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The Capital Predicament: Serbian National Narratives in Socialist Yugoslavia and the Remaking of Belgrade (1944–1961)

Abstract: *The article investigates Serbian national narratives in the first two decades of Socialist Yugoslavia, focusing on the case study of Belgrade as one of key symbolic relevance. As the capital city of the new Federation, Belgrade was invested with a broader Yugoslav identity. Analyzing the politics of identity implemented in the city's public spaces, nevertheless, the article argues that Serbian national narratives were also promoted in the city, articulated within the framework of the Party's official ideology. Drawing on selected examples, the article highlights the emergence of disagreements and negotiations in terms of both content and the use of spaces and resources. As elsewhere in the Federation, ambivalences and revisions influenced the definition of the role of national identities in the building of the new socialist society and the balance with the Party's Socialist Yugoslavism.*

Keywords: Belgrade, Serbian Identity, Yugoslavism, Socialism, public spaces.

Introduction

After the Second World War, Belgrade played a double representative role. As in the interwar period, when the country was ruled by the Karađorđević dynasty, the city was designated as the capital city of Yugoslavia. At the same time, in the post-war

federal organization of the new socialist state, Belgrade officially became also the capital of one of the republics that composed the Federation: the People's Republic of Serbia (renamed as Socialist Republic of Serbia in 1963). Scholars have highlighted how capital cities have fulfilled important representative roles in modern states, both as center of the State and of the Nation. The establishment of state socialism did not completely dismiss the representative national meanings of the capital cities of Eastern Europe.¹ As in the previous decades, Belgrade remained the political and cultural center of Serbia but also one of the main stages for expressing the Yugoslav idea.²

Focusing on the specific role of Belgrade and on the politics of identity implemented in the city, this paper addresses the broader issue of the relationship between Yugoslav and Serbian identity narratives in the first two decades of Socialist Yugoslavia. These two narratives had been entangled, integrated – but sometimes counterposed – since the end of the Nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the Twentieth century.³ Analyzing their relationship in the following decades requires the consideration of the position and role of national identities in post-WWII Yugoslavia. The new socialist Federation was established as a multinational state that originally recognized the existence of five South Slavic Peoples (*Narodi*) and their right to self-determination (art. 1 of the 1946 FNRJ Constitution, inspired by the 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union). The republics were originally designed – but not without problematic ambivalences – as the nation-states of the different constituent Yugoslav peoples⁴. The “*Srpski narod*” (Serbian people/nation), for example, had

¹ See Andreas Daum, “Capitals in Modern History. Inventing urban space for the nation”, in Andreas Daum, Christof Mauch (eds.), *Berlin – Washington, 1800-2000: Capital Cities, Cultural Representations, and National Identities*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Göran Therborn, “Eastern Drama. Capitals of Eastern Europe, 1830s–2006: An Introductory Overview”, *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, 16, 2 (2006).

² On the history of Belgrade and its double national role before the Second World War see for example: Dubravka Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt, urbanizacija i evropeizacija Beograda: 1890-1914*, (Belgrade: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2009); *Belgrade and beyond: reading the Nation through Serbian Cityscapes, Nationalities Papers – Special Section*, 41, 1, (2013); Aleksandar Ignjatović, *Jugoslovenstvo u arhitekturi: 1904-1941*, (Belgrade: Građevinska knjiga, 2007); Olga Manojlović Pintar, Aleksandar Ignjatović, *National Museums in Serbia: A Story of Intertwined Identities*, in Peter Aronsson, Gabriella Elgenius (eds), *Building National Museums in Europe, 1750-2010*, (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011), pp.788-789; Radina Vučetić, “Jugoslovenstvo u umjetnosti i kulturi – od zavodljivog mita do okrutne realnosti (Jugoslavenske izložbe 1904.-1940.)”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, n.3, 2009.

³ An extensive literature has addressed this issue, see for example Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje jugoslovenske države: 1914-1920*. (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, Srpska književna zadruka, 1986); Branka Prpa, *Srpski intelektualci i Jugoslavija: 1918-1929*, (Belgrade: Clio, 2018). Nenad Lajbenšperger, „Srpstvo, jugoslovenstvo i lokal patriotizam prilikom podizanja spomen-kosturnica na Mačkovom kamenu i u Krupnju”, in *Spomen mesta – istorija – sećanja*, (Belgrade: Etnografski institut SANU, 2009).

⁴ Enlightening on this issue Audrey Helfant Budding, “Nation/People/Republic: Self-determination in Socialist Yugoslavia”, in Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Soso (eds.) *State Collapse in*

its own “*Narodna država*” (People/Nation state) in the “*Narodna Republika Srbija*” (art. 2 of the 1947 Constitution of the People’s Republic of Serbia). Inspired by the theories and the politics of *Korenizatsiya* implemented in the Soviet Union until the mid-1930s – aimed at disarming “reactionary nationalism”, while moving towards a communist society – forms of socialist nation-building were introduced also in Yugoslavia⁵. At the same time, a new socialist Yugoslavism was revived in the new Federation. In Central and Eastern European nation-states, where Communist parties seized power after the Second World War, prewar state national identity continued to play a political role.⁶ In Yugoslavia, in contrast to the interwar period and to the politics of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia aimed at forging a unitarian national identity, the new socialist Yugoslav identity was officially conceived in supranational terms, recognizing the specific national identities of the different Yugoslav peoples.

Nevertheless, at least until the 1960s – when official Yugoslavism started to convey a state non-ethnic identity – the Yugoslav identity did not lose its South Slavic connotation. Moreover, during the 1950s, the Party worked to promote greater unity among different Yugoslav peoples. In everyday politics, Socialist Yugoslavism was not articulated in an univocal shape, and “unitaristic” Yugoslavist interpretations – oriented at eventually overcoming the differences among Yugoslavs – were detectable among Party’s leaders and cadres.⁷ These intricate developments have attracted in the last years new scholar attention and fresh research has increasingly highlighted and discussed the ambivalences and the entanglements between socialist nation-building at the federal and republics’ levels.⁸

South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia’s Disintegration (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007).

⁵ On the original Soviet model see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁶ See for example Martin Mevius (ed.), *Socialist nations: the communist quest for national legitimacy in Europe, Nationalities Papers (special issue)* 37, 4, (2009); Yannis Sygkelos, *Nationalism from the Left: The Bulgarian Communist Party During the Second World War and the Early Post-War Years* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011).

⁷ Many scholars have highlighted these tendencies to different degrees, see for example Hannes Grandits, “Dynamics of Socialist Nation-Building: The Short-Lived Program of Promoting a Yugoslav National Identity and Some Comparative Perspectives”, *Dve Domovini*, 28 (2008); Predrag J. Marković, “Titova shvatanja nacionalnog i jugoslovenskog identiteta”, in Hans-Georg Fleck, Igor Graovac (eds.) *Dijalog povjesničara—istoričara II* (Zagreb: Friedrich Neumann Stiftung, 2000); Aleksandar Pavković, “Yugoslavism: A National Identity That Failed?” in Leslie Holmes and Philomena, Murray (eds.) *Citizenship and Identity in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Aleš Gabrič, “National Question in Yugoslavia in the Immediate Postwar Period.” in Jasna Fischer (ed.) *Jugoslavia v hladni vojni*, (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2004).

⁸ See for example Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, communist leadership and the national question* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Ulf Brunnbauer, Hannes Grandits (eds) *The Ambiguous Nation: Case Studies from Southeastern Europe in the 20th Century* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013); Marco Abram, “Integrating Rijeka into Socialist Yugoslavia: The politics of national

During the 1950s, in different republics, Yugoslav cultural integrative tendencies triggered reactions among cultural workers and Party cadres, who defended the expression of specific national identities within the official framework of multinational Yugoslavism. The most explicit reactions were recorded in Slovenia and resulted in a public debate between the well-known intellectuals Dobrica Ćosić and Dušan Pirjevec in 1961. Scholars have highlighted the complexity of this well-known exchange of views regarding the “national question” but also the overall evolution of the Yugoslav socialist experiment⁹. Nevertheless, its public and historical relevance has contributed to consolidating explanations of a broader contention between “Yugoslav unitarist” Serbs and Slovenes as inflexible defenders of national identities. These definitions were certainly representative of widespread opinions but not exhaustive, and the overall compatibility between Yugoslavism and Serbianism in the more centralistic years of Socialist Yugoslavia merits further research. In fact, most academic accounts have considered the tension between Yugoslav unity and Serbian national ideology, focusing on the reactions to the process of decentralization of socialist Yugoslavia that culminated in the 1974 Constitution. In that phase, influential Serbian intellectuals started to critically discuss the position of Serbia within the common South Slavic state and the issue started to obtain growing attention also within the Party.¹⁰ Instead, this article seeks to incorporate in a more comprehensive and extensive manner the case study of Serbia into the analysis of the matrix of national and Yugoslav politics of identity in the first two more centralistic decades of the new federation, suggesting the importance to approach more thoughtfully the definition of Serbian identity narratives developed in the process of building the new socialist society.

Despite being defined in flexible ways, Yugoslavism played a specific role in the construction of the new Socialist and Yugoslav image of Belgrade, when the capital city’s landscape was one of the main spaces of the negotiation and transmission of the new Yugoslav identity discourse.¹¹ At the same time, the official functions of the capital of People’s Republic of Serbia legitimized its historical role as the

identity and the new city’s image (1947–1955)”, *Nationalities Papers* 46, 1 (2018); Tomaž Ivešić, “The Yugoslav National Idea Under Socialism: What Happens When a Soft Nation-Building Project Is Abandoned?”, *Nationalities Papers* 49, 1 (2021); Stevo Đurašković, “Vladimir’s Bakarić’s Idea of a Socialist (Croatian) Nation: From Communist Historicism to Depoliticization”, *East European Politics and Societies* 36, 4 (2022).

⁹ Haug, *Creating a socialist Yugoslavia*, 164–169; Agustín Cosovschi, “Between the Nation and Socialism in Yugoslavia. The Debate between Dobrica Ćosić and Dušan Pirjevec in the 1960s”, *Slovanský přehled* 101, 2 (2015).

¹⁰ Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the nation: Serbia’s intellectual opposition and the revival of nationalism*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press), 37–45; Dejan Guzina, “Socialist Serbia’s narratives: From Yugoslavia to a greater Serbia”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, 1 (2003), 95–98.

¹¹ Marco Abram, “Building the Capital City of the Peoples of Yugoslavia: Representations of Socialist Yugoslavism in Belgrade’s Public Space 1944-1961.” *Politička Misao* 51, 5 (2014), 36–57.

representative center of a more specific Serbian identity. This paper examines this particularly relevant case study, highlighting some aspects of the politics of identity that contributed to shape the city's image. The arguments presented are based on the analysis of the documentation produced by different subjects and preserved in several Belgrade archives, and on the scrutiny of the press coverage of important cultural public events. The article analyzes different forms of intervention (or plans of intervention) in Belgrade's public spaces, providing examples that show the ambivalence and the disagreements in the promotion of a Serbian national narrative within the ideological framework provided by the Party. Moreover, it investigates how the growing insistence on Yugoslavism in the public spaces of the capital city could be discussed and negotiated, with the aim of guaranteeing the "right" space for the Serbian national narrative. Both issues turned out to be crucial for the further evolution of Socialist Yugoslavia.

A "Serbian Belgrade" in the "Capital City of the Peoples of Yugoslavia"

At the end of the Second World War – for the second time in its history, after the interwar experience – Belgrade became the capital city of a geopolitical entity known as Yugoslavia. The post-WWII state was, nevertheless, based on a completely different ideological platform. The process of building a socialist society reshaped the capital city of the new Federation not only in terms of social dynamics but also in its physical appearance, following socialist urban models. The influence of Moscow imposed a growing Sovietization of the city's image in the immediate postwar years until the break-up between Tito and Stalin and the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform.¹² Nevertheless, the new relationship between Belgrade and the citizens of the country was also increasingly reinforced by presenting the city as a historical and representation center for all the South Slavs. The new authorities' public discourse stressed the discontinuity with the role played by the capital city in interwar "bourgeois" and monarchic Yugoslavia, but the post-war reconfiguration of Belgrade's image still followed the process of building capital cities in modern states: embedding representative and symbolic functions (buildings, monuments, avenues), preservative functions (museums, archives, cultural institutions), and performative functions (parades, celebrations, commemorations).¹³

¹² See for example Goran Miloradović, *Lepota pod nadzorom: sovjetski kulturni uticaj u Jugoslaviji: 1945-1955*. (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju 2012); Olga Manojlović-Pintar, "'Široka strana moja rodnaja'. Spomenici sovjetskim vojnicima podizani u Srbiji 1944–1954." *Tokovi Istorije*, 1–2. (2005).

¹³ Daum, *Capitals in Modern History*, 15–18.

A growing literature has explored the building process of *Novi Beograd* (New Belgrade), focusing on the development of its modernist architecture but also highlighting the Yugoslav meanings it was supposed to convey as the center of the new Federation. The newly planned representative buildings – the Federal Executive Council (SIV), the Central Committee, and the Hotel Jugoslavija – developed as the landmarks of the new capital city of Yugoslavia.¹⁴ In the early post-war years, despite not being explicitly formalized, the old city center of Belgrade was therefore expected to keep some Serbian representative connotation. In fact, this informal division was quickly blurred. The implementation of the original plan for New Belgrade encountered problems, delays, and revisions, while “Old” Belgrade consolidated its position, remaining the home of the most important Yugoslav political institutions, such as the Federal Assembly and the Headquarters of the CPY/LCY, and of the cultural institutions that were supposed to promote the history and the culture of all the Yugoslav peoples, such as the Military Museum of the Yugoslav People’s Army and the Yugoslav Drama Theater. Increasingly, the process of Yugoslavization involved the capital city as a whole. During the 1950s, even the city’s cultural institutions controlled by the People’s Republic of Serbia started to embed a broader Yugoslav discourse in their activities, displaying the cultural heritage of the entire country. As stated, for example, by the director of the *Narodni muzej* Veljko Petrović in an interview: “Belgrade is a Yugoslav center, therefore the National Museum must maintain a Yugoslav character”.¹⁵ The capital city’s streets and squares were partially Yugoslavized in names, mainly through the introduction of numerous references to WWII partisans from all over the county. Other street names carrying clear Yugoslav cultural, geographical, and political connotations were restored after being removed by the collaborationist authorities during the Second World War.¹⁶ The old city center was regularly turned into a stage for the most important and representative State celebrations and parades like the Republic Day, the First of May, and Tito’s birthday/the Day of the Youth on the 25th of May. Also, new cultural events of Yugoslav meaning – such as the art exhibition *Jugoslovenska trijenale*, aimed at presenting a more “integrated” Yugoslav art – found their home in Belgrade. The city – often labeled as the “capital city of all

¹⁴ See for example Ljiljana Blagojević, *Novi Beograd: osporeni modernizam* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, Arhitektonski fakultet Univerziteta, Zavod za zaštitu spomenika, 2007); Vladimir Kulić, “National, supranational, international: New Belgrade and the symbolic construction of a socialist capital”, *Nationalities Papers*, 41, 1, (2013); Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito’s capital: Urban planning, modernism, and socialism in Belgrade* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

¹⁵ O.B., “Narodni Muzej raspolaže delima velike vrednosti”, *Politika*, 12 January 1959, 8.

¹⁶ Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB), Fond Skupština Grada Beograda – Gradski sekretariat za obrazovanje i kulturu 17, br. 32, f. 15, V Redovna sednica komisije za spomenike i ulice: poziv sa materijalom i dnevnim redom, 2 October 1962 (henceforth: IAB, 35, 15, V Redovna sednica komisije za spomenike i ulice); “Spisak izmene naziva ulica u Beogradu”, *Politika*, 14 April 1946, 6.

the peoples of Yugoslavia”¹⁷ – became the place where the attempt to represent the new Yugoslav community was more explicit¹⁸.

Nevertheless, the “Yugoslavization” of the image of Belgrade was a gradual, not linear, and, ultimately, incomplete process. At the beginning of the 1960s, the decentralization of the Federation determined a disengagement of the Party in this process, which continued more in an inertial way. Moreover, throughout the 1950s, investments in cultural institutions and cultural programs were significant but not always prioritized. Sometimes, political priorities could shift, resources could be reduced, and projects not be realized. On the other hand, the ambivalences in the practical definition of Socialist Yugoslavism and the difficulties in finding the “correct” expressions of the national identities of the Yugoslav peoples in the new socialist society produced a constant process of revision and negotiation between the official multinational framework and the different forms of pressure for a growing cultural integration of the country.

In fact, in the very first stage of the building of the new political system, just after the end of the war, the Serbian image of the city was, to a certain degree, nourished. According to CPY ideological statements, the new socialist and federal Yugoslavia was based on an explicit condemnation and rejection of the “bourgeois great-Serbian” ideology that ruled interwar Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, the new multinational framework applied to the country entailed some space for the expression of the Serbian national identity within the borders of the People’s Republic of Serbia and in the capital city. For example, despite the clear references by Tito and the Communist leadership to the meanings of the liberation of Belgrade for all the Yugoslav peoples, several sources suggest that the liberation of the former capital city of Yugoslavia in 1944 was initially presented at the local level as an event that specifically concerned the Serbian population. As in other regions of occupied Yugoslavia, the Communist-led partisan movement alternated “partisan Yugoslavism” with national arguments in order to obtain larger support.¹⁹ The letter sent by the “citizens of liberated Belgrade to Tito” and published by the daily newspaper *Politika* on 21 October 1944 – the day after the liberation – for example, also highlighted the Serbian meanings of the event:

Serbian Belgrade (*Srpski Beograd*), capital of free Yugoslavia, liberated from fascist occupation by the heroic efforts of our fearless NOB and POJ, as well as the glorious Red Army, sends you, the Supreme Commander, flaming greetings of admiration and gratitude for having liberated it of the oldest sworn enemy of the

¹⁷ See Istorijjski arhiv Beograda (IAB), Fond Gradski Komitet – Savez Komunističke Srbije – Beograd 865, k. 141, II Mesna posleratna partijska konferencija KPS Beograda, 26 June 1947, 13.

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of Socialist Yugoslavism in postwar Belgrade see Abram, “Building the Capital City of the Peoples of Yugoslavia”, 36–57.

¹⁹ See for example Haug, *Creating a socialist Yugoslavia*, 61–84.

Serbian people, and for taking revenge for Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Jajince and the countless other slaughters in our country.²⁰

This approach echoed one year later, in October 1945, when the city celebrated the first post-war anniversary of its liberation. Culminated in a military parade and the glorification of the Yugoslav Army and the Red Army, the celebration was also coupled with the postponed 100th anniversary of the foundation of Belgrade's National Museum (*Narodni muzej*), the first modern museum in Serbian history, established in 1844. According to the Museum's instructions, the celebration of a cultural institution that was perceived as a pillar of the XIX century nation and state-building was intended to bear clear Serbian patriotic connotations.²¹ The main exhibition organized on occasion was dedicated to the "Serbian painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries", with the idea – emphasized by the inauguration speech – to ideally include the liberation of Belgrade of 1944 into an extended Serbian national narrative.²²

In the immediate postwar years, official cultural politics were oriented to reconfirm and clarify the role of Belgrade not just as the capital city of the new socialist Yugoslavia but – to a certain extent – also as the center of the Serbian nation. In this early phase, for example, Belgrade's museums, theaters, and galleries controlled by the People's Republic of Serbia provided the needed institutional space to express the Serbian identity of the capital city. Consistent visual evidence is also traceable in the configuration of public spaces for the most important Yugoslav federal celebrations staged in Belgrade. Even the organization of the First of May traditional parade – an important federal event attended by representatives from all the Yugoslav republics – included some references to the specific role of the city as the center of Serbia. According to the plans for the decorations of the city, alongside the Yugoslav flags, the flag of the People's Republic of Serbia – "national (Serbian)" as it is called in the documentation – had to maintain a relevant position in the urban landscape.²³ Dimitrije Tucović's square (today *Slavija* square), slightly peripheral with respect to the old town, but particularly important for the Serbian socialist tradition,²⁴ was reserved

²⁰ „Oslobođeni Beograd drugu Maršalu Titu“, *Politika*, 28 October 1944, 3.

²¹ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Ministarstvo Prosvete – Odeljenje za nauku, kulturu i umetnosti 183, br. 4, Letter by the National Museum in Belgrade to the Ministry of Education of Serbia on 9 July 1945.

²² „Prekjuče je otvorena izložba srpskog slikarstva XVIII i XIX veka“, *Borba*, 21 October 1945, 7.

²³ Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond Centralni Komitet Saveza Komunisti Jugoslavije – Ideološka komisija 507, k.2, VIII, II/1-b-51, Plan dekoracije za proslavu prvog maja 1948 godine; Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB), fond Gradski Komitet – Savez Komunisti Srbije – Beograd 865, k.144, Zapisnik sa sastanka Agitprop odeljenja GK KPS, 31 March 1949, 1.

²⁴ Aleksandar Ignjatović, Olga Manojlović Pintar, "Transformations of the Slavija Square in Belgrade: History, Memory and Construction of Identity= Preobražaj trga Slavija u Beogradu: istorija, sećanje i konstrukcija identiteta", in Marijana Simu (ed.). *Memory of the City/Sećanje grada* (Belgrade: Kulturklammer, 2012).

for the representation of the political leaders of the People's Republic of Serbia.²⁵ It was important to highlight, also in a visual and performative way that the role of the federal center taken on by Belgrade could not imply a complete disappearance of the role of the capital of Serbia.

An important anniversary that allowed the emergence of expressions of a Serbian identity discourse in Belgrade was the celebration of the uprising of the first Serbian partisans against German and collaborationist forces in 1941. Every Yugoslav republic celebrated its own "Day of the Uprising" at the republican level, and the anniversary for Serbia recurred on July 7th. For Belgrade, it was one of the main events on the year's celebration calendar, along with many other federal celebrations such as the Day of the Republic or the First of May. In several cases, since the end of the war, the July 7th anniversary was also used as an opportunity to celebrate the "long" history of national liberation of the Serbian people, as explained in the first celebration – on July 7th 1945 – by an editorial on the front page of the newspaper *Politika*:

The July 1941 uprising in Serbia is one of the greatest events of our past, both in terms of gravity and significance of its fateful consequences. It ranks among events like the 1389 Battle of Kosovo and the 1804 First Uprising that left an indelible mark in the history of the Serbian people.

The significance of this uprising is enormous not only due to its pivotal role in the current war, but to an even greater extent because on July 7, the Serbian people once again firmly took the reins of destiny into their own hands, striding forth on its own historic path²⁶.

In the following years, the socialist meanings of the celebration were more emphasized, but evidence suggests that July 7th was still considered the most convenient event to express a more specific Serbian narrative of the past²⁷. In 1951, for the 10th anniversary of the beginning of the uprising in Yugoslavia, the directives for the celebration transmitted by the local Agitprop section stressed that the celebration had to be "in the sign of the uprising of all Yugoslav peoples", to exalt the liberation struggle, the political and economic successes of the new socialist state, but at the

²⁵ Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond Centralni Komitet Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije – Ideološka komisija 507, k. 2, VIII, II/1-b-58, Parole i slike na zgradama u Beogradu za 1. maj 1949. godine, 15 April 1949, 2.

²⁶ M.C. Petrović, "Sedmi Jul – Dan Ustanka u Srbiji", *Politika*, 7 July 1945, 1.

²⁷ The situation was similar in other Republics, to the point that the very existence of different "uprising days" was criticized by some Party leaders and a new *Dan Borca* (Day of the Fighter) was established on the 4th of July, as the 'day of the uprising of all the people(s) of Yugoslavia', see Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond Savez udruženja boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata – Savezni odbor 297, br. fasc. 35, Diskusija o predlozima i idejama za proslavu dvadesetogodišnjice ustanka naroda Jugoslavije, 14 November 1959, 19; "Svaka nova proslava Dana borca biće nova smotra naših uspeha i izvršenih dužnosti", *Politika*, 4–5 July 1956, 4.

same time it was supposed also to “revive the immediate past of Serbia, the First and Second Uprisings, the First World War and the struggle for a free life in Serbia”.²⁸ Hence, the public lectures organized by the SBNOR (Alliance of the fighters of the People’s liberation war) of Belgrade in the different *rejoni* (the administrative units of the city), following these indications, illustrated the fundamental passages of Serbian history from medieval times to the First World War, focusing on: “the battle of Kosovo, the First and Second Serbian uprising, the Battle of Kajmakčalan [an important battle of the First World War] and the breaking of the Thessaloniki front”.²⁹ An ideal connection between all these events was also proposed on the occasion of some collective mourning rites organized for July 7th, such as those held in the suburbs at monuments dedicated to the soldiers who died in the First World War or in previous wars.³⁰

This Serbian narrative was not predominant in the Yugoslav capital city, but neither was it always relegated to the margins of the city’s memory landscape. It could be embedded in the city center landscape, such as when Belgrade’s section of the Agitprop approved the building in the Republic Square of a monument to Vasa Čarapić – one of the leaders of the First Serbian revolt of 1804 – to be unveiled on July 7th 1951.³¹ The commemoration was presented as a moment of “fusion of the past of struggle of the Serbian people with the recent struggle of our peoples in the People’s War of Liberation against fascism”,³² building a clear continuity between the two historical experiences.

The analysis of Belgrade’s cultural life shows how this approach periodically recurred also in other cultural events. Theaters staged plays celebrating Nineteenth-century national heroes such as *Hajduk Stanko* by Janko Veselinović and *Stanoje Glavaš* by Đura Jakšić, which premiered at the National Theatre (*Narodno pozorište*) in 1945 and 1949 respectively, followed by *Pera Segedinac* by Laza Kostić at the *Jugoslovensko dramsko pozorište* in 1950.³³ Other historical figures regarded as relevant in the Serbian “national awakening” movement were still celebrated by

²⁸ Istorijски архив Београда (IAB), фонд Градски Комитет – Савез Комуниста Србије – Београд 865, к. 144, Записник са састанка Агитпроп оделjenja, 21 February 1951, 4.

²⁹ Istorijски архив Београда (IAB), фонд Градски одбор с.б.нор Београда 988, Inv. br. 51, Izveštaj за 1951.

³⁰ See for example the cases in Zemun in 1952, Istorijски архив Београда (IAB), фонд Градски одбор с.б.нор Београда 988, inv. br. 58, Izveštaj, 28 June 1952; and in Železnik in 1956, IAB, фонд Градски одбор с.б.нор Београда 988, inv. br. 50, Izvodi iz referata sa godišnjih skupština Saveza Boraca NOR-a за 1956 godinu.

³¹ Istorijски архив Београда (IAB), фонд Градски Комитет – Савез Комуниста Србије – Београд 865, к. 147, Записник са састанка Агитпроп комисије градског комитета, 23 February 1951.

³² «Београд је подигао споменик своме ослободиоцу из Првог устанка – народном јунaku Васи Čarapiću», *Politika*, 13 August 1951, 3; «Споменик Васи Čarapiću», *Borba*, 13 August 1951, 2.

³³ «Kostičev Pera Segedinac на сцени Југословенског драмског позоришта», *Borba*, 23 February 1950, 5.

street and square names, despite the post-war revisions of the city's place names.³⁴ In 1954, a new monument unveiled in Kalemegdan was dedicated to Branko Radičević, a Nineteenth-century romantic writer considered one of the most prominent promoters of the Serbian language.³⁵ Public exhibitions celebrated not only the battles of the Second World War fought by the Yugoslav partisans or the post-war "achievements of the socialist society", but also historical events central to the Serbian national narrative such as the "liberation of Belgrade from the Turks" in the Nineteenth century, celebrated in the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the siege of Belgrade in 1806 (1957) and of the 100th anniversary of the bombing of the city by "Turkish cannons" in 1862 (1962).³⁶

With varying intensity and visibility, and in the context of the hegemonic promotion of socialist values and of the growing insistence on a stronger Yugoslav identity in the 1950s, different expressions of the Serbian national discourse were articulated in post-WWII Yugoslav Belgrade, according to the ideological principles that were supposed to organize the new political system. They were often based on the celebration of the Nineteenth Century "national liberation struggle", which was supposed to consolidate the patriotic tones embedded in the celebration of the Yugoslav partisans who fought in the Second World War.

In many cases – especially when the promotion of the new Yugoslav identity increasingly insisted on the South Slavic ethnic proximity, even recalling interwar Yugoslavism – Serbian history and culture were invested with broader Yugoslav meanings and included in a Yugoslav integrating narrative. In other circumstances, nevertheless, the Serbian identity narrative was displayed distinctly as part of the multinational identity of New Yugoslavia. The multicultural understanding of Socialist Yugoslavism encompassed the expression of different national identities of the Yugoslav peoples and Serbia made no exception when compared to other republics of the Federation, such as Croatia or Slovenia. In this sense, Belgrade never completely abdicated the traditional and official role of the capital of Serbia. The evidence collected for this article, nevertheless, suggests that the process of articulating and conveying a Serbian national narrative in Socialist Yugoslavia did not develop without disagreements and negotiations.

³⁴ IAB, 35,15, V Redovna sednica komisije za spomenike i ulice.

³⁵ "Spomenik pesniku životne radosti i mladalačke tuge", *Politika*, 19 June 1957, 8.

³⁶ Both the exhibitions were organized by the Museum of the city of Belgrade, see Rajko L. Veselinović, "Izložba oslobođenja Beograda od Turaka u Prvom Srpskom Ustanku", *Godišnjak Muzeja Grada Beograda*, IV, (1957), 627–637; Rajko L. Veselinović, *Beograd 1807-1862-1867. Izložba povodom stogodišnjice bombardovanja Beograda*, (Belgrade: Muzej Grada Beograda, 1962).

Ideological Issues: Defining a Socialist Serbian Narrative

Scholarly work has highlighted the persistence of expressions of Serbian nationalism in Belgrade during the 1950s. The authorities were concerned, for example, by the celebrations for the Serbian New Year – when well-known Belgrade “reactionaries” would sing nationalist and “Great Serbian songs” in the city taverns – and by the exhibitions of Milić Stanković (Milić od Mačve) and by the rehabilitation of Saint Sava in the articles by Milorad Panić Surep and Miodrag Popović.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Serbian national narrative was not simply nurtured by dissonant sectors of the society and regularly countered by the authorities. The situation was much more complex, as witnessed by the fact that personalities such as the above-mentioned Milorad Panić Surep were not ostracized dissidents, but held prominent positions in cultural and political institutions. Communist authorities were very prompt in repressing everything they considered “chauvinistic”, reaffirming at the same time their official commitment to the promotion of expressions of national identities regarded as compatible with the development of a socialist consciousness. The edge separating the two definitions, nevertheless, often appeared to be ambiguous, mobile and subject to political circumstances.

The capital city’s urban landscape reveals the recurring uncertainties in the process of definition of the new socialist national discourses. The politics of memory regarding 19th century Serbian “national awakening” and the “liberation wars”, for example, highlight the ambivalences over the interpretation deserved by these historical events in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia. An episode that, perhaps more than any other, testifies the resumption of the national tradition, which had been consolidated starting since the 19th century, was the great celebration of the 150th anniversary of the First Serbian Uprising in 1954. The revolt led by Karađorđe against the local Ottoman power in 1804 held a central position in the Serbian national discourse as the first stage of the “struggle” that led to the foundation of the modern Serbian state. The previous relevant anniversary – the 100th – had been emphatically celebrated by King Petar in 1904, only one year after the dynasty founded by Karađorđe went back to power in the country. After the Second World War, the historical value of the First Serbian Uprising and the history of the Serbian “struggle for freedom” was not completely dismissed. The event was commemorated throughout the Federation as an historical moment “of great significance” for all the Yugoslav peoples and, more broadly, the Balkans: at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, the Serbian people had shown to the other South Slavic peoples the way in the struggle for freedom and

³⁷ Predrag Marković, *Beograd između Istoka i Zapada*, (Belgrade, Službeni list SRJ, 1996), 203–206.

independence.³⁸ To a certain extent, the approach recalled the identity and cultural politics of interwar Yugoslavia, when specific episodes from the past (often, but not always, chosen from the Serbian national tradition) were promoted as a unified Yugoslav historical heritage.³⁹ In fact, all the republics took part in the anniversary with specific programs organized in the month of February.⁴⁰ In Serbia and in Belgrade, the initiatives lasted for the whole year and involved cultural institutions and mass organizations. The main event in Belgrade was the opening of a historical exhibition dedicated to the Uprising. Documents and artifacts were presented in the heart of the capital city, in the former royal palace called *Novi Dvor*, turned by the new Communist authorities into the seat of the government of the People's Republic of Serbia (*Izvršno Veće Srbije*).⁴¹ The propaganda machine for the exhibition involved also the Belgrade sections of the most important "mnemonic actor" in Socialist Yugoslavia: the organization of the former WWII partisans (Alliance of Fighters of the People's Liberation War – *Savez boraca narodnooslobodilačkog rata* – SBNOR).⁴² According to the data published by the press the exhibition was visited by 120,000 people in less than three months and celebrated as a great success.⁴³

However, the ideological framework and the historical contents conveyed by the exhibition did not go unquestioned. Although the official commemorations and the press coverage presented the First Serbian Uprising as a pivotal moment in the process of "national liberation" of all the Yugoslav peoples, the event revealed how much the public representation of the past was still influenced by the traditional Serbian national narrative. The review of the exhibition published by the main museological journal openly criticized the exhibition's approach, stressing the fact that it remained too dependent on the interpretations of "Serbian bourgeois historians" and did not take into sufficient account the contribution of Marxist doctrine. Criticisms were particularly directed towards the clear intention to strike the emotional side of the visitor and the insistence on the violence perpetrated by the occupier while

³⁸ Ružica Guzina, "Prvi srpski ustanak i jugoslovenski narodi", *Crvena Zvezda*, 93, 2 February 1954, 1.

³⁹ Pieter Troch, "Between Yugoslavism and Serbianism: reshaping collective identity in Serbian textbooks between the world wars." *History of Education*, 41, 2, (2012), 175–194. See also Andrew Wachtel, *Making a nation, breaking a nation: Literature and cultural politics in Yugoslavia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ "U celoj zemlji svečanosti", *Crvena Zvezda*, 95, 16 February, 1954, 1.

⁴¹ In interwar Belgrade, the building served a central cultural and symbolic function, hosting the Prince Paul Museum, see Radina Vučetić, "Muzej Kneza Pavla u Beogradu – Izlazak na Evropsku kulturnu scenu", *Tokovi istorije*, 1–2, (2004).

⁴² Istorijfski arhiv Beograda (IAB), Fond Gradski odbor s.b.nor Beograda 988, inv. br. 56, f. "Stari Grad", Zapisnik sa godišnje skupštine Opštinskog Odbora Saveza Boraca NOR Opštine Stari Grad, 4 April 1954, 1–4.

⁴³ "Muzej Prvog Srpskog ustanka", *Politika*, 8 November 1954, 5; "Muzej Prvog Ustanka u Miloševom Konaku", *Borba*, 8 November 1954, 4.

overlooking the socio-economic context that had led to the uprising. Furthermore, the author, Nada Andrejević-Kun, criticized the attention paid to the heroic figures of the leaders instead of the role played by the popular masses: Karadžorđe was presented “as the figurehead of the insurrection and the leader of the Serbian people, and not as an exponent of a new emerging social class, which already had considerable material wealth at its disposal and now also required political power for its own development”. Moreover, she denounced the fact that “nowhere in the exhibition – either through any given exhibit item or some other way – could it be seen that the main drive of the insurrection was a struggle for new social relations. That the struggle manifested as national-liberation was the result of the bearer of the old relations being a foreigner, in this case, the Turks”. The criticism also regarded another aspect: the exhibition was considered too Serbo-centric: it minimized the Yugoslav meaning of an event that “was not for a single moment a matter of the Serbian people alone” and which had had important influences on the neighbors, “first of all on the Serbs in Vojvodina and Bosnia, the Croats, Montenegrins, and Macedonians”.⁴⁴

The exhibition was open for a few weeks in the city center, but the plan was to find a permanent location in Belgrade.⁴⁵ The lack of space for cultural institutions in the capital city and the specific topic of the exhibition probably concurred with the decision to relocate it to an old traditional building that belonged to Prince Miloš Obrenović [*Konak Kneza Miloša*] in Topčider, a residential area on the outskirts of the capital. The building became the new Museum of the First Serbian Uprising. The Museum was opened with two new sections that seemed to confirm the previous approach: one dedicated to Miloš Obrenović, the leader of the Second Serbian Uprising, and one to the influence of the uprising on the Serbian population out of Serbia.⁴⁶ According to a following evaluation, not much changed in the renewed exhibition, which was still “conceived and realized along a single dimension, an illustrative-documentary presentation of facts, offering no further explanation”.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, despite the criticisms, the distance from the city center, and its limited dimension, the new museum obtained a meaningful position in the Capital city’s cultural landscape.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Nada Andrejević-Kun, “Povodom izložbe Prvog srpskog ustanka”, *Muzeji*, 9 (1954), 156.

⁴⁵Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond Savez Socijalističkog Radnog Naroda Jugoslavije 142, br. fascikle 129, Stenografske beleške sa desete redovne sednice predsedništva Glavnog Odbora SSRN Srbije, 20 January 1954, 8. (henceforth: AJ, 142, f. 129, Stenografske beleške...)

⁴⁶“Muzej Prvog srpskog ustanka”, *Politika*, 8 November 1954, 5.

⁴⁷Milorad Milošević Brevinac, “Muzej Prvog srpskog ustanka”, *Književne novine*, 3–4, 1 April 1955, 7.

⁴⁸Between 1955 and 1958 the museum had between 32,000 and 37,000 visitors per year, which made it the most visited museum in the city after the Military Museum of the JNA and the National Museum, see “Izveštaj o radu Muzej Prvog srpskog ustanka”, *Zbornik Muzeja Prvog srpskog ustanka*, 1 (1959), 170.

The 1954 anniversary of the First Serbian Uprising opened the discussion over another important historical place in Belgrade's landscape. Planning the celebration, the top of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Serbia (*Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Srbije*) discussed many proposals, including the possibility of building a monument to Karađorđe in Serbia and, in particular, to honor the anniversary announcing the building of the new Serbian National Library – with the old one razed to the ground by German bombs in April 1941.⁴⁹ In the following years, both ideas would take shape in Vračar plateau, a well-known historical site in Belgrade, where in 1594, the relics of Saint Sava were burned, and in the interwar period, a new great “Temple” dedicated to the prince of the Nemanjić family and founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church started to be built (later stopped by the new Communist authorities).⁵⁰ The historical importance of the location was further emphasized by the nearby presence of the Karađorđev park, which was established at the beginning of the Twentieth century in the area that hosted the camp of the insurgents led by Karađorđe in 1806, and preserved some of their tombs and a monument to the “liberators of Belgrade” themselves. Nevertheless, the new commemorative process initiated by the 1954 anniversary was a drawn-out endeavor that took more than two decades. In 1955 Sreten Stojanović, a prominent Belgrade sculptor, had already completed a new sculpture dedicated to Karađorđe and in 1958 the City's “Commission for monuments” clarified that the monument to the Serbian leader would be placed close to the new library, but only after the completion of the new “memorial building” [*spomen zgrada*] to the Uprising.⁵¹ The Library was inaugurated on April 6th 1973, but the monument was eventually placed only in 1979 – on the occasion of the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the First Serbian Uprising⁵² – suggesting at least a certain irresolution in finalizing the commemoration of this historical personality.

The Nineteenth-century Serbian “national awakening” was presented in the capital city not only from the political-military perspective but also for its cultural meanings. In 1949, Belgrade dedicated a new memorial museum to the two main reformers and protagonists of the “*flourishing of the Serbian national culture*”: Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić.⁵³ The museum was housed in the building that had been the seat of the first Serbian Lyceum, established by Obradović and attended by

⁴⁹ AJ, 142, f. 129, Stenografske beleške sa desete redovne sednice predsedništva Glavnog Odbora SSRN Srbije.

⁵⁰ See Bojan Aleksov, “Nationalism in Construction: The Memorial Church of St. Sava on Vračar Hill in Belgrade.” *Balkanologie. Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* 7, 2 (2003), 47–72.

⁵¹ Istorijски arhiv Beograda (IAB), fond Skupština Grada Beograda – Gradski sekretarijat za obrazovanje i kulturu 17, br. 32, f. 15. “Informacija o stanju i radovima na spomenicima i bistama javnih i kulturnih radnika i drugim spomenicima na području grada Beograda”, 1961, 3.

⁵² Branko Vujović, *Beograd u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, (Beograd: Draganić, 1994) 425.

⁵³ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Ministarstvo za nauku i kulturu 187, f. 22, Elaborat za uređenje Vukova i Dositejeva muzeja, 1–5.

Karadžić. The new section of the permanent exhibition dedicated to the latter was opened in 1950 for the celebrations of July 7th, stressing one more time the ideal connection between the cultural and the political/military expressions of the “struggle of the Serbian people”.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, during the following years of Yugoslavization and modernization, the museum lost relevance in the capital city’s cultural scene. According to an article that presented an overview of Belgrade’s museums, published by *Politika* in 1959, “Belgraders had forgotten that [the museum] existed”. The same article informed the readers of the difficulties to access this cultural institution: “if you wish to visit the museum, ask the keeper to open it”.⁵⁵

Vuk Karadžić was mainly considered a Serbian cultural reference, despite the recognition of his role in the process of linguistic “unification” of the Yugoslav peoples.⁵⁶ While the loss of relevance of the Museum might suggest a gradual marginalization of the “father of the Serbian language” in Belgrade’s cultural landscape, other episodes highlighted the disagreements over this process. Significantly, in that very year, the proposal by the *Zavod za urbanizam Beograda* to move the statue of Vuk Karadžić from its well-known location at the crossroad of *Boulevard Revolucije* and *Ruzveltova Street* (where it was placed in 1937) to the internal backyard of the Faculty of Philosophy, in the building *Kapetan-Mišino Zdanje* (or, as a second option, to the *Studentski park*) led to different public reactions. The press reported it as a disagreement between urbanists – who explained the need for a new modern *magistrala* crossing the spot – and artists and cultural workers, who defended the monument and its position in the city’s image, worried by the possibility that “Vuk would not be in a public place but in a courtyard”.⁵⁷ Eventually, the sculpture was kept in its place. While the intersection of political, urbanistic, and cultural reasons that led to the final decision is hard to decipher, the ideological interpretation of Vuk’s role in Serbian history and the position deserved in the capital city of Socialist Yugoslavia was not completely straightforward either.

More generally, the relationship with the Nineteenth-century events and historical figures such as Karađorđe and Karadžić expressed by the everyday governance of Belgrade’s public spaces testifies to the relevance of the pre-revolutionary past for the politics of identity, but also recurring uncertainties and ambivalences.

⁵⁴ P., “Izložba Vukove prepiske u zgradi Vukovog i Dositejevog muzeja u Beogradu”, *Politika*, 9 July 1950, 4.

⁵⁵ B. Ilić, “Beograđani u muzejima”, *Politika*, 18 March 1959, 9.

⁵⁶ Marco Dogo, “Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, ovvero la «funzione della personalità» nella storia balcanica”, in Marco Dogo, Jože Pirjevec (eds), *Vuk Stefanović Karadžić: la Serbia e l’Europa* (Trieste: Stampa triestina, 1990), 153–154.

⁵⁷ V. Petrović, “Vukov spomenik se seli”, *Borba*, 11 February 1959, 10; “Zašto urbanisti vuku Vuka”, *Večernje Novosti*, 17 February 1959, 6–7; Habul Mihailo, “Navijamo za Vuka”, *Politika*, 1 March 1959, 11.

Narratives and Space: Belgrade's Museums of the Revolution

Debates were not triggered only by the ideological interpretations of the past but also by intertwined issues of resources and spaces. The Yugoslav cultural and representative function increasingly played by Belgrade affected the balance between the Yugoslav and the Serbian identity narratives during the 1950s. The Yugoslavization process was not always enthusiastically welcomed in the capital city. While a comprehensive and reliable evaluation of the citizens' general response escapes the possibilities of this article, it is worth noting that several Party sources report complaints about the reception of "Yugoslav" cultural events organized in Belgrade.⁵⁸ Certainly, negotiations between different subjects and various levels of power are detectable already in the 1950s. Sources suggest that the process of Yugoslavization of Belgrade could be seen by some actors as a homogenization of the meanings of the public spaces that threatened the existence of a "Serbian Belgrade".

One of the most interesting cases of clear friction between the insistence on a Yugoslav identity discourse and a more specifically Serbian one is the debate that followed the decision by the federal authorities to establish the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. In the mid-1950s, the ideological bodies of the Party stressed the need to push for further unification of the narrative on the Revolution, since the establishment of Museums of the Revolution in the different Yugoslav Republics was, as explained by one of the members of the Ideological commission of the Central Committee of the SKJ, "useful but insufficient, because without a Yugoslav museum it might appear that the revolution was not unified".⁵⁹ In 1959, the Central Committee established the new federal institution and indicated the capital city of Yugoslavia as its seat.⁶⁰ While a new majestic representative headquarters was planned in New Belgrade, the "Museum of the Revolution of the peoples of Yugoslavia" was housed in an important building in the city center, on Marx and Engels Square.

The process that led to the establishment of the museum lasted for almost a decade. The foundation of a large house dedicated to the history of Yugoslavia trig-

⁵⁸ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Centralni Komitet Saveza Komunista Srbije – Ideološka Komisija Đ-2, br.5, Stenografske beleške sa savetovanja aktiva propagandista, 21 June 1961, III/1-III/2; Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB), fond Gradski komitet – Savez Komunista Srbije – Beograd 865, k.179, Diskusija o najaktualnijim pitanjima u kulturi i umetnosti naroda Jugoslavije, 17 December 1962, 102; Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond Savez Socijalističkog Radnog Naroda Jugoslavije 142, br. fascikle 47, Stenografske beleške sa sastanka Komisije za idejno vaspitani rada SSRNJ, 17 September 1957, 9.

⁵⁹ Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Fond Centralni Komitet Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije – Ideološka komisija 507, k. 20 VIII, II/3–35, Sastanak Sekretarijata Ideološke komisije CK SKJ, 6 June 1957, 5–6.

⁶⁰ Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond Centralni Komitet Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije – Izvršni Komitet 507, CK SKJ III/83, Odluka o osnivanju Muzeja revolucije naroda Jugoslavije.

gered debates over spaces and resources involving political organs at the level of the Republic of Serbia. The decision could be understood as a lack of recognition of Serbian history and culture in the capital city. Already in 1951, the importance of opening a museum focused on the specific development on the Serbian territory of the “People’s liberation struggle” – as the war fought by Yugoslav partisans against the Axis Powers was officially called – had been stressed by the Serbian SBNOR, which launched an initiative aimed at collecting historical documents.⁶¹ In the following years, the idea was taken into serious consideration, and stood along with the proposal of a new central and Yugoslav museum of the Revolution.⁶² As proven by the 1959 decision, the establishment of the latter institution was eventually prioritized. Nevertheless, following the first measures aimed at organizing the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples of Yugoslavia, the dissatisfaction created by the marginalization of the idea of a Serbian museum started to be expressed. In February 1961 the *Izvršni Odbor* of the Serbian republican SBNOR“ sa „SBNOR of Serbia raised the issue. The President stressed the fact that it was a “delicate issue”, already discussed “on various levels and in various forums”, and pointed out that: “we don’t know exactly how the whole thing looks, we can move on it without making it public”⁶³. Several members complained about the imbalance between Serbia and the other Republics that had their own republican museums (in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo). The fact that the capital city was entitled to promote a broader Yugoslav picture of the past, according to the majority, limited the space devoted to the specific Serbian dimension. The absence of a “Serbian” museum was considered “somehow unfair”, as the President of the Executive Council of the Serbian SBNOR simply explained⁶⁴. Only one member of the *Odbor*, Oto Bihalji-Merin, criticized such an interpretation, describing as “unnecessary” the opening of a “Serbian” institution in Belgrade and insisting instead on the importance of investing in the Yugoslav Museum in the city, as the “center of the new Yugoslavia”⁶⁵.

According to other members, it was important to have a Serbian museum that was larger than the federal one, or, in the worst-case scenario, the Yugoslav Museum could reserve more space for Serbia than for the other republics. Others proposed to integrate the Museum of the First Serbian Uprising in order to create a museum “about the Serbian people in the struggle for freedom”. The idea that “we need to fight and create a museum of the revolution of Serbia” was presented by a member

⁶¹ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Sbnor – glavni odbor NR Srbije 115, k. 54, Proslava narodne revolucije do 7 jula, 15 December 1951, 4.

⁶² Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Savez Socijalističkog Radnog Naroda Srbije Đ-2, k. 88, O Muzeju Narodne Revolucije u Srbiji, 1956, 2–3.

⁶³ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Sbnor – glavni odbor NR Srbije 115, k. 35, Stenografske beleške iz sastanka Izvršnog odbora SB, 13 February 1961, 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

of the *Odbor* as shared by the majority of the “comrades” and not induced by “great Serbian” motivations⁶⁶. Nevertheless, it highlighted a struggle to accept what was perceived as an undermining of the specificity of the Serbian experience.

The issue of available resources and spaces was also particularly important. As pointed out by Oto Bihalji-Merin: “in a country struggling with two bodies for each hospital bed, we should not be building two museums with the same purpose”⁶⁷. Eventually, making a decision to prioritize one institution over the other in Belgrade resulted in a choice with clear political connotations. The concurrence over the capital city was also epitomized by the unenthusiastic reactions to the proposal to solve the issue with the opening of the museum of the Republic of Serbia in another relevant city for the official memory of the Second World War in Serbia, such as Titovo Užice or Kragujevac.⁶⁸

A few months later, the same claims resounded also at the Fourth *Plenum* of the *Glavnog odbora* of the SBNOR of Serbia, where it was reiterated that Serbia was insufficiently represented compared to other republics. Ultimately, the *Plenum* relaunched the establishment of a new institution that would have functioned as a “museum of the general history” of Serbia, covering both the Nineteenth and the Twentieth centuries.⁶⁹ Less than two years later, in February 1963, the Government of the People’s Republic of Serbia – following the decision of the League of the Communists of Serbia – established a new cultural institution in Belgrade: the Historical Museum of Serbia [*Istorijski Muzej Srbije*], explained by the “specificity of its development and the peculiar individuality of the Serbian people”.⁷⁰ The institution did not seem to enjoy support in the following decades⁷¹, but its foundation was a formal recognition of the need for Belgrade to maintain its role as the Serbian Capital city.

Other pieces of evidence suggest that the Serbian identity discourse was gradually gaining new space in the city in the early 1960s. The discussions regarding new monuments, for example, testified to the lack of interest in strengthening the Yugoslav image of the city: one of the main proposal lists discussed by the local commission included 27 Serbian personalities and only one non-Serbian.⁷² Also the Republic’s

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁶⁹ Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Sbnor – glavni odbor NR Srbije 115, k. 36, IV plenum Glavnog odbora saveza boraca Srbije, 27 May 1961, 16–17.

⁷⁰ “Iz anala Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije”, *Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije*, 5 (1968), 125–126.

⁷¹ In 1990, the serious material difficulties encountered by the Museum were denounced by several Serbian intellectuals in order to stress the “submission and humiliation” of Serbian history and Serbia itself in Socialist Yugoslavia, see “Istorija pred uništenjem”, *Borba*, 31 March 1990.

⁷² Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB), fond Skupština Grada Beograda – Gradski sekretarijat za obrazovanje i kulturu 17, br. 32, f. 15, Redovna sednica Komisije za spomenike i ulice – Informacija o stanju izgradnje spomenika, 3 January 1963, 2. The list included Ruđer Bošković, whose national belonging is claimed in Serbian, Croatian and Italian national narratives.

museums followed the same path. According to the *Narodni Muzej's* new director, Lazar Trifunović, the “The binding duty of the National Museum, both to its collection and to and to the people as its founder, compels us to turn it into a museum of national culture, thus achieving its century-long conceptual formation”.⁷³ In the following years – while expanding its international collaborations and proposing exhibitions of international significance, in the context of the non-aligned policy of Socialist Yugoslavia – the Museum gradually downsized the ambition to present the cultural heritage of the entire country, focusing its domestic work mainly on the territory of Serbia.⁷⁴ Similar signs can be found in the fact that the anniversary of the liberation of city on October 20th – broadly emphasized as a celebration of “all the peoples of Yugoslavia” during the 1950s – seemed to take on more local connotations after 1961⁷⁵. In the following years Belgrade remained in many ways a Yugoslav center, but the general political atmosphere in the country, which until then had promoted a more Yugoslav image for the capital city of the Federation, was starting to fade.

Conclusion

After the Second World war, in new Socialist Yugoslavia, Belgrade officially played a double role, representing both the capital city of the Federation and of the People’s Republic of Serbia. The politics of identity implemented in its public spaces are particularly informative if read as an expression of the relationship between Yugoslav and Serbian identity narratives in the new socialist system. Analyzing them provides a novel perspective on the first decades of the existence of the new state, namely the most centralistic phase of the life of the federation, often depicted as a moment of unequivocal convergence between Serbian and Yugoslav horizons.

The article highlights the way the new Serbian identity narrative was promoted in the public spaces of post-1944 Belgrade, re-codified by the communist authorities according to the new ideological values and in the framework of socialist nation-building. All over Yugoslavia, the process of defining the “right” expression of national identities in the new socialist society implied the promotion of certain aspects and the oblivion of others. In this case study, evidence highlights, for example, the attention devoted to the Serbian national movements from the past as prodromes of the “People’s Liberation Struggle” of the period 1941–1945. At the same time, the research reveals the ambivalences in the ideological interpretation of history and its national meanings, the difficult definition of continuities and discontinuities with traditional

⁷³ B. Vlaho, “Novi potezi Narodnog Muzeja”, *Beogradska Nedelja*, 76, 3 March 1963, 8.

⁷⁴ “Okolo skele, unutra izložbe”, *Večernje Novosti*, 3 November 1964, 7; Manojlović Pintar, Ignjatović, “National Museums in Serbia”, 794–796.

⁷⁵ Marco Abram, “20. Oktobar – Narratives of Identities in the Celebrations for Belgrade’s Liberation Day (1945-1961)”, *History of communism in Europe*, 3 (2012), 185–186.

national discourses, the involvement and the reactions of different actors, and the indecisions about the signification of several of the capital city's public spaces.

Throughout the 1950s, the Party's growing insistence on Socialist Yugoslavism had a decisive impact on the image of the capital city of Yugoslavia. Despite the weaknesses in the definition and promotion of the new Yugoslav identity, Belgrade increasingly followed the ambition to represent the entire Federation. Nevertheless, the article shows how, in particularly relevant cases, this process produced controversies in terms of both contents and the use of spaces and resources. In Belgrade, such as elsewhere in the Federation, Yugoslavism could trigger the reaction of those who considered an excessive insistence on a more integrative Yugoslav identity as a danger to the existence of a clearly separated national identity. The space for the expression of a Serbian identity narrative could be safeguarded referring to the official multinational framework of Socialist Yugoslavism. The case of the Museums of the Revolution shows that such issues could even be widely discussed within the power structures and have practical consequences.

Further research on the role of different actors and level of power and their relationship in the intervention over Belgrade's public spaces will better highlight these dynamics. It is nevertheless important to stress that – while most of the literature has appropriately discussed the resistance to integrative forms of Yugoslavism rising in other republics of the Federation, in continuity with the tensions that characterized the experience of interwar Yugoslavia – this article suggests that Belgrade and Serbia were not complete strangers to similar dynamics. Support for Yugoslavism in the Party and in cultural institutions in Serbia was definitely widespread, but – as in other Republics – different interpretations and applications of the concept of Yugoslav identity and self-determination of the different Yugoslav *narod*i (in this case the Serbian people) needed to find an arrangement. Ultimately, including the Serbian case study in our understanding of the developments of Socialist Yugoslavism – up until its gradual loss of any ethnic connotation in the Party's politics of identity since the 1960s – will help to better understand the role assigned to national identities in the building of a multinational socialist society. In particular, the application of the ideological principles that were supposed to “solve the national question” appeared to follow different interpretations, producing evolutions and opening spaces of ambivalence.

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Сажетак

др Марко Абрам

Капитална невоља: Српски национални наративи у социјалистичкој Југославији и преуређење Београда (1944–1961)

Чланак истражује српске националне наративе у прве две деценије социјалистичке Југославије, фокусирајући се на студију случаја Београда као града са кључним симболичким значајем. Као главни град нове Федерације, Београд је добио шири југословенски идентитет. Анализирајући политику идентитета која се спроводи у градским јавним просторима, међутим, у чланку се наводи да су у граду промовисани и српски национални наративи, артикулисани у оквиру званичне идеологије Партије. Ослањајући се на одабране примере, чланак истиче појаву несугласица и преговора како у погледу садржаја тако и у погледу коришћења простора и ресурса. Као и другде у југословенској федерацији, амбиваленције и ревизије утицале су на дефинисање улоге националних идентитета у изградњи новог социјалистичког друштва и равнотежу са партијским социјалистичким југословенством.

Кључне речи: Београд, српски идентитет, југословенство, социјализам, јавни простори.

