

DUBRAVKA STOJANOVIĆ POPULISM THE SERBIAN WAY

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DUBRAVKA STOJANOVIĆ

**POPULISM THE SERBIAN WAY**

Belgrade, 2017



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# SERBIA – THE VANGUARD OF POPULISM

Finally, one thing in which the Balkans have had an advantage over Europe! Populism. Ever since that word entered general circulation, I have been getting ready to proclaim Serbia, and perhaps the entire Balkans, the vanguard of populism. To show that even we excel in something, that even we can explain to someone what's waiting for them, what you – latecomers – have to expect, and how you might proceed!

The beginning of populism in Serbia dates from the early 1870s, from the populist socialism of Svetozar Marković and the radicalism of Nikola Pašić. After this, such regimes reproduced themselves, with very short intervals, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through socialism, Milošević, all the way to Aleksandar Vučić. That is what gives me that superiority I mentioned at the beginning, because I have that know-how which you are just beginning to acquire.

What are the conclusions? Populism is not a codified ideology, it can be right-wing or left-wing, but its key characteristic is collectivist emotion which sucks in every individual, which crushes every pluralism. A populist movement always speaks in the name of an entire people, and the possibility that you can remain outside and think differently is excluded. It is a deception – it originates from economic and social embitterment as a movement against the establishment, but it will, in the end, additionally impoverish the population and substantially enrich the élite. As identity politics, it is a monistic and essentialist call to be, as the Brexiteers would say, one's own man in one's own country. How familiar that sounds to us!

In populism, everything is clear; as a smart person once said – when the present is simple, the future is complicated. It is a closed system which sees everything outside as hostile, and because of

that it bases homogenization on the production of conflict. The fences which it puts up are not so much against those others, or at least not at first; they are there because of “us”, to squeeze us more firmly, so make us feel warmer. Then we no longer have any need for institutions, nor for laws which stand unnecessarily in the way of the primordial needs of our nation. Institutions are therefore destroyed or “hijacked” by the authorities; they survive but with a completely changed content, misused, exploited and swindled. Populism is an auto-immune disease, says Brigitte Granville, in which a democracy produces forces which turn against it.

I well remember the time when that happened in Serbia after Milošević came to power at the end of the 1980s. Even now I get goose-bumps when I recall the euphoria, the trance, the huge feeling that somehow things had become easier for everyone, because suddenly everything was permitted, as if everybody had taken off very tight shoes. And that was what was most seductive and most dangerous: the feeling that everything was possible. How, then, to go against that? As in modern medicine – by prevention. By preventing it, at any cost, from coming to power in the first place. And if that has already happened, then prepare yourself for the fact that you must do everything over again from the beginning. After populism there is no repentance.

One of the ways to fight against populism is to get to know it and recognize it in time. It is true that it can take many different forms and that it is not a codified doctrine, but those writers who say that it has its own internal logic are correct. If we agree that it is not an ideology, then it would be most accurate to accept the definition of it being a way we think about politics. It is a model which can be dragged across mutually very distant political conceptions from which a system can be made.

Thus, right at the beginning, it is important to stress that populism is indeed a system, notwithstanding that it derives its greatest support by presenting itself precisely as anti-systemic. Its rhetoric is marked by one prefix: anti. It presents itself as anti-urbanist, anti-modernizing, anti-immigrant, anti-capitalist, anti-individualistic, anti-Semitic, anti-communist... But herein lies one of its biggest paradoxes – albeit showing itself as “anti”, as rebellious, it is in fact a very firm system, authoritarian in its very essence. It swallows up all before it, depositing its “credo” over everything. It annuls institutions, tramples over laws, alters collective memory,



constructs a new identity for a nation, and pokes its nose into the private affairs of its citizens.

For this reason, this book contains texts covering a wide range of themes. The aim is precisely to show how the different forms of populism, separated at different times by an entire century, function in a very similar way, destroying all before them. These texts discuss how populist systems annul institutions and procedures which, in full view of their contemporaries, sink into quicksand. This is a very important characteristic of populism, because it retains democratic and parliamentary institutions, laws and procedures, but fills them in their entirety with its own content, thereby essentially annulling them.

That is possible thanks to the obligatory characteristics which all populisms display, in the first place thanks to anti-individualism and anti-pluralism, which, for populism, make a people and a society into monoliths. And if a people is a monolith then there is no space for any “other”. This book therefore includes a chapter on the political use of the *zadruga* (i.e. cooperative, extended family) in Serbian political history, because that traditional form of social organization has for more than a hundred years been seen as an ideal one, precisely because of its collectivism, egalitarianism and the complete control which it makes possible.

Although the chapter on the urbanization of Belgrade could, at first glance, appear to differ from other themes in this book, it turns out that it is in fact the key one. The city is a fixation of every populism, both left-wing and right. The city is the enemy. In it can be seen the social elite and establishment against which populism is rising up, but also visible is the “alienated” part of society which has lost its national identity, and fallen away from the nation. For that reason, urban history is rightly an important litmus test for studying the relationship between society and politics, because the streets of the city also reveal what is unspoken. The same can be said of the attitude towards the most sensitive parts of society, such as women and children. Patriarchalism is a key ingredient of nationalist populism, which sees in women’s liberation the destruction of the desirable traditional society, and for this reason the position of women is one of the most reliable measures of the degree of modernization of a society.

The second part of the book is devoted to research into historical memory. Memory is “applied history”, the way in which the

present chooses necessary content from the past in order to make itself look better. In that, of course, the Serbian case is neither new nor unique. But what makes it interesting is the fact that, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Yugoslavia and Serbia, there were several dramatic changes of regime, that these took place over a short period of time, and that, for historians, this has provided a true laboratory for research into rapid changes in memory. As someone put it – our past has often been more uncertain than our future. Analyses of memory are important also because historical awareness comprises an important ingredient for the construction of national identity, which is the obsession of every populism, particularly of the right-wing kind. Thus, changes in the model of memory speak not only of the past itself but of the present.

For this reason, the entire second half of this book is devoted to memory, as one of the populist symptoms. Along with that, analyses of memory also show the consequences of populism, because the Yugoslav wars were created precisely with the help of changes to the historical matrix. From the moment when the revision of memory began in the 1980s, it was clear that the aim was a change in relations between the Yugoslav peoples by tampering with the states and borders between the republics which comprised Yugoslavia. Memory served as a tool for the psychological preparation for war. And when the war was over, the arguments which had underpinned it returned to the sphere of memory – history became a continuation of the war by other means. It is here, simmering quietly on the back burner. Like it's waiting for the next opportunity.

As can be seen in the bibliographical notes at the end of the book, almost all the texts have previously been published in periodicals and anthologies. I am grateful to Svetlana Lukić and Svetlana Vuković for their idea that it would be good to collect all these texts in a book to be published in English, so that Serbian examples could be offered to the public abroad. Thanks also to Professor Ulf Brunnbauer and Dr. Heidrun Hamersky of the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies and the Graduiertenschule für Ost und Südosteuropastudien who enabled me to spend some time in the University of Regensburg, where, in its excellent library, I found books unobtainable in Belgrade.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the English-language translators. Not only because that task is exceptionally difficult, particularly when one needs to translate the 19<sup>th</sup> century formu-

lations used by the majority of this book's protagonists. That task also requires joint work during which I became friends with all of the translators. Aleksandar Bošković is truly a friend from "way back", a pal from school, and I am grateful to him for translating a large number of my texts. I have enjoyed continual collaboration during recent years with Ivica Pavlović who has borne and endured everything heroically. Two of the texts were translated by members of the "Belgrade English" community – Esther G. Polenezzer and John White. Thanks to them for being here, with us, and for, with such skill and passion, helping what we have to say reach an international readership.

This book arrives at least two years late in relation to the initial agreement with Peščanik, and I take this opportunity to offer my apologies again to Svetlana Lukić and Svetlana Vuković and thank them for their patience. However, it seems to me that, in this way, it has turned out quite well and that, sometimes, anything that one does not have to do today can indeed be left until tomorrow. I am not saying this to justify myself, for justification there is none. I say this because things on the global political scene have changed significantly since the time we began to discuss "The Book". Arguments which we have been able to hear during the Brexit campaign and Trump's election campaign, from Trump now that he's in power, the Catalonia crisis... all these are events which have made newly urgent a re-examination of populism and its devastating consequences.

To us in Serbia, all these stories are too well-known – we have heard them so many times. They were first analysed by Nebojša Popov in his superb study *Srpski populizam. Od marginalne do dominante pojave / Serbian populism. From a marginal phenomenon to a dominant one*, which was published in the weekly magazine *Vreme* just when it needed to be – in 1993. The problem is that we can now follow these populist politics in the world's most developed countries, the most urbane, the most literate, those with the biggest percentage of highly-educated people, founded on democratic traditions, enjoying the highest per capita income... According to sociological and political theory this neither could nor should have ever happened. Earlier, we Serbs were able to tell ourselves that everything which has happened to us was a result of our incurable backwardness, inability to modernize, refusal to change. But now, before our very eyes, Trump is destroying

institutions and forcibly attempting to change laws; Catalonia is demolishing the Spanish Constitution and trying through a policy of *fait-accompli* to evade political struggle. Great Britain is “returning to itself”, whatever that may mean.

Thus this book, albeit belated, has arrived right on time. To present abroad the less well-known Serbian case and to deliver a warning – for it is not true that populism leads nowhere. It does lead somewhere. Right into catastrophe.

Belgrade, October 18, 2017

I

**POLITICS AND SOCIETY  
IN MODERN SERBIAN  
HISTORY**



## OIL ON WATER

*To study history, you need to turn your back decisively on the past and start living, because science is not made in an ivory tower, but out of life itself. It is made by living people immersed in the present.*

Lucien Febvre, *Combats pour l'histoire*

Why would I decide to begin the examination of two centuries of the modern Serbian state with this, almost heretical, quote by Lucien Febvre, the creator of modern historical scholarship? Because I believe that the historian's task is to search the past for answers to the questions posed by the present, to help rationalize current events based on his or her study of the past and offer knowledge about the cause of events and their origin to the public. The historian primarily has a duty to influence his or her epoch by giving contemporaries the most valuable elements for solutions to their problems. The erudite accumulation of details from the past is an outdated scientific concept. Therefore, for me, the fundamental question is not the one that one could hear at the Candlemas celebration of 2004, "how do we face Karađorđe," but rather, what do we historians, on the basis of our knowledge and competence, have to offer Serbia as a response to the problems it faces today, two centuries after the struggle for a modern state began. This is why I begin this essay with this "methodological heresy," because I understand the opening of dialogue about Serbian history also as a dialogue about the purpose of historical scholarship.

The list of problems Serbia is facing today is not short. However, among the crucial ones is the problem of democratization. More precisely, today's obstacles to the introduction of democracy urge historians to consider whether Serbia has a democratic tradition; were there periods in its modern history that could be defined as democratic; how these periods began and how they ended; what was the model of democracy applied in Serbia; what were its problems; what were the obstacles; was democracy introduced

without the social requirements necessary for its success? This essay is both an attempt at addressing these issues, and primarily, as the book's subtitle indicates, an invitation to dialogue.

Namely, it is an attempt at engaging in a dialogue that already exists. More precisely, engaging in a dispute that has yet to become a dialogue, a dispute that can be followed if one carefully reads academic collections, journals, and, less often, monographs. What we are dealing with are two opposing interpretations of Serbia's democratic potential, two very different visions of recent Serbian history. A number of Serbian historians publicly argue that the Serbian state was from its inception open to Western concepts of liberalism, parliamentarianism and democracy and that the Western-educated political elite fully accepted the Western model of development and modernization. By analyzing Serbian constitutions from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, written with the Belgian model in mind, as well as party manifestos which were just slightly adapted versions of the programs of their European role models, these researchers conclude that there is a stable continuity of democratic institutions in Serbia. Based on these analyses, they feel comfortable calling the decade before the First World War – the Golden Age of Serbian democracy, a time of full parliamentarianism, when Serbia was almost equal to its developed Western role models.

Another group of historians argues that the democratic problem in Serbia is exactly the opposite. They see the introduction of liberal constitutions, parliamentary institutions and democratic practices as only a facade that was hiding an undemocratic, authoritarian and pre-modern way of governing, a facade which was necessary so that Western democracies, primarily France and England, would give diplomatic support to Serbian unification ambitions. This was democracy as a means of achieving the national program. Analyzing the political practice that, according to them, lay behind the formal parliamentary system, they argue that the Serbian agrarian, patriarchal, economically and socially disadvantaged society had essentially anti-individualistic and pre-modern values which brought it closer to Russian populism, to collectivist, egalitarian, anti-modern and anti-Western projects than to parliamentary monarchy.

These two views of Serbian history also influenced the interpretation of almost the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to the first



group of historians, the Kingdom of Serbia's authentic democracy was broken by the creation of the Yugoslav state in 1918 when, by their account, because of disparate cultural, religious and political traditions, Serbian democratic heritage was violently suppressed. This interpretation further leads to the conclusion that communism was "brought on a Russian tank" to Serbia and Yugoslavia, forcibly imposed from without as a system completely opposed to Serbian democratic traditions. It follows that Slobodan Milošević's regime is only a perverted form of communism, something unfounded in the Serbian tradition, or even opposed to it – an incident.

The other group of historians draws from their concept of the 19<sup>th</sup> century completely opposite conclusions about the events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to them, Serbia wanted to impose its populist political model on other Yugoslav peoples, which led to a clash of concepts and the disintegration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941. Communism, according to them, did not come on a Russian tank, but was instead a consequence of an authentic revolution which Tito's partisans carried out in World War II. The success and endurance of the Yugoslav communist model is explained as a result of a successful fusion between the egalitarian and anti-individualistic tradition and the new authoritarian regime. That is why, for these historians, Slobodan Milošević's regime was just another stage of development of Serbian populism, and the war in former Yugoslavia only another anti-modernizing response of the Serbian society to the transition challenges posed by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The aim of this essay is to open additional questions related to this problem and offer possible answers for resolving this disagreement between historians. The problem is not simple, because if we analyze the historical reality, we will see that it was no less paradoxical than its subsequently constructed images and historiographical representations. Despite the fact that Serbian and Balkan political history were predominantly influenced by Western European political concepts and models, there are important differences and particularities that shaped the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century political history of the Balkans. One of these is the fact that in Serbia, as in most other Balkan countries, three different domains – government, different forms of civil society, and society as a whole – developed almost independently from one another, without any tangible links. In Western Europe, the development

of the middle class was the foundation on which the seeds of civil society were sown, and the two domains – by mutual influence and by fighting for their interests – put pressure on the government, gradually liberalizing it and expanding civil rights. In the Balkans, these processes of political modernization took a different turn. The modernization there did not begin with the interaction of economic, social, political, cultural and psychological factors, but was taken on suddenly, at the time of the 19<sup>th</sup> century national revolutions and the creation of nation states. These historical circumstances led to the emergence of the “reverse development model” in relation to the West. Political modernization preceded the economic and social one, producing over time a strong contrast between government institutions modeled on the West and the sluggish, poor, agrarian society. This is why in the Balkans the government appears as a substitute for society, becoming the main drive of development and modernization and most important source of individual influence, prestige and wealth.

That is why the political sphere was the first to be affected by the modernization process. Liberal political concepts began appearing in Serbia quite early, shortly after the state got its autonomy. The first signs of interest in Western European liberal ideas were reflected in the early translations of canonical works of modern European political literature. Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* was translated in 1844, and by mid-century the most important writings by Tocqueville, Constant, Mill, Bagehot, Bluntschli and Jellinek came out in Serbian. Liberal ideas were brought to Serbia by first-generation intellectuals who were, thanks to government scholarships, educated at Western universities. A number of them formed the first liberal political group that came into conflict with the Constitutionalist regime, and whose main request was for the center of power to be shifted from the State Council to the popularly elected parliament. It was they who in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century demanded the implementation of individual freedoms, separation of powers and the introduction of accountable, parliamentary government.

After the St. Andrew’s Day Assembly in 1858, when they helped overthrow the Constitutionalist regime, the first Serbian liberals in the 1860s fought for their political principles and in 1869 under the administration of Jovan Ristić, later the Liberal Party leader, helped institute the first Serbian constitution which

adopted the representative system and the principle of separation of powers. This Constitution, however, did not set up the legal prerequisites of full parliamentarism, but it did bring a number of crucial advances: a certain degree of ministerial accountability to the Assembly was introduced, as well as relatively broad suffrage and the Grand National Assembly, which together with the prince could have constitutional authority. Over the next two decades on these principles, with all the resistance, conflicts, and meandering, the domain of freedom in Serbia was widened. A new political generation, formed around the group which would later form the Progressive Party, led by Stojan Novaković, Milan Piroćanac and Milutin Garašanin, put themselves to the task of “Europeanizing Serbia”, modernizing it and introducing a series of liberal political reforms. The liberal ideology subsequently became the official state policy founded on basic principles of freedom of opinion, assembly and speech. These liberal political laws provided a basis, only four years after Great Britain (Chamberlain’s National Liberal Federation, founded in 1877, is considered the first modern political party) for establishing the first modern political parties in Serbia – the Radical, Progressive, and Liberal Parties.

After years of rapid modernization and sharp political friction, a general consensus was reached between the political parties and King Milan, leading to the adoption of a new constitution in 1888, which in its liberal essence was closest to the progressives’ draft of the act. The subsequent Radical-Party-oriented historiography incorrectly attributed this Constitution to the Radical Party, but it was actually a result of political liberalization under the Progressive Party governments, with the consent of King Milan Obrenović. This constitution was modeled on the 1831 Belgian constitution which was, among the continental European monarchies of the time, considered a cornerstone of classical constitutional and parliamentary monarchy. Despite some differences from the Belgian model, the 1888 Constitution is considered in legal history a pinnacle of political modernization and liberalization processes in Serbia. It remained in force only until 1894, but the political consensus reached for its adoption proved that the Serbian elite was seeking European parliamentary and liberal ideals.

After nearly a decade of severe political conflicts, the 1888 Constitution was again brought to force after the May Coup of 1903. The overthrow of the last of the Obrenović dynasty and the

restoration of the Karađorđević dynasty was followed by the return to the framework of a constitutional monarchy. The Constitution introduced a strict separation of legislative, executive, and judicial power, and unambiguously set the basic parliamentary requirement by which the government is formed by the parliamentary majority. This was a classic form of constitutional monarchy with a “soft separation of powers” in which the king and Parliament share legislative and budgetary authority.

The return of the liberal constitution reinforced the liberal laws passed during the progressive governments. Those were primarily freedom of opinion, assembly, and association, freedom of the press, and election law. Apart from securing basic rights, this also introduced universal suffrage in Serbia by a partially limited proportional system. This right was limited to men over 21, with a very lax means test which insured that only the poorest citizens were stripped of the right to participate in political life. The Press Law opened with an article which stated: “The press in Serbia is free.” The only explicitly specified limitation of this freedom was insulting a national or foreign monarch. All of these legal acts vindicate those historians who equate early 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbia with Western Europe, and do not see major obstacles in its democratic development.

Apart from the dynamic development of the state and its institutions, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia has been almost continuously developing different forms of civil society, as buffer zones between government institutions and society. If we accept Jürgen Kocka’s model in relation to Germany, then the emergence of the first civil society institutions could be traced back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when, as he claims, Germany saw the rise of discussion groups, literary salons, intellectual cafes, the first civic associations and the “second print revolution” marked by the emergence of the popular press. In this period Serbia also saw similar institutions – the salons attended by prominent citizens discussing art, ancient philosophy, history, astronomy and, as they used to say, the problems of modern society. Modeled on the Parisian salons, they produced translations of poems and stories from German, French and Italian. By the middle of the century, women’s salons also appeared, holding various lectures, and it is even noted that one high society lady held a lecture on the role of women in 18<sup>th</sup> century France and on modern educated Frenchwomen. In the

1860s, dynamic socialist circles also appeared in Belgrade, holding discussions about the socialist doctrine and contemporary books published in the West and in Russia.

The Constitution of 1903 brought a serious development of different associations. These were mostly professional, but over time, thanks to the liberal law on civil association, a range of youth and socialist societies sprang up, as well as the Animal Protection Society, the Society for the Advancement of Children, the Society for the Protection of Monuments, the Freethinking Priests' Society, the Society for Aiding Destitute Workers and various temperance societies. One particularly interesting association was the "Society for the Legal Solution of the Conspiratorial Issue", founded in 1904, which advocated the punishment of military conspirators who in 1903, after murdering the royal couple, staged a coup which brought about the introduction of parliamentary order. Its founders, brothers Milan and Maksim Novaković, were officers who felt that regicide cannot go unpunished, that the officers who swore an oath to the king they assassinated could not continue as active officers in an army that wants to retain its authority and that a democratic order cannot be founded on such an act. As the most steadfast opponents of the regime introduced in 1903, they founded what could be called the first political non-governmental organization in Serbia.

In the final decade before the First World War, an extremely important factor was the free press, as one of the cornerstones of civil society. Although from the 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers in Serbia were advanced, plentiful and of good quality, further progress was reached after the establishment of the 1903 order. In this year alone, 50 new publications were launched and this level of production was maintained right up to the First World War. Of all the newspapers, dailies grew the fastest: in 1905 there were 5, and already in 1911 there were 23. These dailies ranged from 4 to 8 pages, most of them were short-lived, and their circulation was also low (except for *Politika* which had a circulation of about 14,000, the others were around 1,000 copies). Most of the dailies belonged to political parties, but it cannot be said that they were party news-sheets. Editorials in those newspapers were penned by those parties' most prominent figures, who left a profound mark in our cultural history. Suffice it to say that in *Samouprava* there were fairly regular editorials by Stojan Protić, that in *Odjek* and

*Dnevni list* daily contributors included Ljuba Davidović, Jovan Skerlić, Milan Grol, Ljuba Stojanović, that in *Pravda* there were Pavle and Vojislav Marinković, and we can conclude that these were also the foremost writers of the Serbian intellectual scene. This period was also marked by extraordinary literary-political journals such as *Srpski književni glasnik*, *Delo*, *Arhiv pravnih i društvenih nauka*, which are part of this country's cultural canon and perhaps the highpoints of its cultural history. In addition to these institutions, one must not overlook the role of the University of Belgrade, founded in 1905, which was even at that time considered a bastion of the opposition. What also should not be underestimated is the role of student associations that from the beginning of the century often organized anti-government protests and took an active part in political and social life.

In contrast to this relatively rapid development of the state and even the early forms of civil society, stood an almost static, underdeveloped agrarian society. As Marie-Janine Calic demonstrates in her marvelous book *The Social History of Serbia*, like the other Balkan societies, Serbia did not go through what could be called delayed imitation of Western development, but instead in its modern history followed its own course in cultural, historical, social, and economic terms. What seems particularly interesting in Serbia's modern development is the fact that a country that did not shy away from drastic groundbreaking shifts in the modernization of its institutions, was not ready to apply similar reforms to its society to accelerate its exit from the pre-modern condition. As Calic shows, Serbian lawmakers were not willing to use legislation for the creative shift necessary for overall modernization, thereby, in fact, contributing to the survival of quasi-feudal social structures and contributing to social development slowdown.

This was primarily evident during the liberation of Serbian peasants from the Turkish form of feudalism. This process (1830-1839) is often called the most decisive European agrarian reform, but recent deeper analyses of this phenomenon show that those reforms brought antimodernizing and ossifying consequences for Serbian agrarian society. The Serbian peasant won the right to own the land on which he worked, but a series of provisions essentially prevented further social development. On the one hand family cooperatives were retained, and they involved the principles of collective ownership and enterprise, and as such they entered

the Civil Code of 1844. On the other hand these early laws also planned the division of cooperatives, which included dividing estates, leading to small farms which were irrational, unprofitable, and often even below the subsistence minimum. A special series of provisions drastically restricted the mobility of land ownership, which was supposed to protect the heavily indebted peasants who, in order to pay back their debts, rented out or sold their land. Essentially, this tied the peasants to the land, and the possibility of enlarging the property by buying land was significantly reduced. This also reduced social stratification in the countryside. As Calic points out, these “protective laws” were not unknown in other European countries, but because in Serbia they were introduced before the arrival of capitalism, they also acted as a particular and previously unknown obstacle to the development of capitalism.

These most important provisions of the agrarian law were in effect in Serbia until the 1930s. They ensured that small land holdings were kept, so in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a third of all plots covered less than 5 acres, while 2/5 of plots were between 5 and 12 acres. According to Marie-Janine Calic’s analysis, this meant that about 2/3 of the properties in Serbia had less land than what was necessary for minimum subsistence. Furthermore, most of the land was worked with primitive tools, with 3/4 of all the plows being wooden. Therefore, the farming technology of the country was reduced to shallow plowing that brought poor yields, placing Serbia among the lowest producers in Europe. This brought about other serious consequences. The shallow plowing technique involved extensive farming and constant deforestation in order to obtain arable land. All of this, especially the cutting of oak forests, endangered animal husbandry, especially pig farming, previously a pillar of Serbian exports and an important part of the population’s diet.

Weak yields led to the average rural family (which in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had about 6.2 members) not being able to produce enough food for its own consumption, let alone for sale, which significantly reduced the ability of exchanging goods for money on the market. This resulted in an overall lack of capital, further hampering the development of crafts and trade. The rural family remained trapped in a cycle of production and consumption, a kind of autarchic economy, forced to produce everything it needed, except for matches, kerosene and salt. Unable to increase

yields on small holdings, bare sustenance became the most important goal of the community.

According to Marie-Janine Calic, similar ossifying effects were brought about by the laws on crafts and trade. Many elements of the Law on Crafts introduced in 1847 regulated this industry until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, operating in an essentially anti-modernizing manner by limiting the number of master craftsmen who can form a guild, closing the market and preventing competition. A similar conclusion can be reached about the acts which regulated trade till the 1930s. Keeping the annual number of markets (village fairs) to a minimum reduced the flow of goods and hampered the sale of handiwork. Furthermore, the sale of foreign products, but also local handicraft articles, was repeatedly banned, consistently stifling market forces and keeping pre-modern commercial relations alive. These problems of national trade were related to the difficulties that Serbia faced in its foreign trade development. Thus, before the First World War, Serbia had the second worst foreign trade in Europe, ahead only of Russia. This means that not even joining international trade after 1878 significantly helped the expected economic progress.

Another social group that played a major role in democratizing Western Europe emerged very late in Serbia. This was the industrial entrepreneurial class. It was not before the 1890s that manufacturing plants started developing, largely by way of craft workshops expanding. According to statistical data, the largest part of industrial production before the First World War was the food industry (55%), followed by the textile industry (8%), electrical industry (7%) and construction materials industry (4%). Vibrant development came only after the Customs War with Austria-Hungary, when the number of industrial companies quadrupled, while the number of workers nearly tripled. Despite this development, the Serbian economy continued to be dominated by small companies, with little investment capital and poor equipment. For many reasons, similar to other Balkan countries until the First World War, Serbia saw no significant industrial growth which would be able to drive the development of the whole economy and society and lead to serious structural shifts. This is why there was no development of an entrepreneurial class, which would be fully financially independent from the state and would be, as in Western Europe, the cornerstone of modernization and democratization.



For this examination of obstacles to Serbian democratization, one very significant category of analysis is the citizen class. Before the First World War, Serbia had 22 cities with about 350,000 inhabitants in total, which was 12.69% of the total population. These were mainly small towns, so that six cities numbered between 10 and 20 thousand inhabitants, thirteen had between 5 and 10 thousand, and three cities had between 2 and 5 thousand inhabitants. Of the total Serbian population, 4.65% were artisans, 2.22% merchants and 1.89% civil servants. The largest city was Belgrade, which in 1910 had 90,000 inhabitants. Its population consisted of 24% civil servants, 23% craftsmen and 13% merchants, while the free professions accounted for 21% of the population.

When it comes to city dwellers, special attention should be paid to civil servants. This social group included all those who lived on a government salary, whether they worked in a government office, as teachers or university professors. This was the best educated social stratum which formed the backbone of the Balkan and Serbian elite. It was the leading social class which in itself, because of particular social conditions, synthesizes several types of elites known to developed societies. Most often, these were members of the intellectual elite educated at Western universities, who therefore gave the principal intellectual tone to social life, passed on different European concepts and models, formed the value system. At the same time, again as the best educated part of society, they were the ones who formed the political elite, who from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century carried modern political ideas and with a somewhat messianic ambition tried to apply them in their own country. Given the lack of other financially powerful social groups, government officials were the social elite, forming the class of well-off citizens.

From these facts stemmed some of the problems that would contribute to the stagnation of democratic development in Serbia, which shall be discussed later, but at this level of analysis, while we are inspecting Serbian society, it needs to be said that one of the biggest obstacles to democratization was exactly the fact that its main carriers were government officials, who were in every sense, even the existential one, dependent on the state. In a society which lacked a powerful financial and banking class, entrepreneurs, large landowners or industrialists, the brunt of the struggle for the expansion of freedoms and against government omnipotence fell

upon the class which was almost entirely dependent on the state: from the fact that the state educated it, enabled it social mobility, and thanks to this education brought it from small towns to Belgrade; to the fact that the state provided it the status of the leading social class. There were long periods over the last two centuries of Serbian history when the state used these facts widely, keeping in a sort of trap its intellectuals or those who should have in any way been active in suppressing the state and expanding the rights of citizens. But even in situations where the state was not abusing this fact, it is structurally clear that the class which was so tied to the state could never have the same strength for democratizing the country that in Western Europe was a feature of classes which forced the state to gradually retreat before the society and citizens. In countries where education was the main factor of social mobility, as it was in Serbia, one who had a monopoly on education (the state was virtually the only scholarship provider, very rarely could parents finance education at a foreign university) retained a sort of monopoly on social mobility, which was also dependent on government support. This way the best educated class entered a special type of agreement with the government, an agreement that could only be tested with great risk in the struggle for expanding human rights.

As representatives of the political elite, government officials also formed the first political organizations, and subsequently political parties. This fact critically shaped the history of the Serbian multiparty system. Party leaders came from the capital's narrow intellectual elite, and their personal relations were decisive in forming the party leadership. Political conflicts which later broke out in parties therefore had a private undertone and often, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to party splits, which is how political parties most commonly developed (typical examples are the National Radical Party in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Democratic Party in the 1890s, from which a number of smaller parties emerged). The fact that party conflicts occurred between former friends, often best men at each other's weddings, led to the fact that the private tone from the political parties spilled over into the overall political life, giving it a passion almost unknown in developed political societies. This political passion almost completely shaped everyday life, constantly creating the impression that this is a society obsessed with politics, a society in which politics

determined all other aspects of human existence. However, if one analyzes the political discourse, newspapers, proclamations, speeches, parliamentary debates, it is clear that, actually, there was no politics. Over the last two centuries, Serbian political discourse had little of what was programmatic and principled, there were very few political lines, very little consistency. Contemporaries in different epochs seemed to think that in Serbia everything was politically possible, or as Jovan Skerlić succinctly put it as early as 1906: “While in the rest of the world political rivalry is organized and consequently channeled, here it remains chaotic, leaving us with no incentives other than spitefulness and appetite, in a place where everything is thought to be allowed: political auctioneering, overnight change of heart, most abnormal alliances and selling of conscience.”

This is part of the reason why Serbian political culture has long remained confined in the pre-modern, where the political party is seen as a family and the party leader as a father. This turns party rivalry into a feud between two warring families, coloring political life with excessive emotions. This is also what familiarized the relationship to the state, so that leading Serbian parties, which spent several decades in power, over time began losing distance to the state, erasing the line between the private and the public, between personal and common interest. The state was becoming a tool for realizing private and party interests, and the political opponent was therefore perceived as an enemy against whom, as one member of the opposition remarked in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, “no holds are barred.” Politics, therefore, left its defined role according to which it was “a way of channeling social conflicts” and turned into a war of opposing interests, a participant and often the instigator of social conflicts. Such a conflict would remain endlessly open, while the crisis and instability were chronic. In these circumstances, authoritarian political culture had neither the ability nor time to grow, while tolerance and peaceful problem-solving did not get their chance.

The analysis of the relationship between politics and society in Serbia so far tells us that the Serbian problem was not that there were no democratic institutions, procedures and forms of civil society. The problem was the fact that the three previously described domains – government, civil society and society at large – existed almost independently from one another. Civil society

institutions failed to propel the slow and almost undifferentiated society, and they were never strong enough to curtail the state and seriously direct it towards more complete forms of democracy. This phenomenon in Serbia was not unknown to those who were engaged in the institutions that gave birth to civil society. So for example, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century newspaper analysts and foreign diplomatic representatives concluded in their reports that Serbia was in an unusual situation – the press was almost totally free, it was plentiful and of good quality, but it had no public strength because the authorities completely ignored its reporting. We find a similar state of affairs in regard to the associations which were created more or less with political goals. As we established, they existed from very early times of the independent Serbian state, but were not strong enough to significantly influence politics. Opponents of the 1903 regime called this state of affairs *Stambolovism*, after the then Prime Minister of Bulgaria, who, as they wrote, invented this form of government. In 1907, the opposition daily *Videlo* wrote: “This is a peculiar hybrid regime, which can be found only in Balkan countries. (...) Instead of repealing every liberal law, which would label him reactionary, Stambolov formally left them all in effect. Actually he was able, by way of specially organizing his rule, to turn these progressive laws into a pitiful and contemptible farce. (...) The regime in Serbia today has the same features. Formally this regime is very liberal, but it is actually a negation of every liberty.”

Apart from this problem, contemporaries also noticed that the introduction of liberal and democratic legislation in Serbia did not substantially change the old modes of behavior. Political parties were present almost from the time they appeared in Europe, but almost all parties in Serbian history imagined government as indivisible, thinking of compromise or coalition as signs of weakness, impotence and humiliation. Party pluralism evolved fairly rapidly, but the “political other” was perceived as a “foreign body,” someone “dividing the Serbian people,” bringing “disruption” and undermining unity. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century political actors swore by the ideals of liberalism, and later by democracy, but dissent was actually perceived as a violation of unity, of the oneness and harmony of the Serbian people, which were still, in spite of everything, at all times considered the ultimate political goal, the ideal political situation.

A similar problem can be seen in analyzing the history of elections in Serbia. Suffrage from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was broad, comparable to European role models, and on the eve of the First World War it was almost universal for men. However, elections have always been the point at which Serbian parliamentarism would usually lose ground. First, almost every election from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward was marked by extremely low voter turnout, a fact leading many analysts at the time to conclude that society still did not feel a serious need to participate in political life. Second, almost all elections suffered from serious forms of abuse: voter lists were never up to date; in every election the secret ballot principle was compromised; an almost regular feature was the pressure on the voters by government officials, most often gendarmes; elections were followed by violent confrontations of the supporters of competing groups, and even murders were not uncommon; after almost every election the opposition expressed doubts about the validity of the vote count. Because of all this it is reasonable to ask how the elections, which were liberally regulated, could ever be free in practice. Furthermore, when it comes to elections, it should be noted that, until 2003, the opposition never came to power by the will of the electorate (though these elections were held after the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, which casts them in a particular light). It is hard to tell whether this was because of routine voting for power or the already mentioned pressure on the voters, but this fact also influenced the ossification of pre-modern political culture.

The fact that Serbia had no experience of peaceful, electoral change of government made its mark on the reception of some of the basic democratic principles. Thus, despite the very early framing of democratic ideals as primary political goals, the fundamental democratic principle of equality between the majority and minority was seldom respected. In theory, democracy is the rule of the majority, but its consistency and reliability is measured by the rights of the minority. This principle was interpreted differently in Serbian political practice, so the majority rarely recognized the minority as a legitimate, or even legal, participant in decision-making. Since there was no experience of peaceful change of government, no correctives were introduced to control the behavior of the stronger towards the weaker. The rights belonged to those in power, while others could realize them only by taking power

themselves. Any rights beyond the law of the strongest were therefore not legitimate, or as an opposition member of parliament put it: “Serbia might be said to follow one general rule: one who controls the government controls the country; one who rules also distributes freedom.” This meant that the majority had absolutized their rights, often arguing that the majority is entitled to every right, including the right to break the law (Stojan Protić). This attitude provoked a similar reaction of the minority, which also claimed all the rights, ranging from the frequent obstructions of government institutions to the right to revolution. Therefore, the majority and the minority were not integral parts of the political system, but rather opposing groups on the verge of civil war, between which there was almost no communication. This is why the main political theme was not serving the public interest, but keeping or obtaining power. Naturally, this is the motive of all politics, always and everywhere, but the local particularity was that oftentimes both the government and the opposition allowed themselves the use of any means, including frequent political assassinations.

Physical confrontations were a common way of quashing the freedoms guaranteed by the otherwise very liberal legislation. As noted, freedom of the press was guaranteed by law; prior to the First World War independent courts did exonerate newspapers that the police had confiscated, but the conflict with the opponents of the establishment used to be resolved by mobs of people armed with clubs, which were never identified, bursting into small privately owned print shops and smashing the presses. Freedom of assembly was guaranteed but, for example, in 1907 the Novaković brothers were assassinated. These were the officers who formed the already mentioned Society for the Legal Solution of the Conspiratorial Issue. They were murdered in the Belgrade Police headquarters building, in the presence of the police minister and the Belgrade police commissioner. When the opposition submitted an interpellation in the Assembly over this, the Radical majority responded in a typical manner, with derision and mockery, and left it to the court to determine what happened. Because the independent court ruled that the then minister was responsible, the opposition again submitted the interpellation in 1910, but despite the court ruling, the majority refused to waive the former minister’s immunity. The Novaković brothers’ case, despite the liberal

law of assembly, never got its legal ending, and the principle of majority was given precedence over the principle of justice.

Numerous examples prove that liberal legislation was not strong enough to overcome the political violence that had the persistence of a *longue durée* process in Serbian history. Its most striking feature was political assassination, whether these were eliminations of common people, political opponents, or other leading figures. Primarily these were murders of a monarch, because Prince Miloš Obrenović is the only monarch to die of natural causes while in power. Every other monarch was either killed or forced to abdicate, which makes the continuity of violent change of power one of the dominant features of political life. Karađorđe was violently removed; Prince Miloš and Prince Mihailo were forcibly removed after their first administrations. Aleksandar Karađorđević was deposed as prince. Prince Mihailo was assassinated. King Milan was exiled from Serbia, and his son Aleksandar brutally killed in 1903. King Petar Karađorđević was forced to abdicate in 1914, under pressure from the Black Hand, his son Aleksandar was killed in 1934, King Petar was removed from power along with the monarchy in a revolution. The first democratic prime minister, Zoran Đinđić, was also assassinated. This vicious series of brutal political violence continued alongside all the attempts at the country's liberalization and democratization and the question arises how these two parallel processes affected one another?

Keeping to the central theme of this essay, I can not elaborate on a very important aspect – foreign policy and national issues. These two aspects, which often intersected in the past two centuries of Serbian history, added a special dramatic quality to political life. The Serbian state, which rose by breaking away from the “Ottoman sea,” later finding itself between two empires – the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman, which was the object of rivalry between two different empires – the Russian and the German, gained and lost foreign allies with great difficulty. Different concepts collided: there were those who thought that only with the help of the Habsburg monarchy could Serbia strengthen its interests in Southeast Europe against Turkey and the claims of Russia; there were others who thought that only with the support of Orthodox Russia could Serbia subdue its southern and western adversaries and best defend its national interests; there were also those who thought that only by modernizing in a Western Eu-

ropean manner, taking its cues from France and England, could Serbia gain the respect that would allow it to achieve national unity. Oscillating between these different possibilities, the elites were trying to resolve the issue of national liberation and unification. The obstacles were very serious. On the one hand, the presence of the aforementioned empires made the Serbian and South Slavic question one of the most important problems for European stability, and the consensus of the great powers about the status quo in the Balkans was a clear message that a change in such a country could be sought only at one's own peril.

Nevertheless, from the great Eastern crisis of the late 1870s to the creation of the Yugoslav state in 1918, Serbia waged five wars in an attempt to resolve its national question. These wars led to a serious deterioration of relations with the great powers, and they mostly ended in diplomatic negotiations in which Serbia usually did not participate. All this exacerbated the national frustration, because it was becoming increasingly clear that the solution of the national question depended largely on the attitude of the great powers. At the same time, it became clear that the ethnically mixed territory cannot allow the creation of a pure nation-state, which led to the construction of wider South Slavic unification projects and eventual acceptance of the Yugoslav idea in the decade before the First World War. The great national ambitions of the subjugated peoples' liberation leaders, the frustration with real power relations, frequent wars, international crises, tensions, threats, betrayals by old allies and distrust of new ones – all this constituted an international framework that was not conducive to solving the problems of society and politics discussed here. The impossibility of resolving the national question affected Serbian national politics in several ways: 1. Exacerbating national frustration and nationalism, which would over time develop into a fundamental and most important political issue, a matter of priority; 2. The fact that in several stages of development of the modern Serbian state the national question was a matter of priority, caused other important political, social and economic issues to be suppressed, leading to serious drawbacks in important segments of development; 3. The frequent threat of military conflict was often used in national political conflicts as an argument against further development of democracy and individual freedoms; 4. numerous wars and constant security threats gave strength to the existing



internal political violence as a way of solving problems; 5. The endlessly open national question gave the army special standing in the underdeveloped society, and consequently throughout the development of modern Serbia it had an important political role, largely anti-democratic; 6. All this served to sustain the warrior mentality and the “heroic” model of socialization in an otherwise patriarchal society.

However, in my opinion, the main problem in the development of the Serbian state lies precisely in the already described relationship between the three arenas – government, civil society and society as a whole. During the historical development, politics overtook society, developing at a much faster pace, finding itself without social support, because it did not fully succeed in implementing the “inverse model” in which political transformation should initiate economic and social development. This is why democratic and civil society institutions have never had the firm social background which would render their demands to the state effective. Society’s modernizing potentials were not strong enough to follow the relatively rapid process of liberalization and democratization, and the government, while modernizing itself, neglected or even stifled social development with a series of legislative measures. In doing that it jeopardized its own political reforms for which, as the years progressed, it was becoming increasingly harder to find a social basis.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, relations between the three domains only grew more complex, and the state began losing its modernizing energy and fragile democratic potential. With Serbia joining a complex and multi-national union of South Slavs, the existing political problems gained new dimensions. The most important question to be raised was the national one, imbuing the inherited political culture with new fervor. The basic problem of the newly emerged state was the fact that the Yugoslav peoples joined the union with different concepts and different expectations. For the dominant part of the Serbian political elite the new country was a union which, apart from other Yugoslavs, united the Serbian people and brought them under a single national umbrella. Perceiving it as a country of the dominant, Serbian nation, they saw it as a unitary, centralized, single-nation state. For other national elites, this was a country in which they wanted to get more rights than they previously had in the complex Austro-Hungarian union,

which included expanding freedoms from the previously existing autonomy from the central government. The collusion of these, as it turned out, irreconcilable concepts paralyzed the joint Yugoslav state, and led to its inability, until World War II, to implement crucial legal and social reforms which would fortify it internally and contribute to the development of a common market, culture and society.

Difficult political problems and conflicts were more and more often dealt with in undemocratic ways in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This was amplified by the fact that in Serbia itself the opposition grew considerably stronger and, together with members of the intellectual elite, joined the opponents of centralism and unitarity. This fact, among others, forced the government to undertake a range of measures that were considered protective of the state, and which led the Yugoslav society further and further away from the solution. A new act of political violence, the assassination of prominent Croatian leaders Stjepan and Pavle Radic, lead the country into a new dictatorship, dissolution of parliament and the abolition of democratic, liberal and individual rights that had taken nearly a century to establish. Due to international circumstances and increasing German influence in the 1930s, the state would continue to ossify, taking on ever clearer authoritarian outlines.

At the same time, civil society in the Kingdom thrived. This was the highpoint of the principles of civic association: many national associations were formed which advocated improving the condition of various ethnic communities, there were intellectual associations whose goal was, in their words, “social action” and numerous feminist societies that fought for gender equality. This was the right time for the development of salons, discussion circles and other forms which are today considered important forms of civil society. At the same time, there was a vigorous development of all forms of organization which sprang up in the previous period: the press had gained new momentum, literary and political magazines grew stronger by drawing in intellectuals from all of Yugoslavia, the University engaged in an even stronger battle against the state, while student dissatisfaction drove this social group to those movements which claimed that only a revolution could create a “more just world.” Culture reached its heyday, and artists, especially those leaning toward the avant-garde, belonged to the European cultural milieu. Despite all these facts, the state increa-

singly curtailed freedoms and resembled those European nations which in the interwar period declared democracy a weakness and began searching for a system that would “bring order.” Political parties, the press, civil society organizations, intellectuals and the young educated generation were not strong enough to prevent this.

This fact is also interesting because Serbian society in this period was overcome by a strong wave of modernization. There was significant industrial development, particularly of the textile and food industries. Before World War II, the number of factories in Serbia grew from 465 in 1910 to 718, the number of jobs over the same period tripled, and total investments amounted to 2.85 billion dinars compared to 62 million three decades earlier. However, until World War II, only 9% of the Serbian population belonged to the industrial or trade sector, which meant that industry, despite its development, was still only starting to thrive. Industrial development was accompanied by a number of structural problems. Primarily there was the chronic lack of domestic capital, which led to a prevalence of foreign capital by a ratio of 68 to 31.5. Domestic loans to the industry were expensive and short-term, which is why they carried high interest rates, producing business uncertainty and disastrous consequences in the economic crisis of the 1930s.

The problem with the interwar social development of Serbia was the fact that there was no substantial development of the farming sector, which employed, until World War II, 76% of the population. The problem of plot fragmentation was not solved, but instead due to huge demographic growth grew more serious. Before World War II, 62.1% of Serbian rural households possessed 12 acres of land or less, and suffered all the consequences of fragmented plots – from a lack of free capital to a reduction in livestock numbers. This process was accompanied by a rapid urbanization of cities which became industrial centers, and in particular the strong development of Belgrade as the political and cultural hub. Therefore we have to agree with Marie-Janine Calic when she concludes that there was not a comprehensive social reform in Serbia until World War II, even though since the 1850s there were significant changes in agricultural, trade, craft and family law, modeled on German and French legislation. She concludes that government reform policy mostly remained undecided, because the state constantly tried to contain the previously mobilized forces. All this led to the fact that “the inventive potential was not

strong enough to completely break the chains of the pre-modern economic and social structure,” preventing Serbia and Yugoslavia from becoming, right up to World War II, industrialized and civic states.

World War II opened a new dramatic stage of modern Serbian history, leading it into civil war. On the one hand there were the Partisans, an organized and disciplined army which, along with the continual struggle against the occupiers, fought for a revolutionary upturn and introduction of communism. On the other side there was the poorly organized, undisciplined and insubordinate Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (also known as Chetniks), which began the war as a resistance movement, but already in the fall of 1941 it began collaborating with the occupying forces, primarily trying to fight the communist-oriented Partisan units. In Serbia itself, the conflict was not as brutal as in the other, ethnically mixed parts of the former Yugoslav state, where in parallel with the conflict of competing armies, war was waged against the ethnic “other.” However, when the war came back to Serbian ground in 1944, it brought back with it all the ferocity of civil war, building on the political tradition, but also creating the foundation for a new cycle of violence. The Partisans, now supported by the Allies, led the fight for liberation from the occupiers and for taking power, while the Chetnik units, left without international support, began a full collaboration at every level in an attempt to prevent their Communist rivals from taking power. These conflicts led to an even more divided Serbia, adding to traditional political divisions (Obrenović-Karadorđević supporters, radicals-progressives, radicals-independents) a new one – between the Partisans and the Chetniks, a division which Serbia, even at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fails to overcome in a clear, mature, rational and democratic manner.

The communist assumption of power introduced a new spiral of violence. From the vicious reprisals against political opponents to violent social conflicts and retaliations against “hostile classes,” the newly established regime brought new fervor into an authoritarian political culture. Although violence against the society and individuals was more open than ever before, it still must be viewed in the context of historical continuity of political violence in Serbia, because its most important ally was the authoritarian, or even totalitarian, political matrix.

The violence affected the entire society after 1945. Confiscations, nationalizations and agrarian reforms destroyed the pre-war urban and rural elite, landing a lasting blow to those very classes that could have played a major part in the civil modernization of the country. The opposite side began a process of imposed communist modernization which emphasized rapid industrialization. The concept grew out of the new ideology and permanently altered Serbian society. In the period from 1946 to 1985, industrial production grew approximately thirty-fold, and these were mainly new industries that were unknown before World War II. That led to an abrupt change in the social structure, with Serbia and Yugoslavia losing their agrarian character. Thus in 1948, 21% of the population lived in the cities, while in 1981 this number was 47%. The early postwar years were marked by an extraordinary social and geographic mobility, completely unknown in the previously barely mobile society (in 1948 alone, 3.1 million people changed their place of residence). Still, this rapid industrialization and social change did not bring Serbian society closer to the developed Western societies. Shortly after the outbreak of a deep economic crisis in the early 1980s, it became apparent that the majority of industrial enterprises were unprofitable and that their products were not competitive. It turned out that the huge wave of urbanization was actually closer to rurbanization than to the creation of a real urban population which could play a greater role in the subsequent democratization of the country.

From a political standpoint, the alliance between the poor, egalitarian society, the authoritarian matrix of political culture and the collectivist social and political mindset, made the post-1945 system in Yugoslavia far more appealing to the population than in other Eastern bloc countries. The weakness of the pre-war civil society and the fragility of democratic experiences led to Yugoslav and Serbian citizens failing to massively organize into resistance movements that we saw in the previously far more developed Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary. This indeed was a consequence of “soft” communism, the Yugoslav exit from the Eastern Bloc and opening up to the West, which allowed for a better standard of living and greater freedoms than in any other country behind the “Iron Curtain,” but a more critical fact seems to be that in self-management socialism the greater part of the backward society had rationally recognized its social opportunity, not being

affected that much by lack of freedoms. Examples of individual resistance and prison experiences of Milovan Đilas or Mihailo Mihailov, theoretical and political opposition groups Praxis and the works of Belgrade University professors or the student revolt in 1968 proved to be, as in earlier experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, inadequate challenges unable to mobilize society at large in the struggle for democracy.

This was also the case with the forms of civil society that began developing after Tito's death, in the 1980s. This period saw the rise of citizens' groups that advocated building an independent public and the rule of law, organizing petition campaigns, forming the "Committee to Protect Individual Freedom and Freedom of Speech;" there were public discussions on "touchy" social and political issues in the "Writers Association," "Belgrade Youth Center" and "Student Cultural Center". At that time, in the 1980s, a series of environmental, anti-nuclear, pacifist and feminist organizations also appeared. Although these years were marked by significant liberalization of social debate, it later turned out that the entire public arena had a very thin liberal and democratic basis and that, in the critical late 1980s, it was not strong enough to lead the country in the direction that most of Eastern Europe took after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Again it turned out that the society had neither the strength nor the need to support informal civil society institutions or individuals who stood up against the regime. The struggle for extending the domain of freedom remained their personal battle waged at their own risk. Since the resistance remained confined to a very narrow circle of intellectuals, there were no distinguishable social forces (unlike in Central Europe), which could take over the struggle for the abolition of this order and, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, assume responsibility for the overall transition process. The experience of self-management socialism in Serbia and Yugoslavia also did not leave a critical mass of people who retained their moral integrity, necessary for assuming leading roles in a democratic framework and steering the society into necessary but painful reforms. The few remaining Serbian dissidents did not have the strength to do it. Primarily, there was no force which would make sure that the society, after the collapse of communism, would take up the banner of freedom instead of the nationalist banner.

At this critical moment in history, when Serbia and the former Yugoslavia again faced the possibility of reform and democratic

change, Yugoslav society entered a new cycle of wars. Obviously powerless to respond to the post-communist transition challenge with a strong reform momentum, Yugoslav society opened the way to a new, thus far unprecedented war and political violence. This new vortex of evil would be introduced to Serbia by its almost unanimously elected leader Slobodan Milošević, who received the almost undivided support of the elite for his policies. Instead of democratization and actual transformation of society, the Serbian elite chose war as the means to reconfigure the former Yugoslav state. The wars waged from 1991 to 1999 led to the gravest crimes committed on European soil since World War II; they led to total international isolation; after losing the wars the Serbian people were forced to withdraw from areas where they had lived for centuries; the wars led to a complete economic collapse, criminalization of the state and society, and absolute moral callousness of a society that has difficulty finding new criteria and new values. These wars pushed Serbia to the lowest point in its history, and brought its leaders and ideologues before the UN court to face charges of genocide.

What is particularly important for the interaction of politics and society is Milošević's period in power. In this period, the division between the state, society, and civil society was brought to the hilt. It must be said that Slobodan Milošević abolished the one-party regime and with a series of laws, albeit undemocratic ones, enabled the creation of a multi-party political setting, frequent elections for different levels of government, the first opposition press, independent radio and television stations. A striking fact is the development of the NGO sector, which flourished under Milošević, with 1,200 NGOs registered in the 1990s at the federal and some 20,000 at the local level. A large number of these organizations fought for human and minority rights, against the war and for introducing a democratic order. Opposition parties organized a number of massive political protests, which in some cases, along with the student rebellion, lasted for months and impressed the world. However, Slobodan Milošević's regime managed to resist all this, toppling only after the finally realized unity of the opposition and previously unprecedented organizing in the elections and protests of October 2000.

All this makes the Milošević regime particularly interesting for the analysis of this essay's main topic. Slobodan Milošević

can be considered innovative in the history of anti-democratic political systems. The system he created could be called postmodern totalitarianism, a totalitarianism that allows everything to its disgruntled citizens, apart from seriously threatening its power. This was indeed totalitarianism, because the regime controlled all the key levers of actual power – the party had full control over all the institutions of the unseparated powers, including the completely dependent judiciary. The ruling party controlled the army, the police, the entire economy and cash flows. A kind of political apartheid was created in which the two conflicting sides, the government and its opponents, lived side by side, without communication or possible interaction. This was a genuine innovation in the theory and practice of totalitarianism and one of its most menacing achievements, because it seemed that civil society institutions were losing energy and growing listless, unable to achieve anything substantial. Civil society found itself in an absurd situation. It was lured into a trap: its existence was a necessary precondition for changes in Serbia, but the regime made it so that it became, just like the opposition parties, a part of the totalitarian system for more than a decade, where it served as a warehouse for storing people's frustration.

In addition, there were pathological deformations of society, as the war in the region and the embargo led not only to the creation of a new wartime financial elite, but also to the criminalization of a society in which corruption had become one of the basic principles of life. The criminalized state and society are the legacy left behind Milošević's ouster from power. The democratically elected governments after 2000 failed to take on this difficult legacy, and after the most ardent reformer, Zoran Đinđić, was assassinated, Serbian society and politics remained disoriented, without a clear vision of the future, confined by the unwillingness to face the past and mobilize, based on a straightforward social consensus for change and European integration. Self-perception did not get the necessary critical quality, goals were not set rationally, the relation to reality to a large extent remained irrational, and fear of change is again threatening to turn backwardness into an ideology.

Tracing the development of the political domain over the last two centuries, one might conclude that Serbia has experienced a kind of regression. While the political elite since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, despite all the resistance, inconsistencies, and discontinuities,



was trying to modernize the Serbian state and to bring policies at least partially in line with Western liberal concepts, the subsequent development increasingly saw the rise of anti-modernizing projects and authoritarian political culture. I do not think, however, that this conclusion confirms the attitude of the first group of historians which we mentioned at the beginning, who claim that this was the result of joining the Yugoslav union and subsequent linking with the Soviet sphere of influence. I believe that the key explanation of this phenomenon lies deeper, in the contradictions of Serbian internal development, precisely in the separate development of politics and society which were surveyed in this essay. The modernization of government and politics was made possible by the efforts of the educated political and intellectual elite, but since the society stagnated, over time the two domains increasingly drifted apart. As this essay argues, Serbian society did not experience real reform until the violent, and again antidemocratic, change in 1945. Until communism came, no classes emerged for which, like in Western and Central Europe, democracy was a central interest, who were ready to fight for it till the end, who were strong enough to defend it, or (as in Spain or even Greece) to reconstruct it after decades of undemocratic regimes. Social groups to whom democratization and modernization was a matter of survival never became a dominant force in Serbian society. "The democratic experiment" was not supported by an "elite alliance;" it did not become a vital interest of the powerful sections of society. It remained a project of the educated middle-class minority that did not win this battle in Serbia. It had neither the strength nor the determination to reform society, so that democracy in Serbian society increasingly resembled a drop of oil on water: it remained bound in its narrow circle which it could not escape, it was not strong enough to engulf the whole society, it remained isolated and clearly remote from the prevailing social underdevelopment.

Because of all that, a fundamental problem of modern Serbian history could be social stagnation, the society's impotence and inability to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty and to head, by its own strengths, towards reform and modernization. As described above, the society did not have enough potential for that kind of shift, but the crucial question that remains at the end of this essay is how do we explain the fact that the elite, which in politics often had enlightened ideals, knowingly held back the reform of society?

Was it the fear of the price that must be paid for social reform? Was it the fear of losing social and political monopoly that could be kept intact only in an underdeveloped society? Or was the central concern that a modernized, Europeanized society would lose the patriarchal identity which was, like some people often pointed out, necessary for achieving national unification, through preserving the “heroic code?” Was the greatest problem of Serbian development the dualism of the elite itself, which, originating from villages or small towns, made a remarkable social leap, but preserved the constant duality of the patriarchal and the modern, and was therefore unable to strongly and uncompromisingly pull the society out of lethargy? All these questions require new research into the elite and obstacles it faced over the last two centuries, but it seems to me, judging on historical experience, that the Serbian elite is facing the challenge of making a deep reformist break and releasing the potential that Serbian society possesses.

# IMAGINING THE ZADRUGA

ZADRUGA AS A POLITICAL INSPIRATION TO THE LEFT  
AND TO THE RIGHT IN SERBIA, 1870-1945

The concept of *zadruga* (i.e. cooperative, extended family) could be called the ideological subterranean river of Serbian political history. It appeared in public discourse and disappeared from it, only to spring up on the political stage once again in completely different historical circumstances. By changing contexts it also changed its meaning, gaining new features and losing some older ones. However, research conducted for the Sorbonne's project "The Political Legacy of Zadruga in the South Slavic Area" has shown its persistence over a long historical time and on completely opposite sides of the political spectrum. The *zadruga* was positioned as the key political ideal for Svetozar Marković's early socialists since the early 1870s, but it was also – the key ideal of the extreme right in the 1930s and 1940s. Both Milan Nedić, the prime minister of the Serbian collaborationist government during the Nazi occupation, and Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of the most important component of the armed forces that cooperated with the occupiers, found their primary political inspiration in the *zadruga*.

This presence of *zadrugas* in different positions and different contexts is all the more interesting for the fact that extended families, the family *zadrugas*, were quite uncommon in Serbia even in Svetozar Marković's days, and even then it was clear that they were breaking down under the sway of the widespread national and social modernization. Therefore, posing a few questions seems legitimate: to what extent was this a utopian model that held up an already finished past as the future? To what extent was it just a demagogic narrative whose purpose was practical politics: winning over the poor rural masses that, until the Second World War, had constituted the vast majority of the population? Was this a political project that grew out of underdevelopment, became its reflection, but also hindered further development?

This paper will present data from an unusual comparative research. It will compare political phenomena which are temporally very distant. Furthermore, it will compare phenomena from different and opposite parts of the political sphere, those on the far-right with ones far on the left. Persisting as the key political term, “*zadruga*” was employed in very different contexts – from an imaginary idyllic socialist society of equals in the mid-1800s to the cornerstone and bulwark of racial purity almost a century later. This paper will primarily take into account those different contexts, because otherwise there would be simplifications and equalizations of the movements which were, both temporally and by their ideological affiliation, very far apart. That would be methodologically inaccurate and it would not lead us to a justifiable conclusion. With all the methodological precautions, comparisons will be drawn around the basic axis – the family *zadruga* ideal as a political and social utopia.

The research has shown that the *zadruga* ideal came up in numerous discussions, when the participants in the political struggle spoke about politics, society, and economic organization. This is why the use of the term in this paper will be confined to these three broad fields, which will best demonstrate the similarities and differences in its use.

### ***Zadruga* as a political ideal**

The fundamental political question in Serbia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the question: Which type of state will emerge after gaining first the autonomy and then independence. Among the issues to rise conflicting opinions was the issue of the state model to be emulated and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several political currents arose which advocated the adoption of different European models. First of all, in the early 1870s, there appeared the socialist movement led by Svetozar Marković, who held that these conditions – considering the idiosyncrasies of the Serbian society, with poor farmers forming almost 90% of its population – are most suitable for creating a special model of the popular state, different both from the liberal and the absolutist one. This ideal of the popular state in Marković’s works, despite all the social and political changes, would persist for a long time in the Serbian political discourse, and would dominate the politics of the People’s Radical Party (founded in 1881), which found its ideological underpinning in the very

principles developed by Svetozar Marković. What is particularly interesting is that the popular state ideal also found support among extreme right-wing ideologues in the interwar period. This is why the concept deserves special attention, and what is particularly important for this project is the fact that the people's state model found its main inspiration in the family *zadruga*.

### *The people's state*

The ideology of the popular state came about as a reaction to the early formation of the modern state, the first signs of class disintegration of the peasant nation and the decline of traditional institutions,<sup>1</sup> primarily the family *zadruga*. The first ideologue of the popular state concept, Svetozar Marković, said that such a state is the same as society, that it abolishes the division between those who govern and those who are governed, that it should be a federation of municipalities, an extended family *zadruga* in which the people govern themselves.<sup>2</sup> “The popular state is based on the principles of popular sovereignty. The people must try to eliminate all the ideological professions in the society, such as judges, legislators, lawyers, as well as policemen and soldiers. Every citizen must be a defender of his county and, with education expanding, the manufacturing worker should at the same time be capable of doing the types of jobs that are, today, done by “specialists” from the ideological professions.”<sup>3</sup>

Marković clearly saw the popular state as an antithesis to the modern state that was at the time pioneering institutions in Serbia, so he insisted that the main objective of his program was: “to completely abolish the current bureaucratic system of state administration and replace it with popular self-government in all the domains of our social system.”<sup>4</sup> According to Marković, only the popular state could deliver his other ideal – social equality, which was, again, a prerequisite for attaining political freedom. According to him, this freedom could not exist without a society of complete equals. In addition, to him, such a society and such a state were

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1 Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije. Srpsko društvo na prelazima vekova, XIX-XX*, Belgrade 2006, p. 101.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

3 Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, Belgrade 1985, p. 310.

4 Svetozar Marković, “Narodna partija”, in *Oslobođenje*, No. 16, February 5, 1875, quoted after: Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, p. 103.

the preconditions for national liberation, at which point Marković's social and political platform merged with the national one.

In 1881, the year the People's Radical Party was formed, conditions in Serbia were somewhat changed. A series of factors led the newly formed party to abandon Marković's revolutionary concept and to opt for a peaceful road to the popular state, by expanding voting rights and using parliamentary institutions. This is how the Radicals gave up on the leap forward and accepted the idea of social and political reform. The central question for our topic is whether the change of political means also meant changing political goals; that is to say, whether, in the final two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Radicals genuinely dropped Marković's platform and with it the political ideals derived from the patriarchal *zadruga*?

The analysis of historical sources, which lay out the Radical Party's programmatic principles, indicate that throughout this stage, from 1881 to the early 1900s, regarding the fundamental issues, such as ownership, types of production, and forms of state, Marković's ideals were retained. The central axis of the radical ideology remained the creation of the popular state as the antithesis to the liberal, legal, and civil state. The popular state was understood as the collective owner of capital and the organizer of national production; like the *zadrugas*, it had the duty of ensuring equal distribution of wealth. The party's first ideologue, Pera Todorović, wrote: "Our party knows that by using the power of the state, this country can create such economic institutions which would lead the people to prosperity, so the party is striving to take this power away from the bureaucracy and give it to the people, so that general welfare can be achieved in which universal enlightenment and freedom in the true sense of the word can be developed."<sup>5</sup>

There are numerous documents, both public and confidential, that can confirm the survival of ideological continuity over the final two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the documents outlining the political platform are Pašić's 1872 letters to the minister of education, a secret draft constitution from 1882, letters to Metropolitan Mihailo from 1884, and especially the letter to the head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ivan Zinoviev, from 1887. In this letter, Pašić sketches out his political conceptions and says, directly referring to the *zadruga*: "The main point of our

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5 Zapisnik rada Glavne skupštine Narodne radikalne stranke, III sastanak, July 27, 1882, in *Samouprava*, 1882; Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, 3, Belgrade 1995, p. 123.

political struggle is to maintain the fine institutions agreeable to the Serbian character and to stop implementing new Western institutions, which would undermine the sovereign life of our people and subvert the popular movement and life.”<sup>6</sup> Apart from numerous documents, the most important piece of writing is Pašić’s position paper “Sloga Srbo-Hrvata” (The Harmony of Serbo-Croats), most likely dating from the late 1880s.<sup>7</sup> The text expressed the essence of his Slavophilic understanding of state and society, which primarily places the *zadruga* as the central political inspiration.

The last stage covered in this paper begins with the 1903 coup, after which the Radicals almost continuously remained in power for the next 23 years, and lasts until Pašić’s death, although the party has not lost power even after that. Pašić himself spoke a lot less frequently during this period, and political principles were primarily discussed by the Radical deputies who held 80% of the Assembly seats. For them, the state was still primarily a socio-economic category,<sup>8</sup> which, until the First World War, they had described as a large *zadruga*.<sup>9</sup> One of the most active deputies in the Assembly, Aleksa Ratarac, said: “Serbia is a large *zadruga*, and we are the representatives of this *zadruga*, and it is better when more people decide what is to be done.”<sup>10</sup>

The party’s evolution and its coming into power did not produce changes in the social structure of its parliamentary deputies, who were mostly representatives of poor rural communities. It is true that, at this stage, there emerged a new generation of European-educated, young, and modern politicians, but the majority of them were technocrats and did not discuss party principles. On the contrary, rural deputies remained the main speakers, and they still argued for “equality in poverty,” retaining the basic ideas of early Serbian socialism in their discourse.

Even though they expounded on their principles less frequently since coming to power, the Radicals reaffirmed the most important tenets of their faith with their political actions. The

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6 “Pismo Nikole Pašića A. I. Zinovjevu”, in Latinka Perović, Andrej Šemjakin (eds), *Nikola Pašić. Pisma članci i govori*, Belgrade 1995, p. 241.

7 Nikola Pašić, *Sloga Srbo-Hrvata*, Belgrade 1995.

8 Olga Popović-Obradović, *Kakva ili kolika država. Oglеди o političkoj i društvenoj istoriji Srbije XIX-XXI veka*, Belgrade 2008, p. 329.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

10 *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, May 12, 1910, Belgrade 1911, p. 2997.

only thing that changed from when they took power was that the ideal of the popular state turned into the practice of the party state, erasing any difference between the nation as a politically homogenous entity and the mass ruling party, which controlled 80% of the parliamentary seats. The party state meant that the power of the ruling party was greater than the fundamental laws of the country, which undermined the laws, but also the state itself. The concept of the party state is best seen from how the power of the majority was understood, with the opposition describing it as the “majority terror.” The party ideologue Stojan Protić repeatedly argued that a government which holds the majority has the right to violate laws, “When it comes to the national interest, the government (backed by the majority) not only can, but sometimes must do something outside the law.”<sup>11</sup> The opposition weekly *Nedeljni pregled*, commenting on such positions, wrote: “The Radical Party has subordinated the state to itself in all things and, under the pretentious slogan that the party is more important than the state, it is using Serbia as a cash cow whose exclusive owner is the People’s Radical Party.”<sup>12</sup>

Several decades later, after the great changes brought by the First World War, the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the constitutional debate on the form of the state and the economic collapse of 1929, the *zadruga* ideal also appeared on the Serbian extreme right. In the writings of Dimitrije Ljotić and later, during the Second World War, in the speeches and writings of Milan Nedić, the occupation prime minister, we again find the ideal of the *zadruga* state, which was supposed to be the foundation of the popular state. However, these two models were somewhat different, but the key word that binds them – *zadruga* – was present in both names. Nedić referred to his state as a *zadruga*-peasant state, while Ljotić called his a professional-*zadruga* state. (Ljotić used the archaic term ‘stalež’, which literally translates as ‘estate’, but for convenience we will call them professions or associations.) Evident already from these phrases, the crucial difference is that Ljotić saw the future society organized into professions, approaching the ideal of the Italian fascist corporate state, while Nedić placed the peasantry to the fore as a collective agent of the future social and political system.

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11 “Samostalci ruše parlamentarizam”, in *Samouprava*, May 29, 1907.

12 *Nedeljni pregled*, No. 2, 1908, p. 35.



Although doctrinal differences are clear, these two models had a visible common feature – the *zadruga*. This similarity was not merely terminological, because a closer analysis of what the two leaders said and wrote about the *zadruga* reveals that this institution was what they saw as the foundation of the future state and society. It should be noted that it was a *future* structure, because Ljotić, despite the *zadruga* being a rarity at the time, often insisted that the return to it does not mean a return to the past, but that it is a concept of the future, which speaks about the utopian nature of this ideology, comparable to the ideology of Svetozar Marković.

It was in the *zadruga* that both Nedić and Ljotić saw the Serbian uniqueness and authenticity compared to related movements. Emphasizing this specificity, Nedić wrote that “Serbia has its own national socialism epitomized in family *zadrugas*.”

Ljotić also emphasized, in a series of texts, the difference which he found important between his movement and fascism and Nazism. He insisted that the understanding of professions in its ideology is “neither Hitlerian nor Mussolinian, but purely national, Yugoslavian,” underlining that the institutions of the new state should be created from the “national spirit.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, he wished to avoid terminological misconceptions that could arise from the modern usage of the term *zadruga* (cooperative): “Here we must stress that the *zadrugas* of our spirit, of our ideology, are not cooperatives that emerged in England or Germany, but cooperatives that grew from the roots of the Yugoslav family *zadruga* and the Yugoslav racial spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Nedić also insisted on authenticity, declaring: “We do not need a foreign seed. We Serbs have the finest social structure in the old Serbian *zadruga* system. It is not grounded on platitudes or pleasant slogans (...). We wish to draw on the interpretations of the old Serbian *zadruga* system. We want this old Serbian family *zadruga* spirit to become the faith, knowledge, and understanding of the whole Serbian nation. The most perfect order is to be found in the *zadruga*.”<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting that, although there were scarcely any *zadrugas* at the time, Ljotić insisted that they survived, that they were still there. This is why he insisted that his concept did not mean a

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13 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Čemu težimo?”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, Belgrade 2001, p. 139.

14 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleži i Zbor”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 114.

15 Quoted after: Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina. Kolaboracija u Srbiji 1941-1944*, Belgrade 2006, p. 268.

return to the past, but that it was real, claiming it could not be undermined either by capitalism, or legislators or sociologists who “sounded the death knell” for it, because, as he wrote, “to this day it lives in the Yugoslav countryside.”<sup>16</sup> Insisting on it, Ljotić wanted to underline the uniqueness of his movement, emphasizing that, in both Italy and Germany, it is the state and the party that organize those corporations and professions while, in the case of Serbia, they emerge from the old social structure based on *zadrugas*, which facilitates “freedom and self-government.”<sup>17</sup>

The state, for which both Nedić and Ljotić stood, similar to Svetozar Marković and later the Radicals, had several basic functions: it was supposed to solve social and economic problems (to be discussed in more detail in a separate section); abolish the existing institutions of parliamentary democracy and, finally, bring about the national unity. By its characteristics, it was the opposite of a liberal state, because in it people should govern directly, and not through institutions described as “slow and cumbersome.”<sup>18</sup> Ljotić said that democracy is government of numbers, that parliamentarism means irresponsibility, and that parties are dividing the people. In contrast, his concept meant “an organic life, the people, the state.”<sup>19</sup> He wrote that Zbor stands for “the professional-*zadruga* state in which the people, through professional associations, will take matters into their own hands. The people want to control and handle all the means of national production and not to leave them to individuals.”<sup>20</sup> He saw this type of state organization as superior, as one that goes beyond the interests of social groups, which he sought to merge into one: “Our road is the rule of the people, a total state, a total national policy instead of the petty, partisan one.”

Ljotić dedicated one article precisely to this matter, differentiating between the popular and the national state already in its title: “The national or the popular state.” In the article he insists that every national state is not at the same time a popular state, that it can become one only if it “suits the origin, spirit, and destiny of the

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16 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleži i Zbor”, p. 113.

17 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleška demokratija”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 147.

18 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Veliki zbor g. Dimitrija Ljotića u Vršcu”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 65.

19 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Naš nacionalizam”, in *Sabrana dela*, 5, p. 105.

20 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kakvu politiku hoćemo?”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 103.

nation, if it expresses its deepest feelings and beliefs.”<sup>21</sup> The popular state is Ljotić’s vital idea, because such a state would also have a national function, alongside the social and economic ones, based on his key concept – the organic unity of the nation. According to Ljotić, this unity was crushed by liberal democracy, which tore the society apart into groups and individuals. A popular state would allow the organic unity based on cooperative principles that would solve all the human relations: “to harmonize human relations and produce the hormone of harmony and mutual solidarity.”<sup>22</sup> Only such a state could answer the people’s needs: “The state needs to emerge from the people’s needs and draw its strength from the national characteristics.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Political parties*

The question at hand is the perception, both on the left and the right, of the relationship between the people and the popular state? It is interesting that sides of the political spectrum found the same solution: the popular state was the one to “draw in the entire people and form the unbreakable bond between the people and the state.” It is a populist movement aiming to incorporate the entire people, it is the connective tissue of the popular state.<sup>24</sup> Such movements are the opposite of modern parties, whose purpose is to represent the interests of particular parts of a society. Popular movements or popular parties seek to cover the entire people, abolish social division, unite the nation, defy political pluralism, and become the foundation of a monolithic regime. This is the crucial feature of populist movements. In fact, many other movements refer to the people, but populist movements are different in that they speak of themselves as representatives of the entire nation understood as a homogeneous whole, an organism in Ljotić’s words, which cannot be divided. Accordingly, such movements are bitter enemies of political parties, and even of representative democracy, because they see it as an instrument for dividing a homogeneous national body. The “movement” is also a reflection of the essence of antipluralist political thought. Its task is to draw in the entire

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21 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Nacionalna ili narodna država”, in *Sabrana dela*, 5, p. 88.

22 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleži i Zbor”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 114.

23 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Veliki zbor g. Dimitrija Ljotića u Vršcu”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 65.

24 Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, 3, p. 136.

nation, and those who find themselves outside of it cannot be either legitimate or legal. Movements assign themselves historical missions, they are characterized by fanaticism and exclusivity toward every political other,<sup>25</sup> which is derived from the concept of the popular party and the popular state, which do not tolerate political divisions. The other can only be a traitor, the one who divides the monolith.

The Radical Party saw itself only in that light: “The great Radical Party, which the people do not separate from its name (...) the Radical Party, or better yet the Serbian people (...). In ten years, the Radical Party will be the same as the Serbian people.”<sup>26</sup> They kept insisting that they were not an “ordinary political phenomenon,”<sup>27</sup> but an expression of the “people’s soul,”<sup>28</sup> its essence. They wrote that their party best reflects the needs of the Serbian people, that it is a guarantee for survival.<sup>29</sup> They explained the founding of the party itself as a natural phenomenon, like a geyser: “Its power erupted strongly from the people itself, and it erupted so strongly that the organizers of the party barely managed to channel all the movements in it into a single course.”<sup>30</sup>

The cornerstone of the party state was the People’s Radical Party, which was commonly described by its members as a church, an army<sup>31</sup> or precisely – a *zadruga*. Referring to the Independent Radical Party split in 1911, the radical newspaper *Samouprava* wrote: “Reasonable people must know that true and devoted friends of a *zadruga*, in case they disagree with its line, will not work on splitting up the *zadruga* (...). The Independents left the common house (...) and started working against their old *zadruga*, the Radical Party.”<sup>32</sup> In internal party debates as well, members of the central committee used to identify their party with the *zadruga*, often evoking that ideal. For example, in a lively debate about the relationship between the party organs, it was said: “Indeed, there should be order in a house, and everyone who comes to that house, that is to say that *zadruga*, should and must respect its order (...).

25 Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, p. 129.

26 “Pisma seljaku. Od jednog starovremenskog radikala”, in *Samouprava*, May 6, 1908.

27 Ibid.

28 “Narodna svest”, in *Samouprava*, June 14, 1906.

29 “Biračima”, in *Samouprava*, April 13, 1908.

30 “Tridesetogodišnjica Narodne radikalne stranke”, in *Samouprava*, December 25, 1911.

31 Dubravka Stojanović, *Iza zavese. Ogledi iz društvene istorije Srbije*, Belgrade 2013, p. 40.

32 “Narod u jedinstvu u Radikalnoj stranci”, in *Samouprava*, May 11, 1906.

It should be known that in union there is strength (...) otherwise, as soon as one member of this community reaches for dictatorship, the community breaks up and the *zadruga* is stranded.”<sup>33</sup>

Dimitrije Ljotić held a very similar view of his political organization. It is true that, in the 1930s, this type of political organization was dominant on the European right, that the Italian fascists began as a movement and only subsequently morphed into a political party, while the German Nazis began as a party and later became a movement,<sup>34</sup> but it should be noted that the idea of the popular movement had strong roots in the Serbian political tradition. It was an expression of defiance against the institutions of parliamentary democracy and political parties as their key drivers, but also a way to undo the plurality of “the people,” which Ljotić, like Pašić, understood to be breaking up or dividing the nation. In several speeches and articles he insisted that Zbor was not a political party, but a moral and spiritual movement. His arguments were similar to those of the Radicals, and the basic idea was to deny the possibility of pluralistic thinking in the society and to reduce the entire society and nation to a single line, a popular movement, the movement under his leadership.

As a popular movement that did not recognize differences, Zbor was, according to its leader, supposed to connect fragmented popular forces and discipline special interests. He said that a popular movement grows from below, from the people,<sup>35</sup> that this is a genuine organization and not a party. Similar to the Radicals, the members of Zbor saw their movement as a natural phenomenon that occurs in an eruptive manner and draws its power directly from the people, “the people’s movement will swell like an unstoppable life current.”<sup>36</sup>

By portraying their movements and parties almost as natural phenomena, these political groups reaffirmed their respective ideological tenets. If political movements connected the people with the popular state, then this meant strengthening, even institutionally, the monistic character of these ideological systems, which see a threat in all the pluralism, and see an enemy in any “political

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33 Rad zemaljske radikalne konferencije održane 21. i 22. novembra 1911, Stenografske beleške, Belgrade 1912, p. 44.

34 Andrej Mitrović, *Fašizam i nacizam*, Belgrade 2009.

35 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Razmišljanja o vladama”, in *Sabrana dela*, 4, p. 40.

36 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Stranke ili pokreti”, in *Sabrana dela*, 1, p. 68.

other.”<sup>37</sup> A different opinion appeared as something antagonistic to the desired natural unity, a foreign object against which, as the opposition claimed, “any means are allowed.”<sup>38</sup> Apart from other social and historical factors, this ideological axis was one of the foundations of authoritarian regimes, which were repeated in Serbian political history, as well as in the history of political violence as one of its key features.<sup>39</sup>

### *Zadruga* as an economic ideal

As we mentioned earlier, the basic functions of popular states were social and economic ones. From Svetozar Marković onward, it was seen as a way to avoid capitalism<sup>40</sup> and prevent the division of the society into, as Nikola Pašić later said, “those who govern and those who are governed.”<sup>41</sup> The main objective of the popular state was to prevent the penetration of capitalism, private property, and the free market. As a state – a union of communities, an expanded *zadruga*, in which the people govern themselves, in the belief of its ideologues – it could help Serbia avoid replicating the Western European path of development.<sup>42</sup>

In Marković’s works, the *zadruga* was primarily a model for solving the property question. He opposed private property and argued for shared labor and common ownership, which would allow everyone in the Serbian society to remain equal by way of redistributing social wealth. It was Marković himself who put it succinctly: “Our task is not to destroy capitalist production, which in fact does not exist, but to transform the small patriarchal property into a common good and thus skip an entire epoch of economic development – the epoch of capitalist economy.”<sup>43</sup> This type of social and political development was to be realized by the popular state, which would, according to Marković, abolish the division between the governing and the governed, being a union of communes, an extended *zadruga* in which the people govern themselves.

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37 Latinka Perović, “Politički protivnik kao neprijatelj”, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, pp. 387-400.

38 Dubravka Stojanović, *Iza zavese*, p. 107.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 103-125.

40 Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, 3, p. 121.

41 Nikola Pašić, *Pisma, članci, govori*, p. 98.

42 Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, 3, p. 125.

43 Inaugural address, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Tübingen 1955, p. 23.

Marković's program began transforming from position papers into political practice when the first members of the parliament close to these ideas, especially Svetozar's brother Jevrem Marković and Adam Bogosavljević, turned the ideological agenda into a political demand in their Proposal to the National Assembly in 1876. In this political demand, they opposed the construction of railways, sought to disband the gendarmerie and close down forestry schools, the National Theatre, the teacher training school, the only three diplomatic missions that Serbia had, to cut clerical salaries and ban schools which teach foreign languages, rhetoric and music. The Proposal clearly expressed fears that such institutions would change both the society and individuals, "If you wish to create a bunch of soft weaklings out of a nation, let it have such schools, let those schools teach many different languages, poetic and oratorical styles, let them teach painting, dancing, music, singing (...) in a few decades you shall see an outgrowth of a difficult class of people on the national body."<sup>44</sup>

In his treatise *Sloga Srbo-Hrvata* (The Harmony of Serbo-Croats), Nikola Pašić proved his conceptual continuity in relation to his "political fathers" arguing for the adoption of economic relations to the *zadruga* ideal: "Serbian *zadrugas* can become a model in production." This model primarily meant protection against capitalism,<sup>45</sup> which in the *Harmony of Serbo-Croats* was clearly stated and adapted to his Slavophile understanding of state and society, primarily by placing the *zadruga* as the central ideal: "The Serbian *zadruga* is the social institution which is closest to the Russian 'obshchina' and behind this Serbian *zadruga* stands the Serbian commune which has not dropped or abandoned the demand for its "communal self-government" and which still has ample communal land, belonging to the whole commune, to all its members."<sup>46</sup> He did not see the *zadruga* as something ancient or utopian, but as a real economic future for the common state of Serbs and Croats: "The Serbian *zadruga* can serve as a role model in production, and the Serbian commune will be an example of civic life in the Serbo-Croatian state."

But the *zadruga* was more than that. From the time of Svetozar Marković, the *zadruga* was understood as a peculiar expression of

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44 Predlog Narodnoj skupštini, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1875-1876, p. 1568, quoted after: Latinka Perović, *Između autokratije i anarhije*, p. 87.

45 Latinka Perović, *Između autokratije i anarhije*, p. 134.

46 Ibid.

Slavic civilization, its protection against the West, and a profound link with the Russian civilization. This was expressed most consistently again by Pašić in *The Harmony of Serbo-Croats*: “The *zadruga* is an advantage of the Slavic civilization because it solves the socio-economic problem, which the West did not resolve. In the *zadruga* there is collective ownership of land, because collectivism protects us against the West.”<sup>47</sup> This demarcation was extremely important to Pašić, it was one of his program’s vital features that tied him firmly to his ideological predecessor – Svetozar Marković. It was a model of economy and society different from those provided by Western Europe through its mode of development, and the idea that this road can be avoided, that one does not have to take it, is unequivocally expressed in Pašić’s crucial work. Again, the *zadruga* is seen as the framework for this autonomous road: “The Radical Party wants to prevent the people from adopting the errors of the Western industrial society, where a proletariat and immense wealth are being created, but instead wants to build industry on the basis of association. It wants to introduce full self-government as opposed to a bureaucratic system. Instead of capitalist enterprises, there should be workers’ *zadrugas*.”<sup>48</sup>

Half a century later, with historical conditions completely altered, the Serbian radical right set the fight against liberal capitalism as its main economic objective. It is interesting that Svetozar Marković had fought against capitalism even before it developed in Serbia, while the rightists developed their thinking when it looked like that capitalism reached its end, after the 1929 economic breakdown. This breakdown sparked new lines of thinking throughout the world about the fate of capitalism, its crisis, and alternatives. The Serbian right wing tapped into this thinking, speaking about the end of capitalism, blaming the system of producing crises, writing that “capitalism is unable to resolve the crisis, because the source of the crisis is the basis of the capitalist system, a free play with human interests, which is why capitalism leads only to chaos.”<sup>49</sup> This otherwise often repeated criticism was gradually complemented, especially as the thirties progressed, by racist and anti-Semitic elements of their ideology, and they wrote

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47 Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, 3, p. 126.

48 Olga Popović-Obradović, *Kakva ili kolika država*, p. 329; Nikola Pašić, *Pisma, članci i govori*, pp. 43–44, 51.

49 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kapitalizam”, in *Sabrana dela*, 11, p. 102.



that capitalism was such as it was because it was “the lever by which the Jews govern,”<sup>50</sup> which brought them closer to *Action française* and the German National Socialists.

What is pertinent to this paper is the fact that Dimitrije Ljotić, in contrast to capitalism, and similar to Marković and the Radicals, saw the solution in the popular state, because only such a state could, according to them, enable politics and economy to unite into an organic whole. In one sentence he expressed it succinctly: “*Zadrugas* must form the basis of the political system (...), the basis of the economic and national order. Only then will the state become an organism.”<sup>51</sup>

The starting point was that the political form of the popular state can guarantee better property and economic relations than a liberal-democratic state, primarily because it would install full control, “we want state intervention to regulate relations between labor and capital.”<sup>52</sup> This is supposed to be the basis of a planned economy, advocated by Ljotić: “We are against liberal capitalism, injustices, disorder. We seek the intervention of the state. In contrast to the liberal economy, we advocate the *zadruga*-type, organic, national economy where all the relations are regulated.”<sup>53</sup>

Another important point for this paper is the fact that the right wing also started from the fact that Serbia had an authentic, traditional solution to the capitalist crisis that shook the world. Nedić said: “The spiritual foundation of our economic cooperatives stems from the family *zadruga*. And this originates from our distinctive products, the racial-biological and ethnic realities.”<sup>54</sup> Ljotić also unequivocally argued that the spirit of *zadrugas*, which he promoted as the antithesis to capitalist free market spirit, had special roots in Serbia, writing that “the spirit of the *zadruga* movement originated in the family *zadruga*, so it is different from others. It is a deeper community than it is usually understood.”<sup>55</sup>

In his speeches and writings, Dimitrije Ljotić remained vague regarding the ownership, not giving a clear answer to the question whether the people’s property, which he advocated, also meant the

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50 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Skupština glavnog saveza”, in *Sabrana dela*, 9, p. 171.

51 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zadugarstvo u staleškoj državi”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 134.

52 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kakvu politiku hoćemo?”, in *Sabrana dela*, 5, p. 61.

53 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zadugarima glavnog saveza”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 74.

54 Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina*, p. 301.

55 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleži i Zbor”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 113.

property of the state. He wrote: "The people want to take their affairs into their own hands. Zbor wants to return the entire land and wealth of the nation into the people's hands. The people want to run and handle all the means of national production, and not for them to be handled by individuals, groups, cliques, trusts, cartels."<sup>56</sup> This is where he saw the crucial role of *zadrugas*, as a link between the state and the people, transmission of ownership: "We are fighting for the people to be handed back, through professional and *zadruga* organizations, the right to handle their social and economic difficulties."<sup>57</sup> Apart from the ownership question being regulated through professions and *zadrugas*, although he did not say how this would work, the system should look like this: "fair taxation, a radical exchange of goods, transition from an anarchist to an organized planned economy, socialization of large enterprises,"<sup>58</sup> which clearly inferred nationalization or partial abolition of private property.

By setting such an economic system as his goal, Ljotić came dangerously close to his greatest ideological enemies, the Marxists, which probably led him to unequivocally embrace private property in a series of long articles, however contrary that was to his previous works in which he had advocated collective ownership. In these texts he called private property the "basis of our society,"<sup>59</sup> trying to balance between irreconcilable ideological doctrines "a planned economy will, along with the *zadruga*, limit the play of private interests and subordinate them to the general ones, without destroying private property."<sup>60</sup>

The primary purpose of the *zadruga* both on the left and the right was to provide protection against the penetration of the capitalist system, seen as a product of the West and, therefore, foreign. In capitalism they saw the potential for exploitation within Serbia, but also for Serbia to be exploited by developed countries. But the primary motive for opposing capitalism was the attempt to preserve the pre-modern order, which was still dominant in the undifferentiated Serbian society. It was believed that the free mar-

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56 Dimitrije Ljotić, "Naša pobjeda", in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 117.

57 Dimitrije Ljotić, "Zadugarstvo u staleškoj državi", in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 131.

58 Dimitrije Ljotić, "Nekoliko osnovnih misli", in *Sabrana dela*, 6, p. 32.

59 Dimitrije Ljotić, "Veliki zbor druga Dimitrija Ljotića u Petrogradu", in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 54.

60 *Ibid.*

ket would provoke tectonic changes in the social structure. This is why the *zadruga* ideal was, first and foremost, a social ideal, which was to be achieved or safeguarded by constructing a popular state and preventing the capitalist development on the Serbian borders. The values of the Serbian society, which they wanted to preserve, were the values of the family *zadruga*.

### ***Zadruga* as a social ideal**

Apart from being a political and economic ideal, the *zadruga* was, possibly most of all, a social ideal. It was this social thought of different political elites in the Serbian history that was behind many political activities, and it appeared, as will be shown, as the main ideological obstacle to the Serbian modernization and Europeanization. In this regard as well, the family *zadruga* remained the main inspiration to politicians on both the left and the right, which they turned to whenever they portrayed an ideal society. Their motives differed, the stresses they placed were diametrical, but the *zadruga* narrative as a social ideal persisted in very remote historical situations, different times and national frameworks. The basic components of this ideology, which can be found on the left and on the right, are egalitarianism, collectivism, and the glorification of the Serbian village as a guardian of the social and national identity, and its last defense.

### *Egalitarianism*

In a society of negligible social differences, such as Serbia, a singular ideology was created and it emanated from a fear of change and reflected a desire for social petrification, preventing changes brought on by development. This ideological system connected patriarchal conservatism with European left ideas,<sup>61</sup> creating an amalgamation that would dominate the public discourse, but also influence the implementation of actual political decisions.

These ideas could primarily be heard in the National Assembly, from the members of the ruling People's Radical Party whose representatives proudly pointed out that it never became a "party of bosses," a testament of their egalitarian ideal included among the basic principles of their movement. They continued to advocate

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61 Dubravka Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija. Istorijski ogled o "zlatnom dobu srpske demokratije" 1903-1914*, Belgrade 2003, p. 183.

the philosophy of “equality in poverty,” retaining the basic ideas of early Serbian socialism in their discourse.

The main representative of this line was the priest Milan Đurić, who was virtually a spokesman for Pašić himself. Arguing for the adoption of the law which would prevent the division of the *zadruga*, Đurić, revealing strong anti-Semitism, said: “We do not need wealth. The Serbian tribe is not an Israelite tribe and it does not run on money. We are all equal, not divided into classes like other nations.”<sup>62</sup>

This ideal could be found not only among rural representatives, but also among elite intellectuals and scientists. Thus, a Belgrade University professor and government minister Jovan Žujović, asking for money for pensions, said in the Assembly: “Most probably I would not have been forced to ask for farmer’s pensions today had a fairly equal division of property been preserved; had strong family *zadrugas* and a patriarchal life in them been preserved, had the taxes remained insignificant, the need for money would be slight. Today, unfortunately, this is not the case.”<sup>63</sup>

Apart from these speeches that could be described as lamenting the past, the egalitarian ideal continued to dominate the Assembly and directly influence the legislation. The problem with the traditional concept of social equality was not that it was rationally trying to prepare the country for modernizing transition and to reduce the price that had to be paid,<sup>64</sup> but that it fought these changes and tried to prevent them. This type of egalitarianism proved to be anti-modernizing, an impediment to development. The most important argument was the fear of stratification, so one deputy, comparing Serbia to Russia, pointed out: “I believe that it is not an exaggeration to say that the sudden application of cultural achievements to these two Slavic nations, related by faith, blood, and tradition, gave quite the same results: tattered tail-coats and torn elbows (...)” and again, discussing the egalitarian concept of society: “There are no conditions among the Serbian people for creating classes in the form we know in the West, because we are all children of the same class, the peasant class.”<sup>65</sup>

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62 Govor Milana Đurića, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1910-1911, II, p. 12.

63 Jovan Žujović, “Misli o fondu za zemljoradničke penzije”, in *Srpski književni glasnik*, X, 1905, pp. 755-756.

64 Dubravka Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija*, p. 187.

65 Govor Đorđa Genčića, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1903-I, p. 530.

It should be emphasized that the Radicals did not stop at the anti-modernizing narrative, but that the egalitarian ideal continued to dominate the Assembly and directly influence the legislation. The overwhelming parliamentary majority consisting of deputies from the countryside kept Pašić's government in power almost continuously from 1891 until his death in 1926. Within that time, Pašić formed 25 governments. Many reform laws were postponed or permanently rejected on the grounds of egalitarian arguments. That is why it seems accurate to claim that the Socialists and the Radicals in Serbia were an expression of "the original contradictions of the society faced with modernization, the contradictions between the patriarchal substratum and European forms which provoked resistance, frustration, and hostility."<sup>66</sup> There are many examples from the decade before the First World War which reveal that egalitarian discourse had not been limited to political demagogy and propaganda, but that it had represented a practical policy which had held back Serbian development in many ways. We can mention the decades-long debates on approving the funds for basic public works in Belgrade, which delayed the construction of the sewerage system in the capital for 35 years. The argument repeated every time was very similar to the one in the Proposal to the National Assembly of 1876: "If we embellish (!) Belgrade to the detriment of the people, we will be unable to bring out to the battlefield the kind of soldiers that we should bring out."<sup>67</sup> In the 1930s and 40s, the far right was also dominated by similar, egalitarian social ideas, but the motives and objectives were different. Right-wing ideologues saw in the social stratification a threat to the nation understood in an organicist manner, they saw a threat to its homogeneity, which was one of Dimitrije Ljotić's central ideas. He viewed all the stratification as "grinding down the social organism"<sup>68</sup> to which he opposed his organicist conception of collectivism: "With our class understanding we wish to unite all the fragmented parts and assemble them into a single organ of our country – the association, and unite these newly created organs into a single organic Yugoslav state."<sup>69</sup>

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66 Latinka Perović, *Dominantna i neželjena elita*, Belgrade 2015, p. 20.

67 Govor Miloša Čosića, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1909–1910, p. 1591.

68 Dimitrije Ljotić, "Staleži i Zbor", in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 113.

69 Dimitrije Ljotić, "Čemu težimo?", in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 141.

For Ljotić, the relation between associations and cooperatives was crucial, because they were the solution to what the Marxists called the problem of class. The association was for him a senior social category and a community, which, as he said, determined our independent social development through the centuries.<sup>70</sup> According to Ljotić, *zadrugas* stood above associations, bringing together people from different associations, and he especially insisted on their civilizational, almost racial distinction, calling them the cornerstone of the Slavic social order.<sup>71</sup>

In the social sense, it was supposed to become the institution, under the corporate state, that produces “harmony and mutual solidarity for settling differences,”<sup>72</sup> a necessary element for “harmonizing class and interpersonal relations.”<sup>73</sup> Ljotić perfectly conveyed this unique economic, social, and national function of the cooperative in a single sentence: “Cooperatives must form the basis of the political system (...), the basis of the economic and national order.” In such a state, the cooperative will be, as he wrote in a biologicistic manner, a ‘hormone’<sup>74</sup> that provides solidarity to reconcile contradictions between classes and which enables the functioning of the planned economy.<sup>75</sup>

There is one striking difference between the left and the right understanding of the cooperative, which is also ideologically critical. The Serbian left imagined the cooperative as an egalitarian community of equal individuals, the cornerstone of a future classless society without inequality. In contrast, the right described a diametrically opposite notion of the cooperative. For Ljotić and Nedić it was a strictly a hierarchical community, with a strong authority of a head or elder leading it. Nedić, who was called both the leader and master of the house, transplanted the family cooperative model directly into the state, “The new Serbia will be a patriarchal, corporate, theocratic state, organized as a family where the leader is obeyed without question.”<sup>76</sup> Although in a much less patriarchal vein, Ljotić’s *zadruga* is ideal also because of its hierarchy, order, and discipline, as opposed

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70 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Je li majka rodila junaka?”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 102.

71 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Izvori naših osnovnih načela”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 145.

72 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zadrugarstvo u staleškoj državi”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 133.

73 Ibid.

74 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Nekoliko osnovnih misli”, in *Sabrana dela*, 6, p. 32.

75 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Kakvu politiku hoćemo?”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 73.

76 Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina*, p. 39.

to democracy, which he defined as the main root of the global crisis: “In this cooperative the head of the house (elder) was the leader not only of material things, but also a spiritual and moral drive. An authority!”<sup>77</sup>

### *Collectivism*

One of the fundamental political values, which was read in the *zadruga* ideal, was collectivism, that is to say, a condition in which the community is superior to the individual and its interests are more important than the interests of each of its members. The format of that community could vary – from a society to a nation – but what bound them together was the emphasis on the collective over the individual, or more precisely – the annulling of the individual and his or her immersion in the collective. Such ideas could often be held by the deputies from the countryside, but also by prominent intellectuals, those with degrees from Western universities who formed the social and political elite of the country. Thus, a leading ethnographer of his day and one of the pioneers of the field in Serbia, Sima Trojanović, writing in the most influential intellectual journal at the time – *Srpski književni glasnik*, and with some glumness and resentment – described the practices in the *zadruga* and the changes brought about by its disappearance. He portrayed the *zadruga* almost mechanistically, as a well-oiled machine whose main advantage lied precisely in the fact that all its parts were subordinated to it: “In the *zadruga* the person is always subordinated to the community, and everything he does looks like the operation of a sprocket or some other part of the machine. With this dependence on the entire *zadruga* everything ran smoothly, until one day the person was *individualized*, that is to say until he began calculating for himself and his power separately and believing that he and his wife would do better separately and would acquire greater property.<sup>78</sup> There evidently is regret about the fact that individuals placed themselves above the collective, and certain reproach about the “scramble” for property, ownership, and self-interest, which the author more than likely would rather see subordinate to the interests of the community.

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<sup>77</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Staleži i Zbor”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 114.

<sup>78</sup> Sima Trojanović, “Zadruga i inokoština”, in *Srpski književni glasnik*, X, 1907, p. 742.

This issue was even more explicitly discussed in the papers belonging to the two strongest parties. The Radical *Samouprava*, writing about the new project of creation of agricultural cooperatives, voiced resentment over the organization and the position of individuals in earlier patriarchal communities. What is clearly expressed is a commitment to the patriarchal model of society in which one does the thinking for all, and the collective protects the individual, which surrenders his or her individuality to the community, sacrificing it at the altar of collective security, "Moving from the patriarchal life, in which the *zadruga* elders, either by virtue of their age or intellect, took upon themselves the responsibility for the progress and the well-being of the entire *zadruga*; therefore, moving from this life to another one in which every member had to handle their own affairs, every individual became more fallible not only as a worker or wealth creator, but also in upholding what he had already gained. He felt various harmful effects more strongly when he became autonomous than he had while he was in the *zadruga*, and his income scale was declining day by day."<sup>79</sup>

While it is true that the authors concluded the period of such relations had passed, the way they wrote about it reveals that they regarded a modern society, the atomized family, and self-conscious individuals as unwanted necessities. They openly said that the concept was foreign to them, imported from the West, extraneous. This could not reintroduce the *zadruga* or ossify the society, but such a discourse could become a hindrance to development.

These attitudes are especially visible in discussions about different types of freedom, which were often conducted on the pages of newspapers, magazines, and in the Assembly. While freedom and democracy were constantly invoked as principal and sacred political ideals, comparing discourses at different levels clearly shows that, when it came to national matters, it was clear that the collective takes precedence over the individual, while the so-called external freedom (freedom of the nation and its unification) was placed above the internal freedom (the political freedom of the individual). That actually was the toughest test of the degree of the society's democratization, which always came down to prioritizing ideals, and instead of the necessary balance between freedom, equ-

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79 "Bogatstvo naroda", in *Samouprava*, February 23, 1908.



ality, and fraternity, an order was established with brotherhood on top, understood as a collective (the nation): “They (Serbs) need to work together, uniformly, unanimously. We need to think, feel, and work as one,”<sup>80</sup> wrote *Odjek*, the Independent Radical Party daily, a splinter group of the old Radicals. The even more liberal *Dnevni list* wrote in a similar manner: “The political struggle that had either crushed or is now crushing separate units of our people should stop once and for all.”<sup>81</sup>

A strong anti-individualism and reliance on the collective can be found in a series of Ljotić’s articles, who often reflected on this subject. He wrote, without reluctance, that “all misfortune comes from individualism,” repeating several times that human society is not the sum of individuals, but the “being of a higher order, primarily a moral and historical being that lives and acts.” Individualism was for Ljotić the essence of Westernism, which for him was a “frantic game of individual interests in economy, politics, and social relations.”<sup>82</sup>

At the core of his organicist concept, the human individual could not have “primarily personal interests, but the interests of the community.”<sup>83</sup> Individuals were seen only as parts of the whole, “fragments and limbs of the national body,”<sup>84</sup> and seen in their historical totality in which all the generations, “the dead, the living, and those to come,”<sup>85</sup> form the community. For him, the general interest must not be the sum of personal, individual interests, because the general was for him “something else. The nation is a collective being.”<sup>86</sup> This was precisely the essential role of the *zadruga* spirit that was to “unify the fragmented parts of the nation and assemble them into a single organ.”<sup>87</sup>

This new type of community was also a common feature with Nedić, fiercely opposed to any plurality and particularism, who often defined society and nation as homogenous entities: “My dear *zadruga* brothers, allow me to address you this way, following an old Serbian custom, when we were all brothers, all Serbs, not di-

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80 “Posle razočaranja”, in *Odjek*, March 25, 1909.

81 “Crnogorska emigracija”, in *Dnevni list*, December 3, 1910, p. 236.

82 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dva izlaza”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 41.

83 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ideali savremene omladine”, in *Sabrana dela*, 6, p. 203.

84 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Jedinka i zajednica”, in *Sabrana dela*, 11, p. 86.

85 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dok još nismo roblje”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 30.

86 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zbor i partije”, in *Sabrana dela*, 6, p. 108.

87 Dimitrije Ljotić, “Ni fašizam, ni nacizam”, in *Sabrana dela*, 3, p. 147.

vided into parties, or coteries, when we were led by a single spirit, the spirit of our great ancestors and the spirit of mother Serbia.”<sup>88</sup>

This comparative study has revealed deep similarities between populist socialism and extreme right-wing ideologies of the 1930s and 40s. Although those concepts were temporally and ideologically distant, there was a single conceptual pattern that united them, and which can be summed up in a single word – the *zadruga*. In those imageries, the *zadruga* was attributed different, often diametrically opposite features, but this actually confirms the hypothesis that a myth is a preferred depiction of the past, or that its long-term strength and persistence depends on the flexibility, extensibility, and ability to simultaneously communicate entirely different, even conflicting things, just like the myth of the *zadruga*. It was this ideological flexibility and adaptability that allowed it to play the role of the ideological subterranean river over a long historical time, to disappear from the discourse and reappear again, to be an inspiration in so many different contexts and to so many different political systems. It was neither a utopia nor demagogy. On the contrary, the concept of the *zadruga* was a persistent ideological cornerstone, the foundation of anti-pluralist, anti-liberal, anti-Western, and anti-modernizing political orders. It was a concentrated ideological essence, a synthesis. But it was also a symptom. A symptom which can point the way to a deeper understanding of the Serbian society. The constant returning to the patriarchal, pre-modern ideal is a testament to the attempts by various political groups to hinder development, to prevent changes. Returning to the *zadruga* is not a proof that history is repeating itself but that, between the present and the past, it is the latter that is chosen.

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88 Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina*, p. 303.

# IN QUICKSAND

## POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN SERBIA AT THE END OF THE LONG 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Is democracy weed that can grow in any soil, or is it a delicate plant that requires special social conditions? Does the transfer of democratic models, legislature, and institutions into underdeveloped countries signify their modernization,<sup>1</sup> or could it provoke negative reactions in the host society,<sup>2</sup> produce a counter-effect, and contribute to the strengthening of anti-modern and conservative trends? These are some of the key issues of the theory of democracy,<sup>3</sup> which attained great significance in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the number of self-identified democratic countries grew exponentially.

The Serbian case can provide some interesting contributions in considering these topics. This is a state that came into being after the first “national revolution,” as Leopold Ranke called it,<sup>4</sup> in the Balkan region of the Ottoman Empire and which, adopted liberal models from the European West ever since its first autonomous proclamations, like the 1835 Sretenje Constitution. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Serbia gradually established a liberal legislature and institutions, and this trend accelerated after the 1878 independence. The laws protecting freedom of the press and freedom of association that were passed during the 1880s provided the

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1 Guy Hermet, *Culture et démocratie*, Paris 1993; Guy Hermet, *Sociologie de la construction démocratique*, Paris 1986; Martin Lipset, *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics*, New York 1981; Gary Marx and Larry Diamond, *Reexamining Democracy. Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset*, Newbury Park 1992; Samuel Huntington, *The Third Way. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma 1992.

2 Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism*, New York 2002; David Held, *Models of Democracy*, Palo Alto 2006; Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequences*, Cambridge 2005.

3 Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston 1966; Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Chicago 1956; Giovanni Sartori, *Theorie de la démocratie*, Paris 1958.

4 Leopold Ranke, *Die Serbische Revolution*, Hamburg 1829.

conditions necessary for formulating a liberal 1888 constitution, based on the Belgian model. That constitution remained in effect for six years and was re-instituted after the 1903 dynastic change, beginning the period that is referred to in Serbian historiography as “the Golden Age of Serbian democracy.” It provided for the clear separation of powers and introduced democratic procedures based on the most developed European systems of the time. The introduction of quasi-universal male suffrage and the adoption of liberal laws in regard to freedom of the press, of assembly and speech, provided the foundations for a democratic system of representative government.

Even as this accelerated development of the Serbian state took place, there remained within the country an almost petrified, pre-modern, patriarchal society and its institutions. Poor agrarian people formed 87% of the total population, and most peasants owned areas of land smaller than 5 acres, which was insufficient to provide for their large families.<sup>5</sup> The urbanization process did not really take off until the First World War, so the urban society remained weak, consisting mostly of petty craftsmen, merchants, and state administrators. There was practically no industry, except for a few breweries and cement factories, the capital from which was not enough to start a more serious industrialization process. The literacy rate, considered one of the most important factors in creating the social preconditions for democracy, was extremely low: there was a 76% illiteracy rate in rural areas, while in the urban areas the figure was 45%. Overall, the social basis onto which the most modern European institutions were transplanted was a thin one indeed.

Therefore, the main topic of this paper is the issue of the relationship between modern institutions and pre-modern society, especially its pre-modern political culture. In analyzing the coming together of these two structures in Serbia, it is evident that the imported institutions did not operate according to the envisaged model. They were gradually pervaded by a pre-modern idea of politics, which jammed the new institutional machinery and rendered meaningless the basic legal framework for the state.

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<sup>5</sup> On Serbian society in 19<sup>th</sup> century see: Holm Sundhaussen, *Historische Statistik Serbiens, 1834-1914: mit Europaishen vergleichstadt*, Munich 1989; Marie-Jannine Calic, *Sozialgeschichte Serbiens 1815-1941*, Munich 1994; Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Serbiens, 19-21 Jahrhundert*, Cologne 2007.

This led to a situation in which a democratic form was filled with authoritarian content. The following examples will demonstrate how democratic institutions became the basis of an undemocratic government – in other words, how introducing the form did not mean the introduction of substance. The opposition frequently complained about it in its press. One could read in *Odjek* (the Echo), paper of the younger democratically oriented generation of intellectuals, mostly educated in Paris, such frustrated statements as, “Serbia accepts from the West all the products of human spirit but in form and not in essence. She uses the laws only as ornaments and not as something really needed.”<sup>6</sup> On the opposite side of the political spectrum, progressives and older generation conservatives, made almost identical objections. They saw in institutions a special goal, almost a conspiracy; that is, to keep the same authoritarian political content but to hide it with the change of form:

“This democratism that is paraded here is democratism by name only. Its purpose is to serve as the veneer behind which it will still be speculated, just as happened behind other veneers. Actually, they want speculators of new order to suppress the ones of the older order.”<sup>7</sup>

### Vacuous public debate?

In this pre-modern model of political culture,<sup>8</sup> politics is perceived as a conflict, as a war in which one is justified in using all means possible against one’s political opponents; politics are not a way of articulating and resolving social conflicts. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century non-partisan press reported that politicians’ passions had harmed Serbia: “spites and vengeance, hatreds and defamations, persecutions and spying, are characteristics of the era, where political party passions cannot find their own limits.”<sup>9</sup> The climate of intolerance that governed political life was described<sup>10</sup> as one in which political

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6 “Obični poslovi”, in *Odjek*, April 27, 1909.

7 “Kralj, ustavnost, apsolutizam, demokratizam, parlamentarnost”, in *Nedeljni pregled*, March 14, 1910, p. 138.

8 Guy Hermet, *Culture et démocratie*; Guy Hermet, *Sociologie de la construction démocratique*.

9 “Hajdučija”, in *Politika*, August 10, 1907.

10 “Na novu godinu”, in *Trgovinski glasnik*, January 11, 1904.

freedom was reduced to the “freedom of brawl,”<sup>11</sup> and issues of general interest became subservient to the “fragmentation of political parties, personal strife and conflicts, individual aspirations, insiders’ bills, aspirations to any particularity.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the characteristics of this “political fanaticism”<sup>13</sup> was that the harshest accusations were exchanged between the feuding camps and desensitized everyone, creating a situation in which there were seemingly no limits to what a person could say.<sup>14</sup> This led to a complete impasse in governance, as personal insults gradually became an end in and of themselves. Political opponents were not seen as collaborators in the joint venture to serve the general good but as “blood enemies,”<sup>15</sup> thus delegitimizing the “political other” and creating space for fierce political conflicts, including a long history of political assassinations.<sup>16</sup> This antagonism towards the other, especially towards all kinds of minorities, resulted in a particular political vocabulary,<sup>17</sup> the fervor of which abolished normal political communication. That “foam of words,” as some contemporaries called it, created the impression of freedom of speech, but in truth that freedom had been converted into anarchy. The best examples for this are to be found by analyzing the Serbian press in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The media at that time was very rich and diverse. Along with 12 daily newspapers there were numerous professional, specialized, weekly, and even family magazines.<sup>18</sup> Freedom of the press was enshrined in the 1903 liberal press law. However, when analyzing the press in detail, using content analysis and discourse analysis, it appears that freedom of the press in fact trivialized and distorted the notion of freedom. After a while, anything could be found in public writings, from incorrect information to the worst personal insults.

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11 “Uvodnik”, in *Trgovinski glasnik*, June 11, 1906.

12 “Uvodnik”, in *Trgovinski glasnik*, July 10, 1905.

13 “Rešenje krize”, in *Štampa*, March 29, 1908.

14 “Ljudi i moral u skupštini”, in *Štampa*, June 30, 1907.

15 Govor Andre Đorđevića, in *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1905-I, December 16, 1903, p. 258.

16 See in Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije. Srpsko društvo na prelazima vekova (XIX-XXI)*, Belgrade 2006.

17 More in Dubravka Stojanović, “Simboli i ključne reči u diskursu političkih stranaka u Srbiji početkom 20. veka”, in *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, 1-3, Belgrade 2002, pp. 29-51.

18 On the 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbian press: D. Stojanović, “Javnost u Srbiji 1903-1914. Skica za portret srpskog društva”, in *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, 1-2, 1996, Belgrade 1997, pp. 40-51.

When reading front-page editorials, one could conclude that the main aim was to insult opponents, to belittle and ridicule them. There was no limit to what could be said; there was no responsibility for declarations made. Thus, it was possible for the ruling Radical Party's daily newspaper, *Samouprava* (Self-government), to publish an article full of insults directed at the rival Independent Radicals, which was formed after the defection of several members from the Radical Party. The Independent Radicals belonged to the younger generation, so elder members of the governing Radical Party frequently cited their "youth" in arguments for their lack of political qualifications: "Many among them do not even know what a family is, as they have no wives or children – as people would say, not a dog or a cat – so they do not know what is honor and what is pride."<sup>19</sup> As for the Independent Radicals, this is how they responded: "To join the company of Radicals means entering into a damp, dark and stuffy cave, where poison gases reign and an infinite number of disgusting slimy little animals crawl."<sup>20</sup>

With such a constant exchange of insults, words lost their weight. One therefore questions whether that kind of press was really a carrier of the society's democratization, or whether, on the contrary, such writing created an anarchic political scene in which anything was possible. More detailed analyses of these writings<sup>21</sup> lead one to believe that the latter holds true: such an understanding of the freedom of the press and political expression actually created a space utterly lacking rules and regulations. Public discourse hinged on the imagination required in insulting "the others" today more than they insulted "us" the day before.

So dominant were the personal insults that, as time went by, political debates were completely abandoned, and politics was reduced to private conflicts between the main actors.<sup>22</sup> Instead of articulating and channeling social problems, politics began to deepen them and transfer them into personal conflicts, which then became entangled with important state affairs in the pages of the press. This type of communication completely subordinated

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19 "Odjekovcima", in *Samouprava*, August 2, 1905.

20 "Kleveticima oko Samouprave", in *Odjek*, May 21, 1905.

21 D. Stojanović, "Partijske elite u Srbiji 1903-1914. Uloga i način vladanja", in *Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis*, 2, 1997, pp. 41-51.

22 For numerous examples showing this, see: D. Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija*, Belgrade 2003, pp. 375-421.

public and state interests to the personal bickering of leading personalities. Such a free-for-all trivialized the issues and, eventually, the participants in public life. Each issue and every prominent individual lost authority, leaving society unable to clearly articulate the direction it wanted to follow. This form of press freedom can thus be seen from a dual perspective, both as a guarantor of freedom and as its downfall.

### Political parties

There is an interesting example from the history of Serbian political parties that illustrates the change in the essence of democratic institutions. The liberal Law on the Freedom of Association enabled the creation of modern political parties in 1881, just a few years after Chamberlain had formed the National Liberal Federation in Great Britain (1877), which is considered to be the first modern political party.<sup>23</sup> Serbian parties took their names and programs from European models, thereby linking themselves to key concepts of the time: liberalism, conservatism, radicalism, social democracy.<sup>24</sup> However, their internal organization, their quasi-military discipline and hierarchy, the perpetuity of their leaders, and the lack of internal fractions and debate, made these organizations look more like feuding families than the building blocks of democracy. Aggravating the situation was their continuous fragmentation that resulted from the lack of internal democracy and from adherence to persons rather than principles. In an almost monolithic, impoverished, and overwhelmingly illiterate society, parties were not formed as representatives of different parts of a politically conscious civil society. On the contrary, they were formed within the narrow elite of the capital city, through the gathering of like-minded acquaintances, usually educated in foreign universities.<sup>25</sup> As the most educated segment of society, intellectuals necessarily entered politics. In a society without a powerful financial-banking sector, without entrepreneurs, large landowners or industrialists, the struggle to spread liberties definitively belonged to the most highly educated, who usually served as state bureaucrats. Thus, it

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23 M. Ostrogorski, *La démocratie et les partis politiques*, Paris 1979.

24 Dragoslav Janković, *Rađanje parlamentarne demokratije. Političke stranke u Srbiji 19. veka*, Belgrade 1997.

25 On the creation of the Serbian social elite through education, see Lj. Trgovčević, *Planirana elita. O studentima iz Srbije na stranim univerzitetima u 19. veku*, Belgrade 2003.



paradoxically emerged that the sector of society almost entirely dependent on the state for its financial well-being was also that one charged with the task of curtailing the state's omnipotence.<sup>26</sup> The state provided stipends for the education of future bureaucrats, it enabled their social mobility, and, depending on the education they acquired, it brought them from small towns to Belgrade, where they eventually joined the leading ranks of society. It is clear that a population so tightly bound to the state could not provide the crucial push for their country's democratization in the way that their Western European counterparts stood up in the name of society and its citizens and gradually forced the state to withdrawal.

As representatives of the social elite, state bureaucrats also formed the first political parties in Serbia. Party leaders came from the small world of Belgrade's intellectual elite, and their personal relations were one of the main criteria in forming party leadership. That is why the political clashes that later occurred amongst the parties took on a personal character. By the same token, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries private conflicts frequently led to party splintering, which was the most common way of establishing a second generation of political parties.<sup>27</sup> The fact that party clashes happened between relatives, former friends, and godfathers meant that the private tone of intra-party relations spilled into political life write large, imbuing it with a passion almost unknown to mature political societies. An understanding of parties as extended families and a reduction of internal relations to personal affinities led to a saturation of the entire public space by personal relations. Political principles were replaced by passionate love/hate relationships that obstructed the work of state institutions and put personal interests over and above those of the public.<sup>28</sup>

One of the factors that led to chronic institutional atrophy was the privileging of the party state over the rule of law.<sup>29</sup> The decisions and interests of client groups within political parties were

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26 On Serbian citizenry, more details in D. Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, Belgrade 2008, pp. 173-195.

27 More details in D. Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija*, pp. 245-283. On contemporary political parties in Serbia, see D. Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi. Ogledi iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije (1985-2009)*, Belgrade, 2010, pp. 120-173.

28 More details in Dubravka Stojanović, "Party Elites in Serbia 1903-1914...", op. cit.

29 Olga Popović-Obradović, "(Jedno)partijska država", in *Povelja*, Nos. 103-104, January-February 2007; Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, p. 119.

more important than procedures and laws. The resulting political passion almost completely determined everyday life, creating an impression that politics had overtaken society, dictating all dimensions of life.<sup>30</sup> However, when analyzing political discourse, proclamations, speeches, Assembly debates, and the press, it is clear that there was actually very little in the way of politics.<sup>31</sup> The general absence of clear political positions produced a lack of anything programmatic or principled. One of the greatest intellectuals and politicians of that time, Jovan Skerlić, remarked:

“While in the whole world political struggle is ordered, and almost channeled, with us it remains in a chaotic state, where there are no other urges but spite and appetite, where it is considered that anything goes: political bidding, overnight changes of opinion, the most unnatural alliances and selling of consciences.”<sup>32</sup>

In an impoverished society, political parties had great economic and social importance. Although historians have yet to research their ties to financial circles within the country, it is well known that certain banks were considered to “belong” to certain political parties. Progressives founded and directed the politics of the National Bank, and in 1906 Radicals established the Land Bank in 1906, which financed the paper *Self-Government*. The Export Bank was held by Independents and Radicals and the Commerce Bank by Independents, who also exerted great influence over the Direction of Funds. Progressives were the leading decision-makers in the Economic Bank and Liberals in the Vračar Savings.<sup>33</sup> In the ever-shifting Serbian economy, politics was the way to achieve economic security. Closeness to the ruling elite meant better jobs but also access to markets and investments. Therefore, the rare, financially powerful businessmen had to cooperate closely with the state and were entangled in a constantly unstable political climate. Political parties were thus tied not only to the state but also directly to the money flows in a small, tightly controlled market dominated by monopolies and oligopolies.<sup>34</sup> Specific business interests were linked to specific parties. Through them, businessmen tried

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30 More about this in D. Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, pp. 237-243.

31 For the specific examples, see D. Stojanović, “Simboli i ključne reči...”, pp. 34-37.

32 J. Skerlić, *Feljtoni, skice i govori, Sabrana dela*, VII, Belgrade 1964, p. 126.

33 D. Milić, “Privreda Beograda”, in *Istorija Beograda*, vol. 2, Belgrade 1974, pp. 349-424.

34 On the history of Serbian economy, see: N. Vučo, *Privredna istorija Srbije do Prvog svetskog rata*, Belgrade 1955.

either to gain access to state funds or to guarantee the protection of their interests from foreign or local competitors, if possible by creating a monopoly. Financial and economic monopolies led to party dependency, which further eroded the independence of political parties and reduced the likelihood that they would open up society. This system was a result of transplanting a democratic party system on a peasant society, which had been accustomed to different forms of power and resource allocation and was trying to figure out the new modern state system and how to gain access to it. To be in a party and to be in power were some of the most important factors of social mobility, for, in a dominantly rural peasant society, politics was one of the main ways to secure a better life.<sup>35</sup> People therefore fought to stay in power by any means necessary. Not being in power meant losing privileges, losing property, and sometimes even meant risking one's life. Bearing in mind these high stakes, it could be said that the struggle for power more closely resembled an underlying civil war than a healthy competition between political principles.

### Political violence

Because social conflicts remained outside the institutions, they occasionally led to extra-institutional, and often bloody, turnovers that meant revolutionary changes of government. These sorts of changes began with the very first shift in Serbia's leadership. In 1817, in accordance with the instructions of the leader of the Second Serbian Uprising, Miloš Obrenović, the leader of the First Uprising, Karađorđe, was assassinated. This marked the beginning of the conflict between the two dynasties (the Obrenović and the Karađorđević), formed by the heirs of the two "national movement" leaders. The two national dynasties made Serbia different from all its neighboring countries<sup>36</sup> and added further instability and passion to its political history. For example, during the Second World War there were three dramatic dynastic changes. Even more telling is that all Serbian monarchs, except Miloš Obrenović, were either forcibly removed from power or assassinated. Therefore, one of the parliamentary monarchy's key institutions – the king – was

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<sup>35</sup> Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, pp. 239–243.

<sup>36</sup> Unlike its neighbours (Greece, Romania, Bulgaria), Serbia had an indigenous royal house; as a matter of fact it had two!

devalued, stripped of authority. Following the 1903 murder of the last members of the Obrenović dynasty, the progressive deputy, monarchist Pavle Marinković, said in the National Assembly: “After 29 May, when Serbia saw that a ruler (whatever he was like) was thrown head-first through a window, it is finished with the monarch’s infallibility and prestige.”<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the existence of monarchy, rival camps schemed against one another, which confirm that Serbian monarchism had its own specificities. In the first place, there was an idea that the king should be elected, which was contrary to the Serbian constitution. The latter provided for a hereditary monarchy, which promoted legitimacy based on the origins of the king and on an awareness of community between ancestors and heirs. Moreover, the idea that the monarch’s rule was derived “from the will of the people” was constantly under discussion in the public sphere. Thus, the press wrote of “threats” addressed to the then king regarding his possible deposition. And as a matter of fact, these threats were often carried out, as the history of the Serbian monarchy demonstrates so clearly.<sup>38</sup> The anti-monarchist opposition frequently challenged the king, making various political requests that were contrary to the principles of parliamentary monarchy. Sometimes it directly addressed the issue of allegiance to the monarch in the National Assembly:

“So what then are (the king’s) functions (...) why is there a King then? If the King does not want free elections, he ceases to be The King of All Serbs in our eyes, but becomes The King of only one political party. We shall then determine ourselves based on that fact.”<sup>39</sup>

Other times, the king was threatened even more explicitly with revolution: “His so far passive observance of the government’s misdeeds will be forgotten, if he provides free elections for the people (...) otherwise, he gives fuel to the civil war and revolutions.”<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that there was furthermore a clash between the two hereditary dynasties, Obrenović and Karađorđević, whose

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37 Quoted in Olga Popović-Obradović, “Odnosi prema kralju i monarhiji”, in *Kakva ili kolika država. Oglеди o društvenoj i političkoj istoriji Srbije 19-21. veka*, Belgrade 2008, p. 156.

38 On the idea of electability of the monarch, see: Olga Popović-Obradović, *Parlamentarizam u Srbiji 1903-1914*, Belgrade 1997, pp. 333-370.

39 Quoted in Olga Popović-Obradović, “Odnosi prema kralju i monarhiji”, p. 159.

40 Ibid.

members were followers of the two leaders of the two early 19<sup>th</sup> century uprisings. Under those circumstances, any threat to the monarch meant the possibility of deposing these twin dynasties that switched places four times between 1830 and 1945.<sup>41</sup> Such political threats constantly held the door open to extra-constitutional solutions of political crises, calling for the use of violence.

While violent dynastic changes brought about physical conflicts between the supporters of the new and the deposed monarchs, shifts in party power could also generate waves of violence. This tradition began to form especially after the creation of the first government to include representatives of the Popular Radical Party, in 1887. It was hailed as the end of the previous rule of the Progressive Party, and citizens were invited to join in the physical conflict against the supporters of the previous government. The event was called “people’s sigh,” which was a populist way of saying that it was the right of the citizens to breathe a sigh of relief and get back at the ones who had oppressed them. Several hundred people were killed in these conflicts, and many houses and estates were burned.<sup>42</sup>

The “Golden Age” of Serbian democracy began with the regicide of 1903. This was a coup d’état in which the king and the queen were brutally murdered and their dismembered bodies thrown into the court park in the center of Belgrade. Fierce attacks on supporters and symbols of the deposed dynasty followed; they included demolition of the central court building where the murder took place, destruction of the Obrenović property and of state archive documents, and abolishment of state holidays, including Kingdom Day (Serbia became a kingdom under the rule of an Obrenović). Up until the First World War, the political groups defeated in the 1903 coup d’état were denied many of their rights and were frequently subject to violence. A climate of fear emerged that included physical assaults on opposition leaders. A well-known case is that of the attack on two opposition leaders as they were exiting the National Assembly. Armed officers attacked them in the middle of a crowd at the Terazije and then returned to the garden of the Moskva Hotel, publicly demonstrating the lack

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41 Obrenović dynasty was in power 1830–1842; Karađorđević dynasty 1842–1858; Obrenović 1858–1903; Karađorđević 1903–1945. Branka Prpa (ed.), *Moderna srpska država. 1804–2004. Hronologija*, Belgrade 2005.

42 L. Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, pp. 138–156.

of legal consequences for intimidation of political opponents. A speech by the wounded deputy in the Assembly proved that they were right, as he reported never receiving a response from the court about the complaint he filed against the attackers.<sup>43</sup>

Another particularly dramatic political clash happened in 1907, when military officers Milan and Maksim Novaković were killed in the Belgrade Central Prison, in the presence of the Minister of Internal Affairs.<sup>44</sup> They were founders of the Society for Legal Solutions to the Conspiracy Issue, which wanted the officers who participated in the 1903 regicide to be removed from the army. This demand made them the harshest opponents of the scheming military organization that was behind the government. Despite the liberal law on the freedom of association, their society was banned in 1906, a measure that was clearly contrary to that important democratic law and therefore meant its de facto nullification. The parliamentary majority furthermore rejected the opposition's interpellation immediately after the murder, which raised the issue of the Prime Minister's responsibility. When the Prime Minister remained in his post, it brought into question one of the key principles of parliamentarism, that of ministerial responsibility. A similar case took place four years later, in 1911. Following an independent investigation, the court determined that the Minister of Internal Affairs was the one who had given the order for the two opposition leaders to be killed in prison. After a dramatic debate that went on for several months, however, the parliamentary majority rejected the interpellation asking for charges to be brought against the Minister in the state court.<sup>45</sup> This ended the case. It turned out that neither the proof brought forward by the National Assembly minority, nor the proof established by the court could initiate a process leading to the trial of the ones responsible for the murders. It was thus concretely demonstrated that the supposed independence of the judiciary, and of other institutions, was meaningless: it led to no consequences or corrections in the functioning of the state and society. Political will stood above judicial and legal will, and individual interests

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43 Govor Mihaila Đorđevića, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1910-1911, March 17, 1911, p. 32.

44 More on the Novaković case in Olga Popović-Obradović, *Parlamentarizam u Srbiji*, pp. 325-329, 385-389.

45 "Posle šest godina", in *Pravda*, May 29, 1909.

above institutions. Even when the institutions did work in part, as in the case of the Novaković brothers, their decisions were not implemented. Consequently, institutional credibility was utterly destroyed in the eyes of the people. Institutions lost the confidence of the citizens, as expressed in a 1907 analysis by the opposition: “This is a system in which citizens formally have all the rights but in fact cannot realize any of them. It is a special, hybrid regime, possible only in Balkan countries. This regime is formally very liberal, but in reality it negates all liberty.”<sup>46</sup>

“The Novaković case,” which shook the Assembly, the press and the general public for more than four years, pointed to several key problems with the democratic, parliamentary order introduced in Serbia. It is true that in that case the judiciary, despite its slow reaction, affirmed its independence. However, the response of the majority deputies showed that court rulings had no authority and that their will could trump the court decision. This was a challenge to the balance of powers and removed the judiciary as a key state institution, disempowering it as a corrective of the system and key arbiter of the legal state.

### Minority and majority

This example of the Novaković brothers also reveals a specific understanding of the parliamentary majority’s powers. This is one of the most controversial issues in the theory and practice of democracy; it is unsurprising, then, that of the parliamentary majority, a right to the “extraordinary.” The other side of the argument consisted in a special understanding of the (restricted) rights of the minority. Oppositional groups were perceived as an unequal and illegitimate part of the political scene. This is once again exemplified in the ruling party’s newspaper: “The minority generally has only *one* right: to try to become the majority, and until it achieves it, it must surrender itself to impotence and exclusion.”<sup>47</sup>

This attitude from the Popular Radical Party, which was in power in Serbia for almost half a century with minor interruptions, determined the functioning of all institutions. Hence, rights that extended beyond the right of majority rule were considered

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<sup>46</sup> “Stambulovština”, in *Pravda*, January 28, 1907.

<sup>47</sup> “Borba protiv većine”, in *Samouprava*, April 3, 1908. For the same attitude, see also *Samouprava*, January 28, 1907 and February 29, 1908.

illegitimate. Logically, then, opposition demands were perceived as attacks on the system, and their legitimacy could easily be transformed into illegality. Such an understanding of majority rule was the root of political violence, which further eroded the supposedly democratic laws and the institutional framework based on them. An opposition deputy's bitter conclusion sounded like a diagnosis: "There is one general rule for Serbia: He who owns the government, owns the state; he who has power, has freedom."<sup>48</sup> This statement brilliantly sums up modern Serbian political history, a history in which the domination of a party over the legal state was all too evident.<sup>49</sup>

### Separation of powers

Gradually, these social relations and understandings of politics began to change the essence of the introduced institutions, so they resembled less and less their European models. The parliamentary system implemented in Serbia was based on the French model. This meant that its keystone was the National Assembly. However, after 1905, its internal makeup began to change. The previously dominant People's Radical Party (which gained over 75% of the votes in the elections) split in two, thus making it impossible for either them or the seceding Independents to gain a majority in the National Assembly. Despite, or rather *because* of their loss of absolute dominance in the Assembly, the still ruling Radicals shifted the center of power to the executive branch. The clear separation of powers, enshrined in the 1903 Constitution, was violated quite often, especially as the executive branch increasingly assumed legislative powers.<sup>50</sup> The most common way of evading the parliamentary model and undermining the balance of powers consisted in the government ruling by decrees, instead of by laws voted on in the Assembly. This led to frequent protests by members of the parliament, who claimed that the parliament had become a mere ornament, without any real power.<sup>51</sup> But the ruling party

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48 Govor Ivana Pavićevića, in *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1906, November 17, 1906, p. 540.

49 On the continuity of the party state, see Olga Popović-Obradović, "(Jedno)partijska država", in *Povelja*, Nos. 103-104, January-February 2007; Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, p. 119.

50 Olga Popović-Obradović, *Parlamentarizam u Srbiji*, p. 317.

51 "Vlada i skupština", in *Odjek*, March 26, 1913.



seemed unperturbed by this nullification of the constitutionally provided institutional framework.

Matters grew even worse. “Exempters” were an especially drastic violation of the separation of powers. This was a special legal invention of Protić, Minister of Internal Affairs. The government would adopt certain regulations without prior assent by the Assembly and then, a couple of months later send them to the Assembly for approval. This procedure was sometimes even used for particularly sensitive issues. This was, for example, the case of the trade agreement formulated during the customs war between Serbia and its most important trade partner, the neighboring dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Fearing that the National Assembly would not approve document, the government adopted it in clear violation of the existing constitution, which stated that “trade contracts become valid only after being approved by the Assembly.”<sup>52</sup> The government submitted these agreements to the Assembly, with the “exempter,” two months later. The majority then voted for the dubious agreement in an orderly manner, despite the fact that the opposition pointed out that it was a violation of the constitution.<sup>53</sup>

### The budget issue

Disputes over the state budget put on especial display this upsetting of the separation of powers and disparagement for the institution of the National Assembly. Based on the 1903 Constitution, the king had the right, under extraordinary circumstances, to extend indefinitely the validity of the previous year’s budget.<sup>54</sup> This was the greatest deviation of the Serbian document from its Belgian model.<sup>55</sup> The provision clashed with the fundamental principles of the constitutional monarchy and ministerial responsibility. First, it gave the king an opportunity to interfere in the key state issue of finances. Second, even though the power was supposed to be used only under special circumstances – as when the Assembly was unable to meet, for example – it still potentially denied the Assem-

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52 *Ustavi i vlade Kneževine Srbije, Kraljevine Srbije, Kraljevine SHS i Kraljevine Jugoslavije (1835-1941)*, Belgrade 1988, p. 153.

53 *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, 1906, pp. 271-348. A detailed legal analysis of this case is in Olga Popović-Obradović, *Parlamentarizam u Srbiji*, p. 318.

54 Stojan Protić, *Ustavna i društveno-politička pitanja*, I-III, *Delo*, I-II, 1894, p. 117.

55 Olga Popović-Obradović, “Ustavnost i vladavina prava”, *Kakva ili kolika država... op. cit.*, pp. 57-224.

bly its strongest weapon against the government, i.e. the ability to bring down the government by refusing to adopt a budget.<sup>56</sup> Voting on the budget is the greatest test for any government, a decisive moment in which, every year, the power of the legislative over the executive branch is proved as the basis of parliamentarism. It can therefore be assumed that the right to the “decree budget” constitutionally granted to the Serbian king with the Constitution was among the royal rights initially inscribed into parliamentary monarchies but eventually abandoned.<sup>57</sup>

This budgetary right proved the key to remaining in power for parties having lost their majority in the Assembly. In 1907 and 1908 no constitutionally exceptional events (war or natural disaster) occurred to prevent the Assembly from holding session. However, the ruling government had lost the Assembly’s support, and the latter decided to express its discontent by obstructing the vote on the budget. This should have brought down the government.<sup>58</sup> It did not happen. The government prevented this by using a royal decree to extend the budget for several months, thereby ridding itself of the necessity of obtaining the Assembly’s approval. Even though such a measure was constitutional, it was deeply anti-parliamentary and implied total disparagement of the legislature and the basic rule according to which the Assembly was the one giving power and not the other way around. The actions of the Serbian government and the king destroyed the bases of parliamentarism, for the king sided with the government and entered into a conflict between two key state institutions, which a parliamentary monarch was not supposed to do. Furthermore, the government, in abusing that constitutional provision in both 1907 and 1908, extended its life for two years, even though it had lost the parliamentary majority.<sup>59</sup> This undermined the authority

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56 Slobodan Jovanović, *Ustavno pravo*, Belgrade 1907, p. 230.

57 It is primarily the king’s right to bring down the government that has a parliamentary majority. Most European constitutions recognized this right at the time, but it was assumed that he/she should not exercise that right. Between 1903 and 1914, the Serbian king used this right twice, bringing down majority governments during the crises of 1905 and 1906. See about this Dimitrije Đorđević, “Parlamentarna kriza u Srbiji 1905. godine”, in *Istorijski časopis*, XIV-XV, 1963.

58 “Parlamentarna hronika”, in *Arhiv pravnih i društvenih nauka*, XIII, 1912, pp. 434-435; Kosta Kumanudi, *Administrativno pravo*, Belgrade 1909, p. 59.

59 For the legal analysis of this case, see Olga Popović-Obradović, *Parlamentarizam u Srbiji*, pp. 355-387.

of the Assembly, depriving it of the most important corrective to the executive branch, and so the basic principle of the balance of powers was rendered meaningless.

### "Factors out of control"

The political influence of parts of the military, especially the group of conspirators that brought the Karađorđević dynasty to power in 1903, further decreased institutional authority: key state decisions were often made in secret, outside proper procedures, in places not controlled by democratic institutions.<sup>60</sup> This trend is another continuity in Serbian history. The case of the Novaković brothers already provided one clear illustration of the influence of extra-institutional factors. One should also mention the case of the so-called "New Lands," i.e. the territories annexed to the Serbian state following the Balkan Wars. Those military conspirators responsible for instigating the 1903 coup d'état pressured the government to instate a special, military-police regime in the newly liberated regions of Macedonia and Kosovo. This meant that the 1903 constitution would not be valid for those areas and that the new Serbian citizens would not be granted the rights enshrined in it. This demand provoked an angry response from the opposition and led to parliamentary and public debates<sup>61</sup> that shook Serbia for months. The opposition's main argument was that by establishing two legal systems within the country, the government would create first-order and second-order citizens. A central democratic principle, the equality of all citizens, would thereby be abolished.<sup>62</sup> Despite the opposition, the obedient parliamentary majority voted a special, police regime into place in the "New Lands."<sup>63</sup> It was an important concession to the military elements that had gained strength in the wars of 1912 and 1913.

This political victory furthermore provided space for the segments of the military that had come together in 1911 to form the

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60 On the actions of non-constitutional factors, see Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka. Ličnost i događaji u Srbiji od prevrata 1903. godine do Solunskog procesa 1917. godine*, Kragujevac 1997.

61 "Fuzionaški pašaluk", in *Odjek*, November 30, 1913.

62 V. Marinković, "Odvojeno mišljenje Narodnoj skupštini", *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, March 1, 1914, p. 1142.

63 "Izveštaj skupštinskog odbora", *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, March 1, 1914, p. 1137.

secret organization “Black Hand.” Its objective was to enter into a more open conflict with the elected authorities. The resulting tension peaked in the first half of 1914, when a sort of protracted coup d’état ended with King Petar Karađorđević leaving power.<sup>64</sup> The irony lies in the fact that the king was forced to leave by the same military conspirators who had brought him to power. They considered unacceptable his failure to comply with their request to remove the majority government of Nikola Pašić and bring minority independents close to the conspirators to power.<sup>65</sup> This overthrow – and the subsequent elevation of Aleksandar, the king’s son and conspirators’ friend to the throne – once again demonstrated the sort of open interference by extra-constitutional factors that was continually undermining the institutional framework and Serbian constitution.

## Conclusion

Most examples presented here are easily recognizable by present-day Serbian citizens, confirming the thesis of political culture as a process that takes place over a long period of time duration. This observation also raises the question of Serbian society’s potential to engage in democratic change. To put it another way: should one wait for a society to develop before introducing democratic institutions, or does the introduction of institution itself play an important role in the development of a society? I would argue for the latter proposition. The Serbian experience in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries points to several important reasons for this. First, regardless of its motives, the Serbian intellectual and political elite elected to instate a liberal model of government at a time when, for numerous historical, political, and even geographical reasons, the models of neighboring Austro-Hungary, Russia, or Germany would have been more compatible with Serbian social structure. Choosing the less familiar and more distant French, British, Swiss, and Belgian models also meant that they had selected a value system that could be a successful framework for development, as would later be seen across Europe, from Greece,

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64 See: Dragoljub Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karađorđević*, II, Belgrade 1990.

65 On the clash between military and civil authorities in Serbia in 1914, see Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka*; Vojislav Vučković, “Unutrašnje krize Srbije i Prvi svetski rat”, *Istorijski časopis*, XIV-XV, 1963-1965, pp. 177-189; Dušan Bataković, “Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti u Srbiji u proleće 1914”, *Istorijski časopis*, XXIX-XXX, 1982-1983, pp. 156-173.

through Italy, to Spain, Portugal, and Ireland. It was a good beginning that could have contributed to creating a strong relationship between politics and society. For the many reasons mentioned in the present paper, that happy end was never reached. However, there is another conclusion to be drawn from the Serbian case that may shed more optimistic light on the relationship between institutions and society. More than a decade after the introduction of parliamentary democracy in Serbia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the system began to function by itself, independent of political agents and even against their will. Increasingly, there were situations in which parliamentary rules functioned by themselves, despite all attempts to circumvent them. To give an example: when no one party gained a parliamentary majority, the sheer necessity of the government to be based on such a majority forced otherwise fierce political opponents to form coalition governments. Over time, such compromises wrought changes on both the rhetoric and the actual relations between political participants. A new form of political culture evolved. Or, to give another example: ongoing, reliable elections meant that parties alternated to power, political participants became accustomed to political changes. This attitude consequently reduced the fierceness of political conflicts, so the relations between the government and the opposition, the majority and the minority, began to change. It is true that, on the one hand, this paper has highlighted instances in Serbian political history that permit modern institutions in Serbia to be viewed as chronically depreciated, as institutions that sank in the quicksand. Nevertheless, these examples also show that it was possible to get out of those treacherous circumstances. The war period from 1912 onward interrupted this gradual development of political culture in Serbia. The evidence therefore confirms the thesis that a modern institutional framework does not have to be the consequence of, but could also be the condition for democratic development.



# UNFINISHED CAPITAL – UNFINISHED STATE

HOW THE MODERNIZATION OF BELGRADE  
WAS PREVENTED, 1890-1914

*The existing City is the most important available document on its past life.*

In such a way one could paraphrase one of Fernand Braudel's starting methodological points in his study of the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> If one accepts this, it would mean that the City reflects a special connection between the present and the past, that history on its streets leaves firmer and more durable traces, then the ones left on paper, that past mistakes there affect the most our present, and it is there that "national victories" left the most recognizable symbols. In other words, we could perceive the City as a historical source that, like any other relic of the past, kept and transmitted a message. The problem remains in perennial and most difficult task – to know how to interpret a message. Or, as Braudel's teacher Lucien Febvre would put it: "To describe something visible, that works; but to see that which has to be described, that it is a difficult part."<sup>2</sup>

If present-day look of Belgrade's historical center would be considered a historical source, what could we see in it? Which messages about the past could it transmit to us? Which mistakes and achievements of Serbian history did it bear witness to? Could it also reflect Serbian political history? And, if that is so, could we discern that political past from a specific angle of urban history? Could we limit the connection between city and politics to a symbolic plane only, or could it be explored more directly, through a constant competition of the individual and the collective, city and

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<sup>1</sup> Fernan Braudel, *La Mediterranee et le Monde Mediterraneen a l'epoque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Lisjen Fevr, *Borba za istoriju*, Belgrade 2004, p. 15.

nation, urban and rural? Could one read in the old city's streets today the consequences and the outcomes of these conflicts? Could one discern a winner from the way the city looks?

Just like any other city, Belgrade is the site of controversies and paradoxes. Along with many impressions that it could produce with an observer or an explorer, it seems that in every street, in each part of the historical center, the dominant impression of the city is – of being incomplete. This is the result of the historical struggle between city planning and random solutions, between attempts to introduce order, and efforts for order to fail.<sup>3</sup> This created remarkable differences between city areas which were part of the city limits, where planned building was introduced, and unofficial settlements outside the city limits, where people fled from the high municipal taxes, and which, like pockets of poverty, grew uncontrollably along the edges of the “limits”.<sup>4</sup>

The impression of incompleteness in Belgrade is obvious with the first glance at the map of the old part of the city today. One could see that the network of streets, beyond planned central directions, suffers from strange curves, constrictions, turnarounds and dead ends, the consequence of constant struggle between the octagonal structure, and parts of the city where streets were established without any plan.<sup>5</sup> This is obvious on the present-day city map through very few representative avenues, dominance of confusing network of narrow streets, bad connection between various parts of the city, frequent bypass of two parts of the same street, which leads to strange regulatory solutions. Almost total lack of classical squares is the consequence of the non-existence of holistic approach to urbanism and constant piecemeal solutions.<sup>6</sup> All of

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3 On Belgrade urbanisation see *Istorija Beograda* (ed. Vasa Čubrilović), Belgrade 1974; Svetlana Nedić, "Urbanističko uređenje Beograda od 1886. do 1914", in *Godišnjak Muzeja grada Beograda*, XXIII, 1976, pp. 175-195; Bogdan Nestorović, "Razvoj arhitekture Beograda od kneza Miloša do Prvog svetskog rata", in *Godišnjak grada Beograda*, I, 1954, pp. 160-190; Branko Maksimović, "Urbanistička misao u Srbiji početkom 20. veka, in *Knjiga o sintezi. Zbornik referata, saopštenja i diskusija o sintezi*, Vrnjačka Banja 1978, p. 146.

4 See Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt. Urbanizacija i evropeizacija Beograda 1890-1914*, Belgrade 2008, pp. 48-53.

5 About this see: Dubravka Stojanović, "Orte der Veränderung und Orte der Erinnerung. Die Strassen Belgrads 1885-1914", in *Sudosterupaishe Arbeiten 11, Festschrift fur Holm Sundhaussen zum 65 Geburtstag* (ed. Ulf Brunnbauer, Andreas Helmedach, Stefan Troebst), Munchen 2007, pp. 65-81.

6 Branko Maksimović, "Urbanistički razvitak Beograda 1815-1941", in *Oslobođenje gradova u Srbiji od Turaka 1862-1867*, Belgrade 1970, pp. 630-657.



this is the result of the stubbornness of an eternal dilemma – will the city develop according to the plan and with the public interest, or outside the system, according to needs of the individuals.

Another look – a sight of buildings – shall strengthen the impression of an incomplete city. Even at the very center, there are many small houses, shacks constructed with the cheapest available material. There are relatively few high rises – even at the most representative areas. The buildings are of different height, and are not in a defined line. There are not many representative structures, and the ones that do exist, are built in inadequate locations that diminish their importance – from the Congregational Church and the Patriarchy, to the Court building. There are relatively few buildings constructed with purpose, so almost all key state and cultural institutions are housed in the buildings whose purpose was changed: the bank and the stock exchange buildings were transformed into the National and Ethnographic Museums, which demonstrates lack of care even for the key sites of national memory. Many other problems contribute to the impression of disorderly, dysfunctional, chaotic city, where some planning was attempted, but they were abandoned even before they were put into practice, making later attempts at creating order more costly, and constantly postponing them for “better times.”

So much to be said about the unfinished capital. But what about the unfinished state?<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I argue that in the perception of her elite, from the origin of the modern state until today, Serbia was seen as an unfinished state. This related to both key elements of the modern state – her territory and the defined internal order. In the last two centuries of her modern history, the Serb state changed eleven Constitutions,<sup>8</sup> which is a clear quantitative marker of the existence of great dilemmas and conflicts around formation of that key legal document. Constant constitutional struggles and changes demonstrated deep divisions when it came to direction of the state’s development.<sup>9</sup> They were a consequence of the division into Westerners and Russophiles,

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7 Zoran Đinđić, *Jugoslavija kao nedovršena država*, Novi Sad 1988.

8 Dušan Mrđenović, *Ustavi i vlade Kneževine Srbije, Kraljevine Srbije, Kraljevine SHS, Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1835-1941*, Belgrade 1988.

9 Olga Popović-Obradović, “Ideja i praksa ustavnosti u Srbiji 1869-1914: Između liberalne i “narodne” države”, in *Kakva ili kolika država. Oglеди o političkoj i društvenoj istoriji Srbije XIX-XXI veka* (ed. Latinka Perović), Belgrade 2008.

Europeans and Nationalists, democrats and autocrats, modernizers and conservatives, supporters of the “liberal” and supporters of the “state of the people”... The constitutional question was also the stumbling block in Yugoslavia, which, in the period of the existence of countries with that name (1921-2003), changed eight Constitutions. Just like in the case of Serbia, this proved its instability.<sup>10</sup> Between changes, there were constant struggles for the revision of the constitution, and they usually started immediately after a Constitution has been approved. These debates reflected basic concepts of society and the state. These concepts, mostly debated around the essential interpretation of the character of the state, will permanently remain a characteristic of the Serbian constitutional history.<sup>11</sup>

Beside the always open issue of the state system, about which there was no agreement, the second element of the national state – the territory – remained, in the understanding of the Serbian elite, perennially unattainable, or unfinished. Already from the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, and the incursion of its leader Karadžić's troops into Bosnia, the question of the territory where the Serbian state should be was opened. There are many projects written on the topic, and many maps drawn, in order to express national ambitions of a young state. From the very beginning, the elite created frustration, as the imagined boundaries, envisioned through connecting historical and ethnic rights, could not be realized, which always left “national and state completion” for some other opportunity. This frustration fed the impression that the state was provisional and unfinished, leading to most of the issues remaining open until the resolution of that “question of all questions,” which I will discuss more at the end of this paper.

Does it make sense to connect the unfinished capital and the unfinished state? Is unfinished capital connected to the unfinished state? Was Belgrade merely of symbol of that incompleteness, or was there a more complex relationship? Was Belgrade a victim of state's impotence, its cause, or, perhaps, its effect? Was the impotence of state institutions merely reflected on Belgrade, so that represented the whole system? Or was it the other way around: since the elite did not have the strength to order “the mirror of the state,” her capital, it could not transform the whole, the state,

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<sup>10</sup> Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, Belgrade 2007, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Olga Popović-Obračević, “Ideja i praksa ustavnosti u Srbiji 1869-1914”, p. 60.

into a more efficient and successful system. My aim is to explore various connections between the city and the state, and the city and the nation. I will deal with the issues of who influenced whom, who inspired whom, and who blocked whom. Is it possible to find a connection between Belgrade's architectural iconography and the conflicting national identities, which is the theme of this issue? I am going to try to show that Belgrade is a special case, and that the elite, and therefore, the state as well, in the name of the nation, put before it greater challenges than was the case in other countries and other capitals. To begin with, this can be illustrated by laws and finances.

### Laws, plans, and consequences

The most visible connection between the state and the city is found in the system laws that, as a legal frame, should enable and inspire an overall economic and social development, modernization, and, therefore, development of cities, primarily of the capital. From the beginning of the big changes brought by the two industrial revolutions, the state, through stimulating laws and various benefits, put the modernizing frame, necessary in order to implement expensive and all-encompassing works on the infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> The legal framework was at the same time a necessary precondition that should enable financing and organization of the "major works."

The opening of this question brings us deeper into the relationship between the state and the city. The main problem in the Belgrade's history of urbanization was the direct consequence of the lack of laws or plans.<sup>13</sup> The first attempts to establish a legal framework can be traced simultaneously to other European capitals, to 1867, when the Ottoman Turkish garrisons have barely left Serbian cities, including Belgrade.<sup>14</sup> The speed with which the Prince Mihailo Obrenović (ruled: 1839-1842; 1860-1868) started the process of legal consolidation of the capital's position spoke clearly of his awareness of the importance of regulating the capital for the overall progress of the state.<sup>15</sup> The project was meant to "measure the town of Belgrade with surroundings" and

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12 Jean Luc Pinol, *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine*, Paris 2003, vol. II, p. 176.

13 Branko Maksimović, "Urbanistički razvitak Beograda...", p. 630.

14 About Prince Michael see *Istorija srpskog naroda*, Belgrade 1983.

15 Branko Nestorović, "Razvoj arhitekture Beograda od kneza Miloša do Prvog svetskog rata", in *Godišnjak Muzeja grada Beograda*, I, 1954, p. 164.

establish a system of general regulation.<sup>16</sup> However, this law was never adopted. The Prince was assassinated a year later, so further development of the city proceeded without any legal framework.

The next attempt at regulating happened almost two decades later – the Law on Places, adopted in 1885, with which Serbian cities were legally regulated for the first time.<sup>17</sup> The problem was that the Law referred to all the places in Serbia, from smallest towns to big cities. The main and the biggest city, Belgrade, did not receive an adequate legal treatment with this Law, and it did not provide for its special status. Besides that, the Law created numerous problems for the capital. It slowed its development.<sup>18</sup> The Law on Places was too general a regulation, and it was not applicable to most situations arising in the capital city, which grew all the time, and whose population increased from 35,480 in 1884, to almost 100,000 thirty years later.<sup>19</sup> Contemporaries were also aware that the Law was more a break than the engine for the development, so a member of the City Assembly declared: “The main cause of the disorder is in the Law on Municipalities, which is almost in everything also valid for the capital, as well as for the smallest village, and because many obstacles that slow down the work of the Council and the Court have to be dealt with.”<sup>20</sup> Despite everything, this Law remained a general legal regulation that was valid for Belgrade’s regulation in the coming decades.

The hope that there might be a more significant legal and urban planning appeared during the completion of the Building Law for the City of Belgrade in 1896,<sup>21</sup> as well as a year later, with the “Building Code for the City of Belgrade.”<sup>22</sup> These legal documents provided an important step toward regulating issues related to building, especially the ones relating to the so far provisional rules for building houses and city blocks. Members of the City Assembly frequently pointed to the Laws’ deficiencies, but all attempts to improve them remained in vain until the First World War. Some

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16 Branko Maksimović, “Razvoj Beograda van građevinskog rejona krajem XIX veka”, *Godišnjak grada Beograda*, IV, 1968, p. 129.

17 Svetlana Nedić, “Urbanističko uređenje Beograda 1886–1914”, p. 177.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

19 *Istorija srpskog naroda*, VI-1, Belgrade 1983, p. 8.

20 Arhiv grada Beograda, Zapisnici sa sednica odbora opštine grada Beograda, 1905, I, January 25, 1905, no 52.

21 *Zakon građevinski za grad Beograd*, Belgrade 1896.

22 *Građevinski pravilnik za varoš Beograd*, Belgrade 1897.

basic urbanization issues remained unresolved with these legal acts: separation of the industrial zone, establishing the order of constructing public buildings, rules for regulating squares, poor use of slots of land, and lack of provisions that could regulate speculating with the land, all slowed down the procedure for getting building permits.<sup>23</sup> The city center still remained unbuilt and unregulated, and provisions that were stimulating and that had a modernizing character were later abolished, which I will discuss in this paper.

The history of making the Belgrade city plan was quite similar. Just like the adoption of the Law, creating the Plan was an important step in modernization processes, and in the cities following their European ideals, creating the Plan was also a significant step toward Europeanization. The overall plans appear in Europe following the Hausmann's 1851 plan, which thoroughly reshaped Paris.<sup>24</sup> Barcelona and Berlin followed on the path of planned development and considering the needs of the whole and certain parts of the urban space, and in 1870s this trend spread to the majority of European capitals, from Rome to Stockholm and Sofia.<sup>25</sup>

The case of Belgrade was here specific as well – the first outline of the City Plan was adopted relatively early, in 1867, at the same time as the aforementioned draft Law, at the time when Prince Mihailo Obrenović began the big project of Serbia's Europeanization.<sup>26</sup> However, following his assassination, the area of urbanism was blocked as well. The first City Plan was, after many conflicts, adopted almost six decades later, in 1923. There were constant initiatives in the meantime, plans were drawn, foreign experts brought and paid, but until 1920s the city developed without a Plan.<sup>27</sup> This meant that it developed partially, without a general plan and projected future development needs. It was an important factor that strengthened the urbanistic chaos of the Serbian capital, and the engineers gathers around the Society of Serbian Engineers and Architects and the *Serbian Technical Journal* warned the municipality that it was necessary to draw a general plan before any major infrastructural works, for in the contrary, as they put

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23 See more in Svetlana Nedić, "Urbanističko uređenje Beograda", p. 202.

24 Jean Luc Pinol, *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine*, p. 143.

25 Ibid.

26 Svetlana Nedić, "Urbanističko uređenje Beograda", p. 165.

27 More details in Svetlana Nedić, "Urbanističko uređenje Beograda", p. 176; Branko Maksimović, *Ideje i stvarnost urbanizma Beograda, 1830-1941*, Belgrade 1983, p. 35.

it, “it could happen that all the money set aside for the regulation of Belgrade is spent, and that Belgrade remains a city which is neither nice nor comfortable.”<sup>28</sup>

One of the key problems of the Serbian capital – regulating buildings – was primarily the result of the lack of the Law and the City Plan which would determine the capital’s development. The appearance of the buildings strengthened the impression of incompleteness, the impression that Belgrade was constantly in the transition phase, from village to city. Even today, in the historical center, some houses are of uneven height, frequently shacks, built from weak material. Most frequently, the construction would begin in the courtyard, as people waited to gather money for building and façade facing the street, which would be representative. However, the money was in the short supply, so a hoarding would face the street, waiting for better times.<sup>29</sup> In his descriptions of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia, this is how Serbian geographer Vladimir Karić described Belgrade: “There is not even a shortest street in Belgrade that could boast any row of big, nice constructions, and not to mention any aesthetic architectural whole.”<sup>30</sup>

The existing urbanistic problem was aggravated by the attempts of the well-off citizens to build multi-story houses. Their efforts were without a plan, and they introduced architectural contrariety, so the city, as written by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries “resembled a big, occasionally groomed, small town.”<sup>31</sup> A famous expert and critic of Belgrade construction, Pavle Zorić, wrote in the then most prestigious magazine *Serbian Literary Bulletin*: “The arrangement of Belgrade structures is unique in the world: nowhere could one encounter such a worthless, anarchic arrangement. Take any main street that you want, and look at its height: you will usually find a series of single-storied or ground structures of varying heights and widths, each one of them distinguishing itself by its disharmony towards its neighboring houses. Then comes the ugly ordered several two-storied houses, randomly mixed with shacks (...) should a neighbor build a two-storied house of, say, ten meters height, you can rest assured that his neighbors will see

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28 “Rezolucija udruženja srpskih inženjera i tehničara”, quoted after Branko Maksimović, *Ideje i stvarnost urbanizma Beograda*, p. 36.

29 Miloslav Stojadinović, *Beograd u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, Belgrade 1927, p. 120.

30 Vladimir Karić, *Srbija*, Belgrade 1887, p. 666.

31 “Građevinska pitanja u Beogradu”, in *Ekonomist*, January 15, 1914.

it most logical, each one for his own account, to build one to two meters higher or lower than their neighbor. If one would look for the reason for this, one could never find it (...) in the whole of this chaos of houses of uneven heights and widths, there distinguishes itself a building of at least twenty meters in height, narrow and pointing, and it spoils the whole street.”<sup>32</sup> Vladimir Karić also did not like how the Belgrade streets looked: “There is an occasional pretty building in the street, but that building would be right next to an old shack.”<sup>33</sup>

Building Law for the City of Belgrade, as one of the few laws that regulated this issue, could not help much in introducing order in the construction. This was one of the goals of the Law: an obligation to acquire building permits was stipulated, as well as the height of the houses, which, because of the insulation standards, had to correspond to the width of the streets. It was stipulated that the walls must be at least three meters tall, although they were mostly built up to two meters.<sup>34</sup> Certain aesthetic standards were introduced, so, together with the regulation that buildings made of mud bricks, earth, pipes, woven materials or planks cannot be built “from the face.”<sup>35</sup> Raising an aesthetic level of the city was the intention of the Article 16, which stipulated that “the look (of the facades) from the face of the street has to be pleasant (...), only in side streets can, with the approval of the Belgrade City Administration, built fences from the side of the street, and they must be painted and cleanly done.”

However, the Law opened new problems in the construction business. It stipulated that building permits had to be acquired, as well as penalties for the ones who build without them. This did mean an attempt to introduce order and move toward planned construction, but, as one could expect, created even more problems – permits made construction even more expensive, slowing it down.<sup>36</sup> Together with all that, because of the inefficient and corrupt administration, one had to wait for more than a year for a

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32 Pavle S. Zorić, “Lepa varoš”, in *Srpski književni glasnik*, IX, p. 440.

33 Vladimir Karić, *Srbija*, p. 666.

34 “Građevinska pitanja u Beogradu”, in *Ekonomist*, January 15, 1914, p. 19.

35 *Zakon građevinski za grad Beograd*, član 18.

36 Milan Marković, in *Stenografske beleške sednice odbora opštine grada Beograda*, February 1, 1905, p. 13.

permit,<sup>37</sup> forcing citizens to build houses on the periphery, outside the city limits, illegally.

Therefore, an attempt to introduce legality produced new illegality. Corruption and clientelism were condemned as the main reasons for Municipality not to stick to the rules, and thus impaired its citizens, forcing them to seek solution in temporary, illegal construction. Contemporaries also accused the speculators, who bought properties cheaply, and then divided them “and sold for big bucks. The people were happy to move there (beyond the city limits – D.S.), for it enabled them to have roofs over their heads, the authorities ignored all of that for the love of the speculators, who enabled this population.”<sup>38</sup> This led to the development of the part that was beyond the boundaries stipulated by the Law, creating a problem for the future – over time, as the city expanded, it was becoming increasingly expensive to introduce order in those parts of the city. There was never enough money for expropriation, so introducing order later was more expensive, which was another blow to the always thin city budget. For the main topic of this paper, it is important to note that the state, by adopting a Law whose consequences she did not anticipate, made the development of the capital city much more difficult.

Another, perhaps the biggest, problem with the Building Law was again in the hands of the state: the Law did not stipulate penalties for people who broke it, so contemporaries criticized “the lack of serious sanctions and solid control organization.”<sup>39</sup> That is why it was not implemented, so it remained on paper only, and corruption of the legal system enabled complete ignorance of the regulations in practice.<sup>40</sup> The main flaw of this Law was that it was a compromise with the existing state of things, and it was not energetic in bringing order, removing very weak and shaky buildings, and it did not prevent additional mincing and compartmentalization of small properties, which made the center of Belgrade look more like a village than a city. It was another example from the Serbian history, proving that the elite made populist compromises, unwilling to

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37 Toma Cincarjanković, in *Stenografske beleške sednice odbora opštine grada Beograda*, February 1, 1905, p. 25.

38 Milan Lazarević, *Stenografske beleške sednice odbora opštine grada Beograda*, p. 84.

39 “Građevinska pitanja u Beogradu”, in *Ekonomist*, January 15, 1914, p. 21.

40 Branko Maksimović, *Ideje i stvarnost urbanizma Beograda*, p. 33.



enforce the rules that could provoke dissatisfaction of the voters.<sup>41</sup> Thus, they appeased the lowest instincts of the population, so the elite, instead of determining landmarks for the development, which sometimes include socially painful measures, sacrificed these goals in order to court the poor, who formed the majority of the voters.

The lack of legal framework created another problem. The capital city had very few representative buildings. This was the result of the lack of planning and laws that did not consider location of buildings of public importance. That is why this small number of buildings was mostly located in inadequate locations. Local experts wrote about this, so Pavle Zorić commented that “none of the public and monumental structures has a prominent position (...) Congregational Church lies near the edge of the city, in a low lying area (...) The Church of Ascension is literally in a hole (...) The new National Theater is built into a corner of an open area (...) The New Court is also hard put to the narrowest part of the King Milan street. The monumental buildings of this sort should be completely free, and should have an open and spacious perspective from their most important sides.” He concluded: “We in Belgrade know of a single building which is on good location and well placed, and that is the building of the Great School.”<sup>42</sup> The issue of public buildings was modernized only in 1910s, through an introduction of public advertisements, which helped construction of some buildings still recognizable and exceptional – the contemporary National Museum building, Moskva hotel, or the National Assembly building, whose construction began in 1906.<sup>43</sup> More care on the side of the state could have introduced these standards long before that, thus contributing to a better and more representative appearance of Belgrade.

### Finances and consequences

The second possible connection between the two parts of this paper's title, between the two planes – of the nation and of the city – could be seen in the fact that on both of these levels the development was based on modest budgets. Poor society provided for a poor state budget, so the capital city's budget had to be similar.

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41 Also see Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije. Srpsko društvo na prelazima vekova XIX-XXI*, Belgrade 2006.

42 Pavle Zorić, “Lepa varoš”, pp. 364–365.

43 Svetlana Nedić, “Urbanističko uređenje Beograda”, p. 204.

Different analyses of the Serbian economy and society led to the same conclusion that Michael Palairret formulated as “evolution without development.”<sup>44</sup> This was a particular blockade of the agrarian society (before the First World War, Serbia’s population consisted of 87% of mostly poor peasants), stuck in the pre-capitalist socio-economic stage.<sup>45</sup> The fact that two thirds of village properties had less land than the supposed existential minimum,<sup>46</sup> led to the inability of creating a basis for the economic development, and modernization of the society. The industrial revolution never happened in Serbia, just like in any other Balkan country before the First World War, so no economic growth was started. There was no essential turnaround toward a capitalist society because, as put by German historian Marie Janine-Calic, “the aim of the community was still the preservation of life, and not the increase of income.”<sup>47</sup> Such a state of the economy directly influenced state finances, leading to the permanent crisis, and budget deficit was a chronic illness.<sup>48</sup>

With the budget deficit, the state had to take special care about the investment priorities. The whole modernization process, including the part related to the development of the cities, depend on the orientation of the state. Modernization and urbanization were not high on the list of Serbian state priorities. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many countries began to stimulate urbanization as part of the general capitalist reform of the society, through a carefully planned fiscal policy, especially with tax breaks and whole sets of laws. The European countries paid increasing percentages from their budgets for the development of their capital cities, conscious that they symbolize the nation, and that their functionality could be the engine for the whole society.<sup>49</sup> However, even in this case, and for various reasons, Belgrade did not get the help or the support of the state. The state did not pay anything for the city’s development, and it did not take special measures to make easier for the city authorities to construct a modern infrastructure. This was obvious at the time,

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44 Michael Palairret, *The Balkan economics c. 1800–1914. Evolution without development*, Cambridge 1997.

45 Holm Zundhauzen, *Istorija Srbije od 19. do 20. veka*, Belgrade 2009, p. 196.

46 Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije 1815–1941. Usporeni napredak u industrijalizaciji*, Belgrade 2004, p. 68.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

48 *Moderna srpska država 1804–2004. Hronologija* (ed. Branka Prpa), Belgrade 2005.

49 Peter Hanak, *The Garden and the Workshop. Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*, Princeton 1999.

so the opposition journal published: "Belgrade is more improved with the private initiative, then by official authorities. Even the municipality and the country obstructed Belgrade's development."<sup>50</sup> In the first place, the author of this article thought about the fact that Belgrade citizens paid additional taxes, such as cobblestone tax, rent for quarters, quarterlies for teachers, and providing for the city police. This made, as put by American historian John Lampe in his comparative study of Belgrade and Washington, Belgrade citizens the most tax burdened citizens in Europe.<sup>51</sup>

The second source of financing was the loan. The issue of loan was first discussed in 1883, when the city's budget committee concluded that it was necessary to borrow money in order to build schools, pave streets, and introduce water and sewage. This was not easy, so the first loan was taken only eight years later, in 1891. However, it was enough only for the beginning of the necessary works. The loan that could have more impact was secured only in 1905, twenty years after this issue was first discussed. However, it was based on the ten years old plan, so it was immediately inadequate for the needs of the growing city. The adequate sum, enough for serious works, was only secured in 1911, 28 years after the clearly defined need to finance city needs in this way. The analysis of the consequences of this delay led the city Mayor to conclude in the booklet dedicated to the history of this loan: "unordered, non-paved, full of mud and dust, non-regulated, non-channeled, not provided with water, in a word, deficient in everything that marks a city, and puts it among the cultured cities."<sup>52</sup>

Why the state did not fulfill her duty to make a financial framework for the development of her capital? Part of the reason lied in the irreconcilable political conflicts between political parties. On the one hand, this conflict blocked the approval of the loan, as financial interests of the parties were in conflict. In a poor society, banks were tied to political parties, so any conflict about credits, even ones of essential importance for the capital, was in reality the conflict about financial and political power.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand,

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50 "Napredak", *Kalendar za prestupnu 1912. godinu*, Belgrade 1912, p. 115.

51 Džon Lempj, "Beograd i Vašington. Modernizacija glavnih gradova 1860-1914", *Gođišnjak grada Beograda*, XXVIII, 1981, p. 88.

52 Velisav Vulović, *Opštinski zajam od 60 milijona dinara*, Belgrade 1909.

53 Danica Milić, "Beograd kao privredni i saobraćajni centar 1878-1914", in *Oslobođenje gradova u Srbiji od Turaka, 1862-1867*, Belgrade 1970, p. 299.

blockade was also a consequence of the parties totally opposed to each other coming to power in the city and in the country. This led to the intolerance of state authorities toward the capital, as well as to adopting measures in ministries which effectively blocked the development of Belgrade, which I will discuss later.<sup>54</sup>

When the loan was finally signed, in 1911, “major works” in the capital were soon finished, which proves that the problems of modernization could have been solved easily, should the state have secured the financing. More precisely, even with the modest budget of both the city and the state, financial troubles would have been much smaller with consensus around the development priorities. That is why I interpret these blockades by the state as continuous and deep resistance,<sup>55</sup> and not as random episodes dependent on the government at the time. It was obvious that the key question was the issue of political consensus around the development priorities. To a great extent, it determined the history of civil engineering in Belgrade.

I already mentioned that the appearance and the configuration of buildings in Belgrade were responsible for the impression of the unfinished and unregulated capital. True, there were many reasons which prevented citizens from constructing more expensive and more quality edifices. The fact is that neither citizens nor entrepreneurs had enough capital for the construction of quality multi-storied buildings. However, one should not conclude with that. Urbanization is not only a consequence of the presence of private capital, but, primarily, the consequence of the state policy. A series of flaws were responsible for the sad state of construction works in Belgrade.

In the first place, one could mention the tax system, which was the responsibility of the state. The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century system as it existed in Belgrade was not stimulative for construction. According to this system, small properties were free of taxes, so the fiscal responsibilities fell to the buildings, especially to the newly built ones. In addition to this, the state did not

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54 Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, pp. 353-369.

55 On resistance to modernization see *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 1. (ed) Latinka Perović, Belgrade 1994; *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 2. *Položaj žene kao merilo modernizacije* (ed. Latinka Perović), Belgrade 1996; *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 3. *Položaj elite*, Belgrade 2002; *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima, Žene i deca*, Belgrade 2006.

stipulate an obligation of building on the city land, leaving slots of land in the city center unbuilt for years or even decades. This led to a difficult situation, as the city center was full of “empty slots of land with shacks, whose owners today ask exorbitant sums of money for them, even though they did nothing to increase their value.”<sup>56</sup> This led to a permanent deficit of housing space, which, consequently, caused further price increases.

A 1909 episode most precisely shows that the taxation issue was not an accident, or consequence of incompetence, but a deeply ideologically motivated policy of the state government.<sup>57</sup> The 1896 Building Law made provisions for tax breaks for all new edifices built from higher quality, harder material, which would, apart from the ground floor, also had another floor. The owners of such houses were exempt from paying taxes for 10 years. Also exempt were the citizens who would build one or two additional floors on the houses facing the street. These were modernizing measures, and they were in accordance with measures taken in other European capitals, in order to raise the standard of their citizens, as well as to make cities look nicer. These measures brought good results, for in the next ten years, until 1906, 524 higher quality, multi-storied edifices were constructed.<sup>58</sup>

However, in 1909, a great debate started in the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbia, when a group of deputies of the ruling People’s Radical Party, submitted a motion for abolishing Article 37 of the Building Law, which provided privileges for multi-storied buildings. I will analyze their arguments later, but they stated as their main motif that this Article brought Serbian citizens in an unequal position, endangering, as they put it, the key Constitutional principle of the equality of citizens.<sup>59</sup> Deputies said that, by tax exemption of one or two-storied edifices, Belgrade citizens acquired privilege that other Serbian citizens did not have. The motion caused intensive reactions of the opposition and citizens of Belgrade, the debate lasted for several months, but the

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56 Svetislav Predić, *Pitanje o stanovima u Beogradu*, Belgrade 1914, p. 8.

57 About that see Dubravka Stojanović, “Rural Against Urban. Anti-Urban Discourse and Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Serbia”, in *Ethnologia Balcanica. Journal for Southeast European Anthropology*, 9 (2005), pp. 65-81.

58 “Beograd i Narodna skupština”, in *Odjek*, April 17, 1909.

59 “Predlog o izmenama u Zakonu o građevinama za varoš Beograd”, January 21, 1909, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine Srbije*, Belgrade 1910, p. 950.



protests did not help. Changes in the Building Law were adopted by a big majority, and with open support of the Finance Minister, the ruling Radical party chief ideologist, Stojan Protić. Soon after this, the man who proposed the change, Radical Party deputy Jakov Čorbić, was promoted to Vice-President of the National Assembly. Thus, the state directly, through its central institution, the Assembly, stopped the process of modernization of the capital, showing that blocking this process was the essence of the ruling politics.

Additional responsibility of the state came from its failure to prevent high interest rates, which made money especially expensive, as it was said, that is to say, the credits were quite expensive, resulting in the reduced investment and construction.<sup>60</sup> As a consequence, this led to a new price hike. Citizens were forced to borrow money from loan sharks in private savings, who charged 10-12% interest rate,<sup>61</sup> leading some experts to conclude that “for mortgage loans the interest is much higher than anywhere in the West, so it also renders edifices more expensive, making their construction difficult and raising building costs.”<sup>62</sup> Some said that “the price of land has increased more than it should have had, based on the city’s level of development.”<sup>63</sup> As citizens had little money, the greatest demand was for the small plots of land, leading speculators to carve building grounds into small plots, insufficient for building a proper house (of around 300 square meters in size), which led to construction of small and unrepresentative huts. At the same time, as the price of plots increased all the time, owners of the plots in the city center speculated by “keeping their land from the construction,” waiting for their increase in value, which was one of the reasons for the center remaining unbuilt and neglected. Moreover, increasing price of plots in the city was one of the reasons forcing citizens to build illegally, outside the city limits. This led to the depopulation of the center, and the whole capital city was sparsely populated, especially in comparison with European cities. In 1900, there were 92 citizens per acre in Belgrade, compared to 600 in London, 378 in Paris, and 110 in Hamburg.<sup>64</sup>

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60 "Građevinska pitanja u Beogradu", in *Ekonomist*, January 15, 1914, p. 19.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

63 Svetislav Predić, *Pitanje o stanovima*, p. 14.

64 Jean Luc Pinol, *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine*, p. 23.

This enchanted circle shows that the state bore original responsibility for the chain that led to creation of whole quarters of unrepresentative buildings. Those buildings contributed to the impression of incompleteness, as their owners also waited for something to change, so that they could build a higher quality home. Regardless of the always thin budgets, stimulative state policy could have made construction easier for them, improved living and hygienic situation of the life in the capital, and made more regulated and nicer capital.

The high cost of land, for which the state was primarily responsible, created additional problems in construction. The cost of the land, for which the state was primarily responsible, created additional problems in construction. As they had to invest most of the money into the land, people did not have enough to build a house, so it was additional reason for unrepresentative structures rising even at the very center. Thus, through an inadequate state policy, one reached the situation where houses were cheaper than the slots of land where they were built, so that they were “unrelated to the slot were, for example, land slots in the Kneza Miloša Street were paid hundred and more thousands of dinars, and in those places, which remained empty for several years, houses were built, whose value did not reach even half of the value of the land itself. It is well known among the experts that the value of the land does not normally reach even one third of the value of edifices built on it, and that proportion is six times worse with us, as it stands like three against the half.”<sup>65</sup>

When it comes to the construction, most obstacles to Belgrade development resulted from the lack of building laws that the state, as demonstrated above, never adopted. State was also responsible for the prices of the building material, which additionally burdened investments. Of all the building materials, only bricks were manufactured in Serbia, and everything else was imported. The state put triple taxes on the import of building materials – customs duty, state tax, and municipal tax,<sup>66</sup> which additionally blocked Belgrade’s development. That is why people did not have enough money to build their houses of more quality material, and instead used old ones – *bondruk*, the wooden construction filled with

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65 Pavle Zorić, “Lepa varoš”, p. 280.

66 Svetislav Predić, *Pitanje o stanovima*, p. 12.

sherds and framed with mud. Brick and stone were only used for the construction of “rich man’s houses.”<sup>67</sup> Special problems arose with the houses built beyond the city limits, beyond any control, which enabled the most primitive and the cheapest construction: “One builds in mud. There is no floor (...) rooms are framed with mud (...) when it rains, mud is everywhere.”<sup>68</sup> Despite the constant appeals, state did nothing to solve these problems, as by 1896, when the Building Code for the city of Belgrade was adopted, there were no regulations for building, even though the Municipal committee and the Society of Serbian Engineers several times proposed building laws.<sup>69</sup>

When considering buildings, Belgrade had an additional deficiency – chronic lack of financing and urban planning contributed to the fact that by the First World War there were few public buildings and representative structures. The 1896 Tourist guide recommends that, among newer structures, one should see the Congregational Church, Metropoly, Princess Ljubica’s quarters, The Great School (built in 1863), National Theater (completed in 1869), the old Church of St. Mark (1838), and the Court (1882).<sup>70</sup> Recollections of the then-citizens confirm this list of “around twenty most monumental edifices.”<sup>71</sup> This created practical problems, as great majority of state and national institutions were not adequately housed, which caused problems in their functioning. It is enough to mention that Captain Miša’a Mansion, “the biggest Belgrade edifice of the time,” as noted in the Guide, housed collections of the National Museum, University Library, and National Library, as well as the whole of the University. Together with low quality and ignoble buildings, this lack of public structures added to the impression of a poor and unregulated capital.

### The people against the city

Taking into account all the urbanization problems of Belgrade analyzed so far, one could conclude that this was a poor capital city, where a number of key issues remained unsolved for several

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67 “Građevinska pitanja u Beogradu”, in *Ekonomist*, p. 19.

68 M.N.J. “Razviće Beograda”, in *Srpski tehnički list*, 22, 1907, p. 181.

69 Svetlana Nedić, “Urbanističko uređenje Beograda”, p. 198.

70 *Vođa po Beogradu*, Belgrade 1896, pp. 3-13.

71 Aleksandar Deroko, “Beograd na susretu dva veka”, in *Beograd u sećanjima 1900-1918*, Belgrade 1977, p. 37.



decades, which contributed to the overall impression of an unfinished city, urbanistic chaos, and an underdeveloped infrastructure.<sup>72</sup> Some of the reasons for this were political, especially divisions among political parties,<sup>73</sup> which slowed Serbia's development. These created tension between the city and the state institutions, leading to (like in the cases of abolishing progressive articles of the Building Code, or approving the Loan) the State blocking the capital city's development. Political party divisions blocked the decision-making process, as even expert commissions, who were in charge of formulating some of the key infrastructural issues, like constructing water and sewage systems, were split along the party lines for several decades.<sup>74</sup> Divisions led to each new government annulling decisions of the previous one, changing all the administration, bringing loyal party people, who needed time in order to get acquainted with everything they were supposed to do, which postponed making decisions.<sup>75</sup> Of course, party political divisions were not characteristic for Serbia only, but in the case of Serbia, an important fact was that there was no efficient and independent administration that would maintain the continuity of work. It was completely dependent on party bigotries, preventing a formation of a stable administration, which would work despite the divisions. The bigotry was the break for development because it also prevented reaching consensus among the ruling elites and making a clear list of priorities that would be realized, despite tumultuous changes in power. If a new government would come into power after the public tender and adoption of a project, it would, almost instantly, annul previously adopted expert opinions, and re-start the whole process, in order to secure jobs for experts politically close to them, causing delays that lasted months, if not years. As time went by and political divisions deepened, problems were increasingly more difficult to solve, producing blockades in the work of institutions that did not function. The public interest was lost in private feuding.

As shown before, there was no consensus on the basic state questions: from the internal system, to state borders or foreign policy.

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72 On unfinished infrastructure see Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, pp. 47-171.

73 Dubravka Stojanović, "Podele i sukobi kao deo politike kulture u Srbiji", in *Istorija i sećanje. Studije istorijske svesti* (ed. Olga Manojlović-Pintar), Belgrade 2006, pp. 59-64.

74 More in Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, pp. 137-167.

75 Ibid.



This witnessed of the elite's impotence to respond to challenges, which is always a sign of a deep political crisis. Inability to recognize priorities and act efficiently, with minimum loss of energy, speaks about the undeveloped and insufficiently responsible elite that left all the questions unresolved, or, as put by members of the opposition: "No plan, no system in Works. Only the beginnings, hasty beginnings."<sup>76</sup>

Still, taking into consideration all the obstacles encountered by the process of Serbian modernization, one could conclude that, apart from the inefficient administration and disorganized government, there were some more profound reasons leading for all solutions to be temporary, and incompleteness, permanent. There are many analyses<sup>77</sup> that demonstrate that other key issues were blocked as well, primarily because the elite did not create a framework for the development, as shown with the never adopted Law for the City of Belgrade. There were other important issues where Serbian legislators were not prepared to, through creating necessary legal conditions, make an innovative step forward, necessary for the overall modernization, by which they contributed to preserving quasi-feudal social structures and petrified the society. From the very moment it was granted autonomy, the state legally blocked the development of agriculture, artisanry and trade, thus preventing the accumulation of capital and creation of social groups that could start a systematic development.<sup>78</sup> Studies of Serbian social history point to the existence of a *structural* blockade of growth, which produced a recurring permanent crisis syndrome, typical for pre-industrial societies.<sup>79</sup> In her book *The Social History of Serbia*, Marie-Janine Calic starts from the premise that the Serbian case is specific and that the "events of long duration, such as legal pointers, socio-economic structures and cultural traditions, made Serbia follow her own way toward the civil society, different from the countries of the Western and Central parts of Eastern Europe."<sup>80</sup> Holm Sundhaussen called this peculiarity "a missed agrarian revolution," which led to the century-long zero growth in primary sector, which annulled all incentives toward moder-

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76 *Napredak. Kalendar za prestupnu 1912. godinu*, p. 118.

77 Latinka Perović, *Od anarhije do autokratije*, p. 28.

78 Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije*, pp. 417-430.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

80 *Ibid.*

nization.<sup>81</sup> It was the result of the legal hampering of the market forces, the process contrary to the one that occurred, as part of the reform policies, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Prussia, Russia, and Central Europe.<sup>82</sup> This created the aforementioned phenomenon of “evolution without development,” where weak economic capabilities of the economy and society were stopped by political decisions that prevented stronger development of capitalism. According to Michael Palar, through mincing of the small estates, protection of small craft shops and small traders, those measures led to the defeat of economic liberalism already by mid-19th century. According to him, Serbia did not go back to that path until the Second World War, after which she entered the period of socialist economy.<sup>83</sup>

How to interpret this? One could find a lot of data<sup>84</sup> to support the view that this was a systematic and decades-long obstruction, caused by the state policies, and not accidental errors caused by incompetence or inefficient bureaucracy. That is why it is necessary to inquire why the development of Serbian state and economy was not a priority for the Serbian state. Was it enough to respond that in an undeveloped society it is easier to rule, and that different segments were connected in a specific “alliance of the elites,”<sup>85</sup> whose aim was to prevent modernization? By blocking modernization, various types of elites secured their own monopoly on power, which was part of their self-interest. However, the question is, was that narrow motif enough? Or, more precisely, could it secure such a longevity of development-preventing programs, especially as, over time, elites, dynasties and political groups often changed in power, and Serbia’s political history was quite dynamic. How was any continuity possible? How to explain that so elites so different came onto the same program denominator? And what does it have to do with this paper – where is the connection between the nation and the city?

In order to respond to these questions, it is necessary to analyze ideologies that determined Serbia’s historical development. It is

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81 Holm Sundhassen, “Die verpasste Agrarrevolution. Aspekte der Entwicklungsblockade in den Balkanländern vor 1945”, in *Industrialisierung und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Südosteuropa*, München 1989, pp. 45-60.

82 Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije*, p. 418.

83 Majkl Palare, *Privredna istorija*, p. 113.

84 About that see Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije*, pp. 35-48.

85 Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, p. 368.

crucial to inquire why development was not a priority, or, was there, within the given ideologies, a different list of priorities? Were these ideologically conditioned, and how was development treated against that ideological backdrop? What was its relation to other priorities? Was it perceived as an obstacle to achieving some more important goals, and not as their stimulus?

In disentangling ideological layers, perhaps one could start from the already mentioned parliamentary debate that led to abolishing tax reliefs for citizens who built multi-storied structures. Some of the arguments in the National Assembly were inspired by ideas of social egalitarianism, which could frequently be heard there. It was said that tax reliefs are helping richer citizens, so, the official text of the demand for the change of that article stated that: "Such a provision is harmful for the state interest, and contrary to the principle that all Serbs are equal before the law, as richer citizens are benefiting from it."<sup>86</sup> This remark also contained a general attitude of the deputies from countryside toward the ones from the cities, especially from Belgrade. It was said that "making the capital city better looking goes against the interests of the peasants,"<sup>87</sup> that Belgrade began to differ from the rest of Serbia, that tax reliefs led to Serbia looking in comparison to Belgrade, "like a peasant with the silk umbrella,"<sup>88</sup> for Belgrade's development was presented as a luxury that creates a false image. Just like in many other possibilities, this was resentment to social stratification, so one could hear that: "In our society, this division into higher and lower, into the ones who are masters and the ones who toil, never existed."<sup>89</sup> One of the key ruling Radical Party ideologists used this to express the ideological essence: "The Assembly will not be bothered at all (...) to abolish this measure for a time being (considering tax relief for multi-story houses – D.S.), so perhaps, when the conditions are better, and we are closer to each other, the capital city to the countryside and the countryside to the capital, we could re-institute this provision."<sup>90</sup>

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86 "Predlog o izmenama u Zakonu o građevinama za varoš Beograd", January 21, 1909, in *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, Belgrade 1910, p. 950.

87 Jovan Stojković, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, p. 1594.

88 Mihailo Đorđević, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, p. 1589.

89 "Demagoške deklamacije", in *Dnevni list*, March 24, 1911.

90 Stojan Protić, in *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, April 11, 1909, p. 1593.

This social egalitarianism was the result of the leftist roots of radical ideology,<sup>91</sup> but also an essential ingredient of Serbian nationalism, which was based on the idea that a nation cannot be broken into different social groups, as its homogeneity and force are most closely related to social equality. That is why Belgrade was perceived as an alien tissue, as an element that destroys unity: “I would not wish Belgrade to be representative of Serbian culture, for whoever comes to Serbia in order to see her culture, will not find it in Belgrade; it will much more find a foreign culture in Belgrade, as Belgrade gladly accepts foreign culture (...) I am speaking about a tendency that is visible in Belgrade and that should be prevented. Serbian customs are ignored, even people with little understanding of it, speak a foreign language in Belgrade.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, city’s development was identified with thinning of the wished-for model of national identity, with weakening of the necessary national firmness, with grinding of community’s homogeneity. It seemed that the city is endangering the nation, weakening her “immunity.” Just like in many other cases in the National Assembly of Serbia,<sup>93</sup> this was accused of weakening the warrior spirit, soften the instincts, weaken future warriors: “If we are to make Belgrade prettier at the detriment of that people, at the detriment of its maintenance, we will not be able to bring onto the battlefield the soldiers that we should.”<sup>94</sup> This speech promotes the ideological matrix discussed here: development was perceived as an obstacle to achieving a national goal.

The basis of the ruling Radical Party’s ideology was anti-modern, anti-individualist, anti-urban, and anti-European.<sup>95</sup> It was a combination of egalitarian ideals and nationalism – a blend of social ideal that could be determined by the slogan “equality in poverty” and patriarchal, organicist and essentialist understanding of the nation and its identity. Social equality was seen as the guardian of the nation, so any social reform was perceived as dangerous. Anything different was perceived as hazardous, making this

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91 Latinka Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka*, I-III, Belgrade 1985-1995.

92 Miloš Ćosić, in *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, April 11, 1909, p. 1586.

93 Compare with the history of women rights: Dubravka Stojanović, *Žene "u smislu razumevanja našeg naroda". Slučaj žena stručnjaka u Srbiji 1903-1912. godine, in Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 2, 1998, pp. 239-252.

94 Miloš Ćosić, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, April 11, 1909, p. 1591.

95 About that see Latinka Perović, *Od anarhije do autokratije*, pp. 79-174.



ideology authoritarian and basically anti-plural. Contemporaries commented that “Based on the teachings of Černiševski and the founder of Serb socialism, Svetozar Marković, who filled in their critique of capitalism and bureaucratism by emphasizing rural collective life in Russian *mir* and Serbian *zadruga*, our initial radicalism and socialism also contained a certain opposition toward the city, as representative of that bureaucracy and bourgeoisie. Our initial democratism blended with patriarchal peasantry, and this strange and unnatural mix produced the 1880s radicalism, which was against the railway as a symbol of contemporary civilization.”<sup>96</sup> For radical ideologists, Belgrade was a symbol of that “modern civilization,” so struggle against it was the essence of ideology: “In the beginning, the Radical Party formed its nest among the peasants. (...) Then it was said that all the evil comes from Belgrade; then it was said that the fish stinks from the head, and that hatred, planted over 30 years ago, remained, until culminating in such a proposal (the proposal to abolish tax reliefs).”<sup>97</sup>

This ideology, as some historians would want us to believe,<sup>98</sup> did not remain a mere pre-election demagogy, but directly reflected onto practical politics. Essentially, it dictated priorities. This was the effect of another ruling ideology’s dimension. This was a national ideal that, according to its proponents, should lead to creation of the state that would encompass all Serbian people. The process of liberation and unification was supposed to contain territories to which Serbia claimed historical right, invoking her Medieval boundaries, as well as the areas where an ethnic right could be invoked, grounded in the majority presence of Serbian people. Programmatically formulated for the first time in the 1844 by one of the leading Serb politicians at the time, Ilija Garašanin’s “Načertanije,” considered as the first clearly formulated national program, this idea provided the basic color for the Serbian politics until the First World War. This was the idea that united almost all political currents, as well as different generations of Serbian politicians. It was placed as an unprecedented political priority – the idea of national unification pushed all the other state goals into the second plane. Thus, development also remained of secondary importance, left to be resolved after the primary, unquestionable

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96 “Šumski radikalizam ili reakcionari odozdo”, in *Dnevni list*, April 17, 1909.

97 Dragoljub Joksimović, April 11, 1909, *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine*, p. 1595.

98 Dušan Bataković, *Nova istorija srpskog naroda*, Belgrade-Lozana 2000.

aim, was achieved. This led to an interesting historical phenomenon that determined Serbian history: instead of starting development in the name of the nation, development was sacrificed to imaginary national goals, and perceived as contrary to the nation itself, as something putting it in danger.

Analyses of the National Assembly debates, press, professional journals, and memoirs of chief protagonists, show that there was no disagreement about the list of priorities among the otherwise feuding political forces: all agreed that all the questions of internal development and political order should be subordinated to the idea of national liberation and unity. The key Serbian politician, the indisputable Radical Party leader and prime minister in several governments Nikola Pašić,<sup>99</sup> wrote in his memoirs: “I always had preference for feelings for life and destiny of the Serbian people outside the borders of the Kingdom of Serbia, compared to the ones that made me work for the internal people’s liberties. National liberty of the entire Serbian nation was for me a greater and stronger ideal, than civil liberty of the Serbs in the Kingdom.”<sup>100</sup> Even though he rarely spoke, he stated this political credo in the National Assembly in 1905, during a political debate: “All the internal issues, even the solution of the Constitutional question, I always subordinated to the idea of the nearby liberation. That idea led me to freedom and radicalism.” He concluded by declaring the list of priorities: “Leave everything else behind, solve what the life of Serbia depends on. The voice of Serbhood and the voice of the Serbian Piedmont call upon you.”<sup>101</sup>

When comparing speeches of the representatives of the government and the ones from the opposition, one can see that, when priorities are concerned, there was an actual consensus, and that the ruling and the opposition elites made a conscious choice: the politics of the state’s expansion was clearly put above any other need. The same what we heard from the Prime Minister and key political actor Nikola Pašić, we could have read by his political adversaries, conservative-oriented Progressive Party leaders, in their journal *Pravda* (Justice): “Anyone in politics knows that with each people, when grouping his nation and before completing the

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<sup>99</sup> Nikola Pašić was for the first time Prime Minister in 1891, and, with minor breaks, kept that post until he died, in 1926.

<sup>100</sup> Nikola Pašić, *Moja politička ispovest*, Belgrade 1989, p. 129.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted after Olga Popović-Obradović, *Kakva ili kolika država*, p.147.

task of his unification – the foreign policy takes first place. All the personal interests must be subordinated to it, and it comes until the task is completed, even before the definitive settling of the internal state organization.”<sup>102</sup> For the conservative journal *Nedeljni pregled* (Weekly Review), otherwise opposed to the government in every aspect, the list of priorities was clear: “When a state is concerned, one could discuss her international position or her internal order. We subordinate second to the first, that is to say, according to our efforts, internal life should be derived from the external one, and not the other way around.”<sup>103</sup>

Similar voices came from the other side of the political spectrum, from social-democratically inclined members of the Independent Radical Party, who were most advanced and modern politicians in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Serbia, mostly educated in France: “We were always ready, even at the cost of being criticized by people who agree with us and are our friends in politics, to suppress the questions of internal politics before much more general and much higher issues of state and national politics.”<sup>104</sup> Perhaps even more surprising is that similar opinion was expressed by one of the leading left-wing intellectuals, who belonged to the Independent Radical Party and was the best known representative of the generation that, while studying in Paris, tried to transfer most modern political concepts of the time, Jovan Skerlić, when he said in an eulogy, praising the deceased as “the one who in every place and on every occasion promoted national interests first, and did everything that internal politics be subordinated to the national one.”<sup>105</sup>

There were few dissenting voices. Some people tried to warn the state authorities that the politics of expanding state is too expensive for the poor country. Thus, Živojin Perić, Professor at the Faculty of Law and member of the opposition, a conservative loyal to the concept of the legal state and Serbia’s internal development, even though he was a nationalist, warned of the risks that national politics had for Serbia: “It is not at all certain that politics by the fence is no good, or that policy across the fence is good. For in politics, just like in ordinary life, it could happen that one loses

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102 “Spoljna politika”, in *Pravda*, September 1, 1904.

103 “Demokratizam sa nacionalnog gledišta”, in *Nedeljni pregled*, April 4, 1910, p. 180.

104 “U eri hajdučke politike”, in *Dnevni list*, October 24, 1910.

105 *Samouprava*, March 4, 1911.



by his own fence, when looking across, beyond it.”<sup>106</sup> The address of another conservative Liberal Party deputy, Vojislav Marinković in the Assembly demonstrates that the elite made a conscious choice, and that the dilemma about the two existing European models was quite clear in Serbia at the time: “Serbia must decide: it will either be Turkey and Piedmont, or Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. If we want Norwegian schools, Danish institutes, then we should avoid military expenses; if we want to conduct some sort of a national policy, then we should transform this country into a military camp.”<sup>107</sup> Well-known law Professor and historian Slobodan Jovanović also concluded that everything should be sacrificed for the national goal: “One should have saved – but could not, for the rise of Serbia to the position of an independent state and expansion of her borders caused new expenses.”<sup>108</sup>

Dissonant voices that could be also were heard from Serbian Social Democrats devoted special attention to this topic. When it came to the national question, they had the minority view. They supported the idea of the Balkan federation, starting from the premise that any attempt to create national states in the Balkans only weakened further already feeble Balkan societies. In their views, they were completely isolated on the Serbian political scene, but the isolation of their alternative speaks a lot about the mainstream views. They constantly warned of the direct relationship between, as they said, conquering politics and economic backwardness of Serbia. Thus, one of the leading Social Democratic Party representatives, Dimitrije Tucović, in an article unambiguously titled “War against Serbia,” wrote: “The time has come for you to sober up and you, representatives of the people, realize that the increase in military spending will not at all change our force in relation to Austria-Hungary; the time has come for you to realize that this illusionary policy means criminal suffocation of people in Serbia, who have the right to develop culturally and economically.”<sup>109</sup> They accused megalomaniacal nationalist policies for the backwardness of Serbia; “The Greater Serbia illusion cost us as “an arm and a leg,” pumping out all of our resources into milita-

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<sup>106</sup> Quoted after Olga Popović-Obradović, *Kakva ili kolika država*, p. 248.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>108</sup> Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, Belgrade 1990, p. 249, quoted after Latinka Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije*, p. 136.

<sup>109</sup> “Rat protiv Srbije”, in *Radničke novine*, October 2, 1908, no. 119.

rism, burdening us with horrific amounts of state debt, and the state burdened us with increasing taxes. This illusion prevented us from developing economically and culturally enough, it sacrificed education to the barrack, it lulled us with empty hollow hopes, which cost us dearly.”<sup>110</sup> Despite all this, they remained isolated in their views, and their continuously low election results prove again that there was a consensus around the national program priorities in the Serbian society. In the whole period up to the First World War, they remain on the margins, with only two deputies, more as a warning that another way was possible.

The price for realizing this drawn and consensual national aim was high. In 1909, during most intensive preparation for the wars, 26% of all the state revenue went to paying for the loans for weapons,<sup>111</sup> while the real costs were most clearly shown during the wars themselves: the 1912-1913 Balkan wars cost Serbia around one billion franks, while her average state budget was 130 million franks.<sup>112</sup> However, the key problem was in the goal itself: the ideal of maximal national state was unattainable. The series of military conflicts, from the Great Eastern Crisis until the end of the Second World War (a total of seven wars) proved that the supremacy of a nationally ambitious country in the Balkan was impossible to achieve. None of them had the power to force herself to all the others, and neither could gain the support of the great powers for it, as they only gave an ambiguous support, after many dilemmas, to the creation of a supra-national Yugoslav state. Thus, another enchanted Balkan circle was created: creation of a big supra-national state was an important or even essential part of the ruling elites' national programs; as that goal could not be fulfilled, the states were left with the frustration of unrealisation and unattainability, and the problems remained open. Temporariness and permanent transition, while awaiting another opportunity to realize the “national dream,” became a rare continuity.<sup>113</sup> Under the circumstances, the development became hostage to the pretensions based on egalitarian nationalism. Un-

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110 "Jedno priznanje", in *Radničke novine*, October 2, 1908.

111 *Moderna srpska država 1804-2004. Hronologija*, p. 172.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

113 About continuities and discontinuities in Serbian history see Miroslav Jovanović, "Srbija 1804-2004: razvoj opterećen diskontinuitetima (sedam teza)", in *Srbija 1804-2004. Tri viđenja ili poziv na dijalog*, Belgrade 2005, pp. 149-202.

finished nation, as seen by her elites, prevented the completion of the “competing” program.

Thus the nation’s capital, Belgrade, became image and symbol of that division, incomplete like its unfinished state. As a possible symbol of the development, Belgrade paid the price for the ideology that determined politics during two centuries of Serbia’s modern statehood.<sup>114</sup> In the first place, it was a victim of the egalitarian concepts that saw danger in the capital’s development: its transformation into a modern, ordered and organized city would undoubtedly hamper the ideal community of “equals in poverty,” leading it more decisively toward processes of Europeanization and modernization, which were avoided or, at the very least, slowed down. Belgrade’s development would have questioned the other dominant ideology’s pillar – nation. It would have drawn attention and resources concentrated on realizing an imagined national state, and also destroyed the patriarchal model of national identity, perceived as the guarantee for successful completion of the planned work and final “completion of the state.”<sup>115</sup> Territorially incomplete, and thus, according to her elite, an unfinished state, could not complete her capital. It was another vicious circle. Belgrade was not just a symbol of its incompleteness, but its essence, effect, and victim. Its urbanization was indeed, as put as a question at the beginning of this paper, the expression of permanent competition between the individual and the collective, the urban and the rural, the city and the nation. Consequences of these conflicts are today visible in the streets of Belgrade. Belgrade did not win in these conflicts. That is why its look and its history prove Braudel’s claim that the existing city is the most important possible document of its past life, as well as the historical source that bears witness to key dilemmas of the development of the Serbian state.

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114 Dubravka Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi. Ogledi iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije*, Belgrade 2010.

115 On patriarchal national identity see Dubravka Stojanović, “Žene “u smislu razumevanja našeg naroda”. Slučaj žena stručnjaka u Srbiji 1903-1912. godine, in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 2, Belgrade 1998, pp. 239-252.





# IN THE SHADOW OF THE "GRAND NARRATIVE"

THE STATE OF HEALTH OF WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN IN SERBIA AT THE BEGINNING  
OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*We must make capital out of human material if we wish to survive.*  
Dr. Jovan J. Jovanović, 1905.

After the processes of modernization, which have been forming contemporary society for over a century, one of their greatest effects is often taken to be prolonging the length of life and improving the quality of life of the population. A modern, individualized society ranks the way of life of an individual as one of its highest values, as a measure of the successfulness of a state and a society. The development of states has been measured less and less by their surface area, and increasingly by the standard of life of their citizens. This was not just an empty phrase – it concerned precisely the essence of the modern, of a real change of priorities: from a collective and imperialistic system of values to a new order of ideals which placed Man, the individual, at its centre.

This change of ideals became possible beginning from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The process of urbanization ran, from the 1880s, in parallel with the mass spread of literacy, with the rise in the culture of living and with scientific discoveries which, as never before, were expanding the boundaries of modern medicine. The combination of all these factors was gradually bringing about an awareness that life and death are not a matter of "God's will," but that every human life is of incalculable value, and into its preservation a society needs to invest its greatest amount of energy. The difference between developed and undeveloped societies increasingly became precisely their attitude towards the life

and death of the individual, and prolongation of life expectancy, and reduction in the mortality of women and children, particularly the new-born, became one of the key measures of the state of development.

The transition between the two centuries was, in the history of Serbia, a time of change. The frequent changes in the Constitution and the dynamic life of the political élite bore witness to a society which was re-examining its political orientation, and seeking a way to overcome under-development. The élite invested the greatest part of its capabilities in political modernization and constant attempts to finalize the process of, as it was called then, national liberation and unification. Matters relating to the development of society were suppressed in front of, as it seemed, the greater importance of political progress, and there is proof that the élite saw in the under-development of society a guarantee of the successful realization of its national aims.<sup>1</sup> At a time when many European societies were experiencing dramatic changes which made possible the creation of modern, individualized “societies of prosperity,” Serbian society remained in a petrified state, almost unchanged during the several decades preceding the First World War. At a time of the highest national ambitions, which Dimitrije Đorđević also calls the time of Balkan imperialisms,<sup>2</sup> the Serbian ruling élite did not perceive as an important matter the state of health and rates of death of those whom in the speech of the old epics were placed within the collective term “the weak” – women and children. No data has been found to show that that theme was of interest to representatives of the political élite, even though experts – physicians – regularly presented those problems in their professional periodicals. Aware of the new priorities of modern societies, influential doctors recalled that, “the more that society and the state develop and improve, the more greater value is placed on the individual and his life.”<sup>3</sup> The appeals of the Serbian Medical Association (Srpsko lekarsko društvo) through its periodicals *Srpski arhiv za celokupno lekarstvo* (*Serbian Archive for Complete Medicine*) and *Narodno zdravlje* (*Popular Health*) did not meet

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1 For more details see D. Stojanović, “Ulje na vodi. Politika i društvo u modernoj istoriji Srbije” in *Srbija 1804-2004. Tri viđenja ili poziv na dijalog*, Belgrade 2005, pp. 115-149.

2 D. Đorđević, *Ogledi iz novije balkanske istorije*, Belgrade 1989, pp. 55-86.

3 “Čime je uslovljena telesna razvijenost kod ljudi?” in *Narodno zdravlje (NZ)*. Supplement to *Serbian Archive for Complete Medicine*, no. 2, 1910, p. 31.

with an appropriate reaction either from the state or from society as a whole.

The authors who wrote for the specialist medical journals often began their articles with the statement that “our people are going downhill fast, both physically and spiritually”<sup>4</sup> and that “the unconditional conclusion is that we are degenerating.”<sup>5</sup> Their comprehensive analysis of annual state statistics bear witness to the awareness of experts that the state of general health culture was very bad and that, according to many parameters, Serbia shared a place with the least-developed states in Europe. The Serbian Medical Association warned of this frequently, thus providing proof of its own modernity. It is particularly important to mention that the texts, which will be used in the present chapter, were written by doctors who had also compiled the state medical statistics. That fact gives their articles conviction and professional authority, but there is no data on whether their conclusions brought about substantial changes in state policy in the field of health.

In their texts, the authors sought the causes of specific demographic phenomena highlighted by the state statistics. They particularly singled out one cause of the bad general state of health: the bad state of health of the female population. The statistical data reveals many worrying indicators which made the “female question” a special problem in Serbia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or, even, as one author wrote, “the burning question of our survival.”<sup>6</sup> The first alarming indicator was the quantitative relation between the sexes because, in Serbian towns in 1903, for every 1,000 men there were only 752 women.<sup>7</sup> The gender balance was especially threatened in Belgrade, where there were 731 women for every 1,000 men. The structure among the rural population was somewhat better but, there also, numbers of women were less than the numbers of men, with, in addition, a tendency to fall (in 1903 there were 981 and, in 1905, 969 women to every 1,000 men in rural areas<sup>8</sup>). This data showed that the domestic situation was opposite to that in other European countries in

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4 “Zdravstvene prilike u Obrenovcu”, in *NZ*, no. 4, 1906, p. 31.

5 Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, “Da li degenerišemo?”, in *NZ*, no. 1, 1910, p. 16.

6 Dr. H. Joksimović, “Zdravlje naših ženskinja”, in *NZ*, no. 4, 1911, p. 70.

7 *Statistički godišnjak Kraljevine Srbije za 1903 godinu*, Belgrade 1906, p. 43.

8 Compare: *Statistički godišnjak... za 1903*, p. 43, and: *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 & 1908*, Belgrade 1912, p. 47.



which the number of women outstripped that of men,<sup>9</sup> which was explained by men having died in wars, suffered more accidents and more physical exhaustion at work and, finally, with emigration to America having altered the demographic balance.<sup>10</sup> In the Serbian literature, little attention has been paid to this phenomenon and the most important cause of it was attributed to the fact that towns, particularly Belgrade, were areas of immigration, and that it was mostly unmarried men who moved from the country to the towns, which had an influence on the demographic structure of the population.<sup>11</sup>

Not excluding that factor, it is essential also to mention other indicators which point to the conclusion that women in Serbia lived shorter lives than men. Statistics show that men on the average lived about ten years longer than women and thus, in 1903, the average length of life of men in towns was 50.93 years and of women 40.66, while in the countryside that relation was 49.69 years to 41.74. A particularly ominous relation was that between the average length of life among divorced inhabitants of towns, because male members of that population lived an average of 49.71 years, and females only 35.22,<sup>12</sup> which is explained by the hard lives lived by divorced, single mothers. That relation did not change up to 1908, which was the last year before the First World War that state statistics were published.<sup>13</sup> This data clearly shows that in Serbia, in contrast to the situation in other European countries, the female population was dying at a younger age than the male, which is clear indicator that the immigrant nature of the urban population is not a sufficient explanation for the fact that there existed a gender imbalance in Serbia.

Solving the question of gender imbalance gains clearer contours when one takes into account the age at which the differences in mortality between men and women occur. The statistics show that, up to puberty, more male children died (this was also the

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9 In Germany at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were 1,032 women for every 1,000 men, in Austria 1,035, in England 1,063, in Norway 1,060. H Joksimović, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

10 *Ibid.*

11 M. Radovanović, "Demografski odnosi 1815-1914", in *Istorija Beograda*, 2, Belgrade 1974, p. 270.

12 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1903*, p. 176.

13 In 1908, the average age of men in towns was 50.23 years, and women 41.19. *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 Et 1908*, p. 138.



European experience), but that after the time of puberty a period of higher mortality in females begins. Thus, in the period from 1902 to 1906, for every 100 male babies younger than one year old, 86 female babies died; for every 100 unmarried males (i.e. up to the age of 17), 93.61 girls died, while for every 100 married men 116 married women (a population over 15 years of age) died.<sup>14</sup> State statistics show that the number of female deaths women increases sharply in the period from 11 to 15 years of age, when for 76 deceased young males in towns there are 114 deceased girls, while in the countryside that relation was even more distinct, when for 831 male deaths there were 1,270 female deaths.<sup>15</sup> This data clearly shows that the problem of female mortality was directly linked to sexual maturity, i.e. with health problems which arose from pregnancy, birth and the period of motherhood. The author of the text “The health of our women-folk” particularly warns that among “cultured peoples” women live longer than men because, as he wrote, living conditions are such that “they enable women to preserve themselves better from the vicissitudes of life, they live in a certain way sheltered from the great struggle for survival,” while “the practical application of modern advances and discoveries in medical science” have greatly reduced deaths during childbirth.<sup>16</sup>

Death during childbirth was one of the most frequent causes of shortening women’s life expectancy. It is true that the number dying in childbirth was falling (in 1894, of the total number of female deaths, 8.24% occurred in childbirth, while in 1903 that percentage was 6.10 and in 1908, 5.24), but the number still remained very high in relation to European circumstances. When the statistics are analysed, what becomes particularly striking is the very big difference between the percentages in deaths during childbirth in the city of Belgrade and those in all other districts in Serbia. In the period from 1899 to 1908 the average percentage of deaths during childbirth in Belgrade was 1.78% of all female deaths, but in the Valjevo District that percentage was several times higher. For this reason, we give the following summary of the situation in certain Serbian districts from 1899 to 1908.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> H. Joksimović, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 Et 1908*, p. 171.

<sup>16</sup> H. Joksimović, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 Et 1908*, p. 204.



Districts	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	%
Belgrade	7.90	13.94	11.00	8.28	12.86	9.21	8.37	5.90	5.99	5.49	8.89
Valjevo	8.68	8.74	9.71	5.57	7.16	8.80	6.88	7.42	7.51	5.31	7.58
Vranje	6.06	5.49	6.60	5.88	6.59	6.22	6.23	7.87	7.27	7.79	6.60
Kragujevac	6.14	5.69	5.98	4.84	5.11	5.43	5.24	6.01	5.41	5.11	5.50
Krajina	6.64	9.93	6.87	7.60	8.27	7.99	7.44	6.01	7.42	6.67	7.48
Kruševac	7.20	7.88	7.21	6.09	8.77	6.98	7.18	8.04	5.42	5.38	7.01
Morava	7.88	5.78	5.84	4.00	6.25	6.78	5.22	8.24	7.46	4.65	6.21
Niš	3.33	4.21	3.95	4.90	3.61	6.43	4.82	5.15	4.25	4.91	4.56
Smederevo	10.10	9.12	6.54	9.21	8.70	5.92	4.92	5.57	4.35	5.28	6.97
Užice	11.09	9.29	8.51	6.03	6.71	8.48	8.60	5.71	9.90	6.49	8.08
City of Belgrade	2.90	0.95	3.13	-	1.44	2.97	1.32	1.14	1.47	0.78	1.78
In towns	3.38	3.29	3.42	3.15	2.50	3.94	2.32	2.94	2.95	2.66	3.05
In the countryside	6.62	7.53	7.30	6.19	6.68	7.37	6.32	6.64	6.64	6.39	5.58

Also significant is the datum that, of the total number of women dying in childbirth, in the period from 1904 to 1908, 92.66% were the wives of agricultural workers, which was a higher proportion than that of the total percentage of agricultural workers in the population (87.5%). This data shows that the most important cause of deaths during childbirth should be sought in the conditions in which those births took place, because urban conditions of health protection significantly reduced mortality.

Also of interest is data which shows deaths during childbirth (in 1908) at different ages.<sup>18</sup>

Districts	Up to 20 yrs.	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-30	31-35	36-40
In towns	10.34	-	-	6.90	10.34	6.90	27.59	27.59	10.34	-
In the countryside	8.03	3.04	5.64	4.77	5.86	9.33	25.81	14.53	18.44	3.90
Total	8.16	2.86	5.31	4.90	6.12	9.18	25.92	15.31	17.96	3.67

<sup>18</sup> *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 et 1908*, p. 201.

From the above, it can be seen that a high percentage of cases of death was among women in childbirth younger than 20 years of age (8.16%), and that the percentage of deaths rose sharply among women in childbirth older than 26. Although we do not have analyses which would show the causes of the increase in deaths at these ages, it can be assumed that the largest number of women gave birth at an age up to 20 years, and that, thus, the percentage of deaths was increased. One should also not exclude the fact of insufficient physical maturity at this age, because the law envisaged that girls could marry from the age of 15 onwards, and one of the reasons can therefore be found in the physical weakness of young women giving birth. Another datum which reflects the sharp increase in deaths after the age of 26 most likely bears witness to the fact that there were frequent, multiple births and that the exhausted bodies of women older than 26 lost the struggle. These women were frequently ill, most often from rickets and tuberculosis, which led to a fatal outcome during childbirth. Nevertheless, the most frequent cause were unhygienic conditions. This situation prevailed everywhere in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where infections during childbirth were the most frequent cause of death. However, conditions in Europe improved significantly during the second half of the century. Deaths in childbirth were greatly reduced thanks to the fact that an increasing percentage of births began to take place, whether in hospital or at home, with the help of a doctor. Medical discoveries such as anaesthesia, various antiseptic methods, new surgical sutures and, perhaps primarily, the caesarean operation, reduced deaths in childbirth in developed countries to about 2%.<sup>19</sup>

As regards the causes of the high level of deaths during childbirth in Serbia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, one can, without detailed research, conclude that the most frequent cause of this phenomenon were the bad conditions in which births took place. This has already been written about, with regard to the inter-war period, by Momčilo Isić,<sup>20</sup> but doctors at the beginning of the century were also aware of these facts and, on several

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19 G. Duby, M. Perrot, *Histoire des femmes*, 4, Paris 1991, p. 359.

20 M. Isić, "Žene u seoskoj porodici u Srbiji između dva svetska rata", in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka, II, Položaj žena kao merilo modernizacije*, Begrade 1996, pp. 183-200.



occasions in the publications available to them, they described conditions which they had seen, particularly during childbirth in the countryside. Describing the customary conditions in the magazine *Narodno zdravlje*, one teacher wrote: "In the house a great number of people are living and she (the mother-to-be) has to remove herself from them. For this reason she goes into a field where, often in the open air, in severe frost and snow, she separates herself from her "burden". At the time of her greatest pain, she has to shriek (she daren't complain loudly) in such a way that no one notices or hears her. Most important of all is that usually no one is around her at that time. Standing astride (all peasant girls and many small-town girls give birth like this) during the birth, the child falls out on its head and if the ground is hard is immediately badly hurt. Now (only after the baby starts to cry) a man or one of the women come to help, and as soon as they arrive take the child to have its umbilical cord cut and tied, wash it in cold water and swaddle it in napkins. Through the happiest of acts the unfortunate new mother becomes for the said house filthy, disgusting, unclean, and for this they at once put her in some hidden corner where, as though for a dog, they strew a bit of straw or dirty, torn and cast-off clothes, while she herself (as soon as she felt she would give birth) has already put on her worst shirt and wrapped herself in her worst woollen skirt, which she had long thrown away and on which hens had been laying eggs or cats had born litters. Thus, in that corner (with insufficient light), on the cold ground, on an unclean bed, in unclean clothes, in general: in total uncleanliness, the new mother has to stay 40 days. She will of course not be lying down all that time, but will already on the third day be up and doing her regular chores. During that period, she has to have a special fire and a special pot from which to eat and which during that time 'ought not' to be washed at all. Besides this, for the entire 40 days no young mother should taste water, but can drink brandy, as much as she wants"<sup>21</sup> (*underlined as in the original*).

When one analyses statistics on the most frequent causes of death in Serbia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, one can easily notice controversial data on what can be termed the epidemic of tuberculosis (TB). By number of those suffering from TB,

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21 St. M. M. uć, "Kako nas rađaju", in *NZ*, no. 12, 1902, pp. 281-282.

Serbia falls into the Mediterranean or, to be precise, the eastern Mediterranean zone which was hardest hit by this disease (2.01 to 4.56 per thousand inhabitants ill with TB). According to European statistics, Belgrade had more deaths from TB than Rome, Naples, Palermo, Marseilles, Budapest, Vienna and Barcelona, and the Serbian capital belonged to the group of cities with the highest numbers of deaths, such as Bucharest, Sofia, Athens, Thessaloniki, Madrid, Lisbon, Porto and Paris.<sup>22</sup> This illness takes second place among causes of death (immediately after pneumonia), with an average 13% of all causes of death during the entire decade before the First World War.<sup>23</sup> It is striking that, on the global level, TB took twice as many lives in towns as it did in the countryside (22.13% against 10.40%, in Belgrade as much as 28.02% of all deaths<sup>24</sup>), but it was even more striking that it was in the countryside in fact that more women than men died from this illness. In the period from 1904 to 1908, female deaths from TB comprised an average 14.65% of total deaths, with male deaths comprising 11.34%.<sup>25</sup> In fact, throughout all these years, the percentage of female deaths from TB in the countryside was greater than the percentage of male deaths.<sup>26</sup>

Cause of death	In towns			In the countryside		
	m	f	total	m	f	total
Tuberculosis	21.90	21.16	21.57	9.53	13.92	11.77

A similar proportion was only to be found in relation to “nervous diseases,” which were not clearly defined in the statistics. Warning of the dramatic nature of the “female question,” the well-known doctor Hranislav Joksimović concluded “that womenfolk in Serbia have to struggle with many problems and difficulties, that the struggle is a hard and bitter one for them, that they have taken upon themselves a great burden, under which they groan, break down and fall, that they are so overburdened with work that they

22 J.-L. Pinol, *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine, II*, Paris 2003, p. 93.

23 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 et 1908*, p. 154.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

cannot take it and carry it on their feeble backs, and then they wither and die early and die in greater numbers than men. Our womenfolk in the countryside are some kind of white slaves.”<sup>27</sup>

The second big problem which worried doctors at that time was the high rate of deaths among babies and small children. Annual statistics show that about a quarter of children born alive died in their first year of life. Data from 1903 shows that in Serbia 26.3% of children died in their first year of life, which represented 15.3% of live births.<sup>28</sup> This percentage can be compared only with those from certain German counties and with Romania, while in the majority of developed European countries it was lower: in Switzerland 13.2%, France 12.2, Denmark 11.4, Sweden 10.4, Norway 7.5, Ireland 9.6.<sup>29</sup> Similar proportions lasted until 1908 when, of 100 live births, 22.2 children in Belgrade died in their first year of life, in Moscow 35.6, Bucharest 21.7, Vienna 18.3, Brussels 17.4, Paris 10.3, and in Zurich 9.5.<sup>30</sup> Worrying also were the figures which showed that, in the Serbian countryside, of the total number of deaths, those of children up to one year old comprised 27.2%, while those of children aged up to two years comprised 37.1% of total deaths.<sup>31</sup> Along with this, data shows that the mortality of young children in the countryside was higher than in the towns. The percentage of deaths of children younger than 6 years in the towns (of the total number of deaths) amounted to 37.0%, and in the countryside 49.9%.<sup>32</sup>

Those indicators which refer to the deaths of boys and girls in the period from 1888 to 1908 were exceptionally bad. It can be seen from this data that the death rate did not greatly change in the course of these 20 years, even though it was at just this time in European countries that the discoveries of Koch and Pasteur were beginning to be applied: these would much reduce if not entirely eradicate deaths from typhus, cholera and diphtheria in Western Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> In Serbia, hygienic circumstances were the main cause of baby

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27 H. Joksimović, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

28 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1903*, p. 758.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 et 1908*, p. 1068.

31 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1903*, p. 173.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

33 J.-L. Pinol, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

deaths, both during birth and in the first months of life, as a result of being given insufficiently hygienic food. Data shows that in 1888, of 10,000 live births, the number surviving their first year of life was 8,529,<sup>34</sup> while in 1908 that number was even lower – 8,364.<sup>35</sup> The high death rate among children older than one year brought about the result that (in 1905) of 10,000 children a further 1,000 died up to the age of 5 years (in 1905, up to the age of 5 years 7,214 children survived, of 10,000 live births). As death rates did not significantly change in the period from 1888 to 1908, it can be assumed that a similar proportion was applicable to the generation born in the middle of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which were not covered by statistics before the First World War) which, in fact, meant that, up to the age of 16 years in Serbia, only one half of children born alive survived (in 1891, that number totalled 5,831 of 10,000),<sup>36</sup> which was more than ominous.

The figures were alarming, and distinguished doctors in professional journals frequently referred to the causes of these phenomena. Medical reports showed that the cause of almost half the deaths of small children were diseases of the digestive system, and that the reasons had to be found in the way of life and nutrition, i.e. in customs of hygiene. Doctors established that a very small number of children were breast-fed, because mothers from the better-off households refused to breast-feed their babies, while women from poorer classes were forced to work the whole day and were unable to devote themselves to their offspring.<sup>37</sup> The professional journals concluded that the greatest cause of mortality was bad and rotten food, and that second place was taken by the lack of cleanliness and bad quality of housing in which many people lived, crammed into one room.<sup>38</sup> Bad living conditions also caused the faster spread of infections, particularly those affecting respiratory organs, and those diseases (pneumonia, in the first place) were found immediately after diseases of the digestive organs on the list of causes of child deaths. Doctors also warned that a frequent cause of death was insufficient parental care, as

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34 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1903*, p. 210.

35 *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 et 1908*, p. 218.

36 *Ibid.*

37 "Umiranje dece", in *NZ*, no. 11, 1903, p. 270.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 271.

well as the fact that parents very rarely called a doctor because of a child's illness, because it was thought that it was "normal for a child to die, by God's will."<sup>39</sup>

All warned of the higher rates of death among the children of divorced parents: because of the fact that their mothers were forced to work, they "mainly did not reach their second year."<sup>40</sup> They also wrote that mortality among the poor was far greater, citing as reasons indifference, neglect, uncleanliness and the fact that mothers, in order to be able to work, were forced to leave their new-born children to be looked after by those only a little older.<sup>41</sup> They warned that, in other states, "a person is valued as the highest form of capital" and that they invest great care in cherishing illegitimate and poor children, while in Serbia such care did not exist. The distinguished physician Jovan J. Jovanović made this appeal: "It is precisely in our small state that every person is necessary. Every year we unnecessarily lose several thousand children who, without much trouble, could be saved and be healthy and good citizens. What is our famed fertility worth when it is shown that barely 40 out of 100 legitimate children reach their 14<sup>th</sup> year; there are places in our country where more people are dying than there are being born; when there are circumstances that no recruiting can be done among the people for the sole reason that one whole year, one entire generation already died in early childhood. We must make capital out of human material if we wish to survive further."<sup>42</sup> With this appeal, he had wished to support the initiative to found an orphanage for small children (there already existed an orphanage for children older than 6): in the whole of Europe, only Serbia and Montenegro had not set one up at this time, while, as the author says, Bulgaria had been among the last to do so, in 1900.<sup>43</sup>

Besides the high mortality rate among babies and small children, data which bore witness to the bad state of health of school students also gave cause for concern. Systematic medical examinations of students were regularly done and, on the basis of these, statistics were compiled which, as in the previous cases, gave worrying

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39 Ibid., p. 272.

40 Dr. L. Lazarević, "Pojam, zadaća i sredstva za negovanje dece", in *NZ*, no. 1, 1900, p. 5.

41 Ibid.

42 Jovan J. Jovanović, "Materinsko udruženje", in *NZ*, no. 1, 1905, p. 5.

43 Ibid.



results. The best evidence for this was provided in a lecture which a school doctor gave to a parents' meeting at the Third Belgrade Gymnasium (High School) in November 1908. He related that, during the systematic examination, they analysed the students' constitution, rate of spinal deformation and the state of their teeth. The examination showed that among the pupils of all eight high school grades (from ages 10 to 19) 32% were of weak constitution (poorly-developed bones and chests, under-nourished, with weak musculature and deformed spines), 32% were good, and 25% were medium (quite well-developed bones, but poorly-nourished with weak musculature) and only 11% were of very good constitution (correctly and nicely developed, with a well-developed chest and strong muscles). Spinal examinations showed that 40% of pupils in this high school had deformed spines and, finally, 70% had rotten teeth.<sup>44</sup> Apart from these health problems, the doctor stated that "in very many children" he found enlarged and damaged tonsils, weak muscles, a high degree of anaemia, and poorly developed lungs which resulted in "a proportionately narrow chest and shallow breathing."<sup>45</sup> The doctor particularly emphasized that three quarters of the children examined were unwashed and wearing dirty and unlaundered underwear.<sup>46</sup>

Similar results were found in statistics compiled in a larger number of high schools and elementary schools in Serbia in 1908. This data shows that the state of health of elementary pupils was worst in Belgrade, where 40% of students were of weak constitution, 29% medium and 32% very good. It is interesting that there were striking differences between three Belgrade high schools. The First Gymnasium had a larger number of pupils with very good constitutions (229) compared with weak ones (87), while in the Second Gymnasium the situation was the other way around, the number of weakly-developed pupils (396) being much higher than those assessed as very good (79). There are no clear indicators of the reasons for this state of affairs, but it can be assumed that pupils of the First Belgrade Gymnasium came from the central and wealthiest parts of the city. In towns in the interior of Serbia, the situation was somewhat better, so that the greatest number of pupils were medium-developed (41%), somewhat fewer were

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44 Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, "Za đачko zdravlje", in *NZ*, no. 1, 1909, p. 2.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

46 *Ibid.*

those very well developed (33%), while least in number were those poorly-developed (26%).<sup>47</sup> For those numbers to be better understood, the same issue of *Narodno zdravlje* gave data on the state of pupils' constitutions in German schools, by which those of medium constitution amounted to 52%, those of good to 43.4% and in the weak category only to 5%.<sup>48</sup> This data was used in their analyses by the doctors, who warned of the bad state of health of the population in Serbia and complained that "we do not stand at all well as regards popular health and in that respect we are worse and worse every year."<sup>49</sup>

The above-mentioned school doctor attempted to identify the causes of such a bad state of health among young people. As the most important cause of the bad state of health in Belgrade, he cited unhealthy housing, concluding that "in Belgrade there are almost no healthy apartments, and so it is no wonder that unhealthy housing is one of the main causes of weakness among Belgrade's inhabitants," particularly because, as he states, most Belgrade apartments were short of light and fresh air, and in most of them damp was ruling.<sup>50</sup> He begged parents to give up one of the bad living habits which was "to sleep in the worse, smallest and darkest room and to furnish the best room, close it up, and use it only on feast-days for guests."<sup>51</sup> As the next two causes of the bad situation, the doctor cited "unsuitable and insufficient nutrition," and insufficient hygiene.

The professional journals warned of yet another cause of the poor state of school student health – consumption of alcohol. Prompted by the standpoints of international medicine, Serbian doctors brought the decision at their annual meeting that "every use of alcoholic drinks by children is completely unnecessary and harmful."<sup>52</sup> This resolution was the consequence of examinations carried in schools, which showed that there was alcoholism among pupils and that "for up to three days after *slava* [celebrations at home], teachers could not work with the children because of pupil intoxication."<sup>53</sup> As published in *Narodno zdravlje* on the basis

47 "Statistika telesnog sastava đaka srednjih škola u Srbiji", in *NZ*, no. 4, 1909, p. 98.

48 "Telesni sastav đaka u nemačkim školama", in *NZ*, no. 4, 1909, p. 100.

49 Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, "Da li degenerišemo?", in *NZ*, no. 1, 1910, p. 16.

50 Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, "Za đачko zdravlje", p. 3.

51 Ibid.

52 Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, "Za đачko zdravlje", in *NZ*, no. 2, 1909, p. 37.

53 Ibid.

of questions to teachers, a large number of pupils continually or occasionally consumed alcoholic drinks.<sup>54</sup>

	Takes no drinks whatsoever	Drinks only occasionally (feast-days)	Drinks brandy & cognac	Drinks often or regularly
%	3.2	71.5	39	26.2

Apart from the afore-mentioned problems with elementary pupils, a new phenomenon appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – pupil suicide. The daily press wrote much about this and an editorial was also devoted to this subject by Jovan Danić, editor of *Narodno zdravlje*. His article began as follows: “In Belgrade this year there have been several cases of suicide among pupils, and thus the public have begun to speak a few words about this regrettable phenomenon which, with terrifying perfidiousness, threatens to transform itself into a serious disease.”<sup>55</sup> When one examines state statistics up to 1908, one can really observe a serious growth in suicide in the period from 1898 when, at least according to the available data, there was a total of 130 suicides in Serbia, up to 1907 when there were 204 suicides. Particularly striking is the fact that the number of suicides in towns in this period almost doubled – from 27 to 42. The data was especially worrying in Belgrade, where 9 suicides took place in 1894 and 18 in 1906. That the urban population was worse affected by suicides is shown by the “professional structure” of those committing it, where, say, white-collar employees comprised 9.77% of suicides, although they only comprised 2% of the total population. The state attempted to compile statistics of the causes which led individuals to this act: top of the list long-term illness, then came insanity, and finally unknown and other causes. In the largest number of cases, particularly in the countryside, suicide was carried out by hanging.

One statistic which attracts particular attention is the one confirmed by the newspaper articles about the growth of this manifestation among young people.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jovan Danić, “Đačka samoubistva”, in *NZ*, no. 11, 1909, p. 233.

<sup>56</sup> *Statistički godišnjak... za 1907 & 1908*, p. 1037.



Year	Males 11-15 yrs.	Females 11-15 yrs.	Males 16-20 yrs.	Females 16-20 yrs.
1899	3	1	8	4
1900	5	1	8	8
1901	4	1	7	10
1902	2	1	10	10
1903	5	1	8	3
1904	5	1	22	12
1905	5	2	10	11
1906	4	2	21	13
1907	5	4	15	15
1908	8	4	19	12

From these figures it can be seen that the biggest growth in the number of suicides took place among young people, particularly in the female population. That manifestation is also confirmed by the statistics which record the number of suicides according to marital status, and which show a convincing growth in suicides among both unmarried and married women.<sup>57</sup>

Year	Unmarried women	Married women
1899	3	29
1900	8	31
1901	9	28
1902	8	33
1903	3	23
1904	12	30
1905	12	36
1906	12	37
1907	16	54
1908	13	47

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1036.

Both the press and the professional journals tried to deal with the causes of this manifestation. Most often they condemned “modern life,” which was increasingly “moving away from that calm, patriarchal age, which many so happily call the ‘good old days’.” It was argued that life had become much faster and more tiring and that feebler organisms could easily succumb to it. “Fashion” was also mentioned as was the fact that the spread of suicide among pupils had become “contagious.” The possibility was particularly considered that the modern age had changed the attitude towards success, so that bad school exam results were given as one of the reasons for suicide.<sup>58</sup> Without precise data, it is today difficult to establish the reasons for this manifestation, but it is interesting the statistics show that the number of suicides in May and June were visibly greater than in other months of the year.

The last test which under-age citizens had to go through was the medical examination before the recruitment board. Recruitment for the Army was carried out “earlier at 20 years but, because of the large number of unfit applicants, had to be raised to 21 years,” and “we will not err if we draw therefrom the conclusion that both the health and physical development of our people has reduced and worsened, and that thus we do not stand at all well as regards popular health and in that respect we are worse and worse every year.”<sup>59</sup> The reports of the recruitment boards were in some way the last systematic medical examinations and, as such, gave very worrying results. During the last decade before the First World War an average of 32% of recruits were deemed temporarily or permanently unfit.<sup>60</sup> The criterion on the basis of which fitness for military service was determined had been taken from the French Army, which used the criteria of Dr. Pignier, where height, chest measurement and weight were compared. The boards’ results were troubling: almost one third of all recruits did not have the requisite physical characteristics. In *Narodno zdravlje*, Army doctor Miloš Popović published the data that, among townfolk, as much as 70-90% were temporarily unfit for military service, while among the rural population that percentage was 20-40.<sup>61</sup> Army doctors put these percentages in the context of the general state of health

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>59</sup> Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, “Da li degenerišemo?”, p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, “Privremeno nesposobni”, in *NZ*, no. 6, 1909, p. 132.



of the population, and arrived at the following analyses: it should be born in mind that up to the age of twenty-one almost half have died, that of the [other] half thirty out of every hundred are temporarily unfit, thus of an entirely weak constitution and that about 10 out of every hundred are permanently unfit for military service. So, about only every other male child comes to the recruitment and of these again only every other one becomes a capable soldier, and of those only less than half are strong men and of very good build. This means that, if popular health was as it should be, we could have in the place of that 1 soldier if not 3, then at least 2.”<sup>62</sup>

As has already been stated above, in spite of all the appeals of the Serbian Medical Association and the most distinguished doctors of the time, the problem of the bad state of health of women and children did not reach the highest state institutions at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The issue remained in the shadow of politics, in the shadow of the preparations for the great wars which, from 1912 to 1918, would change the map of the Balkans. It was as if the whole of society lived in some kind of petrification, waiting for the issue to be resolved within the framework of the state. The problem was that the improvement of the health of the most vulnerable parts of society demanded from the state the greatest efforts, considerable funds, continuity, care, organization (medical institutions, medical personnel, health education and improvement of hygiene), but, above all, a social consensus that this issue was of vital importance. Up to the First World War, the Serbian political élite did not attach great importance to this question, and thus many diseases, including those which had become curable in Europe at this time, reached epidemic dimensions.

For historians, it would be very important to research this question during the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because indicators which cover the mortality of new-born babies, small children or women in childbirth comprise one of the most precise indicators of the development and in-depth condition of a society and a state. As exceptionally sensitive instruments, these indicators clearly show the ups and downs through which a society passes, and such research would therefore represent an important contribution to the analysis of the continuity and discontinuity of the development of Serbia during the past hundred years. Every crisis

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62 Dr. Miloš Đ. Popović, "Telesni sastav naših vojnika", in *NZ*, no. 2, 1909, p. 36.

very quickly comes down to the issue of the state of health of the weakest, and results of progress in this field are easily and quickly lost if constant attention is not paid to them and if state policy does not stand firmly behind them.

In the absence of analysis which would show the situation through the whole of the previous century, the results of contemporary research can be taken into account. Serbia entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century in 5<sup>th</sup> place in Europe in terms of deaths of children up to the age of 5 years, behind Turkey, Albania, Macedonia and Romania.<sup>63</sup> This is a result of the big rise in child mortality which took place during the 1990s, when the death rate rose by 40%.<sup>64</sup> This meant that, according to a United Nations report, in Serbia in the last decade, 13 infants died per 1,000 live births which, as Miroslav Jovanović shows, puts Serbia into the same group as the Dutch Antilles and Uruguay “and that in addition one has to bear in mind that this parameter of infant deaths in Serbia is four times higher than that in Sweden, Japan or Iceland (3 infant deaths per 1,000), more than double than that in Belgium, the Bermudas, Finland (4), Austria, Germany, France, South Korea, Spain (5), Czech Republic, Greece, Israel, New Zealand, Portugal and Slovenia (6); almost double than that in Guadeloupe, Malta, Martinique, New Caledonia or the USA (7), and substantially higher than that in Slovakia, Cyprus, Croatia (8), Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland (9).”<sup>65</sup>

The successes achieved in the development of health culture and protection during the previous century were rapidly annulled in the last crisis through which Serbian society passed, which yet again showed that the values of a modern, individualized society do not occupy a high place on the ladder of social and political priorities. They are still always easily sacrificed to “high politics,” they still find it hard to become the “big theme.” The “national interest” which was the focal theme of the “grand narrative” of the 1990s, did not recognize the health of the population as a theme of its own, and thus Serbia, regardless of the progress it had achieved in the meantime, entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it had done

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63 *The State of the World's Children*, UNICEF 2003, p. 102.

64 United Nations, *Joint assessment of the situation in Serbia and Montenegro*, Belgrade 2003.

65 M. Jovanović, “Srbija 1804–2004: razvoj opterećen diskontinuitetima (sedam teza)”, in *Serbia 1804–2004*, p. 196.



on the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup>, with a worryingly high rate of infant mortality, one of the vital statistical indicators of a society's state of development. Those dead infants are the unrecognized victims of the 1990s, a loss invisible in the general defeat. The fact these victims are still not spoken about by anyone, that they are not taken into account, and the fact that there is no adequate state policy which could seriously face up to the demographic collapse shows that this theme is still not recognized as important. The "grand narrative" continues to view the population only as "material." It is one of the most disastrous proofs of the survival of an anti-modern system of values in which human life has a low price.



II

**CROSSED SWORDS  
OF MEMORY**



# NARRATIVE ON WWI AS THE ENERGY DRINK OF SERBIAN NATIONALISM

For the past year Serbia has been taken over by great excitement caused by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War I. It all began in the fall of 2013, shortly before the newly introduced Armistice Day, marking the armistice signed on November 11, 1918. Serbia was then overwhelmed by a state of great emotional tension, as if the July Crisis of 1914 was in full swing, as if the war was about to start and Serbia was surrounded by enemies. The excitement was partially caused by the book *The Sleepwalkers* by British historian Christopher Clark, which was quickly rumored as pronouncing Serbia the main culprit for the outbreak of World War I. The stage was set for historical panic.

Emotions were raised to the highest level – World War I has been all around us for a whole year, ingesting, homogenizing, and closing ranks. No one is to remain outside of it. For days the entire press has been bringing front-page reports, brimming with excitement. The President of the state is holding historical lectures. Poets give new interpretations of this event. Armistice Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>, was used for declaration of war and mobilization. Historians jumped at the opportunity to once again confirm their state-building role and closeness to all regimes. Or, using a figure of speech from the past: World War I entered our society's every pore.

The commotion had its climax on June 28 2014. That day marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination which was a cause for the outbreak of war. Emotions that were raised during the previous months produced the expected political consequences. In Bosnia, this divided land, separate images of this event were created which resulted in two different commemorations. One in Sarajevo, and the other in Kusturica's Andrićgrad, in the Republika Srpska. One was attended by the Federation's authorities

and the other by Serbian politicians from Serbia and Bosnia. One emphasized the tragic nature of the event and its consequences, while the other celebrated Gavrilo Princip as a Serbian national hero. The state leaders of the confronted peoples were once again at opposing sides. It was not a “hot” war like the one twenty years ago, but still the 1990s division line was again in the same place. It was more than a clear confirmation that the conflict was still there, that nothing had changed, that the ideologies which had caused the war in 1992 are still in power and no one is backing down. Again, history was misused in order to express contemporary problems, to voice the burning issues of today using the language of the past and render them emotionally charged.

That is why the question arises: how did history become the ideal conveyer of political messages? Why was history, of all matters, at the very focus of political dispute? And, finally, why is it again more important than the present and more dynamic than the future? Why are we living the past instead of the present? In order to answer these questions, one should keep in mind the fact that awareness of a common past is one of the nation’s constitutive elements, its connective tissue, a reservoir providing collective emotions, motivations, inspirations and values. This is of particular significance for the Eastern European model of nation founded upon the idea of common language, culture and history, based on the German model. Therefore, of course, one should bear in mind that this is not a matter of historical knowledge stemming from science-based historiography, although in those very years the latter had brought several of the most important books on Serbia’s role and position in World War I.<sup>1</sup> However, this was a brand of scientific criticism which could not have acquired its place in the populist wave of mythical interpretation of the past. Those books have influenced the development of science and knowledge about World War I and the creation of Yugoslavia, but at that moment they did not influence a rationalization of the already created emotional relation toward this event which continued to be publically

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1 Andrej Mitrović, *Prodor na Balkan. Srbija u planovima Austro-Ugarske i Nemačke*, Belgrade 1981; Đorđe Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, Saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, Belgrade 1983; Andrej Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu*, Belgrade 1984; Đorđe Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje*, Belgrade 1985; Andrej Mitrović, *Ustaničke borbe u Srbiji*, Belgrade 1987; Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, Belgrade 1987.

“heated“ by non-scientific sources, primarily popular literature, theater and film. Facing competition from memories formed through many sources – primarily popular culture – science-based historiography stands no chance. It aims to learn about the past, it is precise and burdened with the necessity of giving proof. Memories are seductive, emotional and depend on present needs.

Memory is selective. It chooses from the past events that suit the moment, shortens them, insisting on some while forgetting others. Some events are more important to the collective memory than others, for they offer a sum of messages necessary to send to the collective so that the latter can always reconfirm its imaginary connection. During the past year, this role in Serbia was occupied by World War I whose anniversary has incited mass misuses of history. It was proven that this very event has the “most useful” messages for today’s Serbia, that it can offer “favors” to today’s regime. World War I has proven to be the key “reservoir” of mythologized memories with a decisive influence on the Serbian historical narrative or, as recently said by one of the most influential historians: “World War I is of key importance for the Serbs’ national identity.”<sup>2</sup> Namely, the events of this war are the ideal basis for nationalist interpretations, an “energy drink” which can easily “boost” national sentiments.

Memories of World War I went through different phases during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The interwar kingdom celebrated this war as its founding event, but given the fact that this had been a state of reconciliation among the South Slavs who had been on different sides in the war, there was no particular insistence upon concrete events. After World War II there were significant political changes and new memorial necessities. The socialist regime’s founding myth was World War II, which inevitably shifted the previous one to the “storage of memory.“ Additionally, World War I was the source of Serbian pride so this was an additional reason for this subject to be suppressed, even proscribed in the second Yugoslavia.

And then in Yugoslavia, in the early 1980s, an economic and political crisis escalated, spilling over to inter-ethnic relations, and even historical remembrance. In the construction of a new historical narrative in Serbia, the key role was given to World War I,

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2 Dušan T. Bataković, “Revizija Prvog svetskog rata – lična iskustva i moguće pouke”, Nova srpska politička misao, November 27, 2013; “Posveta srpskom junaku”, interview with Miloš Ković, Politika, September 7, 2014.

whose “rediscovery” meant, as was told by contemporaries, the “implosion of history,”<sup>3</sup> i.e. the beginning of a new political phase whose dominant nationalist ideology would be indeed founded upon the mythical interpretation of the past.

This reinterpretation of history was not new, but it had gained its mythical features, drama and explosiveness on account of a literary work, Dobrica Ćosić’s novel *A Time of Death* which was first published in 1972. This epic novel on the Serbian tragedy in World War I appeared as a “discovery of truth,” a new self-perception. The novel was being devoured, retold – it was perceived as a revelation.<sup>4</sup> However, the political situation in the early 1970s was still not ripe for changes and the creation of a new remembrance model. The right moment appeared in the early 1980s with the onset of the Yugoslav crisis.

We can mark 1983 as the first turning point for the “implosion of history.” Namely, that was when one of the most influential Belgrade theaters staged the play *Battle of Kolubara*,<sup>5</sup> based on Dobrica Ćosić’s novel. This play soon became much more than just theater.<sup>6</sup> This is how critics later described the atmosphere in the theater: “The entry to the auditorium, to the ‘Battle’, was pilgrim-like, exalted and devout.”<sup>7</sup> During the play it appeared as though the battle was ongoing and the audience was participating in it. People were standing up, shouting “Charge!” cheering and crying. The play’s reception became a social and political phenomenon.

The next, even more important moment for the complete change of remembrance models, occurred in 1985 when Danko Popović’s novel *A Book about Milutin* was published. As stated on the cover, a mere 145 pages carry the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the character of a peasant from Šumadija who participated in all of the crucial events. Similar to Ćosić’s novels, Milutin is the quintessential Serbian peasant,<sup>8</sup> a collective hero, the personi-

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3 Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*. Intelektualna opozicija Srbije i oživljavanje nacionalizma, Belgrade 2004, p. 106.

4 Nebojša Popov, “Srpski populizam”, in *Vreme*, May 24, 1993, p. 16.

5 Kolubarska bitka, Jugoslovensko dramsko pozorište: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-t6W0mGzpY#>

6 Feliks Pašić, “U drami devedesetih”, *NIN*, November 7, 2002.

7 Slavica Vučković, “Trauma i katarza u srpskom pozorištu”, *Republika*, 1-30, September 2003.

8 Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, p. 151.

fiction of a nation<sup>9</sup> or, as the author himself said, an “all-Serbian grandfather”<sup>10</sup> who directly addresses the reader, presenting the “sum of national truths.”<sup>11</sup> Although the novel itself has no particular literary significance, its mass popularity was a clear sign that a new time had arrived, for it was reprinted 17 times in only a year. It was stated that the book sold around 500,000 copies which was unprecedented in the history of Serbian publishing.

However, a few years prior to the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia, World War I was again pushed to the sidelines of memory, whereas World War II returned to the main stage – this was the feature of “official memory” after the fall of the Slobodan Milošević regime, as well. Still, although removed from the main stage of remembrance, the mythic interpretations of World War I created in literature became the official, ruling and virtually the sole narrative on this event, especially since the time when it had entered the history curriculum in the early 1990s. This way, the “Ćosićesque” literary interpretation became the main educational framework for this event’s account, one which educated more than 20 generations of students in Serbia. When a new edition of *A Time of Death* was published in 2014, a professional historian stated that “*A Time of Death* is the means with which most of the thinking Serbs perceive World War I.”

In this mythic interpretative framework, we can single out several key myths distinguishing from the wider mythic constellation. Within this essay, I will try to present mythic representations in literature alongside those from history textbooks in order to show the relation between those two levels of creating memories, and prove that literary accounts have emerged victorious against science-based historiography, directly pervading classrooms, as the only true interpretation.

The first myth is the one about the victim nation and the death cult stemming from it. World War I is the ideal historical template for this myth’s construction, as Serbia lost around one quarter of its population during its course. But the facts are not problematic; rather it is the relationship towards them. *Mourir pour la patrie* is a cult built upon the representations of martyrdom in that war,

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9 Mirko Đorđević, “Književnost populističkog talasa”, in *Srpska strana rata*, Belgrade, 2002, p. 438.

10 Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, p. 154.

11 *Ibid.*



and its celebration becomes an obligation for survivors. Self-victimization appears as the key narrative strategy, for the role of victim provides a constant moral and political privilege which can be used in the present as a means of societal and national homogenization. In the stated literary works, death is presented as glorious, something one runs to without thinking. Time and again, Milutin repeats: “That is the way of us Serbs. We die first and think later.”<sup>12</sup>

The establishment of a death cult via history textbooks is carried out by summoning a heroic code of behavior which presents dying for one’s nation as the ultimate meaning of life. In most cases, such messages are sent through studies of epic poetry which is approached without distancing or critical attitude. When it comes to historical events, World War I, and particularly the suffering of civilians in occupied Serbia, offers an important lesson. There is open celebration of the epic value and behavior code – as illustrated by sentences such as this one, printed in a textbook published after the fall of Milošević: “Everyday life in many parts of Serbia turned into an epic resistance against the occupier. There were reports from Valjevo stating that the death penalty was ‘awaited stoically and calmly, both by men and women. This way, the occupier in Serbia faced an extraordinary political morale of the conquered which was unprecedented in modern European history. The death penalty was bereft of efficiency. Death was feared by no one’.”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the situation under Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria is often compared with the “Turkish zulum”<sup>14</sup> which in the collective remembrance had a key role in the establishment of the idea of victim nation, hence a sentence like this in today’s textbooks: “The Bulgarians committed atrocities unseen since the times of the Turkish zulum, throwing corpses in wells.”<sup>15</sup>

Such examples show that within a mythic narrative the greatness of a military undertaking is not determined by banal success, but by death, giving it its true meaning and grandeur. Pupils are not urged to think about the horrors of war, about perverted human behavior and frightening psychopathology which is cre-

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12 Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu*, Belgrade 1986, p. 41.

13 Kosta Nikolić, Nikola Žutić, Momčilo Pavlović, Zorica Špadijer, *Istorija za III razred gimnazije*, Belgrade 2005, p. 82.

14 Zulum: oppression, tyranny, translator’s note.

15 Radoš Ljušić, Ljubodrag Dimić, *Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole*, p. 82.



ated by war and leads to mass crimes, but rather to observe and celebrate death as the supreme proof of one's love for his/her fatherland. By means of such messages, education is included in the establishment of a value system that is closer to epic poetry than to modern standards by which life is the ultimate value. To the contrary, quotes like these and the overall attitude towards them celebrate death more than they do life.

Such depictions of the past also form a special attitude towards death and martyrdom in pursuit of freedom is glorified as a desirable model of behavior. This has led to Gavrilo Princip being proclaimed a Serbian hero – as the inscription under a photograph of him read – for the first time in textbooks in the Milošević era. This is no longer the case in recent textbooks but another remnant of the 1990s which is still included in textbooks is the example of a speech allegedly given by Major Gavrilović to his regiment during the 1915 battle of Belgrade. According to this text, he told the soldiers that High Command does not expect for them to survive and that, due to this, they should not be concerned with their lives: “Soldiers, heroes! High Command has already erased our regiment from its records. So, forward to glory!” With examples like this, the principle of self-sacrifice for one's nation has been proclaimed the ultimate value, which serves as an important motivational factor, particularly in times of conflict. Besides Gavrilović's battle cry, the most recent textbooks use the alleged speech given by General Mackensen to German troops before the attack against Serbia in 1915: “Soldiers, you are not going to the Italian, Russian or French front. You are going to the Serbian front, to Serbia, and Serbs are a people who love their freedom and cherish their fatherland and fight and sacrifice to their last,” which, when heard from the enemy's mouth, is perceived as objectivity and gains almost programmatic and testamentary dimensions.

World War I is also used for the purpose of achieving national exceptionalism, in order to describe the Serbian war experience as unique, incomparable with any other people or historical period. Literary characters constantly underline this exceptionalism, so for example, Milutin utters at one point: “None of the European nations has fought war on this level, ever,”<sup>16</sup> whereas today's textbook brings the same idea: “A vast number of Serbian bodies

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16 Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu*, p. 35.

remained, both on land and at sea. It was the price paid by the Serbs, unwilling to admit defeat, an occurrence hitherto unprecedented in warfare and international relations.”<sup>17</sup>

The creation of an image of one’s exceptionalism builds the idea of superiority and the special mission of one’s own nation, of particularly difficult temptations set forth before it and challenges which had not been endured by others. That way, a constant repetition of images ensues – of victims, injustice, and exceptional capabilities of overcoming all hardships. Such perceptions of history exclude the commemorative approach which would question the image of distinctiveness, but also omit the questioning of purpose and price of such goals and achievements.

What is particularly important in the overall remembrance of World War I, and can be proven also through analysis of literature and history textbooks, is the usage of biblical metaphors. So, the retreat of the Serbian Army through Albania and the breakthrough of the Salonica Front, ranging from literature to textbooks, is almost exclusively dubbed “The Calvary and Resurrection of Serbia“ which was also the title of one of many mid-1980s books.<sup>18</sup> Biblical metaphors aim to strengthen the components of historical and national consciousness shaping the image of the victim-people, different from others, resisting the greatest of challenges, constantly repeating the fate of Christ. In this idea according to which there is no resurrection without death, the latter plays, in fact, the central role.

A significant myth which can be built based on interpretations of World War I is the one about heroism. Due to the important victories by the Serbian Army, World War I is of special significance for the construction of that myth, too, as it represents – unlike the Kosovo Battle – an example of victorious martyrdom. The battles of Kolubara and Cer, respectively, add a victorious component to the heroization of the past, necessary for the strengthening of national pride and self-awareness. This component’s significance could, in fact, best be felt in the “Battle of Kolubara“ play which left audiences in a near trans-like state. The victory discourse spilled over to history lessons, as well – hence, we encounter the

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17 Radoš Ljušić, Ljubodrag Dimić, *Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole*, p. 82.

18 Kosta Todorović, Milutin Velimirović, *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije*, Beograd 1971; Momčilo Vuković-Birčanin, *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije, očev dnevnik iz Prvog svetskog rata*, Beograd 1979; Silvija Đurić, Vidosav Stevanović, *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije*, Beograd 1986.

celebration of the nearly superhuman feats of the Serbian Army in the vast majority of today's textbooks. Let me state the example of a nearly absurd, alleged statement by a French general quoted in the textbook: "Only the French cavalry could – and barely so – compare with the Serbian infantry in terms of speed."<sup>19</sup>

A highly important mythic deposit found in the narratives about World War I is the one concerning a generous people, a people sacrificing for others and enabling for others something they did not deserve. The key idea of this mytheme is the concept of injustice, as it creates the impression that the Serbian people had sacrificed everything for others, that all the losses were endured in the name of liberating others and for their benefit, and that this has not been recognized and appreciated enough. Thus the sacrifice gains an additional, special meaning, for it remained misunderstood, deprived of the expected gratitude. It is an exceptional mechanism for creating a sense of betrayal, a loss of trust in the neighboring peoples constituting Yugoslavia, disappointment about "unrequited love," developing a feeling of injustice carrying in itself a seed of resistance and revenge. Milutin often contemplates this and repeats time and again that "we must liberate the others."<sup>20</sup> He thinks about the fact that the Serbian sacrifice is excessive, misunderstood and unnecessary, for those peoples did not want their freedom in the first place. So, during the Serbian Army's charge toward the Soča River, in Slovenia, Milutin ponders: "Where is this Soča and what is this Soča? Let's die for Soča, too. Who will, if not us Serbs? I guess every river has a people that are supposed to die for it."<sup>21</sup> Such thoughts give a clear message that the Serbs have sacrificed for the freedom of others, not even knowing the exact location of those imaginary borders, giving their lives for the rivers of others.

This idea of sacrificing for others is most frequently present in the highly influential myth of Serbian victims who fell in order for the peoples who were on the wrong side to cross over to the right one, without paying the price, by sliding through the moral groove of history. Like it is insisted that people had died for an unknown geographical toponym, it is emphasized that Serbs were used by

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19 Nikola Gačeša, Ljiljana Mladenović-Maksimović, Dušan Živković, *Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole*, Belgrade 1997, p. 65.

20 Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu*, p. 24.

21 Ibid.

others in correcting the latter's wrong positions, again with a lack of gratitude. That is an additional component of the injustice myth which strongly influences the historical consciousness and represents an invitation for retaliation. This primarily implies the myth according to which Serbia, as stated in the history textbook, "enabled other Yugoslav peoples, by establishing the Yugoslav state, to leave the side of the defeated and join the victors."<sup>22</sup> This myth was extremely popular prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia as it described the magnitude of the Serbian sacrifice for other peoples, its benefaction and "historical favor." That has been embedded into the overall chivalrous interpretation of history, according to which a victim and a hero sacrifices for the sake of others, with no concern of his own well-being and interests. Textbooks unequivocally highlight this sacrifice: "Serbia has invested in the new state its statehood, tradition, it sacrificed a third of its population for it, defined and diplomatically carried out the Yugoslav program and, at the end of the war, its army kept the Yugoslav space from being torn to pieces."<sup>23</sup>

The next myth concerns the enemy, as it is only through the image of the enemy that the true image of a nation and its exceptionalism is constructed. Ćosić's *A Time of Death* already paints a systemic picture of threat, primarily in the form of the other Yugoslav peoples and major world powers, whereas the "backstabbing" metaphor serves as this narrative's basic interpretative framework.<sup>24</sup> There is a key sentence by Ćosić which has obtained the status of the ultimate truth about Serbian history: "The Serbs are winners in war and losers in peace," thus indicating that heroism had been despised and the sacrifices were in vain. In *A Book about Milutin* this myth was perfected by depicting all other Yugoslav peoples as insincere, malicious and prepared to use the Serbs. Milutin contemplates how the "brothers" Croats and Bosniaks had slaughtered women in Mačva while Serbs fought for their freedom;<sup>25</sup> how the Bulgarians were "backstabbers,"<sup>26</sup> Albanians slaughtered young girls;<sup>27</sup> Montenegrins stayed at home like traitors instead of co-

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22 Bold in the original text, author's note. Suzana Rajić, Kosta Nikolić, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 94.

23 Ibid.

24 Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, p. 104.

25 Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu*, p. 18.

26 Ibid., p. 19.

27 Ibid., p. 24.

ming to the battlefield,<sup>28</sup> Macedonians, ungratefult who “are mad at us and say we occupied them. Why didn’t they create their own state?”<sup>29</sup> Such a paranoid image of one’s own position was a trigger in the psychological preparation for the Yugoslav wars which were supposed to acquire the features of defensive, morally just, fought in the name of the ultimate fulfillment of justice. However, such an image of others also legitimizes the urge for revenge which is represented as just, so Milutin says during one of his observations: “We should pay them back, kill all the Arnauts,<sup>30</sup> as they have killed our own, they’ve smashed their heads with the blunt side of the axe,” thus openly calling for retaliation and compensation.

The enemy myth is closely tied to another one, the myth of Yugoslavia. Namely, given the fact that since the very beginning of World War I Serbia presented the creation of Yugoslavia as its official goal, that war was colored by the idea of Yugoslavianism, both politically and diplomatically. When this idea and this state were proclaimed enemies in the mid-1980s, then the political essence of the wartime objectives was supposed to be declared wrong – a historical mistake. Dobrica Ćosić often speaks about that and packs his novels with such standpoints. Milutin also develops a highly negative perception of all other Yugoslav peoples and constantly indicates that they did not want a joint state. That is not a historical fact but the insistence upon it is important for it asserts the idea of the misunderstood nature and fruitlessness of the Serbian sacrifice. In *A Book about Milutin*, the Yugoslav ideal is presented as the fantasy of intellectuals who did not even consider reality, whose dreams were far from reality – “it is dangerous when you look over mountains and across the skies without seeing your kinfolk.” In history textbooks, too, Yugoslavianism had to be presented as something that has hardly anything to do “with us,” thus making it necessary to include the following sentence in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook from 1993: “The idea of Yugoslavianism was not widespread in Serbia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as victories in the First and Second Serbian Uprising had created the conditions for independent, political and cultural development.” This banishing of what had become historically unfit meant the falsification of one’s own past and removal of all integrative ideas that had go-

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28 Ibid., p. 32.

29 Ibid., p. 42.

30 A Turkish term denoting Albanians, translator’s note.

verned the Serbian intellectual and political scene since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There is a degree of confusion in recent textbooks, as there are some who claim that there had not been an idea of Yugoslavianism previously, whereas others say that it had existed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, one textbook contains an open critique of the Yugoslav orientation, embarking on an impermissible debate with the past: “Instead of the acceptable Piedmont of Serbdom, Serbia declared itself a hazy Piedmont of Yugoslavdom. It was a hasty and ill-thought reversal, a fatal myth of the Yugoslav state and too great of an intervention for Serbia and the Serbian people.”<sup>31</sup> In the Serbian public which was disoriented as it was, presenting the creation of Yugoslavia as the result of chance and decisions by others, could have permanent consequences and additionally remove Serbia from the possibility of rationally coming to terms with its recent history, including the causes of its own total breakdown that occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, apart from these subsequent “alterations” of the past, the greatest divergence from historical fact can be found in the response to the basic question: did Serbia win World War I or did it lose? Judging by the ruling narrative in Serbia, the correct answer is number two. Last year, on the occasion of the anniversary, Dobrica Ćosić explicitly claimed: “World War I was a defeat.”<sup>32</sup> This conclusion is contrary to elementary historical facts but it expresses the essence of the myth. For Ćosić, it is a defeat because of the victims but primarily because the very goal was wrong – the creation of Yugoslavia. According to this interpretative key, Yugoslavia is a peoples’ dungeon, a “Versailles creation,” historical blunder and mistake. It turned the Serbian victory into defeat, immersing a nation’s triumph into a supranational community. This shows that the actual past has the least influence on the construction of remembrance. The Yugoslav crisis, the war, and today’s anti-Yugoslavianism have had more of an influence on the attitude towards World War I than the actual events which took place between 1914 and 1918. But this analysis shows that historians have had the least influence on this image, even though some of the most serious works of Serbian critical historiography were written about that period, which is a contribution to the considerations

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31 Radoš Ljušić, Ljubodrag Dimić, *Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole*, p. 82.

32 Dobrica Ćosić, “Politički testament”, *Informer*, April 8, 2014.

on differences between the science of history and remembrance and their meaning and goals which are often contrasting. What causes additional concern is the conclusion that the teaching of history is far more influenced by today's political needs than by historiography, confirming the hypothesis that history's goal is not education but, as stated in the curriculum, "establishment of a national identity" which, in Serbia, is decisively shaped by World War I.

Let us go back now to the beginning of this text and the great excitement that has been ongoing in the Serbian public for more than a year. And let us revisit the question of how is it possible to awake such emotions concerning an event from the distant past? This phenomenon has its internal and foreign-political causes. But basically, they amount to the same thing, as this is a matter of confrontation and showdown between the pro-European and the anti-European course at the highest levels of Serbian leadership. And I believe that therein lays the explanation of how it is possible for one event from the distant past or even one book, such as Clark's *Sleepwalkers*, to cause such excitement in an otherwise dull public and provoke such a commotion. All this points out that this is not a matter of *Sleepwalkers*, or World War I itself, and not even a populist distraction of the public, but a matter of essence. Only an essential question could cause such an outburst of emotion and the need for everyone to state their opinion on it. I therefore believe that the emotions caused by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War I should be understood as some kind of non-promulgated referendum on Europe in which everyone can speak their mind, as it will not question the loans and other "benefits" expected from the integration process. Therefore, I believe this new stance toward World War I to be a condensed frustration by Euro-integrations, an expression of inability and rage, an inferiority complex, a sense of vulnerability before the great, unknown world of Europe. This is mostly proven by texts which repeat the militant mythic points: "Serbia is being proclaimed the a priori culprit", "Someone has a problem with Serbia", "the reconciliation which is insisted upon today must not trample the small peoples", "a brave and righteous Serbian people will not flinch before the force of money and blackmail..."

For us who professionally deal with the currents of culture and education, such a state comes as no surprise. All analyses in



those fields after the fall of Milošević have clearly indicated that the nationalist, revisionist and retaliation discourse is still present in the arena of culture, and especially in the arena of historical remembrance. And while many Serbian governments after the year 2000 have filled out numerous European surveys and skipped or avoided the obstacles in the European integrations with more or less success by crossing over from phase A to phase B, the area of education has remained unaffected by deeper reform. There, a brand of hate speech which is often called identity had been kept as a reserve. This space called identity is in fact a storage of old emotions and lingering political programs, lurking in wait for a new opportunity. That is why all talk about history has to do with the future rather than the past, and that is why it essentially depends on how we deal with culture, social sciences, and education whether Southeastern Europe, and Europe itself, will be able to rethink (reinvent) its community as a democratic and peacemaking entity, or face new conflicts.



## VALUE CHANGES IN THE INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORY IN SERBIA

“Serbs, gentlemen, just without history and similar crap.” This is how Richard Holbrooke, international negotiator and emissary of President Bill Clinton, started one of the many rounds of negotiations during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. By doing so, Holbrooke demonstrated that, through contacts with local political leaders, he understood the great importance of using historical arguments in the existing political culture. He was right. Wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s were processed by advertising, rationalized by ideology, and psychologically justified because para-historical explanations put the bloody resolution of the Yugoslav drama in the necessary historical context.<sup>1</sup> These “games with history” were needed in order to reinterpret lowly war aims as “high intentions” derived from the “historical national grievances,” primarily for setting right “historical injustices.” That is why the war in Croatia was, through constant stirring up of memories of the genocide against the Serbs during the Second World War, presented as a sort of “genocide prevention.” Beginning in the late 1980s, Belgrade historians with close ties to the government, appeared on television, evening after evening, to speak about real or invented details of the Ustasha genocide against the Serbs during the Second World War, which was supposed to serve as an a priori indulgence for the planned, and later realized, ethnic engineering on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. The war in Bosnia was put in the ideological context of the “eternal conflict” between Christianity and Islam, with its historical frame positioned in the late Middle Ages, by using of the term “Turks” for the Bosniak population. That is how a bloody war, with ethnic cleansing and

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<sup>1</sup> See more in Nebojša Popov (ed.), *Srpska strana rata*, Belgrade 1996.

genocide in Srebrenica, received historical justification and almost defensive characteristics.

Through many similar actions of historians, history as a discipline needed to change its nature in its entirety: instead of describing and analyzing past reality, it became a kind of experimental science. Like physics or chemistry, it was assigned the task of producing a new reality, based on new junctures of previously known or unknown elements. The recomposed and reworked past had the task of producing a new future. If one wanted to be cynical, one could even say that this was a “creative turn” of Hobsbawm’s or Gellner’s theses about the invention of a tradition: it was no longer the case that every present created the tradition and historical memory it needed, but brutal, surgical cuts in the previous memory model were used in order to change the present. In other words, since the present could not have been changed easily or quickly, and Yugoslavia could not have been dissolved and recomposed in ethnically cleansed national states, it was much easier to first change the model of the national remembering, and then, based on the changed pattern, to intervene in the present. Thus, through para-historiography, written and electronic media, a conflict concept of history was created first, and then the conflict became reality that appeared quite naturally, as the logical continuation of the centuries-old conflict between the Serbs and all the other Yugoslav peoples.

In order for that to become possible, it was necessary to change the previous, socialist value system, and to transform it into an equally authoritarian, but opposite system, derived from the prevailing nationalist ideology, dominant from the late 1980s. In the total value system, it was necessary to emphasize national feelings in the first place, and to create a concrete concept of national sentiments and identifications through a specific structuring of the relations me-us and we-others.<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve this, it was necessary to create a mythical image of one’s own nation, which was done in the most “authentic” way through the recomposition of historical facts, which were turned into crucial evidence of this new, mythical narrative, about us and others.<sup>3</sup> The media served to disseminate this new model of historical consciousness, together

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2 Ružica Rosandić, “Patriotsko vaspitanje u osnovnoškolskim udžbenicima”, in Vesna Pešić, Ružica Rosandić (eds.), *Patriotizam, ratništvo, patrijarhalnost*, Belgrade 1994, p. 42.

3 On the Serbian ethno-myth see Ivan Čolović, *Politika simbola*, Belgrade 1997.

with the public debates (primarily of the Serbian Writers' Union<sup>4</sup>), and history textbooks.

Under the Milošević government, textbooks with altered value concepts were published for the 1993/1994 school year, in the middle of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>5</sup> The sense of these textbooks was precisely correlated with the previously described need to change both present and future, through the misuse of history. The essence of the new, desired model of national consciousness was developed in these textbooks, so that they could be used as the supreme historical source for the analysis of the dominant Serb ideology of the 1990s. It is important for this analysis that textbooks in general, and history textbooks in particular, have always been an important tool of the authorities in Serbia. That is why it is important to say that even today, in Serbia (as in very few other places in Europe), history textbooks are still under the publishing monopoly of the Council for Textbooks Publishing, an institution that has "special relations" with the Ministry of Education, and which is headed by the most reliable members of the ruling parties. While for most other subjects, there is a possibility to publish textbooks with private publishers, this is not allowed in the cases of history and geography – which points to the conclusion that these are not just school subjects, but also subjects through which an identity matrix aligned with the government needs is being transmitted.

Along with public discourses on history, this chapter will present an analysis of both present, and Milošević-era history textbooks. Even though this project deals with post-Milošević transition, there are several reasons for the analysis of the value system introduced in Serbia during the 1990s. First, as these were transmitted through education, they have a delayed, "long term" effect in the minds of the students or former students, independent of whether there was a change of government, or the introduction of a new value system. Second, these textbooks were in use from the 2002/2003 school year, when new ones were written, so they also form part of the transition confusion in Serbia since 2000. Third, the same value system is maintained in the textbooks published

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4 Drinka Gojković, "Trauma bez katarze", in Nebojša Popov (ed.), *Srpska strana rata*, pp. 365-393.

5 Dubravka Stojanović, "Udžbenici istorije kao ogledalo vremena", in Pešić and Rosandić (eds.), *Patriotizam*, pp. 77-105.

following the political changes in 2000; so it is necessary to provide at least rudimentary elements of the value system of the Milošević interpretation of the past, in order to better understand the question of continuity and discontinuity between Serbia at the time, and present-day Serbia. Finally, the fact already mentioned, that publishing history textbooks is still controlled by the ruling party, proves that the political authorities, rather than the educational establishment, still have a “special mission,” which also places them in continuity with Milošević’s time, where school had a special role in the “patriotic education” of the students.

### Continuity of the value system

As stated before, the key shift in the value system in Serbia, which occurred with Slobodan Milošević’s rise to power, was never fundamentally questioned. The dominant discourse of post-Milošević Serbia retained the nationalist mythical frame of the narrative of a Serbian nation, introduced in the late 1980s. That is one of the key reasons why history teaching resembles preparation for the military service, more than a discipline of critical thinking; and why the struggle for the dominant paradigm of historical thinking is actually a war for the total annihilation of the enemy.<sup>6</sup> History is still perceived as a provider of arguments necessary to create an appropriate identity, and connects with Ernest Renan’s definition of 1882, when he stated that misunderstanding of one’s own history is the basis of the national being.<sup>7</sup> The shifting of ideological and identity matrixes during the Milošević era had the aim of placing Serbian history within a nationalist mythic framework, necessary to justify the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. It was necessary to reconstruct a new national and historical consciousness which was a blend of delusion of grandeur, and self-pity, of national arrogance and self-victimization. All of this was explained as a process of “return to oneself,” following the Communist period that, according to this interpretation, had as its principal goal the erasure of national consciousness and memory. That is why the teaching of history became extremely important. It was understood as one of the principal tools in “liberating the

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6 Dubravka Stojanović, “Balkan History Workbooks, Consequences and Experiences,” in *European Studies*, Vol. 7, Tokyo 2008, pp. 157-163.

7 Ernest Renan, *Šta je nacija*, Belgrade 1998, p. 18.

suppressed,” rediscovering “the truth about ourselves,” as well as about “others.” This necessitated a series of changes of facts, deleting many of them, reducing the importance of some, and additionally stressing yet other ones. Hence, this was not just a shift in interpretation, but also a change of facts, necessary in order to establish a mythical narrative. This mythical narrative had several key components. “The people,” or, more precisely, “the Serbian people,” were declared to be the main protagonist of history.<sup>8</sup>

This was an essential shift with regard to the previous time, when history was understood as class struggle. “The people” were essentialized as a “unique being,” almost like a biological community, an organism with clearly defined common traits that deny any individuality, particularity, or pluralism.<sup>9</sup> This essentialist concept of the nation was maintained in post-Milošević Serbia. The collective, that is to say, the Serbian people, remained the main pillar of history. This was most important for maintaining continuity with the value system introduced during the Milošević era.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, we have a collectivist way of thinking, where individualist values of modern society have been understood as “tearing of the national being,” as endangering of the whole, and therefore condemned as inimical.<sup>11</sup> This is the basis of the anti-plural conception of society, for each “alterity” is perceived as a danger, against which, as stated by a representative in the Serbian National Assembly in the early 20th century, one can use all the means necessary.<sup>12</sup> This value system is essentially authoritarian, and contrary to any idea of the competition between different ideas. It denies historical richness, reducing it to a single dimension. That is why groups that had different views from the majority in certain historical moments, are never mentioned in this interpretation, for, in the past as well as in the present, a possibility that things were, or that they could have been different, is a priori denied. Neither public discourse, nor history textbooks mention the heated debates that went on in the pages of the free press, or in the National Assembly in the last decade of the nineteenth century about some decisions that

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<sup>8</sup> See more in Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika*, Belgrade 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Dubravka Stojanović, “Udžbenici istorije”, pp. 80-85.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>11</sup> More: Dubravka Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija. Istorijski ogled o zlatnom dobu srpske demokratije*, Belgrade 2003, pp. 375-421.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.



needed to be made at crucial times, thus creating an inaccurate perception that the “nation” was homogeneous in the past, and identical to its essentialist self.

One could illustrate this concept with the debate created in the Serbian public by the additional teaching materials that were published in 2005 by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe from Thessaloniki, and edited by Christina Kouluri.<sup>13</sup> These are four volumes of historical sources from 11 Southeast European countries where the most controversial and most sensitive events from the common Balkan past were presented, using comparative methods and multi-perspectivity. These books, which promote civic values, caused tumultuous reactions, especially in Serbia and in Greece, as well as serious consequences for some of the project participants. The basis of these attacks was the fact that history was presented from different perspectives, from the points of view of various participants in the events. This forced participants in the debate to assess the project as a part of the globalization process, or, as put forth in the attacks in the Greek press, “the weakening of the importance of the nation,”<sup>14</sup> which “threatens our national identity,” and as a way “towards cultural homogenization,” so that these books were declared to constitute a “genocide on memory,” or “crime of peace...”<sup>15</sup>

Particularly interesting was the reaction of the director of the Council for Textbook Publishing, historian Radoš Ljušić, who condemned the books, stating that there cannot be many truths, that “in history, there is only one truth, just as there is only one God.”<sup>16</sup> He thus expressed the essence of the authoritarian and anti-plural pattern of thinking, which denies divisions within society, but also takes away the right of “others” to see the events differently from “us.” That is why such a monolithic understanding of nation as a being, and “others” as enemy beings, is not just dangerous for the democratic development of a society, but also dangerous for interethnic relations, as it is opposed to the very idea of equality.

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13 *Osmansko carstvo; Nacije i nastanak nacionalnih država; Balkanski ratovi; Drugi svetski rat*, ed. Kristina Kuluri, Dubravka Stojanović, Belgrade 2005.

14 “They are rewriting our History! An anti-Hellenic propaganda tentacle is hitting us from everywhere!” *To Paron*, November 12, 2006.

15 Manos Lygeros, “Against History: The New History Books,” an event organized by Political Association for Democracy and the Homeland, Thessaloniki, February 12, 2007, Makedonia Palace Hotel.

16 *Danas*, Belgrade, January 24, 2006.

The concept of one's own self-righteousness is only a small step away from the idea of one's own superiority, which fuels aggressiveness, and always keeps open the possibility of conflict.

This concept of the past is essentially a mystical one. As the nation is represented as an organic unity, it is understood that there is just one way out in any historical situation, for other solutions have not been shown. Hence, that way out cannot be determined as a consequence of anyone's decision, but rather the nation came to it through destiny or through a metaphysical movement. Such an impression is strengthened by using indeterminate verbal forms and formulations in public discourse, such as "then came the war", "the sanctions happened to us", "we suffered the bombing," and the like, creating an impression that no one bears any responsibility for these events, that no one should be blamed for them, that it all boils down to a mystical flow of history, in which individuals or groups cannot have any influence. This is further amplified in the media, through the use of various metaphorical constructs, the most famous one being that the Serbs "built a house in the middle of the road," which was supposed to mean that, through a simple twist of fate, this people found itself in the wrong geographical location, and as a consequence it had a number of enemies throughout its existence, wishing to take control of that location.<sup>17</sup> This further abolishes any idea of responsibility, for geography appears as a factor denying any possibility or need for judgments. Geography and history interpreted in such a mystical key, determine "our" existence, adding substantial irrationality to the value system, additionally abolishing any possibility to individualize a society, or for society to take precedence over a community.

Furthermore, such an understanding of history as destiny, necessarily leads to understanding it as a narrowly determined flow that leads somewhere and that is, as demonstrated by Karl Popper, the foundation of every authoritarian and undemocratic society.<sup>18</sup> This further strengthens the perception of history as a closed road with its own mystical aim, which is the basis of every totalitarian utopia. The concept of the cyclical movement of time, developed without any reservations in history textbooks, also relies on this. Thus, in an eighth grade textbook from the Milošević period, the

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<sup>17</sup> For more on that subject, see Ivan Čolović, *Politika simbola*, pp. 13-29.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Popper, *Otvoreno društvo i njegovi neprijatelji*, Belgrade 1998.



beginning of the war in 1991 is described as: “The situation was almost identical to that of 1941.”<sup>19</sup> In those years, such a sentence had a strong propaganda value in Serbia, for it meant that history periodically repeats itself in more or less regular time intervals and that this periodicity has nothing to do with the decisions of the political leadership. Facts have no importance for such a mythical interpretation of time, including ones that state that nothing was the same in 1941 and in 1991 – from the European and world contexts, to reasons for the dissolution of the two Yugoslavias. Despite these historical facts, a model of thinking according to which history moves based on its own will is forced, additionally, separating society from modern civic values, based on the concept of individual responsibility.

This non-civic value system gains additional strength thanks to the “characteristics” historically ascribed to the Serb nation. I have written about this in detail previously;<sup>20</sup> so here I will just outline the basic characteristics of the model of “national character traits,” necessary for understanding the issue of continuity and discontinuity between Milošević-era and post-Milošević Serbia. In the first place, there is an ethnocentric approach to history. This approach is also present in textbooks of the majority of European countries, but has some specificities in the Serbian case. The textbooks support a very influential narrative in the Serbian public, stating that both world wars began and ended in Serbian territory.<sup>21</sup> This is a sub-type of stereotypes about the Balkans as a powder keg, but with a positive connotation. This narrative was very influential during the 1990s, as from that time the idea that the Yugoslav war would become a trigger for a wider conflict was maintained, additionally adding to the impression that there was a general flow of world history at work. These expectations, and even hopes, could also be heard during the 1999 NATO campaign, especially after the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit – following which, some people openly hoped for a new global conflict. Even the latest events, with Kosovo’s independence, have

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19 Nikola Gaćeša, Ljiljana Mladenović-Maksimović, Dušan Maksimović, *Istorija za 8. razred*, Belgrade 1993, p. 156.

20 See Dubravka Stojanović, “Construction of Historical Consciousness: The Case of Serbian History Textbooks,” in Maria Todorova (ed.), *Balkan Identities. Nation and Memory*, London 2004, pp. 327-339.

21 Dubravka Stojanović, “Udžbenici istorije”, p. 93.



engendered hope in some quarters that Serbia will again be at the center of a conflict between great powers, as Russia's opposition in the UN Security Council is taken to mean a new cold war, and the re-establishment of a bipolar world. This perception of Serbia's place in the past and present is quite removed from reality, but facilitates the retention of a pre-modern value system, constantly reinforcing the image of "oneself" as the chosen people, with a special mission and central position. In the last 20 years, on many occasions, such an understanding of reality induced the Serb political leadership to take risky decisions, which additionally pushed the country to the lowest point in its history.

The image of the "chosen people" is especially reinforced through a dichotomous perception of the nation which is at the same time both historically justified, and a victim of neighboring nations and big powers.<sup>22</sup> A strong mythical message that "we never started the wars of conquest" is being built in the public and in the educational system, as situations from the past where Serbia had the opportunity and actually led wars of conquest against her neighbors are omitted from the narratives about the past. Historical facts had to be changed in order to build an image of "the people" that was "historically correct," that never led wars of conquest, and never reached for something that belonged to others. In order to achieve this, situations contrary to this message were thrown out of history curricula, or their importance was blatantly reduced. For example, in history textbooks, there is very little left about the Serbian government's policies towards Kosovo and Macedonia in the 19th century, there is no explanation of the attack on Bulgaria in 1885, nor of the several attempts to annex Northern Albania during the Balkan wars. Serb national politics are presented only in a defensive tone, which is the necessary mythical framework to create a new identity, the framework that was also used in the ongoing wars. The character of the main hero, "the Serbian people," created in this fashion, was necessary in order to present the wars of 1990s as purely defensive efforts, which also led to the acquisition of a moral capital, as a kind of guarantee that the Serbian people were, as in previous historical circumstances, "on the right side of the history."<sup>23</sup> According to

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-98.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.



this narrative, “the people” clearly recognized this righteous position in any new situation.

The mythical constructs (mythemes) thus formed are additionally reinforced by an interpretation that Serbia’s neighbors have been on the wrong side in the two world wars, and it was “us” (the Serbs), due to our own right position, who later enabled them to receive absolution, and brought them to the side of the winners, thanks to the creation of the Yugoslav states. The present textbooks include the following statement: “Toward the end of the First World War, Serbia joined the group of victors in the conflict. Among other things, through this, she enabled other Yugoslav peoples to leave the side of the defeated ones and join the victors, through the formation of the Yugoslav state.”<sup>24</sup> This substantial distinction between “us” and “them” at the same time meant building an arrogant component of national identity, proved by the factographic manipulations showing that “we” have always been on the victorious side of history. By not mentioning “our” own defeats, or engaging in “creative interpretations,” the creators of the new textbooks engineered a victorious mentality and spirit, particularly important at a time of conflict. Essentially, it all comes down to the idea of one’s own superiority, and, therefore, one’s opponents’ inferiority, which was the key ingredient in the creation of a psychological rationale for the war.

Another important topic is the nation as victim.<sup>25</sup> It starts from the premise that, despite its own historical righteousness, “the people” were the historical victim of all the neighbors, and even some more distant peoples. This creates a sense of special challenge and martyrdom, most frequently displayed through the use of the term “Golgotha” in describing different historical events. Biblical metaphors are supposed to strengthen the components of historical and national self-awareness that shape an image of the people-victim, distinct from all the others, and therefore also the chosen people, for, despite all the suffering, it remained “just.” Crimes of other peoples against Serbs have been described in the most graphic terms from the early grade textbooks, helping to create an image of the people, the “victim of genocide,” which received through this a sort of preventive historical indulgence. This was especially important during the wars of the 1990s, for it

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24 Suzana Rajić, Kosta Nikolić, Nebojša Jovanović, *Istorija za 8. razred*, Belgrade 2005, p. 94.

25 Dubravka Stojanović, “Udžbenici istorije”, pp. 94–96.

strengthened an image of the people that had to be forgiven for anything, after suffering so much throughout its history.

This can be seen through the titles of chapters in a textbook for nine-year olds on the subject “Nature and Society” from the years of Milošević’s rule. At this age, children acquire their first knowledge about the past, and they are offered the following information as part of the curriculum: “Our Ancestors”, “The Turkish Invasion”, “Enslaved by the Turks”, “the First World War”, “The Liberation of Serbia”, “The Second World War”, “Serbia under Occupiers and their Collaborators”, “The Liberation of Serbia”, and “Renowned Freedom Fighters.”<sup>26</sup> It is obvious from this list of chapter titles that the past is represented as a series of wars and suffering, and these first lessons that children receive do not include anything except suffering. This can also be seen through the selection of illustrations in the book, which confront children, without any preparation, with horrors from the national past. They include: Monuments to the People Killed in Different Wars, The Kosovo Battle of 1389, The Monument to the Kosovo Heroes in Kragujevac, People Fleeing the Turks, Leaders of the Serbian Uprisings, Famous Serb Military Leaders from the First World War, Retreat Across Albania, Belgrade in Ruins Following the 1941 Bomb Raid, and Monuments to the People Killed in the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> One could add to this a linguistic analysis of the cruel expressions used to describe crimes against Serbs, which helps instill fear in the minds of teenagers – creating future anxiety and aggressiveness. For example, a textbook for the 14-year olds, from which almost ten generations of students learned has the following: “The inmates in the Jasenovac (concentration camp) were slaughtered with knives, killed with different tools, axes, hammers, sledge hammers and iron bars, shot and burnt in the crematorium, cooked alive in cauldrons, hanged, tortured with hunger, thirst and cold, for they lived in camps without food or water.”<sup>28</sup>

The emphasis on such images from the past fostered a particular relation toward death, which formed an important part of the national myth. A “martyr’s death” of an individual, or of a member of the collective, became a pattern of behavior wished for, and re-

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26 Boško Vlahović and Bogoljub Mihailović, *Priroda i društvo za 3. razred osnovne škole*, Belgrade 1997.

27 Ibid.

28 Nikola Gaćeša et al., *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 172.



commended. The message was sent in various ways. When it comes to individuals, there was the glorification of the death of those who had heroically sacrificed themselves for freedom. This led Serbian historians to refer for the first time to Gavrilo Princip, the assassin who killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in 1914, as a Serbian hero.<sup>29</sup> With the already known celebration of the death of Stevan Sindelić in the early 19th century, who blew himself up with the whole regiment, to avoid being captured by the Ottoman Turkish army, a new hero emerged during the 1990s. This was Major Gavrilović, who, according to the myth, declared to his unit during the 1915 defense of Belgrade, that their regiment had been erased from the list of the living by the Supreme Command, and that, therefore, they should not think about their lives: “Soldiers, heroes! The Supreme Command has deleted our battalion from the roll. Therefore, forward, to glory!” – and this was celebrated in the latest history textbook. The only thing missing was the fact that Major Gavrilović died of old age, some thirty years following this event. Through such examples, the principle of sacrificing oneself for the nation is declared to be the highest value, which is an important motivational factor, particularly during times of conflict.

Another way of constructing the cult of death through history textbooks was referring to a person “despising death,” which is a call to a heroic way of behaving, where dying for one’s own nation was represented as the essence of life. During the era of Milošević, this idea was already promoted in the third grade (9 year olds), through the use of quotes from undeniable national authorities, such as Vuk Karadžić. By quoting Karadžić and his archaic language, the creators of this new matrix were able to add a sense of authenticity, adding strength to their argumentation. Through celebrating hajduks (outlaws) and their fight against the Ottoman authorities, the textbook suggested a just pattern for dealing with death: “When they catch someone, take him away, and impale him on a stake, he sings from the top of his lungs, showing that he does not care for living.”<sup>30</sup> The relationship toward death remains unchanged in the latest generation of textbooks, published after 2001. The conditions during the First World War were described in especially pathetic terms, again with enormous praise for death and self-sacrifice:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>30</sup> Boško Vlahović and Bogoljub Mihailović, *Priroda i društvo*, p. 56.

“In many parts of Serbia, everyday life turned into an epochal resistance to occupiers. Many people condemned to death, as noted by the occupation authorities, behaved “like heroes, and this was not mere posturing, but a sign of determination, spiritual anger, and contempt for the enemy...” There is report from Valjevo that the death sentence “was accepted with calm by both men and women.” Thus, the enemy in Serbia had to confront a tremendous political morality of the subjugated population, unprecedented in modern European history. The death sentence lost any efficacy. No one was afraid to die.”<sup>31</sup>

The new textbooks thus demonstrated a deep ideological connection with those from the time of Milošević, primarily based upon the mythical relation to the past, and the celebration of collectivist, nationalist, and pre-modern values. Through education, the society remained caught within the authoritarian and patriarchal identity matrix, which denies the individual, and presents history as the destiny and metaphysical evil that does not leave room for choice. The duty of an individual remains clearly defined as subjugation to the collective and his “historical destiny,” which cyclically repeats itself. This excludes any possibility for multi-perspectivity, or presenting history as a field of choice and competition between different points of view. A monolithic image of “the people” is cultivated, erasing any concept of personal responsibility, because individuals are immersed in the collective, and completely subservient to it. This influences an irrational attitude toward the past, as well as towards the present, and the moment of confronting the past is postponed again.

### Discontinuity of political values

After 2000, the new authorities tried to provide an identity for themselves in various forms, and, despite many continuities that tied them to the previous government, to show the depth of the rift between them and their predecessors.<sup>32</sup> Anti-communism was used as the key ideological tool, as the new authorities appeared to think that it would provide them with the most sympathy and support from the voters, who were deeply divided. Slobodan Mi-

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31 Kosta Nikolić, Nikola Žutić, Momčilo Pavlović, Zorica Špadijer, *Istorija za 3. i 4. razred gimnazije*, Belgrade 2005, p. 76.

32 More in Dubravka Stojanović, “DOS: otvaranje traumatičnog kruga?” *Republika*, No. 286-287, June 1, 2002, pp. 23-42.

lošević was judged and condemned only as a communist, while the nationalist essence of his ideology was never mentioned. The strategy had a twofold effect: the condemnation of Milošević as a communist was supposed to bestow on the new authorities an aura of liberators, who had defeated communism in Serbia after nearly 60 years. On the other hand, it was also supposed to demonstrate that the new authorities were the agents of authentic national values, and that Milošević did not realize his program because, as a communist, he could not really be a genuine representative of Serb patriotism. As the majority discourse remained nationalistic even after 2000, the new government had to acquire an element of identity that could separate it more firmly from their predecessors, so anti-communism provided an ideal tool for this.

This essence immediately influenced interpretations of history. It was necessary to create one's own historical continuity in order to acquire an invented tradition for oneself. This invented tradition had to rely on pre-communist times, and to find political forces that were opposed to the communists. The Second World War turned out to be the ideal space for the reinterpretation of the past. There were several reasons for this. It was necessary to compromise the Yugoslav communists' victory in the war, as it was the source of their later political authority. It was also necessary to compromise the success of Tito's Yugoslav policies, as the new Serb authorities based their concept of state on anti-Yugoslavism, just as Milošević did. Finally, most of all, it was necessary to change the image of the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović, in order to make that side of the civil war an appropriate "pre-communist" ancestor of the new government. Chetnik anti-communism, nationalism, and traditionalism seemed to be the ideal characteristics of the newly found ancestor; so the work on changing the facts about the Second World War began shortly after the new authorities came into power.<sup>33</sup>

They began from what is most obvious and most affects the lives of ordinary citizens: changes of street names and the removal of monuments to people previously celebrated as heroes of the Second World War. There is no precise data on the number of monuments that were removed, but the fact that 800 Belgrade street

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33 For more on that subject, see Sulejman Bosto, Tihomir Cipek, Olivera Milosavljević (eds.), *Kultura sjećanja: 1941. Povjesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti*, Zagreb 2008.

names have been changed since 2000 can serve as an illustration of the extent of changes to “places of remembrance.” The tendencies also became clear due to the actions of the representatives of the new government on the occasions of various dates that relate to the Second World War. During the very first anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade, on 20 October 2000, a newly elected mayor of the city, historian Milan Protić, said that he did not consider that event to be the one of liberation, but one of occupation. He said that this event would not be celebrated as it had been in the past. The next president of the City Council still regularly attended ceremonies on that day, but the third elected mayor, also a member of the Democratic Party, declared after taking office that October 20 is a controversial event, that there are different opinions about it, and that he would not celebrate it. He delegated the laying of memorial wreaths to his deputies: so it seemed that it was their own private affair, much more than an official commemoration.

The year 2005 was especially important for this issue, as the whole world marked the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The only European country that did not have its representative at the commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz was Serbia; and her highest representatives gave comical statements about why they failed to attend. Serbia sent a very low-rank delegation to the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War to Moscow. This was also a clear signal that Serbia has problems with interpretations of the Second World War, which is especially clear from the behavior of key politicians. On 9 May 2005, then-Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica laid flowers at the monument to the airmen who had defended Belgrade during the 1941 bombing, avoiding any acknowledgment of the victors in World War II. The President of Serbia, Boris Tadić, laid flowers to the monument to the Unknown Hero, erected after the First World War, also leaving himself outside the important European and world debate about fascism and anti-fascism. At the same time, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vuk Drašković, went a few days later, on 13 May 2005, to Ravna Gora, where he celebrated the beginning of the Chetnik uprising. He had maintained that ritual since the early 1990s, but in 2005, the commemoration was for the first time organized with financial assistance from the state. This was quite logical, following the passage of a law, adopted by a large majority in the

National Assembly in December 2004, equating the Chetnik and the Partisan movements, and the rehabilitation of all those who had served in the units of Draža Mihailović during that war, giving them the status of victims of the communist terror. This gave the Chetniks officially equal status as anti-fascists with the Partisans, and their collaboration with German and Italian occupation forces, as well as their crimes against both non-Serbs and Serbs, were simply “forgotten.”

They also remained “forgotten” in history textbooks published after the changes of 2000. The history textbook for the final years of high schools (published in 2002), and the one for the final year of elementary schools (published in 2006), have as their primary goal the reinterpretation and revision of the Second World War. The way in which the war was perceived and discussed there, is completely opposite to how it was viewed and interpreted during the Communist period. The most important change occurred in the discussion of Chetniks and Partisans, but the assessment of the collaborationist government of Milan Nedić changed as well. General Milan Nedić, Serbian Prime Minister under the occupation, is presented as a man “well respected” among the Serbs, who was saving “the biological substance of the Serbian people,” because “he thought that Germany was too powerful at the time, and that he must cooperate with the occupiers, in order to stop further suffering on the part of the Serbian people. Because of the terrible reprisals against the civilians, he was against all the ill-conceived actions against the occupying army.”<sup>34</sup> New textbooks also considerably soften the assessment of Dimitrije Ljotić and his Serb Volunteer Corps, who were the main allies of the SS units and Gestapo in mass arrests and crimes all over Serbia. Without mentioning their actual role, they were presented with a sentence that hides more than it reveals: “their ideological fanaticism was greater than that of Communists.”<sup>35</sup>

However, the most effort was put into changing the image of Chetnik leader Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović, and his military units. In order for the Partisans and the Chetniks to switch the places of good guys and bad guys, it was necessary to make significant cuts in three basic issues: 1. the interpretation of the relations between Chetniks and Partisans; 2. the issue of collaboration; and

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34 Kosta Nikolić et al., *Istorija za 3. i 4. razred gimnazije*, pp. 147.

35 *Ibid.*



3. the issue of crimes against the civilian population. The essence of the changes was to present the Chetniks as the true and only representatives of Serbian national interests, and to claim that, although they were anti-fascists, they were eventually betrayed by the Western allies. This “betrayal by the allies” remained unexplained, but was presented as the only explanation of the defeat of the Chetniks. The Chetniks were depicted as the only true movement against the occupiers, as “the core of the Serb civic resistance,” which, “contrary to the communists, who wanted to split up the Serb ethnic space, sought to expand Serbia by incorporating Montenegro, the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina, part of Dalmatia including Dubrovnik and Zadar, the whole of Srem, including Vukovar, Vinkovci, and Dalj, Kosovo and Metohija, and South Serbia (Macedonia).”<sup>36</sup> In this manner the textbook authors redrew the map of the ethnic boundaries in accordance with their wishes.

When considering changes in the interpretation of the relations between the Chetnik and the Partisan movements, they were described as two equal resistance movements, but a number of details reveal which one of these is ideologically closer to the textbook writers. For example, even though it is claimed that these movements were formed at the same time, the first part of the text discusses the Chetniks, while the Partisans appear only some pages later. Or the more obvious example: the picture of Josip Broz Tito appears only on page 8 of the chapter on the Second World War in Yugoslavia, whereas Mihailović’s picture appears already on the first page of that chapter. In the comparative biographies of the two leaders, Draža Mihailović is depicted as “a man who was educated in France and who loved French literature,” while Tito is equally briefly introduced as “the notorious agent of the Comintern.”<sup>37</sup>

The next question that presented itself as a problem for the textbook writers was the issue of collaboration. In order to remove the responsibility for collaboration from the Chetniks, a number of rhetorical strategies were used, and a number of historical facts hidden. In the 2002 textbook, there were no examples of Chetnik collaboration, but, after criticism from the public, the 2006 text-

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<sup>36</sup> Suzana Rajić et al., *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 140

<sup>37</sup> Kosta Nikolić et al., *Istorija za 3. i 4. razred gimnazije*, pp. 142-143.



book presented a number of arguments that essentially justified collaboration. One of them is the constant insistence that all the participants in the war collaborated with the occupation forces, which provides justification for the Chetnik actions. However, this was not enough: so in another place one textbook claims: “Many Chetnik commanders were of the opinion that the Italian army was far less dangerous than the Ustashas: so that they should cease fighting. The Italian occupation was the best “war solution” for the preservation of the Serb’s very existence, especially in the regions of Lika, Northern Dalmatia, and Herzegovina, and Italian soldiers were the least of evils they had to face.”<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, Partisan collaboration is depicted as much more successful and differently motivated. According to the textbook, the Partisans had no intention of taking care of the people, as the Chetniks and Nedić’s forces did, but it is claimed that they began to collaborate with the Germans for clear military goals. Their first war aim was to defeat the Chetniks; so collaboration with the occupiers was supposed to serve them “in order to focus their main thrust onto the Chetniks.” Secondly, the Partisan military strategy and cooperation with the Germans is depicted as a serious war policy, which endangered inter-allied agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

The third issue that led to a major change in the textbooks is the issue of war crimes. In the first textbook after 2000, it was noted that, in liberated territories, the Partisans “imprisoned, tortured, and put before firing squads, not only those suspected of having collaborated with the occupiers but also those whom they considered potential class enemies,” while saying of the Chetniks only that here and there they also were “involved in a merciless civil war.” However, their crimes against non-Serb populations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are not mentioned. Following criticisms from the public, the same authors made their stance tougher in the new eighth grade textbook. They still do not mention Chetnik crimes against other Yugoslav peoples, but only against, as they put it “people who hid and helped communists” – which was supposed to absolve them. It is emphasized that these crimes were committed by renegade Chetnik units, which were not controlled by anyone. They also add that “one of the most

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<sup>38</sup> Suzana Rajić et al., *Istorija za 8. razred*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

commonly used methods of intimidation among the Chetniks was beating.”<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, they claim that the Partisans left behind them “dog cemeteries,” that is to say, unmarked mass graves of their opponents, and that common people feared Partisans, whose “military tribunals condemned people to death without any hesitation. (...) Murders in secret and in the open of prominent people, peasants, revenge killings, and murders of the Communist Party members who opposed this, happened almost on a daily basis.”<sup>41</sup>

As the Chetnik movement is, in the new textbooks, depicted as the only one that expressed “Serb national interests,” the outcome of the Second World War was reinterpreted. According to the new textbook, Serbia, through the defeat of the Chetniks, found herself on the side of the defeated in the Second World War, demonstrated by the final statement, in bold font in the original: “In the Second World War, the Serbian citizenry was destroyed, the national movement shattered, and the intelligentsia demolished.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the Chetnik defeat was equated with the defeat of Serbia, disassociating the nation from the Partisan and anti-fascist tradition, as well as the fact that, along with other Yugoslav peoples, she found herself on the side of the victorious forces as an important ally. Hence, the textbook authors were even ready to change the outcome of the Second World War, and to place Serbia among the defeated Axis powers, in order to put forward their own, Chetnik-friendly version of events.

Such manipulations of historical facts aim at changing the value system, which would re-compose the anti-fascist traditions that were, during the communist period, elevated to the mythical status, into now needed anti-communist; or, as put by the sociologist Todor Kuljić, an anti-anti-fascist order of things. Such flirtings with anti-anti-fascist value systems are always dangerous. Similar experiences in other European societies that went through different kinds of transition from undemocratic into democratic systems are well known. Nevertheless, even though the Serbian case is not unique in that sense, it has some special and additional burdens. These burdens are primarily the result of the problems that the Serbian public has with confronting its recent past, wars

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40 Kosta Nikolić et al., *Istorija za 3. i 4. razred gimnazije*, p. 161.

41 Suzana Rajić et al., *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 152.

42 Ibid.

in the former Yugoslavia, and mass crimes committed, including the crime of genocide. The fact that, in the course of mass protests, members of extremist groups wore Chetnik symbols from the Second World War, which was also done by various military and paramilitary units during the 1990s wars in Croatia and Bosnia, leads to the identification, in the public sphere, of the Second World War Chetnik movement with the wars of the last decade. This then leads to the frightening conclusion that the teaching of history, through the glorification of the Chetniks and concealment of their crimes, could offer present students, future citizens of this country, the basis for justification and legitimization of the crimes committed during the 1990s.

My critics could now say that the use of the Chetnik symbols by the extreme right wing groups in Serbia is actually an abuse, and that this is a disgusting design of wild bearded men with knives in their teeth, derived from the Chetniks' images in partisan films produced during the communist Yugoslavia, and that "real Chetniks" were a quite different thing. However, even though historical truth is never simple or one-sided, the irrefutable facts about Chetnik collaboration and crimes against non-Serb populations in Croatia and Bosnia, committed in the name, as it was then put, of creating an ethnically homogenous Serbia, place the Chetniks ideologically close to their Axis allies who were defeated in the Second World War, as well as to those who claimed to be their successors in the 1990s. That is why the creation of a new value system, through which today's "democratic Serbia" would seek her ideological ancestor in the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović, implies Serbia's dangerous detachment from the anti-fascist values of the modern world, and even more ominous bonding with the values that took her to war in the early 1990s.

I do not wish to sound too pessimistic, but the unpredictable chain of events in contemporary Serbia will determine whether these, in recent years very much emphasized, elements of historical memory will in the future connect themselves into a value system that will permanently distance Serbia from modern societies, or whether she will still find its way to them. This is largely dependent on the role that the science of history, historical consciousness, historical memory, and even history teaching in schools, will acquire.

# INVISIBLE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

## SWAPPING ROLES: PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS IN SERBIAN WWII MEMORY

World War II is the period which, from its end to the present day, saw the most dramatic interpretative changes. It was in this period that every regime and every ideology found their historical ancestor and, in some of the ideological concepts of the time, found their historical groundwork. One could say that this historical era is an ideal repository for excavating desirable historical myths and also a period which contemporary regimes in Serbia depend upon. The fact that in Yugoslavia from 1941 to 1945 alongside the occupation there was also a civil and ethnic war, provides an opportunity for political abuse of history in a showdown with today's ideological opponents or neighboring nations, so the Second World War, despite its growing distance, can appear all the more vivid and dynamic today. Its utilization feeds acute political conflicts, intensifies emotions and provides a historical veneer to contemporary events, creating the impression of the present conflicts' historical background, while exempting today's elite from responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

World War II has a special potential for utilization because of the number of ideologies which found themselves opposed during the conflict, and which are still on the political menu. For this reason, in an ideological sense, this event is important for today's positioning on the political scene, while invoking the already mythical leaders of different movements provides a necessary historical

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<sup>1</sup> See more in: Heike Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu, okamenjeno sećanje*, Belgrade 2014; Olga Manojlović-Pintar, *Arheologija sećanja. Spomenici i identiteti u Srbiji 1918-1980*, Belgrade 2014; Tea Sindbaek, *Usable History? Representations of Yugoslavia's difficult past from 1945 to 2002*, Copenhagen 2012; Sulejman Bosto, Olivera Milosavljević, Tihomir Čipek (eds.), *Kultura sjećanja:1941. Povjesni lomovi i svladavanje prošlosti*, Zagreb 2008.



background to those politicians whose current political potential is slim. In a war of ideologies, what is important is the fact that in Yugoslavia communist ideology came out on top from the war, and that its proponents were in power for the next half a century, so that after this system collapsed, a showdown had to be waged in the domain of memory; in other words, the system had to be defeated in its root and source – the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

However, in the battles for memory, the Second World War has another, even greater importance. Vast numbers of victims left in its wake in former Yugoslavia are very convenient for manipulation and for sending useful and tendentious political messages. “Self-victimization is a crucial lesson drawn from history, because the role of the victim secures a permanent moral and political privilege that can be “redeemed” in the present, either in the context of international relations or as a means of social cohesion within state borders.”<sup>3</sup> In the words of Amos Oz, we are witnessing a “world championship of victims,” because the prestigious position of the “greatest victim” brings moral advantage and provides a permanent weapon against the perpetrators which are constantly reminded how they did not pay their real and symbolic debts. Furthermore, current or future violence by the “victims” may be justified in the name of past suffering. The victim has an indulgence for all present and future deeds.<sup>4</sup> The concept of victim-nation homogenizes the nation more credibly and successfully than the idea of its heroism; it creates a sense of self-pity, self-empathy, forcing individuals into the collective in a feeling of existential fear which “closes ranks.”<sup>5</sup>

This is the reason why the competition for the position of the “greatest victim” is so strong, which, with changing political systems and states in former Yugoslavia, led to frequent shifts on that throne over the last 70 years. This is what makes the role play between perpetrators and victims an extremely interesting subject for analysis, revealing the brutality of “memory” acting against “history.” World War II is an especially convenient period for manipulation, because the victims were numerous on all sides,

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2 Todor Kuljić, *Kultura sećanja, Teorijska objašnjenja upotrebe prošlosti*, Belgrade 2006.

3 Christina Koulouri, “Teaching “Victims”: History and Memory in the Classroom”, in *Der Donauraum* 51 (2011), 1, 55-65, p. 57.

4 Dubravka Stojanović, “History Textbooks Mirror Their Time”, in Vesna Pešić / R. Rosandić (eds.), *Warfare, Patriotism, Patriarchy*, Belgrade 1994, pp. 81-111.

5 Corine Defrance, Catherine Horel, Francois-Xavier Nerard (eds.), *Vaincus! Histoire de défaites, Europe 19-20 siècle*, Paris 2016.

both within one's nation and in conflict with its neighbors. But the history of remembrance reveals that tribute was not always paid to all victims, that the treatment of victims by different regimes was always selective and that the "contest for the greatest victim" was, and still remains, open. Political contexts and focuses were changing, and every regime was looking for "its ideal victims" in the World War II "repository." In this production of memory, some victims disappeared completely, while others were being rotated on the top position. The only victims who never reached that position were the Holocaust victims. This article deals with the causes of this phenomenon.

### Phase one

Already in his speeches during the war, Tito decided that the basic myth of the new socialist government will be founded on World War II and in the Yugoslav partisans' epos.<sup>6</sup> Not long after the war, the whole society began to shape within the framework of this paradigm, and the main content of history teaching became the seven enemy offensives, which were studied in minute detail. Numerous research institutes, museums and academic projects were founded and initiated, and the entire past revolved around the Second World War as a keystone of memory, through which the common Yugoslav identity was nurtured and communist rule fortified.<sup>7</sup> The partisans became the symbol of the "barehanded" people defending liberty from the mighty Nazi occupiers, which decidedly, with the help of collaborators, took the No. 1 position among the perpetrators. The main hero and main victim was, in this first stage, the warrior, fighter, partisan.<sup>8</sup> In such a narrative there was no room for civilian victims. Therefore, there was no room for Holocaust victims, so the crime against Yugoslav Jews was almost dropped from history teaching. There was not to be any competition for the partisan victims.

The first monument to Jewish victims was built in 1952, which was relatively early on, even compared to other European countries. The architect was Bogdan Bogdanović, the monument was bu-

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6 For a discussion of the early instrumentalization of the past after the Second World War, see Snježana Koren, *Politika povjesti u Jugoslaviji 1945-1960*, Zagreb 2012.

7 Wolfgang Höpken, "War, Memory and Education in Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia", *East European Politics and Society*, 13 (1999), 1, 190-227, p. 197.

8 Heike Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu*, pp.141-176.



ilt in a Jewish cemetery in Belgrade, but it was isolated and hidden from the public, and so it became more of a symbol of memory exclusion and repression than part of Holocaust memorialization.<sup>9</sup> The suppression of Jewish victims and rivalry for the number one victim position is also reflected in the “memory competition” between the prison camps that were located in today’s Belgrade. As the only European capital which had as much as four camps, after the war Belgrade clearly prioritized their memorialization – main memories were linked to the Banjica camp and the Jajinci shooting ground, and during the annual memorial days what was evoked were the fallen patriots and communists, the only recognized and politically appropriate victims. The Jewish camps, such as the Topovske šupe and Staro Sajmište camps were almost forgotten.<sup>10</sup> This was phase one.

## Phase two

Phase two began when the socialist order began to lose ground, which led to a reconstruction of World War II memory. The first book to open the reevaluation of the defeated Chetniks was a poetry collection by the Serbian author Ljubomir Simović, published in the Serbian Writers Association’s journal, *Književne novine*.<sup>11</sup> From the mid-1980s, the Second World War reevaluation was shifting from literature to historiography, propelled by Veselin Djuretić’s book, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama*,<sup>12</sup> which came out in 1985. It was the first book by a professional historian in Yugoslavia that relativized the partisan struggle and introduced the first positive views of the Chetnik movement. It also raised the problem of the Ustasha crimes against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia in a way that questioned the earlier partisan myth, but also created a new one, a myth of Serbian victims, as Djordje Stanković pointed out in his review of this controversial book.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Olga Manojlović, Aleksandar Ignjatović, “Prostori selektovanih memorija: Staro sajmište u Beogradu i sećanje na Drugi svetski rat”, in Cipek / Milosavljević / Bosto (eds.), *Kultura sećanja*, 95–113, p. 97.

10 Ibid., p. 100; Jovan Bajford, *Staro sajmište. Mesto sećanja, zaborava i sporenja*, Belgrade 2011.

11 Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije: Intelektualna opozicija Srbije i oživljavanje nacionalizma*, Belgrade 2004, p. 155.

12 Veselin Đuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama*, Belgrade 1985.

13 Đorđe Stanković, NIN, 29. September 1985.



This created room for different interpretations of the Second World War, and with nationalism in Serbia and Yugoslavia gaining strength, the holder of the No. 1 spot among World War II victims was changed. Gradually in Serbia, since the mid-1980s, especially in literary works by writers born in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina,<sup>14</sup> instead of the hitherto undisputed partisans, this position came to be occupied by “the Serbian people,” seen as an organic whole and historical mainstay. This was part of the new nationalist narrative created by the Serbian intellectual elite<sup>15</sup> that initiated the transition on the historical pedestal, removing from it the communist “working people” heroes and replacing them with ethnically specific “Serbian people.”<sup>16</sup> Transferring the new narrative to the Second World War, “the Serbian people” replaced the previous primary victims – the partisans.

This phase brought an interesting innovation. Namely, only at this time were the Holocaust victims recognized, but again not in and of themselves, but as completely equated with Serbian victims and always paired with them. This was a bizarre manipulation of history initiated by members of the Serbian nationalist intellectual elite, and it was intended to keep the focus of historical memory on the Second World War as a central event, but at the same time remove the partisans-fighters from the position of the main victim and replace them with Serbs as a whole. As early as 1984, the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts formed the Committee for collecting research material on the genocide perpetrated against the Serbs and other Yugoslav peoples in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The objective of this and other actions was to point the main memory spotlight onto Serbian victims of the Second World War. Such a shift had several different political objectives: to change the whole narrative of brotherhood and unity as the foundation of Yugoslavia; to explain that Serbs were the main victims in that country and to undermine relations with other nations (especially Croats), but also the common state as such. It became one of the triggers for the destruction of Yugoslavia.

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14 Vojislav Lubarda, Jovan Radulović, Vuk Drašković. See Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, pp. 160–166.

15 For the intellectual elite's changing discourse, see Nebojša Popov (ed.), *The road to the war in Serbia. Trauma and catharsis*, Budapest, New York 2000.

16 Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika, Folklor, politika i rat*, Belgrade 1994, p. 73.

17 Jovan Bajford, *Staro sajmište*, p. 135.



For this “operation” to succeed persuasively and successfully, Serbs had to be, in this initial stage of redefining the Second World War, equated with Jews, as the unquestionable victim nation. It is as if these association was meant to “book a reservation” for their place in history. The crimes against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia were now, in line with what happened to the Jewish people, being referred to exclusively as genocide,<sup>18</sup> and by identifying with the Holocaust victims, in this fight for a place in memory, the Serbian victims became greater and unquestionable. This was also a chance for them to gain international credentials and acknowledgment, and in foreign policy propaganda during the war of the 1990s both Serbia and Croatia were drawing parallels with the Jews, probably expecting to appeal to the power of the Jewish-American lobby.<sup>19</sup>

One part of this effort to restructure history was the founding of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society in 1988, which insisted on these two martyr-nations’ identical fate, hammering the theme of Serbian martyrdom which in the late 1980s represented a pillar of Serbian nationalist discourse.<sup>20</sup> Like the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia had noted even at the time, this represented a utilization of Jews and their history, motivated by propagandist objectives.<sup>21</sup> The best confirmation of this was a letter that the Serbian writer Vuk Drašković sent to his Israeli counterparts: “Serbs and Jews perished in the Second World War at the hands of the same executioners, were exterminated in the same concentration camps, slaughtered on the same bridges, burned alive in the same furnaces and disappeared together in the same pits.”<sup>22</sup> The writer used this comparison to point out that Serbs deserved an independent state, like the Jews got, openly using the memory of the Holocaust to pursue his anti-Yugoslav campaign.

Linking Serbian and Jewish victims came to the fore during the raising of the monument to the victims of Sajmište concentration camp and the victims of genocide.<sup>23</sup> The monument was built close

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18 Tea Sindbaek, *Usable history?*, pp.161-189.

19 Jovan Bajford, *Stara Sajmište*, p. 148.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 139. See also: Laslo Sekelj, *Vreme beščasća: Ogledi o vladavini nacionalizma*, Belgrade 1995.

22 Vuk Drašković, “Pismo izraelskim književnicima”, *Naša reč*, December 17, 1985, quotation after Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 165.

23 Jovan Bajford, *Stara Sajmište*, p. 172.

to the former camp, on the banks of the River Sava in 1995; it was supposed to be completed as early as 1989, but this was delayed due to a number of reasons. This is why the inscription on the monument sounds more like the late 1980s and clearly reveals the ambiguity of referring to Jewish victims.<sup>24</sup> A clear hierarchy of victims was presented, from the patriots in the first place, to the victims of Jasenovac, with a short mention of the trinity – “Serbs, Jews and Gypsies.” Thus, the Jewish victims of Sajmište are only mentioned in the context of this trinity, a far greater space is given to the victims of Jasenovac and Hungarian occupiers, referring to the victims of the Novi Sad raid. This was a typical example of bargaining and compromising on memory, but the only thing quite noticeably glossed over was the fact that Sajmište was established as a Jugendlager. At the ceremony of uncovering the monument, the Holocaust was also conspicuously absent.<sup>25</sup> The Holocaust victims were again there incidentally, as some sort of ornament for those that needed to be highlighted – the Serbian victims.

The chief objective for linking the Serbian and Jewish victims was not only to change the main victim, but also to change the leading perpetrator. Specifically, the goal was to label as the greatest crime on Yugoslav territory the one committed in World War II in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), in whose death camps Serbs and Jews perished together (without mentioning Croatian victims of the Ustasha regime). That way, in line with the requirements of Serbian propaganda before the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia in 1991, the Independent State of Croatia replaced the previously incontestable occupiers – the Nazis and fascists. This was already a preparation for the war whose central theme would be the war between Serbs and Croats, so the Serbian genocide reached, to quote Jovan Byford, the point of obsession.<sup>26</sup> At first, in speeches and writings, this genocide was blamed on the Ustashi, but over time the guilt was shifted to the entire Croatian people.

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24 “Here, on the trade-fair grounds, in a Nazi concentration camp, war crimes and genocide were perpetrated against approximately one-hundred thousand patriots, participants in the war of national liberation. (...) Serbs, Jews and Roma suffered the most. This monument is dedicated to the victims of the notorious Ustasha camp in Jasenovac and the victims of Hungarian occupiers carried here downstream on the waves of the Sava and Danube, to the courageous resistance against Nazi terror, and to all Yugoslavian victims of genocide.”

25 Jovan Bajford, *Stara Sajmište*, p. 176.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 137; Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, p. 113.

That way Serbs and Jews took the place of the partisans as victims and Germans were replaced by Croats as perpetrators.

In such a framework of remembrance, there was no room for historical facts, especially not for those indicating that Serbian collaborationist forces played a crucial role in the implementation of the Holocaust in Serbia and that they greatly contributed, after only 6 months of Nazi occupation, to Serbia becoming, among the first countries in Europe, judenfrei. Neither was there room for the fact that in the Second World War 80% of Yugoslav Jews perished, a number unmatched in its tragic magnitude by any other, regardless of how vast they might be.<sup>27</sup> This is another contribution to the analysis of memory, which can bear only simple and unambiguous roles. Historical memory has no capacity for all the complexity of the past, so the victim cannot at the same time be a perpetrator. And when such situations did arise in history, victims were swiftly relieved of this weight. Before the Yugoslav wars broke out, Serbian and Jewish victims had to be equated for the sake of the present. This is why historical facts had to be left out, because they would preclude the possibility of equating Serbian and Jewish fates and undermine the image of the past that was needed at the time.

### Phase three

The second phase was relatively short-lived, and phase three came soon. Preparations for the Yugoslav wars brought new changes. Namely, now Jews were forgotten again, which left Serbs as the only true victims. As Jasna Dragović-Soso has shown, from the summer of 1988, “genocide became a central theme in the media, and particularly in the yellow press, using explosive language, vast generalizations and reproducing photographs from the war showing dead and mutilated bodies for full shock effect.”<sup>28</sup> The main historical subject, from television shows, to monuments, to history textbooks, was the genocide Serbs suffered in the NDH,<sup>29</sup> which served several political purposes. First to create the feeling of fear and vulnerability among the Serbian people; this was portrayed

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<sup>27</sup> It is estimated that in the NDH 17% of Serbs perished who before the war had lived in Croatia. Bogoljub Kočović, *Žrtve Drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji*, London 1985, quoted after Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> Tea Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 161.

as a long-standing historical phenomenon with the Croats, and it was used for fueling nationalist hatred and distrust, and undermining the ideology of brotherhood and unity, a cornerstone of Yugoslavia.<sup>30</sup> The same weapon was used to break up Yugoslavia and the socialist order, because a hypothesis was developed that the Communists hid the true magnitude of Croatian crimes because they were pro-Croat-oriented, as it was then called. There was a growing sense of futility of future life together, and there was a new idea of the territorial enclosing of Croatian Serbs which led to the formation of Serbian autonomous regions and their secession from Croatia, and to total war.

Genocide became a word constantly employed, in daily and continuous use, gradually becoming a sort of mantra, devoid of sense and meaning. A good illustration of this is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade primary school textbook, intended for nine year-olds, with a graphically separated and underlined recommendation saying "1. Read the texts about the genocide over Serbs and other peoples. 2. There are films on this subject, they should be seen and discussed."<sup>31</sup> At the same time, neither the term nor the phenomenon is explained in any way, and the glossary at the end of the book does not contain the term. It is as if the authors felt one had to know this word or even that it is sacral, and therefore needs no explaining. By its massive use, the word genocide was trivialized, and the public was being prepared for new genocides.

Fear and anxiousness grew among the public, and the war that was about to begin was in advance proclaimed to be defensive or lauded as the prevention of future Croatian genocide against the Serbs. Namely, with the coined phrase describing the "genocidal nature of many generations of Croats,"<sup>32</sup> an idea was spread that this was a genetic trait of those people, which would inevitably drive them into a new genocide against the Serbs as soon as they have a chance. This propagandistic formula was extremely successful, especially among the Serbs in Croatia, and the constant abuse of history produced panic among the people and the impression that they

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30 Olivera Milosavljević, "Yugoslavia as a Mistake", in Nebojša Popov (ed.), *The road to the war in Serbia*, pp. 50-81.

31 Boško Vlahović, Bogoljub Mihailović, *Poznavanje prirode i društva za 3. razred osnovne škole*, Belgrade 1992, p. 62.

32 Vasilije Krestić, "O genezi genocida nad Srbima u NDH", in *Književne novine*, September 15, 1986.

needed to do everything to protect themselves from their neighbors. This was important for the moral and psychological preparation of the destruction of Yugoslavia and for creating a situation in which new crimes among neighbors would again become possible.

To achieve all of this, Holocaust rhetoric was adopted, but the victims were replaced, and the Jews, as possible competitors, were again forgotten. The coming war once again did not allow historical complexity, or even the possibility that anyone could find them in a position of the victim other than one's own nation. Such a concept was channeled into the new history textbooks, introduced in Serbian schools in 1993,<sup>33</sup> at the height of the war, sanctions and hyperinflation that beset the Serbian society, which alone says a lot about the significance of bending history to a political order that assumes that controlling the past was the best way to control the present and the future.<sup>34</sup>

New textbooks<sup>35</sup> were completely committed to implanting a strong sense of belonging to the victim-nation into the heads of even the youngest of pupils. All methods were allowed, from brutal images of mass graves to cruel and detailed descriptions of crimes, without any prior preparation of students. For example, a textbook for 13 year-olds, published during the war in 1993, used by nearly ten generations of students, has the following passage: "The inmates in the (concentration camp) Jasenovac (mostly Serbs) were slaughtered with knives, killed with different tools, axes, hammers, sledge hammers and iron bars, shot and burnt in the crematorium, cooked alive in cauldrons, hanged, tortured with hunger, thirst and cold, for they lived in camps without food or water."<sup>36</sup> Harrowing details were thus inducing fear and anxiety in young people, which is the best basis for developing aggressiveness and retaliatory attitudes in later life. The relationship among victims and perpetrators was clear and unambiguous: Serbian people in Croatia held the position of the victim, and the Ustasha regime, often Croats themselves – were the main culprits. This was the mechanism that facilitated the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

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33 Dubravka Stojanović, "History Textbooks Mirror Their Time", pp. 81-111.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

35 For a discussion about changing textbooks in the early 1990s in South-East Europe, see Wolfgang Höpken (ed.), *Oil on Fire? Textbooks, Ethnic Stereotypes and Violence in South-East Europe*, Hannover 1996.

36 Nikola Gaćeša, Ljiljana Mladenović-Maksimović, Dušan Maksimović, *Istorija za 8. razred*, Belgrade 1993, p. 156.

## Phase four

Phase four of this role change came in the wake of the Yugoslav wars and after Milošević's fall in 2000. The new authorities constructed "their own" World War II. That is to say, the objective of the new anti-communist authorities was to make a sharp break with the historical ancestors of the previous regime, and to fortify their victory over the old regime in the field of memories. It is as if they believed that, by pulling out this particular memory brick, the whole edifice of the regimes which rested on the partisan myth would finally collapse. This memory was led "on every front," with astonishing intensity and efficiency. Only a few days after the ousting of Milošević, the newly elected democratic mayor of Belgrade, the historian Milan Protić, said that the city's most important public holiday, October 20, the day Belgrade was liberated in the Second World War, will not be celebrated any longer, because this was, as he put it, an occupation and not liberation.<sup>37</sup> Not long after, all the holidays of the past few decades were abolished, Belgrade changed some 800 street names,<sup>38</sup> and a new series of history textbooks was published which completely altered the history of the Second World War.<sup>39</sup> New laws followed, and the Chetnik and Partisan movements were legally equated,<sup>40</sup> initiating a wave of judicial rehabilitations<sup>41</sup> all the way to the rehabilitation of Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović. This was all sealed with the television series *Ravna Gora*, broadcast on national television in 2015, on Sundays at 8 PM, which portrayed the Chetnik movement in a doctored, agreeable and positive light.

This process of Chetnik rehabilitation, which began discretely at the time of Milošević's wars, managed over the past 15 years to completely recycle the Second World War, completely swapping the roles of its actors. What was now needed, almost 70 years after the war ended, was to defeat Tito's partisans, find a completely new

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37 Dubravka Stojanović, "Value changes in the interpretations of history in Serbia", in Ola Listhaug, Sabrina P. Ramet, Dragana Dulić (eds.), *Civic and Uncivic Values. Serbia in the Post-Milosevic Era*, Budapest-New York 2011, 221-241, p. 233.

38 Srđan Radović, *Grad kao tekst*, Belgrade 2013.

39 Dubravka Stojanović, "Revizija revizije. "1941" u udžbenicima istorije", in Bosto et al. (eds.), *Kultura sjećanja:1941*, pp. 157-167.

40 Savez antifašista Srbije (ed.), *Ne rehabilitaciji. Javna reagovanja*, Beograd 2013.

41 Srđan Milošević, *Istorija pred sudom. Interpretacija prošlosti i pravni aspekti u rehabilitaciji kneza Pavla*, Beograd 2013.



narrative, and consequently new perpetrators and new victims. To do this, it was not enough to deny the partisans their position as greatest victims, but also to proclaim them as main perpetrators.

Switching the main perpetrator meant changing the main victim. This position was still, in a nationalist manner, occupied by the “Serbian people,” but the focus had been shifted. Now these were no longer Serbs from Croatia, but Serbs from Serbia, because after the Yugoslav wars ended, and especially after the defeat in Croatia, the central political message was no longer directed towards neighboring peoples, nor did anyone speak any longer of Serbs in Croatia, which would be a constant reminder of defeat. After 2000, the Second World War returned to “our own backyard,” to national political and ideological showdowns in Serbia itself, again becoming a key argument of internal propaganda, but with values opposite to those in the socialist period.

This is why it was now important for the main victims, still limited to the Serbian people, to be reduced to Serbian anti-communists, that is, the different militias fighting against the partisans, especially Draža Mihailović’s Chetniks. The change was complete. Those who previously were the main perpetrators, along with the Nazi occupiers, playing “national traitors and occupiers’ collaborators,” now became the main victims, and vice-versa – the former only victims, the Partisans, became perpetrators No.1. This led not only to complete distortions of the war’s interpretation and the change of historically determined facts, but also to the identification of today’s Serbia with the forces and ideas defeated in the Second World War.

This new role play, in textbooks published after the political changes of 2000,<sup>42</sup> insists that it was only the partisans who committed crimes, that they “arrested, tortured and executed” and left in their trail “dog cemeteries,” or unmarked mass graves of their adversaries, and that they “without hesitation sentenced people to death in show trials. Secret and open executions of prominent people and ordinary peasants, revenge killings, as well as executions of those members of the Communist Party who opposed it,

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<sup>42</sup> See more in Dubravka Stojanović, “Slow burning: History textbooks in Serbia 1993-2000”, in Augusta Dimou (ed.), *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeast Europe*, Göttingen 2008, 141-159; Augusta Dimou, “Politics or Policy? The Short Life and Adventures of Educational Reform in Serbia (2001-2003)”, in *Ibid.*, 159-201.



were almost a daily occurrence.”<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, large-scale atrocities committed by the Chetniks against Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs disappeared from history. Instead, it is claimed that the Chetniks practiced “beatings as one of the most often used methods of intimidation.”<sup>44</sup> As for the collaborationist regime of Milan Nedić, who was responsible for implementing the Holocaust on Serbian territory, and whose administration was along with Nazi occupiers in earlier stages labeled as the main perpetrator, it is claimed that he “rescued the biological essence of the Serbian people,” while his collaboration is explained in this manner: “He believed that Germany was too powerful at that time, and that in order to prevent the suffering of the Serbian people, cooperation with the occupier was unavoidable.” Members of Dimitrije Ljotić’s volunteer corps, the main aids of the SS units and the Gestapo in terror campaigns in Serbia, are mentioned only once, in the following sentence: “Their ideological fanaticism was greater than that of the communists.”<sup>45</sup>

In other words, the new Serbian authorities found their historical ancestors among the collaborationist forces,<sup>46</sup> allowing anti-communism to lead them to a phenomenon that is now known in Serbia as anti-antifascism.<sup>47</sup> In the struggle against the Communists, the point of fighting anti-fascists was reached, which inevitably meant that one ended up on the opposite side. This again excluded the possibility of mentioning the Holocaust, because its implementation involved the participation of the new idols, various collaborationist forces that have been rehabilitated en masse in the last fifteen years in Serbian courts. It is clear that in such a situation there could not be room for the Holocaust. So the first textbooks that came out in 2000, after Milošević’s fall, were left without any lessons or references to the Holocaust. Following a public outcry against this, subsequent editions included this subject, but devoted only a few paragraphs to it. Jewish victims were again not allowed to threaten the new title holders of the greatest victim. The rhetoric about the victim-nation remained the same,

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43 Kosta Nikolić, Nikola Žutić, Momčilo Pavlović, Zorica Špadijer, *Istorija za 4. razred gimnazije*, Belgrade 2003, pp.142-143.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Stojanović, “Value Changes”, pp. 221-241.

47 Todor Kuljić, “Anti-antifašizam”, in *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, 12(2005), pp. 1-3.



and the patterns of describing the Holocaust still refer exclusively to Serbian victims.

Staro Sajmište is again the most revealing “monument” of this change. Today (2016) it remains neglected, very similar to a slum.<sup>48</sup> It is true that after the political changes in 2000, there was a series of exhibitions, debates and discussions on the future organization of Sajmište, and that even the city administration for a short period advocated building a memorial, but in the end nothing was done.<sup>49</sup> There were also proposals for this ground to serve as a memorial exclusively to modernism in Belgrade architecture, which was most consistently applied to the old buildings of the Fair which opened in 1937, but there were a growing number of voices, even official ones, who favored building a memorial complex.<sup>50</sup> However, with the change of government after 2012 and the declining influence of B92 Television, which advocated in the media the founding of such a complex, this serious effort to do something also faded. Numerous public and international protest notes, which sought to prevent entertainment events and concerts held at the nightclub located on this ground, fell on deaf ears.<sup>51</sup> The ground was getting sadly neglected, and the new administration after 2012 no longer raised the issue. Another Belgrade camp for Jews, Topovske šupe, which before 2006 was not commemorated in any way, was sold to the company Delta to build a monumental shopping and business center, which says a lot about respect for the memory of Holocaust victims in times of a newly discovered consumer fever.

This short outline of memory politics in Yugoslavia and Serbia presented the dynamic of construction and deconstruction in the relation between perpetrators and victims. It has also proven the thesis that “heroes” play a central role in history, while “victims” are the central figure for memory. It showed that, for nearly 70 years, there was everything: the constant talk about the victims, the replacements of leading victims, and dramatic changes of main perpetrators. The only things missing, as it seems, were empathy and remorse. There were no victims of the “other,” even when

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48 Vesna Vučinić, “Antropologija u “divljim” naseljima: pogled na Staro Sajmište u Beogradu”, *Glasnik etnografskog instituta*, 44 (1995), pp 168-184; Jovan Bajford, *Staro Sajmište*, pp. 192-220.

49 Jovan Bajford, *Staro Sajmište*, p. 192; Olga Manojlović, Aca Ignjatović, “Prostori selektovanih memorija”, p. 109.

50 Jovan Bajford, *Staro Sajmište*, p. 196.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

this other was our “internal other,” as with the Holocaust victims, which were not only suppressed because of still strong anti-Semitism and the failure to face our own responsibility, but also because they would threaten the exclusive position of “our victim,” which is the central foundation of all the regimes we discussed. The only things missing, it seems, were empathy and pity.



# EXPLOSIVE DEVICE WITH A DELAYED EFFECT

IMAGE OF THE WARS OF  
THE 1990s IN SERBIAN HISTORY  
TEXTBOOKS (1993-2005)

This is a comparative analysis of the interpretation of the wars of the 1990s in Serbian textbooks published in the 1990s and in those published after the political changes in 2000. The key issue is whether there was a discontinuity in the interpretation of these events or do the current authorities adhere to the same interpretation of the dissolution of Yugoslavia as the previous ones.

History textbooks, especially in times of transition, and particularly in countries where there are no alternative methods of learning, are used to tailor the past to fit the present, to create an instant version of history which will justify the present and put it in the necessary historic context. In times of great disruptions, events are speedily erased from history, and, at the same time, everything that “suits” the present, that makes us feel better, supports national self-confidence, and helps us find a new goal, is added even faster. These alterations can be applied to any historical period, and it is a great misconception that certain historical periods are impervious to manipulations. However, the ending chapters in textbooks for the final years of primary and secondary school, where current issues are discussed, always bring particularly interesting “news from the past” – they express the views of the Ministry of Education, which approves these textbooks, regarding the current state-of-affairs in the country and its recent past. Here we can read “the recommendations how to use the present,” see the values that the current society is based on, see who the main political authorities one should be following are, and understand how we came to where we are now. On these pages, the authorities have the chance to justify themselves, as well as to offer us a desirable opinion on themselves, in a concise and concentrated



manner. Although the desire here is to impose an ideal picture, a researcher can, using the compliments the authorities gave themselves, see what they really are in the best possible way; the more they try to hide, the more they reveal.

This is especially pertinent to textbooks which are written during wartime. There we can find comprehensive explanations of events seasoned to the taste of those who lead the wars; we can see the framework of their ideas; we can fathom the goals, discover the untruths. These pages are intended for schoolchildren growing up in wartimes, so that they can orientate themselves in the present “correctly,” in accordance with the guidelines provided in these textbooks, so that they can understand where and why they still live, and what is the goal of all this. The authorities hope that the schoolchildren of today will take this knowledge to their adulthood. Thus, the interpretation of dramatic events they were given in the earliest years of their life would determine their standpoints towards these events in the future. Education is abused for the sake of permanently shaping generations according to the dictates and current needs of the authorities. When there is a war going on, the abuse is even more brutal and sinister. Those who were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1993, when Milošević’s history textbooks were published, are now in their thirties. The messages they received in their childhood can now be passed along to their children. This is where the danger of these textbooks lies: they work with a delayed effect; they represent permanent contamination, transferred from one generation to another.

History textbooks in Serbia were first changed in 1993, thus – in the middle of the wars for Yugoslav heritage and precisely because of these wars. As I have written on several occasions in the past,<sup>1</sup> same as in previous anthologies published as part of this project, the point of these books was precisely a drastic alteration of the view of the past to suit the needs of the present. It was necessary to construct a history of conflict, in order to place the conflict in progress into the appropriate historical context, to justify it, make it logical and unavoidable. The Serbo-Croatian conflict was extracted from history as a constant feature, as its most important content. The roots are dated back with great precision to the year 1525, when the first open conflict between the two nations was detected – a

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<sup>1</sup> *Patriotizam, ratništvo, patrijarhalnost* (ed. Vesna Pešić, Ružica Rosandić), Belgrade 1993.

date that could not be found in previous scientific historiography. From that year, a continuous line was drawn directly to 1991, thus providing a clear historical foundation for this year, and, in turn, making it both a destiny and a necessity.

In addition to the drastic changes in the interpretation of the past, a large number of pages in the history textbooks for the final grade of primary school, published in 1993, were dedicated to explaining current events. These changes were also introduced into geography textbooks,<sup>2</sup> which are particularly interesting, thus this analysis will begin with an attempt to define geographically the state in which the schoolchildren of 1993 lived. Let's just be reminded that the then-schoolchildren of Serbia lived in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, composed of the republic of Serbia and the republic of Montenegro, which proclaimed a new federation in April of 1992, following the dissolution of the SFRY. However, the uncertainty about the framework of the state one lived in at that time began already in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of primary school. Children were taught that "our homeland was Serbia," that Belgrade was its capital city (not the capital city of the FRY), and that it bordered with Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.<sup>3</sup> Judging by this, Montenegro was in the same position towards Serbia as Croatia, which was a consequence of the fact that textbooks could not be changed at the speed the war was creating a new reality, thus resulting in old relationships between republics remaining unchanged in the textbooks. Moving to the next, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, children would find themselves confused when they discovered that Serbia was in a federation with Montenegro, under the name Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a state bordering with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia to its west.<sup>4</sup> In order to confirm these borders, they were also labeled as natural: "The river Drina is a natural border towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Danube is a natural border towards Croatia and Romania."<sup>5</sup> From this, one could conclude that at that time the FRY recognized the border on Drina and Danube.

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2 Milan Milošević, *Geografija za 8. razred*, Belgrade 1993.

3 Boško Vlahović, Branko Mihajlović, *Poznavanje prirode i društva za 3. razred*, Belgrade 1992, p. 24.

4 Branko Danilović, Dragana Danilović, *Poznavanje prirode i društva za 4. razred*, Belgrade 1992.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 5.



This, however, was brought into question and refuted in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade geography textbooks, where neighboring countries were referred to as Former Yugoslav Republic of Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>6</sup> International documents recognize only the last one under that name, which makes it unequivocally clear that the FRY, at least in this textbook, did not recognize the remaining states. It also makes it clear that, in all actuality, the FRY did not consider the borders on Drina and Danube to be natural. In this way, political ambiguities became part of what one may consider to be an exact science – geography. The problems were even more complicated than they appeared, because, as part of the lesson “Serbian lands beyond Yugoslav borders,” there were entire sections dedicated to the geographical, economic, even tourist details from the life of the then Republika Srpska Krajina and Republika Srpska, which were not recognized as states by the FRY. The textbook did not explain the relation between these states and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or the FRY, so that a less informed child may have understood that these entities were also a part of the FRY.

All of this clearly shows that the relations between Serbia, Montenegro, the FRY, Republika Srpska Krajina and Republika Srpska were not totally clear in 1993, that the borders were not considered definite and that, according to the views of the textbook authors, everything was subject to change and reshaping. Textbooks hastily tailored to the situation in the field create confusion even in basic issues. This is why the authors of 4<sup>th</sup> grade social science textbooks, probably out of sheer despair, found the solution in the following advice: “You will get to know your homeland better if you watch TV, read children’s publications, create albums and collections and make a calendar of social events which pertain to our country.”<sup>7</sup> Textbooks could not change at the speed at which states did, so they retreated before the more modern and faster media, publicly proclaiming their withdrawal from the contest for “the truth.”

Textbooks offer many explanations as to how the political situation of the time came to be. Extensive political lessons were part of

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6 Milan Milošević, *Geografija za 8. razred*, p. 7.

7 Branko Danilović, Dragana Danilović, *Poznavanje prirode i društva za 4. razred*, p. 5.



8<sup>th</sup> grade geography textbooks, where they certainly didn't belong. In these textbooks, the entire history of Yugoslavia was presented in a petty political way, because it was obviously necessary to support the official interpretation from "a geographical perspective" as well. The most vulgar arguments were also used, those that one was able to hear on every street during the late 1980s, at a time when history was a discipline seemingly practiced by everyone and at all times. We can find one of these stereotypical-laden interpretations of Yugoslavia in the geography textbook: it says that in the first Yugoslavia, Serbs, Croats and Slovenians had "opposing religious and national goals. With the creation of Yugoslavia, Croats and Slovenians were, in addition to liberation from Austria-Hungary, saving their ethnic territory from Italy and Austria, and, despite the fact that they were defeated in war, they were included amongst the winners and met the requirements to later create independent national states."<sup>8</sup> Describing the relations among nations in the second Yugoslavia, the authors, still in the geography textbook, openly lobby for Milošević's war program: "A possible solution to the position of Serbs in Croatia was the creation of Serbian autonomous regions where Serbs were the majority. However, the leadership of the Communist Party and of the Federation, where Croatian and Slovenian politicians exerted the biggest influence, did not allow any kind of autonomy for Serbs."<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that, as the authors previously claimed, Croats and Slovenians exerted the biggest influence, "They were dissatisfied with both the first and the second Yugoslavia, although they had an especially favorable position on the Yugoslav market."<sup>10</sup>

In order to show the reasons why Serbia was unhappy in the federation, well-known arguments about the moving of Serbian factories to other republics were quoted. These factories were listed in detail in the textbook; along with iron foundries, mills, the second railroad track near Jagodina, the list includes "the most famous stable with purebred horses in Europe," which was moved from Stare Moravice to Slovenia.<sup>11</sup> With this, the arguments well-known from the SANU Memorandum and the big media campaign aimed at proving the harsh position of Serbia and Serbs

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<sup>8</sup> Milan Milošević, *Geografija za 8. razred*, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



in Yugoslavia, as well as at the creation of a picture about the danger they were in and their subordinate position became part of the education system. Such arguments were necessary in order to create a psychological foundation for war, because the starting point was that “the victim” had the right to compensation that the victim was pardoned in advance. Thus, the victim was free to do anything in the struggle for justice. Bearing in mind “the delayed effect” of textbooks, these explanations were also used to formulate the attitude of future generations towards wars which were being led, to prepare their resistance towards any different view of these events which may occur in the future.

This “geographical” side of the Yugoslav problem fitted into the political one, which was explained in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook.<sup>12</sup> Interpreting the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the beginning of the process of disintegration was placed in the year 1964, at the Brioni Plenum. This is yet another of those historical interpretations which could be frequently heard starting from the 1980s. According to this interpretation, the fall of Aleksandar Ranković from the position of the Minister of Domestic Affairs was part of the reckoning of Tito’s leadership with those representatives from Serbia who wanted to strengthen the position of Serbia in the federation and win a better place for their nation within a complex state union. Aleksandar Ranković thus became the “icon of resistance,” the protector of Serbian national interests, especially those in Kosovo. Such an image resulted in about 100.000 citizens of Belgrade attending his funeral in June of 1983,<sup>13</sup> transforming it into the first unofficial “truth protest,” which Slobodan Milošević would, later on, use as his own method of political reckoning.

The attitude towards the Brioni Plenum in the textbook is rather interesting. The authors claim that this event led to “the disintegration of a powerful federal institution (which exists in every civilized state),” referring to the communist state security!<sup>14</sup> It was already then, the author claims, “that the conditions for carrying out the prepared and well conceived scenario (inspired and helped by certain foreign parties, as well) for the destruction

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12 Nikola Gaćeša, Ljiljana Mladenović-Maksimović, Dušan Maksimović, *Istorija za 8. razred*, Belgrade 1993.

13 *Moderna srpska država (1804–2004). Hronologija* (ed. Branka Prpa), Belgrade 2005, p. 387.

14 N. Gaćeša, Lj. Mladenović-Maksimović, D. Maksimović, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 156.

of the Yugoslav union were created.”<sup>15</sup> This makes it clear that the authors and the then Ministry of Education believed the secret police of communist Yugoslavia to be the defender of Yugoslavia, which says a lot about the way they understood unity and equality, which were to be the foundations of a federation. Furthermore, the textbook claims that the subsequent events which followed in Kosovo in 1968, in Croatia between 1967 and 1971 and in Slovenia in 1969, proved that the dissolution of Yugoslavia started with the ousting of Rankovic. “The crowning event was the passing of the new SFRY Constitution in 1974,” which was “without question” accepted “by the subordinate and bureaucratized structures of the Serbian political scene.”<sup>16</sup> This was meant to prove that the communist leaderships, primarily the leadership of Slovenia and Croatia, were responsible for the dissolution of Yugoslavia, as well as for the war which was underway at the time. According to the textbook, they started carrying out their “plan” from the moment Rankovic was deposed, with obvious, albeit undefined, help from abroad. This absolved those who started the war in 1991 from responsibility, and moved back the beginning of the dissolution for thirty years, thus shifting the focus of interpretation, and laying all responsibility on the previous, communist government.

According to the textbook, the situation in the SFRY did not change until 1987. Then, the correction of the injustice began: “At the 8<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, the concept advocating the democratization of the society, the revision of the existing Constitution, the protection of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo and Metohija and the creation of a unified Serbia on its entire territory, prevailed.”<sup>17</sup> The same power structures adopted constitutional amendments which allowed Serbia to carry out sovereign state functions on its entire territory, and, in 1990, the new Constitution, under which “the citizen, his personal freedoms and rights, are central to all events transpiring in the society.”<sup>18</sup> This presented the existing government as the protector of democratic, human and national rights on one side, while at the same time explaining its politics as a method of protecting the rights of Serbs, which was to remain

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15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

18 *Ibid.*

the key propaganda position during the wars, thus giving those wars a defensive character. Thus moral pardon and political shelter were secured – there is nothing more just than the protection of an endangered nation.

According to the authors of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook, with the passing of time, nationalism and separatism in Yugoslavia gained strength. “Others” are responsible. “The leadership of Slovenia was the most prominent, especially starting from 1989, portending the secession from Yugoslavia.”<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that the authors perceive only two cohesive factors in the SFRY: the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) and the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA), thus confirming, in a history textbook, the most rigid concept of Yugoslavism, relying on communism and the army. This was the interpretation followed by the hard line in Serbia in the late 1980s, which believed that the salvation of Yugoslavia was to be found in “an iron fist,” and perceived its dissolution as a consequence of democratization.<sup>20</sup> Although the disagreements within the federation derived precisely from such an approach, it found its way into the textbook as the sole explanation. Further explanations follow the same logic: the enemy “decided, in accordance with their previously prepared plan, to destroy first one (SKJ), then another (JNA) factor of unity.”<sup>21</sup> This is the reason why, according to the authors, the SKJ was shut down following the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress, “thus resulting in the destruction of one of the factors for the preservation of Yugoslavia.” This was both the official standpoint of Milošević’s leadership and the interpretation of the last congress of Yugoslav communists. The reduction of the Yugoslav federation to the League of Communists revealed a fundamental lack of understanding of the complex union of nations as well as the hard-line attitude of the erstwhile Serbian leadership.

After such an integrative factor had disappeared, claim the authors of this textbook, elections were held in 1990 in all the republics. This did not resolve the crisis, because, according to our author, “in some republics ultra right-wing forces won. Thus, in many parts of Yugoslavia, one type of single-mindedness was

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19 Ibid., p. 156.

20 Olivera Milosavljević, “Yugoslavia as a Mistake”, in N. Popov (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia*, Belgrade 1996.

21 N. Gačeša, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 156.

replaced by another, which, at some points, turned into insanity.”<sup>22</sup> This is an example of repugnant, arrogant and impermissible interference with electoral outcomes in other republics of the then still joint state. At the same time, the attitude towards elections displays a strong influence of the old ideological matrix, while democracy and multi-party system are perceived as a danger. Although the intention of the authors of those lines was to create an image of other nations that were to be accused as the sole culprits for the dissolution of Yugoslavia, they ended up making the strongest accusations against themselves, revealing the attitude that the Serbian leadership had towards political transformations. In this context, textbooks prove to be a valuable historical source which detects the most vulgar ideological messages in their fundamental form.

From 1990 onwards, according to the textbook, the situation started to become more complicated. It is rather interesting that the geography textbook places the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the year 1990. One might at first think this to be a mistake, because the textbook claims that the second Yugoslavia lasted from 1945 (the coat of arms of that state says that it was founded in 1943) until 1990. A later chapter explains that “the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia, and the proclamation of an independent state, was carried out with the passing of the new Constitution in 1990.”<sup>23</sup> The fact is that Croatia proclaimed independence in June of 1991. This antedating actually shifted the dissolution of Yugoslavia, thus proclaiming Croatia as the main culprit and the only one responsible for this event. Namely, the Croatian Constitution was marked as the moment of dissolution, which unequivocally pinpointed the culprit.

This is an interesting lesson to ponder history and its misuse. Namely, the advocates of positivism claim that facts are facts, and dates are dates. The abovementioned example shows that historical chronology is in itself an important part of manipulation, and that by changing dates one can achieve much more in creating a desirable image of the past than by implementing complicated historical argumentation. As soon as the date of the dissolution of Yugoslavia was set in 1990, the culprit became obvious.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Milan Milošević, *Geografija za 8. razred*, p. 11.

The 4<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks then explain to children that Serbs were thrown out of the Croatian Constitution, that they were proclaimed a national minority and thus deprived of their rights. This is why “the Serbian people armed themselves”<sup>24</sup> (without a word as to how they armed themselves), while the JNA, which was, at that time, the Army of the joint state, attempted to protect them: “since the attacked and threatened Serbs had to protect themselves from new tribulations and destruction. Accepting the imposed struggle created a conviction amongst Serbs that they themselves, same as the others, had the right to become independent and decide their own fate.”<sup>25</sup> This is an interesting interpretation, bearing in mind that such standpoints could not be heard in public due to the dominant message about the defensive character of the war led by the Serbian forces, protecting “the empty-handed people.” The defiant view about “taking matters into our own hands” is contrary to the official propaganda formula about self-defense.

The interpretation offered in the textbooks also includes foreign enemies: “The European Economic Community attempted to offer its good services in the Yugoslav conflict. Due to the favoritism of ECC, especially Germany, as its most influential and aggressive member, the fighting continued.”<sup>26</sup> This did not suffice – it was also necessary to remind the children about the “centuries-old” Serbian-German conflict, about “the tradition” of aggressive German policy, about the fact that nothing ever changes in history – that it is some kind of destiny, that we are once again victims of the German *Drang*, as had happened twice already during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a propaganda formula that is expected to leave no soul indifferent, and to always bring about the necessary emotions and psychological defiance in Serbia, twice occupied by German forces. The textbook claims without hesitation: “for the third time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany and Austria repeated their ‘Drang nach Osten’ in 1991, this time political and economical, inciting and supporting secessionist forces in Yugoslav republics and thus contributing to the dissolution of the SFRY.”<sup>27</sup>

Here we can also find another favorite enemy – the Vatican: “The participation of Vatican politics in the Yugoslav syndrome is

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24 Boško Vlahović et al, *Poznavanje prirode i društva*, p. 15.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Milan Milošević, *Geografija za 8. razred*, p. 7.

also very important. Through the Catholic church and its fanatical believers, a fight against Orthodoxy and Serbs is being led.”<sup>28</sup> It was another strong propaganda message, because “the Vatican conspiracy” belongs to the arsenal of favorite interpretations of history, especially when it is necessary to trigger revolt and readiness to fight. And, finally, in order for the set of “ideal enemies” to be complete, the United States of America and the new post-Cold War situation were added – briefly: “The attitude of Serbia and Montenegro, which did not accept the dissolution of Yugoslavia, caused the wrath and vengeance of the initiators and instigators of the New World Order, who decided to punish the disobedient.”<sup>29</sup>

In such difficult circumstances, the Serbian people were left only with the unquestionable faith in their own leadership, one that always welcomes praise: “realizing the complexity of the forthcoming development of events, the Presidency of Yugoslavia and the Serbian leadership took the necessary measures and managed to transfer the problem of the Yugoslav crisis to the Security Council and the United Nations.”<sup>30</sup> Apparently, this diplomatic success was not sufficient, “thus, after many threats, blackmails and unimaginable favoritism,” sanctions against the FRY were imposed. It was not explained why the sanctions were imposed, what was asked of the Serbian leadership, what were the causes and motives for the punishment which deeply affected the very existence of the citizens of Serbia. The sanctions were presented as another in a row of injustices, the product of favoritism and the anti-Serbian orientation of the entire world.

The language used to write the chapters in this textbook speaks for itself about the unscrupulous politization of education. Passionate journalistic platitudes are not a language schoolchildren should look up to. As to its essence, this language can only indefinitely revive the war atmosphere, pushing the schoolchildren even farther away from a rational perception of the situation. Filled with xenophobia, contempt and hatred towards neighboring nations, the European and global community, such texts fit into the propaganda system which has made the war psychologically possible. Throwing insults at the international community we still live in, and even at the religious feelings of certain nations (for example,

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28 N. Gaćeša, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 157.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 157.



the “fanatical believers” of the Catholic church), which is a great example of the propaganda of religious intolerance, can be nothing but the expression of an arrogant, primitive understanding of the world, a world we thus willingly exclude ourselves from. Textbooks are not a place to continue waging a war, and even less a place to praise the Serbian leadership. By explicitly imposing political reasoning, textbooks lose their educational purpose.

This gives an extra-historical interpretation of everything that could have been previously learned about the past, thus making the subconscious suggestions presented in the previous chapter politically usable. Without such a finale, they would not be so ominous. We are left with the impression that the previous historical experience, with all its power, materialized in contemporary events, as if the contemporary events naturally result from it. This is an erroneous interpretation of modernity, but also a dangerous, single-minded reduction of historical totality to one dimension only. This is where the deepest instrumentalization of history in the textbooks lies. The objective of studying history is to develop the ability to think in relative terms, and to realize the richness of many possibilities and choices that are constantly being offered. “Neither history nor nature ever bets everything on one card only.”<sup>31</sup> This very ambiguity of what history offers remains totally unknown to students when their education ends. It is true that it is not easy to present this ambiguity in the limited space offered by a school curriculum, but it would suffice, for a start, to offer views of different parties on a particular event or phenomenon. This would significantly soften the image of a single truth, single direction, single possibility, which dominates the textbooks and which, consequently, creates an erroneous perception of the past. The meaning of comprehending history lies in perceiving all offered possibilities and in contemplating on the reasons for one of these possibilities to take precedence. This conveys the valuable apparatus of reasoning, which can help in explaining the present. However, such dilemmas were not presented to the schoolchildren. On the contrary, they are imprinted with historical determinism which precludes any possibility of free thinking and creativity of understanding. It enthrones a system of thought in which the cause of all causes can be changed as needed, at the same time kee-

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31 Latinka Perović, “Dimitrije Mita Cenić”, in *Izabrana dela*, p. 189.



ping the essence intact. The essence remains a deeply authoritarian understanding of the world, which is older than any other system. More precisely, systems are reproduced from such an understanding. Thus, responsibility lies not only with the authors of school curriculums and textbooks, not even with the science on which they should be based. They are all a mere consequence, and this is why they represent an excellent starting point for contemplating upon the society that generated them.

### Change of matrix after political change?

In textbooks published after the political changes in 2000, special attention, or so it appears, was dedicated to “calming down the passions” regarding the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Probably expecting that the critics would start by very carefully reading just these chapters, authors took pains not to use hate speech, avoided journalistic platitudes, abstained from strongly criticizing the international community and from insulting members of other religions and nations. Great effort was invested in composing a text using correct language and contents.

However, despite the “cleaned up” text, it is interesting that the matrix of interpreting the dissolution of Yugoslavia remained fundamentally identical to the one in Milošević’s textbooks, which goes in favor of the idea that there is a continuity of ideas before and after the changes in 2000. The key to the interpretation lies in the presentation of the Serbian nation as a victim, and of Yugoslavia as a country destroyed by the selfish interests of secessionists who failed to understand the subtlety of a multinational community, and, even more, the interests and needs of the largest, Serbian nation.

From a chronological point of view, the first similarity between the two interpretations is noted where the notorious Brioni Plenum is concerned. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook unambiguously presents Rankovic as the protector of Serbian interests, deposed in order to weaken the largest Yugoslav nation. The start of the dissolution of Yugoslavia is overtly placed right here, in the year 1966, when “this integrative factor” was destroyed with the deposition of Rankovic. This makes it clear who was destroying and who destroyed Yugoslavia: “With his deposition (Rankovic’s – *author’s note*), due to alleged (*author’s emphasis*) audio surveillance of Tito, the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia began, with increasing tendency of

Slovenia and Croatia towards independence.”<sup>32</sup> The word “alleged” is interesting, because it openly suggests that the entire affair was a setup and that Rankovic was yet another innocent Serbian victim, which once again strengthens and openly advocates the mythic matrix.

It is especially important to underline this fact, since the new generation of textbooks also includes the well-known standpoint that the JNA was the key integrative factor of the SFRY. In the lesson pertaining to the sixties and seventies of the last century, the authors claims that: “The Yugoslav People’s Army, as the only Yugoslav institution, also had an important influence on political life in the country.” Although at that time, a large number of Yugoslav institutions existed – from the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Archive of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Drama Theater, up to the Jugoplastika plastic factory, the authors stick to the familiar matrix where the key factor of the common state is seen in the army. This is a glorification of a communist army and a humiliation of Yugoslavia, a state reducible to the power of its army. If the Serbian side has been frequently accused of such a perception of Yugoslavia, then the authors of the textbook, albeit indirectly, proved that the common state was actually understood in such a way, and that the tradition of militarism left a strong imprint on the understanding of this complex federation.

The SFRY itself is interpreted in both relevant textbooks as “the dungeon of the Serbian nation,” which was one of the dominant interpretations during the mid-1980s.<sup>33</sup> A conspiracy is, once again, the key explanation. This time, party and state leadership were part of the conspiracy. Their goal was to destroy Serbian interests, thus, they had an anti-Serbian mission. The culmination of such activity is seen in the process of federalization of the SFRY, which, as is obvious from these textbooks, is perceived as contrary to Serbian interests.<sup>34</sup> The textbook claims that the key event was the passing of the 1974 Constitution, a move interpreted as the breakup of the state, which proves that the strengthening of federalism was understood as contrary to Serbian interests. This, in turn, confirmed, once again indirectly, the unitarian understanding of Yugoslavia

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32 Suzana Rajić, Kosta Nikolić, Nebojša Jovanović, *Istorija za 8. razred*, Belgrade 2005.

33 Olivera Milosavljević, “Yugoslavia as a Mistake”, p. 213.

34 Kosta Nikolić, Nikola Žutić, Momčilo Pavlović, Zorica Špadijer, *Istorija za treći razred gimnazije*, Belgrade 2002.

by the textbook authors: “Nationalisms were orchestrated by state and party leaderships. With the help of other internal and external factors, they were the main cause of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. A part of the Serbian political and intellectual leadership strongly criticized the 1974 Constitution. Their opinion was that this Constitution legalized the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and that Serbia was broken up when Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija were given broad autonomy.”<sup>35</sup> In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook, which was written later, the authors were even more explicit: “These constitutional changes enabled further strengthening of the independence of the republics and provinces. It led to the weakening of unity, splitting up of the economy, and undermining of Yugoslavia as a common state. Provinces were given broader jurisdictions in legislative and executive power, thus practically acquiring the status of republics. This placed Serbia in an unequal position, which, in the following period, led to a great political crisis in Serbia and Yugoslavia and caused the dissolution of the state.”<sup>36</sup>

The next situation which stands out as an important factor which led to the dissolution of the state was the situation in Kosovo. It was interpreted within the matrix of Serbian victimization. Failing to offer a more comprehensive explanation of the situation in Kosovo, authors presented only the Serbian side as the victims, using Milošević’s arguments from the late 1980s: “Pressure on Serbs in this province continued unabated. For a long time, Serbs had lived in an atmosphere of fear, destruction of property, threats and constant exile from that territory.”<sup>37</sup> There is no doubt, according to the authors, that such a position of Serbs was part of a broader, state policy in the SFRY: writing about Albanian demonstrations in 1968, the authors claim that: “Although they were massive and separatist, Tito described them as ordinary riots (*bold in original text*),” criticizing “those who still lived in the old spheres and who were not satisfied with all nations and nationalities in our country having equal rights. He was referring to Serbs here.”<sup>38</sup>

The demonstrations in 1989 were also presented as having full continuity with the conflicts which occurred in Kosovo in the

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35 Kosta Nikolić et al, *Istorija za treći razred gimnazije*, p. 239.

36 Suzana Rajić et al, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 188.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

38 Kosta Nikolić et al, *Istorija za treći razred gimnazije*, p. 237.



sixties and early 1980s. Immediately after the sentence about the exile of Serbs and the creation of pure Albanian territories during the previous period, comes the following sentence: “New demonstrations came after the constitutional changes in Serbia (1989), when civil war in that province was prevented by the JNA.”<sup>39</sup> Once again, the army appears in a positive context, almost as a factor of peace, while, at the same time, the textbook fails to explain the mentioned constitutional changes in Serbia that actually abolished the autonomy of Kosovo, which was part of Milošević’s already advanced policy of crushing Albanian rights and imposing a violent solution to the Kosovo problem. No word about the dozens of people who died at the hands of that same peacekeeping army and police during those days in Kosovo, which was a conflict that permanently separated the Albanian community from the idea of a common life. With this, the authors of the textbook showed a complete lack of understanding of the Kosovo issue, which is what led to the loss of Kosovo.

The formal dissolution of Yugoslavia was dated June 25<sup>th</sup> 1991, when the Slovenian parliament voted for independence. The textbook says that the same thing was done the next day by the Croatian parliament, following the passing of a Constitution in which Serbs lost the status of a constitutive nation. We find only one sentence talking about the cause of the wars: “The increase of intra-national hatred and the strengthening of old fears, ominously pointed towards war as a solution.”<sup>40</sup> Mythological factors such as “ominous indicators” lead to the conclusion that the war was caused by supernatural forces. However, here too we can see Milošević’s interpretation of the cause of war: old fears. The key of the propaganda about a defensive war which was led in Serbia during the 1980s is precisely that: the perpetuating story about Ustasha crimes and genocide against Serbian people in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) blasted almost every evening from TV screens and printed media. The goal of such psychological preparations for war was precisely the creation and dissemination of “old fears,” primarily the fear that the genocide against Serbs may happen again. Thus, the war became not only defensive, but preventive as well – a war that would prevent a new crime from being committed against innocent people.

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39 Suzana Rajić et al, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 189.

40 Ibid.

The war itself was depicted as some kind of natural phenomenon. The language used to neutralize the problem of responsibility, to blur the situation to the extent that history looked like some kind of force directing the behavior of people, controlling them, placing them in situations for which they bear no responsibility, has already been analyzed: “Wars first started as local, limited and partially controlled, but, beginning in the summer of 1992, they flared up so strongly that every attempt of the international community and its military forces to stop the destruction failed.”<sup>41</sup> Everything resembles a natural disaster, almost a summer storm, which started mildly, but then turned really bad. Nothing is said about the fact that peace offers were refused, truces violated, that war was knowingly and intentionally being continued and escalated, expanding the conquered territory and then ethnically cleansing it. The impression was given that no one was making decisions, which was a typical way in which wars were discussed in the Serbian public and media while they lasted. However, there might have been hope that after the fall of the regime which led these wars, the new authorities would distance themselves and be able to realize where the responsibility lay.

This fatalistic attitude towards history is particularly emphasized with the standpoint that the 1991 war is directly related to the Second World War – almost its new phase, so to speak. Such a standpoint could be explicitly found in Milošević’s textbooks, where the idea about repetitious history or about its systematic, cyclical repetition was openly stated: “In 1991, it was like 1941 happened again.” The new regime in Serbia maintained the same understanding of history. Thus the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade textbook claims that: “The causes of civil war, in addition to current problems in resolving further functioning of Yugoslavia and implementing the planned national programs, lie with the events which transpired during World War II. The unfinished war continued exactly 50 years later (bold in original text).”<sup>42</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook offers the same idea in the shape of a question to the students: “Is there a connection between the events during World War II and the events during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and how can it be recognized?”

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41 Ibid.

42 Kosta Nikolić, *Istorija za treći razred*, p. 242.



It is clear to every serious historian and analyst that, apart from national conflicts, no historical similarities between the two events exist. In 1991 there was no Hitler, no World War, no conquered Europe, no external attack on Yugoslavia, no fragmentation of the country by occupational forces, and the world, in the meantime, had started moving in a whole new direction. However, the connection with World War II is crucial to the Serbian propaganda interpretation of the war of 1991. It is important to constantly revisit the genocide committed in NDH, keep reminding people that 1991 was a consequence of that event, thus not only explaining, but also justifying the position of the Serbian side, as well as fully pardoning it. A victim of genocide cannot be the executioner of genocide. Such an interpretation was also included in textbooks.

The JNA is, once again, introduced as a player. Still presented as the only force protecting Yugoslavia, it now also appears in its military role: “the only military force which attempted to protect the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia was the JNA.”<sup>43</sup> With this, another one of Milošević’s propaganda messages entered the textbooks – that the JNA was protecting the common state from separatist forces which were ripping it apart. Without dealing with the reasons for the division of the common state, it was yet another standpoint interpreting the war in a manner which was clearly going to be accepted by the Serbian public, since the protection of Yugoslavia was understood as a totally legitimate goal. On the other hand, the destruction of Yugoslavia was automatically regarded as treason, which, in the emotional sense, linked the public to the politics of the Serbian leadership.

In further texts referring to the JNA, it is said that the JNA withdrew from territories caught in the war, thus providing full pardon for the JNA: “following the international recognition of each of the republics belonging to the former common state, the JNA was under the obligation to withdraw from its territory.”<sup>44</sup> Without noting that non-Serb soldiers left the JNA and that, more or less spontaneously, it became the Serbian army, and, as such, remained present in warzones, the authors offer an extraordinary comical remark, ignoring the fact that this army totally changed its ethnic structure, ideology, and military goals: “With a stroke of historical irony, the former Partisan army started being

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43 Suzana Rajić et al, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 190.

44 Ibid.

called the Chetnik army in the other republics.”<sup>45</sup> Such a claim, completely lacking in insight into reality and the true causes of a phenomenon, continues Milošević’s propaganda and adopts his key explanation – that these events were a product of some kind of injustice, a total lack of understanding and malicious condemnation of the Serbian side.

Not much is said in textbooks about the war in Croatia. Neither Vukovar, nor Dubrovnik, nor Ovcara are mentioned, not even Republika Srpska Krajina and its leadership. Much more attention is dedicated to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is described as a war which had a religious dimension as well, unlike the war in Croatia, which was the product of pure and simple hatred: “In Croatia, hatred between Serbs and Croats was fierce, and the war in Bosnia took a religious dimension.”<sup>46</sup> Without explicit claims, the responsibility for the war in Bosnia is however placed on the Croatian side, with one seemingly skillful sentence: “Croatian tendencies for independence and their own state expanded beyond the borders of that country. The Serbian and Croatian national communities (in Bosnia – *translator’s note*) tied themselves to their homelands, and this former bastion of Tito’s Yugoslavia found itself caught in a tragic rift.”<sup>47</sup>

Responsibility is shown as fully equal, thus making all the warring parties equal as well: “The consequences of these conflicts were catastrophic for all citizens, regardless of their national and religious affiliation. Massacres of civilians, Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, left behind in mass graves (Pakrac, Medacki dzep, Ovcara near Vukovar, Gospic, Kazani near Sarajevo, Kozarac, Foca, Sipovo, Bratunac, Srebrenica).” Mixed and ordered in such a way as to show that the Serbian people have been the victim at more places than other nations. Furthermore, it is important to note that the crime in Srebrenica is included in the same line with all other crimes. This is part of the message of Serbian authorities after 2000, that all crimes are equal, which led the Serbian Parliament to pass two resolutions – one condemning the crime committed in Srebrenica, the other condemning crimes against the Serbian nation. This constant “balancing” can be noted later in the textbook: “Ethnic cleansing is recorded as the cruelest method of creating

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45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., p. 191.

47 K. Nikolić et al, *Istorija za treći razred gimnazije*, p. 242.



new national territories. Hundreds of thousands of families were forced to abandon their homes. Numerous religious buildings and houses of worship were also destroyed: Catholic and Orthodox churches, monasteries, parish homes, mosques and madrassas.”<sup>48</sup> It is, of course, important that this has been stated; however, without more specific information about these crimes, this paragraph remains unclear. To begin with, it makes all crimes equal and does not criticize its own side, and there is also the possibility that such “neutral” language may lead to an understanding that the Serbs were the biggest victims. If we want to express this in a quantitative way – there are three types of Orthodox religious facilities mentioned, two Islamic and one Catholic – thus leading to a conclusion about which nation suffered the most.

The selected photographs also lead towards the conclusion that Serbs were greater victims and paid a higher price: in the history textbook for the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of high school we can see a photo with the caption saying that it is a demolished Orthodox church in Pakrac in 1991, and then a photo of the murder of a tank driver, with the caption: “Croatian nationalists on the streets of Split dragging a JNA soldier from a tank and murdering him, May 6, 1991.” All of this strengthens the image about the Serbian side as the victim. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks, alongside a picture of a tank in Split, there is also a photograph of a monument in Foca, but there is no clarification as to whom it was dedicated, since the caption is: “to fallen fighters 1992-1995.” There is also a photo of picturesque Srebrenica and the photo of a line of Serbian refugees from Croatia on a highway, thus, once again, acquiring “balance.”

When discussing the perpetrators of crimes, textbooks claim that they were members of paramilitary formations: “different newly formed armies and paramilitary formations were gradually joining the war. Fighting against the JNA or helping it, they committed atrocious crimes. The JNA itself, as the federal army, in search of the lost meaning of its existence and its state, most often during liberations of its own barracks and soldiers, contributed to the destruction of many cities and to the suffering of many civilians living in them.” Here we are faced with several problems: it is unclear how the JNA returned into the focus of the story, since only a few sentences ago, it left the republics following

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48 Suzana Rajić et al, *Istorija za 8. razred*, p. 191.



international recognitions of new states. It was not mentioned that it returned to those republics, so this remains a riddle. Its presence and the search for the “lost meaning” become even less understandable if we imagine how, while liberating barracks, it destroyed cities!

This manner of writing about the wars in the 1990s, although cleaned up and pacified in comparison to the language used in textbooks published during the 1990s, proves in a disturbing way the thesis about continuity between “the two Serbias” – the one before, and the one after 2000. The authors believed that it was their duty to hide data about the beginning and the course of wars in former Yugoslavia, but also to unequivocally adhere to the interpretation which led to the dissolution of the common state when explaining the course of events in the SFRY. By establishing continuity from the Brioni Plenum to the secession of Slovenia and Croatia, the finger was clearly pointed at the guilty party, while our own side was pardoned from any responsibility. Serbs once again turned to be the victims, and historic injustice once again remained the key explanation of events. This unequivocally points to the continuity of such a line of thought and to solidarity with those who led Serbia into those wars, since by hiding data, those who committed crimes are being protected. In this way, history textbooks once again proved that they are one of the most sensitive indicators of the current situation, that they include the sublimated message the authorities are sending to schoolchildren, as their interpretation of the world. It is expected that the children will carry such an interpretation into their future, thus defining their own habitus. This would mean that the abovementioned interpretation of the wars in the 1990s will be transposed, through the educational system, as the future attitude towards them. And thus the title of this article: explosive device with a delayed effect.





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