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European Universalism?

Book Review: Beata Klocek di Biasio, Bohdan Michalski & Felix Münch (Eds.), *What Europeanness Means Today*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2015, (pp. 235). ISBN 978–83–8019–003–0. Price: PLN 33.81.

The “What Europeanness Means Today” volume consists of four major chapters (excluding the introductory one) and eleven papers altogether. The book is a part of “Europe of the 21st Century. Tolerance through Understanding” series. It was published by Adam Marszałek Publishing House in year 2015 in Toruń, Poland. The three editors of the book are Beata Klocek di Biasio, Bohdan Michalski and Felix Münch, who is also the chief editor.

The book covers a wide and complex range of issues related to the main idea. As it was written in the new preface, “disarmament through understanding” (p. 6) is the main goal of the authors, inspired by two big events in European history, and those are – the fall of the Berlin Wall 25 years prior to the creation of “Europe of the 21st Century...” and the entering of East European countries to European Union 10 years before the series was launched (p. 5). The first book, published in 2010 (p. 6) was dedicated to a more art-related perspective, while this volume was meant to cover a wider variety of topics and dimensions. “What Europeanness...” aims for showing a multidimensional perspective on perceiving Europe as an organism.

The content of the book was divided into six main parts, the first one being a new preface to the Book Series and an Introduction by Bohdan Michalski and Felix Münch. The second part is an introductory chapter written by Jan Sadlak. The next four chapters, listed as chapters I to IV are thematically organised as follows – Multicultural Dimension (two chapters), National and European Identity

(three chapters), Europeanness: Economic and Social Dimension (four chapters) and Europeanness in the World (one chapter). Only one paper in the volume was presented in French.

In the introduction, Jan Sadlak points out that “as recent European history vividly demonstrates” (p. 20) culture is an important factor in creating reality. The most explicit example of the influence of ideologies would be the “artificial” (p. 20) division to Western and Eastern Europe which suggests a bi-polarity without a common “European culture” (p. 21). Sadlak expresses the opinion, that common culture should be perceived as just as important as common market or currency (p. 21) and that we should “enhance the cultural diversity as mono-cultures hardly innovate” (p. 21).

The first of the four main chapters of the volume covers the topic of multicultural dimension and contains two papers by Joanna Nowicki (in French) and Beata Kłoczek di Biasio focusing on the classic roots of Europe presented in art.

The second main chapter is dedicated to the problem of national and European identity. The first paper in this section was written by Giovanni Bachelloni and it is a commentary on “various forms of academic cooperation” (p. 59), as the author noticed that a certain number of good students started to become more interested in scholarships in USA or Canada. He also stated that “students are seen as customers [...] they are not being seen any more as a group of young learners” (p. 60) and Europe, once supposed to be a place for exchanging good practices, became paralysed by very strong stereotypes (p. 60).

The second paper in this section of the volume is dedicated to the issue of “Metaphors, Simulacra and the European Imagination” by Magdalena Złocka-Dąbrowska. The objective of this paper was “to find the metaphors and simulacra of Europe grasped as a system of representation of the European imagination” (p. 79) and it “aims to place Europe expressed in language and the European image within the conceptual metaphor framework with its rhetorical picture, where meaning is relevant to the construction of any representation of socio-cultural reality” (p. 81).

The third paper in this chapter was written by Felix Münch. Its title is “The Crusades of Civil Religion – »Holocaust versus GULAG« and the Competition of Negative Founding Myths of Europe” and it covers the problem of a particular competition between victims of “Nazi German mass murder and the Soviet System” (p. 91). The idea of more or less tragic crimes and the general problem of compensating things to forced labourers of both mentioned above systems is another reason to see Europe as a bi-polar construct.

The third main chapter of the volume is being opened by a paper submitted by Marie-Christine Bouneau under the title “Youth and Socialism in Europe during the First Half of the 20th Century: the Myth of Europe through Peace and Pacifism”.

Bouneau explains how the myth of pacifism and socialism was functioning in Europe and what symbols had been used (pp. 126–129).

The second article in this section was submitted by Justyna Nakonieczna under the title “Corporate Social Responsibility – the European Union’s Tool for Its Identity Creation” and is dedicated to the European understanding of CSR practices. The paper covers the problem of European approach and institutionalization of CSR.

The next paper in this section was written by Kamila Pronińska and is titled “European Perception of Energy Security and the EU-Russia Energy Relations”. The last paper in this section was submitted by Bohdan Michalski, who is trying to answer the question, whether Europe is “Divided or Sustainable?”.

The last chapter of the book was titled “Europeanness in the world” and contains only one paper, written by Krzysztof Gawlikowski under the title “From False »Western Universalism« towards True »Universal Universalism«”. This paper closes the reviewed book.

There are few reasons why “Why Europeanness...” is an intriguing publication. First of all, it covers a wide variety of topics in a way that is easy for the reader to understand. Moreover, it raises some questions which are very up-to-date in our age. The two particularly fascinating papers, were the ones written by Justyna Nakonieczna and Giovanni Bachellowni. The authors were able to show their views on two important segments of today’s world, which are CSR and education respectively, and also leave some space for one’s own thought and interpretation of data they presented. The authors managed to present their research and ideas in a fascinating and easy to understand way, which makes the book an interesting reading. If something, the authors presented their research in a very wide spectre of topics, which might not be satisfying for readers expecting more details and being interested in only chosen chapters of the book. Generally however, it is a multidimensional publication, that offers high cognitive value.

References:

Klocek di Biasio, B., Michalski, B., & Münch, F. (2015). *What Europeanness Means Today*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2015.

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