Old and New in Histories of Serbia

A Concise History of Serbia. Dejan Djokić. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2023. xvii, 562 S., ISBN: 9781139236140 (ebook); ISBN: 9781107028388 (hardback) ISBN: 9781107630215 (paperback)

Serbia: a Modern History. Marko Attila Hoare. London: Hurst & Company, 2024. xxi, 752 S., ISBN: 9781787385474; ISBN: 1787385477.

Serbian (and other (ex)Yugoslav) historians eschew writing synthetic or general histories. In fact, the last comprehensive histories of Serbia were written in the interwar period by Vladimir Ćorović and Slobodan Jovanović.[1] This would not surprise many observers given the fiery polemics that exploded after the publication of *Istorija Jugoslavije* in 1972,[2] most notably between Zagreb historian Mirjana Gross and then Sarajevo-based Milorad Ekmečić, which predated and, in many ways, anticipated political and ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia in 1980s and after.[3] General histories produce and impose dominant narratives and in Yugoslavia and/or post-Yugoslav Serbia, there was hardly any discussion let alone any consensus among ethnically and/or ideologically polarised historians of what that might be. A notable exception happened in the 1980s with a ten volume *Istorija srpskog naroda* (therafter ISN).[4] It was a state funded project involving Serbia's most established historians with a variety of expertise. As with all collective works, the parts were better than their sum. There was a lack of consistency, not to mention the sheer scale and cost of the collection, which sentenced it to library shelves, rather than to masses of potential readers. There were other issues with the vast project, which appeared just when Serbian nationalism was raising its head, like the section by Radovan Samardžić's on "Serbian people under the Turkish rule" backed only by a handful of footnotes and written largely without consulting Ottoman sources.[5]

The following decades of turmoil only deepened chasms among the Serbian historians and accordingly no attempts at general histories were undertaken, except for Ekmečić and Sima Ćirković.[6] At the same time, the growing thirst about the Serbian past among foreign scholars and general public, who unfortunately discovered the region because of the ongoing wars, was quenched by quickly compiled booklets with attention grabbing titles, which were too

[1] Vladimir Ćorović, I*storija Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Narodno delo, 1933) and his other works later assembled as *Istorija Srba*, 3 vols (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1993); Slobodan Jovanović published several volumes *Ustavobranitelji i njihova vlada (1838-1958*), *Druga vlada Miloša i Mihaila*, Vlada Milana Obrenovića I-III and *Vlada Aleksandra Obrenovića* I-III (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1933-1936) all republished in his collected volumes which appeared in Belgrade by BIGZ in 1990; Michael Boro Petrovich, *A History of Modern Serbia, 1904-1918*, 2 vols, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976) is also mostly based on Jovanović.

[2] I. Božić, S. Ćirković, M. Ekmečić, V. Dedijer, *Istorija Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Prosveta 1972); V. Dedijer et al, History *of Yugoslavia*, trans. by K. Kveder (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974**).**

[3] The extensive polemics was assembled and recently published by Božidar Jakšić, ed., *Istorija Jugoslavije u svetlu kritike. Polemike u jugoslavenskim istorijskim časopisima 1973-1976* (Zemun: Most Art Jugoslavija, 2022).

[4] Individual volumes began appearing in 1981. In 1994, a second edition saw all volumes republished as *Istorija srpskog naroda,* vols 1-6. II (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1994).

[5] Radovan Samardžić, "Srpski narod pod turskom vlašću," in ISN III-1 (Belgrade: SKZ, 1993), pp. 7-42.

[6] Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije, 1790-1918*, 2 Vols. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989); *Dugo kretanje izmedju klanja i oranja, Istorija Srba u Novom veku (1492-1992)* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007); Sima Ćirković, *The Serbs* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) translation of *Srbi među evropskim* narodima (Belgrade: Equilibrium, 2004). With slightly over three hundred pages, the latter was also translated into Russian, Chinese, Italian, Croatian, Slovene, Bulgarian and served for last two decades as an accessible, concise introduction to history of Serbs and Serbia.

many and too unremarkable to be mentioned here.[7] New scholarly but accessible syntheses were delivered much later, first from Germany, a country with the most developed Balkan studies outside the region itself. Concise and reader-friendly histories appeared by Holm Sundhaussen and Marie-Jeanine Calic on Serbia, Yugoslavia, and the Balkans.[8] The appetite of Serbian and ex-Yugoslav public for such works saw them almost immediately translated into Serbian and other languages of former Yugoslavia but also into English.[9] The numerous collective volumes from professors and collaborators of the IOS on the wider Southeast European region should be mentioned too.[10]

In the last couple of years this trend continued with the two English language histories of Serbia by renowned British publishing houses which are under review here. They are works of British trained and formed historians, who are also native speakers of Serbian/Croatian, making them both insiders and able to offer a valuable outsider perspective. Dejan Djokić and Marko Attila Hoare share decades of research in the region's history, proving them highly competent for the task awarded to them by Cambridge and Hurst publishing houses. Having pointed out the commonalities in terms of their authors' background, it is important to stress that, while reviewed here together, these two books are very different in genre. Djokić's (not so) concise history covers the whole history of Serbia (or Serbs) since their settlement in the Balkans. While Cambridge Press 'concise' prefix determines the genre and aims at general public, stretching over five hundred pages Djokić's history turned out to be the most thorough synthesis available to English language readership until Hoare's book appeared less than a year later. Djokić's concise history will remain the point of reference not just for rank and file, but all students of Serbia as the first call and friendly introduction from which to move to their own particular interest. Hoare's in-depth study of over seven hundred pages is limited to the period of 1804-1945. Furthermore, it is almost strictly concerned with Serbia's political history. Thousands of names mentioned (often without introduction or connection) will make it a difficult grasp for all bar few well-informed foreign specialists. Nevertheless, both books make a great contribution to understanding and interpreting Serbian history in English reading world. Alongside the German language volumes mentioned above, one hopes, they will prompt similar synthetic attempts by local historians, upon whose original research they are mostly based. Furthermore, two companion volumes in English, as it were, appeared at the same time on Serbian cultural and constitutional history rounding this

[7] Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia: the history behind the name* (London: C. Hurst, c2002) is mentioned exceptionally because some of its ideas inspired the book by Djokić under review here.
[8] Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Serbiens: 19.-21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007); *Jugoslawien und seine Nachfolgestaaten 1943-2011: eine ungewönliche Geschichte des Gewönlichen* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012) Marie-Janine Calic*, Sozialgeschichte Serbiens 1815-1941: der aufhaltsame Fortschritt während der Industrialisierung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1994); *Geschichte Jugoslawiens* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018). *Südosteuropa. Weltgeschichte einer Region* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016).
[9] Appeared as Holm Zundhausen, *Istorija Srbije od 19. do 21. veka* (Belgrade: 2009). Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije 1815-1941: usporeni napredak u industrijalizaciji* (Belgrade: Clio, 2014); *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. veku* (Belgrade: Clio, 2013); *Jugoistočna Evropa*: globalna historija (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2020); *Zgodovina Jugovzhodne Evrope* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2022); *Jugoistočna Evropa. Globalna istorija regiona* (Belgrade: Čigoja, 2022). Marie-Janine Calic's syntheses also appeared in English *as A History of Yugoslavia*, transl by D. Geyer (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue, 2019) and *The great cauldron: a history of southeastern Europe*, translated by Elizabeth Janik, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019).
[10] Klaus Buchenau, Ulf Brunnbauer, *Geschichte Südosteuropas* (Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam, 2018); Conrad Clewing und Oliver Jens Schmitt, eds., *Geschichte Südosteuropas. Vom frühen Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2011),

remarkable series of works transforming research and public referencing of matters Serbian globally.[11]

Due to the sheer size and aspirations of these histories, conventional book review approach cannot apply. Instead, I will address some general issues and identify similarities and differences, their strengths and weaknesses. But first, how these two books justify their titles, periodisation, their raison d'être? Djokić provides a long sobering introduction addressing the specificities of writing Serbian history in the wake of the wars of the 1990s, not steering away from challenges and directly confronting the negative ballast or shameful aspects of (recent) Serbian history. But he also points to many paradoxes of Serbia, notorious for ethnic cleansing, yet the most ethnically diverse and cosmopolitan part of former Yugoslavia; Serbia that discriminates and celebrates Roma; homophobic Serbia with a Lesbian prime minister and lesbian Roma Eurovision winner. In a similar vein, Djokić points out that no other competitive authoritarian regime in the world experienced as frequent and as massive protests as did Serbia under Milošević. At the same time, Djokić is aware of other aspects of Serbia's dubious position, namely that a player or a person like Novak Djoković remains un(der)appreciated in Britain and globally, because he is from Serbia. His introduction is a wonderful read, witty, interesting, entertaining, showing one can be serious and humorous at the same time, pointing out for example how some key events in recent Serbian history took place in cafés named Europa. Hard to avoid in such an undertaking, Djokić's book displays common hiccups with the Julian or Old-style calendar dates and diacritic symbols from Serbian as well as some factual inaccuracies. Let us hope that his prominent publisher will correct these in future editions.

On the other hand, Hoare's brief introduction does not deal with any of the above but explains his chronology. According to Hoare, interwar Yugoslavia was an extension of Serbia, and King Alexander Karađorđević's dictatorship reconstituted that of his Obrenović namesake, with both ending tragically for their initiators. Being peculiar in its interpretation, I will return to Hoare's vision of Serbian history later. His introduction is then followed by a thirty-page summary of Serbian Medieval and Ottoman history, which reads very rushed and squeezed compared to the extensive main narrative that follows. The Kosovo myth is dealt with contradictory, and we never see how it operates in centuries following the famous battle. Vojvodina is introduced couple of centuries before it came into existence and so is Serbia's reliance on Russia as a saviour at the end of seventeenth century, a claim without evidence. Hoare's interest and emphasis lay elsewhere and in his core text there are remarkably few factual errors.

Both books follow developments chronologically. While Hoare's passion for naming every individual in Serbian politics can be overwhelming to a non-specialist, Djokić offers some respite with short digression essays whose topics vary from clearly important ones such as the number of victims in various wars to lighter ones, stories about sport, film, or literature and hints to Western readers, making his long history easily legible. Both authors use and relate to English language literature and historiography in order to decentre dominant Serbian narratives, but with limited scope except for the twentieth century. For the Middle Ages and Ottoman rule, Djokić follows the established narratives of Serbian historiography, most obviously from the above-mentioned ISN, which leaves much to be desired. The main

[11] David A. Norris, *A cultural history of Serbia: tradition and change* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024); Dragoljub Popović, *Constitutional History of Serbia* (Paderborn: Brill, Schöningh, 2021).

contours of these histories emerged way back in the nineteenth century and despite Djokić's endeavours here to approach them critically, some well-known nationalist, anti-Muslim or anti-Greek tropes and biases linger. Similarly, both books draw heavily on once praised works by Ostrogorski and Obolenski, first published in 1940 and 1972 respectively, and soon becoming standard staples for the medieval period or Byzantine influences in Serbian historiography. Yet many of their conclusions and interpretations have since been widely criticized.[12] To be fair, Djokić at times begs to differ, taking a more nuanced view of cross-communal relations and various religious influences. Many Serbs, or would be Serbs, in places like Montenegro, Hum/Hercegovina, and coastal areas, thrived under the influence of Christianity coming from Rome or the West and remained under the confessional rule of what we now consider as Catholic bishops of Bar and Kotor until the Ottoman invasion. Moreover, almost all Nemanjić and Branković rulers married Catholic women, Catholics settled and traded throughout Serbian lands, developed mines, and built some of the most beautiful and beloved Orthodox churches in Dečani, Studenica and Gradac. While emerging as part of the Byzantine sphere of influence, Medieval Serbia is not the one where Serbs were and could only be Orthodox Christians, let alone marked by hostility between Catholic and Orthodox. The only suggestion is that for the earlier periods of history, it is more appropriate to write about Eastern and Western variant, or Christianity coming from the East and West (Constantinople and Rome, Greeks and Romans, as used in historic documents), than Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which are notions and names that emerged only in the seventeenth century.

Another huge issue in Serbian historiography, but also in the common anti-Ottoman attitude among Serbs, is the conversion of Serbs to Islam under the Ottoman rule. This multifaceted, complex but also personal and intimate process that unfolded over centuries has been downplayed, simplified, diminished, or used to sow hostility and hatred, as I wrote elsewhere, singling out the views of Serbian historians in particular.[13] Djokić's approach here too is more sobering, invoking some recent scholarship and interpretations, illuminating paradoxes in the previous explanations, and in history itself, when for example islamicised Serbs conquered Hungarian-held Belgrade in the fifteenth century, or dominated the Ottoman government in the sixteenth. Both authors point out the complexities of Ottoman domination that continued to shape the Serbian history throughout the long period of liberation from its rule. Not to lose the irony, as the idiotic Belgrade Red Star and Partizan football fans do, Djokić notes how these two biggest, most nationalist and chauvinistic fan groups named themselves *Delije* (Ottoman bravest cavalry units) and *Janičari* (Janissaries/Ottoman mercenaries). Hoare is less keen on humour, but he too singles out, among many and long-lasting Ottoman influences, tobacco smoking, which to this day is heavily affecting the Serbs.

Novel is that both authors enrich their narrative with stories from and about women so both books feature the memoirs of Melek Hanum, the wife of Belgrade vizier and friend of Serbian princess Persida Karađorđević.[14] Similarly, both authors heavily rely on memoirs of Konstantin Mihailović from Ostrovica, that Hoare oddly defines as Bosnian. Yet none spells out or

[12] Diana Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums: Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) is a recent comprehensive comparative view of the way the history of Byzantium has been treated by the Balkan historiographies exposing some of the tropes mentioned before.
[13] Bojan Aleksov, "Die Interpretation des religiösen Bekenntiswechsels bei der Herausbildung des serbischen Nationalbewustseins" in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas,* Bd. 4 (2002), pp. 39-67 and "Adamant and Treacherous: Serbian Historians on Religious Conversions" in Pål Kolstø, ed. *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe* (London: Hurst & Co, 2005), pp. 158-190.
[14] Melek Hanum, *Thirty Years in the Harem, or, The Autobiography of Melek Hanum of Kibrizli-Mehmet-pasha* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872)

contemplates the fact that his memoirs are the only widely known Serbian secular source for the medieval period. Otherwise, the dominant narrative of Serbian historiography, which is largely transmitted in these volumes, remains constructed almost exclusively on (Orthodox) Church sources. Both histories also depend on the works of Serbian historiography for the nineteenth century, with Djokić relying heavily on the authority of the above-mentioned synthesis of Slobodan Jovanović. Hoare's literature scope is much broader, but he misleadingly claims that he is only synthesising the findings of Serbian historians, as if this would be remotely possible. As we will see, Hoare's synthesis comes to rather odd conclusion(s). To be fair, Hoare's focus on political uses wide lenses and includes not only political leadership and parties, but also state administration, military and police forces, political and constitutional reforms, repression and censorship, press, etc. He also departs from historiography by engaging with a vast array of memoirs by his protagonists (Hristić, Avakumović, Djordjević, Alimpijević, Ljubica Ljotić, Meštrović, Stojadinović, etc) and even some original research. Nevertheless, in both books we find disappointingly little criticism of ideological (nationalist or rudimentary Marxist/Titoist) biases of Serbian historiography. This is more an observation than criticism. Both authors undertook tremendous effort to produce their volumes and it would be too much to expect that they also offer criticism of historiography, particularly for the periods they are not specialised in. Here it is worth stressing that Djokić targets recent so-called anti-Marxist or anti-Titoist revisionism in the Serbian historiography and does away eloquently with appalling prevalence of conspiracy theories among Serbs about their predicament.

Moving to the perennial and controversial issues of ethnogenesis and nation building, Djokić is a constructivist, whereas Hoare is more traditionalist or primordialist, though he also admits that both the use of toponym Serbia and ethnonym Serbs date only to the beginning of nineteenth century. Cautious about assigning nationhood and/or ethnicity to people and periods where these did not exist, or mean the same that they mean to us, Djokić often uses expressions such as perhaps, maybe, one might or may, pointing to lack of records and evidence rather than projecting present into the past in the name of an encompassing, homogenising and often repressive and exclusionary nationalising narrative. His approach is best illustrated by yet another anecdote, this time about Serbian President Vučić meeting Israel's Netanyahu with both stressing thousands of years of Jewish-Serb friendship (sic). One only wishes more is done to undermine the narratives on the medieval or Ottoman periods, discussed above and based on primordialist premises. Hoare's primordialist approach extends to Bosniaks, Macedonians and other peoples, which are discussed in the periods when they did not exist or perceive themselves in national terms. It also leads him to describe Dubrovnik-born and raised Matija Ban, tutor to Serbian princesses in mid19th century, varyingly as coming from Croatia or elsewhere as an Austrian Serb. In this way the confusion and old disputes from historiographies of different South Slav peoples are further projected into foreign languages and exaggerated rather than explained.

Djokić, in my opinion, rightly rejects the notion of historical uniqueness or Serbia's *Sonderweg*, which would also mean that approaching its history is more difficult than other peoples or countries. Furthermore, this approach assumes explicit rejection of overarching narratives that attempt to explain Serbian history and look for patterns, recurrent ideas, and coalitions around them, not to say conspiracies, that made Serbian history in some way predictable, drawing a direct line between mid-nineteenth century interior minister Garašanin and recent presidents Milošević or Vučić (p. 34). Hoare, on the other hand, does it throughout, most notably with the thesis that the combination of the Court, Army and the Radical Party formed in 1890, remained a pattern that would hold power in Serbia until 1941 and residually 1944 (p. 259). Both reference the works of late Latinka Perović and Dubravka

Stojanović among others, as examples of this predictability that they reject or adopt. In the opinion of this reviewer, the construct of "one-party" domination for such a long period without at least regional comparison is illusory, not to mention that it absolves the agency of subsequent generations let alone a multitude of changes that Hoare himself is eager to document. In Hoare's meticulous account of events, kings are murdered, conspiracies and rebellions raised and quelled, political parties and coalitions made and broken with individuals crossing sides, dynastic camps, or foreign sponsors, from one page to another. Moreover, he details how key figures change names of their political groupings from radical, to liberal or conservative, that turn any designations meaningless, let alone common threads or legacies stretching over decades if not centuries. Focusing on a narrow defined political sphere, treating Serbia in vacuum, and history as an affair of powerful men, as Hoare does, this scheme overlooks the economic and other realms, which would complicate matters much beyond my review here. But Hoare is right to ponder on the coup of 1903 and the massacre of Obrenović's royal couple and their adherents, as one of the most brutal and transformative episodes in Serbian history, which Djokić hops in one paragraph only. The consequences of 1903 murders have been deeply divisive and controversial to this day, with authors such as Christopher Clark choosing to start his best-seller on the origins of the First World War precisely with these events.[15] Hoare sees it as the beginning of *Praetorian* regime created by the 1903 assassins, with details about this terminology later. But the two most powerful figures, leader of the Radical Party Pašić and Prince Regent Aleksandar Karadjordjević, opposed it, and the latter had his own Praetorian guard (the so-called *White Hand*) limiting the influence of conspirators. More problematic is Hoare's (and Clark's) portrayal of Praetorian Colonel Apis and his misdeeds as inherent to Serbian culture. Hoare describes the coat of arms of Apis's led nationalist organisation 'Unification or Death' (known widely as *Black Hand)* as a "skull with crossed bones – an Orthodox Christian symbol found on churches throughout Serbia" (p. 358). While indeed some graves in Serbia and elsewhere carry this symbol (also known as *Totenkopf*), its design originated in the Middle Ages as a symbol of death and a memento mori, first used by the Knights Templar and later by the Free-Masons. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the skull and crossbones insignia has been officially used in almost all European armies as symbols of superiority, most notably by Frederick the Great's Hussars, from which it was carried in the Prussian army, the Freikorps in the First World War and notably by the Wehrmacht and the SS in Nazi Germany. The symbol became especially popular in the middle of the nineteenth century after the so-called Charge of the Light Brigade undertaken by British cavalry against Russian forces during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War, resulting in many casualties for the British, when the symbol was carried alongside the slogan 'Death or Glory'. It was around that time above-mentioned Matija Ban concocted the word Četnik, proposing to establish armed units outside the Principality of Serbia to undermine and fight Ottoman rule.[16] It seems that at the turn of the century, Serbian Četniks, and later Apis's Black hand, accepted the British and German symbols and slogans (replacing 'Glory' with 'Unification' as their goal) for the lack of proper Serbian traditions rather than being carriers of some Serbian perennial death cult as Hoare implies. Nevertheless, Hoare should be praised for critically assessing Serbian military successes in two Balkan wars and subsequent repression of Albanian and Slavo-Macedonian population, which not only undermined further Serbian hold over these territories, but Serbia's internal political stability. While Djokić glosses over these events, Hoare lets the sources talk, in addition to unmasking Serbia's political ruptures and exposing

[15] Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).
[16] Matija Ban wrote a booklet *O Četničkoj vojni* (about Četnik-guerilla warfare), which was published by the press of Serbian Principality in 1848. Ban also concocted the word Yugoslav.

its vulnerability at the eve of the Sarajevo's assassination and subsequent Great War tragedies.

More problematically, like many Serbian historians upon whose work his history is based, Hoare does not dwell into or employ any theoretical framework on events and processes he describes. For example, he duly notes family connections between personalities shaping Serbian history, but there is no interpretation or further elaboration on the fact that the descendants of few uprising leaders seem to be acquiring all the power, and the successive invigoration of this pattern by intermarriage among their families. Hoare's attention to detail and personalisation of history would have benefitted greatly from anthropological and ethnographic insight into how small societies, and their elites, function. Similarly, both authors stress how many of these individuals or families we come across were of Cincar (Aroumanian), and not Serbian ethnic origin, which is again common to all Balkan nations, but no such or any connections with neighbouring countries are drawn. Both authors confusingly do not distinguish between 1) Balkan Vlach (Roman) speaking population that assimilated into Slavs during the Middle Ages, 2) the Vlachs that moved to Eastern Serbia during the Ottoman period from Transylvania, and finally, 3) the Cincar or Aroumanian Vlachs (Hoare uses also obsolete Kutzovlachs) that migrated to Serbia (and other regions) from Ottoman Albania and Macedonia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and furnished many Balkan political and merchant elites. Instead, Vlachs and Cincars are used interchangeably and so are Bosnians and Bosniaks with the use of Muslims, Ottomans and Turks adding to confusion. Both authors write specifically about the Sephardi Jews present in Serbia for almost half a millennium, and a sort of philosemitism that emerged in the early twentieth century, but do not elaborate on the key roles the few assimilated Ashkenazi Jews played in modern Serbian history as politicians, ministers, and prime ministers (brothers Vojislav and Pavle Marinković, Vukašin Petrović, Momčilo Ninčić), let alone on the personal and business connections between Jewish and Serbian/Yugoslav elites. In contrast to the recognition, if not elaboration, of the role of Cincars and Jews, other much numerous Serbian minorities (German, Hungarian, Albanian, Turkish, Czech, etc) are generally glossed over, or in Hoare's case, only mentioned as victims of Serbian repression.

Finally, we are reaching the biggest differentiation point of these two histories, Hoare's view of Yugoslavia that also determined his periodisation. Relying on his previous research, Djokić points to an excessive focus on particular nationalism in Yugoslavia in the existing literature, both domestic and foreign, which fails to account for a rich and heterogeneous political and especially intellectual scene both in Serbia and Yugoslavia. Hoare, on the other hand, does not believe Yugoslavism was a genuine idea at all and accordingly does not even address it. Similarly, he refuses to distinguish between Yugoslav unitarism promoted by many intellectual elites and centralism, advocated by Pašić. Even the semi-official Yugoslav Pantheon, Meštrović's 'Monument to the Unknown Soldier' on the Mount Avala, along with his other statues, for Hoare only symbolised Serbia's social and cultural modernisation. Furthermore, Hoare's understanding and interpretation of the events surrounding Yugoslav unification is through strictly legalistic and nationalist lenses. When describing how the Serbian Army entered the Habsburg lands in 1918, he neglects its task (and invitation) to preserve the holdings of the wealthy landowners and bourgeoisie (off all ethnicities) and suppress rebellious peasants and army deserters (Green cadre), many of whom were Serbs. Similarly, this narrow vision leads him to claim that ethnic Germans and Serbs shared second-class status vis-à-vis the Magyar population in South Hungary. Opening to class perspective would show us that most of the Magyar population consisted of recent landless colonists whereas many Germans and Serbs owned the land and were socially privileged.

Like Djokić, Hoare challenges the narrative of the Yugoslav kingdom dominated by the national conflict between Serbs, Croats, and others, or their respective political elites but along different lines. Hoare proposes that the new kingdom's politics continued to be dominated by the ongoing internal Serbian power struggle, which is to blame for the Second World War disaster of Yugoslavia and Serbian people in particular. A serious contradiction remains how Serbs managed to dominate Yugoslavia despite their ongoing destructive internal power struggle? Then, there is a question of methodology employed to reach such a conclusion. The most paradoxical is that Hoare provides arguments against his own generalisation, such as the crucial one that the putsch of 26-27 March 1941 was a reprise of the 1903 putsch (p. 557), only to admit several pages later that the structural basis of the former was broader than the (no longer existing) Black Hand. Obviously military putsches have similarities, such as being committed by militaries. Also, Serbian elites were small and intermingled, so there are inevitable connections between the protagonists of two putsches separated by thirty-eight years. But Hoare claims that "Memory of the 1903 putsch was fresh in everyone's mind" (p, 565), which is hard to grasp given that few pages earlier we read the average life span in Serbia was forty-six years. Crucially, Hoare provides a source for his entire deterministic vision and terminology of Serbian history in an obscure self-published pamphlet in London in 1960 entitled *The Lost Way* by Milan A. Fotić, Belgrade professor of Medicine and an anti-Communist emigré, also associated with the journal *Iskra*, published by Nazi collaborationists of Dimitrije Ljotić.[17] Embittered political emigrés had a lot of free time on their disposal and spent most of it blaming each other for their predicament. Hoare does not tell us anything about his source but accepts Fotić's entire interpretation of modern Serbian history culminating in the Putsch of March 27. A notable Croatian/Yugoslav emigré and author with the same publishing house in London as Hoare, Chris (Krsto) Cviic, dismissed Fotić's interpretation many decades ago:

"This kind of reasoning, which makes a small country responsible for being attacked and dismembered by a powerful one that could not have possibly felt itself endangered at the time, is not so much a sign of neo-Nazi sympathies as of bad taste and lack of tact. The background to the March coup of 1941, which provoked Hitler into giving the order to attack Yugoslavia, is complicated, and the coup itself, in the view of some historians, had as much to do with internal politics in Yugoslavia as with foreign policy and resistance to Hitler. But the fact remains that, whatever the political sympathies of the officers who staged it and the ministers who joined the Simović government after the coup, Yugoslavia did not declare war on Hitler nor did it threaten to do so.[18]

Hoare's dubious inspiration is even more odd because elsewhere again without any contextualisation he dedicates pages and pages to every possible emanation or statement or organisation that could be associated with or declared as fascist among the Serbs. In this way Hoare implies and condescends Serb predilection for fascism even though he admits that the fascists attracted only a tiny proportion of the Yugoslav (sic) electorate. At other times, Hoare uncritically inherits other colloquial notions, such as that of Yugoslavia becoming a German

[17] Milan A. Fotić, *Izubljeni put. Pravno-politička i ideološka rasprava* (Izdanje piščevo, 1960).
[18] Krsto F. Cviic, "Jugoslawien und das Dritte Reich: Eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-jugoslawischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis 1945" (review), in *International Affairs* (1970), Vol.46 (2), p. 334-335.

colony in the 1930s.[19] There are other grand historical analogies that are simply not derived from evidence or contextualised. Sometimes, analogies made are totally useless and venomous (i.e. The Yugoslav government moved to Pale in April 1941, the headquarters of Karadžić's Bosnian Serb rebels in the 1990s, p. 581). Another Hoare's conclusion is that Serbian elite's exploitation and oppression of the peasant majority caused the latter widely to perceive it as the heir to the Ottoman oppressors. But is it a fact or just a perception? How does it fare with surrounding countries? Similarly, Hoare concludes that the people viewed the regime as un-Serb or unpatriotic and directing nationalism against it became staple of Serbian opposition politics. But how does that differ from other countries? There are simply too many neglected demographic, economic and sociological factors at play, let alone political agency, to sustain Hoare's interpretations and causal relationships. It is in different contexts, agency and idiosyncrasies that we must search for explanations rather than in the empty metaphor of history repeating itself. Hoare's history is a single case study so no comparative analysis is expected yet some contextualisation in the wider Southeast and Central East European area is essential for any conclusion to make sense.

Only Djokić deals with the World War Two but in a very summative way, which is not a major drawback given the rich literature on the topic. Instead, Djokić reflects heavily on the introduction of federalism and borders drawn by Yugoslavia's communist leaders in 1945. We miss much about post-war inner party debates on national issues, which are still the most contested topics in post-Yugoslav historiography.[20] Economic issues are also insufficiently addressed, and this is especially missing in the build-up to the war in 1990s, when even the notorious Serbia's intrusion in Yugoslavia's monetary system is omitted. Similarly, there is no mention of *Otpor* (controversial movement or project) and its role in the overthrow of Milošević in 2000. But Milošević is well accounted for as the main villain and the disastrous consequences of his rule both outside and inside Serbia are evidenced. Serbia's society and economy lay in tatters and, as Djokić points out, the spike in mortality and death rate took decades to bring down. The chronological approach turns essayistic for the period after 2000, with Djokić rightly pointing out how Vučić's regime fits more easily with the modern global political trends and does not leave us with optimism but unpredictability.

Despite their deficiencies, the books of Djokić and Hoare are important milestones in English language literature on Serbia that will change the existing scholarship landscape and help future students of Serbian/Yugoslav history.

[19] See the recent critical analysis in Perica Hadži-Jovančić, *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia: An Economy of Fear, 1933–1941* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

[20] See for example the award-winning Iva Lučić, *Im Namen der Nation. Der politische Aufwertungsprozess der Muslime im sozialistischen Jugoslawien (1956–1971)* (Uppsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia 2016)