



The Struggle for Legitimacy

A Contribution to the Scholarship on Domination and Participation in the Socialist Dictatorships of East-Central Europe

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DONERT, Celia – KLADNIK, Ana – SABROW, Martin (eds.):

Making Sense of Dictatorship: Domination and Everyday Life in East Central Europe After 1945.

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When I sat in the audience of a panel entitled “Making Sense of Dictatorship” at the annual conference of the British Association for Slavic and East European Studies (BASEES) in 2022, I had no idea that I was at a launch of the book of the same name. Nor did I know that a few minutes later, in a modern seminar room overlooking the sunny springtime courtyard of Robinson College, University of Cambridge, I would feel as I did when studying in the irregularly shaped rooms of Celetná Street in Prague, where I attended social history seminars as part of my studies in history about ten years ago. It was there that I first encountered concepts such as *Sinnwelt* and *Eigen-Sinn* and a way of asking questions that went beyond my previous experience in most of the courses I attended. In the time

between these two moments, however, a number of events took place that affected how the book here reviewed would be received, and which should be considered. I will attempt to briefly summarize these events at the outset before turning to the book itself.

The beginning and institutional basis for the research and publication activities culminating in the book *Making Sense of Dictatorship* was the project *Sozialistische Diktatur als Sinnwelt: Repräsentationen gesellschaftlicher Ordnung und Herrschaftswandel in Ostmitteleuropa in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhundert*, supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung, and conducted between 2007 and 2010.¹ The project, led by Pavel Kolář, Thomas Lindenberger and Martin Sabrow at the Centre for Research in Contemporary History in Potsdam (*Zentrum für zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam*) and Michal Kopeček at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague (*Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR*), asked questions about the nature and transformations of governance in socialist dictatorships in the post-war period. It also included a reflection on the methods and concepts available to historians for examining socialist societies. An important part of the identity of the project was a comparative approach, examining similar phenomena in different countries ruled by socialist dictatorships.

The researchers involved in the project were also important actors in the dispute over the interpretation of the normalization period and the causes of the regime change in 1989, a debate that was triggered by the publication of Michal Pullmann's book *Konec experimentu* [The End of the Experiment].² This controversy, which significantly impacted the Czech public debate, highlighted a number of questions posed by the aforementioned project. Can the stability of socialist dictatorships be explained by repression alone? Were people able to live meaningful lives under normalization? Why did these regimes collapse so quickly? These issues dominated Czech debates about "communism" in the following years. The whole controversy eventually replicated itself in a much more predictable way during the summer of 2020, in response to the refusal of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, headed by Michal Pullmann, to display a banner with the portrait of the democratic politician Milada Horáková (1901–1951) and the slogan "Murdered by the Communists". It can safely be said that some of the issues and results of the project have over time become part of the cultural wars of Czech society, and have recurred in various transformations and contexts.

¹ See KOPEČEK, Michal – KOLÁŘ, Pavel: Projekt „Socialistická diktatura jako myšlenkový svět“. In: *Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2012), pp. 189–195.

² PULLMANN, Michal: *Konec experimentu: Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu*. Praha, Scriptorium 2011.

Although the publication of *Making Sense of Dictatorship* is symbolically the culmination of the project, a number of studies have already been published by members of the project team and their collaborators, based on their work on the project. The aforementioned book by Pullmann as well as Matěj Spurný's book entitled *Nejsou jako my* [They Are Not like Us] were published in 2011.³ However, in the book reviewed here, Spurný has already dealt with a sub-topic relating to the demolition of the city of Most in Northern Bohemia and the construction of a new city.⁴ Among foreign authors, Czech readers could become acquainted with a part of Ana Kladník's research.⁵ Ciprian Cîrniala published a book on the Romanian police apparatus in 2018.⁶ An issue of *Soudobé dějiny* was also dedicated to the project.⁷ Thus, in the scholarly publishing practice, there are already a number of outputs linked to the *Sozialistische Diktatur als Sinnwelt* project, either directly by the author's themselves or through shared methodological assumptions.

Making Sense of Dictatorship, edited by Celia Donert, Ana Kladník and Martin Sabrow, was published in 2022 by the Central European University Press. The book is introduced by two theoretical studies written respectively by Martin Sabrow and Thomas Lindenberger, explaining the key concepts of *Sinnwelt* and *Eigen-Sinn*. These give an insight into the theoretical background behind the project and the discussions that took place among its members. According to the foreword by Pavel Kolář and Michal Kopeček, the book presents to an international audience the results of a project that contributed to a "gradual paradigmatic turn" in the study of socialist dictatorships. The authors characterize it as follows:

"In historical research, 'communist totalitarianism' is no longer taken out of its historical context as the opposite of democracy but has instead become a standard historical phenomenon in a particular time and place. This largely natural historicization of socialist dictatorships opens up the possibility of comparative studies: if communism is becoming an historical phenomenon with a clear beginning and end – like, say, the Great Depression – then it is obviously not a national exception, but a general manifestation of European modernity. More than a decade has passed since our group carried out its research." (p. xi)

³ SPURNÝ, Matěj: *Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945–1960)*. Praha, Antikomplex 2011.

⁴ IDEM: *Making the Most of Tomorrow: A Laboratory of Socialist Modernity in Czechoslovakia*. Prague, Karolinum Press 2019.

⁵ KLADNÍK, Ana: Vietor veje v smere severovýchod–juhovýchod. In: *Historie – otázky – problémy*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2010), pp. 127–133.

⁶ CÎRNIALA, Ciprian: *Ceaușescus Polizei: Herrschaft, Ruhe und Ordnung in Rumänien (1960–1989)*. Berlin, De Gruyter 2018.

⁷ *Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2012), pp. 189–274.

At the core of the book are studies that examine the nature of socialist dictatorship always from a specific case and perspective. The first set of case studies focuses on the relationship between authority and domination. In his study, Ciprian Cîrniala, a Romanian historian based in Germany, describes the career of a member of the Romanian criminal police force through the analysis of oral history interviews and written sources. He shows that even a member of the security forces was part of longer-term transformations in the regime's legitimacy, and that the behaviour of the investigator (among other things, a non-member of the Communist Party and a man of faith) was both legitimizing and delegitimizing.

The German historian Hedwig Richter focuses on the system of informing, reporting and denunciation in East Germany. However, she turns her perspective not only to the "informers" who knowingly cooperated with the secret police, but also to the flow of information in general, which was directed from the population to the state authorities. She shows that this way of reporting information about subversion was significantly more widespread and accepted in East German society than cooperation with the police. The study thus presents surveillance during the dictatorship as a bureaucratic process that was perceived as legitimate by most of society. It is a pity that more space is not devoted to the ways in which the state handled this information, especially in relation to those who were identified in the reports as threatening elements.

In his contribution, Michal Pullmann uses the term "uncertain elite" to characterize the top leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa*) in the face of perestroika and its challenges in the form of pressure for economic and social change. He cites, as the causes of this situation, the breakdown of the ideological language and its inability to absorb new stimuli and issues, the unpreparedness of the leadership after years of normalization for a real debate, and the prevalence of the ideal of individual success over the vision of a collective effort for a more just society.

Another part of the book is devoted to "everyday social practices". It opens with a text by Slovenian historian Ana Kladnik focusing on self-governance and volunteering in the Slovenian industrial city of Velenje. She examines the extent and forms of participation of the inhabitants in the development of the city, which was made possible by the policies of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunista Jugoslavije*) after the split with the Soviet Union. The construction of Velenje appears here as an example of long-term volunteerism that resulted in both the modernization of the city and a greater cohesion of the local community. In her study, the Hungarian historian Annina Gagyiova examines consumer practices in the context of the Hungarian Trade Union's "Washing Machine Campaign" in the late 1950s. According to the author, consumer practices in this period can be understood as a way of expressing an attitude towards

the ruling regime, including the arbitrary appropriation of its social policies for purposes other than those originally intended. It is also one of the texts in the book that deals with the emancipation of women under socialist dictatorships.

In her study, the Polish historian Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, who has also published several books on the subject, examines the project of socialist modernity from a female perspective.⁸ The focus of the study is the status of unmarried, single mothers in the People's Republic of Poland (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*). She documents the significant neglect of unmarried mothers by Polish society, as well as significantly lower support from the state compared to other socialist countries. This study is also based on a combination of the personal testimonies of women and official sources documenting the social policy of the People's Republic of Poland. The story of an unofficial kindergarten in East Berlin is explored by the British historian Celia Donert. She uses the case of an independently run children's group to thematize the relationship between private and public, as well as the post-war reconstruction of Berlin, during one of the phases in which the old city centre became the seat of alternatively minded communities, particularly linked to the anti-war and environmental movements.

The last series of studies focuses on the role of intellectuals and experts in (de)legitimizing socialist regimes. Matěj Spurný's main hypothesis is "that the change in the *Sinnwelt* of the local people, which is linked to the crisis of organized industrial modernity beginning in the 1960s, could not be stopped even in an authoritarian system such as a socialist dictatorship" (p. 179).⁹ The example of Most shows that the late socialist elites were unable to integrate the new narratives associated with the crisis of industrial modernity into their language and thus deprived themselves of an essential pillar of their legitimacy. The Hungarian historian Péter Apor, who deals with the transformation of community life, asks questions in a similar framework. Using several examples, he shows community life as a reaction to the technocratic approach of socialist elites and rigid official collectivism.

The American historian Jonathan Larson focuses his study on Czechoslovak samizdat. In his chapter, he points out some neglected parts of the samizdat

⁸ KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA, Barbara: *Family, Taboo and Communism in Poland, 1956–1989*. Bern, Peter Lang 2021. (The book had been published in Polish in 2015 under the title *Rodzina, tabu i komunizm w Polsce, 1956–1989*. Kraków, Liberian 2015.) See also: STAŃCZAK-WIŚLICZ, Katarzyna – PERKOWSKI, Piotr – FIDELIS, Małgorzata – KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA, Barbara: *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989: Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków, Universitas 2020.

⁹ Spurný's chapter entitled "Problems with Progress in Late Socialist Czechoslovakia: The Example of Most, North Bohemia" (pp. 179–202) is based on research that has previously been published in his monograph *Making the Most of Tomorrow*.

archives (e.g. Czech tramping, science fiction and other productions that did not contain explicit criticism of the regime) and the related implications for understanding what a samizdat was. Michal Kopeček examines dissident legalism in a comparative Czechoslovak-Polish perspective. He points out the differences between the two countries and observes that the concepts of socialist legality and dissident legalism can be understood as the two sides of the same coin. Kopeček also draws attention to the connection between the legalistic strategy of dissent and the non-violent and essentially legalistic transition to democracy.

The preceding list partially summarizes the theses that the texts in the book present to the reader, but also the breadth and nature of the topics addressed in it. Thus, viewed as a whole, the case studies present the theoretical framework of the book as applicable to a wide range of topics and sources. The actors in the book include party elites, members of the power apparatus, and members of alternative communities and dissidents. However, in all cases it is clear that the main focus of research is the dynamics of power, legitimacy and delegitimization in socialist dictatorships.

Although the selection of case studies does not follow any pre-determined structure, the absence of the perspectives of national or sexual minorities, and the predominant focus on urban populations and on activities that were often concentrated in cities rather than in the countryside, cannot be overlooked. For the whole book and for some of the studies, this raises the question of their representativeness. That is, to what extent do they describe a general phenomenon, or rather an exception that captures the experience of a minority of a given country's population. For example, whether volunteering played a similarly productive role in towns and villages in Slovenia other than Velenje. At the same time, it should be stressed that we do not hold in our hands a synthesis of the social history of socialist dictatorships, so these claims go beyond the contributors' own stated goals.

What most of the chapters succeed in doing, on the other hand, is to point to some of the more general phenomena associated with research on socialist dictatorships. Firstly, it is clear from all the studies which cover a longer period of time that the nature of socialist regimes had changed considerably, and with it the shape of repressive practices and people's responses to them. This, in turn, had an impact on the (de)legitimization and ultimately the collapse of these regimes. A transnational perspective is crucial. It shows that the different states – however much they shared the same power and ideological camp – had their own specificities, mainly determined by the legacy of the period before the rise of communism. This legacy then strongly influenced which social groups resisted the regime (this is well illustrated, among others, by Michal Kopeček's study) or coexisted with it in some way. At the same time, however, it can also be

seen that the policies of particular states were not identical – for example, their social policies or the ways in which they supported the emancipation of women.

The more general question is how to read the book as a whole, bearing in mind its institutional background in the original project and the leading role of some of the authors in disputes over the interpretation of the Czech experience of socialism. Moreover, whether it can bring something to readers who are not experts on particular subtopics, for example, the history of the police apparatus in Romania, or the history of volunteerism and urbanism in Slovenia, or research on socialist dictatorships in general. Several possible perspectives could be offered here.

Those who follow or have followed the scholarly debate on the study of socialist dictatorships and the search for interpretations other than strictly totalitarian ones from the beginning are likely to have the least to gain from the book. This is mainly because much of the research has already been published, either in book form or as studies in scholarly journals, and those following the debate will thus not be surprised by the nature of the texts or the methodology employed. In this respect, however, the significance of the book lies in the joint presentation of local case studies to the international expert community. What stands out in this context is the strong representation of Czech historians, and with them Czech or Czechoslovak realities, in the book.

For historians of contemporary history, however, the publication of the book creates a platform for a reflective debate on where approaches to research on this period have shifted. How would research on developments in post-socialist states during the 1990s fit into this framework? Matěj Spurný's text offers a link to the developing subject of environmental history. It also raises the question of where to look for case studies from Czechoslovakia that would correspond to foreign examples. Did independent kindergartens emerge in Czechoslovakia and how did the context of their emergence and closure differ from that of East Berlin? This reflexive perspective assumes that the approaches presented in this book will be understood not as the final stage in the development of approaches to the study of socialist dictatorships, but as part of a story with an open ending in which new paradigms are still likely to emerge.

I perceive a great potential for the book especially in relation to students of history and other humanities and social sciences. The book brings them not only theoretical studies but also a wide range of their applications. All the studies clearly present the problem under investigation and the methodology used, and at the same time have the potential to raise questions and motivate further research. The combination of reading one of the theoretical introductions and one of the studies can thus represent a model lesson for a social or contemporary history seminar at a university. Another group of readers who might find the book

useful are journalists and other professionals who comment on the past and engage in disputes over its interpretation. The book offers concrete examples of what research on socialist dictatorships can mean. Reading them does not confirm the potential authors' exaggerated notion that they deny the repressive nature of the regimes they examine, although repression is not the primary lens applied to the phenomena in question. It is in the specific cases that the interconnectedness of the pressures that socialist dictatorships exerted on their populations, the opportunities that these same regimes offered, and the strategies that populations and communities used to deal with them in lived practice, is well illustrated.

In conclusion, *Making Sense of Dictatorship* well illustrates that a scholarly text is not simply another piece in the imaginary puzzle of historical knowledge, but that its reading and reception is conditioned by a range of material, institutional and discursive circumstances both within the scholarly community as well as among the wider public. It is certain that the reading of this book will be different today than it would have been ten years ago. One can only wish that this book will not fade into obscurity as a monument to wars already fought today (at least in academia), but that it will find its own active and critical readership.

Making Sense of Dictatorship thus lives up to its name on several levels. First, it provides insight into how different actors across the societies of socialist dictatorships struggled to make sense of their social reality. But beyond that, it also comes (albeit with some delay) at a time when a number of debates about the nature of these regimes have taken place in the public sphere, including the participation of some of the contributors in this book. The latter is thus also part of the contemporary trend for "making sense of dictatorship" at the level of the cultures of memory. Last but not least, the book documents one essential phase of how historians have tried to deal with modern dictatorships. Most importantly, however, it is an imperfective aspect, because making sense of dictatorship is certainly not yet over.

Keywords:

East-Central Europe; communism; socialist dictatorships; world of meaning (*Sinnwelt*); socialist modernity; everyday life; transnational history

“Made in Czechoslovakia” Socialism as a Failed Social Experiment

Searching for the Causes of Failure

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RYCHLÍK, Jan:

Československo v období socialismu 1945–1989.

Praha, Vyšehrad 2020 and 2022, 415 pages,

ISBN 978-80-7601-334-6 and

978-80-7601-638-5.

A synthesis of the state socialist period in Czechoslovakia is something which the wider historical community has been waiting for for thirty long years. If we disregard more textbook-like publications, the book under review is truly groundbreaking in this regard. Jan Rychlík did not balk at the many pitfalls involved in a synthesizing project of this type and boldly led the way for other authors hopefully to continue further along this route.

Jan Rychlík, a noted Czech historian, an expert on the modern history of Czechoslovakia and the Balkan countries, decided to focus on the period from 1945 to 1989 primarily from a political and social perspective, striving for a balanced and fairly comprehensive view. He approached the issue from the perspective of the internal development of Czechoslovakia and, as he writes, he “aims to try to describe the period in question as a failed social experiment and

to establish the reasons for this failure" (p. 33). In order to achieve the stated objective, he studied dozens of published sources and works of specialist literature in a number of archives in the Czech Republic (in addition to the Slovak National Archive). However, the writing of the synthesis is primarily based on many years of researching and publishing works on twentieth-century Czechoslovak history. Another important factor was the author's experience of teaching the history of Czechoslovakia during this period at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, as Rychlík mentions on the very first page of the book.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, *Československo v období socialismu 1945–1989* [Czechoslovakia in the Period of Socialism, 1945–1989] is divided into seven chronological chapters. The individual time periods reproduce the conventional division of state socialism. Some chapters are allocated more space than others and therefore more significance for the shaping of the entire forty-year period, as Jan Rychlík indicates in the introduction. The chapters cover the Third Republic (1945–1948), the founding era of the communist regime (1948–1953), another part of the 1950s termed the period of the thaw and re-solidification, the 1960s, the Prague Spring, normalization and the brief period from the Velvet Revolution to Václav Havel's election as president. At least in terms of the ratio between the number of pages and the length of the stage being discussed, the author devotes a great deal of attention to the Prague Spring and to the post-1989 events in particular. For comparison, the twenty years of normalization are allocated the same amount of space as the period 1968–1969.

There are various ways to write a synthesis, and Rychlík's approach will not please everyone. He did not set out to write a "story" of state socialism that would offer an exhaustive explanation or possible interpretation of this period of history. Instead, he chose to describe events and phenomena that he regarded as characteristic of the period. This does not mean that Rychlík refrains completely from interpreting some aspects; for example, he clearly expresses the view that the period of the Third Republic was a stage that cannot be referred to as a time of "freedom in the true sense of the word" (p. 37), and he criticizes the brutality associated with the expulsion of the Germans. However, these are exceptions that confirm the rule of the positivistic approach. Nevertheless, the question remains why Rychlík opted for this approach, which in itself is interpretative in principle because it *a priori* assumes that the mere description of facts will objectively speak for itself – an illusion that has been refuted many times. At the same time, this is why the reader cannot expect these issues to be placed in a wider context – especially the much-discussed topic of modernity, or particular features of it such as industrialization and urbanization. This question arises even more conspicuously in the context of the main objective set out for the book:

the search for the causes and roots of the social experiment known as state socialism in Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, it should be noted that Rychlík *a priori* treats the period of state socialism as a totalitarian system, as is shown by the use of the terms "totalitarian power", "totalitarian regime" and so on. However, there is no systematic anchoring in one of the theories of totalitarianism. As mentioned above, he does not explain his theoretical basis and to a large extent the impression given is that his approach is more of an intuitive one. One commendable exception is the deliberate stance he takes to the one-sided scholarly view of the period through the lens of the population's repression and resistance and also to the interpretation of Czechoslovak state socialism as a mere consequence of Soviet power dominance (see introduction). I must also stress the fact that, unlike many texts which make use of terms like "totalitarian regime", Rychlík's book does not contain emotive moralizing judgements.

Another aspect related to the highly conventional positivistic approach is Rychlík's primary focus on central institutions. This essentially reduces individual events and phenomena to goings-on at the highest power levels of the system. This approach is not only applied to political history, which to a large extent would be understandable given the synthetic nature of the work, but also to the social questions and to the more specific cultural aspects that are dealt with on occasion. And in these two areas it is particularly true that, in spite of certain dictates "from above", practice is modified by the specifics of the local conditions, which means that the resulting nature of one of the sub-stages is in its entirety defined by this. Although the relatively detailed paraphrasing of the debates about social and cultural politics in the central institutions of power offers some kind of an explanation, I believe that readers would be more interested in their repercussions and a full picture of the more diverse situation in Czechoslovakia as a whole.

As previously mentioned, Rychlík's intention was to focus on social issues as well as on the political history of the period. He does an excellent job of this in the chapters dedicated to the Third Republic and the first five years of the new state socialist system. However, as the time period progresses towards the present day, this aspect is increasingly neglected. The worst chapter in this respect is the one devoted to normalization, where the social history of Czechoslovakia is reduced to just a few pages (pp. 270–274). Rychlík's approach reaffirms the prevailing notion that nothing of real importance happened or changed in this area over that twenty-year period.

My other more fundamental reservation about the book is also connected to this issue. Rychlík primarily drew on older post-1989 historical texts where the date of publication is rarely later than 2010. And yet the last decade (Rychlík's

book came out in 2020) has seen the publication of a number of works that have provided new findings from previously under-researched areas but also new stimuli for more profound interpretations of state socialism. In this context the historiographical excursus in the introductory section of the book is in itself very revealing. Rychlík devotes most of the space to basic trends in research into state socialism while the system was in place, i.e. prior to 1989 (pp. 13–28), and summarizes his reflections on post-1989 historical works (with a reference to the high level of output) on three pages.

In the last part of his book, Rychlík attempts to answer the central question posed by the work: what is behind the failure of the state socialist social experiment. He believes (bearing in mind the complexity of the answer) that the reason lies in the utopian and unrealistic foundations of the system itself in the form of a classless society of socially equal individuals. And he also adds that by “the 1980s few people were willing to get behind this utopian dream” (p. 371). In this context, however, I find myself wondering why the question of the ideology or intellectual basis of the system was side-lined in Rychlík’s book and why the chapter about the 1980s and normalization offers the least information about the life of society at that time. And finally a perhaps slightly provocative question: does not every society need certain ideals and visions of a better future to cling to? And are not the values of justice and democracy recognized these days equally utopian and therefore impracticable for real life?

As we can see, Rychlík’s book raises new questions and stimuli for further research, which is one of the purposes of academic texts. And even if I am not satisfied with his approach in some regards, I am glad that this synthesis exists.

Keywords:

Czechoslovakia; communism; state socialism; Third Czechoslovak Republic; Stalinism; Prague Spring 1968; Czechoslovak normalization; Czech-Slovak relations

Recalling the Story of a Forgotten University

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HOLEČKOVÁ, Marta Edith:

Příběh zapomenuté univerzity: Univerzita 17. listopadu (1961–1974) a její místo v československém vzdělávacím systému a společnosti.

Praha, Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta 2019, 202 pages, ISBN 978-80-7308-921-4.

For a historian to find “a blind spot” in history is just the same as for an entomologist to find a new species of bug. It is not impossible, but it is very unusual and, in my opinion, also very exciting. Marta Edith Holečková managed to do just that. She found a topic that for various reasons disappeared from the collective memory of the people of Czechoslovakia and gathered enough information to publish the first book on this topic: The University of 17th November (*Univerzita 17. listopadu*) that existed between the years 1961 and 1974.

The historian Marta Edith Holečková works at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences and specializes in contemporary Czech history with an emphasis on universities in communist Czechoslovakia and the interaction between students from the Global South and Czechoslovak society. Her professional scholarly interests resulted in the book entitled

Příběh zapomenuté univerzity: Universita 17. listopadu (1961–1974) a její místo v československém vzdělávacím systému a společnosti [The Story of a Forgotten University: The University of 17th November (1961–1974) and Its Place in the Czechoslovak Education System and Society].

The book consists of 202 pages and is divided into four chapters (not counting the Introduction and Conclusion). The Introduction presents the three major areas of interest that are related to the establishment and existence of the University of 17th November. The first is the history of the institution itself, the second is the coexistence of the foreign students with the local population and the third explores the question of why this university was displaced from the collective memory of Czechoslovak society. In this section the author also analyses the image and reputation of the university. She also presents the secondary literature that was relevant for writing the book – such as works by Petr Zídek, Pavel Urbášek and Jiří Pulec, Josef Běhounek and most notably the unique memoirs of Milan Janoušek, the offspring of a former student from Guinea.¹ The most pertinent resource, however, was the large but unorganized archive of the University of 17th November, accessible in the National Archives of the Czech Republic in Prague, which provided information pertaining to the inception and the development of the university in addition to its operations and curriculum. The archive also contains data on teachers (sometimes including their political profile), on the student magazine's editorial staff and other historical records which helped to paint a picture of academic life at the time. An especially illuminating resource was the monthly journal *Fórum zahraničních studentů* [Forum of Foreign Students] that was published only in the years 1968–1969 but became the main platform wherein the foreign students were able to present their experiences, problems and opinions. Holečková also makes use of oral history interviews. The memories and narratives of the contemporary witnesses help to expand our factual base and, together with other sources, serve as an additional context when trying to analyse historical facts.

The first chapter entitled “Communist Czechoslovakia and the Third World” discusses the bonds between these two entities. In the second half of the 1950s Czechoslovakia became (due to its convenient geographical position and good post-First World War diplomatic relations) a mediator of Soviet influence in post-colonial countries in Africa, Asia and South America. The USSR offered loans as well as economic and military aid, and through these means, tried to use

¹ ZÍDEK, Petr: *Československo a francouzská Afrika 1948–1968*. Praha, Libri 2006; URBÁŠEK, Pavel – PULEC, Jiří: *Vysokoškolský vzdělávací systém v letech 1945–1969*. Olomouc, Univerzita Palackého 2012; BĚHOUNEK, Josef: *Můj život*. Teplice, Gymnázium Teplice 2003; JANOUŠEK, Milan: *Kolín – Conacry: Příběh naší babičky*. Kolín, M. Janoušek 2013.

the emancipation efforts of those newly established countries in its own favour. During the late 1950s and 1960s Czechoslovakia sent hundreds of experts with the mission to help build modern nations and establish positive political, economic and diplomatic relations with those countries. The functional tools of political and ideological propaganda manifested in cultural exchange and scholarship grants to students from those countries.

The second chapter entitled “Czechoslovak Society and the Third World” acquaints the reader with the way Czechoslovak society was informed about developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s. The increasing interest in the decolonized world resulted in more publications of a wide range of travelogues, reportages and occasionally, films. The most famous Czech travellers who visited Africa, and subsequently Asia, were Miroslav Zikmund (1919–2021) and Jiří Hanzelka (1920–2003). Some of the material presented during this time was part of a propaganda campaign trying to link the decolonization process with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Last but not least, another source of information was the translations (usually through other European languages) of writers from countries in Asia, Africa and South America.

The third main chapter, “The University of 17th November” provides information on the founding and mission of the university, its structure, its teachers, and its dissolution thirteen years after it was created. As I mentioned above, Czechoslovakia started to be interested in post-colonial countries in the mid-1950s, and the government tried to build bonds between the states by granting scholarships to students from countries in Asia, Africa and South America, and also by sending experts to those regions. For this purpose, in 1961 the University of 17th November was established.

The institution was founded with the optimistic idea that its students would become the future elite of the newly created decolonized states and that they would be promoting communist ideology in their homelands. These foreign students were believed to be opening the door to better cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the developing world. However, these expectations were not fulfilled for several reasons. First, the base-level of knowledge that foreign students possessed varied dramatically, so the pedagogical efforts were hampered by inefficiency. Second, most of the courses were in Czech initially, which made the educational process more difficult for the students. Third, it was also challenging to influence the students ideologically since very often they were disenchanted after experiencing life in a communist country and they became anti-communist.

Another problem with the plan to have students be ambassadors for communism was that many would not return home because the political situation in their home countries was not safe or because they got married and settled down in Czechoslovakia. Moreover, if they did return, there could be mistrust towards them in their own country because it was known that they studied

in a communist state, and consequently they were considered suspicious. This could possibly explain why they did not become the part of the elite that Czechoslovakia wanted to collaborate with.

The above-mentioned reasons, disillusion and the lack of political interest in the Global South in the mid-1970s contributed to the closing of the University. As to the curriculum itself, after some years of its existence, the University transitioned from teaching specialized majors in Czech to providing a one-year language (Czech or Slovak) course to all foreign students who wanted to study at any kind of Czechoslovak university. However, the University also offered certain majors in English and French. One of the possible reasons why the University of 17th November disappeared from the collective memory was the fact that its reputation was already problematic and unclear during the time of its existence. There were rumours among the general public that the school was a place for training spies, terrorists and that both the students and the teachers had to have “the correct” political profile to be able to be involved at the University. However, Marta Edith Holečková concludes that many of the lecturers were actually employed there not because of their cooperation with the communist regime but because of their (at that time very exceptional) knowledge of languages such as English and French and their expertise in foreign affairs. Another observation by Holečková is that the Czechoslovak secret service was really interested in the students, but not only to gain new contacts through them, but surprisingly, also because the foreigners represented a certain security threat. They were allowed to travel abroad, own foreign currency and their attitude towards the communist regime was not always evident.

The main contribution of the University to the Czechoslovak education system and scholarship was the establishment of the field of translatology, the study of the theory and practice of translating and interpreting. The interest in developing countries also led to the emergence of new and to the development of already existing scholarly specializations such as Egyptology, African studies, Indonesian studies, Ibero-American studies or ethnography.

The fourth chapter, “Foreign Students” informs the reader about the origin of the students, their socio-economic background, and how they adapted to the new (very often dramatically different) living conditions in communist Czechoslovakia. One of the subchapters even depicts their life at the dorms which was not always conflict-free. The clashes arose amongst the students mainly due to political reasons, but they also occurred between them and the local students, who often envied their generous scholarships and the interest of the local women. Their social and public life was affected by the fact that the Czechoslovak society in the 1960s and 1970s was extremely homogenous. Therefore, the students from Asia, and especially from Africa, with their “exotic” look, stood out from

the majority of society that feared anything unknown. This sometimes led to manifestations of racism and the University of 17th November did not know how to cope with this problem.

The choice of the topic of the book was very well-considered and, in a way, we can say that it was almost brave and praiseworthy. To explore a theme that can be recognized as a “blind spot” in our history requires a certain amount of risk but it is also exciting because one cannot truly know how much of the “unknown” will be revealed in the end.

Holečková’s language is sophisticated and at the same time very readable. There are no word repetitions and no typographical errors. In general, the text is very smooth and highly pleasurable to read. Conversely, the English resumé at the end of the book could have used the hand of an experienced native editor.

The book cover is likeably simple and gets its message across. However, the visual experience could have been improved if the text was accompanied by period photographs (for example of the foreign students, the interior of the University, the city of Prague, the local centres for teaching Czech/Slovak) from the 1960s and 1970s.

The publication is coherently and logically structured. The author gradually introduces the problematics in the first and second chapters so by the time the reader reaches the core of the book in the third chapter entitled “University of 17th November”, the context has been established and the issue clearly understood.

Marta Edith Holečková was able to uncover an unknown place in the history of Czechoslovak universities, one that mainly catered to foreign students from Third World countries – the University of 17th November – which existed in the communist period between the years 1961 and 1974. Due to her diligent work, consisting of the analysis of an extensive array of books and consulting a wide range of archives, including the archive of the University of 17th November, as well as interviewing several people such as the former Indonesian student Soe-geng Soejono, she has managed to contribute to a better understanding of the history of Czechoslovak society by writing a book of high quality.

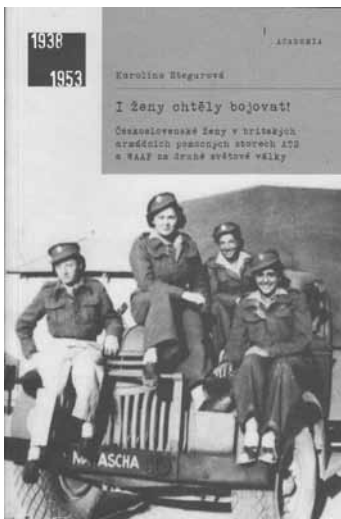
Keywords:

Czechoslovakia; University of 17th November; communism; Czechoslovak education system; Czechoslovak society; foreign students in Czechoslovakia; Third World and Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovak Women in British Uniforms during the Second World War

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STEGUROVÁ, Karolína:

I ženy chtěly bojovat! Československé ženy v britských armádních pomocných sborech ATS a WAAF za druhé světové války.

Praha, Academia 2021, 287 pages,
ISBN 978-80-200-3181-5.

The phrase “Vital to the offensive” stared out in block capital letters from posters affixed to the walls in public spaces. “Thousands of women needed now” was the appeal at recruiting centres and employment exchanges to enrol in the Army, the Navy or the Air Force. “No British woman will stand aside” was the War Ministry’s call, to which thousands of British girls who had just finished school and women who had been working in jobs responded. Nothing could match the sense of duty, patriotism and exhilaration that the prospect of joining the war effort meant, even if it was on the home front far from the battleline.¹ Refugee women from countries occupied by Germany responded as well, believing that

¹ *The National Archives* (London), Poster collection, Inf. 3/119; *ibid.*, AIR 2/6187, WAAF pre-entry training, 13. 9. 1941.

by joining the war effort in Great Britain they could help the liberation of their own country from Nazism.

Czechoslovak women who had emigrated to Great Britain or women who acquired Czechoslovak citizenship, for example by marrying Czechoslovak men, were among them. They joined the British army auxiliary units because they wanted to but also because they were prevented from being part of the Czechoslovak foreign army.

This is the background to Karolína Stegurová's study of the Czechoslovak government and the military administration's political and logistical reasonings and manoeuvrings in Great Britain during the Second World War with regards to women's engagement in the military units. The book's basic premise is that women wanted to join the Czechoslovak foreign army but, because they could not, they enrolled instead in the different units of the British army or air force which were open to them: the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). Independently of their capacities, women in general were prevented from direct employment in combat but as the war progressed and more men had to be drafted to the battlefield, women were recruited to replace men, filling vacancies in industries, in agriculture and in the service sector, some even in British intelligence.

The bulk of the book *I ženy chtěly bojovat! Československé ženy v britských armádních pomocných sborech ATS a WAAF za druhé světové války* [Women Wanted to Fight Too! Czechoslovak Women in the British ATS and WAAF Auxiliary Units during the Second World War] is comprised of exchanges of letters, information and arguments for and against the participation of Czechoslovak women in the war effort. Women rarely got a word in edgeways in this argument. The book touches on three war zones – Great Britain, the Middle East and the Soviet Union – juxtaposing the different rationale that led women to or that prevented them from participating in the war effort. This juxtaposition illustrates the argument that women wanted to be helpful in various capacities, to win the war on behalf of their country. One woman appealed to men on the battlefield to accept them as follows:

"Friends-soldiers! We salute you from one camp, 'somewhere in the Middle East'. We don't know how you view women's emancipation, but we believe that you were pleasantly surprised when you learned that we have decided to exchange our civil [clothes] for khaki. You don't have to be jealous, for the time being we shall not meddle in the affairs of cannons nor do we want to shoot down airplanes. But you must reconcile yourselves to the fact that we shall sit

behind the driving wheel, that you will meet us in hospitals, in warehouses or in offices.” (p. 154)²

But the impediment to women joining the Czechoslovak foreign army lay not with the “friends-soldiers”.

After a brief review of the state of the art and before broaching the crux of the book’s central issues, Stegurová gives a useful historical background to women’s participation in the war effort in several European countries prior to the Second World War and to the circumstances, the fears and the prejudices that surrounded their recruitment during the war. The Ministry of National Defence in exile preferred men without rank to fill the spots in the Czechoslovak foreign army. Around 1941, women began to join the ranks of their British counterpart. The initiative was undertaken by the Council of Czechoslovak Women (*Rada československých žen*) in Great Britain founded in the second half of 1941. Was the government in exile behind the initiative? We do not know. With the government’s acquiescence but without it taking much interest in their welfare, Czechoslovak women joined the auxiliary units of the British army and air force. They learned the ins and outs of handling weapons but were not allowed to use them. This rule could not always be enforced. Should the need arise, women did operate the guns.

The book delves into the negotiations between the British War Office and the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence regarding the issue of female volunteers who wanted to join the war effort. While the Czechoslovak military establishment in Great Britain was unwilling or incapable of organizing the women’s units attached to the Czechoslovak foreign army, the British were unwilling to let the Czechoslovaks meddle in British affairs by allowing the formation of Czechoslovak women’s units within the British army. Women could join the auxiliary units but on an individual basis.

When probing into the situation of Czechoslovak women in the Middle East, Stegurová gives a more intimate portrayal of the women who joined the land force. Mainly spouses of officers, these women became an economic burden to the government, which wanted to evacuate them, separating them from their male partners. Enrolling in the army was not only the fulfilment of a perceived duty and of their desire but a way not to be removed from the locations which they shared with their men. It was true that men’s bias against women wearing uniforms was ever-present. The war disrupted the traditional social order, women either abandoned their traditional role or had to combine their engagement in the war effort with that of being mothers, homemakers and wives. If in the process

² The translation from the original Czech is mine.

women felt emancipated, that was an unintended consequence of any government's political and economic decision.

Czechoslovak women in the USSR war zone illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon. Legally, women were prevented from belonging to the army, but Lieutenant Ludvík Svoboda (later General and Czechoslovak President) encouraged them to participate in the war effort, independently of what the Ministry of Defence and the government in London might have thought. Indeed, according to Svoboda's memoirs, President Edvard Beneš and the Minister of National Defence, Jan Sergěj Ingr, had no interest in strengthening the Czechoslovak army in the Soviet Union in any way so that the liberation of Czechoslovakia did not come from there. A women's fighting force would not have made a difference, but this might have been one element in putting the brakes on women joining the battlefield, or Svoboda might have thought so.³ But Svoboda ignored the legalities of women's participation in the war effort and women went to the front.

In Great Britain Czechoslovak women participated in the war effort shoulder to shoulder with British women, usually in the service sector: they trained together and they went to dances together. But overall, the information regarding their day-to-day hardships and joys is thin. True, these women left piecemeal testimonies which did not allow the author to reconstruct a coherent war time experience. However, the existing testimonies of British women with whom the Czechoslovak women served in the same units would have helped to fill this void. Therefore, Stegurová's book deals more with men's board room discussions than with women's experiences. It is also true that war was the realm of men, but the reason why we are given more from the world of diplomacy than of women's lives on the ground lies in the methodology and sources adopted.

Karolína Stegurová states at the outset of the book that her conceptual approach is one of "traditional historical analysis" (p. 19), not gender theory. Indeed, her method is a critical analysis of sources and literature, providing the reader with a detailed description of the protracted decision-making processes of Czechoslovak bureaucracy regarding women's participation in the Czechoslovak foreign army. This document-based historical research thus becomes an accumulation of opinions and rhetoric. The advantage of sticking rigorously to the facts is that Stegurová leaves no room for speculation. However, it would have been useful to pause from time to time and to provide reflections and elucidations of the primary sources so as to engage the reader in a dialogue.

Stegurová's book follows on from Ivan Procházka's *A královskou korunu měly* [Those with the Royal Crown], which is a useful register of women in British

³ I thank Prokop Tomek for this insight.

military units, however not a thorough investigation.⁴ This makes her study a pioneering incursion into uncharted territory but at the same time it is a missed opportunity to advance the field of gender studies.⁵ Stegurová's bibliography shows that she is aware of that path but decided not to take it.

Finally, Karolína Stegurová delves into women's return to liberated Czechoslovakia. The Red Army received a warmer welcome than the women arriving from the Middle East or from Great Britain. One reason was that the official end of the war was marked on 8 May 1945, so by the time most of these women were demobilized and returned home, the celebration was long over. Consequently, their period of service was recognized as lasting only until 8 May 1945, even though they might have been demobilized a year later. This was not an insignificant subtraction from their service sheet because every year deducted was a year less to be counted for their pension. After the war, women were accepted into the Czechoslovak army, an option denied to them during the war. But the change in regime in 1948 altered the original meaning of women's desire to participate in the armed forces and their numbers subsequently decreased.

In sum: the war had a drastic impact on gender roles, on emancipation, on gaining authority and power in the domestic realm, when male employees and workers, husbands and sons, were drafted to the frontline. Women gained access to public spaces and to employment previously closed to them. How did the gender roles of women who had returned from the war change in post-war Czechoslovakia? The examination of this question could perhaps be on the agenda for future research.

Keywords:

Czechoslovakia; Great Britain; Middle East; Soviet Union; Second World War; Czechoslovak resistance; British Army; Auxiliary Territorial Service; Women's Auxiliary Air Force; women and war; women in the armed forces

⁴ PROCHÁZKA, Ivan: *A královskou korunu měly: Stručný pohled na službu čs. žen v jednotkách britské armády za druhé světové války*. Praha, Vojenský historický ústav 2016.

⁵ See, for instance, SUMMERFIELD, Penny: *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivities in Oral Histories in the Second World War*. Manchester – New York, Manchester University Press 1998; WINGFIELD, Nancy M. – BUCUR, Maria (eds.): *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. Bloomington – Indianapolis, Indiana University Press 2006.

On the Most Diligent Chronicler of the Eastern Bloc

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PRZEPERSKI, Michał:

Mieczysław F. Rakowski: Biografia polityczna.

Warszawa, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej 2021,
432 pages, ISBN 978-83-8229-221-3.

Mieczysław Rakowski (1926–2008), the last communist leader in Poland, is one of the more colourful figures among the politicians that ruled in the former Eastern bloc. He stood out by being different from the average, but only to the extent that allowed him to be part of the circle of functionaries. As the editor-in-chief of the party weekly *Polityka* [Politics], he was considered a political talent from the late 1950s. He liked to give the impression that he would do everything better, more generously and more worldly, if only he were allowed to. Once he arrived at the political summit – he reached the top of the leadership in the early 1980s – he lost his drive and appeal and made no substantial changes. He was already starting to fall into oblivion when, at the turn of the millennium, he published ten large volumes of his *Dzienniki Polityczne* [Political Diaries] from

the years 1958–1990.¹ It turned out that, apart from his well-known journalistic and political career, he also produced another piece of work; for four decades, he chronicled political events, written first in the antechamber of political power and later from its seat. This chronicle mapped in detail developments both in Poland and in the world and provided information obtained at first hand, or through one or – in the worst case – two intermediaries, on how national and foreign policy was formed. It also recorded – often as the only source – the course of hundreds of talks, meetings, discussions, negotiations and travels abroad.

Michał Przeperski, the author of Mieczysław Rakowski's first critical biography, was faced with a challenge on how to tackle such a multitude of sources. How difficult the task was can be shown by a simple calculation: take ten extensive volumes of diaries, expand them with the broadest possible list of resources, complete the missing initial one-third of the biography and present the result in one-tenth of the length of the original. A researcher who is not overwhelmed by this assignment may rejoice at working with an interesting source of information delving into the recesses of communist rule. He or she will examine the veracity, accuracy and authenticity of the published version of diaries, he or she will be seduced by its vision of the world and evaluation of people and events – but he or she will also soon tire of it and start disputing its perspectives and putting his or her own questions to the sources. It is a good thing that Michał Przeperski (born in 1986), a researcher at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (*Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk*), went down this whole path during his previous publications as he was preparing the book. The first of these was published as early as 2012, nine years before the book under review appeared. The outstanding strength of this excellent biography, from beginning to end, is the way in which a relationship is successfully established with the main character, both in terms of understanding and cool evaluation.

In the first chapter, "Youth (1926–1949)", we follow the first steps of the future politician in a small agricultural village near the German border, where his father had a farm of twenty hectares and led a relatively rich political life: he was one of the founders of the local peasant cooperative. In the 1930s he became the mayor of a regional town and represented the political institutions of the authoritative government at local level. This world disappeared completely within the course of a few days in the autumn of 1939: his father was shot right at the beginning of the occupation during a large-scale massacre of prisoners

¹ RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Dzienniki Polityczne*, Vol. 1: 1958–1962. Warszawa, Iskry 1998; Vol. 2: 1963–1966. Warszawa, Iskry 1999; Vol. 3: 1967–1968. Warszawa, Iskry 1999; Vol. 4: 1969–1971. Warszawa, Iskry 2001; Vol. 5: 1972–1975. Warszawa, Iskry 2002; Vol. 6: 1976–1978. Warszawa, Iskry 2002; Vol. 7: 1979–1981. Warszawa, Iskry 2004; Vol. 8: 1981–1983. Warszawa, Iskry 2004; Vol. 9: 1984–1986. Warszawa, Iskry 2004; Vol. 10: 1987–1990. Warszawa, Iskry 2005.

from among the local Polish elite. The then thirteen-year-old Mieczysław and his mother went to live with his aunt in Poznań, where both of them had to start working. The farmer's boy became a worker in a factory that repaired trains. He spent five years of the war there.

After the liberation, he was eighteen years old and joined the army. In the autumn of 1945, after a four-month course, he began his career in Cracow as a political education officer. The biographer refutes later claims by Rakowski about the dangerous adventures that he allegedly had while in uniform near the Polish-Ukrainian ethnic borderland. This was not quite true. The young political officer was sent to a garrison in a large conservative town. Here, he read newspaper reports to soldiers and organized day camps. It soon became evident that, despite not being too refined, he was diligent, a fast learner and extremely ambitious. In March 1947, he joined the communist party. A year later, he completed his secondary distance education and sat for a final exam at a Cracow grammar school. In the rush to further his career, he made certain adjustments to his curriculum vitae, leaving out compromising information about his father's political activity and giving himself a few additional grades of school education. Yet, none of those deceived in this way had any reason to complain. He became a zealous communist and was an above-average student. As a result, in January 1949, he found himself in Warsaw in the first year of the party's newly opened School of Journalism at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR).

The second chapter of the book, "Janissary of the Regime (1949–1957)", starts with his arrival in the capital. The expanding apparatus of the ruling party was being filled with energetic young men, occasionally also women, who quickly settled into the capital city and learnt how to climb the career ladder. Rakowski discovered the benefits of his knowledge of German, which was better than that of his peers in Warsaw, and made use of it both during his study and work activities.

And it was in East Germany in 1952 that he met a twenty-three-year-old violinist, Wanda Wiłkomirska (1929–2018), a soloist at the Days of Polish Culture in Berlin, and in less than half a year they married. For both of them, marriage meant leaving the paths that were usual in their family backgrounds. Wanda was a prodigy and, under the leadership of her father, a professor at a conservatory, had been performing in public since the age of four. This was actually a family standard as her considerably older siblings had all performed as a children's chamber ensemble, the Trio Wiłkomirskich, in Moscow before the First World War. By marrying a government official, Wanda broke from her role of the youngest sibling, and ultimately she was also the most successful of all her relatives, performing in concerts across various continents in the 1960s and 1970s.

According to his biographer, the marriage was also the most important event in Rakowski's professional career. Thanks to his new relatives, he discovered the world of traditional town families, and in the late 1950s he took off his "rádiovka" beret and transformed himself into an elegantly dressed man of fine manners and good taste. Very soon, he made the acquaintance of all of Warsaw's young bohemians and built a solid network of friends in the world of music, theatre and film, a network that probably no one else in the party apparatus had and which helped him greatly in his later career.²

This is because he was in charge of the press. After half a year of training on a party follow-up course in journalism, he left the army and started working directly for the Central Committee as an operative in the press and propaganda services. He organized additional courses for journalism training, supervised the regional press and, after three years, applied to study at the Institute for Education of Scientific Staff. This recently founded institution, under the leadership of philosopher Adam Schaff, offered postgraduate studies for those in top positions in the fields of philosophy, law, economy and history. Rakowski chose the last of these. Any candidate without a university education could participate in these studies after his or her learning potential had been assessed with a preparatory course. Rakowski did well and in the autumn of 1952 started studying diligently and ambitiously. Apart from German, he also refined his Russian, learnt English and filled the gaps in his education. In the preparation for his graduate dissertation and later doctoral thesis, he used the press collection in the Central Committee library. He became an expert in German policy, but he was most active in party organization, becoming its president by the time he completed his studies.

In the autumn of 1955, he returned to his original post in the Central Committee, where he encountered a considerably changed environment. The management of the press was being transformed from a semi-military system with set rules and a strict hierarchy, but it was not clear where it was heading. Factional conflicts resulted in Władysław Gomułka's rise to power. Soon after taking up his post, Gomułka made it clear that discipline should be restored. For the media, this meant limiting the autonomy of the editorial offices, scrapping some press titles and establishing completely new ones. This is how the weekly *Polityka* was founded in the spring of 1957, with a promising operative, Doctor Rakowski, appointed to its management by the party centre.

And this is where the story starts to become really remarkable. We are in the chapter "Maturing: *Polityka* and Practice (1957–1960)". A thirty-one-year-old

² It was far less beneficial to his family life: Rakowski's philandering period resulted in establishing a parallel household with a young actress. In the 1970s, Wanda was a signatory of opposition memoranda and in the 1980s they divorced.

deputy of the editor-in-chief (and soon to be editor-in-chief) keeps on educating himself, developing his strengths and applying them. The weekly did not become a sleepy tribune of the minor Polish "normalization", as was the assignment, but instead gradually evolved into the most interesting and least clichéd press title of the Eastern bloc, with reports at the edge of the possible, and often beyond, leading to much censorship intervention in the preparation of each issue. The mere fact that such a magazine could exist at all was undoubtedly to Rakowski's credit. No one other than a tried and tested comrade from the Central Committee, enjoying the almost unlimited confidence of the members of the highest leadership could dare to enter into permanent conflict with the supervision of the press. In this case, the position of an agile editor-in-chief was clearly understood not as unacceptable arbitrariness, but as a legitimate display of political debate among comrades within the party headquarters (p. 73).

The description of this extraordinary example can help us to understand the entire political ecosystem of officialdom of the Polish communist party at the middle and higher levels. Further adventures of our hero are described by his biographer in the chapters entitled "'Libertarian' of Poor Socialism (1961–1970)" and "In the Antechambers of Power (1971–1980)", which map the power networks in which Rakowski was involved. The terms "patron" and "client", borrowed from Roman history, help to explain these relationships. Part of the narrative reminds one of the words of the sociologist Ireneusz Krzemeński in a debate on the nature of social order in communist Poland, according to which it was "a pseudo-feudal hierarchic system of legalized ideologies" (p. 166).

The material that Rakowski's biographer had in his hands, thanks to the rich documentation in the diaries, raises questions for which the existing historiographic debate has not yet developed corresponding concepts. Rakowski's persistent efforts tested different unwritten rules of government practice, the results of which he noted down in his diary. This source contains images from political life that allow us to see, on the one hand, how interests of all kinds searched for political representation, and, on the other, how politicians and aspiring politicians searched for interest groups which they could rely on. Their coalitions grew through central apparatuses like cobwebs. Individual professions, big enterprises and entire production fields, towns and regions, important institutions of all kinds, all these sought to advance their interests in an incessant struggle for sources. They formed coalitions and promoted their representatives to the highest possible posts in the power apparatuses, blocking or eliminating representatives of opposing coalitions. At the very top sat the party leader and his personal secretariat, which can metaphorically very aptly be called "the court", if we use terms borrowed from elsewhere. That is also where the final decision was taken on unsettled disputes that extended through central apparatuses to

the top. The ruler and his closest circle did not repress these disputes, but rather used them to strengthen their own position, for which it was important that the ongoing struggles should be in a sort of equilibrium. This means that at the court, the disputes at lower levels were not only moderated, but also, to a certain extent, encouraged. This is also why a somewhat undisciplined editor-in-chief of a weekly, which was feared even by higher party officials, could have existed within the system for so long. And if, as a result of injudicious publishing, this editor-in-chief caused such trouble that certain high and mighty officials protested and the existing patron withdrew his support, the party leader, after an impassioned plead for mercy accompanied by a profession of faith in communism and a love for his leader, could reappoint him to the post from which he had been dismissed. This incident happened in 1960 (pp. 86–88).

Rakowski's confidence grew even faster than all his real successes on the way to the top. Over time, he started displaying a pattern of ridiculous grandiosity, which dragged him like a locomotive towards new activities and pursuits, and always and everywhere towards constant self-promotion. This was ideally on television or at private meetings with the most influential politicians or celebrities. When not invited somewhere, he complained and demanded the situation be corrected. We can see how his character helped him to deal with failures, how he never tired of forcing his way to the top. His biographer also vividly describes how Rakowski's nature sometimes impeded him from being able to evaluate many events realistically, because he increasingly interpreted everything through the lens of his personal success.

In the course of his career, he served under four party leaders and was able to become close to each of them, playing the role of a loyal supporter, useful assistant and intimate advisor, whom the leader met – at least occasionally – in private. He was always there when a new leader took up his post and he also saw each of them off pitilessly as a supporter of the next new leader. He always provided leaders with witty thoughts regarding their work and also paid them many compliments, of which, it seems, no leader ever has enough. Gradually, his style as an arduous careerist changed: a promising young man of the 1950s was replaced by an experienced professional in the 1970s.

Then there is the chapter "Deputy Prime Minister (1980–1985)", which describes how he joined the government in 1980 in connection with the mass movement of the independent trade union Solidarity (*Solidarność*). In December 1981, he supported martial law and in its beginning, he formed part of an informal directory, a group of close collaborators of General Wojciech Jaruzelski, which ruled the country. In the mid-1980s, he lost his position in the innermost government circles. The post of vice president of the Polish parliament (*Sejm*), which he was appointed to in 1985, looked like the first step on his way to premature

retirement. However, in the meantime, Mikhail Gorbachev had introduced his doctrine of “new thinking” and Rakowski regained his position. This leads us to the chapter “Grand Finale (1985–1990)”. It describes how Rakowski became the last communist Prime Minister of Poland and how, under his government, the opposition triumphed in the elections. After that, he was elected the last leader of the Polish United Workers’ Party, which his aides, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leszek Miller, transformed into an undertaking with a far greater perspective, a newly established social democracy. Much to his disappointment, however, there was no major role for him in it. Obviously, he wrote them letters full of ideas and comments. This is described in the final chapter, “The Pensioner”.

The final chapter also deals with Rakowski’s diaries, the ten-volume edition of which was published in Warsaw by Iskry publishing house between 1998 and 2005. We learn that the primary sources of the edition are preserved in the collection of the Rakowski papers stored at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University, California. In the last chapter, Przeperski describes the results of the detailed research into these materials that he carried out in the archive, informing us that the published version is not to be trusted: Rakowski made far more substantial changes to the diaries than he admitted to in the published edition’s notes.

As we learn here, the history of the diaries was rather intricate. At the beginning, they were just pieces of papers with notes. After some time, Rakowski retyped them, adjusting the notes and complementing them with quotes from documents, newspaper clippings and correspondence. We learn about him regretting in the early 1980s that the notes for the diaries would have to be recorded orally. In the unpublished part of the diaries from 1990 to 1998, simple factual errors mount up, for example, in the first names of people close to Rakowski. This implies that somebody else retyped the notes. Is it not possible that the clean copies had been typed by somebody else even earlier? We do not know much about this, but it would be useful to find out.

In the preparation of the edited version, Rakowski made further changes to the clean copies of the diaries, amending them quite substantially. Yet these were no cosmetic changes in the sense of polishing the style, correcting clear mistakes or the necessary omission of some overly personal details. On the contrary, he added two completely new passages for periods of several months when, in the midst of political turbulence, he did not keep a diary. This was for last three months of 1980, and for October and November of 1988, when he was in charge of forming a government. He also made substantial changes to the entries elsewhere, changing their meaning, adding comments and making evaluations. The published version of the diaries includes many minor observations that seem to be written with great foresight, for example, when he says he immediately recognized

the great talent of a new editorial apprentice. However, as we see now, some of these notes were added a whole thirty years later. On other occasions during the editing, Rakowski removed some sarcastic or envious remarks, or some of the malicious comments that he often made on the fortunes of his colleagues and the rise and fall of men at the centre of power. In the book, everything seems more polished, well considered and poignant. His biographer sums up the result of his research: "Rakowski's interference in the original entries is substantial. Relatively fewer changes were made to the entries in the 1970s; most were made to the entries in the 1980s. With the regime coming to an end, the additions and changes multiply." (p. 385)

The *Political Diaries* represent "a key to Rakowski", and as such Polish historians have embraced them, "but it should be added that the vast majority of cuts and additions, which they had no idea about, shed a different light on this characteristic and give it a different meaning", Przeperski ironically comments (p. 385). Yet, in the same breath, he adds quite correctly that, despite these problems with the edited version, the diary kept for forty years is probably still Rakowski's greatest achievement. Full stop. But actually, this is not the end of the matter, because much remains to be done.

The task of writing Rakowski's political biography can be ticked off. Michał Przeperski's book fulfils this role very well. The overall image is plausible; it shows the progress of the main figure, and it accompanies him with great skill through all the stages of development. It shows how useful the genre of biography is for the current state of contemporary history, where the most recent and interesting analytical works dealing with political history often tend to limit the period they cover to only a few years in order to include all the necessary sources and offer, to a certain extent, accurate and novel interpretations. In the Polish context, works like this have been published in the last decade, for example, on the end of the old regime by Paweł Kowal,³ or on the first three post-communist governments in 1989 to 1993 by Antoni Dudek.⁴

In skilled hands, however, a biography can be light-footed and can stretch over several decades, representing each event, no matter how important, in a broader context. In a biography, events are faster paced and they guide us through different environments. The research on the dynamics and topography of political careers can be attractive, especially if the life described is eventful and provided

³ KOWAL, Paweł: *Koniec systemu władzy: Polityka ekipy gen. Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego w latach 1986–1989*. Warszawa, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN – Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Trio 2012.

⁴ DUDEK, Antoni: *Od Mazowieckiego do Suchockiej: Pierwsze rządy wolnej Polski*. Kraków, Znak 2019.

the biographer knows how to capture this. In our case, the biographer excels in his description of the main character's involvement in the army, but there is relatively little information on the *Sejm* in the second half of the 1980s. In general, it can be noted that, in his rise to the top, the subject's clear characteristics become rather blurred. It is easy for a newcomer in Rakowski's position to be sharply critical in his diary entries, and it is also easy for a historian to describe this. However, it is much more difficult for a biographer to zoom in on the same character some twenty years later, when he is at the top of the centre of power and is skillfully juggling the different forms of his public persona, in the midst of a torrent of revolutionary events and unreliable resources. Perhaps, the blurriness of Rakowski's image in these passages is an accurate depiction of a long-serving political professional who adapted himself to the changing circumstances so well that he almost vanished as a real person. To sum up, in my view, the image of Rakowski, the politician is practically complete.

But this is not the case for Rakowski, the chronicler. The findings regarding the published version of the diaries raise the question of a new edition of the diaries, which would clarify the development of the text in all the available versions, as well as make available to the public the last part of the diary entries from 1990 to 1998. A new edition is necessary so that full use can be made of this extraordinary source of information on the history of the former Eastern bloc. Given that the edition clearly has transnational importance, this would be necessary not only for Poland, but also for a number of other countries, especially Germany, which Rakowski often visited during his journalistic and political careers, occasionally serving as an emissary for his government. It also contains rich material on the Soviet Union, the United States, Hungary and Austria. Although Rakowski did not have much interest in Czechoslovakia, with the exception of the year 1968, the small and sleepy neighbouring country did get in his way from time to time and we can therefore also find several comments of interest to us.⁵

Translated by Blanka Medková

Keywords:

Mieczysław Rakowski; Poland; communism; Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR); political diaries

⁵ For the commented list of Czech elements from the published version of the Rakowski's diaries from the 1960s and 1970s, see ZÁHRADNÍČEK, Tomáš: Poučený šéfredaktor (Mieczysław F. Rakowski). In: IDEM: *Polské poučení z pražského jara: Tři studie z dějin politického myšlení 1968–1981*. Praha, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR 2011, pp. 59–109.

On Todor Zhivkov's Tastes, *Shkembe Chorba* and Food for Astronauts

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SHKODROVA, Albena:

Communist Gourmet: The Curious Story of Food in the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

Budapest – Vienna – New York, Central European University Press 2021, 251 pages, ISBN 978-963-386-403-6.

The history of food and eating in the countries of the former Soviet bloc as a research field has developed quite successfully in the past ten or fifteen years, with a relatively broad range of methodological approaches. Yet, no solid monograph providing a synthesis on the issue has been written so far. This may be, to a certain extent, due to the attractiveness of the issue as it might be tempting for the authors to take a rather journalistic approach, characterized by a search for partial stories with a wide appeal and often with a very limited critical analysis of the sources. Moreover, archival documents are still largely difficult to access and are scattered among different collections, and therefore challenging to find. Nevertheless, there are some works that have been able to overcome these pitfalls more or less successfully, albeit not perfectly. A number of studies and monographs deal with the situation in South-East Europe – apart from the in many ways specific Yugoslavia, the works focus on different aspects of food in Bulgaria and Romania. This may be somewhat surprising, but less so if we consider that, for example, the already classic work of the Austrian historian Ulf Brunnbauer

from 2007 about socialist lifestyle focused on Bulgaria.¹ A thematic issue of the journal *Food & History*² also contains studies dealing with the situation in Romania and Bulgaria, whereas similar contributions, for example, on Hungary and Poland are lacking. This may be influenced by the fact that, in addition to the Belgian historians Peter Scholliers and Yves Segers, a Bulgarian historian and journalist, Albena Shkodrova, was also a member of the guest editorial team.

Albena Shkodrova is also the author of an extraordinary book entitled *Communist Gourmet: The Curious Story of Food in the People's Republic of Bulgaria*, which I review in this article for its great potential for comparing many issues related to the history of food and eating in Czechoslovakia (or the Czech lands), mainly in the period between 1948 and 1989. It is in fact a revised English version of her very successful book, published in Bulgarian under the title *Sots gurme* in 2014.³ It is definitely not perfect, nor does it offer a synthesis of the history of food in Bulgaria between 1944 and 1989. On the contrary, it is a relatively loose mosaic of essays on selected issues, of different lengths and not all equally detailed. As the title clearly indicates, Shkodrova focuses mainly on some curious cases, for example, the start of Coca-Cola production in the country (surprisingly enough, Bulgaria, which was always very loyal to the Soviet Union, was also the first state in the Soviet bloc to introduce this symbol of American pop culture and the American lifestyle); the taste preferences of the long-time leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (*Bulgarska komunisticheska partiia*) and the most influential man in the country, Todor Zhivkov (1911–1998); and the food for astronauts produced in a cryobiology laboratory. In addition, she also tries to identify some of the typical and specific aspects of food and eating in the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

In doing so, she does not limit herself to the description of food preparation and consumption, but also analyses other issues related to the further stages of the food chain, that is, agricultural production and the food industry. She perhaps pays too much attention to a well-known phenomenon in most socialist countries: the obligatory seasonal work for students, administrative workers and intellectuals in agriculture and the food industry. In this part, she naturally uses recollections obtained through oral history interviews. These cast more light on this practice, which may seem unbelievable today but was generally accepted in both Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria at the time. She also nicely illustrates the impact

¹ BRUNNBAUER, Ulf: „Die sozialistische Lebensweise“: *Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie und Politik in Bulgarien (1944–1989)*. Wien, Böhlau 2007.

² *Food & History*, Vol. 18, No. 1–2 (2020).

³ SHKODROVA, Albena: *Sots gurme: Kurioznata istoriya na kuhnyata v NRB*. Sofiya, Zhanet 45 2014.

that this obligatory temporary work in agriculture and in food conservation enterprises had on the quality of the final food products – demotivated students often intentionally reduced the quality of the vegetable cans, which were one of Bulgaria's important export products. While reading this part of the book, I realized that this key issue in Czechoslovakia has not yet been analysed in detail by historians, even though especially the seasonal hop-picking work represents in many aspects an extremely interesting theme, as was also reflected frequently in film and TV productions of the period.⁴ Moreover, in my view, the obligatory seasonal work in agriculture remains for many contemporary witnesses a painful trauma, like any other, albeit partially paid, forced labour.

Interesting parallels can also be found in other essays dealing with the food industry. For example, the production of “chocolate” from different substitutes also has a long tradition in the Czech lands, such as various kinds of “soya tit-bits” that appear on the Czech counters during retro sales events. The issue of food brands is also fascinating, although the situation in this area in Czechoslovakia was, also due to previous development, markedly different.

The same applies to the chapter on food distribution, which describes, among other things, the already traditional issue of supermarkets (unlike in Czechoslovakia, they appeared in Bulgaria after a delay of several years), as well as networks of shops with luxury goods, where only Western currency could be used (*Pokazne obchody*). The difference between the Bulgarian and the Czechoslovak versions of these shops was that in Bulgaria the customers had to prove the origin of their Western currency. Consequently, the local hustlers did not sell the currency or vouchers (*bony*) like in Czechoslovakia, but mainly resold the acquired goods. Despite the existing parallels, Shkodrova points out that even according to research carried out during the socialist period, Bulgaria lagged behind in the quality of retailing not only compared to Western countries, but also with the other countries of the Soviet bloc, for example the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

The subject matter of the previously mentioned essay on the arrival of Coca-Cola in Bulgaria, possibly as early as the 1960s, is of course very attractive. In contrast with other chapters, in this one Shkodrova also compares the situation with other states of the Eastern bloc (with the Czechoslovak *Kofola* also being mentioned). Her critical approach to the not entirely reliable tale of Toncho Mikhailov, who was responsible for the arrival of the American food giant in the completely unsaturated Bulgarian market for non-alcoholic beverages, is also

⁴ One exception to this is the masters dissertation of Jiří Verner (see: VERNER, Jiří: *Fenomén chmelových brigád v socialistickém Československu* [online]. Praha, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy 2014. [Accessed 2022-11-06.] Available at: https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/67930/DPTX_2011_2_11210_0_342534_0_123017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

valuable. In general, it is clear that the chapter about Coca-Cola underwent a review process in a scholarly journal, which resulted in an improved line of reasoning.⁵ Still, it is somewhat surprising that she practically ignores the role that efforts to encourage international tourism in the country could have played in promoting one of the symbols of American lifestyle in Bulgaria. From my point of view (and also according to the experience of contemporary witnesses), this aspect clearly played an important role in Bulgaria being able to obtain a similar licence for Schweppes soft drinks around the 1980s.

A large part of *Communist Gourmet* is taken up by chapters on public eating in Bulgaria in the period between 1944 and 1989. In these, Shkodrova reflects not only on restaurants, but also on school and company canteens, as well as on a network of popular *shkembedzhiinitsas*, where people relished the Bulgarian version of tripe soup (*shkembe chorba*).⁶ This part also describes a number of features that can be compared with the reality in Czechoslovakia at the time. What I see as an important observation, valid not only for Bulgaria, but also for other countries of the Soviet bloc, is her statement that what restaurants and other similar hospitality establishments lacked most was personality. While this may easily be labelled as a trivial observation that can be deduced from Shkodrova's description of the obsession with various patterns and models, which was apparent not only in model standards and mass centralization of kitchens, but also in typified construction, this fact has not been reflected sufficiently in the analysis of gastronomy in the Soviet bloc countries so far. There are also other comments on the meals offered in public eating establishments which give a number of ideas for comparison with the situation in other countries of the socialist camp, be it the involvement of the secret police in the operation of the more luxurious restaurants intended mainly for Western visitors, or a diet based mainly on simple and quick meat-based dishes from relatively cheap ingredients (in Bulgaria, these were mainly *kebapche* and *kiufteta* from grilled minced meat). The comment on the inclusion of classic meals of French *haute cuisine*, considered by Shkodrova to be proof of the provincialism of luxury gastronomy, is also interesting.

What I am not quite sure about is whether in the case of Czechoslovakia we could confirm the statement about the low social status of cooks, which contrasted starkly with the exceptionally strong position of waiters (which we know

⁵ The chapter is based on the following article: SHKODROVA, Albena: Revisiting Coca-Cola's "Accidental" Entry into Communist Europe. In: *Gastronomica*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2018), pp. 59–72.

⁶ See EADEM: "Tripe Soup for All Women!" Transgression of Gender Boundaries as Part of Female Identity in Communist and Contemporary Bulgaria. In: *Soudobé dějiny / CJCH*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2021), pp. 648–675.

from the Czechoslovak environment very well). As early as the 1960s, a group of celebrity cooks emerged in Czechoslovakia, who, among other things, were able to travel to different events in the West, which was seen as an extraordinary benefit. Needless to say, cooks in ordinary restaurants could only dream of such privileges. Another big issue is the food supplies to restaurants – I remember how in the mid-1980s we were told in one of the most luxurious restaurants in Prague, Alcron, that they did not have supplies of veal. The situation was identical in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia with regard to high number of economic criminal activities related to the operation of restaurants, such as the theft of food, the sale of alcohol acquired by the waiters from retail shops or spirits diluted with water. However, many of these problems also existed and still exist in Western countries, as is shown, for example, by Arthur Hailey's famous novel *Hotel*.⁷ Shkodrova also touches upon the issue of tips, which were officially prohibited in Bulgaria, as well as the issue of restaurants that focused on the gastronomy of other nations. A brief comment here: unlike in Prague, in Sofia a restaurant called Berlin, offering German food, operated successfully, which shows how differently German gastronomy was perceived in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.

A relatively brief chapter on the influence of the taste preferences of Todor Zhivkov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and on the general eating habits in Bulgaria, in principle copies a situation discussed in the studies on Erich Honecker in the GDR,⁸ which could also be expected to be similar in Czechoslovakia, for example, in the cases of Czechoslovak presidents Antonín Zápotocký and Antonín Novotný. Zhivkov's parents owned a pub, where he also occasionally helped as a waiter, but his interest in food (and, in contrast to other communist leaders, also in alcohol) was only minimal. If he loved anything, it was the most simple and popular meals. This contributed to the concept that a good meal amounts to a big helping of food. However, it is worth noting that the image of a political leader or even a "father of the nation", as an ascetic, without much interest in anything so mundane as food, has parallels in our country in the person of the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (president from 1918 to 1935), and his successor, Edvard Beneš. Even the current democratic politicians usually do not present themselves as lovers of refined *haute cuisine*, because it could harm them in the eyes of some of their voters. The image of lovers of fast food restaurants in the United States or jovial beer drinkers, for example, in Germany, Austria or in the Czech Republic is much more advantageous.

⁷ See HAILEY, Arthur: *Hotel*. Garden City [N. Y.], Doubleday 1965.

⁸ See for example: VOIGT, Jutta: *Der Geschmack des Ostens: Vom Essen, Trinken und Leben in der DDR*. Berlin, Gustav Kiepenheuer 2005, pp. 17–18.

Not even in this relatively long review do I want to analyse in detail the individual essays or chapters. Perhaps, I will just note that I was slightly disappointed by the chapter on school and company canteens. In general, Shkodrova draws an image similar to that in Czechoslovakia, that is, monotonous and low-quality food prepared by demotivated and often incompetent female cooks, because the more capable ones have left in search of better jobs in restaurants. There is also a passage describing school canteens as a place of repulsive repression or even "terror" against children, a notion which is also popular in the Czech Republic.⁹ However, overall, I found this part of the book sketchier and less insightful than other essays, especially as I find the issue of school and company canteens extremely inspiring.

On the other hand, I appreciate the fact that Shkodrova focuses at least partially on restaurants patronized by the popular classes – in the case of Bulgaria, places where tripe soup was served. These include the most famous restaurant of this type – *Bumbarnika*, which, ironically, was part of the luxury hotel Trimontsium in Plovdiv. Among other issues, this chapter focuses on how the working class mixed with the intelligentsia in these restaurants, a situation that we know from the classic Czech pub.

However, Chapter Eleven was a real pleasure, because it deals with my favourite issue of national cuisine: its creation and how the communist power worked with it. An insight into Bulgaria is all the more interesting for Czech historians as in the 1950s and 1960s Bulgarian cuisine was presented in Czechoslovakia, mainly through the professional discourse on nutrition, as the best model worth following. Shkodrova draws primarily on the analysis of published cookbooks. This shows that, in comparison with the situation in Central Europe, the concept of a Bulgarian national cuisine was slightly delayed. She also pays attention to the specific dilemma of whether Bulgarian gastronomy should subscribe to the influence of the Ottoman Empire or rather embrace the impulses from Western Europe. From 1944, after the communists came into power in Bulgaria, the fight against nationalism influenced cookbook publishing, which also impacted on the cuisine. Yet, Shkodrova also states that interest in cooking in general declined, demonstrating this by the decreasing number of cookbooks published in Bulgaria at the time, in comparison with the numbers during the interwar era. However, this is a questionable argument given the major changes in book publishing in general. She also fails to consider the number of copies printed and sold. For example, in Czechoslovakia, cookbooks had a very high print volume and were bestsellers.

⁹ See DRDA, Adam – MLEJNEK, Josef Jr. – ŠKODA, Stanislav: *Mýty o socialistických časech*. Praha, Člověk v tísni 2010, p. 17.

It is probably not surprising that mainly in the 1950s any references to Western cuisine disappeared from the cookbooks and many dishes were renamed, with all references to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Church disappearing. Moreover, Christmas dishes became New Year dishes. The second half of the 1950s saw the rise of “Arcadian names” for meals, referencing the bucolic paintings of pre-modernism, which was quite interesting given the atmosphere of the general celebration of industrialization. This was probably related to the creation of the popular national Bulgarian cuisine by nutritional experts, and by following their concept people planned their diet by healthy instincts. These instincts, however, degenerated under the influence of the city and capitalism. Since the 1960s, the concept of a national Bulgarian cuisine was also greatly influenced by tourism. This manifested itself in a certain “re-westernization” of meal names on the menus of luxury restaurants, although these were often merely formal changes. The emphasis put on “national traditions” was also stressed. This came to a head in 1981, when the Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party demanded that the national cuisine must be implemented to a greater extent in public dining.

Apart from this main narrative, Shkodrova mentions two other interesting phenomena, which also have parallels in the Czech environment – one is the surprisingly small influence of “Soviet” gastronomy, even though Bulgaria, like Czechoslovakia, willingly adopted Soviet influences in practically all other areas, including lifestyle. The second issue is the existence of a personality that embodied continuity with interwar *haute cuisine*. In Bulgaria, this was the chef of the tsar, Boris III, Natsko Sotirov (1894–1968), who later also cooked for the first Bulgarian communist leader Georgi Dimitrov, and, most importantly, published a very influential cookbook, entitled *Savremenna kuhnya* [Contemporary Cuisine] in 1959.¹⁰

Shkodrova’s long-term interest is in home-cooking and especially the position of women in this domestic setting. Therefore, it is only logical that she also includes a chapter in the book on canning in Bulgarian households. This was an important activity conducted by women, even in families ruled by men. According to her, it was interesting that the state adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards canning. On the one hand, it was seen as a technologically old-fashioned activity, while, on the other hand, home canning helped deal with supply problems. Again, we can identify a number of parallels with the Czechoslovak environment: for example, the problems with purchasing lids and other necessary items. This issue offers plenty of opportunity for comparative studies, and not only for a comparison of the Czechoslovak and Bulgarian realities, because home canning was also very popular, for example, in the GDR and traditionally in Austria.

¹⁰ SOTIROV, Natsko: *Savremenna kuhnya: 3000 retsepti*. Sofia, Tehnika 1959.

The icing on the cake in the book is the essay which offers an immensely fascinating parallel with one aspect of food history that I have also touched upon in my research on Czech gastronomy: the history of the preparation of food for astronauts.¹¹ However, whereas the Czech efforts using algae did not prove very successful, the production based on lyophilization (i.e. vacuum freeze-drying), promoted by the Bulgarian academic Tsvetan Tsvetkov, was a huge success, turning Bulgaria into a great power in this field. It is interesting to note that, according to research by James Eduard Malin, which was presented at the International Commission for Research into European Food History (ICREFH) symposium in Rome in 2021, American intelligence associated the failure of Czechoslovakia in the field of astronaut food, rather unconvincingly, with the ideologically conditioned aversion of the Soviet leaders towards Czech national cuisine.

Hopefully, this somewhat lengthy review clearly shows that I consider Albena Shkodrova's book *Communist Gourmet* crucial for research on the history of food in the countries of the Soviet bloc and that I believe anyone interested in this field of research should become familiar with it. It offers excellent opportunities for comparative research mainly in the Central and Eastern European regions. Nevertheless, the "mosaic" format of the book, which focuses the reader's attention on selected "interesting" issues, also has some significant shortcomings. We learn relatively little, for example, about the influence of doctors on the discourse around diet, and it offers no deeper insight into the eating habits of specific age groups (such as children and seniors) or eating in the army, nor into the role of ethnographic research works or the differences between everyday and festive eating. There are many other issues that require attention. Shkodrova's approach is also not always sufficiently critical, for example when dealing with the data obtained through oral history interviews (the chapter on Coca-Cola, however, is an exception). Nevertheless, none of this takes away from its significance and excellence, nor from the numerous inspirational observations that it contains.

Translated by Blanka Medková

Keywords:

Bulgaria; communism; Cold War; gastronomy; everyday life; history of food; restaurants

¹¹ See FRANC, Martin: *Řasy, nebo knedlíky? Postoje odborníků na výživu k inovacím a tradicím v české stravě v 50. a 60. letech 20. století*. Praha, Výzkumné centrum pro dějiny vědy – Scriptorium 2003, in particular p. 159.

First Steps Towards a Fruitful Analysis of the Causes and the Outcome of the Kosovo Crisis

Reflections on the Book by the Serbian Historian
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RISTANOVIĆ, Petar:

Kosovsko pitanje 1974–1989.

Novi Sad – Beograd, Prometej – Informatika 2019,
580 pages, ISBN 978-86-515-1555-5.

Dealing with the trauma caused by the bombing of Yugoslavia and the subsequent loss of Kosovo is understandably difficult for Serbian society. Bitterness related to this was one of the main reasons why Serbian historiography has been unable to make any serious attempt in the past two decades at mapping the development of this region in the modern era. However, it appears the time is ripe now for Serbian researchers to start approaching this issue more or less free of strong emotions and prejudice. Hopefully, they will stop seeing the adverse outcome of a long crisis in Kosovo as a national catastrophe for Serbia and will cease to relate it solely to adversity, the treachery of superpowers, the betrayal of unfaithful allies and the ungratefulness of the Albanian population. This opens up an opportunity to search for a reply to the key question that arises in this connection: Why did Belgrade's elites fail to bind the majority Kosovo population,

either by pressure or by a generous responsiveness, closer to Serbia and Yugoslavia for nearly a century? Apart from abandoning a deep-rooted nationalistic paradigm, the analysis of a broad scope of sources that have so far been overlooked is a precondition to finding the right answers to this and many other of related questions.

A representative source base is the main strength of monograph *Kosovsko pitanje 1974–1989* [Kosovo Issue 1974–1989] under review. Petar Ristanović based his work on an analysis of an incredibly broad and varied spectrum of information sources, mainly archival. Only researchers who have had the opportunity to examine documents produced in the 1970s and mainly in the 1980s in connection with the activities of the key bodies of the Yugoslav union and its republics can imagine how arduous such a research undertaking is. All the top party and state institutions made decisions collectively, usually after lengthy debates extending over several days. The transcripts of audio recordings or stenographic notes taken at their meetings comprise thousands and thousands of typewritten pages.

The monograph is based mainly on the collection of documents of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia's (*Savez komunista Jugoslavije*, SKJ) federal leadership and on the documents of the influential Federal Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Savezni savjet za zaštitu ustavnog poretka*), established as an advisory body to the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička federativna republika Jugoslavija*, SFRJ). The author also thoroughly analyses the archival collections of documents produced by similar bodies active on the level of the Socialist Republic of Serbia (*Socijalistička Republika Srbija*). However, as regards the documents resulting from the activity of Kosovo's institutions, he was only able to gain partial access to them. According to his findings, Pristina's authorities often did not hand over copies of key documents to the Serbian leadership at all, or since the late 1960s they repeatedly sent them only in Albanian (a language not read by Ristanović).

The research into the periodical press that Ristanović carried out was equally rigorous. The dailies, political journals and semi-tabloid newspapers and magazines are very rich sources of essential information on the social and political conditions in the then Yugoslavia, especially for the period of the mid-late 1980s, which saw press control practically disappear from the Yugoslav public space.

The high and even exceptional quantity as well as quality of the sources used by Ristanović in the preparation of his monograph also apply to the memoirs. He knows all the important autobiographies written by actors in Yugoslav political life of the final two decades of its existence. He also drew on several unpublished memoirs and diaries. In this regard, especially the diary entries of Dragošlav Marković (1920–2005), among the three or four most influential politicians of Serbian origin active in the Yugoslav public scene in the last years of Tito's life as

well as the first period after his death, certainly made a great contribution.¹ Given the meticulousness with which Ristanović gathered the information sources, it is somewhat surprising that he has omitted the Sarajevo edition of the translation of Azem Vllasi's memoirs.² Vlassi (b. 1948) was probably the single most important representative of the younger generation of Albanian party functionaries in Kosovo and an important figure in the political scene in the last decade of Yugoslavia's existence.

Ristanović is familiar with the basic secondary English-language literature on modern Kosovo history. His approach towards the "pivotal" works of British authors Noel Malcolm³ and Miranda Vickers⁴ is legitimately and reasonably critical. He not only (aptly) states that neither of them has seen any archival documents on the modern development of Kosovo produced in the Yugoslav environment, but he also repeatedly confronts both historians' inaccurate or incorrect data and interpretations using relevant documents.

Due to the unfamiliarity with the language, the author was not able to use secondary literature and published documents written in Albanian, nor carry out research in Kosovo's archives. This is certainly a handicap, as Ristanović has to view a number of aspects of Kosovo's reality of the period solely through the lens of documents, mostly official, written in Serbo-Croatian. His reflections on the everyday life of the majority (that is, Albanian) society in Kosovo and the activity of illegal Albanian groups and organizations are therefore necessarily distorted. On the other hand, when he enters a field that is historically *de facto* unexplored, the lack of knowledge of Albanian documents is not, in my view, a fundamental flaw. Ristanović still had to deal with a large number of documents. The need to analyse a similar quantity of additional archival documents, press articles and diaries might have represented a serious complication in completing the book. By building on Ristanović's pioneering research, future researchers with knowledge of both Serbian and Albanian will have the opportunity to take the research on the political and social development of Kosovo in the last period of Yugoslavia's existence to a new level.

¹ In 1987, when this kind of title attracted public attention, Marković published two volumes of diary entries from 1967–1978. His diary entries not only serve as an important source for understanding how the political system of Tito's federation worked, but also vividly reflect the everyday life of a top party and state functionary. (See MARKOVIĆ, Dragoslav D.: *Život i politika 1967–1978* [Life and Politics 1967–1978]. Beograd, Rad 1987.)

² VLLASI, Azem: *Kosovo, početak raspada* [Kosovo, the Beginning of Disintegration]. Sarajevo, Šahinpašić 2016.

³ MALCOM, Noel: *Kosovo: A Short History*. London, Macmillan 1998.

⁴ VICKERS, Miranda: *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London, Hurst & Co. 1998.

Ristanović's erudition and undeniably high professionalism in working with a voluminous heuristic basis, so far unexplored by other historians, stands out even more if we take note of his brief biographical information in the book. Ristanović published his monograph as a barely thirty-year-old researcher, working in a regional research centre in one of the Serbian enclaves in the north of Kosovo. He drew on his doctoral thesis entitled *Serbian Intellectual Elite and the Kosovo Issue 1974–1989*, defended at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. His relative youth, short professional career thus far and his post in a provincial research institution increases one's respect for his diligence and erudition.⁵

The scope of the heuristic basis and the related knowledge of relevant political, economic and social facts gave Ristanović an opportunity to seek a more fundamental revision of views and evaluations of the Kosovo issue that have long been ingrained in Serbian historiography and offer a new interpretation of key issues in Kosovo's modern development. Ristanović did not take up this opportunity, which is, given the atmosphere prevailing in Serbian historical circles as well as society is quite understandable. His monograph therefore represents an important contribution to the knowledge about the modern history of Kosovo. It is, however, not a ground-breaking work that will determine the basic direction of further research on the previously mentioned issues in the long-term.

One of the reasons for this is the chronological and interpretative framework he selected. Ristanović did not publish his doctoral thesis as a work with a clear thematic focus and chronology, offering, on the one hand, a dense and clearly arranged account of one of the most important aspects of the Kosovo issue, and providing, on the other hand, space for explaining the broader issues. Instead, Ristanović tried to write a synthetic work dedicated comprehensively to the entire issue and covering a period of more than fifteen years, filled – or rather overfilled – with key events and revolutionary milestones. However, this decision contributed little to the quality of the monograph. Given the extremely low level of the current scholarly knowledge of the researched issues, he merely outlines some of the problems, while omitting others altogether. He does describe the other phenomena or processes, but he renounces their analysis or interpretation without making any further comments. Moreover, the angle from which he views the development of the Kosovo issue and the problems, which he covers in the individual time periods, are in many ways different.

⁵ Ristanović currently works as a researcher at the Institute for Serbian Culture Pristina/Leposavić (*Institut za srpsku kulturu Priština/Leposavić*) in the capital of Kosovo. His second book is entitled *Iluzija moći: Srpski kritički intelektualci i komunistički režim* [The Illusion of Power: Serbian Critical Intellectuals and the Communist Regime]. Beograd, Fondacija Alexandar Nevski – IP Princip 2020.

The first issue that could be considered as rather problematic is the periodization of his narrative. Ending it in the spring of 1989, when the newly elected Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević enforced major restrictions on Kosovan autonomy, is logical and correct. However, the year 1974, which Ristanović takes as a starting point of his narrative, represents a problematic chronological boundary. A new constitution was adopted that year, in many aspects *de facto* transforming the union into a confederation. But these constitutional changes were not reflected, to a greater extent, in Kosovo's position and internal development. Vast autonomy, which put Kosovo in line with other members of the federation with full rights, was attained by Pristina's leadership as early as the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. Logically, if Ristanović wanted an ambitious chronology, he should have started as early as 1969 when the situation stabilized (after the manifestations in the autumn of 1968) and the more than a ten-year-long phase of relatively quiet development of Kosovo began. This phase ended in the spring of 1981 with a wave of much larger and very explosive public protests. Thus, 1981 would have been a more suitable starting point for the book. Or, alternatively, it could have been moved nearly a year earlier, to 1980, when with Josip Broz Tito's death, the last period of the development of the Yugoslav federation began both symbolically and in actuality.

What I perceive as a rather unfortunate and somewhat pedantic decision is the inclusion of two chapters on the main features of Yugoslav development in the chosen period. The author obviously intended to set the issues he analyses in a broader framework, but he was rather unsuccessful in his aim. In these chapters, he mostly repeats well-known facts as well as some simplified or even completely incorrect and clichéd interpretations, but he fails to sufficiently clarify the relationship between these more general problems and processes and the Kosovo issue. Adding some more general passages to the narrative on Kosovo, which lacks the necessary context, would have been more to the point.

Ristanović's aim to provide a comprehensive picture of the Kosovo reality is also reflected in the chapters on the engagement of Enver Hoxha's Albania in the Kosovo issue and on the influence of Albanian exiles in Western countries on the events in Yugoslavia. These parts of the book are expertly written and the facts and findings given are relevant. However, they may be misleading for an uninformed reader. Ristanović (probably unconsciously) repeats in them the buck-passing interpretation which was used in respect of events in Kosovo by the Yugoslav leaders and later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, also by the Serbian establishment. Propaganda from Tirana and the different activities of the politically rather fragmented Albanian émigrés in the West certainly did influence the events in Kosovo, but the impact of these activities was by no means decisive.

While the chapters on developments up to approximately 1982 seek to capture all the circumstances of the Kosovo issue, in the subsequent parts of the book the author focuses only on two important, albeit key, aspects of the Kosovo issue. The first of them is the mobilization of the Serbian minority in Kosovo. The spontaneous birth of a vital movement was connected to the concerns of Slavic minorities in this autonomous area, provoked by the previously mentioned Albanian demonstrations in 1981, as well as by the increasing concerns over the further deterioration of interethnic relations. Taking advantage of the gradual weakening of the authoritarian regime, informal leaders of this movement sought to enforce a major change in the situation which was created in Kosovo after 1966. As Ristanović correctly points out, speedy removal of barriers which until then had limited media space greatly helped the Kosovo Serbs. Reports on the difficult situation in Kosovo and dramatic news coverage of the real or alleged harassment of the Slavic minority quickly drew public attention. This only increased after Serbian activists from Kosovo started to pursue their goals by staging demonstrations in Belgrade. The Yugoslav, and mainly the Serbian leadership, therefore, could not ignore the increasing tensions in the autonomous southern province of Serbia.

In the final part of the narrative, Ristanović focuses on the changing approach of the Belgrade (Serbian rather than Yugoslav) leadership towards Kosovo, on the internal conflicts among its key members and the attitude of the still informal Serbian opposition to these problems. These passages, related roughly to the period of 1985–1988, are written with high competence and expertise and are also the best stylistically. This is clearly an issue that Ristanović is well versed in.

The monograph lacks a conclusion. I would not consider this a flaw if the author had included necessary evaluations and generalizations in the individual chapters or thematic parts. Occasionally, Ristanović does so. Some of his observations are correct, others are even very apt. However, in many cases he avoids any evaluation at all or paraphrases a clichéd interpretation that has been long entrenched in Serbian journalistic and historiographic discourses.

I agree with the author that in the 1980s the Serbian opposition in the long-term avoided any comments on the developments in Kosovo primarily because its position on this issue was, in many aspects, in line with the approach of the Serbian party leadership. The oft-repeated statement that, in comparison with Kosovo, the position of Albanians in Macedonia was far worse and that the authorities in Skopje did not hesitate to use open discrimination against them is entirely truthful. The thesis that there was no fundamental difference between the conceptual and programme goals with regard to the Kosovo issue as pursued by Ivan Stambolić (1936–2000) and Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006), the two key figures in the Serbian leadership of the mid-1980s, can also be agreed with. The differences in opinion between them concerned only the methods of how to achieve these

goals. However, in this regard, we cannot really say whether, only some years later, Milošević's former unsuccessful opponent would have let things go as far as a confrontation with the Albanian population's violent resistance. Ristanović also repeats a well-known thesis according to which Milošević, for a long time, at least until the spring of 1987, showed no interest in nor took any stand on the events in Kosovo. However, according to some documents, as early as November 1986, the future authoritative leader of Serbia spoke out very radically on this issue at the internal meeting of the top state and party functionaries, calling for firm action against "Albanian irredentism".⁶

The author differentiates little among the Albanian party functionaries. He repeatedly claims that nearly all members of the highest Kosovo leadership belonged to the "Gjakova group", named after one of the local centres in the west of Kosovo where these leaders came from. He emphasizes their family, tribal and neighbourly ties. However, he writes little about how they approached everyday political questions or how they viewed key issues related to the existence and future of Kosovo, its place within the Yugoslav federation or its relationships with Albania. He merely states that their main goal was to acquire as much power as possible for the Pristina authorities and to prioritize the Albanian part of the population. According to Ristanović, who again clearly oversimplifies here, the more responsive attitudes towards Yugoslavia and Serbia that could be observed in the activities of several other Albanian functionaries (for example Sinan Hasani and Kolë Shiroka) were related to their family ties within the Serbian environment. Global condemnation of Serbian communist politicians, who were active in the Kosovo leadership, also seems overly simplistic to me. Ristanović views their influence as only marginal and their role, which they egoistically used to achieve purely private goals, as merely ornamental.

I could mention many more similar critical observations. Ristanović fails to reflect on why, as late as the 1970s, a large part of the Kosovo Albanians kept looking to Albania with hope, even though Enver Hoxha (1908–1985) had transformed it into a tough and unattractive country. He makes no attempt to find out why Hoxha's authentically Stalinist regime served as a model for most of the illegal groups and organizations, which had formed in the environment of Yugoslav Albanians since the 1960s. Was it merely fascination with the "Albanian Piemont", or was this bizarre attraction also influenced by the enormous poverty and large social differences in Kosovo, to which the ascetic socialism in Albania could serve as an attractive alternative?

⁶ *Arhiv Jugoslavije* [Archives of Yugoslavia], Beograd, collection 803, Predsedništvo SFRJ [Presidency of SFRY], cardbox 439, transcript of stenographic notes taken at an internal meeting of 6 November 1986.

Ristanović also puts forth the thesis that, after the Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913, periods of Serbian and Albanian dominance alternated in the development of Kosovo. He sees the periods of Italian and German occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War and the post-1966 period as phases of Albanian dominance. This in principle is a correct statement. However, without taking into account the level of dominance, its form and the impact of this situation on everyday life in Kosovo, it is rather vague and misleading. The uninformed reader will not understand that, for example, between 1948 and 1958, Serbian domination meant strict, even brutal, police surveillance over Kosovo's majority Albanian population as well as privileges for the Serbs in many areas of public life. After 1966, police surveillance was considerably reduced, and although the dominance of local officials of Albanian origin in the administration of Kosovo was established at that time, and was to last for more than twenty years, it cannot be claimed that the state authorities systematically discriminated against the Serbian minority. Yet, there is no doubt that informal pressure by the majority on the Slavic minority increased at that time. While we know how it was exerted, defining its scope and intensity is far more difficult.

The theses long present in the Serbian reflection of Kosovo's development that Ristanović adopts include the claim on retrogression experienced by the region in the 1970s under the administration of Albanian functionaries, which was under little control from the centre. He stresses that the patriarchal character of Albanian society was strengthened again in this period. While this may be true for social and economic conditions in rural Kosovo, it is not necessarily true for the younger, more educated class of town dwellers whose cultural and civilizational standards clearly increased at that time. The very fact that the modern national movement of the Kosovo Albanians accelerated at that time and grew stronger is indicative of the onset of the modernization processes. This was also the case when the class of factory workers formed, which later in characteristic fashion entered the public scene as one of the driving forces of the Albanian national movement in active resistance against the restrictions of Kosovo's autonomy, as enforced by Milošević. The class of the intelligentsia also grew and was no longer formed almost exclusively of humanities graduates, but also of doctors and engineers. This modernization fully manifested itself both during the passive resistance of Kosovo Albanians in the first half of the 1990s and during the subsequent national liberation war. Nothing is changed by the fact that with the reduced police surveillance in Kosovo in the 1970s the number of cases of blood feud temporarily increased or that the high fertility rates, typical of the Albanian part of the population, did not drop at that time. After all, as we know today, the modernization processes in Albanian society in Kosovo since the late 1950s led to the rapid decrease of fertility rates in this region by the end of the millennium.

Petar Ristanović repeatedly points out that the problems in Kosovo were caused, to a great extent, by the radical lessening of the Serbian leadership's influence on the situation in this autonomous province after 1966. However, this claim is not grounded in arguments. In this context, the question arises as to how else the Serbian leaders could direct or regulate the development in Kosovo. How could they accelerate economic development and eliminate the spontaneous radicalizing national movement of the Albanian majority? Milošević succeeded in radically limiting Kosovo's autonomy, but he was at his wits' end when he encountered protests and subsequently passive resistance. As I have mentioned above, Ristanović repeatedly reiterates that the Macedonian authorities did not hesitate to radically suppress any displays of national emancipation of the Albanians living in this republic. However, when Yugoslavia disintegrated, coexistence with this ethnic group was no different than relations between the Albanians and the Serbs in Kosovo.

As Ristanović states in his introduction, which is written elegantly and placed carefully in perspective, the Kosovo issue persisted into the twentieth century as an unresolved relic of a complex of problems which a century before were known as "the Eastern issue". Yet he does not expand on this thesis nor provide any details on it, even though further deliberation on it could help us to understand the Kosovo issue. As the historical experience from the post-1945 development shows, the stabilization of the situation in Kosovo was an unsolvable task for both Serbia and Yugoslavia. Neither repression, generous responsiveness nor support of the broadest possible modernization could convince or force the region's majority population to accept the borders defined in 1913 and the division of the Albanian ethnic space. European metropolises underwent a similar experience during the disintegration of colonial empires. Algeria did not become a French region, even though in that case its modernization would have brought the local Arab majority a more rapid economic growth and the conditions for social and cultural transformation than it experienced as an independent state.

I am well aware that as a foreign researcher, I can reflect on this context in a broader perspective than Serbian historians. Still, I think that – probably later rather than sooner – these issues will also be discussed in Serbian historical circles. This innovative and expert monograph by Petar Ristanović is a significant step in that direction.

Translated by Blanka Medková

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