

Review

Twilight of Impunity: The War Crimes Trial of Slobodan Milosevic

Judith Armatta. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. 576 pp.

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Judith Armatta, a lawyer and journalist, attended the proceedings of the trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević over a period of nearly three years. During this period, the court was in session for 466 days, interrupted by repeated breaks necessitated by the accused's increasing health problems. Charged with sixty-six counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, Milošević declined to have counsel appointed, electing instead to defend himself. The court's willingness to allow Milošević to do so and to do so on his own terms proved to be a huge mistake, as Armatta stresses. The fallen Serbian leader's priority was not to defend himself but rather to portray himself as a martyr for Serbia, outline an alternative history of events in the post-Yugoslav region, and demolish, as far as he was able, the testimony of witnesses. But what is striking is that Milošević's line of cross-examination repeatedly proved to be damaging to his case, his own witnesses often proved to be more useful to the

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prosecution that to the defense, and Milošević used up a lot of time with speeches and with lines of questioning entirely irrelevant to the charges against him. Milošević also did his best to intimidate witnesses, entering into arguments with them; one witness, Agim Zeqiri, a farmer, was so shaken after the first day that he refused to continue.

Armatta makes it clear that Milošević had helpers in Belgrade, at least until the roundup of various people after the assassination of Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjić in March 2003. These helpers, she reports, in addition to providing legitimate assistance to the accused, also provided forged documents to the tribunal and were presumably behind the preparation of some spliced video footage intended, apparently, to mislead viewers (40). In finding fault with the handling of the trial, Armatta does not mince words. Where the tribunal erred was in allowing the accused to abuse the process for his own purposes, rather than assuring an expeditious process (151–52).

As a record of the testimonies, tracking disclosures and providing a summary of the case against Slobodan Milošević, Armatta is unrivalled. Nonetheless, it seems apparent that her manuscript was not sent out for pre-publication review by a specialist in Yugoslav/post-Yugoslav affairs. This is apparent from her stated belief that the UN arms embargo could be legitimately sought by some actor other than the head of state or central government, and that it could continue to be applied to Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina after those republics were admitted to membership in the United Nations (membership which included a guarantee of the right to self-defense). It is also apparent from her confused references to the “Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia” (map, 4), “the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” (23), and finally to “the Soviet Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or SFRY” (353). Obviously, the copy-editor at the press should have caught the last of these. But, in any event, the SFRY was, in Serbo-Croatian, the *Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*, and the Yugoslavs of old were fond of emphasizing that their republic was federative or federated (*federativna*) and not federal (*federalna*); the term ‘federativna’ was a verbal sign that the Yugoslav union was loose and highly decentralized. In spite of these infelicities, Armatta’s book may be recommended for purchase by university libraries.