

REVIEWS

UDC 327::355.02(497.11)

DOI: 10.5937/spm90-57469

Review (Осврт)

Српска политичка мисао

(Serbian Political Thought)

No 2/2025.

vol. 90

pp. 197-203

*Nevena Jakovljević**

*University of Pristina with temporary seat in
Kosovska Mitrovica, Faculty of Philosophy*

R. A. REISS: NEUTRALITY IS NOT POSSIBLE IN THE FACTS OF CRIME

The work of Dr. Uroš Šuvaković, a distinguished professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Belgrade, *R. A. Reiss: Neutrality is not possible in the face of crime* (Šuvaković 2024), is a very interesting read that encourages the reader to ask themselves about the sociological and historical aspects of Serbian tradition and culture, which, as the author himself states, we tend to forget. That is precisely why the idea of publishing this book on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of the arrival of Rudolph Archibald Reiss (*Rudolph Archibald Reiss*, 1875–1929) in the Kingdom of Serbia and, at the same time, the 95th anniversary of the death of this great Serbian friend, is a reflection of the author's aspiration that what Reiss did for the Serbian people then, during and after the First World War, should not be forgotten. The author himself treats this book as a personal contribution to the “culture of memory” of Serbs, in the specific case of remembering the works of Archibald Reiss.

The book *R. A. Reiss: Neutrality in the Face of Crime* offers answers to some of the questions that should still be kept in mind today: who was Rodolphe Archibald Reiss, what were his ethical and moral views, what significance did his work have for the Serbian society of the time, but also what (apart from the historical) significance of his research

* E-mail: nevenanastic2@gmail.com; ORCID: 0009-0002-4781-8929

for contemporary Serbian society, how much Reiss contributed to the preservation of the Serbian “culture of memory,” what was his role in creating the perception of European public opinion about Serbs, etc.

Professor Šuvaković’s scientific monograph dedicated to Reiss contains, in addition to the preface and conclusion, a total of six chapters, and at the end of the book, there are notes on the works from which this book was created. Some of them have already been published previously, but in English, so they now seem more accessible to our, not only academic, public, while more than half of the text is completely new and based on Šuvaković’s research in the Historical Archives of Belgrade, the State Archives of Serbia, and the Archives of Yugoslavia.

What makes this book special is precisely the fact that it can be discussed from many different perspectives, including historical, sociological, cultural, criminological, pedagogical, and political. However, the author has largely opted for a sociological analysis of Reiss’s thought. Reiss has been written about before, but the significance of this book lies in the fact that Šuvaković is the first to analyze Reiss’s significance for Serbian society from a sociological perspective. This book is also different because the author has noticed that Reiss’s work, although it stretches back more than a century, can be viewed in a contemporary context. This book also identifies current problems in Serbian society and from which lessons can be drawn about how and what needs to be changed for Serbia’s progress.

One of the main goals of this book is “to show in which areas of sociological research Reiss’s scientific contribution is present, bearing in mind that it was never strictly research, but also educational” (Šuvaković 2024, 8). Analyzing the sociological (and criminological) aspect of Reiss’s work, Šuvaković showed that not much has changed in the tradition, culture, or even the pathology of Serbian society in the past hundred years. The essence is shown that “there are those who understand the problems of contemporary society, that in the world today there is an increasing number of critical sociologists who are trying to point out the devastating consequences for contemporary society” (Nastić 2021, 419).

In the first chapter of this book, Šuvaković notes Reiss’s role in researching and interpreting social stratification, focusing in particular on certain social classes, such as peasantry, intelligentsia, officers, and war veterans. Reiss courageously, as Šuvaković points out, pointed out the values but also the shortcomings of these social classes. As he explained, there is almost no difference in the behavior and consciousness of these

layers, what was happening in society then, and the behavior and actions of the same layers today. The same aspirations of those in power to remain in power, the desire to move from the countryside to the city for an easier “official” life, etc., still remain. Reiss calls the intelligentsia “a sower of discord when it should be uniting,” and he puts the term “intelligentsia” in quotation marks. He considers it a caste, “puffed up,” “cowardly,” “immoral beings,” a social stratum for which money is “the God before whom they kneel” (Reiss in: Šuvaković 2024, 14). Although Reiss considers this behavior of Serbs to be deeply traditional and culturally rooted, it should also be considered that, as Bazić and Perović state, a large role in forming such a climate is played by “great powers guided by their geopolitical and geostrategic interests[...], all the way to contemporary world powers” though, (Bazić and Perović 2016, 110).

After reviewing the aforementioned social strata, Professor Šuvaković elaborates on other issues of Reiss’s sociological contribution, devoting significant attention to the development of applied and special sociologies, criminology, political sociology, sociology of elites, and sociology of religion. It specifically focuses on the socio-political pathology, namely party corruption, as part of the party pathology, which was widespread in the state at that time; some authors (Marković Savić 2023), as well as the author of this book, show this using the example of post-October 5th Serbia, point out that it still exists today, and that society has not fundamentally changed much in this regard. Šuvaković repeatedly presents Reiss’s criticism of the professionalization of politicians and the fact that they (in most cases) engage in politics to enrich themselves and are characterized by weak moral virtues, fickleness, and lack the courage and strength to oppose the unprincipled demands that the party places before them. Cronyism was widespread, which further led to both administrative and systemic corruption. The author warns that even today, after so much time, not much has changed and that “the problems of socio-political pathology that the Kingdom of SHS faced then are equally relevant in modern times, at least as perceived by citizens, as indicated by new research” (Šuvaković 2024, 49).

In the third chapter, the author seeks to investigate the credibility, ethics, and morality of Archibald Reiss. He went to the Kingdom of Serbia during World War I to investigate information about the commission of planned and systematic crimes, with the conviction that such claims were exaggerated. Based on his own forensic investigation, he came to undeniable conclusions about mass and planned crimes, primarily against

the civilian population. This left a deep mark on him, after which he wholeheartedly helped the Serbian people and the army, which, among other things, influenced him to voluntarily join the Serbian army at that time. Šuvaković, using the example of Reiss, showed that the credibility, ethics, and morality of an “independent investigator” cannot be called into question, even by his direct alignment with one of the warring parties. Reiss fought for the right “to the freedom of a small people who were attacked by a great military power” (Šuvaković 2024, 67). He was so truthful that he even criticized Serbian society, which he deeply appreciated and respected, on several occasions.

In the second half of the book, Šuvaković presents Reiss’s observations on the crimes committed against Serbian civilians by Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, and the communist movements that operated during and after World War I. Reiss typified these crimes, while the author of this book highlights only the most common ones, according to Reiss’s report submitted at the Paris Peace Conference.

Professor Šuvaković presents an overview of Reiss’s reports and the observed “socio-economic living conditions of the people in Macedonia and the social changes that occurred in this part of the Kingdom of SHS after the end of the First World War” (Šuvaković 2024, 81). Those social changes that occurred in the post-war period were under the auspices of Bulgarian and Albanian terrorist movements with the aim of dismembering Serbia and enriching individuals. Also, in his analysis, the author, based on two Reiss reports, which are part of the archival materials of the Marambo Fund of the Archives of Yugoslavia, points to Reiss’s finding of the pronounced arrogance and corruption of all layers of bureaucracy in Southern Serbia (Macedonia), and that many of the representatives of the “new authorities” were actually simply retrained and continued their cooperation with the Bulgarian government with the aim of Bulgarianizing the population in the post-war period. Šuvaković particularly emphasizes Reiss’s finding, based on research into the genesis of the movement, that the Komitas were not some “Macedonian” indigenous movement but rather bandits and terrorists who were trained on the territory of Bulgaria, organized by Bulgarian officials, and inserted into the territory of the Kingdom of SHS with the aim of destabilizing it. In addition, there was also cooperation with the Kachaks, who were brought into this area from the newly created Albania.

This book also reveals that Reiss, a year before his death, intended to leave the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in protest against

the insufficient nurturing of the “culture of memory” on the glorious day of Serbian warfare in World War I. Although he personally contributed to the commemoration of significant historical events, Reiss believed that the issue was not approached in an organized manner, pointing out that the forgetting of heroic days particularly affected the urban population. His effort advocacy to mark the tenth anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika Front with a campaign to Kajmakchalan, together with French fighters from Salonika, despite initial acceptance, was ultimately thwarted by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs (V. Marinković), who simply canceled the visit of the French fighters. This was the reason for Reiss to demonstratively announce that he was leaving the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes. However, at the request of his comrades, he changed his mind at the Congress of War Invalids in October 1928 in Bitola and decided to remain in Yugoslavia.

In the last chapter of the book, its complete actualization is carried out by drawing a parallel between Archibald Reiss and Dick Marty (*Dick Marty*, 1945–2023), pointing to both as examples of honorable Swiss who have, in different periods, made great contributions to Serbia, with, according to Šuvaković’s analysis, Reiss’s moral imperative being more sublime. He is not afraid of engagement, nor does he accept the stereotypes imposed by the media; he strives for the truth to see the light of day and is not afraid to say, in his lecture at the Sorbonne, that “neutrality is not possible in the face of crime,” which Šuvaković quite consciously chose for the title of this monograph.

Another characteristic of the book is that each chapter begins with a single quote, each of which “hits” the very core of the issue being addressed in that chapter. We are convinced that Šuvaković very consciously and carefully selected these quotes, three of which are by Reiss, while the rest are either by Reiss’s co-authors, or were quoted by Reiss himself, or are quotes from others regarding Reiss and his work, expressing at least through some of them his own position on some of the issues addressed. Therefore, they deserve to be mentioned:

First chapter: “Many members of the ‘intelligentsia’ would coldly sacrifice freedom, and the survival of their country, if it were to their personal advantage” (R. A. Reiss, *Listen, Serbs*);

Chapter Two: “The domination of politics over the entire human and national life, immoral, selfish and partisan politics, has been a long and unfortunate tradition of Serbian politics since the beginning of the creation of the modern Serbian state” (D. Ćosić “Afterword,” in *Listen, Srbi*);

Chapter Three: “Neutrality is not possible in the face of crime” (R. A. Reiss, lecture at the Sorbonne in 1916, according to *Listen, Srbi*);

Chapter Four: “Not even the unfortunate Serbia itself, whose magnificent glory is admired by everyone at this moment, cries out for revenge. It seeks only justice” (A. Bonasie, in R. A. Reiss, A. Bonasie, *Indictment against Bulgaria*);

Chapter Five: “If black clouds once again gather over this country, it should not surprise her, for it will be nothing more than what her own people have been preparing for her. I am utterly disappointed” (R. A. Rice, *Politics*, September 11, 1928);

Chapter Six: “With the exception of a few negligible cases, Albanians of all denominations are wholeheartedly with the Central Powers and rejoice in the failures of Serbia and its allies” (Dr. Turtulis, 1916, in R. A. Reiss, *War Reports from Serbia and the Salonika Front*).

The one and only conclusion that arises after reading the book R. A. Reiss: *Neutrality in the Face of Crime is Not Possible* by Professor Uroš Šuvaković is that it provides a new and, as we have already emphasized, different insight into Reiss’s work and the findings of his research during and after the First World War. With this book, Šuvaković clearly pointed out Reiss’s sociological and, especially, criminological contribution to the study of Serbian (Yugoslav) interwar society, while at the same time, Šuvaković made his own scientific sociological contribution, primarily when it comes to the history of Yugoslav (Serbian) sociology between the two world wars, historical sociology (Antonić 1995, 50–52) and the culture of memory. The monograph provides insight into the social analysis of the society of the time with comprehensive and systematized knowledge about the events that took place in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Serbs while creating a vertical in relation to Serbian society a century later. A very inspiring book that can be read in one sitting but remains in the mind for a long time, and which will be useful not only for future researchers of Reiss’s thought, criminologists, historians, and sociologists but also for the general public. Let it not be forgotten!

REFERENCES

- Antonić, Slobodan. 1995. *Izazovi istorijske sociologije*. Beograd: Institut za političke studije.
- Bazić, Jovan, and Blagica Perović. 2016. „Ljubiša Mitrović o Kosovu i Metohiji.” U: *Prometejska sociologija u stvaralaštvu Ljubiše Mitrovića*, ur. Gordana Đigić, 99–115. Niš: Filozofski fakultet.
- Marković Savić, Olivera. 2023. *Od zaštitnika do štićenika: sociološka studija o ratnim veteranima u Srbiji*. Kosovska Mitrovica: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Prištini.
- Nastić, Nevena. 2021. „Sociološke marginalije na savremene teme (ogledi).” *Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini*, 51(2): 417 –422. DOI:10.5937/ZRFFP51-29250
- Šuvaković, Uroš. 2024. *R. A. Rajs: Pred zločinom nije moguća neutralnost*. Novi Sad: Matica srpska; Arhiv Vojvodine, Beograd; Fakultet za obrazovanje učitelja i vaspitača Univerziteta u Beogradu.

* This review was submitted on March 13, 2025, and accepted by the Editorial Board for publishing on April 14, 2025.