

War, Revolution, and Governance: The Baltic Countries in the Twentieth Century, (*Studies in Russian and Slavic Literatures, Cultures, and History*), Lazar Fleishman, Amir Weiner (eds.), Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018. 307 p. ISBN 978-1-61811-620-8

The history of peripheries, and the consideration of the perspective from the position of the peripheries, has long been established in Western historiography. However, the history of the Baltic countries themselves still remains on the periphery of interest of world historians, even though research by local historians is taking increasingly bolder steps to cross the boundaries of national historiographies. This collection of articles by historians from the Baltic countries is devoted to the short 20th century, from the end of the First World War to the formation of the national revival movements at the end of the 1980s, and is precisely that kind of ‘voice from inside’. The book is an excellent reflection of the dominant trends in 20th-century political history research in the Baltic countries. The focus on political history is also understandable: after all, political circumstances formed the region of the Baltic countries, as opposed to culture, religion or the economy, which were distinctly different in each of the region’s countries.

The editors of the book, Lazar Fleishman and Amir Weiner, have achieved the aim they set themselves, to ‘explore key junctures in the history of three Baltic countries’. The anthology presents a general, albeit fragmented, political history of the region. The articles are mostly reviews and analyses, often summarising more detailed research already conducted and published by the same authors. This is one of the book’s strong points: the reader is not forced to become well acquainted with the subtleties of each country; rather, one receives analytical interpretations of various issues based on detailed research. The studies that involve a broader theoretical or geographical context are particularly appealing in this regard. This is evident from the increasingly stronger and more successful efforts by historians from the Baltic countries to employ the latest research methods, comply with the prevailing historiographical trends in the world, and at the same time to integrate the region’s history into European historical narratives, thereby crossing the boundary of national and regional histories.

The part of the book dealing with the interwar period is very successful and unified. Apart from two articles on aspects of the military and diplomatic struggles in 1918–1920 (by Tomas Balkelis and Ēriks Jekabsons), the rest are united in their coverage of the themes of dictatorship and loss of independence. The analysis by Aivars Stranga of the Latvian political system and ideology after the coup of 1934 is supplemented by Andres Kasekamp's article on the increased authoritarianism in Estonia. Both authors devote a great deal of attention to the ideologies of authoritarian regimes, and seek to determine how political orders and ideologies relate to fascism. Stranga presents a very colourful picture of Ulmanis' regime: an admiration of fascist Italy, attempts not only to follow in its footsteps but to surpass it (Latvia 'pursued greater totalitarian control over the public than seen in Italy and Austria' [p. 61]), the establishment of corporations, megalomaniac architectural plans for the capital city's rebuilding that would have put Nazi Berlin and Stalinist Moscow to shame (taking into account the size of the country, of course), and other characteristics, show that this particular dictatorship was the most ambitious in all the Baltic countries.

Even though fascist Italy clearly inspired the political order in Latvia, it appears that its dictatorship followed the example of the USSR in certain ways, or at least such suspicions are raised by Ulmanis' admiration for planning in every possible field. Also, the cult of the leader can be associated not only with Italy and Germany, as Stranga implies, but with the USSR as well. It would be worth looking at this neighbour's influence on the authoritarian regimes in the Baltic countries. The fact that the coup by Pāts in Estonia is presented as the preservation of democracy, and that democracy was neither condemned nor denied, as in fascism or Nazism, but rather imitated, is actually typical of the order and ideology of the USSR. The influence of the USSR on the Baltic countries in spheres other than diplomatic links in the interwar period certainly demands further research.

It is a shame that the authoritarian regime in Lithuania is discussed much more briefly: there is only the article by Artūras Svarauskas about the Lithuanian state and society in the face of the political crisis of 1938–1940, which looks at dictatorship through the prism of its impact on society. Nonetheless, Lithuania's dictatorship, the third in Central and Eastern Europe in 1926, and its differences to the regimes in Latvia and Estonia, could say a lot about the particularities of each society.

The articles by Kasekamp and Svarauskas indirectly pose the question whether democracies would have avoided the Soviet occupation.

Svarauskas' research shows very clearly how dictatorship divided, disintegrated and demoralised society and especially the political elite, who not only failed to resist the occupation, but envisaged how it could help remove the long-standing dictator. The analyses of the dictatorships also show very well how they prepared their societies for the future Soviet occupation: they accustomed people to formal membership of various pseudo-social organisations, to the planning of every sphere of daily life, to meaningless formal elections, to the dominance of just one ideology in public life, to the cult of the leader, to censorship, etc.

The article by Ineta Lipša contributes greatly towards a deeper understanding of dictatorships in the Baltic countries. It is about gender representation in the press, and the reality of women's lives, giving an excellent analysis of relations between ideologies, political regimes, gender discourses and gender policy. The article compares the gender discourses and women's daily lives in democratic and authoritarian Latvia, analysing what changed in the concepts of femininity and masculinity after the coup. The fact that Latvia was the first Western country to allow abortion in accordance with the woman's wishes from 1933 ('in cases of difficult social circumstances' [p. 40]), along with the abolition of this right and the aggressive masculinisation of the public space after the coup, paints an excellent picture of the extreme social, political and ideological tensions caused by the uneven pace of modernisation, which was typical of the whole region, but probably most visible in Latvia.

The interwar section ends with the largest work in the book, the study by Magnus Ilmjärv about the policy of the Baltic countries in the light of the Czechoslovak crisis in 1938. An expertly selected and very broad source base from the archives of numerous countries has allowed the author to show how, by giving in to Germany's pressure and withdrawing from the United Nations collective security system in September–October 1938 and declaring neutrality, the Baltic countries lost (rejected?) any possibility of being able to steer their fate, and thereby also paved the way to their own occupation. However, this thesis raises a number of questions. It remains unclear what alternative path would have been more successful and would have allowed the countries to retain their independence. Wedged between Germany and the USSR, and stranded by the Western Europe's large states, the room for manoeuvre was not very great. Ilmjärv suggests indirectly that it was possible not to withdraw from the United Nations collective security system, which would have meant that when Germany was declared the aggressor, the USSR would have gained the right to send its army across the Baltic countries

to fight Germany. Estonian and Latvian fears that, having stepped on to their territory, the Red Army could have simply stayed on, are not totally unfounded, much like Lithuania's fears that the Klaipėda region would be next, after the Sudetenland. This essentially pro-Soviet position does not appear any safer than pro-German. Conversely, pro-German neutrality allowed Sweden to keep its independence, the difference being that the Baltic countries were in a much worse geopolitical situation. The article shows very clearly how the different interests of the Baltic countries eliminated any chances for them to act jointly, and thereby acquire at least minimal room for independent manoeuvre.

The article would have benefited from a deeper discussion of Soviet policy. One gets the impression that the Baltic countries were affected only by Germany, even though the USSR had equally serious interests in the region. It remains unclear what its policy was during the Czechoslovak crisis, and whether (and if so, how) it tried to affect the Baltic countries' decisions regarding neutrality. That is why the author's argument seems to rest on just one factor, Germany. Perhaps this is due to a relative over-estimation of Germany in the article. Lithuanian diplomatic archives do not confirm the announcement cited in the article by the Estonian envoy in Kaunas in January 1939, that Lithuania had already come to terms with the loss of Klaipėda, and was seeking to formalise the fact of its annexation as soon as possible (p. 132). Lithuania tried to keep control of its port up to the last minute, even if it came at great cost; however, the interpretation given by Ilmjärv presents Lithuania as having accepted the loss of the port, to the extent of losing any sense of national dignity.

The articles devoted to the occupation period do not have a very clear unifying thread. One particular set of articles can be distinguished that focuses on memory. Ene Kõresaar's article is on this topic specifically, about how Estonians who fought for the Nazis were viewed after 1989. It continues the work by Uldis Neiburgs on the links of the Latvian anti-Nazi opposition with their allies, which is supplemented by Kristina Burinskaitė's article about how the USSR formed the image in the West of émigrés as Nazi collaborators. All three articles raise the same issue of memory of the Nazi occupation, but in different ways: among the Baltic population, the Nazis were deemed a lesser evil than the Soviets, which is why being a soldier in an SS legion was (and often still is) viewed as taking part in the struggle for independence, and not viewed as being outsiders. No Lithuanian SS battalions were formed; however, the Holocaust was not considered an important part of the historic

memory at all for a long time, as the Jews were 'outsiders'. This historical memory is completely the opposite of that of the West, which formed a rejection of the Nazis and remorse over the Holocaust. These articles try, albeit with varying success, to combine the two approaches, explain the specific peculiarities of the region, and thus strengthen the influence of the perspective from the periphery.

Neiburgs and Burauskaitė underline the importance of the West's policy of not recognising the occupation of the Baltic countries. It states that the provision of independent information to the allies during the Nazi occupation helped to keep the stance of non-recognition in place, which in turn allowed for 'effective liberation campaigns by émigrés from the Baltic States' (p. 201). Numerous works have been written about the non-recognition of and liberation from the Soviet occupation in the Baltic countries; however, reading these claims, one cannot help thinking that Baltic historians still often repeat the same Cold War rhetoric on this matter. It is impossible to prove any such influence of liberation, while the policy of non-recognition had zero effect on life in the Baltic countries during the Soviet period, and neither did it help them win recognition when they declared they were restoring their independence in 1990–1991. The United States, which consistently upheld its policy of non-recognition of the Soviet occupation, only ended up recognising the independence of the Baltic countries later than, for example, Australia, which ended its position of non-recognition of the Soviet occupation in 1974. The articles from the period of the occupation are understandably united by memory: it is still a rather painful fact, making it difficult to avoid politicisation in research on the Soviet occupation.

The other articles on the Soviet period discuss various aspects of Soviet policy and functioning of the state: Beria's national policy in Estonia (Tõnu Tannberg) and the deportee rehabilitation process there (Aigi Rahi-Tamm). Nonetheless, when reading research on Soviet state policy, one often thinks that even the most detailed analysis still misses out something fundamental. On this point, Rahi-Tamm states that the successful establishment in Estonia of a person who had returned from exile depended greatly on their relations with the local population and the lower levels of government. In a paradoxical way, it is impossible to understand the internal policy of the all-powerful party-state by studying only state administration, without incorporating research of society as well. This is why it appears that in order to research and understand the Soviet period, it is not political but social history that is much more important.

Daina Bleiere has avoided these kinds of political history limitations when researching the possibilities for women to become established in the Latvian nomenclature and acquire political weight. Saulius Grybkauškas also looks at the institution of the second secretary from an unusual perspective: he states that the powers of this emissary from Moscow to oversee the activities of the republic's executive government arose from the possibilities for interpreting the centre's ideological discourse in the republic. This approach to the governance of the USSR through the power of discourse prism breathes a second life into political history.

The book's cover shows a photograph of the Freedom Monument in Riga, a figure of a woman holding three stars. Unknowing readers would be forgiven for thinking that these probably represent the Baltic countries. This was the Soviet interpretation of the sculpture, but the stars originally symbolised the historic regions of Latvia. This ironic linkage of meanings goes to show just how difficult it is for both the public in the Baltic countries and historic interpretations to shake off the Soviet period. This tome shows readers quite accurately how this process is coming along.

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