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**REKŠĆ, M. (2019). WYOBRAZENIA ZBIOROWE
SPOLECZENSTW BYLEJ JUGOSŁAWII W XXI WIEKU.
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"Wyobrażenia zbiorowe społeczeństw byłej Jugosławii w XXI wieku. Perspektywa politologiczna" [Collective images of former Yugoslav societies in the 21st century. Political perspective] is the publication of a political scientist Magdalena Rekšć, who in her scientific work deals with, among others, the issues of social values in post-communist countries, cultural determinants of politics, ideologies and political utopias². In addition to the discussed monograph she has also written numerous articles, including New Balkan migration route and its impact on transit countries (Rekšć, 2019), and book *"Mity narodowe i ich rola w kreowaniu polityki na przykładzie państw byłej Jugosławii"* [National myths and their role in creating politics on the example of the countries of the former Yugoslavia] (Rekšć, 2013), and she co-edited *"Mity i stereotypy w pamięci zbiorowej społeczeństwa"* [Myths and stereotypes in the collective memory of society] (Ponczek et al., 2015).

The reviewed monograph includes 9 chapters: *"Wyobrażenia zbiorowe w ujęciu politologicznym"* [Collective images in political science], *"Systemy aksjo-normatywne"* [Axio-normative systems], *"Mit jako część wyobrażeń zbiorowych"* [Myth as part of collective images], *"Stereotypizacja wyobrażeń zbiorowych i jej implikacje polityczne"* [Stereotyping of collective images and its political implications], *"Pamięć zbiorowa i nostalgii pamięci"* [Collective memory and memory nostalgia], *"Jugonostalgia"* [Nostalgia for the former Yugoslavia], *"Tożsamość zbiorowa"* [Collective identity], *"Geografia wyobrażona – tożsamość bałkańska"* [Imaginary geography - Balkan identity], *"Tożsamość europejska"* [European identity], and *"Zbiorowe emocje"* [Collective emotions].

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With the *Beginning* the author introduces the readers to the recent history of the Balkans, including the war in this region, the process of the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the accession of Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia to the European Union (Rekšć, 2019). She explains the aim of the work, which is "the analysis and diagnosis of collective images of post-Yugoslav societies for which the realities of the first two decades of the 21st century are very difficult, perhaps more difficult than for many other post-communist countries" (Ibid., 11). Magdalena Rekšć adds that the issues discussed in the book are related to the research, which she conducted so far, focused on qualitative factors of change in political science and the Balkan case study (Ibid., 12). She hypothesizes that in the post-Yugoslav territory (more precisely in the collective perceptions of the region's population), integration and disintegration tendencies develop simultaneously (Ibid., 13).

In the first chapter "*Wyobrażenia zbiorowe w ujęciu politologicznym*" Magdalena Rekšć explains the concept of collective images, considering them to be "a set of elements such as:

- an axio-normative system (along with culture, religion and tradition);
- myths and stereotypes;
- collective memory;
- collective identity;
- collective emotions, between which there are mutual interactions in the form of feedback" (Ibid., 53).

She cites its genesis, starting with the work of the French sociologist Emil Durkheim and the achievements of researchers from the Annales school (Ibid., 28). The author refers also to the metaphorical understanding of Pierre Nora's memorial sites and the use of the term collective images by the culturologist Stuart Hall (which he identifies with linguistic and cultural codes, the understanding and application of which allows us to function in society), the sociologist Jan Berting (describing them as common to a given community mental images) and representatives of other social and human sciences (Ibid., 30-34, 36). She highlights the role of the pioneer of research dedicated to collective images (Baczko, 1994), and his view of their privileged place among collective performances (Ibid., 44-45). She recognizes that one cannot talk about the functioning of collective images without the processes of their ritualization - multiplication and rooting of the content of the message in a given community - by means of the media, statements of politicians, literature, art, culture and language (Ibid., 56-66). Magdalena Rekšć proves that "collective images are moderated from above, that the mental programming of the community depends on the owners of symbolic power and their organizational abilities" and she supplements the above fact with the statement that individual collective images may be fleeting and blur with time, transforming into anachronisms, while others, e.g. the idea of a nation or an imagined community, exist for years, referring to symbols important for a particular community (Ibid., 71). The author concludes her considerations with the observation that each of the elements of collective imaginations would be an interesting subject of a political science debate.

In the second chapter "*Systemy aksjo-normatywne*", after explaining the title term as "a system of norms and values characteristic for a given community" (Ibid., 90) Magdalena Rekšć draws attention to its great importance for political parties and

international organizations and politicians, and thus for political science. She represents the view that when dealing with political thought, party groups or public opinion, we constantly relate to axiology (Ibid., 101). She attaches a particularly large role to culture, religion and national identity, referring to the Balkans, the property of which is to be a significant link between religions with national identity, explained by the desire to find differences in a multiethnic cluster of similar communities (Ibid., 104). The author quotes the words of the Croat Boris Buden, according to which being part of his nation is synonymous with being a Catholic, and the two identities do not have to overlap (Budén, 2012). She also draws attention to the constant attribution to national-romantic content in the Balkans with features of a ritual, linked to the multiplication of ethnic conflicts in the region (Ibid., 110). She reveals the Balkan relationship between politics and customs, explaining that the second element of this relationship creates an image of the era currently prevailing in the region and its realities (Ibid., 117). Referring to the Balkan political culture, Magdalena Reksć shows the small circulation of its elites, representing communist circles and the authoritarian style of exercising power; clientelism, patriarchalism, weak experiences with democracy, civilization delays and chaotic modernization of the state (Ibid., 138-139).

Third chapter "*Mit jako część wyobrażeń zbiorowych*" highlights the multitude of myths prevailing in the Balkans, resulting from the coexistence of ethnos in this area who want to define their own identity, distinguishing them from the communities of their imagined neighbors. An example of such a story is the Kosovo narrative about the heroism of Milos Obilić during the medieval skirmish in Kosovo Pole, which is an inspiration for successive generations of Serbs (Ibid., 180-181). In the 1990s, in the Balkan Peninsula, politicians and intellectual elites used myths to oppose each other's nations (Ibid., 181).

The key starting point for fourth chapter "*Stereotypizacja wyobrażeń zbiorowych i jej implikacje*" seems to be the division cited by the author, proposed by Ivan Duric and Vladimir Zoric in the context of the war in Croatia and its image in the Serbian and Croatian press, on good "us", good "them", bad "us" and the bad "them" (Ibid., 202). Magdalena Reksć refers here to Serbian stereotypes about Slovenes - "Balkan Germans", "Austrians", cold misers without emotions and humor, who with their attitude oppose the Balkan nature - and Albanians - uncivilized, backward people without culture (Ibid., 207, 212).

In the fifth chapter "*Pamięć zbiorowa i narracje pamięci*" the author highlights the effects of the overlapping of conflicting collective memories of Balkan societies, the translation of memory conflicts into the internal and foreign policy of the Balkan states (Ibid., 309-310). She emphasizes that the stories prevailing in Bosnia and Herzegovina about the past of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks do not show common points, which hinders the process of reconciliation and the creation of a state-wide collective identity (Ibid., 273). The celebrations of anniversaries of historical events, including the battles in Kosovo or the adoption of Christianity, which contribute to the development of nationalisms in the Balkans, do not improve the situation for the entire region (Ibid., 297).

The sixth chapter "*Jugonostalgia*" reflects the phenomenon of a positive attitude towards SFRY, longing for "a great homeland in which everything was ours" and where, despite the multiculturalism, the idea of "brotherhood and unity" prevailed, observed especially among the youngest generations of the former Yugoslavia, rebelling against the

present reality, seeking alternatives to mass culture and globalization (Ibid., 367, 371). They identify the former Yugoslavia with anti-fascism, anti-nationalism and anti-capitalism (Ibid., 368-370). They pride themselves on its position in the world as the fourth power in Europe after the USSR, Great Britain and France and organizing world sports events, including the Football Championships in Belgrade and Zagreb in 1976 (Ibid., 373, 377). According to Magdalena Reksć, this nostalgia for SFRY fosters reconciliation and the development of regional cooperation (Ibid., 383).

By means of the seventh chapter "*Tożsamość zbiorowa*" the political scientist underlines the fact that in the area of the former Yugoslavia, the most important role is played by national identities, supported by hierarchies of values of individual states, resulting from the collapse of the common state of the South Slavs rooted in "brotherhood and unity" (Ibid., 436, 401). The Balkan states are considering how to combine the ethnic identity functioning in collective imaginations with the political identity concerning smaller groups (Ibid., 405). The presence in the political life of the discussed area of long-term social conflicts and divisions, and their effects, as well as the lack of appropriate actions by politicians aimed at erasing these tensions mean that in the Balkans 25 years after the war, there is still no talk of reconciliation and forgiveness. This translates into a syndrome of endangered identity of post-Yugoslav communities (Ibid., 436).

The eighth chapter "*Geografia wyobrażona – tożsamość bałkańska, tożsamość europejska*", begins with the definition of the first, mentioned in the title, concept by Małgorzata Mikołajczyk, as a relationship between politics and space guided by ideological control (Ibid., 437-438). It is followed by a comment on the vagueness and multitude of translations of the term Balkans itself, if only due to the fact that there is no clear border between the former Yugoslavia and Europe (Ibid., 442). This makes it difficult for individual nations to admit their Balkanness (Ibid., 444-445). Treating oneself as a representative of the Balkans is also not conducive to, in the case of Slovenia, the communist history of the region, identifying the Balkans with Yugoslavia or Byzantium, what occurs in Croatia, or the myth of the "invincible fortress", not conquered by the Balkan Turks, represented by Montenegro (Ibid., 450-453, 459). In turn, placing the concepts of Europe next to each other and the Balkans give the impression of their separation, the restriction of the Old Continent to the members of the European Union and the exclusion of the Balkans from European ownership (Ibid., 444).

In the ninth chapter "*Zbiorowe emocje*" Magdalena Reksć points to stigmatization and the harmful stereotyping of the Balkan nations, carried out by the West during the break-up of Yugoslavia, and by its juxtaposing the cruel, hateful, uncouth Balkans with a full of peace, order and prosperity Europe (Ibid., 508-509). The fear of being different and of strangeness has also become a tool in the hands of the Balkan politicians themselves, as shown by the example of Slobodan Milošević, consolidating and rebelling Serbs against the following after each other enemies (Ibid., 513). The above fears are accompanied by disappointment with post-Yugoslav nation-states and their ineptitude, longing for life at the level of the West during the times of Titian Yugoslavia, and dissatisfaction with the difficult socio-economic situation in the region, resulting in social protests, e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina in February 2014 (Ibid., 518-519). Hope for the future and a better life was supposed to be the entry of individual Balkan states into the European Union, but it turned out that the above-mentioned organization is failing the Balkans more than it gives them opportunities for development and a sense of stability (Ibid., 541).

The *Ending* makes the readers aware that, despite the passage of many years since the end of the war in the Balkans, the post- Yugoslav nations are still struggling with apathy, a sense of helplessness, fear for the future and the lack of improvement in their difficult situation (Ibid., 543). The dissatisfaction with successive rulers and the sense of humiliation by the West are accompanied by the idealization of the communist past as a reflection of paradise in the face of the present sense of peripherality in relation to wealthy Europe (Ibid., 546). This union is seconded to negative emotions of a conflictogenic nature, which put into question the future fate and security of the region (Ibid., 547).

Finalizing the review, one should emphasize the multifaceted issues discussed in the pages of the publication - the collective perceptions of the peoples of the former Yugoslavia in the face of the post-war period, the deepening economic crisis, the accompanying political problems and the first disappointments in connection with the accession to the European Union. The very choice of topics should also be appreciated, bearing in mind the relatively small, but developing collection of Polish - language literature devoted to the Balkans. Reviewed publication will certainly become one of the flagship scientific books recommended for students of Balkan studies and Croatian philology, as well as a must-read for sympathizers of the region. A pioneering combination of a political science perspective with the analysis of qualitative data and the scientific achievements of cultural anthropology and sociology are admired and appreciated, as is placing the Balkan issues in a wider, global context.

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