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Review of Julius Ruiz, The "Red Terror" and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid

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Julius Ruiz. *The ‘Red Terror’ and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 385 pp.

No doubt the success of Ruiz’s 2012 prize-winning monograph *Madrid Rojo, 1936*¹ informs Cambridge University Press’s decision to publish this very faithful and accomplished English translation based on an impressive treasure trove of archival and periodical research as well as secondary scholarship. Moving away from the lurid descriptions of the Soviet-style *checas* and the nefarious activities of the “uncontrollables” Ruiz (Lecturer in History at the University of Edinburgh) argues that the Terror in Madrid during the first six months of the Spanish Civil War was “not extraneous to the antifascist war” but rather “it was integral to it”(8). Depending heavily on the work of Georges Lefebvre’s *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, Ruiz argues that the acute violence as well as popular support for those perpetrating that violence in Madrid during the start of the conflict are explained by a fundamental “collective delusion” that held that there was a clandestine enemy among the residents of Madrid undermining them so as to deliver the community to the Nationalists.

That republican and Soviet leadership in Madrid needed to feed this fear suggests the so-called Red Scare had an internal dynamic and organization rather than merely responding directly to Nationalist Terror outside of the capital. This also helps explain the radicalization in the development of the organizations behind the atrocities, including the Provincial Committee of Public Investigation (CPIP), as well as why the Republican government seemed to drag its feet and not curb spontaneous anticlerical violence, or properly prosecute the monarchist-bloc leader Calvo-Sotelo’s assassins, and perhaps overlook Soviet/communist involvement in the Paracuellos Massacre. The bulk of the book meticulously details many of the facets and developments of the Madrid-based Terror, from the fate of the CPIP, the rise of the Rearguard Vigilance Militias (MVR), the propagandistic building up of the boogey-man that was the Fifth Column, and the mechanisms through which republican police brigades such as the Directorate General of Security (DGS) were complicit in issuing false release orders that delivered political prisoners into the hands of the CPIP for execution outside the republican prisons. As Seidman has alluded to in his review of the Spanish-language version of this book, the very interesting Chapter 5 (“The Justice of the People”) develops the argument that wartime Madrid never became Sovietized and that Russian propaganda had a very limited impact on *madrileños*. The grisly

¹ Reviewed in this bulletin: Julius Ruiz, *El terror rojo. Madrid 1936*, reviewed by Michael Seidman: *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, Vol. 37, no. 1 (December 2012), 240-242.

“motorized crime” procedure that involved taking a prisoner for a ride in a confiscated car and shooting him – or her, as dozens of women, especially nuns, were among the victims of the terror – in the city’s outskirts speaks to the popularity of 1920s Chicago gangland wars that had filtered into the Madrid population’s imagination through American, rather than Russian, cinema. Although not as fully developed, Ruiz explains the relative absence of women among the perpetrators of the Terror by asserting that “Gangsterismo was a macho business in which females were excluded” because of entrenched cultural assumptions about the “proper” role of women (139-140).

This is most definitely a history of the Terror in Madrid and not a history of Madrid during that Terror. By this I mean that the accounts and descriptions of terror are completely devoid of any effort to situate them in the historical narrative of the Spanish Civil War, and especially the Battle for Madrid of 1936, because the Civil War has seemingly been removed from the equation. The result is a sense that the Terror is decontextualized because, though the period under study includes Franco’s Battle for Madrid, the very real fear and actual damage to the city at the hands of the Nationalists is not woven into the descriptions of and motivations behind the organizations engaged in the Red Terror. Furthermore, this book is highly dependent on the *Causa General* archive (the Franco Regime’s official investigation of Red crimes that was carried out during and after the civil war). Though noting the very problematic nature and Nationalist triumphalism of this cache of documents, Ruiz defends the use of *Causa General* because it contains a great number of Republican documents that might have been otherwise destroyed. Still, while he asserts it cannot be “uncritically utilized” and that he has used *Causa General* in conjunction with other sources, so many of the footnotes give citations solely from the *Causa General* collection. These concerns do not ultimately negate the meticulous and useful account of the Terror, nor the great value this book offers to any modern Hispanist and research/university library.

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