

DIVIDED MODERNITIES

Citizenship, Agency and Public Spaces in a Central Serbian Town

Tanja Petrović

**Institute of Culture and Memory Studies, Research Centre
of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana**

The article addresses the ways in which public spaces have been reconfigured since the end of socialism in Jagodina, a medium-sized industrial town in central Serbia. Unlike the majority of provincial towns, Jagodina experienced extensive building over the last decade. It is viewed as a success-story, and as a rare Serbian provincial town which has managed to develop economically in spite of the challenging economic and political circumstances in the country. This extensive building significantly influenced the nature of public space in the town, producing conflicting imaginations of modernity, which play an important role in shaping citizenship, moralities and the political subjectivities of people inhabiting an urban space.

Keywords: public space, modernity, morality, citizenship, Jagodina

Introduction: Desire and the City

Modern cities may be described as laboratories of neoliberalism: according to David Harvey, “the results of (...) increasing polarization in the distribution of wealth and power are indelibly etched into the spatial forms of our cities” (Harvey 2012: 15). Cities are increasingly becoming sites of struggle for space, for the right to accommodation, and spaces of “fortified fragments, of gated communities and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance” (ibid.). Gentrification, creative destruction (Harvey 2007), resettlement and the stripping of ownership of vulnerable segments of the population (or, in the words of Belgrade’s current mayor Siniša Mali “clarifying ownership relations”) – these are all processes which are changing maps of cities all over the world.

These described processes, however, mainly concern metropolises, cities seen as having a great potential for both investments and exploitation. The category of the desirable (linked to a part of the city, or a specific location ...) is of key importance for these processes. Bearing this in mind, the struggle for the right to the city (Harvey 2012) actually emerges as a conflict between the desires of two opposed groups – the investors, capital, the state, elites – for possessing and managing the surplus products on the one hand, and the city’s inhabitants, on the other. Citizens’ desires are, according to the urban sociologist Robert Park, at the very heart of the idea of the city: the city is “man’s most consistent and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire” (Park 1967: 3). The paradox lies in the fact that today, citizens’ desire is difficult or impossible to separate from the desires of investors, capital, the state and the elites: the city desired by citizens’ must at the same time be desirable for investments and desired by the capital, as the alternative is a city dying out with no prospects.¹

¹ This mutual dependence is an important symptom of the “neoliberal condition”. This symptom points to the impossibility of absolute and unambiguous distancing and resistance in neoliberalism: most of us as citizens are against gentrification, the resettle-

The alternative to the city desired by economic capital is a city that no one desires; a city with no future, a city in which time has stopped. The reality of such a city is best described by Kim Fortun's (2012) term *late industrialism*: a city in which the industrial infrastructure has been destroyed, with ruins, devastated large industrial areas, pollution, health risks and diseases, a lack of prospects... Most of the middle-sized, provincial towns in post-socialist Serbia fit this description. Towns like Leskovac, Bor, Zaječar, Kuršumlija, Valjevo, Zrenjanin, and many others, offer a glimpse into transition and its consequences.² Serbia's highly centralized demography and economy further contribute to the severity of the consequences of transition: Belgrade is the largest city, several times bigger than the next two largest cities in the country, Niš and Novi Sad. According to the 2011 census, there were 1,344,844 inhabitants in Belgrade, 277,522 in Novi Sad and 187,544 in Niš (Census 2011). The economic disparity between Belgrade and the rest of Serbia is also stark, and particularly visible when considering the country's southeast, where, according to Serbian National Television, the monthly income is below the country's average (ca. 370 Euros) by up to 12,000 Serbian Dinars (equivalent of ca. 100 Euros), and the economic potential of the region is 80% weaker than that of Belgrade.³ This leaves citizens in "the provinces" (*u unutrašnjosti*) with radically limited horizons of choice. They are forced to struggle with poverty and unemployment or, in the best case scenario, to work in newly built factories owned by foreign investors, working for small wages and for more hours a day than the law permits, and often off the books. They are deprived of basic rights, dignity and self-esteem, and reduced to an amorphous, silent and helpless workforce, exposed to humiliation and health risks. Two recent examples clearly illustrate such poor treatment and conditions: in the factory belonging to the Korean corporation YURA in Leskovac, workers are not allowed to go to the toilet during working hours and they are advised to wear diapers. In Obrenovac, a town south of Belgrade, representatives of a foreign investor checked citizens' health records, as they would prefer not to invest in an area where the potential employees are of poor health.

All of this sheds light on the importance of medium-sized and small towns as sites of ideological, spatial and political struggle. They usually remain outside the scope of discussions relating to the radical restructuring of urban space in various parts of the globe, but they are indispensable for understanding the scope, reach and nature of ongoing spatial, ideological and political transformations. A focus on processes outside of metropolitan centers offers insights of great theoretical and methodological importance. This is particularly true in post-socialist societies such as the former Yugoslav societies, which have been exposed to "the twenty-year-old experiment in political, social and economic engineering known as transition" (Štiks and Horvat 2015: 4).⁴

ment of the poor from areas of interest to investors and against capital dictating the ordering of urban space, but simultaneously, we would not like to live in an urban space in which capital is totally disinterested.

² For studies into the disastrous dimensions of the late industrial condition in towns in Serbia, other former Yugoslav states, and other post-socialist states see: Berge 2012; Jovanović 2016b; Matošević and Bačac 2015; Pelkmans 2013; Petrović and Vukelić 2013; Potkonjak and Škokić 2013.

³ <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Društvo/2036770/Srpske+opštine,+što+južnije++plate+niže.html>, 15 September 2015 (accessed 1. 4. 2016).

⁴ There is a growing body of research that focuses on middle and small scale towns in the former Yugoslavia that has already led to important insights and made interventions in the broader debate on transformations of urban spaces and their implications: Deana Jovanović's research on Bor (Jovanović 2013, 2016a, 2016b), Ivan Rajković's research on Kragujevac (Rajković 2015a, 2015b), Srđan Mandić's research on Senjski Rudnik, Valter Cvijić's research on Zrenjanin, Sanja Potkonjak's and Tea Škokić's research on Sisak (Potkonjak and Škokić 2013), etc.



Figures 1 and 2: Urban details from Leskovac and Čuprija. Photos taken by the author, in April 2014 (figure 1) and July 2013 (figure 2).

A Place Where Serbia Is Developing the Most Rapidly

Jagodina, a town in Central Serbia with some 37,000 inhabitants, appears to contradict the above described pattern, despite its provincial position, its size, and despite the fact that its urban fabric was defined by rapid industrialization in the second half of the twentieth century, with subsequent deindustrialization since the end of socialism. In contrast to the majority of medium-sized industrial towns in Serbia, which can be characterized in terms of moribund industry and the decay of urban materiality and infrastructure, an intense amount of construction has been taking place in Jagodina over the last decade, with the mushrooming of new residential, commercial and industrial objects. Jagodina is considered to be “a Serbian miracle”: an exception to the grim reality, ubiquitous poverty, and lack of prospects that define Serbian society in the early twenty-first century. Large billboards describing Jagodina as “A place where Serbia is developing the most rapidly” have been placed all over the town. Newly built residential complexes, factories, and a shopping mall supposedly confirm that rapid development.



Figure 3: Billboard with the caption “The place where Serbia is developing the most rapidly”. Photo by the author, February 2016.

The town authorities are particularly proud of its thriving tourist capacities: including the Aquapark – the first entertainment facility of that kind in Serbia, the Zoo Park, the Museum of Wax Figures, a newly built hotel and the shopping mall Vivo. They advertise Jagodina as being “the new Serbian brand”, “the town of the future” and as a “Europe in miniature”. A pre-election flyer for “United Serbia”, a political party led by the long term mayor and current president of the City council Dragan Marković Palma, states that “until 2004,⁵ Jagodina was only a small town in central Serbia. In eight years, we have changed everything but the name⁶ – and made Jagodina a new Serbian brand, a leading tourist, industrial, and university center, and a town of the future”.

My research on Jagodina is longitudinal, spanning a period of more than ten years, and cannot be divorced from the fact it is the town in which I was born and lived in to the age of nineteen and to which I am still connected in a manifold number of ways. For this reason, many of my relatives, friends and acquaintances feature as interviewees. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Jagodina Cable Factory over several intervals between 2004 and 2012 (I discuss workers’ narratives and memories in detail in Petrović 2010). For the purpose of this article, I conducted several interviews in October 2014 and spring 2015. This text is also based on participant observation, the discourse analysis of newspaper articles and political programs, as well as on digital ethnography of several web sites and social media.

Following Robert Park, David Harvey argues that “the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold”. The right to the city, according to Harvey “is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart’s desire” (Harvey 2012: 4). Taking Harvey’s claim seriously, this article considers several questions, such as: (i) How does the exceptional position of Jagodina, and the vision of a new modernity forcibly promoted by the political elite and the city authorities, relate to the needs and visions of Jagodina’s inhabitants? (ii) What is the relationship between the radical restructuring of urban space in Jagodina and the political subjectivities of its citizens? (iii) What is the relationship between the built, material reality of the town and its inhabitants’ social experiences, and sense of citizenship, agency, and belonging?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I turn to the concept of the *divided city*, which highlights the logic of organization of urban space. Divided cities the world over are divided in several different ways. The dividing line may be physically present and even impermeable, as in the case of cities divided by state borders, or barriers such as check points or walls that control or prevent movement from one part of the city to the other. The lines of division may also be less visible, but unquestionably present. They are either clearly delineable (as is the case with rivers dividing cities into two parts according to the population’s religion or ethnicity, as in the case of Mostar or Skopje), or abstract yet well known, as is the case with dividing lines drawn through neighborhoods (e.g. in Sarajevo’s neighborhood Dobrinja as discussed by Jansen 2015). These abstract divisions become replicated in divided schools, kindergartens and other institutions and spaces of everyday life (see Madacki and Karamehić 2012).

In addition to divisions based on ethnic or religious differences, or made by state borders running through cities, today’s divided cities are divided along class lines which closely relate

⁵ The year when Mr Marković and his party came to power in Jagodina.

⁶ The name of the town was Svetozarevo between 1946 and 1992. After WWII, the town of Jagodina was renamed Svetozarevo after Svetozar Marković (1846–1875), the nineteenth-century founder of Serbian socialism. In 1992, the original name, Jagodina, was reinstated.

to education and income. They reveal the “troubling new geographies of the class divided city and metropolis” in the West (Florida 2014; see also Häussermann and Kapphan 2005).

The territory of the former Yugoslavia became well known for cities divided along ethnic lines in the aftermath of the violent conflicts that followed the country’s dissolution. These post-Yugoslav divisions and the emergence of divided cities such as Mostar, Vukovar, Kosovska Mitrovica and so forth, are processes which have occurred alongside the dismantling of walls and borders in Europe in the context of end of socialism and the promotion of further EU integration. In addition, the period usually labeled as the “transition” or “post-socialist transformation” has entailed the radical ideological reorganization of urban spaces, most visibly through changing street and square names, coupled with the removal of monuments and the erection of new ones. In this process, the Yugoslav, socialist and antifascist legacies were either erased or strongly marginalized, while many urban public spaces went through a process of ethnicization / nationalization in which various forms of invented traditions played a prominent role (see Radović 2013 for Belgrade; Markovina 2014 for Mostar and Split). Alongside these ideological restructurings, economically driven processes have taken place which have altered urban spaces across the former Yugoslavia. The latter have increasingly become a subject of interest for both activists and scholars,⁷ not only in relation to large and central cities, but also as concerns small scale, provincial towns. The divisions in which these transformations of urban spaces result are closely related to conflicting modes of imagining modernity, normality, and morality.

Jagodina as a Divided City

With a rather homogenous population structure (at the 2011 census, more than 95% of inhabitants declared themselves as Serbs)⁸ and its position in central Serbia, relatively far away from state borders, the town of Jagodina does not immediately bring to mind the notion of a divided city, but this concept still appears to be very appropriate to use when discussing the organization of urban space in this town, because the imagination of a new, post-2004 modernity, most visible in the extensive amount of construction taking place, is made possible only through the excessive erasure and ignoring of another modernity, that of the socialist period which was marked by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the town. The urban image of Svetozarevo in the second half of the twentieth century was defined by the presence of the Cable Factory, which was the biggest project encompassed in the first five-year plan in Socialist Yugoslavia.⁹ According to a booklet commemorating the factory’s tenth anniversary, the Cable Factory not only resulted in a regional population increase, but also contributed to an improvement in all aspects of life. The older Svetozarevo has been described as a settlement consisting of “undeveloped industry and a deficit of communal objects, an undeveloped network of education and health institutions, and a virtually non-existent infrastructure”. The range of cultural activities the town offered were few and rela-

⁷ See examples such as: Pulska grupa 2010; Vilenica and kuda.org 2012, etc.

⁸ See http://popis2011.stat.rs/?page_id=2162 (accessed 19. 1. 2015).

⁹ The Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia played a key role in the construction of the factory. The memorial plaque in the factory yard reads: “Thirteen thousand members of the People’s Youth from the whole Republic [of Yugoslavia], together with expert workers, engineers and technicians (...) built this factory and finished the major work on it by 29 November 1952 [the Day of the Republic]. Once again, the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia have given a gift to our people, the Communist League and Comrade Tito, in remembrance of the considerable efforts made in the building of our socialist homeland.” The inhabitants of Svetozarevo and other neighbouring places also took an active role in the construction of the factory.

tively basic: the town was home to “numerous bars and only one small cinema”. This was considered inadequate for a socialist society. The factory completely changed the image of the town – after it was built, “many communal problems were solved, and the cultural center was built, so that Svetozarevo became a modern, beautiful and pleasant town” (Fabrika 1965).

Post-socialist imagination of modernity which inheres in the idea of “the town of the future”, as engineered by the transitional political elite, and led by Dragan Marković Palma, is mutually exclusive with the town’s recent past and its architectural and infrastructural legacies. The objects and infrastructure from the socialist period have been abandoned, marginalized and ignored in the urban geography of this “new” Jagodina. While new apartment blocks are being erected in central areas, neighborhoods built during Yugoslav socialism are in very poor condition, with crumbling facades and deteriorated infrastructure. While the modern, Western style shopping center “Vivo” opened in the summer of 2014, the “Beograd” department store located in the main square lies empty and has already been out of use for several years. A new industrial zone has been built on the outskirts of the town, while the Cable Factory has been left to fall apart, having never been privatized, along with numerous other factories and industrial complexes. The Aqua Park has become one of Jagodina’s trademarks, while, at the same time, the publicly owned town swimming pool is now out of function, dilapidated and full of garbage. A brand new hotel lies next to the Aqua Park and Zoo, while the Hotel Jagodina, a classy socialist hotel from the late 1970s, has fallen into ruin and was finally closed in 2013. As such, it is now yet another empty building from the socialist times located in the town center.



Figures 4 and 5: The abandoned public swimming pool and the dusty interior of the closed Hotel Jagodina. Photos taken by the author, in February 2016 (figure 4) and October 2013 (figure 5).

The erasure and abandonment of material sites of socialist modernity results in the disruption of individual and collective biographical trajectories, making it difficult for citizens to refer to their own experience while making claims over their contemporary desires and visions of citizenship. The impossibility of incorporating the socialist experience into present-day demands and desires is a common trait found in post-socialist societies in Europe. The legitimacy of the socialist experience and memories of that experience have been undermined with help of two interpretative paradigms: the first involves understanding socialism as having been a totalitarian system, and the second entails interpreting memories of socialism as being a distorting or irrational nostalgia. Contrary to these normative assessments, the citizens describe their life and work in a socialist town as a time when they possessed much more agency than today. Their affective recollections of participating in the modernizing project may best be described using the definition provided by Dejan Kršić, who sees nostalgia as “as an enraptured gaze”, stressing that “the real object of nostalgia is not a fascinating image of a lost past, but the very gaze enraptured with that image” (Kršić 2004: 31). A fascination of this kind is present in many of the Cable Factory workers’ narratives:

When I came here, I was impressed. The factory had everything: buses from Jagodina to the factory, the train ... At the train station there was a roof over the railroad tracks. Before that, one could see covered railroad tracks only in Belgrade. (Cable Factory engineer, Jagodina)

The factory’s size was impressive. When approaching the factory, you could hear the noise it made even while crossing the bridge. The noise was so loud. (Cable Factory worker, Jagodina)

The fascination expressed here should be placed in a broader social framework of self-esteem, closely connected with a narrative of belonging to the world, and participation in a shared project of modernization and progress:

We used to have ideal working conditions and equipment – we had overalls that assured protection at work. Every six months we used to get new overalls and other equipment. Also, workers had more substantial meals than those who worked in administration. Everything was well-organized and precisely defined. I believe this same kind of organization existed in the West. (Cable Factory worker, Jagodina)

This feeling of pride in the high standards of the production process and a personal attachment to the products perhaps best expresses the desire of workers to speak not from the social margins as humiliated individuals, but as social actors capable of articulating historically and socially relevant and legitimate narratives:

We were selling cables to the Americans. The *Gorenje* industry from Slovenia also used to buy micro-cables from us. We used to export large amounts of cables to American, Russian, French, German, and Belgian markets. (Cable Factory worker, Jagodina)

This metaphor of belonging (to Europe/to the world), which is easily readable from these narratives, cannot possibly relate to the idea of Jagodina as “Europe in miniature”, as promoted by the current political actors in the town.



Figure 6: “Jagodina – Europe in Miniature”: From the municipality’s promotional material (from the author’s personal archive)

With the erasure of spaces closely attached to their memories of socialism from the urban map of Jagodina, citizens have been deprived of the chance to transform their affects and desires into legitimate social claims for social equality, inclusion and solidarity (see Buden 2012). Politically, they have been reduced to a status similar to that of children. According to Boris Buden, “Eastern Europe after 1989 resembles a landscape of historical ruins that is inhabited only by children, immature people unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another” (Buden 2015: 133). For citizens of Jagodina, it is difficult to argue for an alternative politics too, since the new, “European” modernity, as promoted by the town’s authorities, is also supported from the outside – both by revisionist discourses in which socialist experience and legacies are being dismissed as non-European, and by the ideological closure of the contemporary Serbian political landscape (Petrović 2015). In this landscape, Dragan Marković Palma’s party is considered a pro-European political force, despite the fact that it is the ideological successor to the party once led by the war criminal Željko Ražnatović Arkan (Jagodina’s Zoo includes a restaurant with the telling name “Tigar”, while the kick-boxing club is called “Palmini tigrovi”: the Tiger was a symbol used by Arkan’s military forces). After the rather undecided outcome of the parliamentary elections in Serbia in 2008, it was the *Jedinstvena Srbija* (United Serbia) party and its current leader Dragan Marković Palma who played a decisive role in the formation of a pro-European government. They declined to negotiate with the nationalist DSS (*Demokratska stranka Srbije* / Democratic Party of Serbia) party led by Vojislav Koštunica and the *Nova Srbija* Party led by Velimir Ilić, therein enabling the formation of a pro-European coalition including the “For a European Serbia” coalition (which consisted of the following political parties: Democratic Party (DS), G17 Plus, Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV) and Sandžak Democratic Party, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS) and United Serbia). This coalition secured the majority of seats in the 250-seat Serbian Parliament.¹⁰ Ambassadors to Serbia from several EU

¹⁰ Marković explained this “pro-European” move as follows: “I’m a pragmatic man and an entrepreneur, so I know that patriotism cannot be poured into a tractor. I decided on the coalition with the Democratic Party because of its determination as regards EU accession” (see <http://www.glas-javnosti.rs/clanak/glas-javnosti-12-03-2008/palma-patriotizam-se-ne-sipa-u-tractore>, 12 March 2008, accessed 1. 6. 2016).

countries regularly attend United Serbia's national conventions, as well as Palma's *slava*,¹¹ kick-boxing matches and concerts organized in his village of Končarevo near Jagodina.

The "Europeanness" of Dragan Marković Palma and his politics points to the fact that EU-led transformations in the Balkans often produce many unwanted consequences and reveal an uncanny synergy between European institutional practices and discourses, and local political elites in post-Yugoslav societies. The anthropologist Slobodan Naumović has highlighted another aspect of this problematic relationship: his research into agrarian sector transformations in Serbia shows that Europeanization in this context stands not only for rationalization and the intensification of production, but also for land grabbing and systemic legal and legitimate forms of corruption, as well as for limiting access to natural resources and agricultural land. Indeed, proclaiming the "historical victory" of large and corporate land owners became the key accomplishment of this process of Europeanization (Naumović 2013: 15). Such aspects of Europeanization leave citizens in a grim reality and suspend any chance of imagining an alternative, proactive and emancipatory politics that could be linked to the idea of Europe.

Public Space and Political Subjectivity

The sharp difference between the old and the new, between the abandoned and the newly built, creates a clear division of urban space which Jagodina's inhabitants need to navigate in their everyday lives. The erasure from Jagodina's urban map of important sites pertaining to their socialist past, and the increasing number of abandoned, dissolving buildings in the town center have significantly affected their self-perceptions, both as individuals and as political subjects. Their lives and sensibilities have been marked by the ruins among which they live (Stoler 2013b: x); these ruins and this decay shape their everyday practices and disrupt their sense of their own value and worth.¹²

As the architect and theoretician of urbanism Reinhold Martin argues, the set of ideas concentrated around notions of what is "public" and "common" are closely interrelated, and the city figures prominently in both (Martin 2014: 42). The sites of socialist modernity in Jagodina were centrally located and closely related to the urban public spaces, while the spaces relating to the newly invented modernity emerge on the outskirts of the town. The ideology on which this new modernity is based is not centered on public space as being an important embodiment of citizens' agency and anonymity.¹³

Many of the inhabitants of Jagodina find the shrinking of public space in their town both highly problematic and devastating. For the majority of my friends, who are critical of municipal urban-planning strategies, their favorite place to meet for a coffee is a small garden restaurant in front of the Cultural Center, more precisely in front of the first of its two theater

¹¹ *Slava* is a traditional Serbian family celebration of a saint considered to be the family's patron. It is celebrated annually in the house of the head of the family. It gathers family members, relatives and friends. Although this is traditionally a family-oriented, religious festivity with clearly prescribed rituals, Dragan Marković Palma celebrates his *slava* in a pompous and megalomaniacal way, with kick-box tournaments and performances by superstars such as Svetlana Ražnatović or Goran Bregović.

¹² For an insightful discussion into the relationship between ruins/debris and (political) subjectivity, see Birkenmaier and Whitfield 2011; Stoler 2013a; Schwenkel 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2015a, 2015b.

¹³ Social anonymity and bureaucratic universality are prerequisites for a non-clientelistic political society, in which citizens' rights and access to public services and resources are universal and not dependent on personal connections and social capital (Lemarchand and Legg 1972; Roniger 2004; De Sousa 2008). The statement by one of my interlocutors, a small business owner from Jagodina, indicates that there the citizens cannot rely on anonymity in public services: "Whenever I go to the municipality office to sort out some documents, these women sitting behind the counter always ask me who is backing me up."

and cinema halls. The second building in this modernist twin architectural structure has been abandoned and left to disintegrate. The vast empty space between the two halls is already the focus of a struggle for a new private building project. In front of the Cultural Center, there is a grassy area and promenade. Many of my interlocutors consider this space to be the only really public space left in the city, which citizens extensively use and where they still manage to create some sense of community. However, the town authorities did not even spare this last public space from their intervention: in the winter of 2015/2016, several new booths selling fast food, and glass-walled restaurant constructions emerged on the lawn.



Figures 7 and 8: Two Halls of the Jagodina Cultural Center. Photos by the author, February 2016.

All of these interventions in public space have been conducted without any public discussion or serious consideration of citizens' needs and desires. They are usually a result of the desires, "inspiration" and aesthetic preferences of a single man, Dragan Marković Palma. For example, in spring 2015, after he visited Dubai, the prompt decision was made to build foun-

tains in Potok, a large park and recreational area dating back to socialist times, which is now located next to the Zoo Park. The long fountain, which Marković claims to be the longest in the Balkans, resembles those he saw in Dubai, and was constructed in just two weeks.¹⁴

Troubling Moral Economies in the Public Space-less Town

A lack of agency is often stressed as a characteristic decisively shaping political subjectivities in contemporary Serbia. Jessica Greenberg (2011: 97) has shown how the inability of individuals to perceive themselves as “capable of agentive action or moral interiority” significantly influences their attitude towards the society in which they live. When comparing the socialist past with the present, many Serbian citizens consider socialism to have been a period in which they had much more agency and control over their own lives. Similarly, Maja Petrović Šteger (2013: 151) described how her interviewees “would often state that the everyday facts of their lives made it hard for them to imagine themselves actively participating in remaking, or just in contesting, the political and economic fabric in contemporary Serbia”.

The new modernity imposed upon inhabitants of Jagodina significantly reduced their abilities to negotiate their own agency and understand themselves as social actors who participate in a public sphere (Ahearn 2001; Greenberg 2011). The presence of extensive new construction projects on the one hand and the severe deterioration of the socialist architecture on the other result from the prevailing economic regimes, which have conditioned the relative “success” of Jagodina, making it an exception in the economic geography of contemporary Serbia. Most of the citizens of Jagodina, however, do not feel the positive impact of the town’s economic success, as they find themselves stuck in a reality that fully resembles the late industrial condition described at the beginning of this article. What is more, this radical reorganization of urban space has had huge political consequences, the most important being the erasure of participation, agency and anonymity as underlying notions of citizenship.

Writing about the consequences of the ideology of transition in Eastern Europe, Boris Buden warns that “the notion ‘children of communism’ is (...) not a metaphor. Rather it denotes the figure of submission to the new form of ‘historical necessity’ that initiates and controls the process of the post-communist transition. On these premises, the transition to democracy starts as a radical reconstruction out of nothing” (Buden 2015: 133). The metaphor “citizens are children” is brought to reality in the most radical way in Jagodina. Dragan Marković Palma acts as *pater familias* of town inhabitants, as a patriarch having control over social, political and private spheres. He organizes free holidays every year for children on the Montenegrin coast, and trips to Vienna for students and businessmen from Jagodina. He even organizes matchmaking events and holidays in order to fight population decline in the municipality. In March 2016, he announced that every unemployed young woman who gets married over the course of the year will also become employed.¹⁵

With such politics, access to the public sphere is significantly restricted for Jagodina’s inhabitants, while, at the same time, their private life is significantly subjected to municipal governing. As citizens, they cannot count on neutrality and on the general accessibility of common and public goods, institutions and services, but must instead rely on the generosity

¹⁴ <http://arhiva.alo.rs/vesti/aktuelno/u-jagodinskom-izletistu-potok-fontane-po-uzoru-na-dubai/95509>, 29 April 2015 (accessed 5. 6. 2016).

¹⁵ <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/srbija/palma-posaoj-svakojoj-devojci-koja-se-uda/7qj3wx7>, 13 March 2016 (accessed 5. 6. 2016).

of the city authorities, and even more so on personal relations with those who can provide them with access to these goods, institutions and services.

The most extreme manifestation of Dragan Marković Palma's patriarchal role in the public life of Jagodina, and of political and public institutions' reduction to the will of a single person are the "open door" events organized in the municipality on the final Friday of each month. At these events, Mr. Marković distributes financial aid to the citizens most in need – the old, the ill, the poor, those who cannot afford medicine and food. Dragan Todorović,¹⁶ a journalist for the weekly publication *Vreme*, described the atmosphere of these events as follows:

Mr. Palma grants transport free of charge to a woman for her children; he gives 2000 dinars to another woman who takes a lot of medicine; and to an elderly woman who cannot work anymore he gives 2000 dinars as well. He asks her "How long have I been taking care of you for?" "At least for ten years", she responds. He orders a municipality car to take her home. "The first kid (goat) I get goes to you", she says, but Mr. Palma pretends not to hear that. Let's go faster, breast cancer – 3000 dinars, he asks a newly arrived woman what medicine she takes, she points to her head, a female officer interprets, Palma cuts the talking short – 2000 dinars. (Todorović 2012)

Sharp satire, a trademark of Todorović's writing, is also abundant in this text describing Dragan Marković Palma's reception of citizens. Looking between the lines, however, one can also discern traces of respect for Jagodina's first man, the way in which he cares for citizens, and his efficiency and ability to fix everything. On a general level, public opinion in Serbia as concerns Marković and his politics is characterized by this same mixture of mockery and respect. The inhabitants of Jagodina also express mixed feelings when it comes to the municipality's leading figure. They are very critical of the politics that offers an extremely limited space for political action, and they feel entrapped in political structures based on personal connections, nepotism, and corruption. However, at the same time, they see these personal ties as the only social capital they have at their disposal in the face of dysfunctional state institutions and the radical reduction of social services. A journalist working for a local newspaper and television company complains that the media space in Jagodina is highly controlled by municipal authorities, which makes it impossible to do her job properly. "But the big advantage of my profession is that I know everyone in the town, so I never wait in the doctor's office and can easily arrange most things for me and my family members", she adds.

This tension between imagining moral citizenship that requires citizens' agency, the need for a public sphere and citizens' access to it, and the use of available social capital that contradicts that imagination – characterize the views and stories of most people with whom I spoke in Jagodina. Such an ambivalent position taken by citizens towards those in power, whereby they simultaneously express critique and support, strongly resembles what Achille Mbembe (1992) describes as *illicit cohabitation*, a necessary familiarity and domesticity in the relationship between dominant and dominated in the colonial context. Similarly, Lisa Wedeen (1999) in the case of Syria points to "the habituation to obedience – the combination of a cynical lack of belief and compliant behavior", while Neringa Klumbytė (2011: 659) speaks

¹⁶ Dragan Todorović is *Vreme's* journalist who is known for his satirical reports from Serbian provinces. In his texts, Todorović writes about phenomena that are characteristic of the Serbian "transitional", post-socialist reality, usually discussing the most bizarre phenomena of this kind: he reports from local political rallies, festivals such as a blackberry day, a festival of toast-givers, of plum, from anniversary commemorations (police day in Makiš, the first anniversary of Andrićgrad, the anniversary of the Bela Crkva uprising, the statehood day celebration in Orašac...), and from events such as the openings of new factories, zoo parks, the establishment of national movements, etc. Todorović's satirical texts have so far been collected in four books.

about “the coexistence of state authorities and other subjects in fields of social and political comfort, togetherness, and dialogue as well as in the zones of shared meanings and values”.

This ambiguity in citizens’ positioning vis-a-vis political power in Jagodina has its spatial correlates: the abandoned socialist architecture embeds a desire for different forms of citizenship, but new, shiny buildings have their own allure, too, indexing modernity and a vision of a desired, normal life, which many inhabitants of Jagodina long for and strive to achieve with the means that they have at their disposal.¹⁷ The spatial divisions so visible in Jagodina’s urban fabric thus become transposed on the subjective level, reflected in the uneasy questions and dilemmas citizens face while trying to reconcile their existential struggles with their self-perception as moral and political subjects.

REFERENCES

- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. “Language and Agency.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 109–137. [https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109]
- Berge, Trond. 2012. “The Worse, the Better. On Safe Ground in ‘The Most Polluted Town on Earth’.” *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 21/1: 81–102.
- Birkenmaier, Anke and Esther Whitfield, eds. 2011. *Havana Beyond the Ruins. Cultural Mappings After 1989*. Durham – London: Duke University Press.
- Buden, Boris. 2012. *Zona prelasaka: O kraju komunizma*. Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga.
- Buden, Boris. 2015. “Children of Post-communism”. In *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism. Radical Politics after Yugoslavia*. Srećko Horvat and Igor Štikis, eds. London – New York: Verso, 124–139.
- Census 2011. *2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia*. Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.
- De Sousa, Luis. 2008. “Clientelism and the Quality(ies) of Democracy. Public and Policy Aspects”. *DISC Working Paper Series* 2008/2.
- Florida, Richard. 2014. “The Divided City”. <http://www.citylab.com/work/2014/09/the-divided-city/380873/> (accessed 19. 1. 2015).
- Fabrika. 1965. *Fabrika kablova “Moša Pijade” Svetozarevo 1955-1965*. Ljubljana.
- Fortun, Kim. 2012. “Ethnography in Late Industrialism”. *Cultural Anthropology* 27/3: 446–464. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2012.01153.x]
- Greenberg, Jessica. 2011. “On the Road to Normal. Negotiating Agency and State Sovereignty in Postsocialist Serbia.” *American Anthropologist* 113/1: 88–100. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01308.x]
- Harvey, David. 2007. “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction”. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610: 22–44.
- Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London – New York: Verso. [https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716206296780]
- Häussermann, Hartmut and Andreas Kapphann. 2005. “Berlin. From Divided to Fragmented City”. In *Transformation of Cities in Central and Eastern Europe. Towards Globalization*. F. E. Ian Hamilton, Kaliopa Dimitrovska Andrews and Nataša Pichler-Milanović, eds. Tokyo – New York – Paris: United Nations University, 189–222.
- Jansen, Stef, Elissa Helms, Jessica Greenberg and Andrew Gilbert. 2008. “Reconsidering Postsocialism from the Margins of Europe: Hope, Time and Normalcy in Post-Yugoslav Societies”. *Anthropology News* 49/8: 10–11. [https://doi.org/10.1111/an.2008.49.8.10]
- Jansen, Stef. 2015. *Yearnings in the Meantime. “Nomal Lives” and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*. New York – Oxford: Berghahn.
- Jovanović, Deana. 2013. *Bor Forward. Zamišljanje budućnosti*. Bor: Narodna biblioteka Bor.
- Jovanović, Deana. 2016a. *Ambivalence and the Work of Hope. Anticipating Futures in a Serbian Industrial Town*. PhD dissertation, University of Manchester.
- Jovanović, Deana. 2016b. “Prosperous Pollutants. Bargaining with Risks and Forging Hopes in an Industrial Town in Eastern Serbia”. *Ethnos*. [https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2016.1169205]
- Klumbytė, Neringa. 2011. “Political Intimacy. Power, Laughter and Coexistence in Late Soviet Lithuania”. *East European Politics and Societies* 25/4: 658–677. [https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325410387638]
- Lemarchand, René and Keith Legg. 1972. “Political Clientelism and Development. A Preliminary Analysis”. *Comparative Politics* 4/2: 149–178. [https://doi.org/10.2307/421508]
- Kršić, Dejan. 2004. “Work in Progress.” In *VlasTITO iskustvo / Past Present*. Radonja Leposavić, ed. Belgrade: Samizdat B92, 27–37.
- Madacki, Saša and Mia Karamehić, eds. 2012. *Dvije škole pod jednim krovom. Studija o segregaciji u obrazovanju*. Sarajevo: Centar za ljudska prava Univerziteta u Sarajevu – Asocijacija Alumni Centra za interdisciplinarne postdiplomske studije (ACIPS).

¹⁷ For the notion and imagination of “normal life” in the post-Yugoslav context, see Greenberg 2011; Jansen et al. 2008; Jansen 2015.

- Markovina, Dragan. 2014. *Između crvenog i crnog. Split i Mostar u kulturi sjećanja*. Zagreb – Sarajevo: Plejada – University Press Magistrat izdanja.
- Martin, Reinhold. 2014. *Mediators. Aesthetics, Politics, and the City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Matošević, Andrea and Elis Bačac. 2015. "Kamena vuna prijepora. Suživot s tvornicom Rockwool na Pičanštini". *Etnološka tribina* 38: 139–149. [<https://doi.org/10.15378/1848-9540.2015.38.08>]
- Mbembe, Achille. 1992. "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony". *Africa* 62/1: 3–37. [<https://doi.org/10.2307/1160062>]
- Park, Robert. 1967. *On Social Control and Collective Behavior*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Naumović, Slobodan. 2013. *Fields of Paradox. Three Case Studies on the Europeanisation of Agriculture in Serbia*. Belgrade: University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy – SGC.
- Pelkmans Mathijs. 2013. "Ruins of Hope in a Kyrgyz Post-Industrial Wasteland". *Anthropology Today* 29/5: 17–21. [<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12060>]
- Petrović, Mina and Jelisaveta Vukelić, eds. 2013. *Environmental Protection in Pančevo and Bor. Challenges of Participation to Environmental Governance*. Belgrade: Institute for Sociological Research, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade.
- Petrović, Tanja. 2010. "When We Were Europe". Socialist Workers in Serbia and Their Nostalgic Narratives". In *Remembering Communism. Genres of Representation*. Maria Todorova, ed. New York: Social Science Research Council, 127–153.
- Petrović, Tanja. 2015. "Serbia in the Mirror. Parodying Political and Media Discourses". *Slavic Review* 74/2: 288–310. [<https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.74.2.288>]
- Petrović Šteger, Maja. 2013. "Parasecurity and Paratime in Serbia". In *Times of Security. Ethnographies of Fear, Protest and the Future*. Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, eds. London: Routledge, 141–162.
- Potkonjak, Sanja and Tea Škokić. 2013. "In the World of Iron and Steel". On the Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Hope". *Narodna umjetnost* 50/1: 74–96. [<https://doi.org/10.15176/VOL50NO103>]
- Pulska grupa, ed. 2010. *Grad post-kapitalizma*. Zagreb: Centar za anarhističke studije.
- Radović, Srdan. 2013. *Grad kao tekst*. Belgrade: XX vek.
- Rajković, Ivan. 2015a. *Struggles for Moral Ground. Problems with Work and Legitimacy in a Serbian Industrial Town*. PhD dissertation, University of Manchester.
- Rajković, Ivan. 2015b. "We should Now Gather as Serbs, to Become Workers Again". Labour, Morality and National Redemption in Neoliberal Serbia". <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/centenary/sca-conference-blog-publication/i-rajkovic-blog> (accessed 5. 6. 2016).
- Roniger, Luis. 2004. "Political Clientelism, Democracy, and Market Economy". *Comparative Politics* 36/3: 353–375. [<https://doi.org/10.2307/4150135>]
- Stoler, Ann Laura, ed. 2013a. *Imperial Debris. On Ruins and Ruination*. Durham – London: Duke University Press.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 2013b. "Preface". In *Imperial Debris. On Ruins and Ruination*. Ann Laura Stoler, ed. Durham – London: Duke University Press, ix–xi. [<https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395850>]
- Schwenkel, Christina. 2013a. "War Debris in Postwar Society. Managing Risk and Uncertainty in the DMZ". In *Interactions with a Violent Past: Reading Post-Conflict Landscapes in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam*. Vatthana Pholsena and Oliver Tappe, eds. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 135–156.
- Schwenkel, Christina. 2013b. "Post/Socialist Affect. Ruination and Reconstruction of the Nation in Urban Vietnam". *Cultural Anthropology* 28/2: 252–277. [<https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12003>]
- Schwenkel Christina. 2014. "Socialist Palimpsests in Urban Vietnam". *Architecture beyond Europe Journal (ABE)* 6: 2–19.
- Schwenkel Christina. 2015a. "Reclaiming Rights to the Socialist City. Bureaucratic Artefacts and the Affective Appeal of Petitions". *South East Asia Research* 23/2: 205–225. [<https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2015.0257>]
- Schwenkel Christina. 2015b. "Spectacular Infrastructure and its Breakdown in Socialist Vietnam". *American Ethnologist* 42/3: 520–534. [<https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12145>]
- Štiks, Igor and Srećko Horvat. 2015. "Radical Politics in the Desert of Transition". In *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism. Radical Politics after Yugoslavia*. Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks, eds. London: Verso, 1–17.
- Todorović, Dragan. 2012. "Dan otvorenih vrata u Jagodini". *Vreme* 1139, 1 November.
- Vilenica, Ana and kuda.org ed. 2012. *Na ruševinama kreativnog grada*. Novi Sad: Centar za nove medije_kuda.org.
- Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination. Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- <http://arhiva.alo.rs/vesti/aktuelno/u-jagodinskom-izletistu-potok-fontane-po-uzoru-na-dubai/95509>, 29 April 2015 (accessed 5. 6. 2016).
- http://popis2011.stat.rs/?page_id=2162 (accessed 19. 1. 2015).
- <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/srbija/palma-posao-svakoj-devojci-koja-se-uda/7qj3wx7>, 13 March 2016 (accessed 5. 6. 2016).
- <http://www.glas-javnosti.rs/clanak/glas-javnosti-12-03-2008/palma-patriotizam-se-ne-sipa-u-tractore>, 12 March 2008 (accessed 1. 6. 2016).
- <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Društvo/2036770/Srpske+opštine,+što+južnije+plate+niže.html>, 15 September 2015 (accessed 1. 4. 2016).

Podijeljene modernosti. Državljanstvo, agentivnost i javni prostori u gradu u središnjoj Srbiji

Sažetak

Članak se bavi radikalnom rekonfiguracijom javnog prostora po završetku socijalizma u Jagodini, industrijskom gradu srednje veličine u središnjoj Srbiji. Za razliku od većine gradova "u provinciji", Jagodina je doživjela rapidnu izgradnju tijekom posljednjeg desetljeća. Taj se grad smatra pričom o uspjehu i rijetkim primjerom grada koji se uspio ekonomski razviti usprkos lošim ekonomskim i političkim okolnostima u državi. Intenzivna je izgradnja značajno utjecala na prirodu javnih prostora u gradu, proizvodeći konfliktne predstave o modernosti, koje imaju važnu funkciju u oblikovanju državljanstva, moralnosti i političkih subjektiviteta ljudi koji nastanjuju urbani prostor.

Ključne riječi: javni prostor, modernost, moralnost, državljanstvo, Jagodina