

Yugoslavia's Implosion

La implosión de Yugoslavia

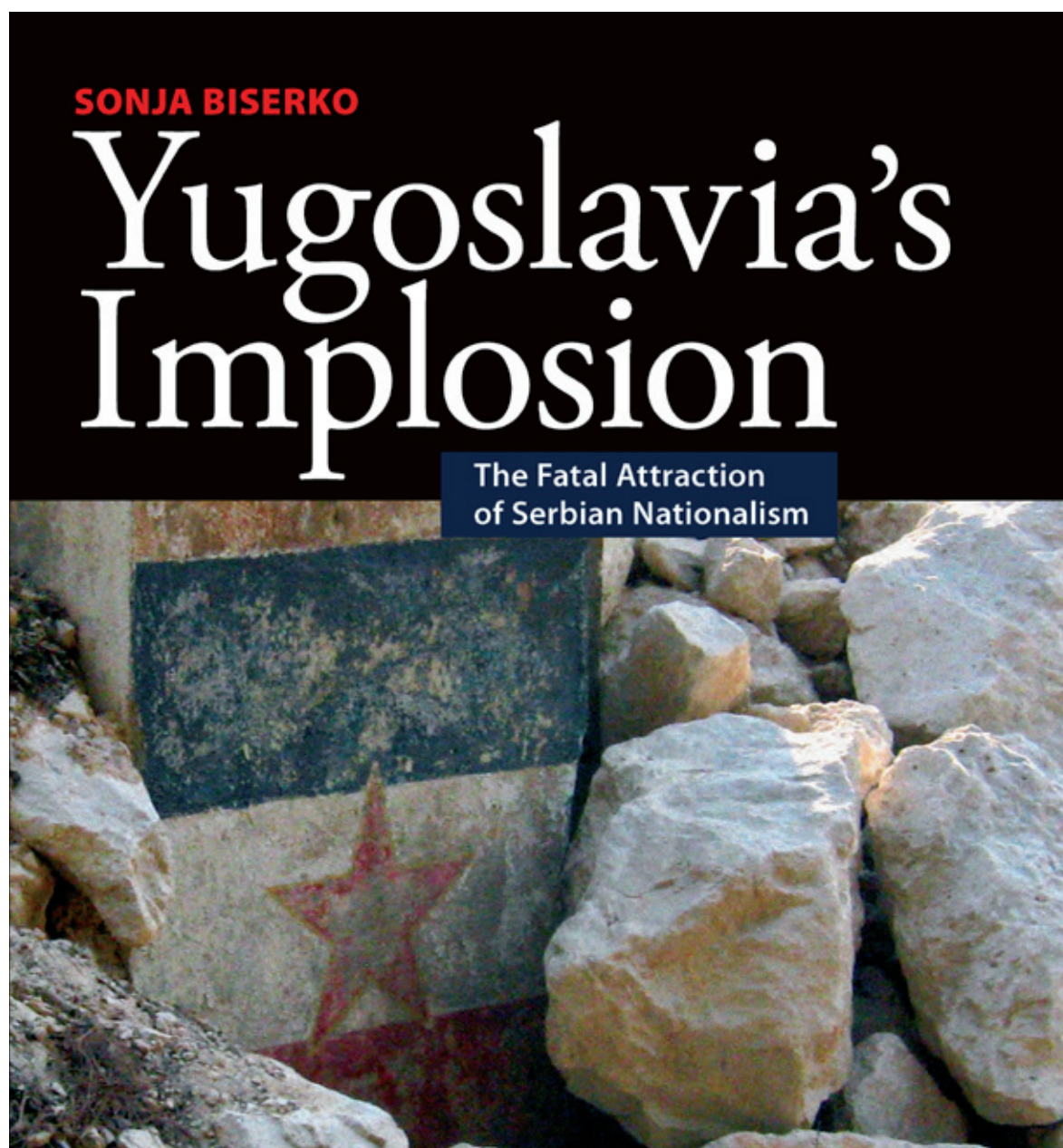
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EN RESEÑA DE • A REVIEW OF

Biserko, Sonja (2012) *Yugoslavia's Implosion. The Fatal attraction of Serbian nationalism*, Belgrado, The Norwegian Helsinki Committee.



Yugoslavia's Implosion. The Fatal attraction of Serbian nationalism written by Sonja Biserko deals and reflects on the role of Serbian nationalism in the disintegration of Yugoslavia and its importance (the Serbian nationalism) in the Serbian political sphere since the end of Yugoslavia. Taking a occidentalist point of view, the author explains that the Serbian nationalism was the main (and unique) cause in the breakup of Yugoslavia and also the cause that prevents Serbia from transforming towards a full market oriented economy and a liberal democracy.

From the former points of view, the author constructs the entire work through five different chapters. Thus, in the first two chapters, Sonja Biserko explains that the breakup of Yugoslavia was nothing but Serbia's responsibility. To back this position, the author explains the process that members of the cultural elite, especially Dobrica Cosic, followed since the decade of 1970s to foster the Serbian nationalism. Moreover, she reveals how Slobodan Milosevic was able to take advantage of nationalist speeches to establish his power and from there, to destroy Yugoslavia and provoke the war after that. In addition, in the second chapter of the book, Sonja Biserko explains how the YPA (Yugoslav People's Army) helped the Serbian nationalism in order to set its objectives, first to force the breakup of Yugoslavia and then, to accomplish the targets of Serbia in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The third chapter is dedicated uniquely to the Kosovo issue. The author analyzes the evolution of the importance of Kosovo's in Serbia's politics and culture reflecting on why the Kosovo myth is so important in the Serbian nationalism and how the Serbian political and cultural elite, and also the Serbian Orthodox Church, deal with the Kosovo issue since the territory was reintegrated in Serbia after the end of the Balkans Wars (1912-1913). Sonja Biserko proves that for the nationalist politicians and cultural elites from Serbia, the Kosovo issue was never about how to create a multi-ethnic society where Serbs and Albanians could have lived together, but it was about how to prevent Kosovo (or at least a part of it) from separating from Serbia. So, the objectives of the most of the political and cultural elites in Yugoslavia about Kosovo during the whole 20th century and the 21th have been, either to expel an important amount of Albanians from Kosovo in order to get a Serbian majority there, or, when this objective was proved impossible, to establish a division of Kosovo between the Albanian entity and the Serbian entity which would join to Albania and Serbia respectively. This idea of dividing Kosovo was proposed by Dobrica Cosic in the decade of 1970s who claimed (and still does) that the Serbian and the Albanian people cannot live together in Kosovo, whereupon the territory has to be split up according to the ethnic lines. Actually, this 'division project' has been so strong in Serbia, that not until much time ago, Belgrade tried to foster and implement it like the best solution for the Kosovo affair.

Eventually, the fourth and the fifth chapter are dedicated to the Serbian political evolution since Milosevic's fall the 5th of October of 2000 and to the lessons that the international community must learn from the Yugoslavia's breakup experience, and about how to deal with similar situations in the future. Respecting chapter number

four, the author explains that the end of Milosevic's leadership did not mean the end of nationalist politics and rhetoric. Kostunica, Milosevic's successor as the President of the third Yugoslavia, followed the major lines traced by his predecessor in the decade of 1990s. However, the rest of important political parties, the most of cultural elite and the Serbian Orthodox Church continue with the nationalist program which claims the division of Kosovo and the right of Republic of Srpska to join Serbia. According to the author, the fact that the Serbian nationalism still plays an important role among Serbian politicians, cultural figures and religious spheres do not permit the modernization of Serbia as a multi-ethnic, oriented market economy and liberal democracy state. This situation can only be modified with the support of European Union and NATO, as democratic agents, and by the liberal forces and the civil society organizations in Serbia. On the other hand, respecting the fifth chapter, Sonja Biserko introduces some sort of general points, such as to identify well the roots of the problem or to support economically and technically the efforts to establish peace in long term, with the purpose that the international community could know how to deal with difficult situations that could come up in the future.

The analysis about the Serbian nationalism and its implications at the end of Yugoslavia and the configuration of current Serbia is truly accurate. Nevertheless, the western point of view had a bias against the final result of the study. There is nothing wrong with having a western point of view (there is nothing wrong with having the opposite either), but in this case, the western lens that Sonja Biserko used to research the Serbian nationalism have three troubles.

On the one hand, the mono-cause of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the wars that came next to that moment. The author blames uniquely Serbia for these two processes. Nevertheless, the explanation of Serbia as the only culprit for the breakup of Yugoslavia was overcome long time ago. Of course the Serbian nationalism played an important role in both processes, but so did the economic crisis, the vacuum of power in the Federal government and the Slovenian nationalism, among others factors. Concerning the war, Serbia of course is the main responsible for the mayhem and tragedy of the War in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo but it is not the only one. Furthermore, it is quite curious how the author does not mention the War of the Ten Days (also known as War of Slovenia) and the War of Macedonia (2001). The former was the first war in the Secession Wars of Yugoslavia and the Serbian authorities did not have any kind of role in that. Respecting the War of Macedonia was a war between Macedonian authorities and Albanian rebels and it was a direct consequence of the international community's support to the Kosovo Liberation Army and the «facto» independence of Kosovo.

On the other hand, the orientalist speech deals with the way with which the Western powers and people look towards the Balkans. The purpose of this speech is a justification of the Western intervention in the Balkans with the excuse for avoiding the «Balkanization» and trying to implement modern values among the Balkan people. This speech tells that the Balkan people do not know how to manage their own affairs

by themselves through diplomatic and political means, but it is only through wars that they can accomplish their objectives. This is Sonja Biserko's opinion when she claims that the European Union and the NATO are key partners to modernize Serbia. This is actually not a novelty in the Modern History of the Balkans. During the whole Modern Age the Balkans have been intervened by Western powers which sought to achieve their economic, strategic and political objectives. The argument that Balkan people cannot handle by themselves their internal affairs and that they need the help to deal with them is nonsense since the moment when the most problematic issues in the former Yugoslav space were fostered by the Western powers. The international community undoubtedly can help the Balkans to develop into a modern society, but the final solution for the Balkan problems is located inside of the Balkans, not outside of them.

Finally there is a (not very) critical opinion about the international community's role. This is the main weak point of the book. The author barely criticizes the role of international community in the Yugoslavia breakup. This lack of critical vision about the role of the international community is truly exaggerated in the conflict of Kosovo, where the author defends the existence of the Plan Horseshoe and the massacre of Racak without mentioning that in the first case there are serious doubts about whether there was a plan to commit ethnic cleansing in Kosovo manipulated by the Serbian government prior to the NATO bombardments. As for the second case, there are also justifiable doubts about if the massacre was not set up. The same can be said about the Rambouillet negotiations and the accord for which the author simply says that Serbia did not want to accept it without mentioning the fact the accord supposed the possibility of Kosovo to hold an independence referendum within three years and the freedom of movement of NATO troops in Serbia. However, the most important bias analysis about the role of international powers comes with the NATO's attack over Serbia. The author defends the bombardment on the pretext of a «humanitarian intervention». Of course, the best way to guarantee human rights is to bombard a legal state to try to force the legal Serbian government to resign. I do not have the intention to defend Milosevic's policy (or other Serbian nationalist parties) towards Kosovo. It has already been proven that this policy was a main factor in the Kosovo War. Nevertheless, the fact that NATO carried out a (illegal) bombardment against a legal country without the Security Council of United Nations' approval in order to «defend» human rights is pure nonsense and it also has a great part of the responsibility for the fact that nowadays the relations between Kosovo and Serbia are so tight and difficult. The attack perpetrated by NATO which had as the target to achieve the objectives of the Western powers in the former Yugoslavia space and to defend human rights was not more than an excuse to accomplish those geo-political goals.

In short, the book written by the Serbian author is a truly good analysis of the Serbian nationalism's role in the end of Yugoslavia as a state, of the Yugoslavia Secession Wars and also of the Serbian nationalism's role in the configuration of politics, religion and culture in Serbia during the 20th and 21st centuries. Nevertheless, the

Western orientation and bias do not permit the author to consider that other internal actors and the international community have also a great amount of responsibility for the end of Yugoslavia and the Wars that coming after the breakup.

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Para mi correctora y compañera Ema Nastran.