

WRITING HISTORY UNDER THE «DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT»: YUGOSLAV HISTORIOGRAPHY 1945–1991

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the development of the historiography in the former socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991). Starting with the revolutionary changes after the Second World War and the establishment of the «dictatorship of the proletariat», the paper considers the ideological surveillance imposed on historiography entailing its reconceptualization on the Marxist grounds. Despite the existence of common Yugoslav institutions, Yugoslav historiography was constituted by six historiographies focusing their research programs on the history of their own nation, i.e. the republic. Therefore, many joint historiographical projects were either left unfinished or courted controversies between historians over a number of phenomena from the Yugoslav history. Yugoslav historiography emancipated from Marxist dogmatism, and modernized itself following various forms of social history due to a gradual weakening of ideological surveillance from the 1960s onwards. However, the modernization of Yugoslav historiography was carried out only partially because of the growing social and political crises which eventually led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Keywords:

Socialist Yugoslavia; Marxism; historiography; historical theory; ideology.

Yugoslav historiography denotes the historiography developing in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia in the interwar period, as well as in socialist Yugoslavia from the end of the Second World War until the country's disintegration at the beginning of the 1990s. The existence of uniform Yugoslav historiography was questioned by some authors, arguing that it had actually never existed as a single entity (Repe 1999). From this perspective, Yugoslav historiography was only the common denominator for several national historiographies which, following their own dynamics, developed more or less independently from each other within Yugoslavia (Najbar-Agičić 2013a: 248–249; Janković 2016). In spite of the different views on the character of Yugoslav historiography, it is possible to speak about some unique Yugoslav historiography considering not only the common state in which it developed, but also the existence of common historiographical institutions (professional associations, projects, and periodicals) as well as the prevailing theoretical and methodological paradigm shared by most of the Yugoslav historians. Following this assumption, this paper will analyze the ideological conditions in which historiography developed, as well as its organizational structure, conceptual framework, and modernization efforts in the socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991).

The development of Yugoslav historiography between the world wars was marked by the attempts to bring three national historiographies closer – Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian which established themselves as academic disciplines at the turn of the 20th century. Simultaneously with the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929, the ideology of the so-called «integral Yugoslavism» was proclaimed (Djokic 2003: 136–156). As an immediate expression of this conception which tended to forge the various South Slavic peoples into one united Yugoslav nation, the Yugoslav Historical Society was established. It launched *The Yugoslav Historical Review* [*Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*] in 1935. This leading forum of Yugoslav historiography was edited by some of the most renowned historians from Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, which were the only three university centers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Dimić 1997). As enthusiastic proponents of Yugoslavism, these historians emphasized the elements of South Slavic unity in their historical narratives (Djokic 2003; Ćorović 1933; Najbar-Agičić 2013b: 8). After the Second World War, Yugoslav historiography continued to develop in entirely different social, political, and ideological conditions.

The winners in the war, which was characterized by bloody civil-, interethnic-, and confessional conflicts, were the Yugoslav communists and their resistance movement. Organizing the struggle against the occupiers, the Yugoslav communists also carried out the socialist revolution. Due to their victory in the war, the communist resistance movement sanctioned the results of the revolution and reestablished Yugoslavia as a federation of six republics. Following the example of the «first land of socialism», during the immediate postwar years (1945–1948), the Communist Party of Yugoslavia implemented a social, economic, and political system almost entirely according to the model of the USSR. Trying to make a radical break with the bourgeois legacy, the new authorities began the fundamental transformation of all aspects of the culture («superstructure») and Yugoslav historiography was forced to adapt to the new social and political reality characterized by the «dictatorship of the proletariat» (Lampe 1996: 226–240).

In the process of «Sovietization», Yugoslav historiography was put under severe ideological control and reconceptualized on the grounds of Marxism-Leninism. The relationship of the communist authorities towards historiography was most concisely expressed by Milovan Đilas, the leading party ideologist of the time. Regarding the global «struggle of socialism against capitalism», he emphasized the importance of refuting the «bourgeois way of thinking» and constituting the historical discipline on the grounds of «dialectical materialism». In the programme document *On the national history as the educational subject* [*O nacionalnoj istoriji kao vaspitnom predmetu*], Đilas argued that in spite of the fact that «we are not able to annihilate the bourgeois scholarship», it was necessary to help the ideology of the working class in the scholarly work (Đilas 1949). Therefore, the ideological surveillance of historiography aimed to functionalize historical studies, especially the teaching of history for the sake of the building of socialism and the creation of a new, socialist kind of men (Koren 2012; Koljanin 2014). In order to fight the «bourgeois conception of history», historiography had to accept dogmatic Marxism as an obligatory ideological framework. At the same time, historiography was expected to give legitimacy to the revolutionary transformation and to the newly established communist order (Nikolić 2003: 28–29). Acting in the one-party system («dictatorship of the proletariat») and under the strict control of the authorities («revolutionary subject»), historiography was forced to accept stereotypes from the communist political jargon as

its conceptual apparatus (Stanković, Dimić 1996; Najbar-Agičić 2013a). In this sense, as early as in the first issue of the *Historical collection* [*Historijski zbornik*], a newly launched journal of the Historical Society of Croatia, the editorial board, referring to the words of comrade Stalin, pointed out that the «genuine scholarship» should do research on the «history of the working masses, history of the people». While the «bourgeois historiography» and its «false objectivism» was sharply criticized, the importance of the «class- and party orientation» of the historiography which should judge the past from the standpoint of «progressivity» was emphasized, as well as its ability to research recent history «in which the present time has its direct roots» (Šidak et alii 1948; Vucinich 1951).

In the processes of «liquidation of the bourgeois scholarship» some of the most renowned historians – as «class enemies» accused of wartime collaboration – were removed from their positions at the university. The sanctions ranged from a loss of employment and expulsion from the academia to civil death and imprisonment. Although these measures were introduced in all three university centers (Najbar-Agičić 2011), it seems that they were the most severe in Belgrade where some prominent Serbian historians were expelled from Belgrade university (Dušan J. Popović, Nikola Radojčić, Jeremija Mitrović) while others were sentenced to civil death (Veselin Čajkanović) and imprisonment (Dragoslav Stranjaković). Slobodan Jovanović, a jurist, sociologist, and historian, and one of the most influential Serbian intellectuals, was sentenced in absentia to civil death and imprisonment too due to his political activity during the Second World War as prime minister of the Yugoslav government in exile (Đorđević 2001: 19; Savić 2005; Milićević 2009: 342–344, Bondžić 2004: 85; Krestić 2019; Đorđević 1973). However, after the purge during the «revolutionary terror», most of the old Professors retained their professional positions. This was enabled by the lack of university professors as well as by the protection of Vaso Čubrilović (1897–1990), an historian who held a high position in the communist régime (Đorđević 2001: 19). This former member of the Young Bosnia who was also a participant in the Sarajevo Assassination, protected some of the most prominent «bourgeois historians» (including the famous Byzantologist George Ostrogorsky). He decisively influenced the politics of history in the community of Yugoslav (and especially Serbian) historians in the ensuing decades (Antonić 2000). Since the revolutionary authorities did not manage to provide ideologically approved staff, members of the

bourgeoisie retained their social positions at the university primarily due to their cultural capital. However, they followed various strategies of cooperation and adaptation to the new social and political reality marked by «dictatorship of the proletariat» (Milićević 2009: 508–543; Bondžić 2004: 80–85). Therefore, in spite of the intentions of the authorities to remove the «reactionary elements» from the academia, the majority of the teaching staff at Yugoslav universities were professors who, by their social habitus and ideological views, were considered to be «bourgeois historians» (Jevtić 1992: 73; Stanković, Dimić 1996: 201). Born at the turn of the 20th century, most of them pursued their higher education in the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia and they belonged to the second generation of the «scientific», i.e. «critical historiography», which reached the top of its creativity after the Second World War. The professors of the «old school» were Milko Kos (1892–1972) and Fran Zwitter (1905–1988) in Ljubljana, Jaroslav Šidak (1903–1986) and Ferdo Čulinović (1897–1971) in Zagreb, as well as Vaso Čubrilović (1897–1990), George Ostrogorsky (1902–1976), Viktor Novak (1889–1977), and Jorjo Tadić (1899–1969) in Belgrade. They did not have «much respect for the ruling ideology, at least regarding the teaching» and the studies of history were not overloaded with Marxist ideology. This fact caught the attention of the Communist Party which warned that «today there were not any Marxists at all among the professorate» (Jevtić 1992: 101; Stanković, Dimić 1996: 210; Najbar-Agičić 2013a: 225). Working in the circumstances marked by the severe ideologization of historical scholarship, the leading Serbian, Croat, and Slovenian historians accepted a kind of intellectual escapism as a strategy of adaptation to the communist régime. Therefore, trying to integrate themselves into the new society, the «old fashioned» historians superficially accepted the Marxist conception of history and its most characteristic ideas such as the base and superstructure, modes of production, socio-economic formations and class struggle. However, at the same time, they redirected their own research mostly to Medieval and Modern History trying to escape the direct surveillance of the authorities which – upon finding its founding myth in the war and revolution – were primarily interested in contemporary history (Banac 1992: 1086; Marković 2004: 47; Brunnbauer 2011).

In that way, in spite of the necessary compromises, the core of the historical profession was preserved and Yugoslav historiography continued to develop on the foundations laid in the interwar years.

Following the escapist strategy, Yugoslav historians tried to avoid the suspicion of the authorities as well as the penetration of dogmatic Marxism in historical studies. However, this practice did not only leave the research of contemporary history to the younger generation of party historians with strong ideological biases, but also had important conceptual consequences. In the first place, it determined the conservation of the traditional historiography mostly focused on establishing individual historical facts in the field of politics and diplomatic relations. This means that prescribing «dialectic materialism» as an obligatory interpretative model for all the social sciences and humanities did not encourage Yugoslav historians to make themselves familiar with the possibilities provided by Marxist social theory. In addition to the historian's traditional reluctance to theoretical considerations (Burke 1993), the other reason for such practice was the perception of Marxism as an ideology imposed by the Communist Party (Marković 2004). This fact was emphasized in the late 1950s in the study devoted to the «contemporary problems of historical studies» written by legal historian Miroslav Đorđević, who held a high position in the party hierarchy (Đorđević 1959). Starting with the role of historical studies in the «socialist development», he considered the lack of research done on contemporary history was a direct result of the unreadiness of the «bourgeois historians» to accept the revolutionary changes. Đorđević explicitly advocated the ideologization of historical studies, arguing that modern history could be interpreted exclusively by the proletariat as «a class aroused from the insides of the capitalist society, a class that overthrew it according to the laws of the revolutionary development, the only class could explain the essence of the bourgeois society and the real causes of its collapse» (Đorđević 1959: 6–8, 18–19). In spite of the fact that this «theoretical» paper did not influence main stream Yugoslav historiography, it is important as an expression of the official views of the «revolutionary subject» on historical studies, and therefore, as a picturesque testimony of the intellectual conditions in which Yugoslav historiography developed (Stanković, Dimić 1996: 251–252).

Bearing in mind these facts, during the entire socialist Yugoslavia period, the conceptual framework of Yugoslav historiography was dominated by the «methodological triangle» consisting, according to Đorđe Stanković, of traditional political history, dogmatic Marxist history, and the so-called «Marxist positivism» as a kind of middle

ground between the extremes (Stanković 1988: 99–104). Originated in Ranke's seminar, the first model became the dominant model, which was then followed by all European national historiographies during the 19th century. Established on the principles of German historicism (Historismus)⁽¹⁾ which considered the state – conceived as a special «historical individuality» – to be the central category of history, the traditional political history dealt with the reconstruction of individual and unique events from political and diplomatic history, as well as the role of the «great individuals». This model was followed by South Slavic historiographies at the turn of the 20th century. Yet, as was the case in many other historiographies, the reception of the historicism was one-sided and its philosophical dimensions about the subject and logic of history, modes of historical inquiry, and distinctiveness of historical knowledge were missing (Iggers 1962). Therefore, it was believed that historical scholarship accomplishes its goals and approves its academic status through detailed source criticism and the reconstruction of unique events from political history. Along with the «terror of factualism», a concept of the *histoire événementielle* with its focus on politics, resulted in the neglect of the social-, economical-, and cultural dimensions of the past: it was neither equipped with appropriate methods of inquiry, nor did it consider these dimensions to be a legitimate subject of research. Contrary to the history of events that had a relatively long tradition, dogmatic Marxist historiography appeared in Yugoslavia after the Second World War as a result of the intentions of the «revolutionary subject» to eliminate the «bourgeois historiography». Primarily interested in the history of the labor movement and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, it used the simplified Marxist schemes considering class struggle as the only contents of history. Interpreting history through the abstract sociological category (exploitation, proletariat, bourgeois, peasantry) and with a strong value judgment (progressive *versus* reactionary), dogmatic Marxist historiography presented a very reduced and extremely depersonalized view of history. Except for «great historical heroes» (regularly revolutionary leaders), there were no «creative individuals» on whom Marxist theory persistently insisted. The bastions of this kind of historiography were institutes for the «history of the Labor

(1) About the difference between «historism» and «historicism» see Berger, Conrad 2015: 22.

movement» established in all the republics (Najbar Agičić 2013a: 402–408; Stanković, Dimić 1996: 256–280). Finally, the «middle way» was the so-called «Marxist positivism»: it appeared as a result of the adaptation of the historians (educated on the principles of the positivist history) to the demands of the official ideology. Understanding political history as the principal subject of historical studies, adherents of this direction accepted some of the Marxist concepts (as the «base and superstructure» and class struggle) but, in fact, continued to follow the traditional model of political historiography. However, all three directions in Yugoslav historiography shared the methodological conservatism characterized by the reconstruction of unique and individual events, accumulation of facts, as well as the lack of theoretical generalizations which could enable the interpretation of political phenomena in the broader social, economic- and cultural context (Stanković 1988; Janković 2016).

During the first postwar years, new academic institutions were established as an integral part of the program of the socialist modernization which paid special attention to the advancement of science and higher education. They were the basis of the historiographical infrastructure during the entire period of socialist Yugoslavia. Historical institutes (as special research units) were established in each of the six republics, as well as the professional historical associations (Slovenia in 1945; Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro in 1947; Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1948; Macedonia in 1953) and new historical journals were launched – Montenegrin *Zapisi* (1947), Serbian *Istorijski glasnik*, Croatian *Historijski zbornik*, Slovenian *Zgodovinski časopis* (1948) and *Godišnjak Istorijskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine* (1949) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Coinciding with the constitutional changes in the Yugoslav federation at the beginning of the 1970s, new centers of historical scholarship were also founded in two autonomous provinces within the Socialist Republic of Serbia – Vojvodina and Kosovo. Generally, this policy of the Yugoslav authorities enabled the development of historical studies in an unprecedented measure – in «undeveloped» republics and provinces like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo which resulted in the first appearance of modern academic historiography ever. Therefore the development of Yugoslav historiographies followed different dynamics – while Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian historiographies continued to develop on the basis of their earlier traditions, the new historiographies faced various problems such as a lack of professional staff, material difficulties, and political

pressures. Political pressures ensued because they had a prominent role in the affirmation of the newly proclaimed nations (which was the case in Montenegro and Macedonia) and in legitimizing the constitutional position of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo) in the Republic of Serbia, respectively (Promitzer 2004; Brunnbauer 2004; Rastoder 2004). In this sense, a characteristic testimony was given by the Society of Historians in Vojvodina (founded in 1972): besides the promotion of historical studies, the teaching of history, and popularization of historical knowledge in Vojvodina, its main goal was «contributing to the development and cultivation of the brotherhood and unity and equality of all nations and nationalities in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially in the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. This was accomplished through the Marxist approach to history and the materialistic interpretation of its phenomena from the standpoint of the interethnic policy of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia ... as well as contributing to the development of socialist society according to the principles of self-management» (Društvo istoričara Vojvodine 1974).

However, along with the republics' institutions, there were also the common Yugoslav historiographical institutions. Developing in the 1950s and 1960s, they presented the core of Yugoslav historiography which, at that time, was more than a mere sum of the republics' historiographies. In the first place, it was the Association of historical societies of Yugoslavia [Savez istorijskih društava Jugoslavije] founded in 1954 that gathered the republics' historical associations, organized congresses of Yugoslav historians (there were nine congresses in total between 1954 and 1988), and from 1962 started publishing *The Yugoslav Historical Review* (Agičić 2015: 21–37). In addition to the three volumes of the bibliography of Yugoslav historiography for the period 1945–1975⁽²⁾ and the cooperation on the *Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia* (published in 8 volumes between 1955 and 1971), the *History of the Yugoslav Peoples* [Istorija naroda Jugoslavije] was certainly the most important collective enterprise of the Yugoslav historians after the Second World War. Launched directly by the highest

(2) See *Dix années d'historiographie yougoslave: 1945-1955*. Belgrade: „Jugoslavija“ (1955); *Historiographie Yougoslave: 1955-1965*. Belgrade: Savez istorijskih društava Jugoslavije (1965); *The historiography of Yugoslavia: 1965-1975*. Belgrade: The Association of Yugoslav historical societies (1975).

officials of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, this project had a strong ideological and political motivation. It was trying to interpret the «most important problems in the history of the Yugoslav peoples» from the standpoint of «historical materialism» that Milovan Đilas considered the «only correct scientific method» (Najbar-Agičić 2013a: 306). In his directions for writing the national history, Đilas demanded that historians apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism «concretely» to the history of South Slavs in order to avoid the abstract and simplified Marxist schemes which do not correspond to the historical reality. He also asked the historians to determine not only the «progressive» but also the «reactionary» social forces, in order to not limit their work in the «narrow national frameworks» nor lose connection with the «national reality». Criticizing the presence of the Yugoslav national unitarism in historiography as the expression of the «bourgeois ideology», Đilas supported the equal treatment of all Yugoslav nations. Finally, besides the didactical goals (providing textbooks for university teaching), *The History of the Yugoslav Peoples* also had an ideological purpose. Considering the task of the historians which was «to support the struggle of the Party for the correct illumination of the peoples' past and the struggle of the Party for a new life», Đilas saw in the planned textbook the «necessary need of the Party's ideological struggle against the overthrown reactionary classes and all sorts of their hangers -on» (Najbar-Agičić 2013a: 213). Đilas's directives served as the basis for the work on the *History of the Yugoslav Peoples* in which historians from all Yugoslav academic centers took part, under the supervision of the ideological commission of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. However, the realization of the entire project did not proceed as expected, primarily because the authors (ordinarily not familiar with Marxism) were not able to ground their interpretation in Marxist theory. Another important problem was the integration of the history of South Slavic peoples into a unique historical narrative (Najbar-Agičić 2013b). Finally, after numerous arrangements mediated by the ideological commission, two volumes were published – the first one covered the Middle Ages (1953) and the second was devoted to Early Modern History (1960). Following the «Marxist-Leninist» periodization and identifying the historical epochs with the «socio-economic formations» (pre-feudal, feudal and capitalist age), the interpretation included a number of factors from economic and social history. However, despite the fact that this historical synthesis was grounded in the «materialist view

of history», its focus was still on political history. Yet, the most important shortcoming of this synthesis was its conception which projected the structure of the Yugoslav federation in the dim and distant past (this was especially the case in the second volume). Although entirely ahistorical, this conception was the result of the ruling ideology and the political «agreements» about the desirable view of history. Finally, this was the reason for the interruptions to the work of the third volume devoted to the «long nineteenth century». Since the historians (and particularly the ideological commission of the Party) did not manage to agree about the interpretation of the origins of South Slavic nations, the project was never finished (Grothausen 1962; Nikolić 2003: 410–414).

Aspecial form of historical writing, the so-called «party historiography», which developed entirely on the model of Soviet historical scholarship, had an especially important place in Yugoslav historiography. The basis of the infrastructure of the «party historiography» was composed of several specialized research units. In the first place, the Institute for Military History had already been founded in 1949 in Belgrade. Its activities were primarily directed toward the collecting and publishing of historical sources from the period of the Second World War with the aim to demonstrate the leading role of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the People's Liberation Movement and the revolution. Despite this obvious ideological aim, the Institute managed to publish a worthy *Collection of documents and data about Liberation Movement of the Yugoslav Peoples* [Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije] encompassing nearly 200 volumes (Branković 1997). At the same time, the authorities did not leave the study of the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (The League of Communists of Yugoslavia from 1952) to the «bourgeois historians». Therefore, they established the multidisciplinary Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade in 1949. According to the party ideologist, it was meant to be a kind of «red university», i.e. «combating center» of the Communist Party accessible only to Marxist historians whose starting point in their research was the official party line (Stanković, Dimić 1996: 263–264). At the beginning of the 1960s, the central institution of the «party historiography» was founded in Belgrade: the Institute for the Research of the Labor Movement and then similar institutes in all the republics and provinces of Yugoslavia (Stanković, Dimić 1996: 279–280, Najbar-Agičić 2013a). What all these newly founded institutes shared in common was that they employed only ideologically

approved researchers and that the focus of their activities was on the publishing of the collection of documents as well as monographs about the history of the labor movement, the history of the Communist Party, People's liberation movement and socialist revolution. Above all, the greatest importance was attached to the writing of the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and to the publishing of the collected works of its most prominent functionaries. Therefore, the short *Review of the History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia* was published already in 1963, while the comprehensive History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia appeared only in 1986. The delay was caused primarily by the general political conditions which influenced decisively this collective project of Yugoslav party historians. In particular, the work on both projects was accompanied by numerous national, political and ideological disputes while the authors, following the political directives, were not guided by the scholarly reasons but by the principle of political symmetry. Hence, they ascribed an equal role to the Communist Party in all Yugoslav republics and provinces. As a result – «finding» the key role of the Party conceived as a «leader of the proletariat» where its impact was almost totally insignificant or even did not exist – *History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia* was an expression of the so-called «consensual historiography». Furthermore, ascribing the most decisive historical role to the «working masses», it was entirely depersonalized: the only persons appearing in the History were the foremost party functionaries, especially Josip Broz Tito (Repe 1999: 315; Nikolić 2003: 123–130). Therefore, the publishing of his collected works was the other central project of Yugoslav «party historiography» although it was never finished due to the collapse of Yugoslavia. The fact that 30 volumes, with the exception of the original edition in Serbo-Croatian, were simultaneously translated and published in Slovenian and Macedonian as well as in Albanian and Hungarian, the languages of the two greatest Yugoslav «nationalities», testifies as to the importance attached to this project (Milenković 1997; Nikolić 2003: 319–322).

The new constitution of 1974, which implemented the (con) federative structure of Yugoslavia and ratified the statehood of the republics, strengthened the processes of political disintegration. In the field of historical studies, this meant the confirmation of eight separate historiographies organized within six republics and two autonomous provinces – Vojvodina and Kosovo (Repe 1999: 320). Although there

were some fragile institutions of Yugoslav historiography, its mainstream was marked by the enclosure within the republic, i.e. the borders and the fading of the common Yugoslav view on history (Petranović 2010: 57–59). While the work on *The History of the Yugoslav peoples* was practically suspended, the voluminous histories of Slovenia, Montenegro, and Macedonia were published during the 1960s and 1970s and the extensive *The History of the Serbian people* appeared in the early 1980s. On the one hand, all these histories were undoubtedly led by epistemological interests but, on the other hand, they all had, more or less, a political function – giving historical legitimacy to the republics and/or nations considered the constitutive elements of the Yugoslav federation; they were also the tool of national affirmation and national integration (Cf. Berger, Conrad 2015: 290–291). Therefore, the disputes which arose regarding the publication of these histories were not motivated by scholarly- but ideological reasons as was the case, for instance, with the thesis about the «Serbian occupation of Macedonia» in the Balkan Wars or the origins of the «Montenegrin nation» and the unification of Serbia and Montenegro (Nikolić 2003). Numerous polemics between Yugoslav historians were reflected in the interethnic relations within the Yugoslav federation (Gross 1986). This became evident, among other things, in the discussions led on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the first Yugoslavia, then in the national policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its struggle against the «Greater-Serbian Hegemony» as well as the responsibility for the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the short April War of 1941 (Banac 1992, Nikolić 2003). The ideological character of the polemics in Yugoslav historiography came to the fore after the publishing of *The History of Yugoslavia* (1972) written by four Serbian historians – Ivan Božić, Sima Ćirković, Milorad Ekmečić, and Vladimir Dedijer (Božić et alii 1972). The book was the unique effort in Yugoslav historiography representing the history of South Slavic peoples from the early Middle Ages until the Second World War from the standpoint of comparative history. Published simultaneously in Serbo-Croatian and English, it received good reviews in Balkanologist circles as «the best comprehensive history of the peoples of Yugoslavia available» (Stokes 1978: 210). However, the bitter disputes which the book provoked among Yugoslav (Serbian and Croatian in the first place) historians demonstrated the power of ideology in the historical culture of Yugoslav society as well as the deep divisions within Yugoslav historiography, which indirectly

reflected the lines of political and national conflicts (Nikolić 2003: 46–67; Marković 2001; Banac 1992: 1090–1092; Repe 1999: 320).

In those circumstances, the modernization of Yugoslav historiography and its search for new ways of historical knowledge took place from the middle of the 1960s. The youngest generation of Yugoslav historians started raising theoretical and methodological issues of historical studies, as well as accepting the approaches of social and economic history. Branislav Đurđev, a specialist in Ottoman history and self-proclaimed expert on Marxist theory, was preoccupied with the philosophy of history. Despite his critique of dogmatic Marxism, he supported a kind of Marxist historiography entirely closed to the most important directions in the 20th century's historical thought including those inspired by Western Marxism (Đurđev 1980; Gross 2001: 13; Luthar 2004: 334). Therefore, a new generation of historians that matured during the 1960s had a key role in the revival of an interest in the theory and methodology of historical studies as a necessary prerequisite for its all-encompassing modernization. Their modernization efforts coincided with similar endeavors in some of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Leaving the traditionalist paradigm of historical studies, all these efforts tried to accept new theoretical approaches while maintaining the Marxist view of history (Luthar 2004: 335; Górný 2011: 254–259; Iggers, 1991). The liberalization of the political order in Yugoslavia from the beginning of the 1960s enabled the emergence of a special Yugoslav form of Marxist philosophy advocated by a group of younger thinkers gathered around the *Praxis* journal. Finding their inspiration in Marx's early writings, *praxis*-philosophers emphasized the humanistic motives in his thought and an authentic type of Marxism. With its critique of dogmatic Marxism, Praxis philosophy enabled the critical reception of Marxism in the Yugoslav society from the end of the 1960s. Loosening these dogmatic restraints paved the way for the inclusion of Yugoslav historiography in the international community of historians, as well as the gradual questioning of its own theoretical conception, a process which was partially induced by the example given by Praxis philosophy. The discussion «about the problems of Yugoslav historical studies» organized by the ideological commission of the Communist Party in 1964 is a testimony of this growing interest for theoretical issues (Nikolić 2003: 26–29). In the following year, *The Yugoslav Historical Review* published an analytical article by Slovenian historian Bogo Grafenauer devoted

to «the problems of methodology of historical studies» (Grafenauer 1965). Journal's editor Jovan Marjanović, an historian holding a high position in the Party's apparatus and the founder of the Department for the History of Yugoslavia at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, pointed out the importance of the conceptual improvement of historical studies. Considering the traditional methodology of historical research to be inappropriate for the study of contemporary history, Marjanović supported the broadening of the research subject, interdisciplinarity, and making a new type of historian who would be familiar with the theory and methodology and have a deep knowledge of other social sciences. At the same time, according to him, the lack of historical synthesis was a direct consequence of the insufficient theoretical knowledge of Yugoslav historians, as well as their prevailing focus on the so-called «small research topics» (Marjanović 1965).

Following these ideas, the modernizing efforts within Yugoslav historiography continued throughout the 1970s. A few outstanding historians with brilliant erudition at the universities across Yugoslavia had a key role in that reconceptualization of historical studies (Stanković 1988: 105). Bogo Grafenauer, a Professor of Medieval- and Early Modern History in Ljubljana, was not only the author of the first companion to the historical theory, but also one of the first supporters of *Annales school* of social history in Yugoslavia (Grafenauer 1960; Rajšp 1996). A similar understanding of history was followed by some of the most prominent Slovenian historians of that time such as Ferdo Gestrin, Vasilij Melik and Peter Vodopivec. A group of younger scholars, gathered around Vodopivec from the end of the 1970s, directed their scholarly interest towards the concept of the French *histoire totale* (Luthar 2004: 336–337)⁽³⁾. Unlike Grafenauer's book published in Slovenian, the companion written by Mirjana Gross, a Professor of Modern History in Zagreb, was much more influential and was used as a university textbook in Yugoslavia (Gross 1976). It was the first book entirely devoted to the history of historiography and the theory of historical studies in the Serbo-Croatian language area. Due to her decades-long interest in the main currents of historical thought, Gross became without a doubt the leading expert in the history of historiography within the community of Yugoslav historians. At the same time, she continuously advocated the

(3) About the development of Slovenian historiography see: Vodopivec 2006; Dolenc 1998

modernization of Yugoslav historiography according to the paradigm of *Annales school*. Her endeavors faced relatively strong opposition among the community of conservative-minded historians and provoked a heavy dispute with Branislav Đurđev who refuted her «so-called structuralist approach to history» (Đurđev 1978; Gross 2001: 13–14). However, Gross's conception of social history was accepted by a group of younger scholars who applied it in their own research of Croatian and South Slavic history (Gross 2019; Roksandić 2019; Budak 2000; Janković 2016: 73–91). Milorad Ekmečić, a Professor of Modern History in Sarajevo, entertained very similar ideas. Being familiar with European and Anglo-American historiography, he grounded his research of Balkan- and South Slavic history on the concept of social history (Kraljačić 1988; Merenik 2014). Although with a varying focus, these modernization efforts were shared by their colleagues in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Along with the innovative amalgam of traditional political history with the concepts of social-, urban-, and cultural history, Sima Ćirković paid attention to the history of historiography, as well (Rudić 2011). However, this neglected discipline was the lifelong concern of Radovan Samardžić. With his excellent knowledge of the history of historiography, he was a supporter of a kind of intellectual history rooted in the traditions of German *Geistesgeschichte* and French narrative history (Samardžić 1976–1994; Tasić 2000). Unlike him, Branko Petranović and the slightly younger Đorđe Stanković, both specialists in contemporary history, insisted on the knowledge of the «historical totality» and, therefore, the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach in historical research based on the postulates of broadly conceived social history/history of society (Petranović 1984; Antolović, Šimunović-Bešlin 2018). A similar conviction was shared by Čedomir Popov and Andrej Mitrović. Beginning with the Marxist theory of history, Popov enriched it by using Pierre Renouvin's conception of the history of international relations. On the other hand, Andrej Mitrović accepted much of the concept developed by the West German «Bielefeld school of history» and he was the author of the first comprehensive theory of historical studies in Serbian historiography (Mitrović 1991). Similar to Vodopivec in Ljubljana and Gross in Zagreb, Mitrović's conception of «total history» (which would encompass politics, economy, society and culture) was mainly accepted by his students, enabling them to apply the «new perspectives in historical writing» in their own research (Burke 1991; Marković, Milićević 2007). In that way,

with this new research agenda, the necessary preconditions had been achieved in the (although partial) transcending traditional disciplinary matrix of the Yugoslav historiography.

However, the modernization of Yugoslav historiography during the 1980s was unfolding in the shadow of the severe political-, social-, and economic crisis which advanced after the death of Marshal Tito, the lifelong president of Yugoslavia. Along with the growing mistrust towards the existing political system, the official interpretation of history was more and more questioned by the Yugoslav public. While the so-called «party historiography» was trying to preserve the prescribed ideological canons in historical writing, the literature and political journalism had a decisive role in the opening of some of the tabooed questions like the relation of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia towards the «national question» and its policy in the interwar period, the mass suffering of the Serbs in the Second World War, the internal borders of the federative Yugoslavia as well as retorsion, the struggle against «class enemies» and the cruel persecution of the supporters of Stalin after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 (Dragović-Soso 2002: 77–99; Nikolić 2003; Nikolić 2012). With his *New Contributions to the Biography of Josip Broz Tito* (published in 1981), Vladimir Dedijer began the process of deconstructing of the cult of Tito. Due to his authority as an outstanding communist, revolutionary, and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Dedijer paved the way to the reexamination of the trite Party judgments on Yugoslavia's past (Repe 1999: 321). At the same time, the thesis about «Illyrian origins of Albanians», which Albanian historians in Kosovo insisted on, provoked strong disapproval by Serbian historians exacerbating otherwise complex Serbian-Albanian relationships (Nikolić 2003: 171–172).

The «outburst of history» in the public discourse from the beginning of the 1980s was showered with heavy criticism by Yugoslav historians considering most of the popular history and memoirist writings about contemporary history as «monument of historical tripe» containing a lot of «false facts, errors and even dangerous prejudices». Therefore, historians warned that it could be abused for political purposes (Mitrović 1998: 63; Petranović 2010: 38). Perhaps the most precise explanation of this phenomenon was given by Sima Ćirković: sharing the belief that the interest for the past is growing at the moments of the social crisis «when the future seems to be uncertain», he critically approached the historical consciousness of his contemporaries which was undeveloped

and marked by inter-ethnic relations. Appraising that «we have historical thought from the *gusle*-epoch⁽⁴⁾ and on the other side we are making efforts about avant-garde historiography», Ćirković pointed out the discrepancy between the collective historical consciousness grounded in historical myths and stereotypes on the one hand, and the sophisticated knowledge of the past provided by historical scholarship on the other (Jevtić 1992: 85). At the same time, frequent polemics between Yugoslav historians concerning the interpretation of some controversial events from the Second World War (in the first place, the genocide of the Serbs in the fascist Independent State of Croatia and the number of victims in the Jasenovac concentration camp) were followed by the vivid interest of the public. During the late 1980s, the polemics became more bitter and, in some cases, turned into angry quarrels of Yugoslav historians touching upon the questions which were at the core of the national identity of Yugoslav nations, as well as always precarious inter-ethnic relations (Nikolić 2003: 279–317; Krušelj 2018). Since then, the question of the genocide was at the center of these disputes and they took place in public and could be compared to the «historians' dispute» (*Historikerstreit*) that, ignited by the interpretation of the Holocaust, almost simultaneously arouse in the Federal Republic of Germany (Dragović-Soso 2002: 100–114; Piper 1987). As for the acrimony of the polemic as well as the mutually opposing views of the participants, Imanuel Geiß appraised it as a «dispute of hysterics» (Geiß 1992). This assessment could be applied to Yugoslav historians as well, who were increasingly taking up exclusive positions. At the same time, the moderate voices that suggested argumentative discussion according to the principle of scholarly objectivity became lonelier while all the polemics in the fervent nationalistic cacophony had clear ideological motivation (Nikolić 2003). Regarding this fact, Mirjana Gross appraised that in Yugoslavia «there was no historiography without ideological elements» (Gross 1986: 163).

In that way, the structural crisis of Yugoslav society directly reflected on the crisis of Yugoslav historiography. After a pause of four years, due to the efforts of the Association of historical societies of Yugoslavia, *The Yugoslav Historical Review* was relaunched in 1986 to strengthen the ties within Yugoslav historiography, as well as to oppose the increase of the pseudo-historical narratives that strongly influenced the collective

(4) The epoch marked by the dominance of the epic poetry.

historical consciousness (Mitrović 1991; Stanković 1988: 70–82). Despite the «national key», the members of the editorial board were some of the most prominent Yugoslav historians of that time, including Čedomir Popov as the editor-in-chief and Đorđe Stanković as an associate editor. Sharing the belief that the existence of the common Yugoslav historical journal was «a major professional and social need», the aim set by the editorial board was to finish or «at least diminish ... the tendency of disintegration, division and the lack of interest for the problems of Yugoslav history in our scholarship» by finishing the final volume of *The History of the Yugoslav Peoples* and publishing the bibliography of Yugoslav historiography for the period 1975–1985 (Popov et al. 1986). According to the editorial policy, *The Yugoslav Historical Review* should cover all historical periods «from prehistory until the current day» and promote different approaches to history including political history in addition to economic-, social-, cultural- and intellectual history. In addition to the research of those phenomena of European and World history that decisively influenced South Slavic history, the editorial board also encouraged the development of the theory of historical studies (Antolović, Šimunović-Bešlin 2018; Janković 2016: 136–153). Expecting that *The Yugoslav Historical Review* presented «the collective mind of Yugoslav historiography», the intention was to reaffirm Yugoslav history and Yugoslavia itself (Popov et al. 1986). However, intensifying the political crisis in Yugoslavia endangered all common institutions. In such circumstances, despite the editorial board's enthusiasm, *The Yugoslav Historical Review* ceased publication after only three years. Along with the «nationalistic politics and anti-Yugoslav trends which became dominant in the majority of the republics», the editor-in-chief Popov considered «the unendurable economic crisis» to be the main reason for the ceasing of the journal (Popov 2017: 38).

Summing up the history of Yugoslav historiography in the period 1945–1991, several conclusions could be drawn. It developed in an authoritarian, one-party political system and during the entire period, it was under the supervision of the ruling Communist Party. This fact had two important consequences – its ideology strongly influenced the historical studies in Yugoslavia as well as their organizational structure. Although the supervision became weaker, the main themes as well as the interpretative framework of Yugoslav historiography, was largely determined by the dominant ideology and Marxism

as the obligatory theoretical paradigm. Yet, contrary to the Marxist historiography in Western (and some Eastern) European countries, Yugoslav historiography did not draw fully on the potentials offered by Marxist theory for the research of economic and social history. The reception of Marxism in Yugoslav historiography was superficial – visible primarily in the application of Marxist terminology, some research subjects, as well as in the general interpretative framework (Marković 2004). On the other hand, the conceptual transformation of Yugoslav historiography in the 1970s and 1980s was limited. It did not encompass the entire historiography and was followed by the permanent resistance of traditionally minded historians. As a result, during the 1980s, in spite of some significant advances mostly in the field of social and economic history, there was no broader reception of the influential direction in historical thought as history of mentality, gender history, new cultural history, or historical anthropology. Therefore, despite the efforts of some of the most prominent historians, the results of the theoretical and methodological transformation of Yugoslav historiography were ambivalent – on the one hand, new theoretical approaches appeared within Yugoslav historiography, while on the other hand, its mainstream maintained the traditionalist outlook.

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