

Stone, Dan (Hrsg.): *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012. ISBN: 978-0-19956098-1; XVII, 767 S.

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Oxford Handbooks in History are proliferating: nearly thirty have appeared since the series kicked off in 2009. According to the press, the series targets scholars and graduate students. Indeed the thirty-five chapters in this Handbook presuppose, rather than instill, a basic familiarity with postwar European history: undergraduates and the general public will find Tony Judt's Postwar a more congenial introduction.<sup>1</sup> What, then, does the Handbook offer the historical practitioner?

As editor Dan Stone explains in the introduction, the Handbook intends to showcase the methodological variety that characterizes the historical discipline today. „History is understood to mean as many ways of approaching the past as possible, with considerable emphasis on the achievements of cultural history,“ runs the programmatic editorial statement (p. 8). Embracing this diversity, the Handbook attempts a „thematic investigation of various facets of postwar life – from high politics to economics to tourism and consumerism“ (p. 7).

Readers who appreciate the gesture towards diversity may yet wonder if all aspects of postwar European history are equally important, or, indeed, how they relate to one another. Is there an obvious categorical relationship between „tourism“ and „high politics,“ except that they are both „facets“ of postwar European history? The Handbook's editorial stance reflects a certain pluralism that has become popular in the historical discipline after years of acrimonious debates surrounding multiple historiographical „turns“. We seem to have arrived at a point of exhaustion, where all we do is tacitly agree on a thin common denominator: that everything is related to everything.

If we imagine that all historical phenomena sit side by side in happy and chaotic coexistence, than it matters little how we group them together. This sentiment is perhaps

the reason why the Handbook's structure is so confusing. Part I, titled „What is Postwar Europe?“ contains essays interrogating the temporal, geographic, and imaginary delineations of postwar Europe, as well as a piece by Geoff Eley on the „Postwar Settlement, 1945–1973.“ By rights and reason, this latter essay should have appeared under the umbrella of Part IV, „Re-Construction: Starting A Fresh [sic] or Rebuilding the Old,“ which otherwise houses chapters on security policy, economic and political history. Part II, „People“, includes not only Philip Ther's authoritative chapter on ethnic cleansing but also essays on topics as diverse as gender (Uli Linke), Americanization (Philipp Gassert) and 1968 (Martin Klimke). Part III is inchoately titled „Blocs, Parties, Political Power“ and includes an essay on Western European welfare states as well as one on Warsaw Pact friendship treaties. Surely it is reasonable to place Stefan Muthesius's chapter on „Postwar Art, Architecture, and Design“ in Part VI („Culture and History“). And three chapters on memory find a suitable home in Part VII, „Coming to Terms with the War.“ But what kind of thematic category is „Fear“ (Part V)? And what is Martin Evans's no-frills, succinct, and illuminating overview of decolonization doing under this heading?

Are there patterns in this kaleidoscope? Eastern Europe has a fair representation: of the 35 chapters, seven address Eastern European topics while seven others deal with Western Europe. The majority of contributions does not have an explicit geographical focus, though most chapters in this category gesture toward, rather than substantially accomplish, the task of integrating Eastern European experiences. Overcoming the East-West divide as explanatory framework, as editor Dan Stone would like to, turns out to be easier said than done: Cold War divisions of labor stubbornly persist in the specializations of academia.

In other respects, too, Handbook's diversity only goes so far. The emphasis on cultural history seems to have resulted in the quiet excision of the tools, concerns, and questions of social history. Social transformations, which

<sup>1</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York 2005.

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a previous generation of scholars used to describe in terms of class, wealth, inequality, access to education, property, and the law, are here being approached in terms of identity, gender, experience, perceptions, and culture. Rosemary Wakeman's essay on postwar consumer culture („Veblen Redivivus: Leisure and Excess in Europe“ – chapter 20), for example, nicely evokes „the allure and seductive appeal of commodities“ with ample descriptions of consumer goods, „from motorbikes and vinyl records to the trendy fashions, graphics, furniture, and personal accessories of the ‘pop sixties’“ (p. 427). But what made this new cornucopia possible in the first place? For an answer, we must turn to the chapter by Nicholas Crafts and Gianni Toniolo („Les Trente Glorieuses’: From the Marshall Plan to the Oil Crisis“ – chapter 17), which suggests that we should look to political economy if we want to explain the postwar economic miracle. The „ec-speak“ employed by the authors („productivity growth“, „resource allocation“, „factor inputs“, and so on) may be jarring to some readers, but the chapter has the advantage of presenting a hypothesis that cuts across both Western and Eastern Europe.

Taken together, the Handbook's chapters do reflect the diversity of today's historians and their approaches, but in doing so, they sometimes talk past each other. Geoff Eley contends that a „Social Democratic Moment“ characterized the postwar settlement (chapter 1) – but then, Eley is only talking about Western Europe. Ido de Hann disagrees, pointing out that welfare states were implemented by Christian Democratic governments, hence the association of welfare states with Social Democracy is misleading (chapter 14). In his hectoring contribution („What is National Stalinism?“ – chapter 22) Vladimir Tismaneanu seems to miss the memo that most scholars today write about the politics of socialist Eastern Europe in the ironic mode, as does, for example, Dan Stone, in his chapter on „Living under Communism“ (chapter 7). Robert Bideleux's essay on European integration („Rescue of the Nation State?“ – chapter 18) is a spirited defense of the EU project, which argues that integration has not weakened nation states, but on the contrary made

them more secure, economically adaptable, and politically effective. But can Bideleux's chapter communicate with Luisa Passerini's essay („Europe and Its Others: Is There A European Identity?“ – chapter 5), which contends that „the construction of a united Europe [...] was accompanied by an increasing feeling of uncertainty over [...] what it meant to be European“ (p. 121)? It is not so much that Bideleux and Passerini disagree; rather, they speak to entirely different audiences.

Ironically, then, the Handbook's celebration of methodological diversity obstructs, rather than facilitates, a fruitful conversation between and among its individual chapters. The Handbook's commitment to diversity is laudable, no doubt – who could argue with the impulse to show the breadth of what historians do? In less sanguine terms, however, diversity is simply a gloss over the very real fragmentation of the discipline today. Perhaps it is time for us to resume arguing.

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