

seeming coherence of Islamist groups is convincingly disproved, while the role of Islam in the success of grassroots mobilization is qualified. Yet White's book lacks a bigger image of Islamist mobilization. As her ethnographic research is concentrated on a working-class neighbourhood of Istanbul, no information is given about Islamist mobilization in other Turkish urban centres, semi-urban and rural areas. This information would have helped elaborate a more accurate account of Islamist grassroots activities. Recent cataclysmic developments in Turkish politics, the closure of Virtue Party, the split of its supporters, the foundation and electoral triumph of the Recep Tayyip Erdogan-led Justice and Development Party (*Adlett ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) has resulted in the transformation of Turkish political Islam. White's book may be missing crucial posterior historical information, yet the liberal switch of Justice and Development Party politics regarding Turkey's political reform and EU membership has verified her view of Islamist mobilization as a stage in the process of indigenous modernization. In a field as complex, contested and yet sparsely researched as Turkish identity politics, White's book remains an excellent source of expertise.

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- Parachutes, Patriots, and Partisans: *The Special Operations Executive and Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*. By HEATHER WILLIAMS. London: Hurst and Company, 2003. Pp.xiii + 297. ISBN: 1-85065-592-8.

It has now become commonplace to say that history is normally written by the winners. In the Balkans, however, this truism has always had important limitations. Consider Greece, for example: in the context of Greek historiography, the Greek Civil War (1946–49) has been largely written by scholars whose sympathies lie with the vanquished Left rather than the victors of that traumatic conflict, the Right. In Yugoslavia, on the other hand, the victors of the war have managed to impose their view with greater ease, and perhaps persuasion, aided by the political developments after 1948 and the Tito–Stalin split. As presented by them, the story of Yugoslavia during the wartime period is quite straightforward. Crudely put, it ran along the following lines: the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), under the leadership of Tito, waged a heroic guerrilla war against the invaders from the day their country was occupied. Without any initial help from either Britain or Russia, they built an impressive military machine which tied down in Yugoslavia over 30 Axis divisions, thus offering substantial help to the Allied war effort, and especially to hard-pressed Russia. At the same time, Tito's Partisans had to endure attacks from the collaborationist bands of General Dragoljub (Draža) Mihailović. The Partisans managed to survive these attacks, and gradually established their presence throughout Yugoslavia, including Serbia. In doing so, they were helped by the fact that Tito's federal plans for the reconstruction of Yugoslavia, which

were crystallised in 1943, had found much support in all Yugoslav lands which had suffered under Serbian hegemony. A year later, the Partisans finally liberated their country with their own forces, transformed guerrillas into a disciplined regular army. (This line was mainly publicised in English by Tito's chief chronicler (Dedijer 1951, 1953, 1971).

As should be expected, many aspects of that view are hotly contested, to say the least. The CPY did wage a heroic guerrilla war, but did so mainly after the invasion of Russia, when, according to communist jargon, the war became overnight a 'fight against fascism'. The Partisans did pin down over 30 Axis divisions, but many of them were not German, and included Italian, Bulgarian and Hungarian divisions, while the German troops that did remain in Yugoslavia were mostly second-rate, not elite, forces. Tito's writ did not run large in Serbia, which remained under Mihailović to the very end. Last, but by no means least, it was not the Partisans who actually liberated Belgrade in 1944, but the Red Army, and in the case of Skopje the Bulgarians. In both instances, however, the Partisans were allowed to make triumphant entries into the cities of Belgrade and Skopje, sometimes to the irritation of their allies, and especially the Bulgarians, who viewed them as a multitude of ill-equipped irregulars rather than a capable fighting machine worthy of respect.

Inevitably, given the dominance of the proverbial 'foreign factor' in the shaping of Balkan history, British foreign policy towards Yugoslavia has become one of the most contentious aspects of that story, and has attracted considerable attention which shows little sign of abating. Again, the 'winners' and the 'losers' have produced radically different interpretations, a debate that has set the so-called 'Children of Light' (pro-Tito) against 'the Children of Darkness' (pro-Mihailović). The former insisted that the British decision, reached in late 1943, to abandon Mihailović was the only practical option available, since Tito was resolutely pursuing guerrilla war. He was 'killing Germans', to use Churchill's phrase, whereas Mihailović remained hopelessly inactive, and awaited the arrival of allied forces in order to order the *Ustanak* (rebellion) against the Germans and their Yugoslav puppets in Serbia. At the same time, his commanders made his position even more untenable by gradually drifting to active collaboration with both Germans and Italians. Mihailović, initially praised by the British as a 'hero', was quickly transformed into an embarrassment and later on into a liability. He had to go. This view enjoyed an impressively long lease of life mainly because it was propped up by influential British books. The most celebrated example is undoubtedly that of Fitzroy Maclean, the head of the British Mission to Tito, and one of the most important architects of British policy towards Yugoslavia. His *Eastern Approaches*, the only book on wartime Yugoslavia that has been continuously in print ever since it was first published in 1949, is an eloquent, gripping, and forceful account that reads like an adventure story. It went a long way in buttressing the interpretation of the 'Children of Light', broadly supported by many other accounts by British officers who had served in wartime Yugoslavia, including William Deakin who had also been sent to Tito. A flavour of early British assessments of Tito can be sampled from Deakin (1971), Davidson (1946), Clissold (1949) and Aury (1970).

From the mid-1980s, however, the 'Children of Darkness' mounted their counter attack. Books by Nora Beloff and Mike Lees (A British Liaison Officer with Mihailović) suggested a totally different picture (Beloff 1985; Lees 1990). They brought to the fore what Mihailović's supporters had been saying all along:

the general himself was not a collaborator, but he sensibly refused to engage in an all-out guerrilla war, for this could only lead to harsh German reprisals, threatening the very existence of the Serbian nation. His commanders may well have been collaborating with the Axis, but they did so out of necessity, not choice: they were fiercely anti-communist, and consequently they wished to wipe out Tito, but this does not mean that their loyalties did not ultimately lie with the Allies. Then came the bombshell: British support for Tito was the result of a conspiracy, woven by a small but strategically placed clique of British communists, based at the Cairo office of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the organization instructed by Churchill to 'set Europe ablaze' by organizing guerrilla warfare and sabotage in the occupied countries. This 'web of disinformation' (Martin 1990), supported by wildly exaggerated pro-Tito reports by Maclean in 1943, sealed the fate of Mihailović. The unfortunate general, misunderstood and mistrusted, was thus unjustly abandoned, and as a result of this shameful conspiracy Serbia and Yugoslavia were delivered by Britain to the hands of Tito.

Given the controversy surrounding the role of Britain, and the amount of interest it has provoked, Heather Williams's clearly written and well-researched book treads on rather familiar grounds as she attempts to take a fresh look at the role of the SOE in Yugoslavia. (For an earlier attempt to document the role of the SOE in Yugoslavia, see Deroc 1988.) She paints a vivid picture of the SOE's role in Yugoslav affairs and sheds much light into the in-fighting that occurred between the SOE and the Foreign Office, as well as between the various branches and personalities within the SOE itself. The book also includes three useful maps of Yugoslavia, which contain, however, a small error: Yugoslavia Macedonia was not officially 'annexed to Bulgaria', but was given to them by the Germans to occupy and administer. The Bulgarians, of course, paid scant attention to this important detail, but the German decision not to sanction an official annexation illustrated Hitler's view that wartime arrangements with Bulgaria should be kept open to ensure that Bulgaria behaved properly. In her preface, Williams states that she fits into 'neither the Children of Light or the Children of Darkness, but feel[s] that history is more a twilight or dawn' (p. xi). Her book, however, seems to offer qualified support to the camp of 'Darkness'. Its blurb, for example, and preface argue that 'SOE's interference in Yugoslavia merely exacerbated the civil war' (p. x). This is a rather difficult case to argue. The exact opposite seems more plausible. Mihailović retained the loyalty of the Serbs (certainly in Serbia, if not elsewhere) but continuing British support for Mihailović would have certainly led to a far more bloody conflict in Yugoslavia after the war. And this because Mihailović represented the old order in Yugoslavia, an option that most Yugoslav nationalities would have found utterly impossible to return to. The ease with which most Croats welcomed the independence of Croatia (despite the fact that the Ustaša was a tiny minority among Croats in 1941) and the enthusiasm with which the Slav-Macedonians awaited the Bulgarian army, offer ample proof of their disenchantment, to put it mildly, with the pre-war Yugoslavia.

It quickly became apparent, even before the war, that the Serbs were not willing to abandon their dominant position within Yugoslavia. This impression was reinforced by the Simović coup of 1941, directed not against the Axis, as Churchill mistakenly thought, but against the *Sporazum* of 1939, an agreement between Serbs and Croats which, according to Serbian opinion, had given too much power and land to the Croats. By 1944, Mihailović was clearly a man of the

past, unable to offer an alternative that Croats, Macedonians, Slovanes and Albanians could possibly share. Tito's federalism, on the other hand, although severely emasculated and undermined, offered them at least the illusion of autonomy and self-rule. In a country under Serbian hegemony ever since it was born in 1918, this illusion was not only appealing, but also politically necessary. At the same time, Tito's centralizing communism made sure that Yugoslavia would remain united. It may be argued that this option was the lesser of two evils, something that the British knew full well. Within this context, and given the military muscle of the Partisans, continuing British military aid to Mihailović, who had precious little support outside Serbia, would have been a recipe for a protracted civil war, much harsher than the one that Greece suffered after 1946. It is not coincidental that Lees's book, which severely criticized British policy towards Mihailović, was entitled 'The Rape of Serbia', not *Yugoslavia*. The sensitivities of the former did not coincide with the preservation of the latter. And it is from the perspective of Serbia, not Yugoslavia, that the 'Children of Light' have mounted their attacks.

In surveying the reasons that tipped the balance in favour of Tito, Williams rightly exposes the highly inflated 'blockbuster' that Maclean delivered in late 1943 (pp.182–5). This lengthy report about Tito and Mihailović probably drove the last nail into the coffin of Mihailović. It was a big nail, indeed. It over-emphasised the military strength of Tito, was based mainly on partisan-supplied sources, and underestimated Mihailović's prospects. Yet again, in its essentials, the report was not inaccurate, and the conclusions drawn by it do not appear to have been totally unfounded: the Partisans did the bulk of fighting against the Axis; their support (and composition) was wider in terms of ethnicity and geography than Mihailović's; his commanders were loosely controlled, if at all, and had become openly collaborationist, while the sources that the Partisans gave to Maclean (and, earlier, to William Deakin), although vetted by the Partisans, included original German and Italian captured documents, and were therefore genuine. More importantly, Maclean suggested in his reports that Tito was a man more likely to issue an order than to receive one. It seemed to him that the Partisan leader was not a mere puppet of Stalin. True, this last point was less evident (although not absent) in 1943 than in 1948, and Maclean was perhaps too close to Tito's viewpoint, but he was right in his assessment of Tito, and he was proved to be so in 1948. This was something that other British observers also knew (or, at least, hoped for before 1948) when they suggested that by building up Tito the British might forge some links that could pull him closer to them when a suitable opportunity presented itself. Be that as it may, the evidence presented by Maclean was not the only source for the British. Churchill had at his disposal the 'Ultra' sources, which must have corroborated the reports of the BLO's from the field, indicating that the Partisans were 'killing more Germans' than Mihailović.

Although Williams attempts to distance herself from the conspiracy theories advanced by Beloff and Lees, occasionally she refers to some suspect cases: BLOs who had served with Mihailović returned to the SOE office in Bari, only to be told that 'their messages from the field had been tampered with' (p. 213). Some of her conclusions also fit into a 'Children of Darkness' mould: 'By a combination of plotting and prejudice a situation developed in which all the cards were stacked in favour of Tito and the Partisans' (p. 247). These points will undoubtedly continue to cause much controversy and debate, but given the circumstances that surrounded Churchill's decisions, 'plotting' and 'prejudice' appear to be rather

strong formulations. Churchill (for the decision to back the Partisans was definitely his) was fully aware that supporting them meant the fall of Yugoslavia into the hands of Communism, although by the summer of 1944 he seemed to regret that development. In a revealing and oft-quoted discussion he had with Maclean in Cairo, in 1943 (which is alluded to, but not reproduced in the book), Maclean told him that British help to Tito would eventually allow him to establish a communist system in Yugoslavia,

strongly oriented towards the Soviet Union. "Do you intend", asked Churchill, "to make Yugoslavia your home after the war?" No, Sir, I replied. "Neither do I", he said, "and that being so, the less you and I worry about the form of government they set up, the better. That is for them to decide. What interests us is, which of them is doing most harm to the Germans?".

(Maclean 1949: 402–403)

Apart from a certain amount of irony that this exchange had for Maclean personally (he *did* buy a house in Yugoslavia after the war, in a small island off the Dalmatian coast) this, ostensibly casual, observation by Churchill does epitomize in a nutshell the crux of the matter. As Williams notes, Yugoslavia was a country in which the British did not have a vital political interest at stake during the 1940s. In fact, it may safely be said that important British considerations about Yugoslavia had a great deal to do with Greece. The British wanted two things from Yugoslavia: to remain united after the war, and to be separate from Bulgaria, for any Slav federation would allow the creation of a large federal Macedonian state, which would then seek to 'liberate' Greek Macedonia and detach it from Greece. If this was allowed to happen, the British feared, then Greece itself would succumb to communism, and the eastern Mediterranean road to India (which Greece commanded) would fall into Russian hands. Such considerations allowed Churchill to be relatively unconcerned with the actual form of Yugoslav government after the war, provided it was strong enough to keep the country in one piece and keep the lid on the Macedonian boiling pot. True, he wanted to keep Yugoslavia as friendly to Britain and as detached from Russia as possible, and he tried to use his favourite tool (the monarchy, in the form of the young King Peter) to that effect. He himself also warned Tito that the imposition of communism on Yugoslavia (with its sturdy Serbian peasantry) would have been a 'battle' the outcome of which, as he put it, 'my friend Marshal Stalin' knew all too well from his own experience in Russia (Maclean 1949: 465–6). The fact remains, however, that his main intention in the Balkans was to safeguard the control of Greece, again by imposing the monarchy, not to re-introduce the old (Serbian) order in Yugoslavia. Consequently, military considerations were allowed to take precedence over political plans, and this meant that Churchill could back Tito, for he was clearly doing much resistance, and let Mihailović rot. Some of the reports on the actual military strength of Tito may well have been exaggerated, as BLOs serving with Mihailović repeatedly asserted and as Williams suggests, but this does not seem to alter the broader picture. The decisions on Yugoslavia were not taken as a result of 'prejudice', but because of wider British interests in southeastern Europe. According to these, the role of the Yugoslavs during the war was merely to kill Germans, while that of the Greeks was to sit tight and remain under the tutelage of the British after the war. The Yugoslav communists did (to some extent) what was expected from them, and were given the goods (in the form of military aid); the Greek communists did not, and were crushed by the British in December 1944.

And what about 'plotting'? The 'Children of Darkness' have argued that the main culprit for the 'misinformation' sent to Churchill about the situation in Yugoslavia and the 'real' strength of Tito and Mihailović was James Klugmann (1912–1977), who served in SOE's Cairo office, and later on in Bari. He was a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the 1930s, at a time when Cambridge offered not only a formidable education but good communist contacts as well. Klugmann came under the influence of Anthony Blunt (scholar, homosexual and spy; probably in that order) and became a devoted communist. Williams does not dwell on Klugmann, perhaps because other 'Children of Darkness' have laboured that point (p.246). But although she seems to accept that he and other 'fellow-travelers' did a lot of 'plotting', she concedes that 'all the plotting and colouring of opinion in Cairo would have come to nothing without the massive conservative forces of the FO, Churchill and Fitzroy Maclean' (p.247). Arguably, the only 'conspiracy' that can be detected in the whole story (and this was due to the personalities involved, not to sinister machinations) is the fact that the British officers who went to Tito had direct access to, and the confidence of, Churchill. Both William Deakin (an Oxford historian, and a personal research assistant to Churchill before the war) and Fitzroy Maclean had the ear of the PM, and were able to argue their case directly with him. They were both conservative and establishment figures, who could not have been accused of communist sympathies.

The end of the war witnessed the establishment of communism in Yugoslavia, a development that Williams strongly regrets. For the British, this result was unfortunate, but not catastrophic: provided that Greece was safe, few in the FO would lose much sleep over Yugoslavia. After all, Churchill had delivered Romania to Stalin during the infamous 'Percentages Agreement' of 1944, a country where opposition to communism (and to Russia) was infinitely stronger than in Yugoslavia. It is quite another question, of course, what the Yugoslavs themselves thought of their life under Tito. Williams argues that the outcome of the war left 'the people of Yugoslavia to make what they could of Tito's concept of democracy' (p.253). This view, however, invites a qualification: Tito was no democrat, but the Yugoslavs had not tasted much democracy in the interwar period either. King Alexander (who established a dictatorship in 1929) and Milan Stojadinovic were hardly the golden age of Yugoslav democracy, whereas Prince Paul paid much more attention to foreign policy (and to reading English periodicals) than to the civil liberties of his people. This is not to imply that the Yugoslavs deserved to be thrown from one dictatorship to another, although it should be remembered that Tito's rule was much more benign than that of the other Balkan communist dictators. That said, for the non-Serbian Yugoslav peoples the restoration of Serbian hegemony that Mihailović represented was definitely not a practical proposition, and had minimal chances of success. A fact confirmed, one is inclined to think, by the tragic events of the 1990s: whenever Serbian nationalism is pumped up, Yugoslavia bursts.

Overall, Williams' work is a welcome contribution to the voluminous scholarly literature on wartime Yugoslavia, and will help to re-activate the debate that surrounds the British role during that period. The battle between the 'Children of Light' and the 'Children of Darkness' is far from over.

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## NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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