
Review

Catherine Baker
**The Yugoslav Wars
of the 1990s**

Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015, 181 pp.

Since its publication in August 2015, Catherine Baker's *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* has become an inescapable entry in countless Yugoslav history course bibliographies and an invaluable contribution to the English language literature on the Yugoslav wars. This recent addition to the Palgrave Macmillan Studies in European History series not only offers a concise review of the English language literature on the wars of Yugoslav succession, but also a critical examination of the scholarly debates on this topic. The book provides a succinct introduction (the word limit of the series is 50.000) to the topic and a knowledgeable evaluation of the interpretations thereof. Furthermore, it is complemented with an extensive bibliography and a timeline of events covering the period between May 1980 and October 2000. Directed primarily at students, but also lecturers and readers at different levels of familiarity with the context of former Yugoslavia, the volume consists of eight chapters that chronologically follow the region from the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to the end of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As its title suggests, the central part of the book is devoted to the wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and

Herzegovina, Kosovo, and the latter conflict's repercussions in Macedonia. These sections are complemented by chapters on peace-building, transitional justice, and language and culture.

Catherine Baker, a lecturer in 20th Century History at the University of Hull, defines post-Yugoslav conflicts as wars of "ethno-political separation, but also opportunism and control" (p. 129), which today can be analysed through the prism of the destruction of a state, the failure of an idea and the fragmentation of a society. This prompts her to pose questions about culpability, the collapse of socialism and the rise of nationalism that are still at the centre of scholarly debates over the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The author does not, however, aspire to offer definite answers or to impose a particular interpretation on the reader; on the contrary, her intention is to incite students to consult other works on aspects that an introductory text can only briefly touch upon. Aware of the role temporal distance has in the emergence of new focal points and alternative approaches, Baker underlines the importance of studying primary sources, albeit without disregarding the interpretative frameworks and narratives surrounding the 1990s. Similarly, she identifies some still under-researched topics that might shed new light on the wars such as organised crime (particularly in Bosnia), or the relations between the Yugoslav region and the non-Western world in the 1990s. The same could be said about some seemingly peripheral facets that the author had previously researched, such as national identity in popular music (Baker, 2010), or translation and interpreting during peacekeeping operations (Baker and Kelly, 2013).

The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s is a well structured and balanced volume that provides the reader with a critically written “state of the debate” on what *The Economist* once called the “Yugomess”. Among its biggest strengths and novelties, if compared with other introductory accounts, is the author’s insistence on not only *what* has been written about particular events, but also *how* it has been written. Hence the readers are also invited to reflect on their own moral convictions and personal ethics. Attributing more or less responsibility for the disintegration of Yugoslavia to internal or external factors, individual or institutional actors, is considerably influenced by value-based judgements, varying degrees of personal involvement. Based on these considerations, it is difficult and perhaps redundant to comment on what could have been included in or left out of the book, as Baker clearly had to make a selection and she did it in a coherent manner. The decision to focus merely on English language works has deprived the volume of important Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian contributions to the literature on the wars in former Yugoslavia, but it was probably a conscious choice based on the language skills of the target audience. If there are weaknesses to be identified, they are rather of a formal nature: coded in-text citations are harder to consult than author-based references, considering their relative importance in the text. All in all, a short but dense introductory volume that successfully captures the complexities involved in writing about history.

References

Baker, C. 2010. *Sounds of the Borderland: Popular Music, War and Nationalism*

in Croatia since 1991. Farnham: Ashgate.

Baker, C. and Kelly, M. 2013. *Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Review

Soeren Keil and Bernhard Stahl
(editors)
**The Foreign Policies
of Post-Yugoslav States:
From Yugoslavia to Europe**

Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, XVII + 259 pp.

More than 25 years after the breakup of Yugoslavia there is a growing interest for overviews and analyses of the foreign policies (FPs) of both the former Yugoslavia and the independent states that emerged out of the former federation. While there is a plethora of literature about Yugoslav FP, although not entirely available online due to the fact that it was published during the second half of the 20th century, there is a significant lack of sources regarding the contemporary FPs of the ex-Yugoslav states. Although we have long entered into the third decade since the 1991 breakup and proclamations of independence by