

Kopeček, Michal (Hrsg.): *Past in the Making. Recent History Revisions and Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*. Budapest: Central European University Press 2008. ISBN: 978-963-9776-02-9; 264 S.

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„Far from being restricted to a small group of „deniers“, historical revisionism seems to feature strongly in the public historical discourses of many countries and regions nowadays“ (p. ix): states the editor of this publication Michal Kopeček. Especially the central and eastern Europe has a long-time experience with this concept and its changes. The various tendencies appearing (or enduring) after the 1989, are only giving new meanings to this notion.

The basic term of historical revisionism is defined by Aviezer Tucker in the opening article, distinguishing it from the „neutral“ notion of historical revision. While the „legitimate“ revision adheres to truth-conducive scientific cognitive values, revisionist historiography has only therapeutic values, inducing a psychological well-being of the intended audience (p. 5). According to Tucker, the key notion separating revision from revisionism is its acceptance.¹ The former is accepted by a „large uniquely heterogeneous and uncoerced community“ while the latter only by „particular clearly identifiable homogenous groups“. This simplicity and clarity of definition seems to be the main advantage of this „formula“ which is very well applicable on the identification of the revisionist attempts.

Vladimír Petrovič is analyzing the difference between revision and revisionism from the point of view of jurisdiction. On the example of lawsuits with „historians“ like Ernst Zündel and David Irving it is shown that there are powerful players outside the historiography who strongly shape the historical discourse. The importance of courts is in the binding definition of illegal revisionism. The article lacks deeper connection with the Central European situation. The influence of mentioned verdicts there is negligible similarly as the discourse-shaping activity of the courts.

The efforts of a group of German histori-

ans to revise the image of Holocaust as the „unique German crime“, by bringing it to the same level as the expelling of the Germans after the war is the topic of Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn. They describe an attempt to enforce a new form of commemorating and understanding of both cases. In other words, the new form of „therapeutic historiography“ is being created. It is however surprising that the „eastern“ attitude to this theory is omitted, because this form of revisionism is causing strong reaction in Poland and Czech Republic.

Two articles are offering interesting and well elaborated examples how the right-wing radicals are using old communist narratives for self-legitimation. Ingo Loose is „outlining the main states of rise and decline of anti-Fascist myth in the GDR [German Democratic Republic]“ (p. 59) Loose introduces a possible link between deconstruction of the myth and the anti-Semitic tendencies among the young generation on the territory of the former GDR. According to András Mink radical right can exploit also the unrevised communist narrative, marking all anti-communist elements as fascist. This creates a paradox enabling the right-wing radicals to accept the communist argumentation and position themselves as the main fighters against the bolshevism.

One of the key articles in this publication, „In search of National Memory“ by Michal Kopeček deals with the question, how the post-communist historiography was able to master the transition from communist discourse towards the one based on plurality. One has to agree with the author, that instead of new methodological concepts, a „nation-centered paradigm of history“ has been revived (p. 82). The second question is about the necessity of the so-called „National Memory“ institutes in post-communist countries. The study concludes with a pessimistic warning, that activity of such institutions is leading towards the normatively structured, sharp, majoritarian and moralizing concept of the so-called national memory (p. 92). However, the present state of affairs doesn't seem to support such pessimism. The mentioned insti-

¹ Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography*, Cambridge 2004.

tutes are resisting the government control and are opposing to the „simplifying“ state preferred image of the national narrative. Their work also doesn't threaten the plurality of the historical discourse.

In the foreground of Rafał Stobiecki's article is the notion politics of history. While in the communist past this politics had become the unilateral form of propaganda, in the post-communist period it becomes an uninterrupted dispute among various interest groups (p. 180). Although Stobiecki deals with the Polish case, outcomes of his analysis are relevant to the whole post-communist region of Central Europe. The question „Do we need a state model of history and if yes, what should it look like?“ remains unanswered by the author. Stobiecki only sums up the existing opinions without giving his own.

Focussed on the Hungarian case Ferenc Laczó contributes to the debates about the relation of morality and politics. He analyzes the continuity and discontinuity in their connection and how this influenced the Hungarian historical culture and politics. Laczó brings up an interesting, quite original idea, that the important reason for the dissolution of communist regime was the fact that it couldn't balance its apparently amoral practices with relevant results.

The remaining texts are case studies dealing with the historiographical revision of particular historical events. Katya A. M. Koucourek writes about the the general Rudolf Medek and his hard critiques of the politics of Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš. The text is analyzing the enduring problem of dealing with the rightist political movement in Czechoslovakia. Owen V. Johnson's main concern is the forming of Slovak national narrative in the second half of the 20th century and the role of journalists in this process. In the „spotlight“ there are the so-called „problematic periods“ of Slovak history, e. g. the wartime Slovak state. One has to stress the lack of originality of his contribution. The article is basically a summary of the known facts. The conclusion stating that the final image of the Slovak history is shaped by mass media is not new and it applies by far not only to the Slovak case.

The scope of the volume is far reaching.

Estonian efforts to revise the history of their nation in the period between two totalitarian ideologies – Nazism and communism – is the topic of Meike Wulf. As an object of revision she singles out the question which of these ideologies brought greater damages to Estonia. The author focuses on the places of memory, which are serving as battlefields and bases of various competing group identities and their specific perception of the past.

A peculiar sort of revisionism is to be found in the Ukraine. The article „Revisiting the Great Famine 1932–1933“ by Georgyi Kasjanov deals with the role which this historical event, tabooed in communist times, plays in the new „nationalized“ Ukrainian history. The article offers a typical example of revision done by politicians, who themselves represent the communist past of the country. The result is a cynical misuse of „national trauma“ for political aims, in the situation where the intellectual elites are too weak to act against this process.

The publication is based on the conviction that the problem of revisionism in post-communist countries is a research subject that deserves a proper analysis. Although written mainly as case studies, most of the articles are proving the striking resemblances in the historiographic developments in post-communist European countries. However, it is a pity that most of the case studies authors, haven't tried to make any generalized conclusions, even though in some cases they were right at hand. The next logical step therefore should be comparison of cases, which would even better demonstrate the similarities, or on the contrary, reveal the differences in the given region.

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