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Political Dimension of Mobbing in Post-Socialist Society

ABSTRACT

Socialist societies, as very closed, were ideal environment for political mobbing. Mobbers made their victims additionally, and mostly, guilty, by making up political quilt, marking them as political enemies for life, and sometimes even their families for generations. Formally reshaped political practice of post socialist societies shows political consciousness and habits change hard, and that tradition, even when it is pathological, survives for long, especially in politics. Since political mobbing and democracy, at least formally, do not mix, mobbing in post socialist societies becomes formally less political, but even more perfid. There are more than enough indications that this kind of perfid repression sustained in post socialist societies that are not truly, but only formally democratized. In those states mobbing frequently exceeds companies and starts to spread across other spheres of the society, becoming much more a brake than a flywheel of democratization.

Key words: Mobbing, Post-socialist Society, Democracy, Beaters, Rule of Law, Serbia.

Introductory notes

Dehumanized socialist societies, as very closed, were ideal environment for political mobbing. Like giant mousetraps, they were not easy to get out of, and inside them, and political sins could result in inability to find employment, and in more severe cases, even jail time or loss of life. Instance of political suitability was hanging over everyone's head like sword of Damocles, and its implementation was in hands of those who held political power. Indeed, everyone who was recognized as politically suitable belonged to large

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ideological brotherhood of “pure and honest”, and all those who were not confirmed as “honest” were suspicious.

Political mobbing should be distinguished from mobbing in the name of politics that was enforced in working and other collectives of socialist societies. Mobbers made their victims additionally, and mostly, guilty, by making up political quilt, marking them as political enemies for life, and sometimes even their families for generations.

The powerful, counting on their close affiliation to politics, gave themselves right to politically judge those who they disliked for personal reasons. That way, an ordinary reason was wrapped in a political jacket, and victims suffered even more from that politicized mobbing than from regular one.

Omnipresent fear of being marked as politically unsuitable made management of any collective in socialist society easier. Those who did not have political power strived, at least, not be politically unsuitable, if they couldn't confirm themselves as suitable.

These are the circumstances in which a special kind of people stands out: beaters. Hysteries by birth, strengthened by political power they passionately attached themselves to, they were that kind of revolution's watchdogs who preemptively barked at everyone as a suspect. They could be found in every collective, and they were most feared by ordinary members of the community. Finger they pointed at someone changed not only destinies of these individuals, but also their families.

Most fearsome of all was the fact that they took their “soul food” not only regularly, but also insatiably. Their method was simple — several unverifiable heavy accusations and the victim would be “in the spotlight”. Perfidy of mobbing in the name of politics was in this: victims were found guilty and inadequate for non-political errors, in order to prove that those who oppose ruling ideology and politics are, in fact, qualified neither as humans, nor as workers.

Formally reshaped political practice of post socialist societies shows political consciousness and habits change hard, and that tradition, even when it is pathological, survives for long, especially in politics. Capable for “feeling the atmosphere” better than ordinary, non-politicized individuals, the beaters had, in large numbers, became useful members of new ruling political forces, even after the political changes that directed ex-socialist countries towards neoliberal democratization. Dressed in new ideological attires, accommodating and loud, they proved as useful in the only way they knew — damaging those nearby. Seemingly transformed, these, essentially, pathological characters continued their dark business of suspecting, labeling and persecution of mostly innocent, in order to keep majority in fear for themselves and their position within community.

Switching ideologies and parties does not make them guilty by itself, since rights to evolution and change are sacred human rights. Of course, if they are not enforced too frequently and at the expense of the innocent. Their quilt is in the fact that they did not actually change, but ideologically disguised in order to keep their dark business of mobbing, relying on politics. For that purpose they approach every new government, in effort to keep the dominant enough position, from which they can keep persecuting those of their choosing. So we have a paradox that former mobbers persist as such, and that their victims are permanently victims. This shows that those societies have not changed enough to be called truly democratic.

Every democracy in which those who mobbed in the name of communist ideology keep doing the same in the name of democracy stultifies itself. However, former mobbers have perfected the skill of attaching to power so much that those in power not only feel uncomfortable about rejecting them, but starts to feel them as “their own” and useful, despite the fact that the only use they seek is for themselves. Instead of being punished they are first in lines of those finding culprits. New culprits being usually the old ones reveal perfidy of new-old mobbers. Former victims must be silenced, in order to avoid being accused for misdeeds, and the easiest way is the one already proven: labeling them as politically unsuitable. Only, new conditions no longer allow public brutality of mobbing in the name of politics so political labels are given unofficially, and mobbing is conducted for alleged mistakes at work and in the conduct around politically powerful, who still may not be criticized. Just this time it is in the name of democracy, very much like before, when every critique of a communist was taken by the beaters to be critique of communism itself and cause for conflict. Critique could come only from politically powerful, could be tolerated only among politically equal and united, and that is, probably, the reason why it was called “comrade criticism”. All others were disempowered mass, with only one right: to imitate actions of the powerful.

It was noted that right after “5th October changes” at one of Belgrade faculties a group of former communist officials was self-organized as “crisis staff”, allegedly formed by new, incoming political garniture. This fake “crisis staff” then called the meeting of the collective, claiming, no less, that Zoran Đinđić himself appointed them, and took over faculty management. Although they were exposed at the very same meeting and admitted that they were not appointed by Đinđić, the collective did not resist them, and had accepted them as leadership — just in case. Paradoxically, some of the members of this professed “crisis staff” were, in previous term, appointed as dean and other leading positions by Mira Marković and her political suite. And what has happened. New government accepted the will of the collective as democratic choice, and new-old management at the beginning passionately proved itself as

ideologically suitable by persecution of real political opponents. But, the moment it gained the trust of the government and established itself, they started persecution of personal enemies of members of management, by the group who took over the collective, and in the name of politics. So filthy practice of mobbing in the name of politics was not shut down, but only transformed into mobbing in the name of democracy.

Since political mobbing and democracy, at least formally, do not mix, mobbing in post socialist societies becomes formally less political, but even more perfid. Political labeling and fabricating of political quilt continued, but now it is done unofficially and thorough rumors; prominent individuals are restrained in their creativity and the incompetent are, through mobbing, keeping the leading positions and maintaining the image of their seeming greatness.

This is one of serious causes of slow pace of transformation of former socialist societies into democratic societies — since such practices stultify the very idea of democracy. Every mobbing, and especially that in the name of politics, is extremely harmful to the society, if for nothing else because it prevents many competent and capable individuals from advancement, but also to contribute to working process or improvement of the environment as much as they could if they were not targeted by the mobbers.

There are probably thousands of such examples in post-socialist societies, and that is the cancer of new democracies. Punks and bullies from the old times, disguised as democrats, neither can achieve nor want real democracy. Instead they are seeking personal gain, reproducing immoral practices of old times and laying grounds for continuance of old violence in the new form.

Political dimension of mobbing in Serbia

Standardization of political thought, and political theory within, in conditions and times of globalization, is frequently followed by mechanical projections of political paradigms of more developed democratic societies into non-democratic ones. Also there is transfer of theoretical patterns in a way that is deprived of boldness to upgrade proposed political and theoretical assumptions to conform conditions of democratically underdeveloped environment. Fear of originality and expression of creativity is actually fear of political error, fear of deviating from generally accepted theoretical premises offered by carriers of globalization. This deviation could be, especially in the domain of political thought, be understood as kind of revision of these premises, and therefore as a sort of political sin. This course of thought implies that such societies are just formally democratized, and that political state is still in place there, as well as repressive political culture which reflects this sort of anachronistic consciousness — sign of

its own antidemocratic stance and retrogression, as opposed to sincere acceptance of ideas and practice of modern democracy.

One of the examples is theoretical approach that distinguishes rule of law from party (that is political) state. For example, at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s in SFR Yugoslavia, and later SR Yugoslavia, then Serbia and Montenegro, authors started writing about rule of law, at first cautiously and relatively rarely. Afterwards, when it became normative standard for recognizing orientation towards democratic changes it became more and more frequent, ending with massive theoretical acceptance and promotion of rule of law, even by those who were not only theoretical but also practical proponents of party state. All that was not followed by much of theoretical originality, except in some cases.² Moreover, in this domain, as well as in other fields of reception of neoliberal premises, disposition towards observation of specific characteristics of these phenomena in SFRY as, undoubtedly, political state, and then in its' successors which were also political states, and not truly under rule of law, was visibly lacking.

Definitions of rule of law which can be found in political science and other sources of social thought of this time can generally be seen as, more or less, mere transmission of those assumptions about these phenomena which were dominant in the Western political thought at the time.

There are, however, certain variations that can be found in works of our authors that are worth mentioning.

Selimir Govedarica, for example, brought some theoretical freshness and undoubtedly some originality in thought about rule of law and party, that is political, state, with his thesis about three kinds of capital that reflect not only in the field of building of rule of law, but also differentiation between the rule of law and party and political state.

Rule of law, as counterpoint to party state, the only form of all socialist states including Yugoslavia and its successors, was theoretically, and then also practically, primarily politically defined, and without much theoretical originality compared to models offered by developed democratic world and treasury of its political thought.

Afterwards these assumptions were established in wider society, and transformed into certain normative, of course also legislative, solution, and discussion about rule of law was dismissed as finished.

This created a problem in Serbian political science, that manifested through some sort of transitional formalism which can be, at the time, recognized more

² Original Serbian thought about rule of law from early pre-transitional period includes works of Kosta Čavoški and Danilo Basta.

as strife for “theoretical modernity” and then incoming political suitability through acceptance of new neoliberal theoretical premises, proving at first distancing from Marxist theoretical matrix, as only valid by then, and its total rejection. This problem is more or less reflected in the field of reception and explanation of other important political phenomena as well, not only rule of law, although rich and somewhat specific political practice of former Yugoslav and later Serbian society offered abundance of possibilities for distinctive approach to explanation not only of rule of law and political state, but also of their residuals.

Apart from mentioned Govedarica’s text³ and texts of several other authors (Čavoški, Basta), all other writings on rule of law in Serbia from that period suffer from this same flaw. For example, in writings about criteria of presence or absence of rule of law in some environment, there is almost no observed specific characteristic of this society, which, it can be freely said, could lack everything but specificities in last decades of twentieth century.

It would be interesting to explore situation in this field in other post socialist societies at the time, see to what extent theoretical formalism manifested there, and establish reasons for differences in degree of such formalism in some of them.

Practice of formalistic reception of theoretical pattern in political science is still present. This is visible also in not recognizing mobbing as social phenomenon that is not only widely spread, but also important political specificum of socialist and post socialist states.

At the beginning of 21st century, research and writing about mobbing became more intensive and unavoidable for every more developed democratic environment. In our country at first comments started to appear, followed by few articles, which aimed more to formally legitimize one’s own correct attitude towards the phenomenon than observation of it as specific for post socialist society.

Therefore mobbing is here recognized just up to the point that exists in legal domain of more developed states, and afterwards it was rather obscurely defined in legislative solutions, where it is treated only as an occurrence in working environment.

Social and political reality of, firstly preceding social state creations, and afterwards post socialist society, is actually very different from arid identification of mobbing, which obviously followed as one more proof of acceptance of political and theoretical globalization standards.

³ See: Govedarica, Selimir, „Pravna država i politička država“, in: Simeunović Dragan, *Teorija politike*, Nauka i društvo, Beograd, 2002, pp. 106–108.

Namely, important difference between developed democracies and socialist societies was also that mobbing in the former existed mostly in non-political sphere, primarily in the workplace and in school, while in the latter, distinctively non-rule of law states, it was more widely spread phenomenon with pronounced political dimension and was an important instrument of policy enforcement.

Lack of observations of this specificity certainly impoverishes explanation of mobbing as a phenomenon in post socialist societies. Consequently, this is reflected in invalidity of legal definitions of this phenomenon and decreased possibilities for it's' removal from social relations.

That very presence or absence of mobbing in political and non-political sphere can be seen as a specific additional criterion for distinguishing rule of law from political state.

Rich history of repression in socialist societies includes distinctive presence of mobbing in function of politics. Maltreatment of individuals and their families, as well as close environment is not unknown, but was never widely spread in modern developed democratic societies enough to be significant. Therefore this dimension was never included in definition of mobbing. Rule of law can actually be recognized by the fact that mobbing is not possible in political sphere, at least not in sense of extending that sphere to workplace or school.

On the contrary, party, that is political, state, cherishes mobbing as a political phenomenon, even treats it as an important invisible instrument of maintaining the criterion of political suitability.

Politically unsuitable individuals and members of their families, but also other persons close to them who could support them in any way, were in party, that is political, states, mobbed in most brutal way. There are more than enough indications that this kind of perfid repression sustained in post socialist societies that are not truly, but only formally democratized.

Apart from punishing true political opponents, these societies cultivate another specific form of political violence which can also be qualified as mobbing. It is formally unfounded political mobbing, when abusers maltreat the victim as if it was politically unsuited, even when it isn't. When someone is to be mobbed in such a way that will not result in public condemnation of mobbers, they resort to politization of mobbing. Namely, whether the victim is politically guilty or not is completely irrelevant. Mobbers, rightfully, work under assumption that, in a country not yet under the rule of law, fear of political sin prevents others from protecting the victim. They are afraid that they could also be labeled as politically unsuitable, therefore exposed to mobbing and abuse. The mobbing group then resorts to proven Stalinist methods of, at first, unofficial, but often also official satanization of the victim regardless of its

“political innocence”, and than to methods of mobbing in order to punish the victim for its political crimes (political unsuitability). It is, mostly, distinct case of mimicry and use of political judgment as mighty instrument for displacement of the victim from network of normal social relations for abusive purposes. Political connotation of mobbing, very present in post socialist societies, is something that is not often outspoken, but is used as powerful, although mostly unofficial justification of mobbing. Mobbers are, at the same time, frequently ideologically disguised bullies who were mobbers during previous regimes and maltreated their victims referring to other ideologies, or its belonging or victim’s not belonging to some other, then relevant, regimes.

Actually mere not belonging to some current political mainstream can be sufficient trigger for mobbers, as well as sufficient legitimization of their violence over politically uncommitted victim (not committed enough to pro-regime thinking and acting). Fact that these societies very loudly advertise themselves as democratic does not diminish Alen Badiu⁴ account about repression towards those who do not share current reigning political attitudes as proof of incomplete democracy, therefore also rule of law. When one thinks that not being a democrat is punishable, and that it is, per se, sufficient reason for mobbing, he is not truly a democrat, but a Stalinist disguised as democrat, sustaining its practice of mobbing political abstinent and opponents.

Mobbers seize the role of guardians of political purity of the state and the society, while they are actually the beaters of the politically unsuitable, which, in a political and unlawful society, secures them the right to mob. Such thing is neither conceded nor recognized by the rule of law, and it is an exclusive feature of party and political states. Vigilant position of mobbers in post socialist societies reflects that these societies were not transformed into democratic milieu, and that is why it is important indicator of whether a state is a rule of law or party, that is political, state.

Mobbers take someone’s virtual political sinfulness as reason for bullying the victim, delay in promotions, or rough, even brutal behavior towards the victim. This is not confined to workplace, but spills into educational system of party state. In line with principle of collective quilt, extremely non-democratic and unlawful, children of politically unsuited are often bullied by teachers and other students. This, on one hand, proves that teachers and parents of underage mobbers belong to “correct”, current political course, and on the other it semi legalizes mobbing, giving it, at least, a flavor of legitimacy.

⁴ Alen Badiju, *Pregled metafizike*, Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, Filip Višnjić, Beograd, 2008.

One more extensive research of this sort of mobbing as a form of political violence, specific for its occurrence in party and political, as well as insufficiently democratically transformed post socialist societies, would certainly show distinct dispersion of this phenomenon, bearing in mind its foundation in tradition of political mobbing that existed and was very widespread in former socialist states. Necessity of one's self-presentation as decidedly democratic and politically suitable influenced the change in forms of political mobbing in post socialist societies. Former intensive repression towards true and assumed political sinners, which existed, say, during Informbiro affair, is no longer possible, but has sustained in its more subtle forms that are allowed by the times of transition.

Practice of political mobbing is one factor that negates the claims of the states formed from the shatters of socialist systems that they have left the transition incubator and became democratic states with rule of law.

Rational and necessary replacement of carriers of political function inline with electoral victory on new political option is understandable, just as losing political and other arrogated privileges for political losers. However, mobbing in the name of politics is something entirely different and consists of unjustifiable violence in the name of the course of current politics, and it usually adds political properties to victim's attitudes and actions. This is done in order to justify mobbing and leave mobbers unpunished as defenders of the regime, and also to paralyze the environment and prevent it, by spreading fear of extending alleged political quilt on them also if they identify with victim of mobbing, from any action.

Conclusion

Conclusion could be drawn that mobbing within the rule of law is mainly non-political phenomenon distinctive for companies, while in party state mobbing frequently has pronounced political dimension. Therefore, in party state, mobbing could be treated as political phenomenon.

In post socialist societies posing as stated ruled by law, although they are in fact not, changes of parties in power bring numerous examples of political mobbing even when parties that alternate in power belong to the same, pro-democratic and, at least formally, liberal political option. Within the rule of law when it comes to professional function such as ambassadors, it is irrelevant which party is in power, or, at least, just some of professionals are appointed politically. In party state, on the contrary, not only all leading positions but also all professional functions are swept from personnel that are not "ours" and frequently replaced with utterly incompetent individuals that qualify only by party membership.

Mobbing in the name of politics exposes post socialist newly composed and formally democratic states as non-democratic, even still totalitarian. In those states mobbing frequently exceeds companies and starts to spread across other spheres of the society, becoming much more a brake than a flywheel of democratization. If democratic system assumes full and omnipresent tolerance as one of the chief principles of new society and politics, than in states which truly want to instate rule of law and stop being party-states, no kind of mobbing, least of all that in the name of politics, should be present.

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