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# SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CRITICAL DISCOURSES IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA: STRUCTURAL APPROACH[1]

**ABSTRACT**
Until a decade ago, a comprehensive contestation of the so-called "transitional" paradigm was largely missing in the post-socialist era. This reality changed in the last ten years, especially in the region of former Yugoslavia. Some social movements in this region have started questioning the very essence of the economic and social misconceptions of the post-socialist condition. This paper first provides an elaboration of the very conceptual edifice of the ruling paradigm (hence the object of the critique of the three social movements in question), as well as a theoretical and methodological framework. It goes on to map out the epistemic discursive content of the respective social movements in Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo, thereby assessing the conceptual content of their critique of the post-socialist transitional paradigm. Finally, given the similarities between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the paper seeks to explain variations in the critique by how the structural and contextual features impact the perspective from which it is constructed.

**KEYWORDS**
post-socialism; social movements; critical discourse; former Yugoslavia

## Introduction

Before the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, social movement studies were mainly focused on Western Europe and North America. Unlike France or the United States where big social and political changes throughout their national histories were, to an extent, pushed forward by social movements from below – East-European states lagged behind with respect to the development of so-called "movement society" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). The first sign of discontinuity, with respect to direction from which social change usually occurs in these societies, appeared in the late

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1980s, when socialist regimes were contested by social movements. Among the most researched and certainly paradigmatic cases of East-European resistance against the socialist regimes was the Polish movement *Solidarnošć* (*Solidarity*).

Until recently, stream of research of social movements in this part of the world did not go too far from the point of the collapse of socialism. In some cases such as Serbia, the most researched movement was *Otpor* (*Resistance*) against Slobodan Milošević in the late 1990s. Anyway, the 'anti-authoritarian' movements of Eastern Europe remained in the focus of social movement scholarship. Currently, we are once again witnessing authoritarian tendencies in countries like Hungary, Poland, and Serbia. It turned out that the perspective of turning into a 'movement society' did not materialize after the collapse of the socialist regimes. On the contrary, post-socialism was often legitimized as 'painful but necessary transition' from real-socialism to liberal capitalism.

This is why the comprehensive contestation of so-called 'transnational' paradigm[2] was, in most cases, missing in the post-socialist era. People would go out protesting against different government's decisions, or against different rulers. Serbian *Resistance* from the second half of the 1990s was one of such movements which tended to confront the 'leftovers' of authoritarianism in Serbia, as if the era of Slobodan Milošević, the former president, represented continuation with socialism rather than the first stage of transition. All in all, no social movement or any other socially or politically relevant actor with a holistic critical approach towards transitional paradigm occurred in the period between the initiation of transition (in 1991) and the recent past.

This reality changed in the last decade, especially in the region of former Yugoslavia. After approximately two decades of uncontested rule of transitional paradigm, with occasional particularistic remarks which may all fall under 'give us real liberal democracy' or 'give us real capitalism' type of complaints, some social movements in this region started questioning the very essence of the economic and social misconceptions of the post-socialist condition. Some ten years ago, different aspects of various 'side-effects' of transition surfaced: lack of real political participation, powerful ethno-nationalism, corruption, commodification of education, high unemployment (due to privatization of factories and companies), violation of labor rights, and general social and economic deprivation. The appearance of social movements in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia opened the door for addressing all these issues as parts of a bigger whole, as compounding elements of the doctrine of transition and, thereby, articulating a systemic critique of the *status quo*.

2 At the general level, transitology is "drawing its origins from the turbulence of the Latin American context of the 1970s, [...] and has established itself as a specific scientific domain after 1989. It, further on, places the social sciences in direct service to neoliberal capitalism - measuring the 'adequacy' of the transformations towards market economy, as well as the adequacy of the introduction of forms of parliamentary democracy which support the former" (Pupovac 2010).

The newly arisen social movements across the region of former Yugoslavia pushed contesting ideas forward and launched the struggle against *neoliberal transition*. Some authors labeled them as the 'new left' in the post-Yugoslav space. Štiks (2015) places these movements in the post-socialist, post-conflict – but also the post-crisis context. The reason why he calls these new actors 'new left', is because he directly refers to the League of Communists of Yugoslavia as the 'old left'. Even though similarities with the 'new left' of the 1960s are admitted, the author nonetheless indicates more specific characteristics of the post-Yugoslav 'new left', including "the critique of electoral democracy [...] critique of the neoliberal capitalist transformation of the post-Yugoslav societies and the so called 'new left' [...] critique of the conservative, religious, patriarchal, and nationalist ideological hegemony [...] defense of common and public goods [...] and an internationalist approach to the post-Yugoslav and wider Balkan region, often coupled with an anti-nationalist and antifascist attitude [...]" (ibid.: 137). In different (national) contexts this struggle got different shapes which consequently pushed different issues to the forefront.

In Croatia the 'ice-breaker' was the student movement. While 'catching the wave' of the global student resistance against the neoliberal turn in the sphere of higher education (see more in Dolenec, Doolan 2013), this movement grew out of the student struggles at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb. In Serbia, the most prominent social actor in critically assessing the post-socialist transition was the municipal movement around the group *Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own*. This group sought to intervene into the public space through involvement in the local authorities' urban policies (Domachowska 2019). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the uprising that was initiated by the workers in Tuzla resulted in the rise of the popular movement in Sarajevo and several other cities. Chiara Milan (2020) rightfully emphasizes that the major characteristic of this movement was "social mobilization beyond ethnicity". One should certainly bear in mind that the three cases occurred within the same post-socialist space and time. The common feature of all three cases is that the main object of their critique was paradigm of transitional post-socialism. This general common feature, however, should not prevent us from bringing up the question of variations in terms of discursive performances upon which the critique was set and potential explication for these variations.

So, what made certain conceptual apparatuses employed within their discourses more appropriate than others? To an extent, these variations are to be explained by the fact that we are talking about three different types of movements – one being student, the second being municipal and the third being 'popular'. The question that still remains is what factors influenced that Belgrade got a municipal, Sarajevo a popular and Zagreb a student movement as the 'ice-breakers'. Out of three possible levels of explanation for these variations, namely micro, meso and macro – I am hereby covering the macro perspective. While the micro perspective would tackle the level of individual activists and meso perspective the organizational level (of collective identity formation), the macro perspective is concerned with different structural and

contextual features of the three nation states which could have affected variations in critical discursive performances. Systemic characteristics of the three nation states, as well as local contextual specificities can therefore tell us something about divergences in the starting position from which these three social movements sought to contest the dominant paradigm.

In this paper thus, I am dealing with mapping the epistemic discursive content of the three social movements, in Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo and thereby assessing the conceptual content of their critique of the post-socialist transitional paradigm. Secondly, I am looking at the structural and contextual features in order to explain the variations with respect to the perspective from which this critique is constructed, while keeping in mind similarities shared by Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Before engaging in this research endeavor, I am providing the elaboration on the very conceptual edifice of the ruling paradigm (hence the object of the critique of the three social movements in question), as well as theoretical and methodological framework.

## Post-Yugoslav Context

Arguably, the Yugoslav transition is perceived as the most complex of all the Eastern European "post-socialisms" (Ritter, 2012/2013). On the one hand, former Yugoslavia shares general features with other Eastern European regions and states. Aspiration towards the so-called 'democratic transformation' is one of them. Capitalism, on the other hand, was not a 'grass-roots' phenomenon but the end result of democratic transformation (Mujkić, 2015: 626). Narratively, it was democracy that was directly opposed to socialism. With the downfall of socialism, one could not hear much about 'capitalism' replacing 'socialism'. "Early revolutionary slogans of 1989 demanded 'socialism with human face', 'human rights and freedoms', 'freedom of movement' and not 'capitalism', or 'the establishment of a sharply divided class society' or a 'trickle-down economy'" (ibid.). When reality turned out to be capitalist, with sharp class divisions, the national elites in Eastern Europe had to find an ideological solution for it. This ideological solution was supposed to serve as justification for sharp social and economic differences. Justification is partially found in the narrative of modernization and its three main pillars: civil society, industrialism and capitalism.[3] However, this was not enough and could not secure smooth capitalist transformation without creating a mechanism for drawing attention away from social and economic problems. In Yugoslavia, the perfect solution had already been there, rooted among certain segments of population including intellectual elites and writers, already during socialism. This is ethno-nationalism that existed in the wider post-socialist space, but showed its most explicit face in former Yugoslavia.

Ethno-nationalism thus represents a political side of the post-socialist medal. It is often defined as 'cultural' or 'Eastern', as opposed to 'civic' nationalism

3 As a matter of fact, industrialization already took place during socialism.

of the 'Western' type (Kohn 1994). Other authors emphasize that such categorical differentiation between the two 'nationalisms' contains a strong normative component. The former is often perceived as 'bad' and the latter as 'good' (Porter-Szücs 2009: 4; Jaskulowski 2009: 95-127; Jaskulowski 2010: 290). The dichotomy could be also posed around different periods (or centuries). The former is the product of the late 20th and the 21st century, and the latter as the 19th century phenomenon. Finally, the former is usually associated with the post-socialism heading towards 'democratic transition' and the latter with 'stabile' democracies. Regardless of one's academic positioning within this normative debate, ethnic nationalism is a dominant category through which post-socialist – and especially post-Yugoslav experience is to be addressed.

The result of playing on the card of ethno-nationalism was ethnically driven conflict in Croatia, Bosnia and later Kosovo and Macedonia. Gagnon's claim that "ethnic conflicts are happening when the elites are making ethnic belonging to be the only politically relevant identity" (Gagnon 2002: 134), found its remarkable realization in the Yugoslav conflicts. With ethnic/national/religious identities becoming the most appropriate distractors from difficult social and economic condition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the post-conflict former Yugoslavia became the region of constant ethnic tensions. Hostile relations between the newly independent states, as well as among ethnic majorities and minorities within single states colored social, political and cultural reproduction of the post-Yugoslav societies.

In spite of the dominance of the ethno-nationalist narrative, the political side of the "transitional coin" was eventually split into two camps: civic (liberal) and (ethno) nationalist. Even though the nationalist stream has often been presented as incompatible with modernization, civic and nationalist streams turned out as equally good executers of the neoliberal (economic) reforms. In the post-war period, 'civic' political forces insisted on political 'pacification' – but the relation of complementarity between nationalism and economic (neo) liberalization became sooner or later, clear in all former Yugoslav republics. In Croatia, for instance, it was the nationalist leadership of the 1990s (embodied in *Croatian Democratic Union* (HDZ) and the first president of independent Croatia, Franjo Tuđman) that linked, both practically and narratively, neoliberal economic reforms to the far-right nationalism. In Serbia, this 'tandem' was initially blurred under Milosević[4] but became clearer after his fall. In contemporary Serbia, the champion of economic liberalization is no other than President Aleksandar Vučić, the former secretary general of the ultra-right *Serbian Radical Party* (*SRS*).[5] In Bosnia, a country that represents the most paradigmatic

4 See more about the blurry ideological condition in Serbia in the graph "Serbian Ideological Paradox" bellow.

5 *Serbian Radical Party* (*SRS*) has been established and led by the convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj. After leaving SRS, Vučić and Tomislav Nikolić (president of Serbia 2012-2017) founded a new *Serbian Progressive Party* (*SNS*), which took a moderate turn, but never gave up on the nationalist rhetoric. Instead of open promotion of 'Greater

case of internal tension between different ethnic groups, a 'non-ethnic' politics is nearly impossible due to the convocational model of state organization[6]. The three dominant (and most of time ruling) parties, *SDA*, Bosnian branch of *HDZ* and *SNSD* (but also *SDS*)[7], all have 'modern' and 'pro-European' agendas. Moreover, they often accuse other parties for 'anti-Europeanism' in order to discredit them.

Nearly two decades after dissolution of the common state in some parts of the former Yugoslavia this blurry signifier called 'transitional post-socialism' was challenged. Both sides of the transitional coin, nationalism and economic neoliberalism, its discursive apparatus and practical social and economic consequences were put into the same discursive basket as objects of the critique. And when it seemed like there was "no end to the beginning"[8] of transition, the combination of some old and some new (radical) democratic ideas (re)emerged.

## Theory, Methodology and the Research Question

The only research aim of this paper is concerned with mapping the presence of critical, counter-hegemonic concepts and ideas in discourses of the new social movements in the former Yugoslav region (traceable in the documents issued by the three movements) – and assessing macro-level (structural) factors affecting divergences in discursive performance of the three cases. In order to accomplish this research task, I am hereby coming up with the theoretical framework and methodology.

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Serbia', Vučić (and Nikolić) simply accepted a more modest or more realistic version of Serbian nationalism.

6 This is a consequence of the Dayton peace agreement. The annex four of that agreement, which represents Bosnian constitution, divided the country into two entities and one district. While the entity called *Republika Srpska* includes 49 percent of the territory, the second entity called *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* contains 51 percent of the territory. In addition, the later entity is divided into 10 cantons. See more in the document of Dayton peace agreement here: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BA_951121_DaytonAgreement.pdf

7 *SDA* is short from *Party of Democratic Action*. The founder was the first president of BiH and the war leader of Bosniaks, Alija Izetbegović. Today, the president of this party is his son, Bakir Izetbegović. *HDZ BiH* is short from *Croatian Democratic Union* of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This party is a major Croatian party in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The president Nebojša Čović is the former member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *SNSD* is short from the *Union of Independent Social-Democrats*, led by the curent member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik. This is the major party in the entity of *Republika Srpska*. *SDS* is short from *Serbian Democratic Party*. It is currently opposition to *SNSD* in *Republika Srpska*. This was the major Serbian party during the war and it was led by the convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić.

8 This phrase is used by the Croatian philosopher Ozren Pupovac in order to point out one of the most often used justifications for damaging economic and social effects of transition: "We have just started [...]", Pupovac 2010.

Theoretical framework includes theory of discourse and related theory of frames from the social movement studies. Namely, in social movement studies the process of discursive consolidation and accommodation of various types of knowledge and 'cognitive inputs' is called 'framing'. The concept of frame "refers to interpretative schemata that simplifies and condenses the "world out there" (Benford, Snow 1992: 137). In Goffman's words, frames allow "individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' events within their life space or the world at large" (ibid.). There are different forms of frames recognized in the literature. The most common for is the so called 'collective action frame', which "serve as accenting devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable" (ibid.). Collective action frames are important because they make diagnostic and prognostic attributions (ibid.), which is something they share with master frames, another type of frames – central to this work. Unlike collective action frames, master frames function at the more universal level, they include frames such as 'justice' or 'rights'. In Benford and Snow's words, "master frames are to movement – specific collective action frames, as paradigms are to finely tuned theories" (ibid.: 138). Master frames therefore include a wide range of ideas and operate at the higher level of abstraction. The so called 'elaborative' master frames are especially to be focused on in this work, since they are defined as "flexible forms of interpretation, and as a consequence, they are more inclusive systems that allow for extensive ideational amplification and extension" (Benford and Snow, ibid.: 140)[9].

Master frames are, furthermore, often linked to the issue of resonance, so the authors emphasize that master frames are usually comprised of "ideas of age", such as "freedom" or "self-determination" (Sanbridge, 2002: 530). One should nonetheless wonder whether master frames may launch the initiation of 'a new age' by themselves and thereby create a new reality, instead of reacting to what had already been the dominant perception of reality beforehand. Through such analysis one may investigate the conceptual apparatus used, the complex set of imageries and their connection to the material/structural conditions standing behind as reasons and incentives for seeking social change (through action).

As to the general understanding of discourse, I take the widely accepted view about it being generated by the combination of cognition and interaction. On the one hand, cognition involves processes of meaning attribution, knowledge production, and opinion and belief formation. On the other, it is a compound of interaction mostly expressed through language (but not only), or the so-called "talk in interaction" (van Dijk 2007: xxiv). It is, therefore, a part

9 Elaborative master frames, according to Bernstein's classification, come from elaborative linguistic code. On the opposite side is the so called 'restricted code' which is highly particularistic with respect to meaning and social structure (Benford and Snow 2002: 139).

of "social practice" (Fairclough, Wodak 1997: 258; van Dijk 1997). Discourse is here, furthermore, understood as "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice" (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 105). My specific theoretical and methodological focus is on the epistemic discourse which tackles the "ways in which knowledge is presupposed, expressed, formulated, organized and managed in language use, communication and interaction" (van Dijk 2014: 9). I am looking at discourses from the perspective of *knowledge management* which represents management of complex schemata of *social interrelations* through which conceptual knowledge (ideas, categories, concepts, prototypes, domains, and scripts) become constitutive of movements' discourses and hence – form the dominant conceptual stream within those discourses.[10] Conceptual knowledge should be seen through the lenses of interaction between the exposure to theoretical influences and direct experience or, better said – between knowledge based on experience and generic knowledge.

Methodologically speaking, I combine epistemic discourse (analysis) with Fairclough's critical discourse (analysis), which aims at revealing "the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power" (della Porta, 2014: 63). This combination is useful at the macro-level in dealing with the interaction (or specific relationship) between (critical) ideas and systemic and/or specific social contexts. Fairclough's approach also refers to the way in which the 'new knowledge' is managed with respect to the 'old knowledge'. I shall interpret this feature as feasible for looking at how *counter-hegemonic knowledge is managed with respect to hegemonic knowledge*. This approach may also be useful for assessing those discourses that *challenge* existing power relations (or the *ruling order of discourse* in Fairclough's terms), structures and specific institutions and thereby compete with other discourses seeking to reproduce the *status quo*. Hence, the role of discursive practices may be, overall, significant both "in the maintenance of social order and in social change" (ibid.: 70) and my focus is on the later.

The discourse analysis is conducted on the sample of documents in which the conceptual positioning of the three social movements was detectable. I chose, in other words, documents in which the macro level of (epistemic) discourse is best represented: "The Occupation Cookbook" (specifically the chapter on the "Meaning of Democracy") and "Educational Brochure" In Croatia; "Plenums, not Political Parties" "In the Name of the Citizens" and "Plenum Takes Over" in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the segment "About us" from the official website, "Local Community: Local or Community" in Serbia.

## Case Presentation and Mapping Epistemic Discourse

I shall briefly introduce the case studies and present the conceptual means through which the three social movements contested the post-socialist reality.

10 More on 'conceptual knowledge' see in van Dijk 2014: 86.

When I say "conceptual means", I refer to the front-running and supporting concepts constitutive of the epistemic (conceptual) discourses of the three movements in question. In accordance to the theoretical framework and the social movement studies tradition, I used specific terms of front-running master-frames and supportive master-frames. Results of the epistemic discourse analysis are presented as they came out from analyzing the abovementioned documents. Before indicating the results of the epistemic discourse analysis, let me first introduce a direct circumstances under which the three movements occurred.

Firstly, the student movement in Zagreb has become famous for its "free education for all" struggle in 2009.[11] The most important endeavor conducted by the movement was the occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy[12], which started on the 20th of April at noon. Around 300 students gathered in front of the faculty and carried the "One world one struggle" and "Education is not for sale" banners with them. Soon they started interrupting lectures and exams and uttering the "Free education" rallying cry. The students never canceled the educational function of the faculty. Even though they prevented professors from teaching, they organized alternative lectures and activities. The unlucky circumstance for the faculty management was that the dean was not in Zagreb at the time. He was in Brazil, spending time in Copacabana beach. This gave the students an advantage, because the management was neither complete nor ready and organized – whereas the movement was. Its activities, moreover, inspired others and the struggle diffused from Zagreb to 20 other faculties across Croatia.[13]

On the other hand, the wave of protests and plenary meetings of citizens in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo was directly triggered by the workers' struggle in the former Yugoslav industrial capital, the city of Tuzla. On Wednesday, February 5th 2014, Tuzla's (mainly industrial) workers from privatized and destroyed factories took to the streets, as they had done many times before. Had the workers not been joined by the unemployed and other supporters from the town, that Wednesday would have probably looked like all of the previous ones, and would have had similar (zero) effects. But the workers' voice claiming the right to social security, work, pension and healthcare payments got louder as the crowd got bigger. Sarajevo, along with other cities such as Mostar or Zenica, heard it as well. The images of police repression against the ever larger mass of people on the streets of Tuzla became viral. The gathering of the protestors in Sarajevo started on the 7th of February at around 1.00 p.m. in front

11 See more in Popović 2015: 105–106.

12 English translation of the Faculty of Philosophy is "Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies". In this paper however, I will use a direct translation from the local language.

13 Apart from Zagreb, students from seven other cities launched blockades in their hometowns: Zadar, Rijeka, Split, Osijek, Pula, Varaždin and Slavonski Brod. Thereby Croatia was at the time the third most rebellious student country in Europe, just behind Greece and France.

of the Cantonal Government. Soon thereafter, they moved to the front of the Presidency building. Both buildings were secured by the police and the television camera recorded a remarkable statement from an elderly protester, who said: "Had you been safeguarding factories like this, we would have been importing the workforce today". The protestor stressed, in other words, that the police should have taken care of factories and local production before these were destroyed by privatization, the same way they did with the institutions (and the political elite) on the day of protest. By the end of the day the protests escalated and the poorly organized crowd created an inflamed atmosphere – both metaphorically and literally, as institutional buildings were set on fire. This time, unlike in the 1990s, it was not an external aggressor who was responsible for it. The inhabitants of Sarajevo themselves did it, targeting the symbols of 'self-colonial' domestic aggression of the ethno-nationalist political elites against their own people. Thus, Sarajevo's Cantonal government and the Presidency building burst into flames. The state was ready, and reacted in Sarajevo in the same way as in Tuzla – with pure repression.[14]

Finally, the "*Don't let Belgrade D(r)own* (*NDB*) movement, finally, sits in between the two previous cases with respect to triggers and repressive response by the state. It reached the peak of public support after an event which might be considered a direct trigger for mobilization. Namely, in the night between the 24th and the 25th of April 2016[15], a couple of buildings (over 1,000 square meters) in Belgrade's downtown were knocked down by heavy machinery. People who witnessed the event were kept in custody for a couple of hours. Their phones were taken and checked by unknown people with masks. Citizens who lived in the area called the police, but no one showed up. The whole endeavor was conducted in the part of Belgrade where an exclusive area called *Belgrade Waterfront*[16] (*BW*), by the Sava River, was going to be built. Then prime minister and today's president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, said that the highest officials of Belgrade's administration stood behind this action and that each and every one of them would be prosecuted. Almost four years later, while I am writing these lines, no public official has been charged or prosecuted.

The conceptual essence of the critique constructed by the *NDB* was set around the claim that the state is occupied and its institutions coopted by the ruling structures. Their purpose is, according to the activists, to fulfill "private interests of individuals". "They sold out everything" they stress out, and thereby deprived people of common goods, pauperized the ever-greater majority and brought it to the edge of existence. Even though power was moving from one clique to another, they claim, most of those who have been among the usurpers of public goods "still belong to the top". Instead, they argue, the state and its concrete institutions should serve the interests of its constituency, its people.

14 See more about Bosnaian protests and plenums in Arsenijević 2014.
15 See more about this case in Bieber 2019: 51–52.
16 The project is worth three billion dollars and the investor is *Eagle Hills*, the well-known company from United Arab Emirates.

This is how they come to start reclaiming what is 'taken away' from the people and initiate struggle for re-appropriation of common spaces and public goods in order to enhance democratic process through (primarily) local participation. The concepts of 'commons', 'public good', 'participation' and 'democracy' thereby became the front-running master-frames of the *NDB*'s epistemic discourse. The supportive conceptual apparatus included the above-mentioned concepts such as state or power (used both as 'power to the citizens' and negatively as 'power of the elite' which took over the state and its institutions). The last supportive master-frame relies on the socialist heritage, and its most important conceptual pillar – that is self-management. This concept is not recalled (only) because of its socialist connotation, but (also) because it is complementary with the overall discursive performance of the *NDB* movement. All the paradoxes of (electoral) post-socialist democracy, including discontents with the lack of inclusion and participation in social and (especially) political processes (of decision-making), are indeed likely to be remedied by a solution that encourages participation. This comes as a logical common sense, rather than as an open claim about the superiority of socialism over post-socialism. The revival of self-management from the past does not play the role of a call for going back to the past. Rather, it calls for looking into the future while remembering and taking from the past what seems to be plausible for resolving current social and political problems and tensions.

In the first statement released by the informal group of activists who (latter) stood behind the Sarajevo's plenums, they are pointing at the social and economic deprivation, the violation of human dignity, and the need to (re)introduce welfare and social justice for all strata in society. One may, furthermore, notice how *politics* is blamed for cloaking the larceny of society. This '(party) politics/society' cleavage may be understood in classical populist terms as a division between the elite and the people. Considering the absence of a potential 'radical' subject, this is to be understood as the first step towards a possible occurrence of such subject. The call for participation at the first Sarajevo plenum goes into the same direction. In this text, we learn that "us" stands for 'the citizens', which gives a civic tone to the discourse. "No political brokering" represents an exclusivist standpoint whereby the activists pose an ultimate line of demarcation between them and the political elite, which is blamed for the distorted social image of Sarajevo and the whole Bosnian society. Behind this demarcation line posed through the statement "there is no party or organization behind us whatsoever" one may notice the presence of a sort of disclaimer which should have represented a sort of *sine qua non* of any progressive social change. Unlike politicians who have gotten richer in the past decades, behind the activists there are "years of humiliation, hunger, helplessness and hopelessness". These four features delved deeper into the "violated human dignity", thus concretizing its meaning. So hunger stands for economic deprivation; helplessness for disempowerment of those who have been economically deprived; humiliation for the violated self-esteem due to the previous two features; and hopelessness for the vicious circle of the political, institutional and general

systemic framework which prevents any sort of intervention of the deprived into mechanisms which determine the conditions of their own lives. Overall, we may say that the discursive performance of the popular movement in Sarajevo rested upon the two front-running master-frames: *social justice* and *human dignity*. Alongside these front-running master-frames, one could also trace concepts such as *transition* (specifically *transitional theft*), corruption or nepotism which are to be blamed for lack of social justice and violation of human dignity. These master-frames fall under the category supportive master-frames.

Finally, the epistemic discursive content of the student movement from Zagreb represented the avant-garde in terms of systemic critique of the post-socialist paradigm. They did it through the niche of higher education and the issue of tuition fees – but never missed a chance to make a point about higher education as a part of the wider problem called the post-socialist neoliberal transition. The key concepts from the domain of the post-socialist paradigm, used in order to challenge it, were *modernization, socialist legacy, European Union / European standards* and the *transition process*. These 'transnational' master-frames are portrayed as pure legitimizing means which serve for suppressing critical thinking in general. The activists claimed that the hegemonic narrative thus constitutes and legitimizes itself on the basis of a newly established dichotomy between 'the modern' and the 'European' on the one hand, and the 'socialists' and (hence) 'backward', on the other. In light of this dichotomy, the introduction of tuition fees for higher education is (dominantly) conceived as being on the 'modern' side. From the hegemonic paradigm's perspective, feeless higher education becomes a synonym for backward logic typical of socialism, whereas the introduction of fees becomes automatically progressive. The main task of the movement was to deconstruct this sort of hegemonic discourse. They start from the supportive conceptual apparatus that is, the discourse of rights. The activists argue that the neoliberal transition has affected negatively social and economic rights, both within the EU and outside its borders (in 2009, Croatia was still outside European Union). They illuminated the contradiction between people's expectations driven by the hegemonic discourse (the story about welfare and the European Union), and the 'real', 'welfare-free' neoliberal structure of the EU. In the section titled "The Attack on the Acquired Social Rights" within the "Occupational Cookbook", the activists deconstruct the structural framework under which their struggle for free education takes place. The concept of 'capital' is introduced for the first time. By referring to 'the majority' as 'working majority', which stands in opposition to a "tacit consensus among the political elites in favor of capital", the critique becomes more radical and, furthermore, labor-oriented. The activists highlight the way in which "political elites work against the interest of the majority". In their view, representatives of the general interest are only nominal representatives, and hence get easily corrupted by the power of capital. The rule of the people consequentially appears as 'alleged' and democracy becomes its own opposite. The mistrust in representative democracy comes from its practical failure to meet real needs of the people. Direct

democracy is therefore presented as a consequence and/or reaction to the "unfulfilled promise of representative democracy". It appears, in the authors' words, as a "security measure", as a "specter that does not stop to haunt".[17] It is argued that the interests of capital stand behind the "ideological justification" of the degradation of social rights. The abstract concept of capital and its "interests" is illustrated through mentioning its social and economic effects (such as layoffs, manufacturing consent for decreasing social rights etc.). Activists here translate 'flexibilization' of labor as the process of enabling employers to lay off workers more easily. This remark highlights the interconnectivity of the student struggle with other socio-economic issues and shows a degree of solidarity with other struggles (such as labor struggle), which reflects the same logic applied in the case of tuition fees in higher education. In addition, they touch upon the concept of "learning society"[18] and argue that even hegemonic master-frames stay unfulfilled due to commodification of education. Finally, they prevent possible attacks (typical of the Croatian public space) by touching upon the concept of "Yugo-nostalgia", and argue that such labels in the hegemonic narrative, primarily serve the purpose of legitimizing the degradation of social and economic rights that were guaranteed in the Yugoslav period. Instead of a "demander of basic rights" (including the right to free education), everyone who calls for these rights thus becomes 'Yugo-nostalgic', 'Serbo-Communist', 'Serbo-Yugoslav' or alike.

**Table:** Master Frames

| Social Movement | Zagreb | Sarajevo | Belgrade |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Front-running Master Frames** | (Rule of) capital; neoliberalism | Social justice; human dignity | Commons; public good; participation; democracy |
| **Supportive Master – Frames** | Human rights; legal discourse; learning society; | Transition; corruption; nepotism | Self-management; power; (occupied) state |

## Discursive Variations: Macro Perspective

Variations in discourses could, as indicated in the introduction, be explained from different perspectives. Before, potentially, engaging in explication at the level of individual activists or collective identity formation, one should first pay attention to structural and contextual specificities which imposed certain

17 This is a clear reference to the famous Marxian notion of the "specter of communism haunting Europe".

18 If one should choose among the different definitions of learning or "knowledge society", the Croatian context most probably corresponds to the following one: "Economic success which is now determined by the ability of individuals and firms to accumulate and transform information in such a way as to produce and market goods efficiently and flexibly" (Smith 2002: 39–40).

limitations or opened up space for given discursive expressions. The three lines along which I am about to show divergences between the three social movements, are set up after I had already had a closer look at the final versions of all three discourses. These three indicators include:

1. The specific type of social movement
2. Structural divergences
3. Divergences of specific (social and political) contexts

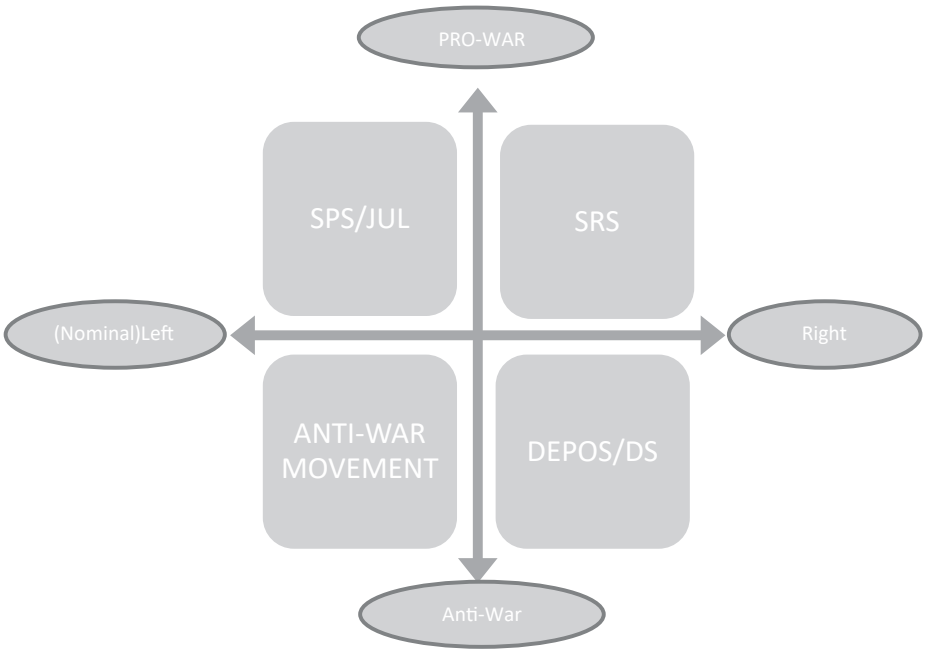
**Table:** Case studies

| Lines of divergence | Type of movement | Structure | Social/Political Context |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Belgrade** | Municipal | Authoritarian tendencies | Ideological Paradox/ Confusion |
| **Sarajevo** | Popular | Structural/ Constitutional Ethno- nationalism | Post-Conflict Collective Trauma |
| **Zagreb** | Student | Domination of the Right Wing (HDZ) Political Culture | Strong anti-Yugoslavism/ anti-communism |

Let me start with the municipal concepts which could end up at the forefront of *NDB*'s macro discourse in Belgrade due to the specific type or 'nature' of this movement. On the other hand, the fact that it was municipal type of movement that was the 'ice breaker' of the relevant and systemic critique of the status quo, owed pretty much to the specific national context. As to the movement's affiliation, *NDB* managed to catch the wave of municipal ideas and municipal social movements which had been spreading across Europe. The movement started its endeavors as a collective of several enthusiasts whose professional affiliation or personal (activist) interest relied on issues related to the 'commons' and the like. No wonder that the conceptual level of discursive performance reflected this type of specific affiliation of the movements' activists. At the same time, the occurrence of such a movement in Belgrade owed something to the fact that Serbia had gone through a sort of proliferation of ideological confusions in the 1990s, where the nationalist leader Slobodan Milošević was (self-) portrayed as an embodiment of the "(dark) communist rule".[19] The left-leaning ideas were usually demonized by equalizing former President Milošević with socialism. This is why the context of post-Milošević's Serbia was highly hostile towards any discourse which would directly refer or reproduce the socialist discourse.

19 I call this situation a "Serbian ideological paradox".

**Graph:** The Serbian (Ideological) Paradox[20]




Secondly, the time of the occurrence of *NDB* overlaps with the rise of authoritarian tendencies in Serbia. The ruling *Serbian Progressive Party* led by its president Aleksandar Vučić, namely, started its dominanation in 2014, when Vučić became the prime minister (and later President of the Republic in 2017). By 2016 when *NDB* gains significant visibility, municipalism represented one of the rare discursive 'way-outs' from the contextually driven division of society along the lines of binary opposition – pro or against the 'ruler'. By pushing concepts such as commons or public good forward, the movement aimed at circumventing this unbearable simplicity of the political discourse and imposition of something new for the given context. Until nowadays however, the context has not change for the better. To the contrary, this division remained the only politically relevant one.

20 *SPS* is short for *Socialist Party* of Serbia, which was founded as a legal successor of the *Communist Party of Serbia*, from the socialist times. *JUL* is short from the *Yugoslav Left*, the sister party to the *SPS*, founded by Mirjana Marković, Slobodan Milošević's wife. *SRS* is short for *Serbian Radical Party*, founded by Vojislav Šešelj, later convicted by the *International Tribunal for war crimes* in The Hague. *DS* is short from *Democratic Party*. *DEPOS* is short from *Democratic Movement of Serbia*, the first oppositional coalition against Milošević. It was composed of four center-right political parties, including the most serious opposition to Milošević at the time, *Serbian Renewal Movement* (*SPO*) which was led by the monarchist and a right-wing writer and politician Vuk Drašković. The coalition contested Milošević in 1992 and 1993 elections.

On the other hand, the front running master-frames of Zagreb's student movement reflected the influence of a different national context, as well as the difference in the type of social movement. Even though the specific accent was on "free education for all", concepts such as (the rule of) *capital* and *neoliberalism* were set as the dominant conceptual 'satellites' placed around the main demand. Starting from a different specific time period in which the movement occurred, one should firstly emphasize that the period of 2008/9, when the student movement occurred, were years when the concepts of *capital* or *neoliberalism* hit a peak in public attention due to the global economic crisis. This is why such master-frames could 'land' more safely even in countries of post-socialism, despite their hostility towards any left-leaning (critical) ideas. Croatian context, unlike Serbian, had not had a proliferation of ideological confusions, whatsoever. It was quite clear from the beginning that the right wing had taken over after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The only obstacle to the revival of critical discourses and ideas was the (dominantly) negative perception of the Yugoslav period, whereby the accent has primarily been on its political (identity) dimension (Yugoslavia has been perceived as 'Serbo-Yugoslavia', hence dominated by the Serbs). Within such a context, master-frames like *neoliberalism* or *capital* could have possibly resonated with certain segments of society, under the condition that Yugoslavia stayed somewhat 'out' as an explicit point of reference.

Secondly, the fact that it is a *student* movement that we are talking about, allowed for such (critical) ideas to be brought up much "easier" than for the majority of other social (and political) actors. The reasoning behind this claim is twofold. Firstly, student movements have had the tradition of operating with and within critical discourses, not only in Croatia but worldwide. They are usually more immune to attacks from the political mainstream. Publics are usually less likely to 'buy' arguments such as "someone is paying them" and the like. Primarily, students are seen as voices of the youth, so that political messages coming from them are in a sort of privileged position. They cannot be so easily dismissed, in spite of their radical content. Secondly, student movements are more likely to develop such radical discourses due to their internal dynamics and the specific habitus of university (especially the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb).

Finally, in Sarajevo, the most decisive structural factors had to do with the limitations imposed by its constitutional post-conflict configuration. Bosnia, namely, suffers from a dysfunctional state character. Its constitution, the annex four of the Dayton peace agreement (which divided the country into two entities, ten cantons, and one district with a special status), as well as the permanent perpetuation of ethnic tensions (primarily by the elites), have created enormous rigidity of political and (thereby) social structures. This rigidity has mostly been reflected through a high level of structural resilience with respect to any sort of non-ethnic politics. Under such circumstances, every statement and every social or political action has to be carefully communicated. Any move outside the ethno-national 'box' in which Bosnia was put by its own constitution has proven to be nearly impossible.

The social and economic degradation that has followed from these structural shortcomings has, nonetheless, created a little bit of a maneuvering space for critical discourses. The attempt was precisely to overcome, or circumvent the structural obstacles and get out of the ethno-nationalist 'cage'. The intention of the 'front-running' duo was clear: it is not about Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, but about the 'winners and losers' of transition, about the human beings whose dignity has been violated by those who enjoy undeserved privileges. The usage of *human dignity* as a concept is specifically remarkable taken the Bosnian post-war context. Similarly to the post-WWII period in Europe, the relevance of this concept comes from the essentialist value of the human being, which obliges others to treat him/her as a value in itself. The main context in which this concept's relevance has reoccurred is the 1990s war and the atrocities committed against civilians, including the genocide in Srebrenica. This is symptomatic, because the concept likewise covers, as the activists argued, the period of "transitional theft, corruption, nepotism, privatization of public resources, and the implementation of an economic model that favors the rich and financial arrangements that have destroyed any hope for a society based on social justice and welfare". This means that the violation of human dignity through war crimes and atrocities during the war has been prolonged in the post-war era by using different means. The main causes of the violation of human dignity in the post-war Bosnia are thus found in the economic model and structurally determined political practice established after the Dayton Peace Agreement. At the same time, the concept of *human dignity* reveals the need for discursive coverage of a wide spectrum of causes affecting the violation of each and every aspect of human existence in Bosnia.[21]

When it comes to the concept of *social justice*, its discursive role could be assessed by referring to the specific type of social movement. The popular character of a movement usually carries both opportunities and dangers. Opportunities concern greater mobilization capacity which may overcome barriers typical for more narrowly set activist collectives. Dangers, on the other hand, come from the overly general character of such movements, which usually cannot fully benefit from the greater mobilization capacity, due to lack of a stable and clear social basis. Popular movements often suffer from overgeneralizations of discourse, which come from the vagueness of their social base. Master-frames in Sarajevo thus came from the very nature of this popular movement, whereas the nature came from the effort to circumvent contextual and structural obstacles. The whole endeavor aimed at making both the social base and the discourse more solid and politically potent. In the case of Sarajevo, this was indeed tried. Structural obstacles however, turned out to be too strong.

When it comes to the set of supportive master-frames, the three cases showed three possible scenarios, depending on contextual and structural specificities.

21 The usage of the concept of *dignity* may likewise be assessed by using the emotional/affective, instead of cognitive approach in social movement studies. For looking at the concept from this perspective, see Eklundh 2019: 114.

Starting from Sarajevo, the activists had to supplement the main discursive focus (expressed in the front-running master frames of social justice and human dignity) with demands such as 'expert government'. This was a direct response to the popular 'anti-political' sentiment coming from a huge disappointment, which made citizens highly mistrustful towards the entire political elite. The combination of these two factors, the absence of a clear social base and the 'anti-political' sentiment, brought the overall discourse to a certain contradiction between the supporting and front-running master-frames. This contradiction was embodied in the groundlessness of the relationship between dignity and social justice, on the one hand, and the historically and recently proven inability of 'expert governments' to inherit these kinds of values, on the other.

The supporting master-frames of *NDB* were more compatible with the front-running master-frames. Self-management, power, (occupied) state and the like indeed supplemented *NDB*'s 'front-runners'. Yet, the reasoning behind the choice of supplementary concepts (such as self-management) has only partially to do with the type of movement and partially with the specific context of Serbia and its relationship with the socialist past. Even though the Yugoslav legacy has been demonized and to a large extent delegitimized, some of its (conceptual) elements have nonetheless remained unsoiled. In Yugoslav times, self-management was introduced as a conceptual response to the growing tendency of bureaucratization and divergence from the ideal of democratic socialism. As the 'father' of the concept claimed, "the working masses which had once gained their right to decide for themselves through the national liberation struggle, were not ready to give up that right so easily and leave it to some new state bureaucracy" (Kardelj 1978: 17). Considering that Serbia has not become as hostile towards Yugoslav heritage as, for instance Croatia, such concepts which glorify participation and democracy (in both politics and economy) were suitable for the new municipalist tendencies. On the other hand, such concepts could resonate with the public if applied without a direct reference to the entire Yugoslav context. Self-management is undoubtedly 'safer' as a supportive, than as front-running master-frame.

Finally, Zagreb's student movement incorporated legal and human rights' discourse within the set of supportive master-frames. At first sight, the legal discourse embodied in referring to the (Croatian) constitutional principles or the human rights discourse (which recalled the *UN* charter on human rights from 1948) do not fit the more radical and clearly anti-capitalist essence of the epistemic discourse. Structurally speaking, however, one should bear in mind that Croatian society has become a mirror image of the state – driven normalization of the agenda imposed by the most powerful right-wing party, *Croatian Democratic Union* (*HDZ*). Oftentimes, internal conflicts and lines of division within *HDZ* reflect lines of division in the public debates, as well. The narrative about national liberation in the war for independence, and a strong influence of the Catholic Church on social and political life, made Croatia and almost uncontestable right-wing national state. Even though there was no signs of authoritarianism in the past 20 years, the cult created around Franjo Tudjman,

the first President of the Republic (and *HDZ*) and the war leader, has been established as undisputable. Even the oppositional *Social Democratic Party* (the successor of *the Communist Party of Croatia*) has been often reproducing this reality. Under such circumstances, the liberal side of the transitional medal, relying upon concepts such as human rights, has been often front-lined narratively – but sidelined practically. Even though the student movement was clearly profiled as a left-wing, even anti-capitalist movement, the structural features made them using legal and human rights discourse as supportive to their more radical front-running conceptual apparatus. The function of this, supportive set of master-frames was contextualizing the main conceptual pillars (of neoliberalism, capital and the like). It was a way of saying, "we also beat you on your own discursive field". Conceptual inconsistencies of the dominant transitional paradigm are thereby illuminated not only from the standpoint of the opposite discursive camp, but also from within the very dominant paradigm. A similar trend may be detected in the case of the use of concepts such as *learning society*. Playing the card of revealing the inconsistencies between narratives and political practice served for showing that the front-running master-frames were not out of touch with reality and that counter-hegemony should not be equalized with utopia. Through such a discursive maneuver, in the light of the misconceptions of the hegemonic concepts, the counter-hegemonic conceptual apparatus gained more solid and context-driven ground.

## Conclusion

I started the paper with a reference to the fall of the Berlin wall. This event undoubtedly announced, both symbolically and practically, the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Since then, the often-repeated catchphrase related to the new world order became the phrase "the only game in town". This means that the announced victory of neoliberal capitalism did not only become evident, but almost final and irreversible. Globally speaking, this alleged irreversibility was soon brought into question. During the late 1990s, protests started spreading from Seattle to Genoa and intensified throughout the following decade. By the end of the first decade of the 2000s, "the only game in town" was significantly discredited across the globe, arguably due to its numerous social and economic (but also political) misconceptions and side-effects.

The post-socialist space, post-Yugoslav area included, was at first lagging behind with respect to these trends of global resistance. Keeping in mind the context, it was difficult for 'post-socialist' activists to come up with a convincing critique of the system to which their states were (still) trying to catch up with. Soon after the socialist systems disintegrated, the narrative about a 'brighter' future was closely tied to the (nation) state building, market liberalization and privatization. In some parts of the post-socialist world such as former Yugoslavia, the 'nation state building' brought about ethnic cleansing, mass killings and genocide. Ethnic nationalism became the most relevant political category. Liberalization and privatization, on the other hand, exposed the already

devastated economies to much more powerful competitors and economic 'tigers' (multinational companies included) that managed to suck even the last drops of 'blood' from its fragile 'veins'. While privatizations, left hundreds of thousands of workers jobless, ethnic nationalism kept their anger at bay. 'National freedom' and 'modernization' represented the key pillars of a narrative which secured hegemony of the post-socialist political and economic elites. Almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the resistance was born in this part of the world as well. The hegemonic paradigm proved to be contestable.

Keeping in mind the context, coming up with a convincing critique of the system to which their states were (still) trying to catch up with, was not an easy task for the activists in former Yugoslavia. As each discourse reflected structural and contextual constrains and specificities, this paper was set to illuminate the conceptual 'backstage' of this resistance and address structural and contextual factors which affected discursive variations of the critique to which the peripheral version of neoliberal capitalism in former Yugoslavia was exposed to. Apart from the shared anti-hegemonic 'nature' of the three discourses in question, the three social movements illustrated three different types of the critique of the post-socialist paradigm. The conceptual apparatuses used by three social movements covered various fields of potential contestation: from higher education, to the 'commons' and general notions such as social justice and human dignity. Master-framing in each of the three discourses in question reflected structural and contextual features of Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. Through the analysis conducted at the macro level, I found that characteristics such as constitutional set up, type of rule (authoritarian vs. non-authoritarian) or ideological constellation among the relevant political actors played an important role in epistemic discursive performances of the new actors who expressed discontent with the ruling paradigm. In Bosnia, the ethnically divided country and the Dayton peace agreement significantly constrained the popular movement's choice of master-frames. The trauma from war, especially in Sarajevo, likewise colored the epistemic discourse and the very (popular) nature of this movement. In Serbia, authoritarian regime and the 'ideological paradox' inherited from the 1990s were influential factors when it comes to master-framing of the *NDB* municipal movement. The social movement in Croatia used the advantages of being a student movement and made discourse more radical. On the other hand, it could not circumvent the strong anti-Yugoslav sentiment, imposed from above.

While explaining discursive divergences between the three social movements, I was, finally, fully aware that critical discursive 'worlds' were not created by a 'big bang'. They first had to be created in both micro (individual) mindsets and meso level of collective identity creation. Under specific circumstances, the activist groups sought to conduct a dialectical endeavor, both to resonate with given contexts and to launch a more tangible social change and transform these contexts. This article did not go deeper into the way in which these critical endeavors and discourses became possible in the first place. Instead, it offered macro explanations on how structures and contexts affected critical discursive expressions, once they had already mobilized individuals and consolidated activist groups.

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# Kritički diskursi društvenih pokreta u bivšoj Jugoslaviji: strukturalistički pristup

**Apstrakt:**

Do pre desetak godina, sveobuhvatna kritika takozvane 'tranzitološke paradigme' je u dobroj meri izostajala u eri post-socijalizma. Ovakva realnost promenjena je u poslednjoj deceniji, a posebno u bivšoj Jugoslaviji. Pojedini društveni pokreti su u ovoj regiji počeli da propituju suštinu ekonomskih i društvenih protivrečnosti post-socijalističkog stanja. Ovaj članak počinjem elaboracijom konceptualne konstrukcije vladajuće paradigme kao objekta kritike tri društvena pokreta kojima se bavim – a onda i elaboracijom teorijskog i metodološkog okvira. Potom nastavljam sa mapiranjem epistemološkog diskursa tri pokreta u Beogradu, Zagrebu i Sarajevu – i time ispitujem konceptualni sadržaj njihove kritike post-socijalističke paradigme. Konačno, uzevši u obzir sličnosti između Srbije, Hrvatske i Bosne i Hercegovine, ovaj članak teži da objasni varijacije u prirodi kritike – imajući u vidu način na koji su strukturne i kontekstualne karakteristike ove tri zemlje uticale na perspektivu iz koje su kritike bile konstruisane.

**Ključne reči:** post-socijalizam, društveni pokreti, kritički diskurs, bivša Jugoslavija