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TEACHING POSTSOCIALISM IN A POSTSOCIALIST COUNTRY: EVERYDAY AS A SOURCE OF THE POLITICAL²

ABSTRACT In this paper, I would like to draw attention to the challenges of theorizing and teaching about everyday practices of postsocialist transformation in the former Yugoslavia. I focus on the master course entitled “Cultural and Social Practices of Postsocialism: A Case Study of the Former Yugoslavia” (later renamed “Culture of Socialism and Postsocialism”) taught as an elective course at the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Belgrade. It is designed to offer understanding of different and often contradictory ways in which dramatic changes in Eastern Europe from 1989 onwards have been played out in everyday life of people who live in these regions. The main challenge of teaching this course was to encourage students to critically think about politics in its various guises and connect their everyday experiences with political and cultural theory. Not only does it show that teaching is always political, but that the actual challenge lies in teaching (and learning) the political from the sources and practices of everyday life.

Keywords: postsocialism, teaching, everyday life, politics

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I would like to draw attention to the challenges posed by theorizing and teaching about everyday practices of postsocialist transformation in the former Yugoslavia. I focus on the master course entitled “Cultural and Social Practices of Postsocialism: a case study of the former Yugoslavia” (later renamed “Culture of Socialism and Postsocialism”) taught as an elective course at the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Belgrade. As a scholar who both researches postsocialist transformation in Europe and lives and works in a postsocialist country, I find it quite usual for researchers to discuss and reflect on the particularity of their position,³ but it seems much less common to discuss teaching in a similar context. Still, I consider it equally important to discuss the issues arising from teaching. It is relevant not only because teaching is what professors do and we should reflect on and theorize about it, but also because it should enhance our understanding of the subjects we research. When it comes to researching and teaching in/about postsocialism, this endeavour meets two important requirements of both anthropology and cultural studies: “always contextualize.” This paper is an attempt to contextualize contemporary teaching of postsocialism and in that sense its aim is twofold. First, it discusses micropolitics of higher education, and second, it analyzes the grassroots challenges of teaching about postsocialism in a postsocialist country.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The course designed to offer understanding of different and often contradictory ways in which dramatic changes in Eastern Europe from 1989 onwards have been *played out in everyday life* of the people who live in these regions. Its aim is simply to question the dichotomy between the macrolevel of political changes and the microlevel of its “application,” whilst try-

³ This applies especially to anthropologists because of the nature of their discipline that tends to study the “others” and, as a result, has to ask the related question of “us” or the “self.”

ing to show diverse ways in which political changes are understood as well as *created* through everyday practices. It was part of the project financed by Patterns Lectures, Austria. The grant was awarded to Professor Jelena Đorđević and myself for developing a syllabus on the culture of everyday life in the former Yugoslavia. Patterns is part of the cultural program of Erste Foundation which aims “to research and understand recent cultural history in Central and South Eastern Europe” (Patterns Lectures 2009–2015).⁴ The organization encourages the development of new courses at *public universities* in the “fields of art history, cultural studies, and cultural sciences (sic!)” and similar disciplines (ibid.). We received the grant for developing the course in the academic year 2012–2013.⁵ The course proved to be a success. In the first year, it attracted 20 students out of 23 enrolled in the program, which shows that it was the most popular elective course in the whole program.

After the initial year, I continued teaching it as a regular elective course in the Master Program of Cultural and Gender Studies. For administrative reasons,⁶ the course was renamed “Culture of Socialism and Postsocialism.”

4 The grant included finances for the book purchase for the Faculty library, grants for the study visit to the University of one’s choice, and the money for the guest lecturers. In the year sponsored by Patterns Lectures, the guest lecturers were Dr. Stef Jansen and film director Slobodan Šijan, but we continued to host guest lecturers in the following years, including Dr. Ivan Đorđević, Professor Ildiko Erdei, Dr. Dunja Njaradi, Dr. Radina Vučetić, Professor Ljubinka Trgovčević Mitrović, Dr. Mila Turajlić. During my maternity leave the course was taught by Dr. Srđan Radović.

5 In that year there were 58 eligible applications from 17 countries, while 13 courses from 9 countries were selected for the grant. From the time the program started in the academic year 2010–2011, there have been 7 courses taught in the former Yugoslav countries sponsored by the Program (2 from Slovenia, 2 from Serbia, and 3 from Croatia). The courses in question were dealing with feminist policies, art practices, and cultural memory. The course I thought was the only course that dealt with everyday life in particular and political change (Patterns Lectures 2009–2015).

6 There is a complex local policy of course naming. Generally, Serbian higher education used to focus on “the big picture” and the educational practice that I usually call “a frontal approach to teaching.” The courses tended to

Its aim, however, remained the same: understanding cultural transformation of South Eastern Europe after the fall of socialism with a particular focus on the former Yugoslavia. The course deploys a multidisciplinary approach using a variety of sources ranging from history, anthropology, and literature to sociology and political economy in order to provide a broader insight into the postsocialist transformation in Europe, at the same time, keeping an eye on the local specificities of these processes in the former Yugoslavia. My aim was to move away from the gatekeeping themes of ethnicity and violence. This does not mean that I consider them insignificant – quite the opposite. For that reason, they certainly figured prominently in some topics.⁷ However, I focused on the more usual topics of everyday life in the so-called transition: changing patterns of belonging and identification,

be encyclopedic (for example Serbian Literature of the Twentieth Century; Theory of Culture; Prehistoric Archaeology), rather than more specific and narrower in scope (for example, European Context of Serbian Literature: Laza Kostić and Ancient Greeks; Roman Art in Serbia, etc.). The University administration and governing bodies usually prefer the first type of courses (at least nominally) and we decided to fit into the pattern (for the specificities of postsocialist education and its socialist legacy in Europe see Silova and Eklof 2013). In addition, we wanted to introduce more lectures on socialist Yugoslavia and its afterlife in contemporary contexts. Thus, we changed the title. It was of particular importance for me to avoid the word “transition” in the course title, although it figures prominently in Serbian academia. The term was usually used by economists who were looking at the transition from socialism to capitalism, but the term has mainly been abandoned in anthropological and cultural studies (if it was ever used) or it has been used critically (cf. Burawoy and Verdery 1999; for contemporary critique see Jelača, Kolanović, and Lugarić 2017). In order to avoid the idea of “transit” as a process or period between socialism and capitalism, in the lectures I insisted on the word “transformation.” It may not be the best possible term, but it should help us expose (Western) Eurocentric perspective of the idea of transition and show that there is no linear trajectory that necessarily leads the former socialist societies to their capitalist futures.

7 Not only did these topics dominate academic written discourse about the region (for obvious reasons), but they were also part of the region-specific components of the postsocialist education reform package alongside the other elements “common to any low-income, developing country that implements the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) recommended by the international financial institutions (e.g., decentralization and privatization)” that include market driven textbook provision, increased educational choice, standardized assessment systems and the like (Silova and Kamsi, quoted in Silova 2010, 21).

changing concepts of work and consumption, leisure time, art, and popular culture. The main idea was to place those practices in the wider context of the political transformation in Europe and put emphasis on the similarities and differences between postsocialist cultural practices in the former Yugoslavia and the rest of Europe. Starting from there, we designed the syllabus covering the following topics:

- What was real-existing socialism and what came next?;
- Specificities of socialism in the former Yugoslavia;
- Changing patterns of identification and belonging I: community and nation;
- Changing patterns of identification and belonging II: gender politics;
- Specificities of identification and belonging in the former Yugoslavia: rural-urban differences;
- Changing understanding of the state and its role;
- Changing concepts of work: the emergence of the market and new morality;
- Changing patterns and meanings of consumption;
- Leisure time – tourism;
- Art and the avant-garde: everyday life and aesthetics;
- Popular culture, politics, and everyday life;
- Final remarks: ideology of “transition” and everyday life.

In the following years, I updated required and extended literature. I would sometimes alter or slightly change the syllabus, usually compressing or elaborating on the particular topics, but the main issues remained the same.⁸

⁸ The model of the exam is somewhat atypical of the traditional Serbian higher education: presentation counts to 30% and 70% of the grade is an essay written at home that asks students to critically discuss one of the topics taught in the class (for example: Discuss the idea that popular culture was the site of resistance in socialism; Discuss the role of popular culture in understanding the postsocialist transformation in Serbia). My aim was to encourage students to think critically about everyday practices that they themselves might participate in and, at the same time, to learn how to build an argument and use academic literature.

TEACHING THE EVERYDAY OF POSTSOCIALISM⁹

While teaching the course, we faced two main difficulties in achieving the aims outlined above. First, it turned out that the students usually had very little or no broader knowledge about socialist Yugoslavia and socialism. Also, their ideas were often fueled by prejudices. As Martha Lampland, one of the important researchers of former Eastern Germany writes: “drawing a sharp line between socialism and the post-socialist period violates the complex flow of memory, continuity, family, politics, and culture in which people live their lives” (2000, 210). This was due to the peculiar discontinuity, despite the ongoing character of the phenomenon. A “transition” has neither a definite beginning nor end. This fact made itself obvious while we were trying to show in which ways the previous system had informed the current one. Second, it turned out to be difficult to theorize and think critically through/about everyday practices that seemed ordinary and “obvious” and to step out of dominant cultural and/or political discourses of their interpretation.

The former was much easier to solve, while the latter proved more challenging. We introduced more lectures about socialism and its Yugoslav-specific variety, which helped students to better understand the transformation. Socialist Yugoslavia was rather different from other socialist countries for a number of reasons that we explored in a separate lecture. It had a specific economy of self-management, and it never became part of the Warsaw

9 There is a hot debate about the scope and meaning of postsocialism and postsocialist studies. Some authors claim that social life in the region usually labeled as “postsocialist” “is not reducible to an outcome of the recent histories” (Empson 2011, 24). Others, like David Kideckel, reject the category altogether as it defines societies by what they are not, rather than what they are (Kideckel 2004, 115). Others, like Dzenovska and Kurtović, use it as “a category that marks the post-Cold War reconfiguration of power relations and the ideological and geopolitical fault lines that continue to shape the present” (Dzenovska and Kurtović 2015, without page number). That does not mean that some (or most) post-1989 Eastern European polities originate in the socialist past. Quite the opposite (*ibid.*). However, it seems to me that the term is still meaningful as a “heuristic device” that can teach us about the current neoliberal reconfiguration in this part of the world. In that sense I used it in the title of the course.

Pact, unlike most of the other socialist states in Europe. In comparison to others living within socialist states, its citizens enjoyed relative prosperity, which in turn allowed for a much higher degree of freedom in various social and cultural practices. However, that does not mean that Yugoslavia was some kind of socialist paradise. We did teach about the specificities of socialist Yugoslavia, but I also wanted to encourage understanding of socialist Yugoslavia in various contemporary discourses. In that sense, I was particularly keen to teach and discuss the topics of memory and nostalgia.

Obviously, there are various ways to approach these topics. It seems that we can distinguish two main trends, one coming from oral history, and the other dealing with the memory in the present. I offered both approaches in my lectures and course syllabus. However, I consider it to be more difficult to discuss the past as the active force in the present. After the fall of the Berlin wall, numerous studies of postsocialist realities were written dealing with memories as representations of the past (for example, Iordanova 2001), but what interested me more were those that pair debates about representation of memories “with the description of everyday lives and situations” (Chushak 2013, 208) in order to produce “a much more nuanced picture of the complex processes of construction of the past” (ibid.) or the present. In that light, we discussed the issues of nostalgia and memories. I tried to encourage my students to think about memories of socialism or Yugoslavia, not simply as longing for the past, appealing to the people who were not able to adapt to the new circumstances, as some of the Serbian scholars argued (cf. Marković 2007), but rather as forms of a specific nostalgia that does not try to restore the lost past, but is actually much more reflective (on restorative and reflexive nostalgia, see Boym 2001). In order to demonstrate that, I wanted to show the specific role of memories in everyday life and couple them with both understanding of the present and hopes for the future.

Many authors writing about the region describe the lives of the people as “longing for normal life” that encompasses both the past and the desired future (Erdei 2006; Greenberg 2011; Simić 2014).¹⁰ For example, Jansen, in his

10 Yet, what counts as “normal” may vary across the postsocialist world and sometimes the idea of normality is conceptualized through consumption

recent book about yearning for “normal life” in Sarajevo, approaches “normality” exactly in terms of lives (and not solely through narratives) in a situation where “normal life” appears only as an absence, as “the affectively overcharged object of evocations of what ‘was’ and what ‘ought to be’” (Jansen 2015, 43). Thus, he sees memories always in conjunction with their future-oriented counterparts. In that sense, I tried to encourage students to “understand why particular aspects of the past resonate more than others, why they come to the fore in particular times, and what they mean in their new context” (Creed 1999, 225).¹¹ In particular, we tried to cast a critical eye over the path dependences theories that see postsocialist changes as “obstructed” by people’s inability to adapt to new circumstances due to socialist (or sometimes “Balkan”) mentalities. However, on the closer inspection, it turns out that the supposedly “Balkan” behaviour emerges as a consequence of new political and social (and cultural) circumstances. Therefore, “instead of seeing Eastern Europe as catching up with the West, we could think of it as a region that points to possible global futures” (Brković 2017, 22; cf. Buden 2017). This can be seen particularly well in the analyses of various everyday practices like consumption or dealing with state bureaucracy. Everyday is not only the place (and time) where political changes are applied (from “high politics” toward “ordinary people”) but the arena in which the political is produced. It is related to all social relations and activities, “including both the ‘official’ practices that are codified and normalized and the ‘unofficial’ practices and articulations of experience” (Burkitt 2004, 211). Those “official” practices like the state and bureaucracy are also everyday practices, and I encouraged my students to see them as such and not as separate realms that stand out of society. Various everyday practices taught in the course were not the “examples” of political change, but the way to see and analyze it.

(Crowley 2000; Fehervary 2002; Rasuing 2002), but it is not the only means through which people construct and understand it (see Yurchak 2006). We discussed this topic in class.

- 11 Similarly, in the lectures on socialist museums and monuments, we tried to see objects as “inscribed with meaning by those who create or live in their vicinity” (ibid.), but also as agentive – “they exude affects on to people” (ibid.) Empson (2001, 22). In other words, we tried to contextualize contemporary museum exhibition on socialism and Yugoslavia and understand contemporary use of the past (cf. Simić 2017b).

Theorizing political changes “from below,” from everyday practices, proved challenging. The usual “top-down” approach – from “theory” or “big politics” toward practices and people – made it difficult for students to reverse that logic and see the everyday as a source of the political and the starting point of theorization. In that sense, the main challenge regarding the course was to encourage students to critically think about politics in various guises and connect their everyday experiences with political and cultural theory. For example, consumption or gender, if not thought of as explicitly political, are not seen as related to politics or political theory. Yet, our idea was not to show that everyday discourses and practices are political (although they are), but rather that a close look at the everyday and mundane can produce important knowledge about the society in which we live.

This problem can stem from two sources: one is a *theoretical legacy* of disciplinary separations, and the second one is *cultural legacy* of seeing politics as a separate realm that has no or little connection with “ordinary” life. This is well-documented in anthropological literature on postsocialism (that we also taught from and about, which made our teaching look like a mirror image in a mirror image). In his study of the “last Soviet generation,” people who came of age during the 1970s in the then Leningrad, Yurchak (2006) writes that most people in the late socialist period considered official state ideology as having little relation to the everyday life experience. Still, they believed that “the system” was there to stay. The cynical distance between everyday practices and events organized by the Party (like parades, for example) opened up the space for the reconciliation between one’s disbelief in official ideology and one’s own participation in its reproduction (Yurchak 1997, 171). This cynical distance enabled the persistence of the (late) socialist system at least in the worldview of Yurchak’s interlocutors that made it look “omnipresent and immutable” (even if largely false) (Yurchak 2006, 183–184) to the extent that its fall came to a great surprise for many (for the very similar accounts of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, see Jansen 2015). Contrary to that, there are some authors who argue that everyday life in socialism was overly political. Svetlana Boym, for example, argues

that Soviet everyday was highly “politicized and semioticized” (Boym 1994, 158).¹²

It seems to me that these arguments reify the power of the socialist states and imply that everyday life in “capitalism” is not political (although I agree that it might be less *explicitly* political) (cf. the critique by Yurchak 2006, 11-14). The separation between politics and everyday is not a specificity of socialism nor was the life in socialism overly political. I would rather argue that this seeming separation between politics and the everyday reflects the ideological split between the public and the private that might be the consequence of Kantian ethics for contemporary European thought (Žižek 1992). According to Žižek (1992), another prominent theorist from and about the region, this separation created a cynical distance between the two that is a part and

12 Similar ideas figure prominently in writings on art in socialism, but also in its aftermath. Thus, Frigyesi, for example, writes that “in Hungary there had never been ‘free’ and ‘noncommitted’ art in the way it exists, for instance, in the United States” (Frigyesi 1996, 57). She further argues that this was not a question of official ideology, although “the political establishment was always ready to exploit art for its own purposes” (ibid.), concluding that “as much as certain intellectuals would like to see what they regard as a healthy separation of culture and politics, such separation has not yet happened in Hungary and there is no sign that it will occur in the near future” (ibid., 58). Silverman (1983), writing about Bulgarian music, asks rhetorically “what could be more apolitical than Bulgarian folk dance?” and answers at some length that “this question might be posed by a naïve layman, but an informed observer would quickly answer that virtually all cultural phenomena in Bulgaria are in a way affected by politics. More specifically, folklore, with its strong ties to the past, plus its potential for manipulating the national consciousness, is indeed an important arena for government involvement” (Silverman 1983, 55). Although I agree with Silverman that “folk dance” was part of a state political project in socialist Yugoslavia, as it was in Bulgaria, both statements are based on the idea that in socialism, everyday life, as well as “culture” and art, were massively controlled by the state, which made everyday life highly political. I am more inclined to think that art is everywhere both aesthetic and ethical and that this is not limited to the socialist period (cf. critique by Simić 2014). So, I tried to challenge these assumptions in classes and provide relevant literature (see, for example, Njaradi 2016 who sees folk dances through the concept of “ethical citizenship” and traces the emergence of new citizen-subjects through the transformation of socialist amateurism toward neoliberal volunteerism).

parcel of modern reasoning, both capitalist and socialist.¹³ He explains that in Eastern European “really existing socialism,” the split was that between a public ritual of obedience on the one hand and, on the other, a private cynical distance. By contrast, in the West, “the cynicism is in a way redoubled: we publicly pretend to be free, whereas privately we obey” (Žižek 1992, x). In both cases, he writes, “we are victims of authority precisely when we think we have duped it: the cynical distance is empty, our true place is in the ritual of obeying” (ibid). In that sense, he proclaims that we live in the age of cynical reason.

I find it particularly important to discuss this topic in my classes. Many scholars of postsocialism in Europe have noticed that irony and cynicism played a great role in people’s positioning relative to the regime and their understanding of themselves in that interaction (cf. for example Yurchak 1997, 2006). It was usually understood not only as a mode of speech, but as a particular way of engaging in public activity in the sense described by Kierkegaard’s “ironic person.” In Kierkegaard’s opinion, “the ironist has no positivist conception of a concrete form of life that would not reduce [it] to this mere immediacy” (Cross 1998, 133, see Kierkegaard 1997). In other words, Kierkegaard’s ironic subject does not speak with respect to some really existing “reality” that the irony actually refers to, but as Kierkegaard puts it “he is continually pointing to something impeding, but what it is he does not know” (quoted in Cross 1998, 138).

However, it seems to me that in most post-Yugoslav societies, as well as in socialist Yugoslavia (cf. Žižek 1999) there were some (however ambiguous) points of an (ideal) comparison that produced the ironic gap (Simić 2014; cf. Jansen 2000 for the self-praising irony of the Serbian anti-NATO protest; Živković 2007 for the idea of “indeterminate irony” for the difficulty of positioning in the morally ambiguous Serbian situation). These points are difficult to grasp, but it could be said that the role of irony as well as that of humour can be to anchor people’s “capacity to imagine a different moral order” (Petrović 2018, 204; cf. Rajković 2017). It can be said that they were

13 I find it particularly important to introduce theorists from the regions in my classes. I often rely on Žižek’s academic celebrity status and I show YouTube clips in which he uses irony and cynicism to make an argument.

more cynical than kynical. As Higgie explains, “cynicism is the belief that there is no hope for change, that truth is dead, while kynicism – a non-nihilistic form of cynicism – maintains that truth does exist, and is worth saving from political and media manipulations” (Higgie 2014, 183). In that sense, kynicism “uses joking, profanity, humiliation and mocking for a ‘morally regulative’ purpose” (Sloterdijk, quoted in Higgie 2014, 185). For most people in the former Yugoslav regions, there is a difficulty in positioning “oneself unambiguously outside the socio-political order that is subject to humorous critique” (Petrović 2018, 206), which ensures the space for mockery or irony that is played in everyday life as a form of moral critique.

Most of my students were well aware of this ironic mode of thinking, and I thought it was important to encourage them to think critically about it and avoid the danger of cynical gap. Kynicism builds up on the socialist ideas of ironic disobedience, albeit it can be played out in a public sphere. But the danger here is that its public character can turn it into the mere cynicism that keeps in the age of contemporary (capitalist) cynical reason (see Sloterdijk 2008; Žižek 1992). In that light, we tried to discuss other (everyday) strategies of being or not being political and a usual description of young people (in the former Yugoslavia, but also more broadly) as “unpolitical.” It is sometimes argued that in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, “institutionalized unpredictability was shaping and [was] shaped by both state and non-state related practices, relationships, processes and aspirations” (Čelebičić 2017, 114) which made it “powerfully pervasive and debilitating” (ibid.) for most people including the young (see Greenberg 2014 for similar analysis of Serbian students and student activists in particular). Čelebičić argues that young people’s response to unpredictability was to anchor their daily activities in some predictable routines such as café coffee drinking that could be viewed as both “acts of *criticism* and sites of *reproduction* of institutionalized unpredictability” (Čelebičić 2017, 120). This should help us move away from the ideas of apathy and, following Farthing (2010, quoted in ibid), see young people’s “inability to do nothing” as a “‘radically unpolitical’ choice”, which she reads as a new form of rebellion in the overpoliticized everyday over which people have little control. Farthing further argues that the “rejection of

politics is a new form of action” that strips “politics of [young people’s] attention and labour” and ultimately challenges “its monopoly of power” (ibid), which in an ironic(al) twist (pun intended, see Žižek 1999 quoted above) makes their “doing nothing” action political.

My students did not necessarily agree with Farthing and Čelebičić, and some of them raised their voices to argue for the contrary. They did not see coffee drinking rituals of “doing nothing” as acts of kynicism, but rather as defeatism and pleaded for the mindful political engagement as the only viable way of acting politically. Still, I find it important to suggest that we should look for politics and the political in the spheres of the everyday. If we follow Lefebvre, who argues that everyday world is “a world of praxis and poesis,” e.g. of production (quoted in Burkitt 2004, 222; cf. de Certeau 1988 who understands everyday as the arena of production), then everyday irony and joking that are sometimes part of the coffee drinking ritual and sometimes embedded in the ritual itself, is a place of production of the (un) political that has to be taken seriously. Furthermore, although Farthing and Čelebičić argue that thinking about young people as “radically unpolitical” opens up possibilities to view their (*everyday*) acts and forms of action ... beyond the state” as an emerging “unbundling of ‘state’ power” (ibid.), that does not diminish the importance of the state. On the contrary, as various authors have shown, there is specific “yearning for the state” in the former Yugoslav space (see for example Jansen 2015; Simić 2017a) that relied not only on the ideas about previous (socialist) states but also on the difficulty to define hopes for the new one. In that sense, my aim was not only to teach students “what socialism was” and what came next, as Catharine Verdery famously proclaimed (Verdery 1996) but to unearth the sources hidden in the layers of the mundane. Not only does this show that teaching is always political, but that the real challenge lies in teaching (and learning) the political from the sources and practices of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

Silova and Eklof (2013) write that “most scholarship on post-socialist transformation in education has focused on examining the trajectories of “glob-

al” education reforms that have spread across different contexts. Typically, the starting point is identifying a ‘global’ reform – such as student-centred learning, outcome-based education, curriculum standardization, privatization, or decentralization – and then tracing its complicated trajectory locally” (Silova and Eklof 2013, 380). However, as there are multiple “socialisms” and multiple “postsocialisms,” “post-socialist education space has become no less uncertain than two decades after socialism collapsed” (ibid.). This certainly applies to the specificities of post-Yugoslav context(s). Studies of postsocialism can help us understand many of the social, political, and economic processes in the former Yugoslavia. Many studies in the region used to concentrate on the issues of nationalism and ethnicity and, even when grounded in historically and ethnographically specific analysis of Yugoslav wars, they rarely addressed broader postsocialist issues that take into account the economic transformations that accompanied the political changes. I argue that any analysis of the former Yugoslav wars and nationalist politics needs to be carried out in conjunction with postsocialist practices (consumption, for example) and values that shape people’s understanding of recent changes (while also being informed by studies of the Balkans).¹⁴ On the other hand, the specificities of the postsocialist setting in the former Yugoslavia (for example, those of consumption or popular culture) can inform postsocialist studies more broadly. People in the former Yugoslavia were exposed to “Western” goods in the way that was very different from the rest of socialist Europe. The issues and generalizations about the nature of socialism that are sometimes taken for granted in postsocialist studies do not apply to the post-Yugoslav context in any simple or straightforward way. Putting those two perspectives together can help us move beyond the ideas of Yugoslav exceptionalism that are sometimes fostered in both “everyday” and academic narratives and, instead, critically assess contemporary post-socialist condition in which we live and teach.

14 Contemporary master program in Cultural Studies at the Faculty of political sciences, also offers a course entitled Cultures of the Balkans, taught by Professor Ljubinka Trgovčević Mitrović.

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Predavati postsocijalizam u postsocijalističkoj zemlji: svakodnevica kao izvor političkog

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Sažetak: U ovom radu bavim se izazovima koje donosi predavanje na master kursu o svakodnevici u postsocijalizmu. Izborni master kurs „Kultura socijalizma i postsocijalizma” na master programu Teorije kulture (ranije Teorije kulture i studije roda) nudi kritičku analizu različitih i često protivrečnih puteva postsocijalističkih transformacija u Evropi i načina na koje su se ove promene konstruisale kroz svakodnevicu ljudi koji žive u ovom regionu. Kurs obrađuje različite teme vezane za specifičnosti društvene i kulturne transformacije u bivšoj Jugoslaviji, kao što su promene vezane za sferu rada i dokolice, popularne kulture i potrošnje, istovremeno ih smeštajući u šire okvire društvenih i političkih promena u Evropi. Glavni cilj kursa je da preispita uobičajenu podelu između makronivoa političkih promena i načina na koji se one „održavaju” u svakodnevnom životu, pokušavajući da svakodnevni život vidi ne samo kao prostor kroz koji se promene manifestuju, već i kao njihov izvor. Najveći izazov u ovako zamišljenoj koncepciji predmeta bio je podstaći studente i studentkinje da kritički preispitaju one teorijske pristupe koji polaze „odozdo” i dovedu u pitanje uobičajene puteve od „teorije” ili „visoke politike” ka „običnim” ljudima i praksama. U tom smislu, moj cilj je bio ne samo da podstaknem studente i studentkinje da misle kritički o politici u njenim raznolikim formama, već i da povežu svoja svakodnevna iskustva i prakse sa političkom i kulturnom teorijom. To pokazuje ne samo da je obrazovanje uvek političko, već da pravi izazov leži u razumevanju političkog na osnovu svakodnevničkih praksi, koje uključuju i samo obrazovanje. Na taj način, kritičko razumevanje načina na koji se političko predaje pruža važne uvide i u procese savremenih (postsocijalističkih) promena i u prirodu onoga što pod političkim podrazumevamo.

Ključne reči: obrazovanje, postsocijalizam, svakodnevica, političko