

IV

REVIEW ESSAY

KRITIČKI OSVRT

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CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN THE EUROPEAN (POST-SOCIALIST) (SEMI-)PERIPHERY: MAPPING REBELLION AND SOCIAL PROTESTS IN SOUTHEAST AND EASTERN EUROPE

Florian Bieber and Dario Brentin (eds.), *Social Movements in the Balkans. Rebellion and Protest from Maribor to Taksim*, Routledge London and New York, 2018. / Veronika Stoyanova, *Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe. Beyond the Transition's Liberal Consensus*, Routledge London and New York, 2018.

ABSTRACT

This essay takes a critical and reflective look at two recently published books on contentious politics in the Balkans and Eastern Europe: *Social Movements in the Balkans* (ed. by F. Bieber and D. Brentin, Routledge 2018) and *Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe* (V. Stoyanova, Routledge 2018). Focusing on regions somewhat neglected in scholarly analyses of the recent global upsurge of protests, these books aim to fill the gap by highlighting some contextual and regional specificities: a position of economic and geo-political (semi)periphery, weak or unconsolidated democratic institutions, post-socialist and transitional environments, societal (ethnic) divisions, etc. By critically assessing both contributions, in a manner that looks for their complementarity, this essay: examines the characteristics of popular mobilizations and grievances in Southeast and Eastern Europe; questions dominant narratives of political and economic transition and EU integration; re-evaluates socialist heritage and post-socialist political trajectories; discusses the (im)possibilities of articulating political alternatives to representative democracy and free market economy; and addresses the burden of conflicting memories and attitudes towards the region's socialist past (and, in case of post-Yugoslav states, ethnic conflicts from the 1990s).

KEYWORDS

social protests, crisis of representative democracy, radical democracy, Balkans, Southeast Europe, Eastern Europe.

Introduction

The global economic crisis of 2008, subsequent worldwide austerity policies, and the general neoliberal preference for technocratic governance have all shaken the trust of citizens in democratic institutions and representational models, giving rise

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to a global cycle of protests movements, from *Indignados*, to Occupy movements, to experimentations with ad hoc citizens' popular assemblies and direct democratic decision-making (della Porta 2013, Kaldor and Selchow 2013, Mercea 2016, della Porta et al. 2017). Within Europe and the EU, these conditions have been coupled with a questioning of the transparency and accountability of EU governing structures as well as a critique of the stance of EU institutions towards indebted countries (on the EU periphery) and those aspiring to become member states (and already part of the EU accession process). However, scholarly interest in new forms of contentious politics and citizens' protests has mostly ignored the regions of Eastern and Southeast Europe, typically 'reserved' for the study of ethno-national conflict, transition successes and (mostly) failures, and contested memories of socialist and post-socialist experiences. Two notable exceptions, both of which aimed to offer a systematic overview of citizens' dynamic engagement in contesting the political-economic "order of the day" in the region, were a 2015 volume on radical politics in the Balkans by Horvat and Štikš and a 2017 special issue of *Europe-Asia Studies* on activist citizenship in Southeast Europe, edited by Fagan and Sircar.

This essay takes a critical and reflective look at two recently published books that are reversing this trend – *Social Movements in the Balkans: Rebellion and Protest from Maribor to Taksim*, edited by Florian Bieber and Dario Brentin (2018, Routledge) and a monograph by Veronika Stoyanova, *Ideology and Social Protest in Eastern Europe: Beyond the Transition's Liberal Consensus* (2018, Routledge) – effectively putting Southeast and Eastern Europe on the map for the study of contemporary social and protest movements. First, I will outline some of the themes and topoi that these contributions share and that, in fact, emerge as distinctive issues regarding popular mobilizations and protests in this part of Europe. Then, each book is discussed separately but is critically assessed with an eye for their complementarity.

Emerging Topics and Points of Contestation

Some problems and topics are saliently present and/or marked as distinctive in both volumes and appear across different country/protest case studies; but also seem to appear generally in contemporary social and protest movements, thus confirming their relevance beyond the region. First, there is a noticeable "return" of class and capitalism – following the end of belief in "the end of history" – as once again useful and legitimate tools of analysis, but also as matters of political contestation. Linked to this is another theme, an articulated critique of the general paradigm of post-1989 transitions to liberal democratic governance and free-market societies; and tightly connected to this is an emerging critique of EU integration as a process that has failed to deliver its promises. However, this cluster of criticisms and contestations are predominantly articulated as negation, or dissatisfaction, without accompanying visions about possible or desirable alternatives.

Also notable is that this general critique of dominant forms of politics – rather than of, say, the concrete political programs of parties in power – and consequent widespread, deep mistrust of all parties, has manifested itself in two different articulations among citizens. Most often, the protests and indignations of citizens fall

short of transforming into any kind of clear political program or goal; but sometimes, they inspire citizens to experiment, *in situ*, with direct forms of participation, in the form of *prefigurative* politics (as was the case in Greek public squares, or in Bosnian towns during so-called plenum-assemblies; see more in Milan 2017 and Zaimakis 2018).

Finally, both volumes reviewed here share insight about two competing major frames of interpretation among researchers of protests, and among protest protagonists themselves. One of these perspectives, which could be termed neo-Marxist or belonging to the academic Left, holds that the general conditions of neoliberalism and the dogma of free-market liberal democracy have led to non-democratic practices, the exclusion of citizens from decision making processes, and ultimately, to the reaction of citizens in forms of mass protest. The other perspective, shared predominantly by democratization scholars, claims that it is weak institutions and a lack of rule of law or accountability of political leaders that are to be blamed for a lack of democratic culture and practices.

In *Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe*, Stoyanova firmly embraces the first position, arguing: “[T]he dominance of the transitological approach to the region should be seen as part of the wider post-Cold War Washington consensus which gave rise to an era of ‘technocratic governance’ that eschewed any popular grounding ... Such an elite consensus engendered a depoliticized technocratic culture of ‘governance’ which lacked accountability – politicians could not be held accountable for policies which were predetermined, even inevitable” (2018: 19, 20).

In *Social Movements in the Balkans*, on the other hand, Bieber and Brentin argue in their Introduction that these two frames of interpretation should not be seen as “irreconcilable alternatives,” asserting that: “The critique of neoliberal policies helps explain how economic and political transformation has failed to deliver states that respond to citizens’ needs and protect from predatory elites. Yet the emphasis on democratization and rule of law highlight why some liberal democratic market economies have been able to mitigate the economic crisis and respond to citizen demands ... [m]arket economy and representative democracy as such were not a problem ... Instead, the core problem remains weak institutions that are easy prey to the dominance of strong parties driven by narrow interests” (2018: 5). However, not every chapter in this edited volume expresses the same view.

Social Movements in the Balkans

Protests “from Slovenia to Turkey” are covered in Bieber and Brentin’s volume. In other words, the entire Balkan region is examined, encompassing countries with both comparable and very different recent histories – some are already part of the EU, some are “potential candidate countries”; some are post-socialist, others are not. Still, despite any differences, common among these countries is the predicament of existing on the semi-periphery of Europe. Stretching their focus thusly, the editors subtitled the book: *from Maribor to Taksim*. These points of reference not only identify the geographic boundaries of the region under discussion, but also infer how versatile yet similar – in demands and sites of occurrence – all these protests were. Maribor is a city and Taksim a city square. Maribor is in the

small country of Slovenia, once an industrial heartland in socialist Yugoslavia, then drastically de-industrialized; while Taksim is at the heart of a true cosmopolis (Istanbul). But both are sites of tremendous change, swift developments, and political processes that have radically challenged their residents to conform, adapt, or resist imposed transformations.

The chapters of *Social Movements in the Balkans* address the diverse issues that incited the protests in question: austerity measures, the privatization and commodification of common goods, corruption, authoritarian political actions, etc. Introducing the volume, Bieber and Brentin invoke Garret Hardin's seminal essay, "The tragedy of the commons," implying that this is the one thing all recent protests in Southeast Europe do share. They describe "a sense of grievance with the way the authorities administer the common good, public spaces and the state" (p. 1).

In the opening chapter, Heiko Wimmen considers informal political movements in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 2005 to 2013, backed by international organizations, to strengthen civil society and encourage bottom-up citizen participation. Wimmen asks to what extent these efforts have compensated for the shortcomings of a political system that sustains and nurtures ethno-national politics and divides. Analyzing several attempts by civil society organizations and other informal actors (who were distanced from and dissatisfied with formal NGOs) to influence both political parties and citizens (to exercise pressure on parties and overcome political abstinence), the paper concludes that these "occurred *parallel to* rather than *cutting across* the dominant ethnic cleavage lines" (p. 13, original emphasis). The conclusion is both pessimistic and optimistic: on the one hand, civic resistance has not brought about major changes, nor has it succeeded in bridging ethnic divisions by promoting inclusive Bosnian civic citizenship; on the other hand, citizens involved in resistance efforts have built capacities, broadened networks of support, and accumulated experiences. It is also important to measure the failures (and successes) of civil society against the wider political system in which they operate, and in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, this system is designed to maintain division and exploit fears of instability.

In the subsequent chapter, Gal Kirn discusses the example of Maribor – once one of the most important industrial cities in Yugoslavia and today almost completely de-industrialized – as typical of the periphery. There, wintertime protests in 2012-2013 raised questions about the "myth of Slovenia as a 'success story' of the Balkans." The protests erupted in reaction to corrupt deals made by Maribor's then-Mayor, who was behind a shady public-private partnership responsible for a new road radar system that resulted in more than 2,000 speeding tickets in just two weeks (in a town of 100,000). The chapter argues that even though protests resulted in a positive outcome, as the Mayor was ousted, they oscillated between a moral and almost apolitical outcry (demanding accountability) and a more complex and rigorous critique of the very foundations of liberal democracy – thus sharing this "in-betweenness" with other recent protest movements on the periphery. Kirn adopts a Rancièrian framework of understanding "the people," the dispossessed, as a political figure of dissensus, but he argues further that the context of de-industrialization and the dismantling of welfare services and infrastructure makes the *surplus population* equally significant. Kirn is interested in the possibilities for

this population to become politicized; this is why, he concludes, the most important outcome of the Maribor protests was not the resignation of the Mayor, but the emergence of new political actors and their coming together in a political coalition (the United Left), which entered Parliament in 2014.

Valentina Guerguieva authored the next chapter, on a series of protests in Bulgaria, by presenting personal accounts of the activists themselves, collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. A special focus is given to the environmental movement that rose in 2012 to oppose the use of fracking to extract shale gas. But Guerguieva also examined two protests in 2013 – in the winter, against a sudden rise in electricity costs; and in the summer, over the election of a media mogul, suspected of having criminal ties, to the position of Director of the State Agency for National Security. She concludes that these protests mostly took on the form and logic of negation, as they were “reactions of indignation, expressions of disapproval” that mostly dissolved after protest actions ended. Nonetheless, Guerguieva argues, these “reactive mobilizations” can in fact have a positive impact and could be seen as a *counter-democracy* (she cites the work of Pierre Rosanvallon), and that “the positive work of mistrust” is a tool for maintaining pressure on the government. This argument resembles the traditional understanding of the role of civil society, and interestingly enough, it is precisely this notion of civil society and its imaginaries in Bulgarian protests that form the object of the study of Stoyanova’s book. In that volume, however, as will be shown shortly, the potential for citizens’ protests to act as checks and balances is viewed with more nuance and less optimism.

In the next chapter, on protests in Greece, Kostis Plevris argues that physical and geographical *spaces* of protests are much more than mere containers and backgrounds to social activities. This chapter differs somewhat from the others by taking a more theoretical approach, and is a bit detached from the actors, actions, and demands that dominate other accounts in the volume; but even so, Plevris points to some shared problems identified in the Introduction, noting that in contemporary struggles for the commons, spatial claims are important and “only a particular space enables social struggle to flourish.” This seems very true in times when important means of struggle include occupations of workplaces, factories, universities, or cultural venues (like theaters). Equally, social *spatial* organization, like communal work in neighborhoods, is becoming increasingly important as traditional institutional networks of support and welfare infrastructures rapidly wither away.

Ksenija Berk then presents another look at the Slovene protests, but in this chapter the focus is on “the visual communications” and the creative, artistic interventions of protestors – a much written about topic in studies on recent waves of protests. She skillfully juxtaposes simple, effective, yet smart and mobilizing visuals (often using irony and parody), such as posters and stencils, to more sophisticated artistic interventions that fail to contribute to the general cause of the protests and serve instead as “vehicles for self-promotion” and “example of aesthetic populism in protest graphics” (p. 89, 90).

The chapter by Željka Lekić-Subašić confronts the use and influence of social media, another prominent object of study in relation to contemporary protest movements. This chapter focuses on online activism and the role of social media in Southeast Europe specifically, with a case study on Bosnia-Herzegovina. It aims to

address questions frequently posed about the prominent role of social media today: What is the transformative political potential of social media? Can social media help mobilize and organize? And, does social media positively affect democracy or actually prevent “real” activism by offering a comfortable substitute and the “feel-good” effect of “doing something” by clicking? Her conclusion, which moderates both an overly optimistic embrace of new technologies and widespread fears related to their use in fighting oppressive regimes, is that social media is primarily a very helpful tool for disseminating information and organizational details but cannot substitute for “traditional” forms of organization. An important caveat, however, is that this research is only illustrative, as it was conducted using very limited material, based on a survey of active students in Sarajevo and secondary resources related to protests in Slovenia.

Chiara Milan and Leonidas Oikonomakis offer a very insightful comparative analysis in the next chapter, examining the characteristics of protests in Greece, Turkey, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In all three countries, protests that were analyzed started in order to challenge a specific single issue – austerity measures in Greece, the demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul, and the inability of the Bosnian government to issue ID numbers for newborns. However, in Greece and Turkey, these protests evolved into a more sophisticated critique of general governing structures and even of representational democracy, establishing grounds for experimenting with autonomous forms of self-organization and direct democracy and thus becoming part of the global “movement family” of protest cycles since 2011. This was a testimony to the realization of citizens in Greece and Turkey that those singular issues which sparked initial outrage were merely the symptoms of a more generalized problem: the exclusion of citizens from affecting political decision making that directly impacts them. But this was not the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, using concepts from social movements studies, like *frame resonance*, *network*, and *resources*, Milan and Oikonomakis argue that the movement there was hindered from further development and politicization because it lacked two important elements: “the resonance of the overarching frame ... and strong local and transnational movement networks” (p. 115). The inability of the movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina to question the structural context generating contested issues was decisive; and this is intricately related to the post-Dayton political system in which the questioning of ethno-political elites has easily translated into a questioning of post-war stability. Still, the analysis of Milan and Oikonomakis does not fully explain the outburst of protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina that followed only a year later, culminating in a series of self-organized participatory assemblies, or plenums. This fact is only very briefly mentioned in the chapter, noting that it is “at odds” with the analysis of the 2013 protest (p. 125).

In the chapter that follows, Marius I. Tatar puts forth a very useful overview and mapping of the statistical data on protest politics in Southeast Europe. Using the European Values Survey and World Values Survey datasets, and then taking a closer look at the cases of Slovenia and Romania, the chapter takes a longitudinal approach to presenting key characteristics of both protesters and the contexts of their protest, from a dynamic and comparative perspective. The figures and tables it includes may prove useful for other research and may inspire other

cross-comparative analysis of available data. All in all, in mapping some specificities of the region, Tatar reveals that protesters who have sparked recent waves of protest in Southeast Europe tend to have similar socio-demographical and attitudinal profiles to those in Western Europe – meaning, those most likely to protest have higher levels of education and higher incomes, and nurture post-materialist values – but also that they “have stronger ideological identifications on the Left-Right axis” (p. 147).

Mark Kramer authors the closing chapter, exploring the somewhat controversial but significant question of how “anti-regime protesters can be influenced by external actors” (identified as foreign governments, foreign media outlets, international organizations, transnational movements, diaspora, spillover effects from neighboring countries, etc.). His analysis is particularly focused on protests in Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey in 2013, but also deals more generally with the issue of influence by foreign actors. Especially important and nuanced is his discussion of the role of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and “external ‘norm entrepreneurs’ (individuals, groups, organizations or governments that promote normative concepts such as human rights, democracy and political freedom)” (p. 163), in correlation with domestic political opportunity structures, where Kramer carefully weighs their mutual influence and co-dependence. Also very useful is Kramer’s systematic elaboration of the specific ways in which protests and political upheavals from other countries can exercise influence: through diffusion, demonstration effects, or spillovers. However, the empirical research supporting important insights in the chapter is lacking, and therefore, it serves mostly as a useful theoretical and methodological consideration for future research.

Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe

While *Social Movements in the Balkans* brings an interesting variety of methodological and theoretical approaches and provides an overview of a very wide region, it falls short of providing a comprehensive, systemic framework for interpreting and understanding new protest cultures in the region. *Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe* endeavors to offer precisely that, although by focusing on a much narrower object of study.

The book is a very ambitious work in which Veronika Stoyanova introduces an important and fresh perspective in understanding recent protest movements. Firstly, it focuses on Eastern Europe, a neglected area when it comes to the subject matter. Secondly, it brings an original approach by studying antagonisms, not between those who protest and those who are protested, but *within* popular protest mobilizations and among different factions of protesters themselves. By focusing on two waves of Bulgarian protests in 2013, viewed as different in many ways and having mobilized distinct social groups, Stoyanova distills the strife between them into a question that goes straight to the heart of all of today’s popular mobilizations for social change: “whose vision for change constitute[s] the right way forward?” (p. 4).

Stoyanova takes a very complex and sophisticated approach that is at times slightly confusing due to the great (and sometimes unnecessary) multiplicity of perspectives she presents in relation to the main object of the study, which is:

understanding post-socialist power relations through discourses on civil society, as they were produced and utilized during the two waves of protests in Bulgaria in 2013 – known as the Winter and Summer protests. This is a very original approach to recent protest movements, harnessing the notion of *civil society* and the peculiarities of its meanings and usages in post-socialist contexts.

The theoretical grounding of Stoyanova's volume does not rely so much on social movement literature (in contrast to most chapters in the other volume reviewed here), as she finds it unsuitable for explaining post-socialist dynamics because it links social movements to reactions to strong states and markets. She firmly embraces the position of the academic Left, but distances herself from the usual post-structuralist and post-Marxist approaches of the New Left, as she wishes to reanimate the notions of *human agency* and the power of the powerless. Thus, she borrows theoretical framing mostly from Gramsci and Ernst Bloch. It is Gramsci's understanding of civil society she uses in asking how different factions of protesters claim to represent the authentic voice of civil society ("how the idea of civil society itself gets mobilized within these struggles," p. 7). Not surprisingly, tightly connected with this is another Gramscian theme of (organic) *intellectuals* and their role in (de)legitimizing political actions, in developing hegemonic discourses, and in presenting specific ideologies in universal terms. She further combines Gramsci with Bloch's ideas about the functionality of utopian thinking: "The same way Gramsci believed that in the mystifying fog of the subalterns' 'common sense' there resided a kernel of 'good sense', Ernst Bloch argued that there always existed a kernel of *utopian surplus* at the core of every ideology" (p. 38, original emphasis).

Arguably, the strongest points of the book reside in Stoyanova's critical and theoretically insightful scrutiny of how notions of civil society and transition have been used, in both academia and politics, to describe the post-socialist condition. She argues that the concept of civil society has been underpinned with ideas of Westernization and "catching-up," and was thus imbued with ideological and utopian content. From 1988 onwards, she further argues that for East European societies, this was "propelled by idealized visions of the future and of notions such as democracy, Europeanization and morality" (p. 88).

"[T]his discourse conceived civil society as comprising the 'energetic minority' of citizen-protesters, as opposed to the 'passive majority' of 'docile subjects' ... Secondly, civil society was opposed to the 'state' or to 'political society' (in a Hegelian manner), which served to depoliticize the concept and firmly ground it in an anti-statist (and anti-communist) ideology. These two currents ... corresponded to the two main tasks of the early transformational utopia ... first, that of a project of modernization ... and second, the project of 'decommunization' or that of the dismantling of the (repressive) state ... Key to not just the manufacture of consent, but to the mobilization of appeal to the neoliberal ideology ... was the emotional appeal to autonomy and self-determination inherent to the idea of civil society" (pp. 88, 89).

This critique is then connected with critique of the dominant, liberal, anti-populist interpretations of popular mobilizations in Eastern Europe and the fear of overcoming the post-1989 liberal consensus. She rightly notes that democratization scholars, who embrace a strong critique of populist tendencies – and who worry more about the decline of trust in liberal institutions than about the decline, or rather exclusion, of citizens in political participation – conflate *elite* forms of

populism (represented in populist political parties) and *popular* forms of populist mobilization, imputing to the latter the illiberal tendencies of the former (pp. 20, 21).

What has come to be known in Bulgaria as the Winter Protest took place in February 2013 and started in reaction to an unexpected and unprecedented rise in electricity costs. Citizens in many Bulgarian cities protested, and even expressed demands for the nationalization of energy distribution companies, the privatizations of which were seen as the core of the problem. As a result, the government resigned, and after elections that May, a new coalition government took office. But just over a month into its mandate, the new government made the controversial decision to appoint a media mogul, known for his ties to the mafia, to head the State Agency for National Security. Once again, tens of thousands of Bulgarian citizens poured into the streets to protest, and this time the corrupt government and its links to the mafia were their focus – resulting in the Summer Protest.

What Stoyanova set out to study were the antagonistic discourses of these two protest waves. The crux of her argument is:

“[T]he Winter protest wave made a counter-hegemonic attempt to challenge the liberal-capitalist discourse of the transition’s organic intellectual elite ... by articulating a popular-national political identity. The latter’s organic expert-intellectuals then responded first with intense criticism and mockery of the Winter protest and a refusal to ‘join in’ the latter’s protest, despite the common ‘enemy without’ (corrupt power-holders); and later by attempting to re-assert the hegemony of their liberal-capitalist vision during the Summer protest wave, which they sought to dominate” (p. 99).

Stoyanova rightly detects two prevailing, mutually antagonistic discourses – both claiming they are about civil society, as they articulate different demands regarding the power relations between state, market, and citizens – but to my mind, she distinguishes them in perhaps a too ‘ideal-type’ manner. She contends that the Winter Protest attempted to de-monopolize liberal understandings of key notions, primarily of civil society, and in fact developed a counter-hegemonic discourse of what she termed *civil society of the people* (a Gramscian understating). Even though this discourse was fragmented, there allegedly “lurks a *radical conception of democracy* as the horizon of social critique, epitomized in the utopian desire to *democratize civil society*” (126, original emphasis). In contrast, Stoyanova found the Summer Protest discourse was much more homogenous and rounded, and that it defended a “civil society of the middle class” (132–172). This was framed as “the protest of the moral, productive (and creative), tax- and bills-paying, and even beautiful middle class, which has finally ‘risen’ to do away with the communist remainders and finish the ‘incomplete transition’ to European ‘normality’” (p. 132).

Some Concluding Thoughts

Though it is convincingly shown by Stoyanova how differing discursive strategies aimed at producing cultural-political distinctions, I believe the question is still open as to whether this testifies about a true inter-class clash and whether we can really talk about different classes representing the two Bulgarian protests in 2013 (the Winter Protest allegedly belonging to the subaltern class, and the Summer to the middle class). It seems to me that Stoyanova is perhaps conflating discursive

tropes with socio-economic strata. After all, what is analyzed in the book are *discourses*; which represent the only empirical material and are not accompanied, for example, by other socio-demographic data about protesters. So, it might as well be the case that these two waves of protests articulated two conflicting discourses – subaltern or middle-class interests – but this fact does not mean that the classes themselves were originators and distributors of these distinct discourses. While Stoyanova quite insightfully and rightfully problematizes the presumed coherence of claims and political stances of those fighting *against* the regime, she ironically assumes a simplified and reductionist approach to what she sees as factions within protesting blocs. Her argument thus tends to homogenize the groups fighting to dominate the discourses of dissent. What I want to underline is that distinct discourses do not necessarily overlap with distinct classes; in fact, this is precisely where the power of discourses resides – in their ability to assert autonomy from concrete class or group interests.

Given the title of the book as well as its Introduction, both of which promise to offer perspective on Eastern Europe, another weak point of Stoyanova's book is the betrayal of this promise, beyond the case study of Bulgaria. Despite announcing that she will take a comparative look at Hungary, Romania, and Macedonia, this is almost completely lacking. Instead, just several paragraphs in the closing chapter serve to legitimize the title of the book but offer no meaningful comparative insight. Consequently, brief descriptions of protests in those countries are not only superficial, but necessarily distorted as well, as they are presented in such a way as to support the prevalent analysis of the Bulgarian case (with an exclusive emphasis on discursive class- and culture-based derogation of 'subalterns' by 'middle class' proponents of the protests).

Still, Stoyanova is absolutely right to claim that "the critical studies of political struggle can benefit tremendously from a stronger East European (post-socialist) perspective, which offers empirical data on the workings of ideological struggle in the aftermath of large-scale social change" (p. 6) and I found it thought provoking to consider how this framework of analysis could be used in post-Yugoslav countries, as they also share the "predicament" of belonging to the post-socialist world. Bieber and Brentin also rightly note that the elaboration of the post-Yugoslav space, as a specific region where grievances and protests can easily have 'spill-over effect', is often omitted from analyses of emerging protests movements. Yet, even in their volume, a comparative or a systematic approach to this region is missing.

Some thoughts that spring to mind when imagining research on theories of ideological discourses in protest movements in the post-Yugoslav space include: First, it would probably be difficult to detect distinct protests articulating distinct discourses (liberal or more radical), as seems to be the case in Bulgaria. Rather, it would be more likely to find different discourses overlapping within the same events or protests. Somewhat connected to this is an assumption that the generational gap could play an important role, as it could be argued that, for instance, the discourse about liberal values is more likely to be found among older generation, whereas younger people are prone to more radical ideas. Perhaps most importantly, though, anti-communist discourse – which Stoyanova sees as central in liberal 'agenda setting' – is very different in post-Yugoslav states, due to the radically

different nature of their socialist periods and, consequently, their radically different cultures of socialist memories. It has already been noted, for instance, that phenomena like *Yugonostalgia* or *Titostalgia* (Petrović 2016, Velikonja 2010) are not homologues to nostalgia for socialism in other post-socialist countries. Finally, the fact that post-Yugoslav states are also post-partition and post-conflict societies adds another layer of meaning to notions of civil society (overlapping with the sphere of anti-war activism during the 1990s) and transition (not only from socialism to capitalism, but also from war and conflict to peace and stability).

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Politike osporavanja na evropskoj (postsocijalističkoj) (polu)periferiji: mapiranje pobune i društvenih protesta u Jugoistočnoj i Istočnoj Evropi

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad se kritički i polemički osvrće na dve nedavno objavljene knjige o politikama osporavanja na Balkanu i u Istočnoj Evropi: *Social Movements in the Balkans* (prir. F. Bieber i D. Brentint, Routledge 2018) i *Ideology and Social Protests in Eastern Europe* (V. Stoyanova, Routledge 2018). Fokusom na regione koji su donekle zapostavljeni u akademskim analizama nedavnih globalnih talasa protesta, ove dve knjige nameravaju da popune tu prazninu, te osvetle neke od kontekstualnih i regionalnih specifičnosti: položaj na ekonomskoj i geopolitičkoj (polu)periferiji, slabe i nekonsolidovane demokratske institucije, postsocijalistički i tranzicioni uslovi, društvene (etničke) podele itd. Kritički procenjujući obe studije i sagledavajući ih u njihovoj komplementarnosti ovaj rad se dotiče sledećih problema: karakterisike masovnih mobilizacija i protesta u Jugoistočnoj i Istočnoj Evropi; propitivanje vladajućih narativa o političkoj i ekonomskoj tranziciji i evropskim integracijama; ponovno vrednovanje socijalističkog nasleđa i postsocijalističkih političkih putanja; (ne)mogućnost artikulisanja političkih alternativa predstavničkoj demokratiji i tržišnoj ekonomiji; teret sukobljenih sećanja i stavova prema socijalističkoj prošlosti.

Ključne reči: društveni protesti, kriza predstavničke demokratije, radikalna demokratija, Balkan, Jugoistočna Evropa, Istočna Evropa.