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Ljubica Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation: the Rethinking of Youth Politics and Cultures in Late Socialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017, xiii + 220 pp. £88.00 h/b.

Of all the promises that the Yugoslav state socialist system failed to keep, perhaps the most revealing was its failure to create the conditions where youth could fulfil the hopes that very system had invested in them. Both Tito in later life, and the successors trying to collectively manage his legacy, looked to Yugoslavia's young people as the generation who would rekindle the Partisan spirit (as the singer-songwriter Đorđe Balašević pledged in 1978 through his early, system-friendly hit with the band Rani Mraz, 'Računajte na nas' ('Count on us')). The regret many of these same young people would later feel towards their elders who had failed to prevent Yugoslavia breaking up or ethnonationalism taking over the political sphere would be expressed by musicians from the same generation – such as the poet and singer Alka Vuica, whose 2004 song 'Pioniri' ('Pioneers') segues from a reworking of the Pioneer anthem and samples of Tito's own speeches into bitter reminiscence of the boys who later took off their scarves to put on ties (which Croatian nationalists had appropriated as an ethnocentric symbol of Croats' historic capitalist *savoir-faire*), joining the agitators and manipulators of other ethnonationalist movements in destroying Yugoslavia for good. The 'last Yugoslav generation', as Ljubica Spaskovska's rich and insightful history terms them, were Balašević's and Vuica's contemporaries, passing through the same student cultural centres and professional networks: in particular, they were the participants and activists of the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (SSOJ), Titoism's 'institutional space devoted to socialisation of the young' (p. 7).

Between Tito's death in 1980 and the collapse of Yugoslav state socialism in 1990, Spaskovska argues, youth embodied the 'challenge to the socialism of the older generation' (p. 2) that recent historians of late state socialist Yugoslavia have done much to reassess. This very age group had heard themselves described as the future of Yugoslavia during Tito's later lifetime and then by the leaders who tried to distribute his charisma through symbolic channels such as Youth Day rituals that youth themselves found ever more bizarre; they were also maturing amid a socio-economic crisis that by the end of the decade was increasingly limiting all but the most fortunate, with life prospects heading in the opposite direction from what 1960s youth had known, let alone what those youth who became parents had desired for their children. Over the last decade, social historians have done much to illustrate the widening socio-economic inequalities that for many Yugoslavs until 1988–9 constituted the most tangible manifestations of the crisis, and scholars such as Dalibor Mišina have also revisited the cultural politics of youth critique – creating a frame for understanding the dissolution of Yugoslavia which asks why the social and political alternatives that so many Yugoslavs during the crisis were starting to envisage ended up being defeated – or suppressed – by ethnonationalist political platforms. Among those articulating such alternatives most passionately were the students and young intellectuals at the centre of this rich and insightful material, which juxtaposes archival material and student media with interviews with 41 former participants in SSOJ's intellectual and cultural milieu.

The key lens this book promises to contribute to understandings of the dissolution is 'generation' itself. Tracing the contours of 'the crisis' as perceived in the early and mid-1980s, it shows convincingly that 'generation' was not just a way for these 'last Yugoslavs' to retrospectively how the disintegration of their country had changed been entangled with a distinctive stage of their lives, but also a frame through which they and elders at that very time perceived their supposedly predestined role as Yugoslav citizens, to bring about and imagine change. While Spaskovska is not the first to explore how a 'last Yugoslav generation' made retrospective sense of the break-up (the media

scholar Zala Volčič, for instance, interviewed a more limited selection of 'last Yugoslavs' for her 2011 book *Serbian Spaces of Identity: Narratives of Belonging by the Last 'Yugo' Generation*), her sources' depth and range breaks fresh ground in situating this generation within the social history of late Yugoslav state socialism. Her insights into how and why SSOJ's cultural institutions pushed the boundaries of Party orthodoxy, meanwhile, offer a fresh perspective on the political history of the dissolution itself. The 1988 *Mladina* trial of 1988 and other instances of Slovenian student dissent, for instance, figure here far less to prove Slovenia's standing as 'the liberal northern republic' than to exemplify the 'sense of shared camaraderie and values' (p. 111) that connected young intellectuals across Yugoslavia at this time: most of Spaskovska's Bosnian and Macedonian interviewees recalled sympathising more with the *Mladina* journalists and their conscript whistleblower than with their own republics' leaders, complicating the notion of the southern republics as 'bastions of dogmatic Party rule' (p. 111). This stronger sense of political and ideological contestation within republics' Party structures pulls away from deterministic notions that Slovenia was naturally more predisposed towards reform, and focuses attention on why reformist voices in other republics could not acquire the platform that Slovenia's enjoyed.

The limits of 'generation' as a lens are, nevertheless, as broad as the social cleavages within the cohorts it describes. Even within Spaskovska's chosen demographic, the institutional spaces of SSOJ, divergences appear between young artists and musicians, journalists, peace/feminist/gay activists, political functionaries and army youth – strengthening the case for integrating the military into Yugoslav social history, and indeed for integrating gender throughout the study of social milieu and class, not just where women's movements are concerned (obligatory military service certainly was 'a diverse space that gathered youngsters from all strata and all parts of Yugoslav society' (p. 141) – but, one could also point out, only gathered men). As Spaskovska recognises, this milieu's members were primarily 'a progressive, predominantly urban elite which was socially, politically or culturally engaged', mostly 'from the big urban Yugoslav centres', and (as sociologists of culture and ethnologists know well) commonly 'appropriated urbanity as a prominent trait of their image and self-perception' (p. 13): comparable research still needs to be done about their socially marginalised age-mates, some of whom (though by no means all) were likely to have been among the wars' first volunteers. As a study of the last *politically* Yugoslav generation, however, this book makes an essential contribution to the history of the break-up and indeed of late Cold War Europe. While many of that generation have left their mark as writers, film-makers, musicians and academics grappling with the dissolution's social – and personal – consequences, this book positions them within late state socialist Yugoslavia's social and political history, at the moment that ideology and system were falling apart.