

## **Book Reviews**

Sabrina Petra Ramet. *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the War for Kosovo*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1999. 374 pp., ISBN 0813390346, 30 USD (paperback).

The challenge to writers of books on the dissolution of Yugoslavia is to identify the essence of this still unfinished process, now well past its tenth anniversary and thrust into the international spotlight once more through the trial of Slobodan Milosevic. With the status of Kosovo undetermined, Macedonia's political evolution tenuous and the Federal Republic's constitutional framework the subject of intense negotiation in Belgrade, Podgorica and Brussels, this is a still simmering debate, although it is reduced from the boiling point that would have greeted the earlier editions of *Balkan Babel*. An equal challenge would be to 'win' the academic thrust and counter-thrust which extends across both the decade of Yugoslavia's demise and the multiple-edition books addressing it.

In fact, this book is substantially different than its predecessors. This third edition sets out to achieve both goals, though it retains much of the format and content of an overview of the dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its causes. It has been extensively revised, discarding two earlier chapters as well as the earlier

epilogue. Two new chapters have been added, which focus on the Dayton settlement in Bosnia and the crisis in Kosovo and its aftermath. There is also a fresh epilogue and a "review of reviews."

The book now covers four parts: (1) the disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1980-91; (2) religion and culture, four chapters of which appeared in the second edition; (3) war and transition, covering the main part of the conflict and the fate of Slovenia and Macedonia; and (4) "Peace without Rights?" the final and most interesting section. The epilogue and unusual 'Anti-bibliography' follow. They stand on their own merit as a condensed version of the academic contest over Yugoslavia. Different authors have sought to examine or explain what John Lampe has called the question of Yugoslavia's 'viability'. Ramet's answer is the 'principle of legitimacy', the absence of which she believes lay at the root of the Milosevic regime and the wars that it is responsible for. It is partly because of this argument that the book retains relevance even as the story of Yugoslavia continues to play out—Milosevic's criticisms of and defence before the UN tribunal will be based on attacking its legitimacy.

Put briefly, Sabrina Ramet claims both Yugoslav regimes were fundamentally illegitimate, that "the fundamentals of the state (the mode of selection of leaders, the division of power, political succession, and the very justification of the state itself) were in dispute" (p. 299). Milosevic and his coterie of 'enablers' harnessed the underlying tensions to push the

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system from illegitimacy towards disaster. Nationalism, then, “in all of its guises, is a false solution which promises much, but delivers mainly hardship, prejudice, injury, pain and constant dangers” (p. 321). It leads, she writes, to an “anti-universalist morality in which equality has no place” (p. 321) and results in delegitimation, not the reverse (p. 333).

Sabrina Ramet’s well-known allegory is of socialist Yugoslavia as a Tower of Babel, in which its diverse peoples failed to comprehend each other’s cultures (p.329), and thereby, each other’s politics. In the new Epilogue, she presents a table of legitimacy (p.334), which ranks four of the Yugoslav successor states on the basis of moral, political and economic legitimacy. While this analysis is by definition a product of the time at which it was written (1999), it illustrates very clearly Ramet’s vision of what constitutes political success. To be viable, the legitimate state must be the moral state. Indeed, her final word as she closes the book on the wrecked (and subdivided) Tower of Babel is to remind those who call themselves political ‘realists’ that the task of any state is “no less than the quest for moral excellence” (p.340).

In setting such a standard, she is fully engaged in that other, above-mentioned struggle, to defeat the academic descendants of Hobbes and Machiavelli in the contest to make sense of the war and suffering of Yugoslavia. To that end, her anti-bibliography or review of reviews proves an interesting exercise. It is not an answer to her critics, but rather

an overview of critical response to scholarly material on the conflict. It is welcome, but given the stronger, more heartfelt tone of her earlier argument, it is a scrupulously even-handed treatment of some authors with whom she clearly disagrees strongly. Since she must feel these authors are morally misled (and misleading), it sits rather incongruously with the rest of the book.

This review has focused on the philosophical themes in *Balkan Babel*, not with aim of avoiding the history of the process of dissolution, but rather to discuss the prescription for that which comes after dissolution. A fourth edition of this book may well be needed. In the coming year, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and probably Macedonia and Croatia, will face electoral challenges to their political regimes; Kosovo’s fate may remain undecided, and Milosevic’s trial will end a great political saga. Yet I doubt that Professor Ramet will have much to add to the essence of her argument. She has examined the heart of nationalism, and found it wanting.

This third edition of *Balkan Babel* commands the attention of those seeking to understand the recent history of the former Yugoslavia. Sabrina Ramet is clear about her position on the causes of this decade of suffering, and certain in her philosophical prescription to end it. Yet, one cannot help but feel that while such moral certainty regarding the Balkans is needed, it is also to be feared.

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Alfred Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 369 pp., ISBN 0199242704, 65 USD (hardcover).

The beginning of this book announces a methodological study devoted to examining how themes in comparative politics are selected. Stepan thinks the problem selection must come first in comparative politics, but also informs us of his surprise at the number of scholars who greatly advanced methodological apparatus but did not know where to apply it. In the introduction, Stepan explains the reasons for writing each part of the book. When we reach the end of introduction, we see that the reasons were mostly personal in nature. The text abounds with verbs such as “struck”, “amazed”, “shocked”, and “surprised” after having heard, read, or been told this or that. But does not Stepan establish a triviality? The motivation behind most academic work is personal.

There are, nevertheless, some helpful observations on the issue selection problem in comparative politics. Some chapters in this book were written to expose themes that have not been sufficiently explored. For instance, Stepan was surprised that the concept of the state was given little academic significance at the university where he studied, so he attempts to correct this stateless perspective by making it less “empirically distorting and methodologically disempowering.” Basically, the themes to be legitimately pursued are invariably the

themes that are undertheorized, or the themes of which we know very little. This is not a trivial conclusion. Many students are unable to pin down the legitimate subject of their research. This is why it often happens that some books are a mere repetition of what has already been said or written.

*Arguing Comparative Politics* is, by and large, a compilation of the articles Stepan published in the period 1973-1996. The book contains only two unpublished papers, one on the relation of religion and democracy and the other on federalism (which is, at the same time, a part of another forthcoming 500-page book Stepan is working on in cooperation with Juan Linz). The following three themes stand out and are related to the issues of democratic consolidation in Southeast Europe: path dependence, the role of the institution of the president for consolidation for democracy, and a new approach to federalism.

The root thesis in “Paths Toward Redemocratization” is that the success of democratic transformation depends on what kind of strategy actors take during the time that precedes the breakdown of authoritarian regime as well as during the onset of the reform. The aspects to be looked into are the structure of the authoritarian regime, the way it breaks down, the bargaining that the hard-liners and soft-liners undertake with the opposition, and what institutions are picked in an attempt to establish a new regime. All this falls under what Stepan dubs “path”. Stepan does not argue that the path invariably determines the outcome of the democratic transformation but rather

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that it creates a context within which transformation develops. Stepan lists 10 paths toward redemocratization, but for the context of South-Eastern Europe redemocratization initiated from within the authoritarian regime (along with its different forms) matters most. Its main feature is that “the ruling coalition perceive that because of changing conditions their long-term interests are best pursued in a context in which authoritarian institutions give way to democratic institutions.” Something like this happened in Poland and Hungary, although the Polish case is also due to what Stepan calls “Society-led Regime Transition” in which “transformation can be brought about by diffuse protests by grassroots organisations, massive but unorganised general strikes, and by general withdrawal of support for the government.” The latter, however, is in itself incapable of completing transformation. At best, it can be seen as a part of redemocratization. Unfortunately, the Stepan matrix misses how the undemocratic regimes in Slovakia, Croatia and Serbia democratized between 1998 and 2000. These cases cannot be covered by any of the paths. The problem is not that this article was published 12 years prior to Meciar’s downfall, and 14 prior to Tudjman’s death and Milosevic’s downfall, but that the matrix in general does not rely on a classification of authoritarian regimes. This element would enrich the Stepan matrix and helped him advance at least yet another path that could cover Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia.

The second topic that is of importance for South-Eastern Europe

is usually referred to as institutional choice. In “Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidations,” Stepan compares advantages and disadvantages of pure presidential and parliamentary models of government. The underlying premise is, of course, that institutions matter, and that, in analysing the outcome of democratic transformation, they should be given equal weight along with economic and social conditions. The discussion of the effects of the presidential system is of a particularly high significance for Eastern Europe, as many East European countries opted for some sort of presidentialism. The thesis that presidentialism is overrated receives an important place in the analysis if related to the claim that the institution of president is an obstacle rather than a facilitator to democratic consolidation. Sometimes numbers say it all. If we consider the former British colonies, we see that out of 34 that began their independent life as parliamentary democracies, 13 later established themselves as permanent democracies. In contrast, of the five former colonies that adopted presidentialism, none became a democracy.

The major reason why Stepan considers presidentialism non-conducive to the establishment of democratic system is that in parliamentary systems government relies on a stable parliamentary majority. This is not the case in semi-presidentialisms, as president functions as a second executive, deriving his legitimacy from popular elections. The situation becomes more complicated if the prime minister and

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parliamentary majority come from one party or coalition, and the president from another. Conflict is inevitable, and the problem of dual executives becomes almost irresolvable by constitutional means.

It is necessary to mention that the semi-presidential system, which is one of the most popular institutional forms in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, can function without problems if the president and parliamentary majority come from the same party. This was actually the case in Tudjman's Croatia and Milosevic's Serbia in 1990-2000. Arguably, even if the problem of dual executive did not exist in such cases, the institutional choice, for reasons other than those Stepan lists, determined the 10-year rule of these two authoritarian rulers. Examining post-Tudjman and post-Milosevic era in Croatia and Serbia demonstrates that Stepan is right when he suggests that the institution of the president blocks rather than contributes to democratic consolidation. The conflicts between the parliament, the president, and the government started taking shape in the post-Milosevic and post-Tudjman era, where the presidents do not enjoy the full support of the majorities in the parliaments. The party of the Croatian president Stipe Mesic, who received 41.11 percent in the first round of elections in January 2000 and 56.94 percent of votes in the second, enjoys meager support in the Croatian Sabor, controlling only 2 out of 151 seats. In several conflicts that occurred between the president and the government, there were no institutional arrangements that could bring about a solution. The conflict

was instead settled through a non-institutional compromise. In Serbia, the situation was essentially similar. The party of president Kostunica, who beat Milosevic in the presidential election in September 2000 by gaining 50.48 percent of the votes, has 10 (out of 138) seats in the Federal and 45 (out of 250) seats in the Serbian parliament. In either case, the president's party is unable to bring about the crisis of the government. However, the president very often takes issues with the Serbian government, which is in charge of economic reforms, accusing it of being immoral.

In Stepan's view, the problem of federalism and its relation to nationalism is undertheoretized in contemporary comparative politics. It deserves more attention because federalism can be rightly seen as one of the key factors in consolidation of democracy. Stepan firstly refutes the long-held Rikerian approach to federalism and its famous "centralized-decentralized federalism" dichotomy by proving it insufficient and explaining what effect a federal system has on democratic consolidation. Stepan develops two novel concepts. The first is "demos constraining-demos enabling continuum." Federations can either enable or constrain demos to rule. This turns on four variables: 1) the degree of overrepresentation in the territorial chamber; 2) the 'policy scope' of the territorial chamber; 3) the degree to which policy making is constitutionally allocated to super majorities or to subunits of the federation; and 4) the degree to which

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the system is politywide in its orientation and incentive systems.

On all four variables, different federations have different impacts. But a tendency can be noticed: the Brazilian and American federation are the most demos constraining on almost all the variables, whereas India's and Spain's federalism tend to be the least. But this cannot be understood without knowing what kind of federations these are. Stepan distinguishes between "coming together" and "holding together" federations. "Coming together" occurred in the case of the US, where relatively sovereign units negotiated their way into a closer union while retaining many of their original powers. "Holding together", by contrast, means that the federation was not a product of a creation of sovereign territorial units. Rather, it was created by devolving power from the previously unified center in order to keep the country together. This happened in India and Spain, which are both multinational and multicultural.

To argue that introducing federalism in order to "hold together" is demos enabling rather than demos constraining sounds logical and even somewhat trivial. But it is worth underscoring that federations in which power was devolved from a unitary state managed to survive precisely because they "held together" the way they did. This was the case with India and Spain. This observation is valuable since this devolving power precluded countries from further disintegration. As Stepan points out, "India's demos enabling federal structure allowed the majority at the

center to respond to minority demands from states for greater linguistic and cultural autonomy". If India had remained a unitary state, this hardly would have been possible.

Perhaps some of Stepan's findings and conclusions can be of assistance in finding solutions for the current crisis of the Yugoslav federation as well as for the constitutional recomposition of Serbia. As regards the latter, it appears immediately clear that federalization of Serbia of the "holding together" sort would preclude it from further disintegration. It also appears reasonable to assume that relations between Serbia and Montenegro can be refurbished only if the Yugoslav federation is established on a "coming together" model.

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Christopher Lord and Olga Strietska-Illina (eds.), *Parallel Cultures. Majority/minority relations in the countries of the former Eastern bloc*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2001. 295 pp., ISBN 0754616169, 79.95 USD (hardcover).

The study of national/ethnic minorities and ethnic conflict occupies a prominent place in scholarly interest on Eastern Europe after the end of Communist rule. However, majority-minority interactions still remain insufficiently investigated. Therefore, books like this one are highly welcome. Christopher Lord gives a long theoretical introduction (pp. 1-124.), while the other chapters present

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case studies: Gavril Flora on Transylvania (pp. 125-146), Madeleine Danova on the Bulgarian Pomaks (147-176), Kirill Shevchenko on the Poleshuks in Belarus and the Ukraine (177-208), Kateryna Stadnik on the Donetsk Region in Ukraine (209-244), and finally Olga Strietska-Iliina on Russia (245-290).

In the introduction, Lord delineates the modern idea of the national state and its traditions, and secondly creates a model for majority-minority relations. He hopes that "forming a theory of parallel culture will in the end lead to a politics of parallel cultures" (p. 64), an aim which certainly deserves our support. Lord's main idea is that the national state is a product of the amalgamation of Roman and (Western) Christian traditions. Its particular power results from what Lord calls the "naive anthropological hypothesis," that nations have always existed and are part of the natural organisation of society, as expressed by Herder. Christianity also creates a "cult of exclusion" that makes nations strive for homogeneity and regard themselves as mono-cultural (p. 59). However, in urban centres parallel cultures develop and nations must find ways to deal with them. Lord presents two solutions, both illustrated by medieval examples, that of the Jews on the one hand, and Dualist sects on the other. While Jews were, tolerated (however reluctantly) and provided a certain theological function (as the main 'other'), the Dualists (Cathars in France, Bogumils in the Balkans) were perceived as rebelling against the existing order and were consequently exterminated. While this certainly is

an interesting thought, it remains doubtful that nation states only developed two devices for dealing with minorities. It seems equally problematic to speak of national states in the medieval and early modern period. But what undermines Ford's reasoning most is his almost exclusive focus on the Christian tradition. What about capitalism, the market economy, and European imperialism and their contribution to the emergence and expansion of the national state? He does not discuss these issues. His many interesting and provoking thoughts are further tarnished by several incorrect assertions, such as "Yugoslavia (...) had an Albanian population on its territory (though this was not officially recognised." (p. 46) Of course it was. Slovenian is not a West Slav language, as assumed on p. 115, but a South Slav one. To describe the Czech revolution of 1989 as "huge crowds of flag-waving nationalists" who "greeted the new national hero, Václav Havel, who would lead them into a new age of Czech greatness" (p. 47) would at least need further explanation. To assume that the Russia is now "officially" a national state "on the Western pattern" (p. 4) is hardly convincing in view of the fact that Russia is officially called the Russian Federation and consists of a complex mosaic of ethnically and administratively defined territories.

Most interesting is Kirill Shevchenko's chapter on the Poleshuks in Belarus and the Ukraine. This emerging ethnic identity in the region of Palesse is evidence of the growing ethnic heterogeneity in those parts of Eastern Europe where 'official' ascription of national

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identities is not sufficiently grounded. Shevchenko describes how Poleshuk 'awakeners' and ethnic engineers are attempting to establish a Poleshuk nationality. For this purpose they want to create a literary Poleshuk language as well as a national history—indispensable features of a self-confident nation. In both cases, they can draw on some traditions of local dialects and versions of history which until recently were not organised in a national narrative. Shevchenko's case-study presents prima-facie nation-building. The apparent success of the Poleshuk movement during the last decade is explained by the weakness of Belarussian national identity and language. The language is based on local dialects and is therefore less inclusive than Russian. Shevchenko's strength lies also in his successful attempt to relate the Poleshuk nation-building campaign to general developments in Belarus: "The mutual interdependence between the emergence of independent Belarus and the Poleshuk movement is obvious. It represents one form of public discontent with the current state of affairs" (p. 206).

Another minority, the Pomaks, (a Bulgarian-speaking Muslim population in Bulgaria) is the subject of Madeleine Danova's case-study.. The Pomaks have traditionally been the object of conflicting claims on their 'true' ethnicity. The Pomaks themselves, however, have not yet created a consistent ethnic or national self-identification. Unfortunately the author does not really deal with the extensive recent literature on the Pomaks and gives only a very sketchy overview of the Pomaks' experience

in the Bulgarian national state. She fails, for example, to treat the "process of rebirth" in the early 1970s, when all Pomaks were forced to replace their Turkic-Arabic names with Bulgarian ones. But these experiences of forced assimilation are highly relevant for the current state of their identity, which forms the main topic of Danova's investigation. The realm of politics is conspicuously absent in her chapter, although Pomaks still provoke fervent debates in Bulgarian politics. The author is certainly right in her assessment that Pomak identities are in a flux because of the lack of clear characteristics, which could mark an ethnic boundary to other groups (p. 167). Danova argues for the acceptance of the hybridity and heterogeneity that appears to be typical of Pomak identity in order to allow Pomaks to be the subjects of their own discourse on identity without the imposition of foreign interpretations. But what if identities other than ethnic self-representation are more important for the Pomaks?

Transylvania and the Donetsk Region, two traditionally multiethnic regions that now form parts of larger countries, are dealt with by Gavril Flora and Kateryna Stadnik.. In his chapter, Flora convincingly argues against ethnic nationalism, which has brought havoc to the region he examines. He describes how in Transylvania different ethnic/cultural groups (Germans, Hungarians, Szeklers, Romanians, Jews) have lived side by side for centuries, developing a specific institutional arrangement that has given all groups the opportunity to preserve their specific cultural and religious



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characteristics. But Transylvania did not develop into an Eastern European Switzerland because in the 19th and 20th centuries two mutually exclusive ethno-nationalist ideologies became prominent first: Hungary and Romania both claimed this multiethnic territory for themselves. The author's main aim is to explain why these discourses became dominant and not, for example, a regionalist one that would have tolerated cultural heterogeneity. He describes in detail the 18th, 19th, and finally early 20th centuries when Transylvania eventually became part of the Romanian state with its aggressive ethnic nationalism. The Communist period further fostered the trend toward ethnic homogenisation. The only weak point of this contribution is that the author does not discuss the developments in the region after 1989. Instead he leaves the reader with a general description of current Romanian attitudes toward minorities, especially Hungarians. These are still determined by deep-seated historical fears, as is also reflected in the ethnic centrism of the post-Communist Romanian constitution.

In her analysis of the multiethnic Donbass in the Ukraine, Kateryna Stadnik focuses on the legal framework in regard to minorities and how these stipulations are put into administrative practice. Ukraine is aware of its ethnic heterogeneity and is seeking ways to peacefully deal with the situation, e.g. by giving "national-cultural autonomy" to the national minorities. Unfortunately, it is not quite clear what this means. Stadnik also highlights the attitudes of

the inhabitants of this region towards minorities and multi-culturality, relying on a poll from 1997. Donbass represents the most 'Russian' region of Ukraine, but is also host to a number of other ethnic groups. She describes their history, although somewhat sketchily. However, she points out some very interesting facts in regard to the ethnic self-identification of Ukrainians. For many of them, for example, having Ukrainian as a mother tongue is not crucial for the continuity of the national tradition (p. 229). Regretfully, Stadnik does not give the central problem of diglossia in Ukraine much further discussion. She concludes that, despite the somewhat artificial character of Ukrainian national ideology, and fears from the centre that regions such as Donbass might get out of control, the country has maintained a rather high level of interethnic stability.

In the final chapter, Olga Strietska-Illina attempts to discern where Russia is heading. She asks whether the Russian Federation has the power to integrate all its nations into one multicultural but civic state, or whether centrifugal forces will eventually destroy the Federation. In the first part of her contribution, she describes the mechanisms that held the Czarist Empire and the Soviet Union together. She discusses the ambiguities of Soviet nationality policies that on the one hand encouraged the national affirmation of some ethnic groups, making them titular nations of republics or other territorial units, while on the other hand doled out repression, terror and expulsion. And above all, Russian was

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a language with a privileged status throughout the Union. Today, the Russian Federation's nationality policies continue the Soviet practice of institutionalising national and ethnic groups, ascribing specific territories to them in which they can enjoy their particular rights as a nation. The author, however, conversely pleads to reorganise the country on a strictly regional principle where all people should be citizens with the same rights and duties. "The principle of a political and territorial organisation of the Russian state based on the ethnic principle is a dead end" (p. 267). Nationalities should not be equal, but people should be. At the moment there are unequal opportunities depending on location of birth. Ethnic issues should be confined to the cultural sphere and not be raised to the political level because, once radicalised, they appear to be unstoppable (she therefore argues for the independence of Chechnya, p. 267). Nationhood should be up-graded to state level and be defined in civic terms, while ethnicity should be down-graded to the local level. This is certainly an interesting option, but the author does not mention the extent to which ethnicity determines social stratification. So we do not learn about ethnically discriminating recruitment patterns or about the representation of nationalities in the central state apparatus. But this is necessary in order to understand ethnic claims, which are often the result of actual or perceived discrimination. People who have less opportunity because of their ethnicity do not believe in a civic state concept, but rather demand collective rights for their ethnic group. Further

on, the author argues that the central state has not yet developed any idea that would allow people from all nationalities to become one sort of citizen. Even the Russians themselves are in a deep identity crisis after the loss of their dominant position in a great empire and the loss of the global importance of their country. In such a situation, religion attracts a growing number of people, and ethno-confessional communities experience a revival. (It seems quite odd to cite the example of an obscure Lutheran community that in the mid-nineties counted "already" 300 people as an illustration (p. 277). Are there no more convincing examples?). What is primarily unsatisfying in this chapter is the lack of references to concrete political and economic developments and regional differences, and a rather unclear focus.

Summing up, the volume raises many questions, but cannot answer them all. Mistakes and a lack of a focus in several chapters reduces its value. But the aim of the contributors is worthwhile. They attempt to show how "parallel cultures" (unfortunately, throughout the volume it does not become quite clear what this means) evolve and develop, and how the national state paradigm is a threat to them, causing great physical and psychological suffering. A new Europe can only live in peace with itself if ethnic grievances are properly addressed, without organising states and societies according to the ethnic principle.

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