

Supervisor'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 thesis focuses on the remembering of the two World War Two bombardments on Belgrade, namely of the German one in April 1941 and the Allied bombing raids on this city three years later. Katarina Puškarov asks how much the memory of these events was present in the public discourse of Milošević and post-Milošević Serbia; in which way the memory was treated and how it was utilized for contemporary purposes. In the period under scrutiny, in 1995–2003, the author traces the shifts in form, interpretation and utilization with regard to the political development in Serbia. The aim was to explore how the memory of bombings was handled in time of stabilization of Milošević regime after cancelling of the international sanctions, during the NATO air strikes in 1999, and finally under the new government after the fall of Milošević in October 2000.

The thesis is structured logically. The first chapter is an introduction into the historical background of WWII bombings, of Serbia from the 1990s to the beginning of the new millennium and into the historiography on the topic. It also describes sources and methods used in the thesis. It is evident that the author has got familiarized with the historical context and with the respective secondary literature, even though other influential works could have been taken into consideration as for example B. Petranović: *Istorija Jugoslavije II* (1988), *Srbija u drugom svetskom ratu* (1991), N. Popov (ed): *Srpska strana rata* (2002), R. Thomas: *Serbia under Milošević* (1999, 2002), L. Cohen: *Serpent in the Bosom. The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milošević* (2001).

In the second chapter a theoretical framework is presented. The author proves not only her erudition in classical works on the collective memory but also her ability to use them constructively in her research. She remarks among other things the role of stereotypes and othering in the mechanism of creating the image of enemy which is highly important for the analysis of the period of the NATO intervention. The memory on the WWII bombings was largely used for the explanation of the motives and of the character of actual aggressor (the US and their NATO allies were compared with the Nazis; the theory of Western treason of Serbia).

Chapters three and four represent the core of the thesis displaying results of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Katarina Puškarov conducted an extensive research of the Politika newspapers in the timespan of nine years. Although she focused on the dates of anniversaries only, the amount of articles was proved to be adequate for the analysis. The research has brought many interesting findings. The daily Politika of the 1990s is well known for its warmongering propaganda, chauvinist hate campaigns and nationalist myth-building role. Nevertheless, in the field of memory on the WWII bombings it repeated quite traditional interpretative patterns and discourses belonging to the partisan Yugoslav patriotic narratives. It is need to say that Milošević's regime tried to preserve some legacy of Titoist Yugoslavia, and among other things it defended the partisan interpretation of WWII against 'chetnik'

revisionism of the anti-communist political right. The contemporary nationalist moods can be read in this case only between the lines. For example, in the story about the April War of 1941, the heroism of Yugoslav pilots fighting against German bombers was stressed. It was clear to the readers that the defenders were of Serbian nationality. On the other hand the treason of the officers of Slovene or Croatian origin played a significant role in the story. So the meaning was as follows: It was the Serbs who defended Yugoslavia in 1941, as well as in the last wars of 1990s. The Croats and Slovenes were traitors in the past as well as in the present (This contemporary figure was used also in Emir Kusturica's famous film *Underground*). I would like to emphasise another two aspects of the persistent Yugoslav patriotic narrative: 1/ the need to manifest an antifascist legacy shared by the Serbia/FR of Yugoslavia with the democratic world, 2/ the interpretation of the April War in course Serbian public unity - so that this defensive war of 1941 could be celebrated in partisan as well as in chetnik/monarchic tradition.

As author shows, the development in presenting the Allied bombings was more complicated. Politika remarked it originally only through the informative articles about commemoration events like Orthodox Church dirges. We can guess that the memory of Allied bombings belonged initially to the conservative political right narrative where it represented important item in the story about the Western treason (during the WWII and in 1990s). In Politika, as well as other pro-regime media it was used suddenly during the NATO intervention. As Katarina Puškarov argues, the memory on the Allied bombings was utilized for the creation of simple black-and-white image of the actual enemy. Identifying NATO with the Nazis was also important in this propagandistic strategy.

Other findings I consider very interesting are connected to the post-Milošević era. The main tendency in the first years of new regime was the abandoning of the Yugoslav narrative and the appropriating the memory of both bombing raids by the new post-Yugoslav, Serbian national narrative. The remembering of Allied bombings declined and was practiced mainly by the Church, while the commemorations of Nazi bombing continued to play a role of the sign of anti-fascist tradition which Serbia could share with the democratic world.

Nevertheless, as Katarina Puškarov states, the Nazi bombing on Belgrade in 1941 have not reached the recognition to be an important site of memory until now. It is manifested by the fact that the place of the greatest symbolic value connected to the event, namely the ground where the bombed National Library building once stood, is still empty and neglected.

For the theoretical background Katarina Puškarov used a *collective memory* and *othering* concepts. However, this approach could be questionable because of sources the author is leaning on: namely the newspapers represented by the one, even though most read, Serbian daily Politika. Could really newspapers mirror collective memory of the whole society? Or do they rather express the will of publisher or (forces behind him) to influence public opinions? Should we not rather ask about the content and strategies of propaganda in the case of a daily controlled by the authoritarian government in that time? It is necessary to say that the author is deeply conscious of such methodological problems and that she argues convincingly for her choice of sources. She understands the role of newspapers to be a tool of communication and a platform for the attitudes shared within a community. If we consider the situation of Serbia at that time, the high degree of mass mobilization in the society for nationalist agenda and the success of the regime to attract extensive popular support, we could accede to the idea that the

ability of Politika in creating, maintaining and sharing popular opinions was far-reaching. It is also important to stress that the memory of WWII bombings on Belgrade was not an issue on which the Serbian public was divided, although some minor differences could be expected.

To conclude, the Master thesis of Katarina Puškarov is a valuable contribution to the research into the culture of memory in Serbia. In my opinion, it fulfils the criteria put on this grade of academic work. Therefore, I can fully recommend the thesis for defence and I propose to classify it with the mark „excellent“.

Prague, 17 June 2015.

PhDr. Ondřej Vojtěchovský, Ph. D.