

COLD WAR BELGRADE: PARALLEL REALITIES AND ILLUSION OF POLARIZATION*

Original scientific paper

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Abstract: Disappearance of great European continental empires during the WWI left Eastern Europe in a state that soon proved to be only contemporary. National and social revolutions disturbed seemingly tranquil order and opened new questions that gradually turned discontents and impatience into totalitarian ideologies and movements. Eastern Europe inherited weak institutions, remnants of feudalism and rural poverty, nationalisms, clerical influences and deficiency in modern urban development (Aldcroft 2006, 3–16). After the WWI Eastern Europe became probably the biggest victim of rising totalitarianism, for it used empty political, social and ideological space that appeared on the ruins of outdated legitimist order. The rise of totalitarianism was so powerful that its power was divided to both belligerent sides during WW II. Allies victory over the Axis therefore wasn't historical defeat of totalitarianism, neither general success of democracy.

Key Words: Cold war, Belgrade, Eastern Europe, totalitarianism

EASTERN EUROPE PAID THE PRICE THAT can't be explained solely by its unfavorable conjuncture. The communism ran down Eastern Europe in a fury of the WW II. That process did not occur solely due to weakness of pre-war democracies and Allies priorities: communism became one of direct historical legacies of nazism. In half a century that followed, Eastern Europe paid the price defined by international relations from pre-war times, and those established during war between the Allies and the Axis. Czechoslovakia, the most democratic of pre-war Eastern Europe countries, was occupied by Germany

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in 1938. That's where sovietization met most resistance, until beginning of 1948, than Soviet tanks rolled into Prague in 1968. The communism finally went down in the Velvet revolution of 1989, while nationalism, also totalitarian in origin, helped its disintegration.

Yugoslavia, together with Czechoslovakia, belonged to democratic, West-oriented European states. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and USSR disintegrated after the fall of communism. Actually, communism went down only in Czechoslovakia. In Yugoslavia and Soviet Union the communism transformed into nationalism that relied on same power leverage, so civilian institutions could not rule them at all times and in each segment.

Anyway, cold war position of Yugoslavia had much in common with Finland, left by Allies to slowly and patiently find its way through last permeable creases of the Iron curtain. Yugoslavia, as well as Finland, was also a part of a regional system. Historical, economic and political ties with German sphere of influence and Italy, during expansion of fascism and nazism caused in Yugoslavia during 1930s confusion that turned into disarray fuelled by national clashes and under influence of clericalism and communism. Finally, it resembled complex ethnic systems of USA and USSR. Federalist aspirations denoted certain democratic tendencies, although their essence made temporary or permanent blocking of particular nationalist issues and some assimilation attempts were made, and in multicultural reality that reminded emerging process of American nation. Centralism, military and police pressures and peripheral extremisms were some of characteristics that implied direct soviet exemplar.

Yugoslavia was attempt to accomplish a complex state concept that envisaged emergence of state-nation. In that political process different influences entwined, and they included international agreements that ended WW I. Establishing unique national body of Southern Slavs was, on one side, excuse for dominance of Serbian army that began its political agenda by assassination of 1903, that brought Karađorđević dynasty and radical nationalist forces back to power. Resistance to unitarism went beyond Yugoslav borders. Yugoslav idea preceded emergence of Yugoslav state, and survived its disappearance in 1991.

Both Yugoslavias (1918–1941, 1945–1991) were unsuccessful states. The first Yugoslavia disappeared under Axis occupation. The second one disintegrated in internal conflicts, effectively historical break of Serbs and Croats, its integrative factors. Yugoslavia was not the only example of national disputes and minority issues. Although until 1941 it tried democratic transformations both in foreign policy orientation and in an effort to ease national tensions (establishment of Governate of Croatia in 1939, distinguished national entities). Anyway, democratic tendencies in foreign policy purported disagreements with Italy and Germany, and those disagreements did not fit Yugoslav interests, so convergence towards Axis

was felt in both Serbian and Croatian politics, otherwise not prone to compromising. Dictatorial and totalitarian tendencies, clericalism and nationalism possessed irresistible pull. It came as no coincidence that Yugoslavia was torn apart after quick capitulation of the same army that in western provinces was seen as a tool of centralist enforcement by Belgrade.

Specificity of Cold War Belgrade reflected specificity of Yugoslavia in post-war international relations, but also its internal metamorphosis. Belgrade was passive in the years that followed Nazi occupation. Nazi regime left even holocaust to local collaborationists. To explain such phenomena requires deeper research and reflection that experienced so far. At the same time, resistance to fascist Italy and Nazi Germany and quislings took place also in western provinces. German repressive measures made communist partisans little desirable already by the end of 1941. Communist met resistance when tried to turn national conflicts into context of social revolution. That idea was acceptable in provinces with longer feudal and, simultaneously, working tradition, the ones that before Yugoslav tradition were under Habsburg, or not long ago, under Ottoman rule. USA and Great Britain during 1943 accepted communist partisans as a side accepting no compromise and therefore as desired partner for final operations considered to ensue. Inclusion of communist partisans into international agreements on future Yugoslavia and Soviet intervention in Eastern Yugoslavia in 1944 contributed towards military and ideological mobilization of that, until then not very numerous, movement (Wilson 1978, 77–78; Swain 1992, 641–663).

Belgrade became a site of intensive social and ideological engineering. It was occupied twice, in 1941 and 1944, by the forces that considered it its legitimate booty. Exuberance because of liberation quickly retreated due to trauma of facing nature of new regime and its barbarian social basis. Just few direct testimonies remained on those traumas. Belgrade became military-police camp and corrective ideological center. By its ruthlessness, violence and primitiveness, new administration was constantly reminding that new political structure is pretty much based on new social structure. Blindsided and weak, citizen elite quickly reorganized to serve order that in time repressive measures turned towards its own people, either for they strayed or were only suspicious. Dissidents in later years were sometimes linked to defeated citizen class, and that mimicry contributed to moral degradation.

Belgrade found itself not only in a complex tight corner of the Cold war. Until the end of 20th century, Belgrade remained in epicenter of Yugoslav national issue. National divisions only partially coincided with Cold war paradigm that revealed affinities of western republics towards German sphere, Serbia and Montenegro towards Soviet Union, and Moslem communities towards Turkey and the Third world. Such a scheme would be, anyway, pretty coarse. Yugoslav project

suffered consequences of all post imperial traumas burdening Eastern Europe after 1918. Yugoslavia was conceptualized as multinational collectivity, but supranational identity in assimilation process never became reality, not even as a lasting political idea. Serbian community was the most numerous, but not absolute majority. Dissatisfaction could be felt also on Serbian side for vague accomplishment of national interest after both world wars. All other minorities were prone to object Serbs their domination, conducted primarily through Yugoslav army, while all the institutions of central government were situated in Belgrade. Identity of Belgrade, capital of both Serbia and Yugoslavia, was halved in simultaneous reality of two concepts, national and integrative one. Although multiethnic city with Serbian character pronounced only after national revolution 1804–1815, Belgrade in a way took over curse of Yugoslav concept.

Belgrade almost literally depicted ethnic structure of Yugoslavia, in both national and religious sense the most complex European state of mid-size. Open, repressed and hidden clashes were its permanent weakness. Serbo-Croatian clashes paralyzed entity of the union and made it vulnerable to foreign interests. Belgrade also depicted unfavorable demographic image of Serbia itself. Loss of lives and demographic deficit of WWI is estimated at almost one third of pre-war population. Already undeveloped economic capacities were almost totally destroyed (Gripp 1960, 934–949; Bertsch 1977, 88–99).

As relatively small environment, Belgrade did not allow clear separation between authorities and society, winners and losers, citizens and provincials, indigenous people and newcomers. Totalitarian order did not result from direct pressure of Soviet troupes that actually just passed through Serbia and Yugoslavia, and that order within half a decade lost some of its original rigidity. In first post-war years sovietization was happening faster than in other Eastern European regimes. Citizen resistance was negligible, as was the one in the years of nazi occupation. Loss of lives, measured in hundreds, was evaded in majority of Serbian towns. Some Belgrade citizens considered new authorities liberatory, some as new occupation forces, but even those divisions were soon relativized. The first wave of repression ran out of steam within years, and in 1948 it focused on rigid Stalinists, real ones, suspicious or just fictitious. And although order was based on Stalinist dogma, overturn was sudden and unexpected (Clissold 1975).

Actually, the whole establishment revealed tendency to belong to citizenry. In relatively small Belgrade society it wasn't possible to make strict lines of social demarcation. That assimilation was contributed by absence of direct pressure by Soviet troupes. Deservedly in certain aspects, new totalitarian order could be considered as liberatory. Citizen amnesia, coming out of characteristic hypocrisy, helped quick oblivion.

First post-war years were passing in a trauma of collaboration. Facing collaboration burdened, with no exceptions, the whole of Europe that underwent nazi or fascist occupation. In ethic dilemmas that tore apart both Cold war Europe and the one that replaced it, important points of that issue were revealed, but clear were tendencies to relativize crimes over collaborationists, and to relativize significance of collaboration with Soviets and new communist regimes.

Collaborationist relations with nazi and fascist invaders and Soviet liberators in a way became paradigm of relations towards new communist authorities. Pre-war Belgrade intellectual circles also made certain contacts with nazism, especially its political-orthodox derivatives – culmination was renewal of St. Sava cult, or with communism. Nazi ideas reached intellectual and clerical circles under influence of Russian emigration, and its emphatic anti-Western, anti-Semite and anti-democracy dogmas. Onslaught of totalitarian ideologies and anti-Semitism contributed towards revival of Russian myth, although it wasn't much ideologically coherent.

Belgrade became scene of ideological and values confusion. Belgrade citizenry could be considered simultaneously historical loser and winner in an overturn whose hidden logic directed it towards gradual interest-based gathering, despite real or imagined political affiliation. Belgrade society enjoyed certain privileges. Belgrade remained Yugoslav capital, and although Yugoslavia turned into federation, certain birocracy centralism was still felt. Not only Yugoslav administration was still concentrated in Belgrade, Belgrade was at the receiving end of huge migration processes from passive western provinces with emphatic frontier or border mentality. Simultaneously it became a center of concentrated military-police power. Political pacification that, despite occasional jolts, characterized 1950s, brought Belgrade temporary stabilization that followed „Third way” of official politics. Meandering along this road didn't bring significant derangements. By support of Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 and establishing of, seemingly neutral, Non-aligned movement in 1961, Yugoslavia stepped into global politics, but on anti-democracy side, cooperating with totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Opening of borders brought immediate economic emigration towards Western and Northern Europe, and that process can be understood in a light of establishing strategic balance in ever more complex Cold war conjuncture.

While armed engagement and resistance took place at ideological extremes, and mass crimes and holocaust at the margins of general disability and moral indisposition, neutrality of Belgrade society during WW II adopted to the frame of social-political consensus on mutual interest. From the depths of regime dissident voices could be heard, but they more denoted abnormalities within ranks of new invaders, than genuine discontentedness.

Democratization that was felt until beginning of 1950s reflected facing reality. Second Yugoslavia was taken by economic collapse. Economic degradation

was more a result of accelerated sovietization than of the war. Change of course implied changed position in international relations. But that „middle” or „third” way was imposed. Anti-Western, anti-American, anti-capitalist, „anti-imperialist” rhetoric remained present in high politics, in intellectual circles, among clergy, workers and students, with no apparent differences. Yugoslavia developed its unique position towards communism. Consensus on communism „with human face” FIGURE kept hidden hypocrisy towards Eastern Europe. That value crisis hid roots of nationalism that destroyed not only Yugoslav union, but also its most important human, moral and cultural values, leaving behind desolation even where its destruction had no direct effects.

After WW II Belgrade was simultaneously capital of federalized Yugoslavia and of federal unit of Serbia. Yugoslavia, despite its federal organization that in time converged towards confederation, remained centralized so all important common institutions were concentrated in Belgrade. Belgrade was conceptualized as a city-barracks, stronghold of the regime actively or passively defended by settled army and police members, a central point of political violence whose deep historical and social essence hid far behind wars and national clashes (Wilmer 2002, 8–20).

Identity of Cold war Belgrade was determined by unique long-term historical structure it belonged to. Deficiency of urban development is one of possible explanations for Southeast Europe’s falling behind in modern history. Balkans cities were small, poor and neglected. They were almost temporary, side borders of small economically active ethnic communities, often considered foreign or hostile by surrounding rural population. They entered industrial revolution era as conglomerates without professional, technological or scientific resources that had to be invested into new economic, cultural or social values. During Turkish reign the Balkans lagged behind at the margin of pre-modern European civilization, at the periphery of peripheries, isolated from influences of Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and Rationalism. Nationalism and colonial imperialism also contributed to neglect of urban development in 19th century. Political will, at the beginnings of parliamentarism and democratization, also addressed prejudices and backwardness of archaic agrarian world that became object of manipulations. Citizenry had a lot of difficulties to earn space in a cleft between elites and wide agrarian base of authoritarian power and autarchic economy. Preservation of traditional mentality contributed towards survival of patriarchal, paternalistic and authoritarian political model. The Islam and eastern orthodoxy during 19th and 20th century revealed certain similarities, after centuries of coexistence, in refusing individualism, capitalism and working ethics. First national writers that belonged to Balkans literary realism revealed reality of local urban civilization in dark hues

of neglected and ignored communities, depicting dark side of human nature immersed in historical heritage and curse of ignorance and poverty.

The Balkans belonged to Habsburg periphery, with feudalism and clericalism relicts sown, including eastern-orthodox clericalism. Slavic nations in Habsburg monarchy did not feel compelled to conform in every way to a notably German state. Relations became more complex after Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 when Hungary became equal partner to Austria, but its potentials for cultural assimilation were shadowed by national relations, more harsh in a contrast to Slavic environment.

Trauma of national revolutions was deeply etched into structure of new state creations. Enterprising strata in Balkans were foreigners, or considered as such, Italians, Dubrovnikans, Jews, Greeks, various Germans. Landlords were Muslims or Hungarians, but feudal history after 1945 had to be definitely closed. Anyway, the remnants of feudal structure, both in economy and mentality, was still felt. Europe's periphery regions at the beginning of 20th century were mostly populated by agrarian communities, with income reaching just a half of that in developed European provinces. In comparison to poor Southern Europe, at the beginning of 20th century in the Balkans between 70 and 80% of population lived in villages, with very low productivity and high rate of illiteracy. During 20th century these differences enlarged further, demographic potentials of rural communities remained weak and poorly structured. Post-feudal rural cultures and mentalities undermined already weak bases of urban civilization. Cities sometimes were identified with foreign cores of a nation and a state (Bartlett 2008, 8–20).

And while in 19th and 20th century in the Balkans a process of ethnic consolidation took place, primarily through dislodging and moving of rural population and citizens of towns, urban structure remained a challenge for that historical tendency. Cities remained life space that allowed more tolerance, or a mimicry. Belgrade, though, developed in markedly agrarian surrounding, and that remained its contrast, sometimes even antithesis.

Poor achievements of urbanization were also related to modest industrial development. Balkan economies remained agrarian and consumer, extremely sensitive to external shocks, tied to a state and privileged groups and monopolists, instead of business oriented urban society. Low standard and poor conditions of living encouraged survival of traditional strata of economic and social power. Under such circumstances, a communist nomenclature appeared that followed logic of inherited social relations.

Socialist utopia of planned industrialization was another factor that shaped Cold war Belgrade. Traditional economic structure was the basis of economic culture, and that one remained at low level of barter of raw materials and cheap commodities. During second half of 20th century a lot was invested into industri-

alization that enabled production of uncompetitive commodities of low quality, protected by state regulation, or exported to less choosy East Europe markets. All parameters of urban development remained therefore very adverse: infrastructure, public transport, social services, culture and education. Cities were managed by incompetent officials, prone to self-will and corruption.

The first mayor of communist Belgrade was Mihailo Stolarić, „Stolar“, on behalf of national-liberation city council between 1944 and 1947. The president of the Council from 1947 to 1951 was Ninko Petrović, a member of executive council of Left agricultural party. Đurica Jojkić, born in the village Turija close to Srbobran, was presiding in two mandates between 1951 and 1961. In the meantime, from 1955 to 1957, mayor was Miloš Minić, born in Preljina near Čačak. He is better known as later ministry of foreign affairs and, previously, attorney general of Serbia and important person in Belgrade proceedings against general Dragoljub Mihajlović, sentenced on July 15, 1946 to death by firing squad, permanent loss of political and citizen rights and dispossession of all property. The fifth mayor of Belgrade was Milijan Neoričić, from 1961 to 1965, who finished grammar school in Užice. Branko Pešić, the president of Assembly of city of Belgrade in an important period of big construction exploits and mass immigration, 1965–1974, was a boxer, finished grammar school and Political high school „Đura Đaković“. By construction of a highway and Mostar and Autokomanda loops, the whole residential zone and parts of town that used to belong to wider center were turned into ghettos, traffic became prone to frequent collapses. One of members of his cabinet was Slobodan Milošević, future culprit of violent disintegration of Yugoslavia.

With such leadership that ruled masses of newcomers from villages, peasants, migrants and homeless, Belgrade became object of urbanistic and architectural failures, failed or robbed investments, a conglomerate of lost human destinies, a cacophony of unordered rights and interests. That's why consequent generations of newcomers, although born in Belgrade, felt the capital as something distant and strange. From city authorities they could take over same model of regard and behavior, especially towards public spaces, common property and other citizens.

Gradual abandoning of rigid politics that was felt after 1950 enabled citizenry to reestablish its social influence. Anyway, citizenry could establish balance to social masses and violent elite only through full collaboration. Regime also needed that collaboration to achieve quick industrialization, to eradicate illiteracy and build infrastructure. In Belgrade, traditional role in commerce, industry and finances partly belonged to „foreigners“. But new „foreigners“ that populated Belgrade did not bring working and business experience, although it is considered that new social mobility, in special circumstances after WW II, became one of initiators of urban development. In other words, Belgrade in Cold war epoch, despite very pronounced dynamics of changes, revealed deficit of European and modernization

potentials. National traumas and antidemocratic character of both first and second Yugoslav union obstructed, at the same time, integration of Belgrade into modern Western Europe culture, including political culture. That culture was guideline for all progressive nations east of Berlin wall.

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