

BOOK REVIEW

Architectures of Violence: The Command Structures of Modern Mass Atrocities, from Yugoslavia to Syria, by Kate Ferguson, Oxford University Press, 2021, 240pp., £35.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9780190949624.

Turbulent and violent developments worldwide in recent years and the increasing involvement of the paramilitary factor, resulting in equally intense paramilitary violence, continue to attract both public and academic attention. Edited volumes of Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur T. Brenner, John Horne and Robert Gerwarth, as well as monographs of Jasmin Hristov and of Uğur Ümit Üngör, provide representative examples. Kate Ferguson's book represents a valuable contribution to the topic of identity-based violence, perpetrated by various state and non-state paramilitaries. To depict complexity of this phenomenon, she uses the term "architecture of violence." This monograph came about as a result of classical academic research but also of the author's active public engagement in promoting Responsibility to Protect (R2P), an international norm adopted at the 2005 UN World Summit as a response to mass atrocities committed in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In this particular case, historical data and methodology served not only to describe and interpret historical events and processes, but primarily to turn the public eye to phenomenon of modern paramilitarism and its involvement in crimes against the humanity, which in recent years begin to appear increasingly. As the author herself points out by citing French historian Marc Bloch, in this particular case, the key word is "understanding."

The author's primary focus is on the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia or so-called Wars of Yugoslav succession during the 1990s. In order to compare, confirm, or confront her arguments, she also uses several contemporary examples, such as genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya ethnicity in Myanmar, and the bloody civil wars in Sudan and Syria as reference points. The fact that the horrendous events in former Yugoslavia had their judicial epilogue, both through the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and respective national judiciaries, provides the author with enormous quantities of valuable sources for the reconstruction of architecture of violence. She focuses her attention on what she has conceptualized as Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian Muslim Models, avoiding the need to dedicate much needed attention to Kosovo and Macedonian cases. However, to my knowledge, she is among the first authors to truly comparatively examine phenomenon of paramilitarism in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. In order to provide a better "understanding" of the matter, she not only displays numerous paramilitary organizations, their command structures and interdependence with contemporary regimes, but she elucidates various societal aspects that had a significant role in the establishment and functioning of architecture of violence. These include the culture of violence, local networks of violence, organized crime and criminal networks, diaspora, appearance of new popular cultural models influenced by violence, crisis, nationalisms, and, interestingly, female complicity. The latter represents a prominent feature of various traditional and modern criminal organizations throughout the Western world – such as the Italian Camorra, 'Ndrangheta, Sacra Corona Unita, Cosa Nostra, as well as numerous groups of organized crime in the USA and Latin America – and can now be associated with modern paramilitarism as well.

There is no historical research without minor – or major – flaws. However, the question is if these flaws deliberately or accidentally distort conclusions or cloud the author's judgment. Kate

Ferguson's "understanding" of the matter – that is to say, why and how authorities in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia relied on the paramilitary factor or how they dealt with it – is well-grounded and reliable regardless of particular omissions and material inaccuracies. If not on the level of archival factography, most of these flaws (such as the chronology of evolution of certain paramilitary units or the affiliation of some notable figures to these paramilitary units) could have been avoided if only she made use of two independent and highly critical documentaries dedicated to the story of Serbian paramilitarism. The first one is the three-part documentary series *Jedinica (The Unit)* by Filip Švarm (produced by Vreme Film), which deals in details with the history of the so-called Red Berets or the Unit for Special Operations. The second is *Patriote (Patriots)* by Brankica Stanković (produced by B92), which deals with the Scorpions (Škorpioni), probably the most notorious paramilitary unit during the 1990s. Knowingly or unconsciously, Kate Ferguson continues to follow the Western interpretation of predominant Serbian responsibility for the breakup of the Yugoslav state. However, while there is abundant literature dedicated to the various aspects of the breakup of Yugoslavia, there is not nearly enough works dealing with inner Yugoslav dynamics or the role of the international factor in years and decades preceding the conflict. For example, the author does not even mention federal Prime Minister Ante Marković and his economic and monetary reforms by the end of the 1980s and in 1990–1991. These resulted in successful financial and economic recovery and the rise of the living standard, which was unprecedented in East Central Europe. This could have actually strengthened, or at least enriched, her arguments related to the rise of nationalism in Yugoslavia, whose strength was powerful enough to undo what reforms had achieved. Instead, she introduces a rather misleading narrative of strong grey economy, organized crime, criminal and smuggling networks that allegedly existed prior to the wars of the 1990s. Undoubtedly, there was a fundamental connection between criminal structures and paramilitary organizing in war-torn Yugoslavia, but criminals in socialist Yugoslavia had never consolidated themselves to the level of narco-cartels or mafia-style organized criminal groups. Phenomena such as racketeering, extortion, and human trafficking were almost unknown in socialist Yugoslavia. Drug trafficking was present, but it was sporadic with relatively small quantities involved. Smuggling jeans, some coffee beans, and detergents from the West during the economic crisis in the 1980s could not constitute ground for systematic grey economy. In the Serbian case at least, two factors should be taken into account: namely, 1) the war and economic sanctions combined with 2) Milošević's economic improvisations aimed at dodging the international sanctions as well as the paramilitarisation of Serbian police forces, which contributed to the development of above-mentioned phenomena.

The author clearly distances herself from "problematic but persuasive conflict analyses of Huntington, Kaldor, Kaplan and Ignatieff." She refuses to go along with "oversimplified explanations of the crisis that drew upon the historical narratives and cultural stereotypes." Instead, she goes with straightforward analyses, trying to provide an explanation for such a wide use of paramilitary structures during the violent 1990s. Although she avoids dedicating equal attention to the 1998–1999 conflicts in Kosovo and the subsequent NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, she dismisses claims that events in Kosovo were merely a continuation of the Bosnian scenario by providing solid arguments in terms of shifts in approaches and policies, both of Slobodan Milošević and the international community. Her description of the role of the Kosovo Liberation Army during Kosovo conflict and post-1999 building of the Kosovo state and emergence of the new political elites, although short, hits the point by presenting a picture of post-war society in which intertwined paramilitaries and criminals are dedicated to invest their "reputation," connections, and acquired wealth into the state-building project.

The author's passion and personal experience can be sensed throughout the book but never to the extent to cloud or obscure her judgment and, equally important, her final goal. With this

book available not only to academia but to contemporary decision- and policy-makers as well, we can all hope that the latter would be deprived of excuses for the lack of understanding and action.

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