

The challenges on the way from socialism to nation-states: the perspective from the political left

Jelena Đureinović

Abstract:

This edited volume aims to cover a wide range of topics related to Yugoslavia and its successor states. The core themes are the historical analysis of the social conditions and the contradictions of the (post-) Yugoslav society. The main focus in this analysis are the Yugoslav Partisans and the war remembrance on the one hand, and the social movements and protests on the other. The book encompasses a chronological framework from the interwar period, through socialist Yugoslavia, to the current issues, providing new perspectives and posing new questions. The volume consists not only of scholarly contributions, but also assembles a diverse compilation of essays, reports, interviews, and photos.

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Tomić, Đorđe; Roland Zschächner; Mara Puškarević and Allegra Schneider (Hg.): *Mythos Partizan. (Dis-)Kontinuitäten der jugoslawischen Linken: Geschichte, Erinnerungen und Perspektiven*. Hamburg/Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2013. 440 S., Paperback, 24.00 Euro. ISBN: 978-3-89771-824-1

This volume is the final product of the project "Mythos Partizan: Partisan_innen im (post-)jugoslawischen Raum" by Hans Böckler foundation scholars, which included an excursion to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. The volume thus consists not only of scholarly contributions, but includes photos and interviews gathered during the excursion. The authors explain that the volume is dedicated to the history of Yugoslavia and especially to the (dis)continuities of the Yugoslav political left. At the same time, according to the editors, the book represents a testimony of the political left itself, including leftist actors and scholars (p.8). The book is structured into four sections. The first provides a background with history of Yugoslavia and its left wing movements from the 19th century to the Second World War. The Second World War in Yugoslavia is the main theme of the second chapter with two theoretical contributions and an interview with two Partisan veterans. The third chapter, named "Mythos Partizan", is closely related to the previous and deals with remembrance on the war in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav space. The final chapter encompasses a wide range of topics related to different forms of opposition and protest in socialist Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav societies, such as the organized left wing, queer, and workers' movements, or the discrimination of Roma.

The interviews are visually separated from the rest of the content with a grey background, but still add personal perspectives to the volume. The photos, distributed throughout the volume, are a story in their own right. Besides the landscapes and city streets, they guide the reader through the region's past, showing monumental memorials from the Yugoslav period, bullet holes on the building in Mostar or ruins from the 1999 bombing in Belgrade, all in all as testimonies of a more recent past. They also reflect problematic memory in the region, such as the Partisan cemetery in Mostar covered with garbage and Ustasha graffiti, concentration camp Topovske Šupe hidden behind the overgrown grass, or the symbolic holes in a sign showing the Yugoslav slogan *Smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu* (Death to fascism, freedom to the people).

The volume covers a very wide time frame from the interwar period to the present and engages with diverse topics. The title for such a volume can hardly encompass all its aspects. In this

case it reveals partly what the topics are, but it remains unclear what readers should expect from the book. That said, the volume's outline solves the issue by meaningfully structuring the contributions in clear thematic sections.

Included in the chapter, which is dedicated to the remembrance of the Second World War, Olivera Milosavljević's contribution investigates the various aspects of historical revisionism in Serbia, defining its nature and main goals. Besides legitimacy, construction of national history and politics of identity-building are at the centre of the reevaluation. Milosavljević discusses the problem of the turn in reevaluation of antifascism and collaboration, claiming that the separation from Yugoslavia does not tackle the Yugoslav system, but the Second World War and the Partisans. They provided sources of legitimacy for the regime, which is why they are replaced in a quest for new national heroes, whose collaboration is overseen (p. 226-227). The reevaluation implies greater issues related to the 1990s wars, which Milosavljević shows on the example of the Chetniks. She argues that the rehabilitation of their ideology from the distant past serves only as a preparation for rehabilitating the same ideology from the recent past – even more so since their ideology from the Second World War is the same used to fight the 1990s wars (p. 226-227). Though not the main topic of this contribution, there remains a need for more detailed elaboration on this aspect of Serbian memory politics, which works on reevaluation and overcoming the more distant past. In focusing on the Second World War, Serbian memory politics neglects the time of Milošević's rule, although there is urgent need of dealing with this past.

While Milosavljević's article gives a general overview, Mara Puškarević's contribution places it in the context of Serbian history textbooks. She focuses on three main subjects in her analysis: Milan Nedić, Dragoljub Mihailović, and the resistance, which represent a good choice since they are the central themes of the Second World War in Serbia. Representations of the war in Serbian history textbooks have been a subject of scholarly interest in recent years, most thoroughly analysed by Dubravka Stojanović in a number of publications. Nevertheless, this article represents a valuable contribution not only by analysing 2008 and 2010 books, while Stojanović engaged with 2002 and 2006 editions, but also because it provides a new perspective. She looks at the problem of the nationalization of resistance and confronts the textbook representations of Nedić with the crimes and responsibility of the Holocaust. Though she defines the 1988 textbook as a source for comparative analysis, it is not cited further in the article. Nevertheless, Puškarević fulfills her research goal of confronting the post-Milošević textbooks with Yugoslav narratives.

What are the other challenges of the post-Yugoslav societies? This question is partly addressed in the last chapter. The topic of the study by Moser, Tomić and Zschächner are the queer movements and their discrimination as "traitors of the nation", a problem mainly overlooked in scholarship on former Yugoslavia. The paper provides history of these movements and a theoretical framework of the term 'queer', placing it in the post-Yugoslav context. Furthermore, it deals with homophobia, clearly separating post-Yugoslav countries from the similar tendencies in other states, the wars in the nineties and their consequences further

complicating it. With a case study of Queer Belgrade collective and Belgrade Pride, the article is an excellent source for understanding this important issue. Schneider's personal account of the visit to concentration camp Topovske Šupe, the discrimination of Roma and their isolation in contemporary Serbia serves the similar purpose of unveiling important problems in the region.

This edited volume sheds light on many topics, encompassing a framework from the interwar period to the present day, which makes it a contribution to the study of the region that is worth reading. By using different forms of representation, such as photos, interviews, scholarly articles, and essays, the volume brings together authors from Germany and former Yugoslavia, and offers a very dynamic and truly valuable perspective. It is relevant because of its attempt to grasp important issues in the contemporary post-Yugoslav space. At the same time it provides the historical context, which makes it best suited not only for those who already engage with Yugoslavia and its successor states, but also for those who are not familiar with the region at all.