
Contested Heritage and Identities in Post-socialist Bulgaria.

Edited by Ana Luleva, Ivanka Petrova, Slavia Barlieva. Gutenberg Publishing House. Sofia, 2015. 390 p.

The collection book „Contested Heritage and Identities in Post-socialist Bulgaria”, edited by Ana Luleva, Ivanka Petrova, Slavia Barlieva, is a result of the project „Stimulating the research capacity development in the field of cultural memory, cultural heritage and identities” of the Institute of ethnology and folklore studies with Ethnographic museum at BAS within the framework of the Human Resource Development Operational Programme, co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union. The book includes the works of 18 authors writing on problems related to the cultural heritage in post-socialist Bulgaria, with emphasis on the relationship “heritage-identity”.

In the introduction (pp. 7–13) Ana Luleva underlines the significance of the discourse on heritage which in Bulgaria, as well as worldwide, is an arena of interactions and confrontation of interests and ideas of different social actors and groups. The shared opinion is that heritage is socially constructed; it bears the marks of the specific historical context and is used as a resource in the corresponding “present”. A. Luleva points to the close connection between heritage studies and the concepts of national, collective and cultural memory, including tradition and identity. The constructivist paradigm in heritage studies, outlined in the introduction, is the general framework within which the authors in the book analyze cultural phenomena, varying in form and manifestation.

The collection book presents the results of different case studies from Bulgaria as well as from Bulgarian diaspora. The authors of the articles have different academic backgrounds – anthropology, ethnomusicology, museology, migration studies and medieval studies. The research focus is on the period of post-socialism, which as A. Luleva argues, is characterized by a new economic, political and discursive framework for constructing and functioning of heritages, as well as by a new pluralized memory culture.

Issues of cultural memory are subjects of the research carried out by many authors in the collection. In the study „Fate, politics and forgeries – the case of the relics of SS Cyril and Methodius” (pp. 15–31) Slavia Barlieva and Alexander

Naumow analyze the sources about the fate of the relics of the brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius over the centuries. The authors outline the social and political reasons for their multiple “rediscoveries” and uses in different countries. In „Memory and monumental representation of the Great war: the Balkan projections” (pp. 32–59) Nikolay Vukov presents the memorialization of World War I on the Balkans in the context of the European trends in memorialization, as he accentuates general characteristics along with local and national specifics in the transformation of commemorated objects into a “heritage”. Ana Luleva’s study on „Commemorating the communist labour camps. Is a new memory culture possible?” (pp. 60–89) compels the readers’ attention. She considers the clash between confronting interpretations of the past, about the communist labour camps in particular – a clash obstructing projects for Europeanization of local and national memory. In the text “Conceptualizing local history: the cases of two local historians of Rakovski county, Plovdiv region” (pp. 214–234) Galina Lozanova analyzes the conceptualizations of local history provided by two amateur historians from the town of Rakovski. The divergent life experiences of the authors validate different memories of the past and local communities.

Issues of cultural heritage form the second thematic circle of the book. In „Ideology, Festivity and Heritage. The Carnival in Rousse” (pp. 126–140) Nikolay Nenov presents the development of the carnival in Rousse in the context of the changes in the social and political life and defines its present existence as some sort of manifestation of the civil society. Lozanka Psycheva and Angela Rodel analyze the changes in the folk singing that occurred in the XX century under the influence of the West in the text „Western models, Bulgarian music: Western influences on Bulgarian folk singing” (pp. 141–157). The authors draw attention to the role of the music industry, media, new organizational forms, and institutional music education. In the article „The National ethnographic museum – mission, exhibition and audience” (pp. 158–191) Igliska Mishkova presents the history of the National ethnographic museum for the period of its independent functioning (1906–1949). She focuses on its structure, expositions, and public relations. Sonja Sredkova’s chapter “Koprivštitsa as a research subject in the Bulgarian ethnography (1920s – 1970s)” (pp. 192–213) considers different elements of the culture, livelihood, and architecture of Koprivštitsa, which became subjects of ethnographic research from the 1920s to the 1970s of the XX century in the museum-town.

The uses of cultural heritage are given due attention in the collection. In „Shared (out) heritage in the borderlands: cross-border cooperation, cultural tourism and local development” (pp. 235–258) Ivaylo Markov explores the process of (re)constructing cultural heritage in the context of the Bulgarian-Serbian cross-border cooperation and the realization of projects related to cultural tourism by

the Municipality of Trăn. In the text „Cultural and natural heritage and family business. The use of local resources in the tourist context” (pp. 259–280) Ivanka Petrova presents uses of cultural and natural heritage in developing family business in the case of one company from Belogradčik. Zlatina Bogdanova’s article “A glimpse towards the cultural heritage of Assenovgrad in the perspective of cultural tourism” (pp. 281–299) reviews the issue of cultural heritage in Assenovgrad, included in the strategies for developing cultural tourism by the local authorities and NGOs.

Two studies are dedicated to cultural processes among the Bulgarian diaspora. Zhenja Pimpireva presents the dynamics of the ethno-cultural identity of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in the post-socialist period in „The dynamics of the ethno-cultural identity of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in the post-socialist period” (pp. 359–383). Dilyana Ivanova’s study on “Socialist legacy and transformations of cultural heritage in the contemporary forms of community gatherings of the Bulgarian diaspora in the USA” (pp. 331–358) is focused on the present transformations in the festive culture of the Bulgarian diaspora in Chicago in comparison with the socialist culture of celebrations.

Elements of everyday culture form the subsequent thematic circle of articles in the collection. In the research „Social critique, resistance, and trauma: complaints of the citizens from the period of early socialism in Bulgaria” (pp. 90–125) Milena Benovska-Sabkova explores social critique in the case of citizens’ complaints from the period of early socialism (1949–1959). She defines them as a manifestation of political culture and a strategy of resistance of the common people. In her text “Forms of exchange between the countryside and urban areas – “food sovereignty” ideas and practices in Sofia city” (pp. 300–314) Atanaska Stancheva considers forms of exchange between the countryside and urban centers, which originated from the ideology of healthy eating. Nacho Dimitrov studies the case of Karakachans in Bulgaria in “The relationship “life–world – daily life” as an instrument for interpretation of the transnational identity (The case of Karakachans in Bulgaria)” (pp. 315–330). The author analyzes the degree of inclusion among the labour migrants, Karakachans, in the host Greek society and demonstrates its limitations in many of the cases.

Many of the presented articles are provided with illustrations, giving a better idea of the considered various forms of cultural heritage (sacred objects, monuments and memorial practices, expositions, celebrations). The excellent quality of the publication – the work of publishing house Gutenberg is noteworthy. The publication of the book in English will contribute to better acquaint the foreign academic audiences with the research of Bulgarian authors.

The outlined thematic range of the collection „Contested Heritage and Identities in Post-socialist Bulgaria”, edited by Ana Luleva, Ivanka Petrova, Slavia

Barlieva, gives an idea of a thematically rich volume with analyses on issues of cultural memory and heritage within a broad time horizon, as the emphasis is on the period of post-socialism.

The presented studies show the dynamic nature of cultural memory and heritage, as well as their importance in the construction of living worlds and identities. They demonstrate active policies and strategies in the process of (re) constructing and “assimilation” of cultural heritage, which is used as a major resource for current and future projects.

Evgenia Troeva