

**From Revolution to Referendum: Processes of Institutionalization and
Practices of Contestation in Post-Socialist Civil Society Building, 1989–2006**

Bojan Baća

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Abstract

At the intersection of civil society studies and contentious politics research lies an opportunity to better understand the development of civil society through contentious practices. Drawing on a diverse body of work in sociology, as well as these two interdisciplinary fields, I use *contentious practices* as the unit of analysis to examine how post-socialist civil society in Montenegro was built “from below” during its post-socialist transition from 1989 to 2006. I focus on how three processes of institutionalization that characterized this period – democratization of the polity, privatization of the economy, and NGO-ization of civil society – affected practices of contestation, and how such practices impinged on these processes. By using Protest Event Analysis to investigate how top-down (formal) processes of institutionalization and bottom-up (informal) practices of contestation interacted in civil society building in Montenegro, I achieve two objectives: firstly, illuminating the empirical reality of the post-socialist space of Montenegro through analysis of actually existing forms of contentious practices through which citizens articulated their grievances, voiced their demands, advanced their claims, and (re-)affirmed their identities; and secondly, analyzing how and to what extent forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices were affected by elite-driven (formal) macro-processes and, conversely, how these processes were influenced by citizens through civil resistance, social activism, popular politics, and other forms of unconventional participation. Much of the existing literature points to the role of *static* structures in causing a socially passive, politically apathetic, and civically disengaged post-socialist civil society in Montenegro. In contrast, my findings demonstrate how both the decrease and depoliticization of contentious practices were consequences of *dynamic* (macro-)processual factors. Furthermore, my findings challenge very idea of Montenegro as a paradigmatic example of the “weak post-socialist civil society” at the European semi-periphery that needed to “catch up” to its Western neighbours. Instead, this dissertation argues that Montenegrin post-socialist civil society was not weak and that it significantly influenced the democratization processes in the country.

Dedication

For my grandparents,
Sadeta and Pavle

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The inadequacies, omissions, and mistakes of the current work remain, of course, my own.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
<i>Introduction</i>	
Why Study Montenegro?	1
Introduction	1
What We (Don't) Know About Civil Society and Contentious Politics in Montenegro?	3
Understanding Post-Socialist Development as a Dynamic and Relational Process	14
<i>Methodological Design: Identifying and Mapping Contentious Practices in a Post-Socialist Setting</i>	15
<i>Theoretical Framing: Periodizing Post-Socialist Development through the Dynamics of Contention Model</i>	22
Periodizing Montenegro's Post-Socialist Development	27
<i>Stalled Transition (1989–1997)</i>	28
<i>Genuine Transition (1989–2006)</i>	32
<i>Conclusion</i>	38
Structure of the Dissertation	44
<i>Chapter I</i>	
Towards a Practice-Oriented Approach to Post-Socialist Civil Society Building	46
Introduction	46
Understanding Post-Socialist Civil Society: Surplus of Reaction, Deficit of Reflection	51
<i>Thesis I: Weak Civil Society</i>	56
<i>Thesis II: Strong Civil Sector</i>	63
<i>Conclusion</i>	69
Rediscovering Contentious Politics in CEE: From Research on Post-Socialist Social Movements to Post-Socialist Social Movement Research	70
Towards a New Conceptual Framework: Studying Contentious Practices	78
Conclusion	84
<i>Chapter II</i>	
1989–1990: The Post-Revolutionary Vacuum	86
Introduction	86
Contentious Practices, 1989–1990	89
<i>Contentious Practices as a Disruption</i>	89
Strikes	89
Boycotts	94
<i>Contentious Practices as a Protest</i>	95
Written Protests	95
Staged Protests	98
Conclusion	101

<i>Chapter III</i>		
1991–1997: The Authoritarian Turn	.....	104
Introduction	.....	104
Contentious Practices, 1991–1997	.....	106
<i>Contentious Practices as a Disruption</i>	.....	108
Strikes	.....	108
Boycotts	.....	113
Blockades	.....	114
<i>Contentious Practices as a Protest</i>	.....	116
Written Protests	.....	116
Staged Protests	.....	121
Conclusion	.....	124
<i>Chapter IV</i>		
1998–2000: A Divided Polity	.....	127
Introduction	.....	127
Contentious Practices, 1998–2000	.....	130
<i>Contentious Practices as a Disruption</i>	.....	131
Strikes	.....	132
Boycotts	.....	136
Blockades	.....	136
<i>Contentious Practices as a Protest</i>	.....	138
Written Protests	.....	138
Staged Protests	.....	141
Conclusion	.....	144
<i>Chapter V</i>		
2001–2006: A Polarized Society	.....	147
Introduction	.....	147
Contentious Practices, 2001–2006	.....	149
<i>Contentious Practices as a Disruption</i>	.....	150
Strikes	.....	150
Boycotts	.....	153
Blockades	.....	154
<i>Contentious Practices as a Protest</i>	.....	155
Written Protests	.....	155
Staged Protests	.....	157
Conclusion and Post-Referendum Epilogue	.....	159
<i>Conclusion</i>		
The Relevance of Post-Socialist Montenegro	.....	164
Introduction	.....	164
Challenging the “Weak Civil Society” Thesis through a Practice-Oriented Approach to Post-Socialist Civil Society Building	.....	167
Investigating Post-Socialist Civil Society Building through the Dynamic Interaction of Processes of Institutionalization and Practices of Contestation	.....	170
Conclusion and Future Avenues for Research	.....	174
References	.....	178

List of Tables

<i>Table 1.</i> Key mechanisms and processes that characterized Montenegro's post-socialist transition.	.....	39
<i>Table 2.</i> Strikes in Montenegro, 1980–1988.	.....	87
<i>Table 3.</i> Contentious practices in the 1989–1990 period (N=352).	.....	89
<i>Table 4.</i> Contentious practices in the 1991–1997 period (N=806).	.....	107
<i>Table 5.</i> Contentious practices in the 1998–2000 period (N=219).	.....	131
<i>Table 6.</i> Contentious practices in the 2001–2005 period (N=368).	.....	149

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Contentious practices in Montenegro, 1989–2005 (N=1,745).	171
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Introduction

Why Study Montenegro?

Introduction

One rainy evening in late 2014, I was waiting for a taxi in front of the closed City Library in Podgorica. It took a while for the car to arrive, by which point I was completely soaked. As I was entering the vehicle, I complained loudly of not knowing what was worse – “breathing all that lead in the media archives or making my body ready for pneumonia”. The driver grinned and jokingly asked me what I was doing in the news media archives now that all information could be found online. The conversation went on, as I tried to explain that the newspaper materials I needed for my research project were not available in digital format. The driver asked me about the topic of my dissertation, to which I answered in a somewhat patronizing tone: “Social movements in Montenegro. You know, civic activism, protest events, popular resistance...” He laughed loudly, dismissing my research endeavour as futile: “Let me solve that problem for you, son: there is none of that here!” This response did not surprise me, as it was the most common remark I had encountered in daily conversations whenever mentioning the topic of my doctoral project.

Interestingly enough, this reaction was always articulated in the form of a helpful-yet-cynical solution to my scholarly dilemma(s). I would go so far to state that the idea of “the passive citizen of Montenegro who does not rebel nor protest” was the lowest common denominator – or, better yet, a constant – in my everyday conversations, even with politically well-informed people. Whether this sentiment was coming from friends invested in local politics, interlocutors from the non-governmental and media sectors, colleagues in the academe, acquaintances among activists and politicians, or even know-it-all taxi-drivers – the answer remained the same: “You aren’t going to find much. This is Montenegro; we don’t rebel here. We don’t have what it takes.” In more inspired instances, friends would jokingly ask me: “How long is that dissertation going to be – two pages?”

This disappointment in – or, more precisely, cynicism toward – civil society, and *the citizen* as a political subject, would heighten if we engaged in discussions about Montenegrin politics. My interlocutors would then become extremely critical of the ruling regime, government policies, and the political establishment in general. Wherever these debates took place – in a cab, in a café, or

on social media – people were not only taking a critical position toward the power-holders and the elites, but were also highly aware of negative consequences of their own social passivity, political apathy, and civic disengagement. This incongruity between all-pervading political *speech* and almost total absence of political *action* began to puzzle me; I formulated my research question as a product of this tension between a public sphere that was oversaturated with dissenting, critical political discourse and the chronic lack of contentious, non-institutional political actions in the public space.

Based on this tension, my interest was not in what people in Montenegro were thinking, saying, or even remembering in their everyday routines, but rather in investigating what they were actually *doing* in the public arena. Informed by state-of-the-art scholarly debates in (post-socialist) civil society and social movement studies, I became interested in, firstly, issues that pushed the people of Montenegro to abandon institutional, routinized venues of political/civic participation through direct involvement and, secondly, in forms through which they articulated their discontent during the traumatic process of post-socialist transition (1989–2006). More specifically, I became interested in how three processes of institutionalization that constituted the post-socialist transformation – democratization of the polity, privatization of the economy, and NGO-ization of civil society – affected practices of contestation, and how such practices impinged on these processes.

Based on this framing, I use *contentious practices* as the unit of observation/analysis for this dissertation. Such practices, I argue, built post-socialist civil society of Montenegro “from below”. As such, this conceptualization allows me to critically examine all actions that operated outside of institutional channels and produced new sites of social enunciation, new forms of civic participation, and new modes of political being as empirical indicators of civil society (building). Contentious practices range from everyday resistance, across protest politics, to experimentation with direct democracy. Moreover, I focus on the actors’ subjective understandings of their contentious practices: in this dissertation, I conceptualize and examine how citizens in the post-socialist region, who were engaged in unconventional participation, often viewed their actions as apolitical, non-political, or even anti-political, so it is important to take an insider perspective on how activists defined, justified, and legitimized the abandonment of institutional venues of political/civic participation.

This introductory chapter is organized in four sections. In the first part, I provide a brief overview of scholarly research on Montenegro and, by situating it in the broader corpus of literature on post-socialist civil society building, I discuss how research on this country's post-socialist experience offers opportunities for both empirical and theoretical contributions to civil society studies and social movement studies and, more broadly, political sociology. The second section is devoted to the theoretical and methodological frameworks which I used to collect and organize data. It is followed by a section on the historical background of Montenegro's post-socialist development, in its three dimensions: political, economic, and socio-cultural; informed by the dynamics of contention model, I extrapolate structural and processual factors that shaped civic participation in the country in order to provide a rationale for periodizing – or, more precisely, framing – empirical material into four chapters. And, finally, I outline the dissertation structure. In this way, before I begin discussing my empirical material, the reader becomes familiar with the socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical context in which this material is situated.

The theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues in the study of civil society and contentious politics in the post-socialist space raised in this chapter are addressed in *Chapter I*, in which I present my theoretical contribution, after which I move onto empirical analysis in *Chapters II–V*. Whereas I predominantly use a synchronic approach in each empirical chapter by looking at time periods as unified wholes, in the *Conclusion* I use a more diachronic approach by comparing contentious practices across these four distinct periods and thus discuss the implications of this study for debates on civil society, social movements, and, more broadly, the political sociology of post-socialist transformation.

What We (Don't) Know About Civil Society and Contentious Politics in Montenegro

In this section, I briefly discuss scholarly descriptions and analyses of Montenegrin civil society and point out that these accounts do not differ significantly from impressionistic observations that my fellow citizens make, in regard to its political component.¹ When discussing non- or extra-institutional political participation – civic actions that by-pass routinized ways of doing politics through unconventional means – I simply refer to it as “contentious practices”, a

¹ For instance, Ekiert and Kubik (1999) used the label of “political society” to designate this political – and often contentious – dimension of the post-socialist civil society that differs from its non-political component that is comprised of neighborhood associations, professional bodies, self-help groups, etc.

concept to which I will return in *Chapter I*. Simply put, I argue that by acting directly, outside of institutionally-mediated mechanisms and channels between the state and civil society, citizens of post-socialist countries do not necessarily understand their activism and engagement as political, but rather more often as social, civic, cultural, moral, etc. In other words, my focus is on practices through which citizens abandon institutional, routinized ways of “doing things” in Montenegro.²

While I draw from diverse body of work in postulating *contentious practices* as the unit of observation/analysis – namely, critical sociology (Kurasawa 2017a, 2017b), the “practice turn” in social theory (Schatzki et al. 2001), the sociology of critical capacity (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 2006), citizenship studies (Isin 2008, 2009), state-of-the-art research on post-socialist civil society and contentious politics (Bieber and Brentin 2018; Cisar 2013, 2017; Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Foa and Ekiert 2017; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015; Razsa 2015), and, of course, the dynamic and relational approach to the study of social movements and contentious politics (McAdam et al. 1996, 2001; Tarrow 2012; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) – the concept itself is essentially a modification of more prominent notion of *contentious politics*, which denotes “what happens when collective actors join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents around their claims or the claims of those they claim to represent” (Tarrow 2011: 4). Understood as such, contentious politics “involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests of programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 7).³ Tilly (2008: 14) uses theatrical metaphors of “repertoires of contention” and “contentious performances” to emphasize the modularity of these public dramatizations of contention, as well as to point out organization, coordination, claim-making towards the government, and collective character as defining features of contentious politics.

For the purposes of this dissertation, contentious practices do not necessarily involve coordinated action of (and strategizing by) collectives, but can be individual instead; do not necessarily target governments; and do not necessarily entail that the actors themselves understand

² These practices are tacitly political, if not explicitly so, something that I discuss in greater detail in *Chapter I*.

³ Only when such actions are sustained collectively against antagonists and thus “based on dense social networks and effective connective structures and draw on legitimate, action-oriented cultural frames”, can we speak of *social movements* (Tarrow 2011: 16; see also Della Porta and Diani 1999: 20–22; Tilly and Wood 2012: 35–37).

their actions as necessarily political. As I will show in *Chapter I*, existing conceptualizations of contentious practice lack the analytical and heuristic bandwidth required to capture the empirical reality of unconventional, extra-institutional political/civic participation in post-socialist civil societies, simply because numerous practices of contestation in the region do not fit into the conceptual indicators provided by these definitions. Research on civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) demonstrates that social actors rarely perceive their contentious actions as political; rather, *a(anti)political* activism/engagement is the defining feature of unconventional participation in the region. This research also demonstrates that these contentious practices often tend to be short-term, small-scale, and low-key outbursts of dissent, rarely taking the form of sustained and coordinated collective action in the public arena (see Fagan and Sircar 2018; Gagyí 2015a, 2015b; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Piotrowski 2015; Pleyers and Sava 2015). For that reason, I speak of *contentious practices* to designate all direct actions that abandon institutional, routinized ways of addressing problems in Montenegrin civil society, actions which are not necessarily perceived as political by the subjects themselves.

Practices of contestation in the post-socialist space, therefore, tended to be void of activities aimed at mobilization, organization, or even coordination, which pushed some scholars to turn to the work of James Scott (1985, 1990) to designate some contentious practices in the region as manifestations of *infrapolitical* forms of resistance, resilience, and direct actions (see Cox et al. 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017).⁴ On the other hand, some openly political mobilizations were facilitated/organized by authoritarian governments to counteract progressive civil society actors and thus promote their own agenda in the public space (see Dragičević-Šešić 2001; Fábíán and Korolczuk 2017; Lazić 1999; Taylor 2011). And, finally, some authors show that citizens in the region did not necessarily challenge governments (or other power-holders), but instead engaged in contentious practices to influence society itself by addressing dominant public attitudes (see Fábíán and Korolczuk 2017; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017) or to establish alternative forms of political organizing and direct democracy, such as more recent forms of “citizen plenums” (see Arsenijević 2014; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Mujanović 2017;

⁴ “Infrapolitics” is a term used by Scott (1985, 1990) used to designate “everyday resistance” in non-Western societies. It encompasses actions used by people to address issues of interest, but without engaging in collective, coordinated, and organized defiance, or open confrontation with the state and power structures. As such, infrapolitical tactics of everyday resistance range from “a repertoire of individual acts ranging from foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage” (Scott 1985: xvi) to direct actions by citizens aimed to improve their own livelihoods through, for example, illegal activities in the economy (Scott 1990, 2012).

Razsa 2015) or kin-based assemblies (see Calhoun 2000) that, by their very existence, deny the legitimacy (or even legality) of existing political institutions.⁵ Cases such as these call for new empirical and conceptual indicators to properly understand contentious engagement in a post-socialist civil society. For that reason, I simply focus on *practices* through which people abandoned available institutional(ized), routinized venues of political/civic participation to act directly, in the process generating contention through which civil society was built. Using “contentious practices” as a unit of observation/analysis allows me not only to identify and map actually existing forms of contention in the post-socialist space, but also to critically examine all actions that operate outside institutional channels and produce new sites of social enunciation, new forms of civic participation, and new modes of political being. In turn, these practices can be used as new empirical and conceptual indicators of political dimensions of civil society (building) in the region: from everyday resistance, across protest politics, to experimentation with direct democracy. Translated into the language of social movement studies, contentious practices can turn into social movements or other forms of contentious politics – depending on the symbolic and material conditions in which they occur – but they sometimes take the infrapolitical form of tactics of everyday resistance instead of politically potent repertoires of contention. As such, this is why it is important to map and analyze actually existing practices of contestation – be they political, infrapolitical, or even openly a(nti)political – in the ever-transforming post-socialist landscape of Montenegro.

“Eventful” protests are not only the primary focus of scholars, but these instances of contentious politics – those large-scale, highly visible mass mobilizations in the streets of the major cities – are deeply carved in the collective memory of Montenegrins. For instance, people tend to speak about street rallies that underpinned the so-called Antibureaucratic Revolution of 1988–1989 and brought into power the presently ruling establishment; the protest activities of the Anti-War Movement during 1991–1995; the failed attempt of the Slobodan Milošević-sponsored opposition to mobilize people and violently take over the government building in January 1998; or more recent waves of mass demonstrations in 2012 and 2015.⁶ Only when bringing into conversation localized-but-successful “examples of civic activism and civil resistance” – such as grassroots movements for the protection of the River Tara (2004), the village of Beranselo (2010–

⁵ Scholarly literature points to the importance of informal politics, both democratic and non-democratic, on power-distribution and decision-making processes (Meyer 2008), as well as to the presence of unique direct democratic institutions, forms, and practices in CEE (Auer and Bützer 2001).

⁶ These historically-important and politically-consequential instances of contentious politics were also covered in English-language scholarly literature (see Baća 2017d; Morrison 2009, 2018; Pavlović and Dragojević 2012; Vladislavljević 2008).

2014), or Valdanos Bay (2008–2014) from environmental degradation and commercial exploitation – would I get a positive reaction from my interlocutors: “Oh yeah, these too! Those are real examples of civic responsibility and civil courage.” These examples are, nevertheless, relatively recent, and were highly publicized at the time, so my interlocutors often spoke of them as exceptions to the rule that Montenegrins do not rebel and, more interestingly, rendered them through normative terms as paradigmatic examples of how “healthy civil society should look”. Overall, my everyday interactions with people of Montenegro showed that when it comes to collective memory, only large-scale, mass mobilizations – resembling textbook examples of social movements, usually with an anti-regime flavor and thus considered to be openly political – were counted as examples of “genuine civic engagement” and “real civil resistance”.⁷

This selective memory is somewhat understandable, because, like any other country in the Balkan region, Montenegro suffers from the “excess of history”: many of my interlocutors had participated directly in the defining events of the country’s contemporary history, so they tended to remember instances of contentious politics that were politically consequential on the national scale.⁸ This so-called “selection bias” in the collective memory is also present among professionals and scholars who study Montenegro, which further enforces the idea of contentious politics as a rare phenomenon in Montenegro. When I started working on my dissertation proposal, the academic literature – both in English and local languages – spoke of the Antibureaucratic Revolution (Vladisavljević 2008) or the Anti-War Movement (Pavlović and Dragojević 2012), or mentioned in passing some elite-driven episodes of contention, such as those in 1998 and 2009 (see Darmanović 2003; Kovačević 2007; Morrison 2011). In addition, scholars interested less in historical events and more in the attitudes of people used survey instruments, have painted a picture of an overly passive and apathetic civil society. The general conclusion of these authors is that there is little empirical evidence of unconventional and non-institutional participation in Montenegro (Komar 2015). Simply put, in this view, Montenegrins rarely engage in extra-institutional political activism (Građanska Alijansa 2015; Ipsos Strategic Marketing 2013; Jovanović and Marjanović 2002), to the point of being the least active in the post-Yugoslav region

⁷ I would also argue that my everyday interactions with people in Montenegro point to a methodologically relevant fact: any interview-based research, such as oral history, would need to be carefully conducted to paint a realistic picture of contention in contemporary Montenegro. In that regard, interviews could be used to complement – or, better yet, fill gaps in – research based on event data, but not as a primary source.

⁸ Montenegro is thus a typical representative of the turbulent Balkans that was once described by Winston Churchill as the part of the world that “produces more history than [it] can consume”. In this dissertation, however, I try to “consume” sociologically “history from below” in this small Balkan country at the turn of the centuries.

(Bešić 2014: 240–241; see also Novak and Fink-Hafner 2015). A reader might wonder if there was any point of studying contentious politics in Montenegro, as everything pointed to the fact that I would not find much, except the “newspaper headline” events that had already been covered in the scholarly literature.

Two points, however, indicated that this research endeavor would not be in vain. First was the fact that Montenegro was – and still remains – the least studied former Yugoslav republic (Bieber 2003a: 7; Džankić 2015: 2), so an *empirical* contribution was guaranteed.⁹ When compared to the rest of the region, Montenegro has been somewhat uninteresting for Western observers: there was no war on its territory, ethno-national tensions never resulted in violent outbursts, there were no extreme right-wing political subjects, and it experienced a relatively smooth transition sponsored by the West. Because all transformations in contemporary Montenegro have occurred *within* the ruling party – the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), which is a reformed communist party that has been in power since 1945, undergoing internal recompositions of its party elites in 1989 and 1997 – the academic focus has been on the emerging polity: the state apparatus, party politics, the electoral system, institution-building, the Europeanization process, etc. In other words, the dominant scholarly “gaze” has been elite-centred and, in the manner of democratization theory and the field of transitology that permeates political science, has dealt with political elites and institution-building (Caspersen 2003; Darmanović 2003, 2007; Kovačević 2007; Strmiska 2000; Vujović and Komar 2008) or with voter-behavior (Komar 2003; Komar and Živković 2016), and, in some instances, with issues of state- and nation-building that resulted in deep ethno-political cleavages within society (Brković 2013; Caspersen 2003; Forbess 2013; Jenne and Bieber 2014; Malešević and Uzelac 2007; Troch 2014). Civil society, on the other hand, was left to experts from non-governmental and international organizations for their assessment, but these reports have focused predominantly on the organizational density of a civil sector populated by professional(ized) NGOs and their policy-related cooperation with the state.¹⁰ Only recently have scholarly overviews of (the development of) Montenegrin civil society begun

⁹ Studies in English that dealt with Montenegro’s post-socialist transformation were almost exclusively in disciplines other than sociology, such as historiography, political science, anthropology, or economics. Even two recent studies – one in German, other in French – are non-sociological: one is focusing on formal institutions and party politics from the perspective of political science (Milačić 2017), the other on informal institutions and traditional customs (Cattaruzza 2011). What is needed, therefore, is a sociological approach to understand how society was impacted by a post-socialist transition.

¹⁰ For instance, once Montenegro became an independent state in 2006, its civil society came under scrutiny for several influential international indices, such as *CSO Sustainability Index*, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*, *Freedom in the World*, *Nations in Transit*, and more recently, *V-Dem: Varieties of Democracy*. Local NGOs also provide regular updates on the state of civil sector, but rarely engage critically with it.

to emerge (Komar 2015, Vujović 2017), some of which focus exclusively on the most prominent social movements during the post-socialist transition (Baća 2017d). When these accounts of Montenegrin civil society are juxtaposed with research on unconventional political participation, we get a picture that is paradigmatic for the post-socialist civil society: a focus on individuals (their attitudes) and/or organizations (their activities) as the units of observation exposes weak individual participation in public life, yet an organizationally dense professionalized civil sector with high political capital used to influence the state through institutional mechanisms. In short, we see a weak civil *society*, but a strong civil *sector*.

While these studies have focused only on some aspects of actually existing civil society in Montenegro and issues relevant to it – citizen attitudes, mass mobilizations, ethno-political cleavages, and the civil sector – they are important in one more regard: many of these accounts have discussed reasons for the absence of unconventional political participation and civic activism in Montenegro. Some of these reasons are endemic to the small Balkan country, but, observed *in toto*, it can be argued that these structural constraints are present throughout CEE. I synthesize and classify these explanations for structural constraints on non-institutional participation into four categories pertaining to political structure, social interaction, political culture, and ethno-political cleavages.¹¹

(1) *Political structure*. To date, Montenegro is the only European country that has not seen a change of regime through the ballot box. During the DPS's uninterrupted reign, Montenegro has developed a socio-political configuration that severely constrains bottom-up mobilizations challenging the governing party or its policies. Understandably, by keeping a strong grip over state organs and resources for such a long period of time, the DPS has perfected not only a clientelistic model for maintaining popular support (Hockenos and Winterhagen 2007: 43; Komar 2013: 44–48; Kovačević 2014: 3–4; Uzelac 2003), but also a repertoire of intimidation and harassment tools designed to influence election outcomes (Milovac 2016; Mocht'ak 2015). This has resulted not only in citizens' pessimistic mistrust in their own ability to make change through institutional mechanisms of political participation (Komar 2013; Komar and Živković 2016), but, in the context of the state functioning as a mechanism for reproducing patron–client relations, citizens have tended to use personal ties and party connections to bend the formal rules in their own favour (Komar

¹¹ I have also addressed in more detail how these constrain collective action in papers I published in 2017 (see Baća 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d).

2015: 157–158; Sedlenieks 2015: 210–212). Political, economic, and social grievances that might otherwise inspire engagement in contentious practices can instead be addressed through these informal (clientelistic) channels that play a central role in defining state–society relationships.

- (2) *Social interaction*. The “non-anonymous” nature of Montenegro’s society exacerbates these political constraints on non-institutional political participation. Montenegro is a country of roughly 620,000 people, condensed in a small territory and characterized by high density of interpersonal relationships and close kinship ties, and thus by extremely dense and personalized social relations (Jovanović and Marjanović 2002; Komar 2013; Sedlenieks 2015). In combination with the small scale on which encounters and interactions between people tend to happen, Montenegro is essentially a large community in which “everyone knows everyone” (see Jovanović and Marjanović 2002; Komar 2013; Komar and Živković 2016; Sedlenieks 2015). In such a “micro-society” highly divided along (ethno)political lines, a citizen is never an anonymous person, but rather a concrete individual whose political affiliations and loyalties are always “known”: everyone is “embedded in a set of assumptions that link him or her [...] in the political web” through his/her personal connections and kinship ties (Sedlenieks 2015: 204). In effect, this severely lowers the social trust necessary for bottom-up mobilization and alliance-building outside existing social and political networks. The non-anonymous nature of social interactions also transforms the public space – understood as the physical site of social interactions – from a space of difference into a space of familiarity where public opinion is never sufficiently anonymous. As a result, social forces that would mobilize mass constituencies across existing socio-political cleavages – which have been vital to forging contentious politics in large “anonymous” societies – are extremely weak in Montenegro (Jovanović 2009: 39; see also Baća 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Komar 2013). Montenegrin society, therefore, rests on perfect socio-spatial ordering for “the effective exercise of the powers of governing, surveillance, and self-disciplining, in which visibility in the public becomes a double-edged sword: being simultaneously limiting and yet necessary for (contentious) political action” (Baca 2017a: 1130). Within such a configuration, social interactions are more akin to *Gemeinschaft* rather than *Gesellschaft* and, in the context of harsh socio-economic restructuring, effectively reinforce the extant patron–client networks that play a central role in defining state–society relations: when the

majority of existential issues are resolved through nepotistic-cum-clientelistic mechanisms, citizens are encouraged to use kinship ties and party connections to achieve their objectives. In other words, protest behaviour against power-holders can bring individuals into conflict with someone personally close – even within (extended) family – who is involved in clientelistic networks, which effectively personalizes contention.

- (3) *Political culture*. The reasons for rare instances of articulating, aggregating, and protecting interests “from below” through (contentious) extra-institutional political action have also been ascribed to Montenegro’s historical heritage of authoritarianism and the current patronage system that render its political culture non-participatory (see Čagorović 1993; Jovanović and Marjanović 2002; Komar 2013, 2015; Komar and Živković 2016). This aversion to unconventional participation has also been strengthened by the so-called “international factor”. Namely, as residents of a country whose strategic goal is European integration – an aim that is based on the consensus of all parliamentary parties since the early 2000s (Vujović and Komar 2008: 230–234) – “Montenegro’s citizens are often reminded by European Union (EU) officials of the need to practice politics through the institutions of liberal democracy (regardless of the ability of these institutions to actually uphold the rule of law or provide credible venues for dissenting opinion)” (Baća 2017b: 1432).¹² The EU’s position thus reinforces the general delegitimization of collective action and protest, characteristic of the entire post-socialist region (see Císař 2013; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Gagyí 2015a, 2015b; Jacobsson 2015; Piotrowski 2015). Resulting from this is a democratic polity solely based on regular elections and narrowly institutionalized conceptions of “the political”. This vision of “politics” has become largely the norm among Montenegro’s political, societal, and intellectual elites who often dismiss contentious politics as “uncivilized behaviour” (see Baća 2017b, 2017c). With contentious, non-institutional forms of political participation rendered a non-option, the political agency of citizens in Montenegro is reduced to voting as their only legitimate activity and obligation towards the political community.¹³

¹² In recent years, the EU’s insistence on supporting stability at the expense of democracy in the candidate countries in Southeast Europe has been dubbed as fostering “stabilitocracy” (see Kmezić and Bieber 2017).

¹³ For instance, electoral turnout in Montenegro have always been high – above 65% (Komar and Živković 2016: 793–794). Therefore, Montenegrin citizens *do* exercise their political agency, but predominantly through institutional channels.

(4) *Ethno-political cleavages*. Ever since the late 1980s, Montenegrin political space has been oversaturated with ethnopolitical lines of conflict.¹⁴ As statehood status emerged at the end of the 1990s as the central political question in Montenegro, political competition and public discourse were gradually realigned from predominantly left-to-right ideological disputes to reflect a new ethnonational identity fault line within the Slavic-Orthodox population (Bieber 2003; Milivojević and Bešić 2006; Morrison 2009: 89–204; Sekelj 2000: 60). By 2001, this cleavage had become entrenched as the principal political division in Montenegro, through which “Montenegrin identity” came to be associated with support for state independence, whereas “Serb identity” signaled support for continued union with Serbia (Caspersen 2003: 115–118; Jenne and Bieber 2014: 447–452; Troch 2014: 25–29).¹⁵ Not only did independence fail to alter the nature of Montenegrin politics after 2006, but it was reframed as the DPS’s brainchild, further reinforcing the link between ethnonational and political cleavages (see Morrison 2011; Brković 2013; Džankić 2014). Aware of the fact that ethnic-cum-political identification is the key determinant of voter behaviour (Komar 2013), the DPS used populism to frame its reign as the *conditio sine qua non* of Montenegrin independence by continuously representing Montenegro’s current statehood (and the peaceful cohabitation of diverse ethnic groups within it) as precarious and reversible if the opposition were to come into power. In that way, any activity seeking to contest DPS rule or its policies was framed – or, better yet, depoliticized and thus delegitimized – as “a threat to the public order” perpetrated by “enemies of the state” (Džankić and Keil 2017). This pattern undermined the potential for cross-ethnic solidarity, mobilization, organization, and alliance-building, even around socio-economic, environmental, and other non-ethnonational issues (cf. Baća 2017b, 2017c). Therefore, engaging in contentious politics became a “ready-made” illegitimate – if not outright dangerous – activity in the eyes of many, effectively rendering protesters agents of chaos rather than legitimate political subjects.

¹⁴ Ever since the early 20th century, the Montenegrin body politic has been deeply divided. This divide began in 1918 when Montenegro lost its independency and was incorporated into Serbian territory, which created a rift between loyalists of the dethroned Montenegrin Petrović Dynasty and the new Serbian Karađorđević Dynasty. This cleavage thus existed before and during World War II, when society became divided predominantly between monarchist chetniks and communist partisans. Likewise, in 1948, the triumphant communists were divided between Titoists and Stalinists. All these divisions became salient during the 1990s and 2000s, when they would realign to create a new highly antagonized socio-cultural and political cleavage within the Slavic-Orthodox population, between Montenegrins and Serbs.

¹⁵ It is important to point out that, prior to the 2000s, the identity categories of “Montenegrin” and “Serb” were not mutually exclusive or antagonistic; rather, they were often interchangeable, as there was substantial overlap between them (see Caspersen 2003; Džankić 2014; Jenne and Bieber 2014; Troch 2014).

To summarize, these four structural constraints canalized political activity from the public sphere into the clandestine spaces of nepotistic-cum-clientelistic networks.

In response, when faced with the apparent narrative of a “weak civil society” in Montenegro, analysts stopped investigating the empirical reality of contentious practices in its civil society and focused on understanding why non-institutional political participation was absent in the first place. However, they have not only neglected actually existing civil society in Montenegro, but have also overemphasized *static* structural factors that constrained collective action at the expense of the effects of *dynamic* processes that resulted in profound institutional and social engineering since 1989. The effects of these processes on contentious practices remain poorly understood. Remediating this gap is another goal of this dissertation.

During the data collection phase, I realized that there were numerous instances of unconventional, non-institutional political/civic participation, but that they were small-scale, short-term, and often low-key outbursts of dissent that could easily escape notice.¹⁶ One could dismiss these as unimportant events, especially when assessing their political consequentiality. As I immersed myself in news media archives, however, I came to realize that these characteristics were the defining features of *actually existing* Montenegrin civil society and, as such, required methodological precision and theoretical nuance in order to be properly understood. At the same time, a new wave of literature on post-socialist civil society began to emerge, in which a growing number of authors began to challenge CEE’s image as *structurally weak* and *culturally deficient*, uncovering a hitherto neglected but vibrant and variegated terrain of civic activism, citizen-led mobilizations, and popular politics that extends beyond the institutional(ized) affairs of the civil sector (Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Jacobsson 2015, Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Pleyers and Sava 2015). In other words, the “non-eventful” protests I had uncovered in Montenegro were not simply mirroring research findings in other post-socialist countries, but represented a paradigmatic example of what state-of-the-art research on civil society in CEE was showing: that the “weak civil society” thesis was a product of theoretical biases and methodological shortcoming rather than a picture painted by empirical material (Fagan and Sircar 2018; Foa and Ekiert 2017; Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Jacobsson

¹⁶ I will address this in detail in *Chapter 1*, since it is characteristic for the entire region.

and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Piotrowski 2015; Pleyers and Sava 2015; Razsa 2015).¹⁷ It was this fact that provided additional reassurance that I was on the right track and pushed me to think about how I could use the post-socialist experience of Montenegro to shed some light on civil society building more broadly by pointing to conceptual and methodological deficiencies that permeate civil society and social movement studies “beyond the core” (Cox et al. 2017). In other words, my empirical material offered a chance not only to make an empirical contribution, but also to think sociologically in terms of providing both conceptual and theoretical contributions in the fields of civil society and social movement studies.

However, before I address conceptual indicators based on the historical experience of post-socialist civil society building, in this introductory chapter I first explain what I mean by “post-socialist development” – namely, externally-sponsored, top-down macro-processes that constitute it. There have been few longitudinal studies of contentious politics in CEE (Beissinger 2002; Beissinger and Sasse 2014; Císař 2013; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Robertson 2011), but these have lacked relational and dynamic perspectives regarding how contentious practices were shaped by macro-processes through different stages of post-socialist development, as these studies mostly focused on the early stages of transition. While Montenegro has been uninteresting and uninviting for the majority of social scientists, I lay out in the following pages why a longitudinal study of contentious practices in Montenegro can provide nuanced insights into the development of civil society “beyond NGO-ization” (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). By juxtaposing (formal) macro-processes of institutionalization with (informal) micro-practices of contestation – their relations, interactions, and dynamics – I uncover how these processes were complemented or challenged by the contentious practices “from below”.

Understanding Post-Socialist Development as a Dynamic and Relational Process

To understand post-socialist development in the context of Montenegro’s civil society building, I focus on the ways in which forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices were shaped during different stages of three macro-processes of institutionalization – democratization, privatization, and NGO-ization – and, in turn, how civil society building was influenced by these practices of contestation. In other words, I am interested in civil society

¹⁷ Simply put, the first wave of research on post-socialist civil society was focusing on individual attitudes to civic engagement, while the second wave was investigating civil society organizations by using data from the official NGO registries, thus leaving contentious practices understudied. I will return to this in *Chapter I*.

building as a dynamic, interactive, and relational process that is shaped through interactions among top-down macro-processes and bottom-up micro-practices.

In the following section, I outline the methodological design that guided my research, and provide a theoretical rationale on why I framed – or, better yet, periodized – Montenegrin post-socialist development into four discrete blocks of time with relatively stable characteristics. I analyze contentious practices from 1989 to 2006 against the backdrop of complex macro-processes that shaped the nexus of polity–economy–society, demarcated into four distinct periods: 1989–1990, 1991–1997, 1998–2000, and 2001–2006. By studying the interaction between formal macro-processes of institutionalization and informal micro-practices of contestation during different stages of “transition”, I provide a nuanced account of post-socialist civil society (building) and contentious practices that characterized it. The case of Montenegro should thus be seen as an illustrative example for understanding not only the neglected dimensions of post-socialist, (post-)transition civil society, but also the (political) agency of citizens in emerging democracies.

Methodological Design: Identifying and Mapping Contentious Practices in a Post-Socialist Setting

With data covering a period of almost two decades, finding the right way to organize empirical material proved to be a more challenging and time-consuming process than I had initially predicted. At the dissertation proposal stage, I relied on the aforementioned scholarly literature stating that there is little empirical evidence for unconventional/non-institutional participation in Montenegro. So, naturally, I expected my data gathering to run smoothly. But as soon as I began to go through daily newspapers, “event data” that I found began to paint a different picture, one of numerous and diverse protest events (N=1,745). While findings produced by attitude-based research in Montenegro may be misleading, they nonetheless point out by omission that conventional survey instruments do not capture the small-scale, short-term, and low-key contentious practices that are endemic to the region.

For gathering, mapping, and coding of data, I relied on a method known as the Protest Event Analysis (PEA). This is the most commonly used method in mapping contentious practices over space and time (Almeida 2008; Beissinger 2002; Hutter and Giugni 2009; Reising 1998; Uba and Uggla 2011). Its main advantage is its openness to modifications and adaptations to different socio-political contexts (Hutter 2014; Imig 2001; Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Koopmans and Statham

2010; Taehyun 2006). In relation to my research, it has already been used in the post-socialist settings, albeit covering countries of East-Central Europe (Beissinger and Sasse 2014; Císař 2013; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999) or Russia (Beissinger 2002; Robertson 2011). My initial ambition was to cover the period from 1988 to 2012 because those were the years during which Montenegro witnessed its only large-scale, cross-sector, mass popular movements; I reduced the analyzed period to cover 1989 to 2006, from the beginning of the post-socialist transition to its consolidation. My reasons for this reduction are threefold:

- (1) The protest wave of 1988–1989 underpinning the Antibureaucratic Revolution is generally perceived as the moment when Montenegro lost its *de facto* independence and fell under the control of Slobodan Milošević through the installation of a puppet regime. On the other hand, citizens of Montenegro voted in favour of the restoration of state independence in the referendum of May 2006, which is often portrayed in the media as the triumph of democracy through which “historical wrongs have been corrected”. Therefore, understanding the nature and dynamics of contentious practices under processes that resulted in profound socio-economic and political restructuring in-between the large-scale, mass protests that underpinned a “revolution” and the nationwide social movement that decided the state’s fate on a “referendum” poses an interesting puzzle for scholarly analysis.
- (2) PEA is an extremely labour-intensive and time-consuming process, especially since news-media sources covering the period before 2006 were not digitized (nor microfilmed), so I had to work “by hand” and photograph all relevant articles; it took me almost two years just to gather and systematize the relevant data. In particular, I focused on the “local news” sections to overcome the selection bias that favours “big” protest events in major cities. On the other hand, news media sources covering the period after 2006 are fully digitalized and available online and thus remain at the disposal of researchers. Examining the previously unexplored period before 2006, therefore, is a worthy focus for this work.
- (3) In recent years, a number of studies have appeared covering social movements in the post-2006 period. I, for instance, have used data I gathered to write about some of the most important social movements in this period (Baća 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d). Other scholars have covered some of the most important protest events in this period as well (Kilibarda 2013, 2016; Komar 2015; Kovačević 2017; Morrison 2018; Vujović 2017). The general consensus is that the honeymoon period after the referendum – and the Great

Recession of 2008, in particular – was followed by an increase in protest events and civil activism, eventually resulting in two large-scale, mass anti-government mobilizations in 2012 and 2015.

Analysis of the 1989–2006 period offered me an unprecedented opportunity to study how contentious practices were changing *before* and *during* the post-socialist transition or, more precisely, during “flawed” and “genuine” phases of this process, which, in this case, included both nation- and state-building. Namely, the period from 1989 to 1997 is considered to be a “stalled transition” (Darmanović 2003; Kovačević 2007; Vujović and Komar 2008), characterized by authoritarianism, transformation (etatization) of worker-owned (“social”) capital, involvement in Yugoslav wars, and international isolation, whereas the post-1997 period is considered to be a “genuine transition”, that is, a shift toward electoral democracy, externally-supported creation of a civil sector, and neoliberal restructuring of the economy. I therefore study why and how popular grievances were articulated and collective actions were enacted in the public arena over time, under different stages of three macro-processes – democratization, privatization, and NGO-ization – that resulted in profound socio-political and institutional engineering, and how these, in turn, affected civil society building and the democratization process in general.

However, while the “event data” offered in Montenegrin newspapers is the most consistent and systematic way of mapping and tracking contentious practices over time through PEA, studies showed that numerous factors affect news coverage for different kinds of protest events, thus severely affecting reliability and validity of newspapers as the primary source of protest event data. On one hand, print media are still the most reliable source for identifying protest events (Smith et al. 2001); on the other, “event intensity” and “media sensitivity” tend to highly impact what and how such events are reported in the newspapers (Snyder and Kelly 1977). Simply put, due to their characteristics, some protest events are considered more newsworthy than others (e.g., media tends to focus on more established or politically significant actors) and thus have high probability of coverage, whereas some contextual elements render other protest events uninteresting for media reports (e.g., those small in scale, short in duration, and distant in proximity). This effect marginalizes or deemphasizes contentious practices by marginalized actors in the media (Myers and Schaefer Caniglia 2004; Oliver and Myers 1999; Smith et al. 2001).¹⁸ As a result, the

¹⁸ This “differential sensitivity” to particular issues, events, and actors, however, varies over time thus making reporting uneven even from the same source (Oliver and Maney 2000).

conclusion is that with the exception of the “eventful protests”, the “non-eventful protests” reported cannot be used as a representative sample of all the events and issues on which they centred. As such, more attention must be given to small-scale, short-term, and low-key protest events (Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000), which are the defining feature of post-socialist civil society.

Having these general reporting biases in mind, the case of Montenegro demonstrates stronger print media attention to small-scale, short-term, and low-key events, even in the most remote rural areas. What is more, this “non-eventfulness” is actually the most prominent feature of contentious practices in my dataset, which makes it relatively representative for the events and issues on which these small-scale, short-term, and low-key events focused. However, “political climate” has severely affected media sensitivity and reporting bias during the nineties, when anti-war and anti-regime protest events were reported selectively by the mainstream media and framed as treasonous activity (Burzan 1998; Keković 2005).

With the methodological shortcomings in using news media sources explained, I relied on Montenegrin newspapers by using the content analysis method that underpins PEA to identify forms of contentious practices in Montenegro, as well as their ebb and flow from 1989 to 2006.¹⁹ Since Montenegro had only one daily newspaper – the state-owned *Pobjeda* – I used that media as a source of information from January 1989 to August 1997. The independent daily *Vijesti*, a much more reliable source, was established in September 1997; I used it as the data source for the remaining period until May 2006.

The use of news media data proved to be an efficient way to identify contentious practices, as well as to track changes in their discourse, frames, and justifications as a way of getting beyond individual attitudinal data. Thus, I created a dataset based on a modified version of PEA used previously in the post-socialist contexts (Beissinger 2002; Beissinger and Sasse 2014; Císař 2013; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Robertson 2011; Szabó 1996) to identify and enumerate contentious practices (N=1,745). Data was primarily collected in the archival sections of the City Library of Podgorica, during several periods: first during my research stay in Montenegro supported by the York University Fieldwork Research Grant from May 2014 to August 2015, and then two more times during my summer stays in Montenegro from June to August 2016 and from May to October

¹⁹ For the sake of consistency, I identified and enumerated contentious practices for each full year. Since my analysis ends in May 2006, I treated these five months as an epilogue to my analysis, since during this period much of conventional politics shifted into public gatherings and mass rallies of both independentist and unionist blocs.

2017. Data unavailable at this institution was gathered in the archival sections of the National Library in Cetinje, during the same periods. Some issues of *Vijesti* covering 2001–2005 were received in digital format, courtesy of its publisher, the Daily Press. Once I photographed the newspaper articles, I catalogued items in Microsoft Word files for each month, after which I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet – with the aforementioned categories for classifying data – where I enumerated, described, coded, and classified contentious practices for each year.²⁰

In order to properly identify and organize data within the time constraints of doctoral studies, I coded data according to the following indicators: form of contentious practice, participating social sector (social groups associated with these practices), geographical location/sites, claims/demands/grievances articulated in these actions, as well as justifications/legitimizations of the action.²¹ Since the last category was not always explicit but rather implicit, I used descriptions to identify common threads – or, more precisely, the lowest common denominator – for each form of contentious practice in each year. More specifically, due to the number of observed data and my interpretative approach, once articles were classified chronologically (grouped into folders by year and month), I followed a relatively simple coding protocol:

- (1) Since the unit of observation/analysis are contentious practices, their form was used as the basic principle for organizing empirical material in this dissertation (see *Chapters II–V*). Therefore, when coding, I discerned two types of civic engagement through contentious practices: *disruption* and *protest*. In this context, I used the following selection criteria to organize my data: contentious practices that fall under the category of “disruption” – such as strike actions, blockades, and boycotts – are *politically reactive*, as people simply react to a political decision or the inaction of institutions; *socially disruptive*, as these actions stop the normal flow of social, day-to-day life; and *spatially regressive*, as these practices bring previous activities in the spaces they occur to a standstill. On the other hand, contentious

²⁰ There is the issue of missing data, as well as of human error (e.g., omission). I have covered newspaper sources from 1989 until mid-2000 by taking photographs of articles. I received about a thousand “pdf” files from the digital archives of *Vijesti*, each containing a daily issue of the newspaper; the remaining issues I photographed to create a digital file. Paper editions of *Pobjeda* – especially from 1991 to 1993 – were missing pages, sometimes even whole issues. Some digitalized issues of *Vijesti* – from 2001 to 2006 – were also incomplete – missing pages, sections (especially related to local news), and even whole issues. Thus, coverage of these years is slightly skewed (especially in regard to small-scale, short-term, and low-key events). I was able to mitigate this problem by taking photographs of print versions of the missing pages and issues, yet there are still pages, sections, and issues that remain missing. My estimation is that once I return to the archives and cover all missing pages, the number of contentious practices reported here will rise about 5–10%. This limitation is further discussed in my *Conclusion* chapter.

²¹ Although, at this stage, I did not code events for scale, in general, the scale of these events can be extrapolated/inferred by comparing forms and locations/sites of coded actions.

practices that are labelled as “protest” – such as written and staged forms of protest – are *politically proactive*, as people take an active stance in order to address or make visible certain social, political, or cultural issues; *socially interruptive*, as these actions temporarily recalibrate the public space and public sphere into a contentious arena; and *spatially transgressive*, as these activities intrude into public space by momentarily transforming them away from their original purpose. Through both disruption and protest, people act directly by abandoning institutionally-mediated ways of addressing problems or communicating grievances, and consequently stepping out of their social roles, civil duties, and daily routines.²² Having this categorization in mind, I coded contentious practices as follows: firstly, those that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or even paralyzed the routinized flow of everyday life due to people’s disengagement from their social roles and daily duties, such as strikes in workplaces, boycotts of the norms of citizenship, or blockades in their local communities; and secondly, contentious practices through which people staged their dissent outside of their comfort zones by entering the public arena, either through the written word (e.g., petitions, protest letters, graffiti) in the public sphere, or through gatherings in public spaces (e.g., rallies, marches, demonstrations, sit-ins).²³ Therefore, the codes I used were *strikes*, *boycotts*, *blockades*, *written protests*, and *staged protests*.

- (2) Once primary codes were established, for each contentious practice I added the participating social sector – the social groups associated with these practices – with descriptive codes, such as *blue-collar* and *white-collar workers*, *private sector*, *civil sector*, *pensioners*, *high school* and *university students*, *(politicized) ethnic/national minorities*, and the broadest category of *citizens* who felt wronged or were simply expressing concerns as the constitutionally-defined “bearers of sovereignty”, as well as the category of *other* (e.g., the unemployed, party activists, clergy).²⁴

²² For the purposes of selecting and organizing data, I make a technical distinction between public sphere and public space, where the first category emphasizes *discursiveness* of the public sphere (e.g., written protests in media), whereas the latter points out *materiality* of the public space (e.g., rallies in the streets) (Cassegård 2014; Howell 1993).

²³ Written forms of protest were the only contentious practice for which I used number of participants (i.e., three or more) as a cut-off criterion. Individual forms of written protests would significantly obscure and skew the number of contentious practices, yet would not add anything new in the analysis because most of the issues raised in individual written protests were covered in those written by three or more.

²⁴ Throughout this text, I differentiate between blue-collar or industrial worker strike actions, which I cover within the industry (e.g., manufacturing, agriculture, mining, construction, forestry, tourism) and white-collar labour shutdowns in the public sector (e.g., public servants, cultural workers, teachers, doctors and nurses, judges). I also speak of labor disruptions in small private businesses.

- (3) Each contentious practice was situated in its geographical location/site with codes such as *urban*, *suburban*, and *rural*, three categories that were exceptionally relevant for blockades and staged protests.
- (4) Since claims, demands, and grievances articulated through these contentious practices were placed under scrutiny, I used a qualitative approach in categorizing and analyzing these features (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Firstly, I described and summarized the key claims, demands, and grievances for a nuanced interpretation of discourses used by actors when engaging in contentious practices. Secondly, I grouped these summarized claims, demands, and grievances into five broad descriptive categories: *socio-economic*, *political*, *cultural*, *civic*, and *environmental*.
- (5) A similar step was taken for justifications and legitimizations of the actions. Namely, justifications and legitimizations invoked by actors through contentious practices – words or phrases they used or simply values to which they appealed (explicitly or implicitly) to justify and legitimize their actions – were described and summarized for a nuanced interpretive analysis. Once summarized, I grouped these justifications and legitimizations into five broad descriptive categories: *political*, *social*, *moral/ethical*, *civic*, and *a(anti)political/non-political*.

Through an extensive, in-depth literature review of scholarly work, policy reports and other documents in both local languages and English, I also identified and analyzed the aforementioned macro-processes in order to frame and periodize my empirical material for the purpose of investigating relationships between these macro-processes and contentious practices. Moreover, I rendered these findings on macro-processes through the synthetic theoretical model of *dynamics of contention* (McAdam et al. 2001) in order to show how the four periods into which I have divided 1988–2006 are actually four discrete blocks of time with relatively stable characteristics with regard to political opportunities, mobilizing structures, framing processes, and the social role that contentious practices played in mitigating the contradictions of a post-socialist transition.

Therefore, by using PEA, I achieve one general and two specific objectives. First, the *overall objective* of this dissertation is to map and explore the role of citizen-led contentious practices during the period of radical soci(et)al change that is a post-socialist transition and, consequently, to situate my findings within the larger post-socialist framework and discuss their theoretical bearings on broader debates about civil society, contentious politics, and

democratization. Second, by investigating how top-down (formal) processes of institutionalization and bottom-up (informal) practices of contestation interacted in civil society building in Montenegro, I achieve two *specific objectives*: (1) illuminating the empirical reality of the post-socialist, transition space of Montenegro through analysis of actually existing forms of contentious practices through which citizens articulated their grievances, voiced their demands, advanced their claims, and (re-)affirmed their identities; (2) analyzing how and to what extent forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices were affected by elite-driven (formal) macro-processes and, conversely, how these processes were influenced by citizens through civil resistance, social activism, popular politics, and other forms of unconventional participation.

Theoretical Framing: Periodizing Post-Socialist Development through the Dynamics of Contention Model

In this dissertation, I move away from focusing only on *stable structures* that facilitate or constrain contentious practices, in favour of analyzing why and how their forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content changed under different *dynamic processes* that shaped contemporary Montenegro. Moreover, to avoid implicit conceptual bias toward change by focusing on processes rather than the reproduction of structures, I take structures into account by looking at what remained in each stage of these processes as well as what changed. My starting point, therefore, is the aftermath of the socio-political movement that marked the beginning of Montenegro's contemporary history, when in 1988–1989 the communist party youth rode a wave of mass street protests underpinning the so-called Antibureaucratic Revolution to replace old party leadership cadres. Although the elites that seized the party-state apparatus remain in power to this day, the period following these events was not a monolith frozen in time and space. The semi-democratic state – reliant on extant patron-client networks – may be a constant in Montenegro's post-socialist transformation, but the society itself has gone through a turbulent socio-political transition and an equally disruptive process of socio-economic restructuring that has profoundly shaped how popular grievances are articulated and collective actions are enacted in the public space (Baća 2017d; Komar 2015; Vujović 2017). For that reason, this dissertation investigates why and how citizens organized themselves and challenged power structures “from below”, through collective and direct actions during different stages of three macro-processes of institutionalization that resulted in political engineering and “tectonic” soc(et)ial transformations – (1) democratization of

the polity, (2) privatization of the economy, and (3) NGO-ization of civil society – and how these “deviations” from institutional venues of political/civic participation, in turn, affected civil society building and the democratization process in general. Therefore, my focus is on the complex interaction between top-down (formal) processes of institutionalization and bottom-up (informal) practices of contestation in post-socialist civil society building during a period of almost two decades. Moreover, focusing on the interactions between these processes and practices brings into question the explanatory value of the aforementioned accounts that focus on stable structures to explicate the “weak civil society” thesis in Montenegro.

Accordingly, when discussing Montenegro’s contemporary history, we can speak of four distinct periods in the nexus of polity–economy–society between 1989 and 2006, each shaped and characterized by distinct yet related macro-processes. Scholarly literature has thus far focused predominantly on how these processes have affected institutional politics (Darmanović 2003; Kovačević 2007; Vujović and Komar 2008), leaving out how these processes affected civil society building and the (political) subjectivity, agency, and autonomy of Montenegrin citizens. In the following pages, I focus on this historical era and interpret it through the interactive and relational theoretical model of *dynamics of contention* – and its process-mechanism approach – developed by Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam (McAdam et al. 1996, 2001) in order to extrapolate mechanisms and processes that affect practices of contestation, and, ultimately, to show that this timespan can be partitioned into four periods: 1988–1990, 1991–1997, 1998–2000 and 2001–2006, each presented in one empirical chapter of this dissertation (*Chapters II–V*). Simply put, dynamics of contention is a theoretical framework that provides concepts and tools for studying why and how forms and dynamics of contentious politics are changing in different historical eras, under different macro-processes (McAdam et al. 1996). As Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam (2001: 8) explain, there are “substantially different varieties of contention within significantly different sorts of regimes”. In other words, the degree of governmental capacity and democracy within a given polity affects forms and dynamics of contention. Therefore, processes that result in structural changes – whether these are political, economic, social, or cultural – influence how popular grievances are articulated and collective/direct actions are enacted in public space. Although Montenegro was ruled by the same party during the analyzed period, the DPS – popularly referred to as “the regime” by its critics – retained power precisely by its unprecedented chameleonic nature, through adaptation to regional and global trends (see Darmanović 2003, 2007;

Komar 2013, 2015; Komar and Živković 2016). So, while “the regime” stayed the same, tectonic structural changes occurred in a relatively stable political setting and, in the process, profoundly affected forms and dynamics of non-institutional politics and, more broadly, civic engagement.

When analyzing the relationship between structural factors and contentious politics, Tilly and Tarrow (2015: 16) distinguish two types of factors that influence forms, trajectories, dynamics, sites, scales, content, and ultimately the outcomes of contentious politics: first, “periods of rapid political change” and, second, “incrementally changing structural factors”. In this case, there were three distinct critical junctures in the contemporary history of Montenegro, each beginning with a crisis within the polity that eventually “spilled over” into society, where it was resolved through non-violent mass demonstrations (January 1989), was intensified through violent clashes with the police (January 1998), or found its epilogue in direct democracy through referendum (May 2006). Periods in-between these turning points were characterized by incremental, yet long-lasting shifts within the polity; restructuring of the economy; or transformation of society, of which each had a profound impact on the everyday lives of a citizenry that, nevertheless, had to go through cultural adaptation to these changes. This dissertation, therefore, not only addresses turning points in Montenegro’s post-socialist development, but simultaneously investigates “the situations, capacities, and constraints that give rise to social movement activity” during periods enacted and followed by these critical junctures (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996: 27). In the following pages, then, I explore how these turning points – and the changes they initiated – were mitigated and/or consolidated through the aforementioned macro-processes of institutionalization.

When this is translated into the language of political sociology, the post-socialist transition initiated a complex set of robust macro-processes – such as democratization, privatization, NGO-ization, Europeanization, and nation- and state-building, among others – that have profoundly affected an equally complex matrix of political, discursive, economic, and legal opportunity structures for interests and identities to be articulated, aggregated, and protected “from below” through contentious practices. How these macro-processes affected post-socialist civil society – especially practices of contestation within it – remains a gap in scholarly literature on Montenegro, and has never been studied in a systematic way in literature on post-socialist societies. By using this small Balkan country as a case study, and approaching it through a diachronic perspective enabled via a longitudinal study, my goal is to shed some light on more general dilemmas in political sociology: firstly, what conditions and circumstances favour contentious practices as a

way for citizens to exert their (political) subjectivity, autonomy, and agency; secondly, why and how did citizens organize themselves and challenge power structures “from below”; and finally, how did these “deviations” from institutional venues of political/civic participation – their form, content, and political consequentiality – vary during different stages of political transition and socio-economic restructuring that are characteristic of the post-socialist region.

Therefore, before I move on to *Chapter I* – where I discuss the specificities of contentious politics in the post-socialist space and postulate “contentious practices” as the unit of observation/analysis – I will extrapolate from the existing literature on Montenegro a complex set of mechanisms and processes that compounded into an equally complex set of macro-processes that characterized distinct, contained wholes in the nexus of polity–society–economy during four periods: 1988–1990, 1991–1997, 1998–2000, and 2001–2006. This periodization helps us understand how forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices varied under different macro-processes. To do so, I use the *dynamics of contention* theoretical framework because it offers analytical tools to conceptually grasp and categorize structural and processual factors in the nexus of polity–economy–society that influenced contentious practices in Montenegro.

McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 344) are clear that contention should be analyzed against the backdrop of a “well-developed analysis of variation in governments, regimes, and polities”, with a focus on causal processes, and their component mechanisms that are specific to each variation. As a mid-range theoretical approach, the dynamics of contention approach analyzes contentious politics as an interactive, dynamic, and relational phenomenon. In the following pages, therefore, I present a synthetic analysis of literature on Montenegrin polity, economy, and society to identify which *mechanisms* and *processes* were dominant during the periods from 1989 to 2006. *Mechanisms* are defined as “a delimited class of changes that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” (McAdam et al. 2001: 24). *Processes*, on the other hand, are understood as “regular combinations and sequences of mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 29). For instance, some of these mechanisms are well-known to social scientists: opportunity/threat spirals, competition, brokerage, (de)mobilization, diffusion, certification, category-formation, alliance-building, attribution of similarity, emulation, etc. It is, however, important to emphasize that under different conditions and factors, these

mechanisms compound and combine in various configurations to produce processes, three of which are most important: the constitution of new political actors/identities; the polarization/realignment of the body politic; and a shift in scale from local struggles to nationwide, or even transnational, movements (McAdam et al. 2001: 314).

In the context of a post-socialist transition, I designate the combination of these conditions and factors in creating and modifying different sequences and combinations of mechanisms and processes as *macro-processes* – that is, democratization of polity, privatization of the economy, and NGO-ization of civil society. As stated above, I discern four different variations of these sequences and combinations under three macro-processes in Montenegro from 1989 to 2006. How these mechanisms combine in a particular socio-cultural and socio-political setting, the sequences in which they recur, the initial conditions in which they appear, and the effects that they produce under these conditions are placed under scrutiny in this introduction. My goal, therefore, is to investigate how these mechanisms combined under different macro-processes during the timespan in question and how they affected forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious politics. However, instead of simply grouping contentious politics according to common features, my primary objective is to study the dynamics of contention and the forms they take under specific conditions, in order to “specify what is distinct about them and therefore identify mechanisms and processes that caused distinctive features” (McAdam et al. 2001: 313). In other words, by examining how these mechanisms and processes combined under three different macro-processes of post-socialist transformation, I also lay out a rationale for a classification of data not simply based on temporal criteria, but also on different relationships between the emerging democratic polity and civil society.

In this way, the dynamics of contention model provides analytical and conceptual tools to “uncover recurring sets of mechanisms that combine into robust processes” by analyzing contentious practices “neither through the stamping of the same general laws onto all the world’s contention, nor through the description of different cases on a case-wise basis, but through the comparison of episodes of contention in light of the processes that animate their dynamics” (McAdam et al. 2001: 314). Consequently, my goal is to shed light on contentious practices in Montenegro, while simultaneously exploring how mechanisms and processes affected these practices over time, in different socio-political configurations that were enacted/facilitated by divergent macro-processes.

Before I move on in explaining why “contentious practices” should be the unit of observation/analysis, in the following section I focus on transformations in three dimensions of Montenegrin post-socialist transition – polity, civil society, and economy – in order to provide a brief overview of three macro-processes that shaped the four distinct periods from 1989 to 2006. Only by understanding these changes, as well as what stayed the same, can the empirical data have meaning.

Periodizing Montenegro’s Post-Socialist Development

The Antibureaucratic Revolution culminated in January 1989, when the nominally reformist party youth replaced the old communist *nomenklatura*. Six months after the first multiparty elections were held in December 1990, the Communist Party, under new leadership – having won the majority of seats in the national assembly – rebranded itself as the DPS. After being relatively obedient followers of their patron Slobodan Milošević for almost a decade, they clashed in 1997 over the continuation of support for his politics and policies.²⁵ The establishment’s falling out would not only split their party and its base, but also create a deep cleavage within Montenegrin society *in toto*, a socio-political polarization that would serve as a foundation for all subsequent antagonisms. Montenegro remains a rather unique case in these internal conflicts and transformations within the ruling party that have shaped political life in the country and its main lines of conflict.

For that reason, to understand the transformation in the nexus of polity–economy–society – or, more precisely, the emerging configuration of a nation-state, free market, and civil society – it is necessary to give a short overview of its historical development from 1989 to 2006, during two phases of post-socialist transformation: “stalled” and “genuine” transition. I focus on these changes in this nexus to extrapolate key mechanisms and processes under different stages of three macro-processes – namely, democratization, privatization and NGO-ization – that shaped dynamics, forms, sites, scales, and content of contention from 1989 to 2006. In other words, by investigating the transformation of the polity – and closely related transformations in the economy and civil society – I shed light on dominant processes and mechanisms that shaped the articulation and aggregation of contentious practices “from below”.

²⁵ Party leaders have always been extremely important in Montenegro, especially during periods of deep polarizations (Darmanović 2007; Fink-Hafner 2008; Morrison 2009).

Stalled Transition (1989–1997)

While this period is often depicted as a monolith of authoritarian rule, it is actually comprised of two rather distinctive phases: firstly, the “post-revolutionary” phase of 1989–1990 that was essentially a political vacuum, in which new political subjects began to proliferate and the public sphere was oversaturated with lively debates about the path the country should take in terms of democratization and modernization; and secondly, the authoritarian turn during 1991–1997, in the context of the collapse of Yugoslavia, civil wars, and international isolation.

Polity. About a year after the events of the Antibureacratc Revolution, the party elites – who had come into power by capitalizing on the popular resentment towards the “alienated” and “bureacratized” establishment and growing desire for change – were gradually splitting into two factions: *traditionalists*, who wanted continuation with the previous system, and *reformists* who were striving toward a Western-modeled social-democracy (Darmanović 1993). The dominant conservative majority came under the spell and patronage of Slobodan Milošević and turned to authoritarian politics and practices, whereas the liberal wing – unsatisfied with the progress made in the democratization of political structures – began to form the first democratic alternative to the regime and the nucleus of what would come to be known as the “civic option” that strongly opposed the authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and warmongering of the DPS.²⁶ By criticizing the politics, policies, and practices of the ruling regime, and grounding their actions on the basis of inclusive civic principles, the progressive anti-regime opposition not only created counter-spaces, both private and public, in which dissenting voices could gather, but also effectively protected *the political* from being devoured by *the ethnocultural* through “civic politics” of “multiculturalism”. More importantly, it set the trajectory for the key antagonism in Montenegro of this period: instead of competing ethnonationalisms being the principal political division, it was pro-Western *civiness* that became the main alternative to the dominant models of regressive

²⁶ The state-sponsored nationalist revival in post-socialist Montenegro “expressed itself rather as Serbian nationalism than as a distinct Montenegrin nationalism” (Bieber 2003b: 12). During this period, by framing any ethnic/national minority that criticized the DPS government as a threat to Yugoslavia, the state apparatus actively pursued and harassed ethnic minorities such as Muslims/Bosniaks, Croats, Albanians, and pro-independence Montenegrins (Morrison 2017; Šistek and Dimitrovová 2003). On the other hand, unlike other former Yugoslav republics, the Montenegrin polity was constitutionally defined as civic rather than ethnic/national, so through the civic parties in the parliament, ethnic/national minorities were not isolated or at the margins of the political process, but “successfully [integrated] [...] in public life” (Darmanović 2003: 150; see also Gallagher 2003: 55). However, after 1997 a “distinct Montenegrin nationalism” became a state-sponsored project, and it became evident that a significant part of the “civic option” was not against the dominant ethnonationalism because it was nationalism *per se*, but because it was *Serbian* nationalism. Put more simply, a proper designation for a considerable part of the “anti-nationalist movement” of the 1990s would be a “counter-nationalist movement”.

politics of Milošević and his avatars in Montenegro, as well as its right-wing counterparts in the opposition (Baća 2017c; Darmanović 2003; Komar 2015). However, after the first multiparty elections in December 1990, and the advent of wars in the region, the DPS successfully seized the state apparatus and began to shrink both the public sphere and the public space for dissenting opinion. Those who dared to speak out against their politics and policies were being framed – and thus depoliticized and delegitimized – as “enemies of the state” and a “threat to public order” (see Andrijašević 1999; Morrison 2009, 2018; Popović 2002). By 1991, therefore, the public sphere was closed and protesting against the government became a rather dangerous activity. Under such conditions, the post-socialist merger of party and the state occurred once again, so that the opposition had little hope of winning elections (Vujović and Komar 2008: 225–226).²⁷ Within such a configuration, formal political participation was reduced to ritualistic behaviour without genuine impact on the political process.

In a nutshell, while ethnocultural tensions informed political debates at the time, Montenegro was nonetheless different from the neighbouring countries in that political life there was not completely subsumed by the gravitational pull of competing ethnonationalisms (Darmanović 2003: 150; Gallagher 2003: 55). Instead, the main line of political conflict was between ethnically-defined parties favouring ethnic homogenization, and civic-minded political subjects opposing it (Bieber 2003: 16–29, Fink-Hafner 2008: 174–176; Morrison 2009: 89–141).²⁸ However, the Yugoslav wars (1991–1995) and the UN sanctions (1992–1996) gave the DPS a *carte blanche* to completely take control over the state apparatus and thus “squench critics and rivals” and ethnic minorities through intimidation/harassment (Darmanović 2003: 146-147; see also Kovačević 2007; Šístek and Dimitrovová 2003) and, in combination with clientelism in maintaining support (Sekelj 2000: 62), ensure electoral victory. Finally, it is important to note that political violence expressed predominantly through electoral violence played a consistent role

²⁷ Darmanović (2003: 146–147) succinctly explains how the DPS “held the system together” by employing a range of intimidation methods for maintaining popular support and harassing opposition: “party domination of the state-owned media; the packing of offices with party favorites; the maintenance of slush funds; occasional intimidation of adversaries; the abuse of police authority to influence the electoral process; and manipulations of the electoral system”. Moreover, subtle methods of clientelism – that play a central role in defining state–society relationship in Montenegro – were used to influence election outcomes, since there were about “300,000 recipients of state funds, or almost the same number as registered voters”, and “there is a clear link between this fact and support for the DPS” (Sekelj 2000: 62).

²⁸ While *ethnonational identity* may have replaced *political ideology* after the collapse of actually existing socialism, the ethnonational/civic division in Montenegro was also informed by ideological positions and historical political divisions, some of which had roots in the pre-socialist period. Ethnification of politics in Montenegro, therefore, predominantly manifested itself through party organization and its functioning on ethnic/national basis, but political divisions also ran along the “left–right” ideological scale (Sekelj 2000: 60, Morrison 2009). Further evidence of this claim stems from the fact that, unlike neighboring countries, Montenegro never had an extreme right-wing party, while those on the right either moved closer to the center or lost popular support to be in the parliament by 1997 (Darmanović 2003).

during Montenegro's democratization process, not as "a single isolated incident", but as a phenomenon that "emanates from the overall state of society itself" (Mocht'ak 2015: 98).²⁹ Therefore, even during democratization proper after 1997, election-related violence has remained a constant.

Civil Society. Just as in other post-socialist societies, the illiberal values, anti-democratic principles and (ethno)nationalist ideals that guided DPS politics – often manifesting as bigotry and xenophobia – came to be associated with the "uncivil society" (Kopecký and Mudde 2003: 2–5) as opposed to "civil society", a concept that during transition came to be (uncritically) synonymous "with all things virtuous, progressive, democratic, and just" (Stubbs 2007: 215). In effect, "civicness" and "civility" became important identity markers for the anti-regime movement of the 1990s (Baća 2017c), which was comprised of both formal and informal civic associations, writers' clubs, independent media outlets, public intellectuals, ethnic minorities, and some minor parliamentary parties (Keković 2005: 39–48; Komar 2015: 149; Muk et al. 2006: 8). Emerging from socialist Yugoslav-era ideals of anti-fascism and internationalism (Čagorović 1993, 2012), and promoting civic values – understood broadly as values supportive of ethnic/national tolerance, respect for human dignity, civil and political rights, and universal equality protected by the rule of law – this assemblage had its most distinct and visible manifestation in Montenegro's Anti-War Movement of the 1990s (Pavlović and Dragojević 2012). This loose network of social, political, and cultural actors was characterized by limited resources and insufficient organizational capacities, but reflected the genuine sentiments of those parts of the population that were pro-Western and opposed to ethno-nationalism, authoritarianism, and war. As opposed to the state-sponsored "societal organizations" aimed at non-political activities of service-provisioning and self-help activities, these "citizens' associations" created spaces – both public and private – in which dissenting voices could gather and deliberate, and also organized more contentious activities, such as anti-war and pro-independence street protests. However, the key importance of the "civic option" lies in the creation of a nationwide anti-regime movement for "national reconciliation" – formed by a coalition of Montenegro's then two strongest opposition parties, under the name "People's Unity" – that placed ethnopolitical differences to the side to focus

²⁹ Overall, during the 1990s, the opposition was subjected to "illegal house searches around the country, voters were intimidated by the police and there were incidents of harassment during public meetings and physical attacks", "acts of intimidation by the police and supporters of political parties", "the police even struck out with violence against a demonstrator shouting anti-government slogans", "acts of vandalism" against the headquarters of opposition parties, and the destruction of ballot boxes (Mocht'ak 2015: 105). Intimidations continued after that period as well, albeit through more subtle interference in the voting process.

instead on growing socio-economic problems as a unifying frame in fighting the DPS's authoritarian rule.

Economy. After the socio-economic crisis that marked the second half of the 1980s, deregulation of the Yugoslav economy began in early 1989, when “the market was opened to imports, prices were freed, the unlimited exchange of hard currency for dinars by both firms and individuals was made possible and the privatization of public property began”, whose benefits began to restore people’s faith in federal institutions (Lazić and Sekelj 1997: 1058).³⁰ The ultimate goal of this reform was the establishment of a new platform for reintegration of an already disintegrated Yugoslav society through a single market for labor, goods, and capital (Lazić and Sekelj 1997). However, the nationalist-oriented forces began to strengthen their own economic regulation at the expense of federal policies, until the reform-oriented federal government became the common enemy, which eventually led to the disintegration of the country in 1991.

The period following the failed reforms was essentially a period of re-nationalization of enterprises – or, more precisely, “statization of property” (Lazić and Sekelj 1997: 1064–1065) – under the label of “managerial transformation” (or “property/ownership transformation”). What was known as “social ownership” – based upon the constitutional concept of “self-management” where workers were property-owners – was eliminated in Montenegro and property was distributed between the employees of the respective “social enterprises” and the state funds, which gave power to the DPS to effectively centralize power through the control of enterprises and “the management of the entire economy” (Đurić 2003: 148; see also Uvalić 1997). As a result of this phase of economic restructuring – and particularly under international isolation and hyperinflation – larger enterprises declared bankruptcy and technically and economically redundant workers were laid-off. The loss of the single Yugoslav market and the progressive stagnation of industrial output eventually led to economic collapse and mass pauperization.³¹ This resulted in all-pervasive social insecurity and uncertainty which considerably affected the political process in Montenegro and, by proxy, civil society’s development.

³⁰ As Lazić and Sekelj show (1997) show, the result of Marković’s reforms was that 160,000 small and medium-sized private enterprises were founded in Yugoslavia (but by the end of 1991, only 45,000 remained), as well as an increase in hard currency reserves, a decrease in public debt, and the stabilization of foreign trade as an entire series of economic laws modeled upon the norms of the European Union were prepared and adopted. In other words, Montenegro, among other Yugoslav republics, entered the 1990s with a socio-economic configuration in which people were supposed to be less reliant upon the party and the state.

³¹ Average income became insufficient for basic subsistence, with about 30% of the population being poor (Đurić 2003).

Politically, this had two important effects. Firstly, a decrease in the number of workers in the economy (this number dropped by more than 30%) was followed by the gradual increase of those working in the public administration (one-third of the workforce by the end of 1990s) (Đurić 2003: 142). The government not only controlled public servants, but also took it upon itself to support laid-off workers based on their “political suitability” (Đurić 2003: 143). Secondly, the constantly rising high unemployment rate, the lowest average wage in the Balkans, and the plummeting standard of living pushed people to ensure their survival not only through these clientelistic networks, but also through the unprecedented escalation of the informal – also known as, “shadow” or “gray” – economy, which ranged from untaxed services, across participation in the black market, to smuggling (Đurić 1999).³² Đurić (2003: 145) labeled this as a “spontaneous movement for survival” in the context of failing institutions. However, this criminalization of everyday life was also accompanied by systemic corruption at the highest levels, where elites close to those in power used the opportunity to enrich themselves through corruption and machinations (Đurić 2003; Lazić and Sekelj 1997; Uvalić 1997). By the end of the decade, these elites emerged as the “winners of the transition”, while the middle class – and workers in particular – would come to be known as the “losers of the transition”.

Genuine Transition (1998–2006)

Two phases are important in this period during which Montenegro turned into a “social movement society” in terms of mass involvement in political life: firstly, the 1998–2000 period when the Montenegrin body politic was split between pro- and anti-Milošević forces; and, secondly, the 2001–2006 period when the emergence of statehood status as a central political question divided citizenry along ethnopolitical lines of conflict.

Polity. Economic hardships induced by Slobodan Milošević’s isolationist policies on the federal level resulted in a political schism that divided the DPS’s electoral base and eventually split Montenegrin citizens into two political camps of roughly equal size: an anti-Milošević alliance, now led by DPS reformists (financially and logistically supported by Western democracies), and a pro-Milošević bloc aligned with the DPS’s conservative wing (see Bieber

³² For instance, out of the 80,000 unemployed, around 30 to 40 per cent had unregistered employment (Đurić 2003). On one hand, the government had to turn a blind eye to these activities in order to maintain social peace and generate support, especially since the government itself kept the state budget afloat through criminal activities, such as the smuggling of cigarettes (Calhoun 2000b; Đurić 1999). On the other hand, almost 300,000 people were recipients of state funds, “or almost the same number as registered voters”, which gave the DPS an unprecedented pool of votes (Sekelj 2000: 62).

2003; Calhoun 2000b; Darmanović 2003; Morrison 2018).³³ Realizing they were losing support in the base, the reformist wing of the DPS had to appeal to their former opponents, those pursuing the “civic option”, who they had hitherto delegitimized and labelled “traitors” and “enemies of the state”: parliamentary opposition, civic associations, independent media, public intellectuals and, most importantly, ethnic minorities (see Darmanović 2003; Kovačević 2007). They reached an official deal in September, 1997, when DPS and progressive opposition forces signed the *Agreement on the Basic of Principles for the Development of Democratic Infrastructure in Montenegro*, a document enabling basic guarantees for free and fair elections.³⁴ Once the reformist candidate won the presidential elections, he formed a multi-ethnic coalition whose initial agreement on cooperation and subsequent coalition changed the political game completely, as it was “no longer a matter of the regime versus the opposition, but of regime reformists plus the opposition versus the pro-Milošević forces” (Darmanović 2003: 148–149). Building its political platform on the ideas of the “civic option”, the new coalition was based on a platform promising economic and political reforms; minority rights and an end to international isolation; as well as a free, multiethnic, democratic society, with stronger ties to the affluent Western democracies (Cross and Komenich 2005).³⁵ Moreover, political and economic reforms and cooperation with the international community implied disassociation from federal institutions.³⁶ For instance, in order to defend Montenegrin autonomy from Milošević’s aggressive politics and policies, Montenegro

³³ This confrontation was not only around political issues, but also among the ruling elites about the sharing of profits from the government smuggling operations that kept the economy afloat (Calhoun 2000b: 66). By mid-1997, this struggle for power and influence within the DPS manifested itself as an ideological struggle pro- and contra-Milošević (Vujović and Komar 2008: 226; Torch 2014: 26–27).

³⁴ When the reformist wing of DPS turned to its former progressive opponents, it asked for their support during presidential elections in exchange for genuine democratization of the polity. The democratic opposition had been advocating this platform for years, but “unlike them, [the DPS] was in a position to secure victory: [it] had the power apparatus behind [it] and [it] also possessed sufficient funds for an effective campaign” (Caspersen 2003: 108). The reformist wing of DPS, on the other hand, was perceived as the “lesser of two evils” and thus the opposition’s only chance for overthrowing Milošević’s forces in Montenegro (Kovačević 2007: 75–77). Moreover, the support of the Albanian and Bosniak voters, who constituted over 20% of the Montenegrin population, ensured DPS’s victory in the context of a divided Slavic-Orthodox population (Caspersen 2003: 108).

³⁵ The DPS government began to pursue “economic and political reforms with support from Western experts and donors” (Darmanović 2003: 145). This reified Montenegro’s pro-Western course, with its president stating that “Europe is our only possible choice”, implying that “European civilization” – political liberalism, cultural diversity and market economy – is Montenegro’s natural habitat (Calhoun 2000: 71). As Gow (1999: 287) explains, “Westerns’ support for [the DPS] was partly predicated on the judgement that, in the absence of credible opposition in Serbia, [it] constituted the only serious opposition to Milošević in the Yugoslav context”. Moreover, Montenegro became a safe haven and logistical basis for Milošević’s Serbia-based opposition, thus branding itself as “a miracle in the Balkans” in the eyes of the international community.

³⁶ This political strategy came to be known as the “Montenegro First” policy, which underlined the idea that the federation could not be supported at any cost, especially not at the expense of Montenegrin interests (Gallagher 2003: 55). By 1999, Montenegro began to boycott federal institutions and elections. As Whyte (2006: 26) explains, “Serbia refused to allow representatives of [the Montenegrin] government to participate in federal structures, and where Montenegrin appointments were required under the constitution, the job went to members of the [former pro-Milošević] opposition”. Even though the political polarization began over issues of political and economic reforms, pressures from Belgrade began to show their unintended consequences: Milošević’s aggressive anti-Montenegrin policies gradually pushed the DPS closer to a separatist stance, contributing to resentment toward Yugoslavia since a growing number of people began to view Montenegro as a victim in the federation.

had to become a *de facto* independent state. By 2000, Montenegro had separate government, state budget, police, customs, central banks, and currencies, with the Yugoslav federal authorities enjoying continued presence only through the army and air-traffic control (Calhoun 2000b: 63; Gallagher 2003: 58; Whyte 2006: 26).³⁷ Milošević's fall also marked an end of the anti-Milošević coalition. Once the uniting factor disappeared, the future of Montenegro came onto the agenda. The result of the fall of Milošević was therefore increased polarization within Montenegro over the issue of statehood. Once again, the political game was changed with two "blocs" emerging, but this time "instead of being for or against Milošević, they became for or against the country's independence" (Vujović and Komar 2008: 226–227; see also Bieber 2003; Fink-Hafner 2008).

Prior to the fall of Milošević, the Montenegrin government had stated that it could not be a "prisoner of Milošević's politics" by waiting for Serbia to democratize. However, when Milošević acknowledged his defeat in October of 2000, the primary argument for Montenegrin independence disappeared. But, "by then, the process had gained its own momentum and backtracking proved difficult" (Caspersen 2003: 111) since the new, post-1997 ruling establishment had "tasted some of the fruits of *de facto* independence" (Roberts 2002: 6). This effect was most evident among the emerging political, business, and intellectual elite with a strong interest in continued separation from Serbia (Simić 2002: 203). In other words, the fall of Milošević did not bring a resolution to the Serbian–Montenegrin conflict, but, rather, the dynamics of the conflict changed: instead of being ideologico-political, the political field was completely colonized by ethno-politics. The statehood issue was temporarily solved by establishing the new state union of Serbia and Montenegro in March 2003, but neither republic was committed to it. The DPS began forming a nationwide movement for independence that won 55.5% of the vote during the historic referendum of May 2006.

Civil Society. One of the key roles in both the anti-Milošević and pro-independence movements was played by externally funded NGOs, which first emerged in the late 1990s and were consolidated in the first half of the 2000s. On the positive side, international financial and logistical support fostered organizational capacity building; increased the political capital of civil

³⁷ This monetary separation, and growing economic independence from Belgrade, made the government of Montenegro assume control of customs and its borders and the collection of duties and taxes within them. Moreover, knowing Milošević's tendency to resolve problems through armed conflicts, the DPS-controlled government "built up a 20,000-strong force of loyal, motivated, and reasonably well-armed police personnel" (Gallagher 2003: 58). This police force would remain one of his key strengths in securing power and strengthening the state apparatus and its capacity.

society; and promoted liberal values of tolerance, human rights, and the rule of law.³⁸ On the negative side, however, this international support effectively narrowed the scope of civil society activity to that of a professionalized *civil sector* (Baća 2017d; see also Komar 2015; Vujović 2017). As observed in other post-socialist and (post-)transition societies in CEE, which I will discuss in detail in *Chapter I*, the advent of foreign donor assistance in civil society building pushed NGOs towards practical activities aimed at decision- and policy-makers – through advocacy, lobbying, and expertise – rather than reaching out to a broader layer of citizens and pushing their demands into public spaces. Therefore, externally-sponsored civil society building resulted in producing well-developed structures within a non-profit “third sector”, populated mainly by advocacy organizations that were professionally managed and, as such, accountable primarily to their donors, instead of being responsive to the needs of the local population. Therefore, NGOs established in Montenegro were not organizational platforms based on individual participation and mobilization, but were instead professional and clientelist in function, with little interest in mobilizing society or challenging dominant power relations. On several occasions, however, Montenegrin NGOs did serve as brokers between civil society and the state by facilitating inclusion of marginalized voices in public dialogue and decision-making processes, thus temporarily creating channels for people to influence political processes outside party (and kin-based) structures (see Baća 2017d; Komar 2015; Vujović 2017). As such, under Western sponsorship, the civil sector was there to ensure a smooth political and socio-economic transition to liberal democracy and a market economy. This was also a period during which independent media began to emerge and eventually would establish itself as important political actors (see Morrison 2009). Also, trade unions were gradually being coopted by the state apparatus, which reduced contentious politics to a growing wave of mostly wildcat working-class strikes by rank-and-file workers, which challenged corrupt privatizations and the frequent violations of Montenegrin labour law through militant grassroots actions (Kilibarda 2016).

What was most important for civil society in this phase was that the Montenegrin body politic became deeply divided along two axes: politico-ideological (1997–2000) and ethno-political (2001–2006). On the level of individual involvement in political affairs, it was turned into a “very Balkan version of a social movement society” in which everyone participated and movements

³⁸ On the other hand, the long defunct tradition of tribal assemblies was resurrected by the late 1990s, becoming a prominent political organizational platform among more conservative parts of the population (Calhoun 2000: 33, 37–40).

signaled different visions of what Montenegro was, is, and should be (Baća 2017d: 36).³⁹ While scholars characterize the 1997–2000 divisions as essentially political in nature, the ensuing ethnonational identity divisions within the dominant Slavic-Orthodox population – between Montenegrins and Serbs – were significantly informed by these political – or, more precisely, ideological – differences between “reformists” and “traditionalists”.⁴⁰ Namely, the multiethnic coalition built around the “lesser evil” in 1997 began to (re)articulate Montenegrin national identity as *inclusive* and, hence, not essentially based on a particular ethnic composition or sense of religious belonging (see Džankić 2014; Jenne and Bieber 2014). As such, it was ideologically framed in liberal, “civic” terms as multiethnic, multicultural, “urban”, and pro-Western in a sense that it became closely tied to what is often referred to as “European and Euro-Atlantic values” (Baća 2017c). On the other hand, the Milošević-sponsored “traditionalists” slid into exclusive Serbian nationalism and effectively rendered its supporters the “political Serbs”, throwing an entire ethnic group into what I elsewhere called *double ghettoization* (see Baća 2017c). On one level, it was ghettoized “from above”, by the state apparatus: during its struggle with Milošević, the SNP and its supporters were often being accused by the ruling establishment of being an “anti-systemic” and “anti-Montenegrin” element (Strmiska 2000).⁴¹ In a reaction to the politicization of Montenegrin identity as inclusive, the Serbian elites unintentionally further ghettoized their constituency – and thus the ethnic group in its entirety – “from below”, by tying it to conservative values, anti-Western sentiments, Serbian nationalism, and ties to the highly politicized Serbian Orthodox Church. This framing effectively demonstrated its ethnonationalist rather than civic outlook, which made it easy for the state propaganda to (re)present the political role assumed by the Serb ethnic group as “the ugly face of the 1990s”, a time when the non-Slavic-Orthodox ethnic minorities were repressed by the very same DPS regime that now claimed to protect them (see Šístek and Dimitrovová 2003). Ultimately, the DPS was successful in establishing itself not only

³⁹ As (ethno)political entrepreneurs mobilized popular support along the independence/union cleavage, the citizenry itself became deeply divided and invested on this issue. While these ethnopositional divisions tended to create insurmountable differences between “political (pro-independence) Montenegrins” and “political (pro-union) Serbs”, the case of the nationwide mobilizations in 2004 to protect the Tara Canyon from being exploited for its hydro-electric potential showed how environmental issues had the power to push beyond dominant ethnopositional frameworks, mobilizing Montenegro’s citizens across existing socio-political cleavages to protect common resources (see Baća 2017b; Komar 2015).

⁴⁰ Ever since a split in the DPS, society became severely divided along ethnic-cum-political lines. Numerous families were divided (and to some extent antagonized) along ethnic/national lines, as it was not uncommon for one member of a family to feel Montenegrin and the other, Serb (Forbess 2013; Jenne and Bieber 2014).

⁴¹ These identity shifts in the Slavic-Orthodox population had a geographical component. Between 1991 and 2003, “a greater proportion of residents in northern districts (bordering on Serbia) identified as Serb, while the residents of central and coastal districts (associated with the historical Montenegrin state) continued to identify as Montenegrin” (Jenne and Bieber 2014: 434–435; see also Cattaruzza 2011).

as the embodiment of Montenegrin national identity and independence, but its rule as the *only* guarantee of the Montenegrin polity's nominal civic composition and pro-Western course.

Economy. Once the Montenegrin government took an anti-Milošević course, it was supported by the US and the EU with significant financial donations that effectively kept the Montenegrin economy afloat (see Đurić 2003; Morrison 2009).⁴² In combination with logistical support and expertise provided by the international community, Montenegro was on a path to economic independence from the federal government. Legislation that regulated privatization of the previously transformed “social enterprises” was adopted in 1996, but due to political turmoil it was implemented slowly until 2001, when mass voucher privatization – a concept supported by the majority of people – was completed (Đurić 2003). Since the state had a total monopoly over the privatization process, the DPS seized an opportunity to produce a loyal economic elite, thus “ensuring that the process developed to their own advantage” (Lazić 2018: 145). This political-cum-economic oligarchy was efficient not only in putting personal interests over national interests, but also in framing personal enrichment as a matter of the common good (Morrison 2009: 229), despite the fact that the entire privatization process was characterized by predatory enclosures. For example, new owners often used bankruptcy as a method of displacing the social costs and risks associated with privatization onto the public, which effectively resulted in quick profits at the expense of production through manipulation of the political economy of transition (Kilibarda 2016). Unlike the first phase, when poverty was almost equally distributed, during this phase, socio-economic inequalities began to develop gradually. However, due to having to ensure support for its strategic projects in the context of deeply polarized society along (ethno)political lines of conflict, the DPS-led government used state resources to strengthen clientelistic networks and maintain social peace (Lazić 2018; Petrović 2018). However, once these goals were achieved in 2006, the privatization process became “aggressive and rapid”, and, in combination with the influx of foreign direct investment, it “created a new, and often brash, nouveau riche at the expense of many ordinary citizens” (Morrison 2018: 143).

In essence, the DPS used financial resources – coupled with legitimization of its politics and policies from the Western powers – to coopt its pre-1997 opponents and foster the formation

⁴² As Đurić (2003: 155) illustrates, “the scope of this aid is sufficiently illustrated by the statistic that, in 1999–2000, Montenegro received the highest aid per capita granted by the US government to a foreign country with the exception only of Israel”. However, after the fall of Milošević, this aid was reduced. For instance, “for 2001, foreign aid (mainly from the USA and the European Union) was planned at a level of DM 60m, although less than half this amount was actually disbursed”.

of cultural, social, and intellectual elites by building their careers in business and state administration, university, and media (Morrison 2018: 136).⁴³ On the other hand, where it could not ensure support through clientelistic mechanisms, the DPS turned to influencing electoral outcomes through intimidation and harassment (Mochťak 2015). Those political, intellectual, cultural, and ultimately civil society actors who remained critical of the government and, in particular, of its “strategic goals”, were gradually pushed to the margins.

Conclusion

Once rendered through the process-mechanism approach of the dynamics of contention theoretical model, the 1989–2006 period analyzed here can be divided into four distinct subperiods, each characterized by a distinct combination of mechanisms and processes. To reiterate, mechanisms “produce the same immediate effects over a wide range of circumstances”, while processes “assemble mechanisms into different sequences and combinations, thus producing larger-scale outcomes than any single mechanism” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 240, 241). According to Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam (2001: 305–347), these are key mechanisms: *boundary-activation* that creates a new delimitation between two actors, *certification* by external authority that recognizes and supports actors, *identity-shift* that results in the formation of new identities and commonalities between former opponents, *repression* that denotes use of force by the state against its challengers for social control, *suppression* as a more subtle way of controlling and discouraging dissent, *brokerage* that entails creation of new connections between previously unconnected actors, *coordination* that denotes engagement in parallel claim-making, *diffusion* that entails spread of a form of contention or a way of framing, *category-formation* through which new identities are created, and *emulation* by which collective action mirrors the actions of others. For their part, key processes are as follows: *mobilization* that denotes involvement of passive actors in claim-making, while *demobilization* is used to label disengagement of these actors; *actor-constitution* by which new political actors are created on the public scene; *scale shift* that denotes a change in the number and level of contentious actions; and *polarization* that denotes widening of political and social divisions between actors by pushing them into extremes.

⁴³ By 1998, “only 95 small and medium-sized enterprises had been privatized in Montenegro, with foreign capital invested in just five firms”, meaning that about 9,000 employees worked in privatized enterprises at the time (Đurić 2003: 149). However, with privatization set in motion after the 2000s, the DPS gained support also with a series of new tax laws, enacted early in 2002, and a program of legalization of the shadow economy (Đurić 2003: 155), where legalization became *de facto* a clientelist mechanism.

Based on this framework, the following mechanisms and processes can be extrapolated from the literature on Montenegro (see *Table 1*):

Table 1. Key mechanisms and processes that characterized Montenegro’s post-socialist transition.

	1989–1990	1991–1997	1998–2000	2001–2006
Mechanisms:				
Brokerage/Coordination	X		X	X
Repression	X	X		
Suppression				X
Category-Formation	X		X	X
Certification		X	X	X
Boundary-Activation	X	X	X	X
Identity Shift			X	X
Emulation	X	X		
Diffusion		X	X	X
Processes:				
Demobilization	X	X		
Mobilization			X	X
Scale Shift			X	
Actor-Constitution	X		X	
Polarization			X	X

When applied to the socio-political situation in Montenegro between 1989 and 1990, I discern the following mechanisms:

- *Brokerage* – After the Antibureaucratic Revolution, in order to show their difference from the “alienated” and “bureaucratized” predecessors, the new party-state actors were open to impulses “from below”, thus enabling state-owned public spaces – including the media – to open for public discussions about democratization of the polity and transformation of the economy. In that regard, the party-state served as a broker in facilitating a wide range of opinions. Moreover, trade unions, workers’ collectives, professional association, local community organizations, and other sites and networks for organizing in socialist times remained strong brokers and platforms for voicing dissent.
- *Repression* – Repressive mechanisms were developing gradually, as the conflict within the Yugoslav republics intensified. Coming under Milošević’s patronage, the party-state became more repressive to those voices that were critical of it and supportive of the federal government and its reforms. These critical voices began to leave the official socio-political structures and form both formal and informal associations, some of which became open political actors.

- *Category-Formation and Boundary-Activation* – During this period, there was a proliferation of diverse political and ideological stances in the public space, with only those that were deemed “separatist” being demonized and shamed. By the end of the period, a boundary was created between pro-Milošević “traditionalists” and pro-Marković “reformers”, with the Montenegrin party-state siding with the former. The latter were gradually delegitimized as opponents of Yugoslav socialism.
- *Emulation* – Due to the presence of certain civil society actors, such as trade unions and local community organizations, collective action was modeled on the actions of others, with modular forms of contention (e.g., strikes, boycotts) being present. Moreover, both informal networks and emerging citizens’ associations were emulating organizations and their repertoires of action from the metropolitan centers in Yugoslavia.

From this pattern of mechanisms, two distinct processes can be discerned in this period:

- *Demobilization* – In terms of mass participation and making (contentious) collective claims, people were demobilized outside their socio-political duties within their workspaces, with predominantly elites participating in public discussions.
- *Actor-constitution* – Emergence of politically-oriented actors outside official state-sponsored societal organizations, as well as the proliferation of political parties during the first multiparty elections.

When applied to the socio-political situation in Montenegro between 1991 and 1997, I discern the following mechanisms:

- *Repression* – With the advent of wars in the region, and subsequent international isolation, the newly elected DPS government became an openly repressive regime. Despite the introduction of political pluralism and multiparty elections, the opposition and its supporters were systematically harassed, demonized, and delegitimized as “traitors” and “enemies of Yugoslavia”.
- *Certification and Boundary-Activation* – Only those supporting the official state politics and policies were certified as “loyal citizens”, and only compliant, non-political societal organizations were supported. The “civic opposition”, comprised of both formal and informal actors, continued to push for genuine democratization of the country, despite its high cost. In a word, a boundary between the regressive “nationalist” regime (and some parts

of the right-wing opposition) and the progressive “civic option” came into being, with the latter being delegitimized and oppressed.

- *Emulation* – Those who opposed the ruling regime’s war-mongering, nationalism, and authoritarianism had limited resources and no infrastructure for big actions, so they emulated repertoires of action used predominantly by the Serbian opposition: independent publishing, (semi)-public gatherings and deliberations, and occasional street demonstrations.
- *Diffusion* – With people being afraid both because of a repressive regime and a socio-economic crisis, the majority retreated and relied on their family and friendship networks. Cooperation and participation in the informal economy as “a spontaneous movement for survival” was diffused across the country.

From this pattern of mechanisms, one distinct process can be discerned in this period:

- *Demobilization* – While voter turnouts were high, people were mostly focused on keeping quiet to ensure basic subsistence. With anti-regime activities being costly, only a small percentage of activists remained involved in contentious politics.

When applied to the socio-political situation in Montenegro between 1998 and 2000, I discern the following mechanisms:

- *Brokerage and Coordination* – Both the Montenegrin government and the federal government in Belgrade served as brokers in the constitution of two political blocs. The Montenegrin government was more successful in connecting previously diverse, even antagonized, social groups, civil society organizations, informal networks, and political parties across ethnonational cleavages into the anti-Milošević movement, while the pro-Milošević camp mainly homogenized the conservative, traditionalist Slavic-Orthodox population. This brokerage greatly increased the material and symbolic resources at the disposal of both sides, and improved coordination across the two poles of the divided society.
- *Certification and Boundary-Activation* – Not only were claims of the previously repressed “anti-regime” political actors and social movements recognized by the Montenegrin authorities, but they were also supported financially and logistically. While the pro-Milošević counter-movement was certified by the federal government, the reformist movement was also certified by the Western powers. This significantly lowered the costs of communication, coordination, and resource mobilization. There was also boundary

activation between a repressive regime and reformation as a way of creating new boundaries between two movements.

- *Identity Shift and Category-Formation* – With the disappearance of previous political distinctions, two new political subjectivities emerged around Milošević: his supporters and his opponents. This identity shift was a form of category-formation through the attribution of similarity in two ways: firstly, by creating a unified identity for achieving a common goal, and, secondly, through political subjectivation of previously non-political actors – from an individual to a collective level.
- *Diffusion* – Having other mechanisms in mind, the way this division was framed spread quickly across society, with people becoming deeply divided and involved in movements, thus escalating to become a nationwide polarization.

From this pattern of mechanisms, four distinct processes can be discerned in this period:

- *Mobilization* – Due to the nature of the conflict and opening of the system, as well as the increase in incentives involved for participation and resources for collective claim-making, people were mobilizing into two camps in high numbers.
- *Scale shift* – With state resources available to each socio-political bloc, the scale of contention shifted from localized resistance (to the regime and its policies and practices) to a nationwide conflict.
- *Polarization* – Montenegrin body politic was divided into two ideologico-political extremes: one pro-Milošević, the other anti-Milošević.
- *Actor-constitution* – Constitution of two socio-political blocs occurred: one pro-Milošević, the other anti-Milošević.

And, finally, when applied to the socio-political situation in Montenegro between 2001 and 2006, I discern the following mechanisms:

- *Brokerage and Coordination* – Brokerage and coordination by Podgorica and Belgrade continued, although two things changed: firstly, this pattern was not happening in a hostile environment (where the escalation of a civil war was looming large), but in a rather democratic competition, and, secondly, the poles changed – it was now a competition between pro- and anti-independence movements. This brokerage severely increased material and symbolic resources at the disposal of both sides, and improved coordination across the

two poles of the divided society. The pro-camp had better brokerage and coordination because it possessed better know-how obtained during the previous period, especially amongst the emerging NGO elites.

- *Suppression* – A non-threatening government in Belgrade focused on its own reforms meant less support for the anti-independence bloc, but also gave more leeway to the Montenegrin government to engage in suppression, such as employment discrimination, surveillance, threats, infiltration, clientelism, prosecution, hearing, and mass-media manipulation.
- *Certification and Boundary-Activation* – Once again, both political movements were recognized and supported by the two governments in the federation, but this time boundary-activation was between two ethnopolitically divided camps. Moreover, what changed was also that both movements were certified by the international community as having equal standing.
- *Identity Shift and Category-Formation* – With the disappearance of the ideologico-political distinction, two new political subjectivities emerged around the statehood status issue: those in favour of an independent Montenegro and those in favour of continued union with Serbia. This identity shift occurred through a category formation that was also *ethnopolitical*.
- *Diffusion* – As in the previous period, the new ethnopolitical framing of divisions within society spread quickly, with people once again becoming deeply divided and involved in two nationwide socio-political movements.

From these mechanisms, two distinct processes can be discerned from the presented material in this period:

- *Mobilization* – With the Montenegrin government set to achieve independence, incentives increased for participation. Moreover, democratization of the regime in Serbia also increased incentives to participate for those who supported the union. In short, the entire population was mobilized in two movements.
- *Polarization* – Montenegrin society was totally polarized into two socio-political movements: one pro-independence, the other pro-union.

Having these mechanisms and processes in mind, I will analyze the empirical reality of actually existing contentious practices in Montenegro from 1989 to 2006, and analyze whether – and to what extent – these patterns affected the forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices in Montenegro.

Structure of the Dissertation

In this introduction, I have provided the socio-political context of Montenegro, with a particular focus on three dimensions of its historical development during the post-socialist period. I have structured the remaining chapters of the dissertation as follows:

- *Chapter I* presents a critical review, summary, and synthesis of literature on post-socialist civil society and contentious politics. I situate this literature within the larger framework of civil society and social movement studies, by taking a critical sociological perspective to inaugurate *critical postsocialist studies*. I also theoretically account for and postulate *contentious practices* as the unit of observation/analysis in the context of post-socialist Montenegro, and call for a more practice-oriented approach towards civil society building in CEE.
- *Chapter II* is an empirical chapter and covers contentious practices during the period from 1989 to 1990, that is, after the Antibureaucratic Revolution and up to the first multiparty elections in December 1990. By illuminating the empirical reality of the contentious practices of this period, I demonstrate how the reformist ideas proclaimed during this historical period have been carried on through these practices and, in turn, have legitimized the engagement of citizens outside of institutionally-mediated venues of participation as the key agents of socio-political change.
- *Chapter III* is an empirical chapter and covers contentious practices during the period from 1991 to 1997, that is, after the first multiparty election and up to formation of the Anti-Milošević coalition at the end of 1997. By illuminating the empirical reality of contentious practices in this period, I demonstrate how civil society was not weak, but that it's *a(anti)politicality* and the civic foundations of the democratization process in Montenegro were actively articulated through contentious practices.
- *Chapter IV* is an empirical chapter and covers contentious practices during the period from 1998 to 2000, that is, after the formation of Anti-Milošević coalition in 1998 to the centring of the issue of statehood status by the end of 2000. By illuminating the empirical reality of contentious practices in this period, I demonstrate how the democratization process in Montenegro during this period not only opened the system for civil society actors to participate through institutional channels, but simultaneously delegitimized *political*

protest and legitimized contentious practices as a way to address predominantly socio-economic hardships and everyday life issues.

- *Chapter V* is an empirical chapter and covers contentious practices during the period from 2001 to 2006, that is, with the beginning of the fight for independence to the independence referendum in May 2006. By illuminating the empirical reality of contentious practices in this period, I demonstrate how the synchronized acceleration of macro-processes – such as democratization of the polity, privatization of the economy, and NGO-ization of civil society, in a radically changed relationship between Montenegro and Serbia – reduced people’s engagement in contentious practices and directed it toward a set of specific issues that had been pervasive throughout previous periods (e.g., socio-economic, everyday life, environmental), effectively concluding the depoliticization process of contentious activities.
- The conclusion takes findings from all chapters into account and provides a diachronic perspective to discuss how each macro-process affected contentious practices and vice versa. Moreover, it demonstrates the theoretical and conceptual bearings of this case study on debates in civil society studies, social movement studies, and, more broadly, the political sociology of post-socialist transformation.

Towards a Practice-Oriented Approach to Post-Socialist Civil Society Building

Introduction

There is a growing consensus among scholars about the need for a critical reassessment of post-socialist civil societies, on theoretical, conceptual, and empirical grounds (Bieber and Brentin 2018; Cisar 2013, 2017; Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Foa and Ekiert 2017; Gagyí 2015a, 2015b; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015; Razsa 2015). In recent years, a number of works have critically addressed the ways in which post-socialist civil society has been defined and assessed, paying special attention to the conceptual and empirical indicators used, firstly, to measure its strength (e.g., voluntary associations, individual participation) and density (e.g., organizational composition), and, secondly, to assess the character (e.g., “civil” or “uncivil”) of civil societies in the region, particularly in relation to the political dimension of civil society as evidenced through practices that are referred to in numerous ways: “social activism”, “civic engagement”, “unconventional/non-institutional political participation”, “popular politics”, “protest politics”, “social movements”, “radical politics”, “activist citizenship”, etc. What is lacking, however, is a critical reading of this theoretically, methodologically, and ideologically diverse body of work and a synthesis of its empirical findings and theoretical implications, as well as, more broadly, theorization of the post-socialist experience of “civil society building” into a unified whole.⁴⁴ In this chapter, I critically interrogate the theoretical frameworks, conceptual apparatuses, methodological limitations, and ideological biases that have been explicitly used in – or that, conversely, have implicitly underpinned – dominant approaches to post-socialist civil society (building) and, by extension, social movements and other forms of contentious politics in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).⁴⁵ By proposing *contentious*

⁴⁴ While I am aware of the differences between historical trajectories of each post-socialist country, regimes of actually existing socialism, political cultures within each country, as well as diverging models of transition and Europeanization, democratization and privatization strategies, and actual paths after the historical 1989 (which in some countries included both state- and nation-building), my goal here is to identify and theorize the lowest common denominator in the “post-socialist experience” – or, better yet, of the “post-socialist condition” – that can provide fruitful empirical, conceptual and theoretical input for civil society and social movement studies. Therefore, all specificities between countries taken into account, as well as between state–society relationships that exist in the region, I am synthesizing findings based on research of actually existing civil societies in the post-socialist space.

⁴⁵ I use CEE to designate former socialist countries of the Southeast Europe, East-Central Europe, the Baltic Region, and the Russian Federation.

practices as the unit of observation/analysis, I aim to achieve two goals in this chapter. The first is to amend the dominant notion of *post-socialist civil society* and to develop a conceptual framework that can grasp the empirical reality of practices of contestation in the actually existing civil societies in CEE and, by extension, Montenegro – spanning from one-man protests, across experimentation with direct democracy, to large-scale demonstrations. The second objective is to demonstrate how analysis of the post-socialist experience offers a unique opportunity to connect civil society and social movement studies into a unified whole.⁴⁶ While there is a substantial overlap between the two literatures, studying civic engagement and civil society organizations on one side, and analyzing protest politics and social movements on the other, represent two disconnected approaches when it comes to investigating CEE.

Using a historically and geographically contingent experience for theory production is not novel, especially not among researchers interested in contentious politics. As Tilly and others (e.g., McAdam et al. 1996, 2001; Tilly 1999; Tilly and Wood 2012; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) demonstrate, conceptual boundaries and empirical indications in social movement studies have been informed predominantly by the historical and cultural experience of affluent Western democracies. In a word, social movement studies remain an overly parochial discipline to this very day (Poulson et al. 2014; Sheoin 2016). Similarly, research on social engagement and popular politics in the global South has given birth to the related but distinctive interdisciplinary field of *resistance studies* (Cox et al. 2017; Johanson and Vinthagen 2016). Experience of societies of the so-called “actually existing socialism”, on the other hand, have become irrelevant for theory production in these respective fields. Predominantly observed through an *Orientalist*-like lens (e.g, Chari and Verdery 2009; Hann 2002; Jezernik 2004; Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008; Todorova 2009), the post-socialist space has thus been reduced to a source of empirical material to apply theories and concepts developed from the experience of core countries; as such, these theories were used to benchmark the “health” of civil societies in the region that were supposed to “catch up” to their Western counterparts. For instance, when communist regimes began collapsing in 1989, some scholars reacted enthusiastically to the potential theoretical significance of social movements emerging during and after 1989 (e.g. Frank 1990; Tarrow 1991), but this fervor quickly dissipated when studies showed that the post-socialist transition was characterized by mass withdrawal from

⁴⁶ As Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2017: 3) point out, for a proper understanding of actually existing civil societies in CEE, it is necessary to bridge “established analytical divisions between civil society research on the one hand and social movement studies on the other”. Similar to these authors, I argue that the practice-based approach to civil society building is a way to unify these two research traditions.

public life and the professionalization of activism (e.g. Bernhard 1996; Carothers 1999; Flam 2001a; Howard 2002, 2003; Narozhna 2004; Rose et al. 1997; Stubbs 1996). Eventually, phrases such as “democracies without citizens” or “civil societies without engagement” began to proliferate in NGO and media reports to describe the condition of post-socialist transformation, while the notorious thesis of “weak post-socialist civil society” (Howard 2002, 2003) became a taken-for-granted truism among academics interested in the region – that is, until relatively recently.

Unlike postcolonialism, which became a highly influential critical standpoint and analytical lens in the humanities and, to some extent, in sociology (Go 2016), post-socialism was doomed to become an “area studies” problem, almost exclusively dominated by political science and economics, two disciplines oversaturated with liberal teleology and its underpinning universalism (Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Hann 2002; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Killingsworth 2012). The essentially normative understanding of civil society used and promoted by these two disciplines had a profound effect on how the elites, media, public institutions, and local academia in CEE envisioned and legitimized civil society, effectively representing post-socialist societies as underdeveloped – often described as “primitive” and “backward” – and thus in dire need of “catching up” with Western liberal democracies and their civic culture. For these reasons, the strength, density, and character of post-socialist civic societies was assessed by transitologists and democratization theorists who were investigating similarities among democratization processes between old and emerging democracies, while at the same time dismissing regional specificities – historical, socio-political, and cultural, among others – as non-important features, if not outright labeling them as “pathologies” (Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Hann and Dunn 1996). This normative, and essentially reductionist, conceptualization of civil society effectively excluded and delegitimized not only social actors that did not fit the liberal agenda (or transitological expectations), but also more informal types of civic initiatives/associations and all those radical, subversive, and contentious tactics of everyday resistance and repertoires of political contention used by civil society actors in achieving their objectives outside of existing institutional frameworks (Fagan and Sircar 2018; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Kopecký and Mudde 2003a, 2003b; Piotrowski 2009, 2015). Eventually, the “weak civil society” thesis was taken for granted as self-evident truth, and the region became uninteresting and uninviting for social movement scholars. It

was condemned to be an “area studies problem” that needed fixing through the “one size fits all” theoretical approach of transitology and democratization theory, while its empirical reality remained unknown.

I argue in this chapter that the “post-socialist condition” cannot be understood simply as a period *after* socialism, but as a complex matrix of externally-sponsored, top-down processes of transition to the liberal understanding of democratic polity, market economy, and civil society. This condition was a period of ambiguous *in-betweenness* – between the state socialist past and liberal democratic future that was essentially, in Gramsci’s (1971: 276) words, a period during which “the old [was] dying and the new [could not] be born”. Understood as a state or “condition” of liminality – an *interregnum* – “transition” can be used to describe complex structural changes that occurred in the nexus of state–market–society during the 1989–2006 period: *political* transition, *economic* restructuring, *societal* transformation, and *cultural* adaptation. In that regard, post-socialist societies today can also be described as *post-transitional*.⁴⁷ As such, this unique historical experience brought into being post-socialist civil societies with shared features that are, nonetheless, distinctive from those in the old democracies, post-authoritarian regimes, or even the post-colonial world. By focusing on contentious practices, I demonstrate the vibrancy of civil society at the grassroots level, beyond the transactional (cooperative, non-contentious) activities of the civil sector.

Only a few attempts relevant to the study of civil society and contentious politics have been made using the post-socialist experience as the basis for critical work and theoretical framing informing broader debates in the social sciences (see Chari and Verdery 2009; Gagyí 2015a, 2015b; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008). For this reason, my goal in this chapter is to amend the dominant models of civil society and contentious politics theory by developing a conceptual framework based on the post-socialist experience with the aim of grasping the empirical reality of practices of contestation in Montenegro. In doing so, I draw from a diverse body of work – namely, critical sociology (Kurasawa 2017a, 2017b), the “practice turn” in social theory (Schatzki et al. 2001), the sociology of critical capacity (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 2006), citizenship studies (Isin 2008, 2009), state-of-the-art research on post-socialist civil society and contentious politics (Bieber and Brentin 2018; Cisar 2013, 2017; Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Foa and Ekiert

⁴⁷ Some can be also designated as “post-conflict societies”, especially those in the post-Yugoslav region.

2017; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015; Razsa 2015) – to introduce the concept of “contentious practice” as the unit of observation/analysis, one that possesses the analytical and heuristic bandwidth required to capture all forms of extra-institutional participation in civil societies whose defining feature is a(anti)political civic engagement (see Gagyí 2015a, 2015b; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Piotrowski 2015; Pleyers and Sava 2015). This conceptualization allows us to critically examine *all* actions that operate outside institutional channels and produce new *sites* of social enunciation, new *forms* of civic participation, and new *modes* of political being as empirical indicators of civil society: from everyday resistance, across protest politics, to experimentation with direct democracy. Simply put, I focus on practices through which citizens act directly, by abandoning routinized, institutional(ized) venues of participation to exercise their agency.

In the following pages, I respond theoretically to the calls for a revised research agenda to study contentious politics in the post-socialist civil societies of CEE (e.g., Ekiert and Kubik 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017), an agenda that includes fewer assumptions – even prejudices – about the nature of civil society and its relationship to democracy. Adopting a critical sociological stance, I investigate why and how citizens challenged power structures, and how they justified their actions against the backdrop of macro-processes that shaped how grievances were articulated and collective actions were enacted in public spaces during a process of profound social change and institutional engineering.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first, I discuss how civil society and movement-related activities were studied in the post-socialist space of CEE, and simultaneously expose theoretical and methodological limitations of their focus on individual attitudes and organizational density. The second part focuses on existing work on social movements and contentious politics, in order to demonstrate how popular politics is a neglected dimension that must be understood if we are to understand civil society building “from below” in CEE. By exposing and critiquing shortcomings, while also relying on the synthesis of knowledge, in the final section I argue for the use of contentious practices as the unit of observation and analysis for my dissertation.

Understanding Post-Socialist Civil Society: Surplus of Reaction, Deficit of Reflection

Sociology investigates and analyzes politics in relation to social structure – namely, “economic organization, class and status, community organization and social ties, formal organization and bureaucracy, or small-group interaction” (Walder 2009: 394). It also maintains a dynamic approach: instead of solely exploring the interaction between politics and stable social structures, sociology also looks at how diverse processes influence and impact the political engagement of citizens (Clemens 2016). However, political sociology does not only look at how these structures and processes affect political actors and, ultimately, stir their political activity through and outside channels of institutional politics, but simultaneously wonders how the political agency of individuals and collectives impinges on these structures and processes and possibly changes them over time. Therefore, politics – or, more precisely, *the political* – that is of sociological interest “is not simply confined to what takes place within government, political parties, and the state”, but pertains to “understanding of politics as a potentiality of all social experience [...] in the broadest possible sense as the contestation and transformation of social identities and structures” (Nash 2010: 2, 4). Critical sociological inquiry may identify politics anywhere and everywhere in a society – from micro to macro level – but it is important to point out that it refrains from uncritically viewing political phenomena and related processes in *a-* or *trans-*historical terms; rather, it investigates its manifestations within historically, geographically, and culturally contingent settings (Kurasawa 2017b). Whereas elite-centred institutional politics tend to play out similarly in liberal or, at least, electoral democracies across time and space, differences produced by contingencies within societies conversely become mostly visible in situations when official state institutions cannot address grievances and contain discontent of the people who, in turn, engage in direct, collective actions to achieve their objectives.

In that regard, the study of popular politics through routinized and institutional(ized) trajectories of political participation is dependent on the context in which political contention is unfolding, since variations in social relations, cultural values, symbolic frames, political regimes, institutional frameworks, geographic locations, and, ultimately, historical trajectories, among other structural variables, affect the ways in which people articulate their interests, advance their claims, (re)affirm their identities, or, simply put, fight for common goals. For instance, the emergence and proliferation of social movements – as probably the most studied manifestation of popular politics in social sciences – has been identified as a *historical* category closely tied to high-capacity

parliamentary democracies and, by analogy, has been understood as a symptom of democratization processes throughout the world (Tilly 2006: 186–188; Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 11; Tilly and Wood 2012: 124–144). With the emergence of social movements being correlated with the development of the bureaucratized and centralized nation-state – and accompanying processes of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization – social movements initially appeared in Western Europe around the mid-nineteenth century, as the “sustained, organized challenge to existing authorities in the name of a deprived, excluded or wronged population” (Tilly 1995: 144). Social movements, thus, became the staple of popular politics in a historically contingent societal configuration that eventually came to be known as *civil society*. Put simply, a combination of democratic polity and civil society gave birth to social movements.

Civil society is, in a word, an autonomous arena for individual and collective *voluntary* participation in public life outside direct state control (Cohen and Arato 1992: 29–174; Habermas 1996: 329–387).⁴⁸ As a normative ideal, civil society is an indispensable element of the development and consolidation of democracy, since it “increases the political efficacy and skill of democratic citizens”, “empowers the powerless to advance their interests”, and “mitigates the principal polarities of political conflict” (Diamond 1999: 21; see also Shils 1991). Scholars draw attention to the political dimension of civil society with respect to its role in ensuring the quality of democracy, as it is seen to *counterbalance* state power – and to a certain extent, market forces – by facilitating associational life; maintaining the public sphere; promoting diverse (and often conflicting) interests; preventing abuse and misuse of state institutions; making the state apparatus more transparent, responsive, and effective; and, eventually, securing the conditions for democracy (see, for example, Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Clark 1991; Diamond 1994a; Gellner 1994; Hulme and Edwards 2013; Paxton 2002).⁴⁹ Alexander (2006), however, adds a crucial symbolic dimension to this rationalist, and often procedural, understanding of the concept by framing civil society as a *solidarity sphere* that comes into being not simply through self-interest or power relations, but rather through universalistic *moral* feelings for others – that is, out of empathy and sympathy. As such, civil society is structured by a binary moral code and set of dichotomies, some

⁴⁸ What constitutes civil society is still open for debate. However, despite the theoretical preferences or ideological convictions of scholars who tend to narrow or stretch the definitional boundaries of civil society, contemporary interest in civil society focuses predominantly on associational life. The lowest common denominator among academics and activists is that civil society refers to uncoerced associational life distinct from the family relations and institutions of the state and market (see Chambers and Kopstein 2006).

⁴⁹ Therefore, throughout the dissertation, I am discussing civil society as a societal realm distinct from state institutions, economic relations, and the intimate sphere of the family. Yet, as I will show, civil society is no way completely isolated and immune to influences coming from these spheres.

of which have been shown to be extremely important in studying post-socialist civil society and assessing its character: civic/(ethno)nationalist, civil/uncivil, and political/a(anti)political (Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Stubbs 2007; Piotrowski 2009, 2015). Such dispositions are not merely products of the market, the state, the family, or religion, but achieve an existence of their own apart from the “non-civil spheres” of the economy and polity. These two spheres, nevertheless, tend to colonize civil society and reconfigure it in accordance to their internal logic. Civil society often reacts to this “domination of one sphere over another” by “demand[ing] certain reforms”. Whatever the motives of this transgression may be, the key lesson here is that active involvement of citizens “mend[s] the social fabric” of a society (Alexander 2006: 34). Civil society, in other words, is a space in which people can exert their political agency independently, directly, and as the “bearers of sovereignty”. And this power of citizens to transform social relations, political structures, cultural codes, and economic institutions through collective, direct action is of sociological interest. While citizens’ motivation may stem from moral concerns, civic responsibilities, political beliefs, or ideological convictions, in the final instance, contention is generated by their actions aimed at counteracting state power outside routinized, institutional venues of participation.

Civil society, by involving citizens in public life, creates a “common polis” which they have a responsibility to preserve (Putnam 1993). Therefore, the basis of popular politics is autonomous “civil power”, a power that is, firstly, independent of the political power held by various social groups, political organizations, and regulative institutions and, secondly, codified in symbolic practices and communicative institutions – ranging from civic associations to public opinion – that can, if successful, “[bend] state power to civil will” (Alexander 2006: 150). This power, however, is not expressed through regulative institutions (such as voting, political parties, democratic offices, and the law), but also through *communicative institutions* “that translate general codes into situationally specific evaluations and descriptions” (Alexander 2006: 70) – namely, through civil society organizations, institutions of public opinion, mass media, voluntary associations, citizens’ initiatives, social movements, etc. Civil power, therefore, constitutes the essence of citizens’ political subjectivity, grounding itself in the order of rights and morality; it is this “conviction that inspires a social movement and the reference to institutions which protect liberties” (Touraine 2007: 102). When this civil power is translated into action, it produces a “social energy” (Hirschmann 1984) that transforms subjectivity into an agency that questions the

instituted dimension of society (Castoriadis 1991) and demands interaction with those institutions (the state) on an equal footing (Rancière 1999, 2010) through contentious practices. Social movements – as the most innovative political subjects in civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992: 492–563; Habermas 1996: 370–373) – were therefore not born within the formal institutions of highly democratic (and capitalist) states, but have rather emerged *vis-à-vis* the state (and the market) out of the *vibrant* associational life of a *strong* civil society characterized by civil power. This emergence is important for the post-socialist space – as well as to understand civil society as also being a political society – because during the transition it was civil society that provided citizens access to political power outside the structures of representative democracy – especially in the case of the former Yugoslavia (Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Lazić 1999; Stubbs 2012) – and, as such, had the potential to turn into a revolutionary project (Anderson 1976; Gramsci 1971). This characteristic was true for rudimentary forms of civil society in the countries of actually existing socialism in particular: those who were oppressed, subordinated, or marginalized by the state were organizing in the only space available to them: civil society.

In the scholarly literature, the “social energy” produced by civil power which changes the *status quo* is based on the civic competence/autonomy often attributed to *active citizens*: the virtuous members of society who do not see voting as the principal duty and responsibility toward their political community, but instead remain proactive in public life *in-between* elections. In recent years, different terms have been used to describe how and to what extent these citizens exercise their political subjectivity outside conventional political channels in order to enhance democratic practices or simply right wrongs. For instance, Schudson (1998) speaks of “monitorial citizens” who surveil powerful institutions and organizations and turn to political action when these abuse/misuse power; Norris (2011), on the other hand, talks about “critical citizens” who are dissatisfied with established (political) institutions and work to improve and reform existing channels of democratic participation; Mouffe (1993) envisions “radical citizens” who share political commitment to fight injustices experienced by various marginalized groups; while Isin (2009) points to “activist citizens” who purposively operate outside institutional channels and, in the process, produce new sites of social enunciation, new forms of civic participation, and new modes of political being. The *strong* civil society of contemporary democracies is, therefore, characterized by different motivations for political actions, venues of civic engagement, and levels of political involvement in public life. Yet again, in all of these accounts, this engagement of

socially conscious and politically empowered citizens – from articulation and aggregation of interests, identities and ideas “from below”, to involvement in collective action for promoting these interests, identities, and ideas – are identified as the property of a *civic* type of political culture that is typical of the affluent democracies of North America and Western Europe (Almond and Verba 1989; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Johnston 2011). The idea is that civic culture strengthens democratic structure – the phenomenon being identified as the congruence of political structure with political culture – which, in turn, empowers the political agency of citizens.

To sum up, a constitutive element of democratic regimes with a vibrant civil society underpinned by a strong civic culture, is a socially conscious and politically empowered citizen who has developed the capacity for networking and taking collective actions to influence decision-making. In such conditions, in which “regulatory institutions are the gatekeepers of political power” and “civil power [...] opens and closes the gate” (Alexander 2006: 110), local citizens’ initiatives could easily grow into nationwide social movements. Keeping in mind that social movements are a property of a specific historical trajectory of what World Systems Theory labels *core countries*, Tilly (1999: 3, 6) emphasized how not only the genealogy of social movements, but also existing definitions of these movements are tied to “a historically circumscribed form of political interaction” in North America and Western Europe. In other words, Tilly inferred that textbook examples of social movements will proliferate as the dominant form of unconventional political participation only insofar as a “high-capacity, redistributive, relatively democratic state” is actively present.⁵⁰ Tilly pointed out that popular politics in other socio-political settings – post-socialist countries, in particular – have different manifestations, so the empirical reality of civic engagement and social struggles in these countries cannot be easily grasped by the conceptual apparatus developed from the historical experience of the West. The question, therefore, is how do we study popular politics in societies that are not seen as *civil* (in the Western sense) and have consistently shown low levels of civic engagement, if not outright withdrawal from public life. Responses to this question can be summarized in the form of two theses.

⁵⁰ As Gagyi (2015b: 19) pointed out, 1968 was “the inspirational moment” of both American and Western European scholarship on social movements, precisely because “the affluence of post-war Western societies made it possible for the first time in history for entire populations to participate in material welfare”. This context of affluence and, consequently, the emergence of “new social movements” can hardly be generalized throughout space or time.

Thesis I: Weak Civil Society

After the collapse of actually existing socialist regimes, *civil society* became “one of the more fashionable concepts” in CEE (Schöpflin 1991: 240). Its importance did not come out of the blue, but rather was an outcome of decades-long discursive exchanges between Western academics and East European dissident intellectuals. These dissenting voices were “praised for having developed the ‘ferment’ of what was later recognized as a civil society in Eastern Europe”, and, due to the prominence of dissidents’ work in the old democracies, their normative conceptualization of civil society became “the exchange ‘currency’ of the East–West intellectual dialogue” (Gagyí and Ivancheva 2013: 8). Namely, these intellectuals were (re)presented in the liberal democracies as the voice of civil society in the authoritarian regimes of CEE, as those who created an autonomous space of freedom from the oppressive party-state that was, unfortunately, denied publicity under state socialism and, as such, was pushed into the obscurity of non-public, essentially private spheres of underground publishing, friendship networks, and clandestine gatherings.⁵¹ Within these spaces of deliberation, “civil society” came to be understood in apolitical and ethical terms as “the force that protects society from the state and the market” (Piotrowski 2012:120). Two defining features of the dissidents’ normative conceptualizations of civil society were its *anti-political* and *moral* character. What differentiated this nominally socialist understanding of civil society from its liberal counterpart was its aversion to institutional/party politics and suspicion of collective actions (Celichowski 2004; Navrátil 2013: 35–38). Consequently, on the eve of collapse of socialist regimes, “civil society” came to denote not only an alternative to the oppressive state, but also to prescribe civic autonomy from the state’s interference in daily lives.⁵²

While interesting for intellectual history, the heuristic and analytical value of this conceptualization was deeply problematic, mainly due to the dissidents’ insistence on civic *disengagement* from political life, which effectively narrowed the conceptual and socio-political boundaries of civil society by expunging contentious politics. Conversely, during the post-socialist transition, contentious politics came to be associated with “uncivil society” (Kopecký and Mudde

⁵¹ Gagyí and Ivancheva (2013: 9) show that “what is nowadays called ‘the 1989 concept of civil society’ was named differently by each prominent dissident: ‘anti-politics’ (Konrád), ‘independent life of society’ or ‘life in truth’ (Havel), ‘parallel polis’ and ‘second culture’ (Benda), ‘new evolutionism’ (Michnik), etc.”.

⁵² Especially because the civil society of the real-socialist states in the 1970s and 1980s was equated with the dissident movement and “was originally understood as a self-organizing alternative society (a ‘parallel polis’, as Václav Benda put it in 1978) in opposition to totalitarian rule” (Rupnik 1999: 60). Flam (2001b: 3), on the other hand, argues that, in reality, these civil societies were nothing more than “dissident subcultures”.

2003a, 2003b), while civil society retained the aura of a domain uncorrupted by politics and came to be a synonym not only with liberal values, but “with all things virtuous, progressive, democratic, and just” (Stubbs 2007: 215). Since the seed of civil society was planted by dissenting intellectuals, and its prospects for blossoming looked promising during 1989–1991, the scholarly gaze began to shift to more formal aspects of transitional political life and economic restructuring that would create conditions favourable to civil society building.

With structural reforms set in motion, this dissident-cum-liberal understanding of civil society in the region was expected to “catch up” with the concept derived from its Western neighbours. Moreover, relying on the historical experience of the old democracies, Western observers expected this embryonic civil society, at the level of empirical reality, to develop *vis-à-vis* a new democratic polity, so they approached it in a somewhat sanitary manner: its strength – measured by levels of civic engagement and membership in civic associations – was to be taken as a sign of “healthy” development and pointed to democratic conditions, thus becoming a relevant indicator of a transition towards liberal democracy (Petrova 2007; Pietrzyk-Reeves 2008). The problem emerged when the strength of civil society failed to be empirically validated. By pathologizing “Eastern backwardness” (Ágh 1998), analysts were eager to diagnose deviations from the normative categories of civil society – and, more importantly, different trajectories and stages of its development – as dysfunctions, underdevelopments, mistakes, deviations, or even pathologies (Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Hann and Dunn 1996). Namely, when it became evident that people were withdrawing from public life during the period of post-socialist restructuring, a highly influential “weak civil society” thesis was developed (Howard 2002, 2003; see also Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Petrova and Tarrow 2007) that, until relatively recently, informed much of the research on post-socialist civil society and, in effect, pushed social movement scholars away from looking for social movement phenomena similar to the paradigmatic cases described by Western literature in this space of extremely weak associational life and mass civic disengagement (cf. Císař 2017; Flam 2001a; Gagyi 2015a, 2015b). After all, where there were no rudimentary forms of civic involvement and associational life, and public life was characterized by mass withdrawal and political passivity of citizens, how could one expect to find more complex dynamics that would create non-state collective actors, such as social movements?

With social movement scholars disinterested in the region, the post-socialist space became the exclusive property of transitologists whose research was saturated with ideological biases,

which eventually resulted in changes involving post-socialist civil society being “the least understood” (Ekiert and Kubik 2014: 46). Post-socialist civil society was entrapped within the post-Cold War, functionalist approach, liberal gaze and its underpinning universalism, so it was investigated through simplistic assumptions of soci(et)al change based on a flawed modernization theory that treated the entire region as homogenous. Moreover, the teleological perspective of democratization theory was “underpinned by an almost Fukuyamaesque triumphalism” that approached the region with an “implicit assumption that the establishment of a flourishing civil society is a given” with the introduction of political pluralism and a market economy (Killingsworth 2012: 147).⁵³ However, it became apparent early on that there was no universal path from state socialism and a planned economy to liberal democracy and a market economy, but rather a number of divergent national and regional pathways, each the direct outcome of path dependency and path shaping (Stark 1992). This led to an overall disappointment about (the development of) post-socialist civil society, especially when studies began to show consistently low levels of trust and membership in civil society organizations and overall civic engagement (Howard 2002, 2003; Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Rose et al. 1997), and certainly no social movements to voice popular grievances and claims (Tilly 1999: 3, Tilly and Wood 2012: 124–144). Conventional survey instruments demonstrated that, compared to the Western European average, the post-socialist space exhibited significantly lower levels of social trust and confidence in various civil and public institutions (Howard 2003; Pehlivanova 2009; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1997; Sztompka 1998), as well as low community engagement and participation in voluntary associations (Howard 2003; Nalecz and Bartkowski 2006; Novak and Hafner-Fink 2015; Wallace, Pichler and Haerpfer 2012). Most importantly, participation in protest activities was extremely low, if not near absent (Bernhard and Karakoç 2007; Greskovits 1998: 69–92; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Novak and Hafner-Fink 2015).⁵⁴ Compared to those in other regions of the world, civil societies in CEE were ultimately portrayed as associationally passive and organizationally anemic. Thus, over time, it became somewhat common wisdom that, when compared to their Western neighbours (both old democracies and post-authoritarian countries),⁵⁵

⁵³ Transitological explanations did not take into consideration the complexity of social, political, economic, and cultural transformations taking place in the concrete historical and geographical conditions at the local, national, and regional levels.

⁵⁴ Truth be told, Ekiert and Kubik (1998, 1999) emphasized the strength of post-socialist civil society, but their analysis addressed the case of Poland – long considered to be “exceptional” within the region – and was focused primarily on protest politics rather than on more typical forms of participation and association.

⁵⁵ This was also the case for more conventional forms of political participation, such as voting.

post-socialist societies experienced significantly lower levels of civic engagement (Howard 2002; Karakoç 2013; Kopecký and Mudde 2003b; Marchenko 2014) and unconventional political participation (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007, Hooghe and Quintelier 2014, Kostelka 2014).⁵⁶ This assumption was strengthened when research showed that post-socialist civil society remained structurally weak even after some countries in CEE underwent a Europeanization process (Lane 2010), remaining among the least organizationally dense in the world (Bernhard and Karakoç 2007). The question was no longer if post-socialist civil societies were strong, but rather why were they so chronically weak.

What was even more puzzling was that, in theory, the democratization of institutions should have created an environment conducive to the emergence of popular mobilization and social movements, but these were somehow suspiciously absent (cf. Císař 2017; Flam 2001a; Glenn 2003). Scholars were faced with a situation according to which, instead of turning communist subjects into active citizens, post-socialist institutional engineering did not bring about political agency in the form of collective actions. To explain this situation, analysts adopted easy solutions by characterizing post-socialist civil societies as *structurally* weak (Barnes et al. 1998; Geremek 1992; Howard 2002; Lomax 1997; Smolar 1996) and *culturally* deficient (Barnes et al. 1998; Diamond 1994b; Jowitt 1992; Mishler and Rose 2001). However, if we take into account the broader literature on the issue, one which is more empirically-oriented and less ideologically triumphant, explanations for the non-participatory nature of post-socialist civil society can be classified into two categories: first are the accounts that focus on *structural* constraints on civic engagement, essentially shaped by the institutional and cultural legacies of state socialism and, to some extent, a pre-socialist heritage; while the second group of authors emphasizes the *processual* dimension of a transition whose ultimate outcome was overall disappointment in democratization and civic demobilization characterized by mass withdrawal from public life.

Belief in the possibility of instant capitalism and liberal democracy being imposed through shock therapy and institutional design quickly dissipated once empirical evidence showed that post-socialist societies were not a *tabula rasa*, but were deeply embedded in social structures, institutional frameworks, and practices of the past, with experiences, attitudes, understandings, habits, symbolic codes, and behavioural patterns strongly shaped by the previous systems (both

⁵⁶ Howard (2002: 160) pointed out that “for all types of organizations except labor unions, the postcommunist mean is much lower than the means of [older democracies and postauthoritarian regimes]”.

pre-socialist and socialist) (Badescu and Uslaner 2003; Goldfarb 2006; Hann 2002; Hann and Dunn 1996; Verdery 1991). Scholars focused on how the all-pervasive (authoritarian and totalitarian) regimes of actually existing socialism had detrimental effects on relations between people in society, identifying the following characteristics: an absence of horizontal ties among the population (Sperling 1999; Sztompka 1998), general disillusionment with meaningful political and collective activity that led to widespread avoidance of public engagement and retreat to the comfort zones of private circles of families and friends (Gal and Kligman 2000; Goldfarb 2006; Howard 2003; Verdery 1991), and aversion towards civic engagement and formal membership in publicly visible civic organizations (Howard 2003; McMahon 2001).⁵⁷ Additionally, the public distrust in the repressive state and, by extension, public institutions and politicians generated during decades of socialism eventually spilled over to voluntary organizations (Gliński 2002; Howard 2003) and international aid programs that fostered an emerging non-governmental sector (Creed and Wedel 1997; McMahon 2001). As a result, the ultimate effect of systemic isolation of citizens from the public sphere was low social trust and the lack of horizontal ties among the population, which effectively constrained civic engagement and, by extension, civil society development.

Post-socialist civil societies, therefore, lacked civic engagement, which has been shown to be strongly correlated with levels of social trust, political skills/learning, political activity, and overall democratic values (Dekker and Van den Broek 1998; Mackerle-Bixa et al. 2009; Sissenich 2010). Studies thus point to the lack of two fundamental elements for active citizenship and functional democracy: informal civic education and grassroots pressure mechanisms. Namely, civil societies built through top-down institutional design in the post-socialist space had emerged without two key ingredients that render civil society strong: civic engagement as a source – or, better yet, school – of social capital, democratic habits, and civic skills that are necessary prerequisites for a stable democracy (Putnam 2000: 338), and active voluntary organizing as a way of creating political “leverage” and directly influencing the political process (Skocpol 1999: 70). The idea was that post-socialist civil societies remained weak due to the lack of experience with

⁵⁷ For example, Putnam (1993: 183) states that many post-socialist societies had “weak civic traditions before the advent of communism, and totalitarian rule abused even that limited stock of social capital” (see also Goldfarb 2006). Moreover, Howard (2002: 160) points out how, unlike authoritarian regimes, “communist regimes not only sought to repress all forms of autonomous non-state activity but also supplanted and subverted such activity by forcing their citizens to join and participate in mandatory, state-controlled organizations”.

pluralism and/or in coalition-building, since citizens were voluntarily locked in their private spheres and friendship networks, which served as zones of comfort during state socialism.

Another group of authors noticed that social ties, everyday routines, cultural practices, and organizational forms developed (before and) during the period of actually existing socialisms not only survived, but were activated to function under new conditions. The system that emerged during the transition was neither capitalist in the Western sense of the word, nor state socialist in the sense of the previous centrally planned economy. Unlike the West, where the decline of democracy followed neoliberal restructuring, in the CEE, democracy came together with harsh austerity measures (Gagyí 2015a: 20–21, 2015b: 21–24; see also Bohle and Greskovits 2007). This coupling resulted in post-socialist disappointment with democratization – if not outright disillusionment with political and economic developments – so “many postcommunist citizens [felt] that they [had] been let down, even cheated, by the new system that quickly replaced the old one” (Howard 2002: 163). The neoliberal restructuring profoundly affected these societies and “re-defined how society works” in CEE (Piotrowski 2012: 118). As power was being transferred from the omnipresent socialist state apparatus to new state bureaucracies and political actors (Howard 2003; Lomax 1997), former activists began to shift toward institutional politics and state administration (Bernhard 1996). Overall, not only did the structural reforms implemented “from above” weaken some inherited civil society institutions (e.g., trade unions, local community organizations) and undermine the development of organizational and collective action capacities of the citizens, but also generated a widespread disillusionment and cynicism concerning the new system. Therefore, this body of work concluded that a “weak civil society” was the product of societal reactions that prioritized self-preservation in the face of a harsh transition, rather than of some structural defect or cultural deficiency; in short, it was induced by top-down processes that did not encourage citizens to participate, but instead to simply survive harsh socio-economic reforms.

For that reason, some authors focused on how elite-driven political transformation and, more specifically, economic restructuring, had a demobilizing effect on society, leading to widespread withdrawal from associational life (Bernhard 1996) and reluctance to engage in confrontational collective action (Greskovits 1998: 69–92). It was, however, also noted that, unlike in post-authoritarian countries, citizens of CEE waited patiently during the first two decades of transition – restraining themselves from engaging in protests – for economic restructuring to be

completed (Greskovits 1998; Beissinger and Sasse 2014). This patience was reinforced by the lack of a tradition of protest culture (Ekert and Kubik 2001; Greskovits 1998), which was why the sudden appearance of extreme inequality – virtually non-existent during the period of state socialism – did not (immediately) result in contentious politics.⁵⁸ These processes, on the other hand, gave rise to distinctive features of civic engagement in the post-socialist space: instead of struggling with a non-responsive state to influence austerity measures, people engaged in self-help and mutual aid activities, the exchange of goods and services, and an informal economy in order to make ends meet (see Lazić 1995; Morris and Polese 2014; Sperling 1999).⁵⁹ This was true, in particular, for the web of informal networks that existed under state socialism as a parallel to official networks, which played an important role during the political and economic transformation. Therefore, rather than being characterized by political action aiming to publicly counteract harsh economic reforms, civil society became reduced to safety networks of pre-existing informal mechanisms and day-to-day practices as means of surviving the detrimental effects of transition. In other words, socio-economic restructuring created conditions in which people could not devote time and energy to voluntary organizations or activism, but were instead pushed to fight for their subsistence using means shaped by their own historical and personal experience.

It was not only actually existing socialism that had a negative impact on civic engagement and associational life, but the political transition and economic restructuring as well. Paradoxically, institutional and policy changes only reinforced attitudes and patterns of behaviour that had developed during the socialist era – rather than producing “civil power” – because people felt neither the need nor desire to participate in and influence a process that was so obviously out of their hands, as had been the case under the previous system (Vanhuysse 2004, 2006). Having this in mind, it is best to view these two explanations in combination with each other in order to develop a critical reassessment of both the structural and processual factors that constrained what was broadly understood as civic participation. In short, the state socialist legacy of civic disengagement from public life and political apathy induced by the post-socialist transition were interrelated and tended to reinforce one another. Because post-socialist civil society was embedded in the previous

⁵⁸ Research has demonstrated the relative absence of disruptive and violent protest activities in the region, often ascribed to a historical heritage of non-violence and a political culture of non-confrontation (Kenney 2002; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Piotrowski 2009, 2012).

⁵⁹ According to Vanhuysse (2004, 2006), governments were using a “divide and pacify” style of social policies designed to prevent any potential social upheaval.

system – from interpersonal relations to a functionally different institutional order – the demise of the socialist state destroyed only the formal networks and institutions, but everyday life molded during socialism remained similar. Since there was no clean break with the socialist past and the transition had eroded voluntary participation in public affairs, the notorious “weak civil society” thesis became taken for granted in the following years. Whatever aspect of civil society was placed under scrutiny – social trust, associational life, civic engagement, or, even, confrontational forms of civic activism – the picture remained grim, particularly for social movement scholars who might have otherwise been interested in the region. However, instead of understanding the empirical reality of actually existing civil society, scholars relied on survey instruments and a normatively and narrowly defined concept of civil society to assess its strength. Informed by this methodology and conceptualization, they eventually turned to answering the question of why civic engagement was absent in the first place. At one point, Flam (2001b) wondered if there were such a thing as social movements in the post-socialist societies. Indeed, are there?

Thesis II: Strong Civil Sector

Since the structural transformations implemented in post-socialist countries were not conducive to civic participation, even their civil societies had to be built “from above”; or, better yet, “from beyond” – through externally-sponsored institutional engineering. Social movements, as a model of popular politics typical of the old democracies, may have grown “organically” within these socio-political contexts, but international donations in CEE had artificially created conditions favourable to a different form of social organizing – the so-called *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs).⁶⁰ During the transition process, the post-socialist state proved to be weak, so foreign donors seized an opportunity to build a non-profit but competition-based network of civic organizations that would eventually, through external mentorship and capacity-building, become more efficient and effective than state institutions in numerous domains of social and political life. Resources provided by Western governments and foundations, in the context of low-capacity post-socialist states, provided an unprecedented opportunity structure for the creation of a network of (relatively influential) professionalized civil society organizations. Ultimately, an outcome of foreign assistance was a well-developed non-profit “third sector” populated predominantly by professionally-managed advocacy organizations disinterested in participation and mobilization,

⁶⁰ While these are known in the West as “non-profits”, they are more commonly referred to today as “civil society organizations”.

which, instead of voicing the grievances of the local population, focused on addressing concerns of their donors and providing expertise to the state (Aksartova 2006; Carothers 1999; Fagan 2005; Fagan and Carmine 2010; Fink-Hafner 2015b; Flam 2001b; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Kopecký and Mudde 2003a; McMahon 2001; Petrova and Tarrow 2007; Piotrowski 2012).⁶¹ This is to say, in the context of “weak post-socialist civil society”, the process of NGO-ization created a strong *civil sector*: rather than fostering the (voluntary) participation of citizens in public life, this process created a strong structure of professionalized, clientelist, and salaried organizations interacting directly with the state.

Therefore, if we factor in NGOs, the picture of post-socialist civil society becomes somewhat different than the one portrayed by survey instruments. A multi-dimensional quantitative study by Foa and Ekiert (2017: 423) showed that the “weak civil society” thesis was based on an essentially flawed methodological bias that resulted in scholars’ focusing “exclusively on surveyed membership in voluntary associations, at the expense of other dimensions of civic life and types of data”, thus “[neglecting] the myriad ways in which citizens organize to defend their interests, reaffirm their identities, and pursue common goals in postcommunist societies”. In other words, these limited data illuminated just one dimension of civil society while simultaneously obscuring other aspects of post-socialist civil societies, which showed that countries in CEE did not lag behind their Western neighbours (Bernhard et al. 2017). These findings have also been supported by numerous qualitative studies that exposed the richness of contentious practices in the post-socialist space (see Biber and Brentin; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Horvat and Štikš 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015; Razsa 2015). In other words, since most influential research on post-socialist civil society was based on survey data that illuminated individual attitudes instead of the actual behaviour of respondents, the numbers of existing organizations – not to mention the forms these took and the ways in which they advanced claims – were not captured. These findings were particularly important in relation to the conceptual narrowing of civil society to a civil sector that, in turn, changed how the relationship between nominal civil society and the state was observed – as non-contentious, cooperative interaction. Simply put, external donor-funding created “dense

⁶¹ This is essentially a process of the professionalization of collective actors within the third sector, whereby groups moved from grassroots mobilization to rank-and-file organizations that were economically dependent (Piotrowski 2015: 9). During the 1990s, US-based foundations provided most of the funding, but during the 2000s EU funds became an integral part of the process of Europeanization. Many civil society actors in CEE saw the EU accession process as a political opening, which they could use to try to influence domestic policies.

and comprehensive organizational structures [that] operate in a friendly institutional and legal environment, and have some capacity to influence policy making on the local and national levels” (Ekiert and Kubik 2014: 55).⁶² Accordingly, it can be argued that while some authors claimed that post-socialist civil *society* was weak in terms of participation and mobilization, others pointed out that its civil *sector* came out of the process of transition as quite strong in terms of organizational density and political capital.

What were the implications for contentious politics that resulted from NGO-ization becoming the institutional framework for civil society building in CEE? Faced with civil societies characterized by low civic participation, Petrova and Tarrow (2007: 79) examined the actually existing challenger–authority relations in CEE and eventually came to the conclusion that civic activism in this post-socialist space occurred through what they labeled *transactional activism*, which was comprised of “the ties – enduring and temporary – among organized non-state actors and between them and political parties, power holders, and other institutions”. As an organizational platform that fostered this type of activism, NGOs influenced the state through non-contentious, cooperative, direct-contact activities with decision-makers through lobbying, expertise, and advocacy, rather than by relying on participation and mobilization. In a nutshell, the process of NGO-ization placed post-socialist civil society on a path of dependent development: the professionalization of associational life became not only the most efficient way to influence the state, but also replaced some of the state’s basic functions in the socialist period (e.g., service provisioning, state-sponsoring of societal associations), thus making NGOs *the* mode of civic organizing. Unlike social movements in the old democracies that pursued their interests in the streets, these organizations abandoned participation and contention, instead engaging in strategic networking, inter-organizational transfer of information, know-how and other resources, and problem-solving activities with decision- and policy-makers. In short, in societies characterized by mass withdrawal from public life, NGOs served as a perfect (funded) platform for mediating between civil society and the state outside party structures (and, to some extent, kinship networks). In the process, potentially contentious topics were channelled through institutionally-mediated venues of participation.

⁶² In other post-socialist countries, especially those that have reverted to various forms of authoritarian rule (e.g., Belarus), civil societies are often organizationally weak and politically irrelevant.

When it comes to contentious politics, NGO-ization had at least two positive effects on facilitating “civil power” and producing “social energy”. Firstly, international financial and logistical support created an infrastructure conducive to the development of transactional activism which, in turn, increased NGOs’ capacity for action, especially in terms of directly influencing and pressuring decision-/policy-makers and improving the quality of governance (Císař 2010; Dimitrova and Buzogany 2014; Ekiert and Foa 2012; Ekiert and Kubik 2014; Petrova and Tarrow 2007; Stark et al. 2006; Stubbs 2007, 2012). Secondly, external sponsorship, in some cases, enabled NGOs to challenge domestic political structures and cultural contexts and, in the process, become politically autonomous actors that would otherwise have been unsuccessful in addressing issues such as domestic violence (Fábián 2010), environmental issues (Carmin 2010; Císař 2010), human and minority rights (Aksartova 2006; Stubbs 2007; Vermeerch 2006), women’s rights (Císař and Vrábliková 2010; Korolczuk 2014), gay rights (Bilić 2016; O’Dwyer 2012), or even regime change in the “color revolutions” (Bunce and Wolchik 2011).⁶³ Subsequently, externally supported civil society building resulted in a duplication of the liberal agenda of Western European and North American social movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Piotrowski 2015). As a result, NGOs in CEE gained significant political capital, albeit at the expense of grassroots organizing, mass participation, and radical action.

Therefore, the reduction of civil society to a civil sector – and its reliance on external sources of funding – had detrimental effects on civil society. Simply put, there is an overwhelming consensus that NGO-ization removed incentives for civil society building “from below”, on participatory grounds and through the “organic” creation of a new democratic (counter-)culture (see Aksartova 2006; Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Gagyi and Ivancheva 2013; Fagan 2005; Henderson 2002; Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013a; Kopecký and Mudde 2003; McMahon 2001; Narozhna 2004; Ost 2000; Piotrowski 2012; Sabatini 2002; Sperling 1999; Stubbs 2007, 2012; Sundstrom 2006). The post-socialist civil sector was once even referred to as a “virtual civil society” that existed “mainly in reports and boardrooms of major NGOs and governmental offices in the West” (Kopecký and Mudde 2003: 5). However, more important was the depoliticization of activities happening in the civil sector: the focus on educational, advocacy, and self-help activities, deeply embedded in the liberal agenda, pushed NGOs away from more

⁶³ Moreover, in the post-Yugoslav space, some NGOs played an important role as they opened up a space for dissidents to fulfill their existential needs, and as such played a key role in alliance-building against authoritarian regimes (Stubbs 2007: 221–222).

radical demands and subversive actions. Eventually, the replacement of social movements with civil society organizations “as the dominant form of collective action”, externally-supported civil society building in CEE and “[limited] the possibilities of meaningful challenges to dominant power relations” (Stubbs 2007: 220). Therefore, NGOs were not organizational platforms based on individual participation and mobilization, but were rather professional and clientelist in function with no interest in mobilizing society or challenging dominant power relations. Instead, the civil sector became a political project that was there to ensure a smooth political and socio-economic transition to liberal democracy and a market economy.⁶⁴

Based on my synthesis of the aforementioned scholarly work, I extrapolate three negative effects that NGO-ization – and its underpinning donor dependence – had on post-socialist civil society, especially in terms of delegitimizing contentious practices and, by extension, contentious politics as “radical”, “uncivil”, or even “uncivilized” among those who had access to resources and the political capital to influence the state.

- 1) *Professionalization and demobilization*. The path-dependent development introduced by post-socialist civil society ultimately resulted in the institutionalization of a civil sector populated and dominated by small, bureaucratized, and professionalized organizations – or, more precisely, corporate-like “grantoids” (Narozhna 2004: 244) – whose main focus was on writing applications, managing grants, and meeting eligibility requirements of Western donors. With their primary concern being to ensure employment (long-term survival rather than working toward a long-term solution with the citizens), NGOs began to rapidly move from one “sexy project” to another and, in the process, neglected real-life social problems and people’s needs (Fink-Hafner 2015: 11).⁶⁵
- 2) *Isolation and cooptation*. Instead of engaging, mobilizing, and empowering people, NGOs became less of a means for civic participation than a lucrative “third sector” for young urban professionals – “NGO yuppies” (Baća 2017c: 140) – who directly participated in a policy network with the state. The external assistance not only created the large gap between the salaries of NGO staff and local public servants, for example, but also created a new urban middle-class, comprised mostly of highly educated, English-speaking experts, for whom

⁶⁴ Fink-Hafner (2015: 4), for instance, identified NGO-ization as a constitutive part of the transition, as a process by which “external experts and the influences of external powers have mostly tended to promote a model of democracy understood as liberal democracy – Dahl’s *polyarchy*”.

⁶⁵ Formal membership in these organizations does not provide a good measure of engagement, as these organizations are hierarchized, professionalized, and possess non-participatory organizational structures. As such, their interest predominantly lies in the mobilization of economic resources rather than of people.

having or being in an NGO became a matter of status. Their projects reflected the concerns of this emergent professional middle-class. As organizations without constituents, NGOs became alienated from the citizenry and financially dependent on – and, therefore, responsive to the interests of – international donors. Put more simply, civil society organizations that “played the funding game” tended to frame problems to appeal to the priorities of grant-givers, so they became indifferent to the interests, grievances, and claims of citizens and tended to be isolated from other civil society groups and associations.⁶⁶ Moreover, dependency on external patronage resulted in non-contentious, non-disruptive activities and moderation of ideological views.⁶⁷

- 3) *Fragmentation and competition.* Professionalization and donor-dependence created conditions conducive to the atomization of civil society and the weakening of solidarity among civil society actors, especially as transition progressed and donors began to withdraw. Western patronage fragmented civil society and shifted the focus of civil society organizations toward organizational and employment matters, such as capacity building and fundraising, which effectively discouraged long-term planning and alliance-building, and instead fostered competition and rivalry in an increasingly fragmented environment.⁶⁸ Even with a strong civil sector, citizens were left out the procedural and formalistic character of post-socialist democracies, thus becoming as disappointed in and cynical towards NGOs as they were towards political parties.

To conclude, rather than being characterized by (contentious) mobilization and (unconventional) participation, the professionalized model of associational life that emerged during transition was limited to lobbying, advocacy, and expertise as a way to influence the state.⁶⁹ Therefore, much of the day-to-day activities of NGOs, most of which were between NGO professionals and the

⁶⁶ In particular, they were isolated from grassroots associations and politically more radical groups. This isolation of NGOs was most visible in the establishment of elite activists that “became dominated by small, formalized, bureaucratized, professionalized, cadre-staffed organizations that have learnt to play ‘the funding game’ [...] rather than the fostering of horizontal ties, norms of reciprocity and civiness” (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013: 6-7). In other words, the process of NGO-ization resulted in divisions between “haves” and “have nots” in civil society as well. Stubbs (2007: 221) also points out how this process marginalized “trade unions and other kinds of interest groups” or channeled them “into the notion of NGO”.

⁶⁷ NGO-ization resulted in the dominance of NGOs with a strong normative commitment to liberal democracy and liberal values. These organizations engaged in productive relationship with the emerging polities and helped them with policy-making, especially during the Europeanization phase.

⁶⁸ In the case of the EU accession, there was *de facto* “Eurocratization of NGOs” (Hallstrom 2004) and the creation of EU empowered elites and interest groups, and those that are not empowered in these ways (Kutter and Trappmann 2010), thus creating a gap between NGOs and the rest of civil society. The unintended consequence of this emphasis on professionalization and technical skills of this *projectariat* was that broader structural problems remained neglected, especially related to growing social inequalities produced by economic restructuring.

⁶⁹ What also characterized NGOs was educational activities of “raising awareness”, such as holding courses, seminars, lectures, among other activities, in order to influence public opinion on specific issues.

governments, did not fall within the framework of contentious politics, even though the work of NGOs did fall into the category of transactional activism. As citizens were demobilized and withdrew from public life, activism became a profession like any other. *Thesis II* points to one important conclusion, however: post-socialist civil society was not weak only due to the lack of a protest culture and a transition process that fostered civic disengagement, but also due to a path-dependent development of civil society that favoured incremental change through professional civil society organizations that relied on institutions, cooperation, and transaction rather than contentious practices. If we clarify conceptual and methodological positions, the question is not only whether there were social movements or radical NGOs in the region, but what were the ways in which people participated outside institutionally-sanctioned channels in the post-socialist space?

Conclusion

Thesis I pointed to the fact that structural factors were important, especially in terms of studying context-specific forms of contention, when it claimed that people reacted to universal macro-processes in widespread ways. *Thesis II*, on the other hand, claimed that civic activism was present in the region, but its most prominent form was neither participatory nor contentious. Both theses shared a functionalist understanding of civil society (building): that its purpose was to support democratization. The development of these theses can be summarized as such:

- 1) A universalist approach of transitology relied on survey instruments for individual attitudes (questions and categories developed from the experience of the Global West, applied to the Global East) that produced findings about low participation, which led to the conclusion that post-socialist civil society was weak.
- 2) Context-specific empirical research relied on official registries of civil society organizations that produced a finding of high organizational density and transactional activity, which led to a conclusion that the (professionalized) civil sector was strong.

Therefore, while individual attitudes were analyzed – as well as non-contentious, cooperative practices through which NGOs influenced the state – what remained a mystery was what people were actually *doing* besides transactional activism, through contentious practices.

Rediscovering Contentious Politics in CEE: From Research on Post-Socialist Social Movements to Post-Socialist Social Movement Research

Outside of transitology and democratization theory, which have dominated research on post-socialist civil society, a small yet relevant body of scholarly work has explored actually existing civic activism and non-institutional participation within the post-socialist space. Once systematized and analyzed, these studies provide the “context of discovery” (Swedberg 2012) for a more nuanced understanding of the empirical reality of and theorizations of post-socialist – and, to some extent, post-transitional – civil society, especially in relation to its political dimension, which is still “in the search of theory” (see Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Jacobsson 2015). Two takeaways can be extrapolated from this body of work: firstly, mainstream literature has often disregarded the (pre-) socialist heritage of movement-related phenomena; and, secondly, contentious practices that did not fit into the liberal normative idea of civil society were often excluded from scholarly accounts of CEE.

Scholars convincingly showed that state-sponsored forms of associational life under actually existing socialisms – along with traditional, pre-communist models of social organizing – continued their *social* functions in a new “transitional” setting, so these “imperfect civil societies” continued to exist once the communist regimes collapsed (Kubik 2000). Moreover, during the two decades prior to the collapse, these societies witnessed a wide range of movement-related phenomena (Glenn 2003; Raina 1981; Tomić and Atanacković 2009). Civic activism and grassroots mobilizations were fairly diverse before the historical 1989 turn: trade union activism and labour movements (Bakuniak and Nowak 1987; Kubik 1994; Osa 2003), anti-regime activism and anti-communist movements (Bugajski 1987), environmental movements (Baumgartl 1993; Hicks 1996; Sarre and Jehlička 2007), nationalist mobilizations (Beissinger 2002; Vladislavljević 2008), women’s organizations (Einhorn 1993), subcultural movements (Piotrowski 2010), student movements (Fichter 2016), and peace movements (Tismaneanu 1990). However, with the transition process in play, the socialist heritage of social movement organizing began to dissipate and citizens began to retreat into the private sphere of family and friends, thus making the region uninteresting and uninviting for social movement scholars (cf. Flam 2001a; Glenn 2003). Even the most politically consequential, elite-driven mobilizations that led to the demise of socialist regimes “were gone within a year or two, leaving little organizational legacy” (Nagle and Mahr 1999: 216; see also Glenn 2003; Ekiert and Kubik 1998; Lomax 1997; Nistor 2016). Simply put, as emerging

democratic polities opened unprecedented space for inclusion in institutional politics, there was less incentive for activists to remain outside the formal political game and, in the process, civil society became void of political capital (Dryzek 1996).

In the context of mass withdrawal from public life, external support placed civil society on a path-dependent development that eventually rendered professionalized NGOs as the only efficient – and publicly visible – mechanism within civil society to exercise pressure on the state. This effect, in turn, obscured other forms of social organizing in the eyes of social scientists. Consequently, scholarly focus on “a relative narrow sphere of ‘pro-democratic’ organizations” excluded “important area[s] of associational life”, such as the so-called “uncivil society” of illiberal, anti-democratic, and xenophobic associations and groups (Kopecký and Mudde 2003a: 2; see also Chambers and Kopstein 2001; Kopecký and Mudde 2003b), which emerged as by-products of civil society building “from above”.⁷⁰ The institutionalization of “healthy” (read: liberal) civil society proved to be problematic in the context of overarching scarcity, since the lack of social justice that characterized the transition led to disillusionment with the promise of liberalism and democracy. Two things that characterized economic restructuring in the region – harsh austerity measures and the destruction of socialist safety nets – had “created illiberal citizens that no amount of deliberation will convince otherwise”. In combination with the “prospect of unemployment and the potential for radical downward mobility, something that was virtually unknown in the communist era”, these characteristics of economic restructuring produced groups that advocated hate and bigotry, which “tend[ed] to be drawn disproportionately from the downsized industrial suburban regions” (Chambers and Kopstein 2001: 848, 846).⁷¹ These so-called “losers of transition” eventually began to participate in grassroots movements that were

⁷⁰ To be more precise, the so-called “uncivil society” includes illiberal and outright anti-democratic actors that are “either (implicitly) excluded from considerations of civil society, or are (explicitly) subsumed under the ill-defined concept of ‘uncivil society’”, such as that part of society that “lack[s] the spirit of civility” or, better yet, “public mindedness, a sense of obligation towards the whole society and support for liberal values”, so these were “organizations that use violence in order to achieve their goals, or groups with non-democratic or (right-wing) extremist ideas”. However, both civil and uncivil society have to be taken into account, since “their goals and actions are highly influenced by their environment” (Kopecký and Mudde 2003a: 3, 11).

⁷¹ The top-down creation of a professional civil sector created a gap between NGOs and the rest of civil society that were impacted by the socio-political and economic transition, whose ultimate consequence was the emergence of the so-called “bad civil society”. Kopecký and Mudde (2003a, 2003b) showed that this classification in the context of CEE is biased and does not make much sense empirically. Namely, many of these uncivil movements are categorized differently at different times, even though classification does not reflect a change of character of these movements. For instance, this categorization “reflects the difference in ‘enemy’” of these movements, so “thinking in simplistic antagonistic models, nationalists were ‘good’ when they opposed a ‘bad’ regime”, but “they turned ‘bad’ when they started to oppose a ‘good’ regime”. “Bad” were, of course, communists, while “good” were anti-communists. In this view, “nationalism was one time part of civil society, and one time not” (Kopecký and Mudde 2003a: 3). In addition, both “civil” and “uncivil” society actors have evolved and changed over time, sometimes for better, other times for worse (see Kopecký and Mudde 2003a, 2003b; Kubik 2005; Piotrowski 2009).

paradoxically “more authentic representatives of civil society in post-communist Europe” than elite-driven, donor-supported NGOs that were detached from society and oriented toward policy circles (Kopecký and Mudde 2003a: 4). In other words, socio-economic restructuring, in combination with low social trust in institutions, created conditions conducive to mobilizations and contentious activities by right-wing populists (see Kalb and Halmai 2011, Kopecký and Mudde 2003b). In short, the unintended consequences of top-down democratization and neoliberal economic restructuring proved to be conducive to “uncivil society” building, often visible at the level of contentious politics.

The normative understanding of civil society excluded not only instances of uncivil society, but also radical and subversive repertoires of contention whose most prominent manifestation were disruptive social uprisings in the streets (Kopecký and Mudde 2003a, 2003b; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Piotrowski 2009). Despite claims that non-participatory political culture and demobilized civil society were distinctive features of CEE, some scholars identified the strong presence of protest events by impoverished people against unresponsive governments (Císař 2013; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Greskovits 1998: 69–92; Szabó 1996; Vanhuyse 2004, 2006). As such, these demonstrations were predominantly motivated by a growing disappointment with the new elites, due to the increasing socio-economic cleavages that had resulted from the post-1989 transitions and “shock therapies” (Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 2001; Klein 2007; Szabó 1996).⁷² However, these mobilizations were sporadic/episodic and “have not resulted in stable formations after the time of contention, especially after the economic demands of the protesters were met” (Piotrowski 2015: 7), thus remaining outside the focus of social movement scholars. On the other hand, the protest politics proved to be highly consequential in some cases, such as the toppling of authoritarian regimes during the so-called “colored revolutions” (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). However, unlike “uncivilized” protests motivated by socio-economic grievances, these protest politics were supported – if not outright sponsored – by the West, and, as such, were considered to be a manifestation of civil society. As authors who studied manifestations of “uncivil society” have shown, the normative conceptualizations of civil society – most visible in the “civil/uncivil” distinction – are thus both conceptually and analytically highly problematic in capturing the empirical reality of post-socialist civil societies.

⁷² The findings of these authors showed that strikes and other socio-economically motivated protest actions accounted for the largest political mobilization in CEE, and were most commonly initiated by trade unions and professional organizations. They did not occur often, but, when they did, they tended to have more participants than other forms of protest.

Taking its cue from this body of work – in particular, some of the rare, early studies of social movements and contentious politics in the post-socialist CEE (Beissinger 2002; Ekiert and Kubik 1998, 1999; Flam 2001a; Glenn 2003; Kopecný and Mudde 2003b; Szabó 1996) – a new, empirically-oriented research agenda began to emerge relatively recently. Its starting point is that post-socialist civil society has to be studied without normative and ideological biases, as it actually is. A growing number of scholars began to question the dogma of post-socialist, (post-)transition societies as weak in participatory terms and yet transactionally strong.⁷³ These scholars’ work stopped solely relying on data from attitude surveys and official NGO registries, in favour of qualitative, in-depth case studies, as well as quantitative historical and comparative research designs to explore the actually existing practices of contestation in CEE. By shifting their focus from NGOs as dominant organizational platforms, these authors began to uncover empirically important and theoretically relevant movement- and protest-related behaviour. Moreover, the academic insistence on searching for social movements that fit in pre-existing categories of classification (such as feminist, labour, environmental, global justice, and other movements) resulted in the disregarding – or, in the best-case scenario, the unintentional neglect – of the variety of contentious activities, strategies, and practices in CEE. Scholars who study the region argue that the most common type of activism in the region tended to emerge from small-scale, short-term, and often low-key citizens’ initiatives without any organizational structure involved, which effectively rendered these endemic forms of contention invisible to social movement scholars who were traditionally focused on highly visible mass mobilizations and NGO activities (Císař 2013, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015). These insights led some authors to question whether concepts that hitherto had informed research in the region – most notably, “social movements” and “contentious politics” – possessed enough heuristic, analytic, and conceptual bandwidth to “capture” all forms of contentious practices that took place in the post-socialist space. According to these accounts, the defining feature of political activism in CEE was actually its *liminality* and *hybridity*, which challenged the dichotomies present in civil society and social movement studies: formal/informal, coordination/spontaneity, private/public, contention/cooperation, infrapolitical/political, participation/transaction (see Fábíán and Korolczuk 2017; Fagan and Sircar

⁷³ Namely, the official NGO registries rendered visible just one model of associational life, but simultaneously obscured others, thus giving, at best, a partial view of post-socialist civil society. Therefore, focusing on ideal types in the research on post-socialist civil society led to systematic privileging of formal actors and some forms of action, while neglecting important activities that took place in less structured formats.

2018; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). Therefore, authors who studied social movements, civil resistance, protest politics, direct actions, and other forms of contention in the post-socialist space drew from both social movement studies and resistance studies to identify contentious practices that often lie *in-between* these categories. In short, what the state-of-the-art research showed is that the problem in studying civil society in CEE not only stemmed from methodological limitations, but conceptual shortcomings in dominant theoretical paradigms and interdisciplinary approaches.

Some authors have even taken a bold step in inaugurating post-socialism as an analytical lens and a critical standpoint in social movement studies – thus abandoning its gloomy destiny as being a simple “area studies problem” – by approaching empirical material in CEE as “an excellent opportunity to test and develop social movement theory” (Jacobsson 2015b: 2; see also Bieber and Brentin 2018; Čisaf 2013, 2017; Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Gagyi 2015a, 2015b; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). Most importantly, instead of simply treating the region as a repository of case studies for the uncritical application of Western theoretical models, researchers have begun to use the empirical realities of contentious politics in Europe’s semi-periphery to re-calibrate social movement theory. The new research agenda takes into account the ambivalence, hybridity, and liminality of the “post-socialist condition”, as well as its distinct historical development, cultural specificities, and the unique institutional engineering of these societies, both during and after socialism, in order to study the myriad ways in which civil society influences not only the state, but the public and society more broadly (Biber and Brentin 2018; Fagan and Carmin 2010; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Mujanović 2017; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson 2015a; Pleyers and Sava 2015). By taking into account these elements, as well as grounding empirical research in actually existing civil societies, the new research agenda is boldly theorizing the experience of post-socialism to amend the dominant interdisciplinary approaches by investigating how these contentious practices participate in civil society building. I argue that *Thesis I* and *II* were informed by *research on post-socialist civil society*, while this new research agenda is actually based on *post-socialist civil society research*. This epistemological shift has not only resulted in empirical contributions to the study of neglected forms of contentious politics in CEE, but is gradually re(de)fining social movement theory from the experience of post-socialism, and thus is testing dominant theories of social movements and civil society.

A careful synthesis of post-socialist civil society research points to three important elements that should inform any future research on civil societies in CEE:

- (1) *Conceptual*. There are numerous reasons why people in the region engage in public life – from a(n)ti-political involvement to openly political activism – which also manifests itself through the manifold forms and trajectories this participation takes, ranging from cooperation with institutions to extra-institutional confrontation. Some authors offered typologies of unconventional participation based exclusively on the post-socialist experience – for instance, participatory and transactional activism (Petrova and Tarrow 2007); participatory activism, transactional activism, radical activism, civic self-organization, and episodic mass mobilizations (Císař 2013); and consentful contention, dissentful contention, consentful compliance, and dissentful compliance (Cheskin and March 2015) – but these proved to be problematic when studying, firstly, infrapolitical forms of resistance/resilience and contention that occupy a liminal position between everyday tactics of resistance and political repertoires of contention (see Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017), and, secondly, alternative forms of direct, “horizontal” democratic organizing that, by their very existence, call into question the legitimacy of the instituted dimension of society (see Arsenijević 2014; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Razsa 2015). In short, what is lacking is a new analytical framework with adequate conceptual boundaries and empirical indicators to grasp the empirical reality of contentious practices in the region.
- (2) *Methodological*. While a focus on activities in the civil sector and high visibility mobilizations (such as “colored revolutions”) gained widespread attention, most activities important for social movement scholars remained invisible to researchers precisely because their low-key, short-term, and small-scale character often occurred outside the public gaze. These activities have not been identified as incidents, but rather as the defining features of civic engagement in the region (Císař 2013, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015). For instance, the so-called “civic self-organization” was shown to be the most prevalent form of organizing and engagement in the post-socialist setting (Cisar 2013). What was becoming more important in the context of democratic backsliding in the region (Greskovits 2015; Kmezić and Biber 2017) were contentious practices that were not necessarily contentious politics nor everyday resistance, such as spontaneous one-man

protests (Beumers et al. 2017) and politically engaged community art projects (Galliera 2017). Simply put, when studying contentious practices in the post-socialist space, a more inductive, “grounded” approach is needed, one that takes into account practices that are considered to be contentious (by the actors themselves, the state, and/or society), in this particular context (although these might not be necessarily perceived as such by Western observers or in other socio-cultural contexts). This approach is operationalized by studying activities by citizens that occur outside of institutionally-mediated settings, whether mutual aid activities in the informal economy at the level of neighbourhoods or open-air demonstrations against the governments in public squares.

- (3) *Theoretical*. New social movements comparable to their Western counterparts – such as environmental, LGBT, urban, alterglobalist, etc. – were indeed present in CEE after the collapse of communist regimes. Moreover, the region gave birth to some distinctive social movements, such as counter-cultural movements (Císař and Koubek 2012), housing/tenant movements (Pickvance 1994, Vilenica 2017), squatting movements (Polanska and Piotrowski 2015), “rights of the disabled” movements (Fröhlich 2012), citizens’ movements (Baća 2017c), the “natural childbirth” movements (Beloousova 2002), pensioners’ movements (Leipnik 2015), and movements with other “adjectives”, many of which gained only limited attention. On the other hand, the scholarly literature points to regressive movements – predominantly right-wing – as being the most politically consequential movements in the region using protest politics as a preferred mode of engagement. These movements that include religious, parental, racist and other prefixes have come under scrutiny only recently (see Fábíán and Korolczuk 2017; Kopecký and Mudde 2003a, 2003b; Jacobsson and Saxonber 2013, 2015). The majority of current movements in CEE use diverse methods of campaigning, some of which are political (confrontational, disruptive, and even violent), but – in the context of unresponsive policy-makers and the overall passivity of the population – apolitical methods are employed more frequently, as they are more suitable to the existing legal, economic, and cultural opportunity structures. Social movements in the region, therefore, do not face a simple dichotomous choice – either professionalization or mobilization – but, instead, employ a variety of repertoires of action ranging from cooperation to contention, service to protest, self-help activities to mobilization, education to policy-writing, and advocacy to radical forms of engagement

(Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013: 18). Simply put, rather than engaging in contentious politics, social movements frequently engage in cooperative relationships with the state or take their struggles to the courts. Therefore, when approaching post-socialist social movements as case studies, instead of “repertoires of contention”, it is better to speak of “repertoires of action”, since social movements act in ways that do not necessarily imply contention, but rather cooperation with the state.⁷⁴

However, rather than focusing on actors, who often combine different tactics and strategies in making claims and/or communicating grievances, my focus is instead on *contentious practices* through which people have been building civil society “from below” for almost two decades. That is to say, I do not focus on individuals or organizations and then investigate the repertoires of action they use, but, rather, I focus on contentious practices as the unit of observation/analysis. However, it is worth noting that contentious practices are just one possible mode of action that social actors can use.

In a pioneering study on post-socialist social movements, Flam (2001b: 5) noted that we can speak of movement-related phenomena in CEE only insofar that we define actors involved in social movements as “social agents who tap and command resources in order to put issues across to the public and to influence the agenda in their polity”, and not as “mobilizing agents who are capable of staging open-air collective protest”. Having this in mind, in the next section I discuss a conceptual and analytical framework for studying precisely these protest activities. Without imposing or implying political content to demands and grievances that come “from below” through these activities, nor reducing the targets of these actions to state structures, the practice-oriented approach I propose simply focuses on *direct* actions: those that are not institutionally-mediated or represented, and thus are outside conventional, institutional, and routinized participation. This approach takes into account justifications employed by the subjects themselves to legitimize their abandonment of institutional venues of engagement. Therefore, one of the challenges is to identify types of activism and forms of contention that are not discussed in the literature, yet are present in the post-socialist space. A nuanced understanding of contentious practices in the post-socialist,

⁷⁴ As stated before, due to the lack of tradition of protest culture in the region, the majority of actions that fell under contentious politics – especially, those perceived as disruptive, violent, and illegal – were publicly perceived as “uncivil” (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013: 257). Therefore, social actors used repertoires of action that were more appropriate for the opportunity structures available within the country, which ranged from protesting in the streets, settling things through courts, or directly influencing politicians – sometimes all three simultaneously.

(post-)transition space of CEE requires a sociological approach, which I address in the following section.

Towards a New Conceptual Framework: Studying Contentious Practices

As I have demonstrated, labels such as “social movements”, “contentious politics”, “popular protest” and “social activism” were employed only sporadically in the analysis of post-socialist civil society. Instead, more general terms that do not necessarily imply contention – such as “civic engagement”, “political participation”, or, more exclusively, “transactional activism” – were used to describe what was actually happening in the civil societies of CEE. In this section, I critique of these concepts and argue that they are inadequate to capture the complex empirical reality of post-socialist civil society building outside the macro-processes of institutionalization – that is, actually existing practices of contestation “from below”. When it comes to non-institutional participation, I propose the concept of *contentious practices* as the unit of observation/analysis. Moreover, I focus on the actors’ subjective understandings of their contentious practices: as has been shown in previous sections, people in the region who engaged in unconventional participation often viewed their actions as apolitical, non-political, or even anti-political, so it is important to take an insider perspective on how activists defined, justified, and legitimized the abandonment of institutional venues of political/civic participation when conceptualizing and assessing post-socialist civil societies. Therefore, my empirical focus is on contentious practices through which civil society in Montenegro manifested its “civil power” and produced “social energy” under different stages of post-socialist transition from 1989 to 2006. Accordingly, I investigate the forms these practices took and their content: claims, grievances, and demands that were communicated through these actions and the justification or legitimation registers used to defend such contentious behaviour.

Before I move to the theoretical rationale for studying contentious practices, I want to point to the problematic conceptual boundaries of each concept currently being used as a unit of observation in research on post-socialist civil society. *Thesis I* was, for instance, developed within a particular framework of transitology and democratization theory, in which civil society development was assessed through the individual engagement of citizens in public affairs. The problem with the concept of *civic engagement* (or, sometimes, *civic participation*) used in these studies was its “conceptual stretching”: since Putnam’s introduction of the concept in 1993, its

heuristic value gradually diminished over time; it “came to mean involvement of any kind, whether passive (paying attention to social and political affairs) or more active (investing energy in social or political affairs)” (Berger 2009: 338). Civic engagement, therefore, can be used to describe entirely different things – from everyday private activities to formal public duties, from non-political voluntary activities to unconventional political participation.⁷⁵ As a catch-all term that can denote virtually anything – from helping a neighbour to artistic expression, from community service to marching in an illegal demonstration, from associational membership to political participation – its conceptual elasticity has been criticized for distorting its use to the point of becoming a concept that confuses rather than illuminates (Adler and Goggin 2005; Berger 2009, Ekman and Amna 2012; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Therefore, although the study of civic engagement has been useful in terms of researching forms of voluntary collaboration or joint action aimed at improving conditions in the civil sphere, it has not particularly useful in distinguishing political from non-political participation.

Similar arguments can be made regarding the term *political participation* in terms of its ability to measure the strength and density of post-socialist civil society. This concept is more precise than civic engagement, because it refers to attempts by citizens to influence any powerful actors, groups, or organizations in society and their decisions that concern societal issues (Brady 1999; Teorell et al. 2007; Van Deth 2014). With its favouring of electoral participation – and, therefore, its tendency to overlook the non-formal, extra-institutional political engagement of citizens – “political participation” predominantly denotes numerous aspects of “normal” political life, in which numerous actions involve little if any collective contention (for instance, ceremonies, consultations, bureaucratic processes, collection of information, registration of events, educational activities, and so forth). Therefore, to politically participate means to be engaged in all aspects of political life – from passive involvement to active engagement, from institutional participation to extra-institutional activism. If we take into account *Thesis II*, then we can speak about high political participation by civil society organizations even though there is no actual participation by citizens in public affairs. In other words, “political participation” becomes problematic because it does not differentiate between “transactional activism” and “participatory activism”, a distinction which is highly important when discussing contention “from below”.

⁷⁵ Putnam (1993) never precisely defined civic engagement. He used it to denote any activity within the community, ranging from watching political television shows to bowling in amateur leagues, from volunteering in neighbourhood associations to writing cheques to political advocacy groups, from membership in trade unions or mass political parties to participating in street rallies.

Therefore, transactional activism is an institutionalized and routinized venue to influence the state. However, social activists in CEE are often disinterested in influencing state structures through non-institutional participation, instead making themselves both audible and visible in the public sphere to raise awareness amongst the public or even to institutionalize other forms of civil organizing. Research has shown that contestation processes in CEE do not necessarily fall within the framework of contentious *politics* – that is, “coordinated efforts” of “claim making” on governments (Tarrow 2012: 16). Instead, they form a complex set of practices whose lowest common denominator is direct action through the abandonment of institutional, routinized venues of civic engagement. Societal actors do not, however, claim political substance, even at times explicitly declaring themselves *a(anti)political*. In this research, contention is not understood as a conflict that arises between civil society and the state through claim-making that bears on the elite’s interests, but is also generated indirectly through the *illegitimacy* of different forms of social organizing (e.g., citizen plenums), or even the *illegality* of some coordinated actions (e.g., informal economy). To borrow from Isin’s (2008, 2009) work on activist citizenship,⁷⁶ I use *contentious* in “contentious practices” to designate actions that operate outside institutional venues of civic engagement, and, in the process, produce new sites of social enunciation, new forms of civic participation, and new modes of political being.⁷⁷ These practices are contentious simply because actors refuse to use institutional channels – moments when citizens decide to “do something” without falling into a routinized way of doing it – in communicating their demands, claims or grievances, and, in the process, exerting their agency. Accordingly, I investigate those patterns of action that social scientists identify and interpret as *contentious*, yet not necessarily political – either from the “objective” perspective of social scientists, or from the subjective understanding of the actors themselves. Without labeling these practices as “political”, I am more interested in how actors themselves understand and interpret their abandonment of institutional venues of participation through contentious practices, by paying special attention to “the political and moral

⁷⁶ Citizenship is, therefore, not to be understood in a legal manner as a *status*, but in political terms as an *act*, during which “subjects constitute themselves as citizens” – that is, “claimants of rights” – by demanding *justice* through unconventional, and often contentious, practices (Isin 2008: 18, 2009: 383).

⁷⁷ As Ekman and Amna (2012: 288) point out, “people of all ages and from all walks of life engage socially in a number of ways, formally outside of the political domain, but nevertheless in ways that may have political consequences”. Having this in mind, the concept of contentious practices does not necessarily entail organized collective action with a clear political objective. Rather, contentious practices can manifest themselves as a cumulative outcome of uncoordinated similar actions performed consecutively by a number of non-activist citizens. One example is military draft dodging in Montenegro: in the beginning, on the individual level, people avoided compulsory military service because they did not want to put their lives or those of others in danger, but when this practice became more prominent throughout Montenegro, it was treated by the state – and quickly afterwards by society itself – as a political statement, even though it did not originate as such.

repertoires that they utilize to provide accounts of and justify their adoption of specific modes of thought and action” (Kurasawa 2017: 16).

As the state-of-the-art work on social movements and other forms of contentious politics in CEE demonstrates, it is necessary to take into account the socio-cultural context, distinct historical trajectories, and political processes that have restructured these societies and affected how popular grievances and collective/direct actions are enacted in the public space (Bieber and Brentin 2018; Cisar 2013, 2017; Ekiert and Kubik 2014, 2017; Fagan and Sircar 2018; Foa and Ekiert 2017; Gagyí 2015a, 2015b; Horvat and Štriks 2015; Jacobsson 2015; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Mujanović 2017; Pleyers and Sava 2015; Razsa 2015). Taking a critical sociological stance, I thus “reject ahistorical and acultural abstractions” (Kurasawa 2017: 18), in favour of utilizing Montenegro’s post-socialist experience as a “context of discovery” for theorizing and providing critique. By adopting “social contextualism” “in order to underscore the socio-economic, cultural, political, and historical conditions under which” contentious practices are “produced” and “embedded”, I am interested in discovering which contentious practices are “geographically circumscribed social constructs” (Kurasawa 2017: 9, 14). In that regard, a sociological understanding of *practice* designates complex relationships between these structural factors and both individual and collective agency, without falling into “structural determinism” or “voluntarist subjectivism”. Simply put, practices are situated within and structured by “historically transmitted and socially institutionalized forms of thought and action, discourses and relations of power, which have enabling and constraining effects upon a practice’s effectiveness and the range of possibilities within which it operates” (Kurasawa 2007: 12). Moreover, “a practice cannot be reduced to adherence to a norm or rule, as cognitivists would have it, nor to the mechanistic execution of a pre-existing structural code”, but rather it “represents – and simultaneously produces – a pattern of materially and symbolically oriented social action that agents undertake within organized political, cultural and socio-economic fields, and whose main features are recognizable across several temporal and spatial settings” (Kurasawa 2007: 11). Therefore, what is considered to be a *contentious* practice depends on social context: for instance, what is a contentious practice in an authoritarian regime may be the institutional essence of a democratic one. Thus, my focus is on practices through which conventional, institutional, and routinized venues of civic/political participation are abandoned, and, in the process, contention is generated.

Contentious practices are salient for analysis, therefore, because they expose similarity and regularity in contestation between civil society and the state, creativity in how contentious practices are adapted in different settings and under different processes, and originality and authenticity in the post-socialist space. While some practices can be similar across different settings – especially those “modular” practices that have been shown to be transferable from one setting to another – other contentious practices are born out of particular local, national, or historical contexts. In other words, instead of privileging structures, individuals, or (inter)actions, a practice-oriented approach in sociology favours analysis of practiced routines – or, better yet, shared social practices – that create, reproduce or transform institutionalized arrangements of people and artefacts or, more precisely, patterns of social life. Therefore, unlike research on post-socialist civil society that uses individuals and organizations as the units of analysis, I take my cue from post-socialist civil society research to focus on actually existing civil society. However, instead of using social movements and their repertoires of contentious and non-contentious action as case studies – which are often comprised of numerous repertoires of contention/action and cooperation – I am interested in enumerating, categorizing, and interpreting contentious practices, ranging from tactics of everyday resistance to repertoires of political contention.

By shifting the analytical focus from repertoires of action to contentious practices as the unit of observation/analysis, I suggest that one can escape the pitfalls of social thinness from which research on post-socialist civil society suffers. This shift of focus investigates contentious practices in the meaningful lifeworlds of post-socialist space: how and why citizens advance their claims through contentious practices and, in the process, counter political power under constantly changing structural conditions via different macro-processes. Therefore, whereas most research on post-socialist civil society was preoccupied with how it was built “from above” – through different macro-processes that made it in the image of Western civil societies, leading to *Theses I* and *II* – I am interested in identifying and interpreting the empirical reality of post-socialist civil society at the level of contentious practices. Moreover, analysis of practices takes into account how they were structured by the historical heritage of (pre-)socialist civil society, how processes restructured contentious practices during the post-socialist transition, and how civil society was structured through these practices. Analysis of contentious practices can show us how established relations and institutionalized fields of power were reproduced or transformed, as well as how new venues for political action were created.

It is not sufficient simply to differentiate between modes of practice; it is “always necessary to ask what disposes people to enact the practices they do, how and when they do; their aims, their lived experience and their inherited knowledge will surely figure amongst the factors of interest here” (Barry 2001: 29–30). Instead of labeling these practices as political (which most of them inherently are), I take my cue from the sociology of critical capacity developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (1999, 2006) in aiming to understand the subjective perceptions and attitudes of the social actors themselves in relation to their actions: “if we want to take seriously the claims of actors when they denounce social injustice, criticize power relationships or unveil their foes’ hidden motives, we must conceive of them as endowed with an ability to differentiate legitimate and illegitimate ways of rendering criticisms and justifications” (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999: 364). Therefore, when investigating contentious practices, in addition to claim-making and strategic frames, I also focus on actors’ justification and legitimation strategies for their actions that violate accepted rules of civic/political participation in transitional democracies. I am not interested simply how these practices impose demands on governments or how they frame their grievances, but also in how they are justified and legitimized by the subjects themselves. I thus focus on their criticisms and justifications referring to the values of various *orders of worth* drawn upon in *critical moments* that “break the ordinary course of action”. These critical moments spur actors to realize that change cannot be made through institutionalized, routinized venues of participation, and to act to change the *status quo* by engaging in a dispute to justify their actions or criticisms (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999: 359–360). In other words, once contentious practices are identified through research, it is necessary to identify the values to which subjects referred in their disputes. What is scrutinized are values invoked by people to legitimate and justify their decision to engage in contentious practices. I thus investigate “how these actors make sense of the social world, operate in specific institutional settings, and negotiate with others in morally pluralistic societies”, and thus treat subjects as “reflexive agents, equipped with the necessary competences to give an account of themselves as well as to justify their actions and worldviews when encountering critiques” (Kurasawa 2017: 4). Therefore, instead of simply using the notion of contentious *politics*, the concept of contentious *practices* takes into account the critical capacity of actors to draw on different resources and toolkits to define situations and to publicly justify their positions and claims.

With contentious practices, the normativity characteristic of civil society studies is abandoned. Instead of studying organizations or different forms of activism, the practice-oriented approach focuses on practices that abandon institutional venues of participation, which range from individuals who engage in hunger strikes, across variegated terrains of everyday resistance and direct actions, to political parties orchestrating revolutions. The unit of observation/analysis thus shifts toward the empirical reality of contestation processes in the post-socialist space, taking into account the actors' own justifications for these processes. While enumerating contentious practices, I am simultaneously engaging in a form of interpretivist critical sociology to understand the content behind the practices: the claims and justifications enacted through them. My approach complements existing studies by examining the forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices during a period of harsh institutional and social engineering. Therefore, by studying these practices against the backdrop of macro-processes, I do not fall for "agentic determinism", but instead look at how structures and processes created competences among civil society actors who engaged in contentious practices, through which they invoked certain values to justify/legitimize their actions.

Conclusion

By focusing on contentious practices, I have shifted the focus from analyzing individuals and their attitudes (theoretico-methodological approach that informed *Thesis I*) and from organizations and their activities (theoretico-methodological approach that informed *Thesis II*) to what people actually do when exercising their (political) subjectivity, autonomy, and agency. By analyzing practices, I investigate how macro-processes of institutionalization affect the forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and contents of claims and grievances, as well as justifications and legitimizations articulated through these practices "from below". While different data sources can be used to study contentious practices,⁷⁸ I have focused on the "event data" offered in Montenegrin newspapers as the most consistent and systematic way of mapping and tracking contentious politics over time, since these newspapers provide the only data source that recorded these longitudinally. Once this data is systematized and interpreted, it can be analyzed against the

⁷⁸ Interview-based and archival research (e.g., official documents, police reports, and government statistics) can offer more nuanced insights into both infrapolitical and political forms of contentious practices.

backdrop of three macro-processes that shaped the post-socialist space, which I have presented in the *Introduction* by analyzing and systematizing existing literature on Montenegro.

Chapter II

1989–1990: The Post-Revolutionary Vacuum

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the period following the restructuring of the old Communist Party *nomenklatura*, through the Antibureaucratic Revolution, to the first multiparty elections in contemporary Montenegro. I begin by outlining the key features of civil society in order to provide socio-cultural and political context for the contentious practices that defined this period. By illuminating the empirical reality of these contentious practices, I argue that the reformist ideas proclaimed during this historical period were enacted through these practices and, in turn, legitimized the engagement of people outside of institutionally-mediated venues of participation as the key agents of socio-political change. I conclude with a focus on the interaction between these practices and the mechanisms (brokerage, repression, category-formation, boundary-activation, and emulation) and processes (demobilization and actor-constitution) that characterized the 1989–1990 period.

Compared to other republics, Montenegro developed arguably the most docile civil society in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. For instance, when university student uprisings began to proliferate in 1968, causing an unprecedented political stir in the country, Montenegro was the only republic in which students remained quiet (see Fichter 2016; Radulović 2016). By the end of the 1980s, publicly audible confrontations were almost exclusively among the local elites (see Brković 2003a; Keković 2003; Špadijer 2007; Vladisavljević 2008). This was due to Montenegro being the federal republic that benefited the most from “communist modernization”. Within a few decades, it had transformed relatively painlessly from an underdeveloped agrarian society to a modern industrial state, with strong middle and working classes emerging in the process (Cross and Komnenich 2005). Montenegrins identified with the socialist Yugoslav project more than any other “nation and nationality” in the region, effectively rendering its anti-fascism and internationalism the key elements of Montenegrin national identity (Čagorović 1993, 2012; Jenne and Bieber 2014). Subsequently, when the rampant socioeconomic-cum-political crisis struck Yugoslavia in 1980s, both the standard and quality of living began to decline rapidly in Montenegro. This changing socio-political environment did not leave only citizens in disarray, but

also left the party-state elites disoriented and reluctant to respond proactively – outside of sluggish bureaucratic procedures – in addressing the growing concerns of its people.

For that reason, dissent and dissatisfaction began to appear within civil society in the 1980s. As the years progressed, strike actions became more common, but these were limited to factories, never spreading beyond the premises. Furthermore, worker grievances were related to declining wages and thus in no way questioned the legitimacy of the communist party or the socialist system (Keković 2003, 2005). Available data demonstrates that workers’ discontent began to grow rapidly from 1985, when the socio-economic crisis began to accelerate (source: Vladislavljević 2008: 112):

Table 2. Strikes in Montenegro, 1980–1988.

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Strikes	0	6	4	4	19	34	34	50	54

In 1988, however, the nature of these labour disruptions began to change – both in their form and content. As workers began to leave their workplaces to express dissent in the streets and in front of the state institutions, their discontent began taking a more political shape: they were positioning themselves as “the producers” demanding accountability from the incompetent and alienated “bureaucracy”, thus creating a crisis of political legitimacy in the country (Grdešić 2017; Vladislavljević 2008). While the workers’ demands were essentially socio-economic in nature, more politically dissenting voices began to emerge in the form of nationalistic speeches given at cultural events held in open public spaces, usually criticizing the party-state leadership in Montenegro and setting up the rise of Serbian nationalism (Filipović 2006; Keković 2003). By the end of the decade, workers’ assemblies and some media outlets – youth and cultural ones, in particular – were becoming more open to critical opinions and dissenting voices, thus making condemnations of the ruling elites in the public sphere more prominent and, in some instances, even acceptable (Keković 2003; Orlandić 1997). The growing labour discontent and dissatisfaction began to accelerate in August 1988, when the so-called Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution was set in motion, eventually culminating in January 1989, when the old communist *nomenklatura* was overturned and replaced by the nominally reformist party youth who have remained in power ever since.

The Antibureaucratic Revolution was not important simply because it resulted in political change through “street democracy” and thus legitimized *the people* as a political actor – an event

often labelled as “the happening of the people” (*dogadjanje naroda*) (Denich 1994) – but also because it brought into existence symbolic frames and narratives that would inform, explicitly or implicitly, all the political turning points during Montenegro’s post-socialist transformation. Two key frames were secessionism/separatism as the ultimate political transgression, and the “alienated” and “bureaucratized” party-state elites as the “enemy of the people”.⁷⁹ The triumph of the people over a bureaucratized and alienated regime through demonstrations validated a rather populist idea that the people are always right and that the new party-state leadership must always consider critical input from its base, which further legitimized some of the basic principles of self-management.

Montenegro thus had entered a new historical era in 1989, which sparked genuine hope within the population about a better future and restored faith in the elites’ ability to solve the country’s accumulated problems through popular reforms “from below”, such as political democratization and economic liberalization. While Montenegro was governed by a *de facto* one-party regime until the end of 1990, the country’s public sphere nonetheless gradually was opening itself up to dissenting opinion and critical thought, as well as to the new civil society actors that had emerged in the first half of the 1980s and operated outside the structures of the Communist Party (Komar 2015; Muk et al. 2006; Vujović 2017). While these relatively independent entities occupied a liminal position between political and civil society – being civic associations yet acting as para-political subjects – the civil society built in socialist Montenegro carried on its functions under changing structural conditions through the umbrella-organization of the Socialist Alliance of Working People (*Socijalistički savez radnog naroda*).⁸⁰ Most of these organizations and associations, especially those with a tendency to be openly political, were visible and audible through the conventional and institutional means of panel discussions, deliberation forums, press releases, public talks, etc. Simply put, both the elites and the people were ready for change and, more importantly, each saw themselves as agents of change. As I demonstrate in this chapter, this was most evident at the level of contentious practices.

⁷⁹ This will become salient after 1997, when the ruling regime had to re-frame the Antibureaucratic Revolution as yet another attempt to abolish Montenegrin statehood, such as what occurred during the Milošević-sponsored violent protests of January 1998 (see *Chapter IV*). After that period, numerous books appeared, framing the whole 1988–1989 period in conspiratorial terms.

⁸⁰ An umbrella organization through which all socio-political organizations were tied horizontally (but monitored by the party-state): sport clubs, youth associations, student organizations, professional associations, writers’ clubs, war veteran associations, scouts, etc.

Contentious Practices, 1989–1990

Contentious practices during this period, identified in my dataset (N=352), can be grouped into two categories: firstly, those that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or even paralyzed the routinized flow of everyday life through people’s disengagement from their social roles and daily duties, such as strike actions in workspaces, or boycotts of the norms of citizenship (e.g., paying taxes, accepting salary); and secondly, contentious practices through which people staged their dissent outside of their comfort zones by entering the public arena, through either the written word in the public sphere or gatherings in public spaces (see *Table 3*).⁸¹

Table 3. Contentious practices in the 1989–1990 period (N=352).

	Disruption		Protest	
	<i>Strikes</i>	<i>Boycotts</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Staged</i>
1989	83	16	43	39
1990	75	15	44	37
Total:	158	31	87	76

In this chapter I provide a descriptive and analytical overview of these practices, paying special attention to the claims/grievances they articulated and the justifications that actors used to account for them.

Contentious Practices as a Disruption

Strikes and boycotts were visible forms of contentious practices that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or paralyzed the flow of everyday life – both inside and outside the workplace (e.g., local communities, neighborhoods, schools) – through people’s disengagement from the ordinary way of “doing things” throughout the 1989–1990 period.

Strikes

A strike was the most frequent contentious practice, with 158 events spreading from January 1989 until December 1990. Strikes were progressively becoming more unpredictable, unexpected, even spontaneous, and tended to last from a few hours to several days, and in a few instances for several weeks. Understandably, as a country of “actually existing socialism”, in

⁸¹ A wave of protests in January 1989 throughout Montenegro, which were a part of the final phase of the Antibureaucratic Revolution, were not counted; I only counted protest events that followed it, or were unrelated to it although happening simultaneously.

which *workers' self-management* was the dominant form of organizational management, Montenegro had well organized and networked industrial workers in all collectives – ranging from small manufacturing business to large enterprises – so in the context of a socio-economic crisis, when inflation began to decimate their wages, workers were used to engaging in labour shutdowns and vocally criticizing the establishment. At the very beginning, it is important to point to the analytically important distinction between strikes in the industrial sector and those in the public sector. Like their blue-collar counterparts, school teachers, health care providers, judges, civil servants, and other white-collar workers were no strangers to labour shutdowns.

While collective memory and public opinion even today often blames workers, calling them lazy and seeing their strikes as carriers of ethnonationalism (Brković 2003a; Burzan 1998; Filipović 2006; Keković 2003, 2005; Nikolaidis 2005), the analysis of data I gathered paints a rather different picture – that of socio-economic anxieties and fears, but also of genuine desire to carry on democratic reforms “from below”. Strike actions predominantly began as a consequence of workers not being able to resolve issues with enterprise management and the local authorities through institutional mechanisms (e.g., negotiations with political representatives, workers’ assemblies). They were often framed as “the instrument of last resort” by which workers attempted to shift attention of the authorities and the public to the rapidly declining standard and quality of life. In general, strikes were used as an instrument for articulating two demands: firstly, regular payment of salaries and benefits (since these were in some cases late for several months), and secondly, monthly increases of their wages so that inflation did not devalue their purchasing power for basic subsistence. It was a class discourse, rather than a nationalist one that was the lowest common denominator for all strike actions during this period.

In most cases, these demands were coupled – for industrial workers more than for those doing administrative work – with harsh criticism of the people they identified as responsible for their declining socio-economic conditions and material predicaments. It is important to point out that the word often invoked – *odgovornost* – translates in English as three related yet distinct words: responsibility, accountability, and answerability. Namely, whenever the industrial workers would invoke *odgovornost*, it was not only related to their personal predicament (e.g. financial, material, existential), but they were genuinely interested in identifying those responsible for the dire state of their enterprise and collective, from whom they demanded answerability and accountability. Most importantly, in light of socio-economic reforms, industrial workers wanted

to be informed as to the future of their enterprise and their collective, since they progressively felt disempowered from doing anything directly on their own, without the support of the ruling power structures that promised reforms. For that reason, this type of contentious practice was a way for workers to *self*-manage their enterprise by demanding the introduction of “order” in their business, which entailed: introduction of an independent financial audit and business review, lowering of administrative costs, financial compensation of overtime, mitigation of interpersonal relationships in the collective, as well as a determined action from the party-state structures to put a stop to incompetence and corrupting practices such as nepotism, favouritism, cronyism, disorganization, unsuitability, irresponsibility, and mobbing. By appealing to *odgovornost*, industrial workers exhibited not only an awareness of the structural condition of their predicament – who was responsible and accountable for the situation their enterprise (and, in some cases, their industrial sector) found itself in – but also acted upon the reformist ideal of *debureucratization* introduced by the Antibureaucratic Revolution. Thus, they demanded an end to all the bad practices that had characterized the previous period.

Since this event was perceived as a moment that marked the well-deserved fall of the “alienated bureaucracy” at the highest party and state levels, strikes were often used as a pressure mechanism for “those responsible” at lower levels – for instance, in the management or in the municipal institutions – to answer for their decisions, incompetence, and (in)actions. The blue-collar workers would thus often justify their actions as an “organic” continuation of the Antibureaucratic Revolution through which they were “debureaucratizing” remnants of “the old [i.e., negative] ways of thinking and doing things” such as, for instance, positioning themselves as defenders of their enterprise from the “usurpation of social property”. By this, they meant that the management was using common, shared resources as their own private property for their personal gain. Therefore, strikes were implicitly legitimized by invoking self-management rights and duties, as values that transcended workers’ personal and material interests. Due to this, workers demanded total adherence to an ethic of self-management, especially when it came to the management actually following guidelines reached by the workers’ assemblies.

On the other hand, industrial workers’ demands for increased (and regular) wages were based on human rights discourse – tied to ideals of socialist self-management as a self-evident truth and inalienable human right – as well as on their sense of personal and collective responsibility for their enterprises. Simply put, workers considered it a right to work and to be

adequately paid for that work. Repeatedly they stated during strikes that they “[did] not want to be on welfare”, nor were they asking for charity; instead, they asked the authorities to ensure production in a time of socio-economic hardship and demanded that they be paid for their work so they could ensure basic subsistence for their families. The invocation of “human rights” and “self-management rights” – as well as their awareness of their crucial role for economic recovery – to justify strikes to the authorities and the public “as an instrument of last resort” were coupled with appeals to morality, as in the case of, for instance, grievances aimed at the local community’s “moral responsibility” to save their own social enterprise. Labour shutdowns demonstrated that the blue-collar workers were fed up with the *status quo*. They were disappointed in their own representatives, in the management structures, and in the local authorities, and called for the reformist ideals proclaimed in the Antibureaucratic Revolution to be introduced in their workplaces, not only declaratively but substantively. In a word, workers saw themselves – not their political representatives – as the agents of change, a self-perception that would disappear over time.

The “new development philosophy” of the Antibureaucratic Revolution had resonated with white-collar workers as well. While those in the industry were justifying their strikes by appealing to the “right to work” and “self-management rights”, white-collar workers – predominantly teachers, but also those working in public services such as doctors and nurses, and those employed in courts and public administration – were using a different register of legitimization for their contentious practices, which exposed not only the homogeneity of the socialist middle-class, but also geographic inequalities in the socialist space. For public employees, strike actions were legitimized as a way of defending their social status and a profession that was being “degraded” and as an opportunity to highlight the fact that the public sector in which they worked was “neglected” by the authorities who were nominally responsible for its functioning. They pointed to progressively worsening conditions in schools, hospitals, and other public institutions – such as lack of heating, water supply, basic necessities for work, among other issues – using these important examples to illustrate the systemic neglect of their professions, which were deemed crucial for social reproduction. In other words, public employees were not only interested in ensuring basic subsistence for their families through strike actions, but also preserving a minimum of professionalism in their workplaces, as well as to put a stop to severe discrepancies between wages and frequency of payments between poorer and wealthier municipalities.

Simply put, they engaged in this form of contentious practice to defend the “dignity of the profession”. This was also coupled with appeals to justice – “to be equally treated by the state” – which entailed “just redistribution” and more specifically implied that inequalities in wages among public employees be abolished. As they were protesting “degrading treatment” – pointing to the lack of material conditions for professionally conducting their work as well as the inadequate treatment of their profession in society, which deemed their profession “neglected and humiliated” – teachers and other workers working in administration, culture, and health created, on the aggregate level, a decentralized but coordinated movement for policy reforms at the national level, resulting in the creation of a national fund that resolved wage discrepancies. By demanding that the state and society recognize the importance of these professions to the process of social reproduction, as well as their right to be treated equally throughout the country, white-collar workers demonstrated surprising independence from the party-state structures as well as their power to make change “from below”.

Due to the socio-political organization of Montenegro during that time, workers in both sectors aimed these demands mainly at the local authorities – from enterprise management to municipal governments – calling out their passivity and outdatedness. In both categories, the majority of requests also included demands for the resignation of those who had placed their enterprises and institutions in this position and were responsible for the predicament of their working collectives. Interestingly enough, while local authorities were responsive to such actions, the new leadership would come whenever called to those on strike and offer declarative support. This gradually helped to ensure their legitimacy as problem-solvers who genuinely listened to the concerns of “common people”. For that reason, both journalists and the workers themselves noticed that it was “fashionable” to call the “new leadership” to come to their aid and promise them that changes would happen.⁸² Since labour saw their contentious actions as a way of advancing the “debureaucratization process”, which was understood as a democratization mechanism, the new leadership gained its legitimacy “from below”. In that way, the desire for change and the new leadership’s genuine (initial) attempts to make change were converging in a populist project that, on the one hand, celebrated people’s willingness to rebel, while on the other,

⁸² While journalists were speaking of this kind of behaviour as “fashionable” (“Od potrebe do pomodarstva”, *Pobjeda*, 9 May 1989), workers, farmers, and others were justifying it by claiming that only the new leadership showed genuine interest in helping them and had power to resolve their problems (“Izgnubljeno povjerenje”, *Pobjeda*, 17 May 1989).

simultaneously providing legitimacy to the new leadership as an expression, or rather a vessel, through which that rebellion could be translated into policy and desired change.

Boycotts

There were 31 contentious practices that could be described as boycotts. Unlike strikes, boycotts were often small-scale, short-term, and low-key events. In some instances, a boycott was a strike surrogate entailing the refusal to accept wages that were deemed to be “humiliating” by workers, both blue- and white-collar alike. Moreover, boycotts exposed the readiness of small business owners, predominantly in the service industries, to fight for their rights by boycotting paying taxes, thus performatively demonstrating their self-organized opposition to tax reforms.

Another group of boycotts were related to everyday life and professional problems, such as: parents refusing to let children go to school until issues – such as bullying, heating and adequate hygiene, or curriculum changes – were resolved; university students boycotting classes due to the unprofessional behaviour of professors; local artists boycotting nationwide festivals due to the systemic neglect and underappreciation of local artists; or members of the local communities boycotting participation in municipal institutions due to their exclusion from decision-making processes or the systematic neglect of their problems by the state or municipal institutions. As they engaged in this form of contentious practice, citizens of Montenegro demanded to have a responsible government that acknowledged the hardship of the general population and consulted them when addressing issues that negatively affected them. Boycotts also began to uncover some ethnic/national tensions, such as Orthodox-Slav ethnic/national minorities boycotting municipal elections due to the poor representation of their population, or female workers of Muslim/Bosniak and Albanian ethnicity refusing to enter their workplaces due to experiencing nationalistic slurs on a daily basis while on the job. While these actions were not invoking politics *per se*, the ways in which they were justified – as, “defending national identity and dignity” – began to expose deep-seated tensions in the multiethnic towns that would gradually become politicized by elites. For instance, this refusal to invoke politics was also present in the infamous nationwide boycott of Slovenian and Croatian goods in grocery stores, which was justified on socio-economic grounds – namely, that these goods were too expensive. This was a *de facto* extension of clashes between the Yugoslav political elites at the grassroots level.

In conclusion, boycotts were predominantly reactive attempts to address injustices and wrongs at the local level. Those who addressed these issues through boycotts legitimized them as civic reactions to defend themselves (e.g., their dignity, rights, identity, interests). This is not to say that their actions were not politically consequential, as was the case of boycotting goods *en masse*, but rather that boycotts were mostly about readiness of certain social groups to make certain social issues visible to the public or simply to point out institutional incompetence and systemic neglect. These actions did demonstrate a willingness and readiness on the part of civil society to address contentiously, through self-organization, the state's deficiencies, social injustices, and issues that impacted them directly, both as individuals and as social groups.

Contentious Practices as a Protest

In this section, I discuss all those contentious practices not related to the disruption of the routines of everyday life, but rather involving the proactive engagement of citizens in the public arena. This includes those practices by which people made their voices audible in the public sphere or, in more inspired instances, made themselves visible through intrusion into or occupation of public spaces. I have grouped these contentious practices into two groups: *written protests* and *staged protests*.

Written Protests

There was a total of 87 written protests, spanning from so-called “open letters” to more conventional petitions. Here, I will discuss written communications that were not a part of institutional mechanisms – such as the delegates of local community organizations sending letters to or petitioning higher instances, societal organizations expressing dissent through press releases, or people simply writing grievances to the national parliament – but instead only written acts used to by-pass institutional mechanisms in order to express protest publicly, as a self-organized collective addressing the state, the public, or even the international community.

On the one hand, petitions were used as an awareness-raising and whistle-blowing mechanism that citizens could use to expose corrupt and illegal practices – often by calling for an independent financial audit in their enterprises or institutions – or, what the signatories deemed to be unethical behaviour in their workplace or local community. In light of biased media, open letters were also used by workers, in both the manufacturing and public sectors, to “objectively inform

the public of the reasons for their strike”, or sometimes even to defend enterprise management from public defamation. While this group of written protests was related to people’s “civic” or “moral duty” to inform the public, a different type of written protest began to address everyday life issues more proactively, demanding concrete improvements and reforms as a “proof” that the new leadership’s promises were being put into practice. This included, calls for increased traffic control and safety in neighborhoods and communities, public transport discounts for the poor, requests for curricular reforms or protests against unpopular reforms and, finally, demands for the opening of kindergartens, schools, discotheques, or building roads that would keep their dying communities alive. However, the demands that the state listens to people and address issues they face were not limited to those regarding material and socio-economic decline. In fact, with the changing political climate, petitions appealing to the revival of “genuine tradition” and asking for changing the names of cities and streets that had communist names – or simply returning them to their pre-communist names – began to emerge, which was the first step towards breaking some of the taboos of the communist era (e.g., removing Tito’s name from the name of the capital).

On the other hand, those who could not stage disruptive strikes used protest letters to articulate their grievances and demands. This group spoke directly to the socio-economic issues that different social groups faced, such as the self-organization of owners of small business writing protests to the local authorities against increased taxes, or pensioners demanding – besides regular pension payments – progressive tax reforms as a way of removing a burden from the poorest parts of the population, or even laid-off workers demanding workspaces that belonged to their working collectives and bankrupted enterprises to be preserved and valorized as commons. Most importantly, civil society reacted contentiously against the cancellation of public goods, such as some communist-era magazines and radio stations. In a similar fashion, environmental activism became the most prominent type of engagement at the grassroots level, showing elements of movement-like phenomena that were to remain a distinctive feature of civic activism in Montenegro’s post-socialist transition. This included protests against forest exploitation, building asphalt plants and hydropower plants, and eventually demands for more information on pollution. All of these letters appealed to socialist notions of civil rights and civic duties, which referred to involvement in decisions affecting citizens’ respective local communities or public goods. This demonstrates that citizens were more willing to make their voices audible in the public sphere than

to withdraw from public life, especially in relation to the common good – something that was to remain a constant of grassroots mobilizations in Montenegro.

Montenegrin identification with the socialist Yugoslav project – its internationalism and anti-fascism, most notably – was visible in petitions signed “against all nationalisms”, as was the emergence – or, better yet, reawakening – of more nationalist and traditionalist sentiments. Written protest was used to attack all those “liberals” who would dare question (“insult”) Montenegrin (Slavic-Orthodox) tradition, as well as to criticize textbooks that were negating the Montenegrin nation and indoctrinating its youth in the name of Greater Serbian nationalism. Written protests also provided a medium for certain intellectual circles to publicly criticize the new party-state leadership for warmongering rhetoric, but more often it was becoming a platform for civil society, that was gradually shifting to the right of the ideological spectrum, to defame these critics and demonstrate support for the new leadership, calling out anyone who was against the new leadership (or supporter of the federal government) as anti-Yugoslav (and later, anti-Serb).⁸³ With regard to this openly political written protests, petitions also became important for the politics of memory and dealing with the past. Former political prisoners, who were imprisoned in the gulag-like island of Goli Otok (1949–1956), demanded responsibility, accountability, and answerability for their predicaments and the decades-long silence about those who were tortured and died there. The emergence of these political voices, coupled with (ethno)nationalist framings, began to uncover not only atrocities committed in the name of socialist Yugoslavia, but also the readiness of parts of civil society to publicly demonize different political opinions as “treasonous” to Yugoslavia and its values. More than the polity, it was civil society that was opening up to diverse voices.

Overall, apart from letters and petitions revolving around these political issues, written protest was a mechanism by which citizens in their local communities could address or point to burning problems, as well as to recommend solutions. Many called for the protection of the commons, such as environmental and communal issues, but others also sought to introduce hitherto silenced voices and invisible actors into the public arena. Simply put, people used written protests to make their problems, which had been completely neglected up to that point, visible to the public. These were justified on the basis of socio-economic hardships, civic responsibility and “genuine worry”, thus acting on the notion of the citizen as a political subject that could address the state on

⁸³ On the other hand, graffiti were used for more political messages. It is symptomatic that in the first half of this period only openly anti-Milošević messages – against him and his supporters in Montenegro – were articulated through anonymous graffiti (e.g., “Neprihvatljiv pamflet”, *Pobjeda*, 19 June 1989; “Grafit kao provokacija”, *Pobjeda*, 15 Novembar 1989).

an equal footing. Moreover, it highlighted the willingness of citizens to participate in public affairs and *self*-manage their lives and communities, thus discrediting the present-day narrative that identifies a withdrawal of people from participation in public affairs, instead indicating active participation that was to set the tone of developing post-socialist civil society. This participation was even more evident in protest gatherings.

Staged Protests

There were 76 staged protests, which took the following forms: gatherings in the streets/squares and in front of buildings (e.g. enterprise management, local authorities), occupation/sit-ins of buildings (in several occasions coupled with hunger-strikes), and mass rallies/demonstrations.

In addition to strikes, protest gatherings in public spaces were not unknown to industrial workers or public employees. On some occasions, strikes would turn into protest walks/marches or gatherings in front of the buildings of municipal authorities condemning low wages and demanding the “right to work”, meaning a more proactive response from government to solve the problems their enterprises fell into and to prosecute those responsible, or to demand the resignation of local authorities who failed to act.⁸⁴ Teachers who refrained from engaging in strikes also held “protest classes” to make their issues visible and audible to the public and demand that institutions act. Taxi drivers protested new legislative changes that enabled “amateurs” to drive cabs, which was one of the first contentious reactions to liberalization introduced by the federal government. However, of the socio-economic discontent, most interesting was a wave of protests on behalf of *the unemployed* – during this period being actively self-organized – who would gather to demand an end to nepotism, clientelism, and corruption in employment practices, but also more transparency in new job position openings and adherence to the law in hiring practices.⁸⁵ In the light of proclaimed reforms, the unemployed appealed to “democratic pressure” to push the authorities to do their job and end the corruption and machinations that prevented professionals from finding jobs in their profession, as they strongly believed that the “right to work” was a “basic

⁸⁴ In an extreme case, these protests escalated when workers began throwing rocks at the enterprise management to make them leave the factory (“Direktori u bjekstvu”, *Pobjeda*, 15 June 1990).

⁸⁵ The most active subcategory of “the unemployed” were the “teachers of Marxism” – namely, those who got their degrees in Marxism, but with socio-political changes and cancellation of Marxism courses in high-schools could no longer find employment. They would often occupy buildings to demand employment from the authorities. This issue was eventually settled by certifying their prequalification as “teachers of sociology” in high-schools, which were to be more prevalent in the next period. Once again, this was another movement-like phenomenon of this period.

human right”. This group of staged protests was deeply embedded in socialist values and, as such, was understood by actors themselves as a contentious debureaucratization of the system “from below”. In other instances, non-labour-related protest gatherings of workers were incidental but had a more political intonation, such as protest gatherings in front of factories during which workers in larger enterprises (supported by their management) would call out and criticize the Croatian and Slovenian media for spreading disinformation about their business and financial records, and express support for Slobodan Milošević. This was just the beginning of the elite-driven steering of socio-economic discontent towards the “ethnic other”.

More civic-oriented gatherings related to everyday, communal, and environmental issues were present in this period, as citizens were determined to render audible and visible problems that state institutions had failed to address. On the one hand, the tribal heritage was evident in protest assemblies organized by kin-related structures to demand help because their villages were dying and young people were leaving because of the lack of job opportunities and poor quality of life. On the other hand, citizens self-organized in urban areas to protest against the state for not opening schools in their municipalities; gathering to protect cultural heritage monuments and building for tourist exploitation; or simply to be included in the decision-making process that affected their lives and professions. In some extreme cases, people would engage in sit-ins and the occupations at the offices of local authorities, whether municipal or party, to demand justice and right wrongs committed to them by the state.⁸⁶ These intrusions in the public arena were usually by individuals or families. Demands were related to issues such as illegal hiring practices, the reversal of unjust court orders, social justice, financial assistance from the state, etc. Most importantly, environmental activism at the grassroots level became more prominent – especially against pollution, putting a stop to landfills in their local communities, building hydroelectric plants that would destroy natural beauty and cultural monuments, and protections of their living space. It was especially common for people in urban areas to gather to protest green fields being turned into construction sites. In addition, environmental movement-like grassroots mobilizations began to occur in the North, when people protested against the new forestry law that transferred ownership of forests in poor municipalities to newly formed public enterprises, and in wealthier municipalities to protest against giving foreign enterprises licenses to exploit flora and fauna in the coastal area. As these contentious practices began to show the powerlessness of local

⁸⁶ Occupations were often coupled with hunger-strikes on the premises of local municipal institutions.

authorities, many of the protests began shifting their aim to the national level, and towards those with the power to protect natural resources and the environment from exploitation and systematic neglect. Conversely, they also demonstrated the civil responsibility of the nominally “communist subject” to organize and mobilize, address a wide range of issues, and ultimately demand action and accountability from the state. Furthermore, this range of practices demonstrated the diversity and strength of civil society of the time, contrary to a narrative of weakness.

And finally, by the end of 1989, mass political gatherings became the most visible and memorable form of public protest. These were predominantly organized by the party-state structures, but the Serbian Orthodox Church began to emerge as an important mobilizing presence as well. It began with protests against Kosovo Albanians, then turned against the federal government when during the so-called “the rally of the hungry” the new leadership, in front of tens of thousands of people, protested against economic reforms implemented by the federation. In late September, while this gathering was still embedded in populist class discourse, nationalistic overtones became more prominent when constitutional changes in Slovenia were denounced as separatism during a mass rally in Podgorica. In 1990, these turned into “people’s grand assemblies” (*velike narodne skupštine*) calling for the “spiritual unity of all Serbs”, as well as open calls to arms through self-organization to defend Kosovo from separatists.⁸⁷ Eventually, these gatherings turned against the federal government, which was seen as an instrument of non-Slavic-Orthodox elites seeking to break up Yugoslavia at the expense of the Slavic-Orthodox population, which reignited political and cultural frames about separatism and “alienated bureaucracy” initiated by the Antibureaucratic Revolution. This also signified the end of class discourse and its merging with an (ethno)nationalist ideology that rendered the “ethnic other” as the source of exploitation of the people.

The ideals of socialist Yugoslavia – such as internationalism and anti-fascism – were turned on their heads, as it became legitimate to demonize the “ethnic other” as “demolishers of Yugoslavia” while at the same time professing oneself to be a genuine defender of the “brotherhood and unity” against nominal “fascists”, further deepening ethnopolitical cleavages. This demonization of political opponents did not extend only to non-Slavic-Orthodox people in the Yugoslav region, but to those in Montenegro, as well. A letter in which anti-regime intellectuals

⁸⁷ It is interesting to point out the effect of ethnopolitics of socio-economic discontent – how suddenly some strikes began to seize, as workers saw it as their duty not to strike while the country was in danger from “separatists”.

criticized the warmongering rhetoric of the new leadership initiated a series of protests against “domestic traitors” – often organized by large industrial workers’ collectives – which eventually devolved into public witch-hunts against anyone who opposed official (pro-Milošević) politics. For instance, pro-regime intellectuals organized a series of “poets’ rallies” (*pjesnički mitinzi*), which responded to all this by distancing themselves from those among their ranks who were against the new leadership and demanding the arrest of all those who wanted to stop the democratization process implemented by the Montenegrin regime. In short, by the end of 1990, when protests against the reformist movement led by the federal prime minister culminated in blockades of these so-called “anti-Yugoslav” politicians, critics of the new leadership (and/or supporters of the reformists at the federal level) in Montenegro were fully constituted as the “enemy” in the public sphere.

The effects of the socio-economic crisis, which resulted in the rapid disintegration of ordinary life, alongside the radicalization of the population through ethnonationalist state propaganda, had distinct effects on the orientation of citizens toward democratic participation. If civil society actors considered themselves agents of democratization in January 1989, by the end of the following year, many of them had turned into the oppressors of those who dared speak and act politically in the name of that very democratization of Montenegro (and Yugoslavia).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the period between the mass demonstrations that ended the dominance of one establishment and brought another into power, as well as the first multiparty elections in contemporary Montenegro that set the new establishment’s rule in stone. In the process, I have demonstrated that during this two-year period, the party-state served as a broker in opening the public sphere to a multitude of voices and that the public space was used for the expression of dissent on behalf of diverse social groups, emulating both contentious (e.g., strike) and non-contentious (e.g., panel discussions) actions evident in neighbouring countries, East-Central Europe, and the West. This opening of the polity led to the creation of new, independent political actors from the party-state-controlled political and societal organizations, all of whom pushed for reforms. However, it was not until the party-state elites began clashing amongst themselves about the nature of reforms that the conservative wing emerged victorious. These forces then resorted to repressing all the voices that dared to challenge them and a wedge formed

between those who pushed for further reforms and those who came under the spell of Milošević, who – in the light of the collapse of Yugoslavia – reignited frames from the Antibureaucratic Revolution, thus painting the reformists who promoted the idea of modernizing Yugoslavia as actual “separatists” and “fascists”, who were no different from the “old bureaucratized elites”.

Therefore, while much of the literature characterizes Montenegrin civil society as obedient and demobilized during this period – with the exception of state-organized mass rallies – the analysis of contentious practices exposes a lively participation outside institutionally-mediated venues of participation by people, where citizens understood themselves as having to support and nurture the democratization process – in the tradition of socialist self-management – thus lending legitimacy to the new leadership “from below”. This chapter demonstrates that if we take into account strike actions – but also those small-scale, short-term, and relatively low-key instances of participation (e.g., boycotts, blockades, protest letters, sit-ins) – we find that citizens were responding predominantly to socio-economic hardships and issues they faced in their everyday lives, showing strong and diverse bottom-up articulation and aggregation of interests as a feature of Montenegrin civil society at that time. Citizens were pointing to problems and offering solutions, but were also not afraid to criticize inefficiencies and failures of the state and establishment to be responsible, accountable, and answerable to its people – including bad social practices such as nepotism and clientelism. They made their issues visible and diagnostics audible “from below”. At the same time, nationalism was emerging “from above”, through frames created and steered by elites to capitalize on this socio-economic discontent – and overall collapse of one socio-political system and the new one not yet born – and use it for their own political gain in the context of a post-revolutionary “political vacuum”.

While the supposed passivity of Montenegrin civil society – when investigated through survey instruments – is attributed to static factors, such as political culture, dense interpersonal relations, and the patronage system, I have shown in this chapter that the first stage of post-socialist transformation in three dimensions (the polity, civil society, and the economy) had actually been characterized by popular involvement in public life through contentious practices, immediately after decades of passivity and disengagement. On the one hand, this was legitimized by the ideas proclaimed in the Antibureaucratic Revolution that called for the pluralization and democratization of these three dimensions. On the other hand, people’s genuine belief that they were supposed to carry on the ideas of socialist self-management resulted in active participation where they saw

themselves as agents of change – as citizens to whom elites should answer. This not only provided support for political, economic, and societal reforms “from below”, but also functioned as a mechanism for monitoring and control of the new leadership. With the increasing socio-economic and political crisis, however, these noble desires articulated in civil society would later be turned into an ethnonationalist frenzy by political entrepreneurs, something whose culmination would occur during the 1991–1997 period.

Chapter III

1991–1997: The Authoritarian Turn

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the authoritarian turn that followed the first multiparty elections, until the split in the ruling party that marked the beginning of the democratization of the polity. I start with a short overview of the key features of civil society in order to provide the socio-cultural and political context for the contentious practices I subsequently discuss. By illuminating the empirical reality of contentious practices in this period, I argue that civil society was not weak as previously thought, but that its *a(anti)political* character and the civic foundations of the democratization process in Montenegro were actually articulated through contentious practices. I conclude with a focus on the interaction between these practices and the mechanisms (repression, certification, boundary-activation, emulation, and diffusion) and processes (demobilization) that characterized the 1991–1997 period.

By the end of 1990, Montenegro was formally established as a façade parliamentary democracy. Even though the reformed Communist Party won the majority of seats, the polity became officially open to a wide range of political voices coming from all sides of the ideological spectrum. As the new legislative framework was conducive to a relatively easy founding of and organizing in political parties (Darmanović 1993; Komar 2013; Vujović and Komar 2008), this had not only created an unprecedented space of inclusion in institutional politics, but effectively disincentivized citizens from participating outside the formal political game, despite the majority of them being highly politicized and genuinely eager to participate in public affairs. This is not to say that the emergent civil society was void of political capital, but rather that the transformed political opportunity structure had streamlined political participation within more conventional – or, more precisely, institutionally-mediated – ways of addressing socio-political issues. Legally, the state recognized two official types of associational life within civil society: firstly, *societal organizations* (*društvene organizacije*) which were a continuation of the socialist model of civil society and, as such, were state-sponsored entities focused on social and professional services; and secondly, *citizens' associations* (*udruženja građana*), a newly established entity that provided

space for new forms of voluntary association at the grassroots level, free from state control (Keković 2005; Komar 2015; Muk et al. 2006; Vujović 2017).⁸⁸

While some of the citizens' associations became openly political during their struggle for democratization and against the war, some societal organizations would become prominent political voices justifying war intervention and promoting ethnonationalism and authoritarian tendencies (e.g., cultural, religious, war veteran, seniors). And in the context of involvement in the neighbouring civil wars, socio-economic crisis, and international isolation, all actors who criticized the regime – that is, the hegemonic project in which the party, church and state-sponsored civil society were conjoined – would eventually become delegitimized and demonized as “traitors”, if not outright “enemies of the state” (see Andrijašević 1999; Darmanović 1993; Džankić and Keil 2017; Morrison 2018). This merger of politics and (ethno)culture set the dominant political tone for the time in which the public sphere was polluted with Serb ethnonationalism promulgated by elites of various kinds, and in the process framed and capitalized on the socio-economic grievances while steering popular discontent toward the ethnic other: first Slovenes, then Croatians, and ultimately towards Bosniaks/Muslims and “domestic traitors” in Montenegro. At its margins, civil society provided safe spaces for numerous counter-hegemonic, anti-regime, and progressive political voices, whether they be formal organizations, informal groups, engaged individuals, or simply politicized members of ethnic/national minorities who felt endangered.

As such, while civil society actors would occasionally appear in the public space to act politically, they were predominantly audible in the public sphere through media and public deliberations. More importantly, international isolation and the socio-economic crisis had pushed people to dedicate their time to daily survival, instead of using it for more attractive personal or public concerns by engaging the non-responsive, oppressive state (Forbess 2013; Sedlenieks 2015). Many of these activities were occurring in-between the public and the private, in the liminal spaces created and maintained by informal networks of kin-related structures, friend circles, and black markets, in which the grey economy became absolutely crucial for day-to-day existence (Đurić 1999, 2003). Hence, contentious practices in Montenegro from 1991 to 1997 ranged from

⁸⁸ Societal organizations were, among others, trade unions, youth organizations, farmers' cooperatives, professional associations, recreation and leisure collectives, sports clubs, women's organizations, and veterans' organizations, retirees' associations, writers' clubs, disability organizations.

the contentious politics of the Anti-War Movement to the everyday infrapolitical direct action that became a defining feature of social engagement in this period (Lazić 1995; Popović 2002).

The scholarly focus on these most visible aspects of civil society, I argue, had obscured a vibrant civil society that hitherto had escaped the gaze of many observers, simply because contentious practices of the period, as I will demonstrate below, mainly addressed socio-economic, environmental, and everyday life issues, not the “big political issues” of interest to most scholars.

Contentious Practices, 1991–1997

Whereas the previous period was characterized by the opening of the public arena for dissenting opinion, it became rather dangerous to openly challenge official politics and policies between 1991 and 1997. This was best exemplified by the oppression that anti-regime activists and politically organized ethnic minorities had to endure during the period of what is nowadays referred to as the “dark nineties” (see Darmanović 1993; Keković 2005; Popović 2002; Rastoder 2015; Špadijer 2007). In this regard, oppositional political and civic engagement became a kind of “luxury” only for dedicated (anti-regime) activists. But what about contentious practices beyond activism – that is, through the engagement of the all those non-activist citizens?

Political authoritarianism and the total collapse of the economy had pushed the institutionally and politically weak civil society toward a game of survival: instead of engaging with an unresponsive state and its dysfunctional institutions, activities in civil society shifted toward more infrapolitical forms of direct action and resistance within the informal economy and black market (Đurić 1999, 2003; Forbess 2013; Lazić 1995; Sedlenieks 2015). Since these forms of contentious practices were not regularly reported in the newspapers,⁸⁹ I am discussing them in this section to demonstrate that mass involvement of the citizenry in the grey economy and black market activities was actually a defining feature of Montenegro’s civil society in the 1991–1997 period. This “spontaneous movement for survival” and “criminalization of everyday life” was not restricted to the exchange of goods and services, nor in more extreme situations on smuggling activities or poaching (Đurić 1999, 2003), but came to encompass squatting, illegal enclosures of forests and lands, and even the development of “illegal settlements” *en masse*. In addition to mass involvement in the grey economy described in the aforementioned literature, by the end of 1997,

⁸⁹ Most of the time these practices were not reported as they were happening. Rather, reports were made on instances in which the government intervened to demolish illegal objects.

there were more than 600 illegally built households just in an “occupied” park-forest in Podgorica, as there were more than 10,000 illegal household connections on the electric grid in Montenegro.⁹⁰ Direct action did not stop there since, for instance, some of those who operated legally and paid taxes regularly, such as taxi-drivers and video store owners, would self-organize to identify and catalogue rivals who were operating illegally and were thus luring away their customers with low prices. Therefore, when discussing the contentious practices of this period, it is important to keep in mind that solely in numerical terms, citizens self-organizing through direct action, instead of addressing the unresponsive and inefficient state, was the predominant form of civic engagement during this period.⁹¹

Contentious practices during this period, identified in my dataset (N=806), are grouped into two categories: firstly, those that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or even paralyzed the routinized flow of everyday life through people’s disengagement from their social roles and daily duties, such as strike actions in workspaces, boycotts of the norms of citizenship, or blockades in their local communities; and secondly, contentious practices through which people staged their dissent outside of their comfort zones by entering the public arena, either through the written word in the public sphere or through gatherings in public spaces (see *Table 4*).

Table 4. Contentious practices in the 1991–1997 period (N=806).

	Disruption			Protest	
	<i>Strikes</i>	<i>Boycotts</i>	<i>Blockade</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Staged</i>
1991	58	8	6	78	43
1992	23	7	13	72	35
1993	21	6	11	54	39
1994	12	10	3	42	22
1995	13	2	4	39	15
1996	14	3	5	29	12
1997	41	3	4	25	34
Total:	182	39	46	339	200

⁹⁰ These cases are just illustrative examples that point to the sheer number of such activities (“Za uzurpante nema vode”, *Vijesti*, 14 January 1998; “Besplatno grijanje”, *Vijesti*, 27 November 1998).

⁹¹ Another important feature was mass avoidance of military drafting. These were individual acts, but on the aggregate level they had enormous political significance, as people demonstrated that they did not support Montenegro’s involvement in wars. In the beginning, on the individual level, people avoided compulsory military service because they did not want to put their lives or those of others in danger, but when this practice became more prominent throughout Montenegro, it was treated by the state – and quickly afterwards by society itself – as a political statement, even though it did not originate as such (see Brković 2003b; Keković 2005; Pavlović and Dragojević 2012). In addition, it exposed solidarity at the local level, as neighbors and friends helped to hide many draft dodgers from the military police.

In this chapter I provide a descriptive and analytical overview of these practices, paying special attention to the claims/grievances they articulated and the justifications that actors used to account for them.

Contentious Practices as a Disruption

When discussing contentious practices that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or paralyzed the flow of everyday life – both inside and outside the workplace (e.g., local communities, neighbourhoods, schools, etc.) – through people’s disengagement from the ordinary way of “doing things”, these became visible as *strikes*, *boycotts* and *blockades* during the 1991–1997 period.

Strikes

A strike action declined as the most frequent contentious practice, with 182 events spreading from January 1991 until December 1997. By 1991, the liberalization measures introduced by the federal government, as well as the poor handling of economic liberalization, began to show its ugly face. This was only intensified by the loss of the Yugoslav market, involvement in wars in the region, and subsequent international isolation and UN sanctions, resulting in a complete collapse of social enterprise (Lazić and Sekelj 1997; Musić 2014; Uvalić 1997). These hardships affected the previously politically potent workforce through two types of administrative leaves but *de facto* lay-offs. First, socio-economic reforms under difficult conditions had decimated the active workforce by forcing workers into early retirement *en masse* by labeling them as redundant “technological surpluses” (*tehnološki višak*). Second, once the enterprises had undergone a restructuring process through bankruptcy, so-called “forced leaves” of the workforce (*prinudni godišnji odmori*) were then introduced during which a worker received only a percentage of the wage while retaining some social benefits (e.g., access to free health care, subsidized public transportation). The workplace as an effective platform for collective identity and mobilization thus gradually dissolved, and with a significant decrease in numbers, industrial workers – once an important political force and actor in social dialogue – began to lose their influence on the state and became increasingly dependent on government welfare programs and clientelist mechanisms. Strikes thus were transformed from the movement-like reformist phenomena into contentious mechanisms for survival through which workers demanded immediate financial or material assistance from the state, rather than institutional, policy, or

management reforms.⁹² The heritage of the socialist self-managerial mindset, values, and practices was also carried on, but gradually began to dissipate in justifying contentious practices. The optimism that followed the Antibureaucratic Revolution was replaced by desperation, as workers found themselves in a limbo in which they were less a force that could actually impact government policies, and more of a desperate mass that easily could be misused by the state for its political goals: warmongering in the region and oppression of the opposition in the country (e.g., by mobilizing them for rallies and counter-rallies).

Once they disengaged from their work duties, workers did demand to have a say in the decision-making processes that affected their workplace – and, by proxy, the fate of their families – but eventually their demands shifted solely to grievances for survival. This elevated the state to this all-powerful problem-solver, which only further entrenched workers’ dependence on the DPS-controlled government. Appeals to “the right to work” that had characterized the previous period were certainly present in the early stages of the 1991–1997 period, but these had disappeared by the end of it. Work became perceived less as a right and more as a luxury in the context of mass lay-offs and the collapsing economy. In other words, the proclaimed “right to work” of the previous period disappeared in the context of a situation in which survival was no longer guaranteed, as the industrial workers had indeed become “cases for social welfare” at the mercy of the state – the only entity that could institutionally provide them with basic subsistence. As demands were aimed at the state to enable/restart the production process or to ensure the sale of products so that the remaining active workforce could continue – or those on administrative leave could return – and not become a part of the ever-increasing laid-off mass, a rather subtle distinction between demands was a tell-tell sign. Workers’ initial demands for *odgovornost* from management and audits of businesses to expose embezzlement transformed in later stages as they began to question the entire restructuring of ownership. Often naming and blaming inegalitarian practices that accompanied this transformation process (e.g., in social housing apartment distribution or income level between administration and workers, appointment of incompetent personnel in managerial positions, bankruptcy as a preferred model of enterprise restructuring), workers generally attributed these practices to corrupt and greedy individuals, rather than to systemic problems.

⁹² Some of these issues were taken up by the trade union on the national level, although predominantly through institutional mechanisms (Kilibarda 2016).

Paradoxically, while being disruptive, strike actions were in one important respect politically supportive: somewhat surprisingly, blue-collar strike actions had exposed unanimous support for the restructuring of the economy and faith in the political elites at the top to carry out the transformation process of turning social enterprises into private companies for the benefit of all, despite the ever-present criticism of how that restructuring was conducted in their respective enterprises. In this regard, the process of economic transformation cannot be seen as simply imposed “from above”, but was also fully supported and legitimized from the ground up. Strikes were therefore often justified as a mechanism for preventing “corrupt restructuring of the enterprise”. Lost in the limbo of transition, and under the mantra of necessary reforms, blue-collar workers saw this as the only possible way of saving their enterprises and collectives, so it was less a question of ideological leanings than what was perceived as a pragmatic inevitability. Therefore, it is interesting how much faith the workers had in the strategic orientation of the government, despite the harsh measures, and how their perception of the structural problems stemming from the managerial/ownership transformation – namely, the systemic corruption that characterized the process – was reduced to the “few bad apples” argument. Their criticism was aimed at the management that was often being accused of being corrupt, nepotistic and, as such, was slowing down the idealistic view of “genuine” economic restructuring that would benefit all.

What had radically changed by the end of 1997 was that the strike actions were now a vessel through which workers, especially those on administrative leaves, gradually began to question and criticize not only corrupt practices committed by individuals in management or state privatization funds, but the transformation of the economy itself (e.g., bankruptcy as the preferred way for restructuring of enterprise). Simply put, as time passed, the “alienation of social property” (*otuđivanje društvene imovine*) – by which workers meant theft through embezzlement of that which was previously collectively owned – began to be associated with the process of transformation itself: even though the workers saw the transformation as necessary, they began to question its model and implementation as something that solely favoured the new owners/management at the expense of workers. Since their protest against late payments were coupled with demands for more information about their future as qualified labour, especially in terms of their status as future pensioners, they gradually began to lose faith in economic restructuring and began feeling deceived, thus articulating the first publicly audible critique of the privatization process. Therefore, what started as a questioning of management during the 1989–

1990 period gradually shifted to challenging the implementation of the economic reforms launched between 1991 and 1997, eventually turning into an open critique of the (neoliberal) privatization process in both the 1998–2000 and 2001–2006 periods.

One would expect that workers' disenchantment with the process of state-led managerial/ownership restructuring would have made them more inclined to support the opposition that was consolidating as a serious challenger to the DPS by the end of the analyzed period. However, analysis of the justifications used by workers points to the workforce's dependence on – and, to a certain extent, fear of – the regime. By 1996, when the opposition coalition was formed, blue-collar workers became vocal in stating that their strikes had “no political connotations” and, somewhat paradoxically, would openly criticize the parliamentary opposition when it used their condition as an example of catastrophic economic policies, demanding that the opposition not politicize their material predicament and social status. However, workers' demand to render their contentious actions apolitical or non-political was not just a matter of ideology, but a pragmatic reaction to the authoritarian (and clientelistic) nature of the polity of that time. Therefore, while contentious practices were justified on apolitical grounds throughout the analyzed period, by the end of 1997 these were getting more *anti-political*, as workers expressed open hostility towards the political elites of the parliamentary opposition and wanted to maintain autonomy from “political games”, effectively rendering their dissatisfaction and dissent *social*. They acted as if their disputes with the those in power were a personal, almost intimate, relationship that should not be polluted by politics. This would become a defining feature of Montenegrin civil society in the decades to come: its “proper” manifestation as a space of associational life and collective engagement void of the political that was, in effect, reduced to party politics (and, by extension, party belonging).

Another interesting element of the strike action was the gradual disappearance of labour disruption amongst public employees. 1991 began with a wave of strikes in the primary and secondary education sectors, but these were reduced by the end of 1997 largely to strike-threats that rarely came to be actualized. While teachers' strike actions in the previous period were more proactive and aimed at policy changes that would lead to equity standards on a national level, in this period this type of contentious practice became more reactive to structural socio-economic problems. Teachers' collectives and unions were relatively strong in the early stages of the 1991–1997 period, as they sought to attribute responsibility for the catastrophic state of the education

sector and the degradation of their professional and working conditions. However, they quickly began losing power once their funding was centralized as they were financed from the newly established state funds and thus were tightly controlled by the state, giving the DPS stronger control of the public sector. The same stands for other public employees by the end of 1997: contentious practices had become a *terra incognita* for them, so they had to rely on union-mediated strike-warnings to have collective agreements respected. On the other hand, reports of strikes in the private sector were rare, but, in some incidental occurrences, those that were employed in the private sector fought against exploitation, demanding free days from work (e.g., non-working weekends) and paid overtime. As they were protesting “impossible working conditions”, those working in the private sector brought into the public sphere issues that were rarely discussed at that time: precarity, lack of labour rights, and outright exploitation in the private sector, as well as the government’s neglect of small business owners. Private entrepreneurs, on the other hand, would engage in coordinated symbolic labour disruptions during which they would close their stores or suspend services for a day to protest increased taxes, once again showing people’s willingness to self-organize around socio-economic issues.

By the end of 1997, despite the rise in strike actions, this contentious practice was gradually becoming unpopular in the public discourse, to the point that even the national and federal unions described it as an outmoded remnant of the past, something that workers should not use if they were to have a proper privatization process and, by extension, an affluent society.⁹³ Despite a number of strike actions, however, it would be unfair to say that Montenegro diverged significantly from the “politics of patience” that characterized the CEE, according to which workers waited for harsh austerity measures to be completed, since they were predominantly focused on financial and material assistance for basic subsistence. Therefore, even before privatization formally began, restructuring of ownership – under neighbouring wars, international isolation, and tighter state control – had affected the bargaining power of the workforce, the ways in which they justified their contentious practices, as well as their dependence on state welfare programs.⁹⁴ In short, legitimizations of strike actions went from demanding “the right to work” and defending “dignity

⁹³ Union leadership on both national and federal levels became dismissive of strike actions and protest gatherings as a way for workers to fight for their rights, as something that could actually slow down the necessary process of socio-economic restructuring (e.g., “Štrajk deplasiran”, *Pobjeda*, 22 March 1996; “Bez masovnih zborova”, *Pobjeda*, 23 April 1996).

⁹⁴ During this period, there were about “300,000 recipients of state funds, or almost the same number as registered voters”, so clientelism was used to influence election outcomes (Sekelj 2000: 62). The government not only controlled public servants, but also took it upon itself to support laid-off workers based on their “political suitability” (Đurić 2003: 143).

of the profession” in the 1989–1990 period, to emphasizing the mere “struggle for survival” in the following period. For their part, government preoccupations shifted from seeing labour as a source of its legitimacy, to viewing its members as a dissatisfied mass whose anger the government could steer for its own goals, away from the reforms demanded by these strikes.

Boycotts

There were 39 contentious practices that could be described as boycotts. Unlike strike actions which were a direct reaction to socio-economic restructuring, boycotts were less uniform; however, some common threads were present. During the 1991–1997 period, boycotts were sporadic, small-scale, short-term, and without serious political implications. However, they were important in two respects: on the one hand, boycotts were a kind of *ad hoc* form of disengagement that was at the disposal of those who did not have the resources to engage in more serious disruptive activities; on the other, this form of contentious practice was largely justified on the grounds of the government’s systemic neglect of people’s problems. Some boycotts had openly political overtones, mostly centred around ethnopolitical issues, such as artists and authors refusing to participate in cultural manifestations they deemed to be “anti-Yugoslav” or “secessionist tendencies”. Conversely, ethnic minorities used boycotts, such as refusing to fight outside of the Montenegrin territory. However, it was precisely these instances of boycotts that had gained media coverage, thus fueling the idea of non-Slavic-Orthodox minorities as disloyal and potentially dangerous citizens. At the same time, they exposed subjective feelings of oppression despite the government’s insistence that human rights were respected, an issue that was easily politicized by political entrepreneurs.

However, the majority of boycotts were related to a harsh material and socioeconomic situation: both blue- and white-collar workers refused to accept “insulting salaries” that were below the minimum wage prescribed by collective agreements and both spontaneously became more prominent among those working in the education, media and cultural sectors, as a way of showing that their salaries had become completely devalued and insulting to their professions. Notable were situations in which boycotts were not used as a weapon of symbolic resistance, but as a way of promoting policy-related reform among high-school pupils or, in some cases, protesting cuts in public spending that led to dire study conditions (e.g., no heating in classrooms, elimination of schools in villages), or curricular reforms in the higher education system (e.g., the

introduction of new study programs that they saw as an important for the job market). Furthermore, boycotts were also used as a preferred contentious practice among other social groups, such as farmers, taxi drivers, refugees, small business owners – among other groups of concerned citizens – to signal how they were being systematically neglected by the state and society. These boycotts included refusal to pay high electric bills; refusal to pay of taxes by farmers claiming state neglect, or by taxi-drivers due to unregulated “illegal drivers”; rejection of humanitarian assistance by refugees as a way of exposing dismal conditions in the refugee camps. Boycotts were, therefore, predominantly used as a symbolic gesture (rather than disruptive practice done *en masse*) to signal to the public the predicament of those who were, despite doing their part, underappreciated, neglected, “unrepresented”, or without political capital. Simply put, people engaged in boycotts to remind the state to “do its job” – by demanding that it act in accordance with the law – as they were the ones, as citizens, paying the price for institutional failures. As such, through contentious practices, they demanded that the government take responsibility for these failures.

Whether the justification for political boycotts was the preservation of the state from its alleged “internal enemies”, or simply an appeal to conscience, boycotts were predominantly used to expose grievances and criticisms of those who felt neglected or ignored by the state. However, rather than being used as realistic attempts to pressure decision-makers, boycotts were mostly used as a symbolic gesture to express discontent publicly and to expose worsening conditions, or simply to protest through disengagement, often appealing to neglect, moral right, or civic duty. The role of boycotts in civil society during that time was therefore not to create a direct confrontation with power-holders, but to render visible their predicaments and to demand a reaction.

Blockades

Unlike what was the case between 1989 and 1990, blockades gained some prominence as a distinct contentious practice during the period between 1991 and 1997. There were 46 observed events that could be described as blockades, especially in rural and suburban areas. Some are still vividly remembered, such was when people self-organized to block members from the most prominent independentist party from holding a rally in the North due to their alleged goal of “destroying Yugoslavia” or the blockade of the entire town of Pljevlja by the self-organized militia.

However, despite the most visible actions claiming to defend Yugoslavia from the spread of separatist ideas, small-scale but politically consequential blockades were most widespread in

rural areas where residents began to protect the local commons and private property from exploitation, effectively turning these blockades into a decentralized nationwide movement. Namely, with the denationalization process in motion – through legislation sanctioning restitution in which land nationalized in communist Yugoslavia was returned to their previous owners – people began to organize blockades of access roads to protect forests and lands (under restitution) from exploitation by state-owned companies. These blockades by villagers were coupled with justifications of not only preserving what was “stolen from their fathers and their fathers before them” during the communist nationalization of property, but also with environmental ideas that forests were a public, shared good that was being excessively exploited.⁹⁵ A similar situation emerged with agrarian lands that were supposed to be returned to previous owners, or when villagers would block a road to demand that telephone lines or the water-supply system be extended to their isolated villages. Simply put, villagers began to view private property as something they could capitalize on during worsening socio-economic conditions, thus turning “private property” into a distinct value worth protecting from government policies they deemed to be unfair. Moreover, these actions exposed the fact that Montenegro’s constitutional identity as “the ecological state” was just a set of words on paper, something that would become a systemic feature often addressed by civil society: declarative reforms, but with poor or non-existent implementation.

Somewhat different were blockades in the urban and suburban areas. The emergence of “illegal housing” (*bespravna gradnja*) – or, in some cases, even “illegal settlements” (*divlja naselja*) – as well as the proliferation of households that illegally connected to the water supply and power grids forced residents of these areas to frequently block attempts by the authorities to take down their houses or connections. In several cases, people organized blockades to prevent their neighbours from being evicted. Tenants would use blockades to prevent the privatization and commercialization of “common areas” in their housing buildings, which included basements, playgrounds, as well as roofs/attics. Finally, urban areas were a setting for blockades that were used as a symbolic gesture by laid-off workers to prevent closing down of their former enterprises, in which they hoped to restart production in the near future. On the whole, people were left to their own means to get by in numerous walks of life, and they often justified their “illegal” actions on

⁹⁵ In a “believe it or not” event, the villagers blew up a bridge with dynamite to prevent exploitation of their forests (“Presječen put šumarima”, *Pobjeda*, 4 September 1992).

the basis of necessity under harsh conditions to preserve for their families what was built by their own hands, since state institutions had left them behind.

When it came to blockades, then, this particular contentious practice was used as a reaction by desperate people to protect what was theirs or simply to demand that the government “do its job” and acknowledge their precarious positions. And in relation to an unresponsive state, this is how contentious actions built a civil society that demanded that the state ensure its basic functioning and protect the well-being of its citizens. Blockades were, therefore, almost exclusively justified on the basis of socio-economic hardships, legal rights, or moral grounds, and defended against processes that citizens could not control yet had severely affected their lives. As such, social actors and the state understood boycotts and blockades as a type of “social protest” rather than “political” one, a dichotomy that will arise in relation to anti-regime activism that I discuss in the following section.

Contentious Practices as a Protest

In this section, I discuss contentious practices that were not related to the disruption of everyday life routines, but rather involved the proactive engagement of citizens: practices by which people made their voices audible in the public sphere or, in more inspired instances, made themselves visible through intrusions in, or occupations of, public spaces. I have, therefore, grouped these contentious practices into two groups: *written protests* and *staged protests*.

Written Protests

There was a total of 339 written protests, spanning from so-called “open letters” to more conventional petitions. As in the preceding period, written protests between 1991 and 1997 were diverse, spanning from mundane concerns of the citizenry to demands for the protection of state borders. However, where written protest became important was in helping to make those who lacked representation in the polity more audible and visible in the public sphere, such as: refugees, pensioners, former prisoners of war, those who gained disabilities both as civilians or military personnel, laid-off workers, people who lost their life savings, those who gained disabilities in their workplaces, emerging voluntary and professional organizations, and local cultural workers and artists. Their demands were related to their group-specific problems, predominantly financial and socio-economic in nature, but these demands also requested acknowledgement and recognition

of their hardships by the state. However, this was not where diversity of demands, grievances, and actions stopped; while citizens might have been politically apathetic when it came to voicing their dissent against the regime and what it stood for, they were not socially passive and civically disengaged. On the contrary, without directly criticizing the regime, they were vocal in protesting specific issues that impacted them directly.

My analysis of written protest shows a completely neglected – if not outright forgotten – dimension of social activism in the urban setting. At this time, written protest was primarily oriented toward protection of the commons; such protests opposed both etatization and privatization of common or shared spaces in apartment buildings; the destruction of natural resources and public goods through privatization and/or commodification; and systemic neglect of cultural heritage monuments and old towns. At the same time, written protest spoke up for the preservation of aesthetic criteria/norms in traditional festivals and cultural institutions that were becoming degraded by commercialization (especially in the coastal region). While these issues sparked movement-like phenomena, which often “spilled over” into public spaces in the form of protest gatherings, we can speak less of sustained involvement and dedication that constituted proactive activism than of short-term reactive and defensive civic engagement around so-called “real life problems” in the context of socio-economic crisis and institutional failures. For instance, citizens were vocal in demanding better public services, protesting nepotism and favouritism, expressing solidarity against evictions, demanding protection for urban parks, exposing embezzlement in pension funds, demanding state intervention in the grey economy (or even allowing them to engage in it until the UN sanctions are lifted), protesting abuse of animals, demanding handling of inflation and declining wages, exposing mobbing and discrimination at workplaces, grieving mass pauperization, and demanding stoppage of development projects they deemed to be environmentally problematic and disruptive in their daily lives. Citizens’ self-organizing was occurring predominantly at the neighbourhood and local community levels, but there were some well-established societal organizations and citizens’ associations involved in the written protest, especially around environmental issues (e.g., pollution by aluminium and thermal power plants, illegal dumps, asphalt plants in rural areas, systemic neglect of rivers and other natural resources, environmentally non-friendly behaviour, among other issues). While criticism of inefficient institutions was present, these letters and petitions appealed to “common sense”, “tradition”, “aesthetic norms”, “right to life”, Montenegro’s constitutional identity of “the

ecological state”, or simply to “tenant rights”, and in no way proclaimed open confrontation with the regime, or designating it as responsible for the predicaments they voiced in their written protests. In that regard, these contentious practices were legitimized as expression of “civil” or “social” discontent, in that they demanded that the state help them, not that it should be held accountable for creating such problems in the first place.

Written protest in the rural areas centred around systemic neglect by the state to provide basic (functioning) services (e.g., electricity, running water, phone lines), but also uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources in their villages (forests in particular) and well as pollution of rivers and lands by big factories. With the restitution legislation (and later implementation processes) in motion – through which lands and forests were being returned to previous owners – people began to demand fairer legislation and more efficient implementation. There were protest letters in which villagers often pointed to exploitation of the commons in rural areas by public enterprises, demanding swift reaction from the state, claiming that natural resources could be devastated or exploited for financial gains or energy projects. Since before the communist nationalization of property, these lands/forests collectively owned by brotherhoods and tribes, kin-based alliances served as a platform for collective organizing to demand return of “the stolen/alienated property”. Whatever they were protesting, peasants appealed to unlawful exploitation of forests and lands by state enterprises, and the systemic neglect of their needs by appealing to the state’s civic and moral duty to protect these resources for future generations. The protest in rural areas was, however, sustained and organized, so in that regard we can speak of a movement-like activity that diffused throughout the country.

It is important to view these contentious practices as the social actors themselves saw them: a non-political expression of dissent. These seemingly uninteresting and mundane written protests aside, this form of contentious practice demonstrated something different: the tension between, as it was called then, the “two Montenegros” – the *nationalist* one supporting wars in the region, and the *civic* one opposing them – which dominated a public sphere oversaturated with ethnopolitical and ethnocultural content. This split between those who supported official warmongering/(ethno)nationalist narratives and those who wanted to counteract state propaganda was, indeed, visible through press releases, parliamentary debates, independent media outlets, and other forms of public deliberations outside representative institutions (Darmanović 1993; Keković 2005; Komar 2015; Muk et al. 2006; Popović 2002; Vujović 2017), but it was also manifested in

petitions and other forms of protest letters. When we examine how each side justified their position, it paints a different picture, demonstrating not only how the binary civic/national was constituted in the public sphere and then in the public space, but also the political/apolitical dichotomy as well.

For instance, while the 1991–1997 period began with petitions, anonymous graffiti, and leaflets sparking ethnic hatred – allegedly written/distributed by non-Orthodox minorities – much of the public sphere during these years was indeed polluted by the ethnonationalist framing of “the ethnic other” as the enemy. These particular forms of written protests were symptomatic of emerging ethno-political frenzy, as they appeared at a time of accumulated socio-economic discontent and, somewhat conveniently, publicly “exposed” Muslim and Croatian minorities as “disloyal citizens” who were not ashamed of “demanding” the breakup of Yugoslavia. This, in turn, steered much of the socio-economic discontent to ethno-political framings and animosities. While it can be argued today that these leaflets and graffiti – highly publicized in the state-owned media – were planted by the secret service, they were just a sign of things to come on a grander scale: warmongering propaganda about armed neighbours just waiting to invade Montenegro or those that are slaughtering Slavic-Orthodox population in the region that shaped the reality of ordinary Montenegrins (who at that time had access to only one independent weekly magazine) (Andrijašević 1999). In this regard, citizens genuinely believed that this was, as the DPS had put it, “war for peace”. In other words, the distinction that would shape normative and functionalist understandings of civil society in the following period had originally emerged as the nationalist/civic political binary, in which “nationalist” signified traditionalist sentiments and conservative worldviews, while “civic” was used to label progressive attitudes and liberal ideology.

In this context, however, it would be a mistake to dismiss written protest expressing ethnonationalist sentiments as simply a manifestation of “ancient ethnic hatreds” (Kaplan 1993), since these letters and petitions were justified on the basis of these wars being a “call for defense” – whether of Montenegro from potential invaders, Yugoslavia from separatism/secessionism, or of the endangered and oppressed “brothers and sisters” in the neighbouring republic. In other words, written protest appealed to the warrior tradition of fighting for “our people” in the neighbouring countries as something morally just. Therefore, the nominally “nationalist” written protests – which addressed the state, the general public, or even the international community using

harsh language – justified their calls to arms by invoking, firstly, calls for the defense of Yugoslavia and its key values of “brotherhood and unity” that were being destroyed by alleged “the fascists” (who were always the ethnic “other”), and secondly, when it became clear that Yugoslavia was falling apart, calls for the military protection of Serbs from slaughter and persecution in areas where they were an ethnic minority (such as Croatia and Bosnia). For instance, letters “outing” alleged “Islamic extremists” were present throughout the period being analyzed here, as well as those by war veterans who were vocal in protesting every occasion during which the state discussed legislation to pardon draft-dodgers, highlighting their treason of civic duties during times of war.

While these protests invoked the “Montenegrin warrior tradition” in calling for the Montenegrin tradition of sacrifice for the higher good of the nation’s people (see Banović 2016), and where Montenegrins were called upon to react – or the state being criticized by the far-right for not doing enough to protect Serbs in the region – the fact that opponents were finally transformed into “enemies” became a bane of the Montenegrin body politic. This moment of transformation of political opinion into moral categorization in such a traditional society had a devastating effect; for example, citizens perceived calls for diplomacy as a sign of cowardice and weakness, if not treason against the country. In this state of exception, civil society thus had played the key role in delegitimizing dissent through demonization and intimidation of different political opinions. For instance, some of these written protests became, firstly, openly anti-democratic in their demands by “concerned citizens” for the end to national broadcasts of parliamentary sessions in which “the minority terrorized the majority”, all in the name of decision-making efficiency; and, secondly, openly anti-political in their demands by workers for the parliamentary opposition advocating on their behalf in the national assembly, that it “not to politicize their social problems”. This fear of confronting the state was translated into a fear of being associated with the parliamentary opposition or anti-regime movements, thus effectively turning apolitical into anti-political engagement: all “critics of the system” were equated with “enemies of the state” and thus seen as unfit to be representatives of workers, citizens, and others writing these protest letters.

The key issue with these protest letters was that they tended to frame anyone who opposed their warmongering ideas as a “traitor” or an “enemy”. Anyone who supported the right to self-determination or peaceful resolution, or who opposed state propaganda, was demonized and intimidated, not only by the state but civil society as well (see Keković 2005; Popović 2002). These

letters particularly targeted the parliamentary opposition, citizens' associations, and independent media that were critical of the regime. Moreover, any attempt on the part of ethnic minorities – especially the largest ones, Muslims and Albanians – to self-organize politically and to defend their interests sparked a protest reaction that characterized them as being dangerous extremists. The analysis of written protests demonstrates how parts of civil society that supported the regime – in thinking they were actually protecting the state and their kin in neighbouring countries – oppressed the sections of civil society that dared to question official politics and practices.

Staged Protests

There were 200 protest gatherings, each addressing a different issue, taking shape as gatherings in streets/squares and in front of buildings (e.g., enterprise management, local authorities), occupation/sit-ins of buildings (in several occasions coupled with hunger-strikes), and mass rallies/demonstrations.

Critical and rebellious voices in civil society that resisted the aforementioned “nationalist” letters had, together with some progressive parliamentary parties and independent media outlets, not only created a resilient anti-regime political project in the face of oppression and intimidation, but had – in the face of pervasive exclusivist ethnonationalisms, conservatism, and traditionalism – articulated ideological narratives and symbolic codes that had postulated inclusive *civicness* as the political counterpart of ethnopolitics (Baća 2017c; Čagorović 1993; Darmanović 1993, 2003; Keković 2005; Komar 2015; Muk et al. 2006; Popović 2002; Vujović 2017). Whether accompanied by loud chanting or silent marches, these staged protests were diverse; some were organized with specific goals in mind, such as to protest involvement in neighboring wars (by concerned parents of soldiers, independent student organizations, or citizens' associations), to protest state repression and discrimination of Albanians, to demand accountability by the state for hijacking and killing Muslims/Bosniaks in 1993, to rally against the state's persecution of opposition leaders for “verbal delict” and independent media for critical thought, or to demand state independence (by political parties, intellectuals, etc.). Whatever the goal, these events were nevertheless protests opposing the authoritarian regime and provided opportunities for citizens who were fed up with being isolated from the world to demand a voice in politics and decision-making. Moreover, during these demonstrations, Montenegro was often framed as being held

hostage by Milošević and his avatars in the country, so these protests were also pro-independence and against Greater Serbian political and cultural hegemony.

However, not all public gatherings were based on these values. While some of the anti-war rallies sparked the gatherings in public space that functioned as *de facto* “counter-rallies” on the part of DPS-supporters, there were also more proactive intrusions in the public space, in which people protested the government for not doing enough in national military missions or for not protecting borders fiercely enough. With that being said, the majority of these gatherings were centred around the defense of Yugoslavia from those who wanted to see its demise, but then shifted to the protection of the existing borders of Montenegro, often accompanied by strong Serbian ethnonationalism. This was never more evident than in protest gatherings that demanded refugees and Muslims/Bosniaks state their political positions about the union between Serbia and Montenegro, as seen in protests against the independentist political parties accused of destroying the state, or in demonstrations for the release of arrested militia members who occupied an entire town as “true patriots”. Once again, these gatherings exposed the “othering” of political opponents into “enemies of the state”, and the readiness of civil society to mobilize the persecution of political opponents and the intimidation of ethnic minorities, but also to demand from the state to do more for the “national cause”. However, with the split in the DPS in 1997 and the turn in its reformist wing towards politics of the “civic option”, suddenly protest gatherings demanding democratization, tolerance, peace, prosperity, and the “return to the (civilized) world” after years of isolation began to proliferate, organized by students, unions, citizens’ associations, informal groups, intellectuals, etc. As they demanded that their government (the reformist wing of the DPS) stop making them prisoners of Milošević’s politics, and called for a new beginning, the social energy of the hitherto anti-regime movement was channeled to give legitimacy to the new DPS government “from below”.

However, the analysis of contentious practices also shows that in numerous instances people had transgressed these divisions to address “real life issues” that impacted them directly. As stated before, the neglected dimension of urban activism was also present in public spaces, often pointing out the systemic neglect of local communities (or in the North, even neglect of municipalities) and against the state’s cooptation/centralization of municipal services, with the most prominent being related to the fight against pollution and for the protection of the environment. On the one hand, some public gatherings were extensions of protest letters, where

people protested the privatization of publicly-owned spaces and buildings and demanded investment in schools and sport/cultural centres. On the other hand, they offered a proactive approach to demand that local and national authorities invest in schools and other public goods so municipalities could offer their residents a good quality and standard of living.

This was a period of increase in individual and family protests, which often took the shape of sit-ins or occupations of state and municipal institutions. These protests targeted such issues as evictions, lay-offs and administrative leaves, illegitimate leadership of societal organizations, non-transparent processes of awarding social housing (or favouring those who already had such housing), unfair court decisions in (family) lawsuits, discrimination at work (e.g., ethnic, political), and nepotism/clientelism in attaining public sector jobs. Alternatively, these protests made demands for personal and collective needs, such as implementation of court orders, recognition of property rights, reinstatement at work after compulsory military service, prosecution of private banks, citizenship rights for the refugees, the return of sons from the battle fields, and better organization of the military. While this was an important feature of civil society at the time, public protest gatherings appealing to “tenant and property rights” were also persistent throughout the 1991–1997 period. People protested against evictions and demanded to be allowed to move into apartments they purchased (social housing) and for buildings to be completed, and not simply given to those who demanded that their land to be returned to them. Further, their protests were more broadly related to the quality of public services (e.g., new phone landlines; better water supply; incompetence of public services, such as electricity, student housing, cultural life of municipalities, and the better organization of schools), with appeals to efficiency and legality. Similarly, gatherings in rural areas became more present, predominantly around environmental protection issues (e.g., building illegal waste dumps, building asphalt plants in their local community, pollution from plants), but also about protecting the forests against the new legislation on forestry that would allow public companies to exploit forests without any consultation with local communities. Such gatherings are one of the most important “forgotten” social movements during this period. People involved in these protests frequently distanced themselves openly from anti-regime activists. This anti-political stance and non-political justifications of their contentious practices allowed them to be tolerated – if not outright ignored – by the state. In effect, this trend further deepened the division between political and apolitical protest.

This vocal distancing from politics – where “the political” was perceived/understood as “anti-regime” – was best exemplified in a series of protest gatherings (e.g., rallies, marches, sit-ins) that workers organized to express their *social* dissatisfaction with difficult living conditions. As they protested harsh living conditions in a collapsed economy, blue-collar workers also appealed to legality, as they demanded to have insight into the accounting practices of their (former) employees, but also pointed out how non-transparent, inegalitarian criteria was used for their lay-offs. Also, workers on “administrative leaves” would gather to point out their “unequal position”, but more importantly to expose management embezzlement from their companies to the public. These gatherings were the first instances where some strategic decisions of the government in the process of economic transformation – such as, for instance, favouring bankruptcy as the dominant model for restructuring social enterprises – were labelled as “fraudulent activities” that systemically enriched new elites at the expense of ordinary workers. However, protesting workers rarely counteracted the regime, and retained their apolitical, if not anti-political, stance. Protests from public employees, on the other hand, almost disappeared; where they were most visible was amongst those working in the private sector (e.g., taxi drivers, small business owners, farmers), who demanded better regulation of their profession or “just taxation” as they appealed to legality from the state to do its job and to punish “illegals”, as well as to support entrepreneurs with lower taxes. Thus, they justified their contentious practices on the basis of “civic duty” to react contentiously when the state fails to uphold its own laws.

The analysis of these staged protests – especially justifications and legitimizations used by those who engaged in this contentious practice – points not only to two *political* manifestations of Montenegrin civil society – one civic, the other (ethno)nationalist – but also demonstrates how a(nti)political protest came to be understood as a legitimate form of civic engagement in the Montenegrin post-socialist civil society. Simply put, by the end of this period, political protest was reduced to anti-regime activism (either against the regime in Belgrade, or against the reformed regime in Podgorica), something that would be even further strengthened in the subsequent period.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how civil society of the so-called “dark nineties”, when the DPS-controlled state engaged in open repression of its challengers, was actually diverse and vibrant. While there was a diffusion of infrapolitical involvement in the informal economy, civil

society was mostly demobilized, with the exception of dedicated anti-regime activists. On the one hand, there was a boundary activation between pro-regime or simply politically apathetic actors – certified as “loyal citizens” – and the anti-regime movement whose critical political stance, as it emulated the anti-Milošević movement in Serbia, was distorted and misused the regime as a “proof” of its “anti-state” character. This division not only created a distinction between “civic” and “nationalist” politics, but also between “political” activism on the one hand, and “a(anti)political” and “non-political” engagement on the other. However, the analysis provided in this chapter has demonstrated that contentious practices were present and targeted a diverse range of these non-political issues, as they were understood by actors who thus maintained a(anti)political registers of justification and legitimization. This period’s particular configuration of processes and mechanisms affected activism as civil society organizations were mostly coopted by the state and lacked resources as a result of the economic collapse. In this context, strike actions and short-term, small-scale, often low-key engagement through contentious practices were the defining, yet neglected, feature of civil society. Civil society itself remained apolitical, but also anti-political, through widespread refusal to be associated with those considered “traitors” and “enemies”, thereby reproducing the idea that civil society is an autonomous sphere that should be not polluted by politics. In other words, looking from the perspective of social actors, while it is difficult to speak of contentious *politics*, the analysis of contentious *practices* unearths a civil society in which people addressed numerous issues, from the non-responsive character of the state to its authoritarianism.

This chapter has demonstrated that the frames – those regarding the stigmatization and demonization of different political opinions, and in particular politically organized ethnic minorities regarding secessionism and treason – from the Antibureaucratic Revolution were still present during this period. However, in sheer numerical terms, infrapolitical direct actions and resistance exposed the fact that civil society, under such conditions, was mostly responsive to socio-economic changes, as well as the state’s willingness to tolerate this type of essentially illegal engagement in the economy – from involvement in grey economy and black market to building illegal housing – for the sake of maintaining social peace (Đurić 1999, 2003; Sedlenieks 2015; Popović 2002). However, this is not to say that socio-economic crisis and the failure of institutions to address it had not resulted in disruptive and protest activities. Overall, while in the previous period elites were legitimized “from below”, being pressured to push for reforms, civil society had

become mostly reactive to socio-economic hardships, addressing issues that institutions had failed to address – issues that had a direct impact on citizens.

While there was some questioning of economic transformation by industrial workers, the key moment in which the predominantly *apolitical* civil society had an impact on the state was in the articulation of the civic (inclusive) alternative to dominant (exclusive) ethnopolitics within civil society (and some minor political parties). This ethnopolitical orientation would, with the DPS's shift toward genuine democratization and opening to the world, be adopted as the official strategic orientation of the new reformist government in 1998. Therefore, while we cannot speak of social movements besides the anti-regime movement in this period, and some movement-like activity in environmentalism and urbanism, civil society was not weak – especially not when measured via actual direct, contentious involvement of citizens in public life.

Chapter IV

1998–2000: A Divided Polity

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the democratization period after the split in the ruling party regarding support of Milošević's politics in 1998, to the centring of statehood status by the end of 2000. I begin with a short overview of the key features of civil society in order to provide the socio-cultural and political context for the contentious practices that I discuss in detail in this chapter. By illuminating the empirical reality of contentious practices in this period, I argue that the democratization process in Montenegro during this period not only opened up the system for civil society actors to address numerous political, legal, and identity issues through institutional channels, but simultaneously delegitimized political protest and legitimized contentious practices as a way to address predominantly socio-economic hardships and everyday life issues. I conclude with a focus on the interactions between these practices and the mechanisms (brokerage, coordination, certification, boundary-activation, identity shift, category-formation, and diffusion) and processes (mobilization, scale shift, polarization, and actor-constitution) that characterized the 1998–2000 period.

Just like in 1989, a mass rally led by the Milošević-supported faction of the ruling party occurred in January 1998, in front of the main buildings of the state institutions in the capital. However, as demonstrators clashed with police, the protests turned violent, thus signaling the beginning of a three-year period in which Montenegrin society, caught amidst open hostility between governments in Podgorica and Belgrade, was on the brink of civil war (Calhoun 2000b; Darmanović 2003; Gallagher 2003; Gow 1999). As the Montenegrin body politic was split into two ideologico-political camps of roughly equal sizes, the citizenry itself became extremely antagonized and highly involved in two socio-political blocs (Cattaruzza 2011; Džankić 2014; Jenne and Bieber 2014; Strmiska 2000). However, after the “eventful” violent protests were suppressed and the all-pervasive fear of Milošević's retaliation, the DPS-controlled regime – now comprised of the reformist wing of the DPS and its former political opponents from the “civic option” and political representatives of ethnic minorities – used this situation to delegitimize so-called “street politics”; this delegitimization continues to this day (Baća 2017c; Džankić and Keil

2017; Morrison 2018; Komar and Živković 2016). Simply put, after the iconic event – during which armed people stormed the police-protected government building while shouting nationalist slurs – the regime equated protest politics with the destructive (ethnonationalist) segment of the population. This segment was used as a prime example of what happens when the “anti-democratic”, “violent”, “uncivilized”, “aggressive”, “intolerant”, “retrograde” and “barbaric” *uncivil society* of Montenegro attempts to exercise its political agency outside of institutional frameworks: destruction and destabilization.

As stated in the introduction of *Chapter II*, the Antibureaucratic Revolution was the defining event in constituting *the people* as a political subject, but now inverted in its official reception and interpretation. Instead of a triumph of the people, the events of January 1989 were “exposed” as a successful *coup d'état* secretly orchestrated by Milošević to place Montenegro under his control.⁹⁶ In a similar fashion, the Montenegrin regime criticized protests in January 1998 as another Belgrade-sponsored, yet failed attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government through populism and “street politics” for Milošević’s sinister objectives. In the public sphere, delegitimization of *the people* as a political subject occurred, as numerous commentators and analysts used these events as an example of how the people could be easily manipulated and turned into a destructive force. In the final instance, the DPS-controlled government capitalized on this “connection” between two turning points in its recent history by presenting itself as the only guarantor of the country’s stability and independence, while simultaneously presenting all critics of the system/regime as “enemies of the state” (Baća 2017c; Caspersen 2003; Džankić and Keil 2017; Komar and Živković 2016; Morrison 2009; Strmiska 2000). In other words, the government run by the coalition of the DPS and its former opponents, both from political and civil societies, framed itself as the last line of defense protecting Montenegro’s democratic path and civic composition from the “uncivil society” controlled by the anti-democratic and ethnonationalist centres of power (Morrison 2009, 2018). In the context of the all-pervasive presence of the Belgrade-controlled army and the Podgorica-controlled militarized police in the streets of

⁹⁶ There is an extensive body of work on the Antibureaucratic Revolution in Montenegro, especially on the protest events that underpinned it. However, the majority of these reports are journalistic accounts, impressionistic memoirs, and other non-academic interpretations that tend to neglect the complexity of this socio-political movement and, as such, often engage in conspiratorial explanations that are accommodating to dominant political narratives rather than adhering to scholarly rigor. However, some of these accounts became immensely prominent in and popular among the public after 1998, most of which supported the idea that the Antibureaucratic Revolution was in no way spontaneous, but a controlled process to abolish Montenegrin statehood in favour of Greater Serb hegemony (e.g., Brković 2003a, 2003b; Keković 2003, 2005; Burzan 1998; Filipović 2006). On the other hand, some academic accounts of Montenegro’s Antibureaucratic Revolution escape the traps of ideological mystifications and political oversimplifications in their analysis (e.g., Kilibarda 1996; Ribić 2012; Vladislavljević 2008).

Montenegro, these framings strongly resonated with a public that was scared, effectively rendering any street protests against the government an anti-systemic activity that could bring into question Montenegrin statehood or lead to bloodshed (Calhoun 2000a, 2000b; Darmanović 2003; Gallagher 2003; Gow 1999). It is during this period that the regime in Montenegro added ethical and aesthetic dimensions to the civic/nationalist binary that had defined the previous period: the nominal “uncivil society” was now not only perceived (by the regime, civil society, international community, etc.) as a manifestation of retrograde politics, but also morally wrong in its destructive objectives, and aesthetically unpleasant in its violent behaviour.

On the other hand, as already stated in the *Chapter III*, the “civic option” of the previous period was now coopted by the state structures as their official policy. This effectively turned existing political divisions into (politicized) cultural identity markers: the supporters of politics of the reformed government became associated with “civil society” and progressive (liberal) ideology, while the supporters of Milošević and his avatars in Montenegro came to be associated with “uncivil society” and traditionalist (conservative) ideology (Baća 2017c; Calhoun 2000a; Darmanović 2003; Kovačević 2007; Popović 2002). In practice, however, civil society came to be associated with the emerging civil sector populated by NGOs, which was cooperating productively with the state and advancing its reformist agenda through institutional mechanisms.⁹⁷ These civil society actors – who began promoting relatively abstract ideas of multiculturalism, human rights, tolerance and dialogue, the rule of law, women’s rights, and pro-Western sentiments, among other liberal values – together with intellectuals and activists who made up the backbone of the Anti-War Movement, began articulating new models of Montenegrin culture and arts – with an emphasis on contemporary theatre and performance art, urban subcultures, critical theory, postmodern literature, and Western values – thus creating a symbolic boundary between the “new Montenegro”, which was civic, multicultural, cosmopolitan, urban and liberal, and the “old Montenegro” that was represented by nationalistic, monocultural, traditionalist, rural and conservative supporters of Milošević (Baća 2017c; Darmanović 2003; Kovačević 2007; Nikolaidis 1999; Popović 2002). However, unlike the anti-regime actors who had minor support and weak resources in the previous period, the Milošević-sponsored opposition had at its disposal state resources from Belgrade and support of almost half of the Montenegrin population, which made it

⁹⁷ Even though the first law regulating NGOs was passed in 1999, the first NGOs began to emerge several years before (see Komar 2015; Muk et al. 2006; Vujović 2017).

a powerful challenger that could respond to people's grievances and demands just like the government in Podgorica, which endowed both sides with material and financial resources they could use to mobilize support in the heated struggle.

In the following pages, I demonstrate how the analysis of contentious practices exposes a differentiation between what the state deemed as illegitimate forms of protest – challenging the government – and legitimate ones – related to socio-economic issues or immediate concerns of citizenry.

Contentious Practices, 1998–2000

During this period of polarization, almost every citizen of Montenegro was proactively involved in either in pro- or in anti-Milošević socio-political movement. As a result, another interesting yet neglected division within civil society began to appear among the most visible forms of associational life. On one side, progressives in urban areas began to use NGOs as the key vehicle for their social engagement and political activism, while, on the other, more traditionalist and conservative strata of society, predominantly in rural and suburban areas, revived tribal assemblies (and other kin-based institutions) as their organizational platform to make their (political) voices audible.⁹⁸ While NGOs served as a constructive support to the democratization processes in the country, tribal assemblies were anti-systemic in the sense that they, as essentially illegal manifestations of direct democracy, negated existing political and legal institutions by threatening to make historically tribal areas of Montenegro secede and join Serbia if the government in Podgorica unilaterally declared independence (Calhoun 2000a). However, it would be wrong to view this revival of tribal assemblies – a contentious practice characteristic only of Montenegro – as a simple manifestation of revived traditionalism (as it was often dismissively characterized by progressives as the prime example of retrograde “uncivil(ized) society”). Their revival was instead a modern appropriation of the available socio-cultural repertoire of (contentious) practices of direct democracy – that is, tribal assembly. In this way, people exerted their civic autonomy by symbolically reclaiming sovereignty from a state that they saw – as had

⁹⁸ Although different newspaper articles speak of different numbers of these tribal assemblies and politicized kin-based gatherings (e.g., “Plemenski skupovi ne mogu donositi državne odluke”, *Vijesti*, 17 August 1999; “Hoće sa Srbijom po svaku cijenu”, *Vijesti*, 27 September 1999; “Protiv odvajanja Srbije i Crne Gore”, *Vijesti*, 11 October 1999; “Plemenski savezi nisu nevladine organizacije”, *Vijesti*, 20 October 1999), I estimated that there were about 20 to 30 of these events in 1999.

been the case ten years prior during the Antibureaucratic Revolution – as being alienated from its citizens.

Other forms of (illegal) direct actions lacked the prominence of tribal assemblies and connection to political divisions, but remained on the level of infrapolitical involvement in the grey economy and the black market, toward which the state continued to turn a blind eye and tolerate – albeit selectively, based on party belonging – in order to maintain social peace or even gain support by offering legalization in exchange for political support (see Đurić 1999, 2003; Forbess 2013; Sedlenieks 2015; Uzelac 2003).

Overall, contentious practices during this period, identified in my dataset (N=219), can be grouped into two categories: firstly, those that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or even paralyzed the routinized flow of everyday life through peoples’ disengagement from their social roles and daily duties, such as strike actions in workspaces, boycotts of the norms of citizenship, or blockades in their local communities; and secondly, contentious practices through which people staged their dissent outside of their comfort zones by entering the public arena, either through the written word in the public sphere or through gatherings in public spaces (see *Table 5*).

Table 5. Contentious practices in the 1998–2000 period (N=219).

	Disruption			Protest	
	<i>Strikes</i>	<i>Boycotts</i>	<i>Blockades</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Staged</i>
1998	19	7	2	31	13
1999	15	3	7	23	27
2000	17	3	5	29	18
Total:	51	13	14	83	58

In this chapter, I provide a descriptive and analytical overview of these practices, paying special attention to the claims/grievances they articulated and the justifications that actors used to account for them.

Contentious Practices as Disruption

When discussing contentious practices that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or paralyzed the flow of everyday life – both inside and outside the workplace – through which citizens disengaged from ordinary ways of doing things, three types can be discerned from the material analyzed for the 1998–2000 period: *strikes*, *boycotts*, and *blockades*.

Strikes

There were 51 contentious practices that could be described as strike actions during this period. The analysis of strike actions in this period points to three things somewhat different from the previous period. Firstly, industrial workers were disinterested in framing their discontent through available binary political master-frames, but instead proactively attempted to maintain the lack of articulation of economic grievances in political terms (e.g., not allowing their socio-economic predicament to be politically instrumentalized by political parties). Secondly, by acting as those who were deceived and exploited during the period of socio-economic restructuring, yet have carried the burden of this process, these workers exercised autonomy in their criticisms and demands (e.g., by speaking directly with the state through contentious practices). Finally, by questioning the privatization of economy, blue-collar workers articulated a more “organic” critique of this process, based on their personal and collective experience and, as such, went beyond populist attacks on the economic reforms stemming from the Milošević-sponsored camp.

By the end of 1997, numerous enterprises underwent bankruptcy, had stopped operating, or were simply liquidated, while those that remained – with a severely reduced number of workers – were late with wages (in some cases, even for years). So, quite naturally, grievances and demands articulated through this form of contentious practice were aimed at late payments and, in more general terms, low salaries (in some cases, going below the minimum wage prescribed by collective agreements). In a number of cases that I analyzed, these reactive claims were simultaneously coupled with proactive demands for a transparent process regarding workers’ pension benefits, as they found out that legally required contributions to their pension funds had not been made by new management for years. However, the analysis of demands of strike action in this period points to an interesting division within Montenegrin labour: certain workers maintained some faith that the industrial workforce would remain an integral part of the economy once it started recovering, whereas others lost all faith in their enterprises ever recovering and their jobs resuming normally.

Having witnessed how other workers had been treated, the first group protested against the government’s decision to use bankruptcy as the key model for enterprise restructuring, which left them jobless and forced to work in the informal economy for survival. Moreover, seeing how

management had enriched itself during the previous period, workers protested bankruptcy as just another way for the few to enrich themselves by embezzling company assets. Workers thus used strike actions as a critique of the government's reluctance to counteract actions that were, in workers' eyes, permanently destroying the economy. More specifically, they were pushing to resolve the "issue of technological surplus", demanding funds and resources to restart the production process. As the workers appealed to their legal rights as employees – as the technocratic term "employee" began gradually to replace the word "worker", void of political connotations of socialist self-management – another demand was more telling for the second category of workers: demands for severance pay, which signaled that an increasing number of workers were disenchanted with the process of restructuring of the economy. This group, therefore, legitimized their strike actions based on receiving what was legally owned to them – late wages and severance packages – so they could move on. Simply put, blue-collar workers appealed to legality (e.g., demanding that the government uphold the law, conducting financial audits) to legitimize their strike actions, as they became progressively disappointed *vis-à-vis* the privatization process and, more importantly, disillusioned that their enterprises would ever recover. Their disappointment was not only directed toward the management that misappropriated their health/pension benefits and stole their wages, but also toward the union leadership that they came to see as alienated, coopted, and, in several cases, colluding with those responsible for their predicaments. This resulted in the state being elevated to the role of key addressee in the resolution of their problems: their status in, and the future of, their enterprises.

As I have demonstrated in *Chapter III*, industrial workers were patiently waiting for the ownership restructuring of their enterprises to be completed, acting contentiously only to demand a living wage and accuse managers of slowing down this process. In this mode, strikes were used to exercise their "right to be heard" – that is, to use their insider position to inform the public about "what was really going on in the industrial sector". As any remnants of self-management ideology dissipated, blue-collar workers began to position themselves as those who carried the burden of economic restructuring and yet emerged of the process as sore losers, while managers – and politicians and even some union leadership – enriched themselves at the workers' expense. In other words, these strike actions were the first to loudly and clearly articulate the notion that workers felt exploited by decision-makers and their cronies in enterprises, and that a gap between haves and have-nots had emerged at the expense of a labour force that had been patient with the

privatization process. In that regard, blue-collar workers demanded that the state pressure management to adhere to collective agreements, as they criticized the government's decisions to "sell them" and then "forget about them", leaving them at the mercy of new owners. The appeals thus shifted to emphasize the "responsibility" of the state in the privatization process, notably in its failure to make strategic decisions about privatization, as well as not thinking about workers and the future of the enterprise and the economy in general. As the employers were being seen less and less as a viable addressee for grievances and demands – namely, the new management was seen as completely unresponsive and disinterested in social dialogue – the government became the addressee of strike actions during the 1998–2000 period. This effect further elevated the state to the level of the all-powerful problem-solver and, consequently, increased workers' dependence on it.

Once again, rather than institutions, it was the blue-collar workers that demanded accountability from the government. Through contentious practices, the workers informed the government about the privatization process of their enterprises and investigated why the recovery programs of privatized enterprises were not realized. Therefore, where their diagnostics and criticism became crucial was in targeting the state-led transformation of the economy – and the state-owned privatization funds, in particular – for the poor and dubious decisions of new managers who were not interested in helping enterprises recover and production to continue, but instead in selling company assets for personal enrichment. In order to preserve as much as social order as possible during this turbulent political period, the government often engaged with the protesting workers by providing them with guarantees that they would resolve the problem, often with no intention of actually doing so.

During this period, therefore, workers' disappointment toward state-led privatization came to fruition, as they legitimized their strike actions on the basis of the right to know what would happen to them and the future of their enterprises. This critique of economic restructuring as a non-transparent process – one that essentially favoured dominant groups in the creation of wealth through corrupt activities – was relatively new in the civil society discourse. Only later, after 2006, was it picked up by NGOs. In other words, it is through strike actions in this period that civil society began to respond to all the problems created by state-led economic transformation in the previous period. As industrial workers were expressing their disappointment toward the ownership transformation and privatization, and dissatisfaction with their socio-material position resulting

from economic restructuring, a different target was clearly articulated in this period – that of “new management” and “new owners”, entrepreneurs who bought companies from state funds and then did not adhere to their contractual obligations. For the first time, industrial workers used strikes to paint these new owners as frauds who used the enterprises they acquired with public funds to exploit their resources for short-term gain, with no intention of investing and developing a long-term strategy for recovery, development, and growth. In so doing, the workers pointed out the predatory nature of the privatization process in Montenegro. Moreover, by presenting these new owners as “parasites” who used workers’ predicaments to enrich themselves and “criminals” who were robbing them by not paying contributions to their pension funds, blue-collar workers restored class discourse to a society that had seen it as a remnant of ideologically delusional times.

Strike actions in the public and private sectors became incidental among public employees because the state was progressively using public administration and other publicly-funded institutions for its clientelistic purposes. However, in a few instances, people were willing to rise against issues such as “highhandedness”, “incompetence” and “political appointment”, thus bringing into the public arena issues of nepotism, clientelism, and cronyism. A similar situation occurred with work stoppages in the private sector, as strike actions were predominantly used by farmers, taxi drivers, and small business owners to publicly expose and protest what they saw as unfair treatment on the part of the state, directed toward their respective professions, which favoured their “disloyal competition” close to the people in power. While strikes in the public sector appealed to professionalization – that is, depoliticization through independence from party involvement – those in the small business sector were rather symbolic, as entrepreneurs still protested to have lower taxes and other “business barriers” removed in order to ensure that their businesses were solvent, if not profitable. Thus, they demanded that the state treat small business fairly and create an environment for fair competition. Small businesses faced the same issues as during the previous period – lack of state support through regulation of the grey economy and tax cuts, which also carried over to the following period.

Overall, the analysis of strike actions across sectors shows that people were willing to contentiously act outside of institutions and to bring socio-economic issues to the fore – and that the state failed to mitigate these strikes – in a public sphere oversaturated with debates about “high politics”. Citizens, on the other hand, engaged in collective actions not only to demand that to which they were entitled, but also to question certain structural injustices that they identified from

their direct experiences in their respective workplaces – namely, corrupt privatization and nepotism-cum-clientelism. That is to say, while the polity was divided along political lines, it was civil society where the previously unquestionable dogma of privatization-as-progress was questioned.

Boycotts

Similar to strike actions were boycotts, of which I noted 13 during this period, since this contentious practice was also predominantly centred on socio-economic issues. Some boycotts were a *de facto* symbolic surrogate for strikes, such as in the case of workers' refusal to accept salaries that were below the minimum wage prescribed by collective agreements. In terms of sites and scales, boycotts were predominantly localized – addressing systemic neglect of certain professions and social groups by local authorities, or protesting the incompetent management of public institutions, demanding change of policy and practices. However, two important manifestations of boycotts became visible on a national scale: first, trade unions called for the boycott of retailers who refused to lower prices in response to favourable exchange rates between local and foreign currency; and, second, self-organizing and networked members of the private sector boycotted paying increased taxes, demanding regulation of “illegal market vendors” in order to ensure fair market competition.

While it is difficult to assess the political effectiveness of boycotts during this period, they nevertheless exposed the willingness of people to self-organize and render visible issues that affected them both as individuals and specific groups. Therefore, the analysis of boycotts demonstrates that when it came to socio-economic issues, people used this particular form of disengagement from their civil duties and daily routines to address injustices that were neglected or simply obscured in the context of societal clashes over “big political issues”. As they appealed to the state's responsibility to mitigate these issues, they simultaneously invoked their civil duties to fight these injustices through civil disobedience.

Blockades

Blockades were simply a different way of addressing similar issues during this period, with 14 observed events. Thus, the analysis of this contentious practice paints a picture of a civil society in which people were more than ready to defend what they perceived as being their private property

or the common good from state power and new economic elites. As such, blockades were the most visible contentious practice, through which people defended the social (e.g., the presence of a socialist mindset in terms of tenant rights and collective ownership in social housing) from being devoured by the economic (e.g., privatization of public and common goods), which exposed strong solidarity in both urban and rural areas.

In urban areas, there was a widespread movement by tenants, firstly, to protect themselves and their neighbours from being evicted and/or to preserve the so-called “common spaces” (e.g., attics, basements) in social housing from both etatization and privatization for commercial purposes; and, secondly, to defend their illegally built houses from being demolished or their illegal connection to power and water grids from being disconnected. As they clashed with police forces, people legitimized their actions by appealing to the state’s failure to ensure normal living conditions, arguing that they could rely only on themselves to survive during the harsh period of transition. However, they were not only refusing to abandon their right to housing or their collective ownership over “common spaces” without proper compensation. In addition, they were willing to block private construction projects in their backyards – enabled by state structures without consultation of local communities in neighbourhoods – as a blatant usurpation of their living space and the environment. People who staged blockades in rural areas also demonstrated a similar determination to protect private property (e.g., lands under a process of restitution) and public goods (e.g., forests, beaches) from exploitation for commercial purposes that would favour only dominant segments of society. Where the road blockades in the rural areas differed from those in urban areas was that sometimes they were used to pressure the authorities to “do their job”, such as building electric- and water-supply grids in villages so they could enter the 21st century like the rest of the “normal world”. To this extent, citizens of these areas used blockades to remind the state that they were not being treated equally when compared to citizens of other regions.

Much like boycotts, blockades were a practice through which people were trying to expose and counteract the government’s tolerance for policies and practices that negatively impacted people, but also systemic neglect of rural Montenegro. Blockades of this period point to people’s willingness to disengage from their daily duties and pursue disruptive practices to protect their private and shared spaces from a state that desperately needed to seize property it could capitalize on and increase revenue due to failing economy. Once again, civil society actors reacted contentiously through self-organization to address socio-economic and everyday life issues,

legitimizing their actions – especially in protecting illegal housing and other fruits of infrapolitical actions during the previous period – on the basis of the state’s failure to ensure decent living conditions for its citizens by favouring its cronies instead.

Contentious Practices as Protest

In this section, I discuss all those contentious practices not related to the disruption of the routines of everyday life, but rather involving the proactive engagement of citizens in the public arena. This includes those practices by which people made their voices audible in the public sphere or, in more inspired instances, made themselves visible through intrusion into or occupation of public spaces. I have grouped these contentious practices into two groups: *written protests* and *staged protests*.

Written Protests

There was a total of 83 written protests, spanning from so-called “open letters” to more conventional petitions. Written protests during this period can be categorized broadly into three groups: first, those related to labour struggles; second, those dealing with socio-economic and everyday life issues; and, finally, those articulating voices divided along the dominant ideologico-political axis. By juxtaposing these groups of written protests, we get a better picture of civil society in this period – one that was ready to eschew political divisions in order to address “the real issues” of “common people”. Since written and staged protests of the third category are interrelated, I begin by discussing the first two groups of completely neglected aspects of Montenegrin civil society.

Blue-collar workers used protest letters and petitions in two ways: first, to inform the public about the dire state of the economy, and, second, as an awareness-raising and whistle-blowing activity. They used these media to publicly expose hardships they were encountering as a collective and to name and blame those in management and administering state funds who were responsible for their predicaments. Blue-collar workers thus made themselves audible in the public sphere by criticizing state funds for selling enterprises to people who had no intention of maintaining production, but instead were simply exploiting them and selling company assets for a quick profit. While appealing to the right of the public to know the truth – to the “factual state of things” about “embezzlement of millions” and “new management as criminals” – workers were also demanding

that the state intervene by conducting background checks of future buyers and thus wisely choosing investors. Similar grievances were coming from white-collar workers, as they were pointing out “the catastrophic material status of the profession and its workers” due to austerity measures in the cultural and education sectors (e.g., cancelling certain university programs, abolishing some schools in remote villages), yet with no political critique directed toward the regime and its strategic policy orientations. While industrial workers were exposing the harsh reality of economic reforms, written protests in the private sector (tourism, in particular) pointed to the emerging voices of the middle class, such as small business owners in the coastal area who demanded that the state ensure the free flow of capital by opening up borders and stopping rising inflation.

The analysis of written protest not only underscores the workers’ desire to speak directly to the public and the state, but also points to the similar desire of citizens across the country to exercise their “civic conscience”, “civic duties” and “civic responsibilities” in relation their living environment, which is a constant feature of grassroots activism in Montenegro. Among other things, citizens demanded protection of urban parks and beaches as common goods from “ecogenocide”, often rejecting privatization and commercialization for construction projects; raised their voices against poor/uneven quality of utility and public services and infrastructure (in particular for seniors and people with disabilities, but also employment discrimination against people who supported the opposition); uncovered the lack of protection of cultural heritage (e.g., old towns, monument buildings) from commercial exploitation; and protested the government’s favouring of the capital and coastal area with infrastructure projects (e.g., building schools and hospitals, extending power and water-supply grids, removing illegal landfills) at the expense of other regions. Since these issues did not discriminate along lines of political belonging, citizens demonstrated exceptional capacity for self-organization to address “real life issues” related to quality of life in their communities and living environments, which were not perceived (by the regime, civil society, etc.) as political issues. It is important to point out that written protests went beyond grassroots organizing and mobilizing, since they were a preferred practice of emerging NGOs to address these “non-political” everyday life issues more contentiously: privatization of hunting grounds, inadequate denationalization legislation and implementation, and protection of parks and forests, as well as the facilitation of some more movement-like phenomena such as animal rights activism. More in the 2001–2006 period than this one, NGOs provided infrastructure

for people to mobilize and organize around these issues, enabling proactive, sustained activism rather than simply reactive, short-term engagement, but in a “civilized” or “European way” – that is, through written word, not staged protest.

The most prominent type of written protests was the political one related to the polarization of society into two ideologico-political blocs. With the total antagonization of society – especially after the violent protests in January 1998 – Milošević’s supporters began voicing their dissent. Through openly political protest letters and petitions, they positioned themselves as an oppressed and persecuted group, justifying their self-organization and mobilization on the basis of “political oppression” or “political marginalization” due to their being the only ones arrested for expressing their political opinions in public. In that regard, they protested the electoral system as rigged; openly condemned Montenegrin institutions as corrupt; and, most importantly, demanded the release of their fellow citizens arrested in the January 1998 protests. Claiming repression of their right to participate in public gatherings, they began to perceive themselves as victims, thus justifying their contentious practices – from tribal assemblies to street protests – on the grounds of their public voices being systematically oppressed. While the ill-mannered and threatening tone of their written protests was further entrenching their image as a manifestation of retrograde “uncivil society”, they were nevertheless one of the rare voices that openly criticized the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia for what they were – an aggression on innocent people, not a “humanitarian intervention” against Milošević (a stance that was now, somewhat paradoxically, supported by former members of the Anti-War Movement).

Other examples indicate that “civil society” also cut across this political cleavage and reacted at the grassroots level, including petitions to stop “the state of war”, as well as other types of written appeals and open letters. These written protests were coming from all sides – cultural workers, artists, union, intellectuals, war veterans, among other groups – that were against the war, appealing to “dialogue”, “diplomacy”, “tolerance”, “common sense”, “reason”, and “preservation of the environment” among other “non-political” justifications. Thus, these protests clearly differentiated themselves from what they saw as “uncivilized” protest against NATO. These protests rarely criticized the NATO intervention – and thus Montenegro’s Western allies – for what it was, but were rather appealing to the international community, arguing that Montenegro was a neutral actor being punished for Milošević’s politics. Among intellectuals (e.g., university professors, artists, writers), however, this discourse of Montenegro being “the prisoner of

Milošević's regime" quickly turned into (or was just an excuse for) petitions for state independence as the only way to preserve a democratic path and the civic composition of Montenegro.

Overall, written protests exposed a deep-seated division in the Montenegrin body politic that was to be rearticulated along ethnopolitical lines in the 2001–2006 period: while the multicultural Montenegrins blamed Milošević as the person most responsible for the “NATO intervention”, politicized Serbs were those who framed the NATO bombing as a manifestation of the “revamped fascism” against Yugoslavia. As they felt betrayed by their own government for “siding with the aggressors”, their anger was to spill out into the streets. This particular manifestation of “street politics” was used by the pro-regime media as evidence that public protest could not be anything but a destructive activity – always on the verge of escalating into civil war – aiming to prevent Montenegro from its path towards Westernization and democratization.

Staged Protests

There were 58 protest gatherings, each addressing a different issue, taking the form of gatherings in the streets/squares and in front of buildings (e.g. enterprise management, local authorities), mass rallies/demonstrations/marches, as well as occasional sit-ins.

As stated before, January 1998 was a harbinger of a new era in Montenegrin politics: the Milošević-supported traditionalist wing of the DPS organized a mass demonstration in the capital, with an aim of annulling the presidential election results and overthrowing the leader of the reformist wing of the DPS, Milo Đukanović, who had been elected as President of Montenegro. Protests turned violent as protesters attacked the police defending the government. After violent attacks on a government building, the protests were dispersed in the early morning hours and those carrying assault weapons were apprehended. This event sparked a pervasive discourse of ever-creeping civil war in the face of antagonism with Milošević. Supporters of the conservative wing of the DPS constituted a pro-Milošević populist movement that served as the backbone of the anti-NATO protest gatherings and tribal assemblies in 1999, during and after the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia. As they protested, chanted and marched against the “global mafia” and the “NATO fascists”, burning the US flag and pictures of its president, they would, somewhat ironically, strongly support the army to intervene against the treasonous government of Montenegro, legitimizing their actions as a defense of stolen elections and an attempt to return Montenegro to “true Montenegrins” (meaning, Orthodox Slavs). Once again, as in the Antibureaucratic

Revolution, citizens legitimized their openly political gatherings by appealing to their moral duty to protect Yugoslavia from what they saw as alienated bureaucracy and their secessionist tendencies.

Analyzed *in toto*, these protest gatherings brought into the public arena an anti-globalist and anti-imperialist sentiment that gradually developed into a conservative – or, better yet, reactionary – ideological stance. This occurred when the public was oversaturated with the liberal consensus about Montenegro’s belonging to “Western civilization” and the “return to the normal world”. The protesters’ “uncivil” slurs and acts of dissent (e.g., flag burning, throwing rocks at embassies) thus masked an important ideological position critical of the military interventions. Such a critique had been chronically lacking in the nominally civil society, especially among former member of the Anti-War Movement. As such, these street gatherings were important because it was the “uncivil society” that was the most vocal in protesting NATO aggression on innocent people in Yugoslavia, but also because of how the right coopted anti-globalist and anti-imperialist worldviews.

On the other side of the political spectrum, pro-government civil society actors organized “dignified” silent gatherings to demonstrate how civilized Montenegrin protests were a “prisoner” of Milošević’s retrograde politics – thus blaming NATO bombings only on his politics and practices, rather than on the Alliance.⁹⁹ Protests were spreading, as parents also mobilized to demand their sons be returned from Milošević’s “dirty wars” in Kosovo and citizens protested the threatening presence of the military in their towns. However, the most telling symptom of how things changed in Montenegro in this decade was that legitimate protest gatherings addressing the “new Kosovo drama” were now organized by Montenegrin Albanians instead of the Slavic-Orthodox population. Ten years previously, Albanian separatists had been blamed for the “terrorism” against non-Albanian ethnic groups; now, Serbian police and army were being accused of “terror” against the Albanian population. Unlike the “street politics” of Milošević’s supporters, these small-scale, openly political but peaceful protest gatherings devoid of slurs and destructive activities – which came to be known as “civic protests” (*građanski protest*) – demonstrated that for the pro-Western, liberal part of Montenegrin civil society, the only enemy was Milošević and actors/institutions under his control.

⁹⁹ Moreover, the leading (but relatively small in numbers) pro-independence opposition party organized a series of rallies both against the DPS and Milošević, accusing both regimes of being “police states” and demanding state independence and democratization.

In addition to political gatherings that came to be viewed as “civic”, several protest gatherings in the street legitimized yet another category of publicly acceptable “non-political” protest – so-called “social protest” (*društveni/socijalni protest*). Citizens still use this designation to distance themselves from the political arena and political entrepreneurs and to underline the socio-economic nature of their demands. Labour protests were still present, but were more of an extension of issues raised in strikes and protest letters by workers in both the industrial and private sectors. The staged protest was important for workers who had been laid-off but were still formally on administrative leaves. They would gather in the streets and at their former workplaces to demand a return to work, to protest incompetent managers who had enriched themselves at the workers’ expense, as well as to defend their company assets from being sold by the new owners.

Social protests were still active in rural areas, but were reduced to incidents in which people demanded better infrastructure in their respective villages. In urban areas, however, staged protests were streamlined around issues targeted by blockades and written protests. As such, besides protests that were reactive and defensive, we can also speak about the emergence of more proactive, movement-like activity. Such activity included refugees protesting to improve their living conditions; animal rights activism; and, most importantly, dispersed, decentralized organization of groups to protect private and shared property. For example, protests originated from a tenant movement that raised its voice against what members often called “urban terrorism” to demand the state’s protection of their backyards and living environments from development projects, of “common spaces” in their buildings from commercial exploitation, and of innocent families from eviction for commercial interests.

The analysis of staged protests in this period demonstrates that the democratization process did not only precede the institutionalization of civil society, but that this particular form of articulating grievances, making demands, and acting in public was legitimizing itself in openly political, anti-regime terms while also being delegitimized as a manifestation of “uncivil society”. However, as explained in *Chapter III*, this delegitimization of political dissent in the streets did not emerge out of nowhere, but built on previous circumstances through which anti-regime protests had been demonized as “treasonous”, as well as through the regime’s re-framing of the Antibureaucratic Revolution: instead of this event being a symbol of democracy triumphing over the bureaucratized and alienated regime, it was claimed to be a form of manipulation on Milošević’s part in order to install a puppet regime. Although roles and actors had reversed, once

particular contentious practices had remained depoliticized and thus delegitimized as anti-state activities, socio-economic, everyday life, and human rights related issues were left as the only legitimate topics to be addressed outside of institutionally-mediated participation – something that became most visible in the subsequent period.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the opening of the polity not only streamlined civic engagement and political participation through institutional channels, but also delegitimized a certain form of contentious practice – that of *political* protest as necessarily anti-systemic. Opening the polity also entailed the adoption of the “civic politics” articulated “from below” during the previous period, and ideologico-political polarization within it, which were intensified by morally polluted violent street protests. Moreover, the international community’s certification of the reformist anti-Milošević bloc as democratic – coupled with the West’s insistence on strengthening institutions of liberal democracy – had profound effects within civil society. In contrast to its rebelliousness during the previous period where the most comprehensive critique of and resistance to the regime was articulated *within* civil society, the anti-Milošević bloc was now perceived in ethical and aesthetic terms as a constructive support to the democratization process that the reformed regime initiated. This rendered civil society into a space in which it could not be criticized or challenged through contention. These interactions and dynamics between mechanisms (most specifically, certification, boundary-activation, identity shift, category-formation, and diffusion) and processes (most notably, polarization and actor-constitution), on one hand, and contentious practices, on the other, highlight that the emergence of the “uncivil society” – as well as constitution of “civil society” as an ethico-aesthetic project that abstained from “street politics” – was not a product of static factors (that span for centuries), such as political culture or “Montenegrin mentality”. Rather, these interactions and dynamics emerged as a contingent historical phenomenon, affected predominantly by state–society interactions during the post-socialist period.

This shift toward the depoliticization of civic engagement activated a boundary between civil society and the so-called “uncivil society” that hosted destructive anti-democratic and anti-state forces aiming to return the country to its authoritarian past. The most visible aspects of category-formation of pro- and anti-Milošević socio-political movements took root in forms of

associational life and venues of participation in Montenegrin civil society: NGOs became the voice of civil society using institutional mechanisms, whereas tribal assemblies and protest politics became platforms for the alleged “uncivil society” to address the state on an equal footing. However, unlike in the previous period, the opposition had at its disposal state resources from Belgrade – material, symbolic, and discursive, among others – which meant it had power to mobilize support against the government in Podgorica to an unprecedented level. This new capacity effectively diffused the division between socio-political actors and shifted the scale of contention in Montenegro, an effect that was to remain during the following period. What had been a small group of dedicated activists challenging the regime was now a large socio-political movement with an army at its disposal. Therefore, deep polarization at the ground level of society, coupled with brokerage and coordination of the divided sides by two regimes within the federation, resulted in mobilization around two newly constituted socio-political actors: the pro- and anti-Milošević blocs.

Moreover, by focusing on contentious practices, I have demonstrated in this chapter that nominally “non-political” protest was acceptable and present during this period (often framed and recognized as “social” or “civic”), addressing socio-economic and everyday life issues of citizens. It was predominantly reactive, using personal hardships and collective experience as the basis for critique and action. On one hand, these protests were important not only to demonstrate that citizens transcended existing ideologico-political divisions to fight for the common good, but also to prevent the (old) social from being colonized by the (new) economic, thus seeking to protect their existing rights from the advent of a neoliberal ideology accepted by political, cultural, and societal elites in power in Montenegro. While challenges to neoliberalism began to take shape after 2006, here we see that citizens were the first ones to seek to protect existing rights and privileges, as well as the public interest and the common good. In that regard, with gradual NGO-ization of civil society, stable structures – workplaces, neighbourhoods, and local communities, as well as kinship as a cohesive factor around certain issues in specific areas – served as mobilizing forces, thus exposing the importance of friendship ties for issues that went “beyond politics”. On the other hand, citizens’ attempt to be outside of politics by refusing to claim that their dissent possessed political substance led, in light of the situation at the time, to the constitution of political protest as a critical activity against the government in power. During this period, apolitical protest characterizing the previous period, which did not use political diagnostics, turned into anti-political

protest that explicitly distanced itself from politicians challenging the ruling party/coalition and its regime. In short, the political content of dissent was reduced to (the refusal to publicly state) partisan belonging.

During this period, beyond the political – that is, anti-regime – protest of the “uncivil society”, the proliferation of contentious practices was oriented towards socio-economic, environmental and everyday life issues, as well as “civic”, pro-regime protest aimed at promoting democratization. However, within the nominally civil society, we cannot speak of proactive (sustained) activism, with the exception of emerging NGOs that addressed relatively abstract issues. Instead, citizen engagement and participation were reactively (e.g., self-organized at the grassroots level) enacted through contentious practices addressing specific issues. In that regard, while we can speak of polarization of the Montenegrin body politic into two movements, other movement-related phenomena were small in numbers. Despite this fact, civil society was relatively strong in terms of contentious practices that addressed numerous issues “beyond politics”.

Chapter V

2001–2006: A Polarized Society

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the period spanning from the ethnopolitical polarization of Montenegrin society into pro-independence and pro-union movements until the resolution of the statehood status referendum in May 2006, with a short summary of post-2006 contentious practices. I begin with a short overview of the key features of civil society in order to provide the socio-cultural and political context for the contentious practices that I discuss in detail in the chapter. By illuminating the empirical reality of contentious practices in this period, I argue that the synchronized acceleration of macro-processes – such as democratization of the polity, privatization of the economy, and NGO-ization of civil society, in a radically changed relationship between Montenegro and Serbia – reduced people’s engagement in contentious practices and directed it toward a set of specific issues that had been pervasive throughout previous periods (e.g., socio-economic, everyday life, environmental), effectively concluding the depoliticization process of contentious activities. I conclude with a focus on the interactions between these practices and the mechanisms (brokerage, coordination, suppression, certification, boundary-activation, identity shift, category-formation, and diffusion) and processes (mobilization and polarization) that characterized the 2001–2006 period.

By the end of 2000, open hostility between governments in Podgorica and Belgrade had disappeared, as both regimes adhered to democratic rules of the game. However, the elites in Belgrade retained interest in preserving the union, so they continued to provide financial and logistical support to the pro-union parties and organizations in Montenegro (Darmanović 2007; Hockenos and Winterhagen 2007; Morrison 2009). Once again, (ethno)political entrepreneurs began polarizing society into two antagonistic socio-political movements of roughly equal sizes. As the battle over statehood status became an institutional game, however, there was no fear of violent escalation or even civil war. Therefore, from 2001 to 2006, ideologico-political divides within the hostile environment that had characterized the previous period were recalibrated into an essentially *ethnopolitical* cleavage between “progressive” and “multicultural” pro-independence Montenegrins and “traditionalist” and “monocultural” pro-union Serbs (Baća 2017c; Darmanović

2003; Kovačević 2007; Nikolaidis 1999; Popović 2002). Since the majority of the pro-union camp was comprised of former Milošević supporters, and thus imbued with conservative rhetoric, notions of “civil” and “uncivil” became markers of national identity: as ethnic belonging was politicized, the *multicultural* pro-independence option became associated with civic nationalism, while the *monocultural* pro-union option became associated with ethnic nationalism. This divide even further delegitimized contentious practices, characterizing them not only as anti-state, but also as anti-Montenegrin, aimed against Montenegro’s strategic goal to restore its state independency (see Baća 2017c; Džankić and Keil 2017; Morrison 2018; Komar and Živković 2016).

I argue that the analysis of contentious practices – or, more specifically, their relative numerical decrease and thematic concentration on several issues – demonstrates how civil society gradually turned into the civil sector during this period. This change was not only a product of the cooptation of people in one of two movements through clientelistic mechanisms, or of complete dedication only to the causes they promoted, but also an effect of legal and political openings of the system through NGO-ization of associational life and civic engagement. That is to say, in the context of polarization and antagonization of the citizenry regarding statehood status, this process created an institutional platform for claim-making, articulation of grievances, and (re-)affirmation of identities that went beyond this (ethno)political cleavage. An ever-rising number of these organizations and independent media outlets made the public sphere favourable to dissenting voices, and thus created relatively efficient institutional channels and mechanisms for diverse voices to be heard outside of party structures (Baća 2017d; Komar 2015; Muk et al. 2006; Vujović 2017). However, as the majority of important NGOs leaned toward independence, the Montenegrin government became open to and highly interested in including these new societal actors in its policy networks and the political projects that were to lead to state independence. These NGOs brought into the public sphere issues of human rights, tolerance and dialogue, dealing with the past, the rule of law, fair elections, women’s rights, and environmentalism, among others. As a result, a progressive stance on these issues not only established a normative and functionalist idea of civil society as a promotor of values and practices that complemented the move toward liberal democracy and a market economy, but also became associated with the independence project and Montenegrin national identity (see Baća 2017c, 2017d; Darmanović 2007; Komar 2015; Kovačević 2007; Morrison 2009, 2018; Muk et al. 2006; Popović 2002; Vujović 2017). As NGOs

claimed a monopoly on these issues, as I will demonstrate, what was left to be addressed directly – outside of institutionally-mediated representation – were predominantly socio-economic and everyday life issues that did not fit into the liberal agenda of externally-sponsored civil society building and democratization.

Contentious Practices, 2001–2006

While a grey economy was still present, citizens were less involved in these activities than in previous periods, and the state was less tolerant of illegal involvement in the economy, especially due to the fact that property values began to rise rapidly, especially in the capital and coastal area. This was also the period during which the illegal housing and other objects built during previous periods came under scrutiny of the state and were demolished.

Once again, contentious practices during this period, identified in my dataset (N=368), can be grouped into two categories: firstly, those that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or even paralyzed the routinized flow of everyday life through people’s disengagement from their social roles and daily duties, such as strike actions in workspaces, boycotts of the norms of citizenship, or blockades in their local communities; and, secondly, contentious practices through which people staged their dissent outside of their comfort zones by entering the public arena, either through the written word in the public sphere or through gatherings in public spaces (see *Table 6*).¹⁰⁰

Table 6. Contentious practices in the 2001–2005 period (N=368).

	Disruption			Protest	
	<i>Strikes</i>	<i>Boycotts</i>	<i>Blockades</i>	<i>Written</i>	<i>Staged</i>
2001	28	6	12	22	21
2002	33	7	11	23	11
2003	18	9	9	12	12
2004	27	6	10	16	17
2005	19	9	7	13	10
Total:	125	37	49	86	71

¹⁰⁰ As I have explained in the *Introduction*, for the sake of consistency, I identified and enumerated contentious practices for each full year. From January until May 2006, when the campaign for a statehood referendum was in full swing, much of conventional politics shifted into public gatherings and mass rallies of both independentist and unionist blocs, thus greatly increasing the number of events that are coded here as “staged protests”. Furthermore, while these were not necessarily contentious practices, they do fit into selection criteria presented in this dissertation. Having that in mind, and without enumerating contentious practices for the full year of 2006, inclusion of these events would severely obscure contentious practices for this year. Therefore, while I did not enumerate contentious practices for the first five months of 2006, I nevertheless broadly describe and analyze this period, and conclude this chapter with the month of May 2006.

In this chapter, I provide a descriptive and analytical overview of these practices, paying special attention to the claims/grievances they articulated and the justifications that actors used to account for them.

Contentious Practices as Disruption

When discussing contentious practices that temporarily interrupted, disrupted, or paralyzed the flow of everyday life – both inside and outside the workplace – through which citizens disengaged from ordinary ways of doing things, three types can be discerned from the analyzed material in the 2001–2006 period: *strikes*, *boycotts*, and *blockades*.¹⁰¹

Strikes

A strike was the most frequent contentious practice, with 125 events during the period analyzed here. As foreign financial assistance to the Montenegrin government began to recede, consequently decreasing the welfare capacity of the state to address workers' issues, the privatization process began to show its ugly face in numerous economic sectors (see Kilibarda 2016). An ever-increasing number of enterprises were going through bankruptcy, casting into doubt the workers' belief that restructuring of the economy would lead to the restart of production, and, thereby, to better lives. These workers, who had been patiently waiting for the first phase of economic reforms and restructuring to be completed, were realizing that they would be nothing more than an aged, laid-off workforce with no prospects of finding jobs in the industry. With the majority of enterprises put "on hold" by the government while waiting for private investments, the "politics of patience" was finally being replaced in the public sphere by something that could be designated as a "politics of disappointment". Simply put, demands and criticism articulated in strikes during this period were aligned in their simplicity, with no aspirations to address structural problems or national policies, instead focusing predominantly on financial compensation. Blue-collar workers demanded only late payments and benefits (as these were late from several months to several years) and that their years of service be counted toward their pension. As their disappointment in the elites and their handling of the restructuring of the economy was not being translated into political critique, workers' outrage with their material predicaments and

¹⁰¹ During this period, labour withdrawals were accompanied by petitions, blockades, occupations, and protests, due to numerous laid-off workers or those who were waiting for the restart of production process. As a result, they could not disrupt production, but they could disrupt the flow of everyday life. In some instances, laid-off workers would organize blockades of newly privatized enterprises.

predominantly single-issue demands aimed at late payments – often seen as wage-theft – was something the government could easily capitalize on with its promises or even fulfilment of workers’ financial demands through one-time financial or material assistance in putting out the fires of social discontent.

This is not to say that blue-collar workers did not have different demands in some instances. Other demands included that the government put a stop to lay-offs, that new owners respect collective agreements, that enterprise assets be protected from being sold, and that production and financial audit of their enterprises be restarted. But the lowest common denominator for strikes was simply to receive late (“stolen”) wages. Strikers appealed to legality, demanding that the state uphold the law by respecting workers’ constitutional and legal rights by pressuring the (new) management of enterprises to fulfill their contractual obligations. The state thus served as a mediator between management that respected neither its contractual obligations nor the letter of the law, and enraged and weakened workers, further strengthening its clientelistic grip over the working population.

Analyzed as such, this common thread contained in striking workers’ demands, juxtaposed with their justifications, exposes blue-collar workers’ disinterest in protecting what they saw as theirs during previous periods – most notably, the enterprise itself and continuation of production or the “right to work”. While angry at the privatization process and their uncertain futures, blue-collar workers’ key target became the government, which they expected to (re)solve their financial and material problems. However, even though their target was now the national government, there was an evident lack of justifying their actions on political grounds. Instead, they legitimized their strike actions on the grounds of subsistence, as those who had been betrayed and thus had no other option but to ask the state to ensure the survival of their families. Once again, Montenegrin blue-collar workers were explicit about the fact that their dissatisfaction was social, and their anger was aimed at corrupt individuals or groups who had carried out the restructuring and privatization; but, unlike what occurred during the period of and following the Antibureaucratic Revolution, they rarely connected their predicaments to the government’s decisions and policies – not to mention clientelistic networks – that had actually led to the situation in which they found themselves. While communicating similar grievances and making the same demands, this socio-economic outrage expressed through strike actions remained atomized and unconnected, never translated into a wider movement that could have become a potent political force to challenge neoliberal privatization (or

the ideology behind it). However, blue-collar workers' anger was important at the level of diagnostics. For example, the privatization process as a way of displacing social costs onto the workers – and, more broadly, the public – during which “new owners” close to the regime quickly profited by manipulating and selling company assets, with no intention of continuing production – was rarely discussed in civil society at the time.

In a context wherein every vote on the statehood referendum counted, the state maintained illusory social dialogue and fully coopted the trade union federation (Kilibarda 2016). The state easily capitalized on workers' predicament through one-time financial assistance, populist promises, and simulation of pressures on private owners, making industrial labour more dependent on state structures. Due to these practices, blue-collar workers, while criticizing government policies that had ruined their lives, once again sided with the party in power, thus demonstrating that they were not against the state. With the blue-collar workers' inability to connect single-issue demands to their structural causes and thus politicize the issues by blaming the regime and its policies, they had finally ceased being an important political subject, as they had been in the preceding periods. Economically irrelevant, socially burdensome, and politically marginal, Montenegrin blue-collar workers – or what was left of them – had nothing else at their disposal but to demand what was owed to them, often leaving their workplaces to block the streets and roads, as well as to make their problems heard in front of institutions they deemed to be responsible for their predicaments. However, in the cacophony about statehood status – and related “identity issues” in the context of nation-building, such as language, religion, historical narrative, and other topics over which the two socio-political movements clashed – that effectively oversaturated the public sphere, NGOs focused on the rule of law, a fair election process, and human rights, which meant that nobody listened to blue-collar workers' grievances. Their outcry, however, was the first reaction to neoliberal dogma, which was to come under overwhelming criticism by civil society only a decade later.

On the other hand, in the first half of the period analyzed here, public employees – elementary and high school teachers, in particular – organized themselves and strived for more thorough reforms that would see fairer collective agreements, increase their salaries, and ensure regular payments. While these strikes produced heated exchanges between the government and public employees, once again there was little questioning of the regime itself or its policies. The idea of defending the “dignity of the profession” through strike actions was almost lost by now, as

their justification was reduced to that of blue-collar workers – to have a living wage and decent working conditions. Similarly to the blue-collar workers, public employees’ political capital during this period was being crushed gradually; by the end of the period under analysis, it was almost gone, simply as an excess. Intimidation by the state and its clientelistic mechanisms had devoured their capacity and desire to organize and engage contentiously in large numbers, as they had before.

Therefore, while literature speaks of total societal polarization in two camps – pro- and contra-independence – my analysis of 2001–2006 demonstrates that strike actions around socio-economic and material issues, not only environmental ones (cf. Komar 2015), had strong potential to cut across ethnopolitical divides and make people self-organize and fight for their rights. However, during this period, we see a loss of proactive demands (e.g., wage increase, improved working conditions), as grievances became mostly defensive in nature (e.g., demanding respect for existing rights or stopping roll-backs), as well as a total depoliticization of action. Responsibility, accountability, and answerability were shifted from the government – which had sold the enterprises – onto management. In this scenario, contentious practices were used to demand that the state pressure the management to adhere to its contractual obligations and uphold the law.

Boycotts

There were 37 contentious practices that could be described as boycotts during this period. These were scarce, small-scale, and relatively politically inconsequential. Those that did occur were mostly present among high school pupils and university students who engaged in this practice to point out the dire state of their respective institutions: from the bad material conditions of their study environment to arbitrariness and disorganization in curricular reforms. In so doing, they symbolically declared their unwillingness to do their duties as students until the state started respecting them as the future of the society by creating conditions in which they could thrive. In several instances, boycotts were used as a way of pointing out the politicization of institutions and discrimination along ethnopolitical lines in the education sector. In other cases, people from rural and suburban areas frequently engaged in boycotts of utility bill payments until telephone, water, and electricity grids were improved in their respective areas; as did green market vendors by boycotting paying taxes until the states starts to regulate black market sellers who they deemed to be “unfaithful competition” that were destroying their businesses. While some of these social

actors demanded that the state “prove its European orientation” by addressing these issues in the same way as developed countries in the EU, boycotts still showed that certain segments of society were more eager to organize and express their dissent contentiously around “real life issues” (e.g., non-political issues), rather than to use clientelistic opportunities.

Overall, once again boycotts were used by citizens to point out “small issues” that were neglected by state institutions and political elites. However, as NGOs and independent media became more prevalent in this period, institutional channels offered more efficient ways of making problems of citizens visible and audible in public.

Blockades

In addition to workers blocking roads during their strikes, it became a preferred practice of people to make their demands and grievances publicly visible through blockades. There were 49 observed events that could be described as blockades. This remains the distinctive feature of protests in rural areas to this day (Baća 2017b), as a way for citizens to counteract abuses of state power that work in the interest of a few elites.

On the one hand, blockades continued to be used to prevent construction development projects (e.g., buildings, plants, beaches, parking lots) on the land under restitution or in city quarters, with appeals to legality and potential devastation to citizens’ ways of life. On the other, blockades were still used by tenants who were protecting their neighbours from evictions. People blocked the machines that came to take down “illegally built houses” by appealing to their right to have a “roof over their head”. Negation of “legality”, “common sense”, “right to clean air and water”, “involvement of the local community in decision making” – all of these violations were invoked in blockades during which people gathered to protect forests, rivers, and other natural resources from pollution by state negligence (e.g., illegal landfills), exploitation for commercial purposes and state infrastructure projects. Moreover, people were no longer just demanding to be consulted on issues that impacted them and their communities, but also to have independent experts assess impacts of these “investments” and “infrastructure projects” on their livelihoods and environment, losing faith in state/authorities and explanations they gave them. However, what was interesting during this period was an emergence of public *quid pro quo* interactions between civil society in rural areas and the government: if the state improved water and power grids, locals would allow the so-called “infrastructure projects”, thus further legitimizing patronage system.

As the land and natural resources became more valuable, the state attempted to capitalize on them. However, my analysis of blockades as contentious practice demonstrates that citizens, who were dissatisfied with official explanation for such actions, were ready to mobilize and protect the common good from being privatized or “valorized” by the state. In other words, blockades were a reaction to market forces enacted by the state and its neoliberal orientation, and their impacts on people’s lifeworlds.

Contentious Practices as Protest

In this section, I discuss all those contentious practices not related to the disruption of the routines of everyday life, but rather involving the proactive engagement of citizens in the public arena. This includes those practices by which people made their voices audible in the public sphere or, in more inspired instances, made themselves visible through intrusion into or occupation of public spaces. I have grouped these contentious practices into two groups: *written protests* and *staged protests*.

Written Protests

There was a total of 86 written protests, spanning from so-called “open letters” to more conventional petitions. My analysis of written protests points to relative dominance of issues related to the key ethnopolitical cleavage. Therefore, politically-oriented open letters and petitions addressed statehood issues. Intellectuals, artists, university professors, and other prominent public figures, in addition to citizens, began to organize petitions and send open letters both to the state structures and the international community to demand Montenegro’s independence (as well as, in some cases, separate Montenegrin language and church). While this was justified on the basis of openly resisting pressures from Belgrade, and thus publicly demonstrating emancipation from “the (Greater) Serbian hegemony” that was negating Montenegrin identity, culture, and right to self-determination, these letters often attacked the international community – the EU, in particular – as violating its humanistic and democratic principles by supporting the union between two countries. In that regard, this form of contentious practice was not only important because it gave legitimacy to the state independence “from below”, but also because it showed that the nominally progressive elites in the country – that is to say, the most prominent voices of “civil society” and “civic Montenegro” – were the ones demanding, articulating, and justifying the so-called “independent

European Montenegro” (see Morrison 2009, 2018). The other side became relatively quiet, due to having its own media outlets. When it used written protests, it often addressed issues of language, religion and culture in ethnonationalist, conservative, and traditionalist terms, further entrenching the idea of the pro-union movement as a retrograde force.

On the other hand, beyond confrontations between two socio-political movements, written protests by blue-collar workers were declining, often pointing out corrupt practices and cronyism, but frequently articulated more as pleas rather than protests, by those whose strikes were nothing more than a symbolic demonstration of dissent, as they were on administrative leave (e.g., could not disrupt production). Furthermore, petitions and protests became an important feature of NGO activism during that time, as they used this contentious practice to pressure the state to enact certain reforms, such as decriminalizing “verbal delict”, penalizing “hate speech”, and depoliticizing curriculum in the social sciences and humanities at the university level – proactive in regard to civil liberties, human rights, and civil dialogue. The issues of protection of the environment and the commons, animal rights, property and tenant rights; the fight against industrial pollution; and commercialization of historical heritage were brought to the forefront by NGOs and self-organized citizens; as well as related issues raised in written protest, including demands for better public services and depoliticized institutions (e.g., exposing corruption). However, most important results achieved through written protest were in the domain of environmental politics and spatial planning, as natural resources and urban space came to be immensely profitable and thus of significant interest to the state and its cronies. This time, a pattern began to emerge, exposing another neglected division in the capital of Montenegro (that remains salient to this day) between two worldviews on how Podgorica should develop into a modern city. The insistence of the authorities, both at the national and local levels, on the neoliberal imaginarium of the “Europeanization” of the city, primarily through condo development projects and excessive and rapid privatization and commercialization of spaces and services, was counteracted by diverse societal actors who demanded protection of the commons and development of creative public spaces. In a similar fashion, organizing at the level of local communities remained a constant, as the vocal opposition of local residents emerged against development projects of the state and investors which citizens deemed to be “ecological bombs”. Once again, civil society protected the public interest from a state that claimed to act in that very interest while simultaneously acting in the interest of the few. These demands for “the state to do its job” by working in the interests of all its citizens, however,

would become most visible in protest letters and petitions by small business owners and entrepreneurs. These written protests not only demanded that the state put a stop to the grey economy that was decimating their businesses, but also pointed out the unwanted consequences of the government's selective approach to combating illegal market activities with no actual system-wide reform, such as how the introduction of cash registers would favour "disloyal competition" that the state was still tolerating.

Therefore, while the citizenry was polarized around the statehood issue and related forms of "high politics", the written protests analyzed in this chapter indicate that citizens were not disinterested in other issues, especially those "non-political" related to socio-economic hardships and everyday life issues. That is to say, expressing dissent on these "commonsensical issues" carried no danger that those involved be associated with one or the other side of the ethnopolitical cleavage.

Staged Protest

There were 71 protest gatherings, taking the form of gatherings in the streets/squares and in front of buildings (e.g., enterprise management, local authorities), occupation/sit-ins of buildings (in several occasions coupled with hunger-strikes), and mass rallies.

Where this period stands in stark contrast to those before is in the gradual dissipation of political protest gatherings. In the previous period, as former activists were coopted by two movements, and "street politics" were delegitimized, political antagonisms were directed into the institutional arena. Between 2001 and 2006, therefore, there were occasional protest rallies, but these were predominantly organized by political parties and organizations that comprised one of two socio-political movements, and focused on issues such as oppression and intimidation, right to self-determination, unresolved religious questions, etc. As such, rallies were part of the institutional political game, especially mass gatherings in public squares in months preceding the statehood status referendum in May 2006. In addition, small-scale protests centred on cultural issues connected to ethnopolitical divides – especially about religious, ethnic, and national identity issues – in which either Serbs or Montenegrins objected to the negation of their rights, or demanded resolution of the issues surrounding the persecution of ethnic minorities in the 1990s. Some political protests, such as those against the war in Iraq, were incidental, but nevertheless demonstrated citizens' willingness to self-organize and express their political selves through

dissent around issues that did not impact them directly. Moreover, these protests were one of the rare cases in which citizens expressed their ideological and political positions beyond local politics and divisions embedded in ethnopolitics.

However, staged protests predominantly left the task of demanding social justice to those “losers of the transition”. Once again, laid-off workers and those who were on administrative leaves – as well as retirees, welfare recipients, disabled workers, and street vendors, among others – were responsible for staged protests addressing socio-economic questions in front of institutions they deemed to be responsible for their predicaments. Protests among public employees, however, began to take the shape of sit-ins, often coupled with hunger-strikes. Those working in public services that took to the streets, however, did so because of late payments and low salaries. In response to austerity measures and restructuring of the administrative apparatus, protesting workers demanded transfers to other public institutions, basing their criticisms/justifications on being loyal public servants, often invoking a sense of entitlement to continued work as public employees. Similarly, individual and family-based protests, often in the form of sit-ins at public institutions, began to proliferate around issues such as the state providing promised social housing, pension plans, or return to workplaces. As they demanded social justice by returning what was stolen from them during the economic restructuring process: for blue-collar workers, swift resolution to the bankruptcy status of their enterprises and restart of production, for others, better social services and welfare. Under these circumstances, political diagnostics were gone and the so-called “losers of the transition” justified their contentious activities on the basis of being victims of systematic fraud; they demanded that the state correct the wrongs they were enduring, predominantly related to socio-economic hardships and unresolved legal status. They identified protests as the only way to, firstly, express their anger, and, secondly, make themselves – as the “forgotten ones” – visible in public, and thus demand support from institutions in resolving their problems. And, finally, once again those working in the private sector – most notably, taxi drivers, street and green market vendors, and small business owners – demanded that the state regulate their respective businesses and purge “the illegals” from the market. In turn, in some cases, “the illegals” who were removed from the streets protested the selective approach taken to remove street and green market vendors. These protests were, once again, a reaction against harsh market forces, since they demanded that the state introduce a set of regulations that would make the protesters’ lives bearable.

In rural areas, residents organized protests in response to what they perceived as the unjust cancellation of public services (e.g., schools, ambulances) for which they now had to travel to the nearest urban area, using collapsing public transportation services. Rural protests also targeted environmental issues (e.g., landfills). However, as urban and environmental activism was on the rise in the capital, with one of the biggest mobilizations against building luxury condos occurring during this period, activism was also spreading out in other urban areas. These protests mostly focused on preventing pollution and respecting spatial planning without destroying urban green areas, but also secondarily included protests of the development of refugee settlements in their neighbourhoods or local communities. Many of these localized struggles would eventually culminate in the famous nationwide movement to protect Tara Canyon from being exploited for its hydro-electric potential – a movement that was comprised by a wide network of NGOs, political parties, media, and international organizations (see Baća 2017b, 2017d; Komar 2015). Once again, without viewing their actions as political or aimed at the regime and its policies, citizens justified their actions based on the “right to light and air”, with the exception of protests that demanded the regionalization of Montenegro – as a way of returning political power to residents to govern their own lives – due to the systemic neglect of the industrial north. These were rare instances in which (grassroots) nationwide movements were able to transcend ethno-political cleavages and unite people around progressive and just causes.

Conclusion and Post-Referendum Epilogue¹⁰²

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the forms of polarization of the previous period were rearticulated around the issue of statehood and, consequently, shifted competing identities into a new category-formation: an ethno-political cleavage between pro-independence “civic” Montenegrins and pro-union “nationalist” Serbs turned into two socio-political movements during a peaceful and cooperative period between Podgorica and Belgrade, both of which had been certified by the international community as legitimate actors. Once again, brokerage and coordination by two governments not only focused contention on one particular issue, but also disincentivized contentious practices in the public area by increasing incentives for people to attain their goals through clientelistic mechanisms. However, this was also a period of subtle suppression by the Montenegrin state, when manipulation and propaganda were used to effectively render its

¹⁰² Early version of sections from this conclusion, related to the post-2006 period, have already been published in a book chapter (see Baća 2017d).

competitors – along with their supporters, who nevertheless were loyal Montenegrin citizens – as yet another manifestation of the “uncivil society”. Therefore, an identity shift around the status of statehood was not only of an ethnonational nature, but a *de facto* political statement, which even further delegitimized contentious activities that challenged official policies as anti-state activity. However, beyond this boundary between independentist and unionist movements, as I have demonstrated, contentious practices were once again focused on socio-economic, environmental, and everyday life issues and, as such, were often tolerated as social discontent and civic protest.

However, regarding the decline of contentious practices during this period, it was not only the issue of statehood that polarized and mobilized citizenry around the ethnopolitical axis, but also the process of NGO-ization of civil society that prescribed and legitimized only certain issues as those that should be of interest for civil society actors, as well as the ways in which these should be addressed (e.g., in non-radical, non-disruptive ways). In other words, a number of relevant issues previously addressed through contentious practices now were institutionalized through NGOs. Contentious practices thus were left to sore “losers of the transition”, such as industrial and laid-off workers, but also to those groups that would self-organize to tackle specific issues. Furthermore, contentious practices were left as a legitimate way for groups whose issues were not recognized as important by mainstream political and societal actors to express dissent and claim-making. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the opening of the political system reduced civil society to the professionalized civil sector, while the negative effects of economic restructuring during this phase were almost exclusively addressed by contentious practices.

All of these effects, however, began to change after the question of statehood was resolved, and after the economic boom following it. 2010 marked the beginning of the rise of dissent through contentious practices, which over time became more political, especially among previously apolitical social groups. As such, their “political becoming” was articulated loud and clear in both the public sphere through written word, and public spaces through direct action (see Baća 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d; Kilibarda 2013, 2016; Komar 2015; Kovačević 2017; Morrison 2018; Vujović 2017).¹⁰³

Therefore, after the independentist movement achieved its goal, civil society actors shifted discourse from ethnonational politics towards democratization, social justice, corruption,

¹⁰³ For more than a decade now, the internet has functioned as the most important public space for political debate in Montenegro. Since the early 2000s, for instance, online discussion forums have served as platforms where many citizens have exercised their “political self” (see Brković 2009).

organized crime, independence of the judiciary, development, social welfare issues, and European integration, among other issues, seeing the partitocratic grip over the state apparatus as the main obstacle to further reform (Kilibarda 2016; Morrison 2018: 136). Thanks to new media technologies, space for more democratic civic action began to emerge, producing new political subjectivities in the process. Contrary to the middle-class urbanity and civility that had defined “civicness” in simplistic terms as ethno-national tolerance since the late 1990s, new civic actors began to redefine the terms of “civic discourse” and “civic participation” on more activist grounds, emphasizing solidarity with the so-called “losers of the transition” and calling for both environmental and social justice (see Baća 2017b, 2017c; Kilibarda 2013). However, unlike activism before the historical turning-point of 2006, mass, contentious, anti-government mobilizations began to appear in the streets of the capital during the post-2006 period, challenging the regime directly, most notably in 2012 and 2015 (see Kilibarda 2013; Morrison 2018; Baća 2017c). Eventually, these events culminated in the opposition’s total boycott of the parliament, which began in late 2016 and continued throughout 2017.

The government actively worked to delegitimize these protests in the eyes of the local and international public (as nationalistic, anti-systemic, anti-state, anti-European, anti-NATO, etc.), largely preventing the spread of these mobilizations beyond their respective core constituencies. Instead of the dissipation of ethnonational identity politics after the referendum, the fusion of politics and ethnicity instead was consolidated, establishing ethnonational identity politics as the master frame through which the DPS (with its small coalition partners) continues to govern (see Džankić 2014; Morrison 2011).¹⁰⁴ What’s more, the DPS has not merely perpetuated these ethnic-cum-political divisions to block oppositional, cross-ethnic, civic-based alliance building, but has also used populism to frame its reign as the *conditio sine qua non* of Montenegrin independence. By continuously representing Montenegro’s current statehood (and the peaceful cohabitation of diverse ethnic/national groups within it) as precarious and something that could be reversed if the opposition came to power, the DPS has sought to discredit and incapacitate any popular mobilization that challenges its rule, even when such movements come from grassroots, civic-minded movements. As Komar and Živković (2016: 790) explain, “the ‘fear’ of Serbs who will

¹⁰⁴ Even though this ethnonational division became entrenched as the principal political cleavage in the country, many wrongly expected that the resolution of the status of Montenegrin statehood would bring about the end of “national divides” and recentre public debates on socio-economic problems (Muk et al. 2006). However, these cleavages were strengthened by political and ethnic entrepreneurs, to the extent that what originally began as a political division gradually transformed into an ethnic cleavage.

take away the not easily achieved Montenegrin statehood’ [became] the underlying theme of every political campaign in the country”. Due to this fear, citizens are consistently drawn into the gravitational pull of identity politics, with ethnonational identification remaining the key determinant of voter behaviour (Komar 2013).¹⁰⁵ The outcome of the process of *politicization of ethnicity* has been that even grassroots political organizing of – and, more importantly, cross-ethnic coalition building with – Serbs is framed as a threat to Montenegro itself and, therefore, is delegitimized as “opposition to the state and its independence” (Baća 2017c; Džankić and Keil 2017).¹⁰⁶

Finally, despite top-down deepening and widening of ethnopolitical cleavages after the statehood referendum, social media – Facebook, in particular – has served as an important platform for encounters and connections among citizens disenchanted with party politics and disappointed in the oligarchic core of electoral democracy in Montenegro, giving rise to what can be described as a new iteration of the anti-regime movement (Baća 2017d; Kilibarda 2013).¹⁰⁷ These actors are beginning to articulate political messages that are radically different from mainstream politics, which tend to be oversaturated with an apolitical – or, better yet, depoliticized – liberal consensus among existing elites.

In their place, these new political subjectivities are introducing to Montenegro genuine concerns about social justice, military neutrality, left-wing Euroscepticism, alternative globalization, and quality of living in urban space, along with more reactionary right-wing populism and romanticized traditionalism. The injustices against which they have struggled are issues that cut across ethno-national communities: systemic corruption, corrupt privatization, austerity measures, environmental degradation, protection of the commons (e.g., natural resources, public spaces, and historic-cultural monuments), unequal access to public services, inequalities in social status, and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the DPS regime. This struggle, in

¹⁰⁵ After 2006, this ethnic cleavage was deepened and widened institutionally. Official recognition of institutions promoting exclusive Montenegrin ethnic identity such as the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, the Doclean Academy of Sciences and Arts, Matica Crnogorska, and Institute for Montenegrin Language and Literature, among others, was a turn in official policies. From that point on, a new set of ethnic identity markers – such as a new historical narrative, separate language and orthography, and new state symbols – established exclusive Montenegrin identity freed of similarities with Serbian identity.

¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the advent of external funding in the past two decades has created a path-dependent development within civil society, so that the non-profit “third sector” – steered by (young) urban, liberal and middle-class professionals and dominated by a small number of advocacy and service-providing organizations disinterested in participation and mobilization – remains the dominant model of associational life, and is, in essence, hostile to those interested in radical change of existing power relations, structural injustices, and patterns of exclusion.

¹⁰⁷ This is essentially a loose network of formal organizations, informal associations, *ad hoc* groups, and individual activists from both the left and right of the political spectrum.

effect, has motivated the creation of new political bonds among multitudes of individuals and collectives that demand proactive involvement in decision-making by renouncing the elites' definition of politics in which the political system is to strictly serve the (economic) interests of the few (see Baća 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d; Kilibarda 2013, 2016). The emergence of grassroots activism, coupled with stark criticism of the oligarchic core of electoral democracy – or, better yet, *stabilitocracy* (see Kmezić and Bieber 2017) – also brings to the fore the question of the quality of externally sponsored, top-down democratization and associated processes (e.g., privatization, NGO-ization, state-building, and Europeanization) that have molded contemporary Montenegro. The overwhelming sentiment among activists is that three decades of democratization of the Montenegrin polity have been purely cosmetic in nature, since their outcome has been a total merger of the state apparatus with the ruling party structure (and, more broadly, its clientelistic networks).

The struggle continues.

Conclusion

The Relevance of Post-Socialist Montenegro

Introduction

To begin with a paraphrase of Andrew Abbott's famous opening: a scholar that uses Protest Event Analysis (PEA) must cheat depth for the sake of breadth. In covering the period of 1989 to 2006, I presented a broad overview of contentious practices as the neglected feature of post-socialist civil society (building), whose analysis showed that civil society in contemporary Montenegro – used here as a paradigmatic example of post-socialist civil society in Central and Eastern Europe – was not weak.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, by using this small Balkan country as a case study, and approaching it through a diachronic perspective of a longitudinal study, my goal was to shed some light on more general dilemmas in political sociology. Firstly, what conditions and circumstances favour contentious practices as a way for citizens to exert their (political) subjectivity, autonomy, and agency. Secondly, why and how did citizens organize themselves and challenge power structures “from below”. Finally, how did these “deviations” from institutional venues of political/civic participation vary during different stages of political transition and socio-economic restructuring that are characteristic of the post-socialist region. This analysis is substantiated by evidence presented throughout this work.

In the *Introduction*, I discussed and analyzed the stable socio-cultural structures in Montenegro and macro-processes that shaped the country's post-socialist transition. These structures and processes, I argued, affected the forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices during this turbulent period of institutional engineering. My goal was to investigate how different phases/stages of these macro-processes – in their three dimensions: democratization of the polity, privatization of the economy, and NGO-ization of civil society – affected post-socialist civil society building outside institutional mediation and through contentious participation. Specifically, my focus was on transformations in the nexus of polity–economy–society rendered through the dynamics of the contention theoretico-methodological model, to discern distinct historical periods that shared common features and, therefore, similarly

¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as I showed in the *Introduction*, comparative studies that used survey-instruments or that focused on highly visible protests events had represented Montenegro as the weakest in the post-Yugoslav region in terms of civic engagement and unconventional political participation.

affected the ways in which citizens articulated their grievances, voiced their demands, advanced their claims, and (re-)affirmed their identities outside of institutional channels, through direct involvement in the public arena.

Subsequently, in *Chapter I*, I provided a comprehensive analysis, critical assessment, and synthesis of available scholarly literature on post-socialist civil society and contentious politics. I then argued that the conceptual frameworks and analytical units – or, better yet, units of observation – proposed by the dominant approaches in social movement and civil society studies do not fully account for what I am studying. My goal was to grasp the empirical reality of non-institutional, unconventional, and *direct* venues of civic engagement and political participation within the “post-socialist condition”. For that reason, I pointed out the necessity of focusing not only on the changes within/of the polity (as the dynamic of contention proposes), but also on structural transformations of institutional frameworks in the economy and civil society that, as literature on post-socialist civil society shows, had profoundly shaped the ways in which people acted contentiously and their reasons for such actions. In the context of post-socialist transformation, I focused on conceptualizing, identifying, and studying *contentious practices* as the unit of analysis/observation because this construct provides enough analytical and heuristic bandwidth to incorporate both contentious political actions and everyday infrapolitical resistance and resilience, as well as practices of contestation that are in-between these categories. In other words, using “contentious practices” as a unit of observation/analysis allowed me not only to identify and map actually existing forms of contention in the post-socialist space, but also to critically examine all actions that operate outside institutional channels and produce new sites of social enunciation, new forms of civic participation, and new modes of political being. These can be, in turn, used as new empirical and conceptual indicators of civil society (building) in the region: from everyday resistance, across protest politics, to experimentation with direct democracy. Furthermore, without attributing political substance to these contentious practices – as literature points to a(anti)political engagement and activism as the defining feature of post-socialist civil society – I did not focus only on claims, demands, and grievances expressed through these actions. Instead, I also drew on critical sociology and state-of-the-art literature on social movements and civil society in CEE to examine how human agents “understand what they are doing and how they explain themselves” (Scott 2012: xxiii–xxiv), treating them as “reflexive agents, equipped with the necessary competences to give an account of themselves as well as to justify their actions and

worldviews” (Kurasawa 2017b: 4). To put it simply, by analyzing contentious practices – through which people act directly, by abandoning routinized, institutional(ized) venues of participation to exercise their agency – under ever-changing structural conditions, I examined not only what people demanded and grieved through these practices, but also how they publicly justified and legitimized their positions, claims, and decisions to act outside of institutional venues of civic engagement and political participation.

In these two chapters, I laid out my theoretical framework, conceptual apparatus, methodological design and historical background. In the four empirical chapters that followed – *Chapters II–V* – I enumerated, classified, described, and analyzed contentious practices against the backdrop of changes in the nexus of Montenegrin polity–economy–society. The analyzed empirical material was divided into four distinct yet related “synchronic” wholes: first, the 1989–1990 period of political vacuum and the democratization experimentation in-between the fall of the communist party-state *nomenklatura* and the first multiparty election (*Chapter II*); second, the 1991–1997 period of the fall of socialist Yugoslavia, civil wars, international isolation, collapse of the economy, and a turn toward authoritarianism (*Chapter III*); third, the 1998–2000 period when the reformist wing of the DPS created an all-encompassing anti-Milošević coalition (with the progressive opposition parties, civil society associations, independent media, intellectuals, etc.), and – supported by the Western powers – engaged in genuine democratization under the ever-present threat of military intervention on its soil (*Chapter IV*); and, finally, the 2001–2006 period, when the polarization of Montenegrin society between pro- and anti-Milošević supporters was realigned to form independentist and unionist movements (*Chapter V*). Taken together, my analysis of the empirical material across these four chapters describes a historical whole characterized by dynamic sets and combinations of mechanisms and processes. To put it differently, by juxtaposing (formal) macro-processes of institutionalization with (informal) micro-practices of contestation – their relations, interactions, and dynamic – I uncovered how these processes were complemented or challenged by the contentious practices “from below”.

Building on my analysis, in this concluding chapter I discuss the contributions of the dissertation from a diachronic perspective of a longitudinal study. The *overall objective* of this dissertation is to map and explore the role of contentious practices during the period of radical soci(et)al change involved in Montenegro’s post-socialist transition and to situate my findings within the larger post-socialist framework and discuss its theoretical bearings on broader debates

about civil society, contentious politics, and democratization. By investigating how top-down (formal) processes of institutionalization and bottom-up (informal) practices of contestation interacted in civil-society-building in Montenegro, I also achieve two *specific objectives*: (1) I illuminate the empirical reality of the post-socialist, transition space of Montenegro through analysis of contentious practices through which citizens articulated their grievances, voiced their demands, advanced their claims, and (re-)affirmed their identities; and (2) I analyze how and to what extent forms, dynamics, sites, scales, and content of contentious practices were affected by elite-driven (formal) macro-processes and, conversely, how these processes were influenced by citizens through civil resistance, social activism, popular politics, and other forms of unconventional participation.

This concluding chapter is organized according to these objectives. In the first section below, I discuss conceptual contributions of this dissertation. In the second part, I focus on interactions between processes of institutionalization and practices of contestation, and discuss the theoretical contributions of this dissertation. And, finally, I briefly return to the overall objective, as well as describing shortcomings of the dissertation and venues for future research.

Challenging the “Weak Civil Society” Thesis through a Practice-Oriented Approach to Post-Socialist Civil Society Building

In addressing the first specific objective of this dissertation in a sociological manner – namely, *to illuminate the empirical reality of the post-socialist, transition space of Montenegro through an analysis of actually existing forms of contentious practices through which citizens articulated their grievances, voiced their demands, advanced their claims, and (re-)affirmed their identities* – I borrowed from diverse strands of sociological thinking to recalibrate the typically used conceptual framework in order to grasp ways in which people were participating contentiously in the public arena. My approach included not only conceptual modifications, but also methodological and theoretical ones.

In the *Introduction*, I demonstrated how the literature on Montenegrin civil society presents the latter as socially passive, political apathetic, and civically disengaged. Except in cases of highly visible and politically consequential manifestations of contentious politics (e.g., social movements, mass demonstrations), the dominant transitological perspective of scholars interested in Montenegro is elite-centered and interested primarily in voter behaviour, focusing on institution-

building through conventional participation and non-contentious engagement in public life. Scholars interested in civil society, more specifically, have relied on survey-based instruments to measure individual attitudes toward unconventional participation, or on official registries of NGOs to understand density and organizational composition of Montenegrin civil society. The conclusion has been unanimous: while the country possesses strong civil sector (especially after 2006), its civil society is characterized by low levels of interest, identity articulation, and aggregation “from below” and, by extension, few contentious politics. As a result, descriptions of this period of Montenegrin history provide a paradigmatic example of what literature on post-socialist, (post-)transitional civil society in CEE has argued, the main features of which I described in *Chapter I*: mass withdrawal from public life, extremely weak associational life, low levels of social trust and confidence in various civil and political institutions, anemic community engagement and participation in voluntary organizations, low membership in civil society organizations, lack of social movements as a way to voice popular grievances and claims, and relative absence of participation in protest activities. Simply put, a weak civil society.

To provide a contrasting analysis to this discourse, I have studied what people actually did: instead of focusing on individual attitudes toward civic engagement and political participation – as well as the dominant collective actors who engaged in cooperative, non-contentious practices (both formally through institutional channels, and informally through clientelistic mechanisms) – I scrutinized the contentious practices through which people exercised their agency and autonomy. By changing the unit of observation/analysis and its empirical indicators, I was able to identify N=1,745 contentious practices.¹⁰⁹ This finding differs from the claim that Montenegrin society was structurally weak and culturally deficient. In other words, the conceptual change proposed in this dissertation, and its application to the empirical material, has shown that it is inaccurate to describe this period as being characterized by a weak civil society in which people were withdrawn from the public life. Quite the contrary, I demonstrated how they addressed through contentious practices numerous issues, both proactively and reactively.

This change leads to abandoning several conceptual and theoretico-methodological biases within civil society and contentious politics study. First, in civil society studies, it led to rejecting (1) a teleological perspective of a dominant normative-functionalist understanding of post-socialist

¹⁰⁹ Not including infrapolitical actions counted in thousands of individual and collective direct actions, spanning from involvement in grey economy and building of illegal housing, to alternative forms of political organizing, such as tribal assemblies.

civil society, in which only those actions that contribute to building liberal democracy and market economy are counted; (2) an “either–or” selection bias in post-socialist civil society – most specifically in relation to these binaries: formal/informal, coordination/spontaneity, private/public, contention/cooperation, infrapolitical/political, participation/transaction – in favour of also including contentious practices *in-between* these categories; and (3) the implicit emphasis on activities that only occur in the *material* public space, which excludes actions through which people make themselves visible and audible contentiously in the *discursive* public sphere. When it came to the study of social movements and contentious politics, my approach discards (1) a sole emphasis on political events that are coordinated efforts of claim-making towards governments, in favour of including practices whose lowest common denominator is direct action by abandoning institutional, routinized venues of civic engagement, but without claiming political substance (or even declaring themselves as *a(nti)political*); (2) if not inclusion of infrapolitical direct actions, due to methodological constraints in collecting such data, then at least their acknowledgement as an important feature of contestation processes in the post-socialist space; and (3) selection bias that favours large-scale, highly visible, and politically consequential events in favour of including also small-scale, short-term, low-key, sometimes even individual protests that occur outside the public gaze (e.g., in remote rural areas, at the neighbourhood level, in occupied offices, in abandoned factories). Once these biases were discarded, the empirical reality of Montenegrin civil society painted a different picture: a relative richness of civic engagement through contentious practices, some of which profoundly shaped its political culture and political structure during the period of post-socialist transition.

Furthermore, this conceptual change also required a theoretico-methodological contribution: to investigate actors’ subjective understandings of their contentious practices. As a result, I not only focused on claims, demands, and grievances articulated through these actions, but also on explicit and implicit justifications and legitimizations of these actions by the actors themselves. That is, I examined how actors themselves understood and interpreted their abandonment of institutional venues of participation in favour of contentious practices. More precisely, I analyzed how they justified and legitimized their actions: which values they invoked in criticizing and defending their contentious practices especially when refusing to frame their actions as political. Most often, justifications and legitimizations were employed by actors to explain their rejection of political action, and to frame their actions as non-political, apolitical, or

even anti-political, by labelling these actions as social discontent, civil disobedience, civic protest, and moral outrage. This refusal to invoke politics in contentious practices was exposed in this dissertation as a defining feature of post-socialist civil society, to which many other studies point as well (see *Introduction* and *Chapter I*). Therefore, rather than taking this feature of “contentious non-politics” for granted, it becomes interesting to inquire as to why is it so. I return to this question in the next section, especially when discussing methodological constraints of this study.

To conclude this section, my analysis of contentious practices as the unit of observation/analysis in post-socialist Montenegro has shown not only the empirical richness of the ways in which people participated in public life and in the issues that they raised through these actions in the public arena, but also the necessity of expanding conceptual and empirical boundaries of civil society and what is considered social engagement in the post-socialist context. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that people were not obsessing only about ethnonational identity issues and other related concerns emanating from the “excess of history” in the Balkans, but rather were reacting to mundane “real life issues” resulting from socio-economic transformation, austerity measures, bad policies, authoritarianism, environmental degradation, and systemic corruption, among other issues, that impacted them and their communities directly. These issues included: the (non-)provision of public utilities, nepotism and clientelism, privatization of public spaces, protection of the commons (e.g., natural resources, historic-cultural monuments), unequal access to public services, inequalities in social status and poverty, bureaucratic inefficiency, and institutional failure. This is a perspective that remains neglected to this day, yet speaks of active citizenship in contemporary Montenegro. However, the post-socialist context is not a stable configuration. It is always in flux, which is why I studied these contentious practices against the backdrop of macro-processes that profoundly changed the affected societies.

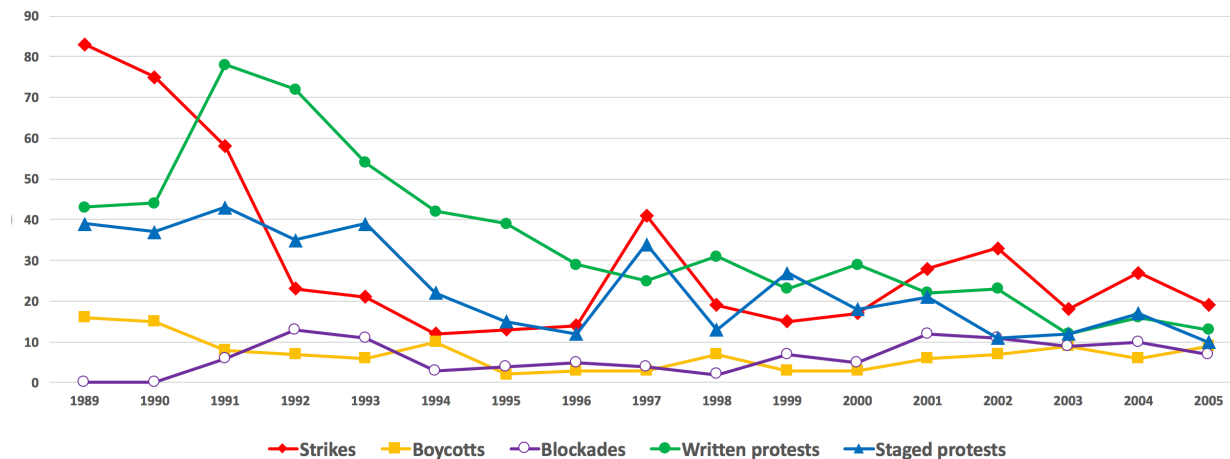
Investigating Post-Socialist Civil Society Building through the Dynamic Interaction of Processes of Institutionalization and Practices of Contestation

When it comes to the second specific objective of this dissertation – namely, *to analyze how and to what extent forms, dynamics, sites and content of contentious practices were affected by elite-driven (formal) macro-processes and, conversely, how these processes were influenced by citizens through civil resistance, social activism, popular politics, and other forms of unconventional participation* – it is necessary to take a diachronic perspective in order to

understand the dynamics, relationships, and interactions between processes of institutionalization and practices of contestation. As sociology pays equal attention to the interaction between politics and structures and processes respectively, I have taken into account both *static* structural factors – which scholarly literature overemphasized – as well as the effects of *dynamic* processes that resulted in profound institutional and social engineering since 1989, which, as I argued, remained poorly understood.

By using dataset created through PEA of Montenegrin daily newspapers from 1989 to 2006, my analysis of contentious practices demonstrated not only how established relations and institutionalized fields of power were reproduced or transformed through these practices and how new venues for political action were created, but also how these contentious practices changed over time (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Contentious practices in Montenegro, 1989–2005 (N=1,745).



From this perspective, we see a fluctuation over the years in *strikes*. In the 1989–1990 period, workers were the backbone of the Antibureaucratic Revolution and saw themselves as advancing the debureaucratization process and as holding those “at the top” accountable to the people. During the chaotic 1991–1997 period, this push for reforms “from below” was followed by a “politics of patience”, when the number of strikes began to decrease as infrapolitical engagement in the grey economy and black market became a “movement for survival” tolerated by the state. Strikes again spiked in 1997, when disenchantment began to crystalize into questioning the corrupt implementation of the transformation process. With the split in two

political camps in the 1998–2000 period – and foreign assistance to the state through which it was able to buy social peace in time of political crisis – the number of strikes decreased. But criticism of restructuring and (neoliberal) privatization process remained and increased in the final period of 2001–2005, when atomized strikes began proliferating and developing an “organic” critique of those who were duped yet carried on their back the privatization process. Based on this analysis, we can see how, as processes of institutionalization progressed, not only did the number of strikes drop, but they turned from politically consequential proactive actions to atomized and defensive actions on behalf of those who wanted to protect what they had or to ask for social welfare from the state.

Over these periods, there was little fluctuation when it came to *boycotts* and *blockades*. The majority of these practices were not only small-scale, short-term, and low-key (e.g., remote rural areas, suburban, neighborhood level, although those were more disruptive and large-scale in earlier stages), but also similar in content – addressing systemic neglect of the everyday-life issues of particular population strata. As such, they changed less because problems remained the same. Through contention, people addressed issues that they could not resolve institutionally due to institutional incompetence and blatant neglect. Regardless of how the institutionalization processes progressed, some issues remained for certain social groups. However, boycotts and blockades were important in two respects: protection of resources and the commons from exploitation and abuse of state power – becoming a movement-like activity in rural areas for forest and land protection – and as a reaction of people to protect what they had during harsh periods, as a consequence of infrapolitical activities (e.g., protecting illegally built housing from demolition). Simply put, when looking at these forms of contentious practices, boycotts and blockades exposed the readiness of people to protect the social – especially the values they inherited from previous periods – from being devoured by unconstrained economic restructuring (neoliberal privatization, in particular).

The protests – *written* and *staged* – are best considered in tandem. Many *written protests* addressed the same issues that were raised in blockades and boycotts, thus exposing the fact that people were not withdrawn from the public arena, especially not when it came to making their problems visible and their diagnostics audible. These were important during the authoritarian turn – characterized by international isolation and warmongering propaganda – when written protests uncovered the dark side of civil society, which was not only supporting wars, but also was

demonizing and stigmatizing political opponents (thus serving as a *vox populi* that legitimized the regime's actions and politics). These protests exposed the oppressive character of civic engagement. While written protest showed diversity, *staged protest* was somewhat different. Whereas the small-scale stage protests demonstrate that people were responsive predominantly to socio-economic changes that affected their everyday lives or what they considered to be common goods and public interests, we also see a move from the politicization of protest – when people eagerly believed that they were to steer reforms – to gradual depoliticization through the delegitimization of protest. This process not only equated politics with anti-regime activities, but also aesthetically and ethically deemed street protests to be anti-state and uncivil, designating only non-political protests (e.g., civic and social) as legitimate ways of expressing dissent outside institutional channels. Simply put, as processes of institutionalization progressed, not only were “civil(ized)” ways of expressing dissent legitimized as an indicator of mature and democratic civil society, but protesting in public spaces became a sign of stagnation in the democratization process and building of civil society.

We thus can see that both the decrease and depoliticization of contentious practices were consequences of processual factors, rather than resulting from the stable structures to which much of the literature has pointed as causing a socially passive, political apathetic, and civically disengaged Montenegrin civil society. In fact, my analysis shows that although it became politically apathetic over time, post-socialist, transitional Montenegrin civil society was neither socially passive nor civically disengaged at any point. Restructuring of the economy, however, proved to be the key motivator for people's engagement in the public arena, due to this restructuring's effects on all spheres of life. On one hand, citizens engaged in infrapolitical direct action that was normalized by the state and society during the 1990s, but, on the other, these reactions primarily aimed to protect what people had from being destroyed by the shift from self-management socialism to neoliberal capitalism. In other words, processes of institutionalization depoliticized Montenegrin post-socialist civil society, leaving citizens to tackle through contentious practices “soci(et)al” and “civic” issues that could not – and should not – affect existing power relations. These processes did not result in creation of “organic” democratic counter-culture “from below”. This trend, however, as I mentioned in the conclusion of *Chapter V*, began changing after the statehood referendum in 2006. From this point people became gradually disillusioned with these processes of institutionalization – along with the international

and local elites as well as the organizations/institutions that supported them – that led to stabilitocracy instead of democracy, the concentration of wealth, precarity and inequalities instead of economic prosperity, and bureaucratization/professionalization of civil society instead of the embeddedness of these processes in civil society. It is only disappointment with the outcomes of the post-socialist transition – that is, actually existing institutions of liberal democracy and market economy in Montenegro (supported by the West as such, regardless of the ability of these institutions to actually uphold the rule of law, channel societal interests to elites, or provide credible venues for dissenting opinion), as well as professionalized civil sector – that began producing democratic counterculture “from below” in the post-2006 period, through which people attempted to proactively influence political processes and policies that affect their lives. Once again, this shows that if we are to understand civil society, the contentious practices within it must be analyzed in relation to the macro-processes that attempt – and often fail – to tame them.

To summarize, I have demonstrated that Montenegrin civil society was most political during the sudden opening and then gradual closing of the polity (1989–1997). It remained politically vibrant during the polarization of the polity (1998–2000), but political contentious practices became delegitimized and symbolically polluted with the democratization, privatization, and NGO-ization processes in full swing (2001–2006). This left a(anti)political civic engagement – through and outside of institutions – as a “normal feature” of post-socialist civil society. While citizens were demobilized, withdrawn from public life, (progressive) activism became a profession like any other. Therefore, Montenegrin civil society of the period was not only weak due to the lack of a protest culture and a transition process that fostered civic disengagement, but also due to a path dependent development of civil society that favoured incremental change through institutional channels. These changes took place through professional(ized) civil society organizations that relied on cooperation and transaction rather than contentious practices.

Conclusion and Future Avenues for Research

The overall objective of this dissertations was to map and explore the role of contentious practices during the period of radical soci(et)al change involved in Montenegro’s post-socialist transition, and to situate my findings within the larger post-socialist framework to discuss its theoretical bearings on broader debates about civil society, contentious politics, and democratization. As I explained in *Chapter I*, theoretical, conceptual, and methodological changes

branched away from existing research on post-socialist civil society toward what I call *post-socialist civil society research*. In so doing, I aimed to avoid taking for granted the concepts and theories developed from historical experiences of affluent old democracies, applying them uncritically and unreflexively to radically different empirical contexts, but, instead, to *theorize* a unique experience of post-socialist transformation. As such, the dissertation represents an exploratory study in which I tried to identify, describe, and analyze the empirical reality of actually existing civil society in Montenegro, and investigate it against the backdrop of different stages/phases of institutional transformation in three domains that constitute “post-socialist transition” – the polity, civil society, and the economy – with a focus on contentious practices in civil society building.

Faced with this amount of data, this dissertation suffered from some methodological challenges that affected its overall shape. Therefore, the following steps could be taken to build upon its findings:

- First, to catalogue all missing data, especially from the periods of 1991–1993 and 2001–2005, by revisiting newspaper archives that have missing pages, sections, and entire issues and including relevant data in the database. Moreover, due to selective reporting of the state-owned daily *Pobjeda* during 1989–1997, especially with regard to activities of the anti-regime movement, inclusion of data from the independent weekly *Monitor* would provide richer materials. And, finally, to identify, systematize, and analyze data from the post-2006 period, whose most politically consequential movements I have already covered in other journal articles (Baća 2017a, 2017b) and book chapters (Baća 2017c, 2017d), exposing a “political becoming” of previously apolitical social groups and a re-politicization of those who stopped framing their dissent in political terms.
- Second, to clean already gathered data by using more strict selection criteria. For instance, to differentiate between symbolic labour disruptions, strikes and general strikes, or differentiate petitions that required signatures of hundreds from protest letters that were signed by a small group of people, rather than simply coding these under “strike actions” or “written protests”. Similarly, to identify if some events are counted twice, such as strikes and blockades that were temporarily on hold but continued after a while over the same issue, or if some events were not counted – or, more precisely counted as one event – such as staged protests over the same issue that were organized in different locations by different people.

In a word, the raw material collected here needs to be “polished” to represent empirical reality in a more precise manner.

- Third, create a complex and comprehensive database for quantitative analysis, based on a modified version of PEA used previously in post-socialist contexts to more precisely and in more nuanced ways enumerate forms of contentious politics, as well as their content, with variables/codes such as: party responsible (organizer, participants); social sector participating (social groups associated); target of the event (addressee of the protest); number of participants (size of the event); duration of the event; scale of the event; geographical location; form of contentious practice; type of contentious practice (disruptive, non-violent, violent); claims, demands and grievances; and justifications and legitimizations of the contentious practice (broken into specific set of “orders of worth” and “moral grammars”).
- Fourth, due to the methodological limitations of PEA in capturing infrapolitical forms of participation, a complementary interview-based study should be conducted to identify predominant forms of these types of actions.
- And, finally, employing the constantly emerging critical scholarly literature on post-socialist restructuring and transition in Montenegro, as well findings presented in this dissertation, to conduct a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the macro-processes of institutionalization, as well as of the mechanisms and processes that constitute each of its phases in three dimensions: the polity, civil society, and the economy.

When it comes to future directions for research, my goal is, firstly, to mitigate the aforementioned issues; secondly, with the abundance of newspaper sources for the majority of reported contentious practices, to engage in a qualitative, interpretive work that would allow for more comprehensive and nuanced categorization of the “orders of worth” and “moral grammars” used to justify and legitimize these actions (e.g., case studies focusing on development of strike actions or other contentious practices over time, or on types of activism such as environmental, anti-regime, urban, etc.); thirdly, to complement with interviews some of the most interesting events presented here, to gain a better idea of societal actors as reflective subjects capable of giving an account of themselves and justifying their actions and worldviews; and, finally, to develop a more qualitative understanding of post-socialist civil society overall. Once this is completed, I predict that the case study of post-socialist civil society in Montenegro – previously considered a paradigmatic example of the alleged “weak post-socialist civil society” at the European semi-

periphery – will further demonstrate that the post-socialist experience is more than just a repository of empirical material to which theories and concepts produced in the West can be uncritically applied. Instead, Montenegro and other formerly socialist countries offer a history of political, economic, and socio-cultural transformation that is relevant for meaningful theorizing that can inform substantively broader debates on (un)civil society, civil engagement, social movements, contentious politics, and the democratization process.

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