

*H-France Forum*

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Pierre Triomphe, *1815, La Terreur blanche*. Toulouse: Privat, 2017. 475 pp. Tables, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. 21€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-7089-6969-8.

Response by Pierre Triomphe, Institut national du patrimoine

I am grateful to the editors at H-France Forum and especially to Jack Censer for choosing *1815, La Terreur blanche* for this review forum and for assembling such a distinguished group of reviewers. It is a privilege to have one's work so carefully read and discussed, and to have the opportunity to explain one's choices and one's omissions.

The idea of writing a book about the White Terror goes back about ten years. Studying this subject fifty years after the last significant and comprehensive work upon it naturally meant taking new perspectives into account.[1] My research took place at a moment when memory played a key role in French historiography. It originated directly from a Ph. D. which was devoted to political memories in nineteenth-century France, and which considered the major role played by the events of 1815.[2] Memory of the events was, therefore, from the beginning a major topic, and the role of reimagination became crucial. Trying to trace a path from the events themselves to the construction and then waning of later memories, I had to cope with another topic: the nature and the structures of royalism, which were at the center of controversies about the origins of violence, and the role played by notabilities. In addition was the problem of the geography. The violence associated with the White Terror occurred mostly in southern France. It was responsible for the birth of a new geographical notion, the "Midi", which was so loosely defined and demarcated that its usefulness to my research area was limited. Nonetheless, I chose a political delimitation of the Midi, a broad area including 20 *départements*, among which all the regions or towns that belonged to the "Midi" when the term was coined around 1815.

In order to address my subject, I also had to take into account new reflections about politicization, anthropological history, rumors, and so on, which have contributed greatly to the understanding of the events. It allowed me to question in a new way my sources—the archives in particular—which had sometimes already been studied by other scholars. Each of those topics could have led to lengthier developments, and most of my reviewers regret that I haven't deepened my analysis of various subjects. Before answering their precise comments, I would like to say that approximately 150,000 words (without the bibliography and the index) was for me—and for my editor!—an upper limit, and to give more space to one question in my book would have meant not treating or not developing another. And, in my opinion, every topic addressed in my book was necessary to understand the White Terror. Therefore, even if I am fully ready to admit that there are some shortcomings, and even if sometimes I feel a few paragraphs could be rewritten, I think that, on the whole, the present book is well balanced and that its flaws are a lesser evil than that of a book that is long-winded and ill-balanced. As for its organization, which is criticized by Jean-Clément Martin, I can only repeat what I said in my introduction: the logic of exposition is not the same as the logic of the researcher. The first one tries to be rectilinear, the second is mostly circular, going

back and forth between sources and theories. For the sake of clarity, it was easier to begin with the beginning, the events themselves, and to finish with memories, reimaginings, and legends attributed to those events.

The various reviewers seem to agree with the main conclusion of my book: the events themselves were somewhat less bloody than previously thought, more spontaneous, and deeply rooted in a social and political context which led to a push to extremes and a civil war. It ended with royalist retaliations, thefts, violence, and murders that I have described without insisting on any peculiar incident, some of which are famous, such as Brune's assassination in Avignon. The narrative might be "puzzling", as Donald Sutherland puts it, but it was the result of a desire to present mechanisms that can be observed in many places, and not to write successive narratives of various incidents, as the previous historians of the "White Terror" have done. In order to understand a situation that no one could control, some people, both during and afterwards, tried to attribute the events to human action – and most often to conspiracies. Such a belief was a major factor in the making of the memory of the liberal "Terror of 1815", which was coined not so much in order to fight the Bourbons, but essentially in order to fight ultraroyalism, as Robert Alexander rightly underlines. After 1830, the period became known as the "White Terror", putting the responsibility of the events mainly on the overthrown dynasty. The bitter memory of the events was a weapon in liberal and republican hands, used mainly during phases of political crisis. It was enhanced by the invention of the stereotype of a savage, the backward and cruel "Mérional" exemplified by Trestaillon, hence the invention of a "Midi" without clear boundaries. This construction was a key component of left propaganda during the first half of the century, before being gradually erased by the memories of 1851 and the decline of legitimism.

In their comments, my reviewers identify various topics that would have benefited from further developments. I will begin with my social study of royalism, mostly conducted in chapter 5. As Donald Sutherland points out, it is (too) often based on generic assertions and, when I used exact figures, for instance in a social analysis of arrested royalist thugs, it was based on a small number of people that did not amount to a representative sample, as I made clear in my text itself. Therefore, I fully acknowledge that my work would sometimes have benefited from some in-depth analysis of smaller areas, using the techniques of microhistory. That I did not do so was partly because I was concerned about the amount of work involved since I chose to study a broader area of 20 *départements*, with overwhelming differences in their social structures, and because of the lack of other micro-analyses dealing with the situation in 1815.[3] Furthermore, I am not fully convinced that more study would have provided valuable information. On one hand, Donald Sutherland himself noticed in his study of Aubagne during the French Revolution that "at the level of the most committed, between the murder gang and the terrorists, the social variable mattered the least,"[4] on the other, sources on royalist crowds in 1815 are scarce, and can be questioned, and therefore their interpretation could be very easily contested.

For her part, Christine Haynes noticed that violence during the White Terror, especially in Marseille, could sometimes be linked to racial bias. I agree with this appraisal, even if I was not convinced by Ian Coller's analysis on the murdering of Mamelukes, which relies on late and biased sources,[5] and by his book generally speaking. Other incidents in 1815 were marked by racial bias. The main ones took place around Bordeaux. General Clauzel decided to form black companies during the Hundred-Days. They were sometimes brutal and were fiercely hated by

royalists, as Bonapartist soldiers but also as people of color.[6] But racial violence was only a minor component of royalist brutality during the White Terror. Even though racial prejudices explain the refusal to embrace diversity of any kind (political, religious or racial), these views were not a central component of their ideology. Christine Haynes' remarks about the Allies' role in 1815 are relevant, and I should indeed have dwelt more upon the subject. It would have been of great interest to use Spanish sources on French exiles during the Hundred Days—mostly the Duke of Angoulême and his entourage. I could easily have used more primary or secondary sources about the Allies' occupation. I underestimated their contribution to the “retour au calme” in my book (chapter 3, part 2). Nonetheless, if foreign troops played a key-role in restoring order in some areas, and if the treaties of 1815 were fundamental for French history later, and often associated with the image of the White Terror in memories, I'm less convinced about the subsequent role of the Allies' ambassadors in the dissolution of the *Chambre introuvable* in 1816.

Jean-Clément Martin and Robert Alexander would have appreciated further analysis of conspiracies. I have made lengthy commentaries about the general belief in the efficiency of conspiracies, which is typical of this period. I would have liked to be more assured about their real impact in 1815, but it is impossible to find reliable sources or information on this matter, as demonstrated in the best research conducted on the subject, such as the recent work of Jean-Noël Tardy.[7] On such a topic, the historian's conviction is always reinforced by the material he or she can find. Nonetheless, I could have studied one or two episodes more closely, such as Ramel's murder or some judicial investigations or trials after 1815 in order to justify more solidly my point of view.

Jean-Clément Martin and Robert Alexander also point out that I ought to have added a comparative perspective. I do agree with them, and, as I wrote in my conclusion, I even think that it should not be limited to the French West, mostly the Vendée, but also to other countries where popular royalism was a strong component of political life, mostly Italy, Spain and Portugal.[8] I will consider making further studies of that dimension in the future. But in this book, I wanted to keep the focus on my subject, and I mostly made comparisons within the Midi, where the diversity of economic, social and political structures proved sufficient to lead to useful comparisons. Jean-Clément Martin and Robert Alexander would also have liked for me to dwell more upon the continuities and discontinuities between the 1790s and 1815. It was not the purpose of this book, which was to see the White Terror as a key component of nineteenth-century political struggles. Of course, the White Terror can also be seen – and usually has been until now - as the late end of a cycle of violence that began in 1789. Even when I addressed the subject in the book, mostly in its second part, I did not insist too much upon it, because, on one hand, it would have rendered my explanations more complex, and on the other, it would have been very difficult to carry out such a study in the entire Midi or to use a revolutionary bibliography which is not very helpful in that matter. Authors such as Martine Lapiéd, on the scale only of a *department*, carefully avoid asserting the existence of continuities or discontinuities between the 1790s and 1815.[9] When such analyses are done, for instance by Gwynne Lewis in her work upon the Gard, it is not always fully convincing.[10]

To finish, I would like to say that, even if I do not think that the expression “*Terreur blanche*” is fully appropriate, it is nevertheless convenient for describing a period of unrest and violence, mostly in Southern France, and of the political reaction throughout the country. Too often in the

social sciences, authors try—and seldom succeed—to implement a new taxonomy in order to clarify things, even though this new vocabulary often becomes a source of confusion and misunderstandings. My purpose was to deepen the understanding of that moment, not to change a denomination understood by every historian. The book also seeks to illuminate some aspects of French and Meridional political life during the nineteenth-century. From the reaction of most of my readers, I believe I was not too far from achieving that goal.

## NOTES

[1] Daniel Resnick, *The White Terror and the Political Reaction after Waterloo* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

[2] Pierre Triomphe, *Les mises en scène du passé au Palais-Bourbon (1815-1848). Aux origines d'une mémoire nationale*, thèse de doctorat d'histoire, sous la direction de C.-O. Carbonell, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, 2005.

[3] Among the exceptions, Michel Riou, « La Terreur blanche dans le département du Gard. Aspects économiques et sociaux », dans *Économie et société en Languedoc-Roussillon de 1789 à nos jours. Actes du colloque de Montpellier 25-26 septembre 1976* (Montpellier: Imprimerie Déhan, 1978), pp. 371-99; David Higgs, *Ultraroyalism in Toulouse from Its Origins to the Revolution of 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

[4] D. M. G. Sutherland, *Murder in Aubagne: Lynching, Law, and Justice during the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 24.

[5] Ian Coller, *Une France arabe. Histoire des débuts de la diversité* (Paris: Alma, 2014), pp. 212-21. Original English language edition: Ian Coller, *Arab France: Islam and the Making of Modern Europe, 1798-1831* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See Alain Messaoudi's review in the *Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*: <http://journals.openedition.org/rh19/5248>.

[6] See AN, F7 9064, and Bernard Gainot, *Les officiers de couleur dans les armées de la République et de l'Empire, 1792-1815* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), pp. 224-5.

[7] Jean-Noël Tardy, *L'âge des ombres, complots, conspirations et sociétés secrètes au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2015).

[8] Triomphe, *1815*, pp. 392-3.

[9] Martine Lapiéd, *Le Comtat et la Révolution française, naissance des options collectives* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1996), pp. 324-5.

[10] Gwynne Lewis, *The Second Vendée: The Continuity of Counter-Revolution in the Department of the Gard, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 167.

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