



## BOOK REVIEWS

Legacies of Violence. Eastern Europe's First World War. Edited by Jochen Böhrer–Włodzimierz Borodziej–Joachim von Puttkamer. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014. 334 pp.

This collection of studies, which analyze the phenomenon of violence as a consequence of World War I from various perspectives, is a welcome addition to the current efforts to broaden geographically the scope of the research on the first global conflict of the twentieth century. Whereas in the past the field has been dominated by studies focusing on Western Europe and the German empire, in recent years there has been a strong tendency to broaden the scholarship and include other geographical areas as well.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the study of physical violence as one of the determining phenomena of twentieth-century history, which has its roots in the catastrophic experiences of World War I, has drawn more attention in recent decades in connection with renewed interest in Central Europe and battlefields in eastern and southeastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The editors of the collection have divided the studies into four main groups that reflect the main trends in the current research on the connection between World War I and physical violence. The first group tackles the longer view on the war, focusing on trends and phenomena in the late nineteenth century that already foreshadowed the conflict and also on some of its lasting repercussions. Joachim von Puttkamer recapitulates the political and cultural development of Eastern

1 The literature on World War I is overwhelming. The most recent titles include: Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2014); Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Herfried Münkler, *Der Große Krieg. Die Welt 1914–1918* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013); Alan Kramer, *The Dynamics of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2 On warfare and occupation on the Eastern front, see most recently: Bernhard Bachinger and Wolfram Dornik, ed., *Jenseits des Schützengrabens. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten. Erfahrung – Wahrnehmung – Kontext* (Innsbruck–Vienna–Bozen: Studien Verlag, 2013); Alfred Eisfeld and Dietmar Neutatz, eds., *Besetzt, interniert, deportiert. Der Erste Weltkrieg und die deutsche, jüdische, polnische und ukrainische Zivilbevölkerung im östlichen Europa* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2013); Stephen Velychenko, *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine. A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917–1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Michael Neiberg–David Jordan, *The Eastern Front 1914–1920* (London: Amber Books, 2011); Alexander V. Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland. War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914–1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Vejas G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Europe just before World War I, which he defines as those parts of Europe that were governed by the Habsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov Empires. He concludes that the wartime conflict in this part of the world signaled the total erosion and collapse of the prevailing order and the subsequent establishment of a new order. Thus, according to him, the global conflict was a clear break with the prewar era, and revolutionary Russia in his view should be understood as a case that calls for further comparisons, rather than as a unique event heralding the beginning of a new era.

Mark Biondich examines the problematic “shatter zones” of the European continent, in other words the areas that were on the borders of the old European empires. Drawing on the example of the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, he shows how these border zones became the first experimental area on which some European powers tested new concepts of ethnic cleansing, forced mass migration or, in some cases, even ethnic extermination. Biondich thus interprets the Balkan conflicts of 1912–13 as a prelude to the so-called Great War, a prelude which foreshadowed the radical transformation of warfare in the twentieth century, targeting large ethnic or religious groups and often blurring the lines between combatants and non-combatants.

In the last contribution of the first group of essays, Jochen Böhler summarizes the existing literature on wartime and immediate post-war military and paramilitary violence in Poland, Ukraine and revolutionary Russia. Essentially, he contends that already before the war the Russian empire added state administered collective violence against an entire ethnic group within its territory to the repertoire of wartime practices, and World War I was thus only a continuation of pre-war developments. This argument corresponds with the conclusion of the previous study and prompts historians to consider the extent to which one should think of World War I as a series of conflicts that began in the Balkans in 1912 and ended around 1922 with the treaty of Lausanne and the settling of another conflicts all over Europe (Ireland, Silesia etc.).

The second section is devoted to the politics of long-term military occupation as a phenomenon during World War I that became part of the standard set of modern warfare practices. In his excellent study, Jonathan Gumz tracks the development of international law and the proper definition of military occupation. Using this as his point of departure, he examines Austria-Hungary's politics of occupation in Serbia and Germany's and Russia's in Poland and the Ukraine. He concludes that during the war the occupation regimes of Germany and Russia violated international norms regarding occupation with

increasing frequency, indeed to such an extent that these norms eventually ceased to function as a reference for justification of the measures they adopted with regards to the occupied population. As an occupying power, the Habsburg Empire, on the other hand, attempted to adhere to valid international norms most of the time. Stephan Lehnstaedt also arrives at the same conclusion in his analysis of the economic policies of occupation practiced by Austria–Hungary and Germany. While Germany, he argues, used the politics of coercion and mass forced labor as a standard tool of occupation, Austria–Hungary adhered to old-fashioned market incentives, which indeed proved much more effective. The section devoted to occupation is concluded by Robert L. Nelson’s study, which tackles the German plans to displace the populations in the eastern territories massively. Nelson reveals the extent to which these German fantasies were influenced by the American colonization of the West and again indicates the contrast between German plans for occupation and the much more modest Austro-Hungarian plans, which were far more rooted in the old world of the nineteenth century.

The third part of the collection covers the radicalization of the warring societies not only on the fronts and in the occupied territories, but also in the hinterland. Maciej Górny vividly depicts how scientific anthropology aided the war effort of states fighting on the eastern front. The Austro-Hungarian army’s anthropological findings on the eve of war served as the basis for interpretations that saw the war as a clash of diametrically different European races. According to Górny, World War II thus was merely the culmination of the biopolitics that took root in Europe during World War I. Piotr M. Wróbel shares this argument in his analysis of violence against Jews in Central and Eastern Europe perpetrated by state as well as non-state actors between 1914 and 1921. He concludes that the radical increase in violence occurred during the immediate post-war era and was the first symptom of the mass hatred that led to massacres twenty years later. Wróbel in particular seems to dwell on earlier literature and the idea of closed, homogenous ethno-religious groupings in East Central Europe. His focus on a mere enumeration of cases of anti-Semitic repressions and violence serves as an informed introduction to the literature on the topic. However, his approach makes it rather difficult to explain some trends that contradict the thesis of a general anti-Semitic setback in the postwar years, such as the official recognition of Jewish nationality in Czechoslovakia or the Jewish emancipation in Romania, and also to understand anti-Semitic violence as a distinct form of aggression,

with its own inner logic.<sup>3</sup> Robert Gerwarth, in his contribution (which had already been published in another forum), also concentrates on the post-war years and the experience of defeat, which greatly influenced the militarization of the vanquished central European states, primarily Germany, Austria and Hungary.<sup>4</sup> For Gerwarth, the specific paramilitary subculture of these states was not the result of general wartime brutalization, but rather a specific, regional reaction to imagined or real threats that arose at the end of the war and materialized as anti-Bolshevik, anti-Slavic and anti-Semitic waves of paramilitary violence.

The last group of contributions deals with the marks that the wartime experience left in some of the newly created Central and Eastern European states. Julia Eichenberg writes about the various successful or failed social and military demobilizations after 1918. In her assessment, the fluid transition from classical war to civil war, which occurred in many parts of Eastern and Central Europe, makes the year 1918 relevant as a turning point. Philipp Ther also argues for a new periodization. Using the example of ethnic cleansing, he points out that this concept of collective violence began to appear in Europe before 1914 and persisted in many regions until the mid 1920s.<sup>5</sup> From his perspective, the traditional periodization of the war should be extended beyond the traditional years 1914–18. The section is concluded by Dietrich Beyrau's study on violence in Soviet Russia. According to Beyrau, physical violence represented a permanent phenomenon which did not decline after World War I, but in fact became one of the main tools in the maintenance of the new order. Beyrau elaborates on the common historiographic perception that the revolutionary party's rhetoric was couched in war terminology and the party elite often understood itself as a prominent army unit on the frontline of a worldwide revolution.<sup>6</sup> The ever-

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3 William Hagen, "The Moral Economy of Popular Violence: The Pogrom in Lwów November 1918," in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland*, ed. Robert Blobaum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 124–47.

4 Robert Gerwarth, "Fighting the Reed Beast: Counter-Revolutionary Violence in the Defeated States of Central Europe," in *War in Peace. Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 52–71.

5 See, for example: Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Nick Baron–Peter Gatrell, eds., *Homelands. War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia 1918–1924* (London: Anthem Press, 2004); Onur Yildirim, *Diplomacy and Displacement. Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922–1934* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

6 See, for example: Peter Holquist, "State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism," in *Stalinism*, ed. David L. Hoffmann (Malden–Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 129–56.

present symbolism of war and violence then spread from party self-identification to the whole society and influenced early twentieth-century Russian history. The book concludes with Jörn Leonhard's short essay, which situates the topics in a wider comparative framework with the western part of Europe.

This collection of essays is a welcome addition to the current debates about new ways of conceptualizing World War I. Some of the essays review existing secondary literature and will serve as an introduction to the vast panorama of East Central European history immediately after the war. Other texts are based on original research and will enrich our understanding of state and non-state violent practices in the multiethnic, religiously diverse regions. The structure of the book and the historiographical overviews that accompany many of the chapters will make it useful not only for researchers, but also for university teachers. Many studies implicitly share the same arguments and persuasively show how the war in the East often meant something different than the war in the West. Individual arguments for a new periodization and the inclusion of transnational spaces as a basic analytical framework are convincing and will certainly enrich the current scholarship on the course and consequences of World War I, beyond the traditional narratives about the West, which tend to stress a distinct beginning and end of the war in 1914 and 1918 respectively, trench warfare, and allegedly more or less successful post-war reconstruction.

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