

REVIEWS

Astapova, A., Colăcel, O., Pintilescu, C., and Scheibner, T. (Eds.). (2020). *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe: Tropes and Trends*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2020. Bibliography. Index. xv+294. \$112 (cloth), \$39.16 (paper), and \$39.16 (eBook). ISBN 9780367344771 (cloth). ISBN 9781000214697 (paper). ISBN 9780429326073 (eBook).

In the current era of post-truth politics and almost universal erosion of trust in institutions, processes, and experts on a global scale, a collection of essays focusing on the historical and contemporary specifics of conspiratorial mythmaking and its consumption in Eastern Europe is unquestionably timely and relevant. One of the significant advantages of this volume is that it is one of the few contemporary systematic attempts to shift the topical focus away from the West while also providing an ambitious overview of the post-communist Eastern European conspiratorial landscape.

The volume's scope communicates this goal, consisting of thirteen chapters divided into four sections corresponding to sequential chronological order and national perspectives related to the main drivers of conspiratorial propagation and amalgamation. According to the editors, these drivers include the historical legacies of nationalism and national victimhood, communism, and post-communism. The book also examines reactions to more contemporary global phenomena as scrutinized through the vantage points of national case studies, including Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania and Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Moldova, and former Yugoslav republics. Additional chapters examine Stalinist conspiracy theories exported to France and Italy.

One of the most significant parts of the book is its introduction which contains the framework of analysis for the entire volume. The introduction identifies its primary task "to seek to understand the function that conspiracy theories fulfill in the societies and cultures, both right now and in the long term" (4), indicating a clear preference for a functionalist approach. In turn, this leads the editors "to the conclusion that most [conspiracy theories] focus on four thematic areas: 1) conspiracy theories and their relationship with dictatorships or authoritarian regimes in the region, including the recent authoritarian drift of some East European countries; 2) antisemitic conspiracy theories (this category overlaps with the first one, since the Soviet Union, but especially Nazi Germany and its satellite countries, heavily instrumentalized anti-Jewish conspiracy theories); 3) conspiracy theories that are strongly entangled with national victimhood narratives, presenting the countries of the region as victims of great powers; 4) new trends or emerging conspiracy tropes in the region framed by the globalization process" (15).

In addition to these four focus areas, the editors outline several avenues for investigation. The most interesting one is the modes of conspiratorial circulation during the Cold War and post-Cold War period and their integration into the global conspiratorial landscape. Thus, some of the most interesting chapters deal

with specific conspiratorial tropes that illustrate how conspiratorial tropes proliferate and circulate at national and international levels.

The initial directions outlined in the introduction enable some contributors to tackle their respective case studies with sufficient scope, depth, detail, and adherence to the theoretical framework. However, overall, the volume suffers from a certain degree of heterogeneity. Several contributions deviate from the promise of robust design that is elegantly outlined at the beginning of the book. Having noted this lack of consistency, it is fair to note that some of the chapters are outstanding and deserve our attention, such as the ones authored by Péter Csunderlik and Tamás Scheibner dealing with the Myth of Judeo-Bolshevik Conspiracy in Hungary, Biljana GJoneska, Kristijan Fidanovski, and André Krouwel's chapter focused on North Macedonia's EU-related conspiracy theories, and the contribution of M. R. X. Dentith on warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories and their epistemology in the East European context in the closing chapter of the book.

Regardless of my criticism of the volume's consistency, *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe: Tropes and Trends* is an excellent example of a comprehensive overview of a fascinating, complex, and essential phenomenon in an understudied context. As a result, this book makes an original and meaningful contribution to the subject and is a good resource for researchers and students.

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