*Konrád, Ota/Kučera, Rudolf: Cesty z apokalypsy. Fyzické násilí v pádu a obnově střední Evropy 1914-1922 [Roads out of the Apocalypse. Physical Violence during the Fall and Reconstruction of Central Europe 1914-1922].*

Academia, Praha 2018, 364 pp. (České moderní dějiny 5), ISBN 978-80-200-2874-7.

Although it is set in 1945 at the end of a different war, the vivid novel of Pavel Kohout, *Hvězdná hodina vrahů* (German*: Sternstunde der Mörder,* 1995; English: *The Widow Killer,* 1998) may be recalled when reading the book under review. For Kohout's tale is about a sadistic murderer stalking the streets of Prague at a time when the city is engulfed in collective violence of all kinds. At that time different types of brutality overlapped in a way far beyond anything witnessed in the hinterland of the wartime Habsburg empire. The relative degrees of violence are important when we consider the discussion in *Cesty z apokalypsy*. This too is a study in mur-

der and collective violence during a period of mounting insecurity, but naturally the authors have a specific academic remit. They seek to show how physical violence was interpreted across central Europe between 1914 and 1922, comparing and contrasting the Bohemian lands, Austria, and South Tyrol. A deeper purpose, highlighted at the start of the book, is to explain how such violence could become normalized through a mental shift in people's horizons. The first aim is ably accomplished with ample examples. The second, however, remains only sketchily explored in terms of the overall argument. For while we are treated to many graphic incidents of violence, the authors pay too little attention to how the sustained killing on the military fronts could accentuate or validate violent acts in the hinterland. Only for the post-war period, in an informative discussion of Czech legionary violence in Slovakia (1919), is the impact of the wartime military experience addressed directly.

The book is otherwise focused on two categories of violence – "murder" and "collective violence" – in order to reassess everyday life in the hinterland. The first half of the book uses material from court cases and the press to uncover how "murder" was perceived by experts and by the general public. Among medical experts in Austria there was a strong reliance on degeneracy theory to interpret acts of murder; in turn those experts posited that the state or social crisis of 1914-1922 was acting as a catalyst on degenerative behaviour, a trigger for murderous acts to occur. In contrast, Czech experts – notably psychiatrists – were very sceptical about the theory of degeneracy, but still tended to explain murder in terms of the individual's (traumatic) social environment. How murder was perceived by the general public is much harder to gauge and, in fact, is discussed here largely through the lens of the press. Both in wartime and afterwards, sensationalized murders were of course a staple ingredient of the news. The authors however go much further in their argument, suggesting that "news reporting about murders had to fulfil a mobilizing function" (p. 123); in other words, it was supposedly a deliberate tactic to instil vigilance and loyalty across wartime society. A similar questionable claim is made for the post-war period. We may indeed accept that the press often interpreted acts of murder along political lines, and even extrapolate from this that it mirrored a post-war culture of defeat (Austria; South Tyrol) or of victory (Czechoslovakia). But it seems a leap to suggest that such murder cases in Austria greatly helped political mobilization (p. 137), or that in South Tyrol they "played an essential role" in focusing attention upon the Italian invader (p. 159). In short, the authors are over-ambitious in the significance they give to the interpretation of murder.

The second half of the book, entitled "Blood on the Streets", has a more convincing argument on the subject of how "collective violence" mushroomed across communities. In 1917-1918, a common phenomenon appeared of popular protest, stirred up by the food crisis in both Austria and the Bohemian lands. It represented a self-mobilization as individuals took control of public spaces, with protests ending in small-scale violence if the authorities gave the wrong response. How prevalent these protests were, however, is not clear from a discussion which tends to accumulate examples and even admits (p. 238) that many of the protests were not actually violent. But where the book breaks new ground is in showing the continuity of such protest into the post-war era. By then a pattern of popular behaviour had been learnt

and, to some extent, it gained traction because crowds could now be stirred to feel extra insecurity from the sudden defeat (Austrians), or from frustration that the sudden victory did not match their expectations (Czechs). In this period of chaotic transition, the Czech authorities had some success in channelling the violent spasms, including the energies of returning Czech legionaries. In contrast in Austria – and here the book needs much more evidence – violence was increasingly politicized with non-state forces having a monopoly. As in the discussion about wartime, it is not clear how prevalent such violence in the community actually was. Was there really "everyday conflict" (p. 260) leading to violence in the post-war streets of Vienna and Prague? As for South Tyrol, we are shown that after 1918 there was increasing violence as local communities were forced to adjust to occupation. The Italian fascists there would eventually play a role similar to some Czech legionaries, eager to correct by force what they saw as a "mutilated national victory."

*Cesty z apokalypsy* is full of colourful instances of small-scale violence at the grassroots, and reveals well the continuities for ordinary lives across the watershed of 1918. Where it is problematic is in its overall argument, particularly its failure to integrate the two halves of the book. The study of murder sits uneasily alongside the communal protests which occasionally turned violent. And while all types of violence had the military conflict as their backdrop, this book – despite some asides in the conclusion – never quite grasps that connection in order to explain why violence became normalized in the hinterland. Many questions therefore are left pending, not least why the public violence of 1918 never matched in ferocity that of 1945.

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