

Opponent's Report

Author: Katarina Puškarov
Master thesis: Remember the Bombs: Memory of the Belgrade Bombings from the Second World War from 1995 until 2003

The presented master thesis deals with memory of Nazi and Allied WWII bombings of Belgrade presented in Serbian daily Politika from 1995 until 2003. Chosen period is justified as the times of high agitation and traumatic circumstances of the period highly influenced by the rapid changes in society as well as those in the politics and last but not least by the series of conflicts with their local peak in 1999 NATO bombardments of (Serbian-Montenegrin) Yugoslavia.

Katarina Puškarov convincingly deploys quantitative as well as qualitative methods working with mainly older theoretical literature on collective memory (with exception of rather contemporary work of Todor Kuljić). Those of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora and Barry Schwartz undoubtedly belong among the classical works in this field and eventual deployment of other contemporary theoretical concepts (eg. Marianne Hirsch on “postmemory”) might not necessarily mean the positive step regarding the clarity of the presented analysis. Also, theoretical literature on stereotypes and othering draws predominantly upon titles verified by more than two decades.

Gathered and analysed empirical material is based on extensive research of mainly opinion press and popular historical articles in Politika. There are no doubts that this newspaper presents an important narrative for the given period but according to my opinion more attention in the methodological part of the thesis could be given to reasons behind the choice of Politika before other printed media in a more nuanced political sphere of late-Milošević and post-Milošević Serbia. This strategy could also be questioned in relation to the hypothesis about continuity of “Serbian National Myth” (p. 28). Almost no more details are given about the content, actors and strategies through which the “Myth” (was) operated and the hypothesis as such seems also rather abandoned.

The uneasy way to generalization of Serbian political imagination in the turn of millennia is once more manifested in a declaration about inertia of Partisan resistance memory of WWII into the Serbian case (p. 30). “Having Nazis (referred as fascists) as the main Other,” undoubtedly worked for an important part of the Serbian political mainstream. However, one could also identify new (and renewed old) “anti-anti-fascist” (Todor Kuljić) narratives that echoed not uniquely in far-right social movements but also to certain extent in Serbian (as well as other post-socialist) public spheres.

The ideological *mélange* of Politika that cannot simply be interpreted through the optics of *longue durée* of certain state socialist narratives (eg. those of Builders) but in the given period also reflected other leftist (eg. antiglobalization movement) as well as rightist (eg. cultural and identitarian “new right”) narratives is illustrated by the quoted article of Harald Neubauer in the issue of 6 April 1999 issued in the period of NATO bombardments. By an ideologically distorted turn of interpretations it is rather a paradoxical situation that against the NATO bombardments (by the way often in Western rightist narratives referred for various predominantly personal reasons as a “leftist war”) a politician linked to the “new right” argued in a journal that echoed the public opinion on bombardments as “fascist”. Fascism as

well as antifascism however holds a multiplicity of meanings and it is often linked to rather contextual declarations which are to be observed also in other conflicts actually burning in Eastern Europe (eg. Ukraine).

Several details could be reviewed: Eastern or Western Slovenia? (p. 6), number of articles referring to Allied bombings (p. 74), misspellings in Conclusion.

Nonetheless, with these objections I wish to not relativize my high evaluation of the thesis. I would like rather to bring these questions into discussion.

In sum, I can fully recommend the thesis of Katarina Puškarov for defence and I propose to classify it with the mark „excellent“.

Prague, 10 June 2015.

Mgr. Ondřej Daniel, Ph. D.