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Book Reviews

Boris Rašeta, *Tito. Povjerljivo i osobno* [Tito, confidential and personal] (Zagreb: Fraktura & 24 sata, 2023), 693 pp.

Reading *Tito. Povjerljivo i osobno* while watching news of the first round of France's snap two-round general election, in which the far right won 35% of votes, makes one worry about the future. Totalitarianism and neofascism are undoubtedly on the rise. However, where are the anti-fascists? In the past? In his column for the French newspaper *Le Monde*, historian Vincent Duclert[1] responds to sarcasm about Jean Moulin from the thirty-year-old president of the National Rally (*Rassemblement National, RN*), Jordan Bardella, who sees himself as the future Prime Minister of France. According to Bardella, Moulin was a joke. Jean Moulin, a key figure in the French Resistance movement helped establish the National Council of the *Résistance* and the guerrilla fighters (*Maquis*), who was tortured and killed by the Nazis in 1943. However, Moulin is no more than a punch line to young Bardella. According to Duclert, Bardella shows not only a lack of historical knowledge but also essentially highlights the fundamentally problematic relationship that the RN has with its founding fathers' previous collaboration with Nazism, racism, antisemitism, and homophobia. Regardless of the polishing of images and PR strategies to make the party and its program acceptable and palatable to the public, it remains loyal to its fascist foundation. In this context, Jean Moulin is a trivialized figure who can be joked about. History can be brushed aside as irrelevant, especially when it does not fit the far-right and neofascist essence of one's political agendas.

However, what is the connection with Yugoslavia, post-Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia, or any of these? The connection exists because the same fascist ideologies so poshly embodied in the Bardellas of this world that are at work in the RN have flourished since the 1990s across the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Additionally, former Yugoslavia was and remains a petri dish for the ideological divisions that have (re)emerged in Eastern and Western Europe since the 1990s—only accompanied by violence against civilians and "others." Thus, the RN's political agenda is a cause for concern.

Therefore, books such as those by Rašeta are valuable and the current context provides additional importance.

Rašeta's book is not an academic study in the traditional sense. As a journalist, his writing is easy and enjoyable. Readers should not expect academic rigor. Arguably, it was certainly not easy to provide a comprehensive and detailed portrait of one of the most divisive personalities that marked the modern history of Yugoslavia, and to do so without attempting to idolize or denigrate but to consider the facts.

1 Vincent Duclert, "Jordan Bardella, en ironisant sur la figure de Jean Moulin, a déchiré toute l'image de respectabilité que ce parti prétend offrir aux Français" [By ironizing the figure of Jean Moulin, Jordan Bardella tore up the entire image of respectability that this party claims to offer to the French], Le Monde, Tribune, 25. 6. 2024 [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2024/06/29/legislatives-2024-jordan-bardella-en-ironisant-sur-la-figure-de-jean-moulin-a-dechire-toute-l-image-de-respectabilite-que-ce-parti-pretend-offrir-aux-francais_6245424_3232.html] (accessed July 1, 2024).

Centered on the figure of Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), the book consists of 693 pages, divided into thirty-one chapters. The chapters are further divided into shorter sections of varying lengths, ranging from three to nineteen shorter sections, covering his first steps as an amateur theatre actor to his state funeral. At the end of the book, Rašeta proposes an additional overview of Tito's life—*Tito—život u 52 slike*. These are vivid snapshots of his long and turbulent life.

This psychological biography provides, perhaps over time, a better understanding of this complex personality. Even though he has died more than four decades ago, Tito continues to provoke polarized reactions, from blatant idealization to plain hatred. He was accused of being a womanizer (he married five times), dictator (he was nominated president for life), Croatian nationalist (by Serbian historians), Serbian nationalist (by Croatian historians), bourgeois and dandy (Tito loved dressing nicely and was always cleanly shaved), and war criminal (sympathizer of the Ustaša or Četniks, any way you pick). However, Rašeta wants to avoid this simplified polarization: He proposed looking at a humane portrait of a complex personality. Considering the life of Tito (his first three children died at an early age and his father was an alcoholic and accumulated debt), he (Tito) almost died at six. He was hungry most of his childhood and adulthood, and the choices he made (to pursue revolutionary work despite the price to his family life) could have transformed him into something completely different. As Rašeta notes, he could have left for the USA, and the history of Yugoslavia would have undoubtedly been different. However, Tito was also a true believer in communism and appeared resilient to a perplexing point. How does one stay mentally sane and positive about such hardships? Perhaps his belief in a better future kept him alive, along with a lot of luck and social intelligence, a zest of narcissism, alertness, and access to information on which he relied heavily for making his decisions. Rašeta calls him a fox, a cunning Zagorec who carefully traded information, never acted impulsively, and was the last man standing among Yugoslav Communists following Stalin's purges.

The pre-World War II years in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were dangerous for communists and challenging for ordinary working-class people. Following World War II, foreign aggression, occupation, collaboration, and all their horrors engulfed Yugoslavia. With all his negative and positive sides, including communism, ambitions, dandyism, openness to compromise, and resilience, Tito remains part of our shared history for better or worse. "Us" and "our" refers to anyone who was, from close or far away, linked to the country that once was, in whose construction Tito played a key role, and on whose life Yugoslavia and Tito exerted influence to various degrees. To understand the 1990s, the fall of Yugoslavia, the bloodshed that followed, and the conditions of our societies today, it is crucial to look at the recent past without fetishization or embellishment. The issue of ethnic versus supranational civic identity remains cyclically unearthed across countries born outside the former Yugoslavia and in France, as we are witnessing at present.

Rašeta wrote that Tito knew that a change in the political regime was imminent after his death. Nevertheless, even Tito could not fully foresee the sieges of Vukovar, Srebrenica, and Sarajevo, just as the citizens of former Yugoslav republics could not have imagined what awaited them.

In France, these elections provided a short respite. However, it should be noted that neo-fascism is doing well, and we will probably witness this by 2027.

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