

Dejan Djokić, response to the review of *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992* in *Slovene Studies* 23.1–2.

I read with great interest Christian A. Nielsen's review of my recently published edited book *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992* (London: Hurst and Madison: U Wisconsin P, 2003). I am glad that the author of the review, a historian of Yugoslavia and a research officer at the Hague's International Criminal Tribunal for the former-Yugoslavia, found the book to be "wide-ranging and provocative," commending the "heterogeneity of the views expressed in the volume." While accepting some of Nielsen's criticisms, I would, however, like to respond to three points that I deem unfair.

First, Nielsen recommends that chapters by such contributors as Andrej Mitrović and Dennison Rusinow need not be read by readers with "more than a basic knowledge of Yugoslav history," chapters which he also brands as "uncontroversial"—as if controversy, not a scholarly standard, should be the aim of academic historians. This is a surprising statement for a scholar of interwar Yugoslavia, who must be aware of the deeply controversial nature of many works that have been written about nineteenth century South Slav national ideologies and the creation of Yugoslavia. In any case, it is unclear what kind of approach Nielsen would favour: he appears equally dismissive (and, in the process, self-contradictory) of those authors who "maintain academic or even clinical poises, writing like coroners reporting on a suspicious and particularly unfortunate death," and those who "present eulogies pervaded by emotion and pathetic counterfactuals."

Second, the reviewer complains that a number of chapters suffer from "a lack of stylistic and grammatical

editing,” especially those “contributed by scholars from the former-Yugoslavia,” to the extent that “the language of these articles often distracts the reader from proper consideration of their thought-provoking arguments,” but does not give any examples.

Finally, it is hard to understand Nielsen’s personal attack on Aleksa Djilas, one of the contributors to the book. Even if he felt that the essay by Djilas was “unpalatable and meandering”—and I don’t think most readers would necessarily feel so—why also dismiss Djilas’ “public statements and writings during the past fifteen years”? If Nielsen had really followed Djilas’ work, he would have found it to be much more subtle than he appears to believe. Aleksa Djilas, in the works that I have read, has been equally critical of Serbian nationalism and of other former Yugoslav nationalisms, of “Western” authors on Yugoslavia and of their governments and international institutions, such as the Hague Tribunal. Although I too have not always agreed with what Djilas has written and said, I have found his work to be intelligent, original, and independent-minded—sometimes scholarly, sometimes less so—but always stimulating and worth reading.

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