

errors, this book cannot be recommended for the layman. Nevertheless, a specialist in the early modern Baltic Sea region could make good use of it as a comprehensive reference work regarding the older secondary literature and source publications.

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### **A Litmus Test of Modernity: Examining Modern Sensibilities and the Public Domain in the Baltic States at the Turn of the Century**

LEONIDAS DONSKIS (ed.)

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Like other books in Peter Lang's series *Interdisciplinary Studies on Central and Eastern Europe*, *A Litmus Test of Modernity* features research papers touching upon the issues concerning the recent economic, social, linguistic and ideological changes in the post-communist region. The eleven chapters of the volume are divided into four sections, each covering a distinct set of issues: socioeconomics, identity, language, media and memory.

The section introducing socioeconomic issues contains contributions by Tatjana Muravska on Latvia and Kaarel Kilvits on Estonia. Both address the changes in the structure of the Baltic economies, while at the same time they draw attention to Baltic perspectives of social development. Muravska and Kilvits are positive about the recent economic transition in the two states from the perspective of market liberalization, changes in the opportunity structure and access to new economic opportunities. These narratives seem overenthusiastic, however, because the impact of the economic developments on the respective societies is kept vague, if not unclear. In the reviewer's opinion, the contributions avoid clear statements on the issue and are uncritical of both countries' economic policies, which during the 'fat years' just after EU accession failed to develop the basis for sustainable growth, development and social security for the subsequent 'lean years'.

The second section, 'Migration, Gender, Race, and Identity', contains two chapters on the most understudied issues in the current scholarship on the Baltic states: ethno-racial stereotyping and the impact of transmigration on national identities. Irina Novikova's '(In)Visibilities of Race, Ethnicity and Gender – Baltic Contexts' features a study of the ways such stereotypes are used in everyday discourse in the Baltic societies. Crucially, Novikova embeds racialized discourses within the context of the Baltic societies' recent transition from the Soviet rhetoric of gender, ethnic and class equalities, something that has never been done before to study the rise of xenophobia in the Baltics. The chapter explains societal intolerance towards social, economic, ethnic and linguistic 'others' through the public sphere's closure to any person unable to demonstrate ultimate conformity to majority group values, however defined. This is an alarming diagnosis of the Baltic societies. Within the context of the European public space, a public space that is open to debate and welcoming of dissent

(as an important means for social change), descriptions such as these are akin to condemnation, a litmus test of non-Europeanness – if not of the failure to embrace modernity writ large.

The chapter by Vytis Čiurbinkas studies the Lithuanian-American community, but fails to link it to contemporary Lithuanian society, and does not give clues on how to tie in the migrant experience in terms of identity negotiation to contemporary Lithuania. Čiurbinkas's chapter can be read as a supplement to Novikova's investigation of Baltic identities, that is, of striving hard for conservation and against hybridization. Čiurbinkas's ethnographic research suggests that Lithuanian-Americans foster their identities along the spectrum of diasporic, missionary and heritage narratives – all of which emphasize the past and present, but fail to engage with realities on the ground or envisage future perspectives.

Gabrielle Hogan-Brun's paper introduces the section 'Language, Media, and the Public Domain'. Unfortunately, the text is nothing more than an introduction to, and is by no means a substantive engagement in, the debate on 'Negotiating Diversity from East to West'. Hogan-Brun makes a plea for state-sponsored multilingualism, rightfully pointing to the nexus of emerging European language policy planning. The chapter, however, precipitates criticism of central eastern European (and Baltic?) policies of ethnic, cultural and ultimately linguistic diversity, something that Hogan-Brun sees as a distinctly 'Eastern' answer to growing cultural and linguistic contact in today's Europe.

The succeeding two chapters on Baltic journalism, one by Auksė Balčytienė and the other by Kristina Juraitė, Epp Lauk and Vita Zelče, tackle the issues of opinion diversification and mainstreaming in the Baltic media today, comparing it with the pre-Soviet experience. The two chapters could not be any more different in their message. The study of current journalism practices by Balčytienė shows that social and economic constraints open the door for journalism that is devoid of content, and is polemic more than it is investigative. At the same time, the overview of the pre-1940 journalism by Juraitė *et al.* argues that the lack of impartial reporting was already symptomatic of the pre-Soviet era. The chapter concludes that journalism neither engaged critically with political processes, nor assessed elite performance during the first Baltic independence and as such became an instrument of political leadership. Whether the authors view the (lack of) professionalism of Baltic journalists today as a result of the Soviet experience, or whether it is pre-Soviet conformism they hold responsible for the regimes' ambiguous legacy in today's media, remains unclear in these two contributions.

The final section of the book is on the Jewish heritage of Lithuania. Its three chapters are highly valuable contributions to the debate about this 'lost history'. A brief introduction by Robert van Voren is followed by Joe (Yossele) Narotzky's 'Memories of Podbrodz' and Dovid Katz's review of the state of affairs surrounding Lithuania's recognition of the Shoah. Van Voren's and Narotzky's contributions are fairly straightforward in bringing their message across, each in its own fashion. Narotzky's chapter is a recollection of the life in a Jewish settlement in Polish-Lithuanian Podbrodz, illustrating the heritage increasingly lost to the state and its citizens over the past century. The power of Narotzky's story is best understood in

light of van Voren's introductory remarks on popular distortions in the representation of recent history: 'Lithuania continues to have a serious problem in dealing with its past, not only its willing participation in the mass murder of its Jewish population but also, later, in collaborating with the Soviet regime . . . It puts itself above the law, creates heroes of its population when they were not and does nothing to avoid a repetition in the future' (p. 206).

Along much the same lines, Katz untangles the semantics and implications of (mis)understanding the Shoah across the board in the Lithuanian debates. Katz spells out the consequences Holocaust denial and obfuscations have for the future of democratic liberalism, modern societies and the European community. Fiercely criticizing Lithuania's current historical narrative of the war years, Katz anticipates that the Baltic discourse of victimhood does nothing more than camouflage the prominence of Baltic people in the Nazi atrocities against the Jews. At the same time, this victim rhetoric fosters in-group solidarity of those who suffered under Soviet occupation, at the cost of relativizing the common cultural loss of the European societies that the Holocaust entails.

Donskis's concluding essay, 'Nationalism and Patriotism Revisited', returns to the efforts of eastern Europeans to minimize the ethnic repercussions of past tragedies. Being a brilliant orator, Donskis comes very close to condemning – without actually doing so – the willful forgetfulness of eastern Europeans as the ultimate threat to the very cultural, ethnic and linguistic heritage they seek to protect. Donskis argues that public forgetfulness is tantamount to the acceptance that similar events have real potential to be repeated in the future. Failing to acknowledge the ultimate monstrosity of past mistakes leads the central and eastern European publics in general, and the Balts in particular, to view history as a set of inevitable structural constraints, reducing individuals to pawns in an evil game where they are denied agency in their own right. The pivotal test of modernity, according to Donskis, lies in individuals accepting responsibility for society's past errors, present conditions and liability for the future, and then engaging critically with these issues in the public domain.

Although the book contains highly valuable contributions, it does not escape the trap of many interdisciplinary edited volumes. It fails to develop a distinct methodology, present a coherent content and formulate an overarching conceptual framework. All these issues result in a loosely tied collection of texts. The contributions in themselves are interesting, but it is hard to see their nodal points, even within each section of the book. The impression is that a narrative has been lost somewhere between the start and the end of the volume.

More stringent editing would also have done the book a favor. Section one is riddled with typos, inconsistencies in argument and grand generalizations; the chapter by Novikova in section two lacks a bibliography; and the concluding chapter by Donskis contains word-for-word repetitions from his introduction. Nonetheless, readers seeking an introduction into debates that link the past with the present in the Baltic public space will find this volume of interest.