

Carey, Henry (ed.), *National Reconciliation in Eastern Europe*, East European Monographs (Boulder)/ Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, 405 pp.

In *National Reconciliation in Eastern Europe*, Henry Carey presents a collection of papers from a 1994 conference, each focused on the post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) beginning in 1989. Because of the timeframe involved, Stephen Fischer-Galati introduces this book as part of the historical record, one that is reflective of the 'perceptions and interpretations of the nature and problems' associated with CEE reconciliation attempts. Then, to provide a more contemporary appeal, Fischer-Galati further contends that many of the highlighted themes could also be applied to more current debates over the promotion of democracy in the Middle East.

With reference to the former, one of the strengths of Carey's book is indeed that it allows for an unmediated glimpse into the often contradictory nature of national reconciliation in the CEE, as well as the problems encountered. The range of topics illustrates this, as they cover twenty interpretations of the transitional period, and collectively address political and economic issues, the nature of democracy, lustration, the experiences of ethnic and social minority groups, and the role of education in transitional periods.

Particularly intriguing is that many of the authors openly disagree in their conclusions, which further reflects the uncertainty of the period in question. For example, in direct contrast to György Csepeli and Antal Órkény, who frequently make sweeping and disparaging remarks about the CEE region generally (i.e. that these countries were 'uncertain of themselves and territorially dissatisfied' and thereby vied first for the attention of the Nazi Party, and then of the Soviets), Venelin Ganey scathingly asserts the damage done to academic research through the simplistic appeal of regional and cultural stereotypes. Miklos Haraszti likewise complains that the use of time-worn clichés – i.e. of 'unrepentant communists' and 'rabid nationalists' – is unsuitable to a multi-faceted analysis of these particular events.

There are nevertheless consistent points of convergence throughout, with each chapter reinforcing the idea that reconciliation, whatever forms it might take, must be understood as long-term processes that involve the interaction, coordination and cooperation of all segments of society, regardless of ethnic background, religious affiliation, gender, or sexual preference. Carey's book

thus provides insight into contemporary debates on social cohesion, democratic consolidation and the role of local governance.

Commonality is also found in the authors' conclusions that democracy, complete with all its systemic flaws and problems, provides the greatest potential for initiating the reconciliation cycle. Having said this, the broad (and arguably contentious) sentiment expressed here is tempered through the reminder that democracy is multifaceted and multidimensional, and that problems emerge when wholly western models and practices are applied to countries with diverse histories, developmental patterns and social values.

The first of two sections includes theoretical pieces ranging from Carey's definitions of what should, and should not be considered national reconciliation, through to the impact of nationalism, democratic development and citizenship on the reconciliation process (as highlighted by William Stearn, John Mueller and Miroslav Kusy respectively), to Benjamin Works' assessment of why societies become polarised. Terence Cook then discusses the role of negotiated cooperation and competition in higher education and Suzanne LaFont closes the section with a delightful and thought-provoking analysis of the experience of women under post-communism.

The second section consists of thirteen country-specific case studies. Beginning with Romania, Pavel Campeanu explores the debilitating effects of open conflict in society, and Richard Hall considers how new oppositional groups are able to manipulate the historical record. Further to this, three pieces focus on national minority rights in Romania, with Aurelian Craiutu considering the Hungarian minorities; Rudy Guyon, the Roma; and Catalin Augustin Stoica, the 'hidden' homosexual community. Susan Sunflower continues by highlighting the case of Bosnia and the role of interpersonal dialogue in reconciliation. Also focusing on the former Yugoslavia, Paul Mojzes extrapolates how religion assumed the status of political ideology in this instance, and Daniel Wolf applies rational game theory to the actions of nationalist leaders and regional elites.

By contrast, Ganev provides a counterintuitive account of the *positive* experiences of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, Yen Yee Chong examines the Baltic States and highlights the need for recognition, participation and education in the social arena, and Jeffrey Surovel explores the troubled road to post-communist cooperation between Russia and western Europe. Two final pieces focus on Hungary, with Haraszti constructing an insightful play on the

novel *Animal Farm*, as he searches for balanced reasons to explain why former communist parties were returned to power in the early-to-mid 1990s, after having been humiliated in 1989. Csepeli and Örkény are more disparaging in their analysis and return the focus to regional (inter-ethnic) conflict through the revival of nationalism.

With reference to Fischer-Galati's forged links with the Middle East, certain sections do indeed prompt reflection over how political debates have changed, post-9/11. Caution must nevertheless be exercised when making comparisons on an international scale. Consider, for example, Sunflower's assertion that while the Bosnian people saw themselves as highly secularized and focused on Europe, outsiders actively 'Islamicised' their identity prior to the war (pp. 266-267). Extending this slightly, Mojzes highlights that the Bosnian Muslims are the only group, about whom Islam was used to denote both their religion *and* their nationality (p. 365).

While this particular distinction has been blurred within recent debates on international terrorism, the Bosnian example (especially when combined with Romanian cases where national minority groups were transformed into the 'enemy within') highlights the divisive nature of ethnic stereotyping and the use of generalities in politics. Fischer-Galati nevertheless has a point, but his focus is arguably misplaced. Rather than assessing these themes against debates related to the compatibility of Islam and democracy, sections of this book more readily apply to the transnational experiences of Islamic migrants living in western societies. Consider, for example, that Carey, Kusy and Stearns each explore aspects of social marginalisation, and Craiutu, Guyon and Ganev each consider social exclusion based on ethnicity. If approached in this way, a range of critical challenges to social cohesion and intercultural harmony is highlighted, as presented by the emergence of distinct patterns of difference within multicultural society.

To summarise, whereas aspects of the book are clearly dated, it retains its value through the depth of analysis provided of a complex transitional period, and the even more complex reconciliation cycles initiated in 1989. This book is thus recommended to anyone interested in understanding the combined transitional experiences of the CEE region as more than just dates and statistical figures in history books.

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