

University Intelligentsia in the Making of Maps: Post-university networks and Political Change in Slovenia and Poland

ESTE ARTÍCULO ES EL RESULTADO DE UNA INVESTIGACIÓN REALIZADA EN ESLOVENIA Y POLONIA DURANTE EL TIEMPO EN QUE EL AUTOR FUE FELLOW EN EL OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (BUDAPEST), ENTRE MARZO DE 2002 Y MARZO DE 2003. EL ARTÍCULO PENETRA EN EL PAPEL QUE UN SECTOR DE INTELLECTUALES POST-UNIVERSITARIOS JUGÓ EN LA INDEPENDENCIA DE ESLOVENIA RESPECTO DE YUGOSLAVIA Y EN LA TRANSICIÓN DE POLONIA DESDE UN COMUNISMO DE PARTIDO ÚNICO HASTA UNA DEMOCRACIA DE PARTIDOS.

PALABRAS CLAVE: INTELECTUALIDAD, TRANSICIÓN POLÍTICA, LIBERTAD DE EXPRESIÓN, MOVIMIENTOS ESTUDIANTILES.

THE PRESENT PAPER IS A RESULT OF RESEARCH DONE IN SLOVENIA AND POLAND WHILE THE AUTHOR WAS A FELLOW OF THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE, BUDAPEST BETWEEN MARCH 2002 AND MARCH 2003. THE PAPER LOOKS INTO THE ROLE OF A SECTION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATED INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE MAKING OF INDEPENDENT SLOVENIA OUT OF COMMUNIST YUGOSLAVIA AND IN THE TRANSITION OF POLAND FROM A ONE-PARTY COMMUNIST RULE TO A MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY.

KEYWORDS: INTELLIGENTSIA, POLITICAL TRANSITION, FREE EXPRESSION, STUDENT MOVEMENTS.

ANIMALS TUTOR THEIR YOUNG ones to learn ways of survival. Humans too engage in this act. From the days of Gurukul learning in India and Sparta's way of developing its citizenry, societies have always had structures of learning. But nothing more elaborate has existed in human memory than the present developed form of the European university which began in the lay (non-religious) learning centres of, what is today, western Europe in the late 12th and 13th centuries. Ever since, the university has shaped knowledge, armed societies and has acted as an important power centre in them, be it a city state, a nation state, an empire with colonies, a post-colonial nation state, a supra-national state or a state with a global imperial structure.

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The university today is 'the knowledge institution'. Like many other 'achievements' of western enlightenment, it has successfully displaced any rival in the area of development and transmission of knowledge.

University is as much a knowledge institution as it is a power centre. Not only that knowledge and power are linked, knowledge networks are linked to power networks. When a group of students are going through a university, they forge a language of communication unique to that group. Often, such groups play pivotal role in the making or shaping of structures of societies at large. Nation state is one such societal entity that universities shape once in a while. The last fifty odd years have seen more nation states being born than the preceding three hundred years. They have been mapped out in Africa, Asia and in central and eastern Europe. In this paper, we will look at two nation states, namely, Poland and Slovenia.

Nation states are expressions of identities. In most cases, such identities are structured through memory. What seems to be an integral feature of a nation might well be a social invention not more than fifty years old. In a way, nations are imagined communities. But the identity of a nation is intrinsic to the nation state. And, in case of central and eastern Europe, national boundaries have been drawn and redrawn so many times in the last hundred years that it is difficult to ascertain where a central European belongs. As Eric Hobsbawm writes: "It is perfectly common for the elderly inhabitant of a central European city to have had, successively, the identity documents of three states"¹. In this drawing of maps in this part of the world, ideas in closed campuses have opened up new national universes of communities.

What is Slovenia today was part of Austro-Hungarian Empire in nineteenth century, was in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the two European world wars and was in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991. Slovenia is an eleven-year old nation state ready to go into a supra-national entity called the European Union in less than two years. But in the formation of this new nation state people educated in the University of Ljubljana have played a critical role. And, this is an ongoing process. Before 1991 –year of Slovenia's independence– and after.

In the 1960s, the Ljubljana University was the only university in Slovenia, which was one of the six republics of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was a one-party state ruled by communists. In the second half of 1960s, like many campuses in Europe and around the world, the Ljubljana University also witnessed student movements. Ideas that questioned authority and *status quo* were in circulation. The radical stance among the students was still influenced by marxist thought. Many of them thought that Yugoslavia and most of

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Outside and Inside History*, Lecture to the students of Central European University, Budapest while opening the academic session of 1993-4. Published in *On History*, London, 1998.

the communist world was not doing justice to people at large. Among ideas that gained currency was Milovan Djilas' concept of 'the new class'². Djilas argued that the communist regimes in different countries have created a new group of exploiters. The students influenced by marxism were fervently opposed to capitalism. So, for example, when the Yugoslav State liberalised its economy in mid-60s, the students were opposed to such a move.

The Ljubljana University, like many other institutions, was rather conservative. However, there were pockets of wonder. One such place was the comparative literature department where a man called Dusan Pirjevec inspired a couple of generations of students to think differently and question the *status quo* of ideas³. These students, like their counterparts in Paris and the then west Berlin, wanted to create their own dreams –dreams where Sartre and Derrida were dream merchants. The late sixties in Ljubljana were exciting idea times for these young minds. That fervour rolled into the early seventies and the philosophy faculty of the university was even taken over by student demonstrations. It was a period when the students in Ljubljana started taking an anti-Belgrade stance. One can trace the beginnings of contemporary Slovene nationalism in this process of student activism in the Ljubljana University. Ivo Vajgl, a former foreign minister of independent Slovenia feels, "We (people in public life in Slovenia today) differ a lot and belong to so many political parties and yet we understand each other, because almost all of us were in the university in Ljubljana in the second half of sixties"⁴.

The 'Ljubljanese Slovene language' that was created by some in late sixties and early seventies rolled on into the seventies and eighties. Marxism stayed on in their minds and so did the ideas that came from Western Europe in the sixties. But the broad socialist orientation did not stop them from questioning a self-professed communist party rule. From the mid-sixties, a stream of dissident journals became a feature of Slovene intellectual life. *Nova Revija*, which was started in 1985, is possibly the most important, in its role in the creation of independent Slovenia⁵. Boris A. Novak, professor of comparative literature at Ljubljana University and one of the founding mem-

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² Milovan Djilas, *The New Class*.

³ Interview with Iztok Osojnik, January 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

⁴ Discussion with Ivo Vajgl, then ambassador of Slovenia to Austria, September, 2001, Vienna, Austria.

⁵ From the 1950s, there were serious dissident journals in Slovenia. *Revija 57*, a literary review that started in 1957 was banned and closed by the government in 1958. It was followed by *Perspektive* (from 1960 to 1964), a critical literary and sociological review covering social and political themes. When *Revija 57* was stopped, after a short "interregnum" at the literary review *Sodobnost* in 1964, the same people moved on and in 1964 took over *Problemi* (established in 1962), a literary and theoretical review, that was often banned but survived all the way till the end of 1980s. In 1988 the journal split into two namely, *Literatura* (which had the literature enthusiasts) and *Problemi* (which became the review for those interested in theory). *Tribuna*, published by the students' association from 1951 was in the late sixties and seventies often very critical and constantly under pressure and even banned at times.

bers of Nova Revija feels that their journal, which was preceded by many similar ones, was just a continuation of the trend of dissidence in Slovene intellectual life⁶. And Peter Vodopivec, professor of history at the Institute for Contemporary History and a founding member of Nova Revija himself, feels it was the activism in their student days in late sixties and later that brought the core group of Nova Revija together. Everyone knew each other from the exciting idea times of the university⁷. Nova Revija was the main platform for dissident ideas all through from 1985 to 1991. In its 57th number published in 1987, Nova Revija brought out a document called 'Contributions to Slovene National Programme'. Students who had known each other from the heady days of sixties were now intellectuals challenging the Yugoslav regime. Slovene nationalism had found its intellectual assertion.

And, when the academic minds behind Nova Revija were putting their act together, students in the Ljubljana University of the first half of 1980s were also engaged in questioning of the idea *status quo* in academics. Vlasta Jalusic, director of the Peace Institute, an independent think tank and NGO in Ljubljana, went to university in those years. She feels that the intellectual hangover of 68 was still there. But, in her view, along with intellectual ideas, popular music like rock was galvanising protest against the state⁸. Jani Sever, editor-in-chief of Mladina, Slovenia's most circulated weekly, also thinks that popular music and punk movement were catalysts in rocking the state. And, of course, so did his own work as a reporter at Mladina. While Nova Revija was the intellectual voice of dissent, it was the formidable investigative journalism of Sever and his colleagues that gave anti-Yugoslavia ideas a popular base. In 1988, a trial began of three journalists of Mladina in a military court. The trial proceedings were in Serbo-Croat. This triggered off a nationalist sentiment among Slovenes. But even reporters had a link with university. Jani Sever went to the university and did law, dropped out and again studied history and in those years, the teacher whose influence brought him close to democracy and freedom of expression was Peter Vodopivec⁹. One can see the idea chain in function. Democracy, pluralism and language were possibly the foundation of Slovene nationalism. And the explosion of ideas in the minds of students at Ljubljana University in the second half of sixties was in more ways than one the foundation stone. Slovenia, one may argue, is a classic case where a closed campus created a nation state with an open society.

Many of those who were thinking against the grain in the years of Yugoslavia, have played important roles in post -1991 Slovenia. Pavel Zgaga

⁶ Interview with Boris A. Novak, March, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

⁷ Interview with Peter Vodopivec, April, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

⁸ Interview with Vlasta Jalusic, April, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

⁹ Interview with Jani Sever, April, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

and his colleagues were involved in ideas relating to educational reform all through the eighties. Zgaga has served a long term as education minister¹⁰. Antone Persak was one of the writers of the Slovene constitution that the Slovene Writers' Association came up with in 1988. Persak has been an M.P. and a very active politician in independent Slovenia. He is still a mayor of a small community¹¹. Joze Mencinger, one of the prominent economists pitched against non-market economy of the Yugoslav days served as finance minister and governor of the central bank. He had fought against Yugoslav socialism and he also found himself pitched against American neo-liberals who he says are "no less of social engineers than the Soviets"¹². Vlasta Jalusic got indoctrinated in pluralist discourse in her university days and now she works for a just world for women and also towards the creation and sustenance of a vibrant civil society¹³.

But Slovenia's new found nationhood is facing crisis. Jani Sever sees a growing political role of church as a challenge to progressive world-views. There is also the issue of joining NATO and the country is deeply divided on that¹⁴. Mencinger sees becoming part of the European Union as an emergency exit¹⁵. Iztok Osojnik, the director of the international literary festival Vilenica, is trying to carry forward his feeling of being a planetary being, a concept he may have picked up from his guru: the legendary teacher Dusan Pirjevec¹⁶. But Slovenes who did not want to break away from Yugoslavia till the last stages, have a nation state today which they are not sure will survive tomorrow. Boris A. Novak feels that it was the existence of a national culture that made Slovenes into Slovenia, and "now that we have the state, we are ready to give it (culture) up. The first budgetary cuts are always on cultural fields". Novak has taken up the cause of Lipizaners, world famous horses found in Lipica, a town in Slovenia near borders with Italy, and is trying to ensure Slovenes do not give up this national symbol¹⁷. As independent Slovenia inches towards the EU world of Brussels, and becomes possibly a nondescript EU member-state, the minds like Novak's would have moved from dissidence of the high-handed Yugoslav communists to the democratic assertion of Slovenian national culture and on to the protection of 'national identities' as expressed in white horses that are as beautiful as the Alpine land that is Slovenia.

As one travels from Slovenia to Poland, one goes from a small country with a population of two million to the largest country in central eastern Eu-

¹⁰ Interview with Pavel Zgaga, April, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

¹¹ Interview with Anton Persak, March, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

¹² Interview with Joze Mencinger, March, 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

¹³ Interview with Vlasta Jalucic, *ibidem*.

¹⁴ Interview with Jani Sever, *ibidem*.

¹⁵ Interview with Joze Mencinger, *ibidem*.

¹⁶ Interview with Iztok Osojnik, *ibidem*.

¹⁷ Interview with Boris A. Novak, *ibidem*.

rope with a population of thirty-eight million. Slovenia was till recently part of Yugoslavia but it never felt that it was a colony of Belgrade. Poland, for much of the post-1945 world, was virtually a Soviet colony. In the words of Maria Krystof Byrski, the first ambassador of non-communist Poland to India, "I was the first ambassador to be appointed by sovereign Poland to sovereign India. Before 1947, India was not independent and between 1945 and 1989, Poland was not independent"¹⁸. But as much as Slovene nationalism fed on anti-Belgrade mood, so did Polish nationalism develop an anti-Moscow stance. And like Slovenia's Ljubljana University, in Poland too, the Warsaw University's students from the second half of sixties and later played a key role in the movement against authoritarian rule. But a critical difference in the two stories is the participation and in a way leadership of the workers in the anti-communist movement. Unlike Slovenia, in Poland, workers revolted and the anti-party intelligentsia and the workers' movements joined hands against the communist dictatorship. The Solidarity movement that rocked the communist state, perhaps the only major independent workers' movement in the 20th Christian century, owed a lot to the work of a small group of dissident intelligentsia who grew out of the 68 movement in Warsaw University and went on to form KOR –Committee for Protection of Workers. As in Slovenia, here too, a small group of dedicated students went on to become the core of democratic opposition to an authoritarian regime.

Between 1945 and 1989, Poland was an authoritarian communist party state. In that political climate the university was possibly the only institution where some non-conformists, people who did not toe the party line, could function. In regimes where free expression is not tolerated, freedom loving independent minds find ways and means to exert their freedom. There was a tendency among some students to choose courses in the natural sciences because there was not much of a party line in those fields. Maria Krystof Byrski who studied Indology at the Warsaw University from 1955 to 1960 because, among other things, it was not a politicised subject in communist Poland, says, "People who liked history read hydro-geology because they wanted to take a subject that was free of politics"¹⁹. This clearly was a way of maintaining distance from the party and thus an ability to nurture dissent.

Like quite a few other European universities Warsaw University too was a centre of student activism in the second half of sixties. There were young Marxist's discussion clubs in the university. These were organised by socialist youth bodies. Two persons, Kuron and Mozelevski got arrested in 1964

¹⁸ Interview with Maria Krystof Byrski, May, 2002, Warsaw, Poland.

¹⁹ Interview with Maria Krystof Byrski, *ibidem*.

because they were perceived to be against the communist party. This arrest stirred up protest on the Warsaw University campus. They were being tried in disciplinary university court. But, at the same time, an alliance was established between professors and assistants (doctoral students). Jan Lipynski who studied mathematics at Warsaw University between 1963 and 1968 feels, "Our greatest success was when we collected more than 1000 signatures protesting against the authority's attempt to malign Adam Michnik". The disciplinary university court had accused Michnik, who was of Jewish origin of creating disturbances in the university. As the students became more and more politically active between 1964 and 1968, the Polish regime started a campaign against Jews. They tried to single out Jewish students in the university and propagated that they were agents of an Israeli Zionist conspiracy to topple the communist regime in Poland²⁰. Anti-Semitism's appeal was so deep in the Polish national collective that the communist party could use this as a method of suppressing dissent. They tried to harass Jews all across Poland but the students on the Warsaw University campus were united in protest. '68 in Warsaw was unique in that the students fought against a sinister campaign by the party. Even at this stage the core group of dissident students believed in marxism. They thought of reforming the state, breaking the state or creating a new one on liberal-democratic agenda was a far cry.

But nationalistic feelings and an anti-Moscow stance was rising. Adam Miskewic is one of Poland's great poets. He died around 1865. In 1968, a drama written by Miskewic was being staged in Warsaw. The communist party wanted to stop it because the drama had a bit of anti-Russian messages. The dissident students took up the cause of this play and popular support was in favour of the students. This was one of the moments of Polish intelligentsia's assertion of Polish-ness as distinct from being a society under Soviet tutelage.

But, according to Lipynski, '68 was a failure²¹. It is true that the student movement did not accomplish much. But it brought together a group of students and professors who were to take a keen and sustained interest in building up democratic opposition to the communist government. Politically motivated students became gradually involved in the workers' movements. There was a growing realisation in the small dissident intelligentsia that the university world cannot change Poland. They felt that for the change to happen they would need workers. In 1970, workers in the northern port city of Gdansk revolted. The workers went on to break the local communist party headquarters. People from the students' movement went to Gdansk and tried to talk to the workers. And this was just the beginning. All

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²⁰ Interview with Jan Lipynski, May, 2002, Warsaw, Poland.

²¹ Interview with Jan Lipynski, *ibidem*.

through the 1970s, there were strikes after strikes by workers in Gdansk, in Radom and many other places. Every where the intelligentsia went to lend political and moral support. In 1976, the KOR –Committee for the Defence of Workers– was formed. There were people like Lipynski who edited a magazine called Robotnik-The Worker, people like Miroslaw Chohecki who ran the publishing house NOWA and many others –all comrades from the student movement in the Warsaw University campus²². It was the untiring work of these young intellectuals that helped the workers to mobilise themselves.

And all this finally exploded in the Solidarnosc movement in 1980. Led by Lech Walesa, this legend of workers’ struggle erupted at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk. The entire port was taken over by the workers. The church and the pope who is Polish came out in support of Solidarnosc. The whole nation was with Solidarnosc. The communist authorities did not know what to do. But in 1981, the reactionary authorities clamped martial law. The entire period of 1981 to 1989, Poland was under martial law. And in this period the anti-party intelligentsia gave all support to workers of Solidarnosc. There were committees within Solidarnosc that were entirely the brainwork of this small dissident intelligentsia. The students who had protested against anti-Semitism had grown politically to be the intellectual and political bulwark of a popular trade union movement which finally brought down the rulers in Warsaw. In 1987 and 1989, round tables were held between the communist authority and Solidarnosc. And the authorities finally relented and paved way for a non-communist Poland.

The students who had dreamt of democracy in late sixties finally achieved it two decades later. But it is the work of a handful of students who helped nurture and develop strong and determined workers’ movement. Poland is a unique case of social activism. The new nation of non-communist Poland is as much the work of workers as it is of the dissident students. Rarely has the intelligentsia and workers worked so closely. In the making of new Polish nationalism, there was an anti-Moscow stance and along with it there was craving for freedom of expression. And, most importantly, the realisation, that the radical intelligentsia has to always extend their support to workers. As Wlodimierz Zagorski-Ostojka, Director of the Institute of Biophysics and Bio-chemistry recalls, “We, the people in this institute and elsewhere were always sending help to the workers’ families whenever we got to know the state was taking people to jail and so on”²³. All along the years of communist repression workers and the dissident intelligentsia fought side by side. The new identity of Poland was forged in this struggle for de-

²² Interview with Miroslaw Chohecki, May, 2002, Warsaw, Poland.

²³ Interview with Wlodimierz Zagorski-Ostojka, May, 2002, Warsaw, Poland

mocracy and better life fought by the university workers and factory workers alike.

Poland and Slovenia differ on the ways of anti-authoritarian struggle. In Slovenia intellectual discourse was much more organised and the idea of democratic structure was worked out clearly by the intelligentsia before it gained independence. In Poland, the academic discourse on freedom was not elaborate but the cooperation between the intelligentsia and workers was dense. Both Warsaw University and Ljubljana University acted as seedbeds of non-violent revolutions. The corridors outside classrooms created an idea universe that was to challenge and help in overthrowing systems in corridors of power in two societies that were under communist party rule. ■

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