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The Business of Solidarity: Balkan Socialisms and Development Aid in the ‘Third World,’ 1953-
1991

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Research Abstract:

This dissertation explores the relationship between European socialist economies and anti-colonial solidarity politics through the experiences of Yugoslav and Bulgarian technical specialists in the ‘Third World’ and foreign students from Africa and Asia in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Specifically, I research how these two states’ commercial and business interests became implicated in their developmental aid programs for decolonizing states in the Third World.’ In tracing this history, I explore the contested meanings of business and commerce in European socialist societies and the attendant conflicts that both socialist and post-colonial states’ integration into global capitalist markets provoked between policy makers, enterprise managers, and workers. To do so, I employ an ethnographic-historical methodology to understand how ideologies and practices of development and international business became inscribed in everyday life and politics. My project primarily draws on archival sources in Serbia, Croatia, and Bulgaria as well as publications housed at specialist institutes for international

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economics and politics in the region. In addition, I feature oral interviews with Yugoslav and Bulgarian technical specialists and former ‘Third-World’ students from Africa and Asia to understand how East European socialist solidarity politics and economics manifested itself in everyday life. In this way, my project seeks to both enrich and challenge the burgeoning scholarship of global socialism by shedding light on how ostensibly ‘Third World’ processes of decolonization during the second half of the twentieth century shaped lives and livelihoods in socialist southeastern Europe.

Research Goals:

My project is situated at the intersection of Cold War and post-colonial studies. As such, I seek to understand how decolonization and global socialism — the two salient processes of twentieth-century history — structured and constrained relations between European socialist societies and post-colonial societies. (Chari and Verdery, 2008; Engerman 2011). Since the early 2000s, scholars have increasingly explored the transnational dimensions of East European socialism and the Cold War in the ‘Third World.’ (Westad, 2006; Slobodian, 2015; Friedman, 2015). While this global turn in Cold War and socialism studies has predominantly emphasized the role of ideology and questions of culture such as race, scholars have recently criticized the field’s marginalization of economics and material concerns in structuring cross-cultural

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encounters and geo-politics (Bockman, 2011; Sanches-Sibony, 2014; and Unkovski-Korica, 2016). This new critical literature, however, while acknowledging the complex interplay of economics and ideology, relies primarily on intellectual histories of economists and high-level Party politics to mediate socialism's global and 'Third World' entanglements. My study addresses this disconnect in the literature by tacking between elite and non-elite perspectives, and attending to the ways in which cultural factors, such as racial ideologies, inflected material and economic outcomes such as cooperation between European technical advisers and decolonizing governments or competition between black African students and Yugoslav and Bulgarian students.

My primary research focus is on socialist Yugoslavia's interactions with the Non-Aligned Movement- a coalition of mostly African, Asian and Latin American states opposed to Cold War bloc divisions. However, the larger questions of my study concern socialist internationalism as a global movement and its influence on cultures of socialism across Eastern Europe. My research thus considers Yugoslavia in relation to the case of a neighboring Balkan country and regional rival, the People's Republic of Bulgaria. While both countries espoused anti-colonialism as a foundational ideology and both boasted significant economic and political commitments in



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solidarity with the ‘Third World,’ Bulgaria belonged to COMECON (The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and the Warsaw Pact, both Soviet-led organizations. In contrast, Yugoslavia largely followed an independent, ‘third way’ in international politics. This comparative portion of my project offers insights into how these competing commitments fostered different attitudes and practices towards development and business in the ‘Third World’ in these two socialist Balkan societies.

Research Activities:

My research began in September 2017 in Belgrade, Serbia where I intensively researched federal and SR Serbian documents related to Yugoslavia’s development aid program in three archives: Archive of Yugoslavia, the Archive of Serbia, and the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. At the Archive of Yugoslavia, I primarily collected documents from collections 208 (The Institute for International Technical Cooperation), 465 (the Federal Institute for international scientific, educational, cultural, and technical cooperation), and 574 (the federal committee for economic cooperation with developing countries). These collections all yielded critical material and insights for my research. Research at the Archive of Serbia proved even more fruitful. This archive’s collection of the Republic Bureau of International Scientific-Technical, Education, and Cultural Cooperation provided detailed statistical analyses of, and individualized reports from, international students in



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Yugoslavia and Yugoslav specialists in the Global South. I also discovered very valuable records from the 1970s and 1980s on the work of the Bureau unavailable at the Archive of Yugoslavia. After exhausting the relevant collections at the Archive of Serbia, I spent most of November and the first half of December examining the dossiers of Yugoslav embassies in African, Asian, and Latin American countries at the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia. At the Diplomatic Archive I primarily focused my research on discussions and negotiations between Yugoslav diplomats and state officials and their partners in the Global South regarding the New International Economic Order. This project will be the basis for the fourth chapter of my dissertation.

In addition to archival research in Serbia, I spent evenings gathering relevant published material from extensive collections at the National Library of Serbia and the Belgrade University Library. This material includes published master and doctoral thesis from foreign students regarding Yugoslavia's system of self-management, specialist journals for Yugoslav businesses, economists, and engineers working in developing countries, and a variety of other material cataloguing socialist Yugoslavia's development assistance to 'Third World' countries. I have also taken advantage of these libraries collections of Yugoslav periodicals such as Yugoslav student newspapers, business bulletins, and monthly bulletins from the Club for International Friendship. This last periodical has proved to be valuable for my research as it contains the published writings of foreign students studying in Yugoslavia and details of their relationship with other Yugoslav students and the authorities. While in Belgrade, I also took advantage of



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documentation of cultural exchanges between Yugoslavia and various African societies at the Museum of African Art in Belgrade. Founded in 1977, the Museum served as a center for African students in Yugoslavia to engage in cultural exchange with Yugoslavs. This included performing traditional music and dance, as well as holding lectures and discussions, for Yugoslav audiences. The museum has diligently preserved records of this exchange in their own archives.

The final aspect of my research in Serbia were oral interviews I conducted concurrently with archival research. Thanks to contacts I made with individuals formerly employed at Yugoslavia's Federal Bureau of International Cooperation, I conducted two interviews with former officials of the Bureau. These two officials worked at the Bureau in the 1970s and 1980s on the implementation of Yugoslav-sub-Saharan Africa technical cooperation. In addition to these interviews, I also interviewed a project manager who worked on various projects throughout Africa for a Serbian multinational engineering and construction company in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, I was also able to conduct two interviews with former students from developing states who studied in socialist Yugoslavia. One former student originally hails from Syria, while the other grew up in Guinea-Bissau. Both have lived in Belgrade for decades and have Serbian citizenship. These interviews with former students add to a growing body of information on the everyday life of Yugoslavia's socialist internationalism.

After completing the first stage of my research in Serbia, I moved to Zagreb, Croatia to consult collections stored at the Croatian State Archive, material at the Croatian National and



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University Library, and important published and unpublished reports held at the Institute for Development and International Relations. At the Croatian State Archive, I researched and collected documents related to the work of the Croatian Federal Unit's Bureau of International Technical Cooperation with developing countries. I also consulted three to four more collections related to Republic-level administrative bodies and international higher education in Croatia during the socialist period. Outside of this archival research, I also made use of literature on my topic held exclusively at libraries in Croatia. In addition, I spent a week and a half collecting documents and reports published by the Zagreb-based Institute for Development and International Relations. This institute first began operating in the early 1960s as a specialized research institute and think tank for the study of Yugoslavia's economic and political relations with the developing world. At this institute, I found significant statistical and other kinds of reports detailing the work of Yugoslav multinational companies in the developing world and reports about the education of students from the Global South in Yugoslavia.

In Croatia I also found a very robust community of interlocutors who directly participated in socialist Yugoslavia's development assistance program. Besides those offering merely material assistance, I was able to conduct four oral interviews with Yugoslav experts working both abroad in the Global South and domestically in Yugoslavia. One expert worked as an expert for the United Nations and was posted to multiple countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa. This expert later worked in the field of Yugoslav-African relations for the Institute for Development

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and International Relations. Each of my interviewees provided valuable information and important context for my dissertation.

The last three months of my research were devoted to research in Sofia, Bulgaria. My research at the Bulgarian National Archive pertained primarily to collections containing information about foreign students from developing countries studying in socialist Bulgaria and about migrant worker programs for groups from developing countries in Bulgaria. I also devoted a considerable amount of time to reviewing secondary literature on the Bulgarian socialist period and, in particular, Bulgaria's technical cooperation program for developing countries. This literature was furnished by Professor Evgenia Kalinova with whom I had a chance to consult while in Bulgaria and with whom I look forward to collaborating in the future. Besides this specialized literature provided by Professor Kalinova, I also availed myself of historic and scholarly literature at the National Library of Bulgaria and at the research library of the American Research Center in Sofia. The collections of these respective libraries greatly aided my project and rendered the relatively new (for me) research field of Bulgarian socialist history accessible and legible. While useful for the purposes of my limited focus on Bulgaria, this line of inquiry into Bulgarian 'Third-World' development aid will most likely require additional trips to Sofia for supplemental research.

Important Research Findings:

My preliminary research findings help to elucidate the relationship between the political economies of socialist states in the Balkans and their development aid programs in the 'Third

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World.’ Alongside its humanitarian and anti-colonial solidarity goals, Yugoslavia’s development aid program operated in accordance with Yugoslavia’s broader economic agenda- much like other states’ technical assistances programs in the wider global development aid economy. Importantly, Yugoslavia’s status as both a recipient and donor of development assistance complicated Yugoslavia’s rhetoric of political and economic solidarity with developing states. In the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Yugoslavia’s loans and technical assistance from Western and international sources became increasingly conditional on the acceptance of reforms reinforcing free-market principles and global market integration, which were, in any case, the general goals of Yugoslav economic reforms throughout the 1950s.¹ Yugoslavia’s significant dependence on Western financial assistance and credits, and not simply its ostensibly sui generis ideology of neutrality, helped determine the state’s liminal positionality and nudge the state towards its novel hybrid economy. The re-orientation towards global market integration influenced both Yugoslavia’s foreign student and technical expert programs as the Bureau was increasingly directed to partner with Yugoslav firms seeking market in developing states.² Following these liberalizing economic reforms of the late 1950s to mid-1960s designed to stimulate international trade, ZAMTES’ increasingly came to function as a conduit for Yugoslav enterprises conducting business in newly independent and decolonizing states.

¹ Andrej Marković and Ivan Obadić, “A Socialist Developing Country in a Western Capitalist Club: Yugoslavia and the OEEC/OECD, 1955-1980” in Matthieu Leimbruger and Matthias Schmelzer, eds., *The OECD and the International Political Economy since 1948* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 102.

² AJ, 145-13, “Consultations on the international activities of the Yugoslav Student Union,” Belgrade, 5 June 1962.

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Changes in Yugoslavia's scholarship program for students from developing countries reflected this wider re-orientation. In the 1970s, republic parliaments and SIV demanded that "selectivity" (*selektivnost*) — meaning the prioritizing of cooperation with countries with which Yugoslavia had the greatest economic interest — be the guiding principle in work with developing countries.³ Detached from centralized policy-making, Yugoslav republics, primarily in SR Croatia and SR Serbia, turned to Yugoslav enterprises and wealthier (typically oil-states) developing countries to subsidize technical cooperation and the scholarship program. When offering scholarships, republic leaderships made decisions, in the assessment of concerned ZAMTES officials, "according to immediate economic interests and opportunities" and thus left "entire groups of developing countries . . . unaccounted for."⁴ This strategy widened growing inequalities in the distribution of economic aid and resources within the Global South. As support for forms of international cultural exchange based on solidarity politics in Yugoslavia waned, Yugoslavia increasingly allocated resources and investments for trade relations with Western capitalist states and wealthier oil-producing states in North Africa and the Middle East

Bulgaria's development aid program fared differently from Yugoslavia's thanks to a stronger central authority and less focus on market mechanisms in the Bulgarian state. In an interesting twist, Bulgaria increased its technical cooperation and corresponding trade relations

³ AS, REMES, box 175, "Izveštaj o radu u 1977. godini," RS Serbia ZAMTES report, Belgrade, February 1978. Serbia's Chamber of Commerce, Parliament and SIV explicitly stipulated that cooperation with Libya, Nigeria, and Iraq should receive the most attention.

⁴ HDA, 1727-299, savezni zavod informacije, 1984-1991 "Politika SFRJ u oblasti školovanja, studiranja I naučnog I stručnog usavršavanja stranih državljana u SFRJ," Belgrade, September 1984.

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with developing states over the 1970s and 1980s as non-aligned Yugoslavia decreased its investment in the Global South. Reports from officials in developing states indicate that Bulgaria undercut Yugoslav firms and workers with its lower prices for construction projects, labor, and expertise. In addition, the Bulgarian state offered generous loans with more favorable terms than Yugoslavia could offer. This was due to the Yugoslavia state's insistence that its development aid program operate based on market principles and competition while Bulgarian loans were provided according to extra-market principles. While more work needs to be done to ascertain how Bulgarian experts in the field and 'Third-World' actors experienced this exchange, my findings show, surprisingly, that Yugoslavia's non-aligned leadership in the Global South was seriously contested by other socialist states such as Bulgaria.

Furthermore, my research this past year has revealed important insights into the ways ideas about race and cultural difference structured East-South exchanges during the Cold War. In particular, Yugoslav actors capitalized on its 'racial' progressivism and ostensibly liminal status between Cold-War worlds in its relations with developing states in the Global South. For example, Yugoslav multinational firms used images of racial solidarity and racial transcendence in advertising and public relations campaigns as the following image shows:

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(Togo, 1985. *Energoprojekt*, no. 18, 25 October 1985.)

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In addition, the mere presence of black African and other foreign students in Yugoslavia produced a running dialogue between black African students and their Yugoslav interlocutors about what constituted racism and did, or even could, such racism exist in socialist Yugoslavia. For many Yugoslavs, the country served as the paradigm of Cold-War cosmopolitanism and international solidarity, a place neither ‘East’ or ‘West,’ but somewhere ‘in-between’ and open to all. African, Asian, Arab, and Latin American students became the most conspicuous domestic symbol of socialist Yugoslavia’s exceptionalism in foreign relations and international politics. For Yugoslavia’s citizens, the act of hosting students from postcolonial countries exemplified this openness and foreign students’ ostensible eagerness to study in Yugoslavia confirmed the admiration and respect that the world reportedly cultivated for Yugoslavia. For many Yugoslavs, the insinuation that racist attitudes and tendencies existed in Yugoslavia was slanderous and seditious. The mere mention of the word ‘discrimination’ aroused passionate denials and declamations that Yugoslav socialist principles precluded such reactionary and bourgeois phenomena. Yugoslav authorities, for the most part, sincerely believed that African students were misconstruing Yugoslavia’s identity as an anti-colonial state and that African students could not, or would not, differentiate between isolated racial prejudice and the idea of racial discrimination as a political system. In official publications, Yugoslav authorities promoted narratives (see below) that highlighted East-South solidarity and brotherhood.

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(Belgrade,

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January 1961, in *Student: List Beogradskog univerziteta*, 21 February 1961)

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

Competition between East, West, and South during the Cold War over the prestige of development aid to the Global South constituted a field of activity that still reverberates today. American self-understanding, other countries' national identities, and global subjectivities became defined, in part, by narratives of comparative economic and political development. Furthermore, the modern neoliberal global economy where multinational corporations often justify their activities based on their social utility and political liberalism stems from practices of Cold War development aid projects and competition. Importantly, my research demonstrates how East European socialist states readily took part in this central process of twentieth-century global history and shaped a more connected world on one hand, but also contributed to widening global inequalities on the other hand. The persistent idea of insular and backward socialist economies in the twentieth century is outdated and risks mischaracterizing modern states and economies in Eastern Europe.

In Serbia, Croatia, and Bulgaria, Cold War-era internationalist legacies persist. China and Russia are increasing economic investment in the region and the non-aligned movement is experiencing a resurgence as the post-Cold War global consensus falters. For policymakers, it is important to recognize the political and economic interconnectedness of these states with areas of the world besides the EU and the US. For example, the current political convulsions in the Balkans regarding its EU future (including current members Bulgaria and Croatia) is partially

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informed by legacies of resistance to ‘Western’ political and economic institutions. My research can help inform political leadership to craft policies which are sensitive to these states’ long histories and current obligations to non-Western global economic networks.

Co-Curricular Activity:

While in Serbia I actively participated in teaching and tutoring refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq stranded in the country. This teaching was organized by the NGOs Refugee Aid Serbia, Northstar, and others. I volunteered with these organizations two to three times a week and primarily taught English courses for displaced youths seeking entry into the EU. I continued this tutoring while in Croatia, Bulgaria, and now in the US through an online platform organized by volunteers in Serbia. This online tutoring allows volunteers to continue helping refugees when they move on to other countries, but are still stuck in a lengthy asylum application process. Many of these refugees lack the support networks they established while in Belgrade, Serbia.

Conclusions:

My research trip facilitated by a fellowship from American Councils has been instrumental in furthering my graduate education and dissertation project. While more short-term research trips will be required to fully complete my dissertation, this fellowship has provided the core documents and other evidence necessary to answer the key questions and goals of my research. My research will help contribute to a growing literature focused on understanding how socialist states integrated into the global economy long before the end of the Cold War and how



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development aid projects in the Global South facilitated this process. As two ostensibly peripheral states in socialist Eastern Europe and in the global economy, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria offer fitting cases to explore the hegemony of development economics in the global Cold War and the extent to which neoliberal economic strategies came to predominate in the West, East, and the South in the latter-half of the twentieth century.

Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

I am currently writing my dissertation based on my research and will most likely need to return to both Serbia and Bulgaria next summer for one to two months of follow-up research. I am planning on presenting my finished research at a number of regional conferences and also at the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies and American Historical Associations conferences in 2019. My research has already produced a publication submission as part of an edited volume. The volume, including my chapter on Yugoslavia's scholarship program for students from developing states, is currently under review by the University of Indiana Press. I plan to complete my dissertation in 2020 and then adapt the dissertation into a book project for publication by 2023.

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