

The Aftermath of War: Experiences and Social Attitudes in the Western Balkans. Eds. Kristen Ringdal and Albert Simkus. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012. 318 pp. Appendix. Index. Figures. Tables. Hard Bound: Paper.

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The Aftermath of War details social conditions in the Western Balkans—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia—in the years since the Yugoslav Wars. It makes analyses of the 2003-2004 South-East European Social Survey Project (SEESSP) data available in a single volume for the first time. Editors and major contributors Kristen Ringdal and Albert Simkus, sociologists at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), invited a team of sociologists, political scientists and a health psychologist from Norway, Serbia, Croatia, and the U.S. to examine SEESSP data from their respective positions of methodological or area expertise. If their fifteen-chapter collaboration falls short of a cohesive whole, it may nonetheless be of interest to scholars of the Western Balkans and social scientists engaged in wider cross-national comparisons.

The SEESSP was funded by the Government of Norway and implemented by Norwegian University of Science and Technology researchers and field workers from the region. It was conducted between November 2003 and March 2004 (2012:5). The SEESSP purposely over-sampled ethnic minority groups relative to national majority populations, allowing ethnic group comparisons within and between countries (2012:292-294). The SEESSP contained items from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) and other international surveys, allowing for inter-regional comparison. War experience items were fielded in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo—where war experiences are assumed to have been pervasive—and items on the 2001 Macedonian conflict were fielded in Macedonia only.

In organization, the book moves from general and historical introduction (Chapters 1 and 2) to sections analyzing war trauma (Chapters 3-4), ethnicity and ethnic intolerance (Chapters 7-10), and group attitudes towards gender equality, LGBTQ rights, economic and social change (Chapters 11-14). It ends with an editors' summary and conclusions (Chapter 15). Sabrina Ramet, a well-known expert on the former Yugoslavia based at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, offers much-needed regional context in her Chapter 2, "Solving the Mystery of Ethnic History." Most proceeding chapters present comparative views across some or all of the former Yugoslavia. Four chapters focus on individual countries: war experiences in Croatia, the Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia, economic change in Serbia, and expectations for the future in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A major question posed by the book's editors regards the "extent of war experiences and their long term effects" (2012:1) on the people of the Western Balkans. In Chapter 3, Gerd Inger Ringdal and K. Ringdal examine war experience and "war-related distress" in Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo, finding the former to be a greater predictor of the latter than respondents' gender, education, age, or geographic region. In Chapter 4, Ringdal, Ringdal, and Zan Strabac compare a 1995 survey of war distress in Croatia with SEESSP responses. Individual war experience (as opposed to community-level war exposure or demographic variables) is again the strongest predictor of distress. In both chapters, continuing distress levels are much higher than predicted by existing literature (2012:43-44, 62) and beg further study.

Several chapters explore post-war ethnic relations and attitudes. In Chapter 7, Simkus examines "six basic dimensions" of social values—ethnic tolerance, nationalism, authoritarianism, and attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and income inequality (2012:105)—of ethnic majority and minority groups in each Western Balkan country. A combination of socio-demographic variables and in-country majority or minority status best predicted social values. Tanja Ellingsen, K. Ringdal, Simkus and Strabac's Chapter 8, "Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Intolerance in the Western Balkans," indicates that ethnic minority status increases tendencies toward "ethnic intolerance" (2012:131) and group insularity.

In Chapter 9, Strabac complicates the spectrum of tolerance-intolerance presented in Chapters 7-8 by analyzing responses to a "Social Distance" questionnaire administered in Croatia (2012:158). Surprisingly, Croats exhibit significantly more tolerance toward Serbs (and Montenegrins) than toward Bosnian Muslims, Albanians, and Roma, despite Croatia's recent war with Serbia. In K. Ringdal, Simkus, and Ola Listaug's Chapter 10, "Disaggregating Public Opinion on the Ethnic Conflict in Macedonia," ethnic Slavs living in close proximity to ethnic Albanians, and therefore active conflict, are found to express *more* sympathy with the Albanian cause than Slavs living in homogenous, unaffected regions. These conclusions suggest that war experiences may be weaker predictors of ethnic intolerance than longer-duration historical and structural factors.

Authors of the book's remaining chapters explore a third major line of inquiry: "general values and attitudes" (2012:1) in the Western Balkans. Values, health, and well-being in the region are well explained by standard sociological models incorporating income and educational achievement rather than war and trauma. Fittingly, Albania is on par with its post-war neighbors in economic and human underdevelopment (2012: Chapters 5-6). In examinations of gender inequality and homophobia (Chapters 11-12), factors such as religiosity contribute to social attitudes, while links between war experiences and social attitudes go mostly unexplored.

One weakness of the book is the absence of serious, individual treatment of Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro, which reinforces their peripheral status. There is also an apparent lack of contributors from these three countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia—surprising considering the SEESSP team's initial diligence in sampling majority and minority populations from every country. A wider inclusion of voices might have complicated the sometimes restricted notions of cultural difference reflected in the original survey and the book. For

instance, a signal weakness of the SEESSP question set on social values (2012:105) is the conflation of willingness to marry a person of another ethnic group with “tolerance.” Marriage between Slav (whether Croat, Serb, Montenegrin or Muslim) and Albanian might, after all, be precluded by language alone, as even a non-Albanian speaking bride would be expected to live in her husband’s Albanian-speaking extended household.

If the “snapshot” design of the SEESSP survey has led certain authors—many of whom are not regional experts—to take decontextualized, ahistorical approaches to a region where the stakes of nuanced scholarship are high, others have shown that SEESSP data *can* challenge assumptions about the post-war Balkans. Ultimately, the book may be a useful starting point for more richly contextualized future studies.