

**After Yugoslavia: Identities and Politics Within the Successor States.** Edited by ROBERT HUDSON and GLENN BOWMAN. Pp. 264. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012. £57.50. Hardback. ISBN 9780230201316.

If one were to draw conclusions from the cover of *After Yugoslavia*, the last fifteen years have done little to alter the political and social landscape of the ex-Yugoslav states, which appear not to have progressed from the destruction and deprivation created by the violent conflicts in the region. The picture is reminiscent of the images of the Western Balkans that the public was bombarded with in the 1990s: the guns and soldiers are gone but the level of development remains the same. In reality, the Western Balkans have advanced significantly since the 1990s, and change has been so rapid that some of the topics in the book have already become historical. Despite the negative initial impression, *After Yugoslavia* proved to be a balanced and interesting portrait of the region. The volume is compiled as an interdisciplinary collection of fourteen essays by local contributors who tackle a mosaic of cultural, political and social issues. With the exception of the last chapter, which revisits Yugoslavia as an object of scholarship, all contributions are devoted to a single successor state.

Despite the scholarly focus of the book, and the premises for academic detachment and objectivity outlined well in the concluding chapter by John B. Allcock, not all contributions can be considered to fulfil these standards. Subjectivity is apparent both in the selection of the topics and in their content. However, this is not necessarily a weakness of the book, as the involvement of the authors in specific issues is also indicative of the pace of reforms that are taking place in different states. The Croatian and Slovenian scholars, for example, are more concerned with topics of culture and identity, such as popular music, monuments, and national memory. The political issues they address largely concern post-transition and post-conflict themes, such as the accession to the EU. In contrast, Serbian and Kosovar contributors discuss more fundamental political issues, such as the political form Kosovo should take, or Albanian-Serb relations in Kosovo (Chapters 2 and 3).

Overall, the volume features a good equilibrium of topics and perspectives, and succeeds in the construction of a balanced picture of the region, a task certainly difficult to achieve. As is frequently the case with edited volumes, however, the quality of individual contributions and overall country portraits varies to an extent. Despite, or perhaps because of the appeal of the covered topics to the general public, the chapters devoted to Croatia are rather weak, featuring many hasty conclusions and aimless narrative. Montenegro, which ranks among the more positive examples of post-Yugoslav transition, is excluded from the volume. In addition, the cross-country connections between the processes taking place in ex-Yugoslav states are insufficiently emphasized, considering the countries share not only common history, but also similar transition paths. This makes the region much more interrelated than could be concluded from the book.

Indeed, the strongest contributions are those which identify common features and tackle cross-regional themes. The Slovenian section stands out from the others in this respect, especially Irena Šumi's contribution 'Unable to Heal: Debate on the National Self in Post-Socialist Slovenia', and 'No Monuments, No History, No Past: Monuments and Memory' by Božidar Jezernik. Both essays focus on issues of

identity and history that are so universal in the region that the name Slovenia could be replaced with the name of another ex-Yugoslav state without losing the meaning. Šumi constructs a dismal but clever, and at times ironic, picture of post-transition Slovenia, where disillusionment with the reforms carried out in the past two decades has led to widespread feelings of apathy and helplessness among the population, and where the political spectrum has been reduced to an equilibrium between the two main parties, with support for either sides being justified by personal interests or past allegiances. Jezernik builds on that analysis by explaining that Slovenians nowadays lack a complex examination of their history, and hence a multifaceted picture of themselves. Centuries of misappropriating and reinventing the past by political elites have led to confusion and political mediocrity, and have brought about a permanent identity crisis on the national level. Although Jezernik does not state it, this lack of a stable national identity is not only destructive on the national level, leading to political apathy and the lack of strong civil movement, but also for cross-border relations, which frequently fall victim to subjective interpretations of history.

The volume does not feature a conclusion, yet the last chapter by John Allcock ('Revisiting Involvement and Detachment') adds particular value to it. His contribution stands out against the rest not only because it discusses the region as a whole, but also because of its focus on methodology. Instead of summarizing the work of his colleagues, or engaging in an extensive, as he calls it, 'detour via abstraction' (p. 231), the author is very concrete in outlining three techniques for achieving objectivity and detachment in scholarly work. In his view, the deployment of theory, use of comparison, and application of discipline could lead to deeper and more objective understanding of ex-Yugoslavia. Allcock implements his own recommendations, and his contribution does not only prescribe suggestions for scholars, but also serves as a demonstration on how to use those suggestions to improve academic work.

Overall, *After Yugoslavia* comes as a much-needed internal re-examination of past events and portrayal of recent developments in the successor states of Yugoslavia. Despite the subjectivity and varied quality of the individual contributions, the editors have been successful in, on the one hand, presenting and building a balance between contrasting perspectives, and on the other hand, constructing a comprehensive mosaic-like portrait of the region by tackling an array of relevant topics. The strongest contributions are the ones which assume a comparative angle, underlining common features that stretch from country to country, and analyse them within the framework of universal processes.

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