want a compromise and a historically just solution for Kosovo-Metohija, above all.”

Trying to account Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s, many writers and commentators have acknowledged the dangerous use of Kosovo for purposes of nationalist mobilization.

However, more recent celebrations and rhetoric are largely ignored, and Serbia's appeals to the myth of Kosovo go virtually unchallenged, even as most western countries have recognized Kosovo independence from Serbia. Almost all European and American media have uncritically adopted Serbia's discourse on Kosovo as "the cradle of the nation". It seems that as Serbia justifies Kosovo's lack of historical rights to independent statehood in terms of its Muslim usurpation in the fourteenth century, Serbia's symbolic identification of Kosovo with Europe's defense from Islam maintains a strong hold on the European imagination. The contemporary context is the perceived Muslim invasions of Europe and its heightened perils after 2001.

This is probably why the negotiation between the EU and Serbia over access, the recognition of Kosovo, and compliance with international justice has faced walls of misunderstanding and incomprehension under Koštunica's tenure. The Prime Minister's resistance to integration without Kosovo proposed a different understanding of European-ness than economic and institutional viability. It revived instinctive memories of earlier representations, in particular a classic notion of Europe as a tradition of deep cultural difference vis-à-vis the oriental Moslem "other". There are historical reasons for this, as an excellent literature on the intellectual and political mapping of the eastern boundaries of Europe in the Balkans and Eastern Europe reveals (Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994; Bracewell and Drace-Francis 2008). A hegemonic Serbian discourse has developed the image of national identity in interaction with an ideal vision of a Christian, enlightened European civilization that is a constant reproach to a reputed backwardness and primitivism of the Balkans and does not recognize their contribution to her history. Significantly, also among the Albanians in Kosovo, in large majority Muslim, there are groups who share with Serbs the story of being the "guardians at the gate" (Di Lellio 2009). This feeling is based on the political mythology of *antemurale christianitatis*, or outer battlement of Western European civilization. Victims of the "Ottoman legacy", they have been made to feel that they lag behind Europe and are anxious and ambivalent about membership. Serbia's role in the medieval battle of Kosovo is evidence of authenticity.

An important part of the Serb leadership is still fighting the last crusade over Kosovo, where they see Serbia at loggerheads with Muslim Albanians in an endless "clash of civilizations", never having succumbed to assimilation. They would rather lose the chance to be part of the European Union, the political offspring of a "soulless" continent, than give up the "cradle of Serb civilization" and the fight against Islam. What gives depth and local authenticity to this understanding of Europe as fundamentally corrupt is the work of the Orthodox clergy, a group that occupies a leading position in the renewal of the battle of Kosovo. Since the mid-1980s, through commentaries and petitions, a few prominent clergy started to alert domestic and international public opinion of the persecution suffered by Serbs in Albanian dominated Kosovo (Jevtić 1991). Retired Bishop of Zahumlje-Hercegovina Atanasije Jevtić, Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije Radović, former Metropolitan of Bačka Irinej Bulović, currently Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Belgrade, and Bishop of Raška and Prizren Artemije Radosavljević, have been and still are influential in the hierarchy and the political debate on Kosovo, both nationally and internationally. In 1985, they were admitted to the Serbian Writers' Association (Dragović-Soso, *ibid*: 124–125; Radić 1998: 137–177); in the 1990s, they fully participated in the call for war and strongly supported the break-away Republika Srpska of Karadžić. They all are students of two much venerated theologians: Father Justin Popović and recently canonized Bishop of Ohrid and Žiča Nikolaj Velimirović.

Father Popović is the author of an important thesis on the estrangement of the European man from the model of St. Sava's God-man. For him, there is no longer any hope for

Europe, where a “Papo-Protestant Ecumenism” has replaced Jesus, the God-Man, with the European Man. From the spiritual death that humanism has brought upon Europe, there is salvation only through repentance before Christ and the Orthodox Church (Popović 1997: 97–116). Bishop Velimirović tirelessly criticizes humanism, European civilization, and materialism, including progress: Europeans are heretics and Satan (Radić, *ibid.*: 142). The influence of these theologians, since their emergence in the first part of the past century as political figures in support of “Yugoslavism” versus the “Faustian rationalism” of Western culture (Banac 1984: 208), cannot be underestimated. New disciples continue in their tradition with energy, political effectiveness, and creativity. A younger follower, Hieromonk Jovan Čulibrk, who before seminary was a member of an avant-garde artists’ movement, has even found ways to connect rock music with Bishop Velimirović’s intransigent message (HCHR (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia) 2006: 12; Di Lellio 1999). The insidious nature of such cultural projects cannot be underestimated, especially in the context of elaborate reconstructions of the past that Serb nationalist elites, including the Orthodox hierarchy, have been enacting in the past 20 years. That Bishop Velimirović was a very controversial figure because of the confluence of his anti-Western philosophy and anti-Semitism with his very public Nazi sympathies has been all but forgotten in the wake of his sanctification, but is highly relevant to my point (Byford 2004).

It is possible that the notion of Serb superiority vis-à-vis Europe has a similar explanation to the one that philosopher Boris Buden provides for Croatia: resentment and the wounds of narcissistic injury (Buden 2000; Čolović, *ibid.*: 168–69). It is certainly consistent with a complex Slavic intellectual tradition of identity construction that identified a Slav world in apparently contradictory ways: essentialist, young, and uncorrupted, but also differentiated and hierarchical according to the distance from a developed, liberal Europe, in which the Balkan nations would rank the lowest (Bracewell 2008: 147–194). What is more interesting for our purposes is that Serb nationalist intellectuals, politicians, and clergy are engaged in an exercise of “Occidentalism”. In the definition of the term that has been given by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, Occidentalists oppose the two main principles on which modern Europe was founded in the seventeenth century: scientific rationality and liberal democracy (Buruma and Margalit 2004). Like the people that they mostly abhor, Serb nationalists reject those principles in the name of a Pan-Slavist idea of society and culture that is intransigent and anti-modern.

The heightened anxiety of European states with regard to a growing Muslim population within their borders, especially after September 11, 2001 and the bombings of Madrid and London, have rendered these apparently outdated and inappropriate modes of self-representations surprisingly relevant. The reality is that Europe is currently confronting issues such as “the place of Christianity in public life and the limits of multiculturalism in regard to the presence of Islam” (Michnik 2007). In Serb Occidentalism, we find notions that belong not to the margin of modern Europe, but closer to its core. Let us take the idea of Christendom’s superiority to “Others”, whether Islam or the modern secular order. In predominantly Christian Europe, as a civilization based on human rights and respect, beside protection, of minorities, this idea should not have much credence. Yet, it is propagated everywhere in crude forms by nativist politicians, acclaimed intellectuals, and in more sophisticated forms by Pope Benedict XVI, who explicitly links the foundation of Europe to Christianity. The most flamboyant example of intransigent public discourse is the international sensation created by Oriana Fallaci’s (2002, 2006) bestsellers, expounding on the inferiority and foreignness of Islam. Benedict XVI’s (2006) controversial Regensburg address was both a declaration of the universal truth of Catholicism and a reaffirmation of its role in defining European identity; the Pope made similar comments in a speech

delivered at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris in 2008. With this narrow view of European identity, Serb Occidentalism shares a criticism of the loss of values in favor of a perceived shallow cosmopolitanism, cast in the language of conservative Christianity, which reflects a yearning for communal solidarities. It might take anti-European overtones, but it is continuous with a dissenting tradition within Europe itself, the reaction against what Max Weber called “the disenchantment of the world” (Bilgrami 2006: 402). This might explain the European underestimation and lack of engagement—both politically and intellectually—with Serb nationalism as it was expressed by Koštunica.

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