

Alegre Lorenz, David; Alonso Ibarra, Miguel; Rodrigo, Javier (Hrsg.): *Europa Desgarrada. Guerra, Ocupación y Violencia, 1900-1950*. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza 2018. ISBN: 978-84-17358-53-2; 444 S.

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The first half of the twentieth century is a crucial period for understanding the world in which we currently live. For example, during those five decades, many of the „old“ liberal and parliamentary political systems that ruled Europe collapsed. Also, an unprecedented process of economic, social and cultural modernisation transformed the nations of the old continent. The masses accessed the public sphere, and Europe experienced a deep process of socio-political radicalisation that led to the growth of extremist ideologies and forces, including fascism and communism. Finally, death acquired its bloodiest profile during the two world wars, and 1945 inaugurated a new era characterised by the conflicts of the Cold War.

This complex landscape sets the scene for the edited volume. The book gathers the contributions of both young historians and renowned experts in the field by combining case studies with general overviews of this troubled period for Europe. The work stands out for its variety of approaches to exploring the continent's violent past.

The authors intend to offer a more comprehensive analytical framework and underscore the importance of continuing to develop comparative and transnational perspectives. To achieve this goal, the editors of the volume argue that the best way is the analysis of particular cases or, in other words, to go from specifics to general ideas to enrich our knowledge of the topic. While this is a heterogeneous book in terms of approaches and topics, all chapters are linked by some common features that provide a coherent framework. Four essential elements can be pointed out.

First, attention is given to violence, which is understood in every chapter as one of the main components of social and political relationships of that period. Violence is conceived as a multi-vocal concept. On the one

hand, contributors like Heather Jones underscore its destructive nature and the way in which it blurs the lines between combatants and civilians. Another contributor, Javier Rodrigo, explains the impact of violence on ordinary people in the context of „total war“. On the other hand, violence is also presented as a force that creates new realities and as a constitutive element of the radical political and ideological proposals born during the interwar period. This is evidenced by Miguel Alonso in his chapter on combatants' attitudes and behaviours during the Spanish Civil War and by Jeff Rutherford in his account of German soldiers on the Eastern Front.

The second essential element is also linked to the leading role of violence, as the book underscores the fact that the so-called „European civil war“ did not end in 1945 after the collapse of fascist regimes. On the contrary, the editors extend the chronological limits to 1950, and even further, as Núñez Seixas pointed out (p. 418). This argument is supported by the fact that different European nations continued to experience internal wars after the end of World War II. This argument is also proven by discussion of the traumatic consequences derived from the social impact of the conflict on both civil society and the demobilised combatants. To analyse these issues, the editors of the volume propose employing long cycles of analysis, as Luca Baldissara or Dmitar Tasić did.

The third common element among the contributions is the importance given to the analysis of the non-material components in the conflicts that took place during this period. The different studies transcend the limits of traditional military history, taking into account various issues, including the social impact of war on combatants and civilians, the role emotions played in decision-making, attitudes and behaviours of individuals and groups, and the transformation of the identities of those who experienced war and violence in its multiple forms. All these questions are particularly well explained in chapters by Alegre Lorenz and Sönke Neitzel.

Finally, the last and most remarkable point is the importance given to experiences as a way to explain different armed conflicts that occurred in Europe as well as the role of vi-

olence in the lives of citizens during the period. The contributors explore what was beyond the battles, including military movements and mechanisms of conscription. Accordingly, they show their preference for understanding the way in which individuals, either in the front or in the rear guard, codified and represented the conflict to adapt it to their beliefs, longings and fears. This issue, addressed by all of the several chapters, is especially evidenced in chapters by Sönke Neitzel and Jeff Rutherford, who remind us of the importance of examining testimonies, letters and other sources through which we can better understand the emotions and feelings of the individuals who experienced war and violence.

These strengths do not hide some general problems such as the unbalanced lengths of the chapters. In my opinion, it would have been worthwhile to include a chapter on the Greek case to compensate for the overemphasis on the Spanish case. Yet, there is no doubt that this book sheds new light on the cycle of conflicts and violence that affected Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. It is very valuable because of the wide geographical framework covered by the chapters and their attention to national realities, which are often excluded from general accounts dealing with this period. All the contributors demonstrate the heterogeneity of actors, attitudes, behaviours and consequences that civilians and combatants experienced, while emphasising the centrality of individual and collective experiences and their importance to analysis and understanding. In short, *Europa desgarrada* is an exceptional example of the potential that „war studies“ have for researchers interested in twentieth-century Europe, not only to understand the history of the wars, but also the societies themselves.

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