



Revolution and Political Violence in Central Europe. The Deluge of 1919

Eliza Ablovatski, Cambridge & New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2021, xii + 302pp., £75.00/\$80.00 ebook.

Stefan Gužvica

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time reviewing in broad but careful strokes the political troubles of the 2017–2021 period as well as the regime's (and Putin's personal) reaction to the global COVID-19 pandemic. He also reviews how Putin has dealt with the changing international interlocutors on the US side, from Barack Obama to Donald Trump to the early days of the Joe Biden administration. Importantly, he is not in thrall to overly rosy or projecting assessments of the Putin–Trump years, which, he notes, had no real honeymoon period.

Overall, the book is an excellent addition to the scholarly literature on contemporary Russian politics. Petersson provides a new and unusual emphasis on Putin's charismatic competence in maintaining political legitimacy. He offers an updated account of recent Russian political history up to the early days of the pandemic, and provides a sober assessment of why exactly we think mostly in terms of the dangers of succession rather than those of imminent downfall *per se*. Some characterisations are perhaps debatable—his account of the existential danger of Aleksei Naval'ny and the final oppositional protest wave of the late 2010s is perhaps overstated, while others might dispute Putin as a truly charismatic politician in the Weberian sense.

But this is a convincing and accessible book, which explains the regime's staying power in terms of both Putin's individual political skill and a cultural and political landscape that is receptive to Putin's rhetoric. That Petersson does not have an answer to the unanswerable question of succession is not a problem but the core motivation for the study in the first place, and a commendable one.

JULIAN G. WALLER, Center for Naval Analyses, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA. *Email*: jgwaller@gwmail.gwu.edu

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Eliza Ablovatski, *Revolution and Political Violence in Central Europe. The Deluge of 1919*. Cambridge & New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2021, xii + 302pp., £75.00/\$80.00 ebook.

IN 1917, THE WORLD REVOLUTION WAS NOT MERELY A FIGMENT of Lenin's imagination: the Russian Revolution was indeed part of a broader process of working-class and peasant uprisings in the Eurasian landmass. Several significant communist uprisings took place around Europe, eventually consigned to the margins of history by their failure. Nevertheless, the fact that they are generally forgotten does not mean they were insignificant, as shown in the monograph by Eliza Ablovatski, *Revolution and Political Violence in Central Europe. The Deluge of 1919*. The book is a tale of two cities, with the author explicitly referring to Dickens, except the two cities in question are Munich and Budapest. For a brief time in the spring of 1919 they were the capitals of the Bavarian and Hungarian council republics respectively.

Although the book title suggests an exploration of post-WWI political and paramilitary violence—and engages with the work of researchers such as Robert Gerwarth—its scope and the author's interest go far beyond the headline issue of the violent struggles between the radical left and the extreme right. Ablovatski's book is mostly a cultural history of the two neglected revolutions, one that examines the passions and perceptions of its participants, from ordinary workers and soldiers to the intelligentsia of the left and right. She illustrates how they shared a sense of urgency and disaster, and a belief that the old world had already collapsed, opening seemingly unlimited possibilities.

While comparing and contrasting the emotions that the war and its end stirred across the political spectrum, Ablovatski also makes an excellent point about why Budapest and Munich are comparable cases. Although Budapest was a larger and significantly more cosmopolitan metropolis, many similarities remained: both cities were capitals of major regions within a larger empire

(Prussia-dominated Germany and Vienna-dominated Austria-Hungary); both were marked by the uneven development of their urban centre and the rural periphery; both had vibrant avant-garde political and artistic movements in the run-up to 1914; both had a politicised proletarian culture that, from the late 1800s onwards, drastically reshaped them; and both had a growing immigrant population. These similarities show that the sense of change—transformative in the eyes of some and cataclysmic according to others—was present long before the shots in Sarajevo put an end to the ‘long nineteenth century’.

Although not a political history, the book gives a useful overview of the major political events for the uninformed reader (who, given the topic’s aforementioned obscurity, might well be most of us). Therefore, it can serve as an introductory text for both Bavarian and Hungarian communism, although the author is not necessarily interested in how workers’ councils operated as an alternative form of government. Rather, the book examines phenomena such as female and working-class participation in political life and the rise of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in response to these dramatic changes.


Consequently, the book also deals extensively with the phenomenon of political terror on both the left and the right. Although much less intense than the terrors of the Russian Civil War, the violence captured the popular imagination and remained the defining memory of the period. In both cases, the White Terror was far bloodier than the Red Terror, although the memory of the latter persisted for much longer in the interwar period, as part of a concentrated initiative of the victorious counterrevolutionary governments. This is of particular significance for contemporary Hungary, the only place where the memory of these two (counter)revolutionary events persists to some degree, and where anti-Semitic conspiracy theories surrounding the Soviet Republic still abound.

Aside from the actual physical manifestations of the terror, Ablovatski also looks at the relationship between terror and rumours. She examines how wartime censorship and existing prejudices shaped public opinion, another welcome and interesting topic that contributes to our understanding not only of rumours in wartime throughout history but also of contemporary social realities. The consensus on both the left and right was, unsurprisingly, that heinous acts of violence were always perpetrated by the other side. For the right, the rumours were grounded in anti-Semitism and fears of ‘Judeo-bolshevism’; both sides shared an obsession with stories of brutal attacks against women, emphasising the ‘bodily’ aspects of the attacks, for instance rape or mutilation. Such stories provoked indignation and often led to intense retribution.

In both cases, the counterrevolution emerged victorious, and Ablovatski shows how this shaped the interwar societies that followed. The Hungarian repression proved much harsher than that enacted in Bavaria, probably due to the greater virulence of right-wing anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The accounts of the victorious reactionary forces are fascinating as a systemic attempt to explain the revolution ‘psychologically’, through the images of ‘feminised’, pacifist and unpatriotic Jewish men. Popular stereotypes about rootless urban populations compared to patriotic villagers also abounded, especially in the trope of ‘Sinful Budapest’.

The book touches, yet it does not elaborate sufficiently upon, class prejudice. Perhaps this topic deserved an entire chapter, as cases of plundering and attacking people who looked ‘bourgeois’ during the revolution or ‘proletarian’ after the revolution were quite common. Although the two events were primarily class revolutions, in Ablovatski’s analysis, class seems to play much less of a role than established gender and racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the merits of the book, an exciting and thought-provoking cultural history that puts into perspective many issues also faced by contemporary societies. It will be of value to those interested in political violence, as well as political history more broadly, since Ablovatski argues convincingly that the Hungarian events once again put into question the German *Sonderweg* thesis of Germany’s unique historical development. Ablovatski’s interesting and thoroughly researched narrative shows the way

forward in the still under-researched field of transnational and cultural studies of revolutionary events from 1917 until 1923.

STEFAN GUŽVICA, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, and Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, Serbia.
Email: guzvica.stefan@gmail.com  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0120-9300>

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Jing Sun, *Red Chamber, World Dream. Actors, Audience, and Agendas in Chinese Foreign Policy and Beyond*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2021, viii + 224pp., \$29.95 p/b.

THIS WELL-WRITTEN BOOK OFFERS A COMPREHENSIVE analysis of Chinese foreign policymaking, focusing on three key groups: leaders, diplomats, and the social forces represented by media and public opinion. By examining their emotions, perceptions, misperceptions, values and resources, Jing Sun sheds light on the intricate interplay of socio-psychological factors and their impact on Chinese foreign policy. The author, formerly a correspondent for Chinese state media and now an academic at the University of Denver, has extensive contacts with Chinese elites living in the PRC and overseas, and draws on interviews with officials, journalists and scholars to support his analysis.

The book's central argument revolves around the dynamic interactions amongst Chinese leaders, diplomats and the public, who shape and contest Chinese foreign policy. According to Sun, the development and implementation of political decisions are not unilateral diktats from the party leadership but, rather, a complex and multilevel process, engaging various actors with different agendas and interests.

The book emphasises the role of President Xi Jinping in the Chinese political system, comparing him to his predecessors and characterising him as a 'disrupter' rather than a transformative leader like Deng Xiaoping. The author contends that the weakening of the prime minister's office has also reduced the influence of technocrats, who were pivotal in China's transformation into a global power. This argument highlights transactional managers' importance and ability to execute policies effectively. Their diminishing role is detrimental to policymaking in China.

In particular Sun highlights the diminishing role of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and that of diplomats, described by Sun as 'daughters-in-law in traditional Chinese families' (p. 21). This analogy illustrates the diplomats' loyal nature, obedience, ability to serve multiple masters with conflicting agendas and willingness to accept blame when things go wrong. The author posits that the diplomats' influence has waned, among other things, due to competition with the military wing of the Chinese Communist Party, the PLA.

Drawing on Susan Shirk's *Fragile Superpower*, the author explores the delicate balance that the Chinese government must strike between harnessing and containing nationalism. The author demonstrates convincingly how the popular desire for national greatness can serve as a valuable foreign policy driver. However, he also cautions against the negative consequences of public anger by oversensitive 'patriots'. Provoked by minor issues such as quoting the Dalai Lama on a Mercedes Benz commercial poster, they can harm China's international influence and sway foreign policymaking or obstruct the development of good foreign relations.

In the concluding chapter, the author assesses the 'Chinese Dream', a central concept for President Xi and his administration. Sun argues that the Chinese Dream is not a future-oriented vision but a prelude to political decay, providing a thought-provoking perspective on President Xi's overarching goal and its implications for China's domestic and foreign policies.