

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties by Radina Vučetić and John K. Cox

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Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties. By Radina Vučetić. Translated by John K. Cox. Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2018. 360 pp.

Six years after its original publication, Radina Vučetić's popular study *Coca-Cola Socialism* is now available to broader audiences thanks to a new English-language edition. Viewed by Vučetić as one of the characteristic processes of the twentieth century, this detailed cultural-historical work offers an analysis of the trajectories and influence of Americanization on culture and everyday life in Socialist Yugoslavia in the 1960s. The study is framed by the definition of Americanization as a form of cultural imperialism through which the United States left a global impact primarily in the spheres of popular culture, mass consumption, and everyday life. Moreover, as Vučetić, persuasively argues, Americanization encompassed transmission and reception of cultural influences, with popular culture used as a political tool in domestic and foreign policies both in the US and Socialist Yugoslavia. In the Yugoslav case in particular, the character of Americanization and its appropriation is conceptualized through the often used historiographical notion of the country's in-between or hybrid position in the Cold War period, which Vučetić further includes in the broader "contradictory" context of the 1960s.

In light of these guiding concepts, in the four chapters of the book, Vučetić maps various high, mass, and pop cultural phenomena which were either imported from the United States or which emerged in Yugoslavia under American influence. The first two chapters focus on cinema and music, primarily jazz and rock 'n' roll, while the third chapter offers insights into modern art movements, such as abstract expressionism and pop art, and modern and experimental theater. The final chapter overviews a range of phenomena related to the topic of everyday life, from cartoons and comics, popular literature, fashion, hippie subculture, and television to Coca-Cola and other elements of consumer culture, such as the supermarket.

In the similarly structured chapters, Vučetić analyzes the use of these cultural and consumer products in both American and Yugoslav political and diplomatic agendas during the Cold War. On the one hand, the United States actively promoted its cultural presence in Socialist Yugoslavia, for example, by setting an artificially low price for the importation of Hollywood movies into Yugoslavia, which then significantly contributed to their popularity. On the other hand,

Yugoslav authorities equally accepted and institutionally endorsed American cultural imports through festivals, trade fairs, and the media. Vučetić completes the picture of these dynamics with a discussion of Yugoslav cultural phenomena which emerged under American influence – such as the so-called Partisan Western –, or with others that were characterized more generally by formal and intellectual tendencies similar to the global modern cultural production of the 1960s. In addition, a sketch of similar cases from other Eastern Bloc countries (such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany) and the indication of the continuity of certain phenomena from the interwar period complements the analysis with a useful, albeit rudimentary comparative dimension.

The argument that Vučetić makes on the basis of this extensive catalogue of examples is that while the diffusion and consumption of American cultural and consumer products was fully supported by the state-socialist authorities, the locally emerging modern artistic practices, primarily in the case of the critically oriented Black Wave cinema and experimental theater, were targets of censorship and repression. Vučetić's explanation for these tendencies is based on her understanding of the agendas of foreign and domestic policies both in the case of the US and Socialist Yugoslavia. For the United States, the promotion of cultural and consumer products was in general part of its propaganda campaigns during the Cold War. More specifically, in the case of Socialist Yugoslavia, it was part of an attempt to Americanize Yugoslav society and consequently use it as a Trojan horse in the struggle against East European state socialism. For Socialist Yugoslavia, the open acceptance of American influences was useful in creating a modern and liberal image of Yugoslavia as a more successful state-socialist system. However, as Vučetić claims, in the cases of cultural phenomena that were formally perhaps similar to the accepted American or Western products, but from the perspective of their content critically pointed against the Yugoslav state, the authorities were far less interested in maintaining the liberal image and more in protecting the system through repression and censorship.

Vučetić describes the conflicting situation created by these tendencies of the Yugoslav authorities as the schizophrenic reality of the Yugoslav system, and she uses it as a basis for the concluding statement, according to which the paradigm through which Socialist Yugoslavia can be best understood is summed up in the symbolic image of the two-faced Roman deity Janus. This claim concerning the Yugoslav state's Janus-like character (i.e. as being both in the East and the West) represents an attempt to redefine the existing scholarly perception of the in-between position of Socialist Yugoslavia during the Cold War. Without any

more particular nuances, the readers are, however, left with the impression that the final conclusion simply echoes the starting point of the analysis.

Theoretical and analytical engagement is the place where Vučetić's study seems to struggle the most. Concepts such as Americanization and the in-between position of Socialist Yugoslavia are taken without any critical distance, although the author herself provides a basis for their reconsideration. Firstly, examples of similarity with the Eastern Bloc and continuity from the interwar period significantly challenge the seemingly unique in-between status of Socialist Yugoslavia and thereby the character of Americanization during the Cold War. Secondly, although admitting that scholars mostly agree that the actual effects of Americanization are difficult to measure, Vučetić nevertheless draws sweeping conclusions concerning the United States' success in Americanizing Yugoslav society by transforming the everyday lives and worldviews of Yugoslav citizens through the promotion of Western values, such as freedom and democracy. In this regard, Vučetić seems to want to affirm that the US Cold War propaganda machine was successful in achieving its goal of diffusing liberal and capitalist values in state-socialist countries through cultural and consumer products. In this way, however, Vučetić's analysis disregards the complexity of messages conveyed by cultural media and traps these messages within the prevailing Cold War dichotomy of Western affluence and freedom versus the gray and repressed state-socialist reality.

Given the distance in time between the original publication and the translation, these conclusions have come to seem particularly problematic. Nevertheless, *Coca-Cola Socialism* appeared at a moment when there was no similar research on the cultural dimension of the political relationship between Socialist Yugoslavia and the United States. By covering numerous examples of American products and influences in Yugoslav culture and everyday life during the 1960s, *Coca-Cola Socialism* without doubt represents a pioneering contribution to the picture of the cultural and political landscape of Socialist Yugoslavia in this period. Moreover, the study gives shape to the broader story of relations between Socialist Yugoslavia, the United States, and to some extent Western Europe in the spheres of cultural diplomacy and commerce. The English edition of the study, therefore, will provide a larger audience of young researchers a much needed basis for further excursions into the complex world of Cold War interactions between Central and East European socialist states and the West in the second half of the twentieth century.

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