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Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities

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Workshop at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade,
December 18th 2017 (14.30-19.30)

Dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, part of the project whose bearer is the Berlin “Haus der Welt” and is curated by Manuela Bojadžijev and Katrin Klingan, our workshop was without hesitation called international. Why?

It was not simply a matter of participants¹ – of which some did not belong to what is called “the region of former Yugoslavia”² – nor was it important that we spoke in English, nobody’s mother tongue. Rather, I feel that it is a matter of an attempt to distance ourselves from the periphery. Paradoxically, Yugoslavia was much less the periphery of Europe and the World than the current “region.” (This uncanny name “region” appeared when the war stopped, but remained in use as testimony that the enmity is still not over, nor indeed very far off, it would

¹ The workshop participants were: Petar Bojanić (Word of Welcome), Manuela Bojadžijev (Introductory Remarks), Marjan Ivković and Djurdja Trajković (IFDT-Belgrade), authors of the text on reception of the book who also moderated the whole event; Rastko Močnik (Ljubljana), Gordan Maslov (Split), Valida Repovac Nikšić (Sarajevo), Marko Božić (Novi Sad), Vedran Džihic (Vienna), Carlo Burelli (CAS SEE-Rijeka), Monica Cano (CAS SEE-Rijeka), Davide Pala (CAS SEE-Rijeka), Nataša Sardžoska (Skopje and former CAS SEE-Rijeka Fellow), Srdjan Prodanović (IFDT-Belgrade), Jelena Vasiljević (IFDT-Belgrade), Adriana Zaharijević (IFDT-Belgrade), Aleksandar Fatić (IFDT-Belgrade). The participants were the researchers from the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade, academics (originally) from the region of former Yugoslavia or working there, who have used the Balibar and Wallerstein book, and the fellows of the Center for Advanced Studies – South East Europe, University of Rijeka.

² Three fellows from the Center for Advanced Studies – South East Europe of the University of Rijeka participated in this workshop. This center was founded five years ago and tasked with reviving the academic and intellectual cooperation in the countries of former Yugoslavia. The visiting fellows of this institution work on various topics important for the region and participate in conferences and seminars organized here.

seem.) It is made up of several new states, of which two are members of the European community. Further, many who have read this book, on this or that occasion, and can understand the language spoken in the “region”, have studied and lived elsewhere, or still do, and have in the meantime become foreigners in these small new states. They have thus become authentically cosmopolitan. If we had to explain in one sentence how Marjan Ivković (PhD University of Cambridge) and Djurdja Trajković (PhD University of Wisconsin Madison), researchers at this Institute, chose the title to their text (“Reception without Receptivity”), as well as why the book has not been translated into this local language (or languages), the answer is trivial: because Yugoslavia fell apart. Of course, this sentence is very difficult to explain. Would that country not have fallen apart had someone found this book or would the country have been ‘transformed’ and ‘changed’ by this book?³

At the end of the workshop, after all the comments, during the final discussion, all participants were seeking the answer why the book had not been more commented upon or better noticed, that is, why it had not received more systematic reception in these parts of the world? Everyone spoke of racism: it is in the title of the book, thematizing racism, something nobody here could have found interesting thirty years ago. (Nor is it found interesting today.) After all, this workshop shows that the thematization of the book chapters about racism are systematically avoided (Dj. Trajković).⁴ None of the participants mentioned that Tito’s policy was directed at countries of the *Non-Aligned Movement*, that his closest friends were statesmen of these countries; that as children (as “Tito’s Pioneers”) we lined the streets of cities to show hospitality when these friends came for official visits; that the hospitals throughout Yugoslavia were filled with wounded soldiers of African countries conducting their wars for independence, etc. The idea that racism towards the Roma is inherent in the current constitution of Slovenia (R. Močnik) or that the latent resistance of Croatia and Slovenia (erstwhile Yugoslav republics) towards the Balkans and disdain for its inhabitants (“we are not these Balkan people;” disdain of the Balkans

³ I am paraphrasing. Manuela Bojadžijev was at one point describing to me her project, saying that Balibar and Wallerstein’s book completely changed her life (I think that was the word used; a similar thing can be found in Asim Mujkić’s note thanking Djurdja for the invitation to Belgrade from Sarajevo; add to that an Italian philosopher I have met recently, who testified the same). For a moment in her speech, Manuela hesitated to recognize in me one who is similar to her. Since Balibar was one of my two mentors, she probably thought that she would not make a mistake in inviting me to participate in this project.

⁴ This also refers to the chapters about class. With the exception of S. Prodanović and partially M. Ivković, no one spoke about class in detail.

is really disdain towards Yugoslavia, that is, Serbs, the people who lived in Yugoslavia), that all this hatred or resistance was racism, and not nationalism (R. Močnik), seems to me a subsequent observation. Simply, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, thinking about nationalism in the context of class and race becomes utterly uninteresting. And vice versa: Yugoslavia fell apart precisely because of a missed opportunity in intellectual circles in the nineties for these three concepts to be thought together (to which I add sexism (gender), as M. Cano and A. Zaharijević speak in their comments). Cano suggests “that heterosexism is a gendered problem because it creates an idea of human as an impossible idea to be reached (white heterosexual middle class man), and that such an impossibility excludes the others, the vulnerable ones, from the notion of humanity. Such an attitude creates disposable, subjects objects.” Cano poses an important question “how to combat sexism and racism? And what are the limits of respectable racism?” and she finds an answer in “creating a feminist imagination and new political imaginaries creating a world not dominated by racism, sexism and universalism”. Zaharijević underlined that in “the post-Yugoslav region the notion of class and gender were not the words that were organized in the narrative where as race and gender were dominant in the 90s.” Furthermore, she notes “that the problem of women today is that their work is portrayed as the non-work. The question is how to relate the notion of class politics with feminist theory today? And how not to erase what we have learnt in the past about gender and how to interrelate different insights?”

Yet, if this book meant nothing yesterday (in the last years of Yugoslavia’s existence), if the book was only occasionally read in the years after the cessation of conflict, the participants of the seminar had the freedom to completely naturally turn to the significance of this book today. Paradoxically, all spoke about the meaning of this for themselves (with some presentations often referring to their own experience of its reading, such as V. Džihić where he argues that “the permanent labeling stands as the consequence of destruction of Yugoslavia” and N. Sardžoska laments that “ever since I was fourteen I had to define myself, my belonging, my nationality and even to change my name which creates an ontological anxiety”), or else their current reading inspired to speak of various social phenomena and sophisticated forms of racism and nationalism in the new states in which they live (R. Močnik, G. Maslov, V. Repovac Nikšić). Močnik has convincingly argued that “the problem of (mis)recognition that Balibar sees as the central to racist complex, cannot not reproduce the racist complex since it relies on the question of “who recognizes?” and today, such a recognition is granted by the military complex in the Western

world where small states seek recognition, and therefore, the domination is inescapable.” Maslov has wondered if “the dissolution of Yugoslavia could not be read along the lines of crisis in class politics and how would such a reading pose new interpretations for us today?” Furthermore, Maslov sees a problem arising today in Croatia as “a tendency to dissolve history into the memory and to reconcile the two registers”. Repovac Nikšić suggests that solution is in “social inclusion and social investment as well as rejection of identity as category of analysis and politics”. As if the new readings of the book have provoked an entirely new ‘application of the book’ into new contexts and have given it new currency. As if the various diagnoses the book offers could still be fatally current for these, the peripheries of Europe.

How then is this book read today? What has this new, joint reading and these discussions about the various presentations shown? If we ignore the strategy the two authors imbedded into the title and subtitle of the book (today the subtitle, *Ambiguous Identities* would probably be the title, and the three concepts race, nation, class would find themselves in the subtitle), the “compendium structure” of the book strictly determines its reading today. A collection of thematically similar texts by the two authors, it is not a book written jointly; rather, two authors jointly discussing and critiquing their own texts until they could be represented as a common endeavor or project constructed it. The contemporary reader consciously chooses certain chapters of the book and comments on them discretely, much as they thematize certain concepts that appear in the various chapters of the book. Nataša Sardžoska focused on chapter 4, “The Construction of Peoplehood,” thematizing the problem of borders, border crossing (Balibar writes much more about this topic later), migrants, problems of existence of new nations, such as Macedonia, as well as a new, and very uncertain, identity. Sardžoska argues “we are bearing witness to the dissolution of liminal spaces with hallucinations, euphoria, erasure of past and memory as well as fragmentation of political spaces.” Valida Repovac Nikšić also spoke about migrants and cosmopolitanism suggesting “the fear and rejection of those who are different, namely, migrants, bring back a dilemma of hospitality to strangers and how to distribute cosmopolitanism evenly through respect and tolerance for singularity and difference”. For her, the solution is to “establish a direct dialogue and fuse horizons”, a concept meticulously criticized from an analytical perspective by Davide Pala. Pala argues “the relation between racism as a necessary component of racism must be refused since one cannot argue that historical regularities are necessary relations.” He further claims, “We should develop an idea of good

nationalism because we need an evaluative methodology to assess the past and present form of nationalism and also in order to develop and built nations in the real world. And finally, we need a good nationalism since we want to be able to ask the question of justice.” Jelena Vasiljević gave a detailed discussion about universalism (using a somewhat later Balibar protocol in order to thematize his earlier attempts) and suggested that “we need to think universalism which will not be diluted to and by particularism and that will move us beyond community” underlining the difficulty of such a task, while Aleksandar Fatić summarily opposes (although in an interesting and convincing way) the forcing of Marxism and Marxist authors in the thematization of conflict, antagonism, and negation by arguing that “at the core of Western culture and political theory lies the question of conflict, antagonism and divisiveness and that overcoming the conflict presumes more violence”. Marjan Ivković is really the only one speaking of ideology and *economism* that in the “tradition of Marxist orthodoxy, figures as a determinism of the development of the productive forces create the one mode of creation of subjectivity.” Rastko Močnik convincingly criticizes Balibar’s “Derridian protocol” (I believe these are the words) about racism as the only way to supplement nationalism and his ethnocentric theory of nationalism. Močnik criticizes Balibar in the following way: “Balibar does not ask two questions as to why nation needs supplementation? What kind of mechanism and structure is nation as to need racism? And because he does not ask this question, he cannot ask the more important question: is racism the only way to supplement nationality?” Močnik than suggests that the reason for this is that “Eurocentric countries never supplemented national liberation with socialist revolution”. Carlo Burrelli, on the other hand, remains with the concepts of capitalism and bourgeoisie and a refined analysis shows the various models in interpretation that Balibar in one way or another neglects to thematize or elaborate. He argues “that capitalism has actually abandoned nationalism and that it is not a good thing.” Furthermore, he claims “that the current cosmopolitan values supported by academics also maintain the current liberal values of the rich bourgeoisie. The national feelings are necessary in order to foster greater distributive justice.” Finally, Mrako Božić considers Wallerstein’s conception of national state building, giving his own alternative model. Božić argued that in the chapter 4 Wallerstein “is wrong about the relation between nation and state because he tried to see only one ideal and unique process as to the formation of nation states.” Božić supplements his argument by saying “that there are at least two types since the meaning of the nation states in the West is not one and the same as it is in the

periphery (Eastern and Central Europe). In the periphery the meaning is different because there was not smooth and evolutive process as nation building and there was no state since periphery was not partaking in imperial endeavors as well as the difference between markets which was less developed.

Appendix:

All the presentations and discussions were video recorded and the material can be found on the site of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory (<http://www.instifdt.bg.ac.rs/>) as well as at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmT5fbnbQek>

The book, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* will be translated this year and published by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory.