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Tomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. X+186 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-966802-1

Fifty years ago, Columbia University Press published the dissertation *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania* by the American historian Alfred Erich Senn.[1] Until now, it was the only work in English devoted entirely to the appearance of the Lithuanian state after the First World War. Even though there have been a considerable number of publications on this topic since then in Lithuanian, German and Polish, half a century has had to pass before a new monograph on the subject has become available to an English-speaking audience. Unlike Senn, who analysed mainly the political and diplomatic aspects of the emergence of Lithuania, Tomas Balkelis covers a much broader range of questions in his book. These questions are united under a desire to show the impact of war, violence and 'great mobilizing moments' on modern Lithuanian society. Because, as Balkelis notes, war and violence played a fundamental role in forming modern Lithuania, its 'range of policies, institutions, and modes of thinking, that shaped the country for decades,' even the Lithuanian identity (!) (pp. 1–2).

Balkelis is not a stranger to those who are interested in the western peripheries of the former Russian Empire and Lithuania in the first half of the 20th century. Many of the issues discussed in the book have been covered to some degree in his articles, while the idea for this book itself is a kind of continuation of his earlier monograph *The Making of Modern Lithuania*.[2] The new book continues directly from where the last one ended: its last chapter was 'War, Displacement and Nation-Building'. This book supplements the earlier book's answers to the questions what factors formed modern Lithuania, and what it means to be a modern Lithuanian, highlighting the effects of various mobilisations and different forms of violence. Unlike the first book, in the new one, the main actors are, as Balkelis calls them, 'war veterans, volunteers, peasant conscripts, prisoners of war, paramilitary militias, and other groups who preferred

[1] A.E. Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania* (New York, 1959).

[2] T. Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania* (London and New York, 2009).

guns, not diplomacy, to assert their power' (p. 9). The new book (like the earlier one) consists of seven chapters, in which the author expands on the ideas presented briefly in the introduction. The book reads well, as each chapter has an introduction and conclusions, while the epilogue summarises the whole book, presenting the continuity of the issues discussed and their long-term impact.

What is the main value of Balkelis' book? Those who are highly knowledgeable in Lithuanian studies, and experts on early 20th-century history, will not necessarily find facts that have not already appeared in earlier publications. As far as the main ideas are concerned, the author does not hide the fact that he has adapted many of them from other historians who have analysed the western part of the Russian Empire and Central and Eastern Europe during the Great War and after the 1917 revolution in Russia (p. 6). Based on the Lithuanian material, Balkelis expands on ideas that have been formulated over the last two decades by Peter Gatrell, Peter Holquist, Alexander Victor Prusin, Joshua A. Sanborn, and other researchers.[3] Nonetheless, the book does carry out an important mission, as it facilitates inter-communication. Firstly, due to the language barrier and other accessibility and distribution issues, many sources and much historiography in Lithuanian is out of reach of members of the English-speaking world; so Balkelis, who has a good grasp of the Lithuanian material, helps to disclose this to the world at large. Secondly, the book's translation into Lithuanian also came out in Lithuania in 2019,[4] so it can help Lithuanian readers become better acquainted with this field, which has been developed in the last decades by authors writing in English.

So what kind of bridges of communication has Balkelis laid down? He is the first to recommend so explicitly searching for continuity between how the future Lithuanian society was affected by the Great

[3] Some of the most influential authors' works are: P. Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1999); P. Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA, 2002); J.A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb, IL, 2003); A. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford, 2010); *War in Peace. Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, eds. R. Gerwarth, J. Horne (Oxford, 2013); *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, eds. E. Lohr, V. Tolz, A. Semyonov and M. von Hagen (Bloomington, IN, 2014); J.A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (New York, NY, 2014).

[4] T. Balkelis, *Lemtingi metai: Lietuva 1914–1923 m. Karas, revoliucija ir tautos gimimas* (Vilnius, 2019).

War and the later wars of independence. From the interwar period, these conflicts have mostly been analysed separately in historiography, without seeing how they interrelate. Balkelis does not try to convince us that this was one war for Lithuanians. Quite the opposite, in numerous places throughout the book (pp. 57, 97), he discusses the differences between the Great War and later conflicts. However, the author encourages readers to take a step back from what he calls an attitude that was once created by the national elites, and to: a) look at the period 1914 to 1923 through the eyes of broader sections of society that experienced these times; and b) to understand the wider regional context. That is why he talks about the violence of war as a constant companion in Lithuania in 1914–1923. And in criticising the limitations of concepts such as 'independence wars', 'civil wars', 'freedom fights', 'liberation struggles', he gently suggests using more neutral and less politically loaded terms, like 'borderland conflicts' and 'frontier wars'. Expanding on his first suggestion, he joins the crowd of authors who claim that the armistice signed at Compiègne in 1918 did not signal the end of the violence in Eastern Europe, and that for societies that continued to experience violence, it was merely a continuation of conflicts, war and crisis. In 2002, Peter Holquist wrote about a 'continuum of crisis' in 1914–1921 in Russia.[5] Later, other researchers followed.[6] Concerning the second suggestion, it is still slightly unclear whose perspective Balkelis suggests highlighting; in other words, which borderland actors does he have in mind? Of course, he is right in suggesting we broaden our field of vision. But is this not just an attempt to change the nationalist perspective with the even less legitimate imperial perspective, to join those treating the whole region as the 'borderlands', 'bloodlands', 'shatterzone', 'lands between', the 'European rimlands' or the European 'Middle East' of the four empires that were cast into oblivion by the Great War (Russian, Austrian, German and Ottoman)? Nonetheless, he appears to solve this puzzle with the term 'multidirectional war' that comes up towards the end of the book. According to him, the military conflicts that took place in Lithuania after the Great War should be treated as 'a single multidirectional war rather than a series of "liberation", "civil" or "revolutionary" wars' (p. 96).

[5] Holquist, op. cit.

[6] Cf. R. Gerwarth, J. Horne, 'Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War. An Introduction', in: *War in Peace...*, p. 1; R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (London, 2016); J. Winter, 'The Second Great War, 1917–1923,' *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar*, 2018, vol. 7, núm. 14, pp. 160–179.

One argument that Balkelis uses to prove the continuity between the wars in Lithuania requires to be discussed further. In several places in the book, he repeats the fact that thousands of demobilised Great War veterans changed uniforms and were called up into new paramilitary units. The author gives specific examples in his book illustrating this argument, but he does not discuss the scale of the phenomenon (pp. 9, 77, 111). This is why we get the impression that in the Great War and in the later multidirectional war, it was the same people who were fighting. I believe this claim should be made more subtle. It is as if Balkelis sees the opportunity to apply Jochen Böhler's insights about how a genuine demobilisation never took place after the Great War (cf. p. 9). However, Böhler's claims that might apply to Poland do not necessarily apply to Lithuania.[7] In 1918 and 1919, a significant number of officers, veterans of the Great War, either joined the Lithuanian army as volunteers or were called up. Veteran officers also operated among the Reds. They performed an important role as leaders, teachers and instructors in the Lithuanian army. However, we should also take into account, first, that many Great War veterans had not yet returned from the depths of Russia by the second half of 1918 and early 1919. In fact, many returned only after 1920, when the most active phase of the multidirectional war had already ended. Second, a majority of the veterans who were simply ordinary soldiers in the Great War did not participate in the new war, so in the Lithuanian army, very few veterans of the earlier war experienced the later war. Balkelis himself has written about this in his earlier articles,[8] although for some reason the subtleness he once demonstrated concerning this matter does not come across here.

Another bridge of communication that Balkelis lays down is visible in his efforts to show that social and national issues had become entangled in 1918–1919, and Lithuania was no exception in this regard in the broader region. Alexander V. Prusin, Ronald Suny and others have written about this in English-language historiography, but Lithuanian historians today also state that 'the episode of Soviet rule in Lithuania in 1918–1919 was not just Bolshevik expansion, but also the aspiration to achieve social justice, not just Russian occupation, but

[7] See his most recent book: J. Böhler, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921. The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford, 2018).

[8] T. Balkelis, 'From Imperial Soldiers to National Guardians: German and Lithuanian Volunteers after the Great War, 1918–19', in: *Transnational Soldiers. Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era*, eds. N. Arielli, B. Collins (Houndmills-Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 127–144.

also an expression of civil opposition (even war), not just betrayal of the national idea, but also searching for a way to solve the national question.'[9] Balkelis aims to show the combination of two revolutions in Lithuania. In one chapter, called 'Two Visions of Lithuania', he takes a serious look at what he calls 'fierce competition between nationalist and Bolshevik state-building projects' (p. 79). He shows that the leftist camp in Lithuania had many levels, and that they became established in the government in certain parts of Lithuania well before the Red Army brought its exported revolution to Lithuania. He also discusses the reasons why the 'socialist revolution' in Lithuania was unsuccessful. This question does not appear to have been answered in his book. In some places, he explains that the main reason why the Reds failed was because they were defeated by German, Lithuanian and Polish forces, and then other reasons contributed to their failure (pp. 80, 119), so he highlights external factors. In another place in his book, the emphasis is put more on internal factors, when he explains that the main reason was the Bolsheviks' reliance on the workers, and their 'inability to conquer the hearts and souls of Lithuanian peasants' (p. 94).

Balkelis' book covers many more questions than those few mentioned here that I have expanded on. When discussing well-known facts about the role of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, and the attempts by Polska Organizacja Wojskowa to organise an uprising in Lithuania, the author is probably the first to present all of this from the 'home front' perspective in Lithuania. In doing so, he shows how the war affected society and culture. He is not the first historian to extend the end of the active military conflict between Lithuania and Poland to 1923, or to claim that the continuing conflict meant a longer period of mobilisation for at least part of Lithuanian society.[10] But he is the first to call the 1920–1923 conflict which unfolded in the neutral zone between Poland and Lithuania 'a dirty war'. He seeks to show that the 'open-ended' outcome of this conflict 'ensured that those paramilitary structures that emerged during it would remain in place for much longer' (pp. 156–157).

[9] Č. Laurinavičius, 'Tarybų valdžios epizodas', in: *Lietuvos istorija*, t. X, d. 1: D. Blažytė-Baužienė, E. Gimžauskas, Č. Laurinavičius et al., *Nepriklausomybė (1918–1940 m.)* (Vilnius, 2013), p. 116.

[10] M. Kuodys, *Karo padėties režimas Lietuvos Respublikoje 1919–1940 m. Dissertation* (Kaunas, 2009); V. Jokubauskas, *'Mažųjų kariuomenių' galia ir paramilitarizmas, Tarpukario Lietuvos atvejis* (Klaipėda, 2014), p. 24; V. Jokubauskas, J. Vaičenonis, V. Vareikis, et al. *Valia priešintis. Paramilitarizmas ir Lietuvos karinio saugumo problemos* (Klaipėda, 2015), especially pp. 66–77.

He considers this structure primarily the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, which, according to him, was a 'key remnant of the violent post-World War I period' (p. 161) in Lithuania during the interwar years. Balkelis lists more of these kinds of relics in the epilogue to his book. All of these discussions, both about the period 1914–1923 and the later period, consistently guide the reader towards the main idea of the book: that in Lithuania, as in other post-imperial societies, violence was an 'all-pervading part of state- and nation-making' (p. 165). This is a claim that is certainly hard to disagree with, and one that Tomas Balkelis argues convincingly in his book.

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