

## Book Reviews

Ivan Colovic, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia. Essays in Political Anthropology*. London: Hurst and Company, 2002. 328 pp., ISBN 1-85065-556-1 (paperback).

When reading contemporary studies of politics in socialist Yugoslavia and its successor states, one quickly comes across a curious absence when it comes to the subject of ethnic identity. It is widely recognized in academia that modes of personhood or identity, and the cultural conventions through which we make sense of the world, are socially constructed – that is, they are not natural but constantly being maintained and reproduced by social institutions, rituals, and myths. Indeed, the study of the social construction of identity has expanded considerably over the past two decades in European and North American academic circles. And yet when it comes to Southeastern Europe, there remains a dearth of serious scholarship regarding the links between political culture and personal identification with an ethnic collectivity. It is hard to say why this is the case: perhaps it is because ethnic identity appears durable enough to simply assume outright, or because nationality and ethnicity come so close to already existing norms of personal identity in Europe, or because the symbolic space in the successor states of Yugoslavia are so thoroughly saturated with the signs, representations, and images

of ethnic collectivity. Whatever the reason, the power of ethnic identity and difference to mobilize people and justify a wide range of political programs and projects is rarely explained or examined in analyses of politics in Southeastern Europe. At worst, the resilience and power of ethnic identification is characterized as part of the backward, primitive detritus of ages past that underwrites the cycles of violence in the Balkans. At best, it is dismissed as merely myth and not worthy of serious study, or lamented as an unfortunate, opaque, but “manageable” fact of political life in the region.

It is because of this that political anthropologist Ivan Colovic's *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia* is such a welcome addition to the literature on politics in ex-Yugoslavia. Throughout the book, Colovic shows clearly that the symbolic dimension of politics can not be separated from any other level of political reality and that the Serbian political ethno-myth is at the core of understanding the events that have rocked the region over the past two decades: “The Serbian ethno-myth does not date from yesterday. It consists for the most part of old stories. That is why it seems like something familiar.... On the other hand, today's Serbian ethno-myth is a product of this age, that is, the state of Serbia and the former Yugoslavia during the last decade of the twentieth century. Often obscure and archaic, it is, nevertheless, focused on contemporary events, and its meaning becomes clearer when it is interpreted in the context of those events. Then it emerges that

Curta observes that “Slavs” were a secondary topic and there is no proof that Slavs called themselves this way. The names actually used by the Byzantine authors were “Sclavene” and “Antes”. The criteria for Byzantine imaginary was not ethnic but military: “Antes” for allies and “Sclavene” for enemies; when the Antes also became enemies, they were also called “Sclavene”. The fourth to seventh chapter analyzes the archaeological material in correlation with the conclusions of the previous two chapters. Quantitative methods in a comparative perspective are used to analyze peculiar archaeological stuff from the entire Lower Danube Region. The fourth chapter (120-189), analyses the very dense fortification system built by Justinian at the south of Danube, issuing that its collapse was produced not by an invasion (or infiltration) of the Slavs from the north of Danube but from an internal social (especially urban) change, started in the fifth century; this way Byzantians had not enough resources to cover the expenses. The other three chapters are “Barbarians on the sixth-century Danube frontier: an archaeological survey”(190-226); “Elites and group identity north of the Danube frontier: the archaeological evidence”(227-310) and “‘Kings’ and ‘democracy’: power in early Slavic society”(311-334).

*Making of the Slavs* of Florin Curta is an extremely provocative and original approach to the problem of early Slavs which challenges the standard knowledge from South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. In six chapters, the

written and archaeological sources used in historiographies from Romania, ex-U.S.S.R, Bulgaria, ex-Yugoslavia etc. are (partially) de-located from their initial (historiographical and ideological) contexts and re-located within the framework of current cultural anthropological theories. The information is completely revisited in an equilibrated and critical perspective by using quantitative and qualitative methods to offer a diachronic and comparative interpretation. The book is also admirable for using computer software in interpreting the archaeological data and for displaying numerous maps and tables in its comparative approach to the sources.

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Michael E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1996. 653 pp., ISBN 0-262-52209-8 (paperback).

Since its publication in 1996, “*The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*” has become a classic volume for scholars and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution alike. This edited volume, a Center for Science and International Affairs study, offers a sweeping insight into one of the most persistent temporary phenomena. The book attempts to debunk the myths surrounding internal armed conflict. Instead of the dominant explanations that see violent internal conflict as mass-based and externally-driven, Brown sees internal, elite-level

activities as the principal triggers. An understanding of the permissive and proximate causes of conflict is then used to provide a plethora of policy recommendations concerning the options available to the international community for dealing with conflict prevention, management and resolution.

The first part is empirical in focus; the discussion of causes and implications of internal conflict is organized by regions, enabling a comparative outlook on the topic. The former communist bloc is somewhat overrepresented. The account of wars in the former Yugoslavia, the most visible conflict at the time of writing, occupies an entire chapter. Ivo H. Daalder has identified the country's ethnic geography and the history of conflict as permissive conditions of conflict, while the collapse of economic and political order were the proximate causes, leading to the rise of virulent nationalism. The bulk of Daalder's chapter deals with international implications of and responses to the wars. His conclusion that international efforts, if any, dealt with the symptoms, not the underlying causes of the conflict is a recurring one throughout the entire book. By contrast, the inclusion of Milada Vachudova's chapter on East-Central Europe, which deals with the absence of armed conflict in that region, is surprising considering the book's focus. In his piece on the former Soviet Union, Matthew Evangelista identifies the communist legacy and opportunism in political and economic affairs as the main

sources of conflict. As for international involvement, he emphasizes Russia's involvement in its near abroad, and risks forecasting future conflicts and the potential for international action in them. The remaining chapters deal with South and Southwest Asia, Southeast Asia, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

The volume's second part shifts the discussion towards concrete policy issues. The first four chapters tackle select issues pertinent to violent internal conflict: secessionist violence and its prevention by political accommodation, negotiation and mediation, light arms and economic sanctions. The remaining chapters are devoted to international actors that engage in internal conflicts: NGOs, the U.S., the UN and collective security organizations. Following the book's general outline, each author summarizes the state of affairs in the respective field and goes on to provide concrete policy recommendations. In addition, all of the authors tend to present their recommendations in an optimistic light, albeit in cautious tone.

The policy orientation of the volume affects its nature. Although individual chapters offer their own respective arguments, they are, in effect, but summaries of the given topics. As insightful and illuminating as these may be, it seems that the magnitude of the book's scope went to the expense of its analytical content; the two main themes of the book, causes of internal conflict and international action could have easily filled two self-sufficient volumes. The book is otherwise

well-organized, and each chapter follows a unified outline. On the other hand, starting the book with case studies underlines the lack of the work's theoretical underpinning, only partly offset by Michael E. Brown's editorial conclusion on the causes of internal conflict. In this chapter, which could have been better placed right after the case studies rather at the very end of the book, he summarizes the empirical evidence on internal conflict and refutes the prevailing academic views on internal conflict. Brown correctly sees domestic elites and their actions as the main proximate triggers of violent conflict. In addition, in order for the masses to get involved in conflict, problematic group histories (underlying cause) and economic problems (proximate cause) also must be present. Brown's elite argument is well-placed into the elite paradigm's revival that took place after the much-celebrated third wave of democratization, although it suffers from the usual shortcomings attributed to that theoretical strand. Brown also suggests that the ability to understand internal conflict and to act effectively to influence it requires moving beyond single-factor explanations. However, his attempt at such a multifactor analysis reads like a selection from a list of factors of those with highest correlations with the emergence of violent internal conflict. The final editorial chapter is a summary of policy recommendations in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

The book is an impressive achievement and a valuable contribution to the field it covers, which becomes especially apparent from our current perspective. Although internal conflicts seem to be a thing of the past in light of the purported new threats of global terrorism and WMDs, they continue emerging. Relegation of internal conflict to the sidelines of the newscasts may, however, release the pressure on the international community to act, and aid prompt and more effective international action. In any case, the book can serve as a useful reference resource for anybody pursuing to understand and help resolve such conflicts, be it academics or practitioners. It is also a reminder that although internal conflict may not be at the top of the agenda of the day, it is recurrent and here to stay, regardless of the newly securitized issues.

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Lucjan T. Orlowski (ed.),  
*Transition and Growth in Post-Communist Countries*.  
Cheltenham/ Northampton, MA:  
Edward Elgar, 2001. 316 pp.,  
ISBN 1 84064 556 3 (hardcover).

The book *Transition and Growth in Post-Communist Countries* edited by Lucjan T. Orlowski contributes to the broad discussion on transition. The authors of this book look at transition processes in Central and Eastern European countries for the most part from an economic point of view leaving