



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*The Myth of Greater Albania* by Paulin Kola

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*Slavic Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3. (Autumn, 2004), pp. 636-638.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0037-6779%28200423%2963%3A3%3C636%3ATMOGA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>

*Slavic Review* is currently published by The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

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*Yugoslavia Unraveled: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Intervention.* Ed. Raju G. C. Thomas. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2003. xx, 386 pp. Notes. Index. \$85.00, hard bound.

This book is going to make a lot of readers uncomfortable if not angry. These essays attack almost every political aspect of western and especially American policy in the Yugoslavian crises of the past decade. Indeed, the editor, Raju G. C. Thomas, and many of the contributors pull no punches in ascribing almost exclusive responsibility for the unraveling of Yugoslavia and the succession of crises and wars there during the 1990s to western policies. These indiscriminating attacks on those western policies are simultaneously the strength and the main weakness of the book and will be the reason many readers will become distressed as they read this book.

As is often the case in works that constitute a fundamental indictment of a government's policies, many of the attacks impute a much greater constancy and coherence to western policies than was really the case. If anything, the memoir literature by David Owen, Richard Holbrooke, and General Wesley Clark, to cite only a few, indicates the high degree of strategic incompetence that characterized western and U.S. policies. And, as Indian analyst General Satish Nambiar, who participated in the United Nations' peace operations indicates, western policy throughout these repeated debacles was often incoherent. But, if that is true, western policy could not have been as consistently nefarious as many of the authors charge. Certainly an impartial assessment of the Kosovo campaign, if such a thing is possible, cannot but show a high degree of strategic incompetence on the part of the Clinton Administration, an incompetence that related equally to the political and military aspects of this war. To say this is neither to exonerate the west for its ineptitude or its other, graver faults, but to point out that the fog of war is a concept that is no less germane to crises and that Yugoslavia's crises demonstrated a rather higher degree of fecklessness and ineptitude among western leaders who often wandered aimlessly in that fog than should otherwise be the case.

Some of the essays are over the top. Michael Mandel, a Canadian constitutional lawyer and peace activist, not only launches a barrage against the legal defenses of the Kosovo campaign conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), he also expands his attack into a comprehensive denunciation of American policy worldwide. U.S. policies in a host of other areas are certainly not beyond criticism, but Mandel cannot even prove all of his accusations regarding U.S. motives in Kosovo and thus ends up weakening the overall force of his argument. Similarly, little if anything is made here of the activities of such key players as Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman. Certainly no analyses of any of the post-1989 crises in the former Yugoslavia makes sense without an assessment of their policies and actions. The same shortcoming applies to the hearings now underway in The Hague and to Milošević's trial in particular. Indeed the International Court of Justice is pilloried and ridiculed throughout the book, notably by Mandel, as little more than NATO's stooge. This defect also weakens the force of these attacks and adds to the feeling of polemic or one-sidedness that pervades the book.

Nevertheless, it is clear that much of the official account of western behavior throughout Yugoslavia's crises is self-serving and, to put it mildly, incomplete. Without strong critiques like this book, it is unlikely that we will be able to "deconstruct" a version of these crises and wars that aspires to genuine impartiality and as much of a complete record as is possible. For these reasons this book is a useful addition to the literature on those crises. But it should not be taken as the first, the only, or the last word on any of the events recounted here.

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*The Myth of Greater Albania.* By Paulin Kola. New York: New York University Press, 2003. xx, 416 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Maps. \$40.00, hard bound.

The aptly titled *Myth of Greater Albania* succeeds in shattering the myth that Albanian-speaking people have consistently chartered their political agenda through a nationalist

lens. In a remarkably broad narrative covering from ancient time until today, Paulin Kola convincingly argues that, “if Albanian nationalism ever existed, it was rooted more outside Albania’s borders than within” (394). This insight, which is carefully crafted through reference to both primary and secondary sources, challenges the traditional thinking of many historians and is of great importance to political analysts attempting to fashion appropriate solutions to contemporary problems in the Balkans.

While leaving no time period unexplored, Kola’s main focus coincides with the Albanian Communist Party period under Enver Hoxha’s rule. Kola portrays Hoxha, not as the strong nationalist many historians assume him to be, but as an opportunist who at times “plays the nationalist card” (xiv), performing “political summersaults” (95) around the Kosovo question. According to Kola, Hoxha was motivated by one thing: his own political survival.

Kola reaches this conclusion by analyzing various dimensions of the triangular relationship among Albania, Yugoslavia, and Kosovo. Once upon a time, it appeared as if Albania and Yugoslavia would enjoy an amicable and mutually beneficial relationship. Many Albanian-speaking people believed that Josip Broz Tito would keep his wartime promise that all the peoples of Yugoslavia would be granted self-determination. When the Albanians within Kosovo were granted an inferior status within Yugoslavia, the Communist Party of Albania failed to object, choosing instead to wager its future on close ties with Yugoslavia. Indeed, Yugoslavia spoke for Albania at the Peace Conference of 1946 and at United Nations’ forums where Tirana was denied participation. And in a May 1944 speech that is omitted from Enver Hoxha’s own memoirs, Hoxha spoke enthusiastically about the establishment of a Balkan confederation “where all people shall have equal rights” (83).

This period of coziness between Albania and Yugoslavia may be news to the people of these countries who grew up thinking of each other as political enemies—if they thought of each other at all. Kola writes that as a child in Enver Hoxha’s Albania, he rarely heard anyone even mention Kosovo. After Tirana broke with Belgrade, Albania did become “the most anti-Yugoslav country within the [communist] camp and Hoxha made the struggle against Tito a permanent fixture of his foreign policy” (387). Yet the rabid anti-Yugoslavism, Kola warns, should not be equated with nationalism. Kola draws from historical examples of Albanian foreign policy decisions to demonstrate that Tirana was untroubled that “the People’s Republic of Albania included only half the Albanian nation within its borders, the other half having been relegated from the priorities of foreign policy in Tirana on the grounds of political pragmatism” (128). To the extent that nationalism existed at all, Kola writes, it was “truncated nationalism” (128).

One of the unusual and interesting aspects of *The Myth of Greater Albania* is that Kola appears as a character in his own narrative. Before receiving his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and working at the British Broadcasting Corporation, Kola served as an Albanian diplomat. Although the vast majority of the book is in the third person, Kola sporadically slips into the first person. In some instances, the sudden appearance of first-person pronouns is jarring and would benefit from more contextual grounding. What exactly was Kola’s role in the opposition and in government? What were Kola and his compatriots thinking and feeling? The answers to these questions are left to the reader’s imagination.

Yet Kola’s candid account of his participation as the Albanian delegate to the Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) is also one of the highlights of the book. As a diplomat, Kola pushed the CSCE to keep Kosovo at the top of its preventative diplomacy agenda “at a time when Bosnia was dictating the pace of the proceedings” (247). Although numerous delegations pressed Kola to back down on Kosovo, he was resolved to implement “a general strategy of the Albanian government . . . [supporting] its brethren in Yugoslavia at whatever costs” (247). Kola thus succeeded—at least in the short-term—in influencing both the CSCE and Albanian foreign policy.

Tirana’s diplomats were decidedly less successful in their participation at the 1992 London Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. They entered the conference with great enthusiasm. “Albania in 1992 nurtured hopes of becoming a center of stability in the Balkans,” Kola explains (282). All Albanian input on the resolution of the Kosovo question was overlooked, however, when the London Conference was “marched to a conclusion” (275). The snubbing of Albanian delegates, Kola contends, served to squelch their “desire to play a more decisive role in the international community” (279).

In addition to the account of Albanian diplomacy in the early 1990s, *The Myth of Greater Albania* provides particularly perceptive reports on Kosovo politics during the same time period (i.e., the Rugova-Bukoshi rift), as well on the origins and development of armed Albanian groups. As a former diplomat, Kola's insight into contemporary Albanian issues is valuable and rarely heard. His future work might benefit from more open and developed first-person accounts, and I eagerly await his next book. A talented author, Kola has provided a valuable addition to the literature on nationalism and the Balkans.

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*The Finnish Guard in the Balkans: Heroism, Imperial Loyalty and Finnishness in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 as Recollected in the Memoirs of Finnish Guardsmen.* By Teuvo Laitila. *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Humaniora*, vol. 324. Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 2003. 451 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Index. Tables. Maps. €35.00, paper.

In 1877, in the heyday of imperial scrambles and national awakenings, Tsar Alexander II sent a multiethnic army to battle Ottoman forces on the ravaged Balkan peninsula. The violent collision of peoples that resulted deserves much greater attention than it has so far received. Russian monographs and articles on the war are rare, English ones are practically nonexistent. Though sections of broader monographs provide strong scholarly interpretations of this key event, a new book that focuses narrowly on the Russo-Turkish War is nevertheless most welcome.

The book under review is a revision of Teuvo Laitila's 2001 dissertation in anthropology at the University of Helsinki. Laitila's core primary sources are nine accounts of wartime experience written by Finns in the Russian army. Laitila mines these sources in depth to address his own concerns about the experiences of ethnic minorities in the Russian imperial army, Finnish visions of the "orient," and much else besides. He diligently addresses the broader theoretical literature and works hard (often too hard) to link his primary source material to that body of scholarship. The accounts of the war are interesting and rich in detail, and some of his interpretations are too. His investigation of the stylized war narrative as part of an evolving Finnish "public memory" is particularly convincing.

The primary problem with the book is that it is too patently a barely revised dissertation. Footnotes are often defensive rather than informative, and there is far too much discussion of various social theorists and the minor adjustments that Laitila wants to make to their work. In addition, the structure leads to confusion rather than clarity. Seeking "to show the polyphony embedded in all historical narratives" (8), Laitila chose to provide serial accounts of how each of his authors dealt with each of the chosen themes. In some of the nine core chapters of this type, he even runs through the sequence of authors for each subheading in the chapter. The result is a great deal of repetitiveness and very little coherence. Much that would be interesting is simply buried beneath this avalanche of loosely connected observations.

There is also real tension between the concerns that Laitila wants to address, such as orientalism and the role of the war in Finnish nationalism, and the sources he uses. Laitila clearly wants his soldiers to talk about "others" and "othering" but is forced to admit instead that "the guardsmen did not pay much attention to places or people they passed" (313) and that "very few guardsmen had a single consistent view of Turks, that is, the enemy" (226). Rather than a tension between Finnish nationalism and Russian imperialism, he finds instead remarkably consistent claims of loyalty to the emperor and a sense of purpose in their task. Laitila's response to this conflict between his sources and his research project is to repeatedly reinterpret what his sources said in ways that were more congenial to him or his dissertation committee. Thus, after one of his authors expresses a preference for highland Bulgarians over plains Bulgarians, Laitila seeks answers in notions of civilization, urbanity, and Finnish disdain for the ethnic heterogeneity on the plains. His soldier had a rather different (and to my mind more convincing) explanation. The highland