



Slobodan Milošević's Place in Serbian History

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Dragan Bujosević and Ivan Radovanović, *The Fall of Milošević: The October 5 Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York and Basingstoke, 2003; 183 pp.; map.; 140396064X, £19.99 (hbk)

Norman Cigar and Paul Williams, *Indictment at the Hague: The Milošević Regime and Crimes of the Balkan Wars*, New York University Press: New York and London, 2002; 339 pp.; 0814716261, \$40.00 (hbk)

Lenard J. Cohen, *Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milošević*, Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 2002; 492 pp.; 54 illus.; map; 0813340233, \$18.00 (pbk)

Ivan Čolović, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology*, C. Hurst and Co: London, 2002; 328 pp.; 20 illus.; 1850654654, £25.00 (hbk); 1850655561, £16.50 (pbk)

Jasna Dragović-Soso, *'Saviours of the Nation': Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*, C. Hurst and Co: London, 2002; 293 pp.; 185065577-4, £45.00 (hbk); 1850654573, £20.00 (pbk)

James Gow, *The Serbian Project and its Adversaries: A Strategy of War-crimes*, C. Hurst and Co: London, 2002; 322 pp.; map; 1850656460, £40.00 (hbk); 1850654999, £16.50 (pbk)

Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija – Država koja je odumrla: Uspon, kriza i pad Kardeljeve Jugoslavije (1974–1990)*, Prometej: Zagreb, 2003; 531 pp.; 9536460327, \$30.71 (pbk)

Adam LeBor, *Milošević: A Biography*, Bloomsbury: London, 2002; 406 pp.; 15 illus.; 0747560900, £20.00 (hbk); 0747561818, £8.99 (pbk)

Vidosav Stevanović, *Milošević: The People's Tyrant*, I.B. Tauris: London, 2004; 256 pp.; map; 1860648428, £18.95 (hbk)

The late Slobodan Milošević and the Wars of Yugoslav Succession are indelibly linked in the popular imagination in the West. Of all the Yugoslav successor states, Serbia has inspired far more scholarly interest than any other. The books here under review form part of a respectable body of historiography on contemporary Serbia, one that has no counterpart for any other Yugoslav successor state. There are no English-language biographies of Croatia's Franjo Tuđman or Bosnia-Herzegovina's Alija Izetbegović; virtually no English-language histories devoted solely to internal Croatian or Bosnian 1990s politics not to mention the leaders and politics of Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Over this historiography on former Yugoslavia towers the figure of Milošević, subject of a handful of biographies written in, or translated into, the English language.

The prominent role assigned to Milošević by the historiography is, arguably, out of all proportion to the intrinsic merit of the subject matter. Following Hannah Arendt, Ivo Banac writes in the introduction to the book by Cigar and Williams: 'the story of Milošević has all the elements of industrious mediocrity, which seems to be the necessary ingredient for evildoing' (11). Indeed, the picture emerging from the literature is of someone who began as a typical career-Communist official, a 'dutiful, pedantic junior apparatchik' in LeBor's words (25), barely different from any number of his contemporaries, except with regard to his exceptionally tragic family background: both his parents committed suicide, his mother 12 years after his father, though Milošević was already a grown man when these events occurred.

Of immeasurably greater significance in explaining the personality behind the historical figure is Milošević's relationship with his more bohemian wife, Mira Marković. Cohen, LeBor and Stevanović agree in assigning major significance to the relationship between the two; in Stevanović's words, 'they gradually merged into a single unit capable of confronting the world' (5). In this assessment, the authors follow in the footsteps of Slavoljub Đukić, the veteran Serbian investigative journalist whose now-classic study of Milošević takes the form of a dual political biography of the Serbian leader and his wife.¹ In part, under the influence of his ideologically dogmatic, zealously Marxist wife, the daughter of a powerful Serbian Communist family, Milošević emerged in the mid-1980s as the protégé of the hardline faction within the Serbian Communist organization. Yet this position

also implied an ideological opposition to Serb nationalism, and until 1987 Milošević showed no signs of deviating from that opposition. It was only in that year that Milošević experienced what LeBor describes as his 'epiphany' (75) and Cohen as his 'epiphanal moment' (106): on a visit to Kosovo Polje to quell popular unrest, when confronted with an angry crowd of Serbs and Montenegrins who complained of having been beaten by the predominantly Albanian local police, Milošević uttered his now infamous words: 'No one is allowed to beat you!' It was on this occasion that Milošević's move toward an alliance with popular Serbian nationalism began, an alliance that would shortly bring him absolute power in Serbia but that would, in the long run, be the downfall of both Serbia and Milošević.

The story is a familiar one, but both LeBor and Cohen have made serious new contributions to it. LeBor's highly readable biography provides the best treatment to date of Milošević's early years, including original insights gleaned from interviews conducted with Marković herself and with others who were personally acquainted with her or Milošević. Along with Đukić's volume, it comprises a natural starting point for anyone wishing to approach the break-up of Yugoslavia via the personality of Milošević. Cohen's more academic work is erudite and well researched, and puts forward various interesting and provocative theses, not all of which are equally convincing. By contrast, Stevanović's *Milošević: The People's Tyrant* is sketchy and impressionistic and contains little new information; its author is a Serbian publisher who went into exile in the West during the Milošević years, and it is written on the basis of general familiarity with the subject matter rather than original research.

The Milošević who emerges from the literature remains an enigma. As Trude Johansson admits in the preface to Stevanović's book: 'This book is about a man no one really seems to know' (xi). The principal aspect of the enigma, perhaps, is how a boy who was a 'friendless orphan' (Stevanović, 1), who 'made few friends at school' and was 'mocked for his weediness and unwillingness to join the rough and tumble of the playground' (LeBor, 13), should have turned into such a charismatic operator and skilled manipulator of people. Clearly, historical circumstances create historical figures as much as the reverse is true.

Cohen explains Milošević's rise through collective psychological rather than historical factors, arguing that Milošević's seizure of power 'depended primarily on factors having more to do with the cultural underpinnings, rather than the structural features, of the Serbian polity'. He emphasizes the Serbs' 'strong penchant for centralized modes of political control, and particularly "heroic leaders" who can maintain political order and preserve the "unity" of the nation'; their 'predilection for statist collective unity in the face of a perceived external

danger to the Serb nation'; and their 'exaggerated emphasis on sanguinity – "Serbian blood and origins" – territorial control, and national religious myths as defining features of collective identity'. In particular, he stresses what he calls the 'deep sense of victimization in the Serbian political psyche and political culture', which expresses itself in 'delusions of persecution and also the rectitude of one's cause, or what has been comparatively termed a "paranoid style of politics"' – a trait arising, he suggests, from their unhappy experience of Ottoman rule and of Austro-Hungarian and German intervention (125).

Such an interpretation explains very little. The psychological characteristics that Cohen attributes to the Serbs could equally be applied to other nations. Americans like strong and heroic leaders (Washington, Lincoln), possess national myths (the Frontier, the American Dream) and – as the McCarthy years showed – are entirely capable of paranoia and intolerance toward dissenting minorities. Germans, Israelis and Croats have ethnically-based national identities stressing 'blood and origins'; the French and Castilian Spanish have traditionally favoured the strongly centralized state; English nationalism historically was defined in terms of Protestantism and despised the Irish, French and Spanish as 'Papists'. The 'Serb' traits Cohen describes are the rule, not the exception, in national psychology.

A second problem with Cohen's approach is that he explains a specific historical episode – the rise of Milošević – through extra-historical psychological factors that could equally well apply to any other historical episode. Other towering figures in Serbian history such as Prince Miloš Obrenović, Ilija Garašanin, Nikola Pašić, King Aleksandar Karađorđević and Aleksandar Ranković all shared Milošević's Serbian nationality, yet they were all very different individuals who played very different roles, and the Serbia of each was very different from the Serbia of the others. To understand the specificity of Milošević, it is necessary to view him in the context of the prior history of Serbia and Yugoslavia.

The establishment of Yugoslavia as a state in 1918–21 involved the imposition of a centralist constitutional order which placed almost all power in Serb hands. The new kingdom's ruling dynasty was the Serbian royal house; the officer corps was predominantly Serb; and all its prime ministers – with one brief exception – were Serbs. The Croats and Slovenes were denied any autonomy, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians any recognition whatsoever. Serbia, as the strongest partner, had imposed its terms upon the South Slavs of the former Habsburg Empire. The latter's ranks were broken by the Serbs of the former Habsburg territories, above all by the Croatian-Serb politician Svetozar Pribićević, who alongside Serbia's Pašić was the principal promoter of Yugoslav centralism. Throughout Yugoslavia's brief history, the alignment of the Croatian

and Bosnian Serbs would largely determine the balance of power between Serbia and the western Yugoslavs.

The Second World War overturned the balance of power within Yugoslavia. Following a British-backed coup in Belgrade in 1941, the Axis powers invaded their erstwhile ally Yugoslavia and dismembered the country to the detriment of Serbia, which was reduced to a small quisling rump-state. The Partisan movement of resistance that then arose in opposition to the Axis was essentially a western-Yugoslav movement. The Communist party, which headed the Partisans, had been a Croatian-oriented party before the war, based in Zagreb with a Croat leader, Josip Broz Tito, and committed to the liberation of the non-Serb nations from Serbian domination – a goal reflecting the Leninist belief in the right of nations to self-determination, as well as Bolshevik hostility to 'Versailles Yugoslavia'. The Partisans proclaimed a new, federal Yugoslavia in November 1943; by the end of that year, of 97 Partisan brigades in existence, 38 were from Croatia, 23 from Bosnia-Herzegovina and 18 from Slovenia. Of the 38 Croatian Partisan brigades, 20 had an ethnic-Croat majority, 17 an ethnic-Serb majority and one an ethnic-Czech majority. At this time, the whole of eastern Yugoslavia (Vojvodina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia) was contributing only 18 Partisan brigades.²

In the autumn of 1944, the Partisans, with Soviet and Bulgarian assistance, liberated – or arguably, conquered – Serbia. In the new Yugoslavia, Serbia was cut down to size: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia were established as republics, separate from and equal in status to Serbia, alongside Croatia and Slovenia. Kosovo-Metohija and Vojvodina were granted autonomy within Serbia. No non-Communist Serbian faction would have contemplated a settlement of the Yugoslav national question along these lines. The years 1944–6 therefore represented 1918–21 in reverse: the western Yugoslavs, or at least the dominant faction among them, this time imposed their constitutional model on Serbia thanks to favourable international circumstances. The pivotal element was again the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs, who together had comprised the single most important component of Partisan manpower (half a century later, the realignment with Milošević's Serbia of top Yugoslav generals from the ranks of the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs – above all Federal Secretary of People's Defence Veljko Kadijević and Chief of Staff Blagoje Adžić – seemed to give Milošević the military power he needed to challenge the territorial settlement of 1944–6).

The Communists retained Belgrade as the capital of Yugoslavia, partly to keep tight control over politically unreliable Serbia, but the colonization worked both ways: Serbia, which had been on the fringes of the Partisan movement, now became Yugoslavia's matrix, as it had been before the war. Simultaneously, the

Communist regime in Belgrade maintained a territorial settlement to the Yugoslav question which was ultimately unacceptable to most nationally conscious Serbians. This contradiction remained latent from the 1940s to the early 1960s, while Yugoslavia was a highly centralized, outright police state – all the perceived ‘Serb lands’ were firmly united in a single state, and there were no channels through which Serbs or anyone else could express dissent. But as Yugoslavia began to decentralize from the early 1960s and the individual units of the Yugoslav federation began to enjoy genuine autonomy, so the question of ‘Serb unity’ resurfaced.

For the Serbian Communists, the decisive turning point occurred in July 1966, when Tito ousted Serbia’s Aleksandar Ranković, Yugoslav Interior Minister and Vice-President. Ranković was a hardline opponent of Yugoslav decentralization, who had harshly repressed the Kosovo Albanians. Following his fall, the ruling élites in the Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces continued to build their autonomy vis-a-vis the Yugoslav centre, and they increasingly chafed against their subordination to it. The culmination of this process, to which Tito effectively gave his blessing, was the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974, greatly resented ever since by many Serbs for its cementing of the statehood or quasi-statehood of the individual republics and autonomous provinces and its emasculation of the Yugoslav centre. It was thus Serbia, of all members of the federation, which had the greatest motive to rebel against the Yugoslav centre, and would do so under Milošević’s leadership. Although many authors have viewed this as a rebellion against the Constitution of 1974, it was also a rebellion against the 1943–6 settlement of the Yugoslav national question.

Following Tito’s death in 1980, a Serb backlash against his system rapidly gathered pace at several levels: in the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA); among the Serbian Communist élite; and among the intelligentsia. These groups were often at loggerheads with one another. In Serbia, the Communist rulers, who sought to restore their control over Kosovo while ideologically rejecting nationalism, stood on the opposite side of the barricades to dissidents who were often nationalist in motivation but defended the victims of Communist repression, sometimes even if they were Albanians. Milošević ultimately brought these two opposing currents together, though it was by no means a stable or non-contradictory synthesis. Many of those who had considered themselves dissidents under the pre-Milošević Communist regime, such as Dobrica Čošić and Mihailo Marković, became Milošević’s strong supporters.

Jasna Dragović-Soso’s *‘Saviours of the Nation’: Serbia’s Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* provides an excellent account of the process by which the vibrant movement for democratic reform in 1980s Serbia mutated

into a nationalist movement directed not against the Communist regime, but against other Yugoslav nationalities. She argues that until the second half of the 1980s, the Serbian intellectual opposition was primarily democratic rather than nationalist in character. As the largest city in Yugoslavia, Belgrade became the centre of the all-Yugoslav opposition to the regime. The 'Committee for the Defence of Freedom of Thought and Expression', created by Čošić in 1984, defended persecuted dissidents of all nationalities, including the future presidents of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Franjo Tuđman and Alija Izetbegović. Yet in 1985, when the Belgrade dissidents began to agitate on the issue of the human rights of Serbs in Kosovo, allegedly oppressed by the Albanian-dominated Kosovo administration, they chose to define it as an issue of Serb national – rather than universal human – rights.

This was the fatal turning point which diverted the Serbian democratic movement into a nationalist movement, and ultimately, the movement of opposition to the pre-Milošević Communist regime into one of support for Milošević's Communist regime. Dragović-Soso explains this change, first through reference to the Titoist restriction of discourse relating to sensitive nationalist issues such as the Ustasha genocide of the Serbs during the Second World War, or the character of the pre-war Yugoslav state. To challenge the regime's restrictions meant reopening the discussion on these issues, yet this in turn meant that the pro-democracy movement effectively adopted a nationalist discourse based on the idea of Serb victimization. Second, the fact that the Titoist regime itself had suppressed democracy while channelling pressure for reform into 'national' channels, by steadily increasing the autonomy of the Yugoslav federal units, helped to ensure that human rights issues would be interpreted as national issues.

While Dragović-Soso's thesis is both illuminating and convincing, it leaves one question unasked, one that is difficult to answer but nevertheless crucial: the extent to which the nationalist dissidents in the mid-1980s might not themselves have been encouraged and supported by elements within the Communist establishment and secret police. Dissidents such as Čošić, Mihailo Marković, Antonije Isaković and others were far from being genuine 'outsiders' – they were old Communists who had once moved in the highest circles of the regime and occupied prestigious positions in Belgrade public life. The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts of 1986 was precisely the work of these élite dissidents. The question of whether the alliance formed under Milošević between the Communist regime and the nationalist opposition might not have had roots going back years or decades needs to be explored.

Just as the Belgrade dissidents rebelled against the Titoist status quo 'from below', so the ruling Serbian Communists rebelled against it 'from above'.

Milošević was by no means unique in seeking to diminish or overturn the extensive self-rule of the other Yugoslav republics or provinces. His opponent, Serbian President Ivan Stambolić, himself sought to reduce provincial autonomy, and was consequently feared as a dangerous strongman by Communist leaders elsewhere in Yugoslavia. This led to their relative equanimity at the results of the 8th Session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia (SKS) in 1987, the occasion on which Milošević defeated Stambolić and effectively seized power in Serbia. Milošević, indeed, received the crucial backing of conservative and hardline members of the SKS old guard, but these were then rapidly sidelined. Milošević differed from them in that he was not merely a hardliner but a radical, ready to break constitutional rules and laws, to ally with the nationalist opposition, and ultimately to discard Yugoslavia and to kill for the goal (though not in the name) of a Great Serbia.

The absolute ruthlessness of Milošević and his apparent readiness to change his goals and strategy, to conquer territory with much bloodshed and then abandon it, have led many observers to dismiss him simply as a power-hungry opportunist with no ideological agenda. In his generally competent study of Milošević, Louis Sell claims: 'Almost all who have known or worked with Milošević agree that power is what motivates him . . . Take away Slobodan Milošević's interest in power and the man is pretty much a cipher'.³ Such a reductionist conclusion does not do justice to the historical figure; it is as if one were to dismiss all Stalin's policies, including his collectivization of the peasantry and persecution of the kulaks, purely by reference to his own obsession with power, without reference to his Marxist-Leninism. Milošević represented a synthesis between the dominant political trends in the Serbia of his times: on the one hand, a synthesis between Titoism and integral Serbian nationalism; on the other, between élite authoritarianism and dissident populism. He was not simply another Serbian Communist or a nationalist, but neither was he an historical aberration.

The clue here may lie in the two dominant factors determining Milošević's political outlook. He was the leader of a country which had been conquered by foreign forces in 1944 and forcibly subjected to an unacceptable settlement of its national question, but which was now, in the 1980s, for the first time in a position to rebel against this settlement. Yet he was also a lifelong Communist; a child and beneficiary of Titoism. However, Communism was not simply a system of rule, but also a set of beliefs, potentially revolutionary. Milošević attempted to reconcile the contradiction between the two aspects of his political being.

One Serbian historical figure who may help to explain Milošević's ideology is Svetozar Marković (1846–75), the founding father both of Serbian socialism and

of the Radical Party, Serbia's principal populist-nationalist party which, under the leadership of Marković's collaborator Nikola Pašić, established Yugoslavia on the basis of Serbian hegemony in 1918–21. That twentieth-century Serbian socialism and populist nationalism share the same founding father is less paradoxical than it first appears. The Serbia of Marković's time, like the Serbia of Milošević a century later, was the national matrix of a Serb nation that was divided between several different states. In Marković's day, these were the Principality of Serbia, the Principality of Montenegro, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, in Marković's Serbia – as in Milošević's – class differences were relatively slight: great differences of wealth existed but were not accompanied by great cultural differences as was the case in Western or Central Europe – the nineteenth-century founders of Serbia's two rival royal dynasties, the Karađorđevićs and the Obrenovićs, were simple pig-farmers. Inevitably, liberation was seen in national rather than social terms.

Socialism in Serbia, as interpreted by Marković and his disciples, consequently meant something different to what it meant in Western or Central Europe. Marković emphasized the inherently socialist character of the Serb peasantry and its traditional institutions, the municipality and the extended family, as naturally democratic and egalitarian. He therefore interpreted socialism as traditionalism rather than as modernization; social change and Westernization were to be avoided.⁴ The other side of Marković's thought fused the revolutionary demand for the overthrow of the empires and monarchies in the Balkans with the nationalist demand for the unity of Serb lands: 'From Istanbul to Vienna, the idea of Serb unity is the most revolutionary idea there is on the Balkan Peninsula. This idea entails the destruction of Turkey and Austria, the end of Serbia and Montenegro as *independent principalities*, and a revolution in the whole political structure of the Serb nation. Out of the parts of these two empires and the two Serb principalities, a new Serb state can come into being – this is what Serb unity means' (emphasis in original).⁵

Marković was, for the Communists who ruled Milošević's Serbia, a national hero as important as Thomas Jefferson is to Americans, and the object of compulsory study for Serbian schoolchildren. His ideas – that Serbs are inherently socialist and the goal of their unity inherently revolutionary – formed the mainstay of Milošević's ideology. This is not to draw an unbroken line of continuity between Marković and Milošević; merely to note that Milošević's ideas involved a reinterpretation of traditional Serbian socialist themes. Marković championed cooperation between the Balkan peoples and opposed military expansionism; Milošević did neither. Marković genuinely opposed the development of Western-style capitalism in Serbia; Milošević, the former banker, embraced free-market

reform and privatization. Milošević in fact followed the path trodden by Georges Sorel, Benito Mussolini and other socialists for whom revolutionary violence and anti-liberalism were more important than international brotherhood or the redistribution of wealth, and who therefore found nationalism and xenophobia to be better weapons than class struggle or proletarian solidarity.

When Milošević merged the SKS and its sister organization, the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Serbia, to form his new political party in July 1990, he named it the 'Socialist Party of Serbia' (SPS). The reconstituted ruling party was viewed by its founders as standing in the tradition of Serbian socialism. In March 1990, the Central Committee of the SKS, on the eve of its transformation into the SPS, had defined itself as a 'party for democratic socialism' and as a 'follower of the ideas of Svetozar Marković, Dimitrije Tucović and the Serbian Socialist Democratic Party'.⁶ Thus the SKS, under Milošević's guidance, had begun to redefine itself as socialist rather than Communist, heir to the Serbian Social Democrats of the pre-Yugoslav era rather than of the multinational Communists of the Yugoslav era.

Nevertheless, Milošević did not reject Titoism altogether; instead, he reinterpreted it on an entirely Serbian basis. His was a revolution of purification, not of overturning. He deprived Kosovo and Vojvodina of all autonomy, but never formally abolished the two autonomous provinces – retained under the new Serbian constitution of 1990. He spoke not of uniting all Serbs in a single Serbian state, but of upholding the 'right' of the Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as alleged constituent nations in their respective republics, to remain within Yugoslavia if the Croats and Muslims chose to secede. (This was, however, a highly tendentious interpretation of the Titoist nationality principle, according to which the Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were not separate nations, but merely parts of a nation. The JNA and Serb militias, under Milošević's control, did not really seek to keep them in a rump Yugoslavia; rather to conquer those Croatian and Bosnian lands, with or without substantial Serb populations, which could be feasibly held, while the substantial Serb populations in cities such as Zagreb, Split and Sarajevo were simply abandoned.)

Milošević never sought formally to enlarge Serbia, only to establish a 'new Yugoslavia' which would, like the old, be comprised of federal units – only this time, they would all be Serb or Montenegrin. Thus in October 1991, at the height of the war in Croatia, Mihailo Marković, ideologue and deputy president of the SPS, stated that 'there will be at least three units in the new Yugoslav state: Serbia, Montenegro and a united Bosnian and Knin Krajina'.⁷ The map of the projected 'Third Yugoslavia' published by the SPS magazine *Epoha* on 22 October 1991 showed borders which were remarkably similar to those of the infamous

'Homogenous Serbia' proposed by the Chetnik ideologue Stevan Moljević in 1941. The new 'Federal Republic of Yugoslavia' (SRJ) established by Milošević on 27 April 1992 comprised only Serbia and Montenegro in their Titoist borders – the very borders that Serbia had gone to war to overturn.

The semantic acrobatics required to square these various circles do not necessarily mean that Milošević, Marković and their fellow SPS leaders were simply cynical. As revolutionaries in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, they employed transitional slogans to mobilize support for short-term goals, which could be retained or discarded in accordance with the ultimate goal – in this case, a Serbia remodelled on SPS principles. Milošević was a nationalist, but just as Bismarck's 'nation' was less the Germans than the Protestant Prussia of the Kaiser, Junkers and officer corps, so Milošević's 'nation' was less the Serbs than the Socialist Serbia comprising the SPS, its sister party the Yugoslav Left, and the economic, military and police apparatus.

Milošević's national ideology represented a synthesis between Titoist Yugoslavism and Great Serbian nationalism. Quite apart from his personal inclinations, this synthesis was forced upon him by his need to retain the support both of the Serbian population and of the established élite, a large part of which was emotionally committed to the idea of Yugoslavia, and by his reliance upon institutions of state which carried the Yugoslav appellation, above all the JNA. Yet the two elements of the synthesis were fundamentally irreconcilable. The contradiction between them largely explains Milošević's political strategy in the period 1987–92, and ultimately the failure of his Great Serbian project.

Serbia was the first secessionist Yugoslav republic. This was, in a sense, the long-term backlash to the conquest of Serbia by the western-Yugoslav Partisans in 1944 and to the ousting of Ranković in 1966. The campaign to abolish Kosovo's and Vojvodina's autonomy involved open disregard of all-Yugoslav opinion and procedure, and removed the provinces from the realm of Yugoslav federal politics, making them a purely Serbian concern. Serbia's constitutional changes of March 1989, virtually abolishing the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, acted as a precedent for Slovenia's own move toward sovereignty. Milošević's abortive attempt during 1989 to introduce a new centralist Yugoslav constitution merely catalysed contrary moves on the part of Slovenia and Croatia.

After Milošević's attempts to dominate a unified Yugoslavia had definitely failed by early 1990, with the collapse of the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, he reverted to an outright separatist policy. On 27–8 June 1990 – the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo – Milošević, Kadijević and Borisav Jović, Serbia's representative in the Federal presidency, decided, with regard to Slovenia and Croatia, to 'expel them forcibly from

Yugoslavia, by simply drawing borders and declaring that they had brought this upon themselves through their decisions', in Jović's words. The JNA was to be used to carry out the 'amputation' of parts of Croatia inhabited by Serbs.⁸ The new Serbian Constitution of 28 September 1990 announced: 'The Republic of Serbia determines and guarantees: 1) the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and its international position and relations with other states and international organizations; . . .'.⁹ During the final, ignominious years of Yugoslavia's existence, Milošević systematically undermined the institutions of the Yugoslav federation, coopting those he could control and sabotaging those he could not. On 16 March 1991, Milošević effectively seceded from Yugoslavia when he announced that Serbia no longer recognized the authority of the Yugoslav Federal Presidency. On 15 May 1991, Serbia blocked the election of Croatia's representative, Stipe Mesić, as Yugoslav President, thereby decapitating the Yugoslav federation.

The widespread portrayal of Milošević as promoter of Great Serbian nationalism and instigator of the break-up of Yugoslavia has not gone unchallenged. In *Jugoslavija – Država koja je odumrla: Uspon, kriza i pad Kardeljeve Jugoslavije (1974–1990)* [*Yugoslavia – the State that Withered Away: The Rise, Crisis and Fall of Kardelj's Yugoslavia (1974–1990)*], Dejan Jović attempts perhaps the most ambitious revisionist treatment of Milošević to date, arguing: 'In his first phase, Milošević was probably a Yugoslav nationalist, but he never became a Serb nationalist, as many label him today' (65n, emphasis in original). For Jović, the real villain who destroyed Yugoslavia was Edvard Kardelj (1910–1974), Tito's right-hand man who successfully pushed for an increasingly decentralized Yugoslav state from the late 1960s on. Jović argues that from 1966, and particularly from 1974, Yugoslavia was 'the fourth (Kardelj's) Yugoslavia' (16), which 'withered away' as the result of the deliberate intention of its creator, inspired by the socialist principle that the state should do just that. By contrast, Milošević sought to restore Yugoslavia to its former strength and unity, and therefore comes across initially as a relatively benign figure in Jović's account, only turning to Serb nationalism reluctantly, under the pressure of events outside his control.

Taken simply as a study of the Serbian Communist élite in Titoist Yugoslavia, Jović's study is illuminating and provides valuable new insights into key events up until 1990. But in attempting to reinterpret the history of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the author ties himself in knots. By virtually ignoring the Yugoslav republics other than Serbia, except for Slovenia in the 1980s, and by abruptly ending his story in mid-1990 – a full year before the final collapse of Yugoslavia – Jović has adopted too narrow a focus for such an ambitious undertaking. Since, as Jović himself notes (145–6), Kardelj promoted the withering away of the

republican as well as the Federal states, and since it was only the Federal state that eventually disappeared, it is difficult to see how this can be blamed on Kardelj's constitutional model. Yet elsewhere Kardelj is portrayed as promoting the statehood of the republics (179), in which case Kardelj's constitutional model cannot be ascribed to a socialist belief in the 'withering away' of the state.

Since Jović describes Kardelj as supporting the Serbian Communist aim of reducing the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and Tito as preventing this (177, 261–2), it is also difficult to accept Jović's claim that the 'fourth' Yugoslavia was indeed Kardelj's and not Tito's; or that 'in destroying the fourth Yugoslavia, Milošević rejected Kardelj but not Tito' (156). Jović appears to want it both ways, arguing that Yugoslavia had 'withered away' by 1990, but also that Yugoslavia was destroyed by politicians in the late 1980s. But Milošević could not be guilty of 'destroying the fourth Yugoslavia' if it had, according to Jović, already destroyed itself. Nor can Jović fairly accuse Tuđman's Croatia of 'separatism' (63), since he also argues that, by the time Tuđman was elected in the spring of 1990, there was no Yugoslavia left to practise separatism from.

In portraying Serb and other nationalisms as the consequence, not the cause, of Yugoslavia's break-up (57–8), Jović gets into further difficulties. For if Milošević was indeed a 'Yugoslav nationalist', and if, as Jović argues, the Yugoslav population was more supportive of the Yugoslav idea than were the Yugoslav élites (42), it is unclear what the impetus was that shifted Milošević toward Serbian nationalism, as Jović describes (471–3). Jović's theoretical model appears to be in constant rebellion against his facts: he quotes Borisav Jović's diary to show that Milošević planned the expulsion of Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia, saying that this decision 'formally destroyed Yugoslavia' (482–3), yet subsequently concludes that '[t]he sources which were at the disposal of the author of this book do not give sufficient reason to support the conclusion that the members of the Yugoslav political elite in this period (including, thus, Slobodan Milošević and Milan Kučan), intended to destroy Yugoslavia' (491). He goes on to say that many of these figures were 'genuinely surprised by the collapse, and still more by the war that occurred after it' – he does not except Milošević (491–2).

This comes dangerously close to whitewashing the warmongers. Jović describes the JNA's intervention in Croatia as motivated by the goal, 'perhaps in good faith, of preventing direct ethnic conflict in Croatia' (485), and the war as 'the expression of a weak, ineffective state that was not in a condition to restrain the private armies, private revenge, private "laws" and private force'. Yet it was not 'private armies' but the JNA, under the direct and formal leadership of Milošević's Serbia (and Montenegro), that destroyed the Croatian city of Vukovar and assaulted Bosnia in 1991–92. Jović's thesis shows that attempting to

shift the blame for the destruction of Yugoslavia away from Milošević and Serb nationalism creates far more theoretical problems than it solves.

Milošević is best known in the West today as the instigator of war crimes. His apologists claim that he was not responsible for those committed by Bosnian Serb forces, as these were outside his control. This claim is refuted by two valuable studies, the first by Norman Cigar and Paul Williams, the second by James Gow. The first of these, now reissued, originally appeared in 1996 as a succinct statement of the case for indicting Milošević. The study was curiously prescient, for Milošević at the time seemed secure in his rule and in Western acquiescence, if not goodwill. Yet, 3 years later, Milošević was indeed indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The book is written from a legalist perspective, and examines the means by which Milošević controlled Serb forces in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – even when, as was generally (though not always) the case, he had no formal responsibility over them.

Indictment at the Hague is an excellent introduction for understanding the legal basis on which Milošević was tried. The book's one significant omission is that it does not cover the conflict in Kosovo. There, the legal case for Milošević's responsibility is much clearer, for Kosovo was part of the SRJ, of which Milošević was the President. Milošević therefore had command responsibility over Yugoslav forces in Kosovo while they were systematically persecuting the Albanian population. Consequently, the ICTY prosecution found it easier to indict him for crimes in Kosovo than for those in Croatia and Bosnia, although the latter occurred much earlier and, in the case of Bosnia, were much larger in scale.

The book by Cigar and Williams is a salutary reminder of the great differences between historical and legal evidence. Paradoxically, the ICTY prosecution found it easier to indict a figurehead like Serbian President Milan Milutinović, who exercised formal command responsibility over forces in Kosovo but little real power, than a bloodthirsty ultra-nationalist poseur like Vojislav Šešelj, whose militia spearheaded operations against Muslim civilians in Bosnia but whose own command responsibility was vague and informal. Yet, ultimately, the informal relationships were more important than the formal in Milošević's Serbia.

Gow's book is the best analysis of Serbian strategy and organization to date. He provides separate chapters on the JNA, on Serbian perceptions of possible Western involvement, on the separate fronts in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, and on the parallel strategies of Serbia's military opponents in the former Yugoslavia and the West. The advantage of this thematic approach is that it emphasizes the different institutional and conceptual levels at which Serbian strategy was working, bringing out the disjointedness of the whole. The disadvantage is that the pre-eminence of Milošević himself, and of the Serbian centre, is somewhat

obscured by an emphasis on the tentacles. Thus, paradoxically, the 'Serbian project' appears more like the lack of one. This is not an entirely misleading picture: the Serbian project failed in part because it was vague and confused. Yet a bad strategy is not the same as no strategy, and this otherwise well researched, informative and thoughtful book would have benefited from an additional early chapter on Milošević's overall goals and considerations.

Gow, like many Western observers, tends to see Serbia and the Western alliance as the two key military players in the Wars of Yugoslav Succession, and downplays the importance of the other former-Yugoslav republics: 'it was Alliance air power, not Croatian and Bosnian ground forces, that defeated the VRS [Army of the Serb Republic] – and would have done so without the contingency of ground forces being there to compound the anguish of the impotent' (198). This is highly questionable. The key military turning points occurred prior to direct Western military intervention against Serb forces: the capture by Croatian forces, supported by the Bosnian Army, of the south-west Bosnian town of Kupres in November 1994 – an event whose importance Gow rightly emphasizes – and Croatia's operations 'Flash' and 'Storm' in May and August 1995, which effectively destroyed the 'Serb Republic of Krajina' (RSK). Gow attributes the latter's collapse to a conscious decision by Belgrade to abandon the territory. However, it is difficult to see why Belgrade would have made a withdrawal of this magnitude if its military position was not anyway crumbling. Immediately prior to Operation Storm, RSK forces were engaged in an all-out attempt to conquer the Bihać enclave of north-west Bosnia, something that might have won the war for Serbia, and it is too much to imagine all this as an elaborate ruse on the Serbs' part to bring about their own defeat.

Gow claims: 'At the end of the war in Bosnia, Serb forces remained the most substantially armed and equipped of the former Yugoslav countries. In the absence of international forces, this left them militarily dominant' (92). Here, he appears to be repeating the error of the Serb leaders: equating superiority in armaments with military superiority. This misconception should have been dispelled by the successive JNA and Serb defeats in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, which showed that superior armaments may be less decisive than good leadership, strong morale and popular support. It is possible to overemphasize Milošević the Machiavellian; ultimately, Serbia lost the war not through his labyrinthine manoeuvring, but on the battlefield and on the home front.

Milošević's ability to hold on to power so long, despite repeated military defeats, appears surprising. Part of the answer lies in the character of Serb nationalism, whose foundation was provided not by a state and its institutions, but by the Serbian Orthodox Church, and which therefore has a somewhat otherworldly

character. The perception by Serb nationalists of their national space tends to have no relation to the actual extent of Serb-held territory: many still believe that territories such as Dalmatia or Macedonia, whose populations are mostly non-Serb and which were not occupied in the recent war, are nevertheless 'Serb lands'. Serb nationalism is, for most of its adherents, more a religion than a practical ideology. This may be traced back to the time of the Ottoman Empire, when the folklore and clergy of the stateless Serbs together preserved the memory of the once-glorious Serbian medieval empire. In *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology*, the Belgrade social theorist Ivan Čolović colourfully portrays this mind-set. His humorous but incisive collection of essays looks at Serb-nationalist perceptions of frontiers, historical memory, warfare, Europe and other concerns, and at various case-studies illustrating the delusions and virtual insanity of his subject matter. Čolović describes rather than explains, but the reader gains the flavour of the subject in a manner not provided by more academic works.

The inherently irrational character of contemporary Serb nationalism, as painted by Čolović, helps explain both the inability of Serb leaders to devise winning strategies of territorial expansionism and their extreme reluctance to abandon such strategies. Milošević seized and maintained power by his appeals to Serb nationalism, but this was a nationalism of emotion rather than concrete goals. Ultimately, he fell from power when the disparity between his nationalist rhetoric on the one hand and the reality of nationalist failure and collapsing living standards on the other became too great. Disaffection permeated right up from the lower echelons of society to the highest ranks of the élite. The revolution of October 2000 that overthrew Milošević, like that of 1987–9 that brought him to power, was a revolution both of the masses and of the élite. *The Fall of Milošević: The October 5 Revolution*, by Serbian journalists Dragan Bujosević and Ivan Radovanović, provides a vivid account of it. Most striking is the interaction between the furious, spontaneous revolution of the ordinary Serbian people and the planned, deliberately restrained revolution of the leaders of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), the anti-regime coalition that included many former Milošević supporters.

It was the latter, particularly the former SPS functionary Nebojša Čović, whose negotiations with the police helped ensure the latter would not fire on the demonstrators; the police's abandonment of the regime ensured the bloodless success of the revolution. Yet, the activities of Čović and other DOS leaders also restrained the revolution to the maximum: they prevented the crowd from lynching policemen and, after the storming of the Yugoslav parliament and Radio/Television Serbia buildings, refrained from going on to storm the Serbian

government and Presidency buildings and arresting Milošević. The authors describe the anger of a certain Igor, bodyguard of a senior DOS politician, at the failure to finish the job: 'We had the opportunity to get rid of Milošević and all those generals, and we blew it. I was terribly disappointed' (163).

Bujosević and Radovanović's account is essential reading on the fall of Milošević. It has, however, a naive feel to it, recalling the euphoric mood in Serbia at the time. The authors depict the colourful surface of the revolution, but merely hint at the accompanying underhand dealings between members of the pro- and anti-Milošević sections of the Serbian élite. These dealings, like those between the Communist hardliners and nationalist dissidents who united behind Milošević in the late 1980s, will probably never be fully uncovered. The revolution ended the personal dictatorship of Milošević, but otherwise the apparatus of his regime remained very much in place. Vojislav Koštunica, who succeeded Milošević as SRJ president, was not a tyrant or a killer like his predecessor, but was nevertheless an unreconstructed Serbian nationalist and opponent of the ICTY, making him a loyal representative of the same Serbian military and police élite who had previously backed Milošević.¹⁰

The fall of Milošević did not, therefore, mean the end of the élite he had led or the politics he had pursued. The big questions concerning Serbia's national identity and her relations with the West and with her neighbours, which Milošević had attempted to answer in his own brutal way, remained unanswered after his fall, and the Serbian élite remained as divided as ever between reformists and nationalists. Milošević was surrendered to the Hague on 28 June 2001 – the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo – and in March of the following year Serbia and Montenegro reached an agreement whereby in February 2003 the SRJ became the 'State Union of Serbia and Montenegro', belatedly consigning the discredited Yugoslav name to the dustbin of history. Nevertheless, the end of Milošević and of Yugoslavia did not bring closure. The resilience of the Milošević-era élite was demonstrated on 12 March 2003, when Koštunica's rival, the reformist Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, was assassinated by members of the 'Units for Special Operations' in reaction to his attempts to cooperate with the ICTY. These were police special forces who had comprised Milošević's praetorian guard and played a central role in his war-crimes, but defected from him in October 2000 and participated in his arrest in April 2001. Đinđić's assassin, Zvezdan Jovanović, had himself been Milošević's bodyguard. The assassination and its aftermath, like the 8th Session of the Central Committee of the SKS 15 years before, split the Serbian élite and raised the old questions once again. In this sense, it is a mistake to overemphasize the significance of Milošević as an individual: he was the product of a definite moment in Serbia's history.

Notes

1. Translated into English as Slavoljub Đukić, *Milošević and Marković: A Lust for Power* (Montreal 2001).
2. *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, 1st edn., Zagreb, Leksikografski zavod FNRJ, Vol. 2 (1956), 207–20; Branko Dubravica, *Vojska antifašistička Hrvatske (1941–1945)* (Narodno Sveučilište Velika Gorica 1996), 9–23.
3. Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milošević and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Durham, NC and London 2002), 169–71.
4. Gale Stokes, *Politics as Development: The Emergence of Political Parties in Nineteenth-century Serbia* (Durham, NC and London 1990), 52.
5. Svetozar Marković 'Slav Austria and Serb Unity', in Andreja Živković and Dragan Plavšić, eds, *The Balkan Socialist Tradition: Balkan Socialism and the Balkan Federation, 1871–1915*, [Revolutionary History, 8, No. 3] (London 2003), 21–7.
6. Dragan Radević, 'Partija demokratskog socijalizma', *Politika* (Belgrade 1990), 1.
7. *Tanjug* (9 October 1991).
8. Borisav Jović, 'Poslednji dani SFRJ', *Politika* (Belgrade 1995), 160.
9. *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije*, Year 46, No. 1 (28 September 1990), 5.
10. See Norman Cigar, *Vojislav Koštunica and Serbia's Future* (London 2001).

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