

316.323.72(497.1):316.7:159.953.

Eda Starova Tahir (North Macedonia)  
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology  
Faculty of Science and Mathematics  
“St. Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje  
e-mail: eda@pmf.ukim.mk

## BUREAUCRATIC INTERACTIONS AND COLLECTIVE MEMORIES OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

**Abstract:** The text of Eda Starova Tahir looks at the present invocations of the Yugoslav socialist healthcare in North Macedonia as means of coping with the contemporary healthcare, in turn; which eventually set the policy expectations of the citizens in the post-socialist period.

**Keywords:** bureaucracy, health system, collective memories, socialist Yugoslavia, North Macedonia

### Introduction

*“But why didn't we do more? /.../ I'll tell you openly, it's because of the same reasons our country has been suffering from for 30 years. A complicated and incredible bureaucracy that thinks of why something can't be done, not of what can be done. The citizens suffer. We are a bureaucracy, and it's about time we face that. That's how our state functions... I have no intention of losing another patient due to impossible bureaucracy.” (Dimitar Kovachevski)<sup>1</sup>*

On February 9, 2023, the statement above by Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski regarding the death of Blagojche Ilievski, who passed away as a result of complications from the chronic illness cystic fibrosis, was widely shared by numerous media outlets in the country. Ilievski's death occurred during a period when the civic organization Cystic Fibrosis Association publicly protested with demands for access to modern therapy (primarily the drug Trikafta) and satisfactory hospital conditions. Ilievski passed away before any processes for change could even begin, and his death prompted a swift response from government officials, resulting in the first procurement of Trikafta for eight other individuals deemed to be in critical condition. According to the prime minister's statement, the blame for Ilievski's death does not lie in the long-standing

---

<sup>1</sup> „Ковачевски: Можевме да го спасиме Благојче, побарав одговорност од Сали“, А1он, објавено на 09.02.2023.

lack of interest on the part of healthcare organizations to act in the field of improving hospital conditions or acquiring modern therapy, nor does it result from deficiencies in conditions, personnel, or medicines available to patients. The cause of his death is bureaucracy, a term that, although vague in usage, alludes to the complex sociopolitical transformations of North Macedonia in recent decades and the long-standing public narrative about the institutional capacities of the state.

When exploring perceptions and interactions with the healthcare system in the present day, my conversations with interlocutors often revolve around the deficiencies and problems within the healthcare sector. In nearly every conversation, there are comparisons with Western European countries (always considered “better”), regional success stories (such as Croatia and Slovenia), as well as socialist Yugoslavia.

*“... I’ll meddle in now; I’m older. Regarding corruption, when we talk about healthcare - I have gone to the doctor on my own since I was 10. So in another time - good, bad, like this, like that - I, as a ten-year-old, went to the dentist, the pediatrician by myself. It’s not just abroad. I felt it here, too. So, I would be home, go to the ophthalmologist, go to the ear doctor, come back home, my mother didn’t worry about whether I should take those eye drops or why I need to have my tonsils removed. It was that you trusted the doctor, you trusted those on the other side... It doesn’t matter that it was former Yugoslavia, it’s - I don’t know what - we were peaceful. Completely different. And I haven’t let my child go alone. And I won’t.” (Woman, 50 years old, Skopje)<sup>2</sup>*

Comparisons with the Yugoslav healthcare system made by older generations (as well as the younger ones) were especially intriguing during my research. Such statements caught my attention, especially since they coincided with a renewed interest among civil society and social science researchers in the cultural heritage of socialism, of so-called archival activism (Kurtović 2018), as well as a broader interest in social policies and the presence of the state in the sphere of social protection. After its dissolution, Yugoslavia remained in an “imagined” form among the people in the former republics. For the generations born in the newly established states, Yugoslavia was still familiar through the materialization of imagined Yugoslavia - in music, retro marketing, and memories of previous generations who had lived a part of their lives in it (Velikonja 2014: 59). Starting from the notion of bureaucratic creation and affirmation of conceptions of culture, and identity and the public, this article explores the reimagining of Yugoslav cultural heritage through the lens of social security policies, specifically the notion of citizenship in terms of responsibilities and expectations regarding the state through the healthcare sector. In this respect, the article delves into collective memories of Yugoslav healthcare and social security services as a form of historical heritage that informs potential futures.

---

2 EST\_2\_Jan2 Transcript

## Bureaucratic Administration

Public administration is a sector and notion firmly rooted in the organizational framework and institutional manifestation of the state in everyday life. The administration, composed of clerical workers responsible for managing, organizing, and operating various institutions, is a significant political resource for which there is a dedicated ministry and agency. Public administration, comprising over 100,000 employees, is a key sector for mobilizing clientelistic relationships for the (changing) ruling structures. Over the years, and especially with mass hiring in the public sector during the period of transition, administration, in popular rhetoric, has become synonymous with party-based hiring of personnel, who, shielded by the specific circumstances of their employment, are labeled as incapable agents, or ‘party soldiers.’ Current perceptions of the administration are similar to the perception of bureaucratic elites in the socialist period itself (Archer 2019), the so-called “estranged structure working for the benefit of those it was supposed to serve” - also known as the red bourgeoisie or the bureaucratic apparatus (Trajkov 2016: 175). Despite the widespread “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 2005) regarding the significance and social status of administration, the state narrative about it is oriented toward rhetoric of its necessity but also the need for modernization.

According to the Law on Administrative Officials, Article 2, “administrative tasks are professional-administrative, normative-legal, executive, statistical, administrative-supervisory, planning, informational, personnel, material, financial, accounting and other tasks of administrative nature.”<sup>3</sup> Public administration represents a complex bureaucratic structure that operates locally (within one institution) and more broadly (within the public system as a whole). From the ideal definition, bureaucracy represents a rationalized system in which strictly defined rules and positions enable mechanized work principles immune to individual influences. The ideal of bureaucracy in the past was tied to notions of modernization and rationalism in the Western world, as associated with Max Weber’s work. Even in the current context, a transparent and efficient administration/bureaucracy is a popular developmental goal, within conceptions of modernity as being equivalent to regulation and rationality (Herzfeld 1993: 17).

---

3 Law on administrative personnel - consolidated text (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 27/14, 199/14, 48/15, 154/15, 5/16, 142/16 и 11/18 and Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 275/2019, 14/20, 215/21 и 99/22); [https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl\\_files/documents/legislation/zakon\\_za\\_administrativni\\_sluzhbenici\\_2022\\_konsolidiran\\_tekst\\_0.pdf](https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/legislation/zakon_za_administrativni_sluzhbenici_2022_konsolidiran_tekst_0.pdf)

Despite the uncertain distinction between administration and bureaucracy in a theoretical sense, one term is warmly embraced by the authorities, while the other is rejected. The negative connotation of the term bureaucracy is also observed in the post-Yugoslav period - where standard Marxist terms and concepts are used to describe the Yugoslav system of “self-organization,” and there is the identification of bureaucracy (administrative workers) as a new bourgeois class (Tomić-Koludrović & Petrić 2014: 111, 116), manifesting in an anti-bureaucratic revolution. While administration is a neutral term that denotes the operational processes of institutions, bureaucracy represents inefficient operations, unsuccessful administration, or overly slow and complex procedures. As an example of the everyday use of the term, one of the strategic goals of the current government’s 2021 program stated “Modern and Efficient Administration: More System, Less Bureaucracy,” in which the strategic goal was said to be the aiming “for faster service, better quality, and equal access for all citizens and business entities in public administration.”<sup>4</sup> In the government program for 2022-2023, a description reads, “Formal, bureaucratic arguments will no longer be reasons for inaction or lack of protection of the citizens.”<sup>5</sup> Such development goals are consistent with long-term processes of modernization and “Westernization” in the Balkan region, implying the consolidation of the bureaucratic nation-state (Todorova 1997: 13). The difference in the contextual use of the terms lies in their role in the socio-political transformations of the state, specifically in the public narratives about the role and presence of the state in regulating social rights, and as a result, the processes of “socialization.”

## Bureaucratic Construction of Identity

The topic of interest in my research, specifically in this paper, is how administrative-bureaucratic processes influence the creation and affirmation of identity in terms of cultural and civic identity within the contexts of post-socialism, the Balkans, and the peripheries of Europe. Anthropological literature on bureaucratic systems in recent decades emphasizes the necessity to analyze bureaucracy within the framework of the state as a space for the creation of symbolic and cultural concepts (Gupta 2012: 43). In this sense, bureaucratic systems are not just rationalized machines existing in isolation but are part of everyday manifestations of nationalist notions of the state and the world (Herzfeld 1993). Bureaucratic systems represent spaces and processes where civic belonging and citizenship as identification categories are created and reiterated. They are central places for the construction of a new self, affective life, and sometimes radical potential (Bear & Marthur 2015: 19). Such systems, more than a collection of empty rules, are filled with human experiences and interactions, representing processes through which individuals “live their own lives.” Especially in the healthcare sector, the

---

4 Government program for 2021 [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa\\_za\\_rabota\\_na\\_vladata\\_na\\_republika\\_severna\\_makedonija\\_za\\_2021\\_godina\\_0.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa_za_rabota_na_vladata_na_republika_severna_makedonija_za_2021_godina_0.pdf)

5 Government program for 2022-2024 [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa\\_na\\_vladata\\_2022-2024.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf)

biopolitical effects of bureaucratic processes can be traced through the transformations of conceptions of responsibility and rights in the context of citizenship and nationality.

In everyday life, the state is visible through urban infrastructure, regular functioning of municipal services, and in public institutions where we exercise our rights and responsibilities as citizens: obtaining birth certificates, renewing personal identification documents and passports, visiting the family doctor, and receiving referrals for additional tests, and a variety of other activities that take place within public institutions. Despite belonging to various sectors, these institutions share several similarities: prescribed regulations for procedures, protocols for receiving services, division of space that separates the employee and the client, rules of conduct and attire, and more. Bureaucratic organization represents a form of state-led “political technology over the body,” where the disciplinary nature of these institutions (waiting in line, strictly designated counters, protocols for behavior, documentation) has the effect of “self-perpetuating formalism” (Foucault 2004; Herzfeld 1993: 19). Not everything in bureaucratic systems makes sense - often the rules are unclear, required documents are not publicly disclosed, and working hours are flexible. In reality, bureaucratic systems, despite their theoretically efficient and rational organization, are often arbitrary (Gupta 2012: 14) or ambiguous (Tuckett 2015; Brković 2017). The unpredictability of bureaucratic systems is also present in Macedonia, where experiences of “returning from the counter,” long waiting periods, people cutting in line, etc. are common. Eventually, the repetition of organizational chaos becomes a general image of bureaucratic institutions, where instead of bureaucracy indicating a system organized according to certain rules, the term becomes synonymous with an inefficient system. As Bourdieu argues, “realizing itself through social structures and adapted in mental structures, the institution leads us to forget that it comes from a long series of institutional actions and thus resembles nature” (Bourdieu 1994: 4) - namely, bureaucracy is inefficient not because of the lack of respect for rules, the presence of a “culture of services,” nepotism, and corruption, or an insufficient number of capacities but simply because it is bureaucracy. As the patron of these institutions and activities, the State is viewed positively when it takes care of citizens and makes their lives easier or is criticized when it imposes illogical rules, inefficient systems, or inequalities. Existing internalized perceptions of the welfare state as a model of a “normal state” are part of the historical or, if one can say so, cultural heritage of socialism in Macedonia.

### **Navigating Bureaucracies**

Administrative (bureaucratic) processes are a common experience in almost all public institutions. The familiar image is one of multiple counters (half of which are empty and closed with a sign saying “Counter is not working”), where people stand in line, uncertain waiting times, moving from one counter to another, a list of numerous required documents, and occasionally someone asking to be allowed to cut the line “just

to ask something.” Clients are often sent back because they lack a specific document or the final product they applied for through bureaucratic processes is not ready within the given timeframe. Anecdotes about bureaucratic nightmares are shared among the population.

*“... personally, even though I wasn't aware that I carry it, I do carry that idea in my head that institutions don't work well. I was very, very pleasantly surprised when everything went smoothly...” (Woman, 30 years old, Skopje)<sup>6</sup>*

The risk of failure in administrative endeavors leads to a widespread feeling of “panic and political haunting,” an undefined fear of unfinished work or futile lost time (Navaro-Yashin, 2007: 83).<sup>7</sup> As a result, people often take matters into their own hands, finding ways to ensure the success of their administrative endeavors through informal research and polling of previous experiences (among acquaintances, on social media, etc.) or by establishing connections - networking with an individual from within who will ensure the process is completed. Using Edmund Leach's term, Brković defines *veze* (connections) as metaphorical relationships that help communicate certain expectations through social relationships (Brković 2017: 7). Relationships represent a form of intentional sociality that is a part of the ‘world’ (*svijet*) of a particular individual (*ibid.*). To solve a complicated administrative problem, people seek acquaintances within the institution, starting a kind of collective mental task - “Who do we have there?” Another example of such insurance is gift-giving - the infamous gift-giving as a standard (and even stereotypical) practice in former socialist countries. Over the past year, a student from Slovenia staying in Macedonia told me that she had successfully visited a dentist and had been prepared in advance by an acquaintance with specific instructions - buy 200 grams of coffee and take it to them. Indeed, the girl humorously recounted that the reception staff were pleasantly surprised and praised her for her politeness, and everything went as it should afterward.

Connections, gift-giving, and other illicit practices are actions that have been explored, interpreted, and used in various narratives about socialist everyday life, transition-period opportunities, and today's developmental obstacles in the former Eastern Bloc. Especially inevitable after the fall of socialist political structures in the 1980s and 1990s, the pervasiveness of corruption in almost all spheres of public life has been interpreted as an unwanted consequence (perhaps called an “intergenerational trauma”) emerging as a way to cope with the difficulties of socialist life. The importance of acquaintances, connections, and social networks is undoubtedly one aspect of Balkan cultures that has been of interest to many early researchers but has also been

---

6 EST\_16\_Feb8

7 The use of the term by Navaro-Yashin is connected to the general state of panic present among the Turkish-Cypriot immigrant community in Great Britain in the sense of a fear associated with British immigration services, whereas for Aretxaga it is visible in the fear present among radical Basque activists in regards to the local police.

stereotypically linked to the orientalist character of the region. Besides authors like Maria Todorova, who have spent decades trying to reexamine or directly refute these images of the Balkans, prevalent approaches in development policies in Macedonia and the region continue to play a role in confirming the same stereotypes. Informality in state systems - the frequent use of personal contacts or other forms of social capital - is formally treated as a problem, a pathology of Balkan institutions. Čarna Brković gives a brief overview of how the phenomenon of “favors” is usually interpreted in Eastern Europe: culturally, systemically, or morally. The cultural perspective presents an essentialist interpretation of the prevalence of favors as part of the mentality or “culture.” In contrast, the systemic interpretation views favors as a response, a result of a dysfunctional system and democracy. The third kind of interpretation analyzes favors through the prism of morality - that is, such interpretations claim that favors are a way in which a person builds themselves as a moral person in the sense of choosing what kind of person to be (Brković, 2017: 58). In any case, the public narratives associated with the “culture of favors” are framed within the simplistic models of a rationalized administrative organization.

Regardless of the origin of the widespread “economy of favors,” what is notable is the feeling of having no choice or fear of unwanted consequences. For Brković’s interlocutors, using favors is not the preferred way of getting things done - favors are condemned, but at the same time, they are used (ibid.). During my research, almost everyone I introduced my topic had a similar reaction - “You have a lot to write about!” “That’s easy, I’ll tell you about bureaucracy.” Talking about bureaucracy in Macedonia is both easy and challenging. The term evokes reactions of revolt, and, like a trigger, it prompts people to talk. On the other hand, using the term bureaucracy instead of administration points to the inefficiency and failure of public institutions, and as such, the term becomes a kind of provocative concept with strong political connotations. Discussing experiences with bureaucracy can lead to recounting implicit practices- i.e., how bureaucracy is avoided - through favors and corruption. In other words, admitting that we do what we condemn.

## Yugonostalgia and Cultural Identity

In healthcare administrative systems, every administrative action is connected to maintaining health at the individual and collective levels. If each rule and action is intended to organize work within the bureaucratic organization more efficiently, then bureaucratic organization in healthcare systems is directly related to how healthcare is provided or how health is maintained. The healthcare system in North Macedonia is an heir to the Yugoslav healthcare system, which was based on the principles of universal and free access to healthcare services (Lazarevik et al. 2012: 176), grounded on the assumption that health is a societal obligation and that healthcare as a system must be organized socially (Sarkanjats, 2010: 20). After the dissolution of the SFRY, in the

first decade of the post-socialist period, the focus was placed on preventing a complete collapse of the system, as well as maintaining the main principles of the old system with support from humanitarian aid and loans from the World Bank (Lazarevik et al. 2012: 177).

Presently, Macedonian healthcare, after the transition from the broader Yugoslav system and partial privatization influenced by neoliberal reforms in the 2000s, is a two-tier system that includes both public and private sectors. Despite the theoretical integration of public and private healthcare service providers in the new system, unlike the contemporary and efficient private system, the state (public) healthcare system is characterized by poor infrastructure, inefficient organization, and limited capacity, often perceived as offering lower-quality healthcare services (Lazarevik et al. 2012: 181; Milevska Kostova et al. 2017).

*“Regarding the need for assuring quality or having to pay bribes if it’s in a state healthcare institution, or refraining from paying and going to a private one - most people in my social circle, especially young couples with children who use healthcare services for childbirth or pediatric care, opt to go to private healthcare facilities, private clinics. When I ask them why, they tell me they pay the same amount of money whether they go to a state or private institution. However, going to a private facility at least feels legal to them, and they don’t feel uncertain about how much they need to pay or fear being asked for extra money or getting into an awkward situation.” (Woman, 30 years old, Skopje)<sup>8</sup>*

The historical legacy of a sound healthcare system from the socialist period is part of a civic idea of good practice. Comparisons between good and bad healthcare systems are made with examples from other countries or the West and often with the past. An exemplary healthcare system becomes part of the collective memories of an idealized, rich, and powerful state. During the political and economic transition period, citizens retained pre-transition models and ideas of the Yugoslav social state, applying them to their expectations of the modern state. Socialist conceptions of the public sphere, where people are morally connected to the state through their rights (Verdery 1996: 63), are compared with the new public sphere – public institutions that represent the state through which a strong sense of citizens’ rights and expectations in the public sector is maintained. This transfer confirms Verdery and Buroway’s point about “the use of familiar forms, though in new ways and for different purposes” (Buroway & Verdery 1999: 2) regarding the idea of the social state. From this perspective, it’s essential to avoid essentializing the post-socialist state by claiming a socialist mentality (Prica 2007: 32-33), especially one used to explain the failures of transition, the growth of corrupt practices, and bureaucratization, or simplistic explanations of the communist creation of the region (Tisen 2010/2007: 17). In this sense, through the examination of various post-

---

8 EST\_16\_Feb8 Transcription

socialist legacies and interpretations of the Balkans and beyond, it's clear that talking about socialism cannot represent generalized interpretive frameworks or romanticized nostalgia for the past (Kurtović & Sargsyan 2019: 6).

In essence, it involves the so-called “bureaucratic management of identity” (Herzfeld 1993: 3) and the symbolic representation of the state through public cultural practices (Gupta 1995: 377). One of the powers of the state is to create and impose categories of thought that are subsequently spontaneously transferred to the social world, including the state (Bourdieu 1994: 1). Such so-called pedagogical practices of the state, in which public policies legal structures, and bureaucratic rules define everyday life, influence the affective construction of citizenship, culture, and identity (Muehlebach 2012). Andrea Muehlebach examines the model of ethical citizenship that emerged in contemporary Italy - termed moral neoliberalism - precisely through the prism of new moral structures, ideas of civil rights and responsibilities, and notions of human freedoms (Muehlebach 2012: 17). In these forms of moral neoliberalism, the historical legacy of Catholicism and socialism offers citizens conceptual categories (so-called cultural material) with which they can embrace subsequent processes of neoliberalization (Muehlebach 2012: 9). Kurtović and Sargsyan utilize Raymond Williams’ concept of “residuals,” a category that allows us to not only examine but to also deal with the present through cognitive residuals from the past, manifestations of selective tradition (Kurtović & Sargsyan 2019: 7-8).

Perceptions and collective memories of Yugoslavia vary in different regions and among different categories of people, especially after the federation’s breakup when strong nationalist narratives emerged to reinforce the sense of distinctiveness and legitimacy of the newly established states. On the other hand, Yugoslav nostalgia is a phenomenon that has been observed since the dissolution, although its expression and meaning have evolved over the years, particularly in a positive way during prolonged and difficult transitions (Simeunović Bajić 2012: 134). The breakup of Yugoslavia created space for the implementation of neoliberal policies in the transition to a capitalist system, as well as strong ethnonationalism (Veličković 2022/2020: 58). Yugonostalgia cannot be said to manifest due to a sense of belonging to a Yugoslav nation per se but rather as a result of the shared cultural identity of residents, regardless of their national and regional differences (Simeunović Bajić 2012: 134). In such a space, with rapid reforms and anticipation of eventually joining the likes of modern, wealthy Western states, the unattainability of those effects results in comparisons with what is familiar—the past. As Stef Jansen describes in his ethnography set in Sarajevo, residents continuously long for a “normal” life and locate that normality in their previous lives within Yugoslavia (Jansen 2015). The modesty of their longing, as well as having a benchmark for comparison, legitimizes their demand for a stable state that is visible and watches over its citizens (Jansen 2015: 9). Mitja Velikonja also emphasizes the nostalgia that exists among people for the “lost socialist utopia” in various forms (Veličković 2022/2020: 63). Similarly, Thiessen locates Yugoslav nostalgia in perceptions that Yugoslavia was closer to Europe

than Macedonia in the period of her research, where Yugoslav's past is seen as an ideal future (Thiessen 2010/2007: 68).

The actual situation in Yugoslavia, especially in the manifestation of the state in the public sector, cannot be easily and unilaterally summarized. As a social state, the Yugoslav social protection system was at a high level. Despite being a socialist state, it differed from other socialist states in its commitment to and realization of human rights (Dimitrijević 2009: 109). Although one could argue that the reasons for these rights were not a genuine belief in the need for protecting rights but rather “generosity” of the authorities (in the sense that these rights could have been expressly limited) (Dimitrijević 2009: 109), many people enjoyed freedoms and privileges that dramatically changed after the breakup. In “Waiting for Macedonia,” Ilka Thiessen begins by describing the situation during the period of Macedonia’s gaining of independence, where she presents a picture similar to Jansen’s, “...waiting for Macedonia, waiting for their land to come, to be” (Tisen 2010/2007: 20). In the conversations with her interlocutors, one can note frequent comparisons with the former Yugoslav system (their Yugoslav identity), as well as contemplations of the future, which is firmly located in the EU (Thiessen 2010/2007). Socialist sensibility, or the legacy of socialist Yugoslavia, is of great importance in self-value and identification with social-democratic models in Europe (Thiessen 2010/2007: 49), and the population views the European future as compensation for what was lost from Yugoslavia (Thiessen 2010/2007: 56).

### **Citizenship - rights and obligations**

Building on Thiessen’s work and in light of the renewed interest in the Yugoslav utopia as a critique of the dystopian present, the question arises - what have we really lost from Yugoslavia, and even more, what have we retained? How much of our daily life is shaped by habits, beliefs, and expectations built in the socialist past? Where does the aversion to administrative systems, or the fear of bureaucracy, originate from, and what sustains and nourishes the culture of favors?

In his research, Jansen notes that his interlocutors often do not differentiate between statehood and statecraft. While statehood represents what the state is and should be - the sovereign existence of the state - statecraft consists of the policies of the state - what the state does or claims to do (Jansen 2015: 12). Questions about the state’s ability and methods of organizing certain social services turn into questions about the very right to existence and legitimacy of power. The role of the government as a patron of social services is undoubtedly one of the main topics of interest in research on neoliberal transformations. The question of who should be ‘taking care’ is closely related to the political organization of the state. The Yugoslav socialist state was paternalistically represented through public narratives as the primary protector and caretaker of citizens.

The homeland took care of people - providing them with employment, healthcare, and even (commonly shared by older generations as evidence of sincere care similar to parental care) mandatory vacations. Such representations of the state especially serve the new political structures in the former Yugoslav space in justifying neoliberal austerity measures - by referencing “outdated communist laws” or a communist mentality (Vasiljević 2020: 9). From another perspective, in return for state solidarity, the citizens of Yugoslavia voluntarily participated in work actions, selflessly dedicated themselves to collective good by participating in charitable actions to build roads, healthcare actions to improve conditions in rural areas, and collectively cared for the public good. Narratives of Yugoslav citizenship, likened to Hobbes’s “social contract,” were constructed by authorities and state institutions and have since been retained in some form in collective memories of Yugoslavia. Additionally, beyond nostalgic sentiments, such narratives contain so-called comparative power (Kurtović 2018) or critical potential for the present, in which the unattainability of civic expectations is identified. Thus, another perspective of the popular narratives about the detrimental “socialist” mentality is that it represents a justified reaction to state failure.

*“Society itself makes you more corrupt, makes you give bribes, and makes you look for connections. If it hasn’t provided you with the basic conditions to function.”*

Approaching “citizen agendas” (Vasiljević 2020) through the prism of solidarity, today’s Yugonostalgic critiques invoke a lack of solidarity from the state, that is, one-sided expectations of contributions from citizens to the state without reciprocity. “It’s moral erosion... since independence” is one interlocutor’s description of the situation. Renewed interest in Yugoslav social policies points to a yearning for civic agency (Vasiljević 2020: 13) in today’s context or the perception that citizens have the power and freedom to act and change their society. In light of the widespread “service economy” and perceptions of a banal and dysfunctional system, the discourse on corruption and coerced corruption becomes particularly important. Faced with the necessity of using services, informal navigation, and “getting by” in the system, there is room for imagining the ideal past, where the state may have had the right to ask for something, but it also gave something in return. Considering that reactions and intervention in the public space must “resonate in a tangible sense and have meaning in historical terms” (Greenberg 2014: 7), for post-socialist citizens, precisely the category of the caring Yugoslav state is familiar and usable.

## Conclusion

Entering into the complex relationship between Yugoslav nostalgia and the perception of the state, the aim of this article is to delve into how historical heritage and collective memory of the Yugoslav social state influence the creation of citizen expectations from the state. While Yugonostalgia has been present and visible in various spheres and forms since the federation's breakup, its meaning and manifestation continually change, subject to current challenges and changes in the region. In terms of bureaucratic infrastructure and public administration as a point of contact between the individual and the state, Yugonostalgia manifests itself as an ideal conception of efficient and just institutions, as a reflection of expected dialectical state-citizen solidarity. Yugonostalgia is just one way of expressing dissatisfaction, through which perceived state failures are identified and expressed using familiar conceptual categories inherited from socialist public narratives. Such categories frame popular rhetoric about the "economy of favors," corruption, and weak institutions in relation to state expectations, simultaneously locating the local population in the category of the "Yugoslav Other" (Velikonja 2018) – within the potential of the ideal past of the Yugoslav system.

## References

Великоња, М. 2022. *Посйсоцијалистйички йолиййички йрафиййи на Балканойй и во Центйрална Евройа*. Скопје: Македонско студентско етнолошко друштво.

*Закон за админисйраийивни службеници – консолидиран йтекстй*, („Службен весник на Република Македонија“ бр. 27/14, 199/14, 48/15, 154/15, 5/16, 142/16 и 11/18 и „Службен весник на Република Северна Македонија“ број 275/2019, 14/20, 215/21 и 99/22), [https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl\\_files/documents/legislation/zakon\\_za\\_administrativni\\_sluzhbenici\\_2022\\_konsolidiran\\_tekst\\_0.pdf](https://portal.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/legislation/zakon_za_administrativni_sluzhbenici_2022_konsolidiran_tekst_0.pdf)

*Програма за работйа на Владайа на Рейублика Северна Македонија за 2021 йодина*, [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa\\_za\\_rabota\\_na\\_vladata\\_na\\_republika\\_severna\\_makedonija\\_za\\_2021\\_godina\\_0.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa_za_rabota_na_vladata_na_republika_severna_makedonija_za_2021_godina_0.pdf)

*Програма за работйа на Владайа на Рейублика Северна Македонија за йериодой 2022–2024 йодина*, [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa\\_na\\_vladata\\_2022-2024.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf)

Саркањац, Б. 2008. *Јавно здравје и здравсйивена реформа: йолиййички и социолошки йерспективни*. Филозофски факултет: Институт за здравје и општество.

Тисен, И. 2010. *Чекајки ја Македонија: Йгениййийейй во свеий кој се менува*. Табахон.

- Трајков, П. 2016. „Теории за бирократијата на Макс Вебер и современиот општествен систем“. *Зошто идеологијата е важна: Есеи за национализам, политички идеологии и бирократија*, ур. Страшко Стојановски. Штип: Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“, 159–180.
- Фуко, М. 2004. Надзор и казна: раѓањето на затворот, Слово.
- Archer, R. 2019. “Antibureaucratism” as a Yugoslav Phenomenon: The View from Northwest Croatia” *Nationalities Papers*, 47: 4, 562–580 doi:10.1017/nps.2018.40
- Bear, L., Mathur, N. 2015. „Introduction: Remaking the Public Good: A New Anthropology of Bureaucracy“. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33(1), 18–34. doi:10.3167/ca.2015.330103
- Bourdieu, P. 1994. „Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field. “ *Sociological Theory* 12(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/202032>
- Brković, C. 2017. *Managing Ambiguity: How Clientelism, Citizenship, and Power Shape Personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Berghahn Books.
- Burawoy, M., Verdery, K. 1999. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dimitrijević, V. 2009. „Od pijanca i plota do devete rupe na svirali“. *Zid je mrtav, živeli zidovi!* Ed. Ivan Čolović. Biblioteka XX vek, 107–126.
- Greenberg, J. 2014. *After the Revolution: Youth, Democracy, and the Politics of Disappointment in Serbia*. Stanford University Press.
- Gupta, A. 1995. „Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State. “ *American Ethnologist* 22(2), 375–402. doi:10.1525/ae.1995.22.2.02a00090
- Gupta, A. 2012. *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India*. Duke University Press.
- Herzfeld, M. 1993. *The social production of indifference: exploring the symbolic roots of Western bureaucracy*. University of Chicago Press.

- Herzfeld, M. 2005. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Jansen, S. 2015. *Yearnings in the Meantime: Normal Lives and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*. Berghahn Books.
- Kurtović, L. 2018. „An archive to build a future: The recovery and rediscovery of the history of socialist associations in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina.“ *History and Anthropology* 30(2), 1–27. doi:10.1080/02757206.2018.1532893
- Kurtović, L., Sargsyan, N. 2019. „After Utopia: Leftist imaginaries and activist politics in the postsocialist world“. *History and Anthropology* 30(1), 1–19. DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2018.1530669
- Lazarevik, V., Donev, D., Gudeva Nikovska, D., Kasapinov, B. 2012. „Three periods of health system reforms in the Republic of Macedonia (1991–2011). *Прилози XXXIII(2)*, 175–189. PMID: 23425880.
- Milevska Kostova N, Chichevalieva S, Ponce NA, van Ginneken E, Winkelmann J. 2017. “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Health system review.” *Health Systems in Transition*, 19(3):1–160.
- Muehlebach, A. 2012. *The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Navaro-Yashin, Y. 2007. „Make-believe papers, legal forms and the counterfeit.“ *Anthropological Theory* 7(1), 79–98. doi:10.1177/1463499607074294
- Prica, I. 2007. „Problem interpretacije tranzicije iz 'nerealnog socijalizma““. *Antropologija postsocijalizma: zbornik radova*, ed. Vladimir Ribić. Srpski genealoški centar: Odeljenje za etnologiju i antropologiju Filozofskog fakulteta, 24–50.
- Simeunović Bajić, N. 2012. „Jugonostalgija kao istraživački koncept istorije komuniciranja: moguće perspektive istraživanja“. *Етноантрополошки проблеми* 7(1). Универзитет у Београду, Филозофски факултет, 127–141.
- Todorova, M. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press.

- Tomić-Koludrović, I., Petrić, M. (2014). „Class in Yugoslav Socialism and in the Post-Yugoslav Societies: Toward a Bourdieuan Repositioning of the Issue (Part 1)“. *Revija za sociologiju* 44(2). Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 107–137.
- Tuckett, A. 2015. „Strategies of Navigation: Migrants' Everyday Encounters with Italian Immigration Bureaucracy“. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33(1), 113–128. doi:10.3167/ca.2015.330109
- Vasiljević, J. (2020). „Solidarity Reasoning and Citizenship Agendas: From Socialist Yugoslavia to Neoliberal Serbia“ *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*. doi:10.1177/0888325420923023
- Velikonja, M. 2014. „New Yugoslavism in Contemporary Popular Music in Slovenia“. *Post-Yugoslavia: New Cultural and Political Perspectives*, ed. Abazović, D., Velikonja, M. Palgrave Macmillan, 57–95.
- Verdery, K. 1996. *What was socialism, and what comes next?* Princeton University Press.
- Програма за работа на Владата за 2021 година [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa\\_za\\_rabota\\_na\\_vladata\\_na\\_republika\\_severna\\_makedonija\\_za\\_2021\\_godina\\_0.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa_za_rabota_na_vladata_na_republika_severna_makedonija_za_2021_godina_0.pdf)
- Програма за работа на Владата за 2022-2024 година [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa\\_na\\_vladata\\_2022-2024.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programa_na_vladata_2022-2024.pdf)
- Тисен, Илка. (2010/2007). Чекајќи ја Македонија: идентитет во свет кој се менува. Табахон. (Originally published in 2007).
- Трајков, П. (2016). „Теории за бирократијата на Макс Вебер и современиот општествен систем“ во Зошто идеологијата е важна: Есеи за национализам, политички идеологии и бирократија, ур. Страшко Стојановски, Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“ - Штип

