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# *Balkan(ising) Myths*

## Historical (Re)Formations of the New Belgrade

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*The association of the geographic zone of the Balkans as a rogue zone is a relatively recent construct. This paper will trace back in time the formation of this construct in order to firstly expose the various agents that facilitated this coercive politicisation, and secondly by deploying the discourse of Balkanism to de-politicise this construct. The de-politisation process will be contextualised in respect to the history of New Belgrade's (re)formations in general, and its post-World War Two modernist planning in particular. Considering that New Belgrade's post-World War Two urban plan is unfinished and the building process discontinuous, a potential reveals itself to re-evaluate the politics of how history is invoked and narrated to what is (re)planned and (re)built. The re-evaluation will be prompted by Gilles Deleuze's idea of the "objectile" in order to suggest the discourse of Balkanism as spatial tool of collaborative struggles; mobilised in an "open" and "non-determined" outcome if a city and a society are to become a democracy-in-process.*

The geographic zone of the Balkans has taken to signify a conflict-prone and barbaric region. When such an association of a geographic zone is taken to represent the space and behaviour of people living within that zone, history can be taken as a construct to fuel a particular political myth. This paper will attempt to "balkanise"<sup>1</sup> this construct by examining the urban (re)formations of New Belgrade through a three-stage process.

The first part introduces the context against which Balkans as a barbaric zone emerged. The emergence of this construct—known as Balkanism—will be contextualised in relation to the Former Yugoslavia, whose capital New Belgrade is the focus of this paper. The second part traces various shifts in the urban planning of

1. Balkanisation is a geopolitical term used to describe the fragmentation/division of the Balkan peninsula which was almost entirely under the Ottoman Empire. This process of fragmentation occurred between 1817 and 1912.



New Belgrade. The intent of examining various urban plans in relation to the political period when they emerged is to re-evaluate both distant and more immediate histories in order to understand the implications of New Belgrade now—as a city in transition after NATO’s Operation Allied Force in 1999.

The third, and last, stage of this paper conflates the outlined conception of Balkanism in relation to New Belgrade’s historical (re)formations in general, and the aftermath of 1999 in particular. This conflation potentiates questioning of values and re-interpretation of limits in respect to “civilised” ways of urban inhabitation and living. The re-interpretation will be prompted by Gilles Deleuze’s idea of the “objectile” in order to suggest Balkanism deployed through urbanism and architecture as a spatial tool of openness and collaborative struggles.



Figure 1. New Belgrade in Balkanim: Incomplete Landscapes. Artwork by Nikolina Bobic.

### **Balkans and Balkanism**

Prior to the eighteenth century, the word Balkan in the English language was associated solely with a mountain range, a peninsula and a geological frontier between Europe and Africa. The Balkans was also acknowledged as having the greatest ethnic heterogeneity in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Heterogeneity was largely a result of the peninsula’s geographical position. Having historically been at the crossroads for trading, messengers and armies, the Balkans had experienced a layering of cultures, languages and ethnicities.<sup>3</sup>

2. Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), 1–16.

3. Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

It is only in the period from the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the mid nineteenth century that the modern Balkans emerged on the political map as a region to be depicted in rogue terms, one whose racial and ethnic hatreds were deep-seated and where “civilised ways” were not possible.<sup>4</sup> The association of the Balkans as a despotic region is also known as Balkanism. According to Maria Todorova, the Bulgarian philosopher and historian of the Balkans, the term Balkanism emerged due to this geographical zone not fitting within the European Occidental ideal, yet not being Oriental enough to be called Oriental.<sup>5</sup> Todorova further writes that “what has been emphasized about the Balkans is that its inhabitants do not care to conform to the standards of behavior devised as normative by and for the civilized world.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, Balkanism poses an identification problem to a binary construct; its peripheral location and its social, cultural and spatial behaviour are neither Occidental nor Oriental enough, explaining the zone as some form of an agitator as it does not fit in a binary “us” and “them” construct. This idea finds a parallel in the writings of Vesna Goldsworthy, a writer, a poet and a Professor of English Literature. She writes that “the Balkan peninsula comes to represent some kind of ‘anti-Europe’. It is always ‘not yet European’ or ‘that which Europe has been long ago.’”<sup>7</sup>

The attempt to deal with this liminal identification of the Balkans by aligning it with the rest of Europe, began in the nineteenth century. The Balkans were reorganised, through a process of balkanisation, both by the Western European powers during the 1878 Congress of Berlin and by Balkan born men educated in Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> Balkanisation was based on fragmentation and the superimposition of an ethnically pure nation-state model onto heterogeneous nations, which led to violent civil unrest.<sup>9</sup> While the ideal of the homogeneous national state developed gradually in Western Europe, it was imposed relatively abruptly in the Balkans

under the eyes of Western Europeans who had forgotten, or who chose to overlook, the methods by which they had achieved their own national unity. Rather than seeing the process of Balkan national consolidation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a parallel and somewhat later version of their own history, they began to view the Balkans as a region of constant ethnic conflict inhabited by incomprehensible and semi civilized (though still semi-European) savages.<sup>10</sup>

4. Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), 77.

5. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

6. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 3.

7. Vesna Goldsworthy, interview by Albena Vacheva, “Not Quite European ... Scrutinizing the Balkan Neo-colonialism,” in *eurozine*, 9 July 2004.

8. Countries involved in the Congress included Britain, Russia, Germany, Austria and France.

9. Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History*, 8.

10. Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History*, 73.



The noted balkanisation of the Balkans did not occur in Yugoslavia. The formation of Yugoslavia (South-Slavia) approached balkanisation in reverse: by grouping together territories where different South Slav peoples lived, meaning that the entity thus created was heterogeneous.<sup>11</sup> However, the unification of the South Slav peoples into a nation-state was at times associated with nationalist outbursts of violence. One significant example of violence occurred in 1914, when a Bosnian Serb nationalist (in)famously shot and killed the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, in Sarajevo. This event not only marked the start of World War One, but also became symbolic of a break: Yugoslavia and implicitly the Balkans were no longer seen as moving towards European civility. It could also be argued, however, that the violence was an expression of resistance to the way Western interests privileged a certain idea of homogeneity in their prescriptions for the future of a region of long-standing heterogeneity.

11. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 33.

The aim of the 1914 assassination was to unify the Yugoslav nationalities and culturally close groups that lived in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The unification would come four years later, with the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, despite the name Yugoslavia colloquially used since 1918). Tito's Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the post World War Two successor state, remained multiethnic. Its heterogeneity was further diversified in that social, cultural and linguistic rights were given to constituent nations. The 1990s disintegration of SFRY was an indicator of this multi-ethnic model in dissolution.

Figure 2. History I and II. Artwork by Nikoline Bobic.



Today, parts of the Former Yugoslavia still retain the Balkanist discourse. This is indicated by the attempt to once again align the Balkans with the West by re-naming the zone as the Western Balkans in 2002. The noted difference in this new name is that the term no longer appears to be geo-political, but political as it is associated with conflict and “problem zone” countries. For the EU, the Western Balkans includes Albania and except for Slovenia, all the Republics of Former Yugoslavia. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development—an agency involved in the reconstruction of war-torn SFRY—uses the term Western Balkans to refer to all countries EU does, except for Croatia. In both categorisations, New Belgrade—once a capital of SFRY and today a capital of Serbia—still falls in the “agitator” zone by being neither European Occidental nor Oriental enough.

## **(Re)Formations of New Belgrade**

### **New Belgrade: Until 1945**

Current day New Belgrade has a relatively recent history. Up until the nineteenth century, the site of New Belgrade was a swamp and a no-man’s land. In military terms it was also used as a strategic place from which to launch attacks. Historically, it has been a border zone between Occidental Austro-Hungarian Empire/Christendom and the Oriental Ottoman Empire/Islam, as well as Western and Eastern Empires, and Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christendom. In the nineteenth century, the wetland separated Belgrade’s Old City which was under Ottoman rule from the adjacent town of Zemun which was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire.<sup>12</sup>

The first urban plan for New Belgrade called “Singidunum Novissima” was prepared by Austrian architects Rudolf Perco, Erwin Ilz and Erwin Böck in 1922.<sup>13</sup> This plan proposed boulevards and neo-baroque architecture. From 1922 up until the 1950s, many urban plans for New Belgrade were proposed though none were implemented.<sup>14</sup> Despite no urban plan approved, the construction of New Belgrade began in the mid 1930s with the construction of the Belgrade Fairground in the area known as Bezanijska Plaza (current day Block 17).<sup>15</sup> This area along the left bank of the river Sava was probably chosen due to its slight elevation above the level of the wetland.

12. Ljiljanja Blagojevic, “New Belgrade: The Capital of No-City’s Land” in *Artifact: Strategies of Resistance* 4, [http://artefact.mi2.hr/\\_a04/lang\\_en/theory\\_blagojevic\\_en.htm](http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_blagojevic_en.htm)

13. Ljiljanja Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd: Osporeni Modernizam* [New Belgrade: Delayed Modernism] (Belgrade: Zavod za udzbenike, Zavod za zastitu spomenika kulture grada and Arhitektonski fakultet, 2007), 21–23.

14. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 20–22.

15. During World War Two, the eleven-hectare fairground became a concentration camp, which the Nazis used to exterminate Serbs, Romani and Jews.



## New Belgrade: Post World War Two

The urbanisation of New Belgrade significantly accelerated after World War Two, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and under the supervision of the Head of State Marshal Josip Broz Tito, the Yugoslav Communist Party Politburo of Serbia and the City Party Committee. New Belgrade was planned to serve as the capital of SFRY. Under Tito, SFRY was established as a series of multiethnic republics and populations “striving to create a balance between Western capitalism and Soviet communism.”<sup>16</sup> In 1961, SFRY became a part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). NAM was conceived as a network of nations that had a “third way” political geography and offered an alternative to Cold War politics, namely those of the USSR/Warsaw Pact and the United States/NATO. In other words, the SFRY under Titoism had an alternative approach to the economy, law, technology and the military, and was the only European country that openly opposed Europe’s Eastern and Western Block divisions. Thus, the urban construction in New Belgrade was part of a larger political project whose motives were uniquely ideological and experimental: the interlacing of Soviet Communist driven public and social welfare with Western Fordist capitalism. Land, property and institutions were state owned, while travel outside the Yugoslav borders was permitted, unlike in other Communist countries. From a legal and social standpoint, a free apartment and social services were considered fundamental rights necessary to the wellbeing of society.<sup>17</sup>

16. Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History*, 9.

17. Ljiljana Blagojevic, “Back to the Future of New Belgrade: Functional Past of the Modern City,” <http://aesop2005.scix.net/data/papers/att/204.fullTextPrint.pdf>.

However, before any construction could begin, New Belgrade’s swampy terrain firstly had to be drained. The area was evenly covered with landfill and raised above the reach of flooding and the underground water table. Due to the immense scale of New Belgrade’s urbanisation, with time, construction work became dependent on World Bank loans from the West. The loans formed part of support for the SFRY’s split with the USSR in 1948.

18. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 68-9.

The Serbian architect and academic Nikola Dobrovic did the first post-World War Two urban proposal for New Belgrade in 1946. Dobrovic imagined New Belgrade as a city in a garden.<sup>18</sup> Unlike the British Ebenezer Howard’s “Garden City” where people were intended to live harmoniously with nature, a city in a garden intertwined agriculture/landscape areas with CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture) influenced ideas – in particular, circulation routes and the necessity of areas devised for leisure, accommodation and work. In other words,

Dobrovic's city in a garden was imagined as a space with gardens, fruit orchards and vegetable fields interlaced with administration and government buildings, where private ownership over land was not permitted. Given New Belgrade's flat terrain, Dobrovic thought it more honest to propose a city with low horizontal structures, in contrast with the Old City's hilly ground and the high Kalemegdan Fortress.<sup>19</sup> For Dobrovic, urbanism and architecture were not a direct interpretation of modernist principles or the dominant socialist ideology of the times, but rather the de-politicisation of both.<sup>20</sup> His urban plan attempted to re-think and re-interpret space and society beyond the framework devised by the state or dominant Western modernist ideology. Despite the merit of Dobrovic's scheme, the plan, still in its sketch stage in dealing with notions of character, size, scale and various social values, was not accepted.

19. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 70.

20. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 72.

A formal competition for New Belgrade's urban plan was held in 1947. None of the thirteen submitted proposals fulfilled the criteria, possibly a result of the actual competition brief largely having no clear objectives on how New Belgrade should look. Apart from the generally stipulated criteria for the Federal Executive Council building and the Central Committee Tower and a Headquarters of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, no other conditions were specified.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the brief was relatively open, and from that perspective ambiguous. The entries to the competition were unimaginative despite or because of the open brief. Proposals often directly translated modernist CIAM principles, with simplified monumental and representational forms today associated with socialist architecture.<sup>22</sup> With no clear winner, Dobrovic was re-engaged.

21. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 83.

22. Ljiljana Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 83.

Dobrovic's 1948 scheme in the imaging of New Belgrade as a cosmopolitan and "open" city derived from two key ideas. The first was the already mentioned city in a garden. Dobrovic's second key idea was the treatment of the city as a dynamic landscape.<sup>23</sup> The notion of dynamism possibly arose out of Dobrovic's three specific interests. The first was his interest in philosophy — particularly Henri Bergson's ideas on matter and memory where space was not singular, whole or fixed, but elastic and interval-based.<sup>24</sup> Dobrovic writes that this interval is found at the intersection of matter and memory; meaning that space is open, adaptable to creative change and the appearance of "something" dynamic and beyond the currently known.<sup>25</sup> The second was his interest in art. The third was the necessity he saw to re-interpret

23. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 113.

24. Nikola Dobrovic, "Savremena arhitektura" [Contemporary Architecture] 3, (Belgrade: Arhitektonski fakultet, 1963), 243.

25. Dobrovic, "Savremena arhitektura," 234–44.



CIAM Modernism to suit the context of Belgrade and Yugoslavia. For the production of New Belgrade's urban plan, both the historical context and the surrounding topographical/river landscapes were important. New Belgrade was not to be zoned as a direct copy of Modernist principles, but was to be more fluid in that history and memory through time became open for both contestation and change. However, because it appeared that Dobrovic was taking it upon himself to solve all aspects of architecture and urbanism, his vision seemed authoritarian and in contrast to the socialist communal political set-up of the SFRY.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Dobrovic's work on designing the urban proposal was stopped.

26. Blagojevic, *Novi Beograd*, 116–18.

Although no consensus was reached on the future character of New Belgrade, work began in the late 1940s on several buildings: the Federal Executive Council building, Hotel Yugoslavia, student housing and the residential complex in Block 1. This construction was short-lived as a result of the SFRY's split with the Soviet Union in 1948, and the ensuing political and economic crisis. The crisis did give rise to a clearer objective for New Belgrade's identity—as a city of government and cultural buildings. It also led to the establishment of a Department of Urban Planning, which solved the identified problem of allowing one individual to project a vision for New Belgrade. These changes saw another urban plan devised in the 1950s. This Urban Plan was constituted of nine orthogonal blocks (Blocks 21 – 29), whose central axis was composed of three blocks (Block 24, 25, 26) intended for public use, and the grand assembly area. The symmetrical blocks fronted the building of the Federal Executive Council and were backed by a proposed, yet never built, railway station. The Plan directly copied principles of Le Corbusier's Radiant City and Brasilia.<sup>27</sup> With this move, the imagining of a truly alternative and “open” vision for New Belgrade stopped. A fixed modernist “ideal” was set. Urban planning and architecture (unfortunately) morphed with the ideology of the state.

27. Milos R. Perovic, *Iskustva Prolosti* [Experiences from the Past] (Belgrade: Zavod za planiranje razvoja grada Beograda, 1985), 127.

### **New Belgrade: After 1999**

After NATO's 1999 attack, and in the ongoing transition period for New Belgrade, the city is rapidly being de-socialised. The socialist right to a residence is now being replaced with a new understanding: the residence as a commodity. New Belgrade's transition aligns with the introduction of the first supposed democratic government in 2000, the ensuing introduction to

28. Zaklina Gligorijevic, "Can new Developments and City Identity grow in Harmony? -The Quest for a successful Public Space design for New Belgrade," presented at 42nd ISOCaRP Congress, 2006.

29. Mina Petrovic, "Diversification of Urban Neighbourhood: The Case Study in New Belgrade," presented at International Conference on Sustainable Urban Areas, Rotterdam, 2007.

30. Sonia Hirt and Mina Petrovic, "The Gates of Belgrade: Safety, Privacy, and New Housing Patterns in the Post-Communist City," in *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 5 (2010), 2-3.

31. Blagojevic. "New Belgrade"

neo-liberalism and the de-nationalisation laws whose governing notion is that public companies and individual buildings should be privatised.<sup>28</sup> In other words, since 1999, New Belgrade's unfinished and unfilled blocks are now being filled with shopping centres and private multi-use buildings, appropriated to suit the narrow interest of neo-liberal entrepreneurs.

With the advent of foreign loans after 1999, New Belgrade became one of the biggest construction sites in the Balkans. This resulted in "gentrification of luxury high-rise buildings (primarily by new construction), while other blocks of lower quality [were] exposed to further downgrading in both physical and social terms."<sup>29</sup> The once relatively hegemonic brutalist block-type building typology has been diversified, though now driven by a global neo-liberal economics. Diversification has translated into a demarcation between neighbourhoods, where there is a discrepancy in aesthetic language and socio-economic levels. In respect to Belgrade, this demarcation is noted in the fact that "most new buildings, including the dozens of Western-style malls and business complexes erected since 2000, serve primarily the upper-middle and upper class of Belgrade's society."<sup>30</sup> Ljiljana Blagojevic, a Serbian architect and academic, describes this demarcated patchwork in a way where

New Belgrade is now a city at war with itself, and its central zone is its main battlefield. Where the battle rages most vehemently is between a number of particular interests, now competing for supremacy and for the status of new, legitimate public interests. [...] First and foremost, a clear demarcation line is in force between the era of social idealism, planning, and modernization, however imposed and hegemonistic its narrative was, and the new era driven by the forces of the market economy, privatization, and denigration of planning. [More so, it] is no more a no-man's-land, nor a common ground, but a land split by new boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, while there is a greater level of heterogeneity in the current typology of Belgrade's buildings and products, the fact that these are predominantly causing economic polarisation makes the hegemony fiercer than its socialist predecessor. Serbia is slowly losing its middle class, and two distinct classes emerging—the privileged and the underprivileged.

The rapid reconfiguration of New Belgrade's central axis, and of other unfilled blocks, is mainly driven by international





Figure 3. Swarms, Shadow Borders and Demarcation Lines. Artwork by Nikoline Bobic.

investment, foreign loans, contractual stipulations by the European Union, corrupt Serbian politicians and the newly created Serbian tycoons. One of these newly created Serbian tycoons—Miroslav Miskovic—among other capital ventures also owns several shopping centres.<sup>32</sup> One of these is Delta City Shopping Centre in Block 67, the first Western-style shopping centre constructed in the aftermath of NATO's 1999 targeting. This once "vacant" Block 67 is built with a particular political goal. In preparation for the 2007 Universiade Belgrade (25<sup>th</sup> World University Summer Games), the same "vacant" Block 67 was turned into an Olympic Village called Belville, with the intention that the numerous apartments in the Village would be sold after the event. Incidentally, the construction of Belville was financially supported by Hypo Adria Bank, the first private neo-liberal bank introduced to Serbia after the 1999 targeting, and Miskovic's Delta Holdings. However, the development of this "vacant" block also resulted in a considerable number of the Romani population forcefully relocated to the fringes of the city and Blocks 17 and 18. It seems that New Belgrade's transition is not only based on de-socialisation and commercialisation, but also de-Romani(sation).

32. *Serbia Today* writes that other notable tycoons include Milan Beko, Miodrag Kostic, Toplica Spasojevic, Zoran Drakulic and Slobodan Petrovic: May 8, 2010.

The proposed 2021 Urban Plan of New Belgrade,<sup>33</sup> prepared by the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, shows an extreme transition, from the leftist post-World War Two socialist conception of *space for all* to a right-wing neo-liberal and private property-oriented *market for the few*.<sup>34</sup> The proposed plan outlines the construction of exclusive residences, commercial zones and the amphitheatre acting as a cultural hearth between the Belgrade's Old City and New Belgrade. The realisation of this plan is dependent on the erasure of all the buildings in Block 18, and removing all the inhabitants occupying Block 17 (both blocks were the first constructed areas in 1930s). The proposed 2021

33. *Generalni plan Beograda 2021* [Belgrade Master Plan 2021] (Belgrade: Belgrade City Government, 2003), especially section 7.1. See also Igor Maric, Ana Nikovic and Bozidar Manic, "Transformation of the New Belgrade Urban Tissue," *Spatium* 22 (2010), 47-56, esp. 51.

34. Paul Waley, "From Modernist to Market Urbanism: The Transformation of New Belgrade," *Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 2 (2011), 226.



Figure 2. New Belgrade's Bloack 67 and Romani Settlements. Photographs by Nikoline Bobic.

plan treats this zone as a tabula rasa, despite being comprised of private residences, small industries, artists' studios, car markets and Romani settlements. Despite the proposed violent erasure of currently occupied blocks, the existing Romani settlements are seen as a greater evil amongst Belgrade's community than the 2021 proposal.

### Objectile: New Belgrade Balkanism

In Deleuze's philosophy, the notion of objectile is deployed as a tool to expose the processes involved in any matter, law or structure, meaning that nothing is fixed or determined or has only ever existed in a currently used thought/form. For Deleuze, the objectile is a noun, a verb and a process in-between, with no definite origin, autonomy or ideal.<sup>35</sup> In other words, no history, belief structure or way of living can have a rigid frame, since thought (noun), action (verb) and representation (process/ adjective) are separated by spaces and temporalities. The objectile is "credited less to the pre-givenness of elements than their ever renewed event of their fusional variation."<sup>36</sup> In other words, the objectile has no clear beginning and end. It is multilinear, transformational and is a never a given plane of reference.<sup>37</sup> Thus, an "objectile approach" can be understood as an opening, a new space of thinking and acting.

35. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 16–20.

36. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 280.

37. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994), 118-19.



If the objectile is liminal in that its formation is related to other spaces, whilst also being open and fluid, then, the association of a (geo)political zone with a particular meaning is a matter of just one historical cut where time has no significance. For example, the representation of the Balkans as a rogue state is a Western perspective whose historical cut was created in the nineteenth century, and largely remained fixed despite historical, social, urban and economic changes. Given this scope, the cut is violent as it treats time and space as definite, and therefore closed. The objectile, as a continuous transforming of matter, facilitates a replaying of a different Balkans, where a historical point of view is extended. The Balkans is a condition treated as an event, since the objectile

refers neither to the beginnings of the industrial era nor to the idea of the standard that still upheld a semblance of essence and imposed a law of constancy ('the object produced by and for the masses'), but to our current state of things, where fluctuation of the norm replaces the permanence of a law; where the object assumes a place in a continuum by variation . . . The new status of the object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mold—in other words, to a relation of form-matter—but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form.<sup>38</sup>

38. Deleuze, *The Fold*, 19.

Since Balkanism has also been associated with a “discourse of indefiniteness,”<sup>39</sup> this zone can be understood as being open. It is both liminal and limit-distinct, and in this position puts into question any fixed values and conventions.

39. Maria Todorova paraphrased in Vesna Goldsworthy, interview by Albena Vacheva. “*Not quite European...Scrutinizing the Balkan neo-colonialism.*”



Figure 5. Openness through intersection: Inter-laying of Past and Present. Artwork by Nikolina Bobic.

Considering that Deleuze's idea of the objectile is associated with disrupting established values and associations, one can also conceive of a similar disruption in respect of New Belgrade's urban planning. Since New Belgrade's urban planning is physically still unfinished, this zone is still open to alternative values from the prescribed norms. Historically, the area of New Belgrade has been a point of negotiation of values, as seen in Dobrovic's 1948 plan. While Dobrovic attempted to de-politicise various architectural and state ideals, the idea was never physically manifested. Despite the project being left at an idea/drawing stage, it is still an event in terms of Bergson's theory on matter and memory where the past is dynamic and is a process through which to produce the new in a time to come. It is a double fold, whose power is in the juncture of memory and perspective extended from past into the future. By deploying Dobrovic's objective for New Belgrade, it is not that "the notion of function tends to be extracted, but [that] the notion of objective also changes and becomes functional."<sup>40</sup> It becomes an objectile, and a form of resistance in its becoming.

40. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*, 18.

Taking into account the variety and multiplicity of urban plans produced for New Belgrade's terrain up until the 1950s, the formation of this zone was not only not set on a particular ideal, but was also democratic—if democratic living is understood as being a project in process. Such "democratic" processes also imply the possibility of change and growth. In this process one can start questioning the hegemonic understanding of social rights to a city and ways of democratic living. Through this engagement neither history nor memory are treated as eternal, but as fragments from which arise both decay and birth. Effectively, a country cannot be called democratic if its values and history are not open for contestation. In other words, the association of a country with democracy—rather than democracy-in-process—signifies that it is totalitarian.

In order to extend heterogeneity in social and urban values, it is necessary to extend limits and points of view. Values need to become objectiles, where architecture, landscape and the living are treated as a process in progress with no projected image as an ideal. In other words,

socialism [...] should not solely be understood as a practical question, based on the power of progressive political parties and the practical ability of holding power, but as a question



of shaping the world set as a daily task [...] That awakening of consciousness about the world, community and ourselves, the building of our findings in respect to every discipline we participate, is a crucial and inevitable process.<sup>41</sup>

41. Vjececlav Richter, *sinurbanizam* [sinurbanism] (Zagreb: Mladost, 1964), 15.

A positive is found in New Belgrade's settlements occupied by the Romani. The settlements provoke in that they expose normative expectations and values of how "civilised" and "respectable" people should live. What is political are not the spectacular commercial shopping centres or even the brutalist blocks built when SFRY was practicing an alternative form of Socialism, but the Romani settlements as these zones that have not been built and are not used in the aesthetic approved by the West or the Serbian government. The settlements' central New Belgrade location, rather than the fringes, means that they are hard to dismiss. From this perspective, the Romani settlements are effectively an open model as they expose urban limits, where the limit itself is violent due to being normative and revealing the social and political cut of who can live in a city and how that city can be occupied.

## Conclusion

Historically, New Belgrade has shown to been both a liminal and limit-distinct zone at whose juncture there is space to extend history and social(ist) ways of living. By deploying the Deleuzian idea of the objectile and the geo-political connotation of the Balkanism as "discourse of indefiniteness,"<sup>43</sup> New Belgrade's unfinished 1950 urban plan is potentially a small-scale political platform of dissidence in constant transformation. New Belgrade's urban landscapes, as illustrated by the Romani settlements, are still occupied in a non-normative way and in this manner endlessly rupture any form of end-driven hegemonic policies while simultaneously exposing their hidden structures and processes of control. Balkanism is a potential strategy where urban zones and ways of living can be approached as new forms of collaborative struggle, and mobilised in a non-determined outcome, meaning that the society can become open by becoming a democracy-in-process. The radical potential of Balkanism is that it is an objectile for rethinking the political, which includes opening up the historical understanding of architecture so that there is no pre-given ideal and reference to the beginning or end of architecture, landscape and the living. All are treated as a process in progress.

43. Maria Todorova paraphrased in Vesna Goldsworthy, interview by Albena Vacheva. "Not quite European...Scrutinizing the Balkan neo-colonialism."