

“Are there Racists in Yugoslavia?” Debating Racism and Anti-blackness in Socialist Yugoslavia

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, policy institutes, academics, and government agencies in socialist Yugoslavia began distributing remarkable surveys in which they asked respondents whether Yugoslavs were racist or not. One 1971 survey conducted by the Institute for Developing Countries in Zagreb, for example, asked more than one hundred African, Asian, Latin American, and Arab students studying at the University of Zagreb to respond to the question, “are there racists in Yugoslavia?” (*Ima li rasista u Jugoslaviji?*).¹ Another survey from the same year queried University of Belgrade students who lived in the same dormitory as Black African students whether they would assent to their brother or sister marrying a Black person (*crnac*), while others interrogated schoolchildren about their attitudes towards foreigners and ethnic others, including Black people.² These studies marked an empirical attempt to understand the phenomenon of racial prejudice among Yugoslavs at a time when Cold War and decolonial politics gave racism increased salience in Yugoslav media and politics. They also appeared at a time when social scientists in Yugoslavia took more assiduously to studying ethnic and nationalist attitudes, a result of heightened public debate about the rights of Yugoslavia’s constituent groups.³ As some of the surveys made explicit, however, these

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1. Biserka Cvjetičanin, *Efeki školovanja i stipendiranja studenata iz zemalja u razvoju u Jugoslaviji preko Jugoslavenske tehničke suradnje* (Zagreb, 1971), 172–73. The Institute was previously the Center for the Study of Africa.

2. Nikola Tomić, “Socijalna distanca studenata prema Crncima,” (PhD diss., College of Philosophy, Belgrade, September, 1971). Tomić’s study is described in Nikola Rot, “Rasne i etničke predrasude,” *Rasizam, rase i rasne predrasude: zbornik radova*, eds. Živojin Gavrilović and Petar Vlahović (Belgrade, 1974), 101; Nikola Rot and Nenad Havelka, *Nacionalna vezanost i vrednosti kod srednješkolke omladine* (Beograd, 1973). Nemanja Radonjić also motions to many of these same sociological surveys as being part of an active conversation about racism in socialist Yugoslavia in his article “Студенти из Африке у социјалистичкој Југославији: Прилог истраживању слике ‘Другог,’” *Годишњак за друштвену историју* 27, no. 3 (2020), 37–38, 42–43. Radonjić’s and my conclusions about this literature’s meaning for Yugoslav identity, however, differ significantly.

3. Dragomir Pantić, *Etnička distanca u SFRJ* (Belgrade, 1967); Đorđe Đurić, *Etnički stereotipi učenika na kraju osnovnog školovanja: Magistarski rad* (Belgrade, 1969).

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novel studies about racism in Yugoslavia were frequently prompted by accusations about the mistreatment of Black African students who had come to the country on scholarships through Yugoslavia's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement.⁴ During the long 1960s, these students' public protests and private consultations with Yugoslav officials led to a sustained conversation about racialized identity and racism in socialist Yugoslavia.

The new field of critical race studies in eastern Europe has largely focused on the ways historical actors and scholars have elided "race" (racialization) as a meaningful political or analytical category in the region.⁵ Indeed, in response to foreign students' charges of racial prejudice on the part of Yugoslav citizens, Yugoslav officials often explained racism away as something foreign to socialist Yugoslav society; "race" and "racism" in the political context of the 1950s and 60s were features of capitalist western Europe, its overseas colonies, and above all, Jim-Crow America. Thus, although sixty percent of Black African students in the 1971 Zagreb survey responded that, indeed, there were "racists in Yugoslavia" to one degree or another, the authors of the study determined that "these responses, nevertheless, say more about the sensitivity of certain foreign students than they do about the racist views of a segment of Yugoslav society. . ."⁶ The reports' authors concluded their commentary on the survey with the following remark: "one cannot speak of the phenomenon of racial discrimination in these cases, as some foreign students claim, because we consider there are no preconditions or historical roots for such a phenomenon."⁷ Over the 1960s and early 1970s, however, other social scientists, Party officials, and cultural critics produced a body of knowledge that recognized anti-black racial prejudice as a part of Yugoslav reality. One scholar in 1974 concluded that "there are indications that we ourselves are not free of racial prejudices in its narrow sense even though we are firmly against any kind of expression of racist prejudice in our official statements and declarations. . . . Some studies. . . have shown that certain forms of racial prejudice exist among us."⁸ Rather than silence and elision, a close study of archival documents, literature, and social science studies in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 70s reveals a dynamic and explicit self-interrogation of Yugoslavs' racial attitudes and identity.

4. Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ) 114–223, "Organizacija rada sa stranim studentima i praktikantima," March 22, 1963.

5. Aniko Imre, "Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe: The Time of the Gypsies, the End of Race," in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. Lopez (Albany, 2005), 79–102; Alena K. Alamgir, "Race is Elsewhere: State Socialist Ideology and the Racialisation of Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia," *Race & Class* 54, no. 4 (April 2013): 67–85; Catherine Baker, *Race in the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-conflict, Postcolonial?* (Manchester, 2018); Marina Yusupova, "The Invisibility of Race in Sociological Research on Contemporary Russia: A Decolonial Intervention," *Slavic Review* 80, no. 2 (Summer 2021), 224–33.

6. Cvjetičanin, 173; also quoted in Radonjić, "Студенти из Африке," 43. Also see AJ 318–45, "Zabeleška o razgovoru sa studentima iz Sudana na studijama na Beogradskom univerzitetu," October 13, 1960.

7. Ibid.

8. Rot, "Rasne i etničke predrasude," 101; also quoted in Radonjić, "Студенти из Африке," 42.

This article examines debates, scholarly studies, and cultural representations of the phenomenon of racism in Yugoslavia and Yugoslavs' relationship to whiteness in the 1960s and 70s. I argue that, in combination with a pervasive postwar discourse of racism and anti-racism linked to decolonization and Cold War politics, the persistent petitioning and activism of Black African students helped provoke official, scholarly, and public discussions about the controversial question of racism in Yugoslav society during this time. This debate raised important conceptual and practical questions with which both Yugoslavs and many Black African students in Yugoslavia grappled. Could anti-black racism exist in a socialist country without a clear colonial past or tangible links to imperialism or the Atlantic slave trade? If so, in what ways did racialization, racial thinking, and racial prejudice manifest themselves in an anti-racist state in contrast to places such as the United States, the United Kingdom, or South Africa? The salience of Black students' accusations about racism eventually made something that was taboo in the 1950s and early 1960s—namely, entertaining the prospect that anti-black racial prejudice existed in non-aligned, socialist, and anti-racist Yugoslavia—become the subject of official inquiry, scholarly debate, and popular literature by the late 1960s. Importantly, the relative candidness with which academic studies and popular literature addressed racism indicates a reflexivity about “racial” questions on the part of socialist Yugoslav society, something that scholarship has largely neglected in favor of focusing on the suppression or elision of race and the inadequacy of state socialist responses to the problem of domestic expressions of prejudice. In highlighting the public and nuanced conversation about racism in socialist Yugoslavia that Black African students helped initiate, this article counters notions of both a passive socialist civil society on the one hand, and ephemeral, ineffectual “Third World” actors on the other.⁹

In the first section of this article, I address how attention to socialist reflexivity about racism challenges scholars' reliance on Cold War frameworks of static state socialism. I then discuss the construction of a Yugoslav anti-racist identity that, while distancing the country from “colonial Europe,” paradoxically reified Yugoslavs' white, European identity. While non-aligned politics in Yugoslavia crafted a discourse that situated Yugoslavs as part of a “postcolonial” Third World, it existed alongside language casting Black Africans as racial others within a hierarchy of social, political, and cultural progress. Next, I turn to the archive to examine discussions and debates that took place between Black African students and Yugoslav officials regarding the kinds of prejudice foreign students encountered and the ways both students and Yugoslav officials attempted to make sense of apparent racism in a non-racist state. These discussions and foreign student activism prompted a proliferation of surveys and studies focused on this problem by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. Finally, I analyze a self-stylized anti-racist novel

9. Scholars have sometimes omitted the contributions of “Third World” actors in organizing anticolonial activism in Yugoslavia, choosing instead to highlight western influences such as American hippies and music as the most important “transnational” actors. See James Mark, Peter Apor, Radina Vučetić, and Piotr Oseka, “‘We are with You, Vietnam’: Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (July 2015): 448–49.

about a transracial romance between a young Yugoslav woman and Sudanese male student to show how ideas about racism and anti-racism appeared in popular literature. The sources of this article, while eclectic, are centered on published Yugoslav social science scholarship and archival collections from the Archives of Yugoslavia. These collections include those of the Student Alliance of Yugoslavia (SS), the Socialist Youth Alliance of Yugoslavia, the Federal Executive Council, and others that oversaw international students in Yugoslavia. Overall, the sources in this article represent material from the Socialist Republic (SR) of Slovenia, SR Croatia, and SR Serbia, Yugoslav republics that dominated the popular and political culture of Yugoslavia. This is a potential limitation of this article as racialization and conversations about racism may have looked differently in places such as SR Bosnia, SR Macedonia, and the Autonomous Province (AP) of Kosovo. Future studies may shed more light on the local languages of racialization and racism in the socialist period.

In this same vein, this article primarily focuses on the role and image of Black international students in socialist Yugoslavia. Other groups in socialist Yugoslavia such as Roma and Albanians also commonly experienced racialization and racial prejudice.¹⁰ However, while Albanians are included unevenly as a category in the early surveys of racism and ethnic prejudice sampled here, anti-Romani and anti-Albanian prejudice only appear as a sustained topic of this literature in the late 1970s, 1980s, and particularly the 1990s.¹¹ This relative silence has multiple explanations and is as significant as

10. Romani groups in the region face what Julija Sardelić has called “cultural racism” in her article “Antiziganism as Cultural Racism: Before and after the Disintegration of Yugoslavia,” in Timofey Agarin, ed., *When Stereotypes Meet Prejudice: Antiziganism in European Societies* (Stuttgart, 2014): 201–17. Scholars have recently adopted whiteness to describe the racialization of Roma. See Victoria Schmidt and Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, *Historicizing Roma in Central Europe: Between Critical Whiteness and Epistemic Injustice* (London, 2021). Anti-Albanian racism also pervaded Yugoslav society. One example is Praxis-school philosopher Rudi Supek’s work on social prejudices, *Društvene predrasude: socijalno-psihološka razmatranja* (Belgrade, 1973), where he ironically repeated a well-worn racist narrative about the threat of a growing Albanian population in Yugoslavia. He argued that Albanian demographic trends were an example of a “small nation” using “population politics” as a weapon of self-preservation: “In Yugoslavia, only Albanians are still in the second phase of biological reproduction, that is, in full biological expansion, which creates a sense of endangerment in their neighbors.” This danger of “overpopulation” is the reason he signed the 1972 Stockholm UN “Declaration on the Human Environment,” see Supek, *Društvene predrasude*, 235–36.

11. See L. Krkeljčić, *Predrasude prema Romima* (PhD diss., Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 1977) and V. Vukajlović, *Demografske karakteristike i crte ličnosti kao činioci etničkih stereotipija i socijalne distance* (PhD diss., Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 1986), both cited in Bora Kuzmanović, “Stereotipije o Romima i etnička distanca prema Romima,” *Sociologija* 34, no. 1 (1992): 119–26. Also see Vesna Vučinić i Jasmina Matić, “Etnička i teritorijalna distanca između srpske i romske dece školskog uzrasta,” *Položaj manjina u Saveznoj Republici Jugoslaviji: Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa održanog 12. i 13. januara 1989. godine* (Belgrade, 1996): 149–57. Pantić’s survey in 1967 included the eight “nations” and “nationalities” from Yugoslavia (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Muslims, Montenegrins, Hungarians, and Albanians). By rule, it omitted Romani. In their 1973 survey of middle-school students’ attitudes towards other “nations and races” in SR Serbia, Rot and Havelka omitted both Roma and Albanians. Their categories were Slovenes, English, Bulgarians, Americans, black people, Austrians, Croats, Germans, and Macedonians.

the dialogue probing Yugoslav racial prejudice. Acknowledging and studying anti-Romani and anti-Albanian prejudice was a potentially explosive venture within the fraught politics of socialist Yugoslavia of this period. Furthermore, Black international students may have enjoyed more international prominence and power than local Romani and Albanian groups in the 1960s and early 1970s. Cold War anxieties about damage to Yugoslavia's international reputation may have informed Yugoslav officials and intellectuals' attentiveness to Black international students' complaints about racism in ways that did not inform their approach to Romani and Albanian activism about prejudice and systemic discrimination in Yugoslavia. In this light, conversations and studies acknowledging anti-black prejudice in Yugoslavia can also be read critically as an exercise of Yugoslav global positioning and managing complex international politics as Jelena Subotić and Srdjan Vucetic have suggested.¹²

Racism and “Static” State Socialism

Over the past two decades, scholars have pursued a dynamic new field of study into race, racialization, and whiteness in eastern Europe, a region in which these categories have typically not been applied to social analysis.¹³ This scholarship has ranged in topic from the racialization of Jews and other groups in imperial Russia, the position of Roma in racial taxonomies of central Europe, and the whiteness of dominant Slavic-speaking populations in places such as socialist/postsocialist Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.¹⁴ As a whole, this scholarship has posited race as an “exceptional” category in the region, meaning one that scholars and historical actors alike have traditionally subsumed under other categories such as ethnicity and nationality.¹⁵ Following trends in critical European race studies, scholars of the region argue that ideas about race, specifically whiteness, played a formative role in shaping identity construction in central and southeastern Europe, but that “whiteness” has

12. Jelena Subotić and Srdjan Vucetic, “Performing Solidarity: Whiteness and Status-seeking in the Non-aligned World,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 3 (September 2019): 722–43.

13. Following Stuart Hall, I use “race” in the sense of a language, rather than something with a biological or scientific basis. The term racialization conveys the socially and historically constructed nature of racial identities. See Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, Mass., 2017), 45.

14. Eugene Avrutin, “Racial Categories and the Politics of (Jewish) Difference in Late Imperial Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 13–40; *Ideologies of Race: Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in a Global Context*, ed. David Rainbow (Montreal, 2019); Sunnie Rucker-Chang, “African-American and Romani Filmic Representation and the ‘Posts’ of Post-Civil Rights and Post-EU Expansion,” *Critical Romani Studies*, 1, no. 1 (April 2018): 132–48; Miglena Todorova, “Race and Women of Color in Socialist/Postsocialist Transnational Feminisms in Central and Southeastern Europe,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 16, no. 1 (2017): 114–41.

15. Imre, “Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe”; Baker, *Race in the Yugoslav Region*; Dušan Bjelić, “Toward a Genealogy of the Balkan Discourses on Race,” in “Balkan Transnationalism at the Time of Neoliberal Catastrophe,” special issue of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 6 (2018): 906–29.

largely functioned as a “concealed ethnicity.”¹⁶ This insight is borrowed from studies showing how social and political interests in places such as Sweden, France, or the United Kingdom elide racialized identities in an attempt to distance these societies from colonial or colonial-adjacent pasts.¹⁷ Unlike much of western and central Europe, however, which are seemingly inextricably imbricated in the categories of European and white, whiteness in spaces marked as eastern Europe is more conditional and contingent on place, historical context, and specific social relations.¹⁸ Thus, while people from Poland or Bulgaria, for example, may rely on notions of whiteness to racialize themselves and other groups, they themselves are often racialized as non-white and non-European within dominant European political discourse.¹⁹

Critical race scholars of the region have introduced whiteness as an analytical category to connect east European identity construction to global racial hierarchies and global (post)coloniality and thereby liberate it from limiting local frameworks.²⁰ However, the study of racialization and racism in socialist eastern Europe has, paradoxically, sometimes reified the difference and distance of central and east European societies from European and global patterns. Specifically, certain strands of scholarship on racialization in socialist Europe have adopted positions about identity and racism in the region in ways that reproduce Cold War narratives of east European and socialist societies as static, backward, and, in some places, uniquely racist.²¹ Importantly, a common Cold War trope of a closed socialist eastern Europe, unpenetrated

16. “Concealed ethnicity” is a term borrowed from Richard Dyer by Bjelić in “Introduction: Blowing up the ‘Bridge,’” in *Balkan as Metaphor*, eds. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 15.

17. Allen Pred, *Even in Sweden: Racisms, Racialized Spaces, and the Popular Geographic Imagination* (Berkeley, 2000) (cited in Baker, 23); Emilia Roig, “Uttering Race in Colorblind France and Postracial Germany,” in *Rassismuskritik und Widerstandsformen*, eds. Karim Fereidooni and Meral El (London, 2017), 613–27.

18. Baker, *Race in the Yugoslav Region*, 176.

19. József Böröcz and Mahua Sarkar, “The Unbearable Whiteness of the Polish Plumber and the Hungarian Peacock Dance around ‘Race,’” *Slavic Review* 76, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 307. John E. Fox, “The Uses of Racism: Whitewashing New Europeans in the UK,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 11 (2013), 1871–89. “Whiteness” does not imply solely a phenotypical racialization or only a supposed “black-white” binary, but involves a broader cultural matrix: attachment to European “civilization,” Christianity, and other cultural markers. This allows scholars to study racializations among supposedly phenotypically homogenous groups: western Europe vis-à-vis the Balkans and Yugoslavia’s own “nesting orientalisms.” Similarly, African students marked black in Yugoslavia were not racialized solely based on phenotype, but according to a wider set of associations connected with “Africa” and the Global South.

20. Bjelić, “Abolition of a National Paradigm: The Case against Benedict Anderson and Maria Todorova’s Raceless Imaginaries,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (January 2021); Baker, “Postcoloniality Without Race? Racial Exceptionalism and Southeast European Cultural Studies,” in “Balkan Transnationalism at the Time of Neoliberal Catastrophe,” special issue of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 6 (November 2018): 759–84.

21. Emil Payn, the head of the Moscow-based Center for Ethnological and Anthropological Studies, has suggested that “the communist model. . . produced a general culture of intolerance that postcommunist societies have yet to shed. . . None of these countries ever experienced democracy and, by extension, tolerance. . .” Quoted in Claire Bigg, “Xenophobia: Postcommunist Societies Remain Acutely Susceptible to Racism,” *Radio*

by, and unreceptive to, transnational influences, has, ironically, obscured the salience of racism as a topic of political debate and public discussion during state socialism. For example, Aniko Imre, a pioneer of racialization studies in central and eastern Europe, has argued that the category of race remained outside political discourse in the region for so long partially because of what she characterizes as an insular culture of state socialism:

With the collapse of socialism, East Europeans have suddenly awakened from their relative imprisonment within the Soviet Bloc to find their national boundaries vulnerable to influences from a world that had moved on to an increasingly transnational order. They have been confronted with the possibility that identities are far from taken-for-granted, not the least because of the power of global communication and information networks. It is not surprising that, emerging from the discredited communist rhetoric of egalitarianism and internationalism, East Europeans have fallen back on nationalism. . . .²²

Here, a static socialist “East” is opposed to a dynamic and transnational global order that formed unencumbered by the weight of socialism. Such notions about “Eastern Europe,” and the identification of “global mobility” with the west or the post-socialist period, reinforce an association of socialism with parochialism and social stagnation.²³ This premise erases not only the rich history of Second World-Third World exchange and socialist internationalism, but also the significant role that explicit discourse about race and racism played in the Second World’s global experience of the twentieth century.²⁴ Socialist societies, precisely because of officially sanctioned internationalist principles and their unique openness to the decolonizing world of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, in fact witnessed robust exchanges about racialized identities, “whiteness,” and the problem of racism. While circumscribed and limited by the controls on the freedom of information in many socialist states, discussions about the nature of racial identities and racism informed ideas about Yugoslavs’ place in the world.

Nevertheless, an emphasis on the repressed or sublimated nature of racializing language and behavior during state socialism is pervasive in the relevant scholarly literature. As seen above, the focus on the elided character of race in east European critical race studies is a double-edged sword that can contribute to the image of the region as static, and of society under state socialism as racially reactionary. Recent scholarship on socialist Yugoslavia, for example, has presented the state’s socialist, anti-colonial, and non-aligned politics as

Free Europe, June 6, 2009. www.rferl.org/a/Postcommunist_Societies_Remain_Acutely_Susceptible_To_Racism/1748366.html

22. Imre, “Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe,” 81.

23. *Ibid.*, 87. Here, Imre relies on Vladimir Tismaneanu’s ideas about the “spurious internationalism of communist propaganda” and his understanding of socialist “Third World” outreach as insincere and self-serving.

24. Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Montreal, 2020); Mark James, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, eds., *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington, 2020); Radonjić, “Студенти из Африке,” 36.

“performative.”²⁵ This language renders state socialist anti-racism and solidarity politics insincere, intended merely to suppress or distract from, rather than address, problems of racism and prejudice. This approach to anti-racism in Yugoslavia, while offering valuable insights into the oft-instrumentalized political goals of non-aligned solidarity rhetoric, casts Yugoslavs’ treatment of the issue of racism as inauthentic or outmoded in opposition to an imagined authentic anti-racism.²⁶ The (unintentional) implications in many scholarly discussions on socialist racial discourse reify the classic stereotypes that juxtapose a 1960s world experiencing vibrant social movements, activism, and protests centered around racism and racial justice with a world made up of out-of-touch socialist functionaries, passive civil society, and archaic mentalities.²⁷

In light of this scholarship, this article aims to do two things: first, it acknowledges and addresses the reality of racism and racialization in Yugoslavia to counter entrenched narratives that romanticize socialist Yugoslav anti-racism or minimize state racism. Besides common, everyday prejudice, socialist anti-racism, as has been demonstrated by many scholars over the past decade, was an ideology with its own internal contradictions that often produced paternalistic and racist attitudes.²⁸ Second, while pointing out the racist and racializing tendencies of socialist authorities and citizens, this article also recovers an active, and often public dialogue about race and racism in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 70s. The image of a static or disingenuous socialist discourse on racism prevails, in part, because many existing studies do not make use of sources that show a plethora of self-reflexive discussions and academic research interrogating Yugoslav prejudice, nor do they consider the energetic political and social activism of both Yugoslav and African actors in Yugoslavia around racism.²⁹ Rather than race-blind, out-of-touch, or provincial in comparison to an ostensibly more open, cosmopolitan, capitalist world, social and government institutions in Yugoslavia responded to accusations of racism by international students with a sustained and

25. Subotić and Vucetic, “Performing Solidarity.”

26. “Artificiality” is another term sometimes used to characterize east-south encounters: “The encounter between the two communities reflected all the contradictions inherent in the artificiality of the Soviet entry into the Third World and in Russia’s age-old wariness of foreigners. The lofty anti-colonial rhetoric of the Soviet establishment could not conceal the country’s homegrown racism and its officially inspired xenophobia,” Maxim Matusevich, “An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans, and the Soviet Everyday,” *Race and Class* 49, no. 4 (April 2008): 69.

27. Scholars have sometimes attributed racism in Yugoslavia to an uneducated, non-socialist “base.” See Milorad Lazić, “Neki problemi stranih studenata na jugoslovenskim univerzitetima šezdesetih godina XX veka, s posebnim osvrtom na afričke studente,” *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 2 (2009), 70, 77. For journalistic writing casting “Balkan” racism as ‘primitive,’ see Matt Ford, “‘Mentally still in primary school’: Racism and nationalism ingrained in Balkan football,” *Deutsche Welle*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/mentally-still-in-primary-school-racism-and-nationalism-ingrained-in-balkan-football/a-48076540>.

28. Quinn Slobodian, ed., “Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York, 2015), 23–42.

29. Radonjić also points out this problem. Radonjić, “Студенти из Африке,” 37–38.

complex conversation about Yugoslavs' attitudes towards racialized difference and racism. While this dialogue often produced denialism or more racism, it also engendered new understandings of Yugoslav identity and revealed the limits of socialist anti-racism. In following these conversations about racism, this article adds to existing scholarship, which has begun to highlight the complex, polysemous racial discourses in socialist Yugoslav society.³⁰

In addition to this corrective of Cold War narratives of insular state socialism, this article introduces novel agents of political and social change in socialist Yugoslavia by centering actors from the Global South. This follows recent scholarship that positions students from the Global South and their politics of protest in Europe not only as Cold War political spectacle, but as catalysts of political and social change.³¹ In 1960s Yugoslavia, the activism (and often mere presence) of hundreds of Black African students who came to Yugoslavia through non-aligned networks helped make racism a topic of serious public and scholarly debate. This article thus positions students and other actors from the Global South as agents in an active process of identity formation in socialist Yugoslavia. I argue that the movement in the 1960s and early 1970s to interrogate anti-black racism in Yugoslavia problematized Yugoslav identification with the "Third World" and destabilized notions of Yugoslav exceptionalism by reinforcing Yugoslavs' identity as white Europeans. Simply put, through intimate interaction and conflict with Black others, non-aligned politics enabled Yugoslavs to construct their own modern, European identity.³²

Racism and Anti-Racism in Postwar Yugoslavia

While scholars have demonstrated racial imaginaries active in the Yugoslav region since the early modern period, subtle shifts in the language and symbols accompanied these imaginaries across different historical periods.³³ The 1950s and 60s marked one such shift as the intensification of decolonization in Africa and Asia, Cold War politics, and socialist Yugoslavia's deepening relationship with the Global South all combined to make skin color and blackness more prominent in Yugoslav discourse about local racialized identities and racism than in previous periods. Discourse about racialized identities in the

30. Sunnie Rucker-Chang's scholarship on the multivalent appropriations of blackness in the Yugoslav region is instructive here, see Rucker-Chang, "'Black' Student Migration and the Non-Aligned Movement in Yugoslav Space," *Slavic and East European Journal* 64, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 352–73.

31. Julie Hessler, "Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, no. 1/2 (June 2006): 33–63; Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, 2012).

32. This argument follows similar conclusions of Rucker-Chang, "'Black' Student Migration," Radonjić, "'From Kragujevac to Kilimanjaro': Imagining and re-imagining Africa and the self-perception of Yugoslavia in the travelogues from socialist Yugoslavia," *Годишњак за друштвену историју* 23, no. 2 (2016), 66; Zoran Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam, 2011), Chapter 5: "Oh to be a European! What did Rastko Petrović learn in Africa," and Anika Walke, "Was Soviet Internationalism Anti-Racist? Towards a History of Foreign Others in the USSR," in Rainbow, *Ideologies of Race*, 284–311.

33. Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region*, 58.

Yugoslav region in the nineteenth and early twentieth century often involved a broad mix of cultural signifiers such as lifestyle, religion, place of origin, as well as biological markers such as blood, height, and other features, including skin color.³⁴ These strains of racialization are evident in the well-known writings of physical anthropologists (the “Nordic” and “Dinaric races,” for example) and eugenicists of the early twentieth century and the interwar period.³⁵ The racial discourse of the postwar period can itself be differentiated chronologically as the experience of the Holocaust and the particular racism of antisemitism dominated immediate postwar conversations about racism in Yugoslavia and across Europe.³⁶ In Yugoslavia, official texts and media of the immediate postwar period often invoked the category of racism in a local context when discussing anti-Jewish violence during the war.³⁷

International politics and domestic media in the 1950s and 60s expanded the possible associations and meaning of racism for the Yugoslav public. Yugoslavia’s non-aligned relationships and its intensified anti-colonial activism during this period elevated the problem of a global anti-blackness (most prominently apartheid in South Africa and segregation in the United States) as the paradigmatic form of racism. Mentions of segregation, apartheid, Jim Crow, and white dominance over Black people in the Congo and elsewhere came to feature frequently in Yugoslav media, popular literature, and official writing.³⁸ Yugoslav leaders seamlessly wove a black-white anti-racism into official formulations of non-aligned liberation politics. At the international conference “Peace, Colonialism, and Aid for Undeveloped Countries” held in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia in 1960, Latinka Perović, a future leader of the League of Communists of SR Serbia stated that the world needed a peace “in which basic human rights would be equally afforded to Black people, not just white,

34. Rory Yeomans, “Of ‘Yugoslav Barbarians’ and Croatian Gentlemen Scholars: National Ideology and Racial Anthropology in Interwar Yugoslavia,” in *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*, eds. Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (Budapest, 2012), 83–122. Also see Jovana Babović, *Metropolitan Belgrade: Culture and Class in Interwar Yugoslavia* (Pittsburgh, 2018), Chapter 4, “Accommodating Josephine Baker in Belgrade.”

35. Nevenko Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia* (London, 2013).

36. This emphasis on the Holocaust can be seen in seminal documents of the period such as UNESCO’s the “Race Question” in 1950. See Michelle Brattain, “Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (December 2007): 1389.

37. *Dokumenti historije Komunističke partije Hrvatske*, tom 3 (Zagreb, 1951), 490–91. This article does not directly confront the important topic of antisemitism in socialist Yugoslavia. For more on this topic, see Emil Kerenji, “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974,” (PhD diss., Ann Arbor, 2008).

38. David Atlagić, *Nacija, nacionalno pitanje, i odnosi među narodima Jugoslavije* (Belgrade, 1964), 13; Stojan Kovačević, “Rasna diskriminacija i izbori u SAD,” *Međunarodna politika* 6, no. 142 (March 1, 1956): 7–8; Miloje Popović, “Rasna segregacija u oblasti obrazovanja i studenti,” *Student: List beogradskih studenata* 24, no. 13 (April 13–19, 1960): 2; Mladen Mosorski, *Aparthejd na jugu Afrika* (Belgrade, 1964); Vojin Šantić, *Rasizam u Rodeziji* (Belgrade, 1965); *Črni otroci: pričevanja črnske mladine o američkem rasizmu* (Ljubljana, 1970).

and to members of small nations, not just large ones.”³⁹ Thus, in Yugoslavia’s domestic media and international politics, the concept of racism became more narrowly connected to colonialism and the idea of white people’s prejudice against Black people in ways that it had not been previously. This mirrored the evolution of language in international fora. For example, the 1967 UNESCO “Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice” featured “Negro slavery” and European colonialism more prominently as a corrective to the organization’s earlier 1950 statement on racism.⁴⁰ Most intriguingly, Yugoslav legal scholars in the early 1970s argued that the Yugoslav criminal code needed to be updated and expanded to include “skin color” as a basis for discrimination and hate crimes. Legal scholars argued that racism in Yugoslav legal practice was too narrowly associated with religious prejudice.⁴¹

Before such opinions emerged, however, official media and political leaders in Yugoslavia consistently externalized racism, presenting it and any legacy of European colonialism as foreign to socialist Yugoslav society. In their early overtures to postcolonial states of the Global South, Yugoslav diplomats and Party leaders distanced the socialist state from the taint of colonialism and its racial division of the world by disassociating the Yugoslav region from “colonial” Europe. At the first Bandung conference in 1955, for example, Yugoslavia’s official observers reported disapprovingly that leaders of postcolonial states, particularly Sukarno of Indonesia, were promoting “Afro-Asian exclusionism” by simplistically dividing the world into peace-seeking Afro-Asia and colonialist Europe. The Yugoslav observers were understandably vexed by their presumed allies’ generalizations that conflated Yugoslavia with the colonial metropolises of western Europe.⁴² A reflex to deny any link to colonial Europe continued throughout the socialist period. When, for example, the museum of African History in Belgrade was dedicated in 1977, a large anchor that once belonged to an Atlantic slaving ship (le Négrier) was positioned near the museum’s entrance. Next to this anchor, a plaque was placed with the following inscription: “. . . the peoples of Yugoslavia never participated in this trade of human beings.”⁴³ In official speech, Yugoslav officials went further, laying claim to a shared colonized past and postcolo-

39. AJ 145–44, “Međunarodni seminar od 5–12. IX. 1960, ‘Mir, borba protiv kolonijalizma i pomoć nerazvijenim zemljama’ održan u Dubrovniku,” September 1960.

40. “Many forms of racism have arisen out of the conditions of conquest, out of the justification of Negro slavery and its aftermath of racial inequality in the West, and out of the colonial relationship. . .” UNESCO Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice, Paris, September 1967, www.honestthinking.org/en/unesco/UNESCO.1967.Statement_on_Race.htm (accessed February 6, 2021).

41. “Neki vidovi zabrane rasne diskriminacije u jugoslovenskom krivičnom pravu,” *Jugoslovenska revija za međunarodno pravo* 18, no. 3 (1971), 422–423; Vida Čok, “Zabrana rasne diskriminacije i ustavi,” *Jugoslovenska revija za međunarodno pravo* 18, no. 1 (Belgrade, 1971), 191. From the 1970s, Yugoslav leaders also spoke more openly about Zionism as a form of racism.

42. AJ KPR 837 I-4-e/1, Bandung, untitled report, April 1955. The observers were the diplomats Jože Smole and Jurij Gustinčić.

43. “Muzej -krajnja tačka afričke avanture dvoje ljudi,” *UNS*, December 31, 2020, presscentar.uns.org.rs/info/Vesti-iz-muzeja/3893/muzej-krajnja-tacka-africke-avanture-dvoje-ljudi.html

nial present with the peoples of the decolonizing world on account of their common history of “suffering and enslavement” to colonial powers.⁴⁴ Slavery was frequently cited as a historical condition that connected Yugoslavs with Africans and other colonized peoples.⁴⁵ Yugoslav officials, writers, intellectuals, and other commentators conflated the legacies of the Ottoman empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire, Nazi Germany, and even the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with that of west European colonial rule in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to buttress Yugoslavia’s postcolonial credentials.⁴⁶ Popular authors and youth also placed Yugoslavia in a “new world” side-by-side with Afro-Asia, opposed to the “old world” of colonial Europe.⁴⁷

Yet scholars have convincingly argued that insulating Yugoslavia, state socialism, or non-western Europe from the legacy of colonialism and global racial formations such as whiteness and blackness is ahistorical.⁴⁸ Not only did tangible colonial histories intersect the region of Yugoslavia—whether through Catholic missionaries to the New World or local exotic “human zoos” full of people from Africa in the region’s Habsburg lands—but a striving for Europeanness and whiteness has marked the region as a conspicuous legacy of colonialism.⁴⁹ As a constellation of cultural signifiers connected to, but not reducible to, light skin, whiteness informed the dominant frame of Yugoslav non-aligned and development theory. As articulated by Yugoslav non-aligned theorists and Party leaders such as Edvard Kardelj and Leo Mates, socialist Yugoslav visions of “Afro-Asian” underdevelopment were informed by a

44. Mihailo Javorski, “Titov put mira, bratstva i nezavisnosti,” *Međunarodna Politika* vol. 6, no. 139, January 16, 1956: 1–2; AJ 130–607, “Učešće Jugoslavije u međunarodnoj tehničkoj saradnji,” *Belgrade*, January 20, 1968. Yugoslav functionaries referred to Yugoslavia as a former “semi-colonial” (*polukolonijalna*) country.

45. Oskar Davičo, *Crno na Belo* (Belgrade, 1962), 13. Similar shifts in discourse and socialist political identities appeared in other socialist states in the 1960s. See James Mark and Péter Apor, “Socialism Goes Global: Decolonization and the Making of a New Culture of Internationalism in Socialist Hungary, 1956–1989,” *The Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 4 (December 2015): 852–91.

46. AJ 145–46, “Bilateral cooperation of the League of Yugoslav Students,” address by Milentije Popović at the Pan-African students in Europe conference, Belgrade, August 29, 1962; address of Novak Pribičević at the same conference, Belgrade, August 30, 1962. Speakers at an event for the “international day for the struggle against racism” in Skopje on March 20, 1985 linked Yugoslavia’s struggle against Nazism and antisemitism to the struggle against colonial racisms and anti-blackness. See Jordan Jelić, ed., *Antikolonijalna revolucija, socijalna, politička i ekonomska emancipacija u svijetu*, vol. II (Zagreb, 1985), 577.

47. James Robertson refers to this as Yugoslavia’s “Third-Worldism” discourse in “Speaking Titoism: Student Opposition and the Socialist Language Regime of Yugoslavia,” in *The Vernaculars of Communism: Language, Ideology and Power in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, edited by Petre Petrov and Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (London, 2015), 119. This language was a commonplace idiom of solidarity building within the Non-Aligned Movement. For example, after attending the first non-aligned summit in September 1961, President Sukarno toured the Belgrade shipyards where he told workers that “Yugoslavs know well what colonialism means because you were under Turkish domination for 500 years,” “Predsednik Sukarno posetio brodogradilište ‘Tito’ u Beogradu,” *Borba*, September 8, 1961, 2.

48. Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region*, 19–29.

49. *Ibid.*, 100–1.

racialized, hierarchical notion of human progress. Kardelj and Mates (and Tito) spoke and wrote of the Global South in the general modernizing, historicist, and Eurocentric register characteristic of both European and postcolonial national elites. While Kardelj used “backwardness” as a framework to contextualize the Global South, Leo Mates, in his major work *Non-Alignment: Theory and Current Practice*, centered the revolutionary and progressive movement in Europe as the paradigm of human political and social organization.⁵⁰ Archival sources confirm this same strain of thought: official Party reports in the 1960s often characterized most African societies as not yet developed enough to produce or support a true socialist revolution like the one Yugoslavia and other European states had produced.⁵¹

Grappling with Yugoslav Whiteness in the Global 1960s

While foreigners’ conflation of Yugoslavs with white, western Europeans by non-aligned allies caused cognitive dissonance and indignation, it also helped construct and reaffirm Yugoslav whiteness and Europeaness in subtle ways. This process of self-racialization and the construction of Yugoslav whiteness can be seen clearly in Yugoslav travel narratives through Africa and other places in the Global South during the 1960s. *Crno na belo* (Black on White), an account by the celebrated novelist Oskar Davičo, offered Yugoslav audiences insights into the postcolonial politics of racialization. After traveling through west Africa in 1961 and becoming frustrated by the stigma that his white skin held for his African interlocutors, Davičo asked rhetorically whether or not all men were “equal regardless of the color of their skin? . . . We are brothers. We are comrades. Is not he (the African) aware of this reality? Or must the complexes created by the colonial system endure longer than him?”⁵² Cryptically referring to himself as a “former white man,” Davičo continued his account with a lament:

It doesn’t make sense, but I can’t help it, I feel shame. The nation to which I belong and the class whose son I am have never coerced, never enslaved, never murdered. *For centuries we were slaves ourselves*. But no matter. I am white and that is all the passersby see. If only I could wear an abbreviated version of my country’s history on my lapel! . . . I look like a Frenchman, an Englishman, a Belgian, a Portuguese, a Boer, a segregationist, and a member of a lynch mob from Little Rock to them. I’m ashamed to think that in the eyes of an African I could resemble their kind. *If I could change the color of my skin, I would do so without hesitation.*⁵³

50. Konstantin Kilibarda, “Non-Aligned Geographies in the Balkans: Space, Race and Image in the Construction of New ‘European’ Foreign Policies,” in Abhinava Kumar and Derek Maisonville, eds., *Security Beyond the Discipline: Emerging Dialogues on Global Politics* (Toronto, 2010), 38–39.

51. AJ 130–633, “Izveštaj o poseti druga Svetozara Vukmanovića-Tempa nekim zemljama Zapadne Afrike,” July 30, 1968.

52. Davičo, 23.

53. *Ibid.*, 13 (my emphasis). Referenced in Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region*, 112. This fetishizing of black skin inverted interwar anxieties about the “blackening” of Yugoslav society expressed during Josephine Baker’s visit to Yugoslavia in 1929; see Babović, 165–66.

While some scholars have interpreted Davičo's renunciation of his whiteness as a way of "seeking similarities" and solidarity with Black Africans, Davičo's bitter guilt ultimately serves to emphasize the difference between him and his African comrades by reinforcing the ostensible immutability of his white identity.⁵⁴ And although Davičo's Jewish heritage and imprisonment in an Axis detainment camp during the Second World War deepens the complexity of his musings on whiteness, his romanticization of internationalist fraternity and paternalistic tone towards Africans suffering from "complexes" situates Davičo in a longer historical tradition of European epistemic hegemony over non-Europeans.⁵⁵ Yugoslav proximity to whiteness, with its colonial origins, is what enabled such hegemony.

Other Yugoslav narratives written of this period featured imagery and fetishizing language remarkably similar to Davičo's account. These revived older tropes that celebrated the vitality of Balkan backwardness and non-European anti-culture or barbarism (a trope most commonly associated with the Zenitizam movement of the 1920s).⁵⁶ The Slovenian writer Jože Javoršek's (Jože Brejc) highly literary, intertextual novel *Okus Sveta* (A Taste of the World) exemplifies this synthesis. First published in the momentous year of 1961, the narrative follows Javoršek's circumnavigation of the globe on an ocean liner and features all the tropes of Balkan liminality and ambiguity, but now expressed in the idiom of post-coloniality. Upon leaving Europe at the beginning of the novel, Javoršek symbolically renounces his Europeaness:

No one could understand my wild, yet pure desire to break free from Europe and consign my false and conceited "Europeaness" to the depths of the deepest ocean for the most hideous creatures to devour. Quite simply, I wanted to kill the European in me and purge myself of the cultivation of the "Mediterranean man" with his contrived classics and hollow culture through which Europeans have enslaved, murdered, and corrupted people across the globe.⁵⁷

Javoršek then foresees the day when there will no longer be a European identity by noting that "cultural mixing" is the dominant trend of the day, marking the onset of a "universal culture."⁵⁸ As if to usher in this new culture as quickly as possible, Javoršek maintains a regime of strict austerity

54. Radonjić, "From Kragujevac to Kilimanjaro," 60–61.

55. "Oskar Davičo: Šapčanin čiji život je stao između tamnice i rime," *Distrikt*, December 20, 2017, distrikt.rs/oskar-davico-sapcanin-ciji-zivot-je-stao-izmedju-tamnice-i-rime/ (accessed June 27, 2022).

56. The trope of the barbarian Balkans resisting the empty culture of the west goes back to the Zenit movement and even further; see Marijeta Božović, "Introduction," *After Yugoslavia: The Cultural Spaces of a Vanished Land* (Palo Alto, 2013) and Milutinović, *Getting over Europe*, 26.

57. Jože Javoršek, *Ukus Svijeta* (Sarajevo, 1965), 7.

58. *Ibid.*, 10–11. In August 1961, *NIN* featured an article from American anthropologist and eugenicist Harry L. Shapiro. Shapiro extolled the superior racial hygiene of "mixed-race" individuals and predicted that this new order would ensure harmony and peace. "Mešavina rasa: Nova stvarnost čovečanstva," *NIN* (Nedeljne informativne novine), August 6, 1961. Shapiro was the anthropology chair at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

and non-fraternization towards his fellow European passengers. When a wealthy English woman raised in Singapore as the daughter of a colonial official becomes infatuated with him, Javoršek resists her advances and the sensual corruption of Europe in his quest to meet the “new world” unblemished. He tells her that “we are from two different worlds. . . even if we are by our upbringing akin. You are England—the old world. I am a man of the new world.”⁵⁹

Javoršek’s sense of belonging to the non-European world is shaken, however, when he reaches America, the land of “Indians” and formerly enslaved Africans. Upon noting how racial minorities in the United States are derisively perceived and treated, Javoršek at first claims his place among them: “When I think about it, I am actually quite primitive as I only feel comfortable around people who are considered primitive. . .”⁶⁰ However, his *esprit de corps* with minorities in the United States receives a shock upon arriving in Harlem, New York. Here, Javoršek experiences a mixture of fear and guilt as he walks the streets of the neighborhood:

The truth is, *I would eagerly paint myself black* this very moment for a silent panic had overtaken me. . . Or should I shout my nationality right there on the street? I don’t think that would change anything for the better as it appears *all white people are guilty* for this completely abnormal situation, which can only be understood *if experienced on your own skin*” (ako se ne iskusi na vlastitoj koži).⁶¹

In both Davičo and Javoršek’s narratives, fetishizing skin color, black and white, ultimately functions paradoxically to reify difference, rather than dispel it. At the end of their narratives, both authors find their skin, and apparently corresponding cultural identity, seemingly unalterable.

Black African Students and “Petite-bourgeois Mentalities”

In addition to traveling abroad in the Global South, intimate encounters at home with visitors from Africa, Asia, and Latin America gradually shaped Yugoslavs’ understanding of their imbrication in whiteness and their place in global racial hierarchies. Most notably, the mid-1950s witnessed a precipitous increase in the number of students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America seeking degrees at friendly socialist universities in Europe. This “post-colonial education migration,” as one scholar has described it, initially performed an important symbolic function in Yugoslavia’s domestic politics, one arguably greater than in other socialist states of the Eastern Bloc.⁶² For Yugoslavs and postcolonial citizens alike, the country served as the paradigm of Cold War cosmopolitanism and international solidarity, a place neither “East” nor “West,” but non-aligned and straddling the border of the Second and Third

59. Javoršek, 39.

60. *Ibid.*, 138.

61. *Ibid.*, 154–56 (my emphasis).

62. Quinn Slobodian, “Bandung in Divided Germany: Managing Non-Aligned Politics in East and West, 1955–63,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 4 (2013), 646.

Worlds. The state's carefully curated national narrative of Cold War exceptionalism based on Yugoslavia's high-profile schism with the Soviet Union, its "self-managed" workers socialism, and its pioneering role in the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s and early 1960s buttressed this worldview. In turn, African, Asian, Arab, and Latin American students became the most conspicuous domestic symbol of socialist Yugoslavia's exceptionalism in international politics. For Yugoslavia's citizens, the act of hosting students from postcolonial countries exemplified this openness, while foreign students' ostensible eagerness to study in Yugoslavia confirmed the admiration and respect that the world reportedly held for Yugoslavia.⁶³ Images of students from decolonizing states studying, working, and even protesting side-by-side with Yugoslavs served to validate the progressive credentials of the state at times when the Soviet Union, China, and others sought to discredit Yugoslavia as a reactionary, capitalist, and even neo-colonial regime.⁶⁴ Yugoslavia, just like the Soviet Union and other socialist bloc states, actively cultivated an image of the state as an anti-racist, workers' utopia where the cultural differences created by colonialism did not matter. The effectiveness of this discourse can be seen in the case of Nwaeze Anyanwu. A chemistry graduate of UC Berkeley originally from Nigeria, Anyanwu wrote the Yugoslav consul in San Francisco in 1955 asking for a scholarship to study in Yugoslavia. He had heard from his friends that "African blacks" were treated well in Yugoslavia and that more and more students from less-developed countries were flocking to Yugoslavia.⁶⁵ Such attitudes informed the decision of many students from the Global South to study in Yugoslavia.

Yet foreign students, particularly Black African students, did frequently experience racial prejudice in Yugoslavia. Black students from places like Sudan, Togo, Kenya, Tanzania, Northern Rhodesia (later Zambia), Nigeria, Ghana, and Guinea often reported instances of verbal assaults laced with racial slurs, physical beatings, police brutality, denial of service at restaurants, unequal treatment in student dorms, Yugoslav anxiety about miscegenation, and media or literature featuring racist stereotypes about Africa and Africans.⁶⁶ More often than not, officials at various Yugoslav universities, the Union of Yugoslav Students, or the Federal Bureau of International Technical Cooperation characterized the complaints as "isolated" incidents rooted in Yugoslav students' "hooliganism," youthful indiscretions, "reactionary

63. In 1961, a thirteen-year-old from Obrenovac wrote to Tito to inform him that instead of celebrating his birthday in the usual fashion, he was inviting Algerian students and soldiers for "a day of African peoples": "I love them with all of my heart because they love our country, our people. . ." AJ, 832–9, letter from Yugoslav Child to Tito, April 26, 1961.

64. Diplomatski Arhiv ministarstva spoljnih poslova Srbije (DAMSPS), PA Kina, 220–423, 1961, fascikla 68, "Odnosi Kina-Jugoslavija, 1958–1961."

65. AJ 145–32, "Predmet: Nwaeze Anyanwu-studiranje u Jugoslaviji," July 18, 1955; AJ 145–32, "Strani Studenti UFNJR," Report from the Commission for International Cultural Relations, December 1, 1958.

66. AJ, 114–223, "Zabeleška razgovora s grupom studenata iz Južne Rodezije koji studiraju na Univerzitetu u Beogradu," March 21, 1964; AJ, 145–45, "Skupnosti Jugoslovenskih univerz, Poročilo o tujih študentih, ki študirajo na univerzi v Ljubljani," December 21, 1962; AJ 208–975, "Zabeleška o sastanku kod rektora univerze u Ljubljani," March 5, 1963.

politics,” or simple misunderstandings rather than examples of any widespread anti-black racial prejudice.⁶⁷ Yugoslav officials sometimes preferred to ascribe the cause of these complaints to African students’ own overdeveloped sensitivity and “inferiority complexes.”⁶⁸ When a group of students from Sudan reported racially-tinged harassment to the director of the student dorms at the University of Belgrade in 1960, for example, they were told that “there were good and bad people” everywhere and that their experience was not an example of discrimination because Yugoslavia had an official policy of peaceful coexistence; she then explained in her report that the Sudanese students, because of their “black skin,” were being overly sensitive to the actions of individuals.⁶⁹ In 1963, the president of Yugoslavia’s Union of Yugoslav students, Novak Pribičević, told a young Kenyan student who had complained about Yugoslavs’ use of the words “monkey,” “boy,” and “negro” (but who, interestingly, never used the word “racism”) that the “roots” of the colonizers’ behavior and the causes of certain Yugoslav citizens’ “excesses” were completely different.⁷⁰

Locating Yugoslav racism in youthful “excess,” “hooliganism,” or, as some officials claimed, “petite-bourgeois mentalities,” did not simply represent a circumlocution or avoidance of an unpalatable conclusion, but hinted at a problem of competing definitions of racism.⁷¹ For Yugoslavs of this period, racism was associated, above all, with a state-sanctioned system of discriminatory laws and segregation.⁷² Through frequent debates and intimate interactions with Black African students over the course of the 1960s, however, the concept of racism in Yugoslavia expanded in ways that could incorporate the forms of prejudice experienced by Black Africans there. From official and popular definitions of anti-black racial prejudice as exclusively a phenomenon of colonial societies and their metropolises and as a system of discriminatory laws, it expanded to include the everyday popular attitudes and behaviors that implicated Yugoslavs.

One particularly frank central committee discussion of the Union of Yugoslav Students in 1961 illustrates how sympathetic Yugoslav officials struggled to define a phenomenon of prejudice that was not systemic in the

67. AJ 145–13, “*Savetovanje o međunarodnim aktivnostima SSJ*,” May 30, 1963, Belgrade.

68. AJ 114–265, “*Call Me African, not ‘Negro’—Is the African Unduly Sensitive*,” by Kimiti Kamau April 27, 1963. Tito also found that Africans suffered from an inferiority complex, which he attributed to colonialism. See AJ KPR I-3-a/2–8, *Prijem predsednika republike Ahmeda Bena Bele*, 5–13.III.1964, “*Zabeleške o jugoslovensko-alžirskim razgovorima u zgradi siv-a*, 6.III.1964,” March 11, 1964.

69. AJ 145–45, “*Zabeleška o razgovoru sa studentima iz Sudana*,” Belgrade, October 13, 1960: Mileva Regner; also see incident in Ljubljana, SR Slovenia in 1962 when Yugoslav officials explained to African students that “*zamorci*,” a pejorative term in Slovene for black Africans, did not have racist connotations, AJ 145–45, “*Skupnosti Jugoslovenskih univerz*, Poročilo. . .”

70. AJ 114–265, Response of Novak Pribičević to Kimiti Kamau’s article, April 27, 1963. This exchange is also cited in Lazić, “*Neki problemi stranih studenata*,” 73.

71. AJ 145–13, “*Savetovanje o međunarodnim aktivnostima SSJ*,” Central Committee meeting, Belgrade, May 30, 1963.

72. Radonjić, “*Студенти из Африке*,” 38.

sense of discriminatory laws or de facto segregation (far from it), but that was nevertheless pervasive and injurious. In their regular course of discussing Black African students' complaints of racism, Ivan Šošić, a committee member from SR Croatia, objected to his colleagues' dismissive attitude to the students' grievances:

In our students' relations with foreign students. . . the problem of segregation (*segregacija*) has appeared, the existence of which I have personally witnessed myself, so it is probably not merely talk and allegations by foreign students, but rather the truth. It is the truth. I personally experienced it when I was riding in a car with a black man, a foreign student, and he was attacked in the city. I was sitting next to him and it was a very, very unpleasant thing. Perhaps it does not have the generalized character or the same essence and content like it has in America or in some other country, but the problem exists here among us. . . I believe that our society will somehow accommodate not only students, but that in a few years it will not be so strange to see a . . . black person.⁷³

Šošić's use of the term "segregacija" is noteworthy. One could characterize Šošić's use of the word segregation to describe the racially-motivated attack he witnessed as a mere mistake, but it does highlight Yugoslavs' legalistic approach to the question of anti-black prejudice. The use of the word segregation also suggests that one of the most, if not the most, important points of reference and sources of vocabulary for discussions of race and racism in Yugoslavia was Jim Crow United States and South Africa. This is important as it shows how Yugoslav officials were actively trying to understand racial prejudice in Yugoslavia by triangulating between multiple contexts of racism. The semantic journey of the word *segregacija* in Serbo-Croatian is also important. From its original meaning referring to the expropriation of nobles' land and its redistribution to former serfs in Habsburg South Slav lands in the mid-nineteenth century, the term *segregacija* in Serbo-Croatian eventually assumed the meaning of the legalized separation of people through mid-twentieth-century media coverage of American race relations. In the 1960s, the term was appropriated by Yugoslav scholars to describe class differentiation in Yugoslav cities and now has widespread use in the region to describe de facto discrimination against local Roma populations.⁷⁴

Black African students, not surprisingly, were often more precise in their use of terminology. While Cold War politics and the power of public accusations of racism informed some postcolonial students' methods of accusing Yugoslavs of racism, many, if not most, carefully qualified their use of terms like racism and discrimination when discussing their accusations with officials. Most Black African students in particular very carefully delineated what they viewed as racist behavior in Yugoslavia from racist regimes much more

73. AJ 145–13, "Savetovanje o međunarodnim aktivnostima saveza studenata Jugoslavije," June 5, 1962.

74. Sreten Vujović, "Socijalna diferencijacija i socijalna segregacija u našim gradovima," *Socijologija* 14, no. 2 (1972), 5. For a contemporary use of *segregacija* in the context of Serbian Romani activism, see "Segregacija u obrazovanju," *Roma world*, August 19, 2018, romaworld.rs/segregacija-u-obrazovanju/ (accessed June 27, 2022; unsecure site).

frequently and consistently than they conflated Yugoslavia with the United States or colonial regimes in Africa. The students were not necessarily caught up in rigid ideological binaries of Cold War and imperialism, as Yugoslav officials sometimes claimed, but rather grappled like Mr. Šošić, with a complex phenomenon. In 1960, for example, a student from Togo told representatives of the University of Belgrade: “we know that racial discrimination like they have in America doesn’t exist here, but these individual incidents cause us pain. It sometimes happens that they tell us there’s nothing left to serve in a restaurant and then they later serve other guests. . .”⁷⁵ Other students similarly declined to conflate socialist Yugoslavia with racist regimes like the United States and South Africa. Emmanuel Kossivi from Togo, in his attempt to describe the problem, indicated that postcolonial students were “becoming reactionaries” in Yugoslavia because of the discrepancy between Yugoslav rhetoric and what they experienced in their everyday lives:

In western countries you know that racial discrimination exists and you know down which street a foreign black student can go, but none of that exists here; there is no racial prejudice or laws— this isn’t Rhodesia, but it’s still bad because there are individual citizens who insult black students and Yugoslav students who attack them. What’s more, a black student receives no protection from security services and the police. . . especially when he’s in the company of a white woman. . .⁷⁶

Like other Black African students, Kossivi hesitated to use the language of segregation, discrimination, and even racism when explaining conditions for Black African students in Yugoslavia given the obvious incongruence between Yugoslavia and colonial African states; nevertheless, he pointed to a clear pattern of racial prejudice that he and other Black African students experienced in Yugoslavia.

As hinted at above, by far the most frequent complaints of Black students involved the question of their relationship with Yugoslav women, whether intimate, casual, or as colleagues. While the Yugoslav state, like many other socialist states, did not prohibit marriage between Yugoslavs and non-Yugoslavs, the fraternizing of Black men with white Yugoslav women appeared to clash with the moral sensibilities of large swathes of the general public and police in Yugoslavia.⁷⁷ In Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade, Black students from the late 1950s regularly recounted incidents of Yugoslav students, citizens, and police officers harassing them while they socialized with, studied with, or dated white Yugoslav women. In June 1960 in Belgrade, for example, students from Togo and Ghana reported that a group of residents in New Belgrade called them monkeys and the women they were with prostitutes. The students

75. AJ 145–32, “Zabeleška Centralnog odbora studenata Jugoslavije o redovnom godišnjem sastanku sa studentima iz afričkih zemalja održanom na Beogradskom univerzitetu,” and “Izvodici diskusije stranih studenata,” June 2, 1960.

76. AJ 145–32, “Zabeleška o razgovoru sa predstavnicima udruženja stranih studenata na sastanku održanom u Komisiji za kulturne veze sa inostranstvom,” December 17, 1965.

77. For an analysis of the politics of interracial marriages in state socialism, see Sara Pugach, “African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic, 1957–1990,” in *Comrades of Color*, 131–56.

also alleged that police constantly asked for their female companions' identification when found together in public.⁷⁸ The pervasive policing of interracial intimacy became such a problem that Black African students in Belgrade took to publicly protesting. In 1961, Sudanese and other African students demonstrated in front of government buildings in downtown Belgrade because of the harassment of their contacts with Yugoslav women by Yugoslav police and students.⁷⁹ Similar problems prevailed in Zagreb and Ljubljana. In Ljubljana, an organization of Black African students named "Black Africa" (made up mostly of students from Ghana) wrote letters to the political leadership of SR Slovenia, and even Tito, informing them of racially-motivated harassment and particularly of the problem of intolerance of interracial intimacy.⁸⁰ One Kenyan student claimed that male Slovenian students would frequently break up Black-Yugoslav dancing partners and chastise them with the question, "aren't Slovenian men good enough for you?" (In interviews, former students from Africa recount similar encounters in the 1980s with almost verbatim language, confirming the regularity of aggression towards interracial couples).⁸¹ The issue was also a key contributing factor for a mass protest in 1963 in which over ninety percent of the foreign students in Ljubljana participated, including Asian, Arab, and African students.⁸²

By the late 1960s, these accusations had persisted long enough and become so public that Yugoslavs officials, scholars, and popular authors began devoting attention to studying the problem of Yugoslavs' racial attitudes. Given that many of the surveys and studies about the phenomenon of racism in Yugoslavia that appeared from the end of the 1960s referenced Black African and other foreign students' experiences, it is clear that the students' complaints and activism were a significant factor in the attention devoted to the issue of racism in Yugoslavia.⁸³ In 1969, the renowned Slovenian academic and first president of the Yugoslav Sociological Society, Jože Goričar (1907–1985),

78. AJ 145–32, "Zabeleška Centralnog odbora studenata," and "Izvodič diskusije stranih studenata," June 2, 1960. In 1963, a student from Nigeria alleged that Yugoslav students had threatened violence against women who fraternized with Black students. See AJ 114–223, "Informacija o sastanku sa stranim studentima stipendistima SSRNJ," December 3, 1963.

79. AJ KPR, 837-I-5-b/106–1, Sudan, 1956–1967, "Studenti iz Sudana na studijama u Jugoslaviji," undated (circa 1962).

80. AJ 208–975, letter from "All Black African Students in Ljubljana, Ljubljana," February 28, 1963.

81. AJ 208–975, "Zabeleška o sastanku kod rektora univerze u Ljubljani," March 5, 1963; interview, Raoul Alberto Dias, Belgrade, Serbia, October 28, 2016. Frequent conflict over Yugoslav women between newly-arrived Black African men and local Yugoslav men underscores how heteronormative masculinities structured both transracial solidarity and resistance to it in east-south encounters. For many Black students in Yugoslavia, equal "access" to local women was fundamental to the idea of full equality and postcolonial autonomy, see Alois Opundo Gonzaga, "Boravak koji će ostati nezaboravan. . ." September 28, 1968, *Solidarnost: Bilten Međunarodnog studentskog kluba prijateljstva* 3, no. 6, 13–15.

82. AJ 145–45, Report from the Rector of the University of Ljubljana, Makso Šnuderl, May 18, 1963.

83. These scholarly surveys reached into the public sphere and were cited in popular periodicals such as *NIN* in the 1980s; see Slobodanka Ast, "Jorgos kod Kneza Mihaila," *NIN*, November 9, 1986.

conducted a study about foreign students' experience in Yugoslavia. Based on survey questions posed to foreign students in Ljubljana, one section of the study concluded that foreign students experienced the most prejudicial treatment at dances and when socializing with Yugoslav women.⁸⁴ Two years later in 1971, a more detailed study appeared in Belgrade when Nikola Tomić, a psychology student, submitted a thesis titled "The social distance of university students towards black people." In his master thesis, Tomić queried Yugoslav students at the University of Belgrade on their views about black-skinned people, not just students.⁸⁵ One question asked the students whether they would accept their brother or sister marrying a black person. Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated that they would not agree with such a union, while twelve percent responded that they probably or definitely would. Some respondents expressed that they would be hesitant not because of personal reservations, but rather out of concern for the possible negative reaction of their family or wider community.⁸⁶ Tomić's thesis was quickly picked up and cited by well-known scholars such as the sociologist Nikola Rot, who worked on questions of racism, ethnic prejudice, and national identity and who organized international conferences in Yugoslavia on the topic of racism. Whereas previous published journalistic and scholarly literature on racism exclusively cast anti-black racism as a problem of colonial regimes and the United States, scholarship and journalistic reporting in the 1970s and 1980s came to include, albeit in small doses, socialist Yugoslavia into their analyses.⁸⁷

Yugoslav literature of the period also took up the problem of anti-black racism and the topic of transgressive romance between Yugoslav and black students. In 1972, the prolific, award-winning author Anton Ingolič (1907–1992) published a book titled *Onduo, moj črni fant* (*Onduo, My Black Boyfriend*) in Slovene, which was translated into Serbo-Croatian in 1975.⁸⁸ The novel tells the story of Vida, a young Slovenian woman, who falls in love with a Black Sudanese student named Onduo shortly after he arrives to study in the SR Slovenian capital of Ljubljana. The two begin an intimate relationship, which they hide from Vida's family, her coworkers at a hairdressing salon, and the general public. Through Vida and Onduo's taboo relationship, Ingolič reveals a Ljubljana characterized by deep racial prejudice and xenophobia. When Onduo impregnates Vida, the two decide to marry and to disclose their relationship to Vida's family and coworkers. This decision causes an intense backlash. After Vida's family refuses to allow the couple into Vida's childhood home and disowns Vida on the spot—and after her work colleagues harass

84. Jože Goričar, "Tuji študentje na ljubljanski univerzi, *Teorija in praksa* 6, no. 1 (1969), 122.

85. Tomić, "Socijalna distanca studenata prema Crncima," in Rot, "Rasne i etničke predrasude," 101; also quoted in Radonjić, "Студенти из Африке," 37, 43.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Ast, "Jorgos kod Kneza Mihaila."

88. Anton Ingolič, *Onduo, moj crni momak*, trans. Ivan Brajdić (Zagreb, 1975). The novel was first published serially in the Slovenian magazine *Jana*, which was known for broaching taboo topics; see Ivanka Gantar, "1971 Ljubljana—Jana," [stareslike.cerknica.org/2015/08/30/1971-ljubljana-jana/](https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.150) (accessed June 27, 2022). This novel is also discussed in Radonjić, "Студенти из Африке," 43.

her for marrying a “negro”—the two decide to leave Yugoslavia for Sudan.⁸⁹ There, Vida tragically dies of apparent malaria on the banks of the Nile before she is able to give birth to the couple’s child and Onduo, bereft, commits suicide by throwing himself into the river. *Onduo, My Black Boyfriend* dramatizes Yugoslav anxiety about interracial romance and ultimately miscegenation, about which many Black African students complained. The novel is an important historical artifact as it memorializes the relatively common, yet controversial interracial relationships from the Yugoslav perspective. In Ingolič’s treatment of socialist Slovenian society, anti-blackness has deep roots that penetrate both the more traditional rural milieu of Vida’s childhood village and the ostensibly more progressive and socialist urban center of Ljubljana. Furthermore, an important intertextual aspect of Ingolič’s novel hints at the longer historical context of anti-blackness in the region. The name of Ingolič’s protagonist is also the name of one of the most well-known characters of Slovenian folklore, “Lepa Vida,” of which the most famous rendition is an early nineteenth-century epic poem written by Slovenia’s national poet France Prešeren.⁹⁰ In the poem, a “black man from across the sea” (*črn zamorec*) seduces Vida who, in the poem’s narrative, essentially abandons her home and children and, symbolically, her nation. In this interpretation, the image of Africa and its dark-skinned people imbricate both medieval and modern Slovenian society in a racialized discourse of whiteness and blackness.

Onduo, My Black Boyfriend helps illuminate how seemingly contradictory discourses of anti-racism and anti-black racialization co-existed in Yugoslavia, sometimes within the same text. On the one hand, in the preface to the 1975 Serbo-Croatian translation, the translator of the novel explicitly framed the work as an anti-racist text meant to demonstrate “how relations between people of different skin colors should be, or better, how they should not be allowed to be. . .”⁹¹ The story provocatively implicates socialist Slovenian and Yugoslav society in a deep, historical tradition of anti-black racism. On the other hand, the novel itself is rife with language and imagery that exoticizes Onduo and presents familiar racializing stereotypes of the hyper-sexualized black male body.⁹² Moreover, the novel’s conclusion, which associates Africa and this interracial union with death, with no hope of offspring, adds to the polysemous nature and ambiguity of the text.⁹³ Thus, while the novel may have subverted officially sanctioned ways of thinking about anti-racism in Yugoslavia, it could also, at the same time, reinforce dominant racializing and racist conceptualizations of Black Africans in Yugoslav society.

89. Ingolič, 120–28.

90. Anton Janko, “Vida the Beautiful and her *Zamorec*: The Allure of the Exotic Stranger in Slovene Literature,” in T.E. Knight, ed., *Broaching Frontiers, Shattering Boundaries: On Tradition and Culture at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of F.I.L.L.M. held in Harare, Zimbabwe, July, 26–30, 1990 (Bern, 2002), 159–66. Catherine Baker discusses this poem in *Race and the Yugoslav Region*, 119.

91. Ivan Brajdič in Ingolič, 242.

92. Janko, 165.

93. Janko, 165.

The 1960s marked an important transnational, global moment not only for the capitalist west and the postcolonial world, but also for socialist states in eastern Europe.⁹⁴ Often cast as static and insular, state socialist societies actively participated in shaping an interconnected postwar world through a robust internationalist tradition of cultural exchange and political protest.⁹⁵ For Yugoslavia and other socialist states, decolonization held more than mere political and diplomatic import. From the cultural imaginary to novel social and material relations, intimacy with the Global South shaped Yugoslav society in significant ways. The circulation and interrogation of ideas about race, racism, and postcolonial thought in the long 1960s constitutes one overlooked aspect of this exchange in the literature on state socialist internationalism. This exchange between socialist Yugoslavia and actors from the Global South counters persisting narratives that posit western origins for histories of the global 1960s and thereby marginalize both the Second and Third Worlds.⁹⁶ The elision of socialist reflexivity to racism, in particular, has also served to perpetuate notions of a stagnant socialist east, one mired in reactionary racial thought and behavior. While political interests and internalized ideology about what and where anti-black racism could be often stifled or predetermined official conclusions about domestic prejudice, Yugoslav writers, social scientists, and some officials offered important critical assessments about racism in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 70s. From something seemingly foreign, Yugoslavs began to locate anti-black racism at home as well.

Finally, this article has centered postcolonial politics and postcolonial actors as important vectors of the debate about racism in Yugoslavia. As such, it speaks to a scholarly methodology and politics of “decolonizing” Slavic and East European studies.⁹⁷ A decolonial approach interrogates dominant knowledge production, identities, and power relations created by colonial language, practices, and ideology.⁹⁸ A decolonial history in Slavic or state socialist studies complicates, for example, narratives of socialist anti-racism and reframes entrenched understandings of group identities (by introducing concepts such as whiteness, for example). In this vein, this article has described how black African students presented a challenge to widespread notions of Yugoslav racial exceptionalism and Yugoslav self-understanding and thus, in effect, acted as agents in “decolonizing” state socialist politics. Decolonization is thus a form of politics that goes beyond conventional narratives of state socialist internationalist politics and anti-colonial solidarity. While sensitive to the incongruence and tension of postcolonial language and epistemologies between different contexts, decolonial scholarship can reveal important insights into how not only African students but also local “Others”

94. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, 2013).

95. Robertson, “Speaking Titoism.”

96. For a similar insight, see the introduction of Slobodian’s *Foreign Front*.

97. The development of a decolonial framework in Balkan studies owes much to the work of Baker, Rucker-Chang, and Miglena Todorova.

98. Anna Engelhardt, “The Futures of Russian Decolonization,” *Strelka Mag*, March 18, 2020. strelkamag.com/en/article/the-futures-of-russian-decolonization (accessed June 27, 2022). Also, see Yusupova’s article on “Decolonial Intervention” cited in n6 above.

in the region mobilized and appropriated language and practices to decolonize knowledge and politics in state socialism.⁹⁹ Such scholarship offers important new perspectives on global socialism and eastern Europe that does not parochialize the region or reproduce conventional north-to-south routes of influence.

99. For an example of this in a postsocialist context, see Rucker-Chang, “Challenging Americanism and Europeanism: African-Americans and Roma in the American South and the European Union,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2018): 181–199.