in the book, such an unreflective argument is unlikely to appeal to social scientists. Perhaps Bećirević has tried to do too much in what is essentially a short book. This is a pity, as the general argument that locates the start of genocide in 1992 rather than 1995 is persuasive and the data she collected on genocide in Eastern Bosnia are very valuable.

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Narrating victimhood. Gender, religion and the making of place in post-war Croatia, by Michaela Schäuble, New York, Berghahn Books, 2014, 374 pp., US$120 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-78238-260-7

The mechanism of narrating victimhood in the poor Dalmatian hinterland – repeatedly revealed by the saying "small nation, great injustice" – is scrutinized in the first chapters of the book by Michaela Schäuble. She does not explain in detail why she has chosen the region around Sinj, the "marginal within the marginal," at the "margins of the nation-state as well of those of Europe" for her field research. But the electrifying analysis of several mass events that take place in Sinj and its surroundings every year from July to September soon makes the choice clear: the famous Sinjska Alka, a local historic "knight's tournament that dates back to the year 1715 when local defense forces successfully defended the ancient fortress of Sinj against the Ottoman troops;" a commemoration of the "alleged Marian apparition in 1715 that has turned the Marian shrine in Sinj into a national pilgrimage site;" and the "commemoration of 'victims of communist atrocities' at a natural pit [*jama*] in the limestone karst mountains that surround Sinj." Politics of (self-)victimization aims at "highlighting recurrent suffering in order to divert suspicion from one's own people's wrongs and, in the case of commemoration ceremonies at massacre sites, at underlining the physical and hence tangible reminders of crimes endured at the hands of others" (139).

In the broader context of post-war Croatia, Schäuble shows in a remarkable way what key role the interpretation of the "Homeland War" of the 1990s plays in the identity-building processes around those mass events. For many years the most prominent issue during all these ongoing was support for two "heroic" generals both originating from and now living in Dalamtia: Ante Gotovina, who commanded "Operation Storm," the reconquest of the Serbian-held parts of Croatia, in 1995 and was acquitted by the appeals chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2012, and Mirko Norac, the first Croatian Army General to be found guilty of

war crimes by a Croatian court for taking part in the Gospić massacre on Serbs and was from 2001 to 2005 honorary Duke of the Alka games. A second strong link between these events is the leading role of the Franciscan Order in the region. Its members "have traditionally cherished very close ties with the local population;" are "very attached to their native soil" (81); "constituted a strong anti-communist force" preserving the memory of the victims of Communism, the so-called Croatian Holocaust (151); and excelled as "advocates of a Catholic Croatian homeland" (82). "The local Franciscans administer and foster a view of regional as well as national history that is constructed in direct opposition to the communist period and which consequently overlooks atrocities committed on the Croatian side" (148).

Especially informative is the diachronic analysis of the changing tropes at the Sinjska Alka from a nationalistic and to some degree fascistic manifestation to a more depoliticized event. Stjepan Mesić, Croatian president from 2000 to 2010, who was first called a "traitor" and a "Gypsy" for testifying at the ICTY, was later allowed to deliver a in a way revolutionary, anti-fascist, pro-European speech at the Alka in which he addressed "all Croatian citizens" and not only Croats. While the Alka has been a focal point for radical nationalists for over a decade, Mesić's anti-nationalist speech was accepted in 2007 due to "not reducing the Alka to a mere folkloristic spectacle but speaking of it as an event with the potential to represent the country's international image." He also supported the tournament's UNESCO application by calling the Alka part of European and world cultural heritage. A few years later, when Schäuble visited the Alka again in 2012 (already after the center-left *Kukuriku*-coalition had won the election), its organizers staged a surprisingly "undramatic event." Although it was by coincidence held on 5 August, the day of the seventeenth anniversary of "Operation Storm," no conspiracy theories or support for the convicted war criminal Norac could be heard any more.

The introduction of the gender aspect is less convincing. Schäuble discusses well-known interconnections between gender, militarism, and nationalism when, for example, arguing that "the dominant role of battle and military discourses in everyday post-war reality constructs masculinity and femininity as polar opposites and excites a long-term imbalance of gender relations" (253), while at the same time she tends to depict women as victims of patriarchy, as "functionalised for nationalist propaganda" (187) or "exploited as heroic mothers." When it comes to gender in the local context of her field study, Schäuble's analysis is not always convincing; for example, when she argues in connection with the fact that two out of three cafés in Sinj, *Alcatraz* and *Westpoint*, are named after a prison island and a military academy:

> In both military academies and in prisons, (primarily) male bodies are disciplined and inmates' or cadets' behaviour is rigorously controlled and sanctioned. … Such institutions also idealise 'masculine qualities' such as toughness, discipline and fearlessness, and proclaim belligerent men as the norm. The unconcealed attraction such institutions hold for young men is in my view a sign that in a society in which social mobility is radically restricted, the longing for directives and conventions prevails. (172f)

This sweeping and speculative interpretation stands vis-à-vis the fact that an important circumstance is mentioned only along the way once in the book (234): violence towards women and the danger the use of weapons in private conflicts pose – when compared with similar countries – a great problem in the militarized macho-society of post-war Croatia. However, the role of war veterans – one of the main protagonist groups in her book – is basically not discussed in this context.

Schäuble spent 15 months of field research in and around Sinj being the only foreigner in the region. In her book she twice mentions phenomena she was not so much aware of

before her stay. She deals with both topics in quite a different way than in the rest of her analysis which is based on her field notes, the tropes she found in speeches, and the reactions of her interlocutors. But when it comes to her explanation of, first, the predominance of anti-European sentiments and, second, her passion for the bad treatment of Croatian veterans by the government, the anthropological research seems far less distanced and/or influenced by her own projections. Schäuble writes that she was "recurrently startled by the strong anti-European sentiment that I encountered, although this issue has not been an initial research topic of mine" (281). As an example, general Norac has allegedly been sold to the "Rothschild EU … for thirty pieces of silver" (216). But contrary to the precise diachronic analysis of the changing narratives at the Alka, Schäuble here interprets the anti-European sentiments as a somehow understandable reaction to the EU accession process without taking into account that these sentiments already peaked during the era of the authoritarian President Franjo Tuđman (1990–1999) and cannot be rationalized as "*growing* Eurosceptic, anti-Europeanist and anti-globalist sentiments" (312). Her diagnose of the "*current return* to local, environmental, geographic, economic, ecological, religious and social niches in Dalmatia" (265) as a *result* of EU regulations does not appear well-grounded, but is unconvincingly interpreted as "*re*orientation … as part of a continual self-positioning towards Europe [my accentuations, L.R.]." This interpretation tells us more about Schäuble's ideas concerning globalization and the deficits of the EU:

> In my opinion, the propagation of economic autonomy through subsistence farming and small-scale agriculture is one of the most vital local reserves currently being mobilised against international companies and against the franchise and sale of property and land rights to foreigners in Croatia. (296)

She writes that a "permanent playful negotiation of marginality and citizenship generates an open space" (265) and at the same time warns – already in the introduction – of the dangers of romanticizing:

> I am also aware of the danger of over-rationalizing or celebrating local strategies of empowerment, insubordination and resistance to a global modernity that tend to subsist in and around marginal places, and I am thus careful not to overrate the political scope of marginality in destabilizing central authority. (3)

Only when she compares the anti-European, anti-Western "regional movement in Dalmatia" to the anti-nationalist one in Istria, she finds her way back to the topic of "narrating victimhood" when she writes that it "explicitly excludes ethnic minorities and focuses on threats to local identity from outside powers – even more than the nationalist politics of the HDZ [the Croatian Democratic Union]" (287).

The other topic Schäuble had not encountered until her field stay is closely connected to her host family, which has four sons who "had voluntarily joined the army during the Homeland War at a very young age and were still suffering from the grisly after-effects" (13). Their self-image of the "branitelji" (defenders), how the veterans are still referred to today, has obviously left deep marks on Schäuble, as she repeats around a dozen times that:

> although the case of the *branitelji* is widely recognized in the media, and although various (mostly nationalistic) political parties use their fate for party politics and propaganda, very little is actually done for ex-combatants in terms of social and professional reintegration, financial support or health care. (201)

First Schäuble says that the veterans "feel" disregarded and that they are "eligible for numerous benefits and material privileges, and their pensions are many times more than

those of civilians" (201), but then her tone again changes – this time from analytic to one of a policy advisor for the Croatian government – when she demands:

> it should be a priority of the Croatian Ministry of the Families, Veteran's Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity to set the record straight and restore the credibility of Homeland War veterans. … I do not argue against a cut in veterans' pensions and privileges … If anything, I am convinced that a further neglect of or public distrust in *branitelji* would contribute to their disillusionment and their political radicalisation. (245)

Personal/political engagement as a result of a long field study could be a positive effect and I am not making a case for some kind of unreachable neutrality. But when it comes to one of the sons of her host family whom Schäuble in her book refers to as Marko, she ends up defending on 14 pages why his carnival costume of an "Arab suicide bomber" attacking the World Trade Center with two rockets he was carrying on his back has a lot to do with Marko's veteran trauma. She tries to explain why his "playful" act, in his own words a "disapproval of foreign policies of the United States and the European Union, as well as an ironic commentary on global terrorism," must be seen "against the backdrop of Marko's own experience of violence during the Homeland War" (229). The "dramatic performance" (230) should be understood as an "imagined suicide" typical for "underdogs or 'losers of history'" (231) due to "helplessness and impotence in the face of current political and socio-economic developments" (230). When Schäuble refers to the high suicide quote among Croatian veterans – as if suicide bombings had something to do with suicide out of depression – she seems unable to place Marko's action in the context of severe anti-American and anti-Semitic sentiments – which she quotes quite often throughout the book, but never scrutinizes.

The short four-page conclusion finally hardly touches upon the research questions from the introduction or the results from the chapters dealing with how victimhood is narrated in Sinj, Dalmatia, and Croatia, and how the local, regional, national, and transnational levels are interconnected. Instead, the book ends with reference to Etienne Balibar who argues that "Europe should recognise and embrace" the "Balkan situation" "as an image and effect of its own history." Schäuble ends the study "with a plea for a revised self-orientation instead of Croatian self-orientalisation and self-victimisation, and rather optimistically argue[s] that the region ought to be re-imagined as a site of political engagement and critique" (314). Thus, the book can be understood as the instructive result of a long, intensive field study in which Schäuble not only scrutinized the narration of victimhood, but also partially narrated victimhood herself.

Finally, one should mention that the translation and transliteration from Croatian could have used some proofreading, for example, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica) is called "Christian Democratic Community Party" (34); the Ustaša turns into "Usatša" (106); carons are missing in "Kriz," "cista;" and our colleague, the late Natalija Bašić, is referred to as Basić throughout the book.

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