

Former Yugoslavia is where Western and Eastern Europe meets the Middle East. Dominating the crossroads of Europe's most important trade routes, it is key to US plans to extend its sphere of influence within the Balkans, thereby diminishing Russia's control over the Central Asian republics and gaining control of Caspian Sea oil reserves.

But Yugoslavia is no more. On 4 February 2003 it was replaced by the new state of Serbia and Montenegro, literally a 'state of emergency' since the assassination of neoliberal Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic on 12 March 2003. As Walter Benjamin said, "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule."

Certainly, this has been the case for Yugoslavia over the last 25 years. Until 1980, Yugoslavia was seen by some as a socialist utopia under the 'benign dictatorship' of Marshall Tito, the war-time leader of the partisans and subsequent ruler of Communist Yugoslavia. The country was a regional industrial power and economic success, with a multi-ethnic population boasting a high literacy rate and free education and healthcare.

However, as leader of a communist state not aligned to the Soviet Union, Tito sought to integrate Yugoslavia with the capitalist system, and borrowed heavily from Western banks. By the 1980s, Yugoslavia had the highest debt-to-income ratio in Europe, and in 1983 when the European Community and Western banks refused to allow it to re-schedule its debts, it placed itself in the hands of the IMF. What followed was catastrophic social meltdown and economic collapse. Essential social services were cut, regional inequalities increased, and unemployment rose. By 1989, Kosovo's unemployment rate was 50 per cent; in Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, it ranged between 20-30 per cent. In 1991, Yugoslavia began to break-up as Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia declared independence; Bosnia-Herzegovina did too in 1992. Nearly a decade of civil war followed.

The West has largely ignored these economic and political fault-lines, preferring instead to see the violence as the result of purely ethnic and religious hatred – Serbian aggression, Croat fascism, clashes between orthodox Christianity, Catholicism or Islam – the past decade is presented as the continuation of the barbarous history of Yugoslavia as the 'other', different, better left alone, too difficult to understand. Easier to send the troops and F16s to sort them out.

NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 under the guise of protecting the Kosovar Albanians demonstrates the axiom of military strategist Carl Von Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of politics by other means." As Massimo de Angelis and Silvia Federici wrote at the height of the bombings, "First the economic and financial élites imposed impoverishing neoliberal policies in the region, policies that shattered the social fabric and created the context in which brutal and murderous nationalisms have flourished. Then they seized the opportunity for military action resulting in further death and environmental devastation. Soon again they will wear the banker's hat to 'help' in the reconstruction, cashing in new interest payments and especially, prospecting a more 'stable' environment for business, thanks to NATO's heavy military presence in the region." By intervening, NATO, led by the UK and US, demonstrated the extent of their ambition. This was less a humanitarian gesture than a sign of things to come, the iron fist in a velvet glove used to subjugate all before the military and economic hegemony of the US and its privileged position within the Imperial constitution of the new Empire.

But as the exceptional state of emergency recedes in post-Yugoslavia and the so-called Europeanization of Serbia continues apace, new movements are starting to emerge. In Belgrade, the movement Drugaciji Svet je Moguc (Another World Is Possible) is now convenor of Peoples' Global Action in Europe and is calling anticapitalist activists to look east.

It's Great We Are Everywhere, We Thought We Were Quite Alone: a letter from post-Yugoslavia

by Ivana Momcilovic

Dark objects of desire

In 1968, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia turned 24 and I turned 4. We were living in the skyscraper suburb of new promises, New Belgrade, when my father brought me a present – my first ‘Texas trousers’ from Trieste (Italy, Western Europe, capitalism). Giving it a second thought, I realize today that this was my first step into the mainstream: of the 20 million ex-Yugoslavs, almost half must have had fantasies at some point about the ‘original’ blue jeans, the uniform of the West. Jeans used to be smuggled in from Italy like gold, since German, English, and Italian tourists did not exchange cheap jeans and nylon stockings in their hotels for local currency (like they did in the countries of the ‘real’ Eastern bloc). What gave us real

pleasure (and also nurtured our sense of ‘freedom’) was actually the night trip by train to the Italian border (touching with one’s own hands as many ‘dark objects of desire’ as possible) and then catching the train back with a brightly coloured plastic bag in hand.

Jeans were more than just jeans; they signified freedom, wealth, better living, happiness. A lust for a flirtation outside one’s rather dull marriage to the socialist dream. Exactly what home was not.

You used to buy Levi’s but what you were actually doing was buying fantasies about a new community. Democracy, in a colourful bag.

Even when textile producers in the south of Serbia (Novi Pazar) started producing counterfeit jeans, it was no use. This was false happiness, for there was no male model promising the Levi’s style of living. Our economy consisted of powerless ‘local raw materials’, unbranded and insufficient for conjuring up the Levi’s phantasm, that myth of the denim that brings better and eternal life, emancipation, and democracy, had to be savoured directly from the source.

International Monetary Fund responds to a call for an international day of action by having their annual meeting. A call for an international *cacerolazo* in solidarity with Argentina, put out by Argentinean anticapitalist activists, and the day is to commemorate the five month anniversary of the uprising. Cities respond worldwide, some banging on pots and pans, others on bells and drums, some unaware that their actions are linked to

Argentina, others unaware of the links to the IMF. Actions take place in Washington DC, New York, Seattle, London and São Paulo, among others.

>> April 20 >> Students take to the streets in Nairobi, Kenya in protest against World Bank-imposed privatizations and restrictions on university admissions.

>> April 22 >> Rejecting the notion that Coca Cola is an acceptable substitute for water, 2,000 indigenous people

and *dalits* (oppressed castes) gather at the gates of the Hindustan Coca Cola factory in Plachimada, Kerala, India. The company has been mining groundwater, drying up many wells, and contaminating the rest. The villages demand restoration of the damaged groundwater aquifers and long term water supply to all those affected. The picket is sustained for 49 days, with the company continuing its excavation under police guard. On 9 June,

This is what we thought back in 1968. We were thirsty and we craved adventures.

The first sparks

And while the Western 1968 revolutionaries on the barricades fantasized about our perceived 'socialist utopia', we fantasized as well – not about more socialism but about the things we were missing in our own marriage to it. In other words, by rejecting our own revolution, we rushed to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

The point is that we had something, and yet we were craving something else – the dream of capitalism. But its reality was smaller, and that is exactly where the problem lay. But some things you can't know before you try them. After all, love is a neurosis.

Seduced by capitalism

You see, the reality in Yugoslavia was free education, free health care, and free housing. And we enjoyed this, of course. Only, we yearned for something more than this freedom, won by our anti-fascist grandfathers, and paid for with their lives.

Throughout the cold war, Western capitalism perfected the tricks of an experienced seducer, proffering warm, instant delight. No seducer has ever been as skillful, smiling, smart, perfumed, young, immortal, and seductive as the advertising campaigns of Coca Cola, Winston, Adidas, Dior, all of which lured us into crossing 'the border'. Capitalism should rightfully be known as the Lover of the Century.

Its only shortcoming was that flirting is so ephemeral! The moment you kiss your desire, cross the border, get the sports shoes, a crush-proof pack of Marlboros, or a mobile phone, you realize that true love doesn't lie in these objects, after all, but in something else – in the zone of half-light, of infatuation, the borderless zone, which fills the existential void lurking in every one of us, and which only the miracle of life can fill with meaning.

Capitalism is hysterical, hyperbolic; its perpetual exaggerations are reminiscent of an obsessive desire that can never be satisfied. Producing more than any other socio-economic system, supposedly in order to satisfy human needs (as Marx pointed out), capitalism actually exists in order to create the need that creates the need. No quantity is ever sufficient, no worker is productive enough, no profit is big enough. To say enough is enough would mean to say that more would not be better.

"I can't get no, satisfaction ..." But, the hardest thing of all is that when you finally realize this, you will already have been alone for a long time

Alone

Now it is 2003, and Yugoslavia is no more. It has ended up on the dump of history, along with the ardent love life of the Yugoslavs, the impossible flirting between the East and the West. All that remains is the steel embrace of the West.

Hanging above the seductive promises of Marxist self-management there is the promise of Darwinist capitalism where chance alone – the caprice of the stock exchange (as

Westerners are discovering when they check their pension funds) – determines the destiny of humankind. And so the world turns its attention back to Yugoslavia, now that its price has dropped due to the market fluctuation produced by horror and war; now it is a saleable commodity. Paradoxically, the anticapitalist movement feels like it turned its [eyes away from us, as it searched for joyful, colourful victories in Seattle and elsewhere – victories that are simply impossible in our country under total defeat and with this phantom ‘transition’ to neoliberalism.

Today, Yugoslavia is a country with 250,000 killed in the war which began in 1991 and has not completely ended. One and a half million people were internally displaced, did not return to their homes, large numbers have emigrated, while an unknown number of people are crossing, illegally or not, the border of the Schengen agreement [the border control agreement within the EU which non-EU citizens cannot cross without visas and passports], which is the new Berlin wall, separating the new Roman empire from the threatening hordes of ‘Barbarians’. The number of disappeared increases daily, as mass graves are exhumed,

and the remains of unidentified people wait in white bags, eventually moved from one administrative status to another, their ‘cases’ closed.

Because of all of this, the most important news of our society is not on the covers of newspapers, but buried in the back pages, somewhere between sports and culture, in the supermarket of classified ads. Read these ads and there you’ll find the appeals of laid-off people selling their labour, legal or illegal Schengen visas, and human organs on offer, as clandestinely people offer their kidneys for sale on the black market in order to provide an education for their children.

This brings the paradox to a peak, since capitalism brought us ‘peace’, if you believe the Western media and the international community. By bombing the country, they helped to overthrow the ‘last communist of the century’, Slobodan Milosevic, creating conditions for the importation of democracy, and capitalism. What they don’t say is that their ‘peace’ initiated the greatest theft of public property (through privatization and fortune making) of our time.

But people have started to realize this.

the police attack, violently arresting 130, including children and infants, and harassing and tearing clothing off several women.

>> **April 27** >> Five hundred Roma people set up a protest camp in Essen, Germany to protest their imminent deportation to ex-Yugoslavia. Then they set off on a caravan to bring attention to their plight. Passing through Muenster, Koln and Berlin, arriving in Dusseldorf on 20

June, where they establish another camp. Conditions in the camp are hard, as the Roma endure racist attacks and constant police harassment. But they insist that Germany has an obligation, after its Holocaust policies against the Roma, to allow them to stay.

>> **May** >> Police in the district of Rohtak, India try to arrest the Regional President of the farmers’ organization, Bharatiya Kisan Union, and are taken hostage by the

villagers. Similarly at Kandela, five state officials are held hostage. Thousands swarm into Kandela district to fortify it against state retaliation. Three or four rings of men and women, armed with stones and traditional weapons, stand guard until 2,000 armed police arrive to release the hostages. Road blocks multiply, shutting down the entire region. 11 peasants are killed by police; hundreds are injured and hundreds more arrested. The involvement of women in



'Farewell to political parties', posters cover election lies. Belgrade, ex-Yugoslavia

Never alone again!

For all these reasons, confusion is at its peak in post-Yugoslavia today. The civil war, military aggression (by our own military), NATO aggression and occupation, privatization, restoration, parliamentarianism, negationism, rampaging capitalism, ethno-fascism, modern atavism, atavistic modernism, mass destitution, to sum it up – the black dream of importing a European reality, are only a few of the reasons for the Yugoslavs' feeling of complete isolation from the rest of the 'normal' world, a world that has not experienced a civil war and the political nonsenses listed above in the past decade.

Also, the absurd feeling of returning into something that already existed, the bloody breaking up of the 'United Yugoslav States' in order to enter the 'United States of Market Europe' is but another element of the average Yugoslav's feeling of hopelessness, driven into the 'joyful expectation of the civilized Europe'.

But in such a climate and despite these days of fog, a constellation has recently emerged – the size of which we still do not know because it is being born before our very eyes. The global movement of movements has reached us. The resin of hopelessness is finally turning into the amber of a new existence.

Loneliness and isolation are transforming into the joy of togetherness. Instead of the brotherhood of market unity, through the stories of these movements we are discovering a new counter-solidarity of gratuity and new values. We are together, not in order to be stronger, but to

expand the circle for all.

Refugees, workers made redundant, war invalids, Roma people, the unemployed, the missing persons committee, the apathetic silent majority – the list of those in our country to whom the movement can and should give real solidarity (unlike those false NGOs and their hollow discourse of human rights) is huge.

The movement's platform is expanding, meetings are flourishing, the form of organization is changing and moving moment by moment. People of various ages and professions are gathering regularly, when a few years ago, some of them would have given a kingdom for just one such gathering. They come in order to attend an evening of solidarity with the rebelling people of Argentina, and then stay afterwards in order to discuss local issues from radically different, non-parliamentary, and non-party positions. The impossible becomes possible, the prohibited becomes allowed. In the beautiful mist of the unsaid, a place finally appears for the suppressed rapture of long ago, for the true freedom to flourish.

The ideological horror of the 1980s, and the more

tangible horror of the 1990s whose black hole swallowed our former and future country, is finally behind us. The prohibited memory and the direct continuity with the non-aligned movement which our country helped initiate in the 1950s is once again becoming the reality of the day.

The (old) new beginning

We are attending a birth, the creation of a new form of the old non-acceptance and resistance, and witnessing the first explosion of grassroots movements and direct democracies. A few months ago, even the most cheerful of optimists would have bet their life on their non-existence. But attending a birth is certainly one of the most powerful events in human life.

Our position is not to fight at any cost for the new: a new brand, new trend, new advertisement, new doctrine of victory, all of which are doctrines of capital. Therefore, we do not start from the absolute beginning; we give old questions new answers, a new non-authoritarian colour, and a horizontal form of old rebellions and emancipatory decisions, which began through the lust for life we

the struggle inspires them to start a women's organization. In opposition to World Bank diktats, the state government agrees a 75 per cent reduction in electricity charges, plus compensation to the families of the dead.

>> May 2 >> Workers begin an occupation of the Ozarów Cable Factory in Ozarów, Poland, in response to the factory's closure by new owner Telefonica. The brutal six day eviction of the occupation begins on 26 November,

with police and a drunken private security force paying threatening visits to the kindergarten where worker's children are in school. When they attack, they target women and supportive community members, arresting 50 and sending four to the hospital. The workers maintain that they will continue the struggle.

>> May 3 >> Victory not only for the U'wa people of Colombia and for all communities fighting against the

devastation of resource extraction around the world comes as Occidental Petroleum announces that it is returning oil concessions on the U'wa land to the Colombian Government, and abandoning its plans to drill in the region. OXY has decided there is no oil under U'wa land despite eight years of assuring investors of a major oil strike. The announcement comes nearly a year after OXY retreated from a site which thousands of U'wa, local

inherited from our rebel forefathers and mothers.

An increasing number of people are becoming aware that the world in which we are living is not a world for everyone. It is a world where, as French philosopher Alain Badiou says, “if you are born in Europe, you will be well nourished, taken good care of, educated, and you will live to be eighty. On the other hand, if you are born in Africa or Asia, like hundreds of thousands of women and men, you will be hungry, ill, illiterate, and you will die at the age of two or thirty. The fundamentals of our World are disparate, non-uniform, inconstant.”

But Yugoslavia is still not Europe – from which it is still separated by the Schengen wall. Yugoslavia is finally in the non-partisan, global movement, and the movement in turn needs our local content.

We are everywhere – especially here

Over the past ten years, dilemmas have been as dead as victims of war all over the globe, ideological marriages have been broken, and everything seems like an enormous ruin upon which the Empire is being rebuilt most successfully. To grasp this rebuilding, one only has to see the army of glaziers doing their work the day after ‘violent’ anticapitalist demonstrations have taken place, or the transnationals as they invade to ‘reconstruct’ countries that have been ravaged by wars, just days after ‘peace’ has been declared. The big question that remains is how long can capitalism be a synonym for peace?

They say that over the past years capitalism has brought

stability and peace. It is rumoured that everybody wants to have parliamentary democracy. And so the idea that ‘We Are Everywhere’ is one of those important ideas that makes the heart beat stronger again. ‘We Are Everywhere’ is, actually, a much better name than ‘antiglobalization’. I shun anything that is anti. In socialism we had to deal with professional dissidents, anti-communists. It is dangerous when your whole identity is built upon a negation. Solzhenytzin, one of such professionals of the anti-Soviet revolution, revealed to us ultimately that he was actually a monarchist, a national-chauvinist and a radical-conservative. When people define themselves anti something, you never know what jester is going to leap out of the box! I have the same premonition in relation to anticapitalists.

This is why it is important to deal with politics on the side of the people – to engage in a new politics of the people and for the people. I am deeply convinced that there are indefatigable issues, epicentres from which new policies for emancipation can come. These issues relate to people and their destinies – to people and their dreams. Starting always from the marginalized, those who are said not to have a right to having any rights, and continuing from there, everyone in their own struggle and coming together, since we know all rivers consist of tributaries. It remains up to us to adjust the imported contagious optimism of the movement of the movements of the whole world, so that it fits in the context of our problems and entanglements, our inventions and imagination. What is important is not only to see, but also to know.

PS: And let us be ready ... the seducer is never at rest! We must make allies with those who do not yet know the emptiness of his promises and are ready to throw themselves into his arms (especially those who remain under his spell after so many years, like our friends from the West). Levi's have finally arrived in our country too. There is a chance for us to definitively protect ourselves, and reject the toxic embrace before it poisons us and then evaporates. However, detoxification takes time and confidence, both of which must be encouraged. We can begin by making small steps (the local, the everyday, the work on a national level) with occasional dashes towards the goal (mass actions, the awareness of an international network), which give breathing space to our little factory of oxygen-dependent optimism. We need it all, no matter where we are. And as we will know from now on, we are everywhere...

Ivana Momcilovic is a dramaturge of post-Yugoslav origin who has lived in Belgium since 1991 when the civil war began. She has not written fiction since. She has worked for ten years with the collective Eimigrative Art

Resources:

» Peoples' Global Action info point in ex-Yugoslavia: Drugaciji Svet je Moguc collective, drugacijisvet@mail.com

AZIN-DSM, 11 000 Belgrade, Post-Yugoslavia Majke Jevrosime 39

» Temporary Yugoslavia IMC site: www.belgrade.indymedia.it

campesinos, trade unionists and students had occupied to prevent oil drilling. After using the Colombian military to brutally evict the protesters and militarize the region, OXY was unable to find oil at the site. This came as no surprise to the U'wa whose *Werjajas* (wise elders) had spent months praying to move the oil away from OXY's drills.

>> **May 6** >> Over a thousand Ecuadorian banana workers go on strike at the plantation complex Los Alamos. Ten

days later, armed men break through the picket line of nonviolent, unarmed workers and take 25 of them as hostages. Eventually, they are freed by their fellow strikers, though two workers are wounded by shotgun fire. The gun-toting thugs are employed by Presidential candidate Alvaro Noboa, whose fiercely anti-union company exports bananas.

>> **May 12** >> About 80,000 people demonstrate in Tel

Aviv, Israel in the largest peace rally since the beginning of the second *intifada* 19 months ago, demanding that Israel withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories. Also 150 members of the Arab-Jewish group *Taayush* (co-existence in Arabic) visit the Kissufim crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip and call on soldiers stationed there to abandon their posts and return home.

>> **May 15** >> Hundreds of families in Caloocan City,