

Pavel Baloun: „Metla našeho venkova!“ Kriminalizace Romů od první republiky až po prvotní fázi protektorátu (1918–1941). [„Die Plage unseres Landes!“ Die Kriminalisierung von Roma von der Ersten Republik bis zur Anfangsphase des Protektorats.] Scriptorium. Praha 2022. 407 S., Ill. ISBN 978-80-7649-041-3.

Pavel Baloun's *„Metla našeho venkova!“* offers a ground-breaking and conceptually rich contribution to the historiography of interwar Czechoslovakia. By focusing on the systematic criminalization of Roma populations from the early First Republic through the initial phase of the Protectorate B. challenges the commonly idealized image of the “Masaryk Republic” as a democratic and civil society, presenting instead a meticulous analysis of how state power, local governance, and expert knowledge produced a system of legal, social, and symbolic exclusion targeting Roma groups.

Where earlier works, especially those by Ctibor Nečas—which B. refers to as the crucial base for his own research—laid the empirical foundation for understanding these repressive practices, B. advances the field by incorporating theoretical tools from Foucauldian biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben's theory of the state of exception, and concepts from postcolonial and critical race theory. Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics provides the foundation for understanding how the Roma were rendered governable subjects through practices of state surveillance. Agamben's idea of the “state of exception” is effectively employed to show how legal protections in practice were suspended for racialized minorities. The application of moral panic theory explains how media discourse fuelled legislative action by portraying Roma as existential threats to rural order. This theoretical scaffolding allows B. to propose a new model for interpreting racialized governance in interwar Central Europe—one that sees liberal democratic institutions not as antithetical to racial exclusion, but as fertile grounds for its bureaucratic articulation. Thus, a significant strength of the book lies in its interdisciplinary ambition. B. synthesizes methods and frameworks from history, sociology, legal studies and critical theory to construct a multifaceted account of how race, law and statecraft intersected in modern Czechoslovakia.

The monograph is organized into seven chapters, tracing both chronological and thematic developments in the legal and practical persecution of the people labelled as “Gypsies” (*cikáni*). Central to the analysis is Act No. 117/1927 Sb., the infamous “Law on Wandering Gypsies,” which institutionalized widespread surveillance, mobility restriction, and family separation through mechanisms like “gypsy identity cards” and coercive child removal. B. demonstrates how the state's biopolitical project—the regulation of populations through classification, tracking, and normalization—was enacted at multiple levels. Drawing on rich archival sources, he examines the role of police, municipalities, judges, and anthropological experts, showing that the law's implementation was far from uniform. Instead, local officials adapted its application based on region-specific ideologies and practical constraints. Especially powerful were the micro-historical case studies, which were used to trace not only the impact of criminalization on Roma families, but also their resistance strategies—from legal appeals to discursive repositioning.

The book also engages with postcolonial theories, especially Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, to interrogate how Roma were cast as internal “Others” within the Czechoslovak nation-state. This intersection of racialization and modernization is particularly evident in B.'s analysis of assimilationist educational experiments such as the “Gypsy School” in Užhorod, which sought to civilize Roma youth while perpetuating segregation.

Importantly, B. avoids treating Roma as mere passive victims. While the book's sources are necessarily institutionally mediated, the author identifies numerous moments of Roma agency, from court cases to acts of everyday resistance. Nevertheless, further integration of oral histories and personal testimonies would have enhanced this perspective.

Despite its many strengths, the book is not without limitations. One concern relates to the geographical imbalance—the focus remains heavily on Czech regions, with less attention given to Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. While B. acknowledges this and compensates for it with valuable case studies, the book stops short of providing a comprehen-

sive comparative framework across the republic's diverse regions. Another limitation is the relatively underdeveloped engagement with linguistic and cultural practices. B. could have further explored how language functioned both as a tool of repression and a site of resistance—especially in court proceedings and identity formation. Finally, while the author touches on continuities into the wartime and communist periods, a fuller exploration of how interwar logics fed into the Protectorate's concentration camp system and post-war Roma policies would be a fruitful direction for future research.

Despite these minor caveats, *“Metla našeho venkova!”* stands as a landmark study—not only for the field of Romani studies but also for broader debates on democracy, racialization, and state power in Central Europe. By drawing attention to how liberal democratic institutions could harbour deeply exclusionary practices, B. invites readers to reconsider comfortable narratives about Czechoslovakia's interwar period. This is a methodologically rigorous, theoretically informed, and ethically engaged work. Despite the fact that the book originates from B.'s doctoral dissertation (and, as such, employs a highly academic language that at times renders it challenging to read) it deserves a wide readership not only among historians, but also scholars of critical race studies, sociology, anthropology, and legal studies. Most of all, B.'s book serves as a necessary corrective to national histories that continue to marginalize Roma voices and experiences.

Frankfurt am Main

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Peter Whitewood: The Soviet-Polish War and Its Legacy. Lenin's Defeat and the Rise of Stalinism. Bloomsbury Academic. London et al. 2023. IX, 233 S. ISBN 978-1-3502-3894-7. (£ 28,99.)

Researchers studying the early period of Soviet history have often reflected on the origins of Stalin's brutally enforced “revolution from above” and the subsequent horrors of the Great Terror. Early scholarship viewed the reasons for the establishment of a dictatorial regime and the elimination of all forms of opposition in the USSR as inherent characteristics of the Bolshevik ideology and system of government outlined by Lenin. Over time, however, historians belonging to the so-called revisionist school have questioned this interpretation. They attribute the course taken by the Bolshevik leadership in the late 1920s to the traumatic experience of civil war, namely the mortal threat that Soviet Russia faced at that time and the terror carried out on all sides in the extremely fierce conflict.

While conceding that the revisionists are right to a certain extent, Peter Whitewood, Associate Professor of History at York St John University, points to significant gaps in their reasoning. He aptly notes: “It is not clear exactly how or through what processes the formative civil war experience contributed to the later Stalinist dictatorship. What connected the early and late 1920s is not always obvious, aside from the fact that Soviet wartime measures of the civil war era resembled, if sometimes closely, Stalin's radical and often destructive campaigns of industrialization and collectivization ten years later” (p. 3). In this book, W. attempts to delineate these processes by tracing the influence of one particular episode from the civil war: the conflict between Soviet Russia and Poland, or, more precisely, the catastrophic defeat of the Red Army at the Battle of Warsaw in August 1920.

The Polish victory halted the rapidly advancing Soviet offensive and dashed the Bolshevik leaders' dreams of quickly revolutionizing Central Europe. The Bolsheviks attributed their failure to the significant support given to Poland by the Entente powers who allegedly directed Warsaw's actions and were responsible for its aggressive policy toward the Soviets. W. convincingly argues that fears of a “capitalist encirclement” and the threat posed by Poland, which had the potential to lead a broader anti-Soviet coalition in the future, had a decisive impact in the years following. These concerns not only shaped the direction of official Soviet propaganda but also the thinking of Bolshevik leaders, as reflected in their private correspondence and intimate discussions. The author points out that these fears were largely unfounded: both Poland and the major Western powers sought to