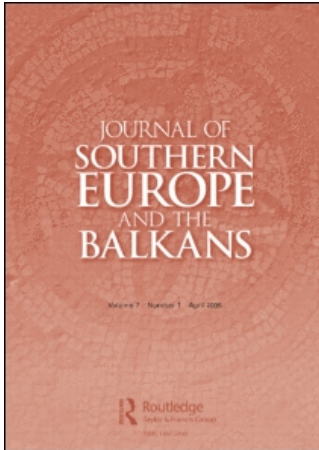


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Aleksa Djilas

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REVIEW ARTICLE

The academic West and the Balkan test

ALEKSA DJILAS

SABRINA P. RAMET, *Thinking About Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates About the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), 328 pp., ISBN 10: 0-521-61690-5 (pbk), £17.99

JOHN R. LAMPE, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006), 338 pp., ISBN 10: 0-333-79347-1 (pbk), £16.99

A territorial dispute as subtle and ill humored as those forestalled by international law brought him up against Paul Kelly, the famous leader of another gang. The boundary line had been established by bullets and border patrol skirmishes. Eastman crossed the line late one night and was set upon by five of Kelly's men. (Jorge Luis Borges, *Monk Eastman, Purveyor of Iniquities*)

Sabrina P. Ramet, a professor of political science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, has written a book which is most impressive in its scope. *Thinking About Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates About the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* is a discussion of more than 130 books, mostly in English but also in the languages of former Yugoslavia and a few in German and Italian, all listed at the beginning. It is divided into 13 chapters with titles that are meant to attract the attention not only of scholars but of all interested in former Yugoslavia, such as 'Who's to Blame, and for What? Rival Accounts of the War' or 'Milošević's Place in History' or 'Debates about Intervention'.

The question that instantly and inevitably springs to mind is, of course, whether Sabrina Ramet has really read all these books or is *Thinking About Yugoslavia* just a spectacular example of that dark academic craft of reviewing a book after only leafing through it or reading other reviews? (Perhaps in the not too distant future we may have a New York or London *Review of Reviews of Books*?) Whether or not one believes that Ramet has read 40,000 pages or 16 million words (my rough calculations), her knowledge is considerable. Yet hers is not a book that can be recommended. Its bane is not to be found in ignorance but, alas, in the author's profound bias, which causes her to evade difficulties and conceal complexities.

Professor Michael Mann, America's leading historical sociologist, published in 2005 *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, which soon won

international acclaim for its powerful insights into some of the most murderous conflicts of the last century. Mann convincingly rejects any attempt to chastise entire ethnic groups as perpetrators of expulsions and genocide. While such simplistic accounts are characteristic of popular media and everyday conversation, they can also be found in scholarly works. Concentrating on recent scholarship, Mann, for example, criticizes Daniel Jonah Goldhagen for trying to prove in his *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* that the whole German nation was imbued with 'exterminist anti-Semitism', and Vahakn N. Dadrian for asserting in his *The History of the Armenian Genocide* that Turks, as fierce warriors and intolerant Muslims, were predisposed to mass murder of Christian Armenians.

Mann's third example is Norman Cigar's *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing*, in which the author 'makes his view of the Yugoslav ethnic wars clear with subheads like "The Serbs' Sense of Superiority"'. Mann then proceeds to describe the views of Goldhagen, Dadrian and Cigar as nationalist 'since it is nationalists who claim that the nation is a singular actor' and because they condemn German, Turkish and Serbian nationalism 'in ways that reproduce the categories of nationalist thought' (p. 20).

Sabrina Ramet, nonetheless, perceives Norman Cigar, professor of Security Studies at the US Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting and a member of the Croatian Academy of America, completely differently. To her, he is a 'meticulous scholar' (p. 269) and *Genocide in Bosnia* a 'brilliantly executed book' (p. 16). Indeed, Cigar is one of the heroes of her book and is extensively and approvingly quoted on dozens of its pages.

But not only is Michael Mann correct about Cigar (and Goldhagen and Dadrian)—what he says about them applies even more so to Ramet. The title of her book postulates thoughtful and learned discussion, yet in the text she proceeds to viciously attack true scholars while heaping compliments on authors whose scholarly credentials are questionable. On the one hand, well-known professors who have devoted their lives to Yugoslav studies, like Paul Shoup, Susan Woodward, Steven Burg and Robert Hayden, are accused of nothing less than moral relativism. But it is precisely their successful avoidance of media hype and resistance to political pressures while providing a complete picture and balanced analysis of the wars of Yugoslavia's disintegration that earned them the respect of their peers. On the other hand, Ramet is full of admiration for Croatian nationalists like Branimir Anzulović, Stjepan G. Meštrović, Ivo Žanić, Branka Magaš and her son Marko Attila Hoare, or politically involved academics like James Gow (his book is 'classic' (p. 80)), who served as an adviser to two British ministers of defence, or Western journalists like Viktor Meier (his 'expostulation' is 'brilliant' (p. 90), his 'defence' of Croatia's president Tudjman 'spirited' (p. 7)), whose work for the right-wing *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* earned him a decoration from the president of Slovenia.

At the end of *Thinking About Yugoslavia*, Ramet presents us with the list of authors and their works that are her 'personal favourites' (p. 310). In my opinion, the vast majority of scholars in the field would consider these books to be among the most biased on the Yugoslav conflict. There are exceptions, of course, such as Jasna Dragović-Soso's excellent account of the role of Serbia's intellectuals in the revival of nationalism with the fine, ironic title *Saviours of the Nation*, or works

by Ivo Banac who succeeds miraculously in being both a Croatian nationalist with political ambitions as well as a prominent historian.

After reading Ramet's book—and, yes, I did read it carefully—I was left with the odd yet indelible impression that for her the realm of the unexplored is either non-existent or irrelevant and elusive truth is obvious—so there is no need to search for it; it is enough simply to struggle against those who refuse to acknowledge her concept of it. Those who doubt this truth ally themselves with evil, and to dispute Ramet's dogmatic conclusions is to stand in the way of justice. What Ramet clearly wants in Yugoslav studies are polemical, aggressive books advocating military intervention against the Serbs (in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as in Serbia) and swift and merciless punishment of defeated Serbian leaders.

No wonder then that if one disagrees with her, one is not entitled to the least respect. Susan Woodward's *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, with its 536 pages and plentiful endnotes, could easily be the most thoroughly researched book on the Yugoslav conflicts until 1995. It pays particular attention to the broader international context of the tragedy and includes a courageous exposition of the complicity of international factors, from the pro-separatist Germany, Austria and Vatican, to the unprincipled European Union and State Department. It also gives an in-depth analysis of the economic causes, such as IMF's policies of demand-repression that 'led to conditions that could not easily foster a political culture of tolerance and compromise' (Woodward, p. 383).

Ramet scarcely utters a word of criticism of the globally dominant Western countries and institutions—Germany supported Slovenia and Croatia because of 'the suffering of innocents' (p. 91) and NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999 was 'generally surgical' (p. 172)—yet she accuses Woodward of subscribing to the view 'that justice is what the rulers say it is' (p. 2). And how did Woodward earn such disapprobation? She invoked the well-known precept of international law that minorities do not have the right to independent statehood while Ramet, in contrast, supports an independent Kosovo. Woodward's account of the Yugoslav tragedy is also 'obscurantist', and since she supposedly does not point out individual people as 'causative agents' but presents only 'blind historical forces', Woodward is like those who believe that the world stands on the back of an elephant which stands on the back of a giant turtle which stands on the back of another turtle and so on 'all the way down' *ad infinitum* (p. 89).

Ramet mentions numerous individuals she holds responsible for the Yugoslav civil war and almost all are Serbian politicians, officers and intellectuals. But she also considers historical forces to be important, though I presume they are not blind since they are to be found within culture, religion and political tradition. For example, Ramet quotes extensively Branimir Anzulović's *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* and we hear of a 'Serbian tradition of violence fostered by ecclesiastical elites and cultural artifacts' (p. 4), Serbs' 'proclivity towards genocide' (p. 61) and 'the destructive ethos ... in Serbian culture' (p. 61).

But it is not only tendentious interpretations and open political sympathies and antipathies that make *Thinking About Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates About the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* such an unacceptable book. There is a myriad of factual errors and were known to be such, or at least were highly suspect at the time of Ramet's writing. Moreover, there are crucial and well-known facts which Ramet simply does not mention, for whatever reason.

It is a significant error to state, for example, that Macedonia was partitioned after the two Balkan Wars (p. 281), since it simply did not exist as a political unit inside the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, Noel Malcolm is wrong to state that within a year and a half after the end of the Second World War, Tito's Partisans murdered a quarter of a million people (p. 250). Nor did over 200,000 people die in Bosnia in the civil war of 1992–1995, as Ramet repeats on several occasions—according to the internationally funded Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo it is actually under 100,000: Bosniaks (Muslims) 66 per cent, Serbs 26 per cent, Croats 8 per cent (p. 22). There was no 'Serbian hegemonism' in the early 1980s (p. 71), nor was Slovenia's move towards independence primarily a reaction to Milošević's Serbia (p. 116). 'Serbian intellectuals' did not draw up a 'nationalist memorandum' in 1986 but some members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences made a draft proposal for a memorandum. Admittedly, it was 'self-pitying' and 'aggressive' (p. 71). Further, Greece did not stand fast at Milošević's side—it accepted the bombing of Serbia by NATO (p. 95). Finally, how odd to believe that Yugoslavia under Tito tried 'for a long time' to develop nuclear weapons (p. 131) and that Milošević compared himself to Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini (p. 160).

Ramet's sins of omission are also numerous. Why did she leave out that all Bosnian Muslims, and not only Serbs, opposed the international recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, fearing it would destabilize Bosnia? And would it not be important to mention that many Albanians in Kosovo often pointed out to the self-proclaimed Serbian autonomous unit in Croatia as something closely resembling what they wanted to achieve?

In the spring of 2006, the Bosnian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sarajevo, which is run mostly by Muslims, came out with the figure of between 500 and 600 Serbian civilians murdered by Muslim forces in Sarajevo during the war. At the same time, *Slobodna Bosna* [*Free Bosnia*], a moderate Muslim weekly also in Sarajevo, maintained that there had been as many as 850 Serbian victims. Not only does Ramet not mention any figures for Serbian victims, but there is nothing in her book that even suggests such killings. There are now not many Serbs, Croats or Jews left in Sarajevo, but for Ramet the city's aura of multi-ethnic tolerance is untouched and undiminished. The Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje* [*Liberation*] received more international awards than any newspaper in history for its alleged truthfulness and opposition to nationalism; but today even the editors do not deny that at the beginning of the war they made a decision to support Bosnia's president and Muslim leader Izetbegović and went to his office to offer their services. But again, Ramet is silent.

Professor Sabrina P. Ramet sees herself not only as a political scientist and historian but also as a philosopher with an unassailable moral position. She invokes Universal Reason and Natural Law, quotes from Plato, supports neo-Kantianism and follows Jürgen Habermas. Now my philosophical knowledge is rusty but is it not somewhat difficult to reconcile Kant with Marxism? Or is Habermas perhaps admired because he belongs to 'idealist-interventionists'? (p. 221). Ramet believes that even Jean Bodin is on her side when she attacks Serbia as an illegitimate state since the 16th-century French jurist held that 'there is no such thing as sovereignty except where the authority acts in accord with Natural Law and Divine Law' (p. 222).

Ramet's random not to mention bizarre eclecticism in matters philosophical is so great that it makes her position not only vague but ridden with contradictions. Nor does she clearly demonstrate how her historical and political analyses are

aided by philosophical exegesis. Weirdly they hover above historical and political reality, their only recognizable purpose being to confer an aura of authority upon Ramet's strident and unfair judgements. At the same time, her style of writing could be defined as postmodern rococo. No, not because it is gentle and pretty but because of its boundless artificiality, unseemly levity and its absence of earnestness.

At one point, Ramet suddenly and most unexpectedly dons the robes of Miss Manners and chastises Sumantra Bose, professor of International and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science, for being in his book *Bosnia after Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*, published in 2002, 'unacquainted with customary rules of etiquette in academic debate' and for writing parts of it 'in a state of uncontrollable anger' (p. 191). She then quotes the expressions he uses when criticizing the work of other scholars: 'ludicrous', 'academic ivory tower', 'dogmatism', 'breezy', 'tendentious', 'superficial'.

Sumantra Bose has written several books on sovereignty and self-determination. He is a comparativist who roams freely from India to Ireland and from Pakistan to Bosnia, and he argues that while a unified Bosnia might be preferable, the integrationists' insistence on it being reassembled as soon as possible is dogmatic. It simply does not take into account that the overwhelming majority of Bosnia's Serbs and Croats reject such instant unity. Such 'moral righteousness' actually harms the prospects of reconciliation among Bosnia's three constituent groups.

Needless to say, Sabrina Ramet is for 'the directive approach to state-building in Bosnia', that is, for the Western powers simply to abolish the federal structure agreed at Dayton. I wonder if it is because of her radical integrationism that she sanctimoniously reproaches Bose for his 'proclivity towards name-calling' (p. 192). Noel Malcolm shares her commitment to complete revision of Dayton, as well as most of her other political sentiments, disguised and undisguised, and is probably the most quoted author in her book. So naturally, he receives praise for offences similar to Bose's though his are far worse. Malcolm, along with Quintin Hoare edited *Books on Bosnia* and Ramet finds it an 'invaluable collection of short reviews' (p. 25) which are 'often witty' and with 'generally reliable' (p. 26) judgments. She admires and shares the 'contempt' of 'polyglot reviewers' and quotes them with glee: 'half-baked populism', 'dumbing down', 'facts are few and far between', 'dismally unintelligent', 'rag-bag of a book', 'picture-book, apparently produced for schoolchildren or dim students'.

Sabrina Ramet not only admires *Books on Bosnia* but is obviously inspired by it, and her writing, though less eloquent, seems to be modelled on this and other products of Malcolm's vitriolic pen. To paraphrase Ramet's story about the elephant and turtles, *Thinking About Yugoslavia* stands on Malcolm's back. And it is infinite Malcolms all the way down.

But what if someone wanted to read a recent book on Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav tragedy that is the exact opposite to Sabrina Ramet's? Is there an antipode (and also an antidote) to *Thinking About Yugoslavia*? Unfortunately, there is not. However, until such a book appears, one could recommend John R. Lampe's *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country*, published in 1996, whose revised and updated edition appeared in 2000. Mercifully, it is free of extremism and excess, respectful of alternative views, and above all, to use again the quote from Michael Mann, does not 'reproduce the categories of nationalist

thought'. Well researched and accessible, it has become a standard textbook for university history courses. Curiously, Ramet does not mention it.

John R. Lampe is a professor of history at the University of Maryland, College Park, and a former foreign service officer who was stationed in Belgrade in the mid-1960s. *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations*, a book of over 700 pages he co-authored with Marvin R. Jackson, was published in 1982 and immediately established him as a leading authority on the region's economics, past and present, as well as a competent general historian. (From today's perspective, a more foretelling subtitle would have been: *From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations to Underdeveloped Imperial Periphery*.)

Now Lampe has given us a new examination of this part of the world. Published last year, his *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition* is a welcome book. Not only students but general readers need an updated one volume history of the Balkans in the last century, for reference and also to provide us with a unified picture of the region. Stevan K. Pavlowitch's *A History of the Balkans, 1804–1945*, published in 1999, sets a high standard of impartiality in presenting the various nationalist conflicts and probing their causes, and is in general an authoritative work. But the portion of the book dealing with the 20th century represents only about half the total volume and only goes up to the end of the Second World War.

Balkans into Southeastern Europe begins by providing us with a much needed foundation in examining the geography of the region. We learn about its rivers and mountain ranges, climate and access to the sea, arable land and ore deposits. All this is skilfully connected to economics and finance, imperial conquest and domination, plus the formation of nation states. Lampe underlines the individuality of the Balkans but also points out that it is not fundamentally different from the rest of Europe whose culture and institutions it craves while occasionally vehemently protesting against them. The role of the great powers and their rivalry is also critically presented, from financial loans and weapons sales to diplomatic intrigues. Lampe further explains that during the 20th century progress in the Balkans was limited but real, and that the influence of Europe, while mostly beneficial, was sometimes harmful, not least in exacerbating nationalist conflicts. Nor were Balkan national ideologies in their essential characteristics un-European.

Emil Cioran, Parisian philosopher of Romanian descent, announced with typical Balkan modesty that through his metaphysics he wanted to ask God questions which God would not be able to answer. Cioran died in 1995 and may now know how successful he was in his endeavour. Students of the wars of Yugoslav disintegration, whether from the Balkans or not, are much less ambitious. But we do know that these wars posed to the Europeans questions to which they had no answer. And still do not. How do you prevent or halt ethnic wars and ethnic cleansings? Who, and under what conditions, has a right to separate and create a state? How should we decide where to draw borders and how to protect minorities? These and many other only slightly less important questions, about religion and culture, language and identity remain unresolved after our recent bloodletting. Europeans are further embarrassed by their ignorance because many regions of the world encounter similar problems and look to them for advice and guidance.

Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition is a step forward in the search for answers, regional and global. It provides us with a rich and sophisticated narrative as well as important insights and mature

judgments. Although quite realistic, it successfully avoids frequent depictions of violence and cruelty, so typical of Western writing about the Balkans, which is in general permeated with its own breed of 'Orientalism' in the sense of Edward Said's eponymous book. We should also be grateful to Lampe for his enlightened attitude and optimistic tone.

Lampe is a dedicated comparativist and he juxtaposes and contrasts Balkan countries whether discussing urban planning or literacy levels, freedom of the press or the growth of fascist movements, the struggle for women's right to vote or military strategy and tactics. It will probably shock many Serbs to learn that there was a period before the Second World War when Bulgaria was freer than the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and all Balkan nations should draw inspiration from the ascent of Greece which was often the poorest and is now the richest country of the region.

It is most likely of no general relevance but still stirs my imagination that Balkan undemocratic regimes had a propensity to put political prisoners on islands. Lampe mentions Bulgaria's Danube island Belene (p. 186 and p. 199), Yugoslavia's Goli otok (Barren Island) (p. 201) and Greece's 'island camps' (p. 194). One could expand this list. Were islands merely the easiest practical solution to achieve high security or did the governments feel so unsure of themselves that they had to take extraordinary measures to isolate prisoners?

After the Second World War, Greece was the only Balkan country under the direct influence of the West, in particular the USA. Academic contacts were also considerable and Lampe's treatment of Greece is therefore especially knowledgeable. It is also comprehensive with nothing painful or unpleasant omitted. We see that during the three post-war decades Greece became neither democratic nor prosperous nor was it able to point to other successes. Slav Macedonians were repressed, and both the expansion of universities and the emancipation of women were slower than in neighbouring communist countries. Lampe elaborates on the internal causes of the less than satisfactory development.

But what about the external ones? Should they not receive at least part of the blame? Lampe's account of the British role in Greece towards the end of the Second World War and immediately afterwards disregards British traditional naval and commercial interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Churchill's instinctive imperialism and simplistic anti-communism (pp. 173–175). So we are left wondering about the motives of General Ronald Scobie when in late 1944 he used 'the larger part of the Security Battalions recruited by the Rallis occupation regime' (p. 174) to disarm the communist-led ELAS which had been by far the largest resistance force to Germans with whom Ioannis Rallis' government collaborated. Nor is our curiosity satisfied about the real causes for the British support of the regency under the Archbishop of Athens, whom Churchill himself had previously called, as Lampe fails to mention, a 'pestilent priest' and a 'survivor of the Middle Ages'.

Lampe also tries to soften all criticism of America, and not only in connection with Greece. Sometimes his method is to point out that a particular critical argument is wrong and then abruptly drop the issue altogether. Thus we learn that the USA 'did not share the British interest in postwar Greece ...' (p. 175). True, but one wants to know how much attention Americans did pay? Lampe is perhaps right when he reproaches Greek scholars for having insisted for so long that the American intervention in the Greek civil war was 'decisive' (p. 194). Yet what was its exact significance? In the parliamentary elections of 1950, the American Embassy was 'supposedly all-powerful' (p. 204). However, stating that

it was not omnipotent does not explain its political influence and control. 'American officials' did not 'initially' approve the *coup d'état* by the colonels in 1967; their reluctant acceptance 'came later, after a countercoup by the King and several senior Generals, that would have been an acceptable alternative, failed in December 1967' (p. 225). But a royal–military countercoup is also a *coup d'état*, and what is the evidence that it would have benefited the Greek people? And should any *coup d'état* be acceptable to the world's leading democracy? Finally, does not the USA's entire post-war policy towards Greece resemble America's disastrous contemporaneous policies in Latin America?

Lampe gives a rather uncritical account of the role of the USA in the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars. This is in stark contrast to his balanced presentation of the conflict and war between Croats and Serbs. For example, he correctly portrays both Croatia's Tudjman and Serbia's Milošević as essentially similar authoritarian nationalists. However, Lampe seems unable to inform us that retired American generals with a nod from the State Department trained the Croatian army that expelled Serbs from Croatia. To mention another characteristic omission, we learn that Croatia's Minister of Defence Gojko Šušak was 'a returned emigré from Canada but proud of his Herzegovina family and its world-war allegiance to the *Ustaša*' (p. 271) but not of the medical treatment he received at the Walter Reed Army hospital in Washington or of the funeral oration given by former US Secretary of Defense William J. Perry. Similarly tendentious is Lampe's account of the NATO war with Serbia in 1999 (p. 266). Nothing there even suggests that the USA gave aid to the Kosovo Liberation Army (whose tactics Lampe rightly describes as 'terrorist' (p. 265)), nor is it mentioned that after the Serbian forces left Kosovo, the KLA expelled the large majority of all minorities—under the noses of the American-led NATO troops.

Lampe is particularly severe with Aleksandar (misspelled Alexandar on page 203) Ranković, a leading Serbian communist, the Yugoslav party's pre-war and wartime organizational secretary, and the head of the communist secret police, which Tito founded in 1944. Lampe calls the secret police 'Ranković's' (p. 201) and considers it to have been 'Serb-dominated' (p. 203). Yet loyal and disciplined Ranković never made a major decision without consulting Tito first, while Tito, true to his autocratic instincts, would not put all his eggs in one basket and kept Croatian and Slovene security agencies outside the command and control of Ranković's Belgrade headquarters.

Lampe tells us that Ranković fell from power in 1966 because his agents planted concealed microphones in Tito's private residence and in the homes of several other party leaders. However, no such bugging ever took place. It was simply a stratagem contrived to topple Ranković, which was sanctioned by Tito. Behind it was Tito's fear of a potential rival, along with a succession struggle among the top tier of politicians, efforts of the bureaucracies of the republics to gain more power at the expense of federal institutions in Belgrade which Ranković protected, and an alliance of economic reformists and party liberals against entrenched conservatives represented by Ranković.

While correcting these misconceptions about Ranković—in the eyes of some, I may even appear to be 'defending' him—I feel both discomfort and amusement, for at the time of the security chief's dismissal my father Milovan Djilas had been in jail for nine years. Lampe believes that Djilas was imprisoned in 1956 for publishing *The New Class*, a critical analysis of the communist system and

ideology, but he actually went to jail for criticizing Tito's support of the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The publication of *The New Class* and the trial for it took place in 1957.

After Ranković's fall, Tito hinted that he might have planned a *coup d'état*, and the official media increased its slanderous attacks on him. But no juridical proceedings took place. Western journalists and academics began publicly asking questions about Tito's peculiar logic of giving Ranković-the-conspirator and his collaborators clemency and pension, while keeping Djilas-the-critic in jail. On the very last day of 1966, Djilas was released but prohibited from publishing or making any public statements for five years. He would not observe this ban.

With the purge of 1966 Yugoslavia entered a period of general liberalization with the exception of the cult of Tito that continued to grow. Lampe wrongly states that Tito became the president for life in 1953 (p. 203). Such formal conferring of absolute power would have presupposed a personality cult which at that time neither existed nor was possible—indeed, it was inconceivable. In 1974, however, Yugoslavia's fourth constitution promulgated the country as an eight-unit confederation in all but name, and its article 333 conferred upon the Assembly of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia the right to elect Josip Broz Tito president of the republic 'for an unlimited term of office'. This is what the Assembly soon proceeded to do. The party congress immediately followed and elected Tito president for life of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

The official West and especially the USA did not object to the cult of Tito. Perhaps it even welcomed it. American presidents, for example, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, were not embarrassed to publicly flatter Tito, who was supposedly a wise statesman and a symbol of freedom. Nor was Britain's Margaret Thatcher parsimonious when giving him compliments. Western governments never gave open encouragement to Yugoslavia's reform-oriented communists, or its critical intellectuals and dissidents, and they rarely protested when Tito dismissed, persecuted or imprisoned them. Tito's Yugoslavia was independent from the Soviet Union and this was in the interest of the West. All else was of little importance. Am I wrong to consider such policies of Western countries to have been nationalistic?

John R. Lampe's *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition* is a good book which could have been better while Sabrina Ramet's book is ... Well, I have said enough about it already. But in spite of the enormous difference between them in approach and quality, they are both written from a distinctly Western, and in particular American, point of view. Lampe and Ramet sometimes even resemble a good cop–bad cop routine—she attacking mercilessly, he all softness and diplomacy. Like most Americans, however, they are completely unaware of their nationalism. We in the Balkans may be more nationalistic than Americans but we also have fewer illusions about ourselves.

On 6 September 1943, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave a speech at Harvard University, stating famously that the 'empires of the future are the empires of the mind'. One can ask, of course, why, after the Second World War, Churchill did not practice what he preached. I also think that at the time of his speech it was already too late for any kind of empire and I am certain that no imperialism has a future in the 21st century. But I do believe that today a country or a group of countries can lead globally only if they firmly embrace high intellectual, moral and perhaps even spiritual values. Further, I am convinced

that the West and especially the USA has a right and a duty to struggle for the global triumph of liberal democracy and that this includes playing an active role in the resolution of nationalist conflicts. Finally, scholars and academics who study nationalism should be at the forefront of all such undertakings. But they cannot intellectually combat nationalist conflicts all over the world, including of course those in the Balkans, if they do not first suppress their own nationalism.

Western scholars and academics—and we in the Balkans too—should remember a noble dictum attributed to Aristotle, another Balkan philosopher: ‘Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.’ Instead of ‘Plato’, we all should put ‘patria’. Is it too much to expect that one day the truth will become to scholars and academics, West and East, South and North, a closer friend than their country? Let me think about it.

Aleksa Djilas is a sociologist, historian and writer living in Belgrade, Serbia. Formerly a Research Fellow at Harvard University and a Public Policy Scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, he is the author of, among other books, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919–1953*, Harvard University Press, 1991/1996, and, most recently, *Najteže pitanje. Eseji (The Hardest Question: Essays)*, Artist, Belgrade, 2005.