

EMPOWERING THE PERIPHERY

The transition process in post-apartheid South
Africa and post-conflict Republic of Serbia

n **s** new south
institute
Government
and Public Action

Radmila Nakarada
& Jelena Vidojević

Working paper (01/01/2023)

Contents

Introduction	01
Seeking new transformative perspectives	03
Empowerment and transcending the dominant narrative	06
Assumptions of empowerment	08
1. Re-reading one's own history	10
2. Understanding the workings of the prevailing system of global capitalism	13
3. Diagnosing own failures, achievements, potentiality in the present	14
4. Learning from and appropriating successful experience of Others	16
5. Seeking new alliances	17
References	18

Introduction

By providing arguments that justify a comparative analysis of processes of post-apartheid transition in South Africa and post-socialist in Republic of Serbia, this article aims to analyse two projects of post-conflict transitions that problematized colonialism, racism and modes of incorporation into global capitalism. The analysis of the reach and limitations of the two projects should lead to wider transformative implications.

At first glance comparing the transition processes in South Africa (1994-) and Republic of Serbia (1989-?), analysing distant lands, belonging to different cultural circles may seem as an exotic academic exercise. However, the justification for such an analysis and its relevancy is based on the following arguments. First, such an analyses appreciates the crucial relevancy of the fact that Africa as such, is the cradle of mankind. The dispersal of the human species in a different geographical directions, the various mixtures, have not erased this memory from our genetic code, as new archaeological forensic evidence testifies to, nor from our cultural, economic, religious DNA. This fact has moral, scientific, political implications, and serves as the meta basis transcending overt geographical and cultural distances, remembering the fundamental links beyond and above all the racial, cultural differences and spaces.

Second, the shared traumatic experiences of colonialism, while unevenly recognized and confronted in the two countries, have left profound structural

imprints that still cast their shadow in the present, in the reproduction of economic, political and social entanglements (Berand, 2001:17).¹ Finally, the two types of recent processes of transitions, from the apartheid to democracy, and from socialism to capitalism,² that are the main focus of our analysis, have exposed some similar profound failures (dysfunctional state institutions, economic instability, widespread crime and corruption, social and economic polarization) and generated widespread internal disenchantment with both the internal and external actors. Both, in spite of their attempts to modernize, develop, stabilize, in spite of their economic and human potential, have remained crisis ridden societies that still reside in the circle of the (semi)periphery. As such in the international arena they are more objects of external processes, than subjects actively participating in shaping the global order. Thus, the term periphery, while primarily referring to the level of economic development, the strength of the rule of law, degree of corruption, depth of political, economic and social polarization, also includes the distribution of the power

¹ In relation to Serbia it is worth paraphrasing I. Berand, who points out that after a century of rebellion against backwardness, after a number of different revolutions, moving from capitalism to socialism and back to capitalism in the end has not resulted in the transcendence of the position of the Western Balkan as a European periphery. In relation to South Africa, the present racial and social divides testify to the continuous reproduction of fundamental strands of the colonial order, regardless of the particular form that that order was taking.

² Serbia (unwillingly) become an independent state as a result of the violent break-up of socialist, federal Yugoslavia that attempted to create a homeland for diverse ethnic groups on the basis of "brotherhood and unity".

of participation in shaping the internal and global processes, the possibility of choosing own's path of development on the basis of internal consensus, and the capacity of defending society from detrimental external impositions. Internal economic, political and social fissures and limited manoeuvring space for autonomous choice, high degree of vulnerability in relation to the external, global actors (financial institutions, powerful states and their military/intelligence/media complexes) and processes,³ low self-esteem and self-confidence, requires thinking through once again possible alternative strategies of development, paths of empowerment. This argument is based on two interconnected assumptions. First, empowering entails inventing, rethinking responses to the internal challenges of the current crisis, and evaluating the competences and responsibilities of key internal actors. In order to generate internal political energy, actors, the rethinking has to be focused on tending to the needs of the majority on the basis of affirming the common good. Second, empowering entails that in a disturbingly polarized world, facing the dangerous implications of the

ongoing conflicts, particularly in Ukraine, the fact that the fate of human kind is in the hands of the most powerful few, a new forceful voice of sanity and nonviolence, a voice that represents the victims of the current world order needs to surface. Empowerment, thus means connecting distant neighbours of the same fate, imagining and creating a New South, increasing its capacity to participate in shaping the world order, by articulating alternatives which can transcend the dominant neo-liberal paradigm and the socio-economic dead ends that it produces.

Having in mind that Serbia and South Africa have already taken part in constituting the Global South as a recognizable international actor, Serbia as part of Yugoslavia, one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and South Africa as a regional power, "a leading voice in the Global South" articulating Southern concerns in a number of multilateral forums, from the UN to BRICS, in the search for "African solutions to African problems (SAIIA, 2019), their comparative analyses is the noted sense is additionally justified.

³ That the influence of external actors and global processes can override the regional significance of individual countries are exemplified by our two examples, particularly in the case of South Africa, for it enjoyed in the nineties a status of a continental power.

Seeking new transformative perspectives

“To believe in the possibility of change is something very precise. It means that we believe in the reality of choice. That there are choices. That we have the power to choose in the hope of altering society for the greater good”. (John Ralston Saul, The Collapse of Globalism, pp. 4-5).

Comparative research of multiple transitions in South Africa and Serbia at this point in time is caught up in an intricate web of chronic and acute global uncertainties created by the combined devastating effects of climate change, pandemics, neoliberal economic paradigm, and violent conflicts. The compounding crisis, has produced contradictory reactions, reflecting sharp divisions between beneficiaries and victims of global capitalism. Thus, hand in hand march doomsday fears and “moral amnesia”, disillusionment/anger and “radical indifference”, bewildering feelings of impotence and reckless acts of violence, stubborn adherence to the TINA (There is No Alternative) creed and signs of reviving voices of the Global South, seeking alternatives and possibly paving a way to a New South.

The current moment is characterized by complex contradictions, lack of transparency concerning locations and structures of power, and an extreme

degree of inconsistencies between political proclamations, (international) legal norms, and practices. Together they are challenging and hampering critical thinking and transformative actions.

An optimistic assessment of the global state of affairs can be based on the statistics⁴ which point to a historic decrease of the number of conflicts between states. But such an assessment is incomplete and misguided if it does not address the systematic, “infinite development of armament”, that is, an “infinite preparation for war” (Virilio & Lotringer, 1983: 31, 91-95, 157) since the end of WWII. The current all time high of global military expenditure, the sophistication of weapons of mass destruction, the “normalization” of the idea of “limited nuclear war”, the fact that in spite of fewer conflicts, humanity has never been closer to a nuclear annihilation, as the current war in Ukraine demonstrates, proves the illusions of uncritical

⁴ Paul Krugman indicates how statistic can be misleading, stating: “Anyone who has seen how economic statistics are constructed knows that they are really a subgenre of science fiction”. Quoted by John Ralston Saul, in: The Collapse of Globalism, Viking Canada, 2005, p.50.

optimism. Peacefulness is not necessarily expressed by the numerical decrease of violent conflicts. One war between nuclear powers armed with the last generations of super destructive weapons, is sufficient to end life as such. In the 21st century, after so much suffering and destruction in human history, violent conflicts, wars should have disappeared as a means of resolving differences had the logic of life and rationality prevailed. Obviously this is not the case.

The creation of material wealth securing an improved material standard of life for the majority of humankind (as S. Pinker (2011) states, human beings have never had it better, historically the present is the best of times) cannot but be acknowledged. But in order for the growth to be socially contextualized, unprecedented, brutal social inequalities colouring the present⁵ as well as the extreme poverty of 860 million citizens⁶ has to be addressed in the same breath.⁷ Furthermore, the environmental consequences of material growth, the unrestrained logic of consumerism, equally has to be noted as a serious shadow overarching the “best of times”.

Technological developments are an impressive testimony of creative human capacities and achievements spanning, as A.C. Grayling notes from the tiniest world of atoms to the world of infiniteness – space (Grayling, 2021: 1). But the lack of their embeddedness in clear and strong ethical foundations, particularly concerning the relation of intelligent

machines and man,⁸ their continues contribution to the development of the war machine, as well as the emerging practice of digital disciplining and repression is a testimony of new dangers and traps. Therefore, the reach of technological achievements on the one hand, and their destructive potential on the other, their capacity to advance common good and their alienating power, require careful and active ethical and political considerations.

Celebration of democracy, protection of human rights, goes hand in hand with limited or no capacity for collective action of citizens (Streeck, 2016: 20, 37). The efficient protection of citizens amidst fragmented, polarized societies devoid of solidarity has been heavily eroded. The sense of community has been to a large extent replaced by unrestrained egotism. Democracy has little bearing on the existential predicament of citizens, redistributive functions of the state having been severely limited and a number of its tasks taken over by private, profit seeking actors.⁹ Democracy has not only distanced itself from the economic realm, but also from the legal one as well. Selective application of the rule of law in foreign policy, and unconvincing, but imposed, moral justifications of military interventions in the name of democracy, together with the “policing of the media”, speak of a substantial erosion of freedom, of the capacity of citizens to recognize the link between internal and external authoritarian (and criminal) tendencies, see through inhibiting hypocrisy and respond constructively.

⁵ “The richest 10% of the global population currently takes 52% of the global income, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8.5% of it. Global wealth inequalities are even more pronounced than income inequalities. The poorest half of the population barely owns any wealth at all, possessing just 2% of the total. In contrast, the richest 10% of the global population own 76% of all wealth” (World Inequality Report 2022, available at: <https://wir2022.wid.world>).

⁶ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/terrifying-prospect-over-quarter-billion-more-people-crashing-extreme-levels-poverty>

⁷ N. Mandela spoke about poverty on Trafalgar Square 2005. “Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times – times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation – they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils. John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism*, Viking Canada, 2005, p. 231

At this moment, due to the four year drought, the pandemic and war in Ukraine, 22 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia are facing harrowing starvation. At the same time millions of dollars are poured into weapons fuelling, escalating ongoing conflicts. Agency France-Presse, *The Guardian*, “Horn of Africa drought places 22 million people at risk of starvation, says UN”, www.theguardian.com 19 August, 2022.

⁸ A bizarre illustration of this relation is depicted in an article of The Guardian, Chess robot grabs and breaks finger of seven year old opponent, www.theguardian.com, 24 July 2022.

⁹ Cf. Ivor Chipkin, “From democracy as political system to democracy as government”, in: *Transformation*, Vol. 105, 2021, pp. 1-25.

All of these illustrations of simultaneous movements in different directions within key human domains, indicate that a complex inventory/diagnosis of internal and external reality is required. However, while complexity cannot be ignored, it cannot easily be addressed. The moment seems to require sustained re-dedication to elementary values “liberty, equality, brotherhood” (injured now by policed liberty, growing inequality, violent fraternity), enriched by satyagraha, ubuntu. It entails furthering diagnostic capacities that are able to incorporate new knowledge, insights across relevant disciplines¹⁰ (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021), in order to extend the realm of choices, interconnections, and the sphere of freedom.

A synthesis is needed that can contribute to generating emancipatory practices, cutting through apathy, anger, indifference. Furthermore, it requires the articulation of present contradictions evading what J. Galtung calls the “tyranny of number two”, the iron law of either/or (Good vs. Evil, democracy vs. authoritarianism, heroes vs. villains). Transcending the either/or logic, entails convincing presentations of the multi-sources and depths of dangers, mobilizing “militant despair”, as well as capturing the indications of the new “possibles” (Sarr, 2019).

The complex reality and its failed mastering, have reopened major questions: concerning the nature of the human species and its capacity to survive¹¹

(Koestler, 1979: 2); concerning the nature of the crisis of the neo-liberal global capitalism, a system that at this moment can neither be “rectified nor replaced” (Streeck, 2016: 35, 59); concerning the (non)transparent power of TNC, financial institutions, hegemonic states and their military/intelligence/ industrial/media complex in framing and shaping the world, defining its fate. As well as questions concerning the once again imposed antagonistic division between the East and the West (a new Cold War), disregarding the South, as well as the fact that the East is made of a number of Easts, the West of different Wests (Chakrabarty, 2000: xiv). All these divisions a la East-West, erase the historical interpenetrations, interactions between cultures and civilizations, disfiguring history with fundamental amnesia and creating a formidable challenge of antagonistic distances. For the peripheries(s) of the world, the depth of the existing drama requires battling through the disfigured history and the fog of current complexity in the search for internal wisdom and clearer responses to the questions “what kind of society are we striving for”, amidst the uncertainty of reality and the “real relationships of power” (Saul, 2005: 11, 61). The task is not to violate the complexity of truth by taking sides, but to recreate space conducive to nuances, non-violent alternatives, understanding “societies on their own terms” and by doing so contribute if not to the resolution, than to the easing of the global crisis.

¹⁰ Among else, archaeology, anthropology have accumulated evidence that is contributing to the non-linear understanding of human evolution, shedding light on alternative forms of social organization evolving in different phases and cultures, having their own notions of freedom and equality.

¹¹ “A dispassionate observer from a more advanced planet who could take in human history from Cro-Magnon to Auschwitz at a single glance, would no doubt come to the conclusion that our race is in some respects an admirable, in the main, however, a very sick biological product; and that the consequences of its mental sickness far outweigh its cultural achievements when the chances of prolonged survival are considered.” (Koestler, 1979: 2).

Empowerment and transcending the dominant narrative

Clearing the path toward defining a strategy of empowerment requires dealing with the dominant narratives that have intervened in the self-perception, self-understanding¹² and confidence of the peripheries.

Peripheries have frequently been viewed, defined, through the eyes of the Centre. Reversing the gaze will, among other things, help redefine the dominant narrative that has been reproducing itself over time, usually reducing vast and diverse spaces to a single story(ies) made of “treacherous clichés, stereotypes and pseudo-certitudes” (Sarr, 2019). The Centre (West) had and still has the power to frame, explain away the consequences of historical circumstances and reduce structural problems of development of peripheries to innate insufficiencies. Complex social structures and processes are treated as they were purely technical matters, waiting to be solved by the Western experts, while the human subjects implicated in these dramas have no histories (Mbembe, 2019), or in the case of *Homo Balkanicus*, “more history than they can consume”.

The Balkans, as well as Africa, are ghosts “haunting Western culture” (Todorova, 2009). They have been commonly associated with “backwardness” and “violence”, and described as places without future or hope, “an outside worlds deemed to translation, mutation, conversion and catching up” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). Implications of this in terms of

self-perception, self-confidence were devastating and long lasting, contributing to an interiorized inferiority complex which, among other things, reduced the ability of these two regions to reflect on their present situation and envision the future for themselves. The West became the supreme authority whose tutelage and (informal and formal) recognition they are pursuing and celebrating.

At the same time, these peripheral regions have served as laboratories for experimentation and solutions developed elsewhere, primarily in the West. The non-West has been long treated “primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means; above all, of unprocessed data. These other worlds, in short, are treated less as sources of refined knowledge than as reservoirs of facts” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012: 1), and thus solutions to the problems of these “crises-prone entities” will have to come from the outside.

Unfortunately, representation of the Balkans in the African imaginary and Africa’s in this “non-European” part of Europe, is almost equally discomfoting, despite the similarities between postcolonial societies and the certain societies in Europe. The concept of balkanization is often used by the African political¹³ and intellectual elite to label the nature of tendencies toward the violent territorial fragmentation, or the inability to build a functioning state,¹⁴ while Africa

¹² Peter Wagner, problematizes modernity as self-understanding, centering on collective “interpretative actions” and autonomy. Cf. *Modernity*. Polity, 2012.

¹³ What is surprising is the negative connotation that balkanisation has among the African nationalists, as if they completely overlooked the fact that European balkanisation liberated many peoples from colonial rule.

¹⁴ According to Achille Mbembe (2000: 261) “The colonial boundaries are also said to have opened the way to the balkanization of the continent by cutting it up into a maze of microstates that were not economically viable and were linked more to Europe than to their environment”.

is represented within collective Balkan imaginary in the form of ultimate failure. It is treated as an entity that has nothing to do (and nothing to offer to) with the Balkans, sharing no similarities with the distinctly more developed Balkans. Reduced to an insult, prime criterion of negative comparison, for the Balkans are (at least geographically) part of Europe, nonetheless.

In essence Euro-American approaches, and the vision of the Other through the eyes, stereotypes formed by the Centre has led to a vision of the single "common" future in which all "outside" voices were silenced. The "end of history" narrative fundamentally affected the transformative strategies after the fall of the apartheid rule and end of socialism. Radical transformation was traded for seemingly endless

transition(s), with (isomorphic) mimicry in its core, guided and supervised from the Centre. Insecure and vulnerable, post-apartheid South Africa and the countries that emerged after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, turned to well-known prescriptions developed and promoted by the (un)holy trinity of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation, while in the case of the Balkans, the leading if not decisive role was reserved for the European Union.

The indicated structural and narrative challenges facing peripheries lead to the question of defining assumptions of empowering strategies.

Assumptions of empowerment

A strategy of empowering should encompass two aims. First, to transcend the lack of effective creative and transformative initiatives, i.e. answers to the crisis, problems created by the undertaken transitions, in South Africa from apartheid to a post-apartheid, democratic system, in Serbia from socialism to neoliberal capitalism. Second, to recreate a new the voice of the South, of the world peripheries in the shaping of the global order. Reinventing alternative assumptions on these two levels can contribute to the modification of the dominant paradigm of economic and political power, transform, or enable constructive resistance to the reach of new locations of power.

The assumptions of empowerment thus entail the following:

- 1** A re-reading of own history, striving for accuracy beyond prevailing stereotypes, imprisoning concepts formulated by others, created in specific historical circumstances yet striving for universalism. Rehabilitating the experience of own principles and practices of community building, economic functioning, relating to others, to nature. Recognizing the processes of *longue durée* that perpetuate internal division, submission and conflict, and require systematic, collective engagement from politics to cultures in order to be transformed.
- 2** Understanding the “workings of prevailing system of global capitalism” (Robinson, 2014), its current crisis and reach. The hierarchy it imposes, the power it wields, the boundaries of economic and political autonomy it conditions, the erosions of the normative standards (unrestrained application of double standard, selective application of self-serving rules instead of laws), democratic practices (irrelevant for resolving existential questions, expelling care and solidarity, sense of community), communications, leading to the creation of the post-democratic, post-truth world.
- 3** Diagnosing own failures, achievements and potentiality in the present, i.e. along the path of transition. Diagnosis should affirm the imperative of finding the balance between dwelling in a distorted and/or oversimplified past and a misunderstood present, between individual and collective interests, defining the measure of global integration and de-linking through the participation of citizens in shaping the vision of desired society. Three tasks are particularly important: 1. recognizing historical structural patterns that are recreated in spite of all the changes; 2. contextualizing the development of institutional patterns (form of government, recruitment of the bureaucracy) in the local-global matrix; 3. revealing the

possibilities of expanding the manoeuvring space for autonomy, choice, de-legitimization of the TINA creed, providing internal cohesion, democratic participation are attained.

- 4 Filtering the relevant, successful experiences of Others in domains important for building a functional and capable state. For example, relevant experiences of Others could include Finnish educational system, Cuban health system, Chinese system of recruitment civil servants, New Zealand's attempt to "re-regulate where deregulation had gone too far" (Saul, 2005: 214), etc. In other words filtering would be a project of synthesising one's own valuable experiences and practices of others in accordance with the consensually derived vision of the desired society. A transformative synthesis could be in the function of zero corruption tolerance, equality and care, participatory democracy, respect for own identity, devising an articulate ethical codex helping the navigation through the world of technological developments.
- 5 Seeking new alliances within and beyond the regional (geographical) framework, i.e. taking in consideration the shared history of subjugation and exploitation, colonization, and the present peripheral status. This among other paths, may lead to the revitalization Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in some form, or joining some of the rising regional organizations (BRICS-plus for example, could be a "meeting point"). Whatever the paths,

alliances need to increase the potential for acting with a **higher degree** of sovereignty and autonomy. The emergence of the New South could be a step towards the creation of a moral, political and economic corrective, the **missing link** between achievements and disasters created by the current neo-liberal western formula of development.

Empowering in short requires diagnosis and policies that can contribute to the creation of a society of engaged, participative and respected citizens, and their adequate political representatives. Among else such a diagnosis should enhance the capacity of new political actors for a synthesis, growing ability to filter, integrate and implement all the useful lessons of own experience and experience of others. Together with the capacity to articulate a transformative Stop! and critically think through the existing problems and the possible alternative practices in the realm of economy and politics, the wisdom to decide to reject a technological possible if it could endanger human liberty, would also be attainable.

All these assumptions further justify comparative analysis of two countries that dwell on the global periphery, as an exercise that can reveal in spite of differences and distances, common patterns and outcomes, generate new insights as well as new modes of cooperation and solidarity, give a stronger voice to the quest for alternatives, and contribute to empowerment - resisting external impositions that perpetuate structural traps and extending the level of decision-making autonomy and participation at the national and international level.

1. Re-reading one's own history

In the case of South Africa re-reading should include three historical sequences: pre-colonial, apartheid, and the anti-apartheid struggle.

a Pre-colonial past of South Africa has been, by and large, discarded as being irrelevant (or lately, by some African intellectuals uncritically upheld as the only foundation of identity) for the present predicaments. The relevancy of history for the understanding the present seems to begin with the onset of colonialism. The pre-colonial period is either locally invoked uncritically as a romanticised past without conflict and injustice, or it tends to be filed, by dominant external readers, into a backward historical phase in line with the paradigm of linear progress. However, following new advances/evidence in archaeology, anthropology the moment has come to take in consideration beyond the linear matrix, the pre-colonial past of South Africa as an expression of diversity (even progressive and sophisticated practices) in the realm of economy, organization of community, relationship toward nature that requires attention and research.¹⁵

"If we compare, for example, European society at the Cape in the 18th and early 19th century with Nguni societies before Shaka, what is striking is their political sophistication by modern standards. Whereas Company rule in the Cape did not know the rule of law, Nguni society was rule/bound. Whereas European society was riddled with race-thinking and with racism, Nguni societies easily integrated strangers, even white ones. Whereas Cape society was a slave-owning and trading one, this was a practice largely unknown among Mthetwas, the Zulus and the Ndwandwe" (Chipkin, 2022).

All this shows that exploring the variety of answers, the specificities that are not culturally and historically treated in a hierarchal manner, broaden the learning framework. In other words, carefully considering the relevancy, creative implications of the experiences of the past, sustains and strengthens the legitimacy of seeking alternatives in the present. Based on critical analyses of the past additional sources of inspiration and self-confidence can evolve.

¹⁵ Graeber and Wengrow provide evidence that a linear understanding of the human evolution prevents us from recognizing the diversity of social organization, flexible arrangements that were not necessarily based on domination and subordination. Nor does it allow us to perceive forms of dealing with differences, modes of coexistence based on hospitality, care, creativity. They argue that not all good things came from Europe, and that both the social thoughts and human institutions that came from outside of Europe need to be taken seriously. Graeber, D. & Wengrow, D. 2021. *The Dawn of Everything*. Allen Lane. Pp. 5, 140.

- b** The colonial past in its brutal apartheid form has to a large degree been analytically depicted. What remains to be done is to reveal its anomalies that are relevant for understanding the ambivalent threads of the system in the present. For instance, one striking anomaly is the combination of extreme racial divisions and discrimination and elements of an exceptional welfare system. The question that thus needs to be answered is how has this sustained racial divisions and inequalities in the present and at the same time enabled strands of development. The apartheid state was, of course, brutally oppressive and it viciously discriminated on the basis of race, denying its African subjects equal political, social, or economic rights. But, at the same time, by 1994, for example, each of three pillars of post/apartheid redistribution were in place: a very high proportion of poor children were enrolled in secondary school, the tax system was progressive and poor men and women enjoyed generous old age pensions in retirement” (Seekings, 2002).
- c** The struggle against apartheid is an extremely important historical chapter of liberation. However, the romanticized aspects of the struggle, implications of policies that have been overlooked or simply abandoned but have been constitutive for some of the present transformative practices, limitations, and require scrutiny as well. This needs to be done particularly, in the realm of economics, i.e. Unveiling the roots, foundations of creeping neo-liberalism, of sustained social (racial) and economic (structural) inequalities that were enabled by the decisions made during the period of post-apartheid state building.

In the case of Serbia, the re-readings of history we suggest, should encompass the ignored colonial past, and the achievements and failures of the socialist project that ended in the violent breakup of Yugoslavia.

- a** Serbia, the Balkans altogether, in its self-understanding has not historically situated some of the enduring structural patterns that have survived great turbulences in the design of the state(s), and their breakups. None of the “new beginnings” despite advances, have developed the capability to transcend in an enduring, irrevocable manner the status of a periphery rooted in the colonial past. Europe, the Balkan region, including Serbia has resisted labelling its past as ‘colonial’, as a way of clinging to its European identity, for colonization is a phenomenon that belongs to the non-European space as M. Todorova argues.¹⁶ What is interesting is that analysts of colonial endeavours in the Orient, like the famed E. Said, have evaded this issue as well, omitting to take in consideration that the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian rule in the Balkans shares some of the fundamental features and outcomes with colonial practices in the non-European world. This evasiveness, among else is part of the “awkwardness”, to put it mildly, that Western Europe demonstrates towards the Balkans, treating its southern parts (“Western Balkan”) as a non-European part of Europe. And it is part of Serbia’s own unease with its complex identity that it cannot fit fully and neatly into the East-West divide, nor into the European/non-European divide.

We have a different approach, arguing that the geographical definition of colonization

¹⁶ On the other hand, when Russia began to be examined within the framework of colonization, “internal colonization” was applied to bridge the gap between previous understandings of colonization and the Russian practice towards non-Russian groups.

is a matter of convention (solidified by the establishment of international law), and that the task is to acknowledge that there are different forms of colonization¹⁷ irrespective of geography and to recognize that Balkan was exposed to one form of it. Thus, for Serbia, still searching for a path to stable, irreversible development, the challenge is to fully accept its complex historical identity, among else, understanding the antagonisms colonialism (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) managed to plant (manifesting itself in “nesting orientalism”), the structural obstacles/limits to economic development it created and the internal forces that is released disrupting several attempts to create a community of southern Slavs.

- b** The Yugoslav brand of socialism was perceived as a “Third Way, ‘socialism with a humane face’”. However, while its federal arrangements attempted to work out the ethnic diversity equation (fair representation of majority and minority groups), they failed to constitute a Yugoslav nation. The self-management system was a form of reaching out to democratic forms of government, but hindered by the party bureaucracy, while the opening of the

economic system to the logics of the market proved unable to survive the international turbulences and resulted in a debt crisis (Woodward, 1995). Industrialization, economic growth, and a strong an extensive welfare state together with open borders and a liberal political and intellectual situation compared to other communist countries, the prestige of the country as one of the leaders of NAM, its bilateral relations with the European Economic Community, all suggested that if the Cold war was to be transcended, Yugoslavia would be at the head of the line to join European integrative processes. Instead, it violently broke up, with Serbia labelled as the main culprit, reduced to a pariah state. The rational, careful evaluation of the socialist legacy, the dimensions that needed to be preserved, others that needed to be reformed or discarded were never carried out in Serbia. Together with the shocking break-up of the Yugoslav state, the (never-ending) transition based on shock therapy was initiated when the regime of Slobodan Milosevic was toppled. Without the process of filtering, the crisis of the neo-liberal turnabout cannot be resolved, i.e., visions of a post neo-liberal order cannot surface.

¹⁷ J. Burbank and F. Cooper show that different forms of colonization are related to multiple histories of Empire. See: Jane Burbank, Fred Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

2. Understanding the workings of the prevailing system of global capitalism

Globalization in its neoliberal form, as a process and a network of actors, is often a decisive force in moulding the internal path of economic and political transformation in countries of the periphery (Robinson, 2014; 2020). Besides connecting the world, contributing to material wealth, technological advances, globalization has become a force that has transformed the nation state, its functions and reach particularly in the realm of redistribution, welfare, security. By pushing for privatization (of everything), austerity, reducing the power of union protection, cancelling out solidarity and eroding social cohesion by celebrating greed and “possessive individualism” it has become an obstacle to emancipatory practices, to the autonomy of choice. The main actors of these process - the transnational class (incorporating fragments of the local elites), TNC that often dispose with financial assets bigger than the budget of some of the states, financial institutions, and digital industries that participate together with intelligence

complexes in the disciplining and control of citizens, are not fully transparent nor accountable. Therefore, understanding the positive and negative dimensions of globalization leads us to the following questions: where is the nexus of national and transnational classes located in Serbia and South Africa, how has privatization/economic liberalization been carried out, which TNC have entered the local scene, which policies were conditioned by the international financial institutions and who benefited the most from them? What were the social costs of externally imposed dimensions of transition? To what extent has the state retained its redistributive capacities? Is the state captured by local actors (ruling party, big business...), or by transnational capital and its agencies, or both. By understanding the nature, contradictions, crisis of global neoliberal capitalism, that is, the internal-external dynamics, a realistic vision, strategy of transformation can be created and new internal actors of resistance may emerge.

3. Diagnosing own failures, achievements, potentiality in the present

The problems and achievements of both societies do not offer a clear definition of their status. Therefore, they are variously depicted as states on the verge of failure, fragile states, captured states, weak states. The different designation indicate that the transition processes have accomplished some achievements, but not optimal, that they have not attained functionality and stability that satisfies most of their citizens and surmounts the internal crisis as well as the consequences of the compounding global crisis.

Serbia for example is a deeply polarized society, politically, socially and economically, operating without an achieved internal consensus about the key national goals (interests), without developing a sense of community. Social indicators show growing inequalities,¹⁸ between classes and the urban rural areas, large segments of the population living below the poverty line (or even in absolute poverty) or being at risk of poverty¹⁹ (A11 Initiative, 2022), high mortality rate, dramatic brain drain,²⁰ high index of corruption,²¹

criminalization, increased family violence. The process of privatization, one of the core axes of the transition from socialism to neo-liberalism, has been described as an unprecedented mode of plundering social and state property by the new capitalist class, and allowing for foreign, transnational capital to take over, land, water, ores, banks, and media resources, all crucial for autonomous development, economic and political sovereignty.

¹⁸ 20 percent of the richest have ten times the equivalent income (household income distributed to household members) than 20 percent of the poorest. According to the Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index, Serbia is at the bottom of Europe and 84th on the list of 154 countries in the world. "Serbia is Among the Countries with the Highest Inequality in Europe, while the Burden of the Crisis is paid by the Poorest" <https://www.a11initiative.org>, 17. October 2020.

¹⁹ According to the statistics 450.000 thousand (6,9% of the population) live in absolute poverty and approx. 2 million are at poverty risk (29.8% of the population). Centre for democracy: "In Serbia an increasing number of poor", www.021.rs 19/02/2022.

²⁰ According to the Human flight and brain drain index, Serbia in 2022 has 6 index points (0 is low, 10 is high). www.Globaleconomy.com, 2022. According to a survey carried out by the National Youth Council of Serbia in August 2022, 50% of the young want to emigrate. It is estimated that between 2007-2019, about 500.000 thousand left. In an article by Tanja Vidovic, "Brain Drain" and Serbia: How to retain them, she cites the European statistical bureau according to which in 2019 about 4.000 people were leaving Serbia per month. *Danas*, 10. 09. 2019, danas.rs. Covid-19 has somewhat slowed down and even reversed somewhat this trend. Nevertheless, half of the young still wish to leave.

²¹ Serbia rank s the 96 least corrupt nation out of 180 countries its corruption s index being 38.00, according to the 2021 Corruption perceptions Index reported by Transparency International. Serbia, www.Transparency.org.

The present state of South Africa is described as “incompetent government leading a state about to fail” (Rachman, 2022), based on rampant corruption, a high crime rate as well as mass structural unemployment. Although South Africa is considered a middle-income country, many of its citizens still live under conditions of moderate to extreme poverty. Fifty percent of South Africans live below the poverty line, while around 30% of the population lives in households defined as ultra-poor (Seekings & Nattrass, 2015). Poverty persisted after 1994 because economic growth was neither rapid enough nor sufficiently inclusive to create work for low skilled, unemployed men and women. The racial divide has transpired, in the form of planetary distances between the wealth, style of life in the white gated communities²² and the impoverished

majority of the black South Africans. Civil unrest is not uncommon in the face of poverty, dysfunctional state institutions and corrupt political actors (ANC is now depicted as a “criminal organization”).²³ From 2008, the pattern of conflict started to change and internal contestation in the African National Congress became a debilitating source of violent political conflict (Chipkin and Vidojevic, 2022). Like in Serbia, South Africa is also confronted with an insufficient capacity to retain the wealthy citizens and the educated young.²⁴ On the other hand, South Africa is in spite of all its deficiencies a “regional powerhouse” (Rachman, 2022), and attractive location for migrants from the Southern African region trapped in economic crisis and political tensions of their own, with a comparatively better infrastructure and a relatively vibrant economy.

²² See Chipkin, I. 2020. *Middle-Classing in Roodepoort: Unexpected Sites of Post-apartheid “Community”* in: (ed.) ?osich, G. & Wagner, P., *The Trouble with Democracy*. Edinburg University Press..

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Safety concerns, rolling blackouts, corruption, and economic stagnation are just some of the motives behind high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) choosing to leave for overseas. Data from New World Wealth and Henley & Partners shows approximately 4 500 HNWIs have left South Africa over the past decade. 6. svi 2022. Wealthy South Africans are leaving in droves – Moneyweb <https://www.moneyweb.co.za> “Here’s how many South African’s are leaving for Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom”, According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs’ 2020 International Migrant Stock report, there were 914,000 taking up residency outside the country, up significantly from 2015 (786,000). [Business-tech.co.za](https://www.business-tech.co.za)

4. Learning from and appropriating successful experience of Others

Self-reflection requires developing capacities for learning from others, appropriating principles of successful practices in the most important domains - education, judiciary, public administration, health. This is a strategy of choice, based on clear visions of which needs are primary, and how the state can preserve its capacities to protect, care for its citizens and their environment. In reality, foreign (predominantly Western) models are imposed upon the countries undergoing transition, often reducing their outcome to uncritical mimicry. Thus, foreign experts of all sorts have come for example, to Serbia to reform the (still inefficient) administration, the education system is constantly under reform in the search for an adequate model, none of the judiciary reforms have resulted in eradication of corruption and inefficiency, and the health system has been ruined by the brain drain, corruption, privatization.

In South Africa the situation is different but the results are to a large extent similar.

South Africa in the 1990s, for example, became preoccupied with and pursued practices and models increasingly rooted internationally. One of these was the taking over, of what has been called the New Public Management in the reorganisation

of the post-apartheid civil service. Public sector reform in post-apartheid South Africa took a particular form, since public administration, due to its links to the apartheid state, was regarded as illegitimate by those involved in anti-apartheid struggle. The central issue for the new post-apartheid government was not how to improve the efficiencies of the government and the public sector, but how to “smash” it Lenin-like or at least transform it according to the ANC's Strategy and Tactics (Chipkin and Lipietz, 2012: 5).

At the same time, in some areas South Africa offers a sneak peek into the future with its highly securitized (and more and more self-sustainable) townhouse complexes for (upper) middle class on one hand and poorly serviced informal settlements for the poor on the other hand.

Therefore, if the common good as the main signpost was taken seriously, it would include in both countries developing a careful strategy of learning and creatively appropriating (not imitating, or mechanically applying) relevant experiences from the outside. In fact, the key to strategic success is to master a fine-tuned combination of past and present, national, and international experiences and lessons.

5. Seeking new alliances

Part of the collective memory of Serbia, as heir of ex-Yugoslavia, is the Non-Alignment Movement it co-founded, as a constructive response of the Third World to superpower polarization and confrontation. South Africa, as soon as it overthrew the apartheid regime, joined the NAM in 1994. Although the movement was at that time waning, the gesture was together with the dismantling of South Africa's nuclear power, an expression of the continuous need to foster, nurture alliances of those smaller, less developed but independence seeking countries. The present moment, marked by the war between Ukraine, the West and Russia, and the pressure for the countries of the global South to choose sides, i.e., support the West and its military alliance, without questions, has rekindled the need for new alliances, new solidarities, reaffirmations of peaceful coexistence, for the constitution of

the New South. South Africa has abstained from supporting the UN resolutions condemning Russia and implementing sanctions. Serbia has voted for the UN General Assembly Resolutions but has not accepted to implement sanctions against Russia and is under heavy pressure from the European Union and U.S., that may be economically and politically very costly. Although war in Ukraine is one serious episode prompting new interconnections, to create space for autonomous foreign policy despite the vulnerabilities, it is not the only incentive. Some form of transcending, delinking from a world order dominated by hegemonic powers, developing alternative institutions, particularly financial ones, is on the agenda, and the two countries could be mutually supporting in extending their autonomy and pooling the energy of resistance to the dominant paradigm of world order.

References

"Views on South Africa's Contribution to Global Affairs Over the Last 25 years". 2019. SAIIA, available at: <https://saiaa.org.za/research/views-on-south-africas-contribution-to-global-affairs-over-the-last-25-years/>

Berand, I. 1996. *Central and Eastern Europe, 1994-1993*. Cambridge University Press.

Chakrabarty, D. 2000. *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton University Press.

Chipkin, I. 2022. *The Idea of South Africa is Blowing in the Wind - We are in the Middle of an Epochal Change*, Daily Maverick, 11. October: available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-10-11-nationalism-and-south-africa-we-are-in-the-middle-of-an-epochal-change/>

Chipkin, I. 2021. From democracy as political system to democracy as government. *Transformation*, Vol. 105, 2021, pp. 1-25.

Chipkin, I. & Vidojevic, J. 2022. *Dangerous Elites: protest, conflict and the Future of South Africa*. Institute for Security Studies and Government and Public Policy.

Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J. 2012. *Theory from the South: or How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*. Routledge.

Corruption perception Index 2021, Transparency International, available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>

Graeber, D. & Wengrow, D. 2021. *The Dawn of Everything*. Allen Lane.

Grayling, A.C. 2021. *The Frontiers of Knowledge*. Viking.

Haldane, M. 2022. *Wealthy South Africans are leaving in droves*, available at: <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/financial-advisor-views/wealthy-south-africans-are-leaving-in-droves/>

Human Flight and Brain Drain Index 2022, The Global Economy, available at: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/human_flight_brain_drain_index/

Koestler, A. 1978. *Janus: A Summing Up*. Hutchinson & Co.

Mbembe, A. 2000. At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality and Sovereignty in Africa. *Public Culture*, 12: 1, pp. 259-284.

Mbembe, A. 2019. *Out of the Dark Night: essays on decolonization*. Columbia university Press.

Pinker, S. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Viking.

Rachman, G. 2022. *South Africa's Fear of State Failure*, *Financial Times*, 15th of August, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/79123d0a-af62-43e3-bfbe-ae942224cea7>

Robinson, W. 2014. *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*. Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, W. 2020. *Global Police State*. Pluto. Press.

Sarr, F. 2019. *Afrotopia*. University of Minnesota Press.

Saul, J. R. 2005. *The Collapse of Globalism*. Viking Canada.

Seekings, J. 2002. The Broader Importance of Welfare Reform in South Africa. *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 28: 2, pp. 1-38.

Seekings, J., and N. Natrass. 2015. *Policy, Politics and Poverty in South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Streeck, W. 2016. *How Will Capitalism End?*. Verso.

The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2022, Oxfam, available at: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621419/rr-cri-2022-111022-summ-en.pdf;jsessionid=97C8B5934995F52915997C1C74414AC5?sequence=6>

Todorova, M. 2009. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press.

Virilio, P. & Lotringer, S. 1983. *Pure War*. Semiotext(e).

Vidojevic, J. & Chipkin, I. 2021. The Gendered Character of Welfare: reconsidering vulnerability and violence in South Africa. *Social Dynamics: a Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 47, Issue 3, pp. 472-487.

Wagner, P. 2012. *Modernity*. Polity.

World Inequality Report 2022, available at: <https://wir2022.wid.world>

Woodward, S. 1995. *Balkan Tragedy*. Washington: The Brooking Institution. pp.47-81.

TECHNICAL DATA

First edition. Johannesburg, January 2022.

This document was edited by the New South Institute (NSI) staff, but opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of the organization, rather those of the authors.

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND COVER ILLUSTRATION

Julia Eccles

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions or feedback, please contact by email: info@nsi.org.za

USAGE RIGHTS

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce this material. We request due acknowledgment of the publication and submission of a copy of the material produced.