

THE ROLE OF STATE SPECTACLE IN A PERIOD OF CRISIS

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Abstract: This paper raises the question of the sustainability of the state spectacle when an ideological code of the transmitted message has no clear ideological definition, which is observed in a case study of the central celebration of "Youth Day" in 1988. The organizational structure, ideological intentions and eventual disappearance of the rally point to the possibility of analyzing state spectacle as an instrument of the system for expressing its identity, power and ideology (purpose), i.e. its weakness at a certain historical moment. Since the state ideological apparatus encodes a message within the dominant code, this paper deals with the possibility of decoding messages within the same code in terms of social crisis. Accepting the thesis that the function of the state spectacle is a "representation of reality" that is imposed on the community by the state ideological apparatus as the appropriate symbolic equivalent, the paper examines the possibility of transposing the message in terms of a vague ideological foundation of the state apparatus. From the perspective of sustainability of "the idea of yugoslavism" the paper explores the issue of expressing national identity in a situation where an "imagined community" lacks a coherent political will.

Keywords: state spectacle, identity, rally, nation

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, the mass spectacle assumed its ideological context in the format of stadium events, with a purpose to glorify a particular regime or its identity (Lukić Krstanović, 2010). The 1930s gave birth to the Thingspiele movement, which was considered to be a format for manipulation of the Nazi cultural and political apparatus. In his discussion of the phenomenon of the Thingspiele, Henning Eichberg considers the fundamentals of this movement to be its mass scale and mutual influences between the performers and the audiences (Eichberg, 1986). On the trail of similar requirements, in our whereabouts another ideology formulated a stage form with a purpose to astound and discipline the masses – at the same time.

Around the same time, the first designed presentations of national mass events in our region referred to the format of the Sokol rallies, which served to validate the ideas of integral yugoslavism. And, finally, the state spectacle was fully expressed in the rally form of the central celebration of the Youth Day in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

With the analysis of the concept of the nation, this paper draws from Anderson's notion of "imagined community" where "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1998: 17). Of great importance for the development of the official state spectacle in former Yugoslavia was the territorial framework of the political community, where, according to Anthony D. Smith's theory, members of the community identify themselves with a neatly bordered and marked territory (Smit, 1998). The territorial framework of the state union of SFRY which included six republics is important for further inquiries, along with different interpretations of the respective national identities which in the last instance summed up the socialist "idea of yugoslavianism". All these factors were unified by the symbols shaped by the ideological apparatus in the format of the official state spectacle. By means of the particular use of space they conveyed the ideological message throughout the entire territory of the state.

According to Louis Althusser ideology is a complex structure, equally including concepts, beliefs, thoughts and symbolic constructs (Altiser, 2009). His theory is based on meanings and representations which are, on the one hand, produced with a purpose, and on the other experienced as a political, economic and cultural order wherein humans are able to find sense. The same author adopts a Marxist method of observation of the state from the standpoint of its specialized (repressive) state apparatuses, leaders, governments and administrations, however adding to the list (for this paper very important) state ideological apparatuses which include the official state spectacles.

If we understand that one of the main functions of the spectacle is altering of reality into the appropriate symbolic equivalent, then, when it comes to the state spectacle, this "reality" is imposed by the state ideological apparatus in its attitude to the community. The "desirable" form of communication within the predominant code is the act of encoding and decoding the message within identical frameworks. The staged spectacle, in its contact with the audience, induces the meaning that suits the ideology of the system shaping the message. In this paper we explore the reasoning behind the existence of the state spectacle and its role under the circumstances of crisis and elusive ideology of the state apparatus.

The theories applied in the research are based on the meanings and representations produced by design. They represent the state of the political, economic, and cultural patterns wherein people find purpose.

Drawing from qualitative data, this study was based on an empirical method – case study of the official state spectacle "Youth Day" in 1988. In order to broaden the basic insights and observe the subject from different perspectives I used research methods of analysis of the historical narratives, observational analysis and interviews. Analysis of historical narratives demands a study of two types of sources – archive documents as indicators of the activities which brought about the form of public rallies in SFRY, and the other group of sources comprising newspapers and periodicals of the period, academic literature etc. Non-participant observation is a method which, by means of analysis of a TV broadcast (the subject of study), largely contributed to getting the sense of the context of the emerging problems in the communication process. In order to acquire precise

information, interviews were conducted in accordance with the overall aims of the research.

Prior to WWII, the Sokol movement gave significant contribution to the process of giving form to the ideology of integral yugoslavianism. In the period of the dictatorship of King Aleksandar I Karađorđević the Sokol movement had a task to demonstrate the ideology and loyalty through disciplines at mass gymnastics performances – rallies. Having in mind Anderson’s notion of an “imagined community,” it is obvious that the message of a collective national identity was conveyed at the Sokol rallies in a disciplined manner and to mass audiences.

After World War II the socialist rallies partly adopted the Sokol tradition – now as a means of formulating the new idea of yugoslavianism with a modified ideology and calendar, and presenting the state spectacle at the sports stadium as an authentic expression of ideology.

If we presume that every political system chooses the type and scope of messages to be imprinted through rituals in the minds of the members of the community, we can clearly see the intentions of the organisational and political secretariat of the Federal Committee behind the decision to adopt the character of the May 25 celebration and the name Youth Day.

The Youth Day ceremony was launched in this period, so it is necessary to keep our focus on the basic principles on which it was founded. The central performative instrument in promoting socialist realism was certainly state spectacle in the form of a rally.

The Sokol legacy served as the starting point for the tradition of passing the baton, and the tenth anniversary baton was finally handed over to Marshal

II. HOW TO DEMONSTRATE THE IDEOLOGY?

Tito in front of 50,000 spectators at a stadium. Addressing the audience at the event in 1957, he said: “Despite this day being commemorated as my birthday, I believe that it should bear a different name: the day of our youth, the day of sports, the day of new generations and their further physical and spiritual development.”

That same year of 1957, the organisational and political secretariat of the federal committee made the decision on the future nature of the May 25th celebration and its ideological and organisational aspects. The national holiday was given the name Youth Day, and the baton relay became the Youth Baton Relay. At the same time, the decision was made on the founding of the Federal Committee for the celebration of May 25.

In addition to the organisational reasoning of the system, the archive documents from this period also show the basic principles in formulating the ideology of yugoslavianism: the project was to join all republics in a territorial framework with the idea to remember the days of N.O.B glory, to express joy over the shared victories in the construction of the socialist homeland and love for the President.

Each subsequent rally had a main political theme and a political message communicated in the title of the ceremony. Several thousands of participants were systematically grouped within the frameworks of the program, which included: commemoration of the communist and war past where army cadets would make formations shaping different messages, glorifying the authority and cult of the President, and celebrating youth with first-grade students as performers.

III. A PERIOD OF CRISIS

“There are not a few people in some republics, and even among some communists, who find it hard to pronounce the word “Yugoslav”, as this would, supposedly, violate their national and other rights. And what exactly is the notion of Yugoslavianism, what, namely, does it mean to be a Yugoslav? Today it means to be a citizen of the socialist Yugoslavia; although this is quite clear, there are, nevertheless, fruitless discussions in our country, for instance, whether Muslims should embrace a particular nationality. That is nonsense. Everyone can be what he feels he is, and no one has the right to impose upon him some national belonging. If he feels as a citizen of Yugoslavia the national belonging and citizenship do not contradict each other.” (Marshall Tito at the VII Congress of the Youth League of Yugoslavia – SOJ)

The constitutional and nationalist crisis of the early 1970s was gradually aggravated after Tito’s death in 1980. This was going on concurrently with the major global and local processes important for the historical context. This was a time of the global crisis. Yugoslavia struggled with high foreign debts, high budgetary deficit, and inflation. The economic decline was followed by the political crisis. Since 1981 the meetings of the highest organs of the party and the state began to discuss the national issues at first in Kosovo, but also throughout the country, which resulted in an increasingly austere attitude towards the nationalities in all the republics. This would last until 1985 when the republics turned again to their national questions. At the time Slobodan Milošević was appointed as the chairman of the City Committee of the League of Communists in Belgrade. Together

with Ivan Stambolić he had a strong influence on formulations of the agenda of national identity. In 1987 Milošević publicly expressed his support for the Serbs in Kosovo Polje, and this speech is considered as a turning point in the recent Serbian history – his ultimate refocusing on the Serbian nationalism. In the same year he reached the top of the hierarchy of the League of Communists of Serbia – at the Eight Session which brought about a change in perception of the enemy, who is no longer merely the “class enemy”, but also the “ethnic enemy”.

At this point, the nationalist euphoria was spreading in every republic, so these questions remained: what were the symbolic elements that now validated the identity of the community? Which community and, finally, which nation? What was this new ideology? Which set of beliefs and values would be performing the uniting role, and for whom? What was the message to be encoded, and from which dominant position?

IV. CASE STUDY: YOUTH DAY RALLY “1988”

In order to describe (through a comparative analysis) the reasons behind the abandoning of the Youth Day celebration, this paper addresses the rally in 1987, whose program contained the passing of the last baton. The rally of that year had a same structure as the previous one: the baton travelled for 66 days through all the parts of Yugoslavia, ending its journey at the Stadium of the Yugoslav National Army, where it was handed to the chairman of the federal youth organization by the eleven years old Kosovar schoolgirl from Gnjilane, Rejmonda Brošaj. The celebration was attended by 50 000 spectators,

including the highest officials from all the Yugoslav republics. The program assembled 5 500 young participants, the national anthem "Hej Sloveni" was intoned, and the program was divided into four multi-layered segments. Everything indicated a regular organization of the celebration. What made this celebration different from the previous ones was the overall idea of the society represented by that rally (Politika, 1987). According to the statements of the director of the stage spectacle and the director of the TV broadcast the official structures, though largely corroded by the interests of the individual republics, aimed to "license" the survival of the socialist idea of yugoslavianism. One of the ways of affirming this feeble concept was the Youth Day celebration as such. My interviewees further related that some republics (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) took primacy in this direction, while others (like Slovenia) put forward arguments about the overall redundancy of the event and communication of its message. This confusing constellation needed a message which would communicate the present moment, a message the community would decode within the frameworks of the dominant code of "brotherhood and unity." This study, furthermore, draws from observational analysis: accordingly, the hosts of the TV broadcast comment the first act titled "Bomb in the chest - what a kolo bouncing around". Here we see concentric circles of the folk dance kolo performed by the members of all nationalities, which split at a certain moment. "As you can see, the kolo began in harmony, but something starts to happen - where is that harmonious kolo from the beginning, why do the circles, one after another, slowly detach from each other? First, there goes Serbia, then Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, one after

another republic and province gets separated. Why do we dance in eight different circles, why does each kolo dance to the respective national tune and not together? It seems that we are not united as we should be. We understand this as a warning, however full of singing and dancing it may be. We struggle with eight systems, and such score is hard to play in harmony - this kolo warns about the current situation. Young people believe in a better future, but in a future that they themselves could control. So, at the centre of the court we see the kolo united again. After those separated circles, here we are, all Yugoslavs, together." The hosts of the ceremony also claim that, in essence, the program is artistic, but conveys political messages. They soon announced the segment titled "I am fed up with hot climate". The scoreboard read aphorisms, like: "Each form of nationalism is equally dangerous - including our own". This analysis should include accounts of the event that symbolically announced the subsequent traumatic circumstances - selection of the poster for the Youth Day celebration designed by the studio "New Collectivism" from Ljubljana. It turned out, however, that this was a redesign of the Nazi poster "Third Reich" by the German artist Richard Klein. The baton itself had eight red drops at the top - indeed, such symbolical inscription of the war events that were to follow does not require additional explanations.

V. "1988"

The lack of ideology of repression had influence on the messages communicated by the ideological state apparatus, so the first proposal to abolish the youth baton relay was eventually adopted. Accordingly, in

1988, by the decision of the organization of socialist youth, Youth Day took on a new dimension. The rally became a representation of the all-human values that “celebrate life”, instead of the state, and political symbols were excluded.

The title of the event, 1988, was a clear indication that the ceremony was to be placed in the context of the present. At a press conference held by the prominent authors who created the event (Paolo Madeli, Vladimir Aleksić, Damir Zlatar Frej, Ksenija Zečević, Marina Čuturilo, Nenad Prokić) it was described as the biggest ballet performance in the world, far removed from the format of a political rally.

The initial script was kept in secrecy: the authors themselves complained about the negative atmosphere in which the whole event was being created. For the first time, the Youth Day celebration did not include: the baton rally, soldiers of the Yugoslav National Army, first-grade schoolchildren, or any participants from Slovenia, Montenegro, or Kosovo. Created at a time when there were not many national or ideological values left to uphold, the program of the ceremony was dedicated to promotion of universal values, remotely detached from any political implications. In front of 40 000 spectators at the stadium and several millions TV viewers, the program commenced at 9 p.m. with a prologue read by the actors Ivana Žigon and Dragan Petrović: “Chronologically, we are facing the end of the century and the millennium and, at the same, the closure of a cultural and civilizational cycle. Both recent and distant past should be respected – one must live now... We argue that there is no such thing as an economic crisis. There is only the crisis of spirit. We have closed ourselves in our local labyrinths and twice locked the

doors which separate us from the rest of the world. Thus we turned our social life into a permanent conspiracy against the truth. And the truth is a matter of fact: we do not know what it is, but we know what it is not. We shall not overcome the crisis of spirit until we boldly decide what we should cease to be – in order to become what we really are. Before we unlock the locked doors, in our circumstances we should first seek the key and the lock itself... That is the proper order of things: he who is not happy in his milieu can not contribute anything positive... Those who no longer want to listen to bad news shall appear on the court in front of you...” (Parts of the Prologue, 1988) After the Prologue, ballerina Sonja Vukićević performed “The birth of the land”. In the subsequent image, a giant blue surface of linen slowly covered the participants (who moved it from below) across the entire court, symbolizing the turbulent sea. Out of the sea grows an island where a man and a woman play the game of love. Especially impressive for the audiences was the scene “Fire” with 2000 burning torches carried by young men who broke the darkness when the reflectors went off. The torches go out, and the performers calmly stand still waiting for the upcoming and gathering storm. Sonja Vukićević and Nenad Jeremić run to each other across the red cloth which covered the whole stadium. The end scene focused on Sonja Vukićević’s 17-minute long masterful solo accompanied by the sounds of Ravel’s Boléro was artistically unique, representing a shift from the ideology of collectivism to individual statements. Against a rain curtain, as a central figure she is approached by all the participants in the performance in concentric circles: she eventually becomes a body from the mass. After the official end of the ceremony

the participants in the program spontaneously sang "Comrade Tito we swear to you", which was the last symbolical reference to the past. The interviewed members of the production team noted that this event was among the most demanding by that time, not only because of the highly charged atmosphere it was created in, but also for its artistic aspirations.

The dissolved Yugoslav state lost a clear idea of what its territory was, what the main political principles of the governing party were, and in which format was the "imagined community" supposed to continue to exist. The performative form of its ideas had nothing to align with, so the Youth Day celebration was abolished in 1989. In the same year the federal institutions started to gradually disintegrate. The first to do so was the Youth Association.

VI. CONCLUSION

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At the time when an ideology was dying out, and because of the fear of the leadership from historical responsibility for abandoning a political tradition, the rally was dying out "in stages". If at the rally performed in 1987 the hosts of the TV broadcast pointed to the dangers from nationalist ideas, in 1988 it announced the upcoming shift of ideology and the

gloominess of the moment the state was in. According to Althusser's theory of ideology the instruments of the ideological apparatus induce ideology by way of their effects. Since the "ruling class" claims the power of the state and thus has the (repressive) state apparatus at its disposal, we may assume that the same ruling class is an active agent of the state ideological apparatus as long as the ruling ideology comes from the same source (apparatus) (Altiser 2009). This paper explores the meaning produced by the official stage spectacle at the moment of social crisis when the repressive and ideological apparatuses are not attuned in formulating the message of the dominant code. In this case study, examination of the meaning produced by the state spectacle at the time of social crisis when the repressive and ideological apparatuses were out of tune has shown that, in terms of a disoriented repressive apparatus, it lacked ideological means to provide a proper alternative. As a result, the national staged ceremony became obsolete. Taking into account Luhmann's notions of survival and purpose, official state stage spectacle as an instrument of the system which failed to respond to inner malfunctions, was not capable of promoting the ideological values of the state which still existed only as a matter of formality. For the reason of existence of the spectacle itself to be valid, everyone involved in organization of an official stage ceremony has to understand its role in the given moment. On the example of a disoriented repressive apparatus of the state, its subverted national identity and ideology, we have demonstrated a dissonant role of the spectacle as an instrument of the official ideological apparatuses.

In this time of information flows and advanced stage technology, the quality of a particular spectacle cannot be asserted through the visual aspect and potential artistic reach – these components are a given. The notion of quality of the state spectacle pertains to how successful is the national message conveyed, which mainly – if not only – depends on whether the national ideology is clearly formulated and whether the state has anything to say in the first place. In 1989, the unifying and mobilizing forces of nationalism (Sulce, 2002: 221), strife towards a basic national consensus and dangerous state aspirations of the diminishing nationalities (demanding an absolute unity of nation, language and territory) brought about a new form of official stage spectacle, whose overall consequences are still beyond our grasp.

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