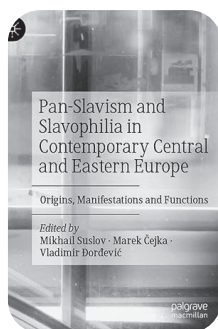


A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO CONTEMPORARY PAN-SLAVISM

Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, Palgrave Macmillan, Springer International Publishing, 2023



The outbreak of war in Ukraine (first in Donbas in 2014, then on a larger scale in 2022) has focused international attention on the Eastern European region. As this is a war between two nations of Slavic origin, traditionally considered brotherly, one of the relevant issues that has come to the fore in the academic approach to this geographical area is Pan-Slavism, which, according to Michael Boro Petrovich, is “the historic tendency of the Slavic peoples to manifest in some tangible way, whether cultural or political, their consciousness of ethnic kinship”¹. After the long Soviet period, during which the Slavic idea was banned and exiled² (with a few exceptions³) because it was too closely associated with tsarism and orthodoxy and thus conflicted with the proletarian internationalism and atheism promoted by the communist regime, with the collapse of the USSR we are witnessing both the intensification of the nationalist vector in the post-Soviet space and the re-emergence of the Pan-Slavic imaginary.

The initial scholarly response to the resurgence of this imaginary has been rather weak and inconsistent, but even where there has been interest, it has been in the Pan-Slavic manifestations of earlier centuries rather than in its contemporary aspects. Only recently has there been a concerted effort to fill this research gap, which culminated in the publication of the book *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), coordinated by Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka and Vladimir

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Dorđević. The groundwork for the publication of this collective volume, which is the most comprehensive and systematic approach to contemporary Pan-Slavism to date, was laid by two articles. The first one, “Beyond Contemporary Scholarship and toward Exploring Current Manifestations of Pan-Slavism”⁴, is a review article focusing on the academic literature on Pan-Slavism (written in English) indexed in WOS and/or Scopus from 2000 to 2020. Following this analysis, the authors found not only that most of the studies published during this period are devoted to traditional/historical forms and manifestations of Pan-Slavism and very few to contemporary ones, but also that these academic studies do not communicate with each other. Consequently, this article also takes the form of an invitation to write more in English about contemporary Pan-Slavic perspectives and to build bridges between publications in the field, so that academic scholarship on the subject becomes less patchy and disjointed and more even and coherent, thus providing a basis for the future advancement of the field.

The second article, “Revisiting Pan-Slavism in the Contemporary Perspective”⁵, builds on the results of the first, but also introduces a theoretical conceptualization of Pan-Slavism that will be further developed in the book. Noting that Pan-Slavism today is even more loosely defined than in the past, and that it has become an umbrella term encompassing a multitude of projects and forms of Slavic solidarity, the authors see the need for a more rigorous approach, starting by distinguishing between pan-nationalism (which they prefer) and macro-nationalism – noting, however, that they often overlap. “While the former

is epitomized by classic Pan-Slavism, which was the future-oriented vision of a new political entity embracing already existing states and regions”⁶, the latter is the expression of an imperial nation’s desire to embrace kindred peoples, to project itself beyond its current borders⁷, and it “could be seen, for example, in the geopolitical ideologies of the ‘Russian world’ and ‘Holy Russia’, in which the bottom-line is the revanchist and nostalgic recreation of the split imperial unity, such as the union of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians”⁸.

Another important theoretical aspect concerns the proposal to replace the term Pan-Slavism with that of Slavophilia (for at least some aspects of the Pan-Slavic revival). Since we are dealing with an imaginary that is based on the Slavic pan-nationalism of the 19th century, but which has neither the scale nor the internal coherence of a socio-political movement or an articulated ideological doctrine, the “ism” is not the best choice to represent the new reality of the 21st century Slavic world. To better grasp the ‘essence’ of this fluid and elusive phenomenon, the authors “propose the term ‘Slavophilia’, which usefully points to the need to substitute the *-ism* in Pan-Slavism with *-philia*, that is to conceptualise Slavic pan-nationalism not as a coherent ideological platform but rather as a coalescence of ideas, emotions, visions, and metaphors, which – due to the shallowness of its political philosophy – is combinable with any ideological tradition.”⁹

However, while the two articles analyse only the English-language bibliography on the subject, *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions* (2023) fills this gap due to the

specificity of its content, as the bulk of the book consists of case studies examining the political, social and cultural manifestations of contemporary Pan-Slavism in each of the Slavic states (except Slovenia¹⁰), and therefore most of the bibliographic sources are in Slavic languages. Presenting a broad, panoramic approach to the phenomenon of Slavic pan-nationalism in the post-communist period, this collective volume is the first significant response to the invitation to deepen and develop the field of international academic scholarship on Pan-Slavism launched by Mikhail Suslov (University of Copenhagen) and the group of researchers from Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic: Vladimír Ďorđević, Marek Čejka, Ondřej Mocek and Martin Hrabálek.

The book opens with a preface in which the authors emphasise the topicality of the subject. Although the term 'Pan-Slavism' may sound obsolete, archaic in the context of today's world, although it is often seen as a utopian dream of the past, a historical and extinct form of pan-nationalism, they argue that the Pan-Slavic imaginary continues to play an important role in international relations, politics, trade, tourism and business. One of the main features of pan-nationalisms is their "ability to re-emerge after long periods of dormancy"¹¹, and this is exactly what happened with Pan-Slavism in the last 20-30 years. As Marlene Laruelle states in the *Afterword*, the concepts of Slavic identity and Slavic unity were resurrected, but largely as "empty signifiers that can be filled with different contents"¹² and therefore can serve various political agendas. Vladimir Putin, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Aleksandr Lukashenka, Slobodan Milošević, Vojislav Koštunica

are just a few of those who have (ab)used Pan-Slavic rhetoric in order to promote a particular international or domestic policy.

The preface is followed by an introduction that presents the state of the art and discusses the conceptual approach and methodological framework through which Pan-Slavism will be further examined. In addition to the two theoretical aspects I have summarised above, it is worth mentioning another important idea, namely that one of the main political motives for generating and disseminating pan-national imagery is "that of enlarging scale for the purpose of fighting for international recognition. Pan-nationalism in this sense is always a by-product of securitisation"¹³, and therefore one of its constitutive elements is antagonism towards a powerful external enemy. In the case of Pan-Slavism, this enemy was embodied in the past by Germany (in the narrow sense) and the Romano-Germanic world (in the broad sense), and in the present by the United States of America (in the narrow sense) and the collective West (in the broad sense).

The way to the main part of the book, on contemporary Pan-Slavic manifestations, is prepared by a small section devoted to the historical perspectives of Slavic pan-nationalism, so that the reader can also follow the phenomenon from a chronological, diachronic perspective. The three chapters that make up this section cover the topic by looking at three different geographical areas: Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe. Of these, Mikhail Suslov's text *Russian Pan-Slavism: A Historical Perspective* stands out, because while the other two provide a clear and concise picture of the history of Slavic solidarity in the Balkans (Susan Baker) and among the

West Slavs (Jakub Woroncow), synthesising for this purpose the existing bibliography, Suslov adds an element of novelty by outlining the trajectory of Russian Pan-Slavism through the representative figure of the late Imperial thinker Sergei Shara-pov (1855-1911) – a lesser-known name, as he has been neglected by the leading scholars in the field.

Mikhail Suslov also provides the text that opens the section on case studies of contemporary Pan-Slavism: *New Wine in an Old Wineskin: Slavophilia and Geopolitical Populism in Putin's Russia* – in which he skilfully analyses the Russian political mainstream, highlighting the ways in which Pan-Slavic rhetoric is ideologically instrumentalised to deepen hegemonic, anti-democratic, anti-civic and populist tendencies. Suslov defines today's Slavic pan-nationalism as one among many other forms of identity politics, "whose purpose is primarily the securitisation of the imagined shared Slavic identity, rather than a direct call for action"¹⁴, as it was in the past. The focus thus shifts from the canonical ideological question 'What should be done?' to the more pregnant question 'Who are we?'. In this perspective, the Slavs represent a separate civilisation and are associated with innate qualities and moral traits such as solidarity, kindness, altruism, peacefulness or collectiveness, radically differentiating themselves from the individualism and consumerism of the decaying but violent West.

While in the 1990s and 2000s the dominant tendency was glorifying Serbia as the centre of gravity of the Slavic world, because it sacrificed itself for the Slavic cause during the NATO bombing in 1999 and was consequently seen as the defensive

line of the Orthodox East, the last Slavic bastion to resist the Western enemies¹⁵, since the 2010s there has been a shift in rhetoric, with Russia being portrayed as the centre of Slavdom. According to the new perspective, Slavophilia was no longer used to praise Serbian or Belarusian resistance to westernisation, but to emphasise Russia's messianic mission to liberate the 'rest' from the 'West', to ensure global stability and to help the smaller Slavic brothers.¹⁶ For this reason, in most Slavic nations, the extent and intensity of the contemporary Pan-Slavic phenomenon depends on relations with Russia.

In Belarus, for example, Pan-Slavic ideas have played a significant role since the establishment of the Lukashenka regime in 1994, with the important specification that in Belarusian political discourse, the concept of 'Slavic peoples' almost always means the East Slavs (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine), and not all Slavs. However, after the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 (the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas), the growing sense of insecurity led Lukashenka to attempt an ideological distancing from Moscow. As a result, Slavophile rhetoric and insistence on Orthodoxy were replaced by the idea of Belarus as a "bridge between East and West, between Eastern European Orthodox and Western European Catholic civilisation"¹⁷. But it didn't last long, as the direct threat of the mass protests of 2020-2021 brought Belarus back into the Slavic family (especially as Russia played a significant role in the survival of the Minsk regime during the uprising), thus emphasising once again the ideas of Slavic unity and solidarity.

The doctrine of "East Slavic brotherhood" is also present in Ukraine, and it

continues to resonate with the population even after the events of 2013-2014, when the pro-European path was chosen. Paradoxically, it even survived the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. According to Mykola Riabchuk, this paradox is possible because "Slavophilia operates at the level of cultural-cum-historical myth and quasi-religious imagery; it transcends political reality and places the people into the comfortable glow of *ur*-brotherhood"¹⁸. Drawing on the results of sociological surveys, Riabchuk analyses the ambivalence of Ukrainian identity in the post-communist period, in which "the idyllic idea of 'brotherhood' bizarrely co-exists in peoples' minds alongside the sober notions that Russia is an 'aggressor state'"¹⁹.

In the chapter on Serbia, Dejana Vukasović and Miša Stojadinović make a similar argument: Slavophile narratives promoted by Serbian political elites revolve around the 'special relationship' with Russia, which often takes on mythological proportions. Even after the democratic changes initiated in 2000, the Pan-Slavic discourse has not been abandoned, mainly due to the fact that the Kremlin regime is the only one to side with Serbia on the Kosovo issue. Because of this deep-rooted closeness and ethno-cultural and religious kinship, in the light of which Russia is seen as a protector and patron, Pan-Slavism in the contemporary Serbian collective identity becomes something close to Russophilia.

Strong Russophile sentiments that bear the mark of Slavic-Orthodox ideology can also be found in Montenegro, especially on the right-wing political spectrum, and are manifested either directly through relations with the Russian

Federation or indirectly through the Serbian Orthodox Church (relations that deteriorated with Montenegro's accession to NATO in 2017). Although to a lesser extent, there is also a pro-Russian agenda in North Macedonia and Bulgaria, articulated as an alternative to the pro-European course. Pan-Slavic ideas about traditional values, shared Slavic culture, roots and the common Orthodox Christian religion are revived whenever EU rules are perceived as a threat to national identity or values (e.g. the name change in the case of Macedonia or the gender debate in the case of Bulgaria). We see a similar phenomenon in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where the rising anti-Western sentiment usually leads to sympathy for Vladimir Putin's strong authoritarian regime. Although the religious component is missing, we are dealing with the same fusion of pan-Slavism with pro-Russian orientation (in Slovakia especially since 2014).

The exceptions to this rule are Poland, because of its centuries-old enmity with Russia, and Croatia, where Pan-Slavism took the form of South Slavism rather than a pro-Russian orientation – but even this unionist project finds little fertile ground in the minds of the majority of the Croatian people because of the violent break-up of socialist Yugoslavia and the association of that period with historical and political trauma. In the case of Poland, although there are pro-Russian affinities associated with the image of Moscow as the Third Rome or Vladimir Putin in the role of *katechon*²⁰, there is also an opposing perspective articulated around the idea of *Intermarium*, i.e. the creation of a union of Slavic countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea, but without Russia.

The case studies on contemporary Pan-Slavic manifestations conclude with two special chapters devoted to an ethnographic approach to Slavic solidarity: “Interethnic Ritual Kinship as Pan-Slavism in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, by Keith Doubt, dedicated to the act of mutual bonding known as *kumstvo*, and “Manifestations of Pan-Slavic Sentiments Among South Slavic Diaspora Communities in the United States of America”, in which Jasmin Hasić and Maja Savić-Bojani reveal the topicality of the pan-Slavic

imaginary within the ex-Yugoslav diaspora in the United States.

Taken together, these chapters provide a panoramic and systematic view of the Pan-Slavic phenomenon, making *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions* a reference work, an indispensable bibliographical source for all those who will approach this topic in the future, exploring aspects still insufficiently studied, such as the Pan-Slavic imaginary in culture, literature and art.

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NOTES

1. Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism 1856-1870*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1956, p. ix.
2. This does not mean that Pan-Slavism ceased to be written or spoken about, only that this scholarly activity took place outside the Soviet Union (especially in America). In Soviet historiography, either the term “Pan-Slavism” was avoided, or brought up only to be refuted, or attention was paid only to those ideas in Pan-Slavic theories that fitted the official ideology. See: Anna Aleksandrovna Grigorieva, “Problema panslavizma v sovetskoj istoriografii”, in *Al'manakh sovremennoy nauki i obrazovaniya* [Анна Александровна Григорьева, “Проблема панславизма в советской историографии”, in *Альманах современной науки и образования*], no. 4 (59), 2012, p. 69-71.
3. Pan-Slavism was revived in 1941 by Stalin's decision, who wanted to mobilise the Slavic allies in the war against Germany. However, with the Tito-Stalin split in the late 1940s, the Slavic idea went

- into exile again for the next 50 years. See: Mikhail Suslov, "Geographical Metanarratives in Russia and the European East: Contemporary Pan-Slavism", in *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 53:5, 2012, p. 580; Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology*, Second edition, revised, New York, Vintage Books, 1960, p. 300-308.
4. Vladimir Đorđević et al., "Beyond Contemporary Scholarship and toward Exploring Current Manifestations of Pan-Slavism", in *Canadian-American Slavic studies*, 55(2), p. 147-159.
 5. Đorđević, Vladimir et al., "Revisiting Pan-Slavism in the Contemporary Perspective", in *Nationalities Papers*, 51: 1, 2023, p. 1-13.
 6. *Ibidem*, p. 4.
 7. Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, Palgrave Macmillan, Springer International Publishing, 2023, p. 4, 400.
 8. Đorđević, Vladimir et al., "Revisiting Pan-Slavism in the Contemporary Perspective", in *op. cit.*, p. 4-5.
 9. Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, p. 15.
 10. After careful research, the authors found that the pan-Slavic imaginary is practically absent from Slovenian society and politics, and therefore the Slovenian case was deliberately excluded. See *Ibidem*, p. 28.
 11. *Ibidem*, p. 8
 12. Marlene Laruelle, "Afterword", in Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 400.
 13. Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 5.
 14. Mikhail Suslov, "New Wine in an Old Wineskin: Slavophilia and Geopolitical Populism in Putin's Russia", in Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 100.
 15. *Ibidem*, p. 95; See also: Mikhail Suslov, "Geographical Metanarratives in Russia and the European East: Contemporary Pan-Slavism", in *op. cit.*, p. 582.
 16. Mikhail Suslov, "New Wine in an Old Wineskin: Slavophilia and Geopolitical Populism in Putin's Russia", in Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 96.
 17. Veera Laine, Aliaksei Lastouski, and Ryhor Nizhnikau, "Ideational Travels of Slavophilia in Belarus: From Tsars to Lukashenka", in Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 113.
 18. Mykola Riabchuk, "Invented 'Europeanness' Versus Residual Slavophilism: Ukraine as an Ideological Battlefield", in Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 250
 19. *Ibidem*, p. 245.
 20. Przemysław Witkowski, "Intermarium or Hyperborea? Pan-Slavism in Poland After 1989", in Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, Vladimir Đorđević (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 180.