

*Atlas of Central Europe* are not up to the task of illustrating the author's spatial interests.

Biondich demonstrates particularly well how the Balkan 'zone of violence' interacted with other spaces—be it the fading Ottoman Sultanate, or revolutionary Russia; the Nazi empire, or the liberal West. Western Philhellenism marked the beginning of Western interest in the region and led to the participation of liberal democracies in nationalising wars. This line can be drawn from the London Treaty of 1827, to Lausanne nearly one hundred years later, to the Dayton Agreement (1995), where the West faced decisions as to the extent that ethnic homogenisation should be perpetuated. But in some respects Dayton marks the detachment of the paradigm that 'unmixing people' involves stability. The right of expellees to return to their communities is a key part of the agreement. But Biondich's optimistic outlook has recently been jolted by the continuing ethno-political divisions in Bosnia. Whether ethnicisation and violent homogenisation really can be undone remains to be seen.

A. KORB

*University of Leicester*

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*Political Violence in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2011; pp. 258. £55; pb. £19.99).

The study of political violence is attracting considerable energy and is quickly emerging as a real interdisciplinary undertaking. It is also characterised by a glaring gap: on the one hand, historians continue to produce detailed, meticulously researched studies of various instances of political violence, ranging from local atrocities to genocide, thus building an enormous monographic corpus of historical evidence (these studies, however, tend to steer clear of theory). On the other hand, sociologists and political scientists approach the same question from an often abstract, comparative and theoretical perspective: unfortunately, they can be historically myopic, studying only the post-1945 era; and they tend to use the monographic corpus in a way that can be superficial. With this present book, Donald Bloxham, Robert Gerwarth and their five collaborators now attempt to fill the gap between context-rich and theory-poor approaches on the one hand and context-poor and theory-rich approaches on the other.

The volume is based on an approach that is simultaneously historical (in that it takes context seriously), comparative (in that it surveys the historical record in a comprehensive way) and causal (in that it attempts to identify broad causal processes that operate above the national context). To be sure, this is an enormous undertaking, and it would be unreasonable to expect it to be mastered in the space of a single volume. Nevertheless, this collection of essays succeeds in surveying a complex question and drawing up what promises to be a fertile research agenda.

The contributors proceed in a systematic fashion. First, they specify the conceptual boundaries of their investigation, clearly defining it in order to exclude 'structural violence' and criminal violence, and yet allowing for a broad range of processes to be included: from street fighting between political thugs

to large-scale genocide, including mass protest, civil and interstate war, and terrorism. Second, they have broadened the geographical field of investigation, in order to offset the prevailing emphasis on Western Europe, by focusing equally on Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, as well as on the actions of European powers beyond the continent. Third, they have broadened the chronological field of investigation away from the usual (and narrow) focus on the two world wars, to include the whole period from 1870 to the present. Lastly, the volume's comprehensive focus on political violence as a whole does not detract from an analysis that also stresses specific processes of political violence, namely interstate war, genocide and ethnic cleansing, revolution and counter-revolution, and terrorism.

The volume's central methodological tool is the periodisation of violence, into distinct 'waves'. The authors describe the features of each of them and draw causal inferences from their differences and similarities. More specifically, they identify five major waves of political violence. The first covers the final quarter of the nineteenth century and includes a series of ethnic conflicts associated with the formation and consolidation of emerging nation-states. The second wave covers the First World War and its aftermath, including the Bolshevik Revolution. We then move on to the third, the pinnacle of political violence if there ever was one, which includes the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. With the fourth we reach the era of decolonisation, the Cold War, and revolutionary terrorism in Europe. Finally, the violent episodes associated with the post-Cold War processes of state dissolution in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia comprise the last wave. Interestingly, these five waves correspond to a parallel periodisation of revolutionary violence, advanced by Martin Conway and Gerwarth in their chapter. Although these five waves cover essentially the same time period, their content is different: the first (1870s and 1880s) is the era of mass politics and acute social polarisation; the second, following the First World War, is dominated by both the Bolshevik revolution and the marriage of revolutionary and ethnic politics; the third goes from the Spanish Civil War to the civil wars which erupted in the margins of the Second World War, related to the emergence of various partisan movements. The fourth wave pertains to the rediscovery of revolutionary violence by young radicals in the 1960s and 1970s; and the last is associated (more problematically, in my opinion) with the collapse of Yugoslavia.

The book's broad chronological focus and its five-wave periodisation are both very fruitful. Processes of political violence, the significance of which was overlooked (in great part because they did not fit into the prevailing 'Two World Wars' frame), such as the Balkan Wars or the massive post-Second-World-War forced population movements, now receive the attention they deserve. Furthermore, this new focus provides an effective way of challenging a number of popular arguments, including those linking the explosion of politically motivated violence during the twentieth century to the European colonial enterprise or to the cultures of brutalisation and violence engendered by the First World War. This framework is also capable of generating some interesting theoretical implications. For instance, it addresses one of the most interesting and contentious historical debates, related to the connection between revolutionary movements and political violence. Scholars have long disagreed about the direction of causality: do revolutionary movements cause an explosion of violence, or are contextual

processes responsible for the emergence of both revolutionary movements and violence? The contributors favour the latter side of the debate.

There is no doubt that the book's periodisation is a useful way of organising a large body of complex information. But what exactly does it tell us about the most fundamental question, namely the causes of political violence? To put it differently, why do we observe 'waves' of violence? Why are there periods of low and high violence? Here the book tends to be much less precise. Of course, the usual suspects, such as state formation, imperial disaggregation, and mass politics are touched upon. In their discussion of the narrower phenomenon of revolutionary violence, Conway and Gerwarth achieve a degree of precision, highlighting five key causal factors behind its spread: the intensity of material socio-economic conflicts; the combination of ethnic conflict and revolutionary violence; the consequences of military defeat and the associated rise of power vacuums; the effects of state repression; and the characteristics of revolutionary movements. But, overall, the book tends to be stronger on mapping and identifying the variation of violence than accounting for it in a systematic fashion.

This is fine, however. The difficulty of assembling, framing, and interpreting a massive body of historical evidence on such a complex and contentious question, over a large period of time and a vast geographical area, cannot be overestimated. The task has just begun. In conceptualising political violence in a way that is both broad and manageable, in identifying its variation over time and space as a central intellectual undertaking, and in suggesting systematic ways to interpret it, this ambitious volume points to the way ahead.

STATHIS N. KALYVAS

*Yale University*

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*Memory of War in France, 1914–45: César Fauxbras, the Voice of the Lowly*, by Matt Perry (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; pp. 259. £55).

This is an unusual book, with an unusual subject. César Fauxbras (the *nom de plume* of Kléber Gaston Gabriel Alcide Sterckeman, 1899–1968) was a working-class soldier, sailor, novelist, and diarist, whose writings span some of the most controversial years in modern French history. Now almost unknown, he was hailed in the 1930s as the 'French Gorky', with his 1935 novel *Viande à brûler* nominated for the prestigious *Prix Goncourt* and judged eminently suitable for cinematic adaptation (Fauxbras was approached for the film rights by an agent of the renowned director Jean Epstein). Matt Perry's study is part of a small-scale revival of interest in this particular writer: *Viande à brûler* was recently republished in 2004, and there are also plans to publish *Sondage 1940*, Fauxbras' survey of prisoner-of-war responses to French military defeat.

But Perry's book is not a biography, nor is it a work of literary criticism. Instead, he focuses on Fauxbras as a 'historical witness': a man whose writings offer a window on his times, and—more importantly—on the lives and thoughts of those whose narratives might best be interpreted as sarcastic scribbles on the pages of official history. The result is a rich and fascinating book which illuminates the experience of war and politics from the perspective of this rather cynical observer, while also engaging with some of the most heated of historical debates.