

APORIAS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF THE (POST-) YUGOSLAV LEFT

Orthodoxy in a Praxis Way

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Abstract

We address the specific, leftist dissent in socialist Yugoslavia that was centred around the Praxis intellectual school. Our aim is to show the divergent paths that strongly marked the legacy of the group's Serbian wing. Tracing the intellectual engagement of two prominent figures that ended on completely opposite ends of the political spectrum – Mihailo Marković and Miladin Životić – we want to show that the inception of Yugoslavia's bloody dissolution can be traced back to the very core of what could be called orthodox left dissent. We analyse the "truly leftist" politics of Mihailo Marković during the 1968 protests, which devolved into support for the police and apologia for war and nationalism in the 1990s. We compare his central intellectual role in instituting a nationalist brand of socialism in Serbia to the public engagement of Miladin Životić, whose marginalization stands as a reminder of those who dared to oppose the dominant nationalist narratives and offered a vision of life together.

Keywords

Socialist Yugoslavia, Praxis, dissidents, Mihailo Marković, Miladin Životić, 1968 student demonstrations

Discounting Milovan Đilas, one may justifiably wonder whether socialist Yugoslavia had any dissidents at all in the classic understanding of this concept. There has been no systematic research covering Yugoslav dissident movements or the dissidents themselves, and in particular, there has been little written and published in the countries that arose in the wake of the break-up of Yugoslavia. The reasons for this absence were perhaps best articulated by Nebojša Popov, himself one of the few *soft* dissidents and among the eight professors expelled from Belgrade University in 1975 due to “moral-political unsuitability.” In a rare, detailed analysis, although within the Serbian national framework, he has recently reflected that dissidence is “a critical position against the governing ideology and the related order, expressed publicly and continuously for an extended period of time, advocating hope for freedom and democracy at the same time.”¹ The dissidence being discussed here was not a resistance movement against the Yugoslav system and its regime, but a phenomenon pertaining to political and cultural domains that asked for *more* orthodoxy.

Etymologically speaking, dissidence implies disagreement. However, in the case of the Praxis group, it is not clear *what the disagreement was about*. Popov’s “freedom and democracy” are two essentially contested terms, making his definition futile. *What kind of democracy?* And freedom *from whom* and *for whom*? How was it possible that former participants of the June 1968 rebellion found themselves on opposite sides in March 1991? Originating from the same resistance group, a quarter of century later, one set was again demanding freedom along with students, while the other was now calling for more repression against protesters.

In this paper, we build our argument around the two opposite tendencies of the prominent left dissidents *within* the Praxis philosophy group. Particularly, we will focus on the Serbian wing of the Praxis group, having in mind its public engagement that was much more linked to the political in comparison to its Croatian counterpart. The argument is based on the analysis of one part of their opus that spans four decades. But we also followed the ideological differentiation by analyzing their public engagement, primarily during the June 1968 protests and during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. We argue that even their strong proximity in philosophical thinking and mutual participation in the Praxis school did not prevent them from diverging into widely differing stances, both of which claimed to be true to their earlier common position. We claim that Yugoslav leftist dissidents never managed to overcome national lines and produce

¹ Nebojša Popov, “Disidentska skrivalica,” *Republika*, August 2000, pp. 242–243.

comprehensive analysis of society using Marxism as an analytical, rather than political, tool.² Following this claim, we confront the theoretical work and social engagement of two philosophers and activists – Miladin Životić and Mihailo Marković.

Living Apart Together

Miladin Životić, a member of the Praxis group and one of founders of the Korčula Summer School (1963–1974), was seen by the regime as one of instigators of the June 1968 student protests. In addition, he was one of initiators of the so-called Free University – a series of lectures and debates organized in private (some held at his own flat) from 1976 until 1984. From the very beginning of the wars in the 1990s, he was one of the fiercest critics of nationalist and war politics, becoming an emblematic figure of the anti-war movement and taking up the position of the President of the Civic Action for Peace. He was also a founder and president of the Belgrade Circle – a gathering of independent intellectuals opposed to Milošević’s regime. Vehemently criticizing the methods and goals of Belgrade’s war politics, he supported the victims of war morally and politically, especially those in Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, and other towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Believing that the possibilities of post-Yugoslav cooperation hinged on the way Sarajevo was treated under siege,³ he visited the besieged town twice, in 1994 and 1995, for which he was stigmatised in the government-controlled Belgrade press. In his final years, he dedicated himself to studying the political notion of the Other and establishing a vision of a different Serbia. Životić was primarily criticising the nationalist intellectuals and coteries of all the former Yugoslav republics, with an emphasis on those advocating the idea of “Greater Serbia.” “There was,” he wrote, “no lack of intellectuals who wanted to project, model and design the future: that was a great flaw in our intellectual reality.”⁴ He fought for the right to rebel, *in the spirit of Praxis philosophy*, firm in the belief of universal human emancipation that can in no way be transformed into smaller, local, and national emancipations. In this spiritual transformation, he saw “the provincial pretentiousness of those philosophers who proclaimed themselves authors of truths about the nation, time and history of their

² While some authors (e.g., Karkov or Bjelic) would primarily highlight that the radical humanism of the Praxis members has never been completely freed from colonial views and was inherently bound to ethnic racism, our standpoint is that the works mentioned don’t explain the divergent paths of the group members. Even if a postcolonial critique perfectly explained the destinies of certain Praxis members, it is a fact that this kind of critique has also originated from other members of the group. See, for example, Nikolay Karkov, “Decolonizing Praxis in Eastern Europe: Toward a South-to-South Dialogue,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 7 (2015), no. 2, pp. 180–200; Dušan I. Bjelić, “Toward a Genealogy of the Balkan Discourses on Race,” *Interventions* 20 (2018), no. 6, pp. 906–929.

³ “Miladin Životić – Dolazak u Sarajevo,” *Angažovana misao* 2017, (online at [youtube.com/watch?v=wwp--6ep9LU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwp--6ep9LU) [accessed Oct. 6, 2021]).

⁴ Miladin Životić, *Contra Bellum* (Belgrade: Beogradski krug, 1997).

people.”⁵ Bosnia and Herzegovina was at the centre of Životić’s engagement: the war there was fought not only for territory, but also with the aim of destroying the possibility of living together. With that in mind, Životić was known to say that “if living together is impossible, life itself is not possible.”⁶

We contrast Životić’s engagement with one of members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Mihailo Marković. Marković was the President of the Yugoslav Association for Philosophy (1960–1962) and, together with Životić, one of the founders of the Korčula Summer School, as well as a member of the editorial board of the *Praxis* journal and editor-in-chief of *Praxis International* (1980–1986). He was also a guest lecturer at many universities in the United States. His theoretical work contributed significantly to the defiance of dogmatic dialectical materialism and “the theory of reflection.”⁷ He was a pioneer in studying the connections between the philosophy of science and epistemology on one hand, and Marxist humanism on the other. During the 1990s, he wholeheartedly embraced the politics of Slobodan Milošević, serving as the Vice President and leading ideologist of Milošević’s Socialist Party of Serbia. Infamously, he will be remembered for his insistence on resolving “the Serbian territorial question”: from the outset of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, he advocated unification of all Serbs and the “humane displacement of populations.”⁸ Due to his advocacy of wartime politics, he was gradually marginalized from political life, and finally, during the 1995 Dayton Peace negotiations, expelled from the Socialist Party.

Praxis Philosophy and Left Dissidents in Serbia

As a country, socialist Yugoslavia was itself a unique “dissident” among socialist countries, and thus its dissident movements differed from those in Eastern Bloc countries. The clearest example of this was doubtlessly the general absence of *samizdat* publications compared to other socialist countries, although voices of dissent were heard occasionally within social political organisations that were part of the system itself (in Serbia, these included the Serbian Literary Guild, the Association of Serbian Writers, the Serbian Philosophers Society, and so on).⁹

The main Yugoslav actors exploring global leftist revolutionary trends in the theory and practice of the left were the journal *Praxis* (1964–1974) and the Korčula Summer School (1963–1974), which were also central institutions and strongholds of the leftist

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Igor Cvejić, Olga Nikolić, and Michal Sladeček. *Građenje jedne kontrainstitucije* (Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2019).

⁸ *Politika*, August 30–31, 1991; *Politika*, Sept. 29, 1991; *Politika*, Oct. 11, 1991; *Politika expres*, Feb. 22, 1992.

⁹ Milivoj Bešlin, *Ideja moderne Srbije u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji 1968–1972* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2021), 367.

opposition or the leftist critiques of Yugoslavia's system of socialist self-management. Despite this, both the journal and the school were created and maintained primarily thanks to the material resources of the state. They were never officially banned – budget allocations were reduced, and pressure was put on the printing house. The specificity and complexity of the Yugoslav system were such that the state, although constantly financing these intellectual centres of the new left in Yugoslavia, also suffered from their fierce criticism while at the same time responding to them, occasionally even undertaking harsh campaigns in pro-government media against *Praxis* and representatives of the Korčula Summer School. However, the Korčula Summer School, founded in 1963, quickly gained global fame and gave Yugoslav society the reputation of being a leader in free philosophical thought. It became a meeting place for philosophers and social scientists from all over the world, including from both Cold War blocs. The journal *Praxis* (1964–1974) was one of the most important results of this creative cooperation. With the growing influence of the School and prestige of *Praxis* in a global context, most of its founders, although they grew up as organic intellectuals from the Partisan movement and were members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia/League of Communist of Yugoslavia (SKJ), themselves from the party. At the same time, the “Korčula” phenomenon was not only a paradigm of the Yugoslav third way, but also of the society's internal contradictions. Every summer this Adriatic island became a meeting place for prominent philosophers, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and other humanities theorists and thinkers. Both Marxist and non-Marxists scholars, from the socialist East (Leszek Kolakowski, Karel Kosík, György Lukács, Ivan Varga, Ágnes Heller) and capitalist West (Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse) were provided a completely free and open (as well as very pleasant) environment for discussion – singularly possible only in Yugoslavia of the 1960s.¹⁰

From the very first edition of *Praxis* journal, it was obvious that this group of philosophers was striving to go beyond hermetic scientific discourse and academic boundaries. Early on, they underlined the fact they wished to “go above and beyond philosophy as a profession,” they drafted a list of issues they wished to discuss that included philosophy, science and art, as well as contemporary social activism and “life issues of our time.”¹¹ This new and emerging critical intelligentsia did not hide its growing and explicit political ambitions. They focused on social practices and political, economic and ideological

¹⁰ Michael Koltan, “Filozofija *Praksisa* i studentski prosvjedi 1968,” in Dragomir Olujić and Krunoslav Stojaković (eds.), *Praxis. Društvena kritika i humanistički socijalizam* (Belgrade: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2012), pp. 151–152; Boris Kanclajter and Krunoslav Stojaković, “1968. u Jugoslaviji – studentski protesti između Istoka i Zapada,” in Radmila Radić (ed.), *1968 – četrdeset godina posle* (Belgrade: INIS, 2008), pp. 460–461; Hrvoje Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2012), pp. 56–57.

¹¹ Zagorka Golubović, “Kritička filozofija u periodu postsocijalističke tranzicije,” in Dragomir Olujić and Krunoslav Stojaković, *Praxis. Društvena kritika i humanistički socijalizam* (Belgrade: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2012), pp. 116–117.

issues of the Yugoslav state. This was how the members of Praxis group, with their new interpretations of ideology and social reality, derogated the political monopoly in society, while setting the foundations in the 1960s for a soft dissident movement. They were fond of saying that they drew inspiration from the young Marx, the original core principles of communism, and “ruthless criticism of all that exists.”¹² The ruling communist elite was losing its monopoly over leftist ideology and its exclusive representation of workers. Finally, with a more active advocacy of revolutionary practices that would reach a climax in the events of June 1968, the League of Communists lost its exclusive right of revolutionary legitimization in society.¹³ Praxis members now became arbiters of how revolutionary or orthodox the Yugoslav socialist movement was, without themselves offering alternatives but rather its “original” and “authentic” interpretation.¹⁴

It was already clear in 1968 how Praxis members saw their role in society when several professors of the Belgrade University Faculty of Philosophy took an active role in student protests. So active that it could be considered as much a professor movement as a student movement. Hrvoje Klasić claims that unlike in the West, where professors were a symbol of an obsolete regime, in 1968 Belgrade they not only demonstrated solidarity with their students but also became “equal participants in the movement that turned into a joint criticism of the Yugoslav reality.”¹⁵ Indeed, Praxis professors used their rich teaching and scientific experience, deliberately going beyond the strict academic framework, to incite the revolutionary movement of 1968. The intention was systematic and in line with Marcuse’s theory that revolutionary potential can only be achieved by a synergy in the actions of the intelligentsia and the students.¹⁶ Praxis philosophers who failed to take an active part in the student rebellion were rare, and almost all the students’ requests aligned with Praxis philosophical principles. Even though the demonstrations themselves began spontaneously, the very next morning the professors showed their strong support for the students by speaking in the public space in front of the university building and leading protestors in a risky march towards the town’s central square.¹⁷ These teachers joined the strike the very first day, informing Belgrade University that they would suspend their classes. They thus became not only co-participants in the movement, but also its “frontline fighters.” Draža Marković, then President of the People’s Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia,

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Koltan, “Filozofija *Praksisa* i studentski prosvjedi 1968,” pp. 152–154; Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968*, 57–59; Kanclajter and Stojaković, “1968. u Jugoslaviji...,” p. 455.

¹⁴ Cf. Jernej Habjan and Andraž Jež (eds.), “May ’68 in Yugoslavia,” *Slavica tergestina* 24, no. 1 (2020); Aleš Gabrič, “Slovenian Intellectuals of the 1960s from the Political Point of View,” *Ibid*, pp. 114–129.

¹⁵ Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968*, p. 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ Đorđe Malavražić (ed.), *Šezdeset osma – lične istorije* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008), p. 57.

noted in his diary his great surprise to see philosophers – academics – turning away from science and demonstrating a sense of concrete political action, greatly impacting student organisations.¹⁸

Even though the outcome of the June rebellion constitutes a rather complex topic, the case of the eight University of Belgrade professors removed from their positions by a *lex specialis* adopted by the People's Assembly of SR Serbia in January 1975 was without a doubt a direct consequence of the demonstrations. The highest legislative body in Serbia placed the eight academics in question – Mihailo Marković, Svetozar Stojanović, Dragoljub Mićunović, Zagorka Golubović, Nebojša Popov, Ljubomir Tadić, Trivo Indić, and Miladin Životić – “at the disposal” of the Secretariat for Science and Education.¹⁹ A crucial reason for this decision lay in Tito's identification of the “group of professors” as instigators of the June rebellion, along with sustained pressure on the Serbian Communist Party leadership to remove them from the faculty lest they continue to influence students. The destiny of the eight professors had become a burning political issue from the moment Tito publicly spoke out against them. When discussing them, Tito often reminded the party's top brass that the professors had to be removed from the University. Therefore, at the historical Party session in Karađorđevo in December 1971, the Croatian leadership were forced to resign while Tito fiercely criticised the Serbian Party leadership for being compliant to “those elements distracting and leading our youth in the direction undesirable for our development. What have we done about that? We haven't removed a single person. We know, for example, precisely who at Belgrade University provoked and advocated for the well-known student unrest.”²⁰ Tito repeated the allegations when deposing reform-oriented Serbian government leadership in October 1972. He asserted that the Belgrade professors “educate our youth, and should things continue this way, the very same youth will tomorrow be absolutely alienated from our socialist system.” Tito repeatedly urged the Serbian leadership “to hold these professors accountable and stop them from teaching at universities.”²¹ Consequently, the destiny of the Faculty of Philosophy professors was a burning political issue that was constantly used as a tool for putting pressure on the new reform leadership of Serbia to do something about them as soon as possible.

¹⁸ Dragoslav Marković, *Život i politika 1967–1978*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Rad, 1987), p. 73. Cf. Thomas Biebricher, “The Practices of Theorists: Habermas and Foucault as Public Intellectuals,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37 (2011), no. 6, pp. 709–734.

¹⁹ Nebojša Popov, *Slučaj grupe profesora Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu* (Belgrade: Scientia Yugoslavica, 1989).

²⁰ *Dnevnik*, Dec. 4, 1971, p. 4.

²¹ Archives of Yugoslavia, Cabinet of the President of the Republic – 837, box 70–71, II-2/570, “Neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške sa sastanka rukovodilaca SR Srbije kod Predsednika Republike, 9. oktobra 1972.”

The “True Left” and the National Issue

Economic reform, market economy, and commodity-money relations became the centre of the left opposition’s criticism and resistance. Since the government had used “socialist commodity-money relations” and market economy as a way out of the crisis, Praxis members increasingly focused on the related negative consequences. Some social phenomena, such as the enrichment of certain groups, corruption, black market trade, shutting down companies, unemployment, economic migration – became the focus of intensified left criticism of Yugoslav socialist self-management. Economic reforms were perceived as the cause of all negative tendencies in the society, in particular since they failed to reduce a bulky bureaucratic apparatus. Nonetheless, the most challengeable aspect of the economic reforms, they thought, was running economic development exclusively in line with market logic, since it could eventually result in the disruption of socialism and the establishment of a standard, liberal-capitalist model of society. In order to avoid this worst-case scenario, Praxis members advocated the reintroduction of planned mechanisms instead of a market-oriented economy. However, this time, planning would not be state-run but managed by society, implying autoregulation or “auto-planning of the productive workforce.” In this way, “capital interests” would not be given the opportunity to lead and condition economic life.²²

Mihailo Marković, one of the most influential representatives of the Belgrade part of *Praxis*, thought that economic reform was causing “Yugoslav socialism to slowly lose its soul” and that the “philosophy of social justice, solidarity, and self-management had been transformed into a philosophy of efficiency, individualism, and egoism.” The 1968 student movement, he believed, was a reaction to the economic reforms and its related crises (“mass redundancies” and “unfathomable social stratification”). The competitiveness that the economic reforms promoted turned the market into “a jungle where survival allowed for anything.” Marković thought that opening Yugoslav borders for “import of sundry consumer goods” from the West was a particularly negative segment of the reforms.²³ Hinting at events in Croatia, he singled out the “disassembling of the federation” as the worst part of the reforms policy: the greatest danger was the federal units “turning into sovereign national states [...] to the hysterical noise of nationalistic drums.” Marković thought that the reforms certainly brought about more civic freedoms: of speech, religion, travelling, trading, enrichment, holding foreign bank accounts, entertainment, pornography, and so on. However, he believed these to be fake freedoms or civic democratism, and that with the 1963 constitutional reform, “real” freedom and democracy were on the decline.²⁴

²² Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968*, pp. 60–61; Kanclajter and Stojaković, “1968. u Jugoslaviji...,” p. 463.

²³ Mihailo Marković, *Juriš na nebo. Sećanja 1* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 2008), pp. 101–105, 107.

²⁴ Mihailo Marković, “Struktura moći u jugoslovenskom društvu i dilema revolucionarne inteligencije,” *Praxis* 16 (1971), no. 6, p. 813.

Moreover, as the most influential representative of the Belgrade part of *Praxis*, Mihailo Marković gave the 1968 movement a “national” dimension in addition to a social one. He believed that Dobrica Ćosić was the first to grasp the “unresolved” Serbian national issue in Yugoslavia. Others, he thought, under the influence of the welfare generated by “cooperation, unquestionable rapid development, and the great successes of our state”²⁵ ignored or failed to understand the need to open this issue. Marković was of the opinion that the dismissal of Aleksandar Ranković, the whole of the Eighth Congress of SKJ, Tito’s personal declaration as a Croat, and the 1968 demonstrations in Kosovo – all represented a “threat to Serbia.” In 1969, he joined the leadership of the Serbian Literary Guild (*Srpska književna zadruga* – SKZ), an organization with Dobrica Ćosić at its helm, in the belief that it was doing the most work on “awakening the dead consciousness of the Serbian people.” With this, representatives of the “left” and “right” opposition, the radical leftists and the nationalists, symbolically formed a united front of resistance against the regime through their two most representative figures in Serbia. Marković went on to explain that The Serbian Literary Guild “started working quite late” on the “spiritual unity of the fragmented Serbian people.”²⁶ In July 1972, SKZ was prohibited from operating politically (particularly in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Serbs lived), thus the “further awakening of the Serbian national identity” was “blocked” until the draft of the SASA Memorandum (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) in 1986.²⁷

A new coalition of Praxis members and nationalists was apparent at a gathering that took place over a number of days in Belgrade in late November and early December of 1969. Organized by the Philosophical Society of Serbia and entitled “Socialism and Culture,” representatives of two opposition groups met for the first time in a single place, voicing no serious ideological differences or mutual polemics. Sixty-eight philosophers from the Belgrade Praxis wing joined nationalists in the Serbian Literary Guild. An institutionalised connection of these two groups emerged in the course of 1971 through the cooperation of SKZ with the Philosophical Society of Serbia and Institute for Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy. The result of their cooperation was two books being published by the newly-founded Association’s imprint: *Stihija savremenosti* (Elemental contemporaneity) by Mihailo Đurić and *Preispitivanja* (Reflections) by Mihailo Marković.²⁸

At a subsequent gathering, “Nationalism and fundamental human rights” in February 1972, Mihailo Marković stated that Serbia was exploited in Yugoslavia, especially by

²⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Bešlin, *Ideja moderne Srbije u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji 1968–1972*, p. 371.

²⁶ It should be emphasized that not all of the Belgrade representatives of the group gathered around Praxis accepted the idea of cooperating and forming a coalition with the nationalists. Some of them, such as Andrija Krešić, Nebojša Popov, and Miladin Životić, opposed such an orientation.

²⁷ Marković, *Juriš na nebo. Sećanja 1*, pp. 79–89.

²⁸ Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Istorija Srpske književne zadruge* (Belgrade: SKZ, 1992), p. 138.

the modernization of the economy and economic reform, and that the Serbian people were being “torn apart.”²⁹ Marković considered interest in the national question in Yugoslavia an expression of personal and intellectual freedom, since “by losing interest in the national problem, we would limit our own freedom.”³⁰ Sharply criticizing Croatian nationalism, Marković said that a nation was seen in these conceptions as a unique and harmonious entity of individuals who strived to identify as much as possible with the leader of the “national movement,” and that awareness of the right to the freedom of their nation was accompanied by a tendency to dominate other nations, pointing towards the “endangerment” of Serbs in Croatia.³¹ According to him, this tendency of domination received tacit support of the Yugoslav leadership. He condemned the government’s aspirations for a more egalitarian distribution of social goods in the republics, advocating the abolition of government and capital. He openly expressed concern for Serbs outside Serbia, which was the central point of the nationalist programme of the time, as well as a decade and a half later.

The culmination of the work on the national issue was the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA). Mihailo Marković was one of its writers, and Dobrica Ćosić provided the inspiration. In the fall of 1986, a working version of this document was leaked to the public. The memorandum determined the direction of Serbian national policy by summarizing its history and articulating its grievances about its position in Yugoslavia. It suggested a future transformation of the federation based on the premise that Serbia and Serbs were in an unequal position in Yugoslavia.³² The consequence of this narrative about the subordination of Serbia by Slovenia and Croatia was mass polarisation and a primer for the final conflict as announced by Milošević’s populist policies.³³ Although the ruling establishment in Serbia, led by Ivan Stambolic, strongly condemned the arguments and rhetoric of the Memorandum, Slobodan Milošević’s victory in the intra-party showdown paved the way for this document to become an action platform for the authorities in Serbia.³⁴

Besides the Belgrade philosophy professors joining the literary circle, conflict also arose between the Belgrade and Zagreb Praxis wings regarding the renewal of the journal. Although the journal was never formally banned, its publication stopped in

²⁹ Bešlin, *Ideja moderne Srbije u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji 1968–1972*, p. 387.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Sonja Biserko, *Yugoslavia’s Implosion: The Fatal Attraction of Serbian Nationalism* (The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2012), pp. 79–80.

³³ Nikola Bertolino, “Programi nacionalnih katastrofa,” in Aljoša Mimica (ed.), *Druga Srbija - deset godina posle: 1992–2002* (Belgrade: Helsinški odbor, 2002).

³⁴ Alexander R. Miletić, “Generacije srpskih (re)centralista, 1968–1990: Opravdani zahtevi ili put u raspad Jugoslavije?” *Yu historija* (online yuhistorija.com/serbian/jug_druga_txt01c3.html, [accessed May 4, 2021]).

1974, following the Republic of Croatia's government decision to completely cut its budget. The proposal for the creation of a new journal, *Praxis International*, caused conflict and lasting disagreement between the Belgrade and Zagreb wings. The original journal was created within the Croatian Philosophical Society, so its editorial board gathered professors from the University of Zagreb while the Belgrade part worked in the editorial office of the international edition.³⁵ *Praxis International* was founded in 1981 against the will of most of the original founders of *Praxis*. The *spiritus movens* of the decision to use the former journal's name was Mihailo Marković, with the support of the majority of the Belgrade *Praxis* representatives. Miladin Životić and Andrija Krešić (from Belgrade) opposed the decision, as did almost all *Praxis* founders from Zagreb, except for Rudi Supek. This new journal deceived its readers, given that it carried a "significantly different platform" under the former journal's name – as stated in a letter by the *Praxis* founders opposed to the deceptive tactic. Andrija Krešić stated that the new journal was no longer philosophical, but "rather a politically coloured periodical."³⁶ That their anxieties were not unjustified was later corroborated by Agnes Heller, one of the journal's former editors, bearing witness to Marković's nationalist statements and the journal's new programme.³⁷

Conflict within the Belgrade wing of *Praxis* would come a bit later, only exacerbating the ruptures that started in 1968. Although not the primary topic of this paper, we can arguably wonder how homogeneous *Praxis* truly was. They not only had different views on the national question, but also diametrically different conceptions for the future directions of liberalization and democratization. Such differences leave open the question whether they were connected more by a common destiny than they were by their theoretical viewpoints. Their various interpretations of the events of June 1968 certainly point in that direction, which also opens the way for tracing the two currents of left dissident movements.

The fiercest opponent of nationalism among the Belgrade *Praxis* wing was Miladin Životić, a professor who returned to the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy in 1988. While Marković viewed the 1968 protests as anti-reform, Životić saw them as anti-Stalinist. Deeply influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre regarding the 1968 demonstrations, Životić criticized contemporary Marxists for abandoning dialectics for the sake of analytic rationality. Moreover, in his view, historical materialism had reduced history to a "carcass of tyrannical universality." In it, the human being has been reduced to a mere epiphenomenal result of circumstances, with dialectical materialism producing knowledge

³⁵ Cvejić, Nikolić, and Sladeček. *Građenje jedne kontrainstitucije*, p. 74.

³⁶ Božidar Jakšić (ed.), *Humanizam i kritičko mišljenje. Tako je govorio Andrija Krešić* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2010), pp. 117–124. Petar Milat, "Praxis i Korčulanska ljetna škola – tragovi jednog desetljeća (1963–1974)," in Dragomir Olujić and Krunoslav Stojaković (eds.), *Praxis. Društvena kritika i humanistički socijalizam* (Belgrade: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2012), pp. 392–403.

³⁷ Cvejić, Nikolić, and Sladeček. *Građenje jedne kontrainstitucije*, p. 82.

of human reality stripped of human subjectivity. Following Sartre, Životić draws the radical conclusion that philosophy must abandon the search for quasi-objective knowledge and must become a theory of comprehensive knowledge by grasping concrete human praxis; simply put, that a community of free persons is achievable through the freedom of the individual.³⁸

His criticism of the nationalist turn among the dissidents should be seen in the following light as well. Životić believed that both Dobrica Ćosić (whom he often mentioned as the ninth member of the group) and Mihailo Marković, as key authors of the SASA Memorandum, had created a hybrid Bolshevik ideology and nationalism, which Slobodan Milošević then seized upon. Even though Praxis members were, on the surface, immune to nationalism, in the end they were not immune to the so-called literary intelligentsia led by Dobrica Ćosić. In an attempt to explain how former dissidents turned to nationalist rather than liberal traditions, Životić attributed personal “Napoleon-like behaviour” to them, that is, personal aspirations to impose themselves as sovereigns. He therefore interpreted the Memorandum as a determination to create a gerontocratic forum that would dictate national interests.³⁹ None of those intellectuals, he continued, sought *interpretative knowledge*; rather, their aim was to merely instrumentalise people for their own ends.⁴⁰ Životić argued, to the contrary, that theory should not define any virtues and duties but create preconditions for people to themselves create their own place in the world.⁴¹ Approaching Habermas’ positions, he categorically stated that truths and moral values were of a communicative nature, acquired only in open communication. Often using Marković as an example of a relic offering obsolete approaches and “miraculously facile promises,”⁴² he criticised his opponents of even failing to understand Marx. For them, Marx was a “planner,” whereas Marx in truth opposed such views, criticising socialist utopians: “He never dealt with the so-called debris of the future, nor was he a prophet or preacher defining or foretelling it.”⁴³

In his essay, “The Broken Die in Silence,” Životić asserts that “Bolshevik ideology” has produced a generation of broken people, torn between the hegemonic way of seeing the world and the reality of everyday life. Such a “broken person” was a spiritually damaged being with a warped historical memory and wrecked ideas: “they knew better the minutiae of military offensives than the riches of our cultural past and the struggles of our peoples for their dignity, national identity and humanity.”⁴⁴ This shows, however,

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Životić, *Contra Bellum*, p. 133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴² “One should only have clear ideas about freedom and justice, and should have a will to power, and suddenly everything becomes ‘miraculously easy.’” *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29

that it would be incorrect to say that Životić neglected the national issue in Yugoslavia. He believed that political bureaucracy was hypocritical when it came to nationalism: on the one hand, it allegedly promoted universal human values while, on the other, it “regionalised social life,”⁴⁵ a policy which resulted in federal units turning into national republics. It favoured some and neglected other of the Yugoslav nations – Životić underlined the sentence “The Comintern’s concept of resolving the national issue [was] at the expense of the Serbian people.”⁴⁶ This constellation forced open a space for arbitration, and arbitration created an irrational surplus in interethnic misunderstandings, which is the main reason for the belated national emancipation. Životić saw the problem of national self-awareness as a cultural process, and, unlike his former friends, he believed that national emancipation is not necessarily in opposition to social emancipation. “[National emancipation] blocks [social emancipation] only when it identifies the state with the nation.”⁴⁷ Still, not long after this, he realized that the feeling of national belonging in Yugoslavia could never actually be developed as a cultural feature, since national belonging became a litmus test for a new political grouping that brought with it the power of terror.⁴⁸

In one of his most important essays, “Disidenti i rat” (Dissidents and war), Životić underscores a significant difference between two schools of thought that draw on Max Weber’s “ethics of responsibility” and “ethics of conviction.”⁴⁹ The ethics of conviction is grounded in belief, which then in itself justifies further engagement. As such, it is authoritarian, since “the practitioner of a doctrine never learns from others, but only wishes to teach them.”⁵⁰ By contrast, the ethics of responsibility emerges from deliberation, and engagement follows *interpretative knowledge*. This distinction was the starting point for the critique of the Memorandum: “projections of the future” do not fall within rational discourse, but seek to impose certain values. He believed such projections to be coercive and achievable only by silencing differences of opinion through the use of political power.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Miladin Životić, “Proizvođači nacionalnih mržnji,” in Mimica (ed.), *Druga Srbija*.

⁴⁹ Miladin Životić, “Disidenti i rat,” in Mimica (ed.), *Druga Srbija - deset godina posle (1992–2002)*, (Belgrade: Helsinški odbor, 2002). Cf. Manuela Boatcă, “‘From the Standpoint of Germanism:’ A Postcolonial Critique of Weber’s Theory of Race and Ethnicity,” in Julian Go (ed.), *Postcolonial Sociology* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 55–80.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The case of Mihailo Marković is paradigmatic of the Serbian intellectual elite: a strong supporter of the Paris May events and one of the most ardent participants in the 1968 protests in Belgrade, he took a diametrically opposite stance a little over two decades later. Remarkably close to Milošević's regime, he ended up expelled from the Socialist Party as too inflexibly opposing the peace negotiations. In his final years, he aligned himself with far-right nationalists like Vojislav Šešelj, taking part in public discussions about "Greater Serbia."⁵²

Standing in stark contrast to Marković was Miladin Životić, the personification of a Great Intellectual speaking truth to power. To those political leaders of today, sporting a revived nationalism, who are the successors to the warmongering leaders of yesteryear, the name Miladin Životić and the anti-war narrative are an unpleasant reminder that their bellicose policy and chauvinist ideology had an alternative in Serbia. One that was fragile, but viable. The suppression of its memory is neither random nor accidental, but a deliberate attempt at obfuscation.

Contrasting these two intellectual figures, we have painted a road from the far left to the far right – a historical lesson of the intellectual treason that occurs when intellectuals choose the side of particularism instead of universalism.⁵³ We have also shown the significance of *individual* actors in shaping the structures and destiny of a people. Finally, the split presented here had far-reaching consequences for the Serbian intellectual landscape, pictured through the narratives on the First and the Second Serbia⁵⁴ – Serbian public discourse has never managed to budge from this division even in the contemporary public discourse, some 30 years later.⁵⁵ Faced once again with a wave of hate speech passing between the former Yugoslav nations, we are calling for a re-examination of those figures who had already (albeit unsuccessfully) struggled to find a path toward that most elusive goal: the need to live together as the only option.

⁵² Velika Srbija no. 551, August 1998.

⁵³ Gazela Pudar Draško, *O čemu govorimo kada govorimo o intelektualcu: ideje i iluzije* (Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2017).

⁵⁴ The term "Second Serbia" originated in 1992, when a group of anti-war and anti-nationalist intellectuals, gathered around the Belgrade Circle and the Centre for Antiwar Action, began holding regular sessions to protest against the war, the spread of hatred, censorship, and authoritarianism. It was the most thorough critique of Milošević's war policy and the deconstruction of its causes. See Mimica (ed.), *Druga Srbija*.

⁵⁵ Aleksandar Pavlović and Mark Losoncz, "Belgrade 1968 Protests and the Post-Eventual Fidelity: Intellectual and Political Legacy of the 1968 Student Protests in Serbia," *Philosophy and Society* 30 (2019), no. 1.