The End of Yugoslavia

VESNA DRAPAC

Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 288 pp., $35.00, ISBN 0-8133-2096-8.

Eric D. Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 230 pp., $17.95, ISBN 0-271-01958-1.

Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 246 pp., $40, ISBN 0-271-01629-9.

Reneo Lukic and Allen Lynch, *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Monographs, 1996), 436 pp., £35.00, ISBN 0-19-829200-7.

Viktor Meier, *Yugoslavia: A History of its Demise*, trans. Sabrina Petra Ramet (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 279 pp., £16.99, ISBN 0-415-18596-3.

Aleksandar Pavkovic, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism and War in the Balkans*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 2000), 243 pp., £42.50, ISBN 0-312-23084-2.

Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War*, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 354 pp., $30.00, ISBN 0-8133-2559-5.

Richard H. Ullman, ed., *The World and Yugoslavia's Wars* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), 230 pp., $18.95, ISBN 0-87609-191-5.

Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995), 536 pp., $16.95, ISBN 0-8157-9513-0.

In June 1916 the headmaster of Sherborne school wrote to Robert Seton-Watson, historian, public intellectual and official adviser on matters relating to the Dual Monarchy, in particular the question of the future of the subject nationalities, to ask him to come to the school and speak to the boys on the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. (The men were connected through their Oxford education, both having been at New College.) The talk to the boys would bring to their attention the plight of the Serbs and their centuries-long battle for independence, thus, in a small

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way at least, allowing them to contribute to the war effort. Much British activism on behalf of the Serbian Relief Fund focused on the defeat at Kosovo, the evocation of which aroused particular sympathy. This sympathy was marshalled to great effect in the propaganda advocating the dismemberment of the Dual Monarchy and the establishment of what became Yugoslavia. The destruction of the central European empire had not been a war aim from the outset and there were dissident voices on the subject through to 1918. Nevertheless the idealists, Seton-Watson and the 'never-endians' were to win the propaganda war and relatively quickly at that, some say within two years.[1] Indeed, we can generalise from the example of the request from the headmaster of this illustrious public school with supporting evidence both from the success of the Serbian Relief Fund and the acclamation enjoyed by promoters of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav cause. That the former constituted what the radical critics of self-determination ironically labelled 'double-barrelled nationalism' seemed to be lost on a British public which, having cast its lot with the 'oppressed nationalities', filled church halls and schoolrooms across the counties to listen attentively to talks on avenging the defeat of the Serbs at the hands of the infidel over 500 years previously.

From the beginning of the war Seton-Watson's views on the South Slavs were established and in 1914 he wrote: 'We are witnessing the birth-throes of a new nation, the rise of a new national consciousness, the triumph of the idea of National Unity among three Southern Slav sisters – the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes. Fate has assigned to Britain and to France an important share in the solution of the problem, and it is our duty to insist that this solution shall be radical and permanent, based upon the principle of Nationality and the wishes of the Southern Slav race. Only by treating the problem as an organic whole, by avoiding patchwork remedies and by building for a distant future, can we hope to remove one of the chief danger centres in Europe.'[2] It was simply 'inconceivable' that South Slav union should be held back: 'So far . . . as the Southern Slavs are concerned, the triumph of the Allies ought to mean the creation of a new state on the Eastern Adriatic, the expansion of gallant Serbia into Jugoslavia and the achievement of Unity by the three kindred races, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.'[3]

A great deal happened between the time Seton-Watson wrote those words and the second, protracted, collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. There was no straight line from Yugoslavia's establishment through to its first and second demise. Nevertheless, in this early appraisal of the nationalities question we can identify a number of the 'truths' that observers found hard, indeed almost impossible, to reconcile with the events as they unfolded from the late 1980s to the final disintegration of the Yugoslav ideal. Although there was rapid disaffection from this ideal among Yugoslavs themselves in the 1920s and 1930s, the British champions of Yugoslavia

[1] See for example Harry Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[2] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'Austria-Hungary and the Southern Slavs', in R. W. Seton-Watson *et al.*, *The War and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 121–161 (159–160).

[3] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Issues of the War' in *The War and Democracy*, pp. 237–298 (262).

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never wavered. Their sincere attachment to the state that, some would argue, was in large part their creation, withstood the brutalisation of politics in the interwar years, the establishment of the royal dictatorship, Allied support for Tito's partisans in the Second World War and the re-fashioning of the original ideal into another based on a dictatorship shored up by the Communist Party, the police and the army. It was a boundless devotion as the Croatians, Bosnians and Kosovars were to witness and puzzle over in their struggles against the rump of the powerful Yugoslav state that openly advocated Serb supremacy in the region. There is a remarkable symmetry between the central themes of the books under review and the issues confronting Seton-Watson's generation and their predecessors, including the nature of international affairs, national identity and nation-states, religion and social and cultural life.

How had the views on South Slavs expounded by travellers, journalists and academics in the late 1800s and early 1900s come to prevail and why were they, ultimately, so intrinsically appealing to those who had the capacity to act on them in the recasting of Europe through the twentieth century? The war years were crucial, of course, in the final shaping of the policy regarding successor states but, from the example of Britain, we can see that the receptivity to the view that Yugoslavia was both viable and rationally conceived, was such that the seeds were sown on fertile ground. The emotion evinced for 'Gallant Serbia' and for the Czechoslovaks – 'fellow Protestants', worthy descendants of John Huss – was not manufactured in 1914 and did not disappear in 1918. The famous complexities of the Eastern Question as it related to the Southern Slavs had stimulated debate and confused some people, but eventually the overarching conception of a modern Europe in which emergent nations, nations on the verge of 'manhood', had a place, came to dominate.

The language of national liberation and a reforming liberal high-mindedness, characteristic of the times, inevitably related to British interests abroad. There had always been a tension between those who favoured supporting the Turkish status quo and those who abhorred the rule of the Ottomans in Europe. The Bulgarian Atrocities in 1876, however, popularised the cause of Slavonic Christians of the Ottoman Empire in Britain. After the killing of some 12–15,000 Bulgarians by the Turks the indifference of the Disraeli government was widely deplored. Gladstone himself took up the Bulgarian cause with such vigour that some of his political colleagues believed his lack of moderation would damage the party. Fears that Russia would advance to fill the void and thereby fuel Pan-Slavism on the peninsula were the Ottomans to withdraw from the Balkans did not subside easily, and anti-Russian sentiment waxed and waned. More problematic, though, was the German ascendancy. The intensity of focus on the Slavonic populations of Turkey, of necessity, related to the firming up of British attitudes towards Austria and Hungary. As Germany came to rival and threaten Britain's colonial and naval supremacy, and as 'Berlin–Bagdad' came to signify much more than a rail route, Austria came under suspicion as Germany's lackey. The monarchy's Slavonic possessions were more closely scrutinised. While the presence of the Austrian and Russian empires had once had an equalising effect on power relations in Europe, the Dual Monarchy,

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which was not a 'homogeneous' country, but 'a fortuitous concourse of racial atoms', was now deemed an anachronism.[4]

The Nationality Principle, so firmly established in theory, was never rock solid in practice. This was both because of the impossibility of allocating geographical areas to a single national group and because, if it collapsed, the monarchy had to be replaced by stable economic units with which one might conduct trade and which would ensure safe passage to markets and possessions further afield. It was a thorny issue, but the example of the United Kingdom, which successfully brought together different nationalities, was salutary. Thus principles alone were never the basis of policy towards the subject nationalities and were modified in direct proportion to the urgency of material or strategic demands. The national 'integrity' of one group might be submerged for the sake of the economic viability of a larger national unit, for example. Ignorance, or prejudice, or personal attachment could also affect a national group's perceived viability.

This was most obvious in discussions about religion, which had become one of the dominant paradigms in the assessment and 'classification' of South Slavs,[5] with Catholicism and Islam falling well behind Orthodox Christianity. Rebel Orthodox Slavs – Serbs, Bulgars and Montenegrins – though not as unfettered as Protestants, were nevertheless seen to be aspiring to forge states which championed liberty and Christianity.[6] The independent Orthodox churches were favourably compared with the highly centralised, supra-national Catholic Church with its tentacles reaching out from Rome. Catholics (interestingly, at a time when Home Rule was a controversial issue) were seemingly incapable of forging that connection between the pursuit of liberty and religious practice. This is especially pertinent to the argument that it was the 'western', Catholic republics of Yugoslavia that received preferential treatment over the 'oriental' Orthodox republics in the final break-up of Yugoslavia.[7]

The deepest disdain, however, was reserved for the Slavonic Muslims. There was no hint of romantic exoticism or liberal tolerance where they were concerned. They were deemed more backward and more fanatical than the Turkish Muslims living in the cosmopolitan cities further east which exposed them to civilising influences. Edward A. Freeman, Professor of History at Oxford, and father-in-law of Arthur Evans, was among the many academics who protested strongly at his government's support for the Turkish status quo and its seeming lack of concern for the Orthodox Christians after the Bulgarian massacres: 'The Saracen was once an unnatural excrescence on the south-western corner of Europe. The Ottoman still is an unnatural excrescence on the south-eastern corner of Europe. He cannot

[4] Francis Gribble, 'Servia Irredenta', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 220 (July 1914), 41–59 (52).

[5] See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 1997), for a discussion of the 'classification' of Balkan peoples.

[6] See for example, George Bowen, 'Montenegro', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 109 (April 1859), 461–485.

[7] Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; and Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

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become a real pupil of Christian civilisation; he cannot take real root on European soil; he can only remain for ever the alien and barbarian intruder which he was at his first coming.'[8] Francine Friedman's *The Bosnian Muslims* covers this period particularly well and shows how opinions such as Freeman's may have gained currency. It was during the Balkan wars (1912–13) that this antipathy towards Muslims was made quite clear. The *Edinburgh Review* ran an article which criticised the lack of interest of the British public in general in the nature of the wars and their Muslim victims. It noted that the expulsion or massacre of Muslims from Macedonia (one of the contested regions) sparked no angry protest or debate: 'A strange silence has been observed with regard to these happenings by the English Press.'[9] It is too tempting not to make comparisons with the 1990s when Bosnian Muslims were demonised as agents of Islamic fundamentalism in the heart of Europe. Friedman's work alerts us to the travails of Yugoslavia's Muslims and the ways in which successive regimes tried to manipulate them.

Theories resting on racial hierarchies gained particular currency in fin de siècle Europe. Accordingly, some ethnographers and anthropologists presented their findings about the South Slavs in pseudo-racial terms. Inevitably pragmatism, historic licence and personal preference worked their way into the theories propounded about the racial or national hierarchies. (It is well known that outside observers of Slavonic affairs had their 'pet' nationalities, including the Montenegrins, the Bulgarians and the Serbs.) So, for example, it was not enough that the Serbs were deemed the most capable military leaders in the region as a result of the prowess they had shown over many decades in expanding their territory, most recently and audaciously in the Balkan wars. It was on spurious historical grounds that they should be availed of the opportunity to 'reunite' ancient Illyria and, finally, gain their 'rightful' access to the sea, without which they were doomed to economic backwardness. As early as 1865, Belgrade was described by Humphry Sandwith as 'having been declared by nature if not . . . the capital of a South Eastern empire, at least the capital of South Slavonic lands'. This view persisted more or less intact through the next 130 years.

Lorraine Lees's book, *Keeping Tito Afloat*, deals with a period (1945–60) when the same blend of self-interest justified by ideological rhetoric continued to determine the nature of international relations. Only now it was to be an open secret that nobody actually expected policy to be founded on principles. Lees describes Yugoslavia's place in international relations, or relations between the blocs in the Cold War, from the point of view of the United States. It is an important, solidly researched book, further proof, if indeed any were needed, of the lasting contribution of specialised studies of this nature.

Yugoslavia was not the thin edge of the wedge, but the wedge itself containing Soviet expansion westwards. It was therefore a worthy recipient of a huge

[8] Edward A. Freeman, 'The Southern Slaves', in *Historical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 384–433 (401). The article first appeared in the *British Quarterly Review* in July 1877.

[9] E. N. Bennett, 'The Turkish Point of View', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 217 (April 1913), 278–96 (290).

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apportionment of aid that effectively kept Tito afloat. Lees shows that the United States never really expected Tito to make any serious concessions in return for the lifeline it provided: the aid was not conditional. What was important to the United States was the sense of reassurance that Yugoslavia would continue to remain impervious to the Soviets if they had sufficient moral and material support from the West. Perhaps that was all that mattered. The aid-givers were not deterred from a policy determined by considerations of national security – rather than ideology – in spite of incidents such as the US aircraft being shot down during the Trieste dispute, the espionage affair in which Yugoslav employees of the US embassy in Belgrade were arrested, tried and executed for spying in 1946–7, and Tito's eventually vigorous pursuit of non-alignment. Clearly it did not matter what Tito did and while the movement towards 'market socialism' may indeed have been welcomed, the aid would have come without it. There was no serious reflection on the nature of the regime and the way it might develop over time: it was plainly the case that the United States was not primarily (or at all) interested in nurturing or supporting freedom or opposition movements in Europe, as was notably evident in Hungary in 1956. The threat to stability and to the diplomatic and economic status quo engendered by such movements was enough to place leaders in the West on guard, and that glaring disparity between the rhetoric about individual rights and justice, and the exigencies of national (masking as global) security, showed just to what depths liberal discourse had plummeted in the course of the twentieth century. It also alerted the architects of opposition or reformist movements in communist countries that their 'liberation' would only be effected from within. It was in vain that they might seek out the heirs of the eighteenth-century Thomases (Jefferson and Paine) among the foreign observers of their revolutions.

Lees notes the way in which the concept of 'national communism' proved attractive to the agents of American foreign policy. They firmly believed in its capacity to gnaw away at Soviet hegemony. But, as Lukic and Lynch show, in federal structures like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, 'national communism' did not have a long shelf-life because there was no great all-embracing, patriotic struggle or tradition to sustain it once the partisan generation aged and the respective communist parties' monopoly on power and political rectitude was lost. The dogged disregard in the United States, and elsewhere, for the fact that Yugoslavia had no national core, or set of national traditions and myths that projected out from the centre and bound disparate groups, shows two things: that much of the early Yugoslavist rhetoric had survived and was strengthened by the calamitous experience of the Second World War; and that observers had little idea of what was happening in Yugoslavia outside Belgrade. It also meant that many 'experts' were to be ill-prepared for the eventual disintegration of the state.

Thus we have the context in which to analyse the United States' policies towards Yugoslavia in the 1990s. We can understand the attitudes of men of George Bush Senior's generation and their heirs, and note that an essentially Cold War mentality prevailed in those crucial early months prior to the attacks on Slovenia and Croatia in 1991. Ideology did not cloud essential issues of self-interest and containment.

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Liberalisation of the economy accompanied by limited democratisation was encouraged, but not at the expense of the stability and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, and not if it ushered in a surge in what Bush was to refer to as 'suicidal nationalisms'. So, whereas the US Central Intelligence Agency had predicted the violent break-up of Yugoslavia some eighteen months previously, political leaders in the United States had neither the will nor the inclination to attempt to apply serious creative energy to the resolution of the terminal problems Yugoslavia faced.

But was this not, after all, Europe's hour? These were extraordinary years and Yugoslavia was definitely not the main story in 1989 and 1990. Still, many European governments were also to take the hardline approach towards the breakaway republics, which implicitly supported Yugoslavia's aggression against the democratising independence movements in Slovenia and Croatia. The extent to which one was aware of, or accepted this, had some bearing on one's view of the debacle. If we have any doubt about this we need simply turn to three books: Susan Woodward's *Balkan Tragedy*, Reneo Lukic and Allen Lynch's *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals* and Richard Ullman's *The World and Yugoslavia's Wars*. Produced at roughly the same time and covering similar themes, they are different in scope, emphasis and perspective. But they convey that sense of frustration, despair and sheer disbelief all onlookers felt at different times and for different reasons. Even if subsequent events and books might overshadow these publications in certain respects, what they do very well is recall the initially unbridgeable divide between those outsiders who advocated intervention and those who did not. This is especially the case for Woodward, whose work stands as a classic contemporary treatment of the events and articulates one of the dominant strands of thinking at the time.

Woodward, who served as senior adviser to Yasushi Akashi, the top UN official in Yugoslavia and special representative of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, counselled a hands-off policy. One of her core arguments, put bluntly, is that if enough energy had been put into bolstering and strengthening Yugoslavia then the allegedly marginal and extreme forces working to destroy its integrity would have been overwhelmed by the majority of Yugoslavs who, Woodward argues, in fact hoped and worked for the preservation of the state. But Woodward provides no evidence to support the assertion that there existed, across the republics, a sense of allegiance toward the state. On the contrary, she documents the lack of support for, and disaffection from, all-Yugoslav structures, military, political and cultural. For Woodward one of the worst mistakes made in dealing with the Yugoslav crisis was 'taking sides', because the taking of sides did not stop the wars, alleviated distress only temporarily and gave the Serbs more ammunition in their xenophobic propaganda. Curiously, she does not consider the policy of maintaining the status quo, or preventing certain parties from purchasing arms while their opponents had such a huge material advantage that they sold weapons to Somalia in order to bolster their war economy, to be taking sides.

Several of the essays in *The World and Yugoslavia's Wars* deal with precisely this point and offer a view often at odds with Woodward's. The authors, prominent specialists in the field of international relations, look at the Yugoslav tragedy 'from

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the outside in' and do not mince words in their short, strongly argued, pieces. Support for the status quo effectively gave Milosevic and the Yugoslav army carte blanche to ride roughshod over all the areas Serbs deemed their 'historic lands' (effectively wherever Serbs lived) and then rewarded them for this by implicitly recognising their territorial gains in subsequent negotiations. It was a game of tiger and mouse. Some European leaders argued that they could not justify intervention if lives, other than those of Yugoslavs, were going to be lost for no material gain or permanent outcome, as there had been following the Gulf War, for example: a variation on the theme of a refusal to die for Danzig, perhaps. Though it soon became evident that UN troops themselves felt constrained and frustrated by their limited brief. The point remains that international security institutions (six in all) expressly designed to deal with such crises failed appallingly. They failed because the governments that wielded the most power within these organisations and which advocated non-intervention, used them as arms of their foreign policy and, in the case of Britain and France, to oppose German initiatives. They opposed them not because they feared for the wellbeing of Yugoslavs, but because of their concerns that Germany was becoming a rival power base in a reintegrating Europe. Evidence that showed Serbs would respond to international pressure if they knew the stakes were high enough was never properly considered (Ullman, p. 31). Instead, everything was negotiable because there was, as Milosevic quickly discerned, 'a high tolerance' in the West . . . 'for the worst atrocities in Europe since the Nazi era' (Thomas Weiss in Ullman, p. 70). It was a legacy of what Lukic and Lynch call 'kabuki diplomacy', which respected form but had no substance (p. 245).

In *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals*, Lukic and Lynch amass a great deal of evidence that leads them to observe, poignantly, that in the absence of political will in a powerful country like the United States 'to take responsibility for the management of political change in post-Soviet Europe', there remains the danger that 'the immense democratic and pacific possibilities of 1989' will be 'squandered' (p. 402). In countries where 'national communism' was a force to be reckoned with – Hungary and Poland, for example – various factors like common cultural and social norms, a common sense of a shared past and future, and social cohesion ensured that the difficult political transition proceeded relatively smoothly. None of these features was present in Yugoslavia, and this was all the more obvious when disintegration came in the wake of the Serbs' destabilising campaigns in Kosovo, Croatia, Vojvodina and Montenegro. Lukic and Lynch's originally conceived and closely researched and argued comparative treatment of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia is both a book of its time and an enduring work of scholarship.

History did not bind the republics but pulled them apart. This was not so much because their histories were different, but because history was made pliable and deliberately marshalled to justify the unjustifiable. Witness the example of the Second World War 'as history'. Every book, of necessity, at least touches on the ravages Yugoslavia endured in the Second World War. The reincarnated state was forged in that war and, in large part, defined itself on the basis of a particular

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experience and reading of it. For many observers, Croatian history seems only to begin and end with the Second World War, though some are more generous in the space afforded that wartime experience by tracing the nationalism of the Ustasha back to the nineteenth-century rhetoric of men like Ante Starcevic who, at one time, advocated a 'Greater Croatia'. Invariably the Ustasha are made to stand for the political norm in Croatia: as, by all accounts, the Ustasha were always 'notorious', with strongly genocidal proclivities, they had to have reflected general tendencies of the population at large. According to this line, so clearly articulated in literature of the Serbian national revival of the 1980s, the ultra-nationalism of the Croats could be camouflaged for periods of time (for example by a superficial communist veneer as in the case of Croats such as Tito and Tudjman) but, it could never be overcome. There are, of course, a lot of books about Yugoslavia in the Second World War (though, perhaps, not nearly as many as one might expect given the centrality of this theme to the state's survival), but it would seem that this remains one of the most cited yet least understood periods of Yugoslavia's history. The sophistication of German, Italian or French historiography of the 'fascist temptation' and the war years is lacking, while there is, still, too often an uncritical acceptance of doubtful historical sources (claims and counter-claims about wartime atrocities, for example). Aleksandar Pavkovic's *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia* provides us with an example of this with his implied continuum of Croatian politics from Pavelic to Tudjman. Viktor Meier's *Yugoslavia*, on the other hand, offers a different perspective. With more measured references to the Second World War, and from within a broader theoretical framework, Meier concludes that the war was not typical of modern Croatian nationalism generally, and that the roots of Croatian politics in 1991 can be traced back to the language and experience of the Croatian Spring of 1971, not 1941.

Traditionally, our understanding of Serb nationalism and politics, on the other hand, was shaped by evocations of a once great kingdom broken up and then reconstituted, slowly, by way of a long struggle. The 'martyrdom' of Serbs, notably in the two world wars, was projected as a unifying theme. The 1980s witnessed the emergence of new histories recalling the Serbs' struggles in the wars and rehabilitating the Cetnik leader, Mihailovic (see Woodward, pp. 71 and 91 and Ramet, p. 22, for example). Less heroic tendencies, territorial expansion in aggressive military campaigns, authoritarian traditions, infighting and the violent treatment of political rivals as evidenced in palace coups and the assassination and defenestration of members of the royal family in 1903, were subsumed. It took the recent wars and 'ethnic cleansing' to shake the foundation of that idealised perception of Gallant Serbia. And if, as Pavkovic argues, the Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians and Kosovars won the 'propaganda war' and the 'media war', and thus attracted the sympathy of the international community, it must also be said that this was a most startlingly successful campaign that overturned more than a hundred years of poor press and outdid Serbia's own enlistment of the Belgrade offices of Saatchi and Saatchi when its image needed a revamp.

According to Sabrina Petra Ramet, Yugoslavia was no longer viable because the

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traditions and histories kept alive by different groups, their collective memories, their sense of themselves, and what they hoped to project into the future, were not compatible. Ramet's work stands apart because of the ease and skill with which she weaves cultural and social strands into the political history of Yugoslavia. *Balkan Babel* combines some of Ramet's previously published works with new material and, as one might expect, given her expertise in the area, the chapters on religion are particularly sharp and evocative. The relationship between politics and culture (broadly defined) is not always easy to determine, but this does not deter Ramet, who takes on the difficult questions, as her subheading, 'Hamlet in Bosnia', reveals! Western observers may well have wanted the aspirations of the republics to be compatible, but they could not will it nor impose it and their inability to recognise that prevented them from bringing anything worthwhile to the negotiating table. Yugoslavia failed ultimately as an integrated state both in 1941 and 1991. In the 1980s very few people actually identified themselves as Yugoslavs (as few as 5.5 per cent in Bosnia), but at the same time, within the rising generation in particular, there was not an especially vigorously nationalistic inclination outside Serbia. Serbian nationalism, articulated with increasing fervour by established writers, academicians and intellectuals, first emboldened Kosovars and Slovenes and then Croats, who had remained particularly divided and reactive on the subject in the 1980s. What true Yugoslavs believed and aspired towards is not entirely clear; nor can we say exactly what permanent values the state upheld and promoted, apart from meeting people's material needs which, ultimately, it was unable to do anyway. The effects of the utter barrenness of the Yugoslav state in this moral sense can be seen in people's behaviour in the war.

Eric Gordy's *The Culture of Power in Serbia* provides us with an insight into the way in which some people struggled through and survived these years in Serbia. It is an engaging book which invites speculation on the persistence, or otherwise, of Serb opposition and conformism in Yugoslavia. One of the questions Gordy addresses is Milosevic's ability to hold on to his position (he was still in power at the time of the book's publication) in spite of the destruction wrought and the suffering endured by Serbs as a result of his warmongering. His essential populism was an important factor in his rule, but, according to Gordy, Milosevic maintained his position as his popularity waned because of the 'destruction of alternatives', political, social, economic and cultural. Moreover, argues Gordy, Milosevic's initial victory was the product of a successful coup, not the culmination of a nationalist revival.

The Culture of Power in Serbia is a welcome contribution to the burgeoning literature on Yugoslavia that eschews narrowly political, ethnic and economic analyses of its nature. Gordy is particularly good on the subject of music and youth culture. Rock music – successful, cosmopolitan, superficially rebellious and enshrining 'modern', urban values of individualism and personal freedom – was out of favour under Milosevic and granted less and less public space. On the other hand the regime favoured and promoted 'neofolk' and then 'turbofolk' which became truly popular with criminal, paramilitary associations (for example the warlord Arkan and his wife, turbofolk queen, Svetlana Velickovic-Ceca). Once it became

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obvious that turbofolk could not be contained, the regime sponsored the return of 'true culture'. This entailed a rejection of kitsch and, directed from above, was so highbrow as to herald, among other things, the coming of culturally uplifting toothpaste, presumably more elevating than the perfume, 'Miss 1389', which solemnly commemorated the Serbian defeat on Kosovo's fields. The regime's attempt at directing popular culture was not without its hazards and failed ultimately because, according to Gordy, rock music continued to be played and, despite its smaller audiences, was more politically significant than ever before precisely because it was out of favour. In drawing this conclusion Gordy briefly alludes to notions of resistance in authoritarian regimes and ways in which people, browbeaten by propaganda, robbed of their autonomy because of the attack on (or as he would put it, destruction of) what pluralism there was, turn in on themselves. They retreat into private life in order to withstand the storm, and Milosevic remained unchallenged because his victory over the people was temporarily complete in the public sphere.

This is a captivating thesis: culturally and politically, it separates Milosevic from the people who failed to topple him and virtually absolves them of any responsibility for the behaviour of the regime. How can this be? Apparently, Serbs who may have behaved differently had the alternatives not been 'destroyed', were to find themselves in a no-win situation when war broke out. War became a legitimising agent and put crass nationalist propaganda to a real purpose: protecting vulnerable Serbs and avenging the past and present sins of the enemies. Gordy's thesis cuts through stereotypes of the nationalist demon and his conversations and interviews with ordinary folk show that many, who continued to think clearly, were unable to act on their feelings of dissent.

Descriptive passages and background (for example on the press and the demonstrations in Belgrade in March 1991) are full of interesting observations, and the book is well constructed and very readable. Methodologically, it is occasionally problematic. Evidence is sometimes partial and one, unkindly, might be tempted to add a subtitle: 'Nice Serbs I have met in the streets, cafes and clubs of Belgrade'. Discussions about questions that have vexed historians of culture and resistance under dictatorships elsewhere, are glossed over. For example, was rock culture in Yugoslavia ever truly politically subversive, offering a real alternative to the prevailing ideology? (Ramet also explores this in *Balkan Babel*.) Simple 'alternatives' (in the sense of not being mainstream) do not, by definition, equate with pluralism, let alone opposition. It could be argued that youth rebelliousness is a societal norm, often encouraged and channelled by governments of all persuasions. Furthermore, the consequences of the actions of rebels, as well as the essential nature of their rebellion, need to have some bearing on our understanding of their behaviour as alternative or oppositional. I am very sympathetic to the argument that sites of resistance are not necessarily public, and that the actions of true dissenters do not have to have narrowly political consequences in order to be effective. The vast literature on resistance and collaboration in occupied Europe, and *Widerstand* and consensus in Nazi Germany, has led to compelling debates about the relationship between the public and private domains under twentieth-century dictatorships, the

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extent to which the ruling ideology penetrated people's daily lives and the strategies enlisted to resist or withstand that contamination. However, as has been argued quite eloquently elsewhere,[10] there is a point at which acts of youth rebellion – whether they comprised youths in Berlin jazz clubs listening to Duke Ellington and turning up their noses (or worse) at members of Hitler Youth, or Serbian rock bands playing to their loyal fans – end, and principled action to negate the nefarious influence of the ruling ideology (even by default), begins. The two positions may be related but cannot be confused.

The point is that it is precisely the search for, or the sustaining of, alternatives, whether in private or public spaces, that leads to (or comprises) opposition or resistance. Gordy recalls the arguments about the legitimating effect of consumerism and materialism in liberal democracies, but he might have done well to consider also the defusing of opposition voices through the sheer lack of interest of the authorities. The Milosevic regime held rock music at arm's length because it had not prepared Serbian youths (who desisted from responding to the call-up for reservists) for the 'defence' of their nation. But simply refusing to respond to the call-up is not, in itself, necessarily indicative of anything more than a desire for self-preservation, as understandable as that desire might be. The French youths who refused to be requisitioned to work in Germany in the Second World War and hid in the scrub in the south of France were not resisters in the first instance, although many, once living underground, were exposed to the influence of *maquisards* and were presented with the opportunity to resist, which large numbers subsequently took up. Were the partisan/resistance experience as central to Serbian history as we have been led to believe, or civic society as highly developed as Gordy avers, there might have been a similar unfolding in Serbia in the 1990s. The option to take flight did present itself to many young Serbs, who chose it and left the country. While, as Gordy argues, this exodus may indeed have depleted the potential sources of 'resistance', there is no reason to believe that, had they stayed, they would have been morally, socially or politically prepared – or inclined – to take up the arduous and dangerous role of opposing the regime. What, in their upbringing under a corrupt and materialistic government, had prepared them to take up such a role? It could be argued that, in a perverse sense, Milosevic was right and that youth rebellion in Yugoslavia was simply a version of Western consumerism parading as individualism, glossing over the sham of the regime's liberalising tendencies, thus engendering anomie. (That one of the signs of media 'pluralism' was the ready availability of a wide range of pornography on the news-stands is another example of this.) Once the 'destruction' of viable alternatives had been achieved, what exactly was the basis on which the opposition might have sought to preserve sociability and civic society? It is questionable that they ever really existed, even in the limited sense to which Gordy alludes.

Gordy's argument is weakened by his recourse to a prescriptively dichotomous

[10] See for example, Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, translated by Richard Deveson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).

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analysis of Serbian society. He explains Milosevic's success in terms of another series of victories: of the rural over the urban; the old over the young; the parochial over the cosmopolitan; and collective authoritarianism over the values of individualism and personal autonomy. His overt disdain for the rural population (*primitivci* or primitives in, the words of rock 'rebels') as a result of their receptivity to xenophobic propaganda, clouds his judgement. And it contradicts the widely held view (expressed quite clearly in *The Culture of Power* as well) that it was not his rural *naifs*, but Gordy's 'urbanites' – in this case the mobilised, ultra-nationalist Serbian intellectuals of the academies – who prepared the groundwork for the ascendancy of Milosevic. Even if Milosevic did assume power as a result of a party coup, that nationalism, which he channelled, pre-dated his ascendancy and made him, first, most acceptable to the public and then truly popular with a broad support base. Gordy argues that what made Milosevic attractive (when he admits that there was a genuine populist appeal) was not what he said, but the way in which he said it. Milosevic's clear, plain and forthright expressions of national triumphalism were, simply, a welcome change in tone from the doublespeak of the communists. I would suggest that perhaps Gordy is labouring the point unnecessarily here. While one laments the destruction of the potential for transforming civil society and nurturing 'sociability', which here seems largely to mean social intercourse pure and simple, there is a temptation to romanticise the immediate past, as did many of Gordy's Yugonostalgic *rokeri* and as do a number of historians.

Moral equivalence or relativism, seen to epitomise 'the post-Vietnam generation', underpins some of these books. In her pithy introduction to Meier's *Yugoslavia*, Ramet writes: 'Relativism is beguiling, because it seems so ''fair''. But relativism is also facile, offering the appearance of wisdom for those who lack either the time or the patience to sort out the facts' (p. ix). Relativism deters us from a principal task, that of establishing the levels of responsibility of groups and individuals for various activities at any given moment. Certainly we need to err on the side of caution, since we know that demonisation has its own pitfalls. But an over-exaggerated and misdirected sense of moral equivalence renders us incapable both of writing good history, and of drawing any lessons from the events in Yugoslavia.

In the first instance we have the fairly standard smattering of comments on the similarities between Kucan, Tudjman and Milosevic. Milosevic was rowdier, perhaps, but their different styles could not hide the fact that these men were all cut from the same Balkan cloth. Understandably, the greater emphasis is on the comparison between Tudjman and Milosevic – 'both as bad as each other' – and their 'symbiotic relationship'. We have, too, pronouncements on the similarity of the tactics 'of all sides' (Woodward, p. 236) and the atrocities committed 'by all parties'. This, in spite of the fact that the arms embargoes were, perhaps, the most successful barriers to all sides acting equally atrociously. Such equal apportionment of blame leads to the more unsettling comments about 'aid spectacles' and atrocities 'hysteria' which prompted a popular, emotive response to the escalating violence. Woodward contextualises the atrocities – notably the Serbs' policy of 'ethnic

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cleansing' – arguing that they were a product of the manipulation of the war and the mass psychological preparation for it by nationalists and their rhetoric of hate (pp. 228, 243). But she does not deny them or minimise their significance.

In Pavkovic's *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia*, however, an inversion takes place. The victims are guilty of bringing the troubles upon themselves, either because of the sins of their forebears, or because of their successful manipulation of their actual suffering. Thus, Slovenes, having won international favour through their propaganda war, staged their alleged invasion as a media event (pp. 137–138). Croats and Muslims brought Serbian attacks upon themselves in Dubrovnik and the safe havens respectively. Western focus on the suffering in Sarajevo provided the Muslims 'with a major asset against the Serb party and its leaders' (p. 164), while media stories showing 'an emaciated Muslim inmate' of an 'alleged Serb concentration camp' elicited a similarly favourable international response. Furthermore, whether Serbs bombed the Sarajevo market remains 'undetermined', while the responsibility for other alleged Serb bombings of civilians also remains 'contested' (pp. 175, 233). (Presumably we should be looking through the archives for written orders.) And finally, television images of 'crying babies' in Kosovo brought sympathy to Albanians who also deliberately provoked atrocities and staged massacres (pp. 191, 193). Pavkovic's relativism trivialises suffering and borders on denial. He would have done better to ask why it is that the term 'ethnic cleansing' does not stick in our throats and how it has slipped so easily into common parlance in place of more appropriate expressions like genocide or murder.

There had to be a bottom line on the question of borders, aggression and atrocities. And there had to be support in the form of an international commitment to the ongoing process of democratisation. None of this would have been 'hardline', 'partisan' or unprecedented. Ramet and Lukic and Lynch show how essentially obfuscatory and diversionary were the arguments against international recognition of the existing republican borders. And Meier makes the pointed observation that while Western diplomats said that they would not interfere in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia, a sovereign state, Western politicians subsequently 'felt quite free to interfere unabashedly in the internal affairs of the Yugoslav successor states' (p. 221). So there was no bottom line, just endless negotiation and accommodation. When policies were pursued determinedly (first by Germany, and ultimately by the United States), then they were quickly attacked by those whose hand wringing and indecision had actually exposed more and more people to violence and chaos.

Tudjman's pursuit of his territorial claims in Bosnia led him to negotiate with Milosevic and proved disastrous for both Croats and Muslims. Nevertheless, it does not follow that because of this he was the same as Milosevic, let alone equally to blame for the debacle. According to Stanley Hoffman, it was wrong 'to negotiate with Serbia as if all the parties to the dispute had the same moral standing' and it left negotiators with no bargaining power (in Ullman, p. 118). Meier's *Yugoslavia* confirms this. It is the product of an understanding and confidence acquired over decades spent studying and writing about south eastern Europe. Meier began his researches with a doctoral thesis on 'The New Yugoslav Economic System' which,

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he writes, seemed 'meaningful and relevant' in 1950. He never felt that Yugoslavia was an 'artificial creation' but, once 'the state formation became unrealistic and politically unsustainable, it became necessary to draw the appropriate conclusions' (p. xiii). He states rather unceremoniously that Yugoslavia failed not because it was multinational, but because it was undemocratic. *Yugoslavia* is remarkable in its construction whereby within the parameters of a close study of the demise of the country the reader is taken on a series of excursions, historical and political, in which Meier skilfully balances detail, personal reflection and analysis. The book is indispensable, an essential corrective to Pavkovic's *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia*.

The fall of Yugoslavia signalled an end point. It also signalled a beginning. There was a political and social dynamic that propelled people in their bid for more freedom. Without that dynamic there would have been nothing on which to hang populist nationalism. That is perhaps one of the most basic lessons of the great social and democratic revolutions. At a time when people should have been asking what kind of society the international community had supported in Yugoslavia, and what kind of society it was prepared to continue to support, an alarmist anti-nationalist discourse took hold. Self-interest and expediency replaced discussion about society and politics, about citizenship and social cohesion, about rights and responsibilities, and about morality in international affairs and public life. It continues to do so. A sad testament indeed to the victims of 'ethnic cleansing'.

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