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ARTICLE

Mediating Spaces: The Scales of Yugoslav Socialist Thought

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Beginning with its emergence in the 1870s and carrying through to the wars of the 1990s, Yugoslav socialism was animated by various visions of supranational affiliation: from Balkan federalism to communist Slavism to the nonaligned movement and European unification. These projects were examples of what this article terms mediating spaces: strategies of spatial consolidation designed to mediate their constituent nations' integration into global capitalist modernity. Throughout the long twentieth century intellectuals on the world periphery set out to secure political sovereignty and economic development at a scale between the national and the global. These spatial projects were particularly pronounced in Yugoslavia, where the fragmentation of multiethnic empires made questions of supranational unity especially urgent. Developing the concept of mediating spaces, this article proposes a mode of intellectual history that approaches the global not as the scope of intellectual mobility or the horizon of historical inquiry, but rather as a generative scale of human experience that conditioned the formation of modern radical thought.

On mediating spaces

In the early months of 1992 Europe witnessed two events that signaled the diverging trends of the post-Cold War era. On 7 February representatives from the twelve members of the European Communities met in the Dutch town of Maastricht to sign the Treaty on European Union. The treaty marked an acceleration and deepening of the process of European integration and was met with celebrations that resonated with the liberal triumphalism of the 1990s. Two months later, on the other side of the continent, Bosnian Serb leaders declared their secession from the newly independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, inaugurating the bloodiest phase in the breakup of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. What are we to make of the coincidence of Europe's deepening integration and Yugoslavia's violent fragmentation? At first glance their synchronicity seems accidental: if the first promised the birth of a future of European unity, free-market dynamism, and cultural cosmopolitanism, the second warned of a regression to the authoritarian nationalism, ethnic cleansing, and territorial partition of the early twentieth century. But what if the historical conjunction of European integration and Yugoslav fragmentation were, in fact, deeply intertwined?

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Both the European Union and the Yugoslav federation were examples of what I am going to term mediating spaces: projects of supranational consolidation that were designed to mediate the constituent nations' integration into rapidly globalizing political, economic, and cultural horizons. As a strategy to secure the place of small nations in an asymmetrical world system, mediating spaces captured the imagination of political thinkers on the global periphery during the long twentieth century. Whether conceived as plans of political-economic federation, programs of regional cooperation, or the more ambitious visions of pan-Islamism, pan-Asianism, or pan-Africanism, these projects similarly sought to nest their constituent national or ethnic units within a broader geography that could foster networks of political solidarity, economic exchange, or cultural affiliation.[1] The borders of these imagined geographies transcended the nation but stopped short of the global, providing a zone of mediation through which small or peripheral states could pursue political sovereignty, economic development, and cultural modernization at a supranational scale.

The intellectual history of Yugoslav socialism is an especially fertile site for elucidating the concept of mediating spaces. From its emergence in the 1870s through to the civil wars of the 1990s, socialists in the lands that became Yugoslavia pursued various projects of supranational unification. These ran the gamut from regional projects of Balkan, Danubian, or Yugoslav federalism to more expansive spatial visions of European unification, communist Slavism, or the more nebulous nonaligned movement. The diversity of these projects of spatial mediation speaks to an impulse among Yugoslav socialists to seek structures that could collectively secure their independence in a global system whose asymmetries compromised the political and economic sovereignty of small states. This impulse led them to regularly reflect on the practical and philosophical problems of spatial mediation: to devise paradigms that could configure the balance between national autonomy and supranational consolidation; to craft cultural frameworks that could ascribe political salience to these imagined geographies; and to provide ideological formulations that could articulate modes of being in common across ethnically, linguistically, and confessionally heterogeneous populations. Yugoslav socialism, therefore, not only offers a wealth of historical examples with which to illustrate the concept of mediating spaces; it also provides a rich intellectual resource for theorizing the supranational as a scale of political thought.

[1]The literature on such projects is, understandably, vast and the following is only a sample: Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Mónika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopeček, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, vol. 1, *Negotiating Modernity in the "Long Nineteenth Century"* (Oxford, 2016), 512–43; Rudolf Schlesinger, *Federalism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London, 1945); Vojtech Mastny, "The Historical Experience of Federalism in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 14/1 (2000), 64–96; Holly Case, "The Strange Politics of Federative Ideas in East–Central Europe," *Journal of Modern History* 85/4 (2013), 833–66; L. S. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times* (Northampton, 1944); Mark von Hagen, "Federalisms and Pan-movements: Re-imagining Empire," in Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington, 2007), 494–510; Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism, Its History and Ideology* (New York, 1960); Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, 2007); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, 2019); Michael Goebel, *Overlapping Geographies of Belonging: Migrations, Regions and Nations in the Western South Atlantic* (Washington, DC, 2013).

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The mediating spaces of Yugoslav socialism were legacies of the radical spatial reconfigurations that characterized the globalization of the second half of the nineteenth century. During this time the world underwent a transformational process of spatial integration as European imperial expansion; the thickened interweaving of world markets; and the proliferation of telegraph, railway, and shipping networks all structured a new global order that facilitated the mobility of people, capital, and ideas to a historically unprecedented degree. Intellectual historians have long acknowledged the impact that this process of global integration had on the diffusion, adaptation, and morphology of radical political ideas. This scholarship, however, has emphasized the rapid increase of human mobility as the driving factor in this intellectual formation.[2] The argument here instead foregrounds the ways in which the spatial dynamics of globalization reconfigured the conceptual and geographical coordinates of radical ideas. It approaches the global not as the scope of intellectual mobility but as a generative scale of human experience that conditioned the formation of modern radical thought.[3] Its specific wager is that closer attention to the problem of spatial scale offers new avenues of research in global intellectual history and in the study of global radicalism in particular.[4]

The spatial reconfigurations brought about by globalization in the late nineteenth century led to the formation of novel conceptual frameworks. As Neil Smith argues, the process of global integration marked not just a quantitative expansion of the area of the world capitalist system, but a qualitative transformation of its spatial dynamics. With the enclosure of capitalist production within a fixed planetary boundary, a logic of infinite expansion was replaced by one of infinite production and reproduction of internally differentiated spaces.[5] Spatial scale was critical to the new logic of geographic differentiation, organizing the vertical hierarchies by which the production of space and socio-spatial relations were structured.[6] The processes that shaped the geographies of global capitalist modernity

[2]Ilham Khuri Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley, 2010); Benedict Anderson, *The Age of Globalization: Anarchists and the Anticolonial Imagination* (London, 2013); Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Berkeley, 2019); Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, 2011); Kris Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (London, 2010); Michael Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2017).

[3]Rebecca Karl and Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz have insightfully demonstrated how the experience of the temporal and spatial unevenness of global capitalist modernity fostered new modes of political affiliation and geographical consciousness that framed the nation within broader transnational contexts. Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC, 2002); Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887–1912* (New York, 2020).

[4]Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, "Approaches to Global Intellectual History," in Moyn and Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York, 2013), 3–30.

[5]Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Athens, GA, 2008), 119–23, 132–74. On the notion of geographic differentiation see also Neil Brenner, "Critical Sociospatial Theory and the Geographies of Uneven Spatial Development," in Andrew Leyshon, Roger Lee, Linda McDowell, and Peter Sunley, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Economic Geography* (Los Angeles, 2011), 135–48.

[6]Smith, *Uneven Development*, 175–205; Brenner, "Critical Sociospatial Theory and the Geographies of Uneven Spatial Development," 142–5.

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—deterritorialization and reterritorialization; the disaggregation and reconcentration of energies and resources; the construction, deconstruction, or circumvention of governing institutions—were embedded within historically produced scalar arrangements. These arrangements conditioned the experience of globalization, structuring horizons of possibility, framing political or cultural imaginaries, and delineating the paths by which strategies of social change were envisioned and pursued. Spatial scales and their historical production and transformation are, therefore, a crucial methodological framework for theorizing the impact of globalization on the history of ideas.[7]

The epoch of globalization produced profoundly uneven geographies of power, wealth, and prestige. It was the experience of this geographic unevenness that fostered new modes of supranational politics in the small nations of the European periphery.[8] Supranationalism was conceived in the conceptual space opened up by the tension between nationally scaled sovereignties and global processes of economic integration and geopolitical competition. The strategies that political thinkers devised to mediate between these two scales were a mode of scalar politics, an effort to strategically use spatial scale to achieve their visions of social transformation.[9] Sensitive to the weaknesses of small nations in this new global environment, Yugoslav socialists envisioned projects that could interface between their respective nation-states and the global system. These projects could be deployed to a number of strategic ends: to strengthen small states' defenses in a world of imperial predation, to integrate disparate local markets into a larger economic zone, to consolidate regional actors to better project their geopolitical influence, or to resolve complex national questions.[10]

Federalism was the chief conceptual framework through which intellectuals in Eastern Europe grappled with scale as a political problem. The proliferation of federalist projects that sought to rearrange the political geography of the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries speaks to the growing preoccupation with the rescaling of statehood in the age of globalization. Analyzing this phenomenon, Holly Case has insightfully argued that federalist ideas captured the imagination of the nineteenth century because they corresponded to an "attitude

[7]Although she does not link it explicitly to the processes of globalization, Deborah Coen offers a fascinating account of the growing intellectual interest in scale during the nineteenth century. Deborah Coen, *Climate in Motion: Science, Empire and the Problem of Scale* (Chicago, 2018).

[8]And not just the European periphery: Karl, *Staging the World*; CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation*; Clare Newstead, "Scaling Caribbean (In)Dependence" *Geoforum* 36 (2005), 45–58.

[9]The methodological and theoretical debates in the field of human geography have produced a rich literature on spatial scale that I can only gesture towards here: Neil Smith, "Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale," *Social Text* 33 (1992), 54–81; John Agnew, "The Dramaturgy of Horizons: Geographical Scale in the 'Reconstruction of Italy' by the New Italian Political Parties, 1992–1995," *Political Geography* 16/2 (1997), 99–121; Sallie Marston, "The Social Construction of Scale," *Progress in Human Geography* 24/2 (2000), 219–42; Neil Brenner, "The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration," *Progress in Human Geography* 24/4 (2001), 591–614; Adam Moore, "Rethinking Scale as a Geographical Category: From Analysis to Practice," *Progress in Human Geography* 32/2 (2008), 203–25; Danny MacKinnon, "Reconstructing Scale: Towards a New Scalar Politics," *Progress in Human Geography* 35/1 (2011), 21–36.

[10]Case, "The Strange Politics of Federative Ideas in East–Central Europe."

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of interrelation that the age engendered."[11] Federalism's unification of political spaces, that is, aligned with an increasingly pervasive intellectual procedure to conceptually aggregate the numerous political, social, and diplomatic questions that became widespread during this era.[12] This conceptual aggregation had obvious resonance at a moment of deepening global integration. Federalist projects sought to make sense of and navigate a world of ever-widening and interconnecting scales of experience.

That a rich tradition of supranationalist thought should have emerged from Europe's eastern periphery is no accident. It was here that political thinkers first posed the question whether the principle of national self-determination could be reconciled with the structures of multiethnic empires. In the second half of the nineteenth century in the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires intellectuals across the political spectrum became engrossed in questions concerning the supranational reorganization of the region. Their motivations were starkly divergent: some sought to reform these empires along federal lines, others harbored more revolutionary ambitions to supplant imperial rule with their own republican federations, still others sought to promote imperial expansion through projects of pan-Slavic or pan-Islamist affiliation.[13] Whether intended to brace or to subvert imperial power, federalism found fertile soil in an intellectual culture concerned with new configurations of nationhood and empire.

The complex interaction between national movements and multiethnic empires in Eastern Europe, however, was also shaped by an emerging geopolitical paradigm that indexed states' wealth, power, and strategic capacity to their jurisdiction over an expansive territory.[14] This paradigm posed quite sobering questions about the viability of small nations in a world of great power blocs.[15] Socialists were especially sensitive to these questions. Lenin, for instance, argued that this imperial world system led to the "mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of the Great Powers" and insisted that socialists tactically support small nations' right to self-determination.[16] For many observers, however, the principle of national self-determination implied the territorial fragmentation of Eastern Europe into a series of weak and dependent states. Set against this geopolitical paradigm, small nations' independence only seemed viable within the framework of a larger territorial unit. This understanding of the global order prompted intellectuals in Eastern Europe to rescale problems of political sovereignty and economic development to a supranational level. More than a

[11]Holly Case, *The Age of Questions* (Princeton, 2018), 135.

[12]Ibid., 137.

[13]Trencsényi *et al.*, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, 512–44.

[14]Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105/3 (2000), 807–31, at 814, John Agnew and Luca Muscara, *Making Political Geography* (Lanham, 2012), 61–72, Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 2010), 61–2.

[15]Klaus Richter, "The Catastrophe of the Present and That of the Future: Expectations for European States from the Great War to the Great Depression," *Contemporary European History*, 2023, doi:10.1017/S096077732200100X.

[16]V. I. Lenin, "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (1915), in Lenin, *Collected Works*, ed. Julius Katzer, vol. 21 (Moscow, 1974), 407–14, at 409.

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shatterzone of empires or the bloodlands of rival totalitarianisms, therefore, the inter-imperial space of Europe's eastern periphery was a rich and innovative site for supranational thought.[17]

By grouping the various supranational projects of Yugoslav socialism under the category of mediating spaces, this article expands the analytical framework through which we might conceptualize supranationalism. The mediating spaces of Yugoslav socialism were conceived and realized across multiple registers of spatiality: from territorially bound polities (the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, the European communities), to loose arrangements of political alliance or cultural affiliation (the nonaligned movement, the new Slavic movement), to imagined spaces that remained confined to the sphere of cultural production (the Balkans, Central Europe, the Third World). Supranationalism, in this more capacious sense, describes the broad array of discourses, representations, practices, and organizations that were articulated at a scale between the national and the global. This way of approaching supranationalism allows us to integrate the material and discursive orders of spatial production, to track the ways in which imagined spaces grew out of and sought, in turn, to transform material geographies. This offers valuable methodological interventions in Eastern European history where scholars inspired by the work of Edward Said have prioritized only the discursive production of space.[18] The argument that follows demonstrates that the ways of imagining Eastern Europe or the Balkans have been embedded within the material processes that shaped this region and structured its integration into global capitalist modernity.

Serbian socialism and Balkan federalism

From its early development, socialist thinkers in the lands that would become Yugoslavia were preoccupied with the question of the supranational consolidation of Southeastern Europe. Projects of Balkan federalism can be traced back to the 1860s when liberal nationalists in Serbia and Bulgaria drew inspiration from Switzerland and the US as possible models for the political unity of a post-Ottoman Balkans.[19] By the 1870s these ideas were taken up by a more radical generation of thinkers shaped by the politics of socialism, anarchism, and Russian populism who called for regional unification as a means for pursuing social revolution.[20] The earliest articulation of a socialist Balkan

[17]Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, 2013); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010). On the concept of Eastern Europe as an inter-imperial zone see Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca, 2022).

[18]Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994); Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54/4 (1995), 917–31; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 2009).

[19]Vladislav Lilić, "Balkan Intellectuals and Plans for a Balkan Federation in the 1860s and 1870s: American and Swiss Models in the Political Thought of Vladimir Jovanović and Lyuben Karavelov" (master's thesis, Universität Wien, 2016).

[20]Blagovest Njagulov, "Early Socialism in the Balkans: Ideas and Practices in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria," in Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova, eds., *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 2,

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federalism was in the work of the Serbian agrarian socialist Svetozar Marković.[21]

Marković laid out his argument for the regional unification of Southeastern Europe in his magnum opus, *Srbija na istoku* (Serbia in the East) (1872). The book offered a history of the modern Serbian state, from the peasant uprisings of 1804–15 that secured the autonomy of the province from Istanbul, through to what Marković characterized as the revolution's betrayal by the new Serbian political class. This account stressed the social-revolutionary dimension of the national liberation struggle, insisting that the uprisings were simultaneously a project of peasant emancipation from the landlords, state officials, and urban usurers. Central to this history was the place of the traditional peasant commune, the *zadruga*, which Marković, drawing from Alexander Herzen's analysis of the Russian *obshchina*, portrayed as the kernel of a more egalitarian social order.[22] While the *zadruga* had played a central role in the beginning of the uprising, he argued, its radical spirit had subsequently been stamped out by the Serbian political class, who modeled their new state institutions on the Habsburg bureaucracy. Marković bemoaned the fact that new property and tax laws had destroyed the peasants' collective way of life, while the introduction of a cash economy had made them more dependent on trade with Europe and undermined traditions of self-sufficiency.[23] The effort to integrate Serbia into European capitalist modernity, he concluded, had crushed the revolution's radical social potential.

Marković argued that if social revolution was to be pursued in Serbia, it had to be conceived at a regional scale. Any social revolution that erupted among the Serbian peasantry would necessarily spread to the neighboring populations of Southeastern Europe and eventually engulf the entire peninsula. In such circumstances the Serbian state would be a "tiny and insignificant" vessel unable to contain the scale of revolutionary upheaval among a diverse population of Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks, Albanians, and Vlachs.[24] The solution, he insisted, was the destruction of the small bureaucratic kingdoms and the unification of the region as a revolutionary association of peasant communes.[25] This federal entity would be a zone of mediation, a means for the political-economic consolidation of the region to shield it from the predations of the great powers and the competition of European markets.

Marković's ideas of Balkan federalism were recast by the first generation of Serbian social democrats, whose political horizons were shaped by the global spatial reconfigurations that took place over the late nineteenth century. Responding to the global depression of the 1870s, reformers in industrializing powers like Germany

Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions (Leiden, 2014), 199–229, Augusta Dimou, *Entangled Paths to Modernity: Contextualizing Socialism and Nationalism in the Balkans* (Budapest, 2009), 17–58.

[21]Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka, II: ideje i pokret Svetozara Markovića* (Belgrade, 1985); Woodford McClellan, *Svetozar Marković and the Origins of Balkan Socialism* (Princeton, 1964); Dimou, *Entangled Paths to Modernity*, 59–156.

[22]McLellan, *Svetozar Marković*, 241–2.

[23]Svetozar Marković, "Srbija na istoku," in Radomir Lukić, ed., *Celokupna dela*, vol. 8 (Belgrade, 1995), 3–100, at 69.

[24]Ibid., 93.

[25]Ibid., 97.

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and Japan turned to policies of national developmentalism. In line with the emerging geopolitical paradigm of the era, these policies promoted the intervention of a strong state that could coordinate economic activity and develop an expansive bounded territory.[26] This paradigm led to a preoccupation with territorial acquisition, a logic that the political geographer Friedrich Ratzel termed the "law of the spatial growth of states."[27] In an effort to survive in this hostile new order, the political classes of Southeastern Europe's small kingdoms promoted aggressive projects of national territorial expansion. This was the era of the rival campaigns of Greater Serbia, Greater Bulgaria, or the Greek *megali idea*, which reached their catastrophic apogee in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13.[28]

The new geopolitical paradigm also informed the theories of Serbia's nascent social-democratic movement, which emerged in the first years of the twentieth century. Revising Marković's federalism for this new era, orthodox Marxists such as Dimitrije Tucović, Dušan Popović, or Dragiša Lapčević advocated a union of Balkan republics as the only path for their nation's economic development in an imperialist world order. Although they accepted the new geopolitical logic that advocated expansive territorial polities, Serbian social democrats also recognized that this logic stood in tension with the overlapping aspirations to national sovereignty in this multiethnic region. The "law of the spatial growth of states," that is, clashed with the principle of national self-determination. To resolve this contradiction socialists looked to the creation of a Balkan federation that could secure national autonomy within a supranational structure. While this strategy drew on the same model of the developmentalist state that animated contemporaneous reformers in Germany or Japan, social democrats in Serbia pursued it at a supranational scale. National self-determination and economic development were to be harmonized in a supranational union whose borders corresponded to the underlying unity of the region's economic geography.[29]

Serbian social democracy's program of Balkan federalism stood in tension with ideas of Yugoslav unification that captured the imagination of many South Slavic radicals in the late Habsburg Empire.[30] The tensions between these two programs become clearer if we contrast the respective movements' responses to the Balkan Wars. While Yugoslav nationalists celebrated Serbia's early victories, heralding the country as the Piedmont of a future South Slavic nation, Serbian social democrats condemned what they saw as a chauvinist policy of expansion.[31] Not only did these wars contribute to the further immiseration of the tiny economies of

[26]Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History," 818.

[27]Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2014), 107–8.

[28]Siniša Malešević, *Grounded Nationalisms: A Sociological Analysis* (Cambridge, 2019), 118–24.

[29]"Resolution of the First Balkan Social Democratic Conference," in Andreja Živković and Dragan Plavšić, eds., *The Balkan Socialist Tradition* (*Revolutionary History* 8/3) (London, 2003), 164–6.

[30]Trencsényi *et al.*, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, 313, 532–8.

[31]Edin Hajdarpašić, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca, 2015), 155–9. During the Balkan Wars, Serbian social democrats organized antiwar demonstrations and voted against war credits in the parliament. See Leften Stavros Stavrianos, "The Balkan Federation Movement," *American Historical Review* 48/1 (1942), 30–51, at 32–3. See also the anonymous report in the Serbian social democratic newspaper from 1 May 1913: "Prvi Maj u Beogradu," *Radničke novine* 75 (1 May 1913), 3.

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Southeastern Europe, they argued, but they also opened the region up to further imperial penetration. Dimitrije Tucović, who had witnessed Serbian soldiers' atrocities against the Albanian populations of Kosovo and Macedonia, warned that these actions had undermined the cause of national liberation. By fuelling interethnic distrust among neighboring peoples, the policy of national expansion had driven Albanian national leaders into the arms of Italy and the Habsburg Empire, creating new constituencies for foreign interference in the region.[32] Only a movement that pursued the goal of supranational statehood could secure genuine self-determination for the small nations of Southeastern Europe. Yugoslavism, to his mind, did little to move that project forward. The question of how Yugoslav unity might fit within the broader mediating space of the Balkans, however, would become a much more pressing issue in the years following World War I.

The Balkan Communist Federation

The upheavals brought about by World War I and the Russian Revolution radically reconfigured the global spatial coordinates of socialist thinkers in the first Yugoslav state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The collapse of the multiethnic empires that had ruled over large parts of Eastern Europe led to a process of territorial fragmentation and nationalist reconsolidation in the years that followed the war.[33] At the same time, Eastern Europe became a focus of rival projects of geopolitical mapping that sought new modes of regional cooperation or supranational statehood. The French-backed Petite Entente brought together Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia to defend the region against future German revanchism.[34] In Poland and the Baltics political leaders ruminated on the creation of supranational polities that might fortify their small nation-states from the threat of Soviet expansion.[35] In the former Habsburg lands, progressive liberals like Oszkar Jaszi sought to salvage the legacy of the multiethnic state in a Danubian federation.[36] Many of these projects were also in dialogue with the continent-wide vision of a European federation best embodied in Coudenhove-Kalergi's pan-Europa movement.[37] The dramatic redrawing of political borders after World War I, that is, excited supranational imaginaries across Eastern Europe.

From its headquarters in Moscow, the newly formed Comintern also envisioned the remapping of Eastern Europe. The small nation-states of Southeastern Europe, in particular, seemed to be a weak link in European capitalism's chain of defense. Ruled over by fragile governments, often riven with national conflicts, and crippled

[32]Dimitrije Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija* (Belgrade, 1946), 117.

[33]Klaus Richter, *Fragmentation in East Central Europe: Poland and the Baltics, 1915–1929* (Oxford, 2020).

[34]Nicole Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: The Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1918–1940* (Cambridge, 1992), Case, "The Strange Politics of Federative Ideas in East–Central Europe," 846–9.

[35]Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Mónika Baár, and Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, vol. 2, *Negotiating Modernity in the "Short Twentieth Century"*, part 1, *1918–1968* (Oxford, 2018), 46–7; Marko Lehti, *A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe: Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War* (Frankfurt, 1999).

[36]Trencsényi *et al.*, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, 2: 47–8.

[37]Ibid., 44.

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by their economic reliance on Western markets, the region seemed ripe for revolution. These dynamics gave Southeastern Europe a distinct geographical coherence that called for a revolutionary strategy specifically tailored to the region.[38] Carrying over earlier social-democratic ideas of Balkan federalism, the Comintern advised its affiliates to pursue a strategy of consolidation and coordination at a regional scale.[39] In January 1920 activists from the Yugoslav, Bulgarian, Greek, and Romanian communist parties met in Sofia to form the Balkan Communist Federation (BCF). The new organization was to strengthen ties between parties in the region with an eye to creating a future supranational state.[40] Initially based in the Bulgarian capital, where it was tolerated by the radical government of Aleksandar Stamboliiski, the organization was forced by his fall in June 1923 to relocate to Vienna, where it published the multilingual newspaper *La fédération balkanique*.[41]

The early Comintern accentuated the antagonistic geopolitical imaginary that underpinned earlier ideas of Balkan federalism, positing a sharpening conflict between the Balkans and European imperialism. The BCF's inaugural conference, for instance, proposed regional federation as the only means of redressing their small nations' dependence on the West:

> Economically destroyed, overloaded with huge state debts and financial difficulties, financially and politically dependent on the imperialism of the Entente powers, transformed into their colonies, the Balkan states are unable, within their territorial borders, to revive their own economic life, and therefore will not be able to offer a solution to the difficult position of the working and impoverished masses. The enormous war debts, which will work as a millstone around the necks of the Balkan peoples, will suck the lifeblood from them for the profit of the European bankers and will interfere with their economic development. And in so far as they seek assistance and means from the great imperialist states, they will receive from them only shackles and obligations for their economic development, because they will be forced to export the same raw materials that they will then import as factory products … The salvation of the Balkan peoples from the political, financial, and economic mastery of Entente imperialism, of their national liberation and unification as well as the creation of the conditions for the development of their

[38]The perception of the Balkans as a coherent political, economic, and cultural zone was not limited to the far left. As Diana Mishkova notes, throughout the interwar period, leftists, liberals, and academic scholars used the regional framework of the Balkans to think about their respective nations' place in the new European system. Diana Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* (Abingdon, 2019), 104–38.

[39]Pavlos Hatzopoulos, *The Balkans beyond Nationalism and Identity: International Relations and Ideology* (London, 2008), 69–96.

[40]Slavoljub Cvetković, "Balkanska komunistička federacija i makedonsko nacionalno pitanje," *Istorija 20. Veka* 12/2 (1994), 49–59.

[41]Stefan Gužvica's forthcoming manuscript, *Sickle without a Hammer: Communism and Nation-Building in the Balkans, 1900–1930s*, promises the richest account to date of interwar communism's Balkan federalism.

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productive powers can only be achieved with the help of the proletarian revolution and with their union in a Balkan Federative Soviet Republic.[42]

The integration of the small national economies of Southeastern Europe into an imperialist world system, the conference claimed, had shaped the region's specific political and economic dynamics. These dynamics, in turn, could only be addressed by pursuing revolutionary strategy at a supranational scale.

Reimagining the Balkans on the map of the world revolution also led communists to draw parallels and project ties of solidarity with anti-imperial struggles then unfolding across Asia. Speaking at the Comintern's Congress of the Peoples of the East, in September 1920, for instance, the Bulgarian communist Nikolai Shablin assured the gathered representatives that "we, the Balkan peoples, are also oppressed and enslaved just like you by the world bandits of Britain and France. Your struggle means our liberation as well."[43] This language of geopolitical antagonism disentangled the Balkans from its historical dependence on Europe and replotted the region within the coordinates of a revolutionary Asia. In this sense, Balkan federalism served as a framework for promoting political affiliation with anticolonial movements to the east.

The emphasis that the Comintern placed on regional unification meant that Yugoslav communists had to recalibrate ideas of national unity within the broader mediating space of the Balkans. These recalibrations did not always go smoothly. Perceiving Yugoslavia as an "artificial construct" devised by the Entente powers, Comintern officials called on their affiliates to aggressively pursue the dissolution of the new state with an eye to the future reconstitution of its various national units within a broader Balkan federation.[44] This policy initially jarred with the political horizons of communists on the ground, many of whom were committed to a politics of Yugoslav unitarism.[45] It was not until the Bolshevization of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) during the mid-1920s that the party brought its position into closer alignment with that of the Comintern, rejecting Yugoslavia as a mere smokescreen for "greater Serbianism."[46]

During the period of the Popular Front, however, the mediating spaces of Yugoslav socialism were again recalibrated in ways that prompted a reevaluation of Yugoslavism. In March 1935, in line with the Comintern's new policy of collaboration with more moderate political forces, the KPJ jettisoned its critique of Yugoslavia and instead offered a more measured proposal that the country be reorganized along federal lines.[47] Yugoslavia was reenvisioned as a mediating space: a supranational formation within which its constituent parts could pursue their

[42]"Rezolucija balkanske komunističke federacije," in Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, eds., *Jugoslavija 1918–1988: Tematska zbirka dokumenata* (Belgrade, 1988), 233–4.

[43]Statement by Nikolai Shablin in John Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York, 1993), 137.

[44]Aleksa Đilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution* (Cambridge, 1991), 56–7.

[45]Ibid., 58.

[46]Ibid., 84–6.

[47]Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke, 1996), 123–7.

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respective paths of national development while enjoying collective security and economic consolidation.[48] This position neutered the more radical separatist positions the party had taken over the preceding decade. It also eroded the anti-imperialist impulse that had informed earlier ideas of Balkan federalism. This was in keeping with the Soviet Union's own geopolitical shift to seek an anti-German alliance with France during the mid-1930s. With the Soviets promoting rapprochement with the West, Yugoslav communists were encouraged to see themselves as part of a European community of nations struggling against fascist barbarism. The antagonistic geopolitical imaginary that Balkan federalism had once sustained began to dissolve into a wider sense of European belonging.

Between Slavism and Balkan federalism

The conceptual tensions that played out during the first decades of the twentieth century between Yugoslavism and Balkan federalism would reappear during the 1940s but reconfigured within the framework of a new mediating space, that of Slavdom. This shift was precipitated by Soviet geopolitical priorities during World War II. Following the Nazi invasion in the summer of 1941, Soviet officials founded what they termed the new Slavic movement. This was a propaganda campaign designed to foster Slavic solidarity as a means to promote Soviet war aims in Eastern Europe. In a region characterized by ardent anticommunist sentiment, Soviet appeals to Slavic unity in the face of the existential threat of German conquest helped circumvent the thorny question of political ideology.[49] Slavism posited a logic of community rooted in notions of consanguinity; that is, it appealed to the idea of a common Slavic ancestry that was historically antecedent and ontologically prior to modern nationalities.[50] The movement emphasized the leading role of Soviet Russia as a defender of Slavdom, often spilling over into messianic rhetoric regarding Russia's historical mission to liberate the Slavic peoples. In the aftermath of the war Soviet officials maintained the movement as a means to draw Eastern Europe into their geopolitical orbit.[51]

The paradigm of Slavic unity found especially fertile soil among Yugoslav communists both during their wartime partisan struggle and in the immediate postwar years of state building. Its appeal lay, in part, in the fact that the new Slavic movement provided an ideological framework for the policy of Yugoslav federalism that the KPJ had adopted in 1935.[52] This federal solution had left many questions unresolved. If Yugoslavia was to be conceived not as a nation state but a supranational federation, what justified this particular assemblage of nations? Why should this

[48]Đilas, *The Contested Country*, 93–4; Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question* (London, 2012), 37–42.

[49]Jan Claas Behrends, "Stalins slavischer Volkskrieg: Mobilisierung und Propaganda zwischen Weltkrieg und Kaltem Krieg (1941–1949)," in Agnieszka Gąsior, Lars Karl, and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Post-Panslavismus: Slavizität, Slavische Idee und Antislavismus im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2014), 79–108, at 88–90.

[50]Stefan Troebst, "Schwanengesang gesamtslavischer 'Einheit und Brüderlichkeit'," in Gąsior, Karl, and Troebst, *Post-Panslavismus*, 43–68, at 47–8; Behrends, "Stalins slavischer Volkskrieg," 95; Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, 303.

[51]Troebst, "Schwanengesang gesamtslavischer 'Einheit und Brüderlichkeit'," 47–8.

[52]Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 56–7; Đilas, *The Contested Country*, 89–97.

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federation include Slovenia but not, say, Albania or Greece, whose inclusion might have helped resolve rivalries over border regions like Kosovo or Macedonia? Slavism offered an answer to these questions. By reinforcing a shared sense of Slavic community, one rooted in ideas of racial solidarity, a federal Yugoslavia could be conceived as one step in a wider system of Slavic affiliations. This idea was sometimes articulated with reference to a model of concentric nesting organized around increasingly broader spatial scales of affinity. The concluding proclamations of a 1942 pamphlet published by the KPJ in Montenegro nicely illustrate this model:

> Long live the national-liberation struggle of the people of Montenegro and Boka! …
>
> Long live the brotherhood and unity of all the peoples of Yugoslavia in the struggle against the fascist occupier!
>
> Long live Soviet Russia and its English [*sic*] and American Allies!
>
> Long live the solidarity of the Slavic peoples in the struggle against the fascist enemies of Slavdom![53]

Each of these proclamations marked a step within this concentric system of affiliations: from the national-provincial level of Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor out to the supranational space of Yugoslavia and, through the struggle of Soviet Russia, to the outer ring of Slavdom. Set within this matryoshka-like model, a Yugoslav federation could be presented as a stepping-stone between the individual nation and the wider domain of Slavdom. The mediating space of Yugoslavia, that is, could itself become an object of spatial mediation, envisioned as nested within more geographically expansive projects. Here, then, was a justification for the compromise of 1935, an intellectual framework that explained the logic of Yugoslav supranationalism.

But ideas of Slavic unity stood in tension with those of Balkan federalism, which also saw a resurgence during the 1940s. With the coming to power of communist parties in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria, and the possibility of a partisan victory in the Greek Civil War, the formation of a Balkan Communist Federation suddenly seemed a realistic prospect. In the immediate postwar years Balkan and Soviet officials set out several possible paths for regional unification. As early as 1943 Yugoslav partisans proposed the formation of a joint Balkan command that would coordinate the antifascist struggles of the region and lay the basis for a postwar federation. By November 1944 Yugoslav and Bulgarian communist leaders were openly discussing the prospect of a future union. Although these discussions came to naught, in the years that followed, treaties of friendship between the new communist governments of the region reflected an impulse for closer supranational integration.[54]

[53]"Narodu Crne Gore i Boke," Arhiv Jugoslavije, Fond 507, Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Jugoslavije, 1942, XI, 3–5.

[54]Branko Petranović, *Balkanska federacija, 1943–1948* (Belgrade, 1991).

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Slavism and Balkan federalism, however, relied on two different, indeed contradictory, logics of community. Slavism was embedded in a racial paradigm that prioritized affiliations rooted in imagined ancestral lineages. Although the idea of a common Slavic race was partly a wartime response to the racialization of Slavs in Nazi ideology, Soviet intellectuals could also draw on their own understandings of race as denoting degrees of kinship.[55] Balkan federalism, however, explicitly sought to transcend such racial or ethnic logics of community and instead was informed by a politico-strategic logic that saw regional integration as a necessary response to the geographically uneven contours of capitalist development. Not only did languages of ethnicity or race not aid this project of regional federation; they actually posed an obstacle to it, especially in border regions where Slavist rhetoric threatened to exacerbate interethnic suspicions among the non-Slavic Albanians, Greeks, Turks, and Vlachs.[56] Throughout the 1940s, then, Yugoslav communists were often compelled to adjudicate between and, if possible, reconcile the rival spaces of Slavdom and the Balkans.

If, during the interwar period, Yugoslav communists had to recalibrate a project of South Slavic unity within the broader mediating space of the Balkans, in the immediate postwar years this scalar hierarchy was upended; now the project of Balkan unification had to be plotted within the coordinates of the larger expanse of Slavdom. To the extent that they resolved this ideological tension, Yugoslav communists relied on a script in which they were cast as the vanguard of revolution in Southeastern Europe. This script drew on the racial paradigm that imbued an imagined Slavdom with a series of essentialized features: anti-authoritarianism, a love for freedom, an instinct for democracy, and revolutionary courage and passion, traits that supposedly made the Slavic peoples the leaders of world socialism.[57] In a 1943 speech to partisan forces in Bosnia, the prominent KPJ official, Milovan Đilas, argued that the war had set alight a "Slavic consciousness" among Eastern Europeans who now "connected their fate with the cradle of Slavdom – the Soviet Union."[58] This consciousness had been critical for the Yugoslavs' own success in their partisan war, inspiring them to great feats of sacrifice and heroism that had, in turn, made their struggle "a center around which all the Balkan peoples gather, a flame that shines a light on the enslaved nations that surround us."[59]

The script of Yugoslavia as the Slavic vanguard of a Balkan revolution became an important ideological leitmotif of Yugoslav communists' postwar statecraft. Crucially, it provided a framework within which the tension between Belgrade's fealty to and autonomy from Moscow could be sustained. Unlike elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Yugoslav communists had come to power on the back of a

[55]David Rainbow, "Race as Ideology: An Approach, " in Rainbow, ed., *Ideologies of Race: Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context* (Montreal, 2019), 3–26, at 8. See also Francine Hirsch, "Race without the Practice of Racial Politics," *Slavic Review* 61/1 (2002), 30–43.

[56]Adamantios Skordos, "Vom 'grossrussischen Panslavismus' zum 'sowjetischen Slavokommunismus': Das Slaventum als Feindbild bei Deutschen, Österreichern, Italienern und Griechen," in Gąsior, Karl and Troebst, *Post-Panslavismus*, 388–426, at 421–3.

[57]Behrends, "Stalins slavischer Volkskrieg," 95.

[58]"Sedmonovembarski govor druga Milovana Đilasa," Arhiv Jugoslavije, Fond 507, Box 22, Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Jugoslavije 1943, 1.

[59]Ibid., 2.

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revolutionary struggle and enjoyed a base of domestic support that undergirded their independence from the Soviet Union. After the war, the new networks and platforms that scaffolded the state-sponsored movements for Slavic or Balkan unity offered the Yugoslav leadership opportunities to project their international prestige across Eastern Europe.[60] That prestige was reflected in the fact that Belgrade was selected as both the headquarters of the World Slavic Committee and the seat of a future Balkan federal state.

The ideological script of Yugoslavia as the vanguard of the Balkans served to exploit these opportunities for projecting regional influence while allaying Soviet anxieties. On the one hand, Slavism ensured a posture of deference to the Soviet Union as the "cradle of Slavdom"; on the other, Balkan federalism offered a possible structure within which Yugoslav autonomy could be more securely consolidated. Such a strategy could not withstand Stalin's paranoia for long. By the summer of 1948 his suspicion of Yugoslav prestige, which he saw as a potential challenge to his own influence, prompted the Soviet leader to expel the KPJ from the Cominform.[61] The Tito–Stalin split, the first open schism between two communist states, therefore, was the result of Soviet and Yugoslav contestations over the configuration of power and prestige in the mediating spaces of the postwar communist world.

The nonaligned movement as a mediating space

In the years that followed the Tito–Stalin split, Yugoslav communists initiated a radical ideological overhaul and a reconfiguration of the country's geopolitical coordinates. Cut off from Soviet support and increasingly threatened with invasion from Moscow's allies, Tito's government sought a rapprochement with the West. From the mid-1950s onwards the country would attempt to balance between the two worlds of the Cold War, maintaining its ties to the Eastern Bloc while integrating into Western-oriented capital and export markets.[62] While this geopolitical liminality allowed the country to preserve its independence, it did little to alter its peripheral position in the global system. In fact, the intensification of geopolitical rivalry between the two Cold War powers reinforced the vulnerabilities of small nations.[63] In response to this predicament Yugoslav socialists once again took up politics at a supranational scale to mediate their exposure to these global dynamics.

To that end they searched for allies amidst the states of the Third World that were, in this moment of decolonization, beginning to assert their role on the international stage. From the mid-1950s through to the late 1970s Yugoslavia played a

[60]Robert Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy: Foreign Policy and Tito's Yugoslavia* (Leiden, 2018), Petranović, *Balkanska federacija*, 137–9; Geoffrey Swain, "The Cominform: Tito's International?", *Historical Journal* 35/3 (1992), 641–63.

[61]Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca, 1988), 28–43.

[62]Susan Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton, 1995), 222–4; Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-alignment* (London, 2017), 220–21, Lorraine Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia and the Cold War* (University Park, 1997), 76–9.

[63]Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia*, 116–24.

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leading role in the nonaligned movement. This international coalition of states sought to secure the sovereignty and economic development of peripheral nations by promoting policies of nonintervention, peaceful coexistence, and respect for national self-determination.[64] As the horizons of socialist Slavism and Balkan federalism dissolved in the aftermath of the Tito–Stalin schism, Yugoslav socialists sought to craft a new mediating space, one that brought their country into an alliance with states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Yugoslav nonalignment was premised on a postwar paradigm of international governance that framed the global as a sphere of regulation and reform.[65] This paradigm had germinated in the cooperation of allied powers during the war and its proponents sought to secure a more stable global order by creating structures of international cooperation that might avert the economic dislocations and geopolitical rivalries of the 1930s. The institutional pillars of this new international system, in particular, the UN, built on the earlier experience of the League of Nations. Crucially, however, unlike its predecessor, this postwar system enjoyed the support of US strategists, who saw it as a valuable structure for projecting their influence globally.[66] Additionally, the UN charter's commitment to national self-determination and the equality of sovereign states secured it a degree of legitimacy among representatives of small or postcolonial states that saw it as a means for realizing a more egalitarian international order.[67] Thus even as its visions of global harmony and cooperation were undermined by the onset of the Cold War and the violence of decolonization, the idea of international governance inspired the pursuit of political action at a global scale.

International governance was a critical reference point for Yugoslav nonalignment. It was in the halls of the UN that Yugoslav representatives first started to coordinate their activity with allies in the postcolonial world and, through its bodies, that they pursued a program of international reform.[68] The principles of nonalignment were also founded on the norms that, at least rhetorically, underpinned this international system: national self-determination, the equality of

[64]Alvin Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (Princeton, 1970), 15–21; Svetozar Rajak, "In Search of a Life outside the Two Blocs: Yugoslavia's Road to Non-alignment," in Ljubodrag Dimić, ed., *Velike sile i male države u hladnom ratu 1945–1955: Slučaj Jugoslavije* (Belgrade, 2005), 84–105; Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy*, 92–5; Paul Stubbs, "Introduction: Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned Movement: Contradictions and Contestations," in Stubbs, ed., *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned Movement: Social, Cultural, Political and Economic Imaginaries* (Montreal, 2023), 3–33.

[65]As Perrin Selcer has demonstrated, postwar international governance led to an explosion of new scalar arrangements around the world as a globally active caste of technocrats set out to reframe regulative problems or research programs at scales that often transcended or cut through national borders. Perrin Selcer, *The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment: How the United Nations Built Spaceship Earth* (New York, 2018), 8–10.

[66]Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea from 1815 to the Present* (New York, 2012), 214–43.

[67]Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, 2010); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York, 2016), 110, 229–31.

[68]Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, 119–83; Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927–1992)* (Leiden, 2019), 46, 108–9.

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sovereign states, and economic development. For the leading strategists of nonalignment, these principles could only be secured by fostering greater international participation from the small, peripheral, and postcolonial states of the world. Nonalignment, therefore, was not just a response to the bilateral rivalry of the Cold War, but also a product of the liberal internationalism that reshaped global politics in the postwar era.

But if Yugoslav nonalignment was so animated by the paradigm of international governance, can we really think of it as a strategy of spatial mediation between the national and the global? Is it not, rather, better conceived as a globally scaled politics? It is certainly true that proponents of nonalignment hesitated to use the language of supranationalism; their goal was reform of the international order, not consolidation of a third geopolitical bloc.[69] Nevertheless, their efforts to coordinate their activity gave rise to supranational platforms that, while often provisional, served to interface between the members of their alliance and the global economic and geopolitical system they sought to transform. This supranationalism was manifested in the highly publicized summits of nonaligned heads of state that offered its participants the capacity to coordinate their activity, cohere their interests, amplify their geopolitical influence, and enact the movement's principles before a world public.[70] In this sense, nonalignment should be understood as a strategy of geopolitical mediation, an effort to structure a field of activity between the national and the global that accorded peripheral states at once greater room for maneuver and new opportunities for political influence.

But if nonalignment can be fruitfully understood as a strategy of geopolitical mediation, is it helpful to conceive of this in spatial terms? Can we really speak of the *space* of nonalignment? Certainly, Yugoslav strategists were loath to speak in such terms. This hesitancy is unsurprising given that each of the available geographies—"Afro-Asia," "Asia, Africa, and Latin America," or even the "Third World"—all marked Yugoslavia as an anomalous participant. While Yugoslav leaders had become especially adept at taking advantage of their country's geopolitical liminality, straddling both the Cold War's East–West axis and the developmental axis of the global North and South, that liminality became a liability if geographical borders were literally taken to map geopolitical allegiances. As such, Yugoslav leaders tended to disavow geographic language when theorizing the strategy of nonalignment.[71]

Despite their disavowals, however, socialist Yugoslavia's turn to the Third World evoked what we might call an emergent geography of nonalignment. This was especially noticeable in the journalism and cultural production from the period, which closely tracked the country's geopolitical realignment. Because nonalignment was premised on rectifying the asymmetries of the existing international system, it necessitated a proactive effort on the part of Yugoslav writers to foreground coverage of the postcolonial world. Newspapers celebrated Yugoslavia's new alliances, relaying photos of Tito's diplomatic visits to, and regularly carrying reports on

[69]Dinkel, *The Non-aligned Movement*, 112–15.

[70]Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, 103–6, Dinkel, *The Non-aligned Movement*, 53–8.

[71]Nemanja Radonjić, "A Non-aligned Continent: Africa in the Global Imaginary of Socialist Yugoslavia," in Stubbs, *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned Movement*, 302–28, at 306–7.

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political affairs and cultural trends from, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[72] Publishers actively promoted the translation of literature from the Third World and travelogues helped to cultivate the sense of a nonaligned space, as diplomats or journalists described their journeys through the lands of their newfound allies.[73] Taken together, these cultural campaigns had the effect of sketching the contours of a nonaligned geography that sustained the new relations of solidarity and affective investments that Yugoslavia's geopolitical turn began to foster.[74] These strands of affiliation, however, would unravel amidst the global spatial reconfigurations of the 1970s and 1980s, which shattered the foundations of both the Yugoslav federation and the Third World project of which it was a part.

European integration, Yugoslav fragmentation

The late socialist period in Yugoslavia was profoundly shaped by the crisis and restructuring of the global economic and geopolitical order over the 1970s and the emergence of a more radical mode of free-market globalization in the 1980s. The breakup of the Bretton Woods order in 1973 and the rapid rise of energy prices following the OPEC shock of the same year inaugurated a new era of global economic insecurity.[75] As states borrowed heavily to shield their populations from this economic turbulence, global financial markets grew in both size and power.[76] Control over sovereign debt, in turn, accorded international financial institutions enormous disciplinary power over national economies. As governments in both the socialist and capitalist worlds struggled to demonstrate their economic viability to international lenders, they were compelled to cut social spending programs, deregulate capital markets, and open their borders to global trade. What Fritz Bartel has termed the politics of "breaking promises" led to a new, more competitive global economic system.[77] These transformations precipitated deep tectonic shifts in the spatial dynamics of that system and gave rise to new political, economic, and cultural geographies.

In Yugoslavia these global changes were registered most clearly on a supranational scale, in the reconfiguration of the mediating spaces that framed the socialist project. Beginning in the late 1970s three geographic shifts radically recast the

[72]An excellent overview of how Yugoslav nonaligned diplomacy was covered in the Yugoslav press is Radina Vučetić and Paul Betts, eds., *Tito in Africa: Picturing Solidarity* (Belgrade, 2017).

[73]Aleš Bebler, *Putovanje po sunčanim zemljama* (Belgrade, 1954); Radoljub Čolaković, *Utisci iz Indije* (Novi Sad, 1954). Živko Milić, *Koraci po vatri* (Belgrade, 1956); Fadil Hadžić, *Budha me lijepo primio* (Zagreb, 1955); Mahmud Konjhodžić, *Video sam Egipat* (Zagreb, 1956); Josip Kirigin, *Palma Misira* (Zagreb, 1956); Kirigin, *Tišine pod Himalajama* (Sarajevo, 1956); Zuko Džumhur, *Pisma iz Azije* (Mostar, 1973); Džumhur, *Pisma iz Afrike i Evrope* (Sarajevo, 1991); Čedomir Minderović, *Tragovi Indije* (Sarajevo, 1966).

[74]Radonjić, "A Non-aligned Continent," 302–28; Ljiljiana Kolešnik, "Practices of Yugoslav Cultural Exchange with Non-aligned Countries," in Stubbs, *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned Movement*, 176–202, at 178–9.

[75]Jeffry Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Rise and Fall in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2006), 363–72.

[76]Fritz Bartel, *The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, 2022), 15; Frieden, *Global Capitalism*, 372–6.

[77]Bartel, *The Triumph of Broken Promises*, 12–13, 184–90. See also Frieden, *Global Capitalism*, 398–400. For a more detailed discussion of the intellectual contours of neoliberal globalization see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, 2005); and Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, 2018).

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ideological coordinates of Yugoslav socialism. The first was the erosion of the Third World as a geopolitical force. The sovereign debt crises of the 1980s decimated the potential of the Third World to realize a more egalitarian international order. Although the previous decade had seemed to promise these countries a new era of influence, the sudden rise of US interest rates in 1979 had a devastating impact on developing economies, which found themselves saddled with unsustainable levels of debt.[78] At risk of default, many of these peripheral states turned to the IMF, which, in line with the new ethos of economic discipline, made access to international loans conditional upon liberal economic reforms. The widespread application of structural adjustment programs across the Third World pried open previously nationalized economies and regional blocs, dismantled state-led development projects, and led to a massive transfer of wealth from the Third World to the First.[79] The dissolution of the Third World as a geopolitical force eroded the foundations of the nonaligned movement, that mediating space within which Yugoslav leaders had sought to project their influence globally since the mid-1950s.

The second geographic shift to reshape the coordinates of Yugoslav socialism was the rapid acceleration of European integration. The crises of the 1970s breathed new life into the European Economic Community (EEC) as Western European states, facing an era of global economic insecurity, sought stability in a tighter supranational assemblage.[80] Two rival projects of European integration emerged in response to the challenges of the 1970s. On the left, socialist parties, trade unions, and social movements envisioned a social Europe as a means to defend the welfare state from the pressures of globalization. Europe, for these forces, would come to symbolize a more humane, social-democratic project that contrasted with the neoliberalism then taking root in Britain and the US. By the mid-1980s, however, this vision had largely been defeated.[81] European integration instead proceeded according to a more technocratic program. In response to the necessity to implement the unpopular austerity policies demanded by international lenders, national governments scaled up areas of policy to supranational bodies.[82] As Tony Judt notes, faced with rising demands from their constituencies, European governments "could point helplessly at the terms of an IMF loan, or the rigors of pre-negotiated intra-European exchange rates, and disclaim liability."[83] By rescaling dimensions of national sovereignty in this way, the mediating space of

[78]Stubbs, "Introduction," 17; Frieden, *Global Capitalism*, 373–6.

[79]Bret Benjamin, "Developmental Aspirations at the End of Accumulation," *Mediations* 32/1 (2018), 37–70, at 53–4; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 73–5; Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London, 2013), 213–16; Brad Simpson, "US Foreign Policy and the End of Development," in David Engerman, Max Paul Friedman, and Melani McAlister, eds., *The Cambridge History of America and the World*, vol. 4, *1945 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2021), 237–59, at 253–6.

[80]Frieden, *Global Capitalism*, 286–7.

[81]Aurelie Dianara Andry, *Social Europe, the Road not Taken: The Left and European Integration in the Long 1970s* (Oxford, 2023).

[82]Christopher Bickerton, *European Integration: From Nation-States to Member States* (Oxford, 2012), 90–109. On the relationship between European integration and late twentieth-century globalization see Gindin and Panitch, *The Making of Global Capitalism*, 196–203.

[83]Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2006), 461–2.

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Europe came to serve the politics of breaking promises that characterized the late Cold War.

The geopolitics of détente also helped to enshrine a European geography in the minds of Yugoslav socialists. Western European governments' overtures to their eastern neighbors over the 1970s prompted a renewed interest in the historical and cultural unity of Europe.[84] Yugoslav strategists were highly attuned to these developments and sought closer association with the EEC. These gestures were reciprocated by Western European leaders, who saw nonaligned Yugoslavia as a crucial pillar of geopolitical stability in the wider Mediterranean. Thus, although never formally considered for membership in the EEC, over the 1970s Yugoslavia signed a number of trade agreements with Brussels that brought the country, and especially its northern republics of Croatia and Slovenia, into the economic orbit of a rapidly integrating Europe.[85] By the 1980s, then, the horizons of Yugoslav socialism had narrowed from the global ambitions of the nonaligned movement to the more modest space of Europe.[86]

The third geographic shift of this period was the deepening economic divergence within the Yugoslav federation itself. The economic instability of these years exposed disintegrative tendencies that were embedded in Yugoslavia's distinct model of socialism. Following the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, the Yugoslav leadership pursued a new political-economic program that would become known as self-management socialism. Breaking with the centralized model of Soviet Stalinism, Yugoslav reformers promoted greater devolution of power, decentralizing the country's political and economic institutions, integrating workers into management structures, and marketizing large parts of the economy.[87] The effect of these reforms was to delink the economies of the federation, thereby undermining the creation of an integrated Yugoslav economy.[88] The economic geography of the federation became bifurcated between the developing southern republics (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia) that relied on bilateral trade with the Eastern Bloc and Third World, and the more industrialized northern republics (Slovenia, Croatia) that sought closer alignment with the EEC.[89]

Yugoslavia's existential crisis came in 1981 when it was revealed that the country owed close to $20 billion in foreign debt.[90] Under pressure from the IMF, the federal government implemented austerity reforms that undermined the social cohesion of the country and soured inter-republican ties.[91] Over the 1980s two rival

[84]James Mark, Bogdan C. Iacob, Tobias Rupprecht, and Ljubica Spaskovska, *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, 2019), 133.

[85]Benedetto Zaccaria, *The EEC's Yugoslav Policy in Cold War Europe, 1968–1980* (London, 2016).

[86]See Tvrtko Jakovina, "'Not Like a Modern Day Jesus Christ': Pragmatism and Idealism in Yugoslav Non-alignment," in Stubbs, *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned Movement*, 108–29, at 121; Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy*, 193–207.

[87]Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia*, 99.

[88]Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State That Withered Away* (West Lafayette, 2009), 141–7.

[89]Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, DC, 1995), 40, 47–8.

[90]Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 147–8.

[91]Ibid., 155–9; Woodward, *Balkan tragedy*, 50–57. On the complex link between economic crisis and nationalist mobilization in Yugoslavia during the late 1980s see Goran Musić, *Making and Breaking the Yugoslav Working Class: The Story of Two Self-Managed Factories* (Budapest, 2021).

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movements emerged to challenge the legitimacy of the Yugoslav federation. On the one hand, a group of aggressive centralizers, represented by the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević, called for the reintegration of the Yugoslav economy along free-market lines. On the other, a confederalist group, associated with the leadership of Slovenia, proposed further decentralization and, in some cases, even the dissolution of the federation.[92] The deepening conflict between these groups eroded the salience of Yugoslavia as a supranational project and allowed rival visions of political affiliation to take root.

The impact of European integration on the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1980s was most intensely felt in the cultural polemics around the concept of Central Europe. In tandem with the political and economic consolidation of Western and Southern Europe in this decade, Eastern Europe witnessed a resurgence of ideas of European belonging that were articulated through the concept of Central Europe.[93] For intellectuals like Milan Kundera, György Konrad, and Czesław Miłosz, the idea of a Central European cultural zone remapped the postwar space of Eastern Europe, negating affiliations with the Soviet East and laying moral claim to belonging to a common Europe.[94] In Yugoslavia this idea played a particularly divisive role since the map of Central Europe, as traced by its proponents, closely tracked the historical contours of the Habsburg Empire.[95] This geography erected an imagined civilizational border within the Yugoslav federation, one that roughly mapped onto the growing economic divergence between the northern and southern republics. Just as Eastern European dissidents mobilized the concept to reject affiliations with the Soviet East, so too did Yugoslav discourses of Central European belonging target earlier ideas of Balkan or Third World belonging. In this sense, we can read the Central Europe idea as a project of ideological disengagement from the mediating spaces of Yugoslavia and the Third World and an effort to frame future integration into a rapidly consolidating Europe.[96]

The degree to which Yugoslavia's crisis was expressed in the reconfiguration of its mediating spaces is clearly demonstrated in the writings of the Slovene philosopher Taras Kermauner. In a series of polemical "Letters to a Serbian Friend," which he penned over 1987–8, Kermauner mobilized the concept of Central Europe to set out his critique of the Yugoslav system and his defense of Slovene independence. In

[92]Andreja Živković, "From the Market … to the Market," in Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks, eds., *Welcome to the Desert of Post-socialism: Radical Politics after Yugoslavia* (London, 2015), 45–64, at 49.

[93]Tony Judt, "The Rediscovery of Central Europe," *Daedalus* 119/1 (1990), 23–54; Jessie Labov, *Transatlantic Central Europe: Contesting Geography and Redefining Culture beyond the Nation* (Budapest, 2019); Yvonne Zivkovic, *The Literary Politics of Mitteleuropa: Reconfiguring Spatial Memory in Austrian and Yugoslav Literature after 1945* (Rochester, 2021).

[94]Of course, the asymmetries between West and East in Europe meant that these amorphous ideas of European unity were often premised on miscommunication between the two sides. Ferenc Laczo, "Rethinking Eastern Europe in European Studies: Creating Symmetry through Interdisciplinarity," in Karin Bijsterveld and Aagje Swinnen, eds., *Interdisciplinarity in the Scholarly Life Cycle: Learning by Example in Humanities and Social Science Research* (Cham, 2023), 79–98, at 85–6.

[95]Vladimir Zorić, "The Mirror and the Map: Central Europe in the Late Prose of Danilo Kiš," *Književna istorija* 46/153 (2014), 505–24, at 506–7.

[96]As James Mark and his coauthors note, the rethinking of Europe in Eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s was a process of producing new boundaries, inclusions, and exclusions. Mark *et al.*, *1989*, 129–30.

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his attacks on Milošević's Serbian nationalism and its recentralizing ambitions, Kermauner posited a civilizational gulf between the post-Habsburg and post-Ottoman republics that divided the country between a "European Yugoslavia" and a "Balkan Yugoslavia." Slovenia and Croatia, he insisted, belonged to a Central European space that possessed a longer and more robust tradition of civil society, political pluralism, and individual liberty than the southern republics, whose political cultures had been shaped under the Asiatic despotism of the Ottomans.[97] This spirit of Balkan Yugoslavia, he argued, had been compounded by the country's orientation to the Third World: "The Federation still operates on the assumption that we are not a European country," Kermauner bemoaned. "We fraternize with Arabs and Africans. We project ourselves to the level of the third and fourth worlds."[98] Milošević's project of Yugoslav reintegration under Serbian hegemony reflected the deleterious influence of the Third World on European Yugoslavia. Under such circumstances, Kermauner insisted, Slovenes were entirely justified in extricating themselves from one mediating space—a Yugoslav federation plotted within Third World coordinates—and pursuing integration into another—Europe.

Set against the longer history of Yugoslav socialism's mediating spaces, then, the synchronicity of European integration and Yugoslav fragmentation in the early 1990s becomes more legible. The point here is not to suggest the nefarious influence of European officials in eroding the Yugoslav project, still less to reduce the rich and complex discourse of Central Europe to a mere veil for geopolitical maneuvering. Rather, the argument is that the gravitational pull exerted by Europe's deepening integration not only drew Yugoslavia away from its alliance with the Third World but also amplified the centrifugal tendencies embedded in the country's socialist system. Over the 1980s these deep spatial shifts were articulated in cultural discourses that renounced (and denounced) affiliations with Asia and Africa and more aggressively asserted a sense of European belonging and identity. As socialist Yugoslavia and the Third World of which it was a part were shattered by the global debt crisis, the anticolonial affiliations that had so long animated the Yugoslav socialist imagination were jettisoned in favor of a new geography of Europe.

Conclusion

The history of Yugoslav socialism's mediating spaces points to a pattern on the part of activists and intellectuals over the course of the long twentieth century to seek supranational assemblages within which to nest their respective nations. It highlights the multiple ways in which nations were plotted within broader spatial horizons and wider fields of affiliation and exchange. This approach moves us beyond a rigid national–global binary to excavate the diverse spatial scales within which programs of self-determination and development were pursued. Situating Yugoslavism in a longer history of mediating spaces allows us to better understand its conceptual affinities or tensions with other projects of supranational unification and to better

[97]Taras Kermauner, *Pisma srbskemu prijatelju* (Celovec, 1989), 25–6, 70, 157, 161–5.
[98]Ibid., 161.

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perceive those previously unacknowledged assumptions that informed Yugoslavism's logics of community and geographies of kinship.

While such a gesture is particularly important for the history of Yugoslavia, where scholarship has tended to assume the primacy of the national, the concept of mediating spaces speaks to a much broader set of contexts. As Frederick Cooper reminds us, the assumption that the transition from empire to nation-state was an inevitable one erases the variety of territorial assemblages that animated the political imagination of socialist and anticolonial movements.[99] Mediating spaces provide a framework to identify and theorize the variety of political-economic strategies that activists, intellectuals, and state actors pursued in the expansive terrain that stretched between the nation-state and the global system. While this article has stressed projects of peripheral actors who sought to resist or contest their subjugation to and dependence on the core, the concept may also be productive for considering projects of hegemony among major states. We might, for instance, think of interwar Japan's promotion of pan-Asianism or the Soviet Union's support for Balkan federalism in the immediate postwar years as efforts to construct supranational formations within which these states' imperial dominance could be consolidated.[100] Similarly, the inclusion of the European Union in this analysis also suggests the ways in which mediating spaces can serve as projects through which to coordinate supranational regimes of capital accumulation and technocratic governance.[101] The scope of analysis opened here should by no means be limited solely to counterhegemonic movements.

Yet even if we look beyond the nation to acknowledge the variety of territorial assemblages that animated the modern political imagination, we must also account for the fact that these supranational projects proved fragile. As Samuel Moyn asks of historians of federalism, "why did the nation-state model win out, when the alternatives were supposedly so compelling?"[102] The history of Yugoslav socialism offers some insights as to the fragility of the supranational. Most obviously, it bears repeating that mediating spaces were never devised to negate the nation-state, but rather to realize its geopolitical security and economic development within a broader structure. As such, they reinforced rather than eroded the centrality of the nation to political life. But their fragility, I believe, lies elsewhere, in their structure of mediation. To the extent that mediating spaces interfaced between the national and the global they were premised on relatively stable configurations of these two scales. When those configurations changed so too did the salience of the supranational project in question. This meant that mediating spaces were characterized by a degree of impermanence. The frequent spatial reorientations of Yugoslav socialism—from the Balkans to Europe to Slavdom to the Third World and back to Europe—made its supranational geographies appear ephemeral, even arbitrary. Amidst this geographical flux the nation remained a constant and

[99]Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, 2014), 8–10.

[100]Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 161–90; Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 31–2.

[101]Bickerton, *European Integration*; Bob Jessop, "The Political Economy of Scale and European Governance," *Journal of Economic and Human Geography* 96/2 (2005), 225–30.

[102]Samuel Moyn, "Fantasies of Federalism," *Dissent*, Winter 2015, at www.dissentmagazine.org/article/fantasies-of-federalism.

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relatively stable site of identity and community, an anchor in moments of crisis. The transience of these supranational projects, therefore, undermined their durability, while their tendency to reinforce the nation as the scale of sovereign initiative limited their purchase on the political subjectivities of the population.

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