

(Post)socialist Meontopolitics

The Sava River and Necroecological Modernization of Belgrade

ANDRIJA FILIPOVIĆ

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This article deals with the analysis of what has been constructed as a double modernization of Belgrade, during the socialist (1945–1991), and postsocialist periods (1991–), as well as the environmental consequences these processes on the left and right side of the Sava River between the Branko’s ridge and the Gazela Bridge. The area is significant because of the spaces of socialist-, and postsocialist modernizations: the Sava River Park, and the Belgrade Waterfront, which sit directly across each other. In both cases, modernization has entailed meontopolitics – an introduction of non-being into the existing relationality through territorial fragmentation, production of conflict zones and intensification of space use. Each period and its kind of modernization assumed destruction of local non-human environments as their condition of possibility leading to (post)socialist necroecologies, a historically produced environmental condition inimical to some human and non-human actors as the defining feature of the environmental condition of both socialist-, and contemporary Belgrade.

Key Words *Sava River; Belgrade; Postsocialism; Necroecology; Meontopolitics*

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Contact *Univerzitet Singidunum u Beogradu; andrija.filipovic@fmk.edu.rs*

Introduction

The subject of this article is a relatively short stretch of the Sava River between the Gazela Bridge (*most Gazela*) and Branko’s Bridge (*Brankov most*). I take the left-, and right banks of the Sava River between these bridges as examples of long processes that have been underway in Belgrade, but also globally.¹ I will explore the consequences of what has been constructed in public discourse as the modernization of Belgrade – the first wave of modernization beginning after World War II during Tito’s Yugoslavia, while the second one is currently taking place. Both socialist and postsocialist waves of modernization are grounded in what I refer to as *meontopolitics* – in various ways in which individual beings and environments are turned into non-being, that is, devastated and destroyed. With the *longue durée* of these so-called modernizing processes in mind, one can talk about *postsocialist necroecologies*, historically produced environmental conditions inimical to

¹ For an example of similar processes occurring outside of Serbia see PÁL, Viktor: *View on Nature : The State and the Environment in Modern Hungary*. In: MÖRNER, Nina (ed.): *Ecological Concerns in Transition : A Comparative Study on Responses to Waste and Environmental Destruction in the Region*. Stockholm 2023, pp. 144–151.

some human and non-human actors, as the defining feature of contemporary Belgrade. The left-, and right banks of the Sava River between these two bridges are chosen also because of the complex histories of the Sava River itself. If we move closer to the Sava River's estuary with the Danube, which is a couple of hundred meters downstream the Branko's Bridge, we will encounter a more direct influence of World War II, as the space below the Kalemegdan Fortress was cleared and used by the occupying German forces. It was left to become overgrown after the war and it was only relatively recently turned into an urban park. On the other hand, if we move upstream, above the Gazela Bridge, we will encounter the Sava River embankments built at the time when Novi Beograd (New Belgrade), a municipality of Belgrade constructed after the World War II between the Sava River and the Danube, was being constructed in order to protect it from flooding. These embankments are now endangered by illegally constructed weekend houses of the wealthy, which phenomenon also closely tied to the Belgrade Waterfront and investment urbanism issues discussed in the third section of the article.

By analyzing the effects of "modernization" on this stretch of the Sava River through the concepts of meontopolitics and postsocialist necroecologies, it becomes apparent that territorial fragmentation, production of conflict zones and intensification of the exploitation of space have been driving forces of environmental destruction throughout the socialist-, and postsocialist periods. Comparing the left bank of the Sava River with New Belgrade stretching in the background and the Belgrade Waterfront on the right bank with the city center in the background, it can be seen that meontopolitics have intensified during certain periods. While New Belgrade, destructive toward the environment as it was while being constructed, was built incorporating large tracts of land for common good, such as urban greenery for leisure and recreation with open access for everyone during the socialist period of Yugoslavia (though still with necroecological effects). One distinctive characteristic of the Belgrade Waterfront is the density of buildings and other constructions that constitute its built environment. Each square meter is planned leaving little to no free space for anything or anyone else. Similar patterns of use of space are to be found throughout Belgrade in the postsocialist wave of investment urbanism, especially after 2012, where apartment buildings at least five stories high have been replacing family houses. New Belgrade is also changing in that regard, with one of the highest high-rises in Belgrade built in recent years together with apartment blocks for the more affluent individuals given the price of square meter (A Bloc and West 65). Other parts of Belgrade are also undergoing their own versions of meontopolitical treatment which produces conditions for the appearance of necroecologies. At the peripheries of the city, whole new neighborhoods are rising, consisting of densely built apartment complexes, (as for example in Višnjička banja and Stepa Stepanović neighborhood) and replacing agricultural land or grass fields producing necroecologies.

Necroecologies and Meontopolitics

Necroecologies are produced through meontopolitics. The concept of meontopolitics names techniques-, and technologies of introducing a non-being into a particular field of relationality. I have coined the term by putting together *ontopolitics* and prefix *me-* which signifies negation (*me on* meaning non-being in Greek). *Ontopolitics* is a term used in what is known in contemporary critical theory as new materialism, relational ontolo-

gies, posthumanism, speculative realism or object-oriented ontologies. The point of the neologism *ontopolitics* is that ontology and politics, or for that matter any other regional form such as aesthetics or epistemology, are impossible to separate on the grounds that [...] *political interpretation is ontopolitical: its fundamental presumptions fix possibilities, distribute explanatory elements, generate parameters within which an ethic is elaborated, and center (or decenter) assessments of identity, legitimacy, and responsibility.*² The point is that, within these theories, the meaning of politics is changed. As Chandler writes [...] *politics is no longer ‘all about us’ in the sense of what we might think a just or equitable world might be and instead ‘all about the world itself’.*³ Political projects are equally ontological descriptions of the world and vice versa, as both material-semiotic formations are grounded in a notion of relation. Ontopolitics insists on the preservation and production of relationality in contradistinction to non-relationality that is introduced through environmental devastation.

Non-relationality and meontopolitics gain more of an explanatory power regarding the environmental destruction than ontopolitics and relational ontologies. As Neyrat notices,⁴ if the central claim is that everything is relational then the issue of breaking apart what is related appears. What is needed is non-being, which is unthinkable from the point of relational ontologies. The concept of meontopolitics does exactly that. It signifies introduction of non-being, conditions of *impossibility* for relationality, *disabling* becomings, the ways in which devastation, slow death and extinction are introduced in the processes of relational becomings. Meontopolitics pertains to the ways non-relations are produced, or the ways in which already existing/becoming relations are broken off, diminished and extinguished. Meontopolitics thus encompasses various material-semiotic assemblages in the range from the Serbian government and the state laws, to pre-postsocialist local environmental-, and social histories that produced current state of affairs, to the flux of transnational capital and all concrete extractivist technologies and techniques for environmental destruction employed on site – such as territorial fragmentation, production of conflict zones and intensification of space use.

The prefix *necro-* in the term necroecologies points toward Achille Mbembe's concept of necropower, which he defines as governing through death, in contradistinction to Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, which is understood as governing the living through shaping of life.⁵ In Mbembe's work, those who are governed by death are exclusively human beings, those who are racialized as non-white. In his words, he deals with those figures of governing, whose project is [...] *the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations.*⁶ Non-human animals and other living beings are not considered in any substantial way by Mbembe despite the fact that necropower, according to his analysis, governs through

² CONNOLLY, William E.: *The Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis 1995, p. 1.

³ CHANDLER, David: *Ontopolitics in the Anthropocene : An Introduction to Mapping, Sensing, Hacking*. London – New York 2018, p. 20.

⁴ NEYRAT, Frédéric: *The Unconstructable Earth : An Ecology of Separation*. New York 2019. For further on what the authors call “negative spaces (voids, abysses, absences), affects (vulnerabilities, sad passions, incapacities, mortality) and politics (impasses, refusals, irreparabilities)”, see DEKEYSER, Thomas et al.: Negativity : Space, Politics and Affects. *Cultural Geographies* 29, 2022, no. 1, pp. 5–21.

⁵ FOUCAULT, Michel: *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the College de France 1978–1979*. Cham 2008.

⁶ MBEMBE, Achille: *Necropolitics*. Durham – London 2019, p. 68, italics in original.

various spatial technologies such as plantation, colony, and apartheid. Or, more precisely in his analysis of colonial occupation, [...] *seizing, delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area* [...], which [...] *mounted to production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves* [...] *resource extraction*.⁷ As Mbembe shows, the example of Palestine [...] *presents three major characteristics concerning the working of the specific structure of terror* [...] that is necropower, and those are territorial fragmentation (*to render all movement impossible*), transformation of underground and airspace into conflict zones (*appropriation of land, water, and airspace resources*), and the state of siege by sealing off entire populations.⁸ All of these technologies of necropower directly affect the non-human animals and plants, limiting their habitats by disallowing them to move freely or destroying their habitats entirely through bombing and other military and police actions.

With the concept of necroecologies, thus, I want to underline that it is not only humans who are governed through death, nor that it is only humans who live in death-worlds produced by necropower. Mbembe defines death-worlds as [...] *new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead*.⁹ But again, I argue, entire environments are produced as death-worlds, and those environments necessarily include other living-, and non-living beings. In other words, non-human animals and plants can be seen as “living dead” in Mbembe’s sense of the word as well, especially so in those “living conditions” that are shaped by necropower through territorial fragmentation, conflict zones and state of siege. Moreover, even the difference between the living and the non-living is produced through geontopower, a form of late liberal capitalistic governing, closely related to necropower and necropolitical technologies of government in the sense that what is considered living and what non-living depends on the possibility of surplus value extraction.¹⁰ The concept of necroecologies is, in a sense, a more encompassing concept than the concepts of necropower and necropolitics, pointing toward a necessity to take into account the ways in which animals, plants, and other (non)living beings are governed through various spatial technologies, death and maiming,¹¹ and, in the final instance, through extinction as the ultimate consequence of necropolitical governing through death. With this in mind, I define necroecologies as naturalcultural¹² (a)biotic assemblages which, due to the historically and complexly sedimented effects of forms of governing, produce environmental conditions that are inimical to some human-, and non-human actors, and lead to their immediate or slow death and, finally, to extinction.¹³

⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 79–82.

⁹ Ibid., p. 92, italics in original.

¹⁰ POVINELLI, Elizabeth A.: *Geontologies : A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Durham – London 2016.

¹¹ PUAR, Jasbir K.: *The Right to Maim : Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham – London 2017.

¹² The concept of naturalcultural aims to trouble ontological and all other kinds of hierarchical divisions between culture and nature that came to be present in the West. Those hierarchical divisions, as much as those between humans and animals/plants and living and non-living, are effects of bio/necropower and their technologies of government. See MALONE, Nicolas – OVENDEN, Kathryn: Natureculture. In: FUENTES, Agustin (ed.): *The International Encyclopedia of Primatology*. S. I. 2016. Online, cited on 28 April 2023, accessible at <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119179313.wbprim0135>.

¹³ For other conceptualizations of the term ‘necroecology’ see CAVANAGH, Connor Joseph – HIMMELFARB, David: Much in Blood and Money : Necropolitical Ecology on the Margins of the Uganda Protectorate. *Antipode* 47, 2014, no. 1, pp. 55–73; THAKUR, Gautam Basu: Necroecology : Undead, Dead, and Dying on the Limits of

Territorial Fragmentation: The Sava River Park

As it can be seen in the pictures taken by the author from the Old Sava Bridge, located between Branko's Bridge and Gazela Bridge, the park on the left bank of the Sava River is made for strolling and other leisure activities along the river (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Along the bank, on the one hand, there is a view toward the old city (and now Belgrade Waterfront too), and on the other, there is a line of trees with several monuments offering a green reprieve compared to the tedium of urban concrete. Just behind the trees there is a small block of low apartment houses present there from the times when New Belgrade was being constructed in the 1950s. Further behind is New Belgrade proper with its blocks and apartment multistory buildings. This thin strip of urban greenery along the left bank of Sava River, I argue, is as much a necroecological product of meontopolitical technologies of modernization as is contemporary Belgrade Waterfront directly across the river from it, even though they could not seem more different. While claimed that the Sava River Park was built for supposedly beneficial purposes – leisure and recreation – it has materialized as a necroecological effect of decades-long modernization processes.

The Sava River used to be a borderland between the Habsburg-, and the Ottoman Empires during the nineteenth century, and then between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia until 1918. The only settlement on the left side of the river during that time was Zemun, which is now one of the districts of Belgrade. On the right side is the old city. Between the old city and Zemun, besides the Sava River, there were swamplands, marshy floodplains that created a local environment together with the river. There were early plans of taking over the marshland for the purpose of turning it into an urban settlement such as Singidunum Novissima in 1922 by Rudolph Perco, Erwin Ilz and Erwin Bock from Vienna. Local architect Đorđe Kovaljeski included a similar idea in his General Urban Plan from 1924, while Czech architect Jan Dubový presented an idea for a garden city that would connect Belgrade and Zemun.¹⁴ These plans were never realized, but a whole new municipality called New Belgrade began coming into being from 1950. It was created as a planned city and became famous for its brutalist architecture. It is now the most populated municipality in Belgrade. It was built in several waves, most important of which were the master plans of 1950, 1962 and 1972, which contain elements of meontopolitical technologies such as territorial fragmentation, production of conflict zones, and intensification of space use.

From the very beginning, the socialist Yugoslav idea of New Belgrade was tightly connected to the values of Yugoslav socialism and its project of economic-, and social modernization. As Brigitte Le Normand quotes Milorad Panić-Surep at the beginning of her book: *New houses, roads, parks will be there. And the life of man improved for one thousand years. When we meet we shall not see the river, nor remember the marshes and coppices; our meetings will be novel from greeting to sunset, changed to the core by a socialist revolution.*¹⁵ And after casting the relatively untouched ecosystem as “marshes and

the Colony. *Victorian Studies* 58, 2016, no. 2, pp. 202–212; *Critical Art Ensemble: Aesthetics, Necropolitics, and Environmental Struggle*. New York 2018; TRUSCELLO, Michael: *Infrastructural Brutalism : Art and the Necropolitics of Infrastructure*. Cambridge 2020.

¹⁴ See LE NORMAND, Brigitte: *Designing Tito's Capital : Urban Planning, Modernism, and Socialism in Belgrade*. Pittsburgh 2014, p. 63.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vi..



Figure 1: A view of the left bank from the Old Sava Bridge. Author's archive.



Figure 2: A closer view of the left bank from the Old Sava Bridge. Author's archive.

coppices”, he connects its future destruction with no less than the “center of brotherly union of Yugoslav peoples”: *But the foundations of this are ancient, very ancient. Since times unknown, this triangle defined by two rivers and opened to infinity on the third side, the white town, invisible and always present Belgrade, inseparable from the town on the hill. From now on, this will be the heart that vigorously pumps life far to the North and deep into the South, the center of the brotherly union of Yugoslav peoples.*¹⁶ First and foremost, New Belgrade was conceptualized through modernist functionalist urbanism inspired by Le Corbusier’s Athens Charter, which argued for planned construction of the built environment in such a way as to enable the most practical everyday life with the help of technology.¹⁷ Socialist version of European-, and global modernism was somewhat different, especially because Yugoslavia cast itself as a third way between the East and the West with its self-governing socialism. New Belgrade was to become a showcase of self-governing socialist ability to not only govern human subjects, but to dominate over “nature” in all of its form. Whichever version of New Belgrade was dominant in the given decade of Yugoslavia, it remained a place of intensive environmental destruction, even though as Normand notes that the socialist regime emphasized efficient use of “natural resources”. With its aim of [...] *modernizing society, civilizing, equalizing social relations, maximizing the use of resources, and rationalizing and industrializing production [...]*,¹⁸ Yugoslav socialist regime paid little attention to what actually constituted local environments. Or more precisely, its environmental concerns were of secondary importance compared to economic interests, and were only dealt with when pollution became chronic and an obvious danger to local communities.¹⁹

New Belgrade has been changing its ideological role during the decades of socialist Yugoslavia. At first, it was cast as a projection of egalitarian workers’ paradise at the beginning of construction, and then became a consumers’ paradise in the 1970s with the socio-economic change toward self-governing and market socialism based on consumption.²⁰ Though the Athens Charter was not implemented directly and though the master plans changed throughout the planning cycles due to the changing socio-economic circumstances, what remained is the highly planned nature of New Belgrade, which can be seen in its grid-like layout of blocks containing apartment-, and official buildings connected by transportation and other kinds of infrastructure. This is where territorial fragmentation is most visible, as these blocks were carved out of marshland that has been drained and thus destroyed before becoming a construction site. More precisely, a highly complex ecosystem was made into a single-, and environmentally simple construction site through various technologies including drainage, paving, etc., after which it was possible to undertake territorial fragmentation. Territorial fragmentation of New Belgrade also produced conflict zones in several aspects. One such zone produced conflicts within

¹⁶ Ibidem. The old city across the river was cast as “congested, unhygienic, chaotic” and the blame was squarely placed on the capitalist regime of former Yugoslavia. See *ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 63–72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ See JANCAR, Barbara: *Environmental Management in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia : Structure and Regulation in Federal Communist States*. Durham – London 1987.

²⁰ See DIMITRIJEVIĆ, Branislav: *Potrošeni socijalizam : Kultura, konzumerizam i društvena imaginacija u Jugoslaviji (1950–1974)*. Beograd 2016; VUČETIĆ, Radina: *Koka-kola socijalizam*. Beograd 2012; DUDA, Igor: *U potrazi za blagostanjem : O povijesti dokolice i potrošačkog društva u Hrvatskoj 1950-ih i 1960-ih*. Zagreb 2004.

what can be called multispecies relationality; first and foremost with mosquitoes given the abundance of standing water,²¹ but also other plant-, and animal species that were, in the final resolution of the conflict, completely removed from the area. What remained is left as a part of replanted urban green zones, such as the left bank of the Sava River, but also many others such as small parks and tracts of greenery between the buildings throughout the blocks. Another zone produced conflicts with what is usually thought of as non-living parts of the local ecosystem, such as the Sava River flooding, necessitating the construction of embankment along the riverside.²² Dredgers were used for collecting the sand from the bottom of the river, which was yet another way to upset the river ecosystem and kill off animal-, and plant species that lived there.

Floodplains and marshlands on the left side of the Sava River were drained and new building technologies and materials were applied in order to create the new municipality, a new city even, given the number of people that kept on increasing with each passing year. The territory of New Belgrade was fragmented in such a way as to include large tracts of urban greenery between blocks of multistory apartment buildings. Compared to other Yugoslav cities, urban green belts in New Belgrade were not constructed for the purpose of protection from factory pollution, as there were no factories in this new neighborhood. New Belgrade was planned and built as a residential settlement with several administrative buildings erected to stand as symbols of political power. The trees were planted between apartment buildings and streets, and numerous smaller parks and playgrounds were constructed. The largest parks were along the southern part of New Belgrade on the border with Bežanijska Kosa, another neighborhood, and along the Sava River. As noted, the Sava River Park was built on a previously destroyed marshland in order for inhabitants of New Belgrade to have a space where to spend their free time. The Sava River Park was created for the purpose of leisure, “essential to the holistic development of the individual”,²³ and it was created through high-quality landscaping, inclusion of sculptures and various species of trees, flowers and grasses.

While New Belgrade enabled a very easy access to green spaces, so much so that it was called “city in greenery”, “city in the forest” and “parky city”,²⁴ parks of New Belgrade are one aspect of meontopolitical technologies – territorial fragmentation – where one environment together with its non-human animals and plants is completely destroyed in order for another one – produced by humans – to come into its place leading to species diversity impoverishment and even their extinction. The Sava River Park is thus directly tied to the whole assemblage of self-governing socialism and its modernization ideology

²¹ Belgrade, because of its geographical position between two rivers and containing numerous floodplains and marshlands, has been an endemic area for malaria as far back as written records can show, and it can be understood as a space of permanent production of conflict between human and non-human actors. See RADOVA-NOVIĆ, Zoran M.: Malaria u Srbiji u XIX veku i rad na njenom suzbijanju. *Acta Historica Medicinæ, Pharmacis, Veterinæ* XI, 1971, no. 1–2, pp. 37–43.

²² That embankment is presently in danger of being destroyed by illegal weekend houses constructed by wealthy individuals and is often a cause for mass protests in New Belgrade organized by the citizens initiative Sava Embankment. The illegal construction and all the controversies surrounding it should be understood as a part and parcel of processes discussed in the second section of the article. It should also be understood as another form of necroecological conflict zone. For the latest action see FONET: *Održan protest “Buna protiv mafije” : Bahata manjina uništava vodoizvoriste*. S. I. 2022. Online, cited on 13 October 2022, accessible at <https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/odrzan-protest-buna-protiv-mafije-bahata-manjina-unistava-vodoizvoriste/>.

²³ LE NORMAND, B.: *Designing Tito’s Capital*, p. 118.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

that is embodied in the construction of New Belgrade. Additional necroecological layer, one in more detail discussed in the next section, is the postsocialist investment urbanism, which reflects on already necroecologically produced urban green spaces in New Belgrade as well. While not affecting the Sava River Park yet, though those low-story houses mentioned at the beginning may become targets for redevelopment like in other Belgrade neighborhoods, shrinkage of those green spaces constructed on the basis of destroyed ecosystems for leisure and recreation is well documented. As New Belgrade is still being built, there are new blocks being added, the latest one being the so-called West 65 completed in 2022. It contains 8 % of green space, compared to earlier built A Block from 2019 which contains 14 %, while Block 20 contains 23 %, Block 70a from 1985 contains 64 %, and Block 45 from 1972 contains 71 %.²⁵ Hence, parks of New Belgrade, including the one along the Sava River, are products of meontopolitical modernization of Belgrade, of modernization that has been creating urban (post)socialist necroecologies.

Conflict Zones and Intensification: Belgrade Waterfront

The park along the left bank of the Sava River was effectively built through territorial fragmentation of New Belgrade with attendant conflict zones arising between humans and non-humans. Belgrade Waterfront was constructed through the production of conflict zones even before the actual construction work began, as described below, while territorial fragmentation was of secondary importance. As the right side of the Sava River is still currently being turned into the so-called Belgrade Waterfront (see Figure 3), a product of both domestic and international capital, what led to its materialization was a series of material-semiotic movements causing numerous conflicts between humans, and between humans and non-humans in order to produce a densely built and populated homogenized space for living, leisure, and consumption of the (newly) rich. The official reason, given by the various government bodies, for redevelopment circulating in public discourse is economic growth through consumption, and to the point, Belgrade Waterfront contains what is described as the largest shopping mall in the Balkans together with other commercial venues. Eagle Hills, the main investor company in the construction, proclaims: *Belgrade Waterfront takes urban renewal to new heights – a smart city for a future that combines commerce, culture, and community.*²⁶ Government's aim is to "modernize" the socio-economic state of affairs in contemporary Serbia mostly based on production, but it reveals meontopolitical technologies which created the local necroecological environment. These are the production of conflict zones and intensification of space use (see Figure 4).

The large redevelopment at Belgrade Waterfront is, according to Vera Backović [...] *a combination of commercial and residential luxury space. It is a foreign investment project for which the state provided land and offered clear support. If realized on the planned scale, it will transform that part of the city through the process of profitable gentrification. The*

²⁵ SIMIĆ, Ivan: *Investitorski urbanizam vs klimatske promene : Kako novobeogradski blokovi ostaju bez zelenila*. S. l. 2022. Online, cited on 13 October 2022, accessible at <https://klima101.rs/investitorski-urbanizam-zelenilo-novi-beograd/>.

²⁶ Quoted in KOELEMALJ, Jörn – JANKOVIĆ, Stefan: Behind the Frontline of the Belgrade Waterfront : A Reconstruction of the Early Implementation Phase of a Transnational Real Estate Development Project. In: PETROVIĆ, Jelisaveta – BACKOVIĆ, Vera (eds.): *Experiencing Postsocialist Capitalism : Urban Changes and Challenges in Serbia*. Belgrade 2019, p. 46.



Figure 3: A view of Belgrade Waterfront from the Old Sava Bridge. Author's archive.



Figure 4: The density of construction at Belgrade Waterfront. Author's archive.

space will only be affordable for members of the elite and foreign citizens.²⁷ The project has been controversial from the very beginning, for reasons including the influx of overseas capital that destructively altered the local landscape and, with it, decades-old local ways of life, producing conflict zones throughout the entire city of Belgrade. It has been seen as a project of national importance by the political establishment, while as an architectural, urbanistic, and environmental monstrosity by its opponents. It contains the tallest high-rise in Belgrade, the largest shopping mall in the Balkans, and it will be one of the densely populated neighborhoods once all the apartment buildings are finished and inhabited.

Belgrade Waterfront is being built in the space that used to be, again, a marshy riverside environment behind the main train station called Bara Venecija (Venice Pond), that has already been subjected to the various environmental treatments.²⁸ Besides numerous animal-, and plant species, it also included a number of improvised constructions inhabited by the poor and Roma people who were displaced by the Waterfront work. The surrounding area, including the Sava Mala neighborhood, which became a culture industry hot-spot during the past decade, was almost completely torn down, illegally at that, for the Waterfront project.²⁹ Spaces of Bara Venecija and Sava Mala were cast as “lairs of junkies and snakes” in public discourse by the government bodies and even the president of the republic,³⁰ while the image of Belgrade Waterfront was projected as the most important project since New Belgrade. The local environment was destroyed by both legal-, and illegal means and the right Sava River bank was cleared for construction work despite mass protests led by the Don’t Drown Belgrade citizen initiative.³¹ These examples show that the Belgrade Waterfront project has been producing conflict zones from the time it began as an idea and it continued to do so until this day. Conflict zones produced here include not only conflicts between humans and local environment, but also conflicts between various groups of humans with the state force most directly pointed against the poor and those cast as racially different, such as the Roma who lived in Bara Venecija, making the necropolitical aspect of necroecologies more visible compared to New Belgrade’s necroecologies.³²

Belgrade Waterfront and the attendant environmental meontopolitics should be understood in the wider context of postsocialist condition. The term *postsocialist con-*

²⁷ BACKOVIĆ, Vera: *Džentrifikacija kao socio-prostorni fenomen savremenog grada : Sociološka analiza koncepta*. Beograd 2015, p. 183.

²⁸ Belgrade’s old city between the right side of the Sava and Danube rivers has been a locus of intense environmental interventions throughout history. See ĆOROVIĆ, Dragana: *The Quest for a New Urban Landscape : Spatial Transformation in the Nineteenth-Century Belgrade Environment*. In: DORONDEL, Stefan – SERBAN, Stelu (eds.): *A New Ecological Order : Development and the Transformation of Nature in Eastern Europe*. Pittsburgh 2022, pp. 29–45.

²⁹ See NIKOLIĆ, Mladen: *The Participants in the Protest against Illegal Demolitions in Belgrade’s Savamala Quarter*. In: PETROVIĆ, J. – BACKOVIĆ, V. (eds.): *Experiencing postsocialist capitalism*, pp. 189–210.

³⁰ See PETROVIĆ, Jelena D.: *Ni posle šest godina ne daju odgovor na pitanje – ko su “kompletni idioti”*. S. l. 2022. Online, cited on 16 October 2022, accessible at <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/i-posle-sest-godina-bez-odgovora-na-pitanje-ko-su-kompletni-idioti/>.

³¹ See PETROVIĆ, Jelisaveta: *The Transformative Power of Urban Movements on the European Periphery : The Case of the Don’t Let Belgrade Drown Initiative*. In: PETROVIĆ, J. – BACKOVIĆ, V. (eds.): *Experiencing postsocialist capitalism*, pp. 171–188.

³² For how the thick relationality between the Roma, ethnic Serbs and animals is produced in urban ecology of Belgrade, see FILIPOVIĆ, Andrija: *Knotting the Humanimal Assemblage : Race, Animals, and Art in Postsocialist Belgrade*. *Revista de Estudios Globales y Arte Contemporáneo* 8, 2022, no. 1, pp. 209–230.

dition marks the end of the actual experience of a self-governing socialism in Serbia and names the present experience of economic, political, social and cultural transition toward what is defined as contemporary European liberal democratic society and economy based on (neoliberal) market capitalism. With the end of Milošević's dictatorship in 2000, Serbia began reforms in order to join the European Union, opening negotiation chapters depending on EU reports on reform development. These reforms, most importantly, include economic reforms toward the liberalization of the market, with privatization of what was once owned by the state and the workers, as the backbone of these changes. One of the main issues in the Belgrade Waterfront project has been privatization of the land because it is being constructed on without any left as commons, as is the case in New Belgrade on the opposite side of the Sava River, though with necroecological effects of its own. Furthermore, the second decade of the 21st century has been marked by so-called investment urbanism, which is defined by Don't Drown Belgrade as [...] *the kind of city development planning which puts the investor and his profit interests at the center of decision making [...] It is really not hard to imagine what the new buildings will mean, besides being an additional load on the already inadequate infrastructure.*³³ The influx of transnational capital and the push toward privatization are the key factors in the Belgrade Waterfront coming into being and the environmental destruction that has been occurring in its wake.

The main characteristic of the postsocialist investment urbanism, besides the production of conflict zones, is the density of construction work. As Figure 4 shows, apartment buildings are constructed extremely close in order to use as much available space as possible. There is just enough space for streets and some trees, which are planted for decorative purposes. Non-residential space is dedicated to commercial use, so even when there is space dedicated for strolling, as there is along the river, bars and stores are located right next to it. The aim is to produce the space that is densely populated and intertwined with commercial venues, so that all value produced can be efficiently extracted, in a way that the extraction of surplus value becomes hidden in plain sight, and the dense space becomes naturalized and taken for granted. Even worse examples of intensification of space use can be found in other municipalities such as Zvezdara, where not even that little space for trees is left as it is in the Belgrade Waterfront. Apartment buildings in Zvezdara, and in other similar neighborhoods, are being built directly next to the streets, leaving barely any space for walking let alone anything else. However, these kinds of intensifications of space use are reserved for less affluent parts of the city, while at least some semblance of paying attention to urban environment is shown for the class of extremely rich and their environment.³⁴ Whether more or less intense, construction density is present all across the city destroying both built environments from earlier historical periods and what is left of non-human habitats. Intensification of space use and the production of conflict zones as meontopolitical technologies produce necroecologies on the right side of the Sava River, as well as in other parts of the city and beyond the city limits, as effects of "modernization" of the Serbian postsocialist society in transition, building a contemporary European socio-economic image.

³³ PETRUŠIĆ, Sandra: *Temeljna betonizacija grada : Naprednjačka humanizacija grada*. S. I. 2018. Online, cited on 16 October 2022, accessible at <https://nedavimobeograd.rs/nin-temeljna-betonizacija-naprednjačka-humanizacija-grada/?script=lat>.

³⁴ Belgrade urban soundscape too is constructed in a similar vein in relation to the wealthy. See FILIPOVIĆ, Andrija: Vroom. In: MEE, Sharon Jane – ROBINSON, Luke (eds.): *Sound Affects : A User's Guide*. New York 2023, pp. 132–142.

Conclusion

While the socialist period was marked by large infrastructural projects, such as the construction of New Belgrade, for the purpose of modernization and socio-economic progress of socialist society aimed at good for all, the postsocialist period has been defined by large-scale privatizations of what was once common good and precarization of the workforce, though presented as another step in modernizing Serbian society, as reflected in the events surrounding the Belgrade Waterfront. These modernizing processes reflected on non-human environments as the production of necroecologies, those environmental conditions inimical to some human and non-human (non)living actors. Analyzing various treatments of habitats on the left-, and the right side banks of the Sava River in socialist and postsocialist periods, it can be noticed that both past-, and contemporary necroecologies are produced through several meontopolitical technologies. Leaning on Mbembe's understanding of technologies of necropower, the article has shown that (post)socialist necroecologies have been produced as death-worlds through material-semiotic territorial fragmentation, production of conflict zones, and intensification of space, as well as "resource" exploitation. While terms such as territorial fragmentation and conflict zones refer only to human populations in Mbembe's work, the concept of necroecologies, as it has been used in this article, expands the reach of Mbembe's analysis to include non-human animals and plants, that is, local non-human environments. It also enables a novel understanding of historical processes such as the establishment of self-governing socialism, its dissolution and the effects of both socialist-, and postsocialist socio-economic forms from an environmental and non-human point of view. Finally, I have shown that meontopolitical technologies – fragmentation and conflict together with intensification of exploitation of space – lead to exploitation of "natural resources", extraction of surplus value, devastation of the environment, and in the last instance, to the extinction of non-human animal and plant species.

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Summary

(Post)socialist Meontopolitics: The Sava River and Necroecological Modernization of Belgrade

Following Mbembe's interpretation of necropower, this article shows that (post)socialist necroecologies have been produced as death-worlds through material-semiotic territorial fragmentation, production of conflict zones and intensification of space use. While these terms refer exclusively to human populations in Mbembe's work, the concept of necroecologies, as it has been proposed in this article, expands the reach of Mbembe's analysis to include non-human animals and plants, that is, local non-human environments. It also enables a novel understanding of historical processes, such as the establishment of self-governing socialism, its dissolution, and the effects of both socialist and

postsocialist socio-economic forms from an environmental-, and non-human point of view. Both socialist- (1945–1991), and postsocialist periods (1991–) in Serbia were marked by what was cast in the public discourse as modernization. Socialist modernization was undertaken as a part of post-World War II reconstruction, as well as progress toward self-governing classless socialist society. Postsocialist modernization is a set of processes based on socio-economic transformation toward contemporary European liberal democracy and (neoliberal) market capitalism. Analyzing various treatments of environments on the left-, and the right side banks of the Sava River in socialist-, and postsocialist periods, it can be noticed that both past-, and contemporary necroecologies are produced through particular meontopolitical technologies. On the left bank of Sava, there is the Sava River Park, a part of territorial fragmentation of New Belgrade and its necroecologies. While thought of as a beneficent space because of its greenery in contradistinction to the urban concrete, it is as much a part of Belgrade's necroecologies as the Belgrade Waterfront directly across it. The Belgrade Waterfront is a redevelopment on the right bank of Sava River currently under construction which combines commercial and residential space. The redevelopment project is grounded in the production of conflict zones (illegal removal of prior inhabitants and their living spaces, mass protests, etc.) and intensification of space use (density of constructed buildings). The article demonstrates that postsocialist necroecologies, understood as naturalcultural (a)biotic assemblages which, due to the historically and complexly sedimented effects of forms of governing through meontopolitical technologies, produce environmental conditions that are inimical to some human and non-human actors and lead to their maiming, incapacitation, immediate or slow death and, finally, to extinction.