

EVA-CLARITA PETTAI, VELLO PETTAI: *Transitional and Retrospective Justice in the Baltic States*. Cambridge University Press 2015. 375 pp. ISBN 9781107049499.

It is almost impossible to understand the social and political development of the Baltic states over the last quarter of century without taking into account their politics of truth and justice or the politics of memory in more general terms. The building of a new future for the three Baltic countries has been closely connected to coming to terms with the totalitarian past. This crucial topic has been attracting ever more scholarly attention both on national and international levels, but Eva-Clarita and Vello Pettai offer the first truly comprehensive and comparative analysis of the politics of truth and justice in the Baltic states since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Authored by two political scientists of Tartu University, the book illustrates the best social-scientific approach, offering first a very clear and holistic analytical model, and then going on to test its validity and coherence on rich empirical materials. In this respect, the book is of interest both to empirical readers looking for reliable information on transitional and retrospective justice in the Baltic states, as well as to the more theoretically minded comparative scholars in the field of memory politics and transitional justice.

In general terms, the book belongs to the burgeoning arena of memory studies, however, the authors emphasize that they focus more specifically on the politics of truth and justice, and consciously avoid engaging with the more general, but less clearly outlined field of memory politics. The authors define the politics of truth and justice as “the struggle waged by political and social actors to influence the role state plays (a) in setting prevailing truth discourses about a non-democratic past and (b) in passing measures to enact some interpretation of justice in relation to this past” (p. 4). Departing from this definition, they build a comparative matrix of truth and justice measures to serve as the conceptual backbone of the study. The authors define six different areas in which they see the politics of truth and justice played out in the post-communist Baltic states. These six areas are based on two main distinctions, firstly (on the horizontal level) between perpetrator and victim-targeted measures, and secondly (on the vertical level) between criminal-judicial, political-administrative and symbolic-representational measures. The scheme is further complicated by introducing a distinction between two basic temporal dimensions: transitional justice – dealing with the recent repression of the previous regime, and retrospective justice – dealing with the earlier wrongdoings of the regime that was toppled from power. (Also a third temporal dimension is distinguished – post-transitional justice –, but it doesn’t change the general matrix.) The outcome is a multidimensional analytical matrix consisting of twelve boxes, visualized as Figure 1.5 on page 32. The book is then constructed very much as though stepping from one box to another (reminding one, in this sense,

of Georges Perec's famous experimental novel *Life a User's Manual*, 1978), while always looking for some general patterns.

The comparative analysis of such patterns in the Baltic countries is particularly interesting, because very often the three states have been lumped together and regarded as a single entity following an almost identical course of development. The authors show convincingly that regardless of similar past experience, the three countries have confronted their past in rather different ways. The authors pay particular attention to the amount of state involvement in the politics of truth and justice, arguing compellingly that whereas Lithuanian politics has been clearly state-centered ("hands-on state"), Estonia has exhibited a much less "etatist" approach ("hands-off state"), while Latvia falls somewhere in between, divided between a tendency toward strong institutionalization of truth and justice policies and a very limited commitment in terms of investing political and economic capital in sustaining these structures and policies ("ambivalent state") (pp. 312-3). Yet, side by side with important differences, the authors also highlight some common patterns like, for instance, the fact that the Baltic states have pursued relatively little transitional justice and much greater amounts of retrospective justice, i.e. all the three countries have concentrated mostly on righting the wrongs committed during the early years of Soviet rule (pp. 66, 169, *passim*).

The main strength of the book (an empirical analysis based on a very clear analytical matrix) can be considered also its main weakness: the rigid model of a twelve-box matrix is not supportive of paying enough attention to some exceptional, borderline or ambiguous cases, in other words, of thinking outside the box. This is particularly relevant when we take into account the fact that the Baltic states experienced two kinds of occupations, the Soviet and the Nazi ones, which means, for instance, that the perpetrators of one occupation could become victims, under the other, and vice versa. The authors briefly address this question (p. 15), but prefer to follow such delineations between victims and perpetrators as have been proposed by the current political power. It is also not absolutely clear how the temporal boundaries between transitional and retrospective justice should be drawn, and one might also wonder whether all the three Baltic states have followed the same temporal pattern in this respect.

But these critical remarks reflect mostly disciplinary differences between humanities and social sciences: coming from history, this reviewer is inclined to pay more attention to exceptions and details, while in social sciences, to which the two authors belong, it is more common to look for patterns and to regard exceptions as something that confirms the rule. However, the authors draw an important conclusion at the very end of the book, writing to the point: "In the end it may be that transitional and retrospective justice cannot easily be generalized across any set of countries, since each case is invariably embedded in a singular context of past repression. Even when three countries like the Baltic states share so much

in terms of a common Soviet past, we have seen in this book that it is in no way guaranteed that they will confront this past analogously” (p. 338).

To sum up, there is no doubt that *Transitional and Retrospective Justice in the Baltic States* is one of the most important contributions to the historical, social and political study of the Baltic states published in recent years. It is a genuinely comparative analysis, very well balanced, that demonstrates most persuasively the important similarities and differences in the politics of truth and justice in the three Baltic countries. There are not many studies dedicated to the Baltic states that participate in the cutting edge theoretical debate and, at the same time offer some truly novel information about the countries in this region. Published by a leading international publisher, Cambridge University Press, the book will definitely excite new interest in the experience of the Baltic states and integrate the Baltic experience of memory politics into an international framework.

MAREK TAMM

PAUL JORDAN: *The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity and the Eurovision Song Contests in Estonia* (Politics and Society in the Baltic Sea Region, 2). University of Tartu Press 2014. 148 pp. ISBN 9789949325580.

Although the Eurovision Song Contests (ESC) are massive show spectacles, in addition to pure entertainment, these spectacles also have substantial political significance. The voting interestingly reflects European geopolitical groupings: Nordics give their vote to fellow Nordics, Balkans favour other Balkan countries and countries with good political relations with Russia never forget to vote for Russian performers. When these traditional patterns are broken as when Cyprus gave eight points to a Turkish song in 2003, the symbolic meaning of this gesture was recognized and even praised. For many former Eastern European countries, participation in the ESC represented a step towards European normality, whereas for representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, it was a desperate cry during the civil war that Bosnians are normal and peaceful people. Furthermore, success at ESC has obviously been a source of national pride particularly among smaller states whereas, on the other hand, organizing the contest after victory has been seen by (semi-)authoritarian powers such as Russia and Azerbaijan as a chance to create a positive image of their countries. The songs, as a rule, don't carry political messages even if some of them