
BOOK REVIEW

Jensen, J. (2022). *Memory Politics and Populism in Southeastern Europe*.
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This book is a unique ethnographic project that reveals the hidden trajectories between memory politics and populism in Southeastern Europe through eleven case studies. The authors are putting architectural designs, memorials, and commemorations under the magnifying glass and uncovering the forgotten heroes or historic events to find untold stories and understand how memories are being fabricated, reinterpreted, and redeemed from the oblivion or pulled out of the original context to tailor-make populist narratives which are always serving political actors to pursue their goals and ambitions. The case studies show how the same historic events, personalities, and (non)places can be interpreted in different ways depending on the ethnic-nationalist codes used to (re)produce identities and imagined communities which leads to the strengthening of enmities. The authors explain how war heroes and ideological categories merely represent empty signifiers in their quest to debunk myths that underly the official government policies as well as conspiracy theories that persistently undermine the projects of reconciliation in the region.

The relationship between memory politics and populism is under-researched and rarely addressed not just in Southeastern Europe but also in the rest of the world, which is why this volume is one of the ground-breaking attempts to illuminate and explain this phenomenon. One of the key qualities of this research project is its multidisciplinary approach. The authors are breaking away from the limitations of set disciplinary boundaries to connect cultural and memory studies with history and political sciences and provide a new methodological and conceptual framework for researching memory politics.

The introductory chapter written by Astrea Pejović and Dimitar Nikolovski is grounding the concept of the 'ethnographic understanding of enmity' as innovative use of ethnography. Enmity is the underlying idea and a basis for the different 'populisms' which is palpable in each of the case studies, be it the 'nationalisation of chocolate,' posthumous awards to forgotten generals or the project of maintaining the ruins to commemorate wars. Even though this book showcases relevant examples from Southeastern Europe, primarily from former Yugoslavia, it transcends the regional studies because it talks about the mechanisms of the production of memory politics that are universal and present in all parts of the world where populist narratives dominate the political discourses.

In the second chapter, Rory Archer warns that oblivion is also a part of memory politics while he analyses the almost completely forgotten Antibureaucratic revolution in Serbia in 1989. This 'happening of the people' is significant because it is the 'first populist mobilisation of the region' and the ethnography shows how and why the narratives were rejected and never became a part of the populist policies because the ideas behind this revolution are 'diffuse and contradictory.'

Inconsistencies and contradictions are present in all the case studies in this volume. In the third chapter, Gruia Badescu analyses how the urban spaces of Belgrade and Sarajevo are designed according to memory politics and emphasises that the maintained socialist, as well as refurbished buildings, contain subliminal political messages. On the other hand, Igor Stipić ushers the readers into a Rashomon-like story while trying to understand who Herceg Stjepan Kosača really was, who has evoked completely different memories among the representatives of Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, Marija Ivanović in the fifth chapter shows how the same memorial centre is being used by different political actors and how the production of peoples and identities relies on the production of enmity. In the sixth chapter, Mišo Kapetanović focuses on the use of memorials and stresses the class dimension of populism analysis to reveal that in some cases local communities and individuals tend to replace political actors to become producers of memory politics.

Ana Ljubojević (Chapter 8) and Lovro Kralj (Chapter 9) focus on memory politics in Croatia by analysing the Ustaša movement and the commemoration of Bleiburg. Both case studies show how memories of the Second World War are changing shapes, getting new interpretations, and are being adapted to new political contexts to achieve political goals. It is also visible how the concept of enmity lies at the heart of the definition of national identity.

Even when the aim is to achieve reconciliation, memory politics strengthens enmities because one collective identity is always defined against the other. This is visible in the case Astrea Pejović analyses in the seventh chapter. In the context of the accession of Montenegro to NATO and the EU, efforts of the ruling party in this country to apologise to Croatia for war crimes in Dubrovnik during the nineties have resulted in deterioration of relations with Serbia. Similarly, attempts to repair relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria have caused a countereffect in the form of resistance to the Good Neighbourliness Agreement, as Dimitar Nikolovski explains in the eleventh chapter.

The region of Southeastern Europe appears complex and dispersed and seems to be a conglomerate of micro-regions. The authors of this volume primarily focus on former Yugoslav republics where populist narratives emerged with the breakup of the country. The only non-Yugoslav state is Bulgaria but by introducing it into the volume, the authors want to start a larger discussion about populism in Southeastern Europe within the international community. In a certain sense, this volume takes into consideration two geographical and conceptual units that are distinguished by their ethnonational identities and populist narratives. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia comprise the first sub-region, while Northern Macedonia stands on the other side because its memory politics are based on its relations with Bulgaria, Greece and Albania. In the tenth chapter, Naum Trajanovski reveals some of the problems related to Macedonian identity by pointing towards the failed project of 'historic reconciliation' through the apologetic

discourse of the Museum of the Macedonian struggle. Finally, in the twelfth chapter, Filip Lyapov illustrates how Bulgarian nationalism is founded on historic revisionism by analysing the far-right supporters' rally, Lukov March.

By gathering young authors who provided a unique take on topics of memory politics and collective identities, the editor of the volume, Jody Jensen paved the way for future research projects on populism that has become an endemic problem in the contemporary world from Southeastern and Central Europe to the United States and Brazil.

IVANA STEPANOVIĆ

[ivana.stepanovic@iask.hu]

(Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg)