Welcome to the desert of post-socialism: Radical politics after Yugoslavia, edited by philosopher Srećko Horvat and political scientist and writer Igor Štiks, was published two and a half decades after the beginning of the “transition” from Yugoslav socialism to market capitalism, and during a time of popular upheavals in the region. The twelve chapters in this volume represent the first primarily analytical, carefully contextualized, and comprehensive reflection of recent popular protests and uprisings witnessed in the post-socialist Balkans published in English. The volume starts with the premise: “radical politics” today involves a “profoundly anti-capitalist and radically democratic vision of...societies”, and that “[u]nderstanding radical politics ‘after Yugoslavia’ necessarily entails a critical re-evaluation of socialist Yugoslavia, its successes and its failures, as well as of the post-socialist, post-partition and often post-conflict predicament of these societies today” (p. 2).

This premise almost seems to be too complex for a pioneering publication of this kind. Nevertheless, the volume convincingly challenges and intervenes in current debates by addressing the region as an active laboratory for new socio-political practices. The volume’s main strength lies in involving a range of authors from various fields of expertise, in order to construct a clear, interdisciplinary framework for existent and new works,¹ which wish to escape the homogenizing and neocolonialist tendency exhibited by mainstream scholarly discourses on post-Yugoslav states.

Four chronologically organized clusters of chapters of the volume address four thematic trajectories. The first three chapters critically examine recent regional economic crises in the context of the Yugoslav socialist experience: the authors argue that incomplete or superficial transition to market capitalism is not to blame for the recent economic problems common to the region. Analyses of states at different stages of EU integration (from Slovenia to Serbia) reveal them to be structural characteristics of market economics (and consequently of EU integration), and not of a lack of market mechanisms. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica (pp. 42–43) even convincingly suggests that the Yugoslav socialist experiment failed precisely because of its reliance on certain market mechanisms, and should therefore be reconsidered (if not revisited)

¹ Five chapters, authored by Maria Todorova, Tanja Petrović, Boris Buden, Agon Hamza, and Mitja Velikonja respectively, are slightly re-worked versions of the contributors’ other recent publications.
from a more radical perspective, for example starting off with a serious reconsideration of the legacy of the experience of self-management, as proposed by Marko Grdešić (p. 78).

The second section complements political-economic arguments with a critical deconstruction of the post-Yugoslav Balkan imaginary, challenging the subordinated space designated to the Balkans on Europe’s symbolic map. Todorova (pp. 100–101) argues that more attention to the complexities of the historical process is needed to avoid embedding the Balkans in invented maladies, such as post-communist nostalgia, and false dichotomies, such as communism vs. fascism/Nazism instead of communism vs. capitalism and liberalism. Petrović (pp. 103–122) explores the implications of such false dichotomies in the context of EU integration, where Balkan states are typically seen as “outside of” the EU, and as foreigners and children in comparison to EU members. Buden (pp. 123–141) questions this metaphor of the “child”, or, rather, this specific “figure of submission to the new form of historical necessity”, which is often used as a “historical abstraction of transitional reality.” He reminds the reader that these “children” are the same people that, just yesterday, chased away totalitarian regimes (pp. 123–125).

This re-calibration of the key concepts used to position the region in the context of European and global politics is followed by a critical analysis of the outcomes of post-socialist economic and political transformation with a particular emphasis on new inequalities and forms of governance. Andrej Nikolaidis examines Montenegro, arguing the realities of “transition” — a formalist substitution of truth by law, coincide with a distorted view on the role of “the West” in the region, where it has either been seen as the one to blame for everything or as the “benevolent civilizer” (p. 150). Hamza’s case study on Kosovo remains in tune with this claim, noting the conjunction of the paradigm of equally formal(ist) “stability” ruling the state (p. 160) with conditions of possibility for a utilitarian, top-down resurrection of myths. Velikonja’s (pp. 173–197) chapter picks up on this point, exploring the post-communist myth of nostalgia for Tito in Slovenia as a contextually bound product of a certain time and space, bearing its own, unpredictable consequences — such as new political subjectivities, discussed in the final cluster of chapters.

The last three chapters focus on very recent developments in the political arena of particular states in the region. Michael G. Kraft analyzes new worker and student movements in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia as “counter narratives of resistance and social emancipation” (p. 222), acknowledging that if these movements wish to become closer to their communities, they will, over time, need to develop a common narrative. Jana Baćević (p. 240) examines student movements in Croatia and Slovenia, acknowledging the potency of student