

BOOK REVIEWS

**Monika Palmberger, *How Generations Remember. Conflicting Histories and Shared Memories in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina***, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. vii + 254 pp., ISBN 978-1-137-45062-3, € 29.26 (Hardcover), open access (eBook)

While extensive work has been done on memory politics and the ways in which elites in the successor states of Yugoslavia manipulated and 'reconstructed' the past to pursue nationalist agendas, less attention has been paid to the differences in how these narratives have been received by the wider population. With its examination of how the Bosniak and Croat citizens of Mostar orient themselves towards the past and utilize it as a tool for navigating the present, Monika Palmberger's book *How Generations Remember* represents a refreshing corrective to this gap in the literature. Palmberger explores not only how Mostarians, in their coming to terms with the past, mimic, reject, or adapt facets of public and official discourse, but also how members of the same generation share certain interpretative principles and discursive practices vis-à-vis the past and present, a process she calls 'generational positioning'. Importantly, her analysis combines both age and cohort effects. She explains differences in 'generational positioning' with reference to the past by considering the narrators' personal experiences of given historical periods, the moment in which they construct a historical event, as well as their life situation during the period

they are speaking about (231). Conceptually, Palmberger prefers the term 'public discourse' to 'collective memory', in order to emphasize the differences that exist between public/official history and vernacular/popular history (7). She effectively captures dominant public discourses and uses the term 'discursive strategies' to refer to the ways in which the key actors involved in the process of writing history deal with the past. The strategies citizens use to interpret the past, on the other hand, she labels 'discursive tactics'. Palmberger describes how these individual citizens develop such tactics through both personal experiences and exposure to commemorative events; their understanding of historical events, that is their 'discursive tactic' in relation to the past, is an effective intermingling of both (5).

Palmberger focuses on the 'discursive tactics' of three generations. The oldest group knew the first Yugoslavia before the Second World War and are now at a stage of life that permits them to 'delve most freely into the past and cherish memories with others of the same generation' (37). They largely perceive the war of the 1990s through the lens of the world war, amalgamating their multiple war experiences into a comprehensive narrative of suffering. These elderly citizens of Mostar do not see national identities as something primordial, and, in defining themselves, they prefer identifications such as city dweller to ethnic signifiers. Their central 'discursive tactic' is to link their more recent experiences of war to those that they lived through earlier in their lives (38).

Those Mostarians who were born in socialist Yugoslavia and are currently in mid-life experienced the war of the 1990s as a rupture and endured the challenges of the postwar sociopolitical contexts (38). They incorporated key elements of the dominant nationalist public discourse into their narratives, while also maintaining a nostalgia for Yugoslavia. As a consequence, they struggle to tell a coherent narrative and their 'discursive tactic' involves taking refuge in an oscillation between discourses that may even be opposing (18).

The third generation has no experience of socialist Yugoslavia; they experienced the war of the 1990s as children, or not at all. They see their parents' generation as spoilt by nationalist propaganda, and claim that they occupy a more neutral position. Less directly affected by war-related feelings of hate and distrust, they remain more sceptical about nationalist narratives of self-victimization. However, they have, to some degree, accepted today's national divisions as a given. Their school curriculum presented ethnicity as something primordial; this is what they were taught (39). On the whole, their main 'discursive tactic' involves disassociating their lives from such strongly nationalized experiences. Palmberger attributes this 'tactic of silencing' to the fact that there has not yet been an opportunity for a substantial narrative of the most recent past to develop (39).

Chapters Four to Six each addresses one of these three generations. In Chapters Two and Three Palmberger prepares the ground for her empirical analysis. Chapter Two gives an overview of how the Bosniak and Croat elites have engaged in memory politics of the Second World War, Tito's Yugoslavia, and the 1992-1995 wars. In Chapter Three, Palm-

berger demonstrates how the 'discursive strategies used in order to nationalize, legitimize, and objectify the respective historiographies' (7) have been similar in both ethnic groups, with the result, however, of creating distinctly different and often mutually exclusive master narratives.

Methodologically, Palmberger's approach is ethnographic and relies on a close 'listening to narratives' through a mix of various qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, informal conversations, memory-guided city tours, observation of commemorative events such as reburials, anniversaries, demonstrations, and round tables, as well as book presentations and university lectures. The long duration of her fieldwork enabled her to establish a sense of trust among the participants, which allowed her to overcome the methodological difficulty of understanding silences and narrative gaps. In many cases, she was able to address 'missing parts' in the narratives of her interviewees at a later stage of her fieldwork.

This book makes an important contribution in several respects. First and most obviously, it is one of the first studies on Bosnia to connect research on generational issues with memory research. The concept of 'generational positioning' is compelling and methodologically relevant. As Palmberger shows, there are certain understandings of the past which span across aspects of identity beyond the generational cohort, primarily across common ethnicity and nationality, but also gender, socioeconomic status, and rural/urban place of residence.

Second, the concept of 'generational positioning' is analytically relevant, as it allows Palmberger to take a welcome step away from assumptions of static and

monolithic Croat and Bosniak narratives. She persuasively shows that the process of how the citizens of Mostar interpret competing public narratives is a complex and messy one. While some individuals reaffirmed canonical historiographies as they changed, others refrained from simply overwriting previous experiences by taking on the new, nationalist narratives. People's different experiences and life courses significantly affected the evolution of their historical understanding (5).

Third, Palmberger focuses on the interplay between personal memories and memory politics in a way that is seldom found in the literature on memory and nationalism in Bosnia. She argues that public discourses are a 'powerful foil against whose backdrop people's narratives are constructed' (17), effectively demonstrating that individual understandings of the past consist of intermingled narratives of autobiographical memories, second-hand pasts in the form of narratives bestowed on them by older family members, as well as the public, institutionalized ways of addressing historical themes (29). And finally, Palmberger applies methodological creativity to capture people's narratives on contentious and sensitive topics, while striving to avoid exposure to bias (for example, by inviting participants to act as historical tour guides of their city). The result is a robust example of a well-executed qualitative multimethod study.

Tamara Trošt (Ljubljana)

**Florian Bieber/Dario Brentin, eds, *Social Movements in the Balkans. Rebellion and Protest from Maribor to Taksim*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. 190 pp., ISBN 978-1-138-05214-7, £ 115.00 (Hardback), £ 39.99 (eBook)**

Over the last decade, there has been rebellion and protest throughout South-eastern Europe. Greece has seen country-wide social mobilization since 2008; Slovenia was the scene of mass uprisings in the winter of 2012-2013; in the same year, mass demonstrations took place in major Bulgarian cities; and the civic activism in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the early 2000s had culminated in spontaneous, decentralized upheaval by 2015. As this tumultuous decade draws to a close, the editors of the volume under review, Florian Bieber and Dario Brentin, address these and other *Social Movements in the Balkans*. Their aim is twofold: to examine South-east European protests in terms of their heterogeneity and plurality, on the one hand, and as a phenomenon specific to this European subregion, on the other. This is an extremely relevant endeavour, also in light of the considerable potential for instability and conflict in the region in the years to come. This edited volume, with contributions from twelve scholars at various stages of their career, is based on an eponymous conference that was organized by the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz in 2013.

The first five chapters—on the uprisings in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Greece—appear promising in light of the research aims set out by the editors in the introduction. Separate country analyses that answer the same research question(s) and/or include regular inter-case references allow for an (in