

The Topsy Turvy Days Were There Again: Student and Civil Protest in Belgrade and Serbia, 1996/1997

Mirjana Prosic-Dvornic Midland, MI

Abstract

After a long silence, university students, and hundreds of thousands of citizens, were on the streets again, protesting against the regime in Serbia. The immediate motive for the outburst of long suppressed discontent was the regime's insolent annulment of the victory of the opposition in November 1996 local elections. In terms of duration (from November 1996 until March 1997), spread (throughout urban Serbia) and number of participants (estimated to 350,000 to 550,000), this protest was unprecedented. However, like all previous demonstrations, it failed to initiate any real, irrevocable change. Instead, the regime succeeded to channel citizens' discontent into "safety vents", into temporary "topsy turvy" days of "Another Serbia", thus enabling once again the continuity and stability of the regime's particular vision of society.

Introduction

The 1992 Student Protest in Belgrade was one of the most dynamic, articulate and creative demonstrations of "civil disobedience" that took place in "Milosevic's Serbia" (cf. Prosic-Dvornic 1993). Despite the significance of the protest, and a desperate attempt by its participants to send a clear message that "Milosevic's Serbia" was *not* the only Serbia that existed, it still failed to make big news in the world. Foreign media and its audiences were rather indifferent towards a student *avant garde* in Serbian civil society, that espoused the fact that there was another, different Serbia, the modern, democratic, and tolerant one in need of recognition and support.

In late 1996 and early 1997, when students, joined by citizens this time, poured into the streets of major Serbian towns once again, the situation was reversed. The protest which lasted four months, never ceased making headline news. "Another Serbia"¹ had finally become media visible throughout the world. Unequivocal approval of the events, boosted the morale of a people

left voiceless for a very long time. For Serbs living abroad² this was finally welcome news coming from their homeland, after the continual stories of war, rape, destruction and ethnic cleansing that had been reported in the press for years.

My own predicament as a researcher, and a chronologist of students' and other protests in Serbia in the 90s (Prosic-Dvornic 1991,1993,1994,1998) changed dramatically, as well. In 1992, as a professor at the University of Belgrade and a vice-dean of the School of Philosophy³, one of the most active in Protest, I was, as part of an "administrative triumvirate", in a position to decide whether the school should or should not be involved in the protest. Leaning on the School's long tradition of supporting "freedom fighters", a quick and unanimous decision, the only possible one, was made: let the students take over the facilities and let us, their teachers, offer them our full support. Fortunately, we also secured the full backing of the majority of staff and faculty. The School of Philosophy, together with the Schools of Philology, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, all located in the very center of the old downtown, in the Student Square became the Protest Headquarters and "home" for the entire student population.

I performed a triple role. I was in a key decision-making positions, balanced between the students and the outside world, I was a keen, always present, active participant in the protest representing my own political views, and I was an ethnographer recording the story from an "insider's" vantage point.

In 1996/97 during the second student protest, it was an entirely different situation. Still formally a professor of Belgrade University on a prolonged sabbatical and living abroad, I was unable to directly participate in the protest, much less influence its course in any way. I was "outside", an observer, who, although vitally interested in the progress of the protest and its achievements, was now in a position to study "culture from a distance" through a variety of primary and secondary sources. These covered domestic and foreign press, radio and television reports, electronic news, photographs, e-mail messages from friends and colleagues in Belgrade that often turned out to be detailed reports, insiders' insights and interviews, and various materials generated daily by the protest, including slogans, mottoes, props and other paraphernalia. Two books on the Protest presenting analyses of the on-going events and processes, one conducted by a group of sociologists and psychologists (Babovic et al.1997), the other by ethnology/anthropology students supervised by two assistants (Gorunovic, Erdei 1997), both from the School of Philosophy in Belgrade, were also available. Being an "insider" in the

"outsider's" position, again a multiple role, with a sound "local knowledge", I could immediately recognize the shifting contexts as well as the intentions of key participants and could "catch" all subtle nuances in meanings. I myself was experiencing a strong sensation of being in a liminal phase of a ritual while participating in the virtual reality created by various media (cf. Silverstone 1988). On the other hand, "a view from afar" provided me with a different, broader and emotionally less biased perspective. If the former was an observation blurred by subjective interests, the latter was a more detached observation from a bird's-eye point of view.

The Setting

The Student Protest '92 (June 4 - July 10, 1992) was conceived as an opening phase of a permanent demonstration against the injustices of the system, personified by Slobodan Milosevic's despotic personal rule, until some real changes were introduced. Instead, it had actually marked the end of the initial period of anti-regime revolts (1990-1993), followed by almost five long years of gloomy interregnum. When students went home for the summer in 1992, the legislatures managed to pass a new, degrading law that completely abolished the former degree of autonomy the University had enjoyed.⁴ Left with no alternative and disturbed by the worsening of the political and economic situation, disappointed by their own and their professors' failure to preserve autonomy, the students responded appropriately one last time. Bearing the specific hallmark of their style of action, unrestrained humor, keen satire and parody, students laid the University (1838-1992) to rest in a mock funeral ceremony (Prosic-Dvornic, 1993:136-137).

This was not only a farewell bid to the University's autonomy, but to civil protests in general, as well.⁵ In spite of the two important developments: the implementation of a new economic program in early 1994 that harnessed rampant inflation and introduced some financial discipline; and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia in November 1995, living conditions continued to be miserable and degrading for the majority of the population. The regime had no intention of loosening its grip, nor of introducing any of the desired radical reforms. Its power remained intact, as did its overall cynicism and ability to turn and shamelessly exploit any situation to its own advantage. The personal rule of Slobodan Milosevic was always defined in ambiguous terms on purpose so that, at the right moment, the

"right choice" could be made. Radical shifts in the political course that Milosevic took were designed to preserve his undisputed primacy. At the time of his ascent to power (1987-1989), Milosevic was balancing between the option of preserving the socialist system in the entire former Yugoslavia under his centralized grip, and the option of introducing an alternative, nationalistic ideology and implement the concept of the Greater Serbia, 150 years long dream of the Serbian "patriotic" elites. After the outburst of the wars in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia (1991-1995), this second option enabled the regime to represent itself as the "essence of patriotism", while those opting for peaceful resolution to differences were labeled as "traitors", "foreign hirelings" and "abstract pacifists". After the Dayton Peace Agreement had been signed, however, this particular paradigm of metaphors distinguishing between "the good" and "the bad" Serbs, no longer applied, for it was now the President who was the greatest peacemaker of all times, (cf. Prosic-Drovec, 1994: 189-193; 1998).

Although the bellicose, blindly chauvinistic propaganda had ceased thereafter to pollute public life, and the usual propagandistic channels which suited the regime's needs were now used to create the illusion of normality, nothing functioned properly. It was not only that the rule of law, an ideal of the civil society, was not established, but that even the existing laws were either conveniently broken or strictly enforced by the regime to purge political adversaries or to enable the additional collection of "tribute". Corruption was the name of the game, and "gray" and "black" zones of economy were the only profitable ones. The new rich and powerful class was setting their rules and standards for the entire society. The majority of the population, formerly well ensconced within the middle class ranks, were rapidly nearing the poverty line. Securities provided by the previous system such as pensions, welfare and health care were gone. Pyramid schemes of all kinds were highly instrumental in "laundering" money and "transferring" private and "social" savings of the entire nation into the hands of the "chosen few". Unfortunate and sad reminders of the recent outrageous war, filled with atrocities, rape, "ethnic" and "cultural cleansing" were abundantly present: handicapped young men, armed individuals roaming about in fatigues, the flourishing of "vices" such as drug addiction and prostitution, refugees and displaced persons with nothing but memories of their former lives and no feasible future, and an exodus of hundreds of thousands of Serbian urbanites who had decided to restart their lives somewhere, far away from the "balkanized" Balkans.

Re-Awakening of "the People"

Life was lived one day at a time, devoid of certainty and even predictability. All one's resources went to secure nothing more than mere daily survival. Apathy was the dominant state of mind. Still, with hope on the wane, discontent and negative energy were building up to dangerous levels, waiting for an occasion to explode.

That occasion presented itself on November 17, 1996, when the democratic coalition *Zajedno* (Together⁷) had won, in the second election round, a majority of seats in local governments in Belgrade and in 13 out of 19 other major cities in Serbia, a total of 34 municipalities. As soon as preliminary results were announced that night, citizens gathered in Belgrade in Republic/Liberty Square⁸ to celebrate their victory⁹. The same was happening in other "victorious" towns throughout Serbia.

In order to prevent the "unimaginable", the regime, as usual, took every "precaution" to secure its victory: prearranging election laws and electoral district to favor the ruling Socialist Party; preparing the dissemination of desired positive images of the regime and negative ones of the opposition, as well as the infamous "commentaries without information", essential to totalitarian propaganda by the state-run media; elimination, by public denunciation or private threats and blackmail, of potentially dangerous candidates in the "enemy camp"¹⁰; intimidation of the electorate; tampering with ballots and "doctoring" the results before they are publicly announced (never proven but always strongly suspected -cf. Prosic-Dvornic 1991). However, despite all these "security actions" the regime was in for a big surprise.

Although the Socialist Party of Serbia won the majority of seats in 144 other communities¹¹, it was quite shaken by the loss of the big cities. The 144 villages and small towns were not as important and they included less than 50% of the electorate. Not only did they lose the majority, they got the message loud and clear that the voters mood was changing and that a dangerous crack in the regime's image of invincibility had been made. According to the sources of a well informed journalist, President Milosevic at first was angry and blamed his closest collaborators' personal disputes ("We lost Belgrade because of your quarrels, and we lost everywhere that there were quarrels" [between party members] - Djukic 1997: 270) and poor organization for this serious precedent. It appeared as though he was willing to accept defeat, and even ready to find a silver lining in this unexpected, dark cloud: "This will only boost the

party to better prepare for the next elections" (Ibid.). Later that day, however, believing that the people were lethargic enough to care about politics, Milosevic turned to a different strategy. He instructed his party members in electoral commissions and district courts to make the necessary "arrangements" that would annul their adversary's victory. which resulted in suddenly "discovering" numerous, alleged irregularities in the voting process at the posts wherever the opposition had won were thus suddenly "discovered"¹². The arrogance of the act, the obvious display of the obstinacy of an autocrat who would not shy away from open deceit nor abuse of any institution, who exposed the entire, allegedly independent, judicial system as being nothing more than one of the levers of power, who in order to protect his will and interests, believing that he could "get away" with it, insulted and enraged the voters.

This was not the first time the public was faced with the arrogant attitudes and acts of the regime. As a matter of fact, there were far more serious deeds and deceptions previously committed that had unobtrusively gone by. But it was this last act that went too far. A sudden and extremely powerful revolt, erupting out of a great for relief from oppression and hardship ensued. Since the joy of victory had already been experienced, and the long-dormant hope that there still could be change after all, was rejuvenated, the situation was very different. It was as if the voters were hit by the old curse, "may you lose what you've already had".

Taking to the Streets Again

The initial release of anger caused by the obvious tampering with the local level election results could have become violent and unpredictable. The masses were charged with negative energy, and all they needed was a call for the "Romanian scenario" to begin. Was this the start of a civil war in Serbia? Unlike all previous rallies most of which were confined to Belgrade¹³, demonstrations this time began in the provinces, in Nis, the second largest Serbian industrial city. Needless to say, the inhabitants of Belgrade were only too eager to join in, as were populations in the all other "annulled" towns. Determined not to withdraw before their demands were met: that the regime honored the original vote count, that the state-run media were freed from the deadly propaganda, and that some sound economic and political reforms were initiated, demonstrations stretched over an extended period of time. Citizens' rallies lasted for three months, and ended only when the opposition candidates were allowed to rightfully took over

local governments. Student protest which had one additional demand, for the University President to resign, continued on through March 1997. The number of protesters was also unprecedented. In Belgrade alone it was not unusual to see between 100,000 and 200,000 citizens and tens of thousands of students participating in daily marches. On special occasions, such as religious holidays, St. Nickolas Day, December 19, Christmas Eve, January 6th, St. Sava Day, January 27 (founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church, celebrated as patron of schools and education), all celebrated according to the Julian calendar still used by the Serbian Orthodox Church, New Year's Eve, one would observe as many as half-a-million people in the streets of Belgrade.

The President of the Democratic Party, Zoran Djindjic, a philosopher educated both in Yugoslavia and in Germany, with profound theoretical knowledge on civil disobedience and other non-violent types of protests, with personal, "field" experience dating back to his own student days in the early '70s, found a salutary solution. Knowing that the enormous tension that was building into what could have turned unto an all-out blood bath had to be given a vent, while implementing the principle of non-violent protest, Djindjic thought of a convenient way of releasing protesters' "steam", yet causing no serious harm or damage to property. The solution was the to launch "cannonades" of eggs directed towards some of the most important "gears" of the regime. The state-run Television Network of Serbia, Radio Serbia, "Politika" Publishing House, and editorial offices of other pro-regime newspapers, the City Hall, Court House, Assembly Building and other well known symbols of repression were all "targeted". For several days, beginning on November 25, 1996, miles long columns of protesters marched by launching attacks with "fresh ammunition" every go round (buttermilk and red paint were also sporadically used)¹⁴. This part of the protest became known as *The Yellow Revolution*. The name was derived from the egg yolk, the part that adhered the best to a targeted object. . One of the streets lined with several target spots was renamed *Scrambled Egg Street* for the duration of the protest. For days the buildings were covered with rotting eggs, "the odor outside matching the one inside". When passing by these buildings, protesters would turn their heads away and hold their noses, pretending to be protecting themselves from the smell of corruption and moral decay. The egg, the symbol of the initial phase of the protest has been commemorated by special memorabilia sold as souvenirs such as, post-cards bearing the inscription "Greetings from

Belgrade", depicting *Politika Publishing House* covered with a giant egg, and spectacles cut out of cardboard, the "lenses" of which were in the shape of a sunny-side up egg.

Once eggs helped channel rage and aggression, there was a lot of room left for more creative forms of expression. The group that possessed the infallible "know-how" in that area, were the students who joined the protest on November 22 when their Student Initiative Committee was organized. They were especially angry because the Rector would not even recognize the existence of the Student Protest. Instead he tried to reduce these tens of thousands of students to what he referred to as "a handful of manipulated kids" who were "obviously only trying to avoid their academic obligations". In reality, there was a general strike at the University, denied by the Rector who chose to ignore the protest and try to deceive the public by announcing that "the schools were working normally".

Representation of the Protest in the State-Run Media

Fallacies uttered by various representatives of the regime, as a way of dealing with the "undesirable events", were not unusual in a society in which the well oiled propaganda machinery constantly recreated "better", virtual reality. Another effective tactic was to ignore the event, as if it had not occurred. This was a good way of not only preventing the real news from getting out, but also a worthy way of trying to send a message to the participants that their actions were so insignificant that they could not even "make the news". The calculated expectation was that protesters who failed to make an impact, would become demoralized and give up. While the same technique was applied to the 96/97, it soon became impossible to overlook the large number of participants who gathered daily at various locations throughout the state. Additionally, there was independent media only too eager to disseminate information about the Protest. A primary example among these was the famous Belgrade Radio B92¹⁶, which the regime perceived as exceptionally "objectionable", despite its very limited broadcast range, barely covering the greater Belgrade area. Signals of Radio B92 were first jammed for days. Finally the regime managed to shut down the station altogether on December 3, 1996, under the pretense of an "expired license"¹⁷. However, due to the combined pressure from both protesters and the international community (Voice of America broadcast Radio B-92 reports during the shut down), the attempt failed and the station was reopened two days later.

Other techniques were employed since the "ignoring" and "muting" ones did not work. They included attempts to minimize the scope or significance of the event, to employ "didactic" rebuking, to discredit and disparage, to label, to dispel solidarity by dichotomizing everything pertaining to the Protest into "bad" categories, such as "different", "foreign", "imposed". To make the attempted deceit more "believable", phrases like "a handful of manipulated kids", were additionally "supported" by cropped camera shots, focusing on small detached groups of protesters going to or from the rally and close-ups of individual participants, montaged to make it seem as though there in fact were not many demonstrators participating. Finally, aiming to produce an even stronger impact upon the viewers, the political "expertise" and opinions of so-called "honest, hard-working ordinary citizens" polled all over the country were broadcast regularly. They revealed that the only representation of the Protest "honest" citizens knew about was through information presented by the regime-run media. Their contempt was hence the result of this imposed ignorance.

Political opposition and the protesting citizens were the ones who were blamed the most. Students, however, were OUR children and it was impossible, or at least counter-productive to proclaim them "our enemies" or even different from US. That was why they were represented in the regime-run media as a small group that had unfortunately fallen into the trap of the "violent, pro-fascist demonstrators" as the President of the Serbian Assembly phrased it.¹⁸ According to another "explanation", it was not the students were not taking part in the demonstrations. They were impersonated by "hirelings" of sorts, "from adolescents to senior citizens (!) disguised as students".

Needless to say that actions like carrying of foreign state and corporate flags, or displaying the Protest's motto "Belgrade is the world", or passing by foreign embassies, which to the protesters symbolized partnership with the community of nations, were readily reinterpreted as undeniable signs that "the protest was mentored from abroad" as part of an "international plot against the small, proud, sovereign, and freedom-loving Serbia". The President of Serbia himself, repeated this message in his very first address to the nation, on December 13, 1996, five weeks after the beginning of the protest. He flagrantly abused the letter from Mr. Warren Christopher, in which the former Secretary of State criticized Milosevic's actions and advised him to honor the will of the voters. Mr. Milosevic, however, presented the letter as a "proof" that

the unrest in Serbia was engineered from abroad. Hence, the treacherous opposition and its followers were nothing but a mob of "Fifth Columnists" and "terrorists".¹⁹

It is true, however, that the international community, as the situation escalated, was more and more involved with the "annulment problem". Were it not for their support of the Protest and pressure on the regime many potentially disastrous actions might not have been prevented. Without outside interference, Milosevic would not have cared much about the "election scandal". But, because of it, he was forced to request an arbitrage from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A delegation, headed by Mr. Felipe González, visited Belgrade in mid-December and their findings verified that the opposition had indeed won the elections in almost all of the disputed posts. Nevertheless, it took Milosevic a month to begin reversing some of the annulments. It turned out that he was actually still pushing the confrontation further, as he continued to irritate the opposition and the entire nation by instructing electoral commissions and courts to play the game of overruling each other. Alternating a proclaimed concession with a new rebuffing the pledge to honor it was nerve racking indeed. Only when all other resources were used up, did Milosevic decided to resolve the situation, in his own way, of course. Making it appear as his grace, on February 11, 1997 he proposed to the Assembly to pass *Lex Specialis* honoring almost all of the original election results. Following the event, opposition representatives were finally inaugurated as mayors and as new municipal councils.

The Police

It was this careful monitoring by international political and humanitarian institutions, and serious warnings from foreign governments that prevented the regime from using police force to mercilessly crush the protesters, a few instances of violence notwithstanding. As is always the case in a protest scenario, the police were present daily in or around all important institutions the demonstrators were likely to visit. However, when so ordered, they performed more than just the perfunctory role of securing the protection of people and property. From the very beginning quite a few individual arrests were made for alleged "disorderly conduct", or "interference with the police work", such as "regulating traffic"²⁰, with the evidence that sometimes there was police brutality behind the scenes. The intent of these sporadic actions was to intimidate and remind people of what might happen if they crossed a line. In mid-December 1996 and again from mid-

January 1997, however, riot police in full gear were beginning to rough up demonstrators. In particular was the time when Mr. Milosevic was contemplating whether to concede some municipalities to the opposition, while the opposition leaders were considerably widening their marching routes which already included some of the Belgrade suburbs, hitherto strongholds of the regime. Enraged anew, the police on several occasions were ordered to forcefully chase protesters away. The scores of wounded protesters were the result of each such "close encounter".

In the last week of January, the police cordons were no longer placed around important landmarks throughout the city. Instead they were preventing protesters from marching along major streets even in the center of the city. The "forbidden city"²¹ was thus greatly expended, at the expense of the "liberated territory" which, practically overnight, was reduced to the confined area of the old city center. Students' reaction to this sudden siege was to walk in circles, surrounded by a police cordon, with hands on their heads, as if on a prison walk. This was the introduction to an eight-day standoff between a motionless, stern police force in full riot gear, and a gay, active and friendly student "cordon", bravely withstanding both the force and freezing temperatures. Students continued with their pacifying behavior, trying to "humanize" the opposite side. They turned the space inside the cordon into a camping ground with a kitchen was set up in a tent, fire burning in barrels, a discotheque working at night. After morning work out, students helped the public city services take away piles of garbage. They never ceased trying to communicate with the police officers. Students offered them food and flowers, talked to them, attempted to draw them into their games and make them smile. One "odd" couple, a young police officer and a female student, who met during demonstrations standing in different cordons, even got married after the Protest.

In Search of the "Good News"

In mid-December when everything seemed to be going against the ruling party,²² the regime badly needed news items that could be reinterpreted in its favor. One operation was to buy social peace by paying welfare benefits that had been in arrears. From the economic point of view this was a desperate and dangerous move for it could generate devaluation and a new wave of rampant inflation. However, from the regime's vantage point, this did not necessarily have to

be a negative development, since it had already used inflation as one of its manipulating tools. Money was also needed to back up parallel programs, such as the formation of a pro-regime phantom student organization, called the *Independent Student Movement*. The job of its well paid activists was to attempt to counter-balance the effects of the authentic Student Protest. Declaring to represent the majority of the student population, the *Independent Student Movement* demanded classes and "normal" life at the universities to resume. However, as this was not the first "student organization" that was set up, the entire outrageous staging was immediately perceived as too transparent to work.

One final attempt to demonstrate that the Socialist Party of Serbia and its Leader still enjoyed vast popular support was to revive populists meetings that were, carefully engineered "from above", highly instrumental at the time of Milosevic's ascent to power. The new series of meetings, For Serbia, with the expressive slogan Serbia shall not be ruled by foreigners, was organized in various towns between December 17 and 24, 1996. "Grand finale" was to take place in the capital. None of the meetings went well and everywhere there were conflicts between the regime supporters and opponents. Staging one in Belgrade was extremely risky and it nearly turned into a clash of catastrophic proportions. The nation was brought to the brink of civil war, and it was hard to accept that the organizers were not aware of the dangers involved. Many believed that the regime counted on these conflicts to be used as an excuse for brutally crushing down the civil and student protest.

The Socialist Party of Serbia announced in advance that at least half a million of its supporters were expected to attend the Belgrade meeting. It was to take place in Terazije, some 300 feet away from the Republic/Liberty Square, the gathering spot of the opposition. People of all ages and from all walks of life, assembled from all over Serbia, especially from more remote places where the only news available was that of the state-run media, were bused or transported by trains to the capital in early morning. They had been susceptible to the propaganda and many confirmed that they really believed their mission was to assist the President in liberating the capital from "traitors", "foreign mercenaries", "fascists", "*Chet-nics*" and "hooligans". Others were motivated by less noble reasons, such as fear of repression or of losing whatever privileges they still thought they enjoyed. Some took a chance to introduce an adventure into their dreary everyday lives, and substitute a free ride to the capital, with travel expenses fully covered, for a

day of work. Whatever the case, they thought that they would be welcome and that its citizens would appreciate their effort. As they started their walk into town, carrying President's photographs and "pre-fabricated" posters with old, uninventive, sterile messages and slogans, attached to long wooden poles, all provided by the organizers, they faced a very different, unexpected reality. Their own arrogance and determination to deal with the traitorous Belgrade mob quickly and thoroughly, was met by anger and insults coming from the Belgrade crowds that could hardly be described as "a handful". Confrontations and clashes occurred throughout the day and ended with scores of casualties. The most dramatic moment occurred immediately before the meeting. Some 40,000 thousand "supporters", less than a tenth of the expected number of participants, were besieged by an at least five times greater crowd of protesters. A possibly disastrous conflict of the two groups was prevented by the opposition leaders who miraculously managed to calm down the opposition protesters and lead on a march in another direction.

The organizers of the Terazije meeting, that is "groups which control[led] the means of communication and repression" (Da Matta 1977:247), made all the necessary preparations well in advance. As a contrast to the flexibility and constant improvisation the opposition resorted to in leading the Protest so that it could respond promptly to the ever-changing situation, the regime, wishing to emphasize its authority, power and stability, adopted an opposite strategy. The Terazije meeting was therefore conceived as a formal ritual celebrating the existing structure and its inherent hierarchy (ibid. 248 ff; Turner 1977), or, in Handelman's terminology (1990: 23-50), it was designed as a public event that *presented the live-in-world*. It was used to impart messages that confirmed social relations, values and orientations in accordance with the regime's world view. To this end, a proper, elevated stage was erected, sturdy enough to support the President of Serbia, his wife, prominent members of the left coalition, and high government officials, or, as some commentators phrased it, "the ruling couple and their suite...weighing several billion dollars" (M. Milosevic et al., Vreme, vol. 323, Dec.28, 1996:10-12).

Iconography and scenography reminiscent of the social realism style, loudspeakers, spotlights, and, most importantly, television cameras and transmission trucks, were all set in place, waiting for the "suite" to arrive. For security reasons, but also for reasons of symbolic spatial distancing between the ruler and the ruled, the stage was conspicuously fenced off from the area reserved for the crowd. The ruler, backed by frenetic clamor of support coming from the

crowd transported from afar to create the right ambiance for his speech, used their presence as a backdrop for the warnings and threats he intended for the other half of the Serbian society. He openly admitted that he was not going to tolerate the existence of the schism; nor the barren attempts by the menacing opposition to harm him; nor the imposition of a world community that he had no intention of honoring, especially the standards of a "new world order"; nor anyone who dared challenge his authority, and so on.

One spontaneous moment that could not have been anticipated and "engineered" in advance revealed the true nature of the Leader's relationship with the People, proving that they were to him nothing but necessary decoration. That moment came when the mass all of a sudden started chanting, using the President's nick name: "Slobo, we love you!". Obviously annoyed for being distracting while delivering some important message, he impatiently cut the chants off with an ill-tempered: "I love you too!" Needless to say that this little phrase immediately became the joke of the town, and that the following day the opposition protesters were all proudly sporting new badges inscribed with the President's "declaration of love".

After the meeting was over, while quietly walking through the city towards their buses waiting to take them home, the supporters were an entirely different kind of crowd from the one that came in the morning to "cleanse" the city. Their arrogance was worn out and replaced by shock, disbelief and humiliation. One scene of retreating defeated "warriors", caught by a Deutschewelle camera crew (Dec.25, English Edition News, MEU, 5:00 P.M. EDT) quintessentially showed how farcical the latest regime "rally-idea" was: An elderly couple, at least in their late 70s, walking rather briskly with an effort, trying to keep up with their group of "retreating supporters", dragged a sign behind them which read: "I want my classes to resume!" Once they were gone, students offered their silent but very expressive comment of the event. The following day they performed a "cleansing ritual" by scrubbing the spot from which the "ruling couple and their suite" instilled hatred, intolerance and isolationism. Indeed the clash that occurred in Belgrade on the Christmas Eve, was not just a conflict of political opponents. It was the clash of two cultures very distant from each other, of two different civilization spheres, one archaic, rural, patriarchal, suffering from an "authoritarian syndrome", the other representing cosmopolitan urbanites with modern/post-modern predisposition.

From the regime's vantage point, however, the meeting produced many positive effects. The leader had demonstrated that he still had the power to impose his will. He also proved that

there still existed a Serbia loyal to him and it was made visible throughout the world. Maybe the image of "his Serbia" was not very appealing to those abroad, but it was extremely useful for internal representation. Pictures, speeches, and especially The Speech, cheers and applause ardently recorded at the meeting, were the "good news" around which new sequences of virtual reality could be built. Reinterpretation by means of electronic editing would create exactly the desired representation of the meeting. All that would be disseminated would be the "right" kind of messages, all negative ones would be eliminated.

Those who had seen both the event and its media representation knew the difference. The citizens of Belgrade, themselves victims of a vicious propaganda, could no longer bear the perpetuation of lies and intoxication of viewers who were not there to witness the events, and who would not, therefore, be objectively informed. As a manifestation of their anger and resistance, early in January, the protesters transposed one of the specific features of the Protest, *the noise*, an obligatory companion to any march or gathering in the streets, to their homes. Every day, as the RTV Serbia, popularly known as TV Bastille since March 9, 1991, started its evening news broadcast, windows would open everywhere, and protesters would begin to make deafening noise by banging pots, pans, lids and any other suitable household utensil, to shout out the stultifying propaganda. Maybe they were recalling the magical power of noise counted upon in traditional religious rituals that were used to chase the "evil forces" away. The effects achieved by this action were really impressive, especially as the noise began to spread out, from the downtown area towards the very outskirts of the city.

Participation in these evening rituals further liberated the citizens from fear instilled by the regime, as the "noise makers", operating from their own homes, without ability to mingle into the street "anonymous mob", openly revealed their identity to neighbors and watchful informers. They were finally brave enough, to speak as individuals, not only "as a mass". The same courage was required to wear some of the badges that bore various mottoes, slogans, or identifiers (e.g. "I am a Walker", "I am a BU Student/Professor", "Greetings from 'a Handful'", "Together", "There are Plenty of Eggs in Belgrade!") all the time, not only during rallies. Being "labeled" outside the "ritual context" as a member or sympathizer of the opposition, and taking individual responsibility for one's actions and thoughts among others who may have held different opinions, was definitely a step toward a democratic, civil society. Also it was a way of transcending individual orientations, hitherto exposed only in a private sphere, to a public arena

and reaching out to others of similar aspirations. Realizing that one was not alone, but rather a part of a large group of people with whom one could share thoughts and actions, created a need to systematically build that group's identity. That is why the participants did not shy away from using audio-visual symbols which confirmed and amplified their belonging to a newly defined collective.

Without a doubt, the protest was dominated by educated urbanites and it was an expression of their cultural and political preferences and values. Strong democratic orientation, non-authoritarianism, non-conformism, preference for freedom over egalitarianism, proneness to "westernization" and a western model of society, openness towards the world, patriotism but not chauvinism, were among the most cherished values of the protesters (Cvijic 1997; Kuzmanovic 1997; Vuletic 1997; Babovic 1997b). However, this is not to say that they were a monolithic mass that shared all the same beliefs and supported all the same actions. They differed in views, but nevertheless knew how to communicate their differences and how to tolerate them. What they shared was "solidarity without consensus" (Kertzer 1988: 67), or, as J.Fernandez phrased it, the "social consensus" about appropriateness of action, but not necessarily also a "cultural consensus" about its meanings (ibid.68).

The Topsy Turvy World of "Another Serbia"

When the Protest is deconstructed to its basic building blocks, it becomes evident that there were very few new elements not seen or exploited in some earlier anti-regime demonstrations. The Protest '96/97 was rather a climax of all previous experiences. What made it different was a fresh *bricolage*, and adaptation of the existing elements to the new situation. One of the most significant changes, however, was augmentation in scope (spread, duration, number of participants) which was one of the Protest's main sources of power.

The Belgrade Protest was evolving in and among *traditional sites* that the opposition had already "conquered" or imbued with symbolic meanings during previous rallies.

Republic/Liberty and Student Square were among the "preempted" spaces that have long been established as trademark assembly spots for the opposition and students, respectively.

Maintaining its assembly site the opposition counted among its few lasting victories. They were able to defy all regime's attempts to relocate their rallying from the center of the town, recently

restored as the regime's own intended show-off place, to a park across the river Sava, in New Belgrade, a city created by zealous socialist builders.

Marches, as a peaceful form of expressing resistance, associated with the universal arsenal of civil disobedience instruments that originated from as far back as Gandhi's marches in South Africa, were a part of the Belgrade opposition rallies from the very beginning. Thus, the very first demonstration organized in June 1990 involved a march from the Liberty Square to the Serbian Television Network Headquarters. Later, from the "Slovenian War" (June 1991) on, they were utilized by pacifist, feminist and civil movements and groups in their anti-war campaigns. Motion played an important role in some of the most memorable actions of the kind, including *The March of Peace*, *The Black Band* and *The Last Chance* (Prosic-Dvornic 1994: 181-184). In addition to their various symbolic meanings, these marches helped publicize the existence of groups of people holding opposing views on some crucial issues to those dissipated by the government. This was a very important function considering that the only available sources of information to the majority of the population was the controlled state media. After some successfully performed "actions in motion" by the Student Protest '92 and the parallel opposition gathering known as St. Vitus Assembly, marches were definitely enlisted as a "mandatory" expression of protest. One of the novelties introduced by the Protest '96/97 were the inter city marches, or "walks" as they were referred to by the participants. Hundreds of students from Niš (250 km away), Kragujevac (120km) and Novi Sad (80) marched to Belgrade in mid-December in support of their Belgrade colleagues.

Noise-making, another trademark of the Protest '96/97, also had its history. Bells of all sizes, alarm clocks, keys, were the most important requisites of *The Last Chance* manifestation. This particular gathering also inaugurated another fixed element in the "protest folklore", a prolonged jingling and clattering with keys or whatever suitable gadget, at every mention of Milosevic's name. It is not surprising that noise had a prominent place in those political rituals. In addition to drawing attention of the onlookers, and symbolizing the "awakening", it is also an excellent boundary marker between different phases of a ritual, or between "sacred" and "profane" modes of existence. Innovative components in the Protest '96/97, were reflected in excessive and diversified noise-making, to an extent that a definite trend was set: "Noise is 'in'!". Thus, every day, drummers from various rock-n-roll bands were at the head of the citizens' procession, making deafening noise by devotedly pounding their instruments and setting the pace

for the march with Latin American and African rhythms. They heralded the approach of the procession to a neighborhood so that occupants of apartments and offices along the way had time to come to their windows and balconies and prepare to greet the protesters. They were not merely spectators, but equally important participants in the Protest. They contributed to the street spectacle "from the galleries", by flashing lights, displaying slogans, dancing, shouting, waving, "playing" small, plastic toy trumpets and rattles borrowed from the sports fans' inventory.²⁷ Often, rock bands and dancers performed while walking with the protesters.

But, it was a new "instrument" in noise-making that had soon become metonymic of the Protest. The instrument in question was a simple, inexpensive piece of plastic capable of producing loud, piercing sounds: *The Whistle*. It was carried everywhere, all of the time, and no protester could be ever found without one. They are still cherished to this day, as a reminder of wonderful times, as a good luck charm, and as a mandatory piece of equipment should a need arise. The huge success of the whistle stemmed from the possibility it offered to act as a neutralizer, as a substitute for other forms of expression. Because of the political and cultural heterogeneity of the protesters, "the whistle is strategically significant for it is not ideologically binding. We can all agree to express protest by blowing a whistle, but it would be difficult to find slogans that everybody would be comfortable with", said one student-protester (N.Jankovic, *Demokratija*, Feb.10,'97 :5).

If the egg, the whistle, and the noise in general were the core symbols of the Protest '96/97, humor, satire, ridicule and parody were the essence of its expression. This particular form of expressing revolt against the oppression in Serbia was introduced by the Student Protest '92 and it was the idiosyncratic feature of the movement. This time, however, students managed to pass it on to the entire protesting population, and helped them take part in an alternative form of existence to the gloomy, burdensome and fearful everyday life they had been forced to lead for almost a decade. Although the citizens had not been completely deprived of cathartic effects of laughter owing to the marvelous work of the devoted cartoonist, Predrag Koraksi?-Corax (cf. footnote 6)²⁸, this time they could experience it first hand, as its active co-creators.

This humorous approach to reality was one of the crucial cultural traits that had helped define and bind together the citizens of "Another Serbia" at that particular time. The relaxed atmosphere, positive attitudes and good-naturedness which represented them as "reasonable", "civilized" and "likable", enhanced not only their internal communication, but also their reaching

out to the outside world. Even more importantly, humor was successful in unmasking the half-truths and outrageous, thumping lies, injustices and abuses used by the regime to instill fear and hatred into the "subjects". Exposed for what they really were, they turned their creators from dangerous into ridiculous giants on glass legs. It was also a way of looking at oneself in a critical, detached way, for humor tends to be self-derogatory as well. In either case, the therapeutic effect of seeing life from a funny side was enormous. Although the criticism was sharp and harsh, sparing no one, their parodies and satires in whatever form they appeared - in verbal messages (slogans, mottoes, graffiti, verses), in art (cartoons and other drawings, sculptures, badges), publications (postcards, collections of protest "folklore"), or "performing arts" (procession as a happening, enactment and games like "camping with the cordon", "traffic light", "traffic jam", "ritual cleansing", "prison walk", "outshouting prime-time news" - were always refined, well balanced, within the limits of good taste, and, above all, intelligent and truly funny. The key for decoding their meanings was submerged in local political events and socio-cultural relations, but most of the references were taken from the cosmopolitan, mass culture: rock'n'roll music and lyrics, movies, strip comics, television sitcoms and mini series. This is another component that was responsible for the Protest's easy communicability.

Humor empowered the Protest by its double capacity, to liberate its creators and to demise those who were the target of ridicule. This was a case of putting laughter to work successfully in undermining destructive social and political institutions (cf. Jenkins 1994). A deadly dictator and his tyrannical regime, surrounded by poltroons as the only acceptable companions, and populist crowds as the only desired subjects, cannot stand laughter which "dethrones" him, destroys his "sacredness", reduces his "gigantic power" and inviolable authority into a soap bubble. On the other hand, the parodists, seeing the effect of their activity, develop a sense of accomplishment, worthiness and confidence. And "emancipated", fear-free, conscious citizens cannot make good "subjects" from an autocrat's point of view. Civil and student protests in Serbia '96/97 were no exception to this rule. Humor thus successfully performed its subversive role, while the key outcome was the *inversion* of reality.

Inversion made possible the demise of the powerful and the empowerment of the deprived. It enabled an easy stepping from the onerous, dismal, meager existence into the world of creativity, hope and spiritual opulence where the participants felt that they were in control of events. It allowed leaving behind the society with strictly defined and hierarchically ordered

roles, with rules, values, interests and obligations and shifting instead into a new egalitarian experience of anti-structure. Finally it provided a passage from passive, oppressed and depressed subjects into active, liberated and joyful citizens. All this could have only been achieved through a medium of a ritual. Upon arrival at the gathering site and with the first sounds of drums and whistles, a pivotal point at the threshold separating the two levels of existence was activated. The participants were collectively "transferred" into the liminal phase of liberated, topsy-turvy world dominated by the experience of *communitas* (V.Turner 1977:96 ff.). Well-known scientists, politicians, celebrities walked side by side with young couples, their children and their pets joining in an informal, familial atmosphere. They were all equal players devotedly engaged in a new game bubbling with opportunities to deconstruct and desecrate, to abstract, contrast and reintegrate anything from the scary everyday world, and give it a different meanings. The events occurring during this "legalized anarchy" that *represented the lived-in-world* were "like multiple or magic mirrors that play with forms of order - that refract multiple visions of the possible, from among whose uncertainties there re-emerge probabilities" (Handelman 1990:49).

Journalists and analysts who had written about some aspect of the Protest agreed that it was enacted in the form of an unrestrained, frolicsome, carnivalesque, Dionysian celebration (cf. Vujovic 1997; Radivojevic, V., Kovacevic, N., Nasa Borba, Dec.31 - Jan.1, 96-97:VII). This "Carnival" even had its Prince, an effigy of President Milosevic as a convict. A full size figure, created by an anonymous author, of Styrofoam, sponge and cloth, was dressed in a black-and-white striped prison uniform. His prisoner's number was actually the date when the election results were annulled. Shackles, chains and a ball complemented the effigy's "attire". In the beginning an opposition party member carried the "Prince-Convict" at the head of the procession, but later on, the effigy was placed to "ride" on a motor vehicle hood. As the protesters wanted to emphasize that the country was ruled by a couple, there was also a "Princess-Carnival", represented both by a doll and by a masked participant. The Spitting Image-like-face of the doll/mask, was topped with the First Lady's characteristic hairdo adorned with artificial flowers. Her clothes were symbolic of her political affiliation: a red neck scarf, a sweater bearing a red star on the front and the inscription "Cool" on the back.

Epilogue

At the end of a real carnival, its Prince, a scape-goat to which all "sins" of the community are pinned, is given a "fair trail". The evidence presented in a humorous form, "proves" that he is "guilty beyond reasonable doubt". His punishment is execution, and after his Last Will and Testament are read, the Prince is either burnt down or washed down. After these purifying rites, the community is ready to return to its "normal", everyday life. In the Protest '96/97 the "Prince" was spared, neither tried nor punished. Instead, the young man who dared desecrate the person whose effigy he was carrying was arrested (charged with "unauthorized regulation of traffic and lighting fire-crackers" though) and severely injured while beaten in jail (cf. V. Marcetic, NIN, vol.2398, Dec.13, '96:11-12).

Nevertheless, this case of "mistaken identities" could not take away the carnivalesque quality from the Protest. On the contrary, carnivals, as well as political rituals which take on carnival expression while containing elements of protest and licensed behavior, are designed to provide cathartic effects. They function as safety valves in a society so that the status quo, the cause of the revolt in the first place, may nevertheless be successfully preserved (cf. Kertzer 1988: 131-134, 144-150. Although this was certainly not intended by the organizers and participants of the Protest in Serbia, this was once again confirmed as a valid conclusion. The outburst of revolt had not yet reached the critical point after which there could be no return to the previous status quo. Although hundreds of thousands of people were engaged in the Protest, probably more than in all previous demonstrations taken together, it was still, confined to but one segment of society, the urban middle class. In all protest in the former Eastern and Central European Communist countries that were successful in overturning the government and initiating change, workers had played a decisive role. In Serbia, however, workers burdened by extremely unfavorable economic conditions, pressured and manipulated by the regime, and fragmented into several opposing unions, were still not ready to exhibit solidarity and proclaim a general strike.

As a consequence, the regime was able to survive, albeit some small, reluctant and certainly not irrevocable concessions. It may have lost a battle but it still possessed the will and means to continue the war. Nevertheless, the President's image was tarnished and a crack in his seemingly monolithic authority was made. To counter this, the grip over the politically and

economically disillusioned population tightened again and manipulation and abuse continued in an even more arrogant fashion than before.

In time, positive effects of each and every concession made was dismantled. Democratic opposition parties, potent only when united in a common goal, was easily broken up by cleverly exploiting rivalry among its leaders. This time, the process of discrediting opponents was greatly helped by the very same opponents themselves.

Several months after the Protest had ended, Mr. Milosevic's resigned from the office of the Serbian President only to take a "better job". On July 23 1997, the Federal Parliament proclaimed him for the President of Yugoslavia. Seven years earlier:

Yugoslavia still existed, salaries were decent, Belgrade was one of 'the safest cities in Europe' ...During those seven years the former Yugoslavia shrunk down to just two federal units, industrial production to 40% of what it used to be, export trade fell to one third, average salaries do not exceed 200 German Marks a month, Belgrade is now known , because of the Mafia clashes, as 'Palermo on the Danube', every tenth inhabitant is a refugee and about every tenth Belgrade dweller has left the country for good.(N.Stefanovic, Vreme, vol. 353, July 26, 1997:11)

Finally Mr. Milosevic's dream to become "Tito instead of Tito" came true. To make that clear and to impress "his people", he immediately took over all Tito's insignia of power, his car (Mercedes-Benz 600 Pullman), his residency (the former royal palace, the White Palace), his ceremonial elite guard. But, apart from these exterior symbols which appeared as a meaningless masquerade, nothing else was the same. Political and economic downfall was continuing and the number of loyal supporters was dangerously decreasing, especially outside of Serbia (Montenegro, Republic Srpska Krajina in Bosnia). Capricious autocrat's power seemed to be crumbling. What was urgently needed was to try and revival popular support, by means of a new homogenization of the masses. The most effective short-cut in that direction was, again, through nationalism. In that respect there was, it seemed, only one card left to play: Kosovo. The circle was closing: Milosevic came to power by manipulating ethnic grievances of both Serbian minority and Albanian majority there in 1980s. Could he restore his power by playing the same

game twice? Hopes are that Serbian sentimentalism when Kosovo is concerned will help shift the attention from the catastrophic results of his rule to something belonging to a "higher moral order". Antagonizing the entire world again seems to be a small price to pay for consent at home. In the past, any "disciplinary measures" imposed on Serbia by the international community did not hurt the elite. While seriously harming the population, the United Nation sanctions provided a welcome smoke screen for the elites to prosper. Will the effects still be the same this time? Could the "awakened" citizens be turned again into a "blind, nationalistic, mob" that is easy to manipulate? Has the positive energy of the civil society been drained out for ever, or is it temporarily latent, waiting for a new chance to emerge? Will the new topsy-turvy ritual function once again as a safety valve for the status quo, or will it be all-pervasive and hence powerful enough to finally bring about real change?

Or, will there be another war, the worst yet to happen? Will historic Kosovo, the Mediaeval "cradle of the Serbian nation", cease to be a part of Serbia? If it does, it will not be because of the "past injustices". Negative historic memories are built on the fact that during World War II hundreds of thousands of Serbs were expelled from the region by the Albanian collaborators of the Axis. In the aftermath the Serbs were forbidden to return to their land, and the province was clandestinely repopulated by large numbers of illegal immigrants from Albania. This, in addition to an extremely high birth rate among ethnic Albanians in Serbia, accounts for a large Albanian population increase over a relatively short span of time. All this has reversed the percentages of groups that make up the ethnic structure of the province. Nevertheless, if Kosovo ceases to be a part of Serbia, it will not happen because there are 97% Albanians living there. It will happen because of the catastrophic political strategy of the anachronistic leader who wanted too much in very many wrong ways, and who had denied everyone else the rights he demanded for himself. Has anyone considered the possible future effects of the "negative historic memories" impressed by the Serbian regime on many other ethnies, but also on large segments of its "own People"?

Notes

1. The term was coined by independent intellectuals gathered in the Belgrade Circle, an association engaged in promoting peace and civil society.

2. According to some estimates, the number of people who have left Serbia since the breakup of Yugoslavia, approximates the number of Serbian refugees from the war thorn regions in Croatia and Bosnia now living in Serbia. That number is in the range between 200,000 and 300,000.

3. Each school of the Belgrade University is administered by a dean and two vice-deans. Although these are de facto full time jobs, no special administrators are hired for these positions. Instead, as a way of preventing bureaucratization of the highest education, every two years, each school elects a new dean and vice-deans from the list of its own eligible faculty members. It is considered to be both an honor and an obligation to one's school to accept this job, compensated by a symbolic 10% salary increase. The 1992 Law on University, however, provides for the government interference. It states that every election has to be confirmed by a School Council consisting of 50% outside members, appointed by the government. The next step towards establishing full control over school administrations would be for the government to directly appoint deans and vice-deans.

4. This was achieved by converting the University into a state-run institution, administered by the University President (Rector) and three vice-presidents, who were, together with the 50% of the Council members directly appointed by the government (The majority was secured by "winning over" few votes from the other 50% members, elected by the schools). The Law on University, passed by the Parliament in August '92 was immediately put into effect and the former University President and one vice-president, proven "disloyal" because they had supported the Protest, were dismissed and replaced by two Socialist Party members with "political clearance". The new President, a party apparatchik, and a long time dean of the School of Agriculture, was to become one of the principal targets of the Student Protest 1996/97.

5. In 1993 street "happenings" occurred only on two occasions. The first one was a quiet ceremony commemorating the victims (one on each side) of the March 9, 1991 demonstrations. The second series of protests were provoked by an incident that took place during a regular session of the Federal Parliaments in June 1993. One representative of the nationalistic Serbian Radical Party, a loyal coalition partner of the ruling Socialist Party, physically assaulted a representative of the Serbian Renewal Party. The incident was immediately followed by an opposition gathering, brutal police intervention and the arrest of the leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement, Vuk Draskovic, and his wife. In an attempt to exert public pressure on the regime to free the couple and to defend political freedoms in general, the democratic opposition, in one of the rare occasions when it had managed to overcome individual differences and act in unison, organized several meetings. A park facing the new St.Sava Cathedral, the largest Orthodox church on the Balkans was chosen for the site of the gathering. These demonstrations and hunger strikes in the country, and resolute international political pressure, forced the President of Serbia to issue an Act of Abolition by which the couple was freed.

6. The "Milosevic Dynasty" and their "suit", the opposition leaders and the entire "transition period" in Serbia were privileged to have an ardent chronologist, a cartoonist Predrag Koraksic-Corax. His work is an invaluable, condensed, "shorthand" documentation of the particular Zeitgeist and its mores. According to some analysts, he was the very first political cartoonist in Serbia after World War II to launch a truly politically unrestrained but aesthetically refined "non-Afganistanian" editorial cartoon. The President's "transfiguration" from Warmonger to

Peacemaker could not, of course, escape his keen satirical demystification. Corax published a series of cartoons that left a lasting legacy of the event. One "drawn joke" depicts Milosevic crossing over troubled water from one river bank to the other by using Radovan Karadic and General Mladic as stepping stones (Nasa Borba, Jan.25, 1996:8). After safe escape, he goes through a cleansing ritual (washes his hands) with a little help from his friends (the most prominent members of the international community). Vreme, vol.310, Sept.28, 1996:11), changes his clothes (civilian for a shining armor - Vreme, vol.245, July 3, 1995:16; or dove feathers instead of helmet and gun - Vreme, vol.198, Aug. 1994:11), gets rid of the nationalistic symbols for petty change at a flea market (Nasa Borba, June 1-2, 1996:1), and appears at the Hague Tribunal, together with Tudjman, his make-believe enemy, as a saint (Vreme, col.273, Jan.13, 1997:7).

7. The coalition partners were the Serbian Renewal Movement led by Vuk Draskovic, the Democratic Party headed by Zoran Djindjic, and the Civic Alliance Party under the leadership of Vesna Pesic.

8. The square was used by the democratic opposition from their very first gathering in June 1990, protesting against the usurped media unfair election law, and it has always stayed "their place". The "preemption" was also expressed by unofficially renaming the site into Liberty Square.

9. Eager to enact the changed reality, even if only on local level, the gathered crowd chanted slogans like "Down with the opposition", "Long live the regime", emphasizing the role reversal resulting from the election victory.

10. Total control over the state-run media empowered the regime not only to reinterpret the selected events in the way that suited it the best, but also to "demonize" all major opposition leaders at one time or another. In the 1996 elections the main target was Mr. Avramovic, an extremely popular former Governor of the National Bank (1994-1996), and economic reformer who managed to bring some order into chaotic economy. After being dismissed from his post because of overtly criticizing many irregularities in the system and ministers abusing their privileged positions for personal gain, he accepted an invitation to head the coalition Zajedno. Since his popularity could mean trouble, nothing was spared in attacking him publicly. He was forced out of the race, right before the elections. The regime believed that the opposition was fatally harmed by his withdrawal.

11. A fortnight earlier, in the first round of the elections, the ruling Socialist Party and its coalition partners, highly influential Yugoslav United Left (YUL), led by Mr. Milosevic's wife, professor Mira Markovic, and New Democracy, had already been victorious. They had won 64 seats in the Federal Parliament. Coalition Zajedno secured only 22 seats, while the ultra nationalistic Serbian Radical Party won 16. At the local level, in Belgrade, for example, the results were completely reversed. Coalition Zajedno won 70 seats, Left Coalition 22, Serbian Radical Party 16, and Democratic Party of Serbia 2.

12. Only one city, Kragujevac, located in central Serbia, was exempted from reversing the local election results. For some reason, the newly elected representatives there were allowed to take power unobtrusively.

13. This enabled the regime to label them as "elitist" or "cosmopolitan" outbursts that were very remote from opinions and sentiments the common folk. This corresponded well with the old, much exploited stereotypical dichotomy between indigenous folk culture vs. "polluted", "imported" urban mores.

14. Two days after "Eggs Attacks" were launched, some participants added firecrackers and stones to their ammunition which shattered many windows. Although the opposition leaders managed to prevent further escalation of destruction, these incidents nevertheless provided the other side with a welcome cover story on protesters' vandalism.

15. Naming events after characteristic objects that were used in a particular revolution become paradigmatic in the post-Titoist Serbian history. Thus, for example, when Milosevic's faction of the Communist Party in Serbia staged a "popular revolt" against the Government in the vojvodina, the former northern Autonomous Province in Serbia, as part of their plan to abolish local autonomies and establish centralized rule from a single center in Belgrade, the event was called the Buttermilk Revolution. It was so named because the protesters used small cartons filled with buttermilk as "ammunition" aiming at the province's government buildings (October 1988). This inspired another leader of the Coalition Zajedno to conclude: "They came to power with the help of buttermilk, we will chase them away with eggs". (Pan jokes were also created by manipulating the word jaje, an egg, and a derivative jajara, signifying petty thief, to describe the regime as "ballot thieves". Another unrest, was named the Log Revolution. It referred to road barricades set up in August 1990 by the Serbs in Kninska Krajina (south-western Croatia), which marked the beginning of the Serbo-Croat war in Summer 1991. The naming of an event in a syntagmatic pattern borrowed from the regime was deliberate and intended as a parody. Also, it seemed that in the meantime, the regime's taste for buttermilk has changed. Or, maybe they did not like their symbols to be "contaminated" and "detoured" by the opposition. Thus, a young man was arrested because he threw two buttermilk cartons at the Politika Publishing House. While in 1988 "buttermilk was celebrated as an expression of now denounced as an act of vandalism and destruction" (V. Marcetic, NIN, vol. 2398, Dec.13, 1996:10).

16. Because of its professional and objective informing even under the extraordinary amount of pressure and obstruction by the regime, The International Organization for the Aid to the Media proclaimed, on December 16 1996, Radio B92 the best radio station of the year.

17. Ironically, Radio B92 could also, at times, be useful to the regime. Namely, according to the account of one police officer who was daily monitoring the rallies, the police were regularly listening to the B92 live coverage of the demonstrations which enabled them to be well and timely informed about the course of the events.

18. Students responded to the Assembly President's "good intentions" by asking him how was it possible that, if so concerned, he had not protected them when their age group (between 18 and 27) was mobilized and sent to Vukovar and other front-lines to fight and perish.

19. Well informed sources claimed that this particular phrasing, and the use of the Communist terminology came from the ultra left hard-liners led by the First Lady, Dr. Markovic. Her recent

evaluation of the Protest 96/97, expressed in a form of a diary, excerpts of which are regularly published in women's magazines (currently it is the bi-monthly "Bazar" from the Politika Publishing House), seems to support those claims. In the February 28, 1998 entry, she wrote: "everywhere in the world demonstrations are brutally ended by poice forces...The only demonstrations that lasted several months, that were neither brutally nor non-brutally disrupted, during which nobody was either arrested or clubbed, that the entire world could watch, and that were, according to its leaders, supported by "democratic community of the world", were the last year's demonstrations in Belgrade. They were neither social nor political in character, but a manifestation of the eight-year long quisling activity of a faction of the so-called right-wing in Serbia which was financially, politically and personally supported from abroad" (Bazar, march 6, '98; 8-9). This quotation reveals two essential components of propaganda that was practiced in Serbia since late 1980s: outright lies that totally deny any wrong doing by the regime, followed by serious accusations, with no obligation to provide any evidence whatsoever, of anyone daring to challenge the will of the ruling clique.

20. The irony was that traffic was completely blocked during demonstrations anyway, so there was really nothing to regulate. That is why students and citizens came up with new kinds of games invented to mockingly get back at the regime, using its own "concern". Namely, students played with remote controlled toy cars and trucks rights in front of the watchful policemen accusing them now of "impeding the free flow of traffic". Citizens led by the Serbian Renewal Movement members, played at zebra crossings. When the traffic light was green they would jump into the middle of the road and joyfully skip around to celebrate the pedestrian right-of-way. As the light turned red, they would quickly jump back to the pavements and chant: "Down with the red!" and "Green, green, give us back the green!" These funny little games drove the policement crazy, to the joy of the protesters. However, if they managed to provoke the police officers to smile, they would chant "Blue is not red" (police uniforms are blue in color, and red symbolizes the Communist past of the regime). On another occasion (Jan.5, '97) thousands of citizens caused an incredible traffic jam in the center of the city, pretending that their cars - all of them - have suddenly broken down. "Mechanics" with stethoscopes were running around trying to diagnose the malfunctions.

21. The idea was taken from the Student Protest '92. The students were then allowed to march by any vital government institution, but they were prevented from entering the street where the President resided. This clearly signified what was the "sacred essence" of the regime. It was not the system as such, but the person behind it. This did not deter the students though. They turned these "protective actions" from "obstacles in their way" into helpful "guidelines" for demarcating the borders of the "Forbidden City".

22. Various professional groups and associations (university professors, members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, performing artists, independent media and workers unions) officially declared their support. Even worse for the regime, the support also came from outside of Serbia, that is from the opposition in Montenegro, the other federal unit of the "Third Yugoslavia", from Serbs in Bosnia and their newly elected President, Ms.Biljana Plavsic, and the leaders of the Albanian "separatist rebels" in Kosovo. The protesters, some 250,000 people gathered in the Republic Square, in return, paid their respects with a moment of siilence to an Albanian from Kosovo, a victim of police torture. The message of this event that took place on

December 13 '96, was dangerously clear. Serbian civil society did not perceive Albanian people as their enemy. Rather, they believed that Serbs and Albanians in Yugoslavia had one common enemy: the Serbian regime.

23. "They wear tailored suits, gleaming patent-leather shoes, ties and dress shirts. They jangle key-rings with little plastic boxes to shut off alarm systems to new cars, and are equipped with mobile phones, beepers and business cards. Most of them say they are in their late 20's, and appear to have spent several years of pursuing their degrees". (C.Hedges, Some Students In Serbia Find It Pays to Be 'Independent'," The New York Times, Dec.12, 1997).

24. The present meaning of the word Chetnik is derived from the World War II Serbian anti-German, anti-Communist, pro-royalist and nationalists guerrillas, fighting against the Axis, Ustashi (Croats, Muslims), but also the ideological enemy, the Communist-led Partisans. In the post-Communists Serbia Chetniks have been seized and revived by the far-right chauvinist parties and they have been engaged, as volunteers, in the Yugoslav wars of succession. Although these parties did not take part in the 1996/97 civil protest, their antipode, the ultra left, found it convenient to label democratic center as Chetniks, while reserving for themselves the term Partisans. This simple stereotypical binary dichotomization, separating "the good" from "the bad", was supposed to work to the Left's own advantage.

25. According to a sociological survey conducted during the Protest, from November 1996 until January 1997, the socio-demographic characteristics of protesters reveal that: 1. they included a somewhat larger share of young and middle-aged citizens (the highest percentages were of those between 20-29, 30%, and between 40-49 years of age, 23%); 2. their education level was unusually high (more than 50% were university graduates), with correspondingly high percentage of experts in the professional structures; 3. more than 80% resided in the city center (31%) or near it (52.5%); 4. only 16% were members of opposition parties. All these indicators qualify the majority of protesters as belonging to the middle class. Dwellers of suburban, satellite settlements and representatives of the working class added up to only 7.1% and 6% of demonstrators, respectively (Babovic 1997a:19-30).

26. There were attempts to discredit the entire civil movement as nationalistic. The accusations came from the very heart of the opposition minded intellectuals. Two philosophy professors, Miladin Ivić (+1997) and Obrad Savic, the president and the vice-president of the prestigious Belgrade Circle, both deserving leaders in opposing the regime, totalitarianism, nationalism and war, hosted the visit of M.Jack Lang, former French Minister of Culture. M.Lang wanted to express his support for the Protest at one of the students meetings. However, the students, rather intolerantly and rudely, refused to welcome him because, while war was still raging in Bosnia, M.Lang supported French and Serbian intellectuals who called for the bombing of Belgrade to end bloodshed. No doubt, in this instance, students violated the rules of democratic conduct failing to communicate in a civil manner with individuals holding different opinion. Their behavior could, therefore, be labeled as nationalistic or, as oversensitive national reaction at best. It is also true that among some 50,000 students participating in the Protest there had to be individuals with nationalistic outlooks. However, although there were some "detectable nationalistic tendencies in the Protest, its core was civil and democratic" (Lj.Rajic, Nasa Borba, Dec.22, '96: VII). To extend the qualification, based on one incident, to include the entire civil

movement, and state that it had fallen into the trap of "virulent Serbian nationalism" was itself a "totalitarian" approach. The point was deliberately missed because of some personal unsettled feuds. Thus, the professors' comment spoke more about them than about the event and the Protest in general. But, if the readers did not know the context and the background for such ship-lashing, an incorrect impression could be made. Thus, they mislead a foreign journalist, who otherwise wrote well informed and unbiased reports and commentaries, to take their evaluation for granted (C.Hedges, The New York Times, Dec.10, '96: A1,A6).

27. The favorite "protest cry", "Come on, Let's All Go for a Walk" ("Walk" instead of "Attack"/"Offense"), was also borrowed from fanatic soccer rooters' repertoire, because their subculture was the only one to offer "fighting" elements.

28. Students, admirers of Corax's work, honored him with The Medal of the First Order presented by the Student Protest. While accepting this honor, Corax said: "It is you who are the masters of jokes and witticism, and I am suffering from a stage fright before you" (ex-Singidunum, B92 news, Jan.12, '97:1).

References

Special Publications:

1996 Buka u modi: Izbor najlepsih parola itd. kreacija sa jedinstvenog do`ivljaja zvanog Studentski Protest 1996 (Noise is In: Selected Slogans, Graffiti, and Other Creations of the Unique Happening Called Students' Protest 1996), compiled by the students of the University of Belgrade: Institut za socioloska istra`ivanja Filozofskog fakulteta i Studentski Protest 96.

1996 Demokratski maraton I - Foto dokument (The Democratic Marathon I: Photo Documents), Vreme - Demokratija, Special Edition, Belgrade, Jan.2.

1997 Demokratski maraton II - Foto dokument (The Democratic Marathon II: Photo Documents), Vreme, Demokratija, Special Edition, Belgrade, March 7 1997.

1997 The Days of Revolt 1996/97, Demokratija, Special Edition, March 9.
Protest Paraphernalia (placards, badges, postcards).

Newspapaers and Magazines:

Vreme - Independent Weekly, Belgrade, November 17, 1996 - the present

NIN (Nedeljne informativne novine) - Weekly magazine, Belgrade, Nov.17, '96 - March 20, 1997.

Nasa Borba - Independent daily newspaper, Belgrade, Nov. 17, 1996 - the present

Demokratija - The Democratic Party Herald, Belgrade, January - March 1997.

Bazar - Woman's Bi-Weekly Magazine, Belgrade, March 6, 1998: 8-9.

The New York Times - Daily Paper, New York, Nov. 20, '96 - March 20 1997.

The Washington Post - Washington D.C., Nov. 1996 - March 1997.

ElectronicMedia:

ex-singidunum - Odras B92, (Radio B92, Belgrade) - <http://www.siicom.com.odrazb>.

TV Networks News:

CNN Headline News - Atlanta, GA, Nov.20 1996 - March 20, 1997.

Deutschewelle - Berlin, Germany (broadcast by Telecourse/Mind Extension University)

France 2 - Paris, France (Broadcast by Telecourse/Mind Extension University)

RTV Serbia, Dnevnik 2 - Prime-Time News, Belgrade, Yugoslavia (VCR Tapes of selected broadcasts)

Newspaper Articles:

Hedges, C.,
Fierce Serb nationalism Pervades Student Protest in Belgrade, The New York Times,
Dec. 10, 1996: A1, A6)

Hedges, C.,
Some Students in Serbia Find It Pays to Be "Independent", The New York Times,
Dec.12, 1996).

Jonkovic, N.,
Surka je subverzivna delatnost u odnosu na re`im (A Party is a Subversive Action
Against the Regime), Demokratija, Feb.10, 1997:5

Marcetice, V.,
Treniranje dr`avnog terora: Slucaj Dejana Bulatovica (Practicing State Terror: The Case
of Dejan Bulatovic), NIN, vol.2398, Dec.13, 1996: 10-12.

Radivojevic, V., Kovacevic, N.,
Vreme smeha i nezaborava (The Unforgettable Time of Laughter), Nasa Borba, Dec.31 -
Jan.1, 1996/97: VII

Rajic, Lj.,
Studenti nisu nacionalisti (Students are not Nationalists), Nasa Borba, Dec.22, 1996: VII.

Stefanovic, N.,

Predsednik je posato Predsednik - u Titovim kolima (President has become the President: Riding In Tito's Car), Vreme, vol.353, July 26, 1997: 11.

Literature:

Babovic, M., et al. (Eds.)

1997 `Ajmo, `ajde, svi u setnju! - Gradjanski i studentski protest 96/97 ("Come on, Let's All Go For A Walk": Civil and Student Protest 96/97), Belgrade: Medija centar & Institut za socioloska istra`ivanja Filozofskog fakulteta.

Babovic, M.

1997a Maratonci tree (po)casni krug: Sociodemografske karakteristike i politicki profil ucesnika Protesta 96/97 (The Honor Lap of the Marathon Race: Socio-de-mographic Chracteristics and Political Profile of the Participants in the 1996/97 Protest), in: M. Babovic et al. (Eds.), `Ajmo, `ajde...: 19-30.

1997b Pistaljkom protiv otmicara (Fighting the Abductor with a Whistle), in: M Babovic et al. (Eds.), "" Ajmo, `ajde..., 114-25.

Cvijic, S.

1997 Demokratija sa kolektivnim predumisljajem - Opsti Karakter Protesta 96/97 (Collectively Pre-Meditated Democracy: General Character of the '96/97 Protest), in: M. Babovic et al. (Eds.), `Ajmo, `ajde...:35-42.

Da Matta, R.

1977 Constraint and License: A Preliminary Study of Two Brazilian National Rituals, in: S.F. Moore, B.G. Myerhoff (Eds.), Secular Ritual, Assen/Amsterdam: VanGorcum.

Djukic, S.

1997 On, Ona i Mi (He, She and We), Belgrade: Radio B92, Series War and Peace.

Gorunovic, G. & Erdei, I. (Eds.)

1997 O studentima i drugim demonima: Etnografija studentskog protesta 1996/97 (About Students and Other Demons: The Ethnography of the Student Protest 1996/97), Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu/Signature.

Handelman, D.

1990 Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ilic, V.

1997 Let It Be: Drustveno-poloticka svest ucesnika Protesta (Let it Be: Socio-Political Conscience of the Protest Participants), in: M. Babovic et al. (Eds.) `Ajmo, `ajde..., 104-113.

- Jenkins, R.
1994 Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy, The Free Press.
- Kertzer, D.I.
1988 Ritual, Politics, and Power, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Kuzmanovic, B.
1997 Setnjom u slobodu: Vrednosne orijentacije i politicki stavovi ucesnika Protesta Walking to Freedom: Value Orientations and Political Attitudes of the Protest Participants), in: M. Babovic et al. (eds), `Ajmo, `ajde..., 51-64.
- Prosic-Dvornic, M.
1991 "Sa nama nema neizvesnosti" - politicki presizborni plakat u Srbiji 1990. ("We Do Not Keep you in Suspence: Political Election Posters in Serbia, 1990), Narodna umjetnost 28, Zegreb: 349-375.

1993 "Enough" - Student Protest '92: The Youth of Belgrade in Quest of "Another Serbia", The Anthropology of East-Europe Review, Spec. Issue: War Among the Yugoslavs (eds.J.M.Halpern & D.A.Kideckel), vol.11. no.1-2: 127-137.

1994 "Druga Srbija" - Mirovni i `esnki pokreti ("Another Serbia": Pacifist and Feminists Movements), in: M.Prosic-Dvornic (Ed.), Kulture u Tranziciji, Beograd: Plato: 179-199.

1998 Serbia: the Inside Story, in: J.M. Halpern, D.A.Kideckel (Eds.), Culture and Conflict: "Inside" and "Outside" Perspectives on the War in Former Yugoslavia, Penn State University Press (in print) pp.56.
- Silverstone, R.
1988 Television, Myth and Culture, in: J.W. Carey (Ed.), Media, Myths and Narratives: Television and the Press, Sage Publications: 20-48.
- Turner, V.
1977 The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Symbol, Myth and Ritual Series, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Vujovic, S.
1997 Pokretni praznik - Protest 96.97 kao urbani fenomen (Ceremony in Motion: Protest 96/97 as an Urban Phenomenon), in: M. Babovic et al. (Eds.), `Ajmo, `ajde...138-146.
- Vuletic, V.
1997 Buka u modi - Bihevioralne karakteristike Protesta 96.97 (Noise Is In: Behavioral Features of the '96/97 Protest), in: M.Babovic et al.(Eds.), `Ajmo, `ajde...43-50.