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Conversations in Belgrade – An introduction

Sitting in a café in Central Belgrade in July 2005, I was discussing the Serbian student movement called *Otpor* (Resistance), with a friend. *Otpor* had played a central role in overthrowing Slobodan Milošević on 5 October 2000 and I was interested to hear about them.¹ My friend related to me that the *Otpor* protests were ‘just like the 1960s. *Otpor* wanted “power to the people”, but they forgot that we’re not in the 1960s anymore.’ He appeared almost indifferent to the student movement that was so important in toppling the ‘butcher of the Balkans’. Such an ambiguous response to *Otpor* problematized the celebratory rhetoric surrounding this student group in the West.² I returned to Australia eager to learn more about the story of student resistance in Belgrade. My search led me to two key events: the occupation of the University of Belgrade in June 1968 and the five-month student strike against the Milošević government in the winter of 1996-97.

In February and March of 2006 I was once again in Belgrade, with more of the language under my belt and a handful of contacts, I hoped to investigate the relationship between the student protests of the 1960s and those of the 1990s, and examine just to what extent students’ conception of democracy in the 1990s were like those of the 1960s.

¹ For a detailed, if somewhat popularised, account of the events of and leading up to 5 October 2000 see Dragan Bujosević and Ivan Radovanović, *The Fall of Milošević: The October 5th Revolution*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2003, Mark R. Thompson and Phillip Kuntz, ‘Stolen Elections: The Case of the Serbian October’, *Journal of Democracy*, 15:4, 2004, pp. 159-172 and Svetozar Stojanović, *Serbia: The Democratic Revolution*, Humanity Books, New York, 2003, pp. 197-220. For an examination of *Otpor*, see Vladimir Marković, ‘Otpor (Resistance) in the struggle against the Serbia-Yugoslav regime’, *The South Slav Journal*, 21, 2000, pp. 107-110

² For an obvious example of this celebratory rhetoric see the DVD by Steve York, *Bringing Down a Dictator*, York Zimmerman Inc., Washington, 2001.

I rifled through student newspapers, tracked down first person accounts and interviewed a handful of participants of the 1968 and 1996-97 movements.

During my time in Belgrade, the popularity of the extremist nationalist party, the *Srpska Radikalna Stranka* (Serbian Radical Party - SRS) was pervasive.³ City walls covered with posters of the Radical Party leader, Vojislav Šešelj, (currently charged with war crimes in The Hague) provided the backdrop for my interviews. On the tram to the archives I saw young men and women pasting up these posters. One evening as I left my hostel to meet an interviewee, a rally of 120,000 supporters of the Radicals occupied the central *Republika trg* (Republic Square). The participants of the rally were very different from the well-dressed urbanites of Belgrade's streets. They were the poor of Serbia, those that are being hit hardest by the economic reforms. As I and other passers-by pushed through the crowds, we were eyed off with a mixture of suspicion and anger. It is that anger that undermines much of the liberal triumphalist discourse of Serbia's 'transition' to democracy, so a feature of post-Milošević Serbia.⁴ Naturally, as I was discussing questions of democracy with interviewees, the question of the Radicals and Serbia's social crisis raised its head more than once. Increasingly, I became interested in the ways in which people, like the supporters of the Radicals, come to feel excluded from dominant forms of democracy and the ways in which alternatives to these exclusions are forged.

Returning to Australia, laden with sources and experiences, I set about a comparison between the Belgrade June 1968 movement and the five-month student strike

³ For a history and examination of the SRS see Siniša Djurić, 'Radically Better Doom: Vojislav Šešelj and the Serbian Radical Party', *Sobaka*, 26 August 2004, <http://www.diacritica.com/sobaka/2004/seselj.html>, accessed on 10 September 2006

⁴ See, for example, Stojanović, *Serbia: The Democratic Revolution*, pp. 147-149, 197-208

in the winter of 1996-97. Both of these protests represent the climax of years of student dissent. I chose to limit my examination of student movements to Belgrade as opposed to Serbia or Yugoslavia because of the ways in which national and transnational solidarities have shifted during the city's chaotic post-World War Two past.⁵ A thorough investigation of the 1968 movement in Belgrade is difficult. Few documents of the events have been translated into English and the secondary analysis of the 1968 movement in English is limited to three articles and one book.⁶ I found existing studies on 1968 to be lacking in several areas. The 1978 sociological analysis by Ralph Pervan, *Tito and the Students*, provides an excellent examination on the interaction of official student organizations in Yugoslav student activism but does not examine the ideological influences of the events of June 1968, viewing the student revolt simply as frustration at the poor material conditions on the campus. Dennison Rusinow's reports, written as the events of June 1968 unfolded, display a similar weakness, as he attempts to reduce the students' discourse of democracy to an episode in the liberal-conservative debates playing out in the ruling Yugoslav League of Communists. Both of these works ignore the influences of New Left and critical Marxist ideas on the student activists in Belgrade in the 1960s. D. Plamenić and Fred Pearlman's works, because they record these

⁵ For example, in 1968 Belgrade students were pan-Yugoslav and acted in solidarity with other Yugoslav students, in the 1990s, the onset of the Yugoslav civil war broke down these solidarities and also shifted the ways students in Belgrade related to other Serbs, as I will examine in chapter 3 and 4. By focussing on Belgrade I am able to better (and less confusingly) treat the conceptions of democracy formed.

⁶ Dennison Rusinow, 'Anatomy of a Student Revolt: What happened when Belgrade's young cats were put amongst the party pigeons, Part 1: A week in June', *American Universities Field Staff Reports, Southeast Europe Series*, 15:4, 1968, pp. 43-66 and Dennison Rusinow, 'Anatomy of a Student Revolt: What happened when Belgrade's young cats were put amongst the party pigeons, Part 2: Events of the later summer', *American Universities Field Staff Reports, Southeast Europe Series*, 15:5, 1968, pp. 68-91, D. Plamenić, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', *New Left Review*, 54, March-April 1969, pp. 61-78 (Plamenić's name only appears as 'D. Plamenić'; I've been unable to find what the initial stands for), Fred Pearlman, *Revolt in Socialist Yugoslavia June 1968*, Black and Red, Detroit, 1973 and Ralph Pervan, *Tito and the Students: The University and the University Student in Self-managing Yugoslavia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978.

influences, provide good blueprints for further study but their articles are too brief and do not deal with the ways in which the regime was able to undermine the students' discourse of democracy during the protest.

The scholarship is little better for 1996-97, although, thanks to the Protest websites of computer (and English) literate Belgrade students, primary sources abound. The Internet served as a central means of communication between the Belgrade student movement in 1996-97 and the rest of the world, which the regime was unable to censor.⁷ Many Faculties set up their own protest websites and translated hundreds of media stories, reports, street press and other documents into English.⁸ Secondary analysis of these events, however, is lacking. The historical literature of the student protest of 1996-97 is limited to a few pages in most post- Milošević histories. These deal inadequately with the ways in which students articulated an understanding of democracy and, because of the length of the period and the repetitive nature of the daily demonstrations, do not attempt to shape a narrative of events. Sabrina Ramet or Louis Sell's accounts, for example, give two or three page descriptions of the events, which do not engage at all with the discourses of democracy students articulated.⁹ The work of Robert Thomas, by comparison detailed, does not explore the particularity of the student protest.¹⁰ Instead it focuses on the political opposition protests. Matthew Collin's book on the independent

⁷ For an examination of the use of the internet in resistance to Milosevic see Christopher R. Tunnard, 'From State-Controlled Media to the 'Anarchy' of the Internet: The Changing Influence of Communications and Information in Serbia in the 1990s', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 3:2, 2003, pp. 97-120 and Spasa Bosnjak, *Fight the Power: The Role of the Serbian Independent Electronic Media in the Democratisation of Serbia*, Masters Thesis, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 2005, pp. 73-78

⁸ Students of the Faculties of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, *Student Protest 96/97 website*, <http://www.yurope.com/mirrors/protest96/pmf/index.html>, accessed on 01 October 2006.

⁹ Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005, pp. 504-507, Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002, pp. 259-261

¹⁰ Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 285-318

radio station, B92, looks at the role of the independent media in the protests, but is more a detailed description of selected events than an attempt to make sense of the five month period and the ways in which students conceived of their actions.¹¹ Much of the literature to emerge from Serbia takes a sociological perspective, which is detailed and useful, but does not historicize the events. Examples of this include Mladen Lazić's edited collection *Protest in Belgrade* and the translated articles in the online 1997 volume of *Sociologija*.¹² Also problematic in these accounts is their unwillingness to interrogate the discourses of democracy that were articulated. The tendency for sociologists at the University of Belgrade to openly sympathise with the demonstrators often meant that, whilst some were willing to criticise forms of sexism or the authoritarian nature of some of the participants, most scholars were too keen to celebrate the protest as the 'emergence of a democratic order in Serbia'.¹³ Thus, this literature is insufficient for investigating the exclusionary nature of discourses of democracy in the winter of 1996-97.

My own interviews with participants from both protests – June 1968 and the winter of 1996-97 – helped me to understand how they understood these events, allowing for a more clear grasp of what was considered important in both movements than a simple analysis of the documents would allow. I spoke with four female participants of the 1968 movement, all of who had been involved in student activism throughout the 1960s. Zagorka Golubović was a lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy and a member of the 'Belgrade Eight', a group of eight Belgrade professors who were targeted by the

¹¹ Matthew Collin, *This is Serbia Calling: Rock'n'roll radio and Belgrade's underground resistance*, Serpent's Tail, London, 2001, pp. 99-131

¹² See Mladen Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade: Winter of Discontent*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 1999 and the articles and documents collected in: *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/> accessed on 19/09/2006

¹³ See, for example, Lazić's introduction to his volume: Mladen Lazić, 'Introduction: The emergence of a democratic order in Serbia', Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*, pp. 1-30

regime after 1968 as being the provocateurs of the student movement.¹⁴ Jelka Imširović was also at the University of Belgrade, studying sociology when she became involved in student politics. She continued to be politically active in the years following 1968 and was one of a handful of students who were imprisoned by the regime on the basis of being a Trotskyite in 1972.¹⁵ Borka Pavićević was at the Academy of Arts during 1968, whilst Sonja Licht was another student activist throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. These women also continued their activism under Milošević in anti-war or women's rights groups and many are today involved in the civil society sector.¹⁶ Each interviewee's close involvement with protest under both Tito and Milošević made them excellent respondents. Their comments allowed me to compare the ways in which discourses of democracy changed over three decades.

I also interviewed three participants from the 1996-97 protest, all of whom were from the Department of Archaeology at Belgrade University. Two of my respondents, Ivana Antić and Miroslav Marić published and distributed a student protest paper called *Protest Tribune*, and set up a media centre for foreign journalists during 1996 and 1997. Predrag Dakić, was another participant of the 1996-97 protest but unlike the others was not involved in the media centre – as he put it: 'I was on the streets in the cold!'¹⁷ His response was useful for a comparison of the role of activists and everyday participants. The interviews also allowed me to examine issues that were absent from discussions at

¹⁴ For a detailed examination of the 'Belgrade Eight' see Nebojša Popov, *Contra Fatum: Slučaj grupe profesor filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu 1968-1988*, Niro 'Mladost', Beograd, 1989.

¹⁵ For the story of the Trotskyites and their repression at the hands of the Titoist state see Jelka Kljajić-Imširović, 'Disidenti i zatvor', *Republika*, 196, 1998, http://www.yuope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/98/196/196_14.HTM accessed on 22/09/2006.

¹⁶ Jelka Imširović organized women's rights activists in the early 1990s Zagorka Golubović and Borka Pavićević were closely involved in the student protests of June-July 1992 and the winter of 1996-97. Today Sonja Licht is with an NGO called the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and Borka Pavićević is an actress with the activist theatre company the Centre for Cultural Decontamination.

¹⁷ Interview with Predrag Dakić, 19 February 2006

the time – of concern here was the question of Kosovo and its relation to events in Belgrade, which is important precisely because of recent events in the region, but was absent from the discussions of Belgrade students in both 1968 and 1996-97. My interviewees from 1968 were women, which also gave me an insight into the ways in which narratives of the events of 1968 are affected by gender.

When conducting the interviews I asked opened ended questions, such as ‘how did you become involved in the June 1968 protest?’ or ‘what is the most memorable event of the protest for you?’¹⁸ Charles Morrissey has outlined the benefits of such questions in allowing the interviewee to recall what they thought was important.¹⁹ I was, however, careful not to allow the interviewees’ concerns to dominate the entirety of the discussion, as I was also interested in the ways in which issues that were not discussed in memories of the events might have been dealt with at the time, for example, the question of Kosovo. Also, my subsequent analysis of the interviewees’ responses took into consideration what Alistair Thomson describes as the ‘composure’ of memories. That is, I was careful to place memories of the events of 1968 and 1996-97 in their current context and to interrogate the ways in which participants may have reconstructed memories to cohere to their existing beliefs or social norms.²⁰ This is particularly pertinent for questions of 1968, where a significant gulf separates the revolutionary socialist politics of Yugoslav student activists in 1968 and today, when many participants are committed to building liberal capitalism in Serbia. Kristen Ross has pointed out the tendency for the radical politics of 1968 to be obscured or rewritten in the narratives of

¹⁸ For a rough outline of the questions I put to the interviewees see Appendix 1.

¹⁹ Charles T. Morrissey, ‘On Oral History Interviewing’, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.109

²⁰ Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac memories: Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia’, in Perks and Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 300-301

participants.²¹ Although I benefited from these interviews, my research was not limited to oral history and covered the examination of first person accounts, documents from the June 1968 occupation collected by Yugoslav dissidents in 1971, student newspapers from the 1960s and the 1996-97 Protest websites.²²

The more I examined the events of June 1968 and the winter of 1996-97 the more their overall programs conflicted. My friend's comparison between *Otpor* and the 1960s was, on one level, totally unfounded, but on the other hand shed an important light on the events. The assertion that *Otpor* was similar to the movement of 1968 was, more or less, incorrect: whilst in 1968 the working class and international revolution constructed the students' program for social change, in the protest of 1996-97 (which informed *Otpor*) the middle class, civil society and integration into Europe were the central themes. Nonetheless, my friend's belief that *Otpor* 'forgot that we're not in the 1960s anymore' points to an important point concerning discourses of democracy; the broader context, and more significantly, the international situation had changed significantly. For the 1960s, the socialist project was still seen as a possibility; the international revolts of students, minorities, anti-imperialist movements and, in some countries, the working class, revitalized the belief in the overthrow of capitalism. By the 1990s, however, the hopes of an alternative to capitalism had been, for the most part, crushed.²³ The rise of neoliberalism and the shifts towards a post-industrial society in the west during the 1970s and 1980s undermined the class politics that offered a radical alternative for the future

²¹ Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, pp. 1-18

²² These first person accounts include Plameniĉ, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', Pearlman, *Revolt in Socialist Yugoslavia*, and Živojin Pavloviĉ, *Ispjuvak pun krvi*, Grafiĉki Atelje 'Dereta', Beograd, 1991. The documents collected in 1971 are Editorial board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun – Lipanj 1968, Dokumenti*, Praxis, Zagreb, 1971. The student newspaper I examined, although many of the articles directly concerning the occupation were reprinted in the *Jun-Lipanj 1968 Dokumenti*, was *Student*. The protest website was that of the Students of the Faculties of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, previously cited in this chapter.

²³ Slobodan Divjak, 'Zbivanja studentske demonstracije '68 i '91', *Treći program*, Proleće 1990, pp. 32-34

and which characterized the European left for a century and a half.²⁴ Simultaneously, as economic crisis plagued the Soviet Union, the Stalinist system came to be de-legitimised as an alternative to capitalism - not that, in many dissidents' eyes, it had ever been a *viable* alternative, but its presence at least testified to the *possibility* of alternatives.²⁵ The overthrow of the regimes of Eastern Europe in 1989 gave strength to a liberal narrative of the 'end of ideology' and the domination of capitalism could continue unabated by alternative social and economic visions.²⁶ It was in this international context that the student strike of 1996-97 took place, a world far removed from the possibilities of 1968, a world where the 'exhaustion of utopian energies' dominated the minds of dissidents and, for a crisis-ridden country like Serbia, the ideal of 'Europe' (i.e. western consumerist capitalism) represented a viable and very desirable end. This international shift in discourses of democracy was also brought out in my interviews with participants from the 1968 protest. Activists, who in the 1960s would confidently label themselves as revolutionary socialists, are today committed social democrats, shunning talk of socialism as an anachronism. As a result, throughout this thesis, I attempt to point out the ways in which students' in Belgrade engaged with different international and transnational discourses of democracy.

My own interest in the category of class and the obvious importance of this category for contemporary Serbia, where many working class and peasant people are suffering under the 'democratic transition' and channelling their anger into support for

²⁴ Phillip Armstrong, Andrew Glyn and John Harrison, *Capitalism since World War Two: The making and break-up of the Great Boom*, Fontana, London, 1984, pp. 378-381, 402-425 and Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe 1850-2000*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 402-404

²⁵ Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgoths, *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, 2004, pp. 238-242

²⁶ Roger Burbach, Orlando Nunez and Boris Kagarlitsky, *Globalization and its Discontents: The Rise of Postmodern Socialisms*, Pluto Press, London, 1997, pp. 35-40

the Radicals, has coloured my investigation of student movements in Belgrade.²⁷ It is with this category in mind that I draw out the discussion of democracy, Belgrade student movements and their importance for contemporary Serbia. In my first two chapters I examine the discourse of democracy that students articulated in Belgrade in June 1968. Firstly, I build on and alter previous narratives of the events in June 1968. It is important for my following examination of democracy to go beyond existing narratives of the events of the 1960s and recover the ways in which two practically conflicting but formally similar discourses of democracy were articulated – one as a radical alternative to the Titoist system, and another as the regime’s program of controlled reform. In the second chapter, using this corrected narrative and a brief examination of the influences of critical Marxist and New Left theory on Belgrade students I analyse the way in which the radical alternative discourse of students conceived of the relationship between democracy, exclusion and class.

My third chapter is a narrative of the student protest of the winter of 1996-97, again building on existing narratives like those of Robert Thomas, Sabrina Ramet or Michael Collin. I focus solely on the student protest and use primary sources from this protest. The fourth chapter examines the changes in Belgrade dissent in the 1980s and 1990s, focussing on the move away from a politics of class and towards the paradigm of ‘civil society’ and a discourse of a ‘return to Europe’. I outline the ways in which these influenced students by examining sources from the protest websites and interviews with

²⁷ Djurić, ‘Radically Better Doom’, <http://www.diacritica.com/sobaka/2004/seselj.html>, accessed on 10 September 2006

participants. Drawing on recent scholarship, I also examine the exclusionary nature of the students' discourse of democracy in 1996-97.²⁸

Finally, I apply the conclusions regarding the new forms of exclusion implicit in the 'return to Europe' discourse to the current context of Serbia. Of concern here is the way in which the discourse has become entangled in neoliberal economic program. The social costs of this program and the forms of exclusion implicit in the 'return to Europe' discourse – as illuminated by my examination of the 1996-97 student protest – are central to understanding the rise of Šešelj's Radical Party and the implications of this for Serbia's future. An understanding of the ways in which the current dominant discourse of democracy excludes and isolates certain classes is made even more pertinent in the current period when 'people power' movements like *Otpor*, heavily supported by western Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like George Soros' Open Society or the National Endowment for Democracy, have articulated similar liberal-utopian discourses of democracy in the 'Orange' revolution in the Ukraine in November 2004 and the 'Rose' revolution in Georgia in November 2003.²⁹

This thesis is, then, a critique of the 'triumphalist' worldview that celebrates the dominant global system as a liberal utopia – a view that is clearly evident in the Belgrade 'return to Europe' discourse. This worldview seeks to impose its unquestionable

²⁸ Zala Volčić has examined discourses of exclusion in post-Milosevic Belgrade. Zala Volčić, 'Belgrade vs. Serbia: spatial re-configurations of belonging', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:4, 2005, pp. 639-658

²⁹ For information regarding the spread of discourses of democracy and organization between *Otpor* and other post-communist 'revolutions' see Milos Vasic, 'A Revolution brought to you by...', *Transitions Online*, 1/12/2003, and Andrew Wilson, 'Ukraine's Orange Revolution, NGOs and the role of the West', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 19:1, 2006, pp. 21-32. Tellingly, 'people power' student movements that don't serve to benefit international powers, such as the anti-UN, Kosova-Albanian student group *Vetëvendosje* ('Self-determination') do not receive the same attention from NGOs or western politicians. For a brief discussion on *Vetëvendosje* see Borut Grgic and Paola Marusich, 'Interpreting Kosovo's Independence', *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 11, 2005, pp. 24-29

dominance over the past by erasing the alternatives that have tormented it throughout its history. The comparison between the 1968 and 1996-97 movements in Belgrade helps to highlight the ways in which this discourse excludes, but it also allows us to revisit the possibilities for alternatives to the dominant liberal discourse; alternatives that are being written out of historical narratives and that question the existing exclusions implicit in modern democracy in Belgrade and other parts of the world.

Chapter 1 – Self-management, socialism and democracy:

Belgrade June '68

On 3 June 1968, students at the University of Belgrade began a weeklong occupation of their Faculties. Sparked by a confrontation between students and police the evening before, students draped their buildings in banners featuring images of Tito and Marx and slogans such as ‘Down with the Red Bourgeoisie’ – ‘Bureaucrats, Hands off Workers!’ – ‘We Don’t Want Democracy in Steel Helmets’.¹ For a week the University turned into the organizing headquarters for the student movement and a battleground, where students struggled to control the direction of their protest. Students in Belgrade used a very similar discourse of democracy as the Yugoslav regime – the language of self-management socialism. Self-management socialism had been developed by the Titoist regime as an anti-authoritarian ‘third path’ to socialism after Yugoslavia broke with the Soviet Union in 1948.² The two discourses of self-management – that of the regime and that of the radical students – were similar only in form. Whilst the regime tried to negotiate with students in the official language of self-management socialism, student activists used an alternative, radical discourse of self-management informed by

¹ Dennison Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt: What happened when Belgrade’s young cats were put amongst the party pigeons, Part 1: A week in June’, *American Universities Field Staff Reports, Southeast Europe Series*, 15:4, 1968, p. 50

² Much has been written about the self-management system in Yugoslavia. For detailed examinations of this topic see: Harold Lydall, *Yugoslav Socialism: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 227-235, Bogdan Denis Denitch, Denitch, *The Legitimation of a Revolution - The Yugoslav Case*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976 or Branko Horvat, Mihailo Marković and Rudi Supek, *Self-Governing Socialism: A Reader*, International Arts and Sciences Press, White Plains, 1975.

critical Marxist theory and the international New Left movement.³ Although both used a similar language, Belgrade student activists perceived the Yugoslav regime as a bureaucratic ruling class, a ‘Red Bourgeoisie’. The common language of the regime and the radical students means that any attempt to examine the events in Belgrade of June 1968 and their historical significance, requires a close reading of the events, the relationship between the regime and the students and the influence of international events. It is this examination that is the aim of this chapter.

The coming storm...

Hints of a confrontation between students and the Yugoslav regime were visible in the years prior to the June events. Market reforms, instituted by the federal government in 1965, had increased social inequalities, and, despite the supposed system of ‘self-management socialism’ being followed in Yugoslavia, power and wealth were increasingly accumulating in the hands of a bureaucratic elite.⁴ The material conditions of students were poor and, under the impact of the 1965 reforms, getting worse. Student dormitories held well over their capacity and the University of Belgrade had not received adequate funding to accommodate the increased enrolments.⁵ In Belgrade in December

³ For the self-management and Marxist aspect of the New Left and student movements in 1968 see George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, South End Press, Boston, 1987, pp. 17-27, Leszek Kołakowski, *Main currents of Marxism: its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution, Volume 3: The Breakdown*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp. 487-494 and Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

⁴ For an account of these reforms and their consequences see Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977, pp. 163-183 and Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005, pp. 263-265

⁵ For a meticulous account of students’ conditions see Ralph Pervan, *Tito and the Students: The University and the University Student in Self-managing Yugoslavia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978, pp. 95-110

1966 a militant student movement had formed against the Vietnam War.⁶ On 23 December 1966, after an anti-war meeting had concluded at the Faculty of Philology at Belgrade University, police violently broke up a student demonstration at the U.S embassy.⁷ The violence many suffered at the hands of the police sparked a movement increasingly critical of the Yugoslav government. Sonja Licht, a participant in the Belgrade demonstrations, notes that it was the violent response of the police that started ‘building a protest mood amongst the students...we were faced with the fact that the state was a lot less friendly than we expected.’⁸ In the months leading up to June 1968 stirrings of dissent amongst the Belgrade student population were clearly discernable. Actions in solidarity with German and Polish students and the Vietnamese anti-imperialist struggle were held in March and April. Public forums discussed the New Left movement in France and articles criticizing the poor material situation of workers and students were printed in student newspapers.⁹ Thus, in the lead up to June 1968, a critical program was being developed in Belgrade’s Faculties.

The Belgrade June

The student protest that erupted in Belgrade lasted for a week, from Sunday 2 to Sunday 9 June 1968. Its origins have already been well documented by other scholars. When, on the first Sunday students were refused entry to a musical performance and police were called to disperse them, a street fight broke out. Students dispersed, many

⁶ Editorial board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun – Lipanj 1968, Dokumenti*, Praxis, Zagreb, 1971, p. 9

⁷ Mirko Arsić and Dragan R. Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt I društvo*, Istraživačko izdavački centar, Novi Beograd, 1985, pp.35-37

⁸ Interview with Sonja Licht, 3 March 2006

⁹ These events are outlined in Fred Pearlman, *Revolt in Socialist Yugoslavia June 1968*, Black and Red, Detroit, 1973, pp. 6-10

returning to *Studentski grad*, the student hostels, where they organized a protest march into the city. The police, however, broke up this march before it reached the city. The next morning, Monday 3 June, as anger with the police spread through the student community, another, larger march set off from *Studentski grad*. Although the marchers were, once again, met with police cordons, two members of the Serbian state parliament arrived to negotiate with the students. After hours of negotiation, the police, without warning and despite the protest of the state officials, charged the students and began beating them (and the state officials!) violently.¹⁰

Students retreated, some returning to *Studentski grad*, others making their way to their respective Faculties to hold meetings (*zborovi*). These meetings elected Action Committees (*akcioni odbor*) and called a student strike before holding a rally on *Studentski trg* (Student Square). This rally did not confront the police; instead it led to the occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy. Outside, the walls of the University were decorated with pictures of Tito, Lenin and Marx and banners proclaiming the students' demands and slogans denouncing the bureaucracy.¹¹ The formation of Action Committees independent from the regime organs (namely the Student Federation of the University Committee) testifies to the distrust students harboured towards the regime and its official structures. The Action Committees came to be the organs in which an alternative discourse of self-management, radically opposed to that of the regime, was articulated.

¹⁰ For reports in English see Pervan, *Tito and the Students*, pp. 18-22, Rusinow, 'Anatomy of a Student Revolt...Part 1', pp. 45-48, D. Plamenić, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', *New Left Review*, 54, March-April 1969, p. 61-62, for more detailed accounts in Serbian see Nebojša Popov, *Sukobi*, Centar za filozofiju teoriju, Beograd, 1990, pp. 15-20, Arsić and Marković, '68: *Studentski bunt I društvo*, pp. 72-77.

¹¹ Rusinow, 'Anatomy of a Student Revolt...Part 1', pp. 49-50

As the Faculties were being occupied, leaflets announcing the students' concerns and demands were printed and handed out in streets and cafes. Endorsed by the Student Federation, the Action Committee and the editorial board of the university newspaper *Student*, these demands included, amongst other points, 'the suppression of the great inequalities in Yugoslavia' and 'the establishment of real democracy and self-management relations'.¹² The Action Committee in *Studentski grad* also drew up a statement, which included demands for tackling social inequality, unemployment, and bureaucratic powers.¹³ On the same day, the Student Federation issued its own statement, focusing only on the concern of social inequalities and phrased in such a way so as not to appear hostile to the regime. Already, the two discourses of self-management were beginning to be articulated. The Action Committees targeted the bureaucracy as the cause of social inequality while the Student Federation courted the students' anger and tried to direct it away from a challenge to the regime. As these demands were distributed, students from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering attempted to march to *Studentski grad*, but were stopped by police. This was the last attempt at a public demonstration by the students. Early the following day, Tuesday 4 June, the state parliament formally banned any public demonstrations and the Action Committees urged students to restrict their protest to the occupied university.¹⁴ By that morning, the strike began to inspire students around Serbia and the rest of Yugoslavia. It spread through Belgrade's Faculties

¹² A translation of this leaflet can be found in PlameniĆ, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', p. 62

¹³ A translation of the third list of demands can be found in Rusinow, 'Anatomy of a Student Revolt...Part 1', Appendix A, p. 64, an original copy of the Student Federation statement can be found in Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, pp. 71-73

¹⁴ Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *June-Lipanj 1968*, p. 78

and to some provincial parts of Serbia, and protests and mass meetings in solidarity with the Belgrade students took place across Yugoslavia.¹⁵

One type of democracy?

Writing from Belgrade at the time of the June events, Dennison Rusinow reported that the Belgrade student revolt was unlike other student revolts in Europe and the U.S at the time in that ‘both students and the regime displayed a maturity, moderation and growing self-confidence in an open, democratic dialogue in accordance with mutually accepted ground rules’.¹⁶ By presenting the events in this manner, Rusinow ignored the way in which the two arms of the regime – the University and Student Federation committees on the inside of the occupation and the police and militias on the outside – operated to isolate and pressure students into dropping their radical demands. In contrast to Rusinow’s account, Plamenić’s article of 1969 made a point of showing the sharp divisions between the regime and the students.¹⁷ Plamenić’s assertions are important for clarifying the two different conceptions of democracy the students and regime evoked, although he himself did not address this. My own research has supported and built on Plamenić’s account by using interviews with the participants and documents unavailable to him at the time.¹⁸

¹⁵ For the relevant documents concerning protests in the rest of Yugoslavia see Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, pp. 186-222 and Popov, *Sukobi*, pp. 39-51.

¹⁶ Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt...Part 1’, p. 49

¹⁷ Plamenić’s account of the occupation records events one day later than they occurred. Thus, though Tito’s infamous speech to the nation in support of the student’s demands took place on Sunday 9 June, Plamenić records this as the 10 June. Any evidence taken from Plamenić will be edited to take this into consideration.

¹⁸ The interviews of four participants of the 1968 demonstrations (Zagorka Golubović, Sonja Licht, Jelka Imširović and Borka Pavićević) were conducted in Belgrade February and March 2006. For examples of the questions that were asked see Appendix 1 of this thesis. The documents to which I refer are those collected by the Editorial Board of Praxis in the *Jun-Lipanj 1968 Dokumenti*.

The cultural theorist, Renata Salecl, has argued that Yugoslav self-management was able to accommodate dissent by constantly revolutionizing its system: ‘Precisely because of this ‘revolutionary’ nature, the ideology of self-management was able to neutralize critics of the system by stressing how the ideologists of self-management were themselves combating these problems.’¹⁹ This was certainly the case during the Belgrade June, when bureaucrats from the League of Communists argued to students that their concerns could be accommodated by the existing self-management system.

Officials from the organs of the regime, namely the University Committee of the League of Communists and the Student Federation, joined the students’ occupation on the second day, Tuesday 4 June, and began holding their own meetings.²⁰ Because of their membership of the upper echelons of the League of Communists these ‘late comers’, as Plamenić dubs them, began to negotiate between the students and the Belgrade City Committee, which was dealing with the events at the University. They ‘warned the students of their isolation and advised that, with their aid, the students would gain all their demands by means of existing party channels.’²¹ Although hardly mentioned in Rusinow’s account, the involvement of these ‘late comers’ was accompanied by further intimidation as cordons of police began circling the Faculties.²²

The officials were sure to warn students of the threat that awaited them outside. Sonja

¹⁹ Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the fall of Socialism*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 59

²⁰ Popov, *Sukobi*, p. 38

²¹ Plamenić, ‘The Belgrade Student Insurrection’, p. 63. Officials in the Croatian League of Communists played a similar role in the occupation of Zagreb University. Particularly interesting in regards to this is that the Croatian officials, who attempted to dilute the students’ demands, used anti-Serb nationalism to counteract the dominance of new left students. Most of these officials were shouted down by students’ chants of ‘Zagreb-Beograd’ before they got a chance to speak. For details of this see: Ana Dević, *The Forging of Socialist Nationalism and Its Alternatives: Social and Political Context in Intellectual Criticism in Yugoslavia Between the Mid-1960s and 1992*, PHD Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2000, pp. 57-58

²² Plamenić, ‘The Belgrade Student Insurrection’, p. 63

Licht, in March 2006, recalled a conversation she had with a friend in the University Committee of the League of Communists on the second day of the occupation:

‘She came to find me and she said: ‘the situation is much more difficult than you understand, the situation in fact is very dangerous. They are ready, if necessary, to send in the army and police to crush you all.’

And I said to her: ‘No no no, V---. This cannot happen. Comrade Tito would never allow this to happen.’

And she said to me: ‘you idiot! Do you really think that anybody would even indulge in the idea to do something like that if Tito didn’t back it?’²³

By the second day of the occupation the regime was mobilizing in two ways; on the inside the university committees were attempting to assimilate the movement and its demands to the policies of the League of Communists; on the outside, the mobilization of workers’ militias (*radnička straža*) and police began to intimidate the students. There is no doubt that between them, the two mobilizations assisted in ending the occupation. The threat of police repression pushed students towards the regime officials, thus strengthening attempts to marginalize the alternative discourse of radical self-management and channelling students’ anger into support for their own reform-oriented discourse of self-management.

‘Workers, we are with you!’

The ‘reform’ discourse articulated by regime officials was also strengthened by the isolation of students from the broader community, especially from the working class. From the first day of the occupation, students had proclaimed their solidarity with the

²³ Interview with Sonja Licht, 3 March 2006

working class, stating: ‘we are enraged at the social and economic differences in our society. We are for social self-management from the bottom to the top. We are against all enrichments (*bogaćenju*) of individuals at the expense of the working class.’²⁴ Some Faculties sent delegations to factories, carrying messages of solidarity. Party officials, however, saw to it that most delegations were refused entry at the gates of these factories.²⁵ Letters and telegrams condemning the students’ actions were sent, ostensibly, from workers in various factories and collectives.²⁶ The state, utilizing its monopoly of the trade unions and managerial positions, cut off the students from their intended audience – the workers – and threatened to break up their occupation by force. At the same time the regime provided a way out of the situation by means of a compromise, communicated to the students by the officials inside the University. This technique, which the regime used to end the student protest, has been unanalysed in the literature in English to far.

On the second day of the occupation, the regime offered a compromise. This compromise, a document that articulated the ‘reform’ discourse, took the form of the *Politico-Action Program*, composed at a meeting between the University Committee, the Student Federation and the Action Committees.²⁷ The document addressed students’ concerns about social inequalities and the poor conditions at the University but, when put into its proper context, was worded in such a way as to make it amenable to the 1965 reforms - the very cause of the rising unemployment and social inequalities that the

²⁴ Editorial Board for Praxis, *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 102

²⁵ Editorial Board for Praxis, *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 89

²⁶ For an example of these letters see Editorial Board for Praxis, *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 119

²⁷ ‘Akciono Politički Program’, *Student*, 8 June 1968, p. 1. An English translation of this document can be found in PlameniĆ, ‘The Belgrade Student Insurrection’, pp. 64-65

students were protesting!²⁸ The reforms of 1965 were an example of the constant ‘revolutionizing’ of the system that Salecl points to. Officials admitted that the students’ concerns were justified, but argued that the problems of social inequality would be solved by better realization of the 1965 reforms.²⁹ In this context, it is hardly surprising that students saw the *Program* as an unacceptable capitulation to pressure from the regime. As the *Program* circulated on Wednesday 5 and Thursday 6 June, condemnations, concerns and supplements came from the different faculty Action Committees. They claimed that the program ‘diluted’ (*razdovnit*) the original demands, that it was not specific and lacked the necessary urgency.³⁰ My own view of a conflict between two different discourses of self-management is strengthened by the fact that the Action Committees were concerned at precisely the *Program*’s lack of radical content. The *Program* was perceived as a way of ‘diluting’ the students’ concept of democracy.

Tito’s speech

By Friday 7 June, it was clear that the student occupation was in a weak position. The press, which had been relatively supportive of the students at the start of the occupation, began to take a more hostile view and on Saturday 8 June, police broke into the Faculty of Arts, beating and arresting students.³¹ By Sunday 9 June, support for the

²⁸ Rusinow, although he doesn’t use this point to draw out a discussion of the intimidation of the students, does note the ways in which the Program was a shift in student demands and suggests that this was the result of League of Communist officials participating in the protest. Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt...Part 1’, pp.61-62

²⁹ Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt...Part 1’, p. 55

³⁰ See the discussions of the program in the occupation, recorded in Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, pp., 143-144, 232-233 and 241-242

³¹ PlameniĆ, ‘The Belgrade Student Insurrection’, p. 65 and Dennison Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt: What happened when Belgrade’s young cats were put amongst the party pigeons, Part 2: Events of the later summer’, *American Universities Field Staff Reports, Southeast Europe Series*, 15:5, 1968, pp. 79-82

students, both inside their walls, and outside in the ranks of the press and League of Communists, was waning.

It was in this context, on the evening of Sunday 9 June, that Tito delivered a speech that was to become infamous. The speech was broadcast nation-wide on television and radio. Such was the uncertainty regarding the regime's response that at the Faculty of Philosophy students did not play Tito's speech over their megaphones for fear that they would be broadcasting a demand for action against the occupation. Instead they organized several small radios for the purpose of listening.³² No one knew what was about to happen. In March 2006, Zagorka Golubović recalled:

‘During our protest some of the leaders from the central committee were very rigid and orthodox...they demanded that the police should intervene with aggression to imprison all of the so-called leaders. But Tito didn't accept that. He said ‘Let's wait for some time. Let's see what we should do.’³³

Having been silent on the events for the entire week, Tito gave a speech in support of the students and their demands regarding social inequalities. Although, he claimed, attempts were made by a minority of extremists to corrupt the movement, the students had shown amazing maturity and responsibility in voicing their demands. He asked the students to assist him in solving the problems in Yugoslav society, in fighting those that sought to hold back the needed reforms. Finally, he finished by telling the students to return to their studies and complete their exams.³⁴ The response of many of the students was joyful. From various Faculties they came out onto the streets, singing

³² Interview with Sonja Licht, 3 March 2006

³³ Interview with Zagorka Golubović, 2 March 2006

³⁴ A copy of Tito's speech can be found in Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, pp. 337-340

and dancing.³⁵ Tito's speech was heralded as a victory by most, though not all students. As Jelka Imširović, related to me in March 2006:

'Unfortunately some of the students accepted Tito's talk and said that because he accepted us it proves that we are right. I listened to this talk at *Studentski grad* and remember that a lot of students went out into the streets and danced the *kolo* and sang 'Comrade Tito we won't leave your way!' And I just sat in my room and cried.'³⁶

Crushing the alternative

Imširović's despair was not without warrant. Tito had succeeded in crushing the radical, alternative discourse of democracy with his bureaucracy's talk of reform. The threat of attack, the advice of the University Committee and the Student Federation and, finally, Tito's speech were enough to re-legitimise the official discourse of 'self-management' at the expense of the radical student version. This spelt the end of the independent movement and its alternative strategy. Although some student meetings continued, mostly at the Faculty of Philosophy, these and the Action Committees were dissolved by force on the 20 July, the eve of the beginning of the new school year.³⁷ The dissolving of the Action Committees testifies to the way in which the two discourses – the radical and the official – were engaged in a struggle for dominance during the

³⁵ For an animated account of the end of the occupation see the film director Živojin Pavlović's memoirs from the occupation: *Ispljuvak pun krvi*, Grafički Atelje 'Dereta', Beograd, 1991, pp. 177-187 for a less animated account see the interview with a participant of June 1968, Ljiljana Mijanović in 'Slobodarenje I robijanje: Razgovor sa sociologom Ljiljanom Mijanović o uzletima I stradanju jedne buntovne generacije', *Republika*, 280, 2002, online at <http://www.yuope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/2002/280/> accessed on 19 September 2006

³⁶ The *kolo* is a traditional Balkan dance. Interview with Jelka Imširović, 3 March 2006

³⁷ Popov, *Sukobi*, pp. 172-177

occupation. As the official discourse emerged triumphant, the organizing spaces of the alternative discourse, the Action Committees, were crushed.

Unlike other movements of the year 1968 – such as the students of Paris or Prague - the Belgrade students were not defeated by police and tanks, but were intimidated and coerced bureaucratically into accepting Tito's hollow talk of reform. Through an understanding of the ways in which the regime operated, we can see Tito's speech as part of a, largely successful, attempt to redirect students' anger away from a radical, bottom-up challenge to the bureaucracy's rule and into the easily controlled structures of top-down self-management. The ability of the self-management system to appear to be constantly revolutionizing itself allowed it to incorporate and then dissolve the radical politics, inspired by the global revolts in 1968.

The Belgrade student movement did not end its activities on 10 June 1968, but it was unable to mobilize the same degree of support. Activism continued, particularly at the Faculty of Philosophy, but it was, for the most part, restricted to the defence of student publications and the 'Belgrade Eight', a group of eight dissident professors at the University of Belgrade who were targeted by the regime in the repression that followed 1968.³⁸ By early 1974, what remained of the student movement had been driven underground by increased repression as student activists were interrogated or arrested.³⁹

³⁸ For a collection of documents relating to the struggle against the censoring of student publications see: Ilija Moljković, 'Dokumenti: Slučaj Student (I)', *Republika*, 183, 1998, <http://www.yuope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/98/183/> and Ilija Moljković, 'Slučaj Student (Drugi Deo)', *Republika*, 184-185, 1998, <http://www.yuope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/98/185/>, both URLs accessed on 1 October 2006. For a collection of documents and some analysis of the events pertaining to the 'Belgrade Eight' see Nebojša Popov, *Contra Fatum: Slučaj grupe profesor filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu 1968-1988*, Niro 'Mladost', Beograd, 1989. For an account of these events in English, see –Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1977, pp.225 - 232

³⁹ For the repression of the student movement see Sher, *Praxis*, pp. 228-230, Popov, *Contra Fatum*, pp. 105-111 and Dević, *Forging of Socialist Nationalism and its Alternatives*, pp. 59-60

In part, this repression was a response to the movements of the late 1960s. In March 2006, Sonja Licht reflected on the link between June 1968 and the repression of the 1970s:

‘(1968) had a very serious effect on Serbian and Yugoslav society. But at the same time it also did something that we simply have to face; it shook the leadership and instead of pushing them into a more liberal, democratic policy, in fact it pushed them in a more conservative policy. Because they got afraid.’⁴⁰

A significant student movement was not to re-emerge in Belgrade until the epoch of Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s.

⁴⁰ Interview with Sonja Licht, 3 March 2006

Chapter 2 – Democracy, class and exclusion in Belgrade June

1968

Year of the Barricades: 1968 movements

The discourse of democracy that students in Belgrade evoked in June 1968 bore a distinct resemblance to the self-management rhetoric of the Yugoslav regime, but was informed by the international ideas of the New Left and student movements of Europe. The global rise of the New Left project in the late 1960s was taken up with relative continuity from Berkley to Paris to Prague and certainly to Belgrade. As Katsiaficas has argued: ‘the New Left was a global movement which sought to decentralize and redistribute world resources and power at a time when their centralization had never been greater. Of course, the movement developed within the nation-state, not by its own choosing but because of the national organization of political power.’¹ National conditions shaped specific movements, but the ideas that informed and inspired these movements were international and transnational.

Self-management democracy was one of the common principles or demands of this global movement. In southern and Eastern Europe, working class and student activists organized around the demands for self-management. These demands should not be confused with the top-down Yugoslav regime’s form of ‘self-management’, for, as I will show, in many ways the Yugoslav regime merely relied on the rhetoric of self-management, without its realization. In the late 1960s in France and Italy, factory

¹ George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, South End Press, Boston, 1987, p. 20

occupations called for greater worker participation in production, as did Czechoslovak reformers.² This was also a concern of the respective students movements, particularly in France, where students saw self-management as the first step towards a classless society.³ In 1968 the Belgrade dissident, Svetozar Stojanović argued that ‘the French workers did not occupy the factories only in order to negotiate questions of distribution; they were also interested in questions of management...Redistribution of power, and not only redistribution of wealth, entered into their demands.’⁴ Self-management was the order of the day in the late 1960s, as Belgrade dissidents were well aware.

The students in Belgrade were certainly well informed about the emerging social movements. Yugoslav newspapers reported sympathetically about the student movements in France and Czechoslovakia and letters of solidarity were sent to Polish and German students from Belgrade University.⁵ Furthermore, Yugoslavia had already seen the emergence of a new left-inspired movement when a major confrontation between students and the regime occurred in Croatia.⁶

² Gerd-Rainer Horn, ‘The Working Class Dimension of 1968’, in Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenny (eds.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, Lanham, 2004, pp. 101-113 and Ali’s chapter on the Prague Spring in Tariq Ali, *1968 and After: Inside the Revolution*, Blond and Briggs, London, 1978, pp. 32-54

³ Bertram Gordon, ‘The Eyes of the Marcher: Paris, May 1968 – Theory and Its Consequences’, in Gerard J. DeGroot (ed.), *Student Protest: The Sixties and after*, Longman, London, 1998, pp. 45-46

⁴ Svetozar Stojanović, *Between Ideals and Reality: A Critique of Socialism and its Future*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 72

⁵ The following samples of the banner headlines of the major Belgrade newspaper, *Politika*, shows how informed students were of events in Czechoslovakia and France: L. Davičo, ‘Student Disquiet in France – The Government Dismisses Ultimatum’, 9 May 1968, p. 1, L. Davičo, ‘A Great Commotion in France – Workers occupy factories’, 17 May 1968, pp. 1-2 and an interview with President Tito appeared under the heading ‘Czechoslovakia desires to freely and quickly move ahead’, 24 May 1968, p. 1.

⁶ After seizing the Presidency of the Union of Students of Zagreb University in 1967, Vesna Gudelj-Velaga, a student of Philosophy, began to use her position to articulate a New Left program. Viewing students as a revolutionary force that could begin to transform Yugoslav society, Gudelj-Velaga focused on the material concerns of students in Zagreb, endorsing a petition protesting the increase in prices of University hostels. In response to this, she was expelled from the League of Communists and subsequently ousted from the Presidency of the Union in January 1968. See Ralph Pervan, *Tito and the Students: The University and the University Student in Self-managing Yugoslavia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978, pp. 146-148

Not only did students read reports about student and workers movements in other parts of the world, but they also had access to many of the ideas, both international and domestic that drove these movements. Zagorka Golubović, in an interview in March 2006, noted that the intellectual openness of Yugoslavia was one of the positive consequences of the break with Stalin in 1948:

‘At the University we had so many international professors from abroad to give lectures...In particular the Faculty of Philosophy...We had analytic philosophy, we had Marxist philosophy, we had Durkheim’s philosophy, we had everything at the philosophical and sociological department...At that time the complete works of Trotsky were translated and you could find them in every bookshop’⁷

The participation of students in the yearly *Praxis* Korčula Summer Schools, held in Croatia and attended by numerous New Left thinkers also testifies to the spread of ideas from the international movements to Belgrade students.⁸ Theories of the New Left, particularly those of Herbert Marcuse, who was popular amongst the students of Belgrade, saw a role for students and other oppressed communities as sparks for a working class revolution.⁹

⁷ Interview with Zagorka Golubović, 3 March 2006

⁸ Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1977, pp. 215-217

⁹ As the Hungarian philosopher György Markus in an interview in June 2006, told me, in reference to the strong student presence at the Korčula Summer School of August 1968, ‘Marcuse was a football star!’ Interview with György Markus, 1 June 2006. A copy of Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* was translated into Serbo-Croatian and published in Sarajevo in 1968; see Herbert Marcuse, *Čovek jedne dimenzije: Rasprave o ideologiji razvijenog industrijskog društva*, Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo, 1968. For an analysis of Marcuse’s thoughts, see Douglas Kellner, ‘Introduction: Radical Politics, Marcuse and the New Left’ in Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Herbert Marcuse: The collected papers of Herbert Macuse, Volume Three: The New Left and the 1960s*, Routledge, London, 2005, pp. 1-37

Broadly speaking, a common project of anti-authoritarianism and self-management united the European student movements of 1968.¹⁰ The position of Belgrade students, in a country supposedly governed by self-management, but where class divisions had become more stark and global struggles from Vietnam to Poland inspired dissent, meant that the movement negotiated with the state in a very different environment from the rest of the world. Even in other communist countries, such as Czechoslovakia, where the regime did not use a discourse of ‘self-management’ but rather state control, workers self-management could be presented as a move towards greater democracy.¹¹ Belgrade students, however, were in the complicated situation of struggling against a regime that used the same language of self-management socialism as much of the international New Left movement.

Praxis: Yugoslav Dissent

Accompanying the influence of New Left ideas was the specific criticism of Yugoslav conditions by the opposition group, *Praxis*. *Praxis* was a group of critical intellectuals who used their self-titled journal and their academic positions to formulate a critique of all ‘really existing’ forms of socialism through a reappraisal of critical Marxism. The trajectory of this approach put *Praxis* in direct confrontation between western capitalism, Soviet Stalinism and, on numerous occasions, the Yugoslav bureaucracy.¹² In the late 1960s, for example, dissidents like Miladin Životić, Svetozar Stojanović and Mihailo Marković accused the bureaucracy of perverting Marxist theory

¹⁰ Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, pp.37-47, 49-55, 59-73

¹¹ Harold Gording Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, pp. 579-585 and Karel Kovanda, ‘Czechoslovak Workers’ Councils (1968-1969)’, *Telos*, 28, 1976, pp. 36-55

¹² See the chapter on *Praxis*’ critique of Yugoslav socialism in Sher, *Praxis*, pp. 151-193

to justify accumulating wealth at the expense of the working class. Any talk of workers democracy, they argued, was merely a veneer, masking the exploitation by the bureaucracy.¹³ An example of this could be seen in the 1965 reforms, which were cast in the democratic Marxist language as ‘the withering away of the state’ but which actually further enriched the bureaucracy.¹⁴

For *Praxis*, the removal of the bureaucratic class and the triumph of real self-management socialism were to be found in radical working class revolt. In the words of Danko Grlić, ‘only democracy – that is, socialism, self-management – can be considered to be the antithesis of Stalinism and the product of its destruction. In their essence, democracy, socialism and self-management are identical concepts.’¹⁵ The distinction implicit between the regime’s conception of self-management and that of *Praxis* was one of direction. Whilst the regime sought to introduce self-management from above, *Praxis* understood genuine self-management to come from below, from ‘man’s everyday actions upon the world’.¹⁶ Dissidents contrasted the ‘really-existing’ form of self-management, which enshrined bureaucratic privilege, with genuine, radical, working class democracy.¹⁷ For example, Grlić warned of the regime’s ‘very dangerous means of deception, of spreading false illusions that by the mere “introduction” of self-

¹³ See, for example, Miladin Životić, ‘Is equality a moral value of our society?’ *Praxis (International Edition)*, 4, 1966, pp. 395-404, Mihailo Marković, ‘Personal Integrity in Socialist Society’, *Praxis (International Edition)*, 4, 1966, p. 410 and Svetozar Stojanović, *Between Ideals and Reality*, pp.42-56

¹⁴ The enrichment of the bureaucracy after the 1965 reforms did not go unnoticed by the mass of the Yugoslav working class, as Zukin’s interviews in 1970-71 indicate. Sharon Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito: Theory and Practice in Yugoslav Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1975, pp.99-115

¹⁵ Danko Grlić, ‘Not Liberally, but Democratically’ in Gerson S. Sher (ed.), *Marxist Humanism and Praxis*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1978, p. 120

¹⁶ Stojanović, *Between Ideas and Reality*, p. 121

¹⁷ Zagorka Golubovic writing in the aftermath of the Titoist state, criticised the way in which self-management was introduced from above and not from the grassroots workers movement. See Zagorka Golubović, ‘Contemporary Yugoslav Society: A Brief Outline of its Genesis and Characteristics’, in John Allcock, John Horton and Marko Milivojević (eds.), *Yugoslavia in Transition*, Berg, New York, 1992, p. 122

management and self-government, by enactment or decree we have earned the right to independent government, thereby negating the need for any sort of rebellion.’¹⁸ In the aftermath of 1968, this warning would have had particular resonance with those students disillusioned with the broken promises of Tito’s 9 June speech.¹⁹

Thus, at the time of the student movement of the 1960s, ideas critical of the regime, that sought to realize the socialist project through a renewed faith in working class activity were present both from outside (the students movements of Europe and New Left philosophers like Marcuse) and inside Yugoslavia (*Praxis*). The latter’s analysis and critique of the particular conditions inside Yugoslavia meant that their ideas resonated with the critical student population. The involvement of so many members of *Praxis* in the events of June 1968 and the solidarity between professors and students in the repression that followed also points to a close transmission of radical ideas.²⁰

Democracy and Exclusion

The alternative concept of self-management socialism that was articulated by students in Belgrade June 1968 was one that sought the elimination of the exclusion of the working class. Students closely associated democracy with the participation of the

¹⁸ Grlić, ‘Not Liberally, but Democratically’, in Sher (ed.), *Marxist Humanism and Praxis*, p. 120

¹⁹ In June 1969, students at the Faculty of Philosophy released a document entitled ‘3000 Words’, investigating the extent to which the demands of June 1968 were being realized. The document was very critical of the regime’s empty promises. See Editorial board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun – Lipanj 1968, Dokumenti*, Praxis, Zagreb, 1971, pp. 442-447

²⁰ Dragoljub Mićunović was a key speaker of the student movement and, along with, Svetozar Stojanović, addressed the Faculty occupations. See pictures of the events the in final (unnumbered) pages of Nebojša Popov, *Contra Fatum: Slučaj grupe profesor filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu 1968-1988*, Niro ‘Mladost’, Beograd, 1989. Ljubomir Tadić wrote an article for a protest edition of *Student*. Ljubomir Tadić, ‘Revolucija i sloboda’, *Student*, 11 June 1968, p. 2. Zagorka Golubović was present at the first demonstrations on the 3 June, as she communicated to me in an interview on 2 March 2006. Golubović, along with Miladin Životić also sided with students in their dispute with Rudi Supek at Korčula in 1971, see Sher, *Praxis*, pp. 215-216. The subsequent repression of the students of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Belgrade Eight lead to collaboration between students and professors, Popov, *Contra Fatum*.

working class in the everyday management of society. The reforms of 1965, by increasing unemployment and social inequalities were seen as further excluding workers from social government to the benefit of the bureaucracy.²¹

The commitment to self-management and the working class stemmed from students' critical Marxist approach to the problems of 1960s Yugoslav life. Students understood their society as plagued by social stratification and they often referred to the bureaucracy, either explicitly, or in ways that suggested it was a ruling class.²² Students were already well versed in the language of socialism. Student unions, including the Student Federation at Belgrade University, functioned as schools of Marxism. Their role was to provide the 'correct' ideological education by putting on forums and discussions. It should be noted that, according to Pervan, by the late 1960s these efforts were a resounding failure. Students described them as too dull. Discussions, when they did draw in students, were cut short or censored.²³ Nonetheless, these institutions provided a foundation of Marxist ideas, of class politics, from which a radical layer of students could engage with more critical ideas.

These critical ideas were not hard to come by in the 1960s. Surrounded by the influence of *Praxis*, the New Left, the international student movement and anti-Stalinist Marxists, such as Marcuse and Trotsky, Belgrade students were able to articulate an alternative form of class politics, one that took Marxism as its foundation but broke with Stalinism and Titoism. This was the substance of the alternative, radical discourse of self-

²¹ See the students' letter to a factory printed in Editorial board of *Praxis* (ed.), *Jun – Lipanj 1968*, p. 102

²² One of the slogans hung from the university was 'Down with the Red Bourgeoisie!' Also, see the interviews done with students and professors in D. PlameniĆ, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', *New Left Review*, 54, March-April 1969, pp. 66-73

²³ Editorial board of *Praxis* (ed.), *Jun – Lipanj 1968, Dokumenti*, *Praxis*, Zagreb, 1971, pp. 111-151

management socialism that the regime struggled to marginalize during the occupation of June 1968. Pearlman sums up the sense of this alternative program:

The conquest of state power by a political party which uses a Marxist vocabulary in order to manipulate the working class must be distinguished from another, very different historical task: the overthrow of commodity relations and the establishment of socialist relations. For over half a century the former has been presented in the guise of the latter. The rise of a “new left” has put an end to this confusion; the revolutionary movement which is experiencing a revival on a world scale is characterized precisely by its refusal to push a party bureaucracy into state power, and by its opposition to such a bureaucracy where it is already in power.²⁴

The Red University of Karl Marx

That students in Belgrade June 1968 were committed to Marxism is hardly surprising considering they hung banners of Marx, Lenin and Tito on their walls, quoted Lenin in poems, and on the second day of the occupation, they renamed their University the ‘Red University of Karl Marx’ (*Crven Univerzitet Karla Marksa*).²⁵ Their critical Marxism, however, went much further than slogans and banners. For the students, the exclusion of the working class was more than a concern for material egalitarianism; Students were concerned that the *universal* interests of the working class were not dominating society, but instead the *particular* interests of the bureaucracy. This was a clear application of Marxist politics, which described the working class as the universal

²⁴ Fred Pearlman, *Revolt in Socialist Yugoslavia June 1968*, Black and Red, Detroit, 1973, p. 6

²⁵ See Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 163 and 151

class - the only class able to bring about socialism - to the Yugoslav situation. In the 4 June edition of *Student*, a student, responding to the accusation of the press that students were only protesting about their own material concerns, wrote: 'All those who participated in the meeting at the demonstration well know that the students cheered another orientation – the struggle for those *universal interests of the working class*.'²⁶ In a letter to Tito, composed at the Faculty of Philosophy on 4 June, students wrote: 'we are bitter that bureaucratic interests long to break the brotherhood and unity of our people. We will not allow them to bring down the opposition of the workers and students. *The interests of the working class are universal interests and these are the only true interests of socialism*.'²⁷ When students, writing to a local factory, proclaimed to the workers 'your interests are our interests!' they were announcing their commitment to the same universal interests of the working class, the interests of socialism.

The interests of the working class were universal; the interests of the bureaucracy were particular and worked against democracy. In the same letter quoted above, students announced to their working class audience: 'we want, together with you and along with the support of the whole citizenry (*građanstva*), to build a socialist society with our knowledge inspiration and love.'²⁸ The implication was that, under the leadership of the bureaucracy, socialism was *not* being built. An even more provocative attack from the students was an article entitled 'Our Dilemma: Proletariat or bureaucracy?' printed in *Student* during the occupation.²⁹ The idea that the bureaucracy was a hindrance to socialism was expressed by a student, attacking the Yugoslav ambassador to the UN: 'In

²⁶ Đ. Vuković, 'Poziv', *Student (special edition)*, 4 June 1968, p. 1

²⁷ Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 84

²⁸ Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 102

²⁹ Anon, 'Naša dilemma proletarijat ili birokratija', *Student*, 4 June 1968, p. 4

short (the ambassador) said that the Viet Cong and the United States are equally guilty in Viet Nam. I am insulted by that! A more reactionary view of the world revolution one could not imagine!³⁰ The substance of the students' critique was that the bureaucrats, although they used the rhetoric of socialism, had their own agenda that held back socialism. True democracy, genuine self-management socialism, had to be brought about by the workers, peasants, and students.³¹ Some students even went so far as to criticise Tito, chanting: 'Down with the pipe and poodle', referring to a depiction of the President with his pipe and dog.³²

Solution: Direct Self-Management

According to the students' alternative, radical conception of democracy the development of direct/immediate (*neposredan*) self-management – meaning the direct participation of the working class in government and the elimination of the bureaucratic managers – was the development of democracy. On the first day of the occupation, students' list of demands called for 'the establishment of *real* democracy and self-management relations.'³³ Similarly, when responding to the poor material conditions of the university, students demanded that: 'in accord with the improvement of material conditions of work it is necessary to immediately work out and further develop forms of

³⁰ PlameniĆ, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', p. 72

³¹ Although they don't occupy a place in the most immediate sense of the students program, students certainly referred to the peasants as being their 'comrades'. For example, one poem uses the line 'Peasants – Workers – Students!' Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 102. Interestingly, the term students in 1968 used for the peasants, '*seljaci*', became a pejorative term in the 1990s and was often used by student demonstrators in 1996-97 to insult the supporters of the regime and to define their own identity as urban, democratic progressive 'citizens' surrounded by a sea of provincial, nationalist 'peasants'. See Stef Jansen, 'The Streets of Beograd: Urban space and protest identities in Serbia', *Political Geography*, 20, 2001, pp. 35-55

³² Pervan, *Tito and the Students*, p. 25

³³ PlameniĆ, 'The Belgrade Student Insurrection', p. 62

direct self-management particular to the students.’³⁴ Even the conservative *Politico-Action Program* demanded that ‘measures must be adopted for a more rapid development of self-management relations in our society, and for removing bureaucratic forces which are hampering the development of our social community as a self-management community of working people.’³⁵ The belief in a reassertion of direct self-management continued well into the 1970s and was present in the final struggle of the student movement in January 1974.³⁶

Their class politics meant that Belgrade students, angry at their poor material conditions, directed that anger into a critique of the bureaucracy, not, for example, into a nationalist critique, as was to develop in later years in Zagreb.³⁷ This class critique, and opposition to nationalism, was articulated in other cities of Yugoslavia in 1968. At the University of Zagreb, for example, meetings were held in solidarity with the Belgrade students. When Croatian party bureaucrats attempted to warn students against expressing solidarity with their historical exploiters, the Serbs, they were shouted off the platform with chants of ‘Beograd-Zagreb!’³⁸

In this struggle between the bureaucracy and the working class (and the peasants and students), the University played an important role. In the days immediately following the end of the strike, student meetings were still held in the Faculty of Philosophy.

³⁴ Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 158

³⁵ Dennison Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt: What happened when Belgrade’s young cats were put amongst the party pigeons, Part 1: A week in June’, *American Universities Field Staff Reports, Southeast Europe Series*, 15:4, 1968, p. 23

³⁶ For example, a document composed by a meeting of Faculty of Philosophy students from Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana claimed that ‘we are for...the kind of self-management socialism in which the working class through the workers’ democracy of the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat will decisively smash all forms of exploitation, monopoly and privilege.’ Popov, *Contra Fatum*, p. 135

³⁷ Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1977, pp. 287-307

³⁸ Ana Dević, *The Forging of Socialist Nationalism and Its Alternatives: Social and Political Context in Intellectual Criticism in Yugoslavia Between the Mid-1960s and 1992*, PHD Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2000, p.58

During one of these meetings a speaker addressed a journalist from the state newspaper, who was in the audience: ‘We here are for the real power in the hands of the working class... you are not socialist and you are not creating socialism. Perhaps we have no way to stop you. But we will attempt to build a truly critical university to help the working class to understand what you are doing in its name.’³⁹ Students in Belgrade, as in other European capitals in 1968, also demanded greater intake of students from peasant and working class backgrounds.⁴⁰ The purpose of the university was to assist in the class struggle by providing the working class with a critique of really existing conditions.

Students’ radical alternatives vs. Bureaucrats’ reforms

During the events of June 1968, Rusinow wrote: ‘Despite the obvious fears of many in the Titoist establishment to the contrary, most of the student rebels clearly believed that their society should be reformed, not torn down.’⁴¹ His position clashes with the discourse of class struggle that I have uncovered above. According to the radical democracy put forward in June 1968, the bureaucracy was not a stain on an otherwise flawless socialist system, but rather the force holding back the development of such a system. Rusinow arrived at his conclusion because he failed to distinguish the student activists’ project of self-management from that of the regime. Students were connected to the critical, anti-Stalinist Marxism and New Left ideologies of the international student movements. They did not see their society as socialist, but as exclusivist, as ruled by a

³⁹ Plamenić, ‘The Belgrade Student Insurrection’, p. 73

⁴⁰ For an English translation of these demands see Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student revolt...part 1’, p. 22. French student activists similarly demanded an increased intake of working class students: Gordon, ‘The Eyes of the Marcher: Paris, May 1968 – Theory and Its Consequences’, in DeGroot (ed.), *Student Protest*, pp. 45-46

⁴¹ Rusinow, ‘Anatomy of a Student Revolt’...part 1’, p. 2

self-serving bureaucracy excluding the working class from positions of power. The students' program of self-management called for the destruction of this exclusion, which they saw as necessary for building socialism. Rusinow, by failing to acknowledge the influence of critical Marxism on the students, forced their conception of democracy into the existing debates within the League of Communists – the result, as he argued, was that, as the regime organs inside the occupation tried to pull students behind their program for reform, students' demands 'matured' i.e. became less radical.⁴² Such an account of events denies the alternative that the student movement of the Belgrade June was forging – a self-management socialism that was neither Stalinist nor Titoist. Tito's speech, whilst formally supportive of the more radical students' program was, in reality, a reassertion of the regime's discourse of democracy. The radical 'Down with the Red Bourgeoisie' of the students was replaced with the official line of reform, behind which lurked the particular interests of the bureaucracy. Despite the fact that a handful of Yugoslav scholars, such as Svetozar Stojanović, highlighted the students' opposition to the Yugoslav regime, contemporary scholars have continued to deny the radical students' alternative.⁴³ In her history of Serbian intellectual dissent, Jasna Dragović-Soso argued that for students 'the main long-term consequence of the repression of the 1970s was that it dashed any remaining hopes that the Yugoslav system was reformable from within.'⁴⁴ Similarly, the historian John Allcock characterizes the Belgrade student movement of 1968 as aiming for 'radical economic liberalization'.⁴⁵ Today, many Belgrade students

⁴² Rusinow, 'Anatomy of the Student Revolt...Part 1', p. 20

⁴³ Svetozar Stojanović, 'The June Student Movement and Social Revolution in Yugoslavia', *Praxis (International Edition)*, 3-4, 1970, p. 399

⁴⁴ Jasna Dragović-Soso, 'Saviours of the Nation' *Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*, Hurst and Company, London, 2002, p. 49

⁴⁵ John Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, p. 273

say that in 1968 students ‘demanded more communism!’⁴⁶ I have shown above that the radical students’ alternative, forged in the June 1968 occupation was more than a reformist trend in Stalinism, as these scholars would have us believe.

Race, Gender and Exclusion in the Belgrade June

Before leaving behind the events of the Belgrade June 1968, it is important for the purpose of my later comparison with discourses in the 1990s, to interrogate the students’ concept of democracy for ways in which the categories of race or gender were implicitly or explicitly excluded in the discourse of working class democracy forged by Belgrade’s students.

For a country such as Yugoslavia, torn apart by ethnic conflict in the 1990s, it is interesting (and refreshing) that the concept of democracy forged by students in 1968 was a pan-Yugoslav one. In solidarity with those in Belgrade, students from all the Yugoslav republics, except Macedonia, held meetings, sent letters of support or organized demonstrations.⁴⁷ Students even criticised the bureaucracy as the cause of nationalism, a view that was voiced in both Belgrade and Zagreb.⁴⁸ Although a nationalist movement took hold in Zagreb in the years following 1968, generally Yugoslav students in 1968 channelled their anger regarding poor material conditions into an anti-bureaucratic class

⁴⁶ This was told to me by a number of people I spoke to in Belgrade when they asked what I was researching. One interviewee related that ‘other students around the world were against their governments, ours demanded more communism!’ Interview with Miroslav Marić, 22 February 2006

⁴⁷ In Serbia protests took place in Čačak, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Niš and Subotica, also in the capital of Montenegro, Titograd, in Bosnia actions happened in Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka, in Croatia in Split, Zagreb and Rijeka and in Slovenia in Ljubljana and Maribor. See relevant chapters in Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, pp. 75-76, 123-138, 335-336

⁴⁸ Dević, *The Forging of Socialist Nationalism and Its Alternatives*, p.58, also see Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p.84

politics. Only in Kosovo, where Albanians made up the majority of the population, did the anger provoked by material concerns realize itself in a nationalist project.

In Prishtinë in November 1968, five months after the Belgrade June, violent demonstrations at the University of Prishtinë voiced demands for greater autonomy and recognition of national freedoms – the granting of republic status to Kosovo and the right for students to be taught in Albanian.⁴⁹ As far as I can tell, the students in Belgrade did not mention this issue at all. Kosovo Albanians, who suffered particularly brutal repression at the hands of the secret police from 1948 to 1966, when the powers of the secret police were curbed, were already very excluded from the Yugoslav system.⁵⁰ Yet there was no reference in the Belgrade June to such an oppressed minority. Most of the interviewees I spoke with in 2006 either did not know about the student movement in Kosovo in 1968 or simply replied ‘it was not the topic of ’68.’⁵¹ Jelka Imširović’s recollections were the most revealing: ‘we were told about the student demonstrations in Kosovo. We felt a certain understanding for the social character of the protest. But we were not really informed about the concrete situation.’⁵² It seems that the lack of reference to Kosovo and the struggle of the Albanian population in the Belgrade students’ conception of democracy should not be seen as an exclusion of this minority, but rather a lack of knowledge of events in the region.

⁴⁹ Yugoslavia consisted of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia) and two autonomous provinces, both a part of Serbia (Kosovo and Vojvodina). Although Kosovo was to gain greater freedoms, particularly after 1974, it was never considered as having equal status of a Republic. Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia: 1962-1991*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992, pp. 40-78. For a history of the 1968 movement in Kosovo and the events leading up to it see Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, pp.162 – 170. For an interesting first person account of the Kosovo November, see Mary Motes, *Kosova-Kosovo: Prelude to War 1966-1999*, Redland Press, Homestead, 1999, pp.101-110

⁵⁰ Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, pp. 162-165

⁵¹ Interview with Zagorka Golubović, 2 March 2006

⁵² Interview with Jelka Imširović, 3 March 2006

A way in which these two protests do intersect is in their common use of dominant global discourses of struggle. For Belgrade students, it was the student movements of other European states that inspired their movement, whereas the Albanian students of Kosovo intersected with the socialist-inspired, anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s – such as those of Algeria or Vietnam. Students at the University of Prishtinë, seeing their struggle as one against a Serbian colonial power, idealized the socialist nature of Albania. Mary Motes, present for the Prishtinë winter of 1968, recorded one students' admiration for Albania: 'power is gone from hoxhas and priests. Women are free...The Albanian Workers Party has electrified the villages. No, there are no cars but Enver Hoxha does not have a car! That is real Communism!'⁵³ In a similar way as the Belgrade students criticised the bureaucracy for holding back socialism, the students of Prishtinë contrasted the Titoist reality with an idealized, socialist Albania. There needs to be much more research into the relationship between the left-wing student dissent in Belgrade between 1966 and 1974 and the nationalist Albanian protests in Prishtinë in November 1968, particularly in the way they intersected with international discourses of resistance.⁵⁴

The extent to which exclusion based on gender was a part of the students' conception of democracy is just as difficult to deduce. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which later became the Yugoslav League of Communists, saw the

⁵³ Motes, *Kosova-Kosovo*, p. 87

⁵⁴ It may be the case that the Prishtinë student protest drew more from Albanian nationalism – which utilized the language of socialism – than from the anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s. A socialist-nationalism and idealization of Albania informed the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1993, despite the move away from a socialist program amongst anti-colonial movements internationally. See Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000, pp. 114-116. My own attempts in February 2006 to examine the sources concerning the events in Prishtinë in November 1968 were thwarted by a power failure that made access to the basement/archive of the University of Prishtinë impossible or useless (as documents would have to be read by candlelight).

emancipation of women and gender equality to be bound up with the question of class. Thus, when the Communist Party seized power in 1945 the liberation of women was, ostensibly, of significant concern to the new social system. Nonetheless, by the 1950s it became clear that, despite advances in labour conditions and literacy, women were still excluded *en masse* from positions of power. It was not until the late 1970s, however, that this became a concern of independent feminist organizations, such as the Zagreb-based Women and Society.⁵⁵ Still, according to Ramet, concerns about gender equality were expressed at party congresses throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁶ It is surprising, then, that there is no evidence of any discussion on this issue in the student protest of June 1968 given its prominence in Yugoslav politics and presence in some comparable student protests of the same year.⁵⁷ Although women were not excluded from the Belgrade occupation and often took up important roles, the leadership of the movement was clearly dominated by men.⁵⁸ Partly, no doubt, this was a reflection of the social domination by men in Yugoslav society. There was also, however, a tendency to characterize the ‘working class’, with which the students proclaimed their solidarity, as masculine. They visited industrial factories dominated by the stereotypical, hardened male proletariat,

⁵⁵ Sabrina P. Ramet, ‘In Tito’s Time’, in Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1999, pp.89-98

⁵⁶ Ramet, ‘In Tito’s Time’, pp. 99-101

⁵⁷ Although it should be noted that in the French 1968 movement it seems that gender politics did not enter into the minds of protesters, Passerini’s work on gender subjectivity in Italy, 1968, shows that women identified and struggled as women, not just as workers or students. For discussion on the absence of gender politics in France see Kristen Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, pp. 155-156. For gender subjectivity in Italy 1968 see Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation, Italy, 1968*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover, 1996.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the pictures of student meetings and negotiations in Živojin Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi*, Grafički Atelje ‘Dereta’, Beograd, 1991, pp. 81-120

rather than the textile factories or administrative offices dominated by the female working class.⁵⁹

There was, however, another kind of exclusion based on gender, not so much concerning the actual events of 1968 but the way in which the protests have been remembered today. Frazier and Cohen, in their study of 1968 in Mexico and its historical narratives have highlighted the ways in which these narratives privilege the male leadership by focussing on certain events. They argue that the dominance of a masculine leadership narrative undermines the everyday activity of women participants.⁶⁰ Although much more work needs to be done in this area regarding the Belgrade June 1968, my own interviews suggest that a similar de-privileging of the everyday activism at the expense of the leaders' narrative has taken place. Sonja Licht, for example, occupied a central role in the Faculty of Philosophy Action Committee and was vital to ensuring student protesters had food and money to continue their occupation. However, she clarified her participation by saying: 'I was not among the speakers, I was simply...I can't say I didn't want to be visible, but I was never one of those people who were seeing themselves as those that had to lead by being the most visible.'⁶¹ As I noted above, much more work needs to go into understanding the ways in which women's participation may have become excluded in narratives of these events. Particularly because, as Frazier and Cohen argue, the de-privileging of women's experiences in 1968 events often de-privileges the

⁵⁹ For reports on what factories student delegations visited see Editorial Board of Praxis (ed.), *Jun-Lipanj 1968*, p. 89. For information on the female working class and the industries they dominated see Ramet, 'In Tito's Time', p. 98

⁶⁰ Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, 'Defining the Space of Mexico '68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and "Women" in the Streets', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83:4, 2003, pp.617-660

⁶¹ Interview with Sonja Licht, 3 March 2006

grassroots and everyday participation that were so central to the Belgrade students' alternative and radical conception of democracy.⁶²

⁶² Frazier and Cohen, 'Defining the Space of Mexico '68', p. 648

Chapter 3 – Milosevic, Student Protest and the Belgrade Winter of 1996-97

The situation of Belgrade students in 1996-97, when the city's streets were occupied for five months in a student strike, was considerably different from the 1960s. The Yugoslav federation had experienced a significant economic and social crisis during the 1980s and collapsed into civil war in 1991.¹ The war and UN sanctions exacerbated the economic crisis in Serbia in particular, sending inflation rates to ridiculous heights.² Slobodan Milošević had successfully channelled the militant, anti-bureaucratic working class movement that emerged in the 1980s into a Serbian nationalist project lead by himself and his Socialist Party of Serbia (formed out of the old League of Communists).³ The Socialist Party, because of this mass support, its monopoly on the media and its appropriation of massive resources from the old Titoist party, was able to maintain a monopoly of power when a multi-party parliamentary system was introduced in July 1990.⁴

Internationally, the rise of neo-liberalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist states had shifted global discourses of democracy. Western Capitalism had 'triumphed' over Eastern Communism. Communism came to be

¹ For an account of the economic crisis and civil war in Yugoslavia see Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*, Brookings Institution, Washington D.C, 1995.

² In July 1993 inflation reached 363 quadrillion per cent, Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000 pp. 267-270

³ Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the fall of Socialism*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 58-68

⁴ See Marija Obradović, 'The Ruling Party', in Nebojša Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2000, pp. 425-448 and Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 52

identified, in both the east and west, as totalitarianism and capitalism as democracy.⁵ This change in international discourses of democracy further isolated socialist-controlled Serbia, rendering it a remnant of the Cold-war era.

In this context of social crisis an active student movement had formed in the early 1990s in resistance to Milošević. In 1991, after police and tanks violently crushed protests demanding freedom of the press in Belgrade, students occupied the city centre for four days.⁶ Again, in June to July of 1992, Belgrade students took to the streets for a month, demanding Milošević's resignation.⁷ Although both the 1991 and 1992 student demonstrations were important moments of dissent beneath Milošević, the student protest that occurred in the Belgrade winter of 1996-97 left behind a wealth of information and represented the climax of years of student discontent, making it an excellent case study of discourses of democracy in 1990s Serbia.

The student strike that shut down Belgrade University for five months was sparked by Milošević's annulment of the November 1996 election results, which saw a significant transfer of power to the 'democratic' opposition. In the lead up to these elections, three of the largest opposition parties formed a coalition, *Zajedno* (Together), united on a platform of a "European" Serbia. Thomas, in his detailed history of politics under Milošević, records that *Zajedno* 'in their rhetoric and the symbolism they used, placed a strong emphasis on the 'European' and pro-Western orientation of the Serbian opposition forces involved... The leaders of the political parties spoke under the banner of

⁵ Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Disintegration of the Monolith*, Verso, London, 1992, pp. 1-8

⁶ For a record of events in the 1991 demonstrations see Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War*, Penguin Books, London, 1992, pp. 47-59 and Eric D. Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1999, pp. 34-43

⁷ Nebojša Popov, 'The University in an Ideological Shell', in Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 320-324

the European Union.’⁸ The coalition expanded as its campaign progressed, recruiting smaller opposition parties, the Independent Trade Union of Serbia (*Nezavistnost*) and Dragoslav Avramović, the former head of the National Bank of Yugoslavia who headed the campaign.⁹ Avramović’s participation in the coalition, although he was to drop out before the actual elections for unexplained reasons, was a further expression of the coalition’s ‘European’ discourse, as he was famous for his attempts at liberalizing the economy in 1993. May Serbs saw him as being able to secure the European economic integration of Serbia.¹⁰ This discourse of a democratic opposition that saw the hope for democracy in an imaginary ‘Europe’ was to have a significant influence on the student movement.

During the election campaign, *Zajedno* was given little coverage on the state media and attacked as lackeys of foreign powers by journalists. In addition, disagreement over the allocation of seats fuelled concerns over the longevity of the coalition and the responsibility of its members.¹¹ Thus, when the results of 3 November federal elections returned a resounding defeat for *Zajedno*, it was dispiriting but hardly surprising. The surprise was still in store. The local elections, returned on 17 November, showed a *Zajedno* victory in fourteen of Serbia’s cities, including central Belgrade. The regime, unwilling to renounce power, even on a local level, argued that irregularities had occurred during the polling and that the electoral commission would not recognize the *Zajedno* victory.¹² On 19 November, two days after the election results were announced (and annulled), *Zajedno*’s supporters took to the streets, firstly in the town of Niš and

⁸ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 264-265

⁹ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 274-278

¹⁰ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 274-276

¹¹ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 268-269

¹² Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 281-286

then in Belgrade and other regional centres. Five days after the first protest in Niš, the students of Belgrade and other major Universities around Serbia joined them, holding their own independent daily protests.¹³ Students made a conscious effort to distance themselves from political parties, even the ‘democratic’ opposition.

As in 1968, the student movement organized independently from the state. The Student Initiative Board, open to any students, provided ideas for the protest and the Main Board, made up of two representatives from each Faculty, organized the demonstrations. The Student Initiative Board in Belgrade was formed on 22 November 1996, calling for the official recognition of the votes and threatening to boycott their classes should their demand not be met.¹⁴ On 24 November, the Board appealed to their peers to join the protests and the next day students demonstrated on *Plato trg* (Plato Square, formerly *Studentski trg*). They announced that they were not providing support to the opposition parties but rather were struggling for democratic principles, namely the recognition of ‘the citizens’ will’. On 26 November, around 20,000 students gathered in front of the Faculty of Philosophy and committed themselves to a student strike until their demand was met.¹⁵

From the outset, the student movement was able to cohere around itself the support of wider sections of the population. Within their own walls, University staff

¹³ Olivera Pavlović and Milica Bogdanović, ‘The Chronology of the Protests in Serbia November ’96-March ’97’, *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>, accessed on 19 September 2006

¹⁴ For an examination of the organization of the student movement see: Anđelka Milić and Liljana Čičkarić, *Generacija u protestu: Sociološki portret učesnika Studentskog protesta 96/97 na Beogradskom univerzitetu*, Institut za sociološka istraživanja, Beograd, 1998, pp. 215-217

¹⁵ Student News Report, 26 November 1996, <http://www.yurope.com/mirrors/protest96/pmf/dnews/news/oldnews.htm> accessed on 22 September 2006. I will extensively use these Student News Reports throughout this chapter. To save space, I will shortlist them leaving out the website address of each report. All of the reports are linked to the single page, cited above in this footnote and were accessed between the 22 and 25 September 2006.

provided public support through speeches to the crowds who gathered on *Plato trg* each day, allowing material to be printed in their offices and by taking industrial action in sympathy with students.¹⁶ An avalanche of support for the students also came from outside the University, particularly from dramatic and performance groups such as the Actors' Association of Serbia who joined in the student protests on the second day.¹⁷ It was the students' 'apolitical' character that ensured them the support of the wider community. The independence of the students, their refusal to join with the political opposition and their disinterest in gaining state power, situated them in the tradition of other Eastern European 'civil society' movements, such as Prague's *Charter 77* or Poland's *Solidarnosc*. The student movement was seen as a pillar of Belgrade's civil society, the new paradigm of post-1968 Eastern European dissent, a point that I examine in greater detail below. On 28 November, the student movement took the chance to further assert the autonomy of their demonstrations when the rector of the University of Belgrade, Dragutin Veličković, in an interview on the state-controlled television station, *Radio-Televizija Srbije* (Radio-Television Serbia, RTS), claimed that university classes were proceeding normally and that only a handful of 'manipulated students' were involved in the protests. The next day the students added their own specific demands: the

¹⁶ For evidence of the participation of academics in the student protest see the programs for the daily actions on the Protest Site for the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, <http://www.yurope.com/mirrors/protest96/pmf/program/proglink.htm> accessed on 1 October 2006. Ivana Antić, who helped produce the *Protest Tribune*, told me that her professors printed the street press on their own equipment, Interview with Ivana Antić, 3 March 2006. On 3 February 1997, after police attacked students in the Faculty of Philosophy, professors at that Faculty held a weeklong strike in protest, see Pavlović and Bogdanović, 'The Chronology of Protests in Serbia', <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>

¹⁷ Milica Bogdanović, Ljiljana Milovanović and Miodrag Shrestha, 'Chronology of the Protest', in Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*, p. 213

resignations of the rector and the student vice-rector, Vladimir Đurđević, who supported the regime.¹⁸

'I want to live in the land of RTS' – The Media Blockade

The regime, somewhat shocked by the intensity of the demonstrations, seemed unsure as to how to respond and for the first days of the protests the state media outlets, *RTS* and the newspaper *Politika*, either ignored the demonstrations or brushed them aside as 'a handful of provocateurs and hoodlums'.¹⁹ Independent media such as the newspaper *Vreme* and youth radio stations *B-92* and *Radio Index* were the few outlets reporting the events. They, however, had a limited influence in comparison to the state media. As the demonstrations grew they became more difficult for the media to ignore completely and the condemnation of the protesters became more vehement.²⁰

Belgrade students, displaying their characteristic creativity, made light of the state propaganda. After a regime official had spoken out against the demonstrations or a media story had run accusing the students of being in the pocket of 'fascist powers', a barrage of placards referencing the accusations would be held aloft the following day. After a Socialist Party official denounced the students as 'pro-fascist', a placard appeared reading: 'I have an under-aged, retarded, impressionable, seduced, manipulated, pro-fascist temperament.'²¹ Another, responding to the propaganda on *RTS* portraying the optimistic, problem-free vision of Serbian life, declared: 'I want to live in the land of

¹⁸ Bogdanović, Milovanović and Shrestha, 'Chronology of the Protest', in Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*, p. 213

¹⁹ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 290-293

²⁰ Matthew Collin, *This is Serbia Calling: Rock'n'roll radio and Belgrade's underground resistance*, Serpent's Tail, London, 2001, p. 110

²¹ Collin, *This is Serbia Calling*, p. 111

RTS.²² Students, attacking the media blockade, also egged the offices of *RTS* and *Politika* and, during the evening news blew whistles and banged pots to drown it out.²³ The media blockade also relied on the silencing of the few independent media outlets. On 3 December, the independent radio stations, *B-92* and *Radio Index* had their transmissions jammed by the regime. This jam, however, only lasted a mere fifty hours before protest from the streets and the rest of the world forced the regime to back down.²⁴ The defeat of the media jam gave a sign of hope to students who realised that pressure from the streets could force the regime back.

Mobilizing regime forces – Rally ‘For Serbia’

By mid-December the media blockade was becoming a farce as Belgrade’s streets were occupied on a nightly basis; the regime was forced to rethink its strategy. As the protests continued into December and drew more support, Milošević mobilized his own forces. He called a protest on 24 December, ‘*For Serbia*’. This pro-regime rally on *Terazije trg* (Terazije Square) in Belgrade was seen by the opposition and student movements as an attempt by the regime to provoke violence during the visit of the Operation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), who had arrived in Belgrade to investigate the charge of electoral fraud.²⁵ Ten thousand buses had been used by the regime to carry government supporters from around the country into Belgrade. There they were given food and drink before listening to speeches by officials from the Socialist

²² Collin, *This is Serbia Calling*, pp. 110-116

²³ Collin, *This is Serbia Calling*, p. 126 and Ivana Spasić and Đorđe Pavićević, ‘Symbolization and Collective Identity in Civil Protest’, *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>, accessed on 19 September 2006

²⁴ Collin, *This is Serbia Calling*, p. 112

²⁵ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 306

Party and their ruling partner, the Yugoslav United Left, lead by Mira Marković, Milošević's wife and key power-sharer.²⁶ Despite the regime's best efforts, the pro-government turnout was dwarfed by the combined opposition and student demonstration by 60,000 to 300,000 respectively.²⁷ During the rally, fights broke out between the two groups. Police intervened by attacking opposition supporters, whilst government supporters fired pistols into the opposition crowd. By the end of the night fifty-eight demonstrators had been hospitalised, one student was in a critical condition after being shot and another died three days later.²⁸ The next day students returned to the square where Milošević's supporters had gathered, in order to 'decontaminate the area.'²⁹ There they used detergents, brushes and brooms to clean the square occupied by Milošević's supporters the previous night.³⁰

The Belgrade sociologists, Ivana Spasić and Đorđe Pavićević have ominously but appropriately dubbed the period immediately following 24 December 'the truncheon stage'.³¹ After the failure of the pro-regime rally, police warned students that any demonstrations that interrupted traffic would be broken up. The warnings by police, however, coincided with a backlash from the international community, including Bill Clinton, who condemned the violence of 24 December and urged Milošević not to resort

²⁶ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 302-303

²⁷ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 303

²⁸ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 304

²⁹ Student Street Report, 25 December 1996,

<http://www.yuope.com/mirrors/protest96/pmf/dnews/streets/oldstr.htm> accessed on 23 September 2006.

As with the Student News Reports, I will cite the main page of the Student Street Reports once. All the reports are available from the above site and were accessed between 22 and 25 September 2006.

³⁰ Ildiko Erdei, 'Alice's Adventures in Studentland: Narrative Multiplicity of the Student Protest', *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>, accessed on 19 September 2006

³¹ Spasić and Pavićević, 'Symbolization and Collective Identity in Civic Protest', <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>, accessed on 19 September 2006

to force to put down the demonstrations.³² In addition to this, the leadership of the student movement continued to emphasise the need for non-violence. This was partly a desire to avoid a violent confrontation with the regime (in which students' would clearly come off second best) but also referenced the tactics of other 'civil society' movements of both Eastern Europe and the west.³³ The result was a kind of stalemate; whilst the demonstrations were not broken up, undercover police increased their beating of protesters. Despite the increasing violence, the students and opposition remained confident. On 27 December, the OSCE ruled that Milošević's courts had annulled the election results undemocratically and that *Zajedno* had won in thirteen towns and eight districts of Belgrade itself.³⁴ News Years Eve on *Plato trg* saw tens of thousands of students come out to rally/party.³⁵ The students then joined the opposition rally/party on *Republika trg* (Republic Square), swelling the numbers to over half a million.³⁶ It was clear that the opposition forces had not dissipated.

The tide begins to turn...

Throughout January the police, attempting to intimidate the students, formed cordons and stopped them from marching. On the evening of 19 January the students retaliated with their action, 'Cordon vs. Cordon'. Toe to toe with the riot police, hundreds of students formed an opposing cordon, declaring their intention to remain until the police withdrew from the streets. The action, which lasted day and night for a week in the

³² Student News Report, 26 December 1996

³³ Jansen has noted the way in which, by advocating non-violent tactics, the student protests were 'inserting themselves into a global discursive practice of resistance.' Stef Jansen, 'The Streets of Beograd: Urban space and protest identities in Serbia', *Political Geography*, 20, 2001, p. 44

³⁴ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, p. 306

³⁵ Student Street Report, 31 December 1996

³⁶ Collin, *This is Serbia Calling*, pp.127-128

Belgrade winter, drew support from all walks of life – the Union of Dramatists, the Serbian Independent Association of Journalists, 17 deans from Faculties at the University of Belgrade, football stars, musicians, unionists from the independent trade union, the Lawyers' Chamber of Belgrade, the Association of the Film and Television Art Associates of Serbia and several other groups.³⁷ During 'Cordon vs. Cordon' students took the chance to show off their creativity and commitment to non-violence. They wore fancy dress, offered flowers to the police and drew pink hearts on their riot shields, held an open-air disco and even prepared a jazz band to 'blow away the cordon'.³⁸ The playful attitude of the students towards the police was meant as a contrast to the violent riots of the 1991 protests. After almost a week of camping in the Belgrade streets in subzero temperatures the students claimed a victory. At 4.00am on the morning of 27 January the police cordons withdrew entirely and the students held their walk through the city.³⁹

The withdrawal of the cordons did not, however, signal a shift in the regime's tactics. On the night of 2 February, cordons of police attacked opposition marches. Water cannons and batons cleared the streets, putting down any attempts at resistance.⁴⁰ During the attacks, small numbers of student and opposition protesters sought refuge in the faculties of Belgrade University. Police followed and beat and arrested them. Orders went out ordering mass arrests of any young people holding whistles (for drowning out the *RTS* news) and protest pins. Searches were also conducted on any young people in the city wearing sneakers.⁴¹ Rather than force protesters off the streets, the violence merely

³⁷ For information on the social groups that supported the students' cordon, see Student Street Report, 19-27 January

³⁸ Collin, *This is Serbia Calling*, p.126

³⁹ Student Street Report, 19 January, 1997

⁴⁰ Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 312-313

⁴¹ Student News Report, 3 February 1997

provoked larger demonstrations and the failure of the police assault to put down the protest forced Milosevic to draw up a law that would recognize the opposition victories. It was carried in the Serbian Parliament on 11 February before the opposition held their last rally on the 15 February.⁴² The end of the opposition protests did not signal the end of the student protests. Two of their original demands - the resignation of the rector and the student vice-rector – continued to bring thousands of students out into the streets.

'Treason!'

Throughout February, from the ranks of the government pressure was coming to bear on the Deans of the University, who were regarded as ties to securing an end to the student protests. The Deans, although they supported the students, knew that in order to protect themselves, they had to prove they held some control over the situation at the University. Thus, on 5 March, the Deans of the Faculty of Philosophy and Chemistry revealed to students that the rector would resign should students return to class.⁴³ The Main Board of the Student Protest accepted the agreement and ordered a return to classes on 7 March. The majority of the student protesters, however, condemned the agreement with cries of 'Betrayal!' As a report from the day explains:

"Treason" was the word of the day. That is what many students felt happened the previous night at the meeting of the Main Board with the Deans of the Belgrade University. The Deans had promised at one point that the students would decide when their demands had been met and when it was time for them to return to class, but now they were the ones

⁴² Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, pp. 314-315

⁴³ Student News Report, 5 March 1997

pressuring the students to return and as such end the protest...Many students felt betrayed by the decision last night, which was contrary to the belief that the students would not accept any compromises and endure until the end.⁴⁴

As a result of this betrayal, the return to classes was not as total as the Deans had hoped. Most Faculties simply held discussions between students and lecturers on the protests and their future, whilst some did not return to class at all, preferring to reject the decision of the Main Board and continue their protests inside Faculty buildings.⁴⁵ Just as they were uncorrupted by political-party interests, compromise and negotiation were not seen to be the jobs of the Belgrade student movement. The rejection of the return to classes by so many rank and file students testifies to how pervasive such an anti-compromise position was. This development in the student movement is not recorded in existing narratives because scholars have not examined the online sources from the student protest.

Despite the fact that the return to classes was only partial, the rector and student vice rector handed in their resignation on the same day, 7 March.⁴⁶ Their resignations, however, could only be officially accepted by a meeting of the Belgrade University Council, which was to meet on the 20 March. Meetings of students in Faculties decided, narrowly, to continue their protest until the resignations could be officially accepted. In response to the pressure to return to classes coming from the Minister of Education, 20,000 students marched on his office on 10 March.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Student News Report, 6 March 1997

⁴⁵ Student Street Report, 7 March 1997

⁴⁶ Student News Report, 7 March 1997

⁴⁷ Student News Report, 10 March 1997

The final ten days of the protest were marked by discussion on the future of the student movement. On 12 March, at a press conference in Budapest, Daliborka Uljarević, a spokesperson from the Main Board of the Student Protest, declared that the students of Serbia wished to continue the struggle for democracy but not at the expense of joining the existing political parties or forming one of their own. She added that, should the *Zajedno* coalition abuse its authority, students would oppose them as completely as they opposed Milošević.⁴⁸ On 16 March, four days before the protests ended, a student from the Main Board, Slobodan Homen, announced the founding of a Student Parliament, which would consider important questions for students and the University.⁴⁹ The Parliament was to consist of two students from each of the faculties of Belgrade University and two from each of the other Universities in Belgrade.⁵⁰ These efforts to institutionalise the student movement as a non-party, but politically active space, point to the ways in which ideas of ‘civil society’ building were taken up by Belgrade’s students.

On 19 March, the Belgrade University Council officially accepted the resignations of the rector and vice rector.⁵¹ The students celebrated the news the same evening with a victory march past the state media offices at 11.30pm through a snowstorm. The next day, celebrations were held on *Plato trg* and the final protest walk was undertaken but not before one last stunt.⁵² Before students left for their walk, they wrapped the building of the rector in white cloth, as construction workers do when renovating a building. On the cloth was printed, in both Serbian and English, ‘Student

⁴⁸ Student News Report, 12 March 1997

⁴⁹ Student News Report, 16 March, 1997

⁵⁰ Student News Report, 17 March 1997

⁵¹ Student News Report, 19 March 1997

⁵² Student Street Report, 19 March 1997

Protest 96/97' - 'To be continued...' ⁵³

⁵³ Student News Report, 20 March 1997

Chapter 4 – Civil Society, ‘Europe’ and the Belgrade Winter of

1996-97

To understand the student movement of 1996-97 and to assist in drawing out the points of contrast between it and the 1968 movement, I will examine the trends in post-1968 Belgrade dissent and, after 1990, opposition politics. Of concern here is firstly, the move away from a Marxist framework in the late 1970s and into the 1980s towards a project of creating civil society and defending human and civil rights. Secondly, in the period of multi-party politics the emergence of a discourse of democracy framed as a ‘return to Europe’. This ‘return to Europe’ incorporated the civil society project developed in dissident circles in the 1970s and 1980s into a discourse of civic, modern, liberal-capitalist and democratic European democracy. Students in 1996-97 were strongly influenced by both of these developments.

Civil Society

‘Civil society’ emerged in the dissident circles of Eastern Europe in the mid 1970s as a means of critiquing the totalitarian systems. Dissidents in these countries, such as the Czech Vaclav Havel and the activists around *Solidarnosc* in Poland, argued that the uniqueness of the Stalinist state lay in its repression of civil society. Seeing this as a direct consequence of Marx’s condemnation of ‘civil society’ as ‘bourgeois society’, they formally broke with the class politics of socialism and began to develop a politics concerned with the relationship between society, the state and, to a lesser extent, the

economy.¹ As opposed to the anti-state projects of many 1968 movements, the project of rebuilding civil society carried with it a conception of the infallibility of the state. One analyst, John Keane, pointed out the necessity of having *both* the state and civil society for a healthy democracy, noting that attempts to make one sphere dominate the other led to totalitarianism or ‘terror from below’.² Thus, the civil society project was one that saw democracy as balancing the relations between the state, the economy and civil society. In Eastern Europe, where totalitarianism had crushed the public sphere, the project of democracy was of righting this balance by strengthening civil society.

The ascendancy of this civil society project was not isolated to Eastern Europe but also accompanied the rise of new social movements in the west, such as the ecology or anti-nuclear movements. In the west, however, it was the dominance of the economy, not the state that was seen as dominating civil society. Nonetheless, the new social movements of the west were tied to the movements in Eastern Europe both by their rejection of class politics and their acceptance of the state but refusal to struggle for state power.³ The political historian, Geoff Eley, argues that in the years following 1968: ‘the hard-and-fast assumptions about the centrality of the working class were thrown into question.’⁴ By the 1980s, neoliberal economics was the global hegemony, and ‘socialism itself was a bad word.’⁵ Thus, the period from the 1970s onwards, in Belgrade as much as in Berlin or Budapest, was one characterized by the move away from an opposition

¹ For an examination of the shifts in Eastern European dissident ideology see Tony Judt, ‘The Dilemmas of Dissidence: The Politics of Opposition in Eastern Europe’, *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, 2:2, 1988, pp. 185-240

² John Keane, ‘Introduction’, John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, Verso, London, 1988, p. 25

³ Roberta Garner, *Contemporary movements and ideologies*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1996, p. 100

⁴ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe 1850-2000*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, p. 385

⁵ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, p. 455

politics of class and one based on strengthening the sphere of civil society against the encroachment of the state.

In Belgrade the shift towards the language of civil society took place around 1985. Inspired by the works of Keane, Habermas, Arato, Touraine and events unfolding in Poland, Belgrade dissidents worked on a project of socialist civil society, re-examining the basic Marxist tenets and reconceptualizing the relationship between the state (which was far from withering away) and civil society.⁶ As with other Eastern European dissidents, such as those involved with *Charter 77* in Czechoslovakia, those in Belgrade tied their project of civil society into a discourse of rights. Human and civil rights, it was argued, could not be ensured, when the state dominated civil society.⁷ In 1984 the author and nationalist dissident, Dobrica Ćosić, set up the Committee for the Defence of Freedom of Thought and Expression.⁸ This Committee, which included dissidents from many different and opposing ideological backgrounds, campaigned for civil and human rights throughout the 1980s and defended dissidents from all over Yugoslavia.⁹ As Dragović-Soso has argued, the discourse of rights allowed for a common language to unite the wide range of dissident ideas present in 1980s Belgrade: from the neo-Marxism of *Praxis*, to the nationalism of writers like Dobrica Ćosić to liberalism and even

⁶ Mojmir Križan, "'Civil Society' – A New Paradigm in the Yugoslav Theoretical Discussion', *Praxis International*, 9:1/2, April and July 1989, pp.152-156

⁷ Križan, "'Civil Society' – A New Paradigm in the Yugoslav Theoretical Discussion', p. 156. See also, Mihailo Marković, 'The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights', pp. 386-400, Ljubomir Tadić, 'The Marxist Critique of Right in the Philosophy of Ernst Bloch' pp. 422-429 and Kosta Čavoški, 'The Attainment of Human Rights in Socialism', pp. 365-375 all in *Praxis International*, 1:4, 1982

⁸ Ćosić was a member of the League of Communists before being expelled in 1968 for his defence of Kosovo Serbs. After his expulsion he became a key nationalist dissident. See Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998, pp. 197-204

⁹ Jasna Dragović-Soso, *'Saviours of the Nation' Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*, Hurst and Company, London, 2002, pp. 58-60

religious thought.¹⁰ The clearest example of this is the case of the eventual leader of the Radicals, Vojislav Šešelj, who was defended by Ćosić's committee, including its Marxist members, when he was imprisoned for espousing his Serbian expansionist project in 1984.¹¹

By the late 1980s, the dissident project of 1968 was completely abandoned, from its ashes a kind of social democracy or, as Stojanović terms it, 'a democratic left with a capitalist face', emerged.¹² The struggle to overthrow the bureaucratic class (and their state) was abandoned. A conception of civil society, an autonomous space from the state, took its place. As the Belgrade historian, Slobodan Divjak, has pointed out, in 1968 the project of dissidents and students was the collapsing of the state into society, through the empowerment of self-management organs, in the 1990s, it was balancing the power of the state and civil society.¹³

Civil society and the winter of 96/97:

A central idea of this civil society project in Eastern Europe was the politics of 'anti-politics' – the idea that civil society groups went beyond the dichotomy of left and right wing politics and were 'self-limiting', that is, they did not aim to take state power.¹⁴ As the historian, Alan Renwick has argued, there was not one conception of what 'anti-politics' meant, but rather the term changed depending on each dissident scene. His category of a civil society that 'engages the state from outside' best characterizes the

¹⁰ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, pp. 52-55

¹¹ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, pp. 57-59

¹² Svetozar Stojanović, *Serbia: The Democratic Revolution*, Humanity Books, New York, 2003, p. 45

¹³ Slobodan Divjak, 'Zbivanja studentske demonstracije '68 i '91', *Treći program*, Proleće 1990, p. 34

¹⁴ David Ost, *Solidarity the Politics of Antipolitics: Opposition and reform in Poland since 1968*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990, pp.6-17

Belgrade students' protest of 1996-97; they did not seek to enter, nor to ignore the state, but rather presented demands and hoped to reform it from outside.¹⁵

The 'anti-politics' of Belgrade students in the winter of 1996-97 was embodied in their slogan: '*ne levo, ne desno – već Pravo!*' (Not Left, Not Right – But Straight!).¹⁶ Testifying to the international dimension of this kind of politics, the new social movements in the west also distanced themselves from the traditional left-right wing dichotomy.¹⁷ Students in Belgrade saw their actions as defending democracy in a space quite separate to that of party politics. In response to Milošević's annulling of votes, students organized autonomously; they distanced themselves from political parties, refusing leaders of *Zajedno* a place on their platforms. Although this was partly an attempt to avoid the attacks of the press, who were keen to paint the students' actions as those of children, manipulated by the opposition coalition, it was also an articulation of a discourse of democracy uncorrupted by the struggle for state power.

In December 1996, an intellectual group, *Beogradski Krug* (Belgrade Circle), held a discussion with protesting students at the University of Belgrade. At this meeting intellectuals told the students that 'the support of an enormous number of intellectuals from around the world is a great responsibility, and thus the student protest must remain above the realm of political parties, directed towards the fight for legality and the right of

¹⁵ Alan Renwick, 'Anti-Political or Just Anti-Communist? Varieties of Dissidence in East-Central Europe and Their Implications for the Development of Political Society', *East European Politics and Societies*, 20:2, 2006, pp. 292-298

¹⁶ 'Pravo' has a more ambiguous meaning in that the word also means right, legal etc. For an examination of this slogan see Andjelka Milić, Lilijana Čičkarić, Mihajlo Jojić, 'A Generation in Protest', in Mladen Lazic (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade: Winter of Discontent*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 1999, p. 182

¹⁷ Paul D'Anieri, Claire Emst and Elizabeth Kier, 'New Social Movements in Historical Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, 22:4, July 1990, p. 452

citizens to decide about their lives.’¹⁸ The specific demands regarding the resignation of the Rector and Vice-Rector, taken up by the students on 28 November became a further means of distancing their protest from that of the opposition parties. Furthermore, it enabled students to incorporate the university into their program of civil society. As a writer for the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences’ protest bulletin, *Boom*, argued:

‘Our protest must not end with the fulfilment of only the first of our demands—the recognition of the electoral will of the voters. Until all our demands are fulfilled we cannot proclaim the protest finished. If we were to end our protest after the fulfilment of just one of our demands, we would betray our principles. It would turn out that we supported only the opposition...The concept of our protest is of nonparty character, because the interests of various parties have no place in the university.’¹⁹

Similarly, a document composed by students, professors and associates of the universities of Serbia argued that the social role of the university ‘consists in qualifying the members of the academic community for active participation in the building and functioning of a civil society and a legal and social state.’²⁰ Thus, the University was an institution of civil society, where party interests had no place. The student movement itself was conceived of in a similar way, as can be seen by the discussions amongst

¹⁸ ‘Belgrade Circle’, *Boom*, 7, 9 December 1996. An index of the *Boom* issues can be found on this website: <http://www.yuope.com/mirrors/protest96/pmf/boom/oldbilt.htm>. In future citations of *Boom* articles, I will not re-cite this website. The articles on this site I have accessed between 20 August and 10 September.

¹⁹ ‘A comment...’, *Boom*, 10, 18 December 1996

²⁰ Charter of the Universities of Serbia, printed in: *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>

students regarding the formation of a student parliament.²¹ When in March 2006, I asked Miroslav Marić about his thoughts regarding the importance of student movements today, he told me that such movements were central to educating students in how to channel their demands in the ‘acceptable’ way.²² The student movement was conceived as an important institution in civil society, protecting democratic principles and educating citizens in ‘democracy’.

As democracy was conceived as a balance of social institutions, it was not just civil society that had to be strengthened, but the state had to perform its correct role and had to be protected from a corrupt regime. It was in this sense that Svetozar Stojanović, writing in December 1996, spoke of Milosevic’s ‘conspiracy against the state’.²³ In contrast to the anti-state project of 1968, students in 1996-97, sought to strengthen the legality of the state. They struggled for a state that was unable to be manipulated by the ‘conspiracy’ of a corrupt regime. This can be seen in a letter sent to the Belgrade police department in response to the police violence of February 1997. In it, the author informs the department that the demonstrators they beat ‘are paying you to work CONSCIENTIOUSLY, EXPERTLY, ABOVE PARTY INTERESTS, and in accordance with the REGULATIONS.’²⁴ Similarly, a placard carried by a student read: ‘All judges to judge by the law, righteously, as it is stated in the Law, and not to judge in fear of the emperor.’²⁵

²¹ See the final paragraphs of Chapter 3 of this thesis.

²² Interview with Miroslav Marić, 22 February 2006

²³ Stojanović, *Serbia: The Democratic Revolution*, pp. 76-78

²⁴ Lawyers’ Chamber of Belgrade, ‘The Lawyers’ Chamber...’, *Boom*, 28, 7 February 1997

²⁵ A picture of this placard can be found at Students of the Faculties of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, ‘Streetwear – Part 1’, *Interesting Slogans from the Student Protest*, <http://www.yurope.com/mirrors/protest96/pmf/slike/slogans/slogans.htm> accessed on 4 September 2006

'Return to Europe'

The move towards a liberal, civil society project in the 1980s was incorporated into a discourse of democracy, which looked to the west, particularly Europe. This 'return to Europe' was developed in the multi-party period of post 1990 Belgrade. Belgrade dissidents and opposition politicians based their understanding of democracy around a discourse utilizing the symbols of the 'west', 'Europe' and 'civil society'. This occurred all over Eastern Europe, as the post-socialist anthropologist, Katherine Verdery, has pointed out: "Europe" was a vivid presence in the talk of dissidents; it remains, for many, the overarching symbol of the end of Party rule, signifying all the Western forms socialism suppressed – forms such as civil society. To build civil society, then, is to return to Europe, indicates one's adherence to an entire program of social change (or at least one's opposition to someone else's program).²⁶ The move by Belgrade dissidents in the 1980s away from a socialist project and to a 'civil society' project that accepted the state put the opposition onto a trajectory of liberalism and forced them to look to Europe as a suitable model. In 1989 the Belgrade dissident, Bogdan Denitch, argued that Yugoslavia needed to join the European Community to 'greatly strengthen the development of a civil society and autonomous institutions in Yugoslavia.'²⁷ Various opposition parties used this discourse of a 'return to Europe' as the rebuilding of civil society in the years of multi-party elections under Milošević.²⁸ This reached a high point with *Zajedno*, the members of which, during the campaign of 1996 presented themselves

²⁶ Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism and what comes next?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 104

²⁷ Bogdan Denitch, 'Yugoslavia: The Present Limits of Communist Reformation', *Praxis International*, 9:1/2. April and July, 1989, p. 177

²⁸ Two key examples of this are the *Demokratska Strakna* of Dragoljub Mićunović and, later, Zoran Đinđić and the *Gradski Savez Srbije* of Vesna Pešić. English translations of these parties' programs can be found in Vladimir Goati (ed.), *Challenges of Parliamentarism: The case of Serbia in the Early Nineties*, Institute of Social Science, Belgrade, 1995, pp. 303-306 and 293-299, respectively.

as standing for all that was 'European' in Serbia; all that was civic, rational, democratic and tolerant.²⁹ Stef Jansen's point that the 'Europe' that occupied the minds of the Belgrade democratic opposition and student movement alike was an imaginary space, a discursive construct, is important - An idealization of the west and its forms informed the discourse of 'Europe' in Belgrade.³⁰

Participants of the student and opposition demonstrations conceived of their respective movements as ushering in this 'return to Europe' for Serbia. An article, written as the 1996 protests began, by a former '68er, Nebojša Popov, noted that: 'When the present government is indifferent to the future of the country, her citizens do not have any other choice than to take over the responsibility for survival and the returning of Serbia to the civilized world.'³¹ When discussing what he remembered most about 1996-97 Miroslav Marić told me that during the walks around the city: 'I felt like part of the world. You see that on the news where people around the world struggle for their rights. You see it in France, you see it in America, you see it in Switzerland, whichever country, normal country in the world.'³² Perhaps the most obvious way this discourse was articulated was in the banner held by leading marchers on the students' walks - '*Beograd je svet*' (Belgrade is the World). According to Spasić and Pavićević, this symbolized the struggle being waged by students against the self-isolation and nationalist paranoia Serbia

²⁹ Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 264-265

³⁰ Stef Jansen, 'The Streets of Beograd: Urban space and protest identities in Serbia', *Political Geography*, 20, 2001, pp. 50-52

³¹ Nebojša Popov, 'Snaga protiv sile', *Republika*, 2 (*vanredno izdanje*), December, 1996, <http://www.yurope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/96/154/154-6.html> accessed on 4 September 2006

³² Interview with Miroslav Marić, 22 February 2006

incurred under Milošević.³³ The struggle to emphasize the European nature of the student strike went to ridiculous lengths. When, in February 1997, the Dutch artist Iris Honderos invited students of the protests to participate in her work, a report appeared in *Boom*. The reporter, it is safe to say, was keen to use this as an opportunity to highlight the ‘Europeaness’ of their demonstration:

‘Iris Honderos was born on May 4th 1958. in Utrecht, Netherlands, *Europe*. She was a student of the Academy for Expression and Communication in Leeuwarden, Netherlands, *Europe*, as well as of the Academy of Modern Art in Utrecht, Netherlands, *Europe*. She exhibited her works in the majority of *European Countries, Europe...* When the artist has gathered all the available canvases, she will transform them into a complete artistic formation by her own creative impulses and present them to the public. In this way, all those who bring their piece of cloth will contribute to a work of art that will testify to a personal opinion about the current Student Happenings in Belgrade(, *Europe*).’³⁴

It is worthy of note that ‘student happenings’ were occurring elsewhere in Serbia, not just Belgrade. The report, however, does not say ‘Serbia, Europe’, but ‘Belgrade, Europe’. It articulates a civic connection between Belgrade and Europe, which has been further studied by Volčić and Jansen who highlight the way in which a specific ‘Belgrade’ identity was constructed under Milošević as progressive and European.³⁵

³³Ivana Spasić and Pavicević, ‘Symbolization and Collective Identity in Civic Protest’, and Đorđe Pavićević, ‘Symbolization and Collective Identity in Civil Protest’, *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>, accessed on 19 September 2006

³⁴ Maximilien Robespierre, ‘The Student Protest and the European Avant-garde’, *Boom*, 28.

³⁵ See Zala Volčić, ‘Belgrade vs. Serbia: spatial re-configurations of belonging’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:4, 2005, pp. 639-658/651-655 and Jansen, ‘The Streets of Beograd’, pp. 46-49

This view is supported by my interviews, Predrag Dakić explained to me, with reference to the 1996 demonstrations: ‘Belgrade was the most progressive region of the country, if anything was going to happen it should be in Belgrade.’³⁶

‘Europe’, Democracy and Exclusion

The most obvious exclusion implicit in the discourse of democracy in the Belgrade winter of 1996-97 was based on class, a point I will examine shortly. Gender and, to a lesser extent, race were also implicitly excluded categories. Women’s rights organizations, such as Women in Black, were particularly active in resisting Milošević during the 1990s.³⁷ During the protests of 1996-97 women’s groups distributed leaflets, made public appearances, wrote articles and organized discussions around the issues of civil society and women’s rights. The participation of women’s groups in the protests, however, did not mean that women were not excluded in other ways. The sociologist, Marina Blagojević, has documented the ways in which women were excluded during the student protests – The ‘Miss Student Protester’ beauty contest organized in January 1997, for example, or the sexist attacks made against Mira Marković, the female leader of the Yugoslav United Left.³⁸ Although this thesis has not the space or sources to thoroughly investigate further exclusions, current literature suggests that a further exclusion of women was present in 1996-97.

The anthropologist, Jessica Greenberg, in analysing post-Milošević politics, argues that the new ‘European’ discourse of democracy implicitly constructed and

³⁶ Interview with Predrag Dakić, 19 February 2006

³⁷ Bojana Šušak, ‘An Alternative to War’, Nebojša Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2000, pp. 489-491

³⁸ Marina Blagojević, ‘The Walks in a Gendered Perspective’, in Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*, pp. 113-127

privileged a kind of ‘masculine’ citizenship.³⁹ Although much more research needs to be done it is likely that the privileged masculine citizen Greenberg points to in post-Milošević Serbia was present in the winter of 1996-97. My own interviewees showed an obvious reluctance to relate their narratives. Unpersuaded, Dakić told me: ‘I wasn’t involved in any organized way, I was just out there in the street’ and Antić: ‘I wasn’t involved in any kind of organization. I wasn’t on any kind of the boards. I wasn’t in the leadership.’⁴⁰ This suggests a tendency for participants to de-privilege their own narratives and, implicitly, to privilege those of the leaders. The suggestion in the above quotes is: ‘because I was not a leader, perhaps I’m not the best person to tell you what happened.’ As Frazier and Cohen argue, this kind of privileging is often achieved at the exclusion of the everyday activism and, as leaders become characterized as masculine and participants as feminine, compounds existing exclusions of women.⁴¹ Alongside Frazier and Cohen’s argument it is telling that the masculinity Greenberg points to was embodied in the late prime minister, Zoran Đinđić, well-known for his role in leading opposition groups under Milošević.⁴² Further examinations of the exclusion of women could use this connection between masculinity and leadership to analyse the gendered aspect of student resistance under Milošević.

³⁹ Jessica Greenberg, “‘Goodbye Serbian Kennedy’: Zoran Đinđić and the New Democratic Masculinity in Serbia”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 20:1, 2006, pp. 132-139

⁴⁰ Interview with Predrag Dakić, 19 February 2006 and Ivana Antić, 3 March 2006

⁴¹ Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, ‘Defining the Space of Mexico ’68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and “Women” in the Streets’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83:4, 2003, p. 636

⁴² Đinđić was a student activist in 1974 and became the leader of the *Demokratska Stranka* in the mid-1990s. He played an active role in the 1991 student movement, the *Zajedno* coalition and was a key figure of the opposition protests in the winter of 1996-97. Along with *Otpor*, he was a central factor in the toppling of Milošević in October 2000. For an examination of his role in Serbian dissent see the numerous and detailed references to him in Robert Thomas, *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999 and Obrad Kesić, ‘An Airplane with eighteen pilots: Serbia after Milosevic’, in Sabrina P. Ramet and Vjeran Pavlaković, *Serbia Since 1989: Politics and Society Under Milošević and After*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2005, pp. 95-123

Students in 1996-97 in no way articulated a pan-Yugoslav democracy as they did in June 1968. The break-up of the Yugoslav federation and the civil war that followed severed many of the ties between students in the Yugoslav republics. Only in Kosovo, which had an Albanian majority, was there a large population of non-Serbs in Serbia, but the political and social connections between the students from Belgrade and Prishtinë were few. Milošević rode the wave of nationalism to power and revoked the autonomy of Kosovo in 1989. As general strikes and demonstrations engulfed the region, demanding a return of its autonomy, Milošević responded by creating an apartheid state. Albanians were dismissed from most employment, refused entry to public schools and hospitals and were constantly intimidated by Serbian police.⁴³ As the repression continued, the non-violent tactics advocated by the Kosovo Albanian leadership wore thin with the population and in the final months of 1996 the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* (Kosovo Liberation Army) began a guerrilla campaign against Serbian police.⁴⁴

Despite the crisis growing in the region, interviewees I spoke with from the 1996-97 demonstrations recalled that students paid very little attention to the Kosovo question. Although, as Dakić informed me, they were aware that police were being sent to the region and that ‘something was going down there’, it was not taken up by the mass of demonstrators.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, some common acts of resistance between Kosovo Albanians and the Belgrade students warrant further investigation into this area. For example, on 16 December, during an opposition protest in Belgrade, a minute’s silence was observed to mark the death of a Kosovo Albanian teacher in police custody. Human

⁴³ Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, Pluto Press, London, 2000, pp 46-51 and Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-92*, Verso, London, 1993, pp. 179-217

⁴⁴ For the most detailed English account of the KLA see Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000, pp. 129-132

⁴⁵ Interview with Predrag Dakić, 19 February 2006

Rights organizations, involved in the Belgrade opposition protests argued that Serbs and Kosovo Albanians shared the same burden – the absence of democracy and protection of human rights under Milošević – and therefore the same struggle.⁴⁶ From Kosovo messages of solidarity were sent by a handful of opposition leaders, such as the dissident Adem Demaçi. University students in Prishtinë, inspired by the events in Belgrade, began to organize around the issues of education and democracy in the Kosovo Albanian political scene.⁴⁷ The concern of many scholars, both western and Serbian, to focus on the conflict between Albanians and Serbs during this period has made any investigation of inter-ethnic solidarities difficult. As with the relations between Kosovan and Belgrade students in 1968, much more research needs to be undertaken if we are to further uncover these solidarities.

The Revolt of the Middle Class

The most significant form of exclusion in the Belgrade winter of 1996-97, though, was based on class. The ‘return to Europe’ discourse represented a significant shift in the class dimension of the Belgrade conception of democracy. As neoliberal economics became the new global framework, leaders and citizens of post-communist states conceived of ‘progress’ as ‘integration’ into the West. Across Eastern Europe a ‘return to Europe’ discourse was tied to the emergence of a new elite class.⁴⁸ This discourse was certainly taken up by an urban, aspiring middle class in Belgrade. Greenberg’s work on the discourses of masculinity and democratic, ‘European’ citizenship shows well the

⁴⁶ Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, pp. 126-127

⁴⁷ Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, pp. 125-128

⁴⁸ Steven Sampsons, ‘Beyond Transition: Rethinking elite configurations in the Balkans’, in Chris M. Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and practices in Eurasia*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 298

connection between the post-Milošević urban middle class and the discourse of ‘Europe.’⁴⁹ Whilst her study is limited to the post-Milošević period, the discourse tying democracy and Europe to the Belgrade middle class was present earlier. Daković has highlighted the way this middle class discourse of an ‘Europeanisation of Serbia’ was articulated in film under Milošević: ‘Such films focused on an urban, cultured middle class life that was oppressed to the point of vanishing under Milošević...the films worked to accentuate and valorise Western cultural and social models...’⁵⁰ A similar move to revive Serbia’s crushed, Europe-gazing middle class was undertaken in the prose of the 1990s, as Hawkesworth has revealed in her analysis of novels such as Svetlana Velmar-Janković’s *Dungeon*.⁵¹ Similarly, the economic liberalisation with which *Zajedno* associated themselves by recruiting Dragoslav Avramović, appealed to this middle class, which had emerged during the brief period of free-market reforms under the last Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante Marković in 1989.⁵² By propagating an image of themselves and their campaign in 1996 as a ‘return to Europe’, *Zajedno* was giving political voice to an aspiring Belgrade middle class ‘oppressed to the point of vanishing’ under the years of Milošević’s rule and desiring a return to all that was Europe: civil society, liberal-capitalist democracy, a free market, consumption, in short, ‘normality’.

The Belgrade winter of 1996-97 was a revolt of this middle class. Investigations by Serbian sociologists of the participants’ political and social values and their economic

⁴⁹ Jessica Greenberg, “‘Goodbye Serbian Kennedy’”, p. 143

⁵⁰ Nevena Daković, ‘War in the Hall of Mirrors: NATO Bombing and Serbian Cinema’, in Andrew Hammond (ed.), *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945-2003*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, 2004, p. 204

⁵¹ Celia Hawkesworth, ‘Images of the West in Serbian and Croatian Prose Fiction 1945-1995’, in Hammond (ed.), *The Balkans and the West*, pp. 92-93

⁵² Aljoša Mimica, ‘The Awakening of the Civil Society? The 96/97 Protest in Serbia in a sociological perspective’, *Sociologija*, 1, 1997, <http://www.sac.org.yu/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/>, accessed on 1 October 2006

position lead researchers to confidently label both student and opposition demonstrators as ‘belonging to the middle urban strata.’⁵³ Many researchers also stressed the fact that, as they saw it, the political emergence of this class was the ‘emergence of a democratic order in Serbia’.⁵⁴ The middle class brought with it the potential for civil society, human rights, rationality and modernity; it was the carrier of enlightenment values.⁵⁵ In the Belgrade winter of 1996-97, the middle class were seen by the demonstrators and Belgrade sociologists to be the force able to break Serbia’s isolation and usher in a ‘return to Europe’. However, there is an exclusionary character to this discourse, which has particularly serious implications for contemporary Serbian society.

In the ‘return to Europe’ discourse, the democratic, middle class, Belgrade, citizen was contrasted by a Serbian, provincial, nationalist peasant (*seljaci*).⁵⁶ The anthropologist, Zala Volčić has noted that this discourse rendered ‘outsiders’ from the city, such as refugees, roma and peasants, as pollutants. As she describes: ‘New boundaries are re-created, and a simple logic of connecting filth, nationalism, and Serbia’s problematic past to ‘those outsiders’ is applied.’⁵⁷ This exclusionary character also targeted the working class as those who were seen as poor were also rendered ‘undemocratic’ by this ‘civil’ discourse.⁵⁸

The construction of a backwards, filthy, peasant/working class Serbia was present in the streets of Belgrade during the winter of 1996-97. The following cartoon depicting

⁵³ Marija Babović, ‘Potential for an Active Society’, in Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*, pp. 41-42

⁵⁴ Mladen Lazić, ‘Introduction: The Emergence of a Democratic Order in Serbia’, in Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*, pp. 1-30

⁵⁵ This rhetoric about the liberalism of the middle class can be found in numerous works. See Slobodan Cvejić, ‘General Character of the Protest and Prospects for Democratisation in Serbia’, pp. 60-77, and Vladimir Vuletić, ‘Citizens in Protest’, pp.78-99 both in Lazić (ed.), *Protest in Belgrade*.

⁵⁶ Jansen, ‘The Streets of Beograd’, 46-49

⁵⁷ Volčić, ‘Belgrade vs. Serbia’, p. 650

⁵⁸ Jansen noted that the term ‘*seljaci*’ was often used to refer to people from industrial suburbs as well as to the peasants. Jansen, ‘“The Streets of Beograd”’, p. 46-49

students protesting in front of a factory while the workers hide inside, shows one of the ways students conceived of workers and peasants as undemocratic.



In 1968, students sent delegation to the factories; in 1996-97, however, students were not carrying messages of solidarity.

The exclusionary nature of the 'return to Europe' discourse became more pronounced during the confrontation between student and opposition demonstrators and the regime-supporters on 24 December 1996. Descriptions of the regime's supporters that the student and opposition protesters left behind are particularly revealing. The historian, Vidosav Stevanović, for example, refers to the supporters of the regime, as 'unemployed workers, poor peasants, miners on vacations that had gone on for years, drunkards and street riff raff'.⁶⁰ A students' report from the day noted that 'tension could be felt because of the presence of people from the province.'⁶¹ A student referred to the regime supporters as 'the mob coming to liberated Belgrade' and 'a flock of deceived sheep we shall hopefully

⁵⁹ The students' signs read: 'Student Protest '96-'97' and 'Zajedno'. Miro Stefanović, *Workers*, <http://www.yuope.com/people/sen/prezentacije/protest96/img/Workers.gif>, accessed on 4 September 2006

⁶⁰ Vidosav Stevanović, *Milošević: the People's Tyrant*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004, p. 127

⁶¹ Student Street Report, 24 December 1996

put back on track, the only track leading to Serbia's survival and integration with democratic Europe.⁶²

The way in which the 'return to Europe' discourse characterized outsiders as undemocratic pollutants sheds light on the students' 'decontamination' action (the cleaning of the city square where the pro-regime rally was held). Students intended to wipe the presence of the 'other' Serbia away. They saw the regime's supporters as '*seljaci*', as filthy peasants, the poor, the working class, the least hygienic, the least cultured, the least 'European' and certainly the least democratic. The 'return to Europe' discourse, then, privileged the Belgrade middle class and excluded lower classes from their democratic project. In the concept of democracy to take the streets in the winter of 1996-97, cleanliness was next to Europeanness, and Europe and democracy were synonymous. 'Democracy' had come to mean 'middle class'.

We have in 1996-97, then, a program of democracy in complete contrast to that of 1968. Whereas students in the sixties struggled against the exclusion of the working class from social power, in 1996-97 the exclusion of the lower classes was a necessary part in defining democracy. Democracy was, according to the program of 1996-97, what the peasant Serbia was not. It was urban, civil, educated and it was European. To be sure, the students of the Belgrade winter of 1996-97 did not pose their democracy in explicit class terms, but rather in the divide between those within the city walls and those outside. Nonetheless, this division is laden with assumptions about the relationship of class and democracy. Whilst, the characterization of lower classes as undemocratic was partly a result of the tendency of the poorer people in Serbia to vote for Milošević's party, it was also the consequence of an international shift away from the class politics of the 1960s.

⁶² DED, 'United we should stand', *Boom*, 14

⁶³As Eley has pointed out, the ascendancy of neo-liberalism and the shift away from class politics meant that social progress could no longer be grounded in a militant working class movement. The hopes for democracy had to be relocated. In Belgrade it was placed in an urban middle class, who were seen to be able to overcome the isolation incurred under Milošević and ‘return’ their Belgrade to Europe. A similar process of celebrating an aspiring, ‘European’ middle class took place across Eastern Europe as the Soviet regimes were overthrown. Andor and Summers term this process ‘The Great Bourgeois Cultural Revolution’ and, as they and other scholars have highlighted, it created (and is creating) new forms of exclusion based on class across the former Communist world.⁶⁴ The limitations placed on such conceptions of democracy by international factors, such as the hegemony of neoliberalism, do not, however, lessen the exclusionary nature of this discourse. On the contrary, if we are to understand the global dominance of neoliberalism as the reimposition of strict class rule, as David Harvey convincingly argues, the exclusion of lower classes, of immigrants, peasants and workers is an implicit but central part of that project.⁶⁵

⁶³ Working class, pensioners and peasants were the most likely people to vote for Milošević throughout the 1990s. Srbobran Brnković, ‘Social Class and Political Choice’, in Goati, *Challenges of Parliamentarism: The case of Serbia in the Early Nineties*, Institute of Social Science, Belgrade, 1995, pp.69-92

⁶⁴ Laszlo Andor and Martin Summers, *Market Failure: Eastern Europe’s ‘Economic Miracle’*, Pluto Press, London, 1998, pp.30-44. For examples of ways in which this process is creating new forms of exclusion see David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2005, Alison Stenning, ‘Where is the Post-socialist Working Class? Working Class Lives in the Spaces of (Post-)Socialism’, *Sociology*, 39:5, 2005, pp. 983-999 and David A. Kideckel, ‘The unmaking of an East-Central European working class’, in Chris M. Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism*, pp. 114-132

⁶⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

Chapter 5 – post-Milosevic Serbia, Student politics and the rise of the Radicals

A 'Democratic' Revolution

The discourse of a 'return to Europe', with all the exclusion it implied in 1996-97, informed many of the groups that joined in the overthrow of Milošević on 5 October 2000. The demand on the opposition to mount a united challenge to Milošević, meant, however, that much of the exclusionary nature of the 'European' discourse had to be concealed. Workers and peasants were noticed by their absence in 1996-97, but on 5 October 2000 their support was central to the fall of Milosevic.¹ The support of these classes - who were excluded by the 'return to Europe' discourse – forced the opposition coalition and the student movement, *Otpor*, to at least temporarily include the workers and peasants in their democratic project. The anti- Milošević coalition, the *Demokratska Opozicija Srbije* (Democratic Opposition of Serbia), had as its figurehead the nationalist politician Vojislav Koštunica. With his distrust of the West (the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 had demonised the West in the minds of many Serbs) and rejection of neoliberal capitalism that was ravaging Eastern Europe at the time, Koštunica was a popular candidate amongst the population.² *Otpor* also recognized the need for convincing the peasantry and workers to their program of democracy and, in many ways,

¹ Mihail Arandarenko, 'Waiting for the Workers: Explaining Labor Quiescence in Serbia', in Steven Crowley and David Ost (eds.), *Workers After Workers' States: Labor and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2001, pp. 159-180

² Svetozar Stojanović, 'Democratic Revolution in Serbia', in Ivana Spasić and Milan Subotić (eds.), *R/Evolution and Order: Serbia after October 2000*, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade, 2001, p. 30

played a much more significant role achieving this than Koštunica.³ The story of the events of 2000, the lead up to the elections of 24 September and the subsequent overthrow of Milošević on 5 October have been well recorded elsewhere.⁴ The concern of this thesis is that, despite attempts to conceal it in order to forge an alliance with the peasants and workers, the exclusionary ‘return to Europe’ discourse was still present during this ‘revolution’ and re-emerged with a vengeance in the new post- Milošević ‘democracy’.

From ‘return to Europe’ to neoliberal ‘transition’

Although less aggressive than in the 1996-97 student protest, the exclusionary ‘return to Europe’ discourse was present in the *Otpor* project from the outset. The Belgrade sociologist, Vladimir Marković, in 2001 highlighted the ‘orientalist’ nature of the *Otpor* discourse of democracy. The movement used the same dichotomy as the ‘return to Europe’ discourse by casting everything in Serbia perceived to be undemocratic as ‘eastern’ and ‘Turkish’ and those democratic elements as ‘western’ and ‘European’.⁵ Although, in order to garner the support of the population, *Otpor* concealed much of its exclusionary nature, the same dichotomy that premised itself on a ‘democratic’ and ‘European’ middle class against a barbaric and undemocratic ‘*seljaci*’ other was still

³ Zagorka Golubović told me that, although Koštunica, when he became the president of Yugoslavia, claimed that convincing the peasants had been his contribution to the overthrow of Milosevic, in actual fact *Otpor* had been the real force all over the country, including the provinces. Košunica, she claimed, was nowhere to be seen whilst *Otpor* was everywhere. Interview with Zagorka Golubović, 2 March 2006.

⁴ See, for example, Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002, pp. 329-352 and Vidosav Stevanović, *Milošević: the People’s Tyrant*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004, pp.176-193 and Mark R. Thompson and Phillip Kuntz, ‘Stolen Elections: The Case of the Serbian October’, *Journal of Democracy*, 15:4, 2004, 159-172.

⁵ Vladimir Marković, “‘Druga Srbija” u Diskrepanciji: Elementi ideologija neoliberalizma i orijentalizma u procesu konstituisanja jednog balkanskog civilnog društva”, *Diskrepancija*, 2:3, 2001, pp. 3-4

present. Marković also outlined the ways in which a neoliberal economic program became entangled in the discourse of democracy expressed by *Otpor* during their campaign against Milosevic. The *Deklaracija* (Declaration) released by *Otpor* in 1999 talked explicitly about the return to a free market and privatisation, and noticeably ignored the question of social welfare.⁶

Otpor was a group united by one thing – resistance to Milošević. With his overthrow on 5 October 2000 the student movement collapsed.⁷ Some *Otpor* activists transformed the group into a political party and ran in the 2003 elections on an anti-corruption platform, which, in the words of Predrag Dakić, ‘failed miserably...miserably’.⁸ Other activists became involved in the growing NGO sector. Most of the students who were involved in *Otpor* returned to their classes or moved onto employment. Today, in ‘democratic’ Serbia, little to no student movement exists at the University of Belgrade. Dakić told me that ‘Student voices have died after 5 October. Students have basically turned to business and to leaving the country and going somewhere else to work.’⁹ Jelka Imširović, reflecting on the change in campus politics, told me that: ‘I think that the new generation of students is more business-orientated (*biznesmanski*). I don’t think you can really find a similarity between those students of ’68 and today, who are mostly interested in their careers.’¹⁰ Student Organizations still exist in Belgrade, but none have the strength of *Otpor* or the student movement of 1996-97. Most of these organizations see themselves as part of Belgrade ‘civil society’ and are

⁶ Marković, “‘Druga Srbija” u Diskrepanciji”, pp. 5-6

⁷ Eric D. Gordy, ‘Building a “Normal, Boring” Country: Koštunica’s Yugoslavia’, *Current History*, 100, 2001, pp. 112-113

⁸ Interview with Predrag Dakić, 19 February 2006

⁹ Interview with Predrag Dakić, 19 February 2006

¹⁰ Interview with Jelka Imširović, 3 March 2006

committed to the 'return to Europe' discourse of democracy but are limited in their actions by the apathy of the student population. Jessica Greenberg's work on gay rights and student organizations in post-Milošević Belgrade shows how students, committed to a 'return to Europe' discourse, seize on issues that are seen to be a step forward to 'Europeanization', in this case, gay rights.¹¹ I will return to her work at the end of this chapter, because it is important for examining the ways in which the exclusionary nature of the 'return to Europe' discourse is challenged by a new radical alternative. This radical alternative, like its equivalent in June 1968, was forged as a response to the exclusionary nature of the dominant discourse of democracy.

Civil Society and Exclusion

In the aftermath of Milošević's fall, the triumphant 'return to Europe' democracy provoked new forms of political and economic exclusion. Although, during the opposition campaign against Milošević, Koštunica proclaimed his rejection of neoliberalism this was only temporary. The post-Milošević government pushed through wave after wave of painful economic reform (painful for the population, not for the politicians) at the behest of the International Monetary Fund and the European Union. High unemployment, a massive rise in living costs and cuts to social welfare have been the price the population has paid as 'integration' marches slowly forward, excluding those that do not have a place in Serbia's liberal-utopian future.¹² The dominant global discourse of democracy, so closely tied - as Eley has noted - to the neoliberal program,

¹¹ Jessica Greenberg, 'Nationalism, Masculinity and Multicultural Citizenship in Serbia', *Nationalities Papers*, 34:3, 2006, pp. 323-325

¹² Paul Aaron, 'The Anguish of Nation Building: A Report from Serbia', *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2005, p. 113 and Ivan Janković 'Necessary Reform or Attack on the Poor?', *Transitions Online*, 2 January 2006

allowed Belgrade politicians and economists to call upon the spectre of 'Europe' to lend legitimacy to the reforms. The demands on Serbia to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal were treated in a similar way, i.e. as the necessary sacrifices to make in order to rejoin democratic 'Europe'.¹³ The tendency for civil society and state leaders to articulate a democracy that justifies such harsh economic costs under the banner of 'Europe' prompted one Serbian journalist to remark in 2002: 'It was with great effort that the Serbian nation freed itself from the red star, while new political commissars are in a hurry to impose on it the yellow star of the European Union.'¹⁴

The exclusionary nature of the 'return to Europe' discourse, because it no longer requires the united support of the population against Milošević, is much more aggressive in its exclusion of workers and peasants than in 2000 or even in the winter of 1996-97. Volčić's work, which I initially drew from to show this exclusion, was informed by interviews in post-Milošević Belgrade, and shows much more open exclusion than existed in the discourse of students in 1996-97.¹⁵ Some NGOs who are informed by this 'return to Europe' discourse (and, therefore, are committed to the neoliberal program) openly exclude 'those strata' of the population that need to be 'reconciled' to the economic reforms. In May 2003, the Zrenjanin-based Centre for the Development of Civil Society released a report entitled 'Minimizing Resistance to Reforms and the Integration of Serbia'. In it 'unskilled labourers suburban dwellers, rurally-based workers...and elderly people in general' who supposedly held Serbia back from

¹³ Denisa Kostovicova, 'Post-socialist identity, territoriality and European integration: Serbia's return to Europe after Milosevic', *GeoJournal*, 61, 2004, p. 25

¹⁴ S. Stamenković, quoted in Kostovicova, 'Post-socialist identity, territoriality and European integration', p. 25

¹⁵ Zala Volčić, 'Belgrade vs. Serbia: spatial re-configurations of belonging', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:4, 2005, pp. 639-658

democracy are described as ‘biologically and economically uncompetitive strata whose attitudes are according to their electoral orientations and the results of numerous studies characterised by outdated communist egalitarianism, ethnic nationalism, xenophobia and an anti-market bias.’¹⁶ In this vision, to be egalitarian is to be ‘anti-market’ and, thus, undemocratic. The dominant discourse of democracy, the ‘return to Europe’, achieves the exclusion of the working and peasant classes by tying democracy to neoliberal reforms. In order to be considered ‘democratic’ these social classes have to advocate the economic reforms that leave them in poverty. The absurdity of this situation is not lost on past dissidents. Zagorka Golubović presciently explained to me in March 2006, ‘who of the workers nowadays will be interested in freedom of speech or freedom of association when they have no money to buy bread to support their family?’¹⁷

The Rise of the Radicals

Just as in other post-socialist Eastern European countries, much of the social anger that is provoked by the exclusionary nature of dominant discourses of democracy is being channelled into support for radical nationalist alternatives to the current ‘European’ project.¹⁸ Vojislav Šešelj and his cohort of radical nationalists saw a rise in support in the 2003 elections and, in the presidential runoff in 2004.¹⁹ Research collected in July 2006 indicated that, were an election held the Radicals would emerge with an increased

¹⁶ Centre for the Development of Civil Society, ‘Minimizing Resistance to Reforms and the Integration of Serbia’, *Centre for the Development of Civil Society Homepage*, May 2003, http://www.cdcs.org.yu/docs/min_res.doc, accessed on 24 September 2006, p. 7

¹⁷ Interview with Zagorka Golubović, 2 March 2006

¹⁸ A similar process of, what David Ost called managing ‘social anger’, has occurred in Poland. See David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2005

¹⁹ Aaron, ‘The Anguish of Nation Building’, p. 119

majority.²⁰ The Sarajevo-based journalist, Siniša Djurić, convincingly argues that the rise in support for the Radicals is to be found in the failure of the ‘so called democratic bloc’ to solve the increasing poverty of the population.²¹ As I have shown, this is not a failure of the ‘democratic’ bloc but is inherent in their political program, which grounds democracy in the middle class and its ‘European’ agenda. The Radicals, by pointing out the increasing poverty much of the population suffer under the ‘democratic’ bloc’s economic reforms, articulate a radical nationalist alternative that sees closer economic ties with China, Russia and India and ensures the protection of jobs.²² This alternative integrates its defence of workers rights into a racist, homophobic and masculine discourse, not at all dissimilar to that of France’s Jen-Marie Le Pen or Russia’s Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.²³ In the Radical’s vision, gay and feminist activists, Muslims and other non-Serbian minorities are seen to be in league with the exclusionary ‘European’ agenda and attempting to weaken Serbia.

The radical nationalist alternative, because of its utter rejection of the economic reforms, is attractive even to parts of the population who aren’t ethnically Serbian and who were once committed to the ‘democratic’ parties. In March 2006 Ivana Antić, related a story to me about a town in Northern Serbia where she and some colleagues were working: ‘they were the first municipality in Serbia where the opposition won in 1991. They had a very long history of opposition movements...Very significant. In the last elections I think 80% of the population voted for the Radical party...people who were

²⁰ TNS Medium Gallop, *Voting Preferences in Serbia – July 2006*, http://www.tnsmediumgallup.co.yu/results_of_surveys.htm, accessed on 1 October 2006.

²¹ Siniša Djurić, ‘Radically Better Doom: Vojislav Šešelj and the Serbian Radical Party’, *Sobaka*, 26 August 2004, online at <http://www.diacritica.com/sobaka/2004/seselj.html>, accessed on 10 September 2006

²² Paul Aaron, ‘The Anguish of Nation Building’, p.119

²³ Djurić, ‘Radically Better Doom’

voting in '91 for the opposition, in '96 for the opposition, in 2000 for the opposition now decided they would vote for the Radicals, including some of the Hungarians.²⁴ This shows that, people who in past years were convinced by the 'return to Europe' alternative to Milošević's agenda are, in 2006, committed to the nationalist alternative of the Radical Party.

Student organizations, gay rights and the Radicals

The popularity of the Radicals, the strength of their discourse is shown in literature on student organizations in post-Milošević Belgrade. As I mentioned above, student organizations in Belgrade, which are committed to the 'return to Europe' discourse, have organized around issues, like gay rights, which are seen as a step forward in 'Europeanizing' Serbia.²⁵ In June 2001, the first gay rights parade in Serbia was held in Belgrade on *Plato trg*. Before it had a chance to march anywhere, young radical nationalists attacked the participants. Jessica Greenberg, in analysing the response of the nationalists, argues that the conflict stemmed from the perceived attack a gay rights parade (conceived of as feminine) levelled against the 'privileged nationalist collective' (conceived of as masculine). As the new liberal democratic discourse became widespread in post-Milošević Serbia, this 'privileged nationalist collective' came to feel excluded and 'struggled to retain political relevance, representation and a sense of agency' through 'violence, homophobia, misogyny and racism.'²⁶ What is missing from this account is an understanding of the material basis of the social insecurity that fuels the violent, homophobic, misogynist and racist alternative that is offered by the Radicals. The

²⁴ Interview with Ivana Antić, 3 March 2006

²⁵ Greenberg, 'Nationalism, Masculinity and Multicultural Citizenship in Serbia', pp. 323-325

²⁶ Greenberg, 'Nationalism, Masculinity and Multicultural Citizenship in Serbia', pp. 335-336

exclusion of peasants and workers, the unemployed and pensioners is not just a question of identity, as Greenberg argues, but rather an economic one. The elites in Belgrade and their 'European' agenda – including gay and feminist NGOs who use the 'return to Europe' discourse – are seen by many of the excluded classes as committed to an economic program that benefits the middle class of Belgrade but pauperises the majority of the population.²⁷ The 'return to Europe' discourse is more than just an attack on a masculine identity; it is the discourse of economic reform, of social security cuts, of privatisation, in short, a discourse of class domination. This explains why, as Ivana Antić related, groups of people who may otherwise have been opposed to Milošević and who voted for the 'European' alternative, now vote overwhelmingly for the Radicals. Not because their 'privileged nationalist collective' identity has come under attack – often they voted against Milošević who privileged that very collective - but because the Radicals offer the only alternative to the poor economic situation.

The attack on the gay rights parade in 2001 and, as Greenberg records, the subsequent abandonment of the gay rights issue by student organizations, is testament to the increasing pervasiveness of the Radicals' nationalist alternative.²⁸ Their increasing popularity and the rise of their alternative has de-legitimised, on some level, the discourse of 'European' democracy. When, in 2003, student organizations at the University of Belgrade (even those that supported the June 2001 gay rights parade) refused to support a second parade, they did so because of the strength of the Radicals' alternative. The issue

²⁷ Šešelj, for example, when he was the vice president of Yugoslavia in 1998 openly denounced civil society activists, or 'those who receive money from the Americans and their allies to act against Yugoslavia'. Quoted in Aaron, 'The Anguish of Nation Building', p. 118

²⁸ Greenberg records the debates that occurred in student organizations when the question of supporting another gay rights parade was put forward in 2003. Greenberg, 'Nationalism, Masculinity and Multicultural Citizenship in Serbia', pp. 327-328

of gay rights, tied to a discourse of ‘Europe’, lost its legitimacy amongst students because the very discourse of a ‘return to Europe’ came under attack. As the ‘European’ discourse of democracy loses its legitimacy in the face of the Radicals’ onslaught, the political confidence of minorities that see their own liberation bound up with a ‘return to Europe’ is undermined.

In 1968, students, protesting the exclusion of workers from society argued for international revolution and working class-student solidarity. They were pan-Yugoslav and positioned themselves in direct opposition to nationalism. In today’s Serbia, it is the Radicals who articulate the alternative radical discourse that protests the exclusion of the working class. Their discourse, however, is one that provokes nationalist tensions and blames gay and feminist activists for the effects of economic reforms. Far from the discourse of solidarity and revolution of students in 1968, the inclusion of workers today is sought in a discourse of conservative hatred and violence against minorities. Meanwhile, as Žižek has pointed out, the dominant discourse of democracy in Serbia today, that of a ‘return to Europe’, further provokes the racist nationalism of the Radicals: ‘the choice between the new world order and the neoracist nationalists opposed to it is nonexistent: these are two sides of a coin – the new world order itself creates the monstrosities it fights against.’²⁹ In an epoch when the dominant discourse of democracy relies on the economic and political exclusion of vast segments of the population and the radical alternative to this discourse advocates the politics of hatred and violence, an examination of the internationalist discourse of democracy forged in the 1960s is more than timely - it’s a necessity.

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, as quoted in Markovic, “‘Druga Srbija” u Diskrepanciji’, p. 2

Conclusion

My examination of Belgrade student movements and their discourses of democracy in the 1960s and 1990s achieved three things. Firstly, by clarifying the involvement of the League of Communists in the June 1968 occupation I have reasserted the alternative democracy students articulated. The tendency for scholars to pass off the Belgrade June as a naïve attempt to reform Stalinism strengthens a historical narrative of an eventual, post-1989 liberal-utopia. As Kirsten Ross has noted: ‘the fall of socialism and the seemingly undisputed hegemony achieved by capitalism distances our world from the world of ’68 to the point where it becomes quite difficult to imagine a time when people once envisioned a world different in essential ways from the one in which we now live.’¹ As a student movement with a clearly articulated socialist program, the Belgrade June is unable to be characterised by the liberal-utopian narrative as a movement that refused Communism, as opposed to, for example, the Prague Spring, which is often presented as having led to the fall of communism.² As a result, the Belgrade June is often constructed as nothing but a form of Stalinism, and is thus rendered historically obsolete. In making this move, scholars sacrifice the Belgrade students’ alternative democracy to the trash heap of history by tying its fate to that of Stalinism. By uncovering the ways in which the regime mobilized to erase this alternative and replaced it with a discourse of reform, I have hoped to undermine this liberal-utopian narrative and recover the alternative.

¹ Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, p. 20

² Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p. 19

Secondly, I have uncovered the exclusionary nature of the ‘return to Europe’ discourse articulated in the 1996-97 student protests. By drawing on Volčić’s work I was able to show the ways in which the exclusion of workers and peasants was bound up in the ‘European’ discourse of democracy of the 1990s. Again, this is important if we are to cut through the liberal-utopian vision embodied in the ‘return to Europe’ discourse. As inspiring as the events of the Belgrade winter of 1996-97 may be, I have shown that, by placing their hopes for democracy in a discourse that privileged the urban middle class, Belgrade students implicitly excluded vast sections of the Serbian population. In the post-Milošević period, with the rise of the Radicals’ nationalist alternative taking root amongst these excluded classes, we cannot afford to hold onto the liberal-utopian narrative that sees Serbia’s ‘return to Europe’ as synonymous with democracy, whilst ignoring the exclusions implicit in such a narrative.

Finally, in this thesis I have elucidated the ways in which these discourses of democracy were limited or directed by international factors. The years of the 1960s were years during which alternatives between the Stalinist and capitalist paths flourished. Anti-imperialist and student movements, resisting the authoritarianism of foreign armies or their own states forged concepts of democracy around which they struggled. The strength of labour and other opposition movements created an environment in which alternative visions of democracy could gain legitimacy. The crushing of these oppositional movements and the subsequent economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, from which neoliberal capitalism emerged triumphant over both its domestic labour movements and the Stalinist states, allowed liberal discourses of democracy to recolonise the space in

which these alternative visions grew. These international factors clearly shaped the discourses of democracy articulated by students in Belgrade.

During my examination, although I have focussed on the category of class, I have highlighted areas for further research. Particularly important here is the role of women and feminist politics during the June 1968 occupation and the ways in which narratives of these events are gendered and de-privilege women's participations. Also important is the relationship between the student demonstrations in Belgrade and Prishtinë in 1968 and the 1990s. I have also sought to highlight the necessity of an anti-exclusionary alternative to the current liberal-utopian discourse of Serbia in the new millennium. Perhaps this alternative can be drawn from further examinations of the Belgrade June 1968 and similar struggles during this period, or perhaps it is yet to be forged. In any case, as Žižek has noted, this alternative must take into consideration, as did that of the Belgrade June, not just political or social exclusion, but also economic exclusion, 'the spectral presence of Capital'. In our current age, where liberal capitalism is hegemonic, we would do well to recall Žižek's critique concerning the changes in discourses of democracy: 'the so-called repoliticization of civil society advocated by the partisans of 'identity politics' and other postmodern forms of politicisation: all the talk about new forms of politics bursting out all over, focused on particular issues (gay rights, ecology, ethnic minorities...), all this incessant activity...has something inauthentic about it, and ultimately resembles the obsessional neurotic who talks all the time and is otherwise frantically active precisely in order to ensure that something – what really matters – will not be disturbed, that it will remain immobilized.'³ Such a description characterizes the situation in post-Milošević Serbia well. As an army of NGOs, advocating a mosaic of minority concerns, mobilize

³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, Verso, London, 1999, p. 354

around the politics of civil society, the ranks of Serbia's discontent swell with each step towards 'Europe'.

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Appendix 1

Questions asked during interviews with participants of June 1968 student movement in February and March 2006.

Personal:

How did you get involved in the student protest of June 1968?

What do you most remember about the occupation?

Feelings after the occupation? Victory? Disillusionment?

Historical:

At the time, did you see a connection between your actions and other forms of dissent?

For example, Milovan Djilas, the Praxis group, events in France or Czechoslovakia?

Looking back, how do you see the protest in June 1968 relating to:

- the Albanian demonstrations in Kosovo in November 1968? 1981? 1989?
- The student protests of the 1990s and *Otpor*?
- What do you see as the main differences between these movements and the student movement of June 1968?

Have dissident movements become redundant after Milosevic?

Do you still see a need for a student movement today in Serbia?

Questions asked during interviews with participants of 1996-97 protest in February and March 2006.

How and why did you get involved in the protest?

What is your most memorable experience of the protest?

What relationship, if any, do you see between the 1996-97 protest and:

- 1991-92 demonstrations?
- June 1968 movement?
- *Otpor* in 2000?
- Other dissidents in Serbian history such as Milovan Djilas, Praxis, Dobrica Cosic, etc?
- With the demonstrations in Kosovo during 1989?

What role did the wars in Croatia and Bosnia play in the 1996-97 protest?

What became of the student movement of 1996-97 after its demands were met?

Do you see things like the war in Kosovo or the NATO attacks on Serbia as having had an influence of the student movement in Serbia?

Do you think there is still a need for a student movement in Serbia today?