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The Nonconformists: Dobrica Cosic and Mica Popovic Reinvision Serbia

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The Nonconformists: Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović Envision Serbia

Nicholas J. Miller

There is little to debate about the nature of Serbian political life since the mid-1980s—it has been highly nationalized, to the point that one can argue that a consensus existed among Serbian public figures that the Serbs' very existence was threatened by their neighbors. This consensus links political, cultural, and intellectual elites regardless of their ideological background. It draws together figures representing great diversity in Serbia. This powerful movement has usually been either dismissed or demonized: dismissed as superficial, the product of the cynical adaptation of politicians to new times, or demonized as something inherent in Serbian political culture, a historically predetermined mind-set, ancient and therefore ineradicable. But there is too much evidence that nationalism in Serbia is neither superficial nor ancient. What of the large number of Serbian intellectual and cultural figures who traversed the path from socialism to nationalism after 1945? Were they collectively one of the most cynical generations in any society's modern history, or were they simply possessed by the ancient demons of Serbian nationalism? Neither explanation is satisfying. Instead, postwar Serbian nationalism began as a legitimate and humane movement, neither incomprehensible nor artificial, and it should be understood in the context of communism's effect on Serbian society and its failure to fulfill its own promises, particularly to bring modernization and a universal culture to the peoples of Yugoslavia.¹

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1. Until recently nearly all attention paid to Yugoslavia's collapse focused on political and economic causes, with very little comment on the cultural context. Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, 1998) provides an excellent antidote to that disinterest. This article is intended to contribute to furthering our understanding of cultural processes at work in Yugoslavia.

In this article, I will examine two members of a group of Serbs who together formed a single loose-knit circle in post-World War II Serbian intellectual and cultural life. After their own informal custom, I will call them "nonconformists."² This circle serves as an excellent prism through which to test my assertion that Serbia's intellectuals responded to the specific conditions of communism in their land, conceiving of national consolidation as the only path to overcome the corrupting influences of Tito's regime. I will focus on Dobrica Ćosić and Mića Popović because their transition is clearest and most instructive in my view, although there were other influential members of the group, including Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Mihailo Djurić, Pavle Ivić, and others, most of whom followed similar paths. This group intrigues me for several reasons. Most of them considered themselves left-oriented, open to the promises of Titoism for the modernization of Yugoslav society; with the exception of Ćosić, they were rarely active in forming public opinion; they blazed an early trail rather than actively participating in the populist movement of the late 1980s. Their transition to nationalism was more authentic than that of the populist-manipulators who emerged in the 1980s to ride the wave of Serbian fears, and as such they strike me as a vital entry point in a study of the early origins of the nationalist movement that convulsed Serbia after Tito's death.

I have chosen to concentrate on Ćosić and Popović because their contrasts are as illuminating as their similarities. Although they traversed similar paths, those paths were not identical. They were characteristic of the immediate postwar generation of idealists in that they were willing to test the ability of the new idea—communism—to solve the problems that plagued Yugoslavia. Aside from the obvious contrast of their vocations, others stand out. Ćosić was a true believer, Popović was not. Ćosić was an idealist—his goal was nothing less than the complete transformation of Serbian society. Popović was a humanist—if communism could bring equality and social justice to Yugoslavia, he would have been satisfied. In spite of the differences in their personalities and orientations, their lives were intertwined. They ultimately concluded that Tito's communism not only oppressed Serbs, but that it willfully hid the truth of this oppression from Serbs. Thus by the 1980s they had concluded that they must tell the truth about communism, which had been hidden by the authoritarian state from a deceived population. As members of the first postwar generation of Serbian intellectuals, their disappointment in communism's failure was genuine. Unlike many of the activist nationalists of the 1980s, these men cannot be dismissed as opportunists.

The nonconformists congregated in Belgrade after World War II, in an apartment at Simina ulica 9a, rented by Mihiz and Vojislav Djurić, but

2. In actuality, they had no name for themselves as a group. Dobrica Ćosić, who first contributed to the creation of a minor legend surrounding these men, called them "nonconformists" in Slavoljub Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu: Razgovori sa Dobricom Ćosićem* (Belgrade, 1989), 32; at another point he described them as "people without compass" in Dobrica Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji* (Belgrade, 1988), 28; Mića Popović dubbed them "heretics" in Milo Gligorićević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića* (Belgrade, 1983), 49.

shared by them all. Many of them have exalted their own collective role and importance in Serbian cultural life. As Popović would later remark (in 1992), "one can unconditionally say regarding the romance of Simina 9a that it gave birth to the most genuine values of our generation!"³ They have characterized themselves as iconoclasts and are proud of their intellectual and artistic achievements. They were in fact an interesting collection of young people, and in spite of the collective arrogance that seeps through their own autobiographical writings, it must be acknowledged that they were an accomplished group by the 1980s.⁴ Their attitudes toward the communist regime varied widely, from Mihiz's barely concealed hostility, to Popović's hopeful skepticism, to Ćosić's enthusiastic embrace. Initially, they had certain hopes for the revolutionary communist movement in Yugoslavia. In each case, those hopes were universal; they applied equally to all citizens of the new Yugoslavia. When it became clear that the Tito regime was unwilling or unable to satisfy their desires to develop a new integral culture or to reward their faith in the regime's commitment to social justice, their disappointment germinated.

Dobrica Ćosić and the Death of a Universalist Culture

Dobrica Ćosić saw in communism a vehicle for the modernization and cultural integration of Yugoslavia's peoples. The best known of the nonconformists, Ćosić began public life as a member of the Communist Youth during World War II, when he worked on various propaganda projects and edited the party's youth newspaper, *Mladi borac*. After the war, he was employed in Serbian agitprop (agitation and propaganda), the office devoted to persuading Serbs of the righteousness of communism. Far from exhibiting nonconformist tendencies, Ćosić actually contributed to the enforcement of conformity as a regime propagandist, a fact of which he is proud to be ashamed today. He was an emotional Marxist: one is surprised to find Ćosić admitting that he never really understood the ideology he professed.⁵ Like many adherents of communism, Ćosić was attracted to the doctrine because it promised the modernization of Yugoslav society. For Ćosić, achieving modernity required the elimination of all obstacles to communication and integration, cultural as well as social and political, and the removal of the borders between the village and the city as well as between one nation and another. Ćosić claimed to have been "a Yugoslav, inclined to integralism, for whom national feeling was extinguished; and a Serb, who was prepared to deny Serbianness in the interest of Yugoslav-

3. Popović made this comment in an extensive interview contained in Miloš Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem* (Belgrade, 1994), 26–27.

4. Autobiographical writings include Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, *Autobiografija—o drugima* (Belgrade, 1993–95); Dejan Medaković, *Efemeris: Hronika jedne porodice* (Belgrade, 1992). Extensive interviews include Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*; Gligoričević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*; and Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem*. They have written extensively about each other as well: Zoran Gavrić et al., *Mića Popović* (London, 1987); Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji*.

5. See, for instance, his retelling of the events surrounding his polemic with Dušan Pirjevec, in Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 121–37.

ism" until the mid-1960s.⁶ In September 1961, he publicly explained his understanding of communism's task and triumph: "Perhaps the essential humanistic result of our socialist revolution is the fact that the space for creativity and affirmation has expanded beyond the borders of national geography and its social order."⁷ Communism's success could be measured by its ability to achieve the full integration of Yugoslavia's constituent cultures ("the space for creativity and affirmation") in one new supranational culture. Although possessing an acute social conscience, Ćosić's emphasis was on cultural universalism and the eradication of national difference. But between 1958 and 1968, his faith in communism (or, minimally, Titoism) declined. A key event in Ćosić's transition was seemingly trivial: the failure of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia (*Savez književnika Jugoslavije*) to reorganize along aesthetic lines in the early 1960s.

Originally a "transmission belt" organization whose task was to pass policy directives from the state and party down the social and political ladder to the new literary elite of Yugoslavia, the League of Writers of Yugoslavia held its first congress in November 1946 in Belgrade. Within it were constituent republic organizations—the Serbian Writers' Union (*Udruženje književnika Srbije*), the Croatian Writers' Society (*Društvo književnika Hrvatske*), and others, one for each republic.⁸ As early as 1957, some writers within the League of Writers of Yugoslavia began to flirt with the idea of a reorganization that would allow members to group themselves according to aesthetic criteria instead of being limited to regional associations.⁹ In 1957, the first program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunista Jugoslavije*) was formulated, and the regime allowed Yugoslavs to believe that it would fulfill the promises of the break with Stalin: more self-management, more openness in society. For those writers favoring reorganization, it seemed time to make the next logical transition, toward greater integration and, importantly, more substantive Yugoslavism. Reorganization for them meant breaking down republican barriers and establishing aesthetic categories in their place. Ćosić led the movement to reform the League of Writers, first openly broaching the topic in 1958 in Ljubljana, where the Seventh Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was meeting to unveil its new program.¹⁰

By the time the Seventh Congress of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia met in Titograd in September 1964, there was a full-fledged movement afoot to reorganize the literary associations. Supporters of the proposal included writers from all republics except Slovenia, a fact that allowed its formulators to claim that it was a "Yugoslav" initiative.¹¹ On the

6. Ibid., 99.

7. Dobrica Ćosić, "Nalog i poruka nase revolucije," in *Odgovornosti: Akcije II*, vol. 8 of *Sabrana dela Dobrice Ćosića* (Belgrade, 1966), 9.

8. On literary life in Serbia and more specifically the *Udruženje književnika Srbije*, see Radovan Popović, *Pisci u službi naroda: Hronika književnog života u Srbiji, 1944–1975* (Belgrade, 1991).

9. Djukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu*, 100.

10. Ibid., 100.

11. Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade; Collection of *Savez književnika Jugoslavije* (SkJ): F:2 (VI, VII, Vanredni Kongresi, 1961, 1964, 1965 g.) "Stenografske beleške SkJ VII Kongres—Titograd 24–26.IX.64 g.," shows that the motion was signed by 15 Serbs, 19 others, plus 3

other hand, the movement had a Serbian character, since the plurality of its supporters were from Serbia; they were referred to as the "Ćosić Group," and Ćosić himself described the proposal as the work of "some people from Belgrade."¹² The proposal suggested "that alongside the principle of the national-territorial organization of writers, the right of writers to organize on other bases and according to other similarities and affinities be affirmed in the statute."¹³ At Titograd in 1964, the League of Writers opted to postpone consideration of the proposal, due to considerable opposition from the Slovene contingent and other individuals who saw in it the Trojan Horse of Serbian centralism.

The proposal was postponed until a special congress was convened in Belgrade in December 1965. Just before that meeting, Ćosić published an article in *Praxis* that, in part, was a final attempt to urge his conception for reorganization on his fellows.¹⁴ Ćosić did not attend the Belgrade meeting because he realized that his movement was going down to defeat. When asked to comment on the congress as it met, Ćosić said: "I think that the last [1964] Congress of Writers of Yugoslavia was a convincing confirmation of the bureaucratism, apathy, conservatism, and backwardness in the soul of republic and associational (*udruženjski*) literature."¹⁵ The League of Writers was now merely "an expression and mechanism of republican and national bureaucratism and centralism." As Ćosić saw it, Yugoslav writers had chosen atomization and fragmentation instead of integration and a new consciousness: "Yugoslav federalistic centralism and bureaucratism are exchanged for republican centralism and national bureaucratism. All in all, many writers believe that republican and national bureaucratism and étatism are better and more bearable, and perhaps more democratic, than that federal, 'Belgrade,' version."¹⁶

What does this all mean? Why the bitterness regarding the nature of literary organization? At the Titograd congress, Sveta Lukić, a literary critic and ally of Ćosić on this question, observed: "Affinities may be

whose names are unreadable. The Serbs were Ćosić, Antonije Isaković, Sveta Lukić, Petar Džadžić, Matija Bečković, Brana Crnčević, Oskar Davičo, Aleksandar Tišma, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, Bogdan Popović, Ivan Lalić, Dušan Simić, Branislav Petrović, Eli Finci, and Sreten Asanović. See also Sveta Lukić, *Savremena Jugoslovenska literatura (1945–1965): Rasprava o književnom životu i književnim merilima kod nas* (Belgrade, 1968), 148.

12. Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade; Collection of the Savez književnika Jugoslavije: F:14 Plenums of SkJ from 1961–1965; Sten. beleske: SkJ Plenum uprave 23.IX.64 Titograd (No. XXV). See also the notes from a meeting of the directorate of the Udruženje Književnika Srbije on 21 February 1965, at which considerable opposition to the Ćosić proposal was voiced; "Reorganizacija Saveza književnika?" *Književne novine* (Belgrade), 6 March 1965, 8–9.

13. Lukić, *Savremena Jugoslovenska literatura*, 148.

14. "Zajedno i drugačije, ili o aktuelnostima nase savremene kulture," *Praxis*, 1965, no. 4/5:519–34. Like most of what Ćosić had to say about the national question in Yugoslav culture, this article provoked a Slovenian response: in this case from Josip Vidmar. See Vidmar, "O nasem sovinizmu," in *O slovenstvu i jugoslovenstvu: Izbor iz radova* (Zagreb, 1986), 392–97. Vidmar criticizes Ćosić for accusing him of being a narrow-minded nationalist.

15. Dobrica Ćosić, "O modernizmu i realizmu, potom," in *Prilike: Akcije 1*, vol. 7 of *Sabrana dela Dobrice Ćosića* (Belgrade, 1966), 259–60.

16. Dobrica Ćosić, "O Savezu književnika i drugom," in *Prilike: Akcije 1*, 264–65.

deeply aesthetic. . . . It is important, I think, that these affinities generate results that are more Yugoslav than they have been to date."¹⁷ So the importance of this resolution for Ćosić and others was that it would contribute to the creation of a true Yugoslav culture; in its current state, for Ćosić, Lukić, and their supporters, literature that developed regionally and nationally inhibited the development of aesthetic, cross-national, potentially supranational forms. Were we to explore the attitudes of non-Serbian writers, we would find that the Ćosić group's proposal was viewed as an expression of Serbian hegemonism, an attempt to further centralize activity of all sorts in Yugoslavia. But the view of many Serbs was precisely the opposite. At the extraordinary Belgrade congress in 1965, Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz remarked portentously that the failure of the resolution marked the first time that confederalism was formally accepted in principle in Yugoslavia.¹⁸ At a remarkably early date, then, the potential decentralization of Yugoslavia had become a source of resentment for many Serbian writers, a limited but influential group.

Ćosić viewed the failure of his resolution as the failure of Yugoslavism at the top, with Tito and Edvard Kardelj. He was not surprised by resistance from his fellow writers, but the lack of continued commitment to the complete transformation of Yugoslav culture(s) by the regime disturbed him greatly. His conclusions only confirmed earlier fears engendered by his polemic with the Slovene writer Dušan Pirjevec in 1961–62.¹⁹ Ćosić's debate with Pirjevec is often cited as the first public discussion of the nature of the national problem in postwar Yugoslavia. The discussion of the future of the League of Writers reached its climax three years after the Pirjevec polemic. Both episodes illustrate the type of resistance that Ćosić's fellow writers could offer to his vision and reveal that this resistance did not surprise him. The problem with the failure of his initiative was that it did not seem to have governmental support. The regime's lack of clear commitment irked him and ultimately undermined his own faith in the possibility of creating a truly Yugoslav culture. After the failure of his literary initiative, Ćosić's trust in Yugoslav supranationalism dwindled; he soon became convinced that the failure of his attempts to keep integration on track implied the continued division and perhaps eventual destruction of the *Serbian* nation.

Ćosić was now set on the path that he would follow to the end of Tito's Yugoslavia. To his growing belief that Tito was uninterested in realizing the supranational vision of the new faith, Ćosić would add trepidation that the regime was actually anti-Serbian. Accordingly, his commentary focused ever more on defining *Serbia's* culture under communism, as op-

17. Arhiv Jugoslavije, Belgrade; Collection of the Savez književnika Jugoslavije: "Savez književnika Jugoslavije: VII Kongres" Titograd, 1964, 187.

18. Quoted in Lukić, *Savremena Jugoslovenska literatura*, 154.

19. On this polemic, see Jelena Milojković-Djurić, "Approaches to National Identities: Ćosić's and Pirjevec's Debate on Ideological and Literary Issues," *East European Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 63–73, and Dimitrij Rupel, *Od vojnog do civilnog društva* (Zagreb, 1990), 96–113. Two of Ćosić's contributions to the polemic are published in his collected works: Dobrica Ćosić, "O savremenom nesavremenom nacionalizmu" and "Nacija, integracija, socijalizam," in *Odgovornosti*, 18–85.

posed to Yugoslavia's. A good example is a 1967 lecture entitled "How We 'Create Ourselves,'" in which he took as his theme Serbian culture and its lines of development before and under communism. Ćosić now limited his hopes for communism to the consolidation of Serbia's cultural identity, having abandoned the hope that communism might give birth to a universal Yugoslav culture.²⁰

Ćosić's talk reflected his belief that Serbian culture and the Serbian nation were tragically fragmented, and that such fragmentation would be eliminated under a Marxist regime in which local identities lost pride of place. Ćosić resented a Serbian culture that idealized the peasant, especially the peasant from the Šumadija, the Serbian core south of the Danube. Ćosić blamed Vuk Karadžić, the early nineteenth-century language reformer, for this narrow cultural emphasis, counterposing him to Dositej Obradović, another early nineteenth-century figure who favored a European, enlightened model for cultural development among the Serbs. Ćosić proposed that Vuk's Serbia needed to be fused with Dositej's: "Today, possibly more than ever, we have reason to creatively unify the two theses. For according to these antitheses—folk/bourgeois, rural/urban, national/European—two governing ideologies in Serbian national culture will be outlined."²¹ Such a lasting division was unacceptable to Ćosić, for whom the integration of disparate cultures was the primary promise of communism in Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, Ćosić saw Vuk's Serbia as identified with a narrowly defined geographical area, which ostracized Serbs living outside those boundaries. "Without the abandonment of the old national ideology . . . it will not be possible to strengthen the historical unity of Serbian culture . . . not possible to found a contemporary, unified, socialist cultural-national consciousness."²² Further, Vuk's Serbia would "undervalue and disregard the cultural creations and efforts of the Serbian people wherever it has lived and where it lives now."²³ "Perhaps the most unfortunate characteristic of Serbian national culture is its textual, temporal, and spatial disunity. Today our governors tirelessly stoke this disunity."²⁴ Ćosić believed that Serbs needed to liberate themselves from a narrow conception of Serbianness even though a broader one would bring them into contact with neighboring nations. Serbs, in his view, had nothing to lose from contact; nor, significantly, did other nations. In his words, "Our culture need not in any way be exclusive, closed, nationalistic, 'Šumadijan' [*srbijanski*], 'republican,' or 'statist'; it has every reason to freely intermix with the cultures of neighboring nations. . . . We have never smothered a single culture, rather we have helped and still sincerely help cultures to appear and freely develop."²⁵ Yugoslavism might have brought the erasure of borders of all types and the integration of Serbs and other peoples of the state. Con-

20. Dobrica Ćosić, "Kako da 'stvaramo sebe,'" in *Stvarno i moguće: Članci i ogledi* (Ljubljana-Zagreb, 1988), 11–12.

21. Ibid., 11.

22. Ibid., 12.

23. Ibid., 11.

24. Ibid., 6–7.

25. Ibid., 25.

vinced of Tito's superficial commitment to that supranational vision, however, Ćosić was no longer as concerned with the Yugoslav context as with the narrower Serbian one. This somewhat defensive passage indicates that he believed that if Yugoslavism failed, it should not be considered a Serbian failure. The demise of Ćosić's initiative regarding literary organization was the first indication for him that Yugoslavia was becoming more rather than less fragmented, and that such fragmentation could only threaten the necessary integration and even the existence of the Serbian nation.

Ćosić's biggest public splash came in May 1968, when he unexpectedly delivered a scathing speech to the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia. This speech, while reiterating some of the points that he made in his 1967 talk, had a slightly different focus. Here he condemned nationalism among the party bureaucracies, especially in Kosovo and Vojvodina. Ćosić's disenchantment with the Tito regime had grown, largely due to the status of Kosovo. Kosovo was at the same time predominantly Albanian by ethnicity and an integral part of Serbian history—"the heartland of Serbia." But the status of Kosovo began to change in 1966, when Tito removed Aleksandar Ranković from his posts as the head of the Yugoslav state security apparatus and as vice president of the state. Ranković was a proponent of continued centralism in Yugoslavia and was perceived by many as representing Serbia in the leadership. His removal heralded revisions in the way Yugoslavia would be administered, but it also (in hindsight) is often credited with provoking fear among Serbs whose protector at the top was now in forced retirement. Aside from its part in the ongoing process of economic reform, the purge brought a new approach to the governing of Kosovo. After 1966, the bureaucracy, the police, and the party in Kosovo were gradually handed over to Albanian communists. Ćosić's speech responded to this turnover and to his perception that the Albanian leadership in Kosovo was fundamentally nationalist. Ćosić left the League of Communists two months after his speech to the Fourteenth Plenum. The lasting effect of the speech was to establish Ćosić as a leading dissenter from regime policy in Kosovo. For our purposes here, however, the importance of this speech was that its critique of the communist bureaucracy paralleled his earlier critique of cultural policy in Serbia.

Symbolic of his narrowed focus on Serbian integration, Ćosić, who had resigned from the Serbian Writers' Union in 1965,²⁶ became president of the Serbian Literary Guild (*Srpska književna zadruga*) in 1969. His task, in the words of the historian of the guild, was to "return the guild to its role of nurturing the soul of Serbian culture, to initiate new—and emphasize already begun—research on Serbian tradition, to return to its task of bringing enlightenment to the entire Serbian cultural space."²⁷ Ćosić's move had important institutional connotations: he had now begun to refocus his efforts, switching from the Yugoslav context, where he had

26. "Literatura u ostavci," *Književne novine* (Belgrade), 8 January 1966, 1.

27. Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Istorija srpske književne zadruge* (Belgrade, 1992), 137.

concluded that the dream of integration had failed, to the Serbian context, where the task was parallel, but narrowed. Now, under his leadership, the Serbian Literary Guild would contribute to the integration of the Serbian people, wherever it lived. He was irked by the fact that the guild, which in his view had worked before the war throughout the Serbian culture zones of Yugoslavia, had "in recent decades seen its activity narrowed and for the most part reduced to the republic of Serbia. . . . The true extent of the spiritual unity of the Serbian people, the historical and textual unity of Serbian culture, the unity that has existed ever since there has been a Serbian people with a national consciousness is called into question."²⁸ The fact that he took over the Serbian Literary Guild at an unstable point in Yugoslavia's postwar history only increased his fear. For it was not Serbian nationalism that threatened the existence of the state at this point—it was Croatian. When Ćosić uttered these words before the annual congress of the Serbian Literary Guild, the Croatian mass movement (*maspok*) was in full force. Thus he made certain that no one doubted his, and by implication the Serbian Literary Guild's, opposition to nationalism: "We reject nationalism, this culture of egoism and aggression, intolerance and collective stupidity, because ideas of hate toward other peoples, violence toward foreign values . . . the devaluing of the other, the acceptance of local, regional, particular criteria and measures, is deeply foreign to that liberationist, humanistic, and tragic essence of the Serbian people and their culture."²⁹ For Ćosić, the failure to integrate Yugoslavia's disparate cultures amounted to a devaluing of the Serbian contribution to Yugoslavism, for, he argued, it was precisely in its openness toward others that Serbian culture excelled.

Ćosić's ever-narrowing frame of reference shrank even further during the 1970s, as he became convinced that Serbs were the focus of Tito's special wrath, and that the truth of this Titoist vendetta was being kept from them by an authoritarian state. Ćosić marked this new focus with his 1977 speech to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, upon his election as a full member, that comes to us under the title "Literature and History Today."³⁰ This was a speech on the relationship of the novel to history—specifically, on the ability of the novel and the novelist to characterize the history of a people where historians fail. He was frankly self-pitying: "in Europe there is not another small nation that in the past two centuries, and especially in the twentieth, has expended so much in the name of history . . . as the Serbian nation."³¹ Nevertheless, much of Serbia's efforts had been wasted on fratricidal conflict, the victory over which had been squandered in peace: "The meaning of the liberation battles and victories

28. Dobrica Ćosić, "Porazi i ciljevi," in *Stvarno i moguće*, 87.

29. Ibid., 91.

30. This speech can be found in Dobrica Ćosić, "Književnost i istorija danas," in *Stvarno i moguće*, 121–33. See also Slobodan Stanković, "Conflict over 'Serbian Nationalism' Sharpens," *Radio Free Europe Research* (RAD BR 198, 4 October 1977), and Zdenko Antić, "The Danger of Increasing Serbian Nationalism," *Radio Free Europe Research* (RAD BR 63, 24 March 1983).

31. Ćosić, "Književnost i istorija danas," 126.

on the battlefields of this century has been denied in peace; peace has been understood as an opportunity to fulfill various selfish goals under various illusions and excuses."³² Serbian history, for Ćosić, was European history writ small. To fully encompass the absolute tragedy of Serbia's (and Europe's) fate, he concluded, the novel was the best medium: "the 'true history' of our century . . . I see in the novel."³³ Appropriately he noted Lev Tolstoi's command: "Write the real, true history of this century! There is your life's task!" He had decided to combat Serbia's disunity by becoming a purveyor of truth.

The rest of his life has been spent repeating this truth to his people. It was a truth whose origins were in his disappointment, a Serbian truth that had emerged only after the failure of his Yugoslav project. For Ćosić, the active fulfillment of his own vision remained to be undertaken following Tito's death, when the political and intellectual life of Serbia would be reinvigorated by the return to public life of those who had been quieted or merely chastened while the great man lived. Ćosić would become the active tribune of Serbian consolidation and renewal within Yugoslavia. But his themes were set: geographic and spiritual unity must be achieved in spite of the implacable opposition of the Titoist regime; the Serbian people must overcome decades of moral decline embodied in their submission to Tito's communist regime. Ćosić, who often characterized his own career as a slow emergence from the darkness of subservience to Titoism, would continue narcissistically to take pride in revealing his own previous degradation, generalizing from his own experience to that of the Serbian nation.

The Multifold Revelation of Mića Popović

Mića Popović was a marginal Serbian painter until the success of his *Slikarstvo prizora* (Scenes painting), which he first exhibited in 1971.³⁴ Until that point, he had enjoyed a checkered career during which he had experimented with various abstract styles. His first exhibition opened in Belgrade, at the Umetnički paviljon in Kalemegdan Park, in September 1950; Mihiz called it "neorealistic,"³⁵ but Popović's realism soon gave way to experimentation with other people's styles, whether inspired by the medieval Serbian fresco or by French abstract expressionism (*informel*). *Scenes Painting* was novel for him because it was adamantly realistic—and its realism expressed a critique of Yugoslav socialism. His critique, in fact, was so withering that one writer, only somewhat facetiously, imagined that Popović would soon find himself on the run from the regime.³⁶ And so he did.

32. Ibid., 126–27.

33. Ibid., 129.

34. Mića Popović, *Slikarstvo prizora* (Belgrade, 1971). The exhibition lasted from 29 April to 24 May 1971.

35. Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, "Izložba slika Miće Popovića," in *Ogledi* (Belgrade, 1951), 219.

36. Šlobodan Novaković, "Mića bez iluzija," *Jež* (Belgrade), 14–20 May 1971, no. 1663:25.

Popović was not the sort of character that one imagined taking on the powerful. It is true that he was not a communist and that he had suffered at the hands of the Tito regime early in his career. Initially, he supported the Partisan movement at the urging of his father, who was in a prison camp in Germany during the war and whose letters home urged his son to look "to the east" for salvation.³⁷ Therefore, he reluctantly volunteered for service as a Partisan on the Drina River in January 1945. He described himself as a youthful leftist, but for him that was less a matter of ideological commitment than a combination of attitudes: "Aside from an impulse for justice, by leftism I understand a constant preparedness for rebellion, the readiness to make one's contribution, the subordination of one's personal ambition."³⁸ After the war, Popović lived and painted as an outsider, never receiving the government's patronage. He was denied the right to finish his education at the University of Belgrade because he chose the dangerous path of publicly (if impulsively) rejecting the socialist realism of the Tito regime.³⁹ But beginning in 1950, following the split with Stalin in 1948, Popović could feel free (as did others) to criticize Stalinist traits in Yugoslav society, including socialist realism. Still, in notes from 1950, he professed not to understand the politics of art: "To be totally honest, ideas on political and apolitical art, on art as propaganda, and l'art pour l'art are to me quite unclear; I am certain of just one thing: that there are good and bad paintings."⁴⁰ Popović would continue to assert his own dispassion, which would continue to sound like false naiveté.

Popović was moved to create *Scenes Painting* by the Belgrade student movement of 1968. Like many other Serbs, Popović's eyes were opened by the demonstrations. The movement turned on the question of the fulfilled and unfulfilled promises of the regime. The students demanded employment, an explicit promise of any communist government. The lack of jobs in Yugoslavia served in turn to highlight the logjam that existed in the party and in the state bureaucracy as old members of the party and state employees held on to positions. Ultimately, the demonstrations focused on breaking that logjam—"to all, a job; to each, bread" was a typical slogan—through the perfection, rather than the abandonment, of self-management; the students demanded more Titoism, not less. For Popović, "sixty-eight was not an organized rebellion, but a spontaneous negation of all that exists which is false."⁴¹ In response, he created *Scenes Painting*, which gave life to his own vision of what socialism in Yugoslavia had wrought. The picture was not positive, but to Popović's mind, it told the truth.

One critic has described *Scenes Painting* as "the first true Socialist Realism—the first pictorial expression of the truth about the reality of

37. Gligorićević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*, 27; Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem*, 16–18.

38. Gligorićević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*, 17.

39. In fact, he publicly debated the merits of socialist realism with Radovan Zogović, one of the new regime's ideologues. Popović implied that socialist realist art was no different from Nazi art. See Gligorićević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*, 30; Gavrić, *Mića Popović*, 19.

40. Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji*, 46.

41. Gligorićević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*, 32.

socialism—and not only in Serbia.”⁴² Popović’s ironic return to realism was prompted by his dawning realization that abstract painting, the chosen medium of the critical cultural intelligentsia of his era, was considered no threat at all by the powerful.⁴³ “Is one of the possible solutions not a return to realism, even to socialist realism? By socialist realism under new and changed spiritual circumstances, one can understand a wide-ranging *critical engagement*, something, indeed, fundamentally contrary to the varnishing of reality. Such engagement could be understood as a sort of *pragmatism*, but not in the service of ideology (of whichever type), but in the service of *truth*.”⁴⁴ Popović had begun to travel a path that other artists, writers, and intellectuals in Yugoslavia and elsewhere in communist Europe would choose to traverse: the search for “truth,” which was, in their eyes, the key fatality in the states in which they lived.

Popović’s *Scenes Painting* focused on the drudgery and even tragedy of daily life in a Yugoslavia that could not provide for its own. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, the artist explained that “Scenes painting is not, in fact, political painting. Its ambitions are more to bring happiness, or at least a corrective. But I wish only to witness. WITNESS! I love this word, to which [Eugène] Ionescu gave dramatic and SUFFICIENT meaning. I would like to take part and to witness. I do not wish to take anything, not even a position. I do not need to. I do not even answer questions that I ask myself. Watch and witness. But also paint.”⁴⁵ At least one observer found it hard to believe Popović’s claim to be nothing more than a witness. “Popović’s *Scenes Painting* has no illusions about itself, but it has no illusions about us, either. In place of illusions, Popović offers us black bread, a German visa, yoghurt, temporary residence abroad, pasteurized milk, the wooden leg of Vuk Karadžić, . . . lousy workers’ lodgings with sweet May Day slogans . . . the new paintings of Mića Popović are indeed without any sort of illusions!” And all of this at a time when “the general temperature is already high enough without his paintings!”⁴⁶ This was 1971, the year of the Croatian mass movement and public discussion of constitutional amendments, the climax to several years of turbulence in Yugoslav politics. A second, less flippant critic exclaimed: “Perhaps never before in our short and messy history of learning the language of modern painting has painting so loudly and caustically spoken out.” This critic believed that what *Scenes Painting* sacrificed in terms of technique, it made up for in its ethics.⁴⁷

Popović’s “Gvozden” cycle, which features the fate of one of Yugoslavia’s thousands of *Gastarbeiter*, best expresses the social commentary embedded in *Scenes Painting*.⁴⁸ *Gvozden u prenočištu na putu u Nemačku*

42. Heinz Klunker, “A Gentle Provocateur,” in Mića Popović and Heinz Klunker, *Mića Popović* (London, 1989), 154.

43. Gligorijević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*, 31.

44. *Ibid.*, 31–32 (emphasis in the original).

45. Mića Popović, *Slikarstvo prizora*, 3 (emphasis in the original).

46. Novaković, “Mića bez iluzija!” 25.

47. Dušan Djokić, “Zapis o ‘slikarstvu prizora’ Miće Popovića,” *Umetnost* (Belgrade), January–June 1972, nos. 29/30:46.

48. In 1969, there were approximately 800,000 workers abroad, 22 percent of Yugoslav domestic employment; by 1974–75, 150,000 of them had returned home due to the



Figure 1. *Gvozden odlazi na privremeni boravak* (Gvozden leaves on a temporary sojourn, 1978).

(Gvozden at the hostel on the way to the Federal Republic of Germany), *Gvozden odlazi na privremeni boravak* (Gvozden leaves on a temporary sojourn), *Gvozden je zavirio u kupleraj* (Gvozden peeped into a brothel), and *Druga klasa* (Second class)—the titles of these paintings, produced between 1970 and 1978, indicate the degrading nature of the subject (see figures 1 and 2). They testify to Popović's disgust at a government that could not support its own workers, that forced them to humiliate themselves abroad to make their living. Popović was speaking for them, for people characterized by their "strength, firmness, hardness," but who

economic downturn in northern Europe. See Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948–1974* (Berkeley, 1977), 251; and Susan Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton, 1995), 198–200.

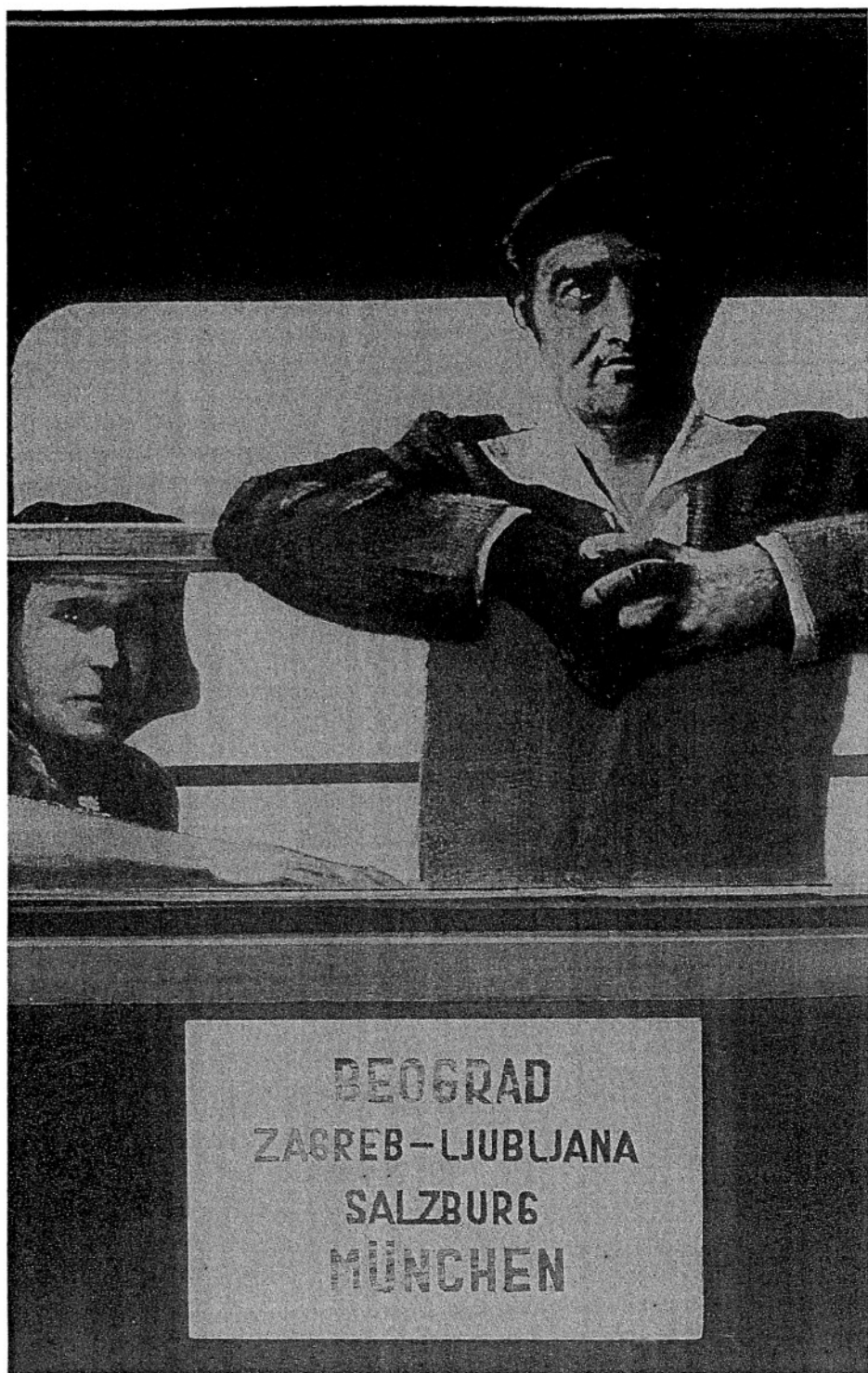


Figure 2. *Druga klasa* (Second class, 1977).

were unable to control their own fate.⁴⁹ The theme is universal—the existence of Gastarbeiter was not a strictly Serbian tragedy, it was Yugoslav, and it represented Titoism's betrayal of all the people of Yugoslavia.

Of course the government refused to tolerate Popović. His 1974 exhibition at the Gallery of the Cultural Center in Belgrade was closed down hours before it was to open. The specific culprit appears to have been a provocative juxtaposition: a painting of Tito and his wife, Jovanka, bedecked in jewels and in the company of Dutch royalty was placed next to another depicting Gvozden on a train heading to Germany.⁵⁰ Pointing out Tito's hypocrisy did not endear Popović to the regime, which thereafter obstructed his exhibitions and tracked his work abroad. Draža Marković, a fixture in the Serbian party leadership in the 1970s and 1980s, believed that Popović's show was part of a "well-thought-out action."⁵¹ It could not have helped that Ćosić, by now a dissident, wrote the copy for the catalog of the exhibition and took the opportunity to characterize his generation as one that had "completely worn itself out in ideological battles and exertions; above those battlefields, the smoke of resignation hangs high."⁵² Ćosić's rather morose ramblings did not suit a party whose revolutionary enthusiasm had obviously waned but which refused to face that fact.

Popović's 1979 exhibition in Belgrade marked a subtle but substantive change in the nature and presentation of his realism. This show was allowed to open, and once it achieved a bit of notoriety (in the form of negative reviews in the government press),⁵³ many Belgraders viewed it. This time the focus was Gvozden, whereas the earlier (1971) showing was less directed, as well as much smaller. As in 1971, it included a life-sized hexagonal depiction of several of Popović's friends who also happened to be critics of the regime (those portrayed included Ćosić, Mihiz, Stojković, all nonconformists, as well as the novelist Antonije Isaković and the art historian Lazar Trifunović). Additionally, the Gvozden material had achieved a laserlike focus over the decade: now Gvozden's life on canvas was embellished by actual newspaper clippings informing Yugoslavs that Tito, for instance, was opening a flower show. The barbed juxtapositions were the vital heart of *Scenes*. In addition, the exhibition gave early evidence of a slight transition in Popović's work. It would be foolish to argue that, up to this point, he had been a "Yugoslav" or, to put it slightly differently, that he had always been thoroughly unconcerned with the fate of the Serbs. But it would be safe to say that the fate of the Serbs *as such* had never been the center of his attention. The 1979 show, however, included a painting entitled "Serbs," which hinted at a new direction.

49. Gligorijević, *Odgovor Miće Popovića*, 89.

50. Jevtić, *Sa Mićom Popovićem*, 42–43.

51. Dragoslav Draža Marković, *Život i politika, 1967–1978* (Belgrade, 1987), 2:32.

52. This text is now incorporated into Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji*. See also P. R., "Dim Dobrice Ćosića," *Komunist*, 22 August 1974, 4.

53. See, for instance, the review of Sava Dautović, "Izložba političkog pamfletizma," *Politika* (Belgrade), 10 December 1979, 12; also, R. K., "Filosofija 'svevidećeg oka,'" *Komunist* (Belgrade), 14 December 1979, 18–19.

Srbi (Serbs, 1978) illustrates the progression of Popović's work from the humanistic, universalist themes of the early *Scenes* (figure 3). It depicts a far from uplifting scene, a waiting room in which the only light is cast on the faces of the depressed occupants. There is nothing quintessentially Serbian about the scene, unless we count the newspaper *Politika* lying on the table. Of the myriad possible depictions of Serbs, Popović chose demoralization. As Ćosić described it: "Mića's Serbian men and women accept their fate patiently, quietly, with astonishment and menace, but above all, in silence. For how long, and what then? Mića Popović does not answer that question, because the answer is still not known by any Serb. If it turns out to be the traditional answer, then there is no salvation for them."⁵⁴ "Serbs" was in fact singled out by critics as indicative of the nationalism of Popović's 1979 show.⁵⁵

For Popović, as for Ćosić, the final disappointment came from events in Kosovo. *1 maj 1985* (The first of May 1985, 1986), which is not part of Popović's *Scenes Painting*, depicts the fictional crucifixion of a Serbian peasant named Djordje Martinović in Kosovo (figure 4). The painting is based on a real event, but there is no consensus about the facts surrounding it. On 1 May 1985, either Martinović was attacked by Albanian youths who forced a broken bottle into him ("impaling" him), or he himself broke the bottle while masturbating. The event became a polarizing affair, as Serbs were convinced that the attack on Martinović was part of a program designed to drive Serbs from Kosovo, while Albanians insisted that it was nothing more than an isolated act of self-gratification gone awry. The affair served to crystallize Serbian fears of Albanian separatism in Kosovo.⁵⁶ Popović chose, not only to render the scene, but to render it as the martyrdom of the Serbian peasant, standing in for the nation as a whole. All of the elements of Serbian subjugation in Yugoslavia are present—white-capped Albanians hoist Martinović onto the cross; the bottle waits; the blue-uniformed policeman, the ubiquitous watchman of the Titoist regime, stands guard over the ceremony.

Like Ćosić, Popović saw himself as a seeker and provider of truth for a truth-starved nation. In June 1986, he was elected a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His acceptance speech, entitled "The Work of Art as the Last Bastion of a People," was delivered to an audience confronted by the painting of Martinović as it entered the hall. "Art which takes the side of truth and not cliché, the side of freedom and not brutality, can be a reliable signpost for a people 'that has been deprived of the right to differ,'" he told his audience.⁵⁷ Like many other intellectuals in Serbia during these convulsive years, he reserved for the artist and literary figure the right to filter and interpret the truth to a waiting nation: "The manner and conditions in which a work of art is created are not important, nor is the area of truth about which it speaks; the important thing

54. Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji*, 198.

55. Dautović, "Izložba političkog pamfletizma," 12.

56. On the Martinović affair, see Svetislav Spasojević, *Šlučaj Martinović* (Belgrade, 1986).

57. Popović and Klunker, *Mića Popović*, 106.



Figure 3. *Srbi* (Serbs, 1978).

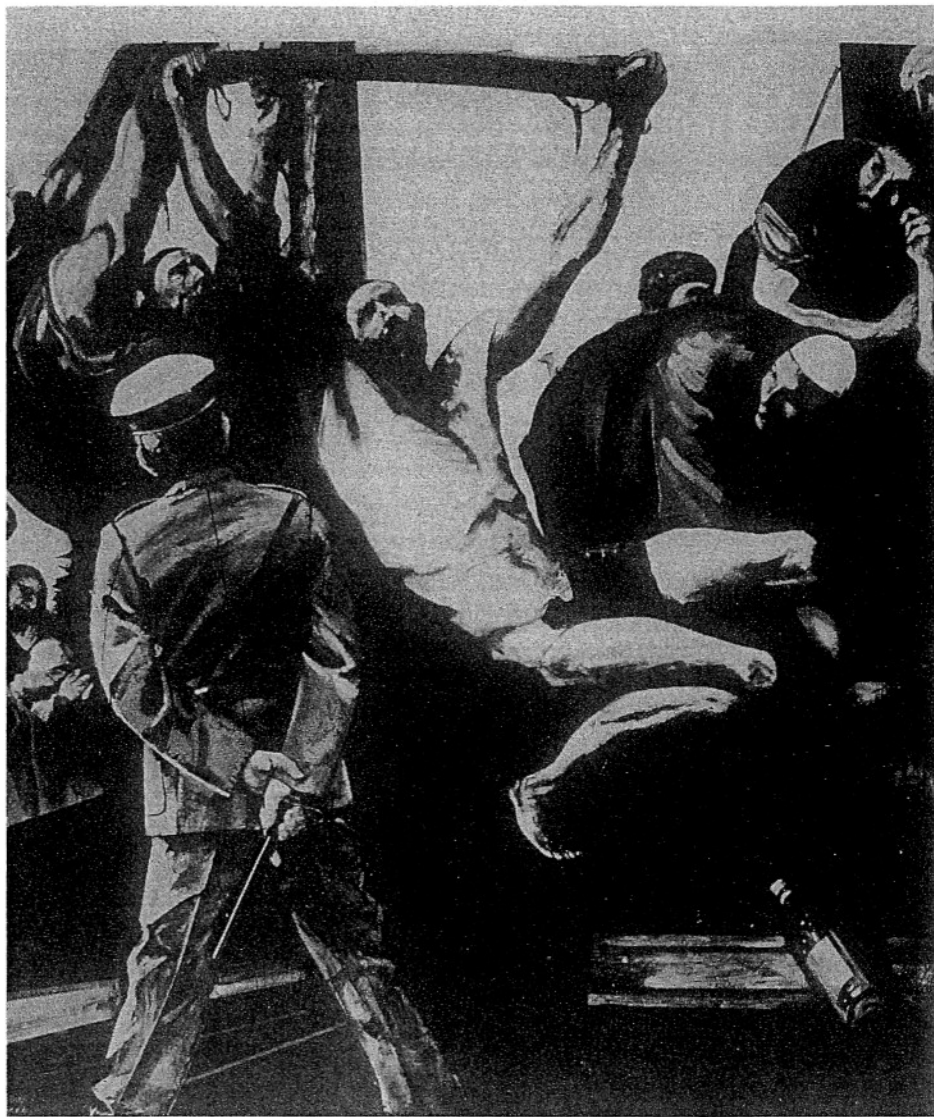


Figure 4. *1 maj 1985* (The first of May 1985, 1986).

is that *truth* is a driving force, a multifold revelation. Repressive societies are allergic to any sort of truth, even when it concerns the possibility of developing form in the sphere of pure artistic abstraction."⁵⁸ *The First of May 1985* played a powerful role in the whole presentation. Popović addressed the work: "The title of the painting is *The First of May 1985*. It not only poses the question of what happened on 1 May that year, but, above all, why this question has not been answered so far."⁵⁹ Popović answers that question for himself in the painting. Martinović was martyred by Albanian nationalists who were given free rein by the Titoist regime. But is

58. Ibid., 110 (emphasis in the original).

59. Ibid., 128.

this the *truth*? For Popović, as we know, the truth is “a driving force, a *multi-fold revelation*,” so all that is necessary is that Serbs perceive essential elements of the truth in the work of art. If Serbs recognize and comprehend their persecution in that painting, then it is telling the truth.

Ćosić did not like *The First of May 1985*. He believed that its mixing of metaphors, its recollection of the crucifixion of Christ on the one hand and the impalement of the Christian by Muslims on the other, degraded this particular event, which should have stood “as a symbol of Albanian violence toward Serbs in the second half of the twentieth century, just as the gas chamber and crematorium became the symbol of Nazi German crimes against Jews and Slavs.” It also bothered him that Popović employed universal (historical, Christian) symbols to express truths about the contemporary world. Ćosić seemed to think that Serbia’s fate deserved more than this painting had to offer, which was fundamentally derivative and hardly up to the task of portraying the depth of evil that had befallen the Serbs. Nevertheless, for Ćosić, the painting offered evidence that Popović had “that consciousness and conscience that distinguished Francisco Goya, Eugene Delacroix, and [Honoré] Daumier.”⁶⁰

Connections: From the Search for Truth to a National Movement

The phenomenon that I have described with regard to Popović and Ćosić was common among Serbs in the postwar era. Those who were not Marxist true believers were numerous, and many of them were willing to allow the revolutionary spirit of Titoism a chance to succeed according to its own standards, rhetoric, and stated goals. Ćosić and Popović were not nationalists in 1945, yet by the mid-1980s they had become virulent nationalists. Their progress belies two notions: one, that Serbian nationalism is something inherent in Serbian culture, and the other, that the Serbian nationalist movement was an artificial creation of a desperate communist regime in the 1980s. Instead, it supports the assertion that for some Serbs, nationalism was something new, reflecting the influence of communism or its failure. At most, their long-standing commitment to Marxism could not overcome their conviction that Titoism had failed in its basic universalist and humanitarian promise. In the case of Popović, nationalism seems to have been the logical result of his humanitarian impulses. He was genuinely moved by the fate of Yugoslav workers and students long before he allowed his concern for the fate of his nation to overwhelm him. It is more difficult to argue that Ćosić was a humanitarian above all—instead, he was an idealist. He was less concerned with the fate of individual Serbs (or Yugoslavs) than he was with the total transformation of Serbian society, the making of a modern Serbia. Titoism betrayed his faith in the transformative value of communism, and his response was to shift the object of his idealism from the revolution to his nation.

The search for truth that Ćosić, Popović, and others like them inaugurated in the 1960s and 1970s served to prepare the ground for the first broad-based opposition to Titoism in Serbia, which emerged after the

60. Ćosić, *Mića Popović, vreme, prijatelji*, 175.

dictator's death in 1980. Specifically, a free speech movement grew after the 1981 arrest and trial of Gojko Djogo, a poet whose volume of poems entitled *Vunena vremena* insulted the person and work of Tito in the eyes of the state, thus constituting "enemy propaganda." Djogo's fate became a cause for the Serbian Writers' Union, which held protest meetings in response to the poet's arrest. Although at this early date the free speech movement was far from universally embraced by the Serbian intellectual elite, the Djogo case did initiate the process that eventually made the Serbian Writers' Union one center of intellectual opposition to the regime in Serbia. In May 1982, Mihiz and several other Serbian writers of all generations founded the Committee for the Protection of Artistic Freedom. This committee, born in the Djogo maelstrom, gave way to the Committee for the Defense of the Freedom of Thought and Expression, whose creation was prompted by the conviction of Vojislav Šešelj in 1984. It was envisioned as a Yugoslav initiative but in the end was solely Serbian. Mihiz, Popović, and Ćosić were founding members, along with members of the *Praxis* group (the philosophers associated with the journal), historians of Serbian communities in Kosovo and Croatia, and several young legal theorists. Freedom of thought is merely another way of conceptualizing Ćosić's and Popović's search for truth; and the process thus far did not foretell its own eventual collapse into ethnic nationalism.

By 1986, the Serbian Writers' Union and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts had become the two leading institutions in the movement of opposition to Titoism (which remained in place despite its namesake's death). The movement was not monolithic; the Serbian Writers' Union and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts were not two venues for the same group of people. They have each achieved fame (and lately infamy) as the two loci of opposition to Titoism, and each has produced its symbol for the movement. The "literary evenings" of the Serbian Writers' Union served as boisterous rallies of the Serbian literary intelligentsia through the eighties, beginning with the Djogo affair. The more genteel Serbian Academy, on the other hand, produced the "Memorandum of the Serbian Academy," a now-legendary document that most consider to be a manifesto of Serbian nationalism.⁶¹ The memorandum and the literary evenings of the late 1980s focused on a single issue of staggering importance to the Serbian intellectual elite: the dispersion of Serbian lands, with overwhelming attention paid to Kosovo, which had emerged as the single most vexing problem in Serbian life in the wake of Tito's death in 1980 and the Albanian uprising in 1981. The tragedy of the opposition to communism in Serbia was therefore that it began as a free thought movement but *eventually* coalesced on the issue of the territorial division of Serbia. Ćosić's fixation on spatial and spiritual division became a general con-

.61. Pavle Ivić and Dejan Medaković were the nonconformists on the Committee for the Preparation of a Memorandum on Contemporary Social Questions, which was appointed on 13 June 1985. The committee had sixteen members, including Antonije Isaković, Mihailo Marković, Radovan Samardžić, Vasilije Krestić, and Kosta Mihailović, but not Dobrica Ćosić. Information on the committee is from Srpska akademija nauke i umetnosti, *Godisnjak* 92 (1986): 105.

cern throughout Serbia. From the search for truth to freedom of speech, the truths that Serbia's intellectuals sought, the speech that had been most diligently suppressed by the regime, concerned territorial unity and Serbia's history, which stood in for the social and economic failures of the regime.

The fact that my subjects did in fact reject the universalist approach offered by the Tito regime brings us to the first general lesson to be drawn from this story: the nationalism that the nonconformists embraced was conditioned by the failure of communism, and thus cannot be viewed as a simple inheritance from the Serbian past. The Czech historian Miroslav Hroch has noted the "extravagance" of assertions that postcommunist nationalism is merely nationalism removed from the "deep-freeze" of authoritarianism.⁶² By contrast, anthropologist Katherine Verdery has carefully concluded that in Romania, nationalism did not change "under the impress of socialism." In her view, socialism did nothing to *hinder* the existence of nationalism, but it also did not alter the nature of Romanian nationalism in any way.⁶³ I would tentatively argue for a more ambitious interpretation of the interplay between nationalism and socialism in Serbia. One way that postwar Serbian nationalism reflects its roots in the communist system in Yugoslavia is the critical importance of images drawn directly from the communist era in its revivalist message—specifically, by sponsoring the division of the Serbian population into several republics and autonomous provinces, a historical Serbian insistence on unity was fully developed and fatally intensified under Tito. Another was its eventual mutation into a populist mass movement, one that thrived on the reluctance of Serbs to question authority, no matter the source.⁶⁴ Nationalist populists such as Slobodan Milošević, Vuk Drasković, and Vojislav Šešelj (otherwise quite different people) thus inherited a constituency preconditioned by Titoism to accept their lead.

A second general conclusion is that the nonconformists were not activists, with the exception of Ćosić, who accepted that role in the mid-1980s to serve as a spokesperson for the leaders of the Kosovo Serbs. They were, however, responsible for establishing many of the images necessary to the nationalist movement in the minds of Serbs. One example of this is the use of Popović's *Serbs* as the original cover art for the phenomenally popular *Book about Milutin* by Danko Popović (published in 1985, this novel was issued in multiple editions, attesting to the popularity of its populist message). Images of a nation divided and kept prostrate by Titoism were harnessed by powerful political leaders in order to stay in (or compete for) power in a rapidly changing moral, political, and ideological environment. But my subjects (and all of the nonconformists, by and

62. Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe," *New Left Review* 198 (March–April 1993): 14.

63. Katherine Verdery, "Nationalism and National Sentiment in Postsocialist Romania," in *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, 1996), 102.

64. On the nationalism movement and its eventual cooption by Slobodan Milošević and the Serbian League of Communists (later Socialist Party of Serbia), see Nebojša Popov, *Srpski populizam* (Belgrade, 1991).

large) provided the images alone—not the activism needed to create a mass movement.

Finally, this nationalism that called for Serbian revival, whose birth was conditioned by Marxist antecedents and which thrived on the mass psychology of authoritarianism, bears a resemblance to that of the fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe. That era's fascisms focused on national unity as a means to combat the divisions introduced by parliamentary liberalism and the class warfare of communists. Certainly none of the practitioners of Serbian nationhood that I study (Ćosić, Popović, and others) were ever political fascists, but the parallels between the interwar and the postwar periods are quietly remarkable: a disillusioned generation reacts to the disorder around them by rejecting their class-based convictions in favor of national consolidation and revival. Students of fascism acknowledge the crucial role played by apostates from the left, including Marxists, in the formation of fascist movements.⁶⁵ The term *fascist* has been applied so loosely in debates on the nature of Serbia's role in Yugoslavia's collapse that it has little meaning anymore. Slobodan Milošević and Vojislav Šešelj have been labeled fascists, each with his own justification; my subjects have rightly not been so labeled, and I will not do so here. But their place in Serbian history is not unambiguous; before any Serbian movement could become actively nationalist, racist, populist, or fascist, someone produced a body of ideas and images that decried division and preached revival, that pointed out the divisions that had humiliated and degraded Serbs and offered a vision of unification and future glory. The nonconformists, and many others of their first postwar generation, provided those images. That is the tragedy of these men, whose nationalism had idealist and humanitarian roots.

65. See, especially, Zeev Sternhill, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton, 1996); also, Zeev Sternhill, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton, 1994).