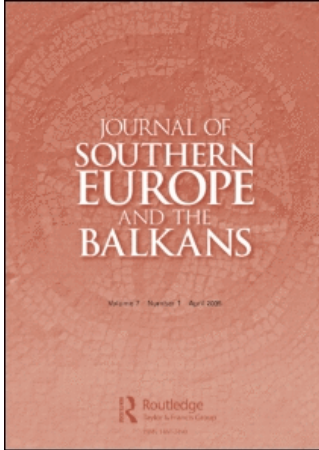


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John R. Lampe

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DEBATES

Responses to Aleksa Djilas, 'The Academic West and the Balkan Test', *JSEB*, Vol. 9, No. 3, December 2007

JOHN R. LAMPE

In his lengthy and erudite review, first of Sabrina Ramet's *Thinking about Yugoslavia* and then of my *Balkans into Southeastern Europe*, Aleksa Djilas calls attention to three of the major problems that still burden Balkan history. All are problems that help to preserve the region's pejorative designation as Balkan even for the recent past. At the centre of South-eastern Europe's pejorative recent past are of course the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution.

First, this recent violence has tempted some of 'the academic West', in Djilas's phrase, into separating the warring sides on grounds of guilt or innocence, black or white, then reading the verdicts back into historical patterns of Balkan or un-Balkan behaviour. Western scholars who have been attracted to such an unambiguous moral narrative typically exonerate, at least in the main, Croats and Slovenes or Bosnian Muslims with their Habsburg heritage while tracing back Serb guilt to Balkan roots. For the 1990s of course, the abuses of the Milošević regime left little room for reversing this moral narrative in Serbia's favour or even, in the Bosnian case, room for accepting what I have called 'the fallacy of false equivalence', holding all three sides equally guilty for 'the same dirty business'.

Second, the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution have tempted regional scholars, particularly but not exclusively from Serbia and Greece, with another moral narrative, the primary responsibility of Western, primarily American intervention. They fall back on the dated paradigm of Great Power predominance in the affairs of the fledgling Balkan states of the 19th century, still defensible during and after the two world wars but otherwise debatable. American survival as the one present-day Great Power after the collapse of the Soviet Union has revived its attraction as a way of avoiding domestic responsibility.

Third, these two moral narratives of the 1990s, each read back across the 20th century, challenge the region's own younger scholars to take the lead back from 'the academic West' in re-examining the domestic history of the pre-1989 and pre-1945 periods. For Greece, re-examination of the three rounds of Civil War in the 1940s, with constructive contention between scholars criticizing first the anti-Communist and then the Communist sides, was already under way by the 1980s. Elsewhere, freedom from ethnic or international stereotyping is appearing in new scholarship from Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, and also Bulgaria and Romania. Working from primary sources to conclusions, rather than the reverse,

it is addressing the interwar period and the early Communist years. Moving on to the last Communist years will be needed to address the domestic dynamics of the 1990s adequately.

What do we learn from the Djilas review about these three problems? His detailed critique of Ramet's moral standards for judging Western historiography on the wars calls fair attention to her uniformly favourable reviews of work contrasting Croatian white with Serbian black. We might discount these criticisms if Djilas, writing from Belgrade, had countered with reference to Serbian or Serbian-centred works reversing the colour coding. Instead, he calls attention to several of the major Western volumes (he might have selected more to greater advantage) that represent the majority of highly regarded scholarship on the wars, a majority that identify shades of grey rather than black or white. While still leaving the Serbian side with darkest shade, these works also resist reading its pre-1989 history backwards from the 1990s. Ramet's dismissal (or omission) of them deserves to be called to account.

In his generally favourable treatment of my own volume, Djilas does not fall directly back on the alternate moral narrative, which finds Western intervention as primarily responsible for the tragedy of Yugoslavia's bloody dissolution. He does however suggest that the very nationalism with which Serbia is charged unconsciously prompts my account to 'soften criticism' of US policy. Consciously at least, I was prompted by the awful alternatives to American-led NATO initiatives, belated in Bosnia if overconfident in Kosovo, that arguably made US policy 'least-bad'. In addition, Djilas's own criticism of US aid to the Croatian army as decisive in 1995 and as significant for the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1999 exaggerates the role it played, an exaggeration that infers a guiding Great Power hand in Croatian and Kosovar actions that is hard to support. Also constrained by space in my treatment of US policy, my volume nonetheless takes note of the range of critical American scholarship, as may be seen by the title alone of *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo*, by Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon for The Brookings Institution in 2000.

More questionably, Djilas argues that I soft pedal the role that US policy played in suppressing democracy in post-war Greece and Tito's Yugoslavia. As for post-1945 Greece, Djilas unpersuasively links first British and then American influence, real enough, with control that it never had. By the late 1950s, moreover, that influence strongly supported the open, multi-party elections that became a cornerstone of democratic Greece, a cornerstone whose removal by the brief Colonels' regime of 1967–1974 never won US approval. And in Tito's Yugoslavia, I point to considerable American encouragement to market-oriented economists. They became the only effective dissidents, in contrast to the fuzzy 'socialist humanism' of the *Praxis* group. Still, we must acknowledge with Djilas that Tito and his regime always received the benefit of the doubt from the USA in particular for breaking with the Soviet bloc. At the same time, this favouritism never went as far as calling Tito 'a symbol of freedom'.

We are still left with the need to re-examine the region's post-1945 history in order to move beyond any overly simple narrative, moral or otherwise. Here I must agree with Djilas that my volume could have been better. It could have been longer to start with, held to barely half the length of my *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 2000) in order to make it more accessible to a Western audience less interested even in the wars

of the 1990s than many, especially in the former Yugoslav capital of Belgrade still believe. A longer version would have added some of the details whose absence or imprecision Djilas laments. It would not however have retreated from my assertion, based on evidence provided to me from informed diplomatic as well as journalistic sources in Belgrade in 1966, that Yugoslav army intelligence (KOS) had discovered the Interior Ministry's bugging of Tito's residence and thus precipitated the abrupt dismissal and disgrace of its still closely connected former chief, Aleksandar Ranković, however much liberal reformers within the party desired his dismissal.

Yet my longer version would also admit that we do not know as much as we should about the detailed history of Yugoslavia's security service, before or after Ranković, or about Bulgaria's and Romania's. I can well believe as Djilas states that for Slovenia, if not Croatia, its security service operated independently, as it most probably did in the 1980s in conflict with the Serbian controlled KOS. It is for just such issues that we must hope that the sort of new scholarship noted above, already at work for Serbia on the interwar record of King Aleksandar's Interior Ministry, can shed light which any Western survey such as mine would welcome.

John R. Lampe is Professor of History at the University of Maryland in College Park and a Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. He also served as Director of East European Studies at the Wilson Center from 1987 to 1997. As a young Foreign Service Officer, he was assigned to the American Embassy in Belgrade during 1965–1966. In addition to *Balkans into Southeastern Europe* and *Yugoslavia as History*, as noted above, his other recent publication is *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth Century Southeastern Europe* (CEU Press, 2004), co-edited with Mark Mazower.

SABRINA P. RAMET

My book, *Thinking about Yugoslavia*, has received rave reviews from Gale Stokes, Ivo Goldstein, Alex Bellamy, and Denisa Kostovičova and Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović, among others. The fact that major figures in the field of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav studies have found merit in my book should suggest that it ought not to be dismissed out of hand. And yet, this is precisely what Aleksa Djilas sought to do, in a review published in the December 2007 issue of this journal. Unfortunately, he does not tell the reader what is in the book, and misrepresents it in some important ways.

It was not my intention originally to write a book, but to use the device of book reviews to keep up with the field. In other words, the reading was its own reward. The earliest of the book reviews reprinted in this volume was published in 1993 after a long delay. In fact, I began reading the books reviewed in *Thinking* as long ago as 1991, reading the last of the books included here in 2004. This means that I read at least one book in my area of highest interest every five to six weeks. Djilas would like the readers of this journal to believe that it is impossible for someone to read the books under review within the time allocated for work on the book. If Djilas believes that this is some extraordinary feat which no mortal person could manage, then this reflects on his own work methods.

Before addressing his various misrepresentations, I should like to say what is in my book (since he failed to execute his duty in that regard) and a little more about how it came about. I have already mentioned that my original ambition did not extend beyond meeting my commitments to the journals contracting my reviews. But, at a certain point (specifically after writing what would become Chapter 10), I realized that bringing these various review essays together, as A. J. P. Taylor did with his own reviews in his book, *Europe: Grandeur and Decline*, might produce a volume of use to some scholars. (Thus, it was A. J. P. Taylor, not Hoare and Malcolm as Djilas speculated, who was the inspiration for converting the reviews into a book.) The text was reworked somewhat. I also added some books, at the suggestion of the three pre-publication reviewers contracted by Cambridge, and also deleted one or two books which I had discussed in the original text of the chapters.

The book begins by setting out certain terms of analysis, providing stipulative definitions (which Djilas ignores). The key terms are: *idealism*, which I define in the book as 'the belief that sovereignty is relative to morality and that governments should be held to a universal moral standard'; *realism*, which I define as 'the belief that human rights are relative to sovereignty and that governments should enjoy a wide latitude in their domestic policies on the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of another state'; *relativism*, which I define as 'any orientation which relativizes morality or which treats the rights of one (group of) people as less important than the rights of some other (group of) people'; and *conventionalism*, which I define as

the belief that there is no external standard by which one may assess the morality or immorality of the laws or practices of a given government and that it is meaningless to speak of universally valid moral precepts, except arguably in a nominal sense as established by written international agreements.

(Two other terms are defined on page xvii of the book, but, for reasons of space, I shall leave that to the side; interested readers should consult the book itself.) These terms are, in turn, the key to understanding a central debate in the field of Yugoslav studies, a debate in which, however, only a minority of the scholars discussed in the book actually took part. Readers wishing to know why I characterize Robert Hayden and Susan Woodward, for example, as conventionalists, or why I am troubled by Burg and Shoup's suggestion that what the Muslims endured may not have been genocide (p. 402), even while they offer that the loss of life by 526 Serbs in the course of Operation Storm may have been tantamount to genocide (p. 414), should consult my book. It is striking that Djilas does not cite my criticisms of any of these books, leaving the reader in the dark as to what my thoughts might be.

There are several errors and misinterpretations in Djilas's account. First, he endeavours to harness Michael Mann in his argument with me, noting that Mann 'convincingly rejects any attempt to chastise entire ethnic groups as perpetrators of expulsions and genocide'. I agree wholeheartedly with Mann and would view him as a likely ally on perhaps everything except his apparent distaste for Norman Cigar's book. In fact, if Djilas can find the energy to read some of my other books, such as my *Whose Democracy?* and my *Three Yugoslavias*, and, for that matter, my earlier *Nationalism and Federalism*, where I speak in my own voice

rather than spending much of my time summarizing the views of others, he will see that I have repeatedly gone out of my way to stress that there has been a striking diversity of opinion just among Serbs, as there has also been among Muslims, as well as among Croats. In both *Nationalism and Federalism* and *Three Yugoslavias*, I highlight the courage and activity of Serb liberals (by name in some cases) in their opposition to Milošević's policies while, in *Whose*, I use the phrase 'Milošević and his henchmen' specifically too avoid attributing to 'the Serbs' the commitment of atrocities and the infliction of suffering.

Second, he says that it is a 'significant' error to believe that Macedonia was partitioned in the course of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, as Hugh Poulton notes. Djilas's argument is that since Macedonia did not enjoy independence at that time, it did not exist. Yet historians of Macedonia agree in referring to 'historic Macedonia', as a region which was, indeed, divided up at that time by Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece—and, in the cases of Serbia and Greece, against the wishes of the local inhabitants. It is Djilas who makes the 'significant' error here.

Third, Djilas must surely know that the figure of more than 200,000 dead in the Bosnian war is a figure generated by the American CIA and that, although it has been challenged since the publication of my book, it is still a respectable figure. In any case, the recent figure of roughly 100,000 dead, estimated by the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo, was not released to the public until June 2007. For him to pretend that the figure was available in 2004, when I was finishing my book, is either an error or a trick on his part.

Fourth, although the figure of 250,000 casualties after the end of the Second World War is Noel Malcolm's, not mine, Djilas offers no documentation whatsoever for his allegation that the figure is wrong. In so far as he was not able to offer documentation, I suggest that it is he, not Noel Malcolm, who commits the error here. But here, as elsewhere, Djilas is guilty of false attribution, attributing to me the accounts and views of others, which I merely report.

Fifth, he mistakenly characterizes Ivo Banac as a 'Croatian nationalist', even though Banac consistently opposed Franjo Tuđman's policies and championed the unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Banac could be better viewed as a 'Croatian-American liberal intellectual'.

Sixth, Djilas insists that the Serbian political system is legitimate, and attacks me for thinking otherwise. Yet a report issued by Washington's Heritage Foundation in 2005 (the year my book was published) finds that 'Serbia's power structure remains in the grip of ... war criminals, corrupt security chiefs and ultra-nationalist politicians' (< www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-08/2005-08-06-voa1.cfm >)—perhaps Djilas's formula for 'legitimate' government, but not mine. The same impression is conveyed by the 2006 issue of *Nations in Transit*, which notes that 'corruption remains a potent problem within the judiciary' and refers to 'evidence of the continued political abuse of courts and the judiciary' (2006 issue, p. 528). More recently, the 26 December 2007 issue of *Glas javnosti* reported that 45 per cent of respondents in an opinion poll said that the judicial and legal system in Serbia protected criminals, with an *additional* 48 per cent declaring that the judicial–legal system was 'unjust, problematic, and ineffective' (< www.glas-javnosti.co.yu/node/6642/results >, as accessed on 26 December). Only 5 per cent approved of the system. The vast majority of Serbs, thus, agree with me that the legal foundation of the system is illegitimate; Djilas is, of course, entitled to approve of the system, but not to declare his minority

view to be a 'holy truth'. He is also dogmatic in his judgments, suggesting at one point that he favours over any other alternatives the highly dysfunctional system under which Bosnia-Herzegovina currently suffers and with which none of its constituent peoples are satisfied.

On another matter, I offered, at the end of my volume, a list of 'personal favourites' and did not suggest that these were objectively the best volumes. However, Djilas, in countering with an expostulation of his own preferences, dismisses 'the vast majority' of my own favourites as 'biased', while highlighting the relativists and conventionalists as 'true scholars'—a term which makes a pretence of objectivity but which actually betrays Djilas's awareness that the writings of those I have identified as relativists have always been the most acceptable (and even useful) to those persons who favoured the expansion of the Serbian state at the expense of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Does Djilas truly hold the works of Dennison Rusinow, Jozo Tomasevich, Ivo Goldstein and Nebojša Popov, whose works are among my favourites, in contempt?

He would like to condemn me for silence on matters unrelated to the books I was reviewing. If that is legitimate discourse, then perhaps I may reprove him for his silence on the flight of Croats and Hungarians from the Vojvodina, under pressure, during the years 1991–1995 or for his silence about Milošević's brutal treatment of the Albanians of Kosovo or for his silence about the suffering which Milošević inflicted upon the Serbs themselves. (And here, Djilas shows his ignorance by failing to understand that the term 'Serbian hegemonism' used by Branka Magaš refers to Milošević's policies and does *not*, by any stretch of the imagination, assign culpability to all Serbs, as Djilas apparently thinks.)

Djilas also supposes that 'if one disagrees with her, one is not entitled to the least respect', and yet, over the years, in the 21 books I have edited (one of which is still in production), I have repeatedly welcomed and included chapters expressing viewpoints which differ in important ways from my own. This is reflected in the diversity of viewpoints expressed among scholars in works I have edited. For examples, I can refer the interested reader to my edited volumes *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (1988), *Beyond Yugoslavia* (1995), *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe* (1999), *Serbia since 1989* (2005) and *Croatia since Independence* (in press). In all of these cases, the reader can find diametrically opposed viewpoints. One example is the chapter by Obrad Kesić in my *Serbia since 1989*; I have some differences of opinion with the views which he expresses in that chapter, but I respect him and his scholarship very much and I was happy to include it. Or again, I list two books by James Gow among my favourites even though, on several important points, his interpretations are quite different from my own. But in writing about some of the most distinguished historians, whose work is characterized by balance and fair-mindedness, Djilas dismisses them with a wave of his fist; his only 'argument' against those with whom he disagrees is alleged 'bias'. Our real fault is only that we exposed the damage done by Milošević's expansionist project not only to non-Serbs but also to Serbs. If Djilas approved of Milošević's expansionist project, surely that means that Djilas turned a blind eye to the harm it did to the people of the region, both Serbs and non-Serbs.

It is, furthermore, false to imply, as Djilas does, that my citation of Meier's defence of Tudjman as 'spirited' was praise or expressed agreement; it was neutral. Strange too, that Djilas could not remember that, on the previous page

in my book (i.e. on p. 6), I noted that '[Michael] Sells provides a damning summary of Tudjman's 1990 book'—again a neutral summary of the given author's views but, no doubt, if Djilas were a Croatian nationalist, he might have twisted this sentence to paint me in very different hues. Or again, in Chapter 11, I contrast very different accounts of Bosnian history by Donia/Fine, Malcolm and Velikonja, noting differences of interpretation without rejecting any of them, and allowing the reader to make her or his own choices.

One of the salient features of my book is, in fact, a systematic, blow-by-blow comparison of historical accounts of Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as of Milošević's policies, in which, with few exceptions, I allow the reader to judge for herself with which account to agree. How could he have missed this?

It is comforting to see Djilas admit his lack of education in philosophy since, if he had kept up with the more recent writings of Jürgen Habermas, he would know that Habermas has, in recent years, converted to Kantianism and now holds up Kant as one of the most important moral philosophers of all time and even as a guide. If Djilas had been inclined to spend even five minutes on the question, he could easily have found substantiation for my representation of Habermas. Thus, for example, in the journal, *Political Theory*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (October 1999), he may read Brian J. Shaw's article about Habermas and Kant, which begins with the words, 'In recent years, Habermas has enthusiastically acknowledged an expansive debt to Kant's legal and political philosophy.' Again, at the website <http://www.msu.edu/~robins11/habermas/main.html>, he can find Steve Robinson writing that 'Habermas is decidedly Kantian in his dedication to reason, ethics, and moral philosophy.' Or again, at <http://habermasians.blogspot.com/2007/10/habermas-kant-and-darwin.html>, he may find Ali Rivzi's reference to Habermas's 'homage to the Kantian insight about the irreducibility of "reason" and "nature"'. Or again, at the website <http://www.nhinet.org/day15-2.pft>, he may verify that, in the view of the University of Toronto's Richard B. Day, 'Habermas remains committed to Kant's faith in human reason'. He may also wish to read Habermas's *The Inclusion of the Other* (1998) and may, in this way, brush up on his education in matters of philosophy.

For Djilas, I am simultaneously moralistic and displaying an 'absence of earnestness'. These two accusations do not go together. Of course, every reader can decide for himself or herself what may seem 'strident and unfair'. I would nominate Djilas's review as a quintessential candidate for that honour. At least he recognizes the importance that the moral law has for me.

Finally, Aleksa Djilas reproaches me for not including a discussion of John Lampe's much-lauded *Yugoslavia as History* in my book. The reason for my choice in this regard is rather simple. The book does not fit under any of the chapter headings. It is not a book with any special focus on the War of Yugoslav Succession (as per Chapters 1 and 4); nor is it a book about the collapse of East European communism (Chapter 2); nor is it a book about the roots of the Yugoslav collapse (Chapter 3); nor is the book autobiographical in nature or tantamount to memoirs (Chapter 5). The list could go on. But, to put it succinctly, anyone taking a look at the table of contents will readily see that, had I wished to include Professor Lampe's history in my review, that is, without just stuffing it into a chapter in which it did not belong, I would have had to create a special chapter, perhaps contrasting it with other histories—which would have made the book longer than Cambridge was ready to countenance. As Djilas can verify for

himself, I do not discuss any histories of Yugoslavia—not that by Holm Sundhaussen (1982), nor that by Paul Garde (French edn, 1994; Croatian translation, 1996), nor that by Hrvoje Matković (1998; 2nd edn, 2003), nor that by Leslie Benson (2001; revised edn, 2004), let alone the 1974 *History of Yugoslavia*, written by Vladimir Dedijer et al. In highlighting only Lampe's work, while ignoring the histories written by these other scholars, Djilas is expressing his own preferences—which he is entitled to do—but also converting it into some sort of absolute truth or dogma—which is entirely inappropriate.

I believe that Djilas has treated the work of Noel Malcolm, Marko Hoare and others unfairly (without any explanation other than alleged 'bias'), and that he has seriously misrepresented my own work. Readers wishing to know what is actually in *Thinking about Yugoslavia* should read the book.

Sabrina P. Ramet is Professor of Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway. She received her PhD in political science from UCLA in 1981 and taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and at the University of Washington before moving to Norway in 2001. She is the author of 11 books, among them, *The Liberal Project and the Transformation of Democracy: The Case of East Central Europe* (Texas A&M University Press, 2007).