

Merima Omeragić

merima.omeragic@unsa.ba

University of Sarajevo

Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies “Prof. Dr Zdravko Grebo”

Regaining the Yugoslav Heritage vs. Culture Crisis

Regaining the Past. Yugoslav Legacy in the Period of Transition: The Case of Formal and Alternative Institutions of Art and Culture in Serbia at the End of the 20th and the Beginning of the 21st Century / Tijana Vuković. – Warsaw–Bellerive-sur-Allier: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw Wydawnictwo DiG, 2022. – 343 pp. – ISBN DIG: 978-83-286-0204-5 & ISBN La Rama: 979-10-95627-88-3

The study of Tijana Vuković which is the subject of this review was determined also by its purpose – to inscribe in the epistemological spectrum new findings about the period of transition in the field of culture. Namely, the research framework is dictated by the chronological dimension at the turn of the 21st century, as well as the spatial difference between the Yugoslav heritage and the articulation of the new culture of Serbia. The selection of this challenging context, as well as topic, confirm the commitment of the researcher to tackle complex phenomena of dispute, especially from the point of view of the centre and the margin. The research construct is thoroughly analysed and confirmed by various examples and ways institutions handle dynamic social changes that make their work largely difficult. In no way accidentally, with the selection of the sample, official and alternative institutions, a mosaic that bears witness to the existence of various discourses is formed. This contributes to the building of a comprehensive image, and the undermining of the dominant practices in the understanding of the Yugoslav heritage. The book presented to the readers is founded on the innovative and important concepts of the culture of memory.

Symbolically determined, the study follows abandonment, destruction and war over identity. At another, higher level, the central problem of the study is regaining the past through the creation of new narratives and tendencies for overcoming cultural trauma. Striving to widely analyse and describe the dominant and marginal heritage, the study as a whole follows the logic and scientific demands of the formed alternative research system. The structure of the study includes an introductory and concluding chapter, or, rather, theoretical bases and

hypotheses and the presentation of final stances in the final chapter, as well as four discussed and well-substantiated chapters in the middle.

As her first hypothesis, Tijana Vuković posits the phenomenon of unwanted heritage, mapping the idea and dissolution of the Yugoslav as a “common cultural (and art) space” (Vuković 2022: 9). A historically related term is the phenomenon of unwanted heritage, in which all categories of the unwanted and the other can be identified, which is a direct and indisputable result of the ideology that produces. In addition to the terrible and obvious effects on the independent states, the war breakup of Yugoslavia led to the death of the Yugoslav identity, and, consequently, to a crisis and trauma in the field of culture. For the purpose of argumentation, the author presents the disintegration of cultural institutions during the wars, but also during the time of the official anti-Yugoslav narrative. Therefore, through research objectives, she faces challenging questions: whether and in what way Yugoslavia continued to exist in discourse, narratives and ideology in the practices of cultural institutions, ways of representation (relation: dependent on official authorities or suppressed), ways of transformation, discontinuities and new narratives and perspectives; questions about the non-consensus of values, the significance of presenting the Yugoslav symbolic heritage as a way of overcoming trauma, as well as the search for thematic projects. More precisely, the goal of the study was a challenging confrontation with the discovery of whether the attempt to preserve Yugoslavia in cultural memory was successful despite aggravating circumstances, especially “why remembrance of Yugoslavia survives among the fragmentation of narratives and the challenging process of overcoming cultural trauma in a permanent crisis without any coherent strategy to succeed in that” (Vuković 2022: 19). Using an interdisciplinary approach, Tijana Vuković deals with the existing knowledge on collective trauma, that is, the relations between individual and collective memory. In this sense, in the individual memory in Serbia, the recollection of Yugoslavia is kept in the form of memories, while the transition to the collective level is debatable. Cultural institutions should play the main role in this process. When it comes to the actual research process, particular care was taken with regard to the places of the subversiveness of official institutions, and the suggestiveness and power of alternative institutions to “provide a framework for the Yugoslav legacy and a link from the past to the future” (Vuković 2022: 14). The focus of the research is placed on studying not just the survival of the memory of Yugoslavia, but also the path from Yugoslav institutions to a crisis in culture.

In the first of the central chapters, “State of Art,” the author presents various theoretical aspects, forms and content by building an intersectional approach founded in the culture of memory. The next chapter, called “Historical Context,” represents a historical overview of the

idea of the unity of South Slavs with a basis in art and culture. In that sense, Tijana Vuković demystifies and explains the phenomenon of Yugoslavism as a link and influence between Yugoslavia as a cultural and political project. Therefore, Yugoslavism exists as a potential of a common space of culture in the past and an independent space in which Yugoslavia could have existed after the dissolution. The next chapters of the study are dedicated to the so-called analytical research. Specifically, through the examples of three official institutions of culture (*the Pavilion of the Republic of Serbia in Venice* – Yugoslavia exists through an active context; *the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade* – the symbol of the creation of Yugoslav culture and *the Museum of Yugoslavia* – huge transformative potential), as well as three unofficial institutors of culture (*the Centre for Cultural Decontamination/CZKD* – an avant-garde movement in the fight against permanent oppression and injustice; the *Inex* squat – a polyphonous independent cultural institution that freely communicated the heritage of Yugoslavia and *Catch 22* – based on Yugoslavia as a joint space of values, difference, equality and good), the researcher examines and shows ways of shaping and maintaining the narrative on Yugoslavia's heritage. The transformation of specific and complex narratives is at the centre of attention of this approach. At the same time, the difference between institutions that partly foster approaches of dominant discourses is underscored, and the impression of the opulence of the models used by alternative institutions “by primarily celebrating the ethics of togetherness (stances on the common as heritage from the Yugoslav period)” (Vuković 2022: 17) is increased. In addition to a sense of community, the work of alternative or unofficial institutions is based on sharing resources and an activist approach. Also, unofficial institutions are identified as those having the capacity to use the free space of art and culture to express protest against the regime and promote humanist values. By expanding the research corpus from official to alternative cultural institutions, the author used significant resources of comparison and the study of marginal narratives. By studying both narratives, official and alternative, Tijana Vuković also achieved the primary goal of seeing the wider picture of culture in Serbia in the transitional or post-Yugoslav period, and, as she herself states, this was also significant for the purpose of forming the basis for the map of cultural institutions in Serbia after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

In “Forgetting or Remembering Yugoslavia: Creating Connecting and Continuity,” the researcher presents concluding thoughts with the goal of summing up the presented knowledge and making a coherent and stable framework, i.e. whole. Recalling the ambivalent attitude towards Yugoslavia and its legacy in the processes of dealing with the past, the study accentuates the state of culture in trauma (which destroys the identity of Yugoslav unity), in

the context of the transition, fragmentation, suppression and confusion that rule over cultural institutions. In accordance with the situation analysed in the previous chapters, the author of the book also presents concrete conclusions related to the differences between official institutions that emphasize the traumatic past, and unofficial cultural institutions that count on Yugoslav unity as a progressive stronghold and source. The latter attitude is most effectively reflected through the symbolism of anti-fascist legacy. With the section “Choosing between the Illusion of Ground Zero and Regaining the Past: In Search of Meaning and the Old/New Identity,” comes the second part of the conclusion, determined by the context of the study of the hiatus caused by the trauma of war, more precisely, the destruction of the common Yugoslav identity. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the identity choice was reduced to two opposing positions: the fall into crisis and the consequent drowning of institutions in the processes of overcoming the past; and the regaining of the past. The result of the official selection is the tendency to represent only isolated fragments of the story as a whole, confirming the authoritative discourse of the undesirability of the legacy of Yugoslavia. The task of regaining the past with the aim of overcoming trauma contains the potential of reconstruction and creation of a common, progressive cultural space. The key to a different approach lies in the connections, functionality and creativity and character of the narrative inside and outside the institutions in all former Yugoslav countries.

In short, the study of Tijana Vuković was written from the position of alternative research, including significant thematic areas and challenging hypotheses, as well as modern methods. By reading and analysing the disrupted narratives about the disputable legacy of Yugoslavia, common identity and Yugoslavism, the researcher achieved the set goals in the context of transition and trauma, with the tools of the intersectional approach and the culture of memory (regaining the past), while successfully interpreting the conflicting narratives (by creating a comprehensive picture), offering alternative solutions and approaches, pointing out the importance of research that integrates the centre and the margin, and finally appealing to the demand of overcoming trauma, i.e. the crisis in culture – through the regaining of the past. In the end, Tijana Vuković’s study represents the necessary confrontation with knowledge from the point of view of the scientifically based principle of regaining the past.

Prevod Radojka Jevtić

Merima Omeragić

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Centar za interdisciplinarnu studiju „prof. dr Zdravko Grebo“

Osvajanje jugoslavenskog naslijeđa nasuport krizi kulture