

activities that cannot be justifiable, even under the motivation of the global war on terror or the interests of US national security.

The authors base their research on data that has been made public because of legal proceedings, government investigations, and leaked information. In doing so, they have synthesized and connected the dots of a huge volume of sources, with the aim of producing a largely empirical work that can serve as a basis for further research on the region. As the authors themselves note, there are currently insufficient instruments for validating the accuracy of data provided in courtrooms or even in politically motivated leaks. This may prove to be a challenge for parsimonious research, yet the data merely point to another dimension that confirms the characterization of the Central Asian states as patrimonial and autocratic regimes, with leaders interested above all else in their own survival.

Nevertheless, *Dictators without Borders* is mandatory reading for those wishing to understand the power dynamics in the region, without falling into the trap of erroneously viewing Central Asia as a region that is closed off from the rest of the world. *Dictators without Borders* represents a laudable attempt to present a clearer and more accurate image based on the most recent data, as a basis for future in-depth analysis regarding the role and place of Central Asian states in the world order.

ANA-MARIA ANGHELESCU

National University of Political Science and Public Administration
(SNSPA) Bucharest

Irene Kacandes and Yuliya Komska (eds.), *Eastern Europe Unmapped: Beyond Borders and Peripheries*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018. 300 pp.

Intrigued by the promise of an “unmapping” of Eastern Europe, I was excited to review this edited collection. The book begins with a substantial introduction by *Yuliya Komska*, discussing Eastern Europe under the notion of being “discontiguous.” The introduction and the critique of “mapping” opens with an anecdote about the

second Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, or, to give its official title, the “German–Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Development,” signed on 28 September 1939 and leading to what the author calls a “cartographic mandate,” with wide-ranging geopolitical consequences. Komska critically assesses the histories of land-locked nationalism and border issues, often associated with cores, peripheries, and colonies in Eastern Europe. The book proposes to “unmap” Eastern Europe by bracketing these hegemonic notions related to the region and, consequently, decolonizing our thinking on the region.

The other contributions are divided into five parts. Part I, “Replaced Religion,” comprises two contributions: on Jewish cultural and ethnic plasticity (*Miriam Udel*); and on periodization and Muslim subjectivities in the Balkans (*Piro Rexhepi*). Part II, “Dislodged Dissent,” provides a chapter on Belarusian intellectuals (*Tatsiana Astrouskaya*); and a critical rereading of the Polish émigré journal *Kultura* (Jessie Labov). Labov sees the journal as “suspended between the regional (Eastern Europe) and the global (Polish-language diaspora),” and working “at a scale that we do not yet know exactly how to name” (p. 104). Part III, “Fictional Cartographies and Temporalities,” analyzes Central European literature (*Daniel Pratt*) and the transnational matrix of post-communist spaces (Ioana Luca), arguing for a comparative approach as an important tool to be added to traditional geographic tools such as maps and statistics. Luca’s quest is to see the Eastern Europe through relationships; this chapter combines literary analysis with Doreen Massey’s ideas on relational space and how certain stories of spaces become dominant. Part IV, “Appropriated Afterlives,” analyzes instances of the appropriation of the past through the cases of the New Synagogue in Poznań and Olsztyn’s Bet Tahara (*Sarah M. Schlachetzki*) and Bruno Schulz’s Murals, *OyNEG Shabes* (*Adam Zachary Newton*). Part V, “Elective Affinities,” presents chapters on Balkan travel (*Ann Cvetkovich*) and Polish childhood (*Irene Kacandes*). These two chapters use imaginative and reflective approaches, demonstrating relationships to places through subjectivities and biographies. Finally, the book concludes with the chapter “Afterword/Afterward: Eastern Europe, Unmapped and Reborn,” by *Vitaly Chernetsky*.

Clearly, the collection has an emancipatory aim of shedding light on overlooked histories, blind spots on the scientifically discursive and geopolitical “map” of social and cultural theory. I appreciate the effort to argue against framings whereby post-socialist Eastern Europe is superficially and unjustifiably portrayed as a consumer and a non-producer of theoretical and methodological innovations. I welcome the experimental, provocative, and creative style of writing that is on display here. However, the aftertaste of the book is eclectic and uneven. Perhaps the most important contribution of this book can be summarized in Ann Cvetkovich’s words in the chapter “The Balkan Notebooks”: “I try to see something else, to move between visible and invisible as icons and ruins both require, while also acknowledging my own ignorance and inability to see” (p. 245). Hegemonic notions of Eastern Europe are so strong and difficult to overcome. The collection tries to move beyond seeing the region as one of “misery,” as a border region, or a region defined by all kinds of “posts-” (post-social, post-colonial, post-occupied, post-oppressed). The book sets out to understand the region’s diverse histories and cultures from various viewpoints, spatially and temporally. This book asks questions, proposes critiques, acknowledges our own inability to breakthrough existing views, but does not really come up with coherent propositions. Some chapters engage with relational and contextual critique; others pursue very particular insights. In sum, the collection joins a growing dissatisfaction on how we see, interpret, and portray Eastern Europe, but suggests that the main work—coming up with new theories and understanding—is still to be done. Finally and positively, this collection is refreshingly rich in references to lesser known recent texts on Eastern Europe, many of which have been neglected in the Anglophone literature.

AIJA LULLE
Loughborough University