Kosovo in the Yugoslav 1980s

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Relations Between the Writers' Associations of Kosova and Serbia in the Second Half of the 1980s

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Abstract: The author examines the activities and relations between the writers' associations of Kosova and Serbia during the second half of the 1980s. He focuses on the interaction between the two cultural institutions and the debates they organized between the mid-1980s and the end of the decade. While political relations were deteriorating, the meetings of the two associations were intended to form a channel for communication which it was hoped would stimulate debate among intellectuals about then-current relations between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs. But, as this study explains, those attempts ended in endless disagreements over "historical truths."

Keywords: Kosova, Serbia, 1980s, association of writers, meeting at Francuska Street No. 7

Introduction: The Awakening of Consciousness Through Kosova's Cultural Institutions

All over Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1980s there arose a dissident movement demanding more political freedom. Protests were organized in many places, but it was not long before a tide turned in relations between Serb and Kosovar-Albanian intellectuals. In Kosova, by both articulating and representing the culture and history of Albanians in Kosova, it were the cultural institutions that emerged as the main centres of influence over the process of strengthening the national consciousness of Kosovar-Albanians. Institutions such as the University of Pristina, the Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Institute of Albanology (IA) and the Association of Writers of Kosova (AWK) all helped nourish the intellectual desire of

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Albanians in Yugoslavia to learn more about their past and make sense of their current situation. The cultural institutions were supported by the publishing house *Rilindja* and by *Radio Television Pristina* (RTP) (Clark 2000, 66–8; Logoreci 1997, 151; Schmitt 2012, 128–30; Maliqi 2010).

The focus of this article is on the period between 1985 and early 1989, when the debate among Kosovar-Albanian and Serb intellectuals about historical perspectives on Kosova changed drastically. Old prejudices and hostile imagery resurfaced, and events from the very distant past were recalled as nationalist ideas from hitherto marginalized thinkers suddenly became socially acceptable. A number of books and plays as well as the pictorial arts and the cinema dealt with such subjects as the Battle of Kosova of 1389, and Kosovar-Serb emigration, which reached a peak of popular interest such that more and more intellectuals from different strands came to embrace the argument that the historical and current emigration of Serbs from Kosova was the most pressing problem. A chain of various societal actors contributed to creating a climate of fear for Kosovar-Serbs, something that was facilitated by publications by representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other writers, who were soon followed by intellectuals, politicians, and journalists until, “at the end of the chain the nation happened” (Sundhaussen 2007, 385–6, also 285–7; cf. Schmitt 2012, 238–9; Zirojević 2000, 206–7; Milosavljević 2015; Milosavljević 2000).

What follows is my attempt to shed light on the activities of those centres of the intelligentsia, focusing most closely on the meetings and debates between the AWK and the Association of Writers of Serbia (AWS) between 1985 and the “debate at Francuska Street No. 7” in 1988, which concluded with the “appeal by 215 intellectuals” in early 1989. I shall explore the role of the particular intellectuals who gained a voice in the debate, in order to assess whether it is valid to maintain that the rising nationalist current swept away the integrity of the cultural institutions and in doing so led them to gamble away one of the last opportunities for dialogue and understanding. Scholars like Holm Sundhaussen, Vedran Džihic, Julien Benda and Olivera Milosavljević have written about a “betrayal by intellectuals”, describing how intellectuals, in opting to lay the groundwork for politicians and governments to pursue their nationalist course, gave up their moral authority (Sundhaussen 2007, 397, 406–7; Džihic 2003; Benda 1988 (1927); Milosavljević 2000).

As I shall argue, however, despite the worsening political and socio-economic situation and increasing ethnic tension, the meetings and debates of the AWK and AWS continued to offer an opportunity to address matters between Serbia and Kosova as they stood until the late 1980s. There was a significant final channel of communication that remained open between cultural institutions, precisely because it did mirror both the turning of the intellectual tide towards nationalism, and the new societal functions assumed by intellectuals during those times.

My repeated requests for access to the primary sources of the meetings of the AWK and AWS were denied, as were my appeals to *Književne novine*, the literary magazine published by the Serbian Writers' Association from their headquarters at Francuska Street No. 7 in Belgrade. I was therefore forced to rely on secondary literature available at the National Library in Pristina, but fortunately that proved highly valuable to this study. I must point out too that there have been fewer than a handful of general studies that have engaged critically with the roles, function and activities of intellectuals in Kosova during the 1980s, and even fewer more specific works covering relations between intellectuals in Kosova and Serbia during that same period.

Competing Centres of Influence

After the Second World War as part of Tito's Yugoslavia an unprecedented transformation of education took place in Kosova, an improvement that became especially marked when Kosova's status, and with it its cultural development, was enhanced by the constitution of 1974. Branches of the University of Belgrade had been opened in Kosova from 1960, with classes held in the Serbo-Croatian language at first and then from 1966 in Albanian too. The opening of the University of Pristina in 1970 marked another waypoint on the road to mass education and moreover, placed the Albanian language on an equal footing with Serbo-Croatian (Koliqi 1997, 15–6; Bobi 1997, 175–82).

Because many of them had studied there, Belgrade remained one of the intellectual centres of Kosova's elite who were emerging during that time, and Belgrade itself, as the federal centre of the Yugoslav state, hoped to have an ideological influence. In Kosova, a competition for influence emerged after what is referred to as the “normalisation” of relations between Belgrade and Tirana between 1971 and 1981. As a result, the ties of Kosova's elite with Belgrade became weakened while those with neighbouring Albania were strengthened. That decade not only made it easier for Albanians from Kosova to connect with Albanians in Albania, but on the other hand it also allowed Enver Hoxha's communist regime in Albania to spread its ideas into Kosova (Schmitt 2012, 189–94; Clark 2000, 189–92).

Denisa Kostovicova (2005, 45; cf. Kullashi 1994, 117–42, 125) has emphasized that as a result of the demonstrations of 1981 “any semblance of brotherhood and unity at the university and in the province” was shattered. Now, Serbs maintained a raw nationalist discourse and, as a result, a movement grew in Serbia that demanded both the abolition of Kosovo's autonomous status and the reintroduction of restrictions in Albanian-language education. According to Atdhe Hetemi, the protests were “among the bloodiest”, leading to the deaths of “five high school students, two

factory workers, one retiree and one university student” (Hetemi 2020, 239). Howard Clark too pointed to the repercussions on the University of Pristina after the protests of 1981. In an action known as “differentiation”, Kosova’s branch of the League of Communists (LC) expelled a number of individuals from the party and declared others “politically suspect.” The university meanwhile had to face the consequence of being labelled a “nest of nationalists” which largely involved the number of its students being “cut back by 25 per cent and the curriculum [...] re-oriented away from the humanities towards the [natural] sciences” (Clark 2000, 43; cf. Schmitt 2012, 188–9).

Were the protests related to the strengthened cultural cooperation between Kosova and Albania? Certainly, such cooperation did support Albanian national identity. Shkëlzen Maliqi confirms that the selection of what was deemed to constitute “national heritage”, combined with “a critical appraisal of both past and contemporaneous tradition”, served as compensation for the “national frustration” Kosovar-Albanians had experienced in Yugoslavia (Maliqi 1998, 220–1; cf. Pipa 1989, 88–9; Syla 1995, 73). According to Elez Biberaj, part of the process was the “rejection of the Serbian interpretation of Albanian history” along with over-attention to historical figures concerned with past national concerns from a “uniquely Albanian point of view”. Among other things there was, too, perhaps excessive emphasis on the existence of a “past unity of the Albanian nation” (Biberaj 1983, 490). Oliver Schmitt has argued that in the period of “normalization” of relations between Yugoslavia and Albania, Kosovar-Albanian historians adopted communist Albania’s nationalist-Stalinist historiographic model which, he maintains, they have still not relinquished today. The crucial aspects of that interpretation of history were that the Albanians are an autochthonous group whose forefathers were the ancient Illyrians, and “the cult of the national hero Skanderbeg” (Schmitt 2012, 188–9).

The voices claiming that the ongoing emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosova demanded a response by the authorities became louder as they became more determined. As Robert Pichler has shown, there were plausible socio-economic and cultural reasons for the large increase in Kosova’s Albanian population, the high birth rate for one thing being a consequence of a rather belated modernization process, to which should be added the persistence of traditional cultural structures coupled with Yugoslav politics of marginalization of the Albanians. However, the question of why Serbs and Montenegrins emigrated is more difficult to answer. During the 1980s the media would speak of 200,000 Serbs leaving over the preceding 20 years, and sociopolitical reasons can be found for that too, although it is an exaggeration. Sociologist Marina Blagojević came to the conclusion that “threats, verbal attacks, and intimidations and destruction of private property were used while there was also an institutional and ideological

discrimination” (Blagojević 1997, 70). Wolfgang Petritsch and Robert Pichler have shown that only after the events of 1981 was there noticeable deterioration in interethnic relations, so that it is perfectly plausible to suggest increasingly pressing sociopolitical as well as economic reasons prompting migrants to leave. However, there is no evidence for anything that could be described even as “expulsion” let alone “genocide”, as claimed by Serbs at the time. Use of such words was clearly a means by which “Serbs were trying to further incite anti-Albanian sentiments” (Petritsch and Pichler 2005, 88–93; cf. Dragović-Soso 2002, 116–21; Budding 1998, 166–70).

To counter “rising Albanophobia” the recently founded Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (*Udruženje za jugoslovensku demokratsku inicijativu*, UJDI) set up a commission in 1990 which concluded that “the core of the Serbian–Albanian relationship has been characterized by a pattern of domination—Serb over Albanian or Albanian over Serb—ever since Kosova was a part of the Ottoman Empire.” Dubious of the claim that a Serbian “exodus” was taking place, the UJDI commission found that “demographic shifts were not the result of an unusually large emigration of Serbs, but of a surprisingly small emigration of Albanians.” There was “extremely low Albanian mobility”, and most of those who had left to work abroad eventually returned (Clark 2000, 14–5).

The Writers' Associations Develop into Important Actors

The origins of the AWK date back to the “Club of Intellectuals of Kosova” which began in the late 1950s (Rugova 1991, 49) and until the 1960s remained a section within the AWS, only in 1970 becoming an independent and equal member of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia. The AWK went on to play a crucial role in the cultural life and representation of Kosova, similarly to the other Writers' Associations throughout Yugoslavia. It steadily demanded greater freedom, until during the 1980s it had clearly become an important actor. As time went on the AWK became a central voice calling for more understanding and democracy, and its members found themselves in the spotlight more often, debating with their Serb counterparts both present-day Kosova and its history. As such they became an influential centre of the Albanian opposition (Rugova 1991, 49; cf. Clark 2000, 55; Schmitt 2012, 191).

In the early 1980s the dissident movement in Yugoslavia was composed of individual intellectuals from various political currents and all nationalities. They raised awareness and demanded freedom of speech by raising petitions and

calling for public protests, the Belgrade section of the AWS in particular attracting further attention with the founding of the “Board for the Protection of Artistic Freedom”, originally set up to protest against the arrest of the Belgrade poet Gojko Đogo, who had published poems critical of Tito. In 1983 the AWS organized public protests, an unusual thing at the time for a cultural institution (Gojković 2000, 327–8; cf. Dragović-Soso 2002). The Board continued to stand up for writers such as the Kosovar-Albanian author Adem Demaçi and the Croatian lawyer Vladimir Šeks against measures that hindered their work (Gojković 2000, 327–8).

Between November 1984 and February 1985, six Serbian intellectuals were charged with counterrevolutionary activity and examined in the “Trial of the Belgrade Six.” In response, 23 intellectuals from Belgrade, including members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU), created the “Board for the Defence of Freedom of Thought and Expression.” The name they chose clearly indicated that their mission extended much further than that of the Writers’ Association’s Board. Indeed, its members were from a broader spectrum of people representing many political currents of the time, and among them were Vesna Pešić, Mihailo Marković, Nikola Milošević, Vojislav Koštunica and even Dobrica Ćosić (Djilas 1991, 255–88; cf. Budding 1998, 164–5; Clark 2000, 55).

However, the “Trial of the Belgrade Six” was only one outstanding moment in a series of events. In 1984 for example, the authorities had imprisoned 28 individuals who had participated in a “Free University” session, at which Milovan Đilas was speaking. Six were detained, one of them the sociologist Vojislav Šešelj who was notorious for accusing Muslim scholars of “Pan-Islamic tendencies.” Šešelj had published such charges in the Belgrade journal *Književna reč*, published by the Literary Youth of Serbia (e.g. Šešelj 1986) and was expelled from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LYC) after his employer, the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo, proclaimed him ideologically unsound and therefore politically unsuitable to teach. However, his sentencing to eight years imprisonment in 1984 occurred for another reason, for in an unpublished manuscript he had not only attacked the party but also argued that “Serbs and Serbia were suffering consistent discrimination” in Yugoslavia. He had further suggested that the Yugoslav federation should be made up of only four republics: Slovenia, Croatia (within smaller borders), Serbia and Macedonia (Danilović 1993, 199–200).

In the event, Šešelj’s sentence, condemned by intellectuals not only in Belgrade “as a return to Stalinism,” was reduced to less than two years, of which he himself later wrote an account (Danilović 1993, 198–201). Šešelj’s trial too was met with protests, petitions and appeals, among others from a so-called “Group of Professors” which included Dobrica Ćosić, who sent a petition to the Yugoslav and Serbian parliament (Magaš 1993, 91–3; cf. Danilović 1993, 203;

Gruenwald and Rosenblum-Cale 1986, 622–31). It is not clear if those intellectuals were fully aware of the content of Šešelj's manuscript, nor therefore if they were perhaps using the protests in favour of "greater freedom of speech" as a pretext to allow the expression of ideas considered to be "extreme." Dobrica Ćosić's involvement perhaps suggests an answer to both that and another question, for according to Milosavljević, Ćosić held no official position but was a member of the SANU. He therefore had a considerable effect, both political and ideological, on the "politicization of SANU and the ideological content of the Memorandum" (Milosavljević 2000, 274). Moreover, Bogdan Bogdanović, a professional architect and former mayor of Belgrade, sent a letter to the Central Committee of the LC in Serbia in 1987 which has echoed through time. Bogdanović wrote, "Serbia is tired ... but not tired of its leaders. It is rather tired of its half-leaders and quarter-leaders. Our Serbia is also tired of its half-politicized intellectuals and its tempered half-intellectuals" (Bogdanović 1997, 255; cf. Sundhaussen 2007, 397, 406–7; Milosavljević 2000).

The Congress of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia

By the mid-1980s the AWS had incorporated almost six hundred members, and in 1986 those members elected a new board. The election showed that things had reached a turning point, because well-known anti-regime personalities as well as nationalists were appointed, coming from the "Board for the Defence of Freedom of Thought and Expression," such as Dobrica Ćosić, Dragoslav Mihailović and Matija Bećković. The latter now also included Miodrag Bulatović, former president of the AWS, and Antonije Isaković who coordinated the committee responsible for the Memorandum in the SANU. A number of poets too were elected, individuals known for instrumentalizing Kosova and historical themes in their work; their number included Aleksander Petrov, Milan Komnenić, Ljubomir Simović, Slobodan Rakitić and Rajko Petrov Nogo (*Politika*, 22 July 1986; "Programska načela UKS," *Književna reč* 303–4, July 1987, 5; cf. Dragović-Soso 2002, 144–5). I shall analyse the impact on the AWS of the changes in the next part of this study, when I shall focus on the meetings and debates between them and the AWK. Clark argues, surely correctly, that the 1988 resignation from the Kosova Writers' Association of 27 Serbian members of the total of 150 paved the way for the Kosovar-Albanian writers to express their aspirations, which amounted to the drafting of an Albanian programme. In fact, by resigning the Serbians had initially intended to destroy the AWK altogether (Clark 2000, 55).

The starting point of these developments was the Congress of the League of Writers of Yugoslavia which took place in Novi Sad (Vojvodina) from 18 to 20 April 1985. At first sight the meeting was an example of the joint efforts of writers demanding freedom of speech, as suggested by the joint initiative of Slovene and Serb writers to pass a resolution to abolish any laws restricting freedom of speech (IX. Kongres Saveza Književnika Jugoslavije Novi Sad, 18–20 April 1985; *NIN*, 20 Jan 1985; cf. Dragović-Soso 2002, 135–6). In the end however things developed to such a pitch that there came what may be described as a “showdown” between Serb and Kosovar writers on matters that now became a veritable obsession among Serb intellectuals and would pave the way for what was to come. The immediate cause of their distress was emigration of Slavs from Kosova (Qosja 2014; Viti 1985, *Zëri i Kosovës*, 22 Aug 2018; Clark 2000, 55; cf. Dragović-Soso 2002, 135–6).

It was at the Novi Sad congress that the Serbian novelist Miodrag Bulatović raised the question of changing Yugoslavia’s federal and cultural system. Indeed he went further, claiming that “genocide” was being visited on the Serb community in Kosova. In his reply, Ibrahim Rugova, literary critic and a member of the Institute of Albanology, distanced himself from Bulatović’s claims before embarking on a presentation he called “Tangible Freedom” (*Liria Konkrete*) (Rugova 1991, 29–32). Another energetic response to Bulatović came from Rexhep Qosja, Albanian writer and literary critic, also affiliated to the IA in Pristina. Stated Qosja, “In all the books and works published by Serbian scientists, there are things that are not documented at all, which are even falsified, malicious intentions which can be characterized as an attack on Albanian scholarship, to destroy it as well as their culture and history” (Viti 1985, *Zëri i Kosovës*, 22 Aug 2018). In this context, Qosja was pointing to the increasing number of poems, songs, novels and plays in Serbian-Croatian dealing with Kosova and the alleged “genocide” of Serbs there. According to Belgrade historian Olivera Milosavljević, “in the 1980s, the Albanian name came to be linked exclusively with words such as genocide, terror, banditry, rape—every mention of this population in both political and private exchange carried a negative connotation” (Milosavljević 2015). Oliver Schmitt confirmed as much, saying that old images of hostility resurfaced among intellectuals in Serbia and the notion of “biological genocide” was used in 1985 to describe what was happening to the Serbs in Kosova (Schmitt 2012, 163, 238–9).

Qosja also brought up the matter of “differentiation,” the term, as mentioned above, used to describe the measures that had been taken after the protests of 1981 in Kosova and through which a number of individuals working at educational and cultural institutions such as the University of Pristina had lost their jobs. According to Kjell Magnusson a total of 13 university teachers were dismissed and 113 students expelled from the University of Pristina (Magnusson 1987, 11). In Novi Sad, Qosja described the highly uncertain situation intellectuals in Kosova found

themselves in and the severe repercussions they faced (Qosja 2014, *passim*; cf. Viti 1985, *Zëri i Kosovës*, 22 Aug 2018). Even Rugova, a man accustomed to expressing himself in more measured terms, confirmed the intimidation in an interview he gave the Kosovar newspaper *Fjala* in 1988, stating that “in the last seven years the Albanian intelligentsia had to live with the label of being silenced [...] anything has been expected from Albanian intellectuals, but that they be intellectuals” (Pavarësia dhe Demokracia/Independence and Democracy 1991; Presim një dialog të barabartë e konstruktiv, *Fjala*, 15 March 1988, quoted in Rugova 1991, 42). The Serb writer Dobrica Ćosić was one of the main figures in the congress of 1985, and branded the Kosovars “separatists,” as Rugova maintained elsewhere (Rugova 1994, 86; cf. Clark 2000, 55).

The notion of “biological genocide” had appeared in “The book on Kosovo” (*Knjiga o Kosovu*) by Dimitrije Bogdanović, published in 1985 by SANU (Bogdanović 1985, 3). It soon became a common phenomenon among Serbian intellectuals to depict or write about Albanians in a manner that confirmed their imagining of Serbs as the victims in Kosova, and “Bogdanović was soon overtaken in this display of negative sentiment against Albanians” (Milosavljević 2015). In a scientific session at the Institute of Albanology in Pristina in 1985, Shkëlzen Maliqi referred to a practice among many historians and ideologists who seek solutions to present-day problems by embedding them in historical “truths”. Such were those individuals who were convinced that their “truths” were the key to the amelioration and improvement of relations between Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians. On the one hand, Serb historians claimed that they, the Serbs, were the sole rightful owners of Kosova, while the Albanians had no rights because they had arrived later to colonize Kosova using violence and assisted by the Ottomans. Albanian historians on the other hand held that Albanians had been the first people in the Balkan peninsula alongside the Greeks. They were successors to the Illyrians and therefore autochthonous in the lands they inhabit today. Maliqi called this the “Balkanization of their scientific assumptions” (Maliqi 2010, 19–20) in a presentation of 51 theses published in the magazine *Thema* both in Pristina and Belgrade in 1987 (Maliqi 1987; cf. interview with Shkëlzen Maliqi, Pristina, October 2019). Even though Kosova became their dominant topic, the Serb scientists remained ignorant of Albanians and their culture and history, which Schmitt saw as proving their arrogance and racism towards Albanians (Schmitt 2012, 163, 187, 189–91, 238–9; cf. Milosavljević 2015).

In 1988, three years after the “showdown” at the congress in Novi Sad, Rugova, now the AWK’s president, gave a long interview to the Pristina-based semi-weekly *Zëri i Rinisë*. The article was entitled “A recurrent crisis” (*Repriza e një krize*) and described Rugova’s reflections on the challenges his association had been facing. The problems had become evident in 1985, he said, with the politically motivated

“letter” certain members of the AWK wrote in the Serbo-Croatian language. In July 1985 forty non-Albanian writers had sent the AWS an open letter complaining about discrimination against them in the AWK. They complained particularly about “majorization,” a term describing the consistent out-voting of a minority national group, which had occurred in the appointment of the then-new president of the AWK, Hasan Mekuli. They also denounced discrimination against non-Albanian writers in various other events and deprecated the generally worsened conditions of the Serb minority in Kosova (Rugova 1988; cf. Rugova 1991, 49; *Književna reč*, July 1985, 3; Dragović-Soso 2002, 135–6).

This current of confrontation between Serbs and Albanians became stronger in 1986 when Dobrica Ćosić, Serbian writer, political theorist and politician, reformulated his extreme position on Albanians by including them in the petition signed by 215 Serb intellectuals. The signatories were a diverse group including a former editor of *Književne novine*, a novelist, a literary critic, several legal scholars, four members of the above-mentioned “Group of Professors,” representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and even intellectuals who would later take anti-nationalist positions, such as Nebojša Popov and Zagorka Golubović (Magaš 1993, 49–73. 52–3; cf. Dragović-Soso 1997, 62–4; Sundhaussen 2007, 392). The petition asserted that “intimidation” had forced about 200,000 Serbs and Montenegrins out of Kosovo; it ignored the fact that Serbian emigration was a much more complex process, which had been motivated most strongly by the economic situation in Kosovo (Pleština 1992, 114 and passim; Singleton and Carter 1982, 22–6; Reuter 1982, 54–70; Ramet 1989, 231; Islami 1989, 58–66). The petition was sent to the Yugoslav and Serb parliament in January 1986 (Đilas 1991, 260–8; cf. Budding 1998, 166–71).

The changes to the structure of the AWS and the tensions between the Kosovar-Serb and Kosovar-Albanian members of the AWK led to another “showdown” which lasted from 18 to 20 October 1986, on the occasion of the traditional “Belgrade International Meeting of Writers.” On the second day, the topic of Kosova was discussed at length in Serbo-Croatian in what Rugova described as “the apocalypse, the end of the world, in a very religious way.” Even though he was asked to speak as a guest representing the AWK, he declined, citing the very heavy, tense atmosphere that was evoked by the presence of the Serb writers Dobrica Ćosić and Antonije Isaković. At the plenary session on 20 October some 40 writers from around the world joined the discussions, and perhaps unsurprisingly the subject of Kosova came up once again. This time Rugova spoke out, saying that “some of the presentations and statements that I’ve heard today about Kosova were at the level of ‘yellow papers’ and of ‘yellow politics,’” in reference to the “yellow press.” He noted that “there is great hypocrisy here: on the one hand demanding democracy for oneself and on the other hand seeking repression for the

others and in fact the very negation of everything.” His words brought prompt reactions. First the Macedonian writer Ante Popovski demanded that Rugova take responsibility for what he had said. The Serb poet Milan Komnenić added that, “Rugova is using the stage of the international meeting to address issues of Kosova [...] The Association of Writers of Kosova is in an abnormal and illogical position in the federative system (of Yugoslavia).” Rugova for his part reminded the assembly that Komnenić “would not understand why I demanded more democracy for the Albanians, who according to him did not deserve it” (all quotations in this paragraph are from Më shumë demokraci për Kosovën, *Fjala*, 15 Dec 1986; cf. Rugova 1991, 31–2).

It is fair to say, then, that the structural changes of 1985 as well as the support from such a variety of influential Belgrade intellectuals for the 1986 petition were clear indications that there was overwhelming consensus regarding Kosova, created by the mutual opposition from intellectuals of different currents to the political leaders in Serbia and by friction with the Yugoslav cultural institutions. That gathering opposition promoted among Serbs feelings of nationalism focused on Kosova long before Milošević decided to ride its wave, for the widespread support for the petition preceded Milošević’s own “coming out” as a nationalist. Furthermore as indicated by the open hostility between Kosovar-Albanian and Serb writers at the Belgrade International Meeting of Writers, by the mid-1980s the tide was turning against the general demand, articulated in the beginning, for more freedom for all. Now, the demands were for repression and changes to the status of Kosova. What would have been impossible to imagine just a few years earlier, namely open criticism of the federal system in Yugoslavia as well as the emergence and perpetuation of images of hostility—in particular the unfavourable depictions of Kosovar-Albanians—became socially acceptable in the “debates” and periodical meetings organized by the Writers’ Associations for intellectuals and writers.

Perhaps ominously, that shift in focus coincided with a structural and generational change among Serb and Kosovar-Albanian writers, for fertile new ground for conflict had been created, as the subsequent activities of the Writers’ Associations would show. The final plea of 1989 by 215 Kosovar-Albanian intellectuals and their appeal confirmed it, as room for a real dialogue, for dealing with the deepening disagreements among Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs, not only became ever smaller in the second half of the 1980s, but vanished completely, as if into thin air. What was probably always going to be the last-ditch attempt to get Kosova-Albanian and Serb writers to talk to each other took place in April 1988 at the Belgrade headquarters of the AWS, the famous “Meeting at Francuska Street No. 7,” an event anchored in the collective memory of Kosovar-Albanians. Alas, it brought forth none of the desperately needed mutual understanding of matters at hand.

The Meeting at Francuska Street No. 7

In the highly charged atmosphere that year, the AWS invited the AWK to debate “The current relations of Serbs and Albanians in Yugoslavia” at Francuska Street No. 7 in Belgrade from 26 to 27 April, 1988. In an interview with the Kosovar newspaper *Fjala* on 15 March 1988, Rugova cautiously stated that “there were actually no good conditions for the debate,” and yet “we [the AWK] decided to accept the invitation of our Serb colleagues as a gesture of goodwill” (Presim një dialog të barabartë e konstruktiv, *Fjala*, 15 Mar 1988; cf. Rugova 1991). For the members of the AWK the intention in participating was to exchange ideas on relations between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs with their colleagues from the AWS on the basis of equality and tolerance for each other. The AWK at least neither expected nor intended to come up with any programme nor conclusion after the debate (Presim një dialog të barabartë e konstruktiv, *Fjala*, 15 Mar 1988; cf. Rugova 1991, 40, 42; Gojković 2000, 334–5).

The Kosovar-Albanian historian Zekeria Cana confirms the tensions that preceded the debate and refers to the protest evenings known as “On Kosova, For Kosova” (in Serbian: *O Kosovu, za Kosovo*) organized by the AWS in May and June 1987 (UKS – O Kosovu, za Kosovo, *Književne novine*, 1 Apr 1987, 4; cf. Gojković 2000, 330–4, 347; Cana 2001, 23–4). They resembled “medieval courts” in which “the language, history and culture of Albanians had been treated with disregard” (Cana 2001, 23–4). Gojković emphasizes the role of Ćosić in these meetings, whose focus on the Serbs narrowed and simplified the complex problems of Yugoslavia. He demanded change to the 1974 constitution in order to stop the “total Albanization of Serbian and Yugoslav space” (Gojković 2000, 332–3; cf. Presim një dialog të barabartë e konstruktiv, *Fjala*, 15 Mar 1988; Rugova 1991, 42; Cana 2001, 23). During the Assembly of the AWS on 27 March 1988, the Serb writers had demanded the release of those imprisoned for dissent, especially those from Kosova, adding that this was done in the spirit “of support for freedom of speech” (Gojković 2000, 335; cf. Apel jugoslovenskoj javnosti, *Književne novine*, 1 May 1988, 4). At that time, thousands of Kosova-Albanians were in gaol in Kosova. Clark referred to these as “half of the adult population” which was, “arrested, interrogated, interned or reprimanded.” (Interview with Rrahman Morina, *Jedinstvo*, 25 Nov 1988; cf. Clark 2000, 43).

The debate at Francuska Street no. 7 in April 1988 focused on three general themes concerning cultural history, language, and current difficulties between Serbs and Albanians in Kosova. As Rugova pointed out, those topics covered a spectrum of matters a number of which had scarcely been studied by Albanian historians, much less so by Serbs. He added that “these issues have been studied

by the Serbs only in an imbalanced and denigrating way.” Still, the participants were chosen according to their contribution in their respective disciplines (Presim një dialog të barabartë e konstruktiv, *Fjala*, 15 Mar 1988; Rugova 1991, 40–1).

In his opening remarks in front of a large number of journalists, the Belgrade poet Aleksandar Petrov, president of the AWS, stated that “there can be no freedom and peace without Kosova.” But he soon focused entirely on the struggles of the Serbs in Kosova and their uprooting from their sacred land, which he saw as holy to them alone. The reason for the migration of Serbs, he went on, was the 1974 constitution, the goals of which had become reality, “a reality that no one who cares about Yugoslavia can agree with” (Cana 2001, 25–6; Gojković 2000, 335). Ibrahim Rugova, as the president of the AWK, spoke next and in his talk entitled “Strategjia negative” (“The negative strategy”) offered a solution, “a positive strategy,” to the problems that had been raised. First, he addressed the matter of Kosova’s autonomy, saying that the people of Kosova should not have “solutions” imposed on them but should be given the freedom to solve their problems by mutual agreement among themselves. According to Rugova, “autonomy should not be taken away from Kosova” but should “rather be extended.” Concluding his talk Rugova affirmed that “the situation in Kosova is not as bad as it is being portrayed and can be only improved through democracy and humanism in our relations, not through repression” (Presim një dialog të barabartë e konstruktiv, *Fjala*, 15 Mar 1988; Rugova 1991, 43–8; cf. Cana 2001, 32–4).

Gojković pointed out that other Serb participants then followed Petrov’s lead in portraying Serbs as the only victims in Kosova. For instance, historian Radovan Samardžić offered arguments on the “long history of persecution of Serbs in Kosova,” while linguist Pavle Ivić highlighted that Serbia’s assistance to Kosovo had turned out to be ineffective and insufficient to change conditions there. The reason for all this was the “Afro-Asian birthrate.” In fact, Ivić deduced that “the natality in Kosova is financed by this assistance,” and that “the Kosovar-Albanian woman has turned into a machine, serving nationalist ideology” (Gojković 2000, 335; cf. Cana 2001, 34–5; Blagojević 2000; Zirojević 2000). Rexhep Qosja on the other hand emphasized the Serbian–Montenegrin–Macedonian agreement to pursue a joint hard line on both Kosova-Albanians and Kosova’s autonomy. In journalism, scientific works, literature and even in the cinema, he said, there was an unprecedented campaign focusing on the relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosova, with an emphasis on not only resurrecting old prejudices against Albanians but creating new ones too (Gojković 2000, 335; Cana 2001, 34–8).

The debate, also known as the “dialogue of monologues,” was characterized by participants who spoke from positions focusing on their own problems. Failing to even attempt to connect with others present, the participants succeeded only in

talking at cross purposes even if for the most part the dialogue remained calm (Gojković 2000, 335). As had been the habit on previous occasions where Kosovar-Albanian and Serb intellectuals had met, each party referred to their history and used “historical arguments” to project future relations. Referring constantly to the past they found themselves unable to find common ground based on mutual respect and freedom for all. In the absence of analytically sound arguments, more and more general statements were made about the situation in Kosova, although one exception was the Kosovar-Albanian journalist Agim Mala, who had this to say:

It has been completely forgotten that we are nonetheless talking about Kosova and its population, which has the smallest per capita income in the country, [...] the lowest socioeconomic and cultural development rate, 200,000 people who are illiterate and 150,000 unemployed; that this is an ethnic minority [of Kosova-Albanians] whose political criminals have made up half the total number of prisoners in Yugoslavia in recent years. (Gojković 2000, 336; cf. Cana 2001, 63–5)

The participants in the debate agreed to meet again soon, in Pristina, provisionally in mid-May 1988. However, that second debate was never staged, after the AWK wrote to the AWS confirming that “continuation of the discussion will be postponed indefinitely” (Gojković 2000, 337). In an interview he gave to the Slovenian newspaper *Večer* in April 1989, Rugova explained why the second debate did not take place; he mentioned a “committee” but did not make clear whether he meant the Central Committee of the LCY or the Committee of the Kosova branch of the LC. But it was this same “committee” that had requested cancellation of the second meeting because, they said, the first session had been no sort of debate, and because “we [i.e. the Kosovar-Albanians] are the ones to blame, because we spoke out against them [i.e., the Serbs]” (Le të thonë se jetoj në Diktaturë, *Večer*, 22 Apr 1989, cf. Rugova 1991, 65; Cana 2001, 78).

As a result the AWK was challenged in 1988 by the 28 Serbo-Croatian language writers of its total of 163 members—of the rest, 125 used Albanian, nine Turkish, and one wrote in Romani. The 28 Serbo-Croatian members held a press conference on the premises of the Serbian Writers Association in Belgrade—again at the famous Francuska Street No. 7—declaring that they had decided to resign from the AWK. They had not warned their Kosovar colleagues who heard about it only via the media. The president of the AKW Ibrahim Rugova, whose voice had by then emerged as one of the loudest in both the domestic and international press, stated that these were politically motivated resignations by individuals who had disagreed with the decision not to organize the second meeting between the AWK and the AWS in Pristina. Moreover, they had criticized their Kosovar-Albanian colleagues for speaking up on political matters at the famous original “Francuska Street No. 7” event (Clark 2000, 55; cf. Repriza e një krize, *Zëri i Rinisë*, 28 Oct 1988; Rugova 1991, 49–55; Rugova 1994, 163).

The Appeal of 215 Intellectuals in February 1989

At the beginning of 1989 the Kosovar-Albanian intellectuals made a final attempt to address the challenges facing them. Reacting to Milošević's government's growing repression and the resignation of the Kosovar party leaders it caused, in February 1989 some 7000 or so workers "shut themselves in Kosova mines"—1300 of them in the Trepça mines near the town of Mitrovica (Clark 2000, 49). With the constitutional amendments that revoked Kosovo's autonomy about to receive final approval in the Serbian Assembly, a group of intellectuals decided to support the strike with an appeal, while other workers as well as students and other groups showed increasing solidarity with the miners (Clark 2000, 50; Schmitt 2012, 242–3; Meier 2006 (1995), 131–53; Gjeloši 1997).

The legal scholar and rector of the University of Pristina Gazmend Zajmi wrote the text of this "Appeal of the employees of scientific and cultural institutions for the preservation of the institutions and the confirmation of the constitutional status of Kosovo on the basis of the fundamental principles of the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia," which consisted of two parts. The first was an appeal to the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, while the second appealed to Yugoslav public opinion. However, attempts to distribute the text, printed in both Serbo-Croatian and Albanian, to the staff of the Archives of Kosova and the Institute of History were stopped (Cana 2001, 123–44).

The appeal to the Assembly of Serbia expressed opposition to the impending approval of amendments that would change relations between the Socialist Republic of Serbia and the Autonomous Province of Kosova. The signatories urged the Assembly of Serbia to take into account the position of the majority in Kosova, who wished to see its current status in the constitution preserved. In its second part the petition addressed the general Yugoslav public asking what kind of justice would remove self-governance from Kosovar-Albanians who had achieved their position by means of joint political efforts. Tito himself was mentioned, as was Edvard Kardelj, the main creator of the Yugoslav system of workers' self-management. A clause in the petition added that with "the eventual contraction of their constitutional status, Albanians will feel that something that rightfully belongs to them is being taken away" (Cana 2001, 125–30).

215 Kosovar intellectuals signed the petition and sent it to the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosova, the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, the Council of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Central Committee of the LCY. A handful of people helped distribute it to other intellectuals, to medical centres, to the Faculty of Philosophy, and to media outlets in Kosova such

as *Rilindja*, *Jedinstvo*, *Radio Television Pristina* (RTP), and the rest of Yugoslavia, such as the national press agency *Tanjug*, *Vjesnik*, *Borba*, *TV Ljubljana*, *Oslobođenje*, and *Delo* (Cana 2001, 130, 145). However, the appeal failed to stop the process and the constitutional amendments were approved by the Assembly on 22 February 1989 (Meier 2006 (1995), 133). The Kosova Assembly ratified the amendments by 23 March 1989 (Clark 2000, 50–1; Meier 2006 (1995), 142–3). By that time many of the intellectuals and members of the University of Pristina had been “isolated,” a euphemism for “a form of arbitrary detention without contact with the outside world, usually including torture” (Clark 2000, 53). The “isolation” of 65 of the signatories of the appeal left a bitter aftertaste to the initiative. As philologist Rexhep Ismajli recalls, “after this [miners’] strike [...] everybody came to declare openly their support for an independent republic of Kosova and against Serbian domination” (Interview with Rexhep Ismaili, 1997, 88; cf. Clark 2000, 53; Cana 2001, 271–313; Maliqi 2010, 323–7; Schmitt 2012, 242).

In fact the crackdown on the petition’s signatories was so brutal that even officials in the highest ranks of the Yugoslav State were appalled and said so openly. On the main news programme of the First Channel of *TV Zagreb* on 11 May 1989 a declaration was read out, while Josip Vrhovec, Member of the Presidency of Yugoslavia for the SR Croatia, admitted that despite his high position in the federal institutions he had been informed late about the “isolation,” which had effectively been carried out by the Serbian authorities. Vrhovec emphasized that the signatories of the “Appeal of the 215,” who were in favour of preserving the 1974 constitution, were “arrested, badly mistreated and interned outside Kosova, and their families were not allowed to see them” (Meier 2006 (1995), 183). The Croatian newspaper *Danas* was among the first who would take notice and report on this dramatic situation (Meier 2006 (1995), 142–6, 182–4; Cana 2001, 270–313).

Conclusion

The crisis in Yugoslavia in the 1980s had various causes and was triggered by various actors. However, the collective role of intellectuals and cultural institutions in Kosova and Serbia is often addressed by looking only at one or the other side. At the centre of this study are the writers’ associations in both Kosova and Serbia. At successive meetings in the mid-1980s between the AWS and the AWK, the “battle lines” hardened as the AWS demanded changes in the status of Kosova and the AWK demanded better understanding of the situation in Kosova. The final attempt at dialogue on relations between Serbs and Albanians in Yugoslavia was organized by the AWS in April 1988 at its premises at Francuska

Street No. 7 in Belgrade when both associations agreed to discuss three general topics: cultural–historical, linguistic as well as current matters between Serbs and Albanians in Kosova. The members of the AWK expected neither to formulate a programme nor reach a conclusion. However, they did demand the freedom to solve their problems themselves, without outside interference (from Serbia). For their part, the members of the AWS insisted that a constitutional change was inevitable. The dialogue ended there, with cultural conflict and the clash of “historical truths” mirroring and finally exacerbating the deteriorating situation in Yugoslavia.

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