

Zitierhinweis

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Gabriela VOJVODA, Raum und Identitätskonstruktionen im Erzählen Dževad Karahasan. Der Dritte Raum als Verhandlungsinstanz für eine bosnische kulturelle Identität. Berlin: Lit, 2014. 290 pp., ISBN 978-3-643-12737-2, € 34,90

More than twenty years have passed since Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) established itself as an independent state. Yet, as a consequence of the ensuing war, BiH has remained a divided polity dominated by mutually exclusive ethnonationalist discourses. Dževad Karahasan is one of the few intellectuals in BiH challenging such discourses. In his literary work, he presents a BiH that goes beyond ascribed ethnic identities and shows their cultural interdependencies and also contradictions.

In her book, which is based on her doctoral thesis, Gabriela Vojvoda thoroughly examines spatial and identity constructions in Karahasan's works. According to her, Karahasan imagines Bosnia as a "third space" in which identities have been more negotiable than elsewhere. By drawing from Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish theology and philosophy, Vojvoda convincingly illustrates how Karahasan entangles the syncretisms of Bosnian belief systems, which ultimately combine into mixed and entangled identities. These prove to be pluralistic and individualistic, imagined in terms of "as well as" rather than "either or". Vojvoda defines Karahasan's "third space", by which she means Bosnia, as a place where individuals "negotiate their identities" beyond the dichotomies of "West" and "East", "Christianity" and "Islam", and apart from the common ethnonationalist postulates. The "third space" functions as a meeting point for the different cultures and religions and ultimately – due to the pressure of circumstances – forces them to interact. Vojvoda

examines the presence of this "third space" as a spatial and metaphoric construct in Karahasan's later texts.

In the first chapter, Vojvoda presents the theoretical backbone of her work. Her discussion of Bosnian cultural identity after the dissolution of Yugoslavia draws from theorists such as Aleida Assmann, Homi J. Bhabha, Benedict Anderson, and Ivan Lovrenović, and emphasizes that identities result out of interactions between individuals and are thus multifaceted, dynamic, and even contradictory (26). Vojvoda's concept of a "third space" is similar to that of Nirman Moranjak-Bamburać, who conceives of Bosnia as a country located at the "cross-roads" or in the "in-between" (29f.). The war in Bosnia led to the destruction of physical spaces, which included the destruction and re-construction of identities. In terms of the syncretisms of Bosnian identities, Vojvoda compares the understandings of the *here and now* and the *afterlife* in Christianity and Islam. In Karahasan's works, the *barzakh*, the barrier between the physical and spiritual worlds in Sufi Islamic theology, is a place where identities are negotiated and constructed.

In the second chapter, Vojvoda begins her discussion of various works by Karahasan with the volume of essays *Knjiga vrtova* (Book of Gardens). It focuses on the garden and its symbolic meaning in both Islam and Christianity as well as on its function as a chronotope for Bosnia. Vojvoda explains that "while a garden allows two worlds to meet, it functions as an inter-space between two worlds that are clearly separated from each other" (88). The novel *Noćno vijeće* (Night Council) deals precisely with the "third space", located in the *barzakh*. This Sufi *barzakh* is represented as simultaneously the basement in the house of a Serb family and a mystical metaphor for negotiating Bosnian cultural identities. It thus symbolizes cultural syncretism, the

overlapping of identities with crosscutting friendship ties. Despite diverging historic memories, such identities cannot be mutually exclusive. In the volume *Izveštaj iz tamnog vilajeta* (Report from the Dark Vilayet), set in the context of the Bosnian war, Vojvoda shows how the protagonists search for their identities and realize that these are overlapping and contradictory. Exile, too, functions prominently as a "third space". Here, identities are remembered and thus (re-)constructed, but it is also clearly shown how these identities have ceased to be real and are thus unable to be maintained.

While there is no doubt that the image of a "third space" is present in Karahasan's works, Vojvoda sometimes overstretchers its applicability. For example, it is unconvincing to apply the "third space" to other settings, such as the "Third World", a construct questionable in itself (44-46). Vojvoda does so in an attempt to assign a post-colonial status to Bosnia, with the Ottoman and Habsburg empires as "colonizers". This does not provide a satisfactory analytical framework for the fact that identities are always negotiated – even in spheres that are different from the realm of officially ascribed identities (73). In fact, state ideology has collided with individual identities in most historical settings throughout world history. Certainly, it has not been limited to countries under colonial rule. What is more, if Vojvoda's line of argument were valid, any identity construction beyond the control of the discourse forming elites would need to be considered as a "third space". The "third space" would turn out to be merely the retreat of the individual into the private sphere and, with it, the construction of his own individual identity. This is a phenomenon common throughout the world – nothing new or in any way specific to Bosnia.

I would contend that a strong analogy exists between the concept of the "third

space" and topoi encountered in the works of Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović, for example, who portray Bosnia as a bridge between East and West and between Islam and Christianity. Although Vojvoda acknowledges such similarities, she insists that the "third space" concept goes beyond these (66). Yet, throughout her book, she does not succeed in making clear precisely what the difference is. However, despite the shortcomings I mention, the book is diligently composed and makes intellectually engaging reading.

Dareg Zabarah (Frankfurt/M.)

Jelena OBRADOVIĆ-WOCHNIK, *Ethnic Conflict and War Crimes in the Balkans. The Narratives of Denial in Post-Conflict Serbia*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013. 254 pp., ISBN 978-1-84885-003-3, £ 58.00

The book under review presents a case study on "ordinary" public perceptions of the 1991-1999 conflicts in former Yugoslavia. The focus is on the reflections, interpretations and narratives circulating in Serbia concerning the atrocities and human rights abuses conducted by Serbs and Bosnian Serbs during these wars. Drawing on her own ethnographic fieldwork, the author sheds light on the hitherto untold stories of "ordinary" Serbs, who have been excluded from both national and international political debates and from civil society activities aimed at confronting the past. Her ambition is to analyse how citizens – people on the streets of Serbia – have dealt with the historical record of civil war and systematic violence against civilians. It is argued that the ordinary people have been ignored in the efforts made towards transitional justice in Serbia. Civilians' narratives are indeed a forgotten dimension in political debate and in academic literature, leaving