

LIMITS OF  
REPRESENTATION

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Film As Political School Vol. 2

AS FILM  
POLITICAL  
SCHOOL 2

























# LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION

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## Limits of Representation:

On a Couple of Minutes of Srđan  
Karanović's film *Za Sada Bez Dobrog  
Naslova*

Sezgin Boynik

### I

In 1988, Yugoslav filmmaker Srđan Karanović, released one of the most interesting films on Kosovo● *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* [A Film Without a Name, or Still Untitled], is definitely not in the list of his most famous films, despite the fact that it won the Golden Tulip award at the Istanbul Film festival in 1989—and was liked by Martin Scorsese, who tried to hire Karanović to Hollywood after watching the film●<sup>1</sup> But, it is, in the words of the author himself, his most political and at the same time most experimental film● This film about Kosovo tells the story of a dramatic and impossible relationship between an Albanian woman and a Serbian man●

*Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* was made during the most dramatic years of Yugoslavia, and was focusing on the weakest link of its chain – Kosovo● As such, it is impossible to view the film without acknowledging its wider political context● *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* is, however, not the only political film about Kosovo made during that year● In the following text, I will mention other films as well, and discuss what is so exceptional in Karanović's film● I will argue that Karanović's film on Kosovo was not only politically more interesting than the others, but that the film also had more profound artistic



concerns● Further in the text, I reveal the sociological backdrop that fed his artistic vision●

In parallel, there also exists another dimension to this film, which resists the logic of sociological and historical representation● This level is more complex, it is deeply embedded into the form of film craft itself● This second level of abstraction will allow us to ask a fundamental question: is it possible at all to make artistic films about political subjects? Or, in the case of *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova*, we can formulate the question more precisely: did the artistic form of the film enable Karanović to say something different about Kosovo?

The story of the late eighties in Yugoslavia was just as much about nationalism as about dismantling socialism● As we will see, these two can not be separated in *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova*● These dynamics are, as Stuart Hall said in the eighties, “articulated in a complex unity●”<sup>2</sup>

In one of his later interviews, Karanović claimed that *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* was not a film about Kosovo, but a film about manipulation● This might be the case, but as Gani Bobi argued (in a text we are publishing here), any discourse on Kosovo in the eighties must start with a discussion on the question of manipulation itself● In making *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* our subject, we will look at ways to disentangle the “semantic chaos” surrounding Kosovo, nationalism, politics, and art●

## II

*Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* has an unfinished structure● It starts abruptly, giving the impression that the first 300 metres of film

has been lost, and ends by showing how the protagonists of the movie thrash the material used in the making of the film● It is a meta-film, which depicts the contradictions of filmmaking by making a film about the whole process of the film-making● It is a film about Kosovo at the end of the eighties but it is also a film about an attempt to make an artistic, non-compromised, experimental, non-narrative and autonomous film on Kosovo● This is the main strength of Karanović’s film● It is a deviation from other films made about Kosovo since the eighties● It is a film that sticks out, or, as Viktor Shklovsky would say, makes us stumble on the rock of Kosovo●

*Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* became synonymous with the impossibility of Serbian-Albanian relationships, and as such is often used as a metaphor for the impossibility of artistic discourse on Kosovo●<sup>3</sup>

## III

To start with situating the film in a broader theory of cinema we can say that *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* has a similarity to what is usually described as the Godardian (discursive) cinematic model● This model is, as Peter Wollen wrote in his famous programmatic text ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’, based on the “possibility of generating the new expressions of meaning through the film● The array of sign-systems at work in the cinema are thus brought into a new kind of relationship with each other and with the world●”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the meaning of the cinematic signs are freed in these films, in opposition to narrative and mainstream films which operate



through fixed constraints● This liberative aspect of the cinematic model employs “counter-semiotic strategies●” The theoretical outcome of this strategy is most concretely felt in two domains: the first is in the field of *cinematic-language*, which is generally understood through the operation of sign systems similar to linguistic processes● One of the most apparent effects of this theoretical manoeuvre is the possibility of translating political contradictions into the specificity of a cinematic language● As a conclusion, this approach allows space to conceptualise politics in works of art in a way that bypasses the reductionist and simplified strategies of propaganda● In other words, the Godardian model allows for complex forms when dealing with political subjects●

The second outcome of this model is the relationship of the film form to the *extrinsic elements* involved in its making● It specifically claims that cinematic representation can surpass the limits of linguistic codings● This particular aspect of the Godardian device is distinctively Brechtian and questions in effect the ways discourse is constructed● In other words, cinema can push the boundaries of representation and transgress norms● Cinema can perform this in many ways, with one option—among many—to render images involved in the film as contradictory constructions● This is usually achieved through the use of montage, defined as “the effect generated by a conflict of discourse in which the oppositions available in the juxtaposed discourse are contradictory and in conflict●”<sup>5</sup>

## IV

One cannot imagine a better example of semiotic elements juxtaposed within a discourse as contradictory and conflicting as the one that defined the antagonistic Serbian-Albanian relationship in Kosovo in 1988! We should start from there●

In this film, Karanović found a very playful way of dealing with these socio-political contradictions by constructing a narrative that explores the relationship between the contradictory social content and a complex artistic form, or more precisely between the “plot” and the “story”● For a materialist understanding of the artwork, the dynamics between the plot and the story is of crucial importance● As initially proposed by Viktor Shklovsky, the term “plot formation, altered the traditional notion of the plot as a set of motifs and redirected it from the provenance of thematic concepts to that of compositional concepts●”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the plot is not seen anymore as a depiction of events, or “story-stuff”—that is, only material for ‘filling’ the narrative● The plot is subsumed within the artistic laws that organise or compose the material itself● This corresponds to the inner dynamics of the film; the logic that makes it enjoyable also for those who do not necessarily identify with the subject of the film● Following this line of thought, we can say that a film about Kosovo is particularly successful when it is also interesting for viewers not familiar with the place itself●

Karanović manages to capture this dynamic by constructing a strange equilibrium



between plot and story● On the structural level, this balance provides Karanović with an additional tension in terms of composition that for spectators figures as an irony● However, more profoundly, Karanović composes a plot that is similar to a story; in other words, a form that can hold content● Technically in *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova*, Karanović is using a collage of diverse film styles, such as 35 mm, 8 mm, video, and various archive materials; together, they give an impression of a reality structured through contradiction● This seems to be perfect for a story that is overdetermined by the already existing social contradictions (Kosovo and Serbian-Albanian relations)● To put it simply: Karanović found an experimental form corresponding to a difficult content● But, as we will discuss further, this solution does not guarantee artistic power to the artwork, the film●

## V

As a film produced in 1987–88, the subjects of *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* have a similarity with other films made about Kosovo during the same years● The story is about violence, gender representation, national stereotypes, dramatic love, castration, rape and other issues that are marked with the stamp of the impossibility of representation● Paraphrasing Roland Barthes, we can say that *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* is “pregnant” with “images of social gestures” in which a “whole social situation can be read●”<sup>7</sup> As is often the case with cinema, these images of social gestures are translated into a love story – which often stands in for an inevitable catastrophe●<sup>8</sup>

## VI

*Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* is the story of a catastrophe● A Serbian man and an Albanian woman (Miloljub and Nadire)—both from Prishtina—meet in Niš, during ORA ‘86 [Omladinska Radna Akcija/ Youth Labour Actions]●<sup>9</sup> They keep their relationship a secret● But after the families of the lovers find out about them, Miloljub is castrated by a group of masked men● Both Nadire’s brothers and the Serbian community are accused of this brutal act even if both sides have a strong alibi● The final verdict is not depicted in the movie● During this process, Nadire experiences a breakdown and is put under intensive care in the same hospital where Miloljub is treated● Meanwhile, an unsuccessful Macedonian filmmaker (the ‘Director’ in the movie) with a tormented relationship of his own decides to make a “committed film” about this story● Because of the involvement of the media and public committees and courts bent on discovering the truth, his film project grows increasingly complicated and is finally halted● The financial interest of a rich Kosovar emigree (“whatever makes profit is not expensive”) who supports the film, as well as the compromises made by the director further complicates the situation● Nadire’s suicide attempt, her family’s uneasy situation, debates on Kosovo—one of the producers of the film proposes *Balkan Rhapsody* as an alternative, “more human,” title for the film—and the meddling of the bureaucracy pushes the director to completely abandon the project, finally letting an Italian director to complete it in the style of action



movies● The Macedonian film director decides to use his connections and his awareness of the situation in Kosovo to save the relationship of the unfortunate couple● In the end, he arranges for them to travel to Lyon● He saves the real characters of his experimental documentary film by abandoning filmmaking altogether● In this dilemma between art and life, he chooses the latter● In deciding not to exploit the subjects of the film, he concludes the story with a humanist and ethical stance● The filmmaker has, literally, exited the cinema●

## VII



[IMAGE: A collage composed in experimental cubist style published in number 738 of Književne Novine magazine in April 1987]

Above is a collage depicting what in the media was known as the ‘Martinović case’● It is about Đorđe Martinović, who in 1985 was found in a field near Gjilan with a bottle shoved up his rectum● The Martinović case, described by a Serbian writer as a “one-man Jasenovac” is a

case riddled with contradictions●<sup>10</sup> Julie Mertus’ book *Kosovo: how myths and truths started a war* dedicates one chapter to this case● Mertus’ central point is that a monolithic communist ideology made it difficult for Yugoslav society to accept more than one truth● She argues that the concept of a unique truth is always ideologically constructed as a result of “complex power relations●” From her liberal point of view, the truths are nothing but the “hidden transcripts” of conflicts of storytelling; everything is reduced to the realm of representation● According to Mertus, the truth which is a transcript of the conflict is similar to an intrusion into “others” domain of freedom and sovereignty: “conflicts arise only when one’s truths are constituted as degrading the others●” In conclusion, she argues, there is always more than one truth; in this ideal image of a harmonious democracy, the antagonistic truths must find ways to co-exist with mutual respect● All truths must have equal representation● In the case of Kosovo, as Mertus warns: “we must hear both the truths of Serbians and Albanians if we want to understand the situation, and avoid the conflict●”<sup>11</sup>

## VIII

The truths Mertus is arguing for are rather reminiscent of the “opinions”, which Alain Badiou called “the cement of our sociality●” The endless stream of opinions on immigration, revolution, money, sex, the latest film, etc● that keeps the business of existing normative society (and capital) running as usual● These opinions have nothing in common with “truths,” which, according to Badiou, “punch a hole in existing



knowledge●”<sup>12</sup> Every truth challenges existing knowledge, and thus opposes opinions● The question is whether cinema can be a site where such piercing truths can appear?

Although, Mertus’ relativisation of the situation in Kosovo can be challenged and her conceptualisation of the “untranslatable” and “unspeakable” be criticised as ideological theories which reduce the discursive elements of politics to generally accepted ideologies, this sort of approaches can be found in many other accounts● There is something of this also in the film of Srđan Karanović, but, as I want to show, *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* manages to escape this ideological framing through the excess that is available only through a cinematic form that presents the contradictions themselves● It does this in a most unexpected way in a scene lasting only a couple of minutes●

## IX

The discussion in the Serbian (and partly Yugoslavian) press on Kosovo and Albanians in the eighties was largely based on the sexualisation of nationalist politics, especially through the machinery of propaganda regarded by alleged mass rape of Serbian women by Albanian men in Kosovo●

A book published in 1990, *Kosovski Čvor: drešiti ili seći* [The Kosovo knot: to untie or to cut] which was the result of research conducted and initiated by an independent committee (Srđa Popović, Dejan Janča and Tanja Petovar) and which included texts by Svetlana Slapšak, Nataša Kandić, and Vesna Pešić, problematized this issue● The main argument of the report—

similar to Mertus’ position—is that the relationship between Serbians and Albanians is determined by the domination model inherited from the Yugoslav constitution and the legacy of the KPJ [Yugoslav Communist Party]● They see the instruments (the apparatus) of domination—which was highly concentrated in the hands of a few after the Second World War—as a reason behind the blocking of the democratic formation of nations● Everything is explained through this model of domination, including the apartheid of Albanians in Kosovo, Albanian Marxist-Leninist fractions, and rising nationalism●

Despite this liberal ideological position, the book does well in exposing a few state-fueled lies that contributed to the ‘Kosovo knot’, especially in showing the fabricated nature of the claims of mass rape● In Kosovo, as the report shows, overall cases of rape were much lower than in other Yugoslav republics, including the autonomous province of Vojvodina● Between 1982 and 1989, there were 323 cases of criminal charges based on rape in Kosovo; from this only 31 cases (9,6 %) were those where the crime was committed by Albanians against Serbians or Montenegrins● Consequently, the cases are fewer in the years following 1982, and through 1987–1989 there was no such criminal case at all●<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, propaganda on the sexuality of Albanians is crucial in understanding the discourse on Kosovo during the period of the eighties● The film *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* is situated at the heart of this discourse●

On the one side of this discourse based on the sexualisation of politics is the issue of rape; on another, the demographic question,



which was also heavily mobilised for nationalist ideologies● The first is best paraphrased by Fehmi Agani, who bitterly commented that according to Serbians, “the Albanian men rapes everything, everywhere, in all possible ways●” The second was commented by Muhamedin Kullashi, who described the politics of over-fertility as “the bomb in diapers” exposing the racist connotations of Serbian ideologies based on demographic fantasies●<sup>14</sup> Both forms of sexuality, the rape and over-fecundity were mobilised in Yugoslav nationalist discourses in relation to the forced migration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo● These two are the most explicit examples of the absolutization of political consequences of the sex●<sup>15</sup>

## X

Srđan Karanović avoids this absolutization, and gives voice to a liberal civic identity in the midst of the crisis of socialist Yugoslavia● His heroes are not traditionalists; they are against both elitist (bureaucratic) nationalism and the vulgar, popular and sexualized nationalism● In fact, there was no difference between these two, since most of the elite Serbian intellectuals (such as Dobrica Ćosić) and including the non-conformist and dissident Praxis philosophers continuously wrote about the situation in Kosovo from the perspective of sexual violence, primarily associating Albanians with rapists●

The use of sexual violence for the purpose of political manipulation did not happen spontaneously through the illogical outburst of the masses’ unconscious libidinal drive; it was bureaucratized and legalised in the mid-

eighties● Already in 1986, the category of “nationalist rape” was hastily and arbitrarily added to a Serbian Criminal Code, introducing the formal difference between ‘ordinary’ and ‘nationalist’ rape● This entailed a more severe punishment for the latter version of rape● As Hivzi Islami pointed out, the arbitrariness of the debates on rape—apart from reproducing crude nationalist propaganda—were at the same time contradicting the basic principles of socialist self-management●<sup>16</sup> Both elite and vulgar nationalists were calling for a strong intervention by the State apparatus (in the form of quotas, police, control, bureaucracy, etc●) in order to dismantle the democratic constitution of the Yugoslav style of self-managed socialism in favour of authoritarian and neo-liberal politics● In short, what united the different strands of nationalisms (if they were different at all) was the critique of socialist self-management●

## XI

In order to properly understand the exception constituted by *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* we should compare it with another film on Kosovo released the same year● Srđan Dragojević’s *Kuća Pored Pruge* [House next to the railway], which won the prestigious Golden Arena at Pula festival in 1988, tells the story of a Serbian family forced to leave Kosovo (“but who carried Kosovo with them” as Dragojević says in one interview); the reason being the rape of a Serbian woman by Albanian men● This overtly chauvinist film was made in a style that allows one to immediately recognize specific roles (who is a Serb, who is an



Albanian, who is good and who is bad): it is a film where housewives cook, and honest husbands build homes● In other words, it is a commercial and mainstream film, which enjoyed a huge popularity among the whole spectrum of Serbian and Yugoslav film critics and intellectuals●

Muhamedin Kullashi's observation that "the Kosovo question is a litmus test for all Serbian intellectuals and artists" is also illustrated by the way Serbian intellectuals have approached Karanović's film● Hardly any Serbian intellectual failed to praise the pathetic and gross fabrication of lies spewed by propagandists● For example, film critic Severin M● Franić dismissed *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* as "the typical artistic salto-mortale of Karanović's cinematic opus," and labeled it as an example of propagandistic, opportunistic and gutless way of making a film on Kosovo! As a counter-example, he referred to *Kuća Pored Pruge*, as a film that really understood the "heart of the Kosovo situation●"<sup>17</sup>

## XII

In an article on his own films, Karanović writes that the real topic of *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* is not Kosovo, nor nationalism, "but a story of manipulation of people from different classes and backgrounds in the context of self-managed socialism●"<sup>18</sup>

Acclaimed film theoretician Ranko Munitić, when writing about *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* in 2000, observed that the film is the prophecy of what will happen not only to Serbs in Kosovo but also to self-management, illustrating "balkan-socialist short-sightedness●"<sup>19</sup> In the

realm of liberal ideologies, this "socialism" has been related to nationalism in a very murky way; socialism is interpreted as a non-democratic oppressive regime that gave the ground to archaic nationalism, but on the other hand nationalism is portrayed as a force responsible for the deviation from socialism with a human face● The latter was the case with Praxis philosophers (Mihailo Marković, Ljuba Tadić, Svetozar Stojanović, and Zagorka Golubović) who singled out Albanian nationalism as particularly Stalinist and "counter-revolutionary●"<sup>20</sup> This was a very odd statement to make, considering the fact that it was in the demonstrations organised by Serbians and Montenegrins in Kosovo that one could hear overtly racist and anti-socialist slogans such as: "Albanians Out!" "Death to Shiptars!" and "Is the state sleeping?●"

The most eloquent critique of this position was made by Branka Magaš who in her writings published in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* (under the pseudonym of Michele Lee) showed how the Kosovar Albanians in the demonstrations at Trepça Mines and in later mass demonstration in support of Azem Vllasi were clearly calling for the application of the democratic principles of the constitution based on self-management● The demands of Albanian workers in the late eighties in Kosovo were, according to Magaš, about labour conditions and they were hardly expressed in the form of oppressive nationalistic demands● In her subsequent debates with Praxis philosophers, Magaš also showed that it was the Serbian intellectuals who attacked the principles of

self-management by insisting on the centralised state apparatus in Kosovo in order to defend the *identity* of Serbs in Yugoslavia●<sup>21</sup>

### XIII

As we have already stated, *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* is an experimental-montage film about a social reality overdetermined by contradictions● Karanović himself gives a clue regarding this in an interview published in *Sineast* magazine in the late eighties: “I actually wanted to make a film on this moment in Yugoslavia, and in particular its Eastern or Southern part, or as some call it, ‘Zone B’● I wanted to make a film that ‘stinks’, but also smells of Yugoslavia, because I think we are all very silly and stupid, that we are passing through a million different crises which the civilised world has forgotten for a long time and resolved for itself already in the 19th century●”<sup>22</sup>

What Karanović had to say about Kosovo (or ‘Zone B’) did not differ much from the general discussion regarding the southernmost part of Yugoslavia● That specific identity was a topic for many intellectuals and artists● Between 1986 and 1988, aspiring young philosopher Zoran Đinđić, wrote a series of essays on this subject for nationalist bi-weekly *Književne Novine*● In ‘Troubles with Identity’, published the same year as Karanović’s film was released, Đinđić argued that the contradictions within the overall social structure became obvious through the situation in Kosovo, or, as he calls it, through the “Kosovo crystallisation●” Đinđić writes that the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution does not allow for a “normal situation” because in the constitution

“the basic rights of individual freedom are negated in relation to state power●”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the concept of normality as a necessary condition for the rule of law is suspended● What has been crystallised in Kosovo, according to Đinđić, and to the committee who authored *Kosovski Čvor*, is not dissimilar to Karanović’s “Zone B realism●”<sup>24</sup>

In his ‘Serbia and Kosovo’ essay, Đinđić comes closer to defining some features of this ‘Kosovo crystallisation’: its dynamics transforms the semantics of general communication and frame the situation as a “terror of interpretation●” Đinđić specified the situation even further: “The total communicative structure of the phenomenon of Kosovo abolishes all concrete communication● It is a quicksand, a room with a thousand mirrors, where the bad eternity triumphs in every step●”<sup>25</sup>

Karanović gives a similar statement: “the problem of Yugoslavia, especially that of ‘Zone B’ is that it never respects any coherent style● For example, it is impossible either in Belgrade or in any place to its south, to shoot two scenes on a street connected in an architectural unity● Unfortunately, our traditions are richer with destruction than construction; no generation respects the previous one● It’s all a mess● That’s why I wanted to do a film that would be stylistically heterogeneous, and would have not 2 but 30 styles and would be capable of reconstructing the smell of our surroundings●”<sup>26</sup>

In 2000, Karanović gave a more acute interpretation of the identity politics caught in the maelstrom of social turbulence referring to the then actual political situation: “[*Za Sada*] is



dilettante surrealism, which tries to show the upcoming kitsch and turbo-folk culture by using fiction similar to a documentary●”<sup>27</sup>

#### XIV

*Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* can be dubbed as a fictional documentary (“fictions bring us closer to reality” as Godard once said), but this does not tell much about how it is related to its subject● Circling back to the beginning of the text, we can ask whether *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova* tells something new about Kosovo? Or, whether the film escapes the index of objective reality, and exposes some aspects that differ from normative (and ideological) forms of communication● In other words: are there some “excess of materials inscribed as a contradiction”<sup>28</sup> in *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova*? This excess spoils the usual story-telling and adds something unusual to the filmic language: it is a punch of truth that disavows the relativism of culturalist opinions●<sup>29</sup>

This truth of the filmic system itself is a configuration of what Alain Badiou called the “human presence●” Among all arts, cinema is perhaps best equipped in showing the presence “of someone who exists, who makes a choice, even if that mode of presence is somehow off-kilter, odd, unsettling●”<sup>30</sup> It is the moment of the film when we say: “here, there’s someone!”

#### XV

These moments of presence in films are rare● But they are the reason why we watch them: to catch this glimpse of fleeting subjectivity, which in normal conditions are not instantaneously recognisable● I think *Za Sada Bez Dobrog*

*Naslova* has such a scene, even if it only lasts a couple of minutes● It is so strong that it pushes us to reconsider the whole film through the prism of these two minutes—despite the film’s issues with the question of identity and the over-sexualisation of politics● Such a scene has no equivalent in other films made in Yugoslavia in the eighties; as such, I understand it as a powerful configuration of cinematic subjectivity●

Here is a transcript of the scene in question, in which the truth of cinematic presence declares itself:

24' 08" – 24' 45"

(shot in video, in blue colour):

Miloljub (standing in the yard of the hospital, facing the camera): *Ona me je učila da hleb se kaže “bukë,” voda “ujë,” “unë të dua” znaçi volim te● Kad se nismo krili na pesme Evrovizije ja je pitam da begamo kod mog brata u Lyon● On bi nam našao posao● ●●● Na to ona reçe “hajde” i pokloni mi šnalu●*

[Subtitles in English: She taught me Albanian● Bread is “bukë,” water “ujë,” “unë të dua” means “I love you”● When we met at the Eurovision Song Contest, we agreed to escape to my brother in Lyon● He would find us a job● She said “OK” and gave me her hair clip●]

24' 45" – 24' 58"

(large shot of hospital yard with video moving towards the ward)

24' 58" – 25' 31"

(shot in video, in blue colour)

Nadire (lying in bed, speaking in Serbian): *Viđali smo se na korzou non stop● On je išao njihovom stranom a ja našom● Nije smeo da mi priđe bilo bi svašta● Onda idem ja na ORA Niš 86', i tamo sretnem i njega● On mi priđe i kaže mi "ja Prištevac, ti Prištevka, ajmo u disko●" Ja kažem "super●" Oboje se zaljubimo ... Tako skroz●*

[Subtitles in English: We saw each other all the time on the promenade● He was on their side, I was on ours● He didn't dare to come to me● Then I went to a Youth Labour Action in Niš in 1986, and ran into him there● He said "I'm from Prishtina, so are you, let's go to a disco●" I said "Super" and we both fell in love ... Completely●]

24' 32" – 26' 05"

(shot in 35 mm, inside the film company)

Producer of the film: *I dobro je što ne navijaš ni za jedne ni za druge● I zato nemoj da ti Albanka govori Srpski molim te● Nemoj da se smiješ● Meni to ne smeta, ali neki članovi savjeta mogu da se nakače za to i da te proglase Srpskim nacionalistom●*

Director of the film: *Meni! Pa ja ovde živim samo od svoje dvanaeste godine● Ja sam Makedonac●*

Producer of the film: *Ma tim prijete● Šta će ti to● Ako ti je stvarno stalo do ovog filma moraš i nešto da progutaš● Vidiš da su se naoštrili●*

[Subtitles in English: Producer: It's good you haven't taken sides● So don't let the Albanian girl speak Serbian● Don't laugh, it doesn't bother me, but some of the board members might accuse you of being a Serbian nationalist● Director: Me? I've only lived here since I was 12● I'm Macedonian● Producer: All the more so● What do you need it for? If you really care about this film, bite your tongue a bit● You can see that they are getting angry●]

26' 13" – 26' 41"

(shot in video, in blue colour)

Nadire (same shot of her, lying in bed, now speaking in Albanian): *Një kohë të gjatë jemi njoftë dhe ai më pëlqente sepse i kishte sytë si John Travolta● Pastaj jemi shoqëruar ashtu intimisht dhe një herë kemi shkuar në lumin Sitnicë për të luajtur ... vetëm●* (Switching to Serbian): *Ne seçam se tačno što sam govorila ali mislim da je to●*

(Subtitles in English: We knew each other for a long time, and I really liked him, 'cause he had eyes like John Travolta● Then we were, you know, intimate, and once even went swimming in the river Sitnicë ... alone● I think that was what I said before●]



- 1 *Malo Iznad Tla: Srđan Karanović o svojim filmovima* [Little Over Ground: Srđan Karanović on his movies], Interviews and edited by Stefan Arsenijević, Filmski Centar Srbije, Belgrade, 2022, p● 233●
- 2 Stuart Hall, 'Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance', in *Sociological theories: Race and colonialism*, UNESCO, Paris, 1980, p● 321●
- 3 For example, Svebor Midžić in his text on the first attempt of having a contemporary art exhibition in Belgrade in 2008, which was vandalised by neo-nazi thugs and forced its closure, compares the situation to *Za Sada Bez Dobrog Naslova*● Svebor Midžić, 'Za sada bez dobre politike...' 7● februar: *Glasiló Radnika u kulturi*● Beograd, 2008●
- 4 Peter Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes', *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*, Verso, London, 1982, pp● 92-104●
- 5 Colin MacCabe, *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature*, Manchester University Press, 1985, p● 44●
- 6 Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher, Dalkey Archive Press, London, 1991●
- 7 Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', *Image-Music-Text*, Fontana, London, 1977, p● 73●
- 8 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1986●
- 9 Annual ORA's brought together youth from all over Yugoslavia for voluntary labour actions●
- 10 Initially Martinović accused two Albanian-speaking of attacking him while he was working in his field● After being interviewed by a Yugoslav People's Army colonel, Martinović reportedly admitted that his injuries had been self-inflicted in a botched attempt at masturbation●
- 11 Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*, University of California Press, 1999●
- 12 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of the Evil*, translated by Peter Hallward, Verso, London, 2001●
- 13 Izveštaj Nezavisne Komisije, *Kosovski Čvor: Drešiti ili Seči*, Chronos, Belgrade, 1990, p● 41●
- 14 Muhamedin Kullashi, 'Kosovska kriza i kriza Jugoslavije' and Fehmi Agani, 'Kritički osvrt na politički diskurs o Kosovu i Albancima', in *Kosovo-Srbija-Jugoslavija: zbornik*, Krt, Ljubljana, 1989●
- 15 Vlasta Jalušić and Tonči Kuzmanić in their text 'Rape by Albanian' discussed the structural changes in gender representation when the sexual violence is overtly politicised● The political tension, they observe, which is looming over the most of the rape cases becomes very messy in the case of nationalist rape● It becomes what they call something of a "baroque exaggeration" (remember the obscure and strange form of Karanović's film)● Another aspect of the sexual fantasy relating to nationalist rape, is that women are dehumanised and

- reduced to the function of reproduction● The role of women is not anymore only a biological reproduction, but rather of cultural, historical and national reproduction● Vlasta Jalušić and Tonči Kuzmanić, 'Posilstvo po Albansko', in *Kosovo-Srbija-Jugoslavija: zbornik*, Krt, Ljubljana, 1989●
- 16 Hivzi Islami, "Demografski problemi Kosova i njihovo tumačenje", in *Kosovo-Srbija-Jugoslavija: zbornik*, Krt, Ljubljana, 1989●
- 17 Severin M● Franić, 'Mnogo Starog, Malo Novog', *Sineast*, Sarajevo, 1988● Few years later in 1993, this same Franić was to be appointed as a TV editor in Republika Srpska●
- 18 Srđan Karanović, "Druženje s Filmom", *Srđan Karanović: monografija*, edited by Ranko Munitić, Centar Film, Belgrade, 2000●
- 19 Ranko Munitić, "Srđan Karanović: ili 'Da li Uvek Treba Želeti Nešto Više'", in *Srđan Karanović: monografija*, edited by Ranko Munitić, Centar Film, Belgrade, 2000●
- 20 Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-1992*, Verso, London, 1993●
- 21 Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*●
- 22 Blagoje Kunovski, "Film o Filmu: Razgovor sa Srđan Karanovićem", *Sineast*, Sarajevo, 1988●
- 23 Zoran Đinđić, 'Tradicija i identitet', *Književne Novine, No● 738*, 15 September 1987●
- 24 Slobodan Karamanić in his text 'Kosovo after Yugoslavia', interprets Đinđić's writings as maintaining "the idea of politics strictly attached to the process of establishment of the normal and non-contradictory liberal state – the establishment of the state as an ultimate limit of politics and the only possible field of conflict resolution●" Slobodan Karamanić, "Kosovo after Yugoslavia", *Prelom: journal for aesthetics and politics no:8*, Belgrade, 2006●
- 25 Zoran Đinđić, "Srbija i Kosovo", *Književne Novine, No● 756*, 15 June 1988●
- 26 Blagoje Kunovski, "Film o Filmu: Razgovor sa Srđan Karanovićem●" Gani Bobi's text that we publish in this volume also refers to semantic confusion, a term he borrowed from Rudolf Ponzio in order to explain the regimes of representation on Kosovo● Gani Bobi, "Paralogizmi Iskrivljenog Diskursa o Kosovu", *Thema 8-9*, Prishtina, 1987●
- 27 Srđan Karanović, "Druženje s Filmom", *Srđan Karanović: monografija*, edited by Ranko Munitić, Centar Film, Belgrade, 2000●
- 28 Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Pt● I", *Screen, 16:1*, 1977●
- 29 Another device is the suspension, withdrawal, or estrangement that expose the cinematic structure and its narrative● One example could be Želimir Žilnik's *Brooklyn Gusinje*, also made in 1988 about a love relationship between a Serbian woman and an

Albanian man● In that film, the tension of rape and nationalism (and stories associated with them) is left unresolved, hanging in the air● They are not even touched upon● There are no heroes in this option● This is story-less cinema●

30 Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, Polity Press, London, 2013, p● 6●

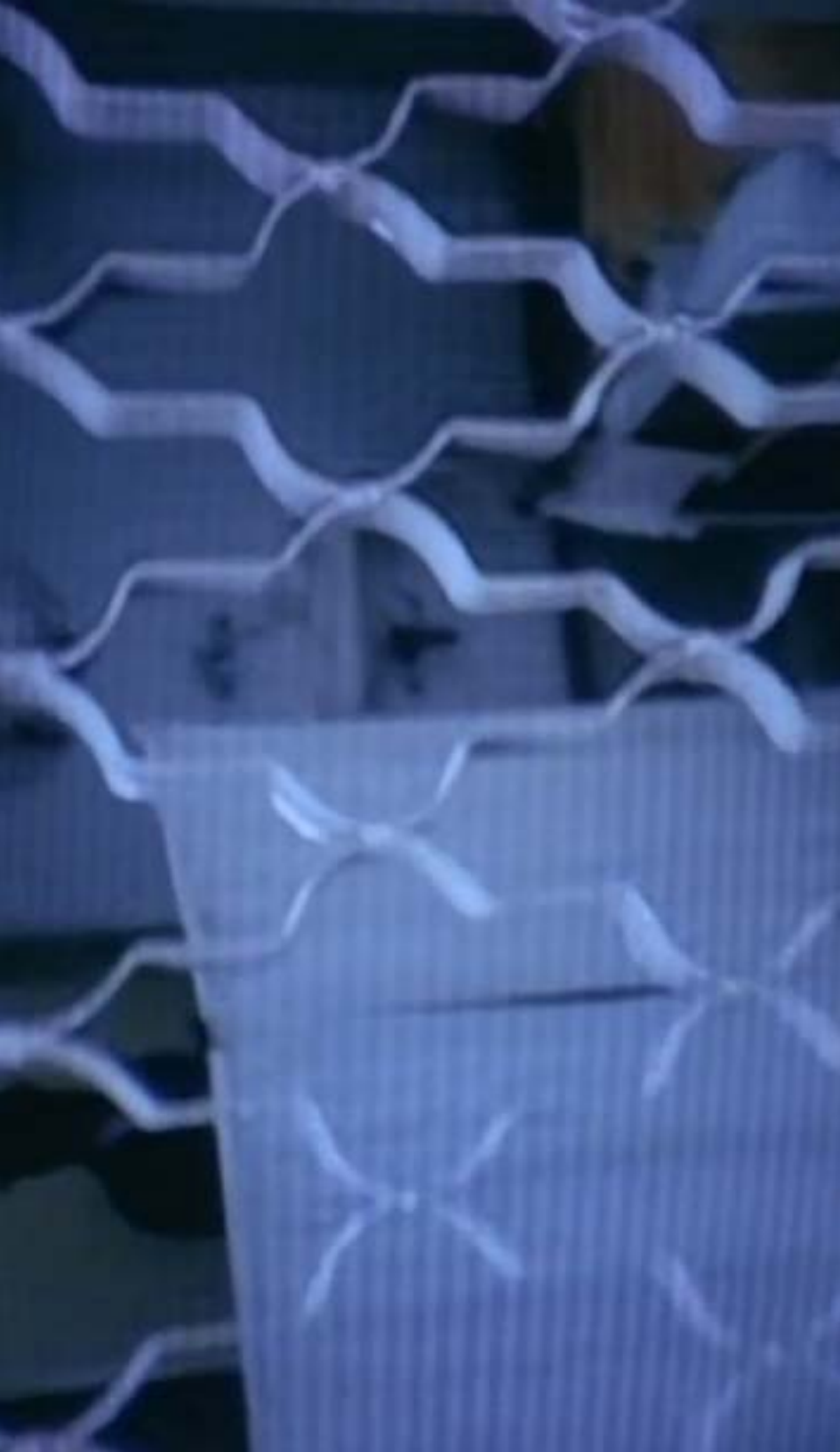


























## The Discourse on Kosovo: Paralogisms and Distortions

Gani Bobi

The discourse of the day on Kosovo is increasingly characterized by stereotypes and paralogisms that serve to exacerbate the already boiling emotional tension, as well as to blur the differences between real and imaginary problems that we are facing in our society● Due to hasty and irresponsible generalizations that ignore the facts and, instead, rely on unverified assumptions, i●e●, *pre-judgements*, the horizon of rational judgment about the *situation* in Kosovo is significantly limited● How can one oppose this kind of “semantic disorder” (Ponzio) within the discourse on Kosovo with all its one-sided generalizations, distortion of facts and mystification of problems? This question is directed above all to the intellectuals from Kosovo●

In a certain sense, the very posing of this question to intellectuals from Kosovo underlines the contention that these intellectuals haven't been engaged enough—or even that they have ceased to be intellectuals at all, because they have done nothing to prevent the distortion of discourse pertaining to Kosovo● Stating that intellectuals from Kosovo have failed and ceased to be intellectuals because they haven't thought through their own thinking, because they haven't succeeded in becoming the “consciousness and conscience of their times”, because they have drawn back into a



quiet resignation, etc● – thus contributing implicitly or explicitly to intentionally distorted discourse on Kosovo – can in certain sense be taken as factual; but it still cannot be taken as *entirely* true● I surely have absolutely no intention to defend or justify the intellectuals from Kosovo● What I would like to emphasize – before I proceed to further analyses – is that the discourse on Kosovo was mainly established on the basis of a single monopolistic interpretation in which, through a malicious usage of revolutionary eschatology, the blurring of the boundary between progressive and regressive tendencies was set up● Such an interpretation has also shored itself up against every effort to disclose its falseness since it had, every time when it was needed, the liberty to declare such efforts as counter-revolutionary● Oftentime, as soon as they dared to oppose the distorted discourse on Kosovo, local intellectuals were without any hesitation declared as nationalists or irredentists when they were of Albanian ethnicity, or opportunists and careerists when they were of Serbian or Montenegrin descent● Fear regarding possible negative labeling but also of very tangible consequences that could ensue within a very complex and flammable situation both represent “justifications” for the insufficient engagement of intellectuals from Kosovo in the struggle against paralogsms and prejudices regarding their social environment and the people that comprise it● The eradication of paralogsms and prejudices represents the necessary precondition for any kind of rational judgement (which is the only way of reaching the core of the problems that Kosovo faces

nowadays); this kind of rational judgement is a precondition for *future* itself – the kind which would eliminate weaknesses and overcome the situation in which both Kosovo and our country find themselves in● This is why I will discuss in this text only particular tendencies comprised in the discourse under study● Those tendencies might not have been entirely thought through, but they can have very grave and unforeseen consequences●

There is a tendency which represents a form of psycho-social and political manipulation which seeks to blame Kosovo, i●e●, its autonomy, for all the nuisances and problems that Yugoslavia is facing today● The existence of such a tendency is an unquestionable indicator that within the distorted discourse on Kosovo there is no willingness to solve the problems, but, quite on the contrary, an inclination to mystify them● Such tendencies should not be surprising● Although they can be “efficient” in achieving a certain type of social integration – based on affect and irrationality – by attacking the ones that are “most unashamed”, the ones that are considered to be socially “the weakest” and “most suitable” for victimhood, such tendencies are in reality also detrimental for those who employ them, since in such tendencies there is no *future* but only an *acrimonious past*●

There is also a tenet within the distorted discourse on Kosovo that Albanians are the ones destroying Yugoslavia● There is at times a difference between *Albanians* and *good Albanians*, according to which “Albanians” are counter-revolutionaries, nationalists,

irredentists, separatists, fascistic rapists, etc●, while, on the other hand, the “good Albanians” (no one can say how many there are... only that they can be found solely among simple shepherds) are not like “Albanians”● There is also no shortage of attempts to describe the “characteristics” of Albanians – sadistic torturers, plunderers, murderers, intimidators; people who assimilate others, rob them of their possessions, burn houses and villages and drive out members of other nations from their land and so on – as *constant factors*, since said Albanians have continually displayed them “since the Turks have conquered Serbia●” Thus, over the next five centuries—as the scientist who has “published twenty-three voluminous studies” claims—“Serbian people in Kosovo were exposed every day to torture, a compulsion to declare themselves as Turks or Arnauts, to rape, murder, robbery, exile, destruction of their homes and villages, the loss of their houses and livestock, exile to Asia Minor, etc● It was all done by *Turks and Arnauts together*, since they shared the same religion – Islam●” The emphases in this text were made by the author who published 21●000 pages of scientific studies which—according to their author—“stacked vertically one upon another,” form with their bindings an “impressive pillar of books one and a quarter meter high” (Dr● Branko Peruničić, “Odgovor Škeljzenu Malićiju iz Prištine” [“Reply to Shkëlzen Maliqi from Prishtinë”], *Književna reč* no● 288, p● 4)● This author, in order to factually illustrate his scientific opus of one and a half meters is offering readers an image of the impressive vertical pillar of his science●

He uses this opportunity to publish once again statistical data that he has gathered from “unknown yet important historical documents” about the population of Kosovo in 1905● According to this data, Serbs made up 96% of the population of Kosovo, while Albanians, who are mainly “immigrants from Malësia” comprised little over 4% of the population● In fact, the total number of Serbs in Kosovo in 1905, according to Dr● Branko Peruničić’s research, amounted to: “Serbs declaring themselves as Arnauts of the Islamic religion” (390●010), Orthodox Christian Serbs (248●300), “Serbs that were converted to Catholicism” (1●750), “Serbs of the Islamic religion that immigrated from Bosnia” (1●200) and “Serbs of Protestant religion” (1)● It is evident from the data that most Serbs living in Kosovo in 1905 were “Serbs declaring themselves as Arnauts of the Islamic religion” whose number, according to Dr● Peruničić, is “absolutely correct”● In his mind it is “absolutely correct” and beyond any doubt that *Albanians together with Turks* have spent five centuries killing, raping, robbing and persecuting Serbs from Kosovo, which was their native land● Indeed, it is hard to make the author of “twenty-three voluminous scientific studies” (some of which contain *two thousand* pages!) reflect on his finds● However, some questions beg to be asked here● And since the scientist didn’t dare to—let an ordinary reader do so: How was it possible at all for such a striking small minority of Albanians (3%!) who “immigrated from Malësia” to assimilate the people that comprised the overwhelming majority of the population (around 96%!!!)?



Why did *Albanians together with Turks* need to convert a part of the Serbian population to Catholicism? Weren't Albanians, just as Serbs, enslaved by the Turks? And, finally, did all the Albanians belong to a single religion – Islam, shared with the Turks? One could proceed to ask similar questions, the ones that Dr● Peruničić had no intention (I am taking the liberty of assuming so) to ask of himself● He never thought of taking into consideration facts that could question his *pre-judgements*●

This is not the only (or the most adequate) example of “excessive categorization” (Allport) within the prevailing discourse on Kosovo● In our everyday lives, we are exposed to an extensive and vast literature, as well as to everyday talk and speeches in which the present is being mystified through its reduction to an acrimonious past in which singular cases and conflictual experiences are being exaggerated and in which there is a desire to bring into question—in one way or another—the possibility of cohabitation of the peoples that comprise this very social environment● All of this only serves to reinforce prejudice and encourage actions taken under their impulse● In other words, prejudices are not only characteristic of those insignificant persons that feel important when they are allowed to blame and offend others, but of those that seek to become the prime movers of social actions●

When assumptions about Albanians from Kosovo are made on the basis of such isolated cases or on completely unverified facts, and when renowned intellectuals treat said Albanians as being “below the level of

civilization,” such judgements have not only intellectual motives but also something “deeper” – something controlled by affective-irrational instigators● The so-called *Albanian tribalism* from Kosovo is being emphasized in a ritualistic manner as *xenophobic and aggressive tribalism* (and all but dubbed *cannibalism!*)● This cannot be comprehended otherwise than as a call for taking a broad spectrum of measures that would lead to *civilizing* Albanians and rescuing them from *savagery* and *barbarism*● It is futile to point out this view's inconsistencies since one cannot expect of even the most ardent advocate of democracy and the principles of sovereignty to apply those principles to creatures that are ignorant and undeserving of them● On the contrary, the democracy and sovereignty of such creatures represent a permanent danger to democracy and the sovereignty of civilized people● It is only once we understand this kind of framework that the call for *understanding, democracy* and *humanism* made by a delegate from Kosovo at the October Meetings of Writers in Belgrade was characterized as a *misappropriation* by some of the writers present at the event● One of them said that *Albanians don't deserve to live in a democracy* (*Fjala*, no● 21–22/1986, p● 15)●

It is worth saying that the previous example represents only the logical consequence of the mode of thinking about *tribalism in Kosovo*● However, one cannot ignore some attempts of organizing concrete actions that aim for the “de-feudalization of regional-socialism” in Kosovo—followed by the clarification that such actions “should be neither too forceful, nor sporadic or

narrowly political” (*NIN [Weekly Informational Newspaper]* no● 1875, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1986, p● 29)● As stated in the *NIN* article, an action “in the field of cultural collaboration between Belgrade and the Socialist Autonomous Region of Kosovo” (all quotes are from the article entitled “Belgrade-Kosovo in Belgrade” with the subtitle “It’s Better to Have Less and Yet More”), cannot be respectable “unless it becomes and remains lasting and of high quality and the collaboration between Belgrade and the Socialist Autonomous Region of Kosovo becomes physically (in terms of flows of goods and people), culturally and ideationally normalized●” Actually, a public action in the field of cultural collaboration was initiated five months ago by the Municipal Committee of the Communist League of Belgrade● This action was debated recently among delegates from the field of culture at a meeting where no representatives from Kosovo were present● As it is claimed in the *NIN* article, the concept behind this action is firmly removed from “the idea of reciprocity in a well-known mechanical ratio that is often detrimental when it comes to higher forms of culture●” The article also emphasizes that “some of the participants in the debate specifically insisted on the necessity to... ‘survive and remain”● The reasoning behind this is that “there can be no de-feudalization of regional-feudalism in culture without ‘mixing’ not only goods but people too●” It is also emphasized in the article that this has nothing to do with any kind of “elitism” or, even more, “colonialism” because “Belgrade’s initiative in terms of collaboration with Kosovo is not a ‘call’ aimed towards either Kosovo, Belgrade or

Yugoslavia as a whole: instead, it keeps in mind that if we don’t endure, we will not remain●”

Surely it would be entirely incorrect if I would comment on the action of Belgrade solely on the basis of what was written in *NIN*● I am well aware that culture is a permanent process of humans acquiring self-consciousness both about themselves and the world that surrounds them, and that it is not conceivable without free and constant communication with no imposed exchange of cultural values between peoples and individuals● Thus, the reciprocal cultural exchange between Kosovo and Belgrade (as well as other parts of Yugoslavia) is more than needed, not only in the sense of fusing the cultural polymorphism of our country into some monocentric culture but in the sense of upgrading that very polymorphism● Cultural collaboration based on the assumption that the values of one culture are “superior” to the values of another cannot be fruitful, especially if one enters that collaboration with the mission of “de-feudalization” of a given society● I have already emphasized that it makes no sense to judge Belgrade’s initiative in terms of cultural collaboration with Kosovo on the basis of what was written in *NIN*, but I still have to acknowledge that some formulations found in the article cannot be favorable for such an action● Not only is the term *regional-socialism* (in reference to Kosovo and which reminds one of the infamous *National-Socialism*) offensive for the people from Kosovo itself, but there are also other points that seek to offer ideological justifications for it, in the name of saving a “superb culture” (I find the Sartrean notion of

*militarization of culture* particularly adequate for it)●

I would like to say a couple of words about the grave problem that is the emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo, but without falling into some kind of ranking regarding the problems that make the situation in Kosovo so very complex● When I state that the problem of emigration is grave, I don't mean them as merely words in the air● However, I am deeply convinced that problems in Kosovo cannot be tackled in a palliative manner and *without invoking the future*; I thus feel the need for pointing out some inconsistencies in the actions undertaken in the name of preventing the emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo● My intention here is to show that the ideas behind these actions can become a righteous moral and intellectual obligation of every individual in our society● The most illustrative example of the narrowing horizon of rational judgement and the impact of emotions and prejudices on the discourse on Kosovo is the recent opening of Belgrade's *Radioton* plant in the village of Botushë in Kosovo● The opening of this factory, which employs *only non-Albanians*, was seen as a "tangible victory over separatist Albanian nationalism" (*NIN* no● 1875, p● 13)● I can say right away and with no qualms whatsoever that I am not convinced of the accuracy of this statement published in *NIN*● Moreover, I think that this kind of statement should be questioned for many reasons● There cannot be any kind of "victory over Albanian separatist nationalism" for any kind of endeavor that ignores Albanians themselves and in which

they are relegated to an inferior social position● On the contrary, I am deeply convinced that such endeavors serve precisely Albanian (and other) nationalisms● Nevertheless, the judgements published in *NIN* also imply another kind of "conclusion", one that is too often present within discourse on Kosovo: when one claims that the opening of a plant that doesn't employ Albanians represents "victory over separatist Albanian nationalism", it is easy to arrive to conclude that all Albanians are nationalists and separatists!

Yet, what has been published in *NIN* still allows for the possibility that time will be the "judge" in determining "whether in a moment characterized by delicate political circumstances, we were right to claim that factories such as this one represent a barrier to emigration from the autonomous region of Kosovo as well as to counter-revolutionary activities of Albanian chauvinists●" Time will be the judge of this because "from the broader perspective of our contemporary world, an ethnically pure factory simply represents an insult to human reason●" However, considering the political circumstances in Kosovo, "it represents the only possible solution" since—according to what is written in *NIN*—"thank God, in other parts of Yugoslavia there are no counter-revolutionary activities, rapes, shameful ignorance of the basic human rights, arsons, and conflicts●" Thus, the conclusion of *NIN* is that "the present situation in Kosovo calls for the usage of some of the measures that humankind—relieved of chauvinist burden—has forsaken long ago●"



It is clear that such statements cannot be verified as such● They are impulsive, arbitrary and abrupt, do not differentiate between individual and general cases, are characterized by black and white schematism and are unable to take notice of inconsistencies and contradictions which would be evident for any normal person● For example, we would be asking in vain how it is possible that—in the name of collectiveness and respect for basic human rights—decisions are made that generate social distance, prevent physical and spiritual contact, as well as living and working with members of other nations? Likewise, we would ask in vain how it is that regarding Kosovo “the only possible solution” is seen as something that in our contemporary world is “simply an offence to human reason”? Or, for example, why political circumstances in Kosovo demand the usage of such measures that “humankind—relieved of chauvinist burden—has forsaken long ago”? I emphasize that asking such questions is in vain since there is a readymade answer for all of them: it is because in Kosovo there are cases of rape, violations of basic human rights, violence and other crimes●

It is therefore logic that stimulates such hasty judgements; a kind of logic that’s schematic and one-sided, that leads to the use of stereotypes in thinking and rationalizes prejudices● It’s a logic that seeks to block a rational mode of thinking in order to mobilize people towards subconscious and irrational behavior, for actions that are purely based on an emotional appeal● The effect is that of ringing an ideological alarm: in Kosovo—and in Kosovo

only—there are murders, rapes, the plunder of social and private property, disasters, violations of basic human rights... Nothing is being done there in order to alleviate the situation● Non-Albanians are daily exposed to serious tragedies● Yugoslavia is being betrayed day after day, more and ever-more by the Albanians● Their deceitful machinations are systematically undermining its very foundations● And so on● What is lost here is a sense of reality● As I said at the article’s start, there is blurring between real and imaginary problems; the difference between a demand for work and a demand for workplaces to be non-ethnic is erased; and so is the difference between demands to solve existential problems and demands to remove neighbors of another nationality just because they so happen to belong to another nationality● All of this pushes the overall situation in the direction of generalised social insecurity; in doing so, it subtly conveys that everything is to be blamed on the autonomy of Kosovo and Kosovo Albanians themselves, who are not only the majority in Kosovo but also “National-Socialist”● The distorted discourse on Kosovo only adds to the already complex reality● And this is certainly not a mere turn of phrase●

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