Introduction

MANY PEOPLE IN SERBIA speak of March 12, 2003—the date of the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić—as the day the spirit of Serbia's democratic revolution died. Just two and a half years earlier, on October 5, 2000, hundreds of thousands of people had poured into the capital demanding the ouster of longtime strongman Slobodan Milošević. October 5 came to be associated with many images: protesters storming the parliament and state television buildings; the raised fist of the student resistance movement Otpor; the lines of workers marching behind a bulldozer that had driven all the way from central Serbia (giving rise to the term *bulldozer revolution*, or *bager revolucija*); the disarming, boyish smile of Zoran Đinđić. A charismatic, staunchly pro-European politician and former student protester, Đinđić was deeply linked to the youth movement largely credited with Milošević's downfall. His assassination—at the hands of former members of state security who had ties to organized crime—stood in marked contrast to the nonviolence of the October 5 protests. This contrast between the joyous crowds of the revolution and the silent shock of the assassination became emblematic of Serbia's seemingly failed democracy.

During the 1990s Slobodan Milošević had taken Serbia from the largest republic in the internationally respected and cosmopolitan Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to a pariah country plagued by nationalism, haunted by war crimes, and devastated by economic insecurity.[1] If Milošević and other nationalist politicians represented violence and social chaos, Đinđić, and the young people who rallied around him, came to

represent a hopeful new generation of educated, urbane citizens. But the disappointment of this generation was never clearer than on the day of the assassination. When I arrived that afternoon in 2003 at the main bus station in Belgrade, I was shocked to see so many people so utterly still and silent. Belgrade was a city of movement and energy, despite conditions of poverty and high unemployment. Cafés and streets were always packed, as people strolled or sat nursing a drink at the trendiest spots. The new upscale shops that lined the pedestrian thoroughfare in the city center were full of people browsing and dreaming, even if they couldn't afford to buy anything on their two-hundred-euro-a-month salaries. It was a city of contrasts—rich and poor, grand and decaying, cosmopolitan and revanchist—that buzzed with the desire for something better that lay just out of reach.

That afternoon the bus station was crowded as always, but the silence was palpable. Instead of the usual rushing to and fro, the pushing and jockeying for positions in line at the ticket counter, everyone seemed frozen in time. Unaware of the bloodshed that had transpired, I wandered over to a young woman to ask what was going on. She fixed me with a strange look before delivering the news. Zoran Đinđić was dead. Serbia had come to a standstill.

The image of Serbia at a standstill was resonant with language that Đinđić himself had used only a year earlier. In a now-famous 2002 speech, Đinđić posited a stark choice: Serbia could move forward toward Europe and democracy, or it could simply stop. "If Serbia comes to a standstill [*Ako Srbija stane*]," he cautioned, "this is my warning. . . . [W]e have a huge historical chance to do something big in this country. But we have to try hard to avoid risks and temptations. And it is not in any way a guaranteed thing [*i to nikakva nije garantovana stvar*] that we will accept democracy, that we will move towards economic reform and towards Europe. . . . [I]t is not guaranteed. It's a chance that could be wasted tomorrow."[2]

This book is about that chance. It is about democracy not as a guaranteed outcome of a revolution but as a project always on the threshold of becoming. And it is about the experience of moving both forward and backward as student activists and former revolutionaries try to navigate a democratic present in the shadow of the past. The shift from the energy of the revolution to the quiet disappointment of Đinđić's assassination crystallizes the tentative experience of Serbia's democracy after October 5, 2000. If one takes the measure of Serbia's democracy as the relationship

between revolutionary expectations and their fulfillment in the years after 2000, then Đinđić's death seems like the epitaph in a story of tragic failure. But this perspective would miss the ways in which democracy is always profoundly contradictory and flawed when measured against idealized moments and normative expectations. Such contradictions and disappointments are intrinsic to actually lived democracies, rather than their exceptions.

What I witnessed on March 12 at a crowded bus station bathed in the midday sun was the collective experience of a future not guaranteed. Many people I met referred to it in the months and years to come as they tried to make sense of what could and should have been. Later that evening, I joined hundreds of people in line in front of the headquarters of Đinđić's Democratic Party. We were waiting to sign the book of mourning mounted against an altar of flowers and candles that cast strange shadows in the night's thickening gloom. As we stood in line, a friend lamented that he could no longer imagine raising a family in Serbia. Another friend told me in the more sober vein of political analysis that Serbia's political system had come down to one man, as so often had happened in the country's history: "Now he is gone, and we will have to see if the institutions are strong enough to hold. I worry they won't be." A few nights later I met friends in a café. One of them looked at me as I walked up and simply said, "This country is . . ." and drew her finger across her throat. The imagery was violent, the sentiment not fully captured by words.

The Social Life of Disappointment

The 2003 assassination, and the years that followed, marked the end of a romance with democracy that began with student and opposition protests during the 1990s. The assassination and its coverage sparked a new, reflective genre of disappointment, particularly across mass media. Indeed, every year, October 5 becomes the occasion for narratives of disappointment and stocktaking. The fact of disappointment is so taken for granted that it is enough for a headline to simply declare, as the news site *B92* did last year, "Oktobar 5.—12 godina razočaranja," October 5—twelve years of disappointment.[3]

In the early years of the postrevolutionary period, the energy and movement of the protests had been something of an antidote to the sense that Milošević's Serbia was slipping backward in time.[4] This sense was best

summed up by a professor of sociology who explained to me Serbia's role vis-à-vis other postsocialist transition countries: "In the nineties those countries were heading towards where Yugoslavia was in the seventies while Yugoslavia was heading towards where they were in the fifties." Milošević's overthrow was supposed to return Serbia to membership in the world community as a triumphant post–Cold War democracy. With Đinđić gone, the infighting that had plagued the post-2000 ruling coalition only worsened, which fueled the public's sense that the political system was broken. The assassination garnered international attention after the country's brief three-year honeymoon as an exemplar of peaceful democratic revolution. The shooting made clear that the Serbian state's ties to organized crime and the violent legacies of the past had not been broken. At the same time, unemployment continued to rise. Many felt trapped by poverty and isolation, exacerbated by harsh visa regimes for travel abroad. Serbian war criminals indicted for genocide and ethnic cleansing during the wars of Yugoslav succession continued to evade capture. Right-wing parties gained increasing support. Political and economic changes seemed to grind to a halt. Even before the assassination, it seemed impossible that Serbia would meet the conditions to begin accession to the European Union—a process many saw as Serbia's only hope for economic recovery.

The people I encountered during my field research between 2002 and 2004 struggled to build Serbia's democracy, despite these frustrations and setbacks. My research focused on those student activists who had gone from protesting Milošević to working within state institutions, and more specifically working on the reform of higher education within the state university system. As in other postauthoritarian and postrevolutionary contexts, activists struggled to engage with (rather than protest) the democratic state institutions that they had helped usher into being (Lukose 2009; Paley 2001; Alvarez 1997).[5] After 2000, student leaders, like other activists, translated political rhetoric and the symbolic vocabularies of mass protest into forms of engagement that made sense in the democratic context. Student groups moved from the streets to offices and meeting rooms; they crafted policy papers, donor reports, and promotional material in addition to placards and street theater; they focused on electoral procedures within their organizations; and they gained expert knowledge about complex matters of university reform.

University reform took on urgency because young people saw their own fates, and those of Serbia, as tied to processes of regional and

European integration. This process included adoption of the European Union's higher education reforms. No longer a site of state power to be resisted, the university provided an institutional framework that produced subjects capable of building viable democratic futures for themselves and the nation. But even as they tried to engage the new realities of democratic politics, student activists also tried to live up to older expectations for how students ought to behave as political and moral actors. The collision of expectations was frustrating both to students and other citizens. Given the popular narrative of the youth-led revolution as the moment when democracy arrived, it made sense for people to focus on former revolutionaries when expressing their frustration with the new democratic state. Ordinary citizens, and even activists themselves, pointed to the chasm between the excitement and hope of the democratic revolution and the messy and painful realities of building a democratic state and society. If the state was rife with corruption and factionalism, the figures associated with the revolution must have betrayed their ideals. At the same time, student leaders who remained active found that university reform was far less exciting than bringing down a dictator. At every turn, students were measured (and measured themselves) by revolutionary qualities they no longer seemed to possess and democratic ideals they no longer seemed to embody.

Student organizations were both a microcosm for the experiment with democracy and a publically available site for policing the parameters of political and activist engagement. The formal shift from an authoritarian state to a formal democracy opened up opportunities for new kinds of citizen practice overnight.[6] But making sense of these new arenas of politics was a complex process. Long-standing associations with politics as corrupt and morally suspect made it hard for new democratic actors to justify their engagement as in the service of a common good. The problem of articulating a common political agenda was exacerbated by the divisiveness of post-2000 Serbian public discourse and politics. The coalition of opposition parties, citizens' organizations, and ordinary people that joined forces to overthrow Milošević was politically and ideologically diverse. Once the unifying goal had been achieved, fractiousness followed, particularly in the context of competitive elections.

In addition, the process of state democratization was highly contentious. Essential questions of democracy were debated through seemingly mundane disagreements over administrative policies, such as state decentralization or budgetary policy. Although most groups at the university

agreed on the necessity of university reform, student activists within and across organizations disagreed on the means for achieving that goal. They fiercely debated what democracy meant in practice. Some of these arguments broke down along ideological lines and reflected highly charged debates within Serbian politics at the time: Kosovo's bid for independence, newly visible social movements advocating gay and lesbian rights, the capture and extradition of war criminals to the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague. Conflicts among student activists over issues like EU-driven curriculum reform or the proper way to run student elections seemed less immediately charged. But these deceptively mundane questions closely echoed larger public debates in Serbia about the role of Serbian tradition in the wake of nationalist violence, the proper distribution of political power in a democratic state, and the legacy of socialism that shaped state institutions, like the university. Even a narrow focus on university reform meant taking a stand on the often unsaid but always present issues of the day.

Activists and others often had contradictory expectations of what politics ought to look like and the ways in which it ought to be enacted. These contradictions forced students, like other political actors, to experiment with socially authoritative forms of postrevolutionary action in a shifting ideological and social terrain. The story of these student organizations tells us about how democracy is made and experienced both in terms of and against the expectations of political transformation. The social life of such expectations shapes political horizons and democratic action after a revolution.

Postpessimism and the Politics of the Present

My interest in democracy activists and student organizing in Serbia stems from several years of volunteer and nongovernmental organization (NGO) work in the region, beginning in 1996. In speaking with students and other young activists during the Milošević regime, I was often struck by the way they narrated both deep frustration and a pragmatic urge to change the situation around them. This commitment to action in the face of frustration was best summed up by the name of a youth activist group that I met with in Belgrade in 1998 while on a research trip for an international NGO that I worked for at the time. The group had taken the name the Postpessimists.[7] The name struck me as unique

in a context of deep cynicism about the possibility for social and political change. The Postpessimists arranged arts and cultural exchanges across the former Yugoslavia. They fostered networks among young people by highlighting their commonality as youth or artists. In so doing, they tried to sidestep categories of ethnic and national belonging that defined and constrained dominant social imaginaries at the time.[8] The students I spoke with were savvy analysts and operators in the complicated world of NGOs and donor politics, even as they were earnest and sincere in the conversations I had with them about their hopes for social change. The *post* in Postpessimists was anything but a Pollyannaish trust in the future. Rather, the Postpessimists seemed to move beyond the binary of cynicism versus hope. Instead, they opted for some kind of practical action in the interstices of the two.

When I began my initial field research in 2001, I was curious as to how this late 1990s generation of youth activists and student organizations would move from struggling against a state to working for and within state institutions. And I wondered how the contradictory experiences of hope and frustration would shape democratic ideals and practices with the formal arrival of political democracy. Young men and women in Serbia were beginning to confront the fact that democracy did not solve the painful realities of social conflict and impoverishment overnight. Some retreated into their own private lives. Others, in smaller numbers than before, began to focus on education reform and university student organizing. Everywhere people had to develop new vocabularies for making sense of a rapidly transforming society.

As scholars of social movements have demonstrated, authoritative frames for social action can change quickly with the arrival of formal democracy (Junge 2012; Harper 2006; Paley 2008). Social actors must frame interventions in socially resonant and historically meaningful ways while simultaneously trying to change the terms of politics.[9] Politics thus entails articulating and practicing new horizons and possibilities in and against existing discursive frames and practices (Dave 2012; Scott 2004). This dynamic of creativity and foreclosure is critical for understanding the challenges of postrevolutionary activism and why people practicing democracy may be "frustrated with the categories available to them" (Paley 2008, 7).

The work of making the inconceivable possible in a postrevolutionary context is particularly challenging for those figures who come to be most associated with the revolution itself. As in other "post" contexts, those most

associated with collective resistance to the state in Serbia became a site for policing the boundaries of the political (Chakrabarty 2007; Siegel 1998). As ethnographies of student protest have shown, the narrative frames and institutional forms central to mass mobilization become both creative resources and potential traps for student activists over the long term (Calhoun 1997; Burawoy 1976).[10] Indeed, in Serbia after 2000 student activists were haunted by the same discursive frames that they had used to generate support and to direct meaning making during their period of unruly activism. Under Milošević, students had drawn on socially resonant histories of youth politics, traditions of civil society and protest in formerly socialist Eastern Europe, as well as local and international interpretations of democracy and citizen entitlements. As these frames circulated and were picked up by later protesters and media the meaning of individual protest events was more easily laminated onto recognizable frames of authoritative political action and civic organization. Student unruliness had been iconic of democracy before 2000, but after the revolution protest and dissent were often framed as disruptive in the context of the democracy they had helped to achieve.

In this book, I develop the frame of a politics of disappointment to analyze how student activists manage the contradictions of democratic practice as they play out in real time. Disappointment emerged as people compared the expectations of revolution to the realities of democracy in an impoverished country marked by the legacies of state violence and repression. It also emerged as people contended with the murkiness and contingency of political agency under such conditions. A "politics of disappointment" is evident in students' flexible negotiation of changing meanings of youth politics in such a context. It is defined by student activists' awareness of the contingency of action, as well as knowledge that their activism would inevitably be disappointing to others. Student activists were both objects of disappointment, given long-standing ideological investment in youth revolutionary politics, and well poised to confront the contingencies of activism as they moved between street protest and institutionally based democratic engagement and reform.

Disappointment was thus a condition of living in contradiction, of persisting in the interstitial spaces of expectation and regret. In mapping the field in which democratic practice unfolded, I seek to show the conditions under which the coherence of practice is impossible, and yet action takes place nonetheless. Here I take disappointment seriously as the ethos of many new (and not so new) democracies. Disappointment is neither

an absence—of hope or possibility—nor the aftereffect of "real" politics having taken place in another time or place. It is a complex political and affective form in its own right.[11] An attention to the politics of disappointment is not intended to heroicize student groups as fighting the odds at all costs. Rather, it is to draw the lesson that democracy happens even in the face of disappointments. Why don't more students show up for rallies? Why do "grown-ups" constantly make promises they cannot keep? Why do students persist in being "political" when they should get back to their studies? Why do violent nationalisms persist? How can the hope and excitement of revolution fade so quickly? These questions appear antithetical to democracy, but they are in fact the essence of it. People construct a sense of postrevolutionary agency not by avoiding the messy answers to these questions but by navigating them, sometimes skillfully, and sometimes with disappointing and undesired results.

Revolution and Youth

A politics of disappointment in contemporary Serbia unfolds in the context of modernist understandings of political transformation. "Revolution talk" was a genre through which people made sense of and critiqued post-2000 political life in Serbia.[12] When people mobilized the idea of revolution, they also invoked the ideas of a desirable form of total political transformation and the utopian reorganization of society. Yet when taken as an ideal for measuring political progress, revolution inscribes messy and complicated social practices in a temporality of rupture and progress (Graeber 2004; Donham 1999; Koselleck 2004; Berman 1988).[13] These narratives of modernist political transformation map the world along a trajectory of political social progress, creating what Donald Donham (1999, xv) has called "people's sense of living vis-à-vis."[14] Thus, as a model of political transformation, revolution lends itself to precisely the comparative logics and idealized expectations that produce disappointed forms of politics. The idea of revolution sets up an (impossible) expectation in which "one totalizing system [could] be replaced by a completely different one" (Graeber 2004, 44). When political transformation is tied to valorized notions like modernity, European civilization, and democracy, these temporal frames become important ways that people judge themselves (and are judged) as modern political subjects on a world stage (Ferguson 1999; Trouillot 1995).

As a narrative framework through which people conceptualize the world and order social relations, revolution is a way of organizing time, narrating history, and understanding agentive action. In other words, the temporalities and expectations built into the idea of revolution can shape how those engaged in political transformation understand their own (and others') successes and failures. At the same time, the idea of a revolutionary politics is inseparable from the social categories through which politics is authorized and made meaningful. Like tropes of nostalgia so common to the postsocialist context or discourses of sacrifice and redemption at the heart of contemporary liberal imaginaries, projections of idealized futures are best understood as processes of making and interpreting life in the present (Todorova and Gille 2012; Povinelli 2002, 2009; Boyer 2006; Nadkarni 2007; Berdahl 2001).[15] The ideal of transformation becomes a socially meaningful and lived metric for comparing before and after, success and failure, democracy and its discontents.

At the same time that revolution lends itself to a particular utopian imaginary, one cannot have a revolution without revolutionaries. It is for this reason that youth is such a productive lens for analyzing ideologies of political transformation, particularly in the postsocialist context. The idea of youth as a future-oriented vanguard has long fit hand in glove with modernist ideals of revolution as a moment of total social transformation (Passerini 1997). Across the globe, youth participation has become central to globally circulating models of political empowerment and social change (Greenberg 2012; Kwon 2013). Rather than take the link between youth and social change for granted, I join many scholars in using ideologies of youth and generation as a critical lens for analyzing the specificities of social and political practice (Stubbs 2012; Lee 2011; Shankar 2008; Cole and Durham 2007; Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Pampols and Porzio 2005; Sharp 2002). Such expectations about generational politics affect how all citizens authorize democratic action in the aftermath of mass mobilization and youth protest (Lukose 2009; Manning 2007; Varzi 2006; Anderson 1972).

Key to this literature is an examination of the particular links between conceptions of youth agency and political modernity (Bucholtz 2002). As Deborah Durham (2008) has argued, both policy interventions and scholarly literatures on youth political participation tend to reproduce twentieth-century Western understandings of youth agency as made possible by extrication from the social ties and obligation of early childhood. Yet as she demonstrates in the case of youth groups in Botswana, this

perspective misses locally meaningful forms of personhood that link maturation, social power, and status to embeddedness in relations of reciprocity and obligation that are grounded in expanding kinship networks. Thus, what at first blush look like reinscriptions of generational hierarchies, or even apathy, are in fact socially powerful ways of signaling and enacting youth agency.

Although Durham's account is an important one for understanding the critical blind spots of romanticist accounts of youth, it perhaps offers too partial a picture of twentieth-century modernist understandings of the relationship between youth and political agency. While twentieth-century developmentalist state projects entailed the production of modern, secular citizens freed from domination by "traditional" social relations, they also frequently reinscribed social embeddedness through state-mediated institutions and practices. These publically mediated forms of obligation bound citizens to one another over time through highly affective rituals, registers of talk, and bureaucratic practices. That such practices were highly gendered, particularly in the socialist context, is no surprise. The project of state-socialist "alternative" modernity entailed no less than the reworking of social reproduction as a site of public intervention (Haney 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000; Rofel 1999). Yet scholars have devoted less time to analyzing age and generational belonging as key frameworks for understanding new citizenship regimes and political practices for all citizens in the postsocialist context (Fournier 2012; Hemment 2012; Hromadžić 2011).

Indeed, even within the context of the modernizing Western European social-welfare state coming of age as a *citizen* entailed embeddedness in state-mediated networks of intergenerational solidarity. The nation-state as both a home and a political-economic project grounded in a Durkheimian model of organic solidarity relies on temporal imaginaries (Peebles 2011; Holmes 2000). This has perhaps become clearer as the dismantling of European social welfare has proceeded by reworking specifically *generational* relations of ethics and care under conditions of neoliberalism (Muehlebach 2012).

The centrality of generationally configured citizenship opens up important comparative possibilities for understanding the mutual imbrication of youth, politics, and social reproduction within modernist state projects. For example, in her ethnography of nostalgia for the early modern, secular Turkish state, Esra Özyürek (2006) demonstrates how important metaphors of kinship and generational identifications were to Turkey's

modernist state project. Lisa Rofel (1999) has argued that the project of generational difference was essential to alternative socialist modernities in China. Jessica Winegar (2006) has shown how state resources in socialist and postsocialist Egypt were negotiated through competing claims to modernist "authenticity" that took place in generational terms. Thinking about socialist modernity comparatively, through the lens of generation, allows us to better understand why the particular disappointments of the post–Cold War and post-Fordist context so often take the form of experiences and rhetorics of generational betrayal, nostalgia, and discourses of "failed" or dangerous youth (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005). It also helps us understand why youth movements associated with political vanguardism and social renewal are so frequently sites of disappointment. Indeed, it is no coincidence that disappointment in the generation most iconic to youth revolution and political renewal—the students of 1968—intensified with the dismantling of the social and economic conditions that brought them into being as politically active subjects (McAdam 1988).

The New Model of Post–Cold War Youth Revolution

If the Cold War world was a site of experimentation for radical politics, the fall of official state socialism was a crucial spark for the reconceptualization of democracy in the post–Cold War period.[16] Formerly communist Eastern Europe became a central site for the redefinition of revolution. Where socialism had long been tied to revolutionary politics through the postwar and postcolonial conflicts that swept communist regimes to power, the exit from socialism tied transformative politics to liberal (and later neoliberal) democratic imaginaries.[17]

In the wake of the collapse of state socialism, policy makers, scholars, politicians, and activists scrambled to make sense of what had finally brought down the Berlin Wall. Accompanying this process was a scholarly and political redefinition of mass protest as a particularly civic endeavor, severed from socialist origins and distinguished from uncivic, nationalist forms of populist protest (Kalb 2009). More radically destabilizing discourses of worker control, social solidarity, and workers' rights, like those in Poland in the early 1980s, quickly blended with more liberal formulations of civic rights and civil society promulgated by students, dissidents, and other activists throughout the region (Ost 1990). In the early 1980s

citizens began to challenge the socialist state through protest; strikes; and nonviolent, citizen-based mass organizing. Protesters drew on both socialist genres of critique and humor, music, and theater to create spaces of ludic performance and resistance (Kenney 2002). Socialist states' use of force against protesters placed violence on the side of the state against the people. Such performances shifted the meaning and signs of revolutionary politics away from those long dominated by the revolutionary socialist state, thereby redefining the meaning of revolution as a civic endeavor.

At the same time, scholars and civic activists struggled to make sense of the political formations that emerged after the fall of European state socialism. The combination of working-class, and formerly socialist, solidarities with emerging nationalist and xenophobic agendas is a phenomenon that has occurred across the formerly state-socialist European states (Bracewell 2000; see also Holmes 2000). In part, rather than deal with these complex and disturbing imbrications, scholars often moved to discredit the form that protest took: the mass, populist protest (Tismaneanu 2000; Mudde 2000). The problem of the crowd—affective, unmediated, violent, without clear will or controlled intentionality—came to substitute for analysis of the increasingly ambiguous relationship between economic and civil rights in the age of Eastern European liberalism. Everyone from local media to scholars juxtaposed the unruly (and often youthful) crowd to an idealized civic crowd for whom democratic practice was rational, contained, and transparent (see Manning 2007). As I show throughout this book, the meaning of crowds on the street was thus an emerging site of contestation over what democracy could and should look like. These distinctions are important to understanding how the notion of civic or electoral revolution contains fundamentally classed assumptions that continue to shape the legacies of dissident civil society movements in the formerly socialist world.

Such ideas ironically wedded socialist understandings of the revolutionary society to triumphalist models of postsocialist transition as a process that would wipe away a communist past and build democracy on a tabula rasa.[18] Taken together, the fear of the crowd and the idea of a liberal configuration of state and society aligned with liberal, democratic, and free-market logics promulgated within Western critiques of state socialism in the Cold War period. The triumphalism of 1989 laid the groundwork for new ways of thinking about transformative politics as tied to, rather than antithetical to, liberal and market-based configurations of popular

sovereignty and democratic participation.[19] What came out of this productive relationship between indigenous activists and foreign policy makers and funders was a distillation of the lessons of 1989: a model in and through which nonviolent democratic revolution was tied to civic-minded youth movements.

The early 1990s saw the explosion of the promotion of "civil society" and the rise of democratization as a basis for US intervention after the Cold War (Hemment 2007; Brown 2006; Guilhot 2005; Dunn and Hann 1996). Toward the end of the decade, and in the face of recalcitrant authoritarianisms, such as those in Slovakia, Serbia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and later Ukraine, international policy experts, democratization workers, and academics mobilized the notion of civil society as a mode of soft intervention that would reproduce the nonviolent overthrow of European state socialism (Carothers 2004). As US academics and policy makers trained and funded student and opposition groups for civic revolution, they also reinvented revolution as a liberalizing reconfiguration of state, economy, and society that could be achieved through elections.[20]

In Serbia, student organizations and opposition politicians had already been actively protesting against Milošević for some years. But by the late 1990s, the US Agency for International Development began funding and training activists with Otpor in their attempts to challenge the regime. In the years that followed, Serbia became one of a handful of models of "color revolutions" that would form the basis for a new benchmark of democratization policy and scholarship (Greenberg 2012; Rosenberg 2011; Bunce and Wolchik 2006, Kuzio 2006). The Serbian revolution became the exemplar of a nonviolent, civic revolution founded on liberal democratic commitments, a focus on elections and other forms of democratic proceduralism, and youth-led antiauthoritarian mass protest. As Slobodan Naumović (2006) has argued, Otpor was a complicated and deeply contradictory organization: creative and pragmatic, hierarchically and horizontally organized, and rooted in long-standing Serbian (and Yugoslav) protest traditions and internationally supported approaches to democratic revolution. I see these contradictions not as a "Faustian bargain" (Naumović 2006), or as an imposition of democracy from the outside. Rather, Serbian student activists cocreated and popularized forms of political organizing, and they were in some ways shadowed by their own success.

Ironically, Serbian student activists were measured by expectations that they had helped to popularize as part of a model of youth and civic

revolution that was taken up in different sites beyond Eastern Europe. Students were able to draw on youth as a socially resonant category, but this also limited the ways in which they could authorize political action as political subjects outside that category. Within East European communist states, youth was a discursive and representational genre through which people negotiated their relationship to the state and through which entitlements were mediated and categories of belonging were defined (Taylor 2006; Yurchak 2006). The category of socialist youth provided critical cultural and political materials that communist officials and media elites used to represent the state's revolutionary project (Kürti 2002; Gorsuch 2000). Along with workers, youth and students were among the limited categories of people that the Yugoslav communist state allowed to form associations and organize (Vladisavljević 2008; Carter 1982; Pervan 1978). Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito depended on ritual representations of youthful regeneration in generating popular support (Bringa 2004). Youth had also served as a socially resonant category of citizenship that derived political significance through their link to revolutionary practice and vanguardism. Official state rhetoric and student activists justified extraparty political action through culturally resonant images and associations with altruistic youth, regeneration of community, and socialist modernity.[21]

The prominence of youth and student organizing in popular local and international imaginaries generated widely circulating narratives that ordered the experience of social change. Student activists in Serbia built on Yugoslav histories of protest and organization, sometimes consulting with professors who had been involved in earlier periods of protest. They were hooked into local and international NGO and activist networks and borrowed from the playbooks of dissidents that had been critical to the overthrow of communist regimes in other parts of Eastern Europe. For example, by refusing to endorse any particular opposition party and distancing themselves from "formal" politics, student protesters positioned themselves as altruistic representatives of the people, as other generations had before them.[22] In addition, youth activists grafted older associations with youth politics onto new protest tactics borrowed from democratic activists in socialist Europe leading up to 1989 (Kenney 2002). The use of music, concerts, and logos made activism and protest "cool" (Collin 2004). Highlighting play and creativity during street protests was also a way to distinguish the student movement from a regime that often relied on mass protests of rural and older citizens to demonstrate public support.