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ARTICLE

Ethnopolitics in a Mining Enterprise in Crisis: Revisiting the Albanian Miners' Protests in Late Socialist Kosovo

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Abstract

This article presents a novel approach to explain ethnopolitical mobilization among Kosovo Albanian miners during the winter of 1988–1989. Based on a close reading of the mining enterprise's journal, it identifies three factors accounting for the rising politicization of ethnicity in microlevel dynamics within the Trepça mining enterprise. First, the article points at ethnic grievances in intra-elite managerial tensions and miners' unrest. It relates these to structural conditions generated by the shifting cultural divisions of labor in Kosovo mining. Second, the article looks at counter-mobilizational dynamics among Kosovo Albanian miners, which were directly provoked by Serbian ethnopolitical mobilization during Slobodan Milošević's rise to power. In a final step, the article reconstructs socio-occupational realignments taking shape in the particular decision-making structures of the mining enterprise. Against a background of internal power struggles and reorganizations, the executive management and the miners found themselves on the defensive against party representatives and managerial competitors. Making use of the enterprise's institutional setup, they established a strong ethnopolitical alliance, which culminated in the underground strike of February 1989. The article suggests that this approach can be valuable to study other cases of intersecting social and ethnopolitical mobilization.

Keywords: Kosovo; mining; Yugoslavia; mobilization

The Kosovo Miners' Protests of 1988–1989

The Kosovo miners' protests are one of the iconic and transformative moments in the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. On November 17, 1988, a group of around 1,500 mostly Albanian workers laid down work in the Trepça/Trepča mines in northern Kosovo. They embarked on a march to the provincial capital of Prishtina/Priština in protest against the imminent removal of leading Kosovo Albanian politicians Azem Vllasi and Kaqusha Jashari. Vllasi and Jashari were widely seen as the main defenders of Kosovo's autonomy against increasing encroachments by the Serbian leadership under Slobodan Milošević. Notwithstanding mass protests, the provincial committee of the League of Communists removed Jashari and Vllasi. It also approved a series of constitutional amendments that would further reduce Kosovo's autonomy (Ristanović 2019, 510–513).

In a dramatic culmination of events, on February 20, 1989, some 1,300 Albanian miners barricaded themselves in the mine of Stanterg/Stari Trg and declared a hunger strike. In a number of underground talks with representatives of the provincial and federal leadership, the miners rejected the suggested constitutional amendments. They also demanded the resignation of newly appointed politicians close to the Serbian leadership. The miners exited the pits on February 28 after the latter demand had been met, although the decision would later be reversed (Haziri 2011;

Ristanović 2019, 513–521). The strike led to mass unrest and violence in Kosovo, while large crowds in Belgrade and elsewhere hit the streets to support Serbian national interests. The strike was also picked up by foreign media, leading to the internationalization of the Kosovo question (Ristanović 2019, 521–524).

Although there was support for the Kosovo Albanian case by the Slovenian party leadership and public (Ramšak 2021), the Yugoslav state reacted heavy-handedly. It declared the state of emergency in Kosovo and arrested a group of Kosovo functionaries on accusation of Albanian separatism. In the Trepça mine itself, it came to the mass layoff of Albanian workers and complete economic collapse (Palairet 2003, 13–23). The constitutional amendments that were formally approved by the Kosovo assembly at the end of March 1989 de facto returned the province under the authority of the Serbian republic (Ristanović 2019, 524–532). This gave way to a decade of Serbian domination and repression of Albanians in Kosovo.

The Miners' Protests in the Context of Serb-Albanian Rivalry over Kosovo

The events of the winter of 1988–1989 are part of a longer history of Serb-Albanian ethnopolitical rivalry in and over Kosovo. Alternating sequences of political dominance since the late 19th century produced mutually exclusive ethnopolitical perspectives (Cohen 2002, 47–86; Guzina 2003; Petrović and Stefanović 2010). The Albanians of Yugoslavia held accumulated ethnic grievances over the Serbian and Yugoslav state's expansionist and discriminative policies after acquiring Kosovo during the Balkan Wars. They overwhelmingly welcomed the German and Italian dismemberment of the first Yugoslav state during World War II and assigned little to no legitimacy to the Yugoslav partisan resistance movement. In the postwar decades, the Serbian communist apparatus once more installed a repressive regime against distrusted Albanians. Only after the dismissal of security chief Aleksandar Ranković in the mid-1960s did the political climate slightly improve. Kosovo's political autonomy was gradually expanded, and Albanians started dominating decision-making functions. However, the province formally remained subordinated to the Serbian republic. Kosovo also witnessed considerable economic growth, and Albanians in Kosovo enjoyed access to education and employment. Yet the gap with more developed parts of the state widened, and economic expansion did not keep track with the growth of the population. The fifteen years of Albanian upward mobility in socialist Yugoslavia thus remained fraught with frustrations (Daskalovski 2003, 18–21; Ströhle 2016a; Petrović and Stefanović 2010).

From the Serbian perspective, Serb national interests in Kosovo were subject to systematic ethnic pressure. This took the form of open anti-Serbian repression and violence during the Second World War and was pursued in a more subtle manner under socialist Yugoslavia. The increasing autonomy of Kosovo de facto meant that Serbia no longer had any real political control over its province. It also provided a cover for Albanian political and demographic domination, which came with discrimination and violence against Kosovo's Serbian population. From the 1960s, Serbs started leaving Kosovo, reporting relative deprivation in terms of life chances and ethnic pressure and insecurity (Petrović and Blagojević 1989). The ultimate goal of these policies, it was argued, was secession and the removal of the Serb element in Kosovo (Daskalovski 2003, 14–18; Ristanović 2019).

In the 1980s, the Kosovo question provoked unprecedented social and political tensions. The Kosovo Albanian demonstrations of the spring of 1981 started off as relatively confined student protests but turned into an open uprising against the Yugoslav state (Hetemi 2020, 133–152; Ristanović 2019, 181–215). The Yugoslav League of Communists initiated a punitive process of "differentiation" to rid the party and society of Albanian separatism. This quickly turned counterproductive and further alienated the Albanian population (Pichler 2021; Ristanović 2019, 216–253). Meanwhile, Kosovo Serbs embarked on a number of street rallies to put pressure on the Serbian and federal leadership to address their concerns about discrimination and pressure (Vladisavljević 2008, 78–108).

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Slobodan Milošević skillfully established his political power on the wave of Serbian ethnic grievances and anxieties over Kosovo (Cohen 2002, 87–139). He appropriated Kosovo Serb grassroots mobilization and linked it to existing frustrations within the Serbian political and intellectual elite about Serbia's ethno-territorial disintegration (Dragović-Soso 2002). Milošević also succeeded in co-opting popular discontent with the socioeconomic crisis and dysfunctional bureaucracies (Musić 2021, 217–226; Vladisavljević 2008, 110–119). After securing undisputed political authority over the Serbian political landscape, Milošević turned against his political adversaries in Serbia's provinces. His increasingly populistic politics mobilized his ethnic constituency in a series of large protest meetings in Serbia, Vojvodina, and Montenegro. Milošević used these "anti-bureaucratic revolutions" to push for political change and appoint political allies in Vojvodina and Montenegro (Ramet 2002, 26–31; Vladisavljević 2008, 145–178). The removal of opposition in the Kosovo party leadership and the adoption of constitutional amendments were the final step in this process

Most commentators of the Kosovo miners' protests of 1988–1989 situate the events against this ethnopolitical context. Participants in the strike insist on the political nature of the strike. Burhan Kavaja, who was director of the Stanterg mines at the time, recalled that the "whole gathering started for social issues" but "turned into a public, political gathering for national issues."[1] In a contemporaneous comment, Shkëlzen Maliqi noted that "Milošević's extreme Serb nationalism made [the miners] react not only as workers, but as Albanians" (Maliqi 1993, 183). According to Maliqi, the miners' "retreat underground cannot be called a strike, but a national rebellion that is only taking the form of a strike" (Maliqi 1993, 186). In the dominant Kosovo Albanian historical narrative, the miners are heroes who stood up against the aggressive Serbian nationalism of Milošević and paved the way for the long struggle of Kosovo Albanians for independence (Haziri 2011). Regardless of obvious differences in evaluations of the nature of the protests, interpretations on the other side of the ethnopolitical spectrum are in agreement when it comes to the political nature of the events. Official state reports of the time accused the political and economic elite of Kosovo of orchestrating the miners' protests for counterrevolutionary purposes.[2] In Serbian popular opinion, the strike counts as an organized and staged act of Albanian separatism, with the primary aim to destabilize Serbian politics, further terrorize the local Serbian population, and mislead public opinion in Yugoslavia and internationally (Đoković 1990, 185–204).

Positioning the Miners' Protests in the Social Domain of Mining

What is striking in these accounts is that the protests are decoupled from the social domain of mining. The political context sketched above is crucial, but by itself it does not explain the rise of ethnopolitical mobilization among Albanians in Kosovo's mining industry. Available social histories of Albanians in socialist Yugoslavia focus on the Albanian rural population, which remained outside of formal employment (Brunnbauer 2004; Pichler 2005; Ströhle 2016b), or Albanians involved in private businesses in Yugoslavia's North (Archer 2023). For these social domains, Albanian ethnopolitical mobilization against the Yugoslav state can be understood by looking at the failure and unwillingness of the state to elevate the status of its Albanian citizens (for an early formulation of this argument, see Woodward 1995, 342–344). This finding concurs with Michael Hechter's model of cultural divisions of labor, which argues that group formation correlates with the way culturally marked groups are distributed in the occupational structure of a polity. Hechter stated that maximized degrees of differential stratification and occupational specialization of ethnic groups contribute to the social relevance of ethnicity (Hechter 1978). This hypothesis, however, does not apply to the mining industry, which did provide Albanians with access to privileged social spaces and generated social rapprochement across ethnic divisions. In Hechter's model, we would expect that these structural conditions limited the salience of ethnicity (Hechter 1978, 312–313).

Global histories of mining show that the correlation between social relations in mining and the politicization of ethnicity is highly contingent. Structural preconditions for ethnic identification

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and differentiation in mining are strong due to its dependence on labor migration and cultural divisions of labor. Ethnic divisions become particularly salient in contexts of mining decay (Knotter 2020). However, this does not automatically translate into ethnopolitical mobilization to the degree evident in Kosovo in the late 1980s. Mining was an important site of social unrest in late socialist Yugoslavia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe (Friedgut and Siegelbaum 1990; Vladisavljević 2008, 113–115). As a rule, however, it did not lead up to ethnopolitical mobilization. The massive labor unrest in Russian and Russified coal-mining regions during 1989, for example, did not seek connection with Russian liberal and non-Russian separatist contention taking place simultaneously (Beissinger 2002, 393–401). To be sure, ethnic polarization related to divisions of labor, migration, and economic exploitation in mining and retractive industries and industrial development more generally played an important role in mobilization in the peripheries of the Soviet Union. Labor unrest itself, however, did not serve as a catalyst of ethnopolitical contention (Auer 1998; Guth 2018).

A closer look at media reporting on the miners' protests in Kosovo reveals an equally contingent course of events. This confirms that external political appropriations alone cannot account for the politicization of ethnicity among the miners of Stanterg and its escalation into outright ethnopolitical contestation. In the November demonstrations, the miners closely adhered to the script of the social protests taking place all over Yugoslavia. These so-called antibureaucratic protests included ethnically framed demands, but were arguably more occupied with socioeconomic inequality against a background of deep economic and political crisis (Musić 2021; Vladisavljević 2008, chapters 5–6). As elsewhere in Yugoslavia, the Kosovo miners physically occupied and made use of sites of formal decision-making to make their claims. They carried with them Yugoslav flags and pictures of Yugoslav communist leader Josip Broz Tito, whose death in 1980 had left the party and state with a power vacuum. In subsequent talks with party-state functionaries, spokespersons of the protesters went to great lengths to position the protests within the acceptable ideological framework of the Titoist legacy ("Azem Vlasi govorio radnicima Trepča: Podrška važnija od sednice." *Trepča* November 21, 1988; Radulović 1988f; Smikić 1988a).

The balance tilted toward ethnopolitical contestation in the February underground strike. The miners still tapped into the Yugoslav-wide anti-bureaucratic discourse. They demanded a direct meeting with Milošević and argued that the Kosovo leadership "should be elected by the Kosovo base and not by the bureaucracy of other republics" (Maliqi 1993, 180–181). Yet ethnopolitical demands challenging the Yugoslav order dominated. The miners explicitly opposed impending constitutional amendments, condemned the discriminatory policies of the Serbian leadership under Milošević, and demanded that the United Nations examine the position of Kosovo Albanians. The longevity and modalities of the strike also no longer met the established norms of anti-bureaucratic protest.

This article aims to understand the contingent transformation of social unrest in the Trepça mines into ethnopolitical mobilization during the winter of 1988–1989 by approaching the enterprise as a space of social interaction that connects the macrolevel of social and political structures with the microlevel of concrete social interaction (Lauschke and Welskopp 1994). Macrostructural conditions related to the shifting cultural division of labor in a context of mining decay and the mesolevel of ethnopolitical contestation over Kosovo during socialist Yugoslavia made mining in Yugoslav Kosovo highly susceptible to the politicization of ethnicity. The ethnopolitical mobilization of miners in the winter of 1988–1989, however, can only be understood through a reconstruction of microlevel dynamics within the Trepça mining enterprise.

The remainder of this article is comprised of two parts. The first part sketches the structural conditions that explain the latent relevance of ethnicity in the domain of mining. I start with a contextual clarification of the crucial role of mining in Yugoslav development politics in Kosovo. I then assess the dialectics of social mobility and its correlation with ethnic cleavages in Kosovo's expanding mining industry through an analysis of the position of management (section two) and miners' resentment (section three). Here, I particularly rely on Joseph Rotschild's conceptual

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framework of ethnopolitics, which states that modernizing societies are characterized by structured interethnic inequalities and dynamic patterns of social mobility that are easily coopted by political entrepreneurs for the politicization of ethnicity (Rothschild 1981, 116–121). The second part of the article goes on to show how these structural preconditions developed into ethnopolitical mobilization. Section four explores the politicization of miners' unrest in Kosovo as a countermobilization against Serbian ethnopolitical mobilization. The final section analyses the ethnopolitical mobilization of the miners as the outcome of power struggles within the mining enterprise which led to an ethnopolitical alliance between Albanian managers and miners.

This article primarily makes use of reporting in Trepça's factory journal. This is a unique source for analyzing social interactions within the enterprise, provided that some caveats are kept in mind. First, the journal was published by the self-management bodies of the workers' collective. It served as the mouthpiece of a particular stratum of sociopolitical activists who played a crucial role in managing socio-occupational relations. These activists were represented in the enterprise cells of the communist party and self-management organs and positioned themselves between direct production and management (Musić 2021, 64–70). One of the central functions of the journal was to serve as a site of mediation and sociopolitical control within the complex enterprise (Archer and Musić 2017, 11–12). Between the lines of dry reports on production output or proceedings of internal meetings, critical claims toward management and production workers can be read. These are not presented with solid evidence. This article does not use these as factual statements, but as keys to gain insights in the way social interactions functioned within the enterprise. A second caveat concerns the obvious political bias of the factory journal. It did not question the basic premises of Yugoslav economic and political system. It was also very cryptical in writing about ethnic cleavages within the enterprise, although it gives clues on the latent presence of ethnicity. Reflecting broader changes in society in the late 1980s, the journal became increasingly outspoken in its Serbian ethnopolitical stance. As such, it itself became a vehicle of ethnopolitical mobilization.

Part I: The Latent Relevance of Ethnicity in Kosovo Mining

Mining and the Ambivalences of Modernization in Kosovo

The Trepça mining enterprise originated in the interwar period around the lead and zinc mines and metallurgical works near the city of Mitrovica in northern Kosovo. From the mid-1960s, Yugoslav state support for insufficiently developed regions and the growing political and economic autonomy of Kosovo led to the vertical expansion of the enterprise. Trepça turned into a typical socialist big system enterprise, which included a conglomerate of mines, metallurgical and chemical industry factories, as well as a string of factories producing paint and varnish, batteries, jewelry, and ammunition. Most of these were located in Kosovo.

Trepça was a pillar of socialist development in Kosovo. During the heyday of the enterprise in the 1970s, the economic and political importance of the mines was measured in a developmentalist logic in terms of increase in employment and production and expansion of economic activities. The political and economic elites of the period recognized that expansion and growth relied on federal aid. They justified these subsidies as a compensation for the exploitation of Kosovo's resources and the skewed investments in capital-intensive heavy industry with limited opportunities for economic expansion into more profitable activities during the first decades of socialist industrialization (Abdyli 1978, 74–79). Moreover, the expansion of industry was intrinsically connected to the emancipation of Yugoslav Albanians (Ströhle 2016a, chapter 6). This sense of entitlement at national emancipation through industrialization, coupled with complaints about exploitation, was an important ground for Albanian ethnic grievances. These were captured in the popular slogan "While Trepça is working, Belgrade is being built," which was used during the demonstrations of 1981 (Ristanović 2019, 181–215).

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In the context of the general economic recession and debt crisis of the 1980s, critical articles in the factory journal as well as political reports challenged the developmentalist faith in mining as the motor of economic expansion. This change of tone reflected the efficiency-oriented economic rationale that was gaining prominence in Yugoslavia (Woodward 1995, chapter 10). To critical evaluators within the province's elite, the overexpansion of Trepça became a prime illustration of "the lack of engagement, organization, expertise and work" in Kosovo's economic development.[3] It was emphasized that employment politics were fraught with corruption and clientelism and that social inequality grew because of power abuse.[4] Such accounts are taken over by contemporary (Serbian) historiography and Serbian public opinion, which argues that the Kosovo Albanian political elite diverted enormous international and federal funding to the hyper-production of national cadres and irrational, inefficient, and megalomaniac investments with the only goal to make the province economically independent (Ocić 2006, 357; Palairet 2003; Ristanović 2019, 59–63).

The evaluation of the mining sector was particularly negative. It was found that mining continued to rely on the expansion of labor input and the exploitation of new pits, while productivity dropped (Đokić 1990). Overemployment was dramatic. Some accounts gave figures of 50% labor surplus in the Stanterg mines, the oldest and largest mines in the Trepça enterprise (Abazi 1987b). Because of ore depletion and lack of technological and geological development, it was reported that by the late 1980s half of the existing pits would be no longer profitable (Abazi 1987a). Necessary technological and geological investments in mining lagged behind the investments made in metallurgy and processing industry ("Program ekonomske konsolidacije rudnika 'Trepča': Oslonac na sopstvene snage," *Trepča*, March 23, 1987).[5]

The year 1985 was an *annus horribilis* for Trepça mining. The mines of Stanterg recorded losses, allegedly for the first time since its establishment (Lazarević 1986a). Whether this is true is beside the point that losses were articulated in such a dramatic tone to send a message to the collective that stabilization measures would be necessary. The crisis was accompanied by social unrest. In August 1985, a two-day strike erupted in Stanterg. Strikes had not been uncommon, but the character of this particular strike stood out. The miners made expected complaints about the poor quality of the food in the canteen and public transport and demanded wage increases. They also criticized the skewed distribution of company housing and credit for individual homebuilding, another well-known concern among Yugoslav workers. The strikers, however, expressed a number of demands that were not in the script. They demanded the resignation of the entire executive management of the mines, which was technically within their competences but highly unusual. There were also hints of ethnic polarization, as it was said that national relations were overall problematic, that nationalist elements were dominating the workforce, and that hostile political elements (meaning Albanian separatists) had been involved in the strike and regular acts of vandalism and sabotage (Lazarević 1985a, 1985b). In the following months, the entire upper management structure of the Stanterg mines was replaced. The local newspaper in a typically cryptical manner referred to "disorder in the national structure of the management cadres" as one of the reasons for the reshuffle (Lazarević 1985c).

The strike of August 1985 and its aftermath indicate the susceptibility of the mines in crisis to ethnic division. The next two sections analyze the structural preconditions explaining ethnic group formation in the mines in more detail. I argue that ethnicity gained salience against the background of the ambivalences of social mobility in the expansion of mining. These appear prominently in the reporting of the factory journal on two types of so-called subjective shortcomings in the functioning of self-management. References to the "cadre question" dealt with the alleged lack of skill and bureaucratic abuses of power at the level of central and direct line management. Complaints of so-called non-work concerned absenteeism, idleness, and more organized forms of sabotage in direct production. These discussions reflect the factory journal's role as a mediator across the basic socio-occupational distinction between productive and non-productive workers. Most importantly for this article, they cryptically reveal the latent relevance of ethnicity for making sense of socio-occupational relations within the mining enterprise.

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The Relevance of Ethnicity in Debates on Management

The Shaky Authority of Management in Decaying Mining

The crisis in mining put management on the defense from various sides. In the late 1980s, newly appointed General Director Aziz Abrashi initiated a lobbying campaign with representatives of federal, provincial, and republican institutions. He stressed that Trepça needed "social support and considerable material help" to bridge the crisis – in particular, through revision of price politics, revisions of debt instalments, and investments in mining (Abazi 1987c; Kpuska 1987; Lazarević 1987b; Radulović 1987a). Abrashi emphasized that Trepça had succeeded in stepping up production and suggested that the enterprise, as a motor of economic development, be exempted from Yugoslav-wide consolidation measures.[6] Such lobbying for soft-budget constraints was inherent to the Yugoslav economic system. By the late 1980s, however, the economic and political climate had changed. Austerity measures meant that the Yugoslav state was more critical of lending support to unperforming enterprises. Moreover, political elites close to Slobodan Milošević used a liberal reformist agenda to challenge the authority of managerial elites in what essentially came down to a power struggle over financial and economic assets (Cohen 2002, 129–132). Against this background, political decision-makers no longer went along with the developmentalist logic inherent in Abrashi's calls for support. Instead, they openly questioned the capacities of the management in place.

The February 1988 session of the provincial committee of the League of Communists illustrates the growing rift between political and managerial elites. A report on the performance of the enterprise prepared for the occasion noted that massive employment increase was "largely the result of hiring beyond the technological labor norms in existing mining and metallurgy capacities."[7] The report further found that federal investment funds made up for 71% of the total investments made by the enterprise but that these investments as a rule took longer and costed more than expected. They were used to construct auxiliary factories that were hugely oversized for the existing mining capacities.[8] In the ensuing debate, some discussants explicitly expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of structural reforms and called into question the role of management ("Opšta mobilizacija i vanredne mere," *Trepča*, February 29, 1988).[9]

At the same time, the upper management echelons were subject to increasingly open accusations of corruption. These featured prominently in workers' protests and media reporting. The factory journal, for example, repeatedly published accusations that the management bought expensive and luxury West-European company cars and went on long and unnecessary business trips (Abazi 1987d). These accusations played a prominent role in mobilizing social unrest in the enterprise.

Party representatives in the enterprise's self-management bodies made use of combined charges of power abuse and unsuccessful management to destabilize the position of the executive management. Widespread complaints about clientelism and corruption lodged during the strike of August 1985 in combination with dramatic production results ultimately led to the removal of the management of the Stanterg mines ("Sa zborova radnika u Starom Trgu: Prava ali i obaveze," *Trepča*, September 16, 1985; Kpuska 1985b). The position of the new manager of the Stanterg mines, Burhan Kavaja, also quickly became critical. After initial positive reports about the consolidation measures introduced by the new management, the factory journal quickly had to "recognize that we were too quick in our evaluations" (Lazarević 1987j). A particularly dramatic session of the Central Workers' Council in September 1988 called for an ideological-political action against all managers who were incapable of addressing the situation in their collectives (Antić 1988). These more technical charges were conjoined with sensationalist media accusations of corruption against the Stanterg mines management (Janićijević 1988).[10]

Criticism was also directed toward engineers and technicians with supervisory functions in direct production. Sociopolitical cells within the enterprise and the Stanterg mine noted that Trepça faced a dramatic lack of qualified engineers because of shortcomings in employment politics (Nagavci 1985). They found that the problem was not that the mine was short on experts, but that

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experts were not up for the job. The younger generation of supervisors especially did not have the technical skills or managerial authority to coordinate work properly and deal with limited work discipline. These young experts were simply not sufficiently skilled and "politically deviant." They prioritized family, neighborhood, and "who knows which other ties" over expertise (Radulović 1986).[11] The executive management of the mine called for "differentiation" among the supervisors in the pits, applying the term used by the League of Communists to remove Albanian separatist elements from decision-making functions after the demonstrations of 1981 (Lazarević 1987a).

Ethnic Grievances Surrounding Upward Social Mobility in Kosovo Mining

Although rarely mentioned in an explicit manner, ethnicity was salient in these debates on management. To understand this, we have to consider the ethnically variegated temporalities of social mobility through mining in Kosovo. During the initial phase of modernization and industrialization in socialist Kosovo, there was a hierarchical cultural division of labor. Elite occupations were overwhelmingly South Slav. Albanians made up the non-elite and serviced the regional economy. In subsequent phases of economic expansion, however, Albanians gained access to elite occupational positions as a result of affirmative action politics in education and employment. This led to horizontally segmented divisions of labor, with Albanians and Serbs dominating different elite occupational sectors. Upper management in the industrial sector remained Serb-dominated, but the rise of Albanian managerial elites caused considerable intra-elite conflict (Cohen 2002, 62–69; Troch 2019).

Aziz Abrashi and Burhan Kavaja were typical products of Albanian upward social mobility under socialist Yugoslavia. Abrashi was among the first generation of Kosovo Albanians to gain a higher education degree in the early 1960s. Given that higher education in Kosovo itself was not available before the 1960s, this generation was trained at the University of Belgrade. Abrashi made a career in Kosovar economics and politics in the 1970s and is said to be one of the main architects of Kosovo's economic autonomy. He was also instrumental for the expansion of a string of processing activities under the banner of Trepça throughout Kosovo. He was finally appointed general director of Trepça in 1987 with the clear task to guide the company through the crisis (Antić 1987).[12] Abrashi brought with him Burhan Kavaja, who became director of the Stanterg mines. Another native of Mitrovica, Kavaja was part of a younger generation of educated Kosovo Albanians. He was a graduate of Mitrovica's technical high school, which had been established to train local mining experts. He then went on to gain a degree in mining engineering in Belgrade with a scholarship from Trepça. In the 1970s, he held various posts in Kosovo's provincial institutions and became a close associate of Abrashi (Lazarević 1987c).[13]

In addition to these changes at the executive management level, new generations of Albanian skilled miners staffed the expanding enterprise's line management. As a rule, these engineers and technicians stemmed from surplus agricultural population that had benefited from the social mobility made possible by mining. Their fathers had started to work as unskilled miners, which had given their sons the opportunity to study in one of the vocational education facilities in Mitrovica and become a skilled miner. The life story of Gani Osmani is illustrative. Osmani was born in 1962 in a mountain village near Stanterg. His father worked in the mine as an unskilled miner. The family moved from the village to the periphery of Mitrovica in 1965. Osmani himself obtained a degree from the technical high school in Mitrovica and was employed as mining technician in Stanterg immediately after his graduation in 1981.[14]

In Rothschild's conceptual framework, ethnically based claims and grievances are produced and aggravated by the dialectics of social mobility enabled by economic expansion in multi-ethnic societies. While during early phases of modernization subordinates experience frustrations of relative deprivation due to a widening gap with dominants, during later phases it is the dominants' turn to be afflicted by the sense of relative deprivation as they fear leap-frogging into positions of skilled and powerful positions. In this stage, "ethnic mobilization and countermobilization pursue

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each other" (Rothschild 1981, 120–121, quote on 121). Signals of relative deprivation among Serbian managerial elites in Trepça first came to the surface in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the decreasing number of South Slavs in management positions became a topic of concern in the enterprise. Some Serb managers went against the official party line and warned that the departure of Serbian experts was the result of ethnopolitical pressure. By the early 1970s, the dispute was settled to the advantage of the upcoming Albanian elite, but the topic remained lingering (Troch 2019). After the mass demonstrations of 1981, the issue of Serb emigration from Kosovo reappeared high on the political agenda. This time, the Serbian political leadership's evaluation that the emigration was the result of ethnic discrimination was officially endorsed. The federal party leadership imposed a set of concrete measures to stop the phenomenon (Ristanović 2019, 328–339, 350–357). Serb returnees received priority in employment procedures, enjoyed career development opportunities, and gained beneficial access to housing and education and employment for family members ("Program za akciju i konkretizaciju zadataka iz zaključaka devete sednice CK SKJ," *Trepča*, August 3, 1987; D. M. 1986; Radulović 1987c).

Against this background of ethnically reticulated patterns of socio-occupational mobility, the attacks on management outlined above carried obvious ethnic connotations. Burhan Kavaja recalls that opposition against reorganization measures in the mines was organized by a network of administration workers connected to the Serb-dominated security organs.[15] In upper-level political circles, charges were framed along lines of ethnically skewed employment practices. At the February 1988 session of the provincial committee of the League of Communists, Tomislav Sekulić, who was to become General Director of Trepça in the 1990s, connected the crisis in Stanterg to the insufficient expertise of new Albanian managers. He noted that they had received their education in Kosovar educational institutions of questionable standing and were infused with Albanian nationalism ("Opšta mobilizacija i vanredne mere," *Trepča*, February 29, 1988).[16] Similar implicit criticism informed the (unsuccessful) Yugoslav-wide call for specialists Trepça launched at this time. The call implied that local Albanian cadres were not capable of organizing production in a profitable manner (Radulović 1988e). Throughout 1988 and especially in the wake of the demonstrations of November 1988, claims about the lacking expertise and political deviance of Albanian cadres became widespread in local media (Nagavci and Radulović 1989; Vlahović and Smikić 1989). In its final evaluation of the miners' protests in Kosovo, the party endorsed this view. It concluded that economic cadres were insufficiently experienced and skilled and were nothing but strawmen of the separatist political elite.[17] In this line of argumentation, the miners' protests of the winter of 1988–1989 were the work of Albanian nationalists who had penetrated into the managerial structures ("Ocene i stavovi o masovnim protestnim okupljanjima i demonstracijama građana albanske narodnosti u novembru 1988. godine," *Trepča*, February 25, 1989).

Ethnicity became salient in debates on social mobility also beyond the narrow confines of the upper management. In the self-management organs of the Trepça mines, working groups were formed to establish the scope and whereabouts of Serbian employees leaving the enterprise. As a rule, these groups came to the officially sanctioned conclusion that people left the enterprise for financial and private reasons, but not because of ethnic discrimination. Such official evaluations were increasingly refuted by Serbian delegates, who claimed that the enterprise's employment politics deliberately obstructed the appointment of qualified and experienced Serbian experts. They found that the principle of ethnic proportionality in employment was completely skewed to the extent that skills and moral qualities became subordinated to ethnic ties (Radulović 1988c). In these discussions, the Stanterg mines were increasingly presented as a hotbed of anti-Serbian discrimination (Lazarević 1987d; 1987h). As one Serbian mining engineer put it, "There are talks in our work organization that there are no capable Serb cadres to fill the job positions, but this is not true. They exist, but they are not suitable to some because they do not nod their heads" (Đorđević 1988).

The debate also caused considerable grievances on the Albanian side. Albanian workers typically emphasized that Serbs left the enterprise out of financial opportunism. They were said to profit from the system in various ways. Some allegedly rented out their company flats and used company credit to build a house in Serbia. Others sold their houses in Kosovo for good money, moved to

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Serbia, but then returned to Kosovo under privileged conditions. The result was that while local Albanians were waiting for a job and a company flat for ages, returnees gained immediate access to housing and employment (Kpuska 1985a; Smikić 1988c). Some Albanian party members also expressed their frustration that Serbs who were employed under the new measures did not hold the required university degrees and thus took the jobs of unemployed but better qualified locals (Radulović 1987b).

The Relevance of Ethnicity in the Pits

Social Unrest in the Decaying Mines

In addition to tensions concerning the managerial elites, there was a lot of talk about rising unrest from below. The factory journal frequently reported about so-called subjective shortcomings at the shop floor. These included various forms of "non-work," ranging from absenteeism to idleness and vandalism. Such charges of workers' shortcomings were part and parcel of the discourse of Yugoslav self-management and the sociopolitical control exerted over workers. References to non-work featured prominently in the factory journal's evaluations of the mining crisis. It was argued that while objective factors, such as ore depletion and limited investments in mining, explained the failure to reach production plans, subjective factors "were the main reason for the situation in the collective" (Radonjić 1985).

In its most straightforward usage, non-work referred to idleness and lack of engagement at work. The symbol of poor work responsibility in the mines was absenteeism, which became a central theme in internal discussions of the mining crisis. During the summer season, 30% of the miners were reported absent, indicating the continuing reliance on seasonal recruitment of peasant migrants (Lazarević 1987e). In the Stanterg mines in particular, absenteeism was considered an enormous problem. In the summer of 1988, it was noted that half of the workforce in the mines was absent. With real wages dropping on a daily basis, many workers saw no more purpose in coming to work and invested instead in subsistence farming (Lazarević 1988d).

In the second half of the 1980s, authorities responded to limited labor motivation with interventions in employment politics and income distribution. The federal government imposed a wage freeze in unprofitable enterprises, which heavily affected loss-making enterprises in Trepça. Due to galloping inflation, between 1980 and 1987, real wages in the Stanterg mines dropped by 37% (Radulović 1988a). Official party reports noted that the dropping real wages "had brought a large number of workers to the bottom line of existence and threatened their work motivation."[18] The enterprise management also looked at labor rationalization measures. In evaluations of the dramatic production results for 1985, it was found that the enterprise and the Stanterg mines, in particular, hired people "who were of no added value" and that the same production results could be achieved with 30% less employees (Kpuska 1985b). With the arrival of new director Burhan Kavaja, the Stanterg mines announced stricter supervision and the lay-off of "technological surplus" labor ("Burhan Kavaja: Rudnik Trepča – Stručnost na proveri," *Trepča*, December 29, 1987). The mines envisaged 500 forced redundancies, a "delicate" endeavor considering that unemployment was skyrocketing (Lazarević 1988c). The management also stepped up the battle against absenteeism. The factory journal launched a campaign, publishing lists of employees who had been illegitimately absent (Lazarević 1987g). The management announced that 45 employees would be fired for absenteeism (Lazarević 1988a).

These measures were bound to create social unrest. As elsewhere in Yugoslavia, there was an upsurge in so-called work stoppages. Miners typically laid down work to protest against delays in payment of wages and to demand wage increases (Bursać 1987; Lazarević 1988b; Lepaja 1989; M. R. 1988; Radulović 1988b). The work stoppages, however, did not revolve only around material conditions. They also reflected frustration over the social degradation miners experienced when facing wage freezes and redundancies, limited access to proper housing, the lack of communal investments in the miners' settlements, and difficulties in securing employment for miners' children

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(Bursać 1988). Miners' frustration were also directed against other socio-occupational groups in the enterprise. Workers in metallurgy and processing industry were said to enjoy high wages and various benefits, while they were dependent on the concrete output produced by the miners (Lazarević 1987k). Such narratives of relative deprivation were also co-opted in the management echelons of the mines. The program for economic consolidation adopted by the workers' council of the Stanterg mines in March 1987 committed to step up productivity and attract expertise. In return, however, the mines demanded social support in the form of revisions of unfavorable debt installment plans, taxation reductions, and subsidies to modernize and expand mining ("Program ekonomske konsolidacije rudnika 'Trepča': Oslonac na sopstvene snage," *Trepča*, March 23, 1987). In the words of Burhan Kavaja, the mines "should get back at least a part of the investments it had made for years in support of the development of others" (Lazarević 1987f).

The Ethnic Grievances behind Miners' Unrest

Social cleavages reflecting frustrations over the lost social status of mining correlated with ethnicity in particular ways. Until the late socialist period, mining in Kosovo remained an important valve for the absorption of surplus agricultural population. The continued migration from the rural hinterlands to the mines is one factor explaining the ethnic homogenization of mines in the Trepça complex. While the mine of Stanterg drew its unskilled labor from the predominantly Albanian Shala mountain area, the Kopaonik mines relied on the majority Serbian-populated area north of Mitrovica. The mines in Central Kosovo were more mixed, reflecting the ethnic composition of their hinterland.

The Stanterg mine counted as an overwhelmingly Albanian mine. In 1985, 82.5% of the 3,500 employees in the mines were Albanian, against 13.7% Serbs ("Komunisti Starog Trga o iseljavanju Srba i Crnogoraca: Pritisaka nije bilo," *Trepča*, March 18, 1985). It was further reported that the national composition of the workforce in some units was completely disproportional and that there was a number of mono-ethnic Albanian units (Lazarević 1987d). The Albanian dominance in Stanterg, moreover, became more and more pronounced. Serbian delegates in the enterprise cell of the League of Communists warned that if the current pace of Serbian departure was continued, the mine would be "ethnically pure" in 15 years (Lazarević 1987i).

The increasingly mono-ethnic nature of the Stanterg mines allowed the ethnic framing of sentiments of resentment caused by the crisis of mining. From the Albanian perspective, mining decay went hand in hand with discrimination against the Albanian population. Kosovo Albanian accounts emphasize that the concentration of Albanians in mining was part of the retaliatory policy of the Yugoslav Communists against the Albanian-populated Shala region. This region is located to the northeast of Mitrovica and had been a hotbed of Albanian anti-partisan resistance. It is emphasized that Albanians were forced to work in the mines for disproportionally low wages and to either commute without proper public transport or move to the decayed dormitories and barracks in the miners' settlements, while Serbs gained access to more prestigious jobs in metallurgy or processing industries and enterprise housing in the city (Hajrizi 2011, 464).

Also from a Serbian perspective, the ethnic homogenization of the Stanterg mines became an ethnically framed topic of concern. It was connected to broader fears of Albanian majorization and the securitization of Albanian separatism in the province. Reports of the August 1985 strike in the Stanterg mines referred to the harmful work of anti-socialist (parlance for Albanian separatist) elements in the mines. Sabotage, vandalism, and theft of social property were claimed to be widespread in the pits (Lazarević 1986b). In evaluating production failures in the Stanterg mines, sociopolitical activists referred to "saboteurs and enemies" in line management (Lazarević 1987h). Communist party cells also associated the growing unrest in the mines with the underground presence of Albanian illegal separatist organizations and strategies to employ anti-socialist elements (Abazi 1985). In this line of reasoning, the decay of mining was directly related to the infiltration of Albanian separatism.

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Part II: The Politicization of Ethnicity among Kosovo Miners (1988–1989)

Countering Serbian Ethnopolitical Demands

The preceding part of this article has demonstrated the structural salience of ethnicity in the context of mining recession, both in tensions surrounding managerial elites and in social unrest from below. In this section, I demonstrate that Serb ethnopolitical mobilization in the second half of 1988 provoked counter-mobilization in Trepça mining. I identify three external triggers that are necessary to understand the politicization of ethnicity in the mines.

First, in the summer of 1988, the mobilization of the Kosovo Serb political movement gained momentum and brought the ethnopolitical question of the status of Kosovo high on the agenda (Vladisavljević 2008, 134–144). It also entered the real worlds of the Trepça mining communities. On August 6, 1988, traditionally celebrated as miners' day, a protest rally of Kosovo Serbs took place in Zvečan/Zveqan. This was a Serb-majority village just north of Mitrovica where the central management of the Trepça mines was located. One month later, another protest rally was held in Zvečan. The rallies called for the re-establishment of Serbian territorial integrity, the resignation of officials from Kosovo and Vojvodina who opposed constitutional amendments, and the protection of Serbian interests against Albanian separatism. Little or no references were made to local concerns (Radulović 1988d; Simić and Blagojević 1988). As will become clear below, Albanian miners regularly referred to these rallies to legitimize their own social mobilization.

Second, the amendments to the Serbian and Kosovo constitutions, which would reduce the autonomy of Kosovo, were discussed in workers' assemblies. This was part of the participatory democratic system socialist Yugoslavia prided itself on. In most of the work collectives, the public discussions followed the script and supported the amendments, without any substantial discussion. In some of the factory units, however, it came to "dynamic discussions" when majority Albanian workers' assemblies rejected the constitutional amendments (Abazi 1988a; Kpuska 1988). In the zinc metallurgy factory, which was portrayed as a hotbed of Albanian counterrevolutionary activism already in 1981, the public discussion led to complete ethnic polarization. Already in the introduction to the public discussion, it was claimed that any changes to the constitution of 1974 were anti-Albanian and, as such, not in line with the Titoist legacy. This provoked a stormy applause from the Albanian workers, while Serbs left the meeting (Lazarević 1988e). At roughly the same time, on October 10, 1988, the highly anticipated 17th session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists publicly held the Kosovo political leadership accountable for failures in the implementation of the measures to address the crisis. This seriously increased pressure on the Kosovo leadership to resign and drop their opposition against the constitutional amendments (Ristanović 2019, 506–510). These political developments were followed with great anxiety in Trepça.

Finally, the increasingly sensationalist and biased media reporting also intensified the politicization of ethnicity in the enterprise. Serbian newspapers played a central role in spreading myths that confirmed ethnic anxieties and grievances over Kosovo (Mertus 1999). They also cemented racist anti-Albanian tropes in reporting on squander of Yugoslav financial means, high birthrates, and genocidal and sexual violence against Serbs (Bracewell 2000; Guzina 2003, 36–37). These tendencies also infected local media. The main Serbian-language newspaper in Kosovo, *Jedinstvo*, in an increasingly open manner reported on ethnopolitical divisions in local politics and factories. It also brought dramatic stories of Serbs leaving the province, unfair application of the national key in employment procedures, and ethnic purification of villages. Even the factory journal, which previously followed the dominant party line and reported on ethnic divisions only vaguely and indirectly, in 1988 gave a prominent voice to Serbian views on some of the themes discussed above. This culminated in the reporting on the November demonstrations, when *Jedinstvo* was quick to emphasize the organized and political nature of the demonstrations (Vlahović e.a. 1988). With some delay, the factory journal came with a similar assessment. The biased reporting in Serbian

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media was a central frustration among the Albanian miners on strike during the winter of 1988–1989.

Ethnopolitical Realignments within the Mining Enterprise

In order to understand the final step toward ethnopolitical mobilization in the Stanterg mines in the autumn and winter of 1988–1989, I suggest looking at socio-occupational realignments within the organizational structure of the self-managed enterprise. During the crisis-ridden second half of the 1980s, both executive management and sociopolitical elites in the Trepça mines attempted to co-opt anti-bureaucratic resentment in order to strengthen bonds with the shop floor. As elsewhere in Yugoslavia, and among Kosovo Albanians even more so, after a decade of differentiation, the traditional party leadership was rapidly losing influence to new political actors (Vladisavljević 2008, 202). The newly appointed executive management, put on the defense from sociopolitical elites within the enterprise and beyond, appeared ready to fill this gap.

Against this background of power struggles, the accusations of financial malversations and power abuse to the address of the managerial elites should in fact be seen as a failed attempt by the party representatives to reaffirm the bond with miners. However, party representatives had to concede that "bureaucratic-technocratic structures" succeeded in channeling the dissatisfaction from below for their own purposes.[19] Facing increasingly hostile encroachments from party representatives in the enterprise and the state structures, General Director Aziz Abrashi was quick to express understanding for workers' dissatisfaction with the federal consolidation measures (Lazarević 1987b). He asserted himself as a spokesperson of the workers' demands in lobbying for the relaxation of these measures and fending off social unrest (Abazi 1987c).

In the period between the miners' demonstrations of November 1988 and the strike of February 1989, managerial tensions within the mining enterprise gained momentum. The institutional setup of the complex socialist enterprise, a product of the economic reforms of the 1970s, was conducive in structuring these tensions. The mines of Stanterg constituted a Basic Organization of Associated Labor (BOAL), which was an independent economic and technological entity with its own self-management bodies and party organization. The Trepça enterprise as a whole was a Complex Organization of Association Labor, comprising different mines, metallurgy, chemical industry, and processing factories. It had three central institutions. The Central Workers' Council was made up of representatives of the workers' councils of the participating BOALs. The management board was comprised of departmental directors presided by a general director. The action conference, finally, coordinated the party organizations within the BOALs. These central institutions formed an arena for competition between the enterprise entities (BOALs), led by executives who tended to be quite powerful and independent figures (Musić 2021, 51–70).

One such confrontation at the Central Workers' Council of December 14, 1988, took an unexpected turn toward ethnic polarization in a discussion on the November demonstrations, or what the factory journal called an "unnecessary polemic about questions that had not been on the agenda" (Abazi 1988b). One of the speakers was Tomislav Milašinović, the Serbian director of planning in the central administration entity, which was a separate entity in the complex enterprise structure. He argued that the production plans had not been realized and explicitly pointed at the harmful effect of the miners' protests, adding that the miners had been manipulated. This provoked an angry reply by Burhan Kavaja in defense of himself and the miners. Other Albanian factory directors rebutted the negative evaluations of the production results, insinuating that Milašinović purposely twisted the numbers. General Director Abrashi was reserved in his comment, but noted that the central administration was preoccupied with politics instead of business. Later in the discussion, Milorad Laketić, the Serbian deputy director of the central administration, launched a head-on attack against the Albanian executive management. He combined ethnic and social grievances and frustrations. Tapping into miners' dissatisfaction, he noted that the management was guilty of typical bureaucratic malversations at a time when miners barely survived on their

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wages. In an attempt to connect the issue to Serbian fears of Albanian leap-frogging, he added that Kavaja and Abrashi obstructed the work of young and creative cadres and promoted Albanian nationalists to decision-making positions. Finally, he connected his criticism to broader Serbian ethnopolitical mobilization over the Kosovo question, insinuating that Abrashi and Kavaja were hand puppets of the provincial leadership who had manipulated the miners into the November demonstrations (Smikić 1988b). Kavaja fiercely objected to the statements. He returned Laketić's accusations of poor management, claiming that Laketić himself had mismanaged the Stanterg mine during his previous stint in the mines' management. Kavaja also stood up for the miners, arguing that they had acted on their own behalf and with dignity. By now, Kavaja openly co-opted the sentiments of resentment among the miners, arguing that Laketić's claims were an offense to all miners (Abazi 1988b).

Such ethnically framed tensions between executives in different units of the complex enterprise were not entirely uncommon. Earlier research on social unrest in Trepça in the late 1960s has identified elements of ethnic polarization in intra-elite tensions between established Serbian managerial elites and upcoming Albanian managers (Troch 2019). What was new in the power struggles during the winter of 1988–1989, however, was that the Albanian executive management co-opted the structural salience of ethnicity in Kosovo mining and counter-mobilization against Serbian ethnopolitical mobilization over Kosovo to establish a strong ethnopolitical alliance with the miners. The institutional setup of self-management in the Stanterg mines was instrumental in this process. A week after the critical meeting of the Central Workers' Council, a seven-hour-long (!) assembly was held in the canteen of the Stanterg mines. An estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Albanian miners gathered in the presence of representatives of local party bodies, as well as the provincial and Serbian League of Communists. The discussion nicely captured how the alliances were shifting. The assembly started according to the usual script. Director Kavaja presented the economic situation in the mines, arguing that the collective had stepped up production and rationalized costs. Then, representatives of party cells within the enterprise repeated their claim that the miners' demonstrations were not anti-Yugoslav and in fact stood up for the Titoist legacy. The interventions from the audience, however, did not go as anticipated. The miners criticized the openly nationalist character of Serbian protest rallies, rejected media claims that their protests were orchestrated, and opposed the amendments to the constitutional autonomy of Kosovo. The discussants also addressed latent ethnic grievances within the mining community, arguing that Serbs were leaving Kosovo for opportunistic reasons and not because of ethnic discrimination. They also emphasized that Serbs leaving Kosovo were free to come back "on the condition that they return all the wealth they had gathered and that they do not request armchairs [an administrative job] but go down into the pits." Party-state representatives tried to return the focus of the assembly to the usual talk of labor discipline and reforms, but to no avail. In the end, Burhan Kavaja confirmed the authority he had established over the miners, having them applaud their colleagues who had crossed the party lines before closing the meeting (Radulović and Lazarević 1988; Smikić 1988c).

By the beginning of 1989, two opposing ethnically framed positions were taking shape in different segments of the enterprise's institutional setup. One was critical of the Albanian management and the miners' demonstrations and emerged in the enterprise's central-level party and self-management institutions. At a meeting of the party organization at the central enterprise level on January 5, 1989, discussants tapped into miners' resentment and ethnically framed sentiments of relative deprivation. They blamed engineers and managers for "clientelism and building nests of bureaucracy and hostility." Milorad Laketić repeated his combined ethnic and anti-bureaucratic attack on the "the mono-national management." Party representatives from the Stanterg mines tried to oppose these ethnicized charges, holding on to earlier interpretations that the miners had always acted in the interest of the socialist Yugoslav ideology: "The workers of Stanterg are not nationalists, they live on the edge of existence in very difficult and inhumane conditions" (Kpuska 1989). Such evaluations of the events as socially just and not ethnically motivated were, however, increasingly sidelined. The factory journal started putting pressure on the local party network to

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denounce the November demonstrations as anti-socialist and to hold the management accountable (Radulović 1989). This was also the official verdict of the November demonstrations the provincial committee of the League of Communists reached on February 13 ("Ocene i stavovi o masovnim protestnim okupljanjima i demonstracijama građana albanske narodnosti u novembru 1988. godine," *Trepča*, February 25, 1989).

In response to the increased pressure within the enterprise and beyond, the nascent ethnopolitical alliance between miners, management and sociopolitical organizations in the Stanterg mine was consolidated. Following a new strike in Stanterg after the ousting of Azem Vllasi from the party, on February 4, 1989, the provincial leadership convened a workers' assembly in front of some 1,000 Albanian miners. While the purpose was to reconfirm the party's control over the miners, the meeting evolved in a completely different direction. The miners vehemently countered Serbian ethnopolitical mobilization. They expressed outrage with the way their protests were framed in media and political circles. They repeated that they were loyal to Tito's Yugoslavia, criticized the nationalist tendencies at Serbian rallies, and opposed upcoming constitutional amendments. These reactions were amplified by the sentiments of resentment and frustration among the miners caused by the failed expectations of Yugoslav development. As one of them put it, "Tito called us work heroes for the work we do […], while now some irresponsible people call us demonstrators" (Abazi 1989). One day later, the top management and party representatives discussed the events in the presence of the provincial party leadership. Aziz Abrashi and other Albanian directors by now fully sided with the miners, arguing that "the demands of the working class of Trepča could not be disparaged" and that it was "incomprehensible" that the Serbian and federal leaders showed no understanding for the miners. Abrashi connected the ethnically framed miners' resentment to politicized ethnicity, arguing that the frontal attacks on the miners *and* on the Albanian people as a whole should stop (Nagavci and Radulović 1989). The underground strike of February 1989 was the culmination of this ethnopolitical mobilization.

Conclusion

This article has provided a three-pronged explanation for the ethnopolitical mobilization among Kosovo Albanian miners in the winter of 1988–1989. It combines structural conditions related to shifting cultural divisions of labor, ethnopolitical entrepreneurship, and mobilization and power struggles and divisions within the particular institutional setup of the enterprise. It suggests that this approach can be valuable to study other cases of intersecting social and ethnopolitical mobilization.

First, the article has pointed at the structural conditions explaining the rising salience of ethnicity in Kosovo mining. More particularly, it has shown that the recession of mining during the 1980s concurred with a particular phase in the expansion of Kosovo mining when the gap between subordinates and dominants was narrowed. In this context, ethnically framed claims and grievances over relative deprivation became readily available in tensions among the managerial elites and miners' unrest.

The increased salience of ethnicity in contexts of mining decay, however, does not automatically give rise to the politicization of ethnicity. This article brought in two additional steps explaining the outright ethnopolitical mobilization taking place in the Stanterg mines in the winter of 1988–1989. First, Serbian ethnopolitical mobilization during Slobodan Milošević's rise to power, which gained momentum in the summer and fall of 1988, provoked counter-mobilizations among the Kosovo Albanian miners against increasingly politicized and nearby movement of Kosovo Serbs, public debates on constitutional amendments, and sensationalist anti-Albanian tropes in media reporting. These external triggers politicized the social mobilization of Kosovo miners, leading to the protest march of November 1988.

For the final step toward ethnopolitical mobilization, which culminated in the miners' strike of February 1989, it is necessary to take into consideration socio-occupational realignments taking shape in the particular decision-making structures of the mining enterprise. Against a background

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of power struggles in the enterprise, the executive management and the miners both found themselves on the defensive against party representatives and managerial competitors. Making use of the institutional setup of the complex and self-managed enterprise, they established a strong ethnopolitical alliance, which drew on ethnic grievances conditioned by the dialectics of social mobility through mining expansion in socialist Kosovo and Kosovo Albanian counter-mobilization.

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Notes

1 Oral History Kosovo, *Burhan Kavaja*, part 3, October 30, 2020, https://oralhistorykosovo.org/burhan-kavaja/. This narrative is also dominant among other participants in the strike. See the series of interviews on Oral History Kosovo on the miners' strike, https://oralhistorykosovo.org/research/miners-strike-1989/ (Accessed April 5, 2024.)
2 Archives of Serbia (AS), f. Đ2–PK SKK, box 49: "Ocene i stavovi o masovnim protestnim okupljanjima i demonstracijama gradjana Albanske narodnosti" (February 11, 1989); AS, f. Đ2–PK SKK, box 48: "Ocene i stavovi o aktuelnoj političko-bezbednosnoj situaciji u SAP Kosovo i zadaci Saveza komunista" (April 1, 1989).
3 AS, f. Đ2–CK SKK, box 45: "Informacija o idejno-političkim pitanjima ostvarivanja društveno-ekonomskog razvoja u 1986. godini i osnovama razvoja u 1987. godini" (December 10, 1986). Quote on p. 2.
4 AS, f. Đ2–CK SKK, box 45: "Aktuelna idejno-politička kretanja u pokrajini i zadaci Saveza komunista Kosova" (February 27, 1987); AS, f. Đ2–PK SKK, box 46: "Informacija o aktuelnim problemima društveno-ekonomskog razvoja" (September 18, 1987).
5 AS, f. Đ2–CK SKK, box 57: "Analiza proizvodne i ekonomsko-finansijske situacije SOUR – RMHK Trepča" (February 1988), p. 21.
6 AS, f. Đ2–CK SKK, box 46: Discussion statement by Aziz Abrashi at the 11th session of the provincial committee, September 18, 1987.
7 AS, f. Đ2–CK SKK, box 57: "Analiza proizvodne i ekonomsko-finansijske situacije SOUR – RMHK Trepča" (February 1988), p. 17.
8 AS, f. Đ2–CK SKK, box 57: "Analiza proizvodne i ekonomsko-finansijske situacije SOUR – RMHK Trepča" (February 1988).
9 Criticism against the management is particularly evident in the statements by Tomislav Sekulić and Petar Kostić.
10 In a recent oral history interview, Burhan Kavaja recalls these charges. This indicates their social salience.
11 Quotes from the comments by Radojica Vučurović.
12 See also the documentary *Njeriu i tokës sonë: Aziz Abrashi*, Radio Televizioni i Kosovës, March 22, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reqe0eWjD9c.
13 See the interview with Kavaja at Oral History Kosovo, October 30, 2020, https://oralhistorykosovo.org/burhan-kavaja/.
14 Oral History Kosovo, *Gani Osmani*, October 26, 2020, https://oralhistorykosovo.org/sq/gani-osmani/.
15 Oral History Kosovo, *Burhan Kavaja*, part 3, October 30, 2020, https://oralhistorykosovo.org/burhan-kavaja/.
16 At the same meeting, this evaluation was rejected by Minir Dushi, himself one of the first Albanian university-trained engineers at Trepça.
17 AS, f. Đ2–PK SKK, box 50: "Aktuelna privredna kretanja u pokrajini i zadaci Saveza komunista Kosova" (April 27, 1989), p. 19.

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18 AS, f. Đ2–PK SKK, box 50: "Aktuelna privredna kretanja u pokrajini i zadaci Saveza komunista Kosova" (April 27, 1989), quote on p. 18.
19 AS, f. Đ2–PK SKK, box 55: Discussion statement by Husamedin Azemi at a joint meeting of the Presidency of the provincial committee of the Kosovo League of Communists and the Presidency of the Council of Trade Unions of Kosovo (August 24, 1987).

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