

## **ENOUGH! STUDENT PROTEST '92: THE YOUTH OF BELGRADE IN QUEST OF "ANOTHER SERBIA"**

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June 1992, was a culmination of tumultuous political times resulting from the crisis of the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This involved Serbia's struggling for a civil society with peace, freedom, tolerance and justice. This is in place of a nationalistic revival, with "homogenization" and authoritarian rule. At the same time internal wars rage and sanctions threaten ghettoization. The Student Protest seeking a radical turn in this government policy burst out at the University of Belgrade. Its first phase, permanent protests of tens of thousands of students in schools and streets lasted for 26 days. During that time many new forms of civil disobedience and protesting were introduced giving these techniques an entirely new meaning. Although none of the students' demands were met, their movement may be considered successful because they allowed, at least for a while, another Serbia to come to life. They enabled themselves and the rest of the opposition of public-minded citizens to express their concerns, frustrations, hopes and ideas. This paper aims at presenting the ethnography of those wonderful days of freedom in an otherwise gloomy and pessimistic Belgrade. Data presented result from my own intensive fieldwork and continual participant observation and talks with students. In addition, daily newspapers and weekly magazines, and the student press were carefully studied, and visual media coverage was also noted.

Five long years have passed since the processes of disintegration began in post-communist Yugoslavia. Each of the six former republics experienced its own critical periods and faced decisions about future developments. These decisions nearly always provoked conflicts with neighbors, formerly fellow countrymen.

Serbia began its transformation with the so called "anti bureaucratic revolution." This action promoted the selection of its current president, Slobodan Milosevic, as the new leader and established his power. Aggressive media propaganda and a series of populist movements invoked the revival of formally suppressed nationalist sentiments, glorification of national history and selective promotion of traditional values. This included invoking a patriarchal ethos which provided the leader with legitimacy and homogenized the masses. But this action opened the door wide for all kinds of national and

religious exclusiveness (cf. Colovic, 1990:61 ff; Moscovici, 1985:102-103)). That kind of transformation could not, of course, resolve any of the acute social and economic problems but it made it possible to substitute "national interests" for "class interests." This transformation enabled the old authoritarian rule to continue. One of its most effective methods being the transposition of responsibility and guilt on both "external enemies" and "domestic traitors". This, in turn, caused the worsening of "foreign relations", eventually leading to internal wars, and in "domestic affairs" to impeding the processes of democratization. This development, in turn, caused severe conflicts and tensions.

The struggle began between the ruling strata and the opposition. In essence they shared many common traits. These included nationalistic orientations and a disposition toward authoritarian rule. The conflict began as soon as the regime was forced to allow a controlled media and a multi-party system. The ruling party defeated the opposition in the 1991 elections. In the election campaign they promised prosperity, peace and democracy. They, however, resorted to their old methods to retain absolute power. This action, in turn, instigated new non-parliamentary forms of political pressure, mostly in the form of massive political meetings. The one held on March 9th ended in bloodshed, arrests and preventive military intervention. The fear arose that power might be retained by terror.

The following night, however, students "occupied" the central square in the city protesting against this turn of events. Their form of protest was completely new, based on different symbols as in a plush panda bear instead of national banners. Their slogans invoked a new iconography, one related to modern world phenomena in place of historical referents. They used another vocabulary, the urban talk of the young instead of folkloric stereotypes. This included rock music instead of folk song. This was a new political articulation. The students signaled the arousing of the old democratic spirit, cosmopolitan cultural aspirations and communication instead of voluntary ghettoization. Their meeting, which lasted for several days, was called "The Terazije Parliament", and their movement "The Plush Evolution". Since then Serbia has been torn between Bolshevik

residues, pro-fascist parties of militant nationalistic orientation and a radical democratic opposition. It has been slow going for civil options. For a long time, during the heated nationalist euphoria, these civil forces\*have been relatively uninfluential.

During the period of general consternation, when the wars began to explode, the opposition faded away. But as hatred, bloodshed and barbarism grew to enormous proportions -- democracy, pacifism, Europeanization and civil, instead of national rights, began their gradual comeback. These civil movements expressed their disgust with all these devastating developments and rebelled against apathy, fear and animosity. Anti-war and pro-democratic campaigns were also led by independent media in Belgrade. These included "TV Studio B," "Youth Radio B 92," and the weekly magazine *Vreme* which balanced the horrifying propaganda of the official stations and newspapers.

In Spring of '92 when life in Serbia was so depressing, Youth Radio B 92 designed a badge saying: "It is Spring, and I live in Serbia." Very articulate anti-regime protests poured in from all sides. The opposition held a commemorative meeting in March 1991. At this meeting students memorialized their "Plush Evolution." The Democratic Party gathered 800,000 signatures for a petition demanding the resignation of the president and elections. The war in Bosnian and United Nations sanctions only intensified the pressure coming from many public-minded and responsible citizens. They were determined to say no to the disastrous policy and to demand radical changes. By that time coalitions had been established within The Serbian Orthodox Church, Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and other research institutes. Massive anti-war demonstrations like the "Black Band" and the "Bell procession" put ideas into action and in their demonstrations indicated that the time was "five to twelve." The participants had no fear of being branded traitors or mercenaries.

In such an agitated atmosphere it was only a matter of time until Belgrade University, with its long-standing rebellious reputation under all regimes, would join in. The Student Protest The youth had already declared its intention not to be passive and let others determine their future. This was particularly so since there was abundant evidence that the ones in power were extremely incapable and irresponsible. The students wished to make their own decisions and play a role in creating the kind of society in which they would live. Additional motives for the protest were the new laws for the University and the Law on

Student Standards. These had been prepared in two versions: one by the University expert group and the other by the government. The former endeavored to introduce full autonomy, the latter threatened to abolish even the existing degree of self-management.

The students had many grievances impelling them to action. First, they were dissatisfied with their official Belgrade Student Association. This organization was a highly ideological relic of the old system. It was formally controlled by the communist party and hence supportive of the regime and of repression as a method of discipline. Subsequently, it was influenced by the ruling Socialists who the same goals.(1) This Association had managed to retain only 3-4% of the students as loyal members to take part in its meetings and elections. It thus lacked legitimacy to represent students' interests.

The student majority, taking advantage of the new legislation, established and registered independent organizations in each school and then united them into the Student Inter-faculty Association. This later became the Inter-university Association of Serbia. Finally, the students had a legal, institutionalized and authentic body that could express and act in their real interests. All clashes that occasionally occurred with the "official" student organization concluded with the new groups enjoying a moral victory.

Faculty organizations also decided that it was time to cry out loud and clear that it was ENOUGH! They declared that under current political and economic conditions it was hypocritical to act normally and to pretend that nothing had happened. The authorities had recommended that the students fulfill their school obligations and take their exams. Both faculty and students believed that this was a time of overwhelming disaster. There was the "Bosnian war" and the United Nations resolutions and sanctions which excommunicated Serbia from the world community and threatened imminent ghettoization. They felt it was appropriate to close down the University. As the students saw it, what future is there in science and learning if there is a communication blockade? They decided to have a general strike until their demands were met. In this way they proclaimed that they were not ready to accept the degrading situation in the name of some abstract "noble goals," which were vague even to their zealous executors. They did not wish to render their youth, aspirations, talent, knowledge and, subsequently, life itself, to the needs of the regime. Disgusted, they resisted it all and decided to struggle for a different life, a different country and a different future.

The first assembly was held on June 4th, in front of the School of Electrical Engineering. This is an elite institution with selective admissions. The event attracted a crowd of about 3,000 students, teaching assistants and faculty. They expressed their contempt for the government in silence. They sat on the pavement listening to classical music (Bach, Grieg and Mahler). Their messages were written on a long, narrow sheet. The first one, in memory and in the spirit of the late Rev. Martin Luther King, "I still have a dream." The second, "SPS =Guns 'n Roses," was a cry of both despair and hope. The association was with the name of the hard-rock group and referred to both words: guns = use of arms in executing the SPS "just policy." Roses were the official party emblem, borrowed from the Swedish socialists' 1990 election campaign. The implication was that they wished to create a similar, peaceful, democratic, progressive and affluent society in Serbia. Reference to the ruling party (SPS, Socialist party of Serbia, successor to the communists) clearly indicated that the students knew who was responsible for the present situation.

This was their view even though they felt the sanctions an inappropriate measure and an unjust punishment which would afflict only innocent, ordinary citizens and not the regime. They also were aware of how the regime manipulated the impact of the sanctions. The government pictured "external enemies" and "world conspiracy." This, they claimed, exposed their intentions to destroy the Serbian people. This attitude the government felt might help them consolidate their ranks and tighten their grip on power. The silence of the protesters was clearly a boundary marker between "our world" and "their world", "our way" and "their way." and a distinction between what the sacred and the profane. The demonstration had another objective. This was to distinguish themselves from the noisemakers so often present both at the "Meetings of truth" of the ruling party and at spectacular opposition gatherings. Classical music was deliberately chosen to contrast with the official use of prevailing folk style poetry and music of both traditional and modern provenance. This nationalistic iconography went together with the staging of populist drama. The event was designed to say, "look, this is not an exclusively folk society, urbanites and cosmopolitans also exist here and they claim their right to express their own culture."

Sitting down has a two-fold meaning. Standing is not a sign of respect, but is a submissive act. In the Serbian Orthodox Church sitting is not allowed, only standing and kneeling. One does not sit at populist meetings glorifying a leader. The demonstrators implied that they regarded

themselves as equal to anyone else. They rejected the idea of a glorified leader. In a conscious Gandhian manner the group declared that it was for peace and against any kind of violence. Hallmarks of the Protest were thus defined at its first gathering. They also established a distance from all militant, nationalistic meetings on the one hand, and fidelity to the students' own vocation expressed at the Terazije Parliament with its commitment to authentic civil and peace movements.

Several days later these ideas were supported by all other independent student organizations in Belgrade. Later universities from other towns joined. On June 8th The Proclamation Of The Belgrade University Students was issued specifying their political demands. These were disbanding of the National Assembly and the government of the Republic of Serbia because of their deceit, incompetence and failures which had led to the current disastrous situation. Also demanded was the resignation of Slobodan Milosevic, the President of the Republic of Serbia, the creator of this policy. They supported the formation of a capable and wise Government of National Salvation which would prevent bloodshed, disunity, revenge and chauvinism, and reintegrate Serbia into the world community and also schedule multiparty elections for the Constitutional Assembly. These demands were in accord with those of the opposition and various non-political institutions. Included among those who shared these objectives was Prince Alexander, heir to the Serbian throne.

On the same day the University Council announced its own Declaration, a detailed analysis of current political conditions. The University Rector described this document as a, "framework for peaceful, democratic and institutionalized resolution of the dramatic situation" (*Borba*, June 9th, 1992). Students, however, found it ambiguous, vague, indecisive, and one which equally blamed all sides. They also saw it as containing no concrete proposals for change. Hence, two days later, they organized another gathering. This time it was in front of the Law School and attended by some 5,000 supporters of their Proclamation. At noon on June 15th, while the university Council was in session, a general assembly of over 12,000 students and supporters gathered on the Student Square which was surrounded by the faculties of Philosophy, Philology and Sciences and Mathematics (3). This is in the very center of Belgrade. Students hoped the Council would support their demand for a general strike. The long and tense wait of the assembly, cheered by many distinguished guest speakers, finally ended when the Council, the Rector and deans, appeared on the

improvised stage to announce their decision. They supported the Declaration, in principle, but not the decision to call a strike. There was suspense because of a dilemma whether to give up or to find a way out. There was also fear that authorities would manage to crush the Protest by promoting discord between students and professors ("Yugoslav version: Divide et impera -impera et divide, anything to retain power!" - read one of their slogans). Since there was nothing else to lose, and perhaps a slight possibility for a gain, there were thus no alternatives. The students voted for "all or nothing." ("It's easy when you don't have a freedom of choice.") They were convinced that the professors would support them sooner or later. The students had "conquered" the three adjoining faculties. They then decided to, "retreat to our schools while they still exist!"). This was the beginning of the first phase of the twenty-six-day Student Protest '92.

Their decision was wise. Since they wanted their protest to last, to have continuity, they knew from their previous experiences that they could not remain outdoors. Persistence required some kind of housing and the school buildings proved to be quite suitable and comfortable. While the Philological Faculty and the Faculty of Science and Mathematics "rented out" their entrance halls, amphitheatres and some classrooms on the first floor to the students, the Faculty of Philosophy was literally "taken over", except for a few administrative offices. Telephone, faxes, and computers were readily handed over. Students "sublet" the schools for two days to freshmen, new "recruits" in the protest. Their entrance examinations turned out to be the only activity performed at many University of Belgrade faculties in June 1992.

It was impressive how quickly and skillfully the students organized. The group consisted of nearly fully trained professionals in their various disciplines. Thus it was not surprising to soon see well-equipped and efficient press, computer, program centers. The latter were entrusted with the job of obtaining speakers for talk shown and debating sessions and also enlisting popular rock groups and other entertainers. There were also first aid centers, an editorial boards for their newsletter and for the magazine entitled "*Dosta!*" (Enough). In addition they organized security and supply services, kitchens, a student radio station Index 202 (it broadcast 24 hours a day from an improvised studio) and Radio B 92. There was a video center recording all important events. They edited the tapes edited and they were shown on the independent TV station, Studio B. These organizations operated smoothly. Many companies, particularly private ones, and some institutions and faculties (which did not have the honor of

housing the Student Protest), were more than glad to lend some of their electronic equipment. Citizens were also happy to have a chance to participate. They supplied food and drinks. Contributions in cash began to pour into the students' accounts. One elderly lady came every morning with freshly baked cheese and meat pies. Peasants brought dairy products and fruit. One day, a villager dressed in his festive folk attire, appeared on Student Square carrying a lamb roast. Their participation was extremely important because the regime's propaganda always boasted of having the support of villagers, "simple people who can immediately tell right from wrong and who cannot be deceived by fancy talk."

These new spatial arrangements gave the university a new appearance, meaning and function. The entrance was guarded by the students who carefully checked identities and bag contents of everyone coming into the building. Although unarmed they had enthusiasm and a highly developed sense of duty. The glass-walled first floor and the terrace outside the building had a cafe. The owners sensed an unexpectedly profit in impoverished times. These were crowded places. During the first two weeks of the Protest there were from 15,000 to 20,000 people circulating each night among the three schools. There was a real danger that the hall might burst, the doors had to be closed from time to time. The amphitheater, first floor and mezzanine, were jammed. Temperatures were high for there was no air-conditioning. Areas designed for 450 people at times had to accommodate more than 1,000 who came for the plays or movies. They were particularly eager listeners for the scientists, politicians, writers, cinema or a theater directors, journalists, theologians, and even a royal highness who came to lecture.

In all more than 200 sessions were organized. There were serious, discussions with the guests and great differences in opinions. Various issues were analyzed as in how to stop the media blockade and the government's propaganda. Journalists alienated from the state media prepared alternative newsreels. These and the discussions dealt with the properties of authoritarian political culture, reform of the armed forces, the role of the (Orthodox) church in contemporary society, and a possible restoration of the monarchy. They were interested in the future of the country both with and without the present regime. Students proved to be well-read, shrewd, witty and critical. They demonstrated how differences in opinions could be resolved in a dialogue, in a civilized and democratic manner. This they did without exclusiveness, hatred and bloodshed. Even when they expressed their contempt for groundless accusations, deliberately twisted

facts and fabricated lies uttered by some ruling party representatives they chose socially acceptable ways for opposition. For example, long applause, the meaning of which could not have been misinterpreted. They made it very clear that their Protest was based on strong democratic and European traditions, and hence, on controlled anti-communism and anti-chauvinism. The students resolutely rejected either left or right extremism.

However, unfortunately, twice, and for different reasons, there were non-democratic models of behavior. Once, when physical violence almost occurred, they were directly provoked when a speaker accused them of "kneeling before the killers of the Serbian people." The second incident occurred during the visit of two French philosophers and pacifists, A. Glucksman and B.H. Levi. They tried to explain their views on what was really going on in Bosnia. They depicted a war between nationalists, executors of ethnic cleansing policy and those who were liberal cosmopolitans, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations. Some students were not yet ready for truth put so bluntly.

In contrast to the serious debating air in the amphitheater, the second floor hall was furnished with tables and chairs, brought out from classrooms. They were arranged to resemble a cafe or a disco club. This was where rock singers and groups performed. Here students enjoyed music, dancing, singing and socializing. The upper floors (3-6) had a quieter and more private atmosphere. Halls were turned into "clubs" where students debated, played chess and cards, listened to their own music, made new friends, and found new love. Some librarians (there are two specialized libraries on each of these floors) worked in shifts all day round, so that anyone who wished to be alone with a book could retreat to the piece and quiet of reading rooms at any time. Workshops were organized covering various topics, as for example, "How to cope with war psychosis." Classrooms and many offices in a horrifying experience for janitors, were turned into bedrooms. These room became filled with sleeping bags, blankets, and pillows.

From the second night onwards, the only visible component of the Protest for a casual outside observers was a grandiose party with lots of merry-making going on. Organization boards could breathe a sigh of relief, convinced that the crucial battle had been won. A spirit of *communitas* was created. Representatives of the opposition, supporters of the regime, or simply victims of the nationalistic propaganda, thought that the behavior of the students was disgraceful. They called the students

irresponsible, selfish hedonists interested only in their own well-being. To them the Protest was nothing but an excuse for entertainment. "How could they sing, dance and have fun when Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia were exposed to yet another monstrous genocide". By their standards participants in the Protest engaged in highly questionable activities. They felt that these students had no sense of duty towards their nation and country. Some considered that evil and alien forces must have led them astray turning them into traitors and mercenaries. Therefore, they indicated that the only way for their salvation: "They should go and protect their brothers!" But they did not, however, refrain from threats. Some suggested that "*Voivoda*," Serbian Radical Party leader, V. Seselj, holding the rank of Chetnik commander-in-chief and known for his militant chauvinism, "should be sent to mess you up." Others suggested, "they should be deprived of everything, including their students' identity cards," which were essential to maintain one's status.

There were also warnings and explanations about the true culprits. "You should be ashamed of yourselves! You want to remove Slobodan from power but your real enemies are Bush or Genscher" There were stern parental-like rebukes, "Don't disgrace your parents," or "Do you have parents?" "Your job is to study, pass your exams! How much longer do you think we'll support you?" There were also expressions of opposing opinions, "You cannot find a place with more democracy than Serbia," and "We do not have a better candidate than Milosevic. There is no one who could replace him." There was also advice, seemingly more tolerant, coming from experienced elders, "nothing should or could change," or, kindly, "You are young, don't be fainthearted. There will be jobs and apartments. You can't have everything at once." Then there was resignation, "We didn't have anything in our youth either, so what?" (!Dosta!, no.12, July 9. 1992:4).

National mass media, alternatively attacking or ignoring the Student Protest helped the students articulate their opinions. Some were humorous, "This is the most important exam - the exam of your consciousness", "You must earn your credits now if you want to enroll in the next year." Others were sarcastic, "Yes, we are paid by Aristotle, Descartes, Dante, Newton, Joyce...and by other world scum, as well as by delinquents from our own ranks - Tesla, Pupin, Andric". They also proudly wore badges reading I'm a CIA (MI-6, MOSSAD) agent and photocopies of foreign currency bank notes.

Worst of all, there were potentially more dangerous endeavors from official circles. Their objective was not

only to proclaim the protest as an act of treason but to blame it all on some eminent professors and prominent student leaders who were actually or supposedly of non-Serbian origin. Even the vice-president and the main ideologist of the Socialist party, formerly himself a professor of philosophy, publicly stated that he was "not surprised that students were stirred up when their teachers, who are not Serbian, were most active" (*Politika*, July 10, 1992, p. 12). They were called "the fifth column", or "the culprits of different ethnic origin."

The Student Protest was indeed a party and this was one of its best qualities and most lasting values. The purposely ludicrous component of the protest provided it with the authenticity of the new sensibility of the young. Instead of folkloric or former socialists models of public declarations, designed to instill in people a blind faith, students turned to their own cultural codes and their own language with the aim of challenging the supposedly hypnotized masses. It was an attempt to make them see reality, to reflect and question the stereotypes inflicted by the mass media. The students offered their own cultural, social and moral principles to fill the abyss left after total destruction of the previous order. They used humor, wit, laughter, irony, joy, and music. In demeanor they were optimistic, calm, independent, polite and civilized. Their actions were directed toward pinpointing problems and frustrations. This strategy was the exact opposite of the official society's attitudes, speech, and behavior. The students wished to make their message loud and clear and to articulate differences with the government. Their attitude towards work and duty was, "Problems were there to be solved, work was there to be done, the only important thing is to have it well organized and to find the right person at the right time for the job." This ethos was a world apart from the ideas held by many of their elders. They showed that being serious, responsible and concerned did not mean one has to be stern, lifeless, and aggressive. They were irritating and provocative! In Serbia which is nowadays generally incapable of curbing its passions, they aroused different and tempestuous public reactions. These reactions varied from unconditional support to strong condemnation.

They really need joy in an event to celebrate the end of a school year, but much more important they needed to put a barrier between themselves and the horrifying everyday situation. They wished to relax from their disgust with the war, their fear of mobilization, repression, propagandistic brain-washing and the taste of blood and death. Many of their friends returned from the war as invalids, others never came back, and still others fled as far as possible

from the devastating hopelessness at home. It was estimated that over 120,000 people left the country during these two years. This was why they cried out, "enough!" The word was chosen as the Protest emblem. "Enough with Thanatos, we vote for Eros!!!" Others thought in more structural terms, "The party is only a side effect, a background activity, the best things are going on at the sessions. But, why not a party? Don't you see that the party itself is an anti-Milosevic phenomenon." One professor, a participant in the '68 student demonstrations added, "Now I know why we failed. We were terribly bored!"

The student takeover of buildings contained another message, this one directed at the university authorities. "Our school should always be a place of gathering, of sessions with guest speakers and workshops. We should have concerts and parties on week-ends, providing they do not disturb those who want peace and quiet for study." Libraries should be opened at night, our school should have its independent and full life. This criticism was justified because for more than a decade, from the initial phases of the Yugoslav crises, various restrictions had been imposed. An ideological net was thrown over the chaotic reality to give an illusion that everything was still under control. Universities were turned into highly bureaucratized institutions. Working hours were cut in half. Books, periodicals and equipment were hard to get, classrooms and libraries were cold in winter. Activities were reduced to a minimum, and students thought it was time to take their schools back.

## II

The huge glass walls on the first and the second floor facing the courtyard of the Faculty of Philosophy, one of the busiest pedestrian passages in the center of Belgrade, were, naturally, turned into a bulletin board. This was called the "Wailing Wall." In other schools similar boards soon appeared, and, eventually, the entire city became one large bulletin board. These areas were covered with schedules of events and, more importantly, with slogans, messages, and rhymes. These were probably the most creative, and certainly the longest lasting products of the Protest. Passersby, especially in the morning hours when there were no crowds, carefully studied and copied the messages. Students gathered en masse late in the evenings and stayed through the night. This was no doubt the most appropriate time for the activities of "forces of chaos and madness" as Radio B 92 sarcastically suggested. This was intended to please their violent critics.

Many of these notes soon became a part of "Belgrade folklore." This despite the fact that these writings had nothing in common with folkloric style or content. On the contrary, their referents were taken from cosmopolitan (mass) culture but they were deeply submerged in local political circumstances. They had various forms. They could be composed as a classified ad: "Wanted! Exchange of a student booklet for an agricultural cooperative membership card" President Milosevic had said that to him all opinions were equally important regardless of who uttered them, a student or a peasant. Another, "Offer: house with a single story for a house with a basement," an allusion to possible bombardment. Still another request, "Urgent! A young, handsome, intelligent student requests a resignation." There was also paraphrasing of well known TV commercials, "Sloba (Milosevic) or wealth? We have decided, have you?" This was based on the original, "Smoking or health?." There were also inserts from popular and rock music songs both foreign and domestic, e.g. "Hit the road... 10,9,8," or "Last night I dreamt that you were gone," both clearly referring to the president. "Good morning, this above you is B-52" (in the original "B-52" is "clear sky) an obvious allusion to potential American bombing. From the TV serial, Twin Peaks, "Sloba killed Aura Palmer," or "Mr. President, Rambo sends his regards." From famous sayings, "one small step for you, one giant leap for Serbia," a parody of Neil Armstrong. In a more philosophical realm, "I live, therefore I think, I think, therefore I strike!" based on Heidegger. Even Shakespeare in the famous dilemma, "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer ...or to take arms against the sea of troubles?" (Hamlet, Act III, scene 1). These were examples of what L.J.Calvet (1976:26-33) called *parodie* and *detournement*. This occurs when already existing and recognizable formulae from other realms are preempted and given different meanings but the formula itself is included in the process of signifying.

Messages were addressed directly to slobodan Milosevic and the government with the comment on the current political situation and a danger of a war. Some messages phrased as questions: "Mr. President, why don't you have friends?" or "Mr. President, are we going to be bombarded?", in a more cutting way, "Mr. President, where is your dignity" This took note of the fact that Milosevic frequently remarked that people must restore their dignity through national awakening, homogenization and by resisting submission. The students replied, "What are you waiting for?" or, on a more somber note, "Is ghetto our fate?" To fellow citizens they asked, "Do You have food for your children?" "Are you prepared for long fasting (hunger)?" "How long can you support your

family without a job?" At this time many factories were already closed and workers were on paid leaves. Some were concerned with family. "Dad, do I have to get killed to make you come to your senses?" Others were in an imperative mood, again directed to S. Milosevic, "Go away!, go away! Together we are weaker!" Some taunted, "Come on, do it!" "Endure! (Tito)" "Hold on, buddy" (Saddam Hussein). Others to the public, "Turn off your TV sets, open your eyes," and the most telling of all, "!Enough! We want to live now!" Here they proclaimed that the new generation was not ready to annul its own life and future for some imagined "better tomorrow," no matter what collective voice was calling for the fulfillment of such a goal, whether patriarchal for the nation, or communist in the name of the proletariat.

There were observations, declarations, comments on reality or recommendations as to what was to be done:

"All we have from your rose are the thorns" (a reference to the SPS);

"The star is fading, it's setting" (a comment on Milosevic); "These are not threats-these are promises;"

"I don't know how it is without him, but I know how it is with him;"

"It's your time, but the judgement is ours;"

"He should be awarded the Nobel Peace prize - he united the world! (i.e. against Serbia);"

"If you are SLOBODAN (the name means free), I don't feel that way;"

"*Sloboda*" (freedom) is spelled without an "n" (Slobodan);"

"We are not ashamed of our past but of our future;"

"The Locksmith was better" (in reference to Tito's original trade);

"A smiling man has not yet heard the news;"

"Raise your heads, not your hands;"

"No nation has ever been exterminated - what a challenge for us Serbs;"

"This is chaos - in anarchy there is some order."

"Only in novels do people die of love - in reality they die of hatred!"

"Heavenly nations do not need a God on earth" (again, referring to mythical Serbs and Milosevic);

"Elevators for heavenly Serbia are out of order;"

"We don't need tear-gas for crying anymore;"

"Police love (symbolized with a heart) students;"

"They voted, so let them starve now!"

In addition to verbal expressions, students also had a need to express themselves in plastic and visual art forms. Fine and Applied Art students created several successful sculptures using paper and cardboard. Their meanings were submerged in local political events, such as a "Degenerated TV Watcher," a "Blind-Folded Soldier", committing suicide with a cannon (war is suicide!), a "Baby" (associating an action "All the President's babies" organized in February 1992 by Radio B 92 when parents were invited to protest against high prices of children's food and clothing by symbolically handing over their babies to the President's care). "Man-Trash" was a male figure wrapped in a garbage bag. "A Path to Heavenly Serbia," consisting of a male figure placed on the roof of the Faculty of Philosophy with his footsteps painted on a long sheet of paper all the way to the ground indicating that he had climbed up the building, towards the heavens. However, that path led nowhere and left him to balance on the ledge. The art group FIA designed a series of four posters. One represented the slogan "ENOUGH! - students for life now!" written above paper clips containing various bad news which were daily affecting Serbians. Another one represented a young soldier in a neutral uniform without any insignia on it and with his eyes blind-folded. The message read, "Why are you blind?" The remaining two posters represent different versions of a happy, smiling, beautiful girl wearing a kerchief on her head and watching bombers above her. The inscription read "impossible!" while the words tam-tam and ticktock indicated that time was running out. On the other version the first syllable, IM, was crossed out in red paint (blood?). All these works were later displayed at several exhibitions organized in the Happy Gallery of the student Cultural Center, well known for its avant-garde orientation.

### III

During the twenty-six days of the Protest, the students held several mass gatherings at the Student Square. They also paid several official visits: to the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, with reverence; to the

President of Yugoslavia, Mr. Dobica Cosic, with respect; to the President of Serbia, Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, with the strong conviction that they were right! (5) and to the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Mr. Milan Panic, with high hopes that in him they had found a man of the future. In all these visits they felt themselves equal partners. They even tried, and partially succeeded, in organizing the much needed round table discussions between the representatives of the ruling party and those of the opposition.

The most spectacular events, however, were their open air demonstrations which developed into street theater. Generally they took place with a generalized preconceived plan but with enough room for on the spot improvisations. They always had a good reason when they took to the streets and they knew exactly what to do there. One night, at midnight, thousands of candles for all innocent victims of the wars and for salvation of the Serbs were lit in the park on the Student Square. Their idea was borrowed by another, parallel protest, the St. Vitus Assembly (June 28th, celebrating the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo) organized by the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DEPOS), for their closing night on July 5th. Both scenes had grandeur and were charged with positive emotions. Several days later, on a sunny, afternoon they sat for several hours in the streets at the Student Square, blocking the traffic and reading aloud. They commented on Milosevic's speeches at the time he was came to power. These were compiled in a book entitled, *The Years of Denouement*. Another day they painted their messages all over the roadway.

The students' most celebrated outings were, however, their so-called walks, marches, picnics, and history trails. These were intended as campaigns against the forces of chaos and madness. Each walk often comprised several independent scenes. The first, a 3.5 kilometers long procession, was held on July 3rd and it included a stop at the Serbian Parliament in order to deposit their Proclamation. Then they passed with eyes closed by the building housing the TV Station of Serbia. Finally they joined the DEPOS gathering. They carried with them their leaflets, slogans and their student booklets. By then they had achieved the status of cult objects. They also wore jail numbers symbolizing their imprisonment. This "prison walk" involved confronting strong police forces in front of what they referred to as the "TV Bastille." Students were not concerned, they greeted the policemen, calling out that police loved them and offered them flowers. This was another "student formula" which DEPOS later also used several times, while symbolically besieging TV



Serbia, and visiting Student Square, to honor the students. At the same time this provided opposition gatherings with an entirely new meaning. They realized that symbolic actions were far more effective than speeches, slogans, static iconography and music.

On July 7th, the anniversary of Partizan Rebellion Day, an ambitious "Peace March" was organized from the Student Square to Dedinje, the elitist residential area of Belgrade. This was formerly inhabited by the bourgeoisie and, after the Second World War, by the "social equals" holding power. Milosevic's residence was located here. Their aim was to walk through his street, to pass by his house and leave him some messages. "We're going for a cup of coffee," they joked. It was a long walk, about 12 kilometers round trip. The students' line, with 4-5 people in each row, was more than three kilometers in length. The sight was so impressive that one bystander asked another, "Are they going in circles?" On their way through the main street of the city, the students and their teachers were generally greeted cheerfully. Many citizens also joined in the procession. This time they carried no numbers but they were adorned with foreign bank notes as any decent hireling should indeed be! However, when the procession reached the top of the Dedinje hill, students were met by cordons of armed police. They prevented passage through to the President's street. The police claimed that the peaceful inhabitants of that street did not want to be disturbed and had asked for Police protection. That was clearly only an excuse.

The confrontation of the two groups was announced by the bells of the nearby nunnery. The students sat down on the roadway. They tried to negotiate their passage. They took off their shirts to prove that they were not armed. Bear chests against guns, a surrealistic scene! They even twice attempted to break through the cordons, but accomplished nothing. "Orders are orders," the police commander said. Water cannons approached from the President's street but, fortunately, there was no violence. Several hours later it got very dark. The street lights were deliberately kept off. It was then that the leaders decided to walk back. Were the students in for a surprise! As they looked downhill they saw blockades of the highway, the intersections, and all bridges over the Sava connecting the old and New Belgrade. Rattling on the rails of the blockade announced yet another victory for the students. No police forces showed up. Nobody tried to remove the blockade, except for a few nervous bus and tram drivers. The message was clear, one particular street is far more important than the rest of the entire city populated by two million inhabitants.

Two days later the same adventure was attempted. This time an even longer route was followed including passing by the TV station, the second "untouchable" place in town. As expected it was protected again by the police. Once on top of Dedinje, students only walked around the central traffic circle, without even attempting to enter the "tabooed street." On the way back they stopped by the Parliament to leave soap, detergents and deodorants for its members to wash themselves clean of their past deeds. There, the President's "favorite opposition leader" (as Mr. Milosevic called him), vojvoda (leader) Seselj, walked out of the building and into the street to threaten the students with a gun, as he had done several times previously in meeting various "disobedient" groups on strike. There were no police to intervene and there was no reply from the authorities even after the students had pressed charges against him.

That last walk ended on Students Square where a theatrical scene representing the clash between the police and students in the President's street was improvised. "If he won't let us pass through his street, never mind, we shall make the street here." The staging of the event resolved the conflicts symbolically in favor of the students, an "actor" impersonating Milosevic replied, "I decided to resign, oh, but that's a sham."

Although none of their demands were met, the first phase of the protest ended on July 10th when a general assembly was held under the slogan "Oh yes, you will, you will" (alluding to the President's resignation). This was followed by an all-night rock concert at the Square. Universities were closing for the summer, to the relief of the bureaucrats. The students were exhausted, their money was spent and they had to go home. Only the members of the General Committee and of the Organizational Board remained. The Inter-University Board was alerted to act if needed, in case of a new repression requiring mobilization. They insisted that the protest was only "frozen" until September. Many students went home to the provinces which did not have the privilege of receiving information through independent media. These only covered the greater Belgrade area. They would now be restricted to the interpretation of the events "coined" by the state television.

Many students dreaded the moment of their first encounter with their parents and townsmen. But they had a mission to perform, to explain and popularize the goals and the ideas of the Protest. The main one was to try to make people aware of the dangers closing on them, and to help them to see reason in time, and realize that radical

changes were indeed gravely needed. Students knew that the President, who they always attacked as a functionary, and never as a person, was not the only obstacle. But they felt that his resignation would automatically mean progress because he symbolized a particular policy and type of rule that had no future.

Could this first phase of the Protest be considered successful? If its effects were measured by political consequences alone, than it was clearly a failure. The demands remained unfulfilled. However, if their influence was evaluated in socio-cultural terms, then it was a complete success. Those intelligent and capable young people proved that they were different. They were ignored, rebuked, belittled and marginalized by the authorities, state media and one part of the public, but they were not dismayed. They did not respond to hatred, absurdity, stubbornness and arrogance in equal terms. By not being prone to such negative emotions and attitudes they proved their superiority. They had overcome fear and they discovered that they could exist in a parallel world unharmed by the former, sure in themselves and in their chosen goals. They even brought some balance into the society which was deeply disturbed by the prolonged crisis. There was a wide cleavage between those pro et contra. They offered new concepts and models of behavior. The students could now conceive of themselves as autonomous individuals. They needed no collectivity to feed them with courage and strength. The regime dared not break them down by force, believing that sooner or later they would have to stop by themselves. This was particularly so because the government had succeeded in isolating workers and other strata from the Protest. But the gathering lasted too long to be easily annulled. Although their demands were political their movement was essentially cultural and in that respect it was completely victorious.

On August 5th, during its Summer session, the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia passed its version of the Law on Universities. Despite and contrary to all agreements reached between the representatives of the state and the University negotiators, the new law enabled the Government to establish full control over the University. Students, nonetheless, again reacted promptly and announced that they would never agree to have another ideologically biased university. University officials appealed for the revision of the degrading Law. The battle seemed lost, yet the students were determined to persist. The Protest was not a matter of choice anymore, but of existence. In September both economic and political conditions were worse than in Summer. There were

shortages of gasoline, cigarettes and even some basic foods such as sugar and flour. The black market was flourishing, the rate of unemployment constantly increased, and the standard of living rapidly deteriorated. There was the pauperization of numerous social categories as well as hyperinflation, and refugees. Students had many more supporters in the wider public than in the Summer. Their leaders were ready for a fresh start. However, what forms should their Protest take was still a dilemma. They know that they are dealing with autistic and irresponsible rule, one ready to do anything to retain its power and position. This was expressed by the Organizational Board President in Kragujevac (*Borba*, Aug 25th, 1991:12-13).

In Belgrade new slogans appeared. "Stalin for the second time among the Serbs. Your merits are far beyond our abilities. Were it not for the Law we would all be equal. Hammer and Sickle are side arms." The spirit of the students remained the same but their intentions revealed that their protest might ramify into very different actions. They were analyzing their work in the first phase, classifying abundant documentation, and preparing a book and two documentary films on the Summer Student Protest. They were also planning to include other social and professional groups in their movement and they tried to establish the Student Parliament as an alternative institution and authority.

Their last demonstration of this time took place on October 3rd, 1992. It was conceived as a highly symbolic comment on the Law on Universities. Soon after the law had come into effect their University (1838-1992) passed away. Thus they organized a proper funeral procession for the deceased, with a coffin, obituary and the last will, but there was nothing to leave to the many bereaved because the state had deprived it of all its property. The procession solemnly proceeded from the Faculty of Philosophy to the National Assembly where the coffin was displayed for the public, and handed down to those responsible for its death.

The Student Protest, together with all those truly democratic individuals, groups, movements and institutions, will certainly continue the quest and struggle for another, a different Serbia. Their weapons are reason, rationality, knowledge, ethics, tolerance, and open-mindedness. Could they be considered sufficient in the unequal struggle with the other side? In times of crises people are prone to choose different, opposite options in hopes of salvation. Will it be democratization or war and madness? The outcome remains yet to be seen.

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