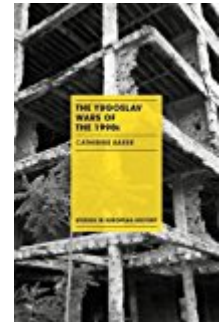


Catherine Baker. *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. x + 181 pp. \$27.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-137-39898-7.



Reviewed by Matthew Schwonek

Published on H-War (April, 2016)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Almost twenty-five years have passed since the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, and in that time a substantial literature has appeared. It is high time to pause and consider where researchers have been and where they may yet go in assessing this seminal conflict of the post-Cold War era. Catherine Baker of the University of Hull surveys this body of research, with the intention of introducing “the scholarly interpretations of the Yugoslav wars as they stand in the scholarly literature published in or translated into English” (p. 131).

This survey begins with the break-up of Yugoslavia. Separate chapters consider the Slovenian and Croatian conflicts, the Bosnian war, and insurgencies in Kosovo and Macedonia. The last carries the discussion through the final demise of the federation with Montenegro’s independence in 2006. Postwar reconstruction, transitional justice, and linguistic and cultural aspects—Baker’s specialty—are also considered. Baker deftly marches through this tangled history. Each section contains an overview of key events and is-

sues followed by a recapitulation of scholarly points of view. Micro and macro levels are considered along with matters of evidence and interpretation. Her presentation of major issues and points of view is dispassionate, scrupulous, and accurate. As with any work there are lacunae. Operation Deliberate Force and Richard Holbrooke’s ministrations get no mention, perhaps casualties in the quest for brevity. Less forgivable is the omission of the important contributions by Chip Gagnon, Dag Henriksen, Craig Nation, and Henry H. Perritt Jr.

Although the author shows skill in navigating the area, the scope and nature of the undertaking impose important limitations. The approach omits from consideration works in Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, and Albanian, except for the few books that have been translated into English. Access to the points of view and explanations of the very peoples who fought the Yugoslav wars would have been a priceless tool for students and researchers. The survey nature of the book, moreover, means that analysis and assessment are cir-

cumscribed. The author restricts discussion to levels of analysis, matters of evidence and interpretation. There is no attempt to gauge why certain questions drew American and British writers. There is no consideration of the assumptions they have brought to the topic. The survey does not place these endeavors into the broader literature on political violence in the twentieth century, despite the claim on the cover. On a practical note, the employment of a coded reference system instead of author-title entries makes citations difficult to navigate, a serious flaw in such a guide.

There is much to admire in this work, not the least of which is the text's perspicacity and concision. All the same, this literature review does not aspire to much and consequently offers little. Researchers in military studies and international relations, who are inexplicably daunted by this topic, will find it a boon. The student researching a paper or college instructor writing a lecture will also be indebted to Baker, yet only for a short while, for new research, personal accounts, and more are arriving regularly. Slavic and East European specialists, however, will be put off by the want of assessment and having to wait a little longer for a fulsome appreciation of the literature on the Yugoslav wars.

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Citation: Matthew Schwonek. Review of Baker, Catherine. *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2016.

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