SERBIA, BETWIXT AND BETWEEN:

CULTURE, POLITICS AND IMAGES OF THE WEST[1]

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U sumi vuci, na drumu turci.
(Wolves in the woods, Turks on the road.)

Serbian Aphorism

During the mid-years of the Tito regime, a narrative film appeared entitled "*Nesto Izmedju*" (Something in Between). At that time, the title's reference was to the Yugoslav balancing act between the Eastern Block and the West. However, as the scenario reveals, its significance was not only political, but also cultural. With particular reference to the Serbs, this was not at all a new phenomenon, but one dating from at least the first decades of the nineteenth century (cf. Andric *et al.* 1967). Perhaps more than other peoples of former Yugoslavia, the Serbs have long been suspended politically, ideologically, and emotionally between the perceived affluence, power, prestige, and "modernity" of the West, on the one hand, and a profound emotional attachment to their own folkways, the cultural heritage of Byzantium, especially the Orthodox faith, and a persistent, almost mystical sense of kinship to Russia, on the other. Nevertheless, the realities of the East and the West have been filtered through the prism of an idealized and romanticized view of both, as well as by fragmented and decontextualized perceptions of the outside world on the part of ordinary people, who, for the most part, have had little opportunity to travel abroad. As Bogdan Denitch (1994:134) has commented, there are "masses of East Europeans seeking to become just like their *idealized* [my italics] versions of Western Europeans or Americans."

In this discussion, the term "East" will be employed in a specific and limited sense in respect to the Serbs, that is, not with specific reference to geographical regions or societies outside of Serbia, but rather to a reflexive, self-referential nationalist ideology, an ideology which rests heavily on a mythologized popular history and the celebration of indigenous culture and traditions, however these may be defined. "West," on the other hand, will specifically designate Western Europe and America, and the cultural and social characteristics commonly associated with them. Thus, it is in the context of this opposition that I will address the profound political and cultural divisions which characterize contemporary Serbian society, with particular emphasis on the ubiquitous influence of the various manifestations of Western European, and especially American popular culture.

It is probably no exaggeration to assert that Western popular culture is the single most visible expression of the aspirations of those in Serbia who yearn for inclusion in the West. In contrast, and in at least equal numbers, are those who passionately defend native Serbian traditions and national political and cultural autonomy. Almost a decade ago during the Milosevic era, Gordy (1999:103-164), in his study of the "culture of power" in Serbia, noted the strong correlation between cultural and political affiliation. From a clearly pro-Western perspective, he negatively stereotyped and contrasted those whom he labeled as "traditionalists" and "nationalists" with those whom he characterized as espousing "Western values and democracy." With reference to culture, he associated the former with a genre of popular national music *(turbofolk)* which enjoyed considerable support on the part of the Milosevic regime, and the latter with young, Western-oriented rock musicians. And today, little has changed in terms of the gulf separating these two segments of Serbian society.

The influential role played by Western popular culture in Serbia is not at all unique, but simply one example among many others which can be cited throughout the world. The acculturative power of Western popular culture has been treated in great detail by Sardar and Davis (2002:104) who cite the hamburger as a "seductive novelty" symbolic of the way that "America is taking over the lives of ordinary people in the rest of the world and shrinking their cultural space." Similarly, Postman (1986: vii-viii), in his discussion of Huxley's *Brave New World,* points to the insidious nature of popular culture. He attributes its "tyranny" to its ability to provide amusement and pleasure. In a somewhat parallel analysis, Bayles (1994:10) explains that it is the very popularity of popular culture which "makes it part of everyday life in a way that high culture almost never is." Thus, its pervasive and insinuative nature renders popular culture a potent and extremely manipulative vehicle for the assertion of Western and American economic and political values. For instance, Kolker (2002:xv) points to the role of film as "part of the world of politics," and notes that governments support filmmakers as a means to "express their national cultures to the world". How-

ever, American cinema in particular is far more, and at the same time far less, than simply an expression of national culture; it is the purveyor of fantasies and partial truths about our society, and as a consequence, it simultaneously creates unrealizable desires, envy, and dissatisfaction with indigenous ways of life. Its far-reaching and profound influence is exemplified by the number of people in former Yugoslavia who have over the years explained to me that their surprisingly fluent and colloquial knowledge of English was largely derived from viewing American films and television shows. Nevertheless, as the following discussion will indicate, popular culture encompasses far more than the media, although it is the media which constitute the chief conduits for diffusing other aspects of Western popular culture.

Western Popular Culture and Serbia

As a preface to this discussion, understanding the difference between *popular culture* and *folk culture* in respect to Serbia **is** essential. While the perceptual boundaries between these two terms and genres in English are rather imprecise, in the case of Serbo-Croatian,[2] the distinction is quite clear. In Serbo-Croatian the nearest equivalent of "folk" is *narodno,* a lexeme which carries a rather different meaning than its English gloss. That which is *narodno* is by definition an attribute of the "nation," i.e., the ethnic group. Thus, for instance, in Serbia when one refers to *narodna muzika* ("national music"), the reference is to music which is regarded as quintessentially Serbian, be it "folk" in the American sense or any one of a number of commercially produced genres. In contrast, popular culture will be defined here as any complex of mass-consumed cultural traits which are predominately commercially produced or derived, and are of more or less immediate foreign origin, that is, of a so recent derivation that they have not yet been fully integrated into national culture and accepted as typically "Serbian," as have been, for instance, many long-syncretized Greek, Turkish, Russian, Austrian, and Hungarian borrowings.

Among many Serbs there is a strong correlation between a predilection for Western popular culture and the rejection of Serbian national traditions because of the latter's association with what is regarded as "primitive," "archaic," or "provincial." It is the very foreignness of Western popular culture which so many find attractive, that is, its association with a world outside of Serbia, a world perceived to be prestigious, powerful, and affluent in opposition to Serbian "Balkan backwardness" *(balkanska zaostalost).* This phenomenon was expressed to me in very direct and simple terms by the curator of a Belgrade museum (2007):

There is a big problem with American culture here. Many of the young, especially the better educated, feel isolated, and by consuming American popular culture they feel part of the larger world. But, perhaps what they don't understand is that this can have negative political and economic consequences for our country. [my translation]

Schiller, in his book, *Culture Inc.* (1989:30), defines popular culture in commercial terms as a product of "cultural industries." Citing a 1982 UNESCO study, he refers to "cultural goods and services which are produced, reproduced, stored or distributed on industrial and commercial lines...." These include: publishing, the press, film, radio, television, photography, recording, software production, and other aspects of the information industry. Extrapolating from Shiller's discussion, popular culture can be characterized not only as a commercially produced product, but as one created and disseminated by economic and cultural elites vertically from the top down. In contrast, so-called "pure" or grass-roots folk culture is generally understood as springing from the experience of ordinary people, and often spanning a number of generations with little or no specific knowledge regarding its creators or origins. However, in Serbia this distinction is not entirely apt since some forms of national culture are in fact commercially produced, for instance, so-called *komponovana narodna muzika* ("composed national music") (cf. Simic 1976). What is significant about composed national music is that it is culturally reflexive in that it evokes a sense of regional and national affiliation and identity. On a more elite level, such highly professional ensembles such as Belgrade's *Kolo* and *Branko Krsmanovic* revivalistic folkloric music and dance troupes can be mentioned.

In contrast to inward-directed national traditions, Western popular culture implicitly and explicitly draws attention to the world outside of Serbia, what Serbs sometimes refer to as "the white world" (*beli svet*). In this sense, popular culture references, propagates, many of the young are familiar with American popular culture:

I DON'T GIVE A FUCK IF I GET CAUGHT

ALEKSA RULES

WE ARE OF HELL

LUNATICS

DISCO LEAGUE

In clear contrast, almost all political graffiti were written in Serbian and in Cyrillic characters,[3] and were predominately nationalistic in character as the following examples demonstrate:

SESELJ SRPSKI JUNAK

("Seselj Serhian Hero"--Vojislav Seselj is an alleged war criminal in the custody of the Hague Tribunal, and the titular head of the Serbian Radical Party)

NE U NATO
("No to NATO")

SRPSK1 VUKO VAR

("Serbian Vukovar"--The city of Vukovar was besieged by the Serbs and severely damaged in 1991 during the Yugoslav civil wars; it is now part of Croatia)

VELIKA SRBIJA
(Greater Serbia)

CLINTON U HAG
(Clinton to the Hague)

EU NECEMO BITI ROBOVI
("EU we won't be slaves")

In contrast, a clearly Western orientation is reflected by the T-shirts sported by young Belgradians who crowd the city's downtown thoroughfares into the late evening hours. However, in many cases, this may simply represent a taste for novelty and a desire to appear modern and stylish. However, even if this is true, it does not negate the fact that the statements and symbols displayed clearly signaled a yearning or a predilection for Western, particularly American, things and values. It is indicative that most of the logos which I observed were in English, for example:

FLORIDA ROAD GANG

PALM TREES WITH CARS

BREAK OUT

I AM THE AMERICAN DREAM

PLAY HARD

Surprisingly, considering the fact that in the spring of 1999 the United States and NATO had bombed Serbia for 78 days, and destruction from this assault is still visible in downtown Belgrade, a number of young people were observed wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the American flag. Seemingly contradictory were T-shirts with images of Che Guevara, as well as a bigger-than-life poster of Che displayed at a popular outdoor cafe on Belgrade's main promenade, Kneza Mihailova Street. However, what was conspicuously lacking from public view were T-shirts with images of alleged war criminals Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, even though these were readily available from street vendors. Since both men continue to garner considerable support as "national heroes," one explanation for this is that these images were not regarded as chic by the style-obsessed youth.

The streets of Belgrade exhibit a profusion of posters affixed to walls, fences, lamp posts, trash cans, and on almost any other available object. These evidence a surprising variety of topics, among others: support for political candidates of all persuasions; announcements of rock, jazz, and other musical events; advertisements for businesses; and invitations to academic lectures and museum exhibits. However, of particular note is that these posters also constitute a major medium for the public expression of nationalist sentiments and rhetoric as the following examples illustrate:

OSTANI SRBIN, P151 CIRILICOM
("Remain a Serb, Write in Cyrillic"--A reaction to the increased use of the Latin alphabet, particularly in the public sphere)

PREDAJA KOSOVA l METOHIJE VELAIZDAJA
("The Surrender of Kosovo and Metohija A Great Betrayal")

ZA BOGA I SRPSTVO
2007
VIDOVDANSKI MARS
("For God and Serbdom
2007
St. Vitus Day March"--
an invitation to a commemoration
of the Battle of Kosovo, 1389)

SABOR NA RAVNOJ GORI

13 MAJ, 2007
("Assembly on Ravna Gora, May 13, 2007"--This poster displayed a large picture of General Draza Mihailovic, the leader of the Serbian royalist guerrilla forces, the Chetniks, during World War II.)4

If one were only to take note of the content of TV and radio broadcasts, the brand names of products for sale, dress styles, the preponderance of CDs by Western artists displayed in music stores, the crowds in McDonald's restaurants, and a myriad of other small indicators such as restaurant menus offering Piña Coladas and Tequila Sunrises, one might be easily convinced that local traditions have been totally overwhelmed. To some extent this is true, especially in Belgrade where the young, educated, and relatively affluent are particularly attracted to the Western styles and products. However, to obtain these things requires money, and often considerable sacrifice. In this regard, it is significant that a disproportionate amount of wealth is concentrated in Belgrade, and to a lesser extent in Novi Sad. For instance, it is estimated that approximately 200,000 people in Belgrade may be considered by local standards to be affluent. This represents about ten percent of the city's population, a sufficient number to maintain an impressive facade of Western prosperity, a facade which is most visible in central Belgrade. However, as one moves away from the center and out of the city toward the east and south, the landscape takes on an increasingly impoverished and non-Western appearance, and it is here that life assumes a more traditional Balkan aura.5

Persistent elements of national culture do in fact continue to coexist in what might be defined as enclaves or cultural interspaces throughout Serbia, and provide potent symbols for nationalist political movements. In terms of the Great Tradition, the resurgence of the Serbian Orthodox Church is perhaps the most widespread and visible example of the public expression of national identity. New churches are being constructed not only throughout the provinces, but also in Belgrade; public-school children are now receiving optional religious instruction, the Patron Saint's Day of Belgrade (Ascension Day--*Spasovdan*) is now celebrated with a traditional religious procession (*litija*) through downtown Belgrade with military officers carrying icons; and prominent clergy are now actively participating in public political discourse (particularly in respect to the crisis regarding the status of Kosovo). The growing influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church6 is testified to by the strong negative response it has generated among some anti-nationalist, pro-Western elements. For example, local representatives of the Helsinki Committee, Women in Black, and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights have condemned the resurgence of Orthodoxy which they regard as resulting in the loss of secular society. Their views were recently cited in an article in The American Srbobran

of November 19-20, 2007 (a translation from the November 22, 2007 issue of *Politika*);

> *The secular society is an achievement of the modern age and an affirmation of the secular values It is a needed condition for preserving and strengthening the democratic movement. This will occur with the expelling of Christian education from the schools, the suspending of religious ritual from public establishments.... The presence of the president or premier at the liturgy, the celebration of municipal or school slavas* [Saints Days], *city processions, and other public displays of religious expression have imperiled our citizens.*

Such statements fail to take into account the deeply ingrained tie between Orthodoxy and Serbian national identity. Nor does it recognize the secular role of the Serbian Orthodoxy as a marker of ethnicity, which for many is largely devoid of any religious or supernatural meaning. Even during the Tito era of official atheism, several Party members told me that, even though they were nonbelievers, they regularly donated small sums of money to the Serbian Orthodox Church because "the Church has always defended our national traditions." In this regard, comparisons can be made to a similar role played by religion is such places as Northern Ireland and Lebanon where religious boundaries are also ethnic boundaries.

As Hammel (1969:196) once observed in respect to social and cultural change, "The maps in people's heads are the last thing to go." Similarly, as I commented in a previous essay (Simic 2002:138), "nationalism and ethnicity [in Serbia] can be conceptualized as a multi-stranded world view which contextualizes and encompasses a wide range of life's ordinary and extraordinary concerns." In other words, this corpus of beliefs and assumptions tends to shape, either consciously or subliminally, the way people view themselves, others, and their social environment. Thus, it can be argued that even those Serbs who are the most pro-Western and anti-nationalist, are in fact responding to deeply felt emotions regarding their own identity.

In an article appearing in the June 7, 2007 edition of *Politika*, Djordje Vukadinovic, Chief Editor of *Nova Srpska Politicka Misao* (New Serbian Political Thought), comments about the unusually large number of educated Serbs who "cultivate an almost pathological antipathy toward their own country and a hate toward everything which carries the Serbian denominator." For instance, he describes a friend who kept "a little American flag which he intended to wave" in anticipation that American troops would enter Belgrade

in 1999. According to Vukadinovic, such people express a certainty that the Serbs are responsible for the wars in former Yugoslavia, and that Milosevic is accountable for the sanctions against Serbia, the bombardment by NATO], *turbofolk* music, and the spread of criminality throughout the society. Furthermore, he asserts that they support the separation of Montenegro, have nothing against the independence of Kosovo, and express a "great understanding for the justified aspirations [for autonomy or independence] of the people of Vojvodina." The author explains that these attitudes stem from a wide variety of factors including the mental and physical inertia of recent times, and the derived tendency to view the world in terms of black and white. Thus, it follows that if the Milosevic regime is perceived as synonymous with evil, therefore, all that which is associated with its opposite is comprehended as essentially good. Vukadinovic also comments that "national sovereignty and patriotism are generally no longer in style." Another factor to which he attributes significance is the lingering influence of the socialist period when "old national sentiments were for decades to a greater or lesser extent repressed." Regarding former Yugoslavia, Vukadinovic cites those whom he labels "incurable Yugonostalgists,"[7] that is, those who "cannot come to terms with the fact that Yugoslavia no longer exists, and who can no longer go shopping in Trieste with the red passport with which they were able to travel about the entire world."

While Vukadinovic only briefly mentions the role of economics as a factor in generating anti-Serbian sentiments, it is clear that either directly or indirectly, materialism plays a very significant role in this phenomenon. As has been the case in Eastern Europe in general since the fall of communism, there has been a rapid spread of Western-style consumerism in Serbia, which in turn has created heightened expectations regarding material well-being. However, because of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the ensuing civil wars, Western sanctions, and the military aggression by NATO, these expectations have been realized by only a relatively small minority in Serbia. Significantly, those who are among the most affluent also appear to be among those who are the most supportive of the West, probably out of fear that political or other expressions of nationalism will further alienate the West, and thus endanger their privileged positions. In contrast, based on my conversations and interviews over the past six years with hundreds of people from all walks of life in Serbia, there are also those who blame Western influence and pro-Western political movements for their economic difficulties, the decline in public services, and the loss of amenities which they had enjoyed under socialism

In a satirical response to Djordje Vukadinovic's depiction of an "archetypical anti-Serb Serb," Ljubisa Rajic, Professor at the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Belgrade, commented in an article in

Politika (2007~-June 22) that such a person surely could not be shown empirically to even exist. Rajic then proceeds to describe an archetypal counterpart of Vukadinovic's "imaginary friend":

> *My friend is not an intellectual... he comes from the mountains.... he belongs to the young modern generation and, therefore, cultivates respect for older people and does not compete with them; he knows who reaps and who makes burek and jogourt. For him life was better under Milosevic... he knows that the Macedonians are really South Serbs... this friend of mind is a hybrid between the Radical and nationalist-oriented parties.[8]* [my translation]

Rajic's satirical article, which occupies an entire page, reflects the disdain and indifference which many Serbs have expressed to me regarding the rhetoric and political platforms of the extreme fringes of both the pro-Western anti-nationalists, on the one hand, and the ultra-nationalists, on the other. However, there is considerable hostility and antipathy toward political parties and politicians in general. This was borne out by a survey conducted by the Center for Free Elections and Democracy in the summer of 2007 which showed an approval rating of 14% for President Boris Tadic, the highest received by any politician *(Politika* 2007-- July 7).

The Rolling Stones and the Second Coming

> *The Rolling Stones are like the Second Coming* (Statement of a young taxi driver regarding the Rolling-Stones concert in Belgrade).

From time to time, there are highly visible events which showcase and reify certain values, predispositions, or trends in a society. One such event was a concert given by the Rolling Stones in Belgrade on the evening of July 14 of 2007. This concert generated a seemingly unwarranted amount of publicity and commentary. Of particular note was an article by Jelena Koprivica and Vladimir Djurdjic appearing in the July 15 issue of *Politika* entitled "*Srbija U Ritmu Rokenrola*" (Serbia in the Rhythm of Rock and Roll). This commentary covered two-thirds of the front page and was accompanied by a color photograph of the Rolling Stones:

> *We are no longer on the margin of cultural events in Europe. We have*

dreamed that like some in London, New York, and Paris we would be able to choose what concerts we would attend. At last, we can enjoy being able to choose. "[my translation]

The importance attributed to this event was manifested by the magnitude of the preparations at the concert site at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers directly across from Belgrade. A temporary "small town" was created on a 4000 square-meter field to house the approximately 500 workers who were erecting three "enormous, identical red, white, and blue stages 30 meters high." In addition, a temporary restaurant was built to feed these workers. There were also ten pavilions *(satori),* four of which were for the exclusive use of the Stones, and in one of which the members of the band could play billiards. At the then exchange rate of approximately 60 dinars to the US dollar, ordinary tickets ranged in price from about *$50* to $75, and VIP tickets *$425* (*Politika* 2007, July 14). When one considers that most salaries at that time fell within the $300 to $400 a month range, the whole extravaganza was disproportionately expensive for a poor, economically depressed society. However, this seeming incongruity was explained in the following way by Jovan Gajic (2007), commenting on an earlier summer concert in the Vojvodina town of India by the American rock group, the Red Hot Chili Peppers:

The arrivals of well known musicians from abroad in our country are not ordinary entertainment happenings, and for a part of our public they hold a much wider significance.... For that public they are an affirmation that Serbia is slowly but surely becoming part of the developed world which is ready to share its values and... modern life style. [my translation]

However, Gajic (2007), recalling the political support under Milosevic for *turbofolk* culture, and noting the current support by West-leaning Serbian and Montenegrin politicians for rock groups such as the Peppers and Rolling Stones, he warns that this, too, threatens to divide the population. Significantly, the article is subtitled, "Is One Part of the Cultural Elite Trying to Construct a New Cultural Identity so as to Create a Clear Distance between the 'Old Time' and the 'New Time'?" [my translation]. However, it would be mistaken to regard this divide in musical taste as an entirely new phenomenon, although today it surely carries far greater political and social significance than at an earlier time. During my field work in Belgrade in 1968-1969, I observed that the urban working-class,

rural migrants to the city, and villagers expressed an almost universal preference for national music, while professionals and intellectuals generally shunned contemporary national music in favor of jazz, Western-style hits, "old city songs,[9] and the classics (Simic 1973:128) In evaluating the significance of musical predilections, it should be kept in mind that it is not so much the innate character of the music per se that is the determining factor, but rather the images and identities that any particular form evokes. And after all is said and done, the Chili Peppers and the Stones are *celebrities,* and as such, have significant economic and political power, albeit indirect and largely persuasive. As Sardar and Davies (2004: 24) have commented, "Celebrities encode values and ideas that are projected on the globe and serve to enhance the power of empire...." This contention regarding the transcendent meaning attributed to celebrities, is reflected in the following commentary in the July *15,* 2007 issue of *Politika:*

The Rolling Stones long ago went beyond the framework of a rock group; they are an idea, a principle, a motto for life. [my translation]

However, those who adulate the Rolling Stones and other manifestations of Western culture are probably a minority, albeit a large one, composed, for the most part, though not exclusively, of young, better educated urbanites. Furthermore, if my conversations with several young adults who were among the approximately 150,000 spectators who attended the Red Hot Chili Peppers concert in India are any indicator, at least some people attended the event simply out of a desire for excitement and novelty, rather than as an expression of a pro-Western political orientation. For instance, a university student, who had attended the Stones concert, recounted that she was also among the approximately 60,000 fans present at a concert by nationalist Ceca Raznjatovic in Belgrade a few years earlier. [10] At this event, the crowd, as if with one voice, shouted nationalist slogans and tributes to alleged war criminal, Arkan. This was audible from the terrace of our apartment over a mile away. The point is that the cultural and political gulf in contemporary Serbia not only polarizes the population as a whole, but is also evidenced by the divided sentiments and ambivalence expressed by many individuals as well.

Culture and Politics

While there is no absolute correlation between a predilection for Western popular culture and an anti-nationalist political orientation, nevertheless, it is safe to venture that those who vehemently support pro-

Western political parties will also be more likely to evidence a strong attraction for Western popular culture. And similarly, while there appears to be a correlation between nationalism and an antipathy toward Western culture, this linkage is far from absolute. Among the many people from all walks of life with whom I have spoken over the past several years, a significant number voiced both nationalist sentiments as well as an attraction to Western popular culture and the perceived comforts and pleasures which they associated with it. One can speculate that this latter group is probably well represented in the approximately one-fourth of the electorate which voted for neither pro-Western Boris Tadic nor for ultra-nationalist Tomislav Nikolic in the first round of presidential elections on January 20, 2008.

With approximately 54% of those eligible voting in the January 20 elections, Tadic received 35% and Nikolic 39% of the total ballots cast *(New York Times* 2008, January 21). However, there was no clear correlation between urban voters and support for either Tadic's Serbian Democratic Party or Nikolic's Serbian Radical Party. Given the widespread highly visible public expressions of Western culture and influence in Belgrade and Novi Sad, one might have predicted greater urban support for Tadic's Democratic Party. However, the results show an almost evenly divided electorate; in Belgrade Tadic received 39.28% of the vote and Nikolic 40.28%, and in Novi Sad, Tadic garnered 41.48% and Nikolic 38.33% *(Politika* 2008, January 23).

Commentary in the Serbian media prior to the run-off elections of February 3 clearly portrayed this contest as one between West and East, and the "new" versus the "old." For example, in the January 31 edition the of the pro-Tadic Belgrade newspaper *Danas*,11 there appeared eleven articles which directly or indirectly supported his candidacy. In these commentaries it was alleged, among other accusations, that a victory for Tomislav Nikolic would be a victory for the Kosovo Albanians who would immediately declare independence; that Nikolic would return Serbia to the politics of Slobodan Milosevic, and that a vote for Nikolic was a vote for "conflict, hate, sanctions, and isolation." In contrast, Tadic was lauded for leading Serbia into Europe, i.e., eventual membership in the EU, while Nikolic and the Radicals were characterized in terms of "retrograde ideas leading the country backwards in the opposite direction from civilized currents."

The cultural aspects of this election were evident at a rally held in a Belgrade sports stadium attended by 25,000 supporters of Nikolic. At this event *turbofolk* entertainment was provided, a song praising Bosnian Serb fugitive from the Hague Tribunal, Radovan Karadzic, was performed, and T-shirts with images of Karadzic and alleged war criminal General Ratko Mladic were sold. Nikolic 's pro-Russian orientation was underscored when a "large screen showed an he-

roic report of his visit to Moscow where, accompanied by the brother of Mr. Milosevic, he met with Russia's next president, Dimitri Medvedev)." (Bilevsky 2008b)

The results of the runoff presidential elections of February 3 further revealed the extent of the political and cultural divide in Serbia, with pro-Western Boris Tadic receiving 51 percent and ultra-nationalist Tomislav Nikolic 47 percent, with the remaining ballots ruled invalid (Bilefski 2008c). Whatever other factors may have energized Tadic' supporters, years of exposure to American media and other expressions of Western popular culture surely must have played a significant role. What Rothstein (2002:19) has noted about capitalism can also be asserted specifically about popular culture, that is, it "seduces through sheer force of marketing and sheer promise of pleasure."

Postcript

This essay was written before the declaration of independence by Kosovo, an event which will surely alter the balance of political support in Serbia.

Notes

[1] Fieldwork in Serbia during the summers of 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007 was financed in part by grants from IREX (International Research and Exchange Board); the Center for Visual Anthropology, University of Southern California; and Faculty Development Awards, University of Southern California. While this study is largely the result of research in Serbia between 2002 and 2007, it also reflects the findings of numerous sojourns in former Yugoslavia dating from 1968.

[2] I employed the previously accepted term "Serbo-Croatian" since the word *narodno* carries exactly the same meaning in the now officially designated Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian languages.

[3] I have rendered these graffiti in Latin letters *(latinica)* even though they were written in Cyrillic script *(cirilica)*. The Cyrillic alphabet constitutes a significant marker of ethnic identity among the Serbs, who, like other Eastern Orthodox Slavs, traditionally employ Cyrillic characters in contrast to the Roman Catholic Croats and Bosnian Muslims, who employ Latin script almost exclusively.

[4] Ravna Gora is a mountainous area in western Serbia where Draza Mihailovic's Chetnik resistance forces first established their headquarters in May, 1941. Mihailovic was executed by Tito's post-war communist government as an alleged traitor and collaborator with the Axis occupation forces. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, he has been rehabilitated and publicly lauded by many as a "Serbian hero."

[5] Poverty in the southern regions of Serbia is often characterized by the aphorism *Sto juznije, sto tuznjie* ("The more southern, the more unhappy").

[6] Probably the most visible symbol of the resurgence of the Serbian Orthodox Church is the construction in Belgrade of the largest Orthodox Church in the Balkans, the Memorial Church of St. Sava. Its dedication to St. Sava, the

Patron of Serbia, plainly underscores its nationalist significance.

[7] Regarding what appears to be a widespread nostalgia for former Yugoslavia, Dan Bilefski (2008a) describes this phenomenon in Slovenia, the former Yugoslav republic where one would least expect it to appear.

[8] Rajic employs the terms *radikal* and *narodnjacki.* The first refers to Seselj's and Nikolic's Serbian Radical Party, and the latter to Premier Kostunica' s Democratic [9] Old city songs *(stare gradske pesme)* have their origin in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century urban centers in Serbia, especially Belgrade and Novi Sad (which until the close of World War I was part of Austria-Hungary). In many ways they resemble the romantic ballads of both Hungary and Russia during this same period.

[10] Ceca Raznjatovic is the widow of assassinated alleged war criminal Arkan Raznjatovic, and one of the leading exponents of *turbofolk* music.

[11] A number of people with whom I spoke attributed political significance to the fact that *Danas* is printed in Latin rather than Cyrillic script.

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