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Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror. Virtue, Friendship, and Authenticity in the French Revolution*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. x + 323 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. ISBN: 9780199576302 (cl). US \$99.00.

Review essay by Don Sutherland, University of Maryland

Choosing Terror attempts to explain why Jacobin politicians in the National Convention killed each other. The life of a deputy in the Convention was amazingly turbulent. Marisa Linton quotes Mette Harder's figures that 220 of 749 deputies were arrested, and her own incomplete list shows that 47 deputies were executed. This is what Linton calls the "politicians' terror," as distinct from the Terror of repression, punishment, and tribunals. Her problem is not new. Albert Mathiez, who devoted much of his career to this problem, explained it as part of a process. As everyone knows, Mathiez took sides, but behind the now archaic passion for Robespierre and the hatred of Danton, Mathiez deployed a serious argument. The divisions began with the debate in 1791 and 1792 over the desirability of war against Austria. Again, as everyone knows, the journalist Jacques-Pierre Brissot argued for the war, Robespierre against. This was the beginning of the Girondin-Montagnard split that continued with furious disputes over Girondin ambition for office; over allegations that the Girondins attempted to save the monarchy in August 1792; over allegations that the Montagnards attempted to have Girondin leaders murdered during the September Massacres; and, above all, over accusations that the Girondins tried to save the life of Louis XVI in January 1793.

Marisa Linton accepts most of Mathiez's arguments. Like Mathiez, she presents Robespierre as a brilliant tactician, a selfless statesman, blameless for the atrocities of the Terror. Like Mathiez too, she finds a remarkable number of politicians who opposed Robespierre to have been corrupt or at least suspiciously compromised. Where Mathiez saw character flaws, Linton explains the disputes among the Jacobin politicians over the impossibility of living up to the image they constructed for themselves as virtuous patriots. This was a concept derived from Roman antecedents that represented the ideal political persona as selfless, willing if necessary to sacrifice his or her life for the *patrie*. One of Linton's strengths is to show that this ideal did not stand apart from daily political and personal lives. Indeed, Linton believes that the personal, emotional lives of members of the political class explain a lot about the bonds of amity and enmity. Declarations of principle were devices to persuade, not by the force of argument, but by force of personality, by representing oneself as honest, sincere, and willing to die for one's principles. She has some strong passages at the end where she describes many of her politicians constructing their own deaths to underline these concepts. The book is particularly strong too in its attempts to tease out networks among politicians, whether they were public, as in the press or the Jacobin Club, or private, as in meetings, dinners, or salons. Such friendships sometimes even pre-dated the Revolution. She goes on to argue that these private networks created a tension with the ideal of the virtuous patriot because they opened their participants to allegations of backstairs intrigue, promoting ambition, and hypocrisy.

Ideology or even ideas do very little work in Linton's schema. Her treatment of the debate over the desirability of war in 1791 and 1792, for example, gives a glancing mention to Brissot's arguments for a preventive war and then goes on to assert the "real" reasons for urging war: fear of the Austrian Committee, intoxication with their own rhetoric, personal ambition, and craving for office. Yet she owes the reader more than this casual dismissal of Brissot's case. After all, his argument that the liberties of revolutionary France were incompatible with the serfdom of feudal Europe had a long life that continued to be used until the end of the period. Interestingly, she shows, as others have shown, that

Robespierre could not take disagreement on the war without imputing sinister ulterior motives to his opponents. Linton blames the Girondins for starting this nasty habit, but does it really matter? Once each side began to assault the honesty of their opponents, they were poisoning the political culture of the Revolution as a whole.

Linton argues that friendships and other non-political forms of association underlay factions. While this is certainly plausible, these arguments about networks could be presented more clearly. Since she follows a chronological organization, she introduces the topic of networks and alliances episodically. The reader has to track an often familiar narrative alongside her network argument when it might have been easier to track with a thematic presentation or even a series of charts. She would respond, I suspect, that the chronological presentation is necessary in order to show that the pathology of revolutionary politics got worse over time. As she says, the war and the increasing polarization of the country as a whole raised the price of opposition and the cost of failure. Each crisis produced reactions that attributed blame to elaborate conspiracies. By the spring of 1793 one was guilty for just having associated with Dumouriez; a year later, politicians and prosecutors were fabricating evidence.

Linton devotes considerable space to the role of the allegedly extremist representatives on mission recalled from the provinces in bringing about the downfall of Robespierre. Like Peter McPhee and others, she simply asserts that these deputies were recalled because of their atrocities and that Robespierre was appalled by their excesses. This is where her “politicians’ terror” needs to be put in the wider context of the national terror. The Committee of Public Safety dispatched their colleagues to the provinces with instructions to do whatever necessary to crush “counter-revolution.” There was no indication from the center that the representatives were to moderate the local terror. Barère, speaking for the Committee on 1 August 1793, proclaimed that the Vendée would be destroyed. On 12 October, Barère persuaded the Convention to eradicate Lyon’s name, destroy the houses of the rich, and erect the famous monument bearing the inscription “Lyon fit la guerre à la liberté, Lyon n’est plus.” Collot d’Herbois, a member of the Committee on mission at Lyon, was preparing to execute all the guilty at a single stroke. This was the goal behind the botched *mitrillades*.

The Committee continued to initiate a ruthless terror down to Robespierre’s overthrow. Robespierre himself signed the mission statement of the *Commission Populaire d’Orange* (22 Floréal—11 May), a second generation revolutionary tribunal that blurred the distinction between suspect and accused and that prefigured the infamous Law of 22 Prairial, even in its phrasing. The representative on mission in the Vaucluse and Bouches-du-Rhône, Etienne Maignet, proposed the *Commission* to his good friend Couthon as a way of getting rid of the 15,000 individuals in the Midi who remained to be executed.

The representative on mission in Nantes, Jean-Baptiste Carrier, wrote frequent if euphemistic descriptions of the drownings to the Committee and to the Convention. No one at the time repudiated him. Instead, the Convention greeted him with rapture when he returned in February 1794. Carnot, a member of the Committee, designed General Turreau’s mission that killed thousands of civilians in the Vendée in the late spring of 1794. Prieur de la Marne, yet another of Committee member deeply involved in the provincial terror, was sent out on mission to supervise him.

The men caught up in the “politicians’ terror” were inseparable from the politicians’ wider Terror as a whole. They were sometimes the same men, and they shared the vision of an extravagant terror. Yet Linton tries to distance the Montagnards from activities in the provinces as much as she can. She misidentifies Maignet, says nothing about Carrier, little about Collot d’Herbois, Fouché, Fréron, and Barras, and does not keep the attributions of the terrorist tribunals straight. She asserts the Terror continued after the battle of Fleurus (26 June 1794) because of Robespierre’s allegedly horrified reaction to the representatives’ so-called atrocities. One would like to see the evidence that “some Jacobins were looking for a way out of the terror. . .,” (p. 229) particularly Robespierre.

What Fleurus had to do with ending domestic repression is not at all clear. Instead, blowback from the provincial terror was essential. The Paris-out, top-down, wide angle terror of the politicians collided with local realities that themselves had a history that was only dimly appreciated in the capital. The extremist deputies who were recalled played the role they did because the republican victory over the Vendéans at Savenay (23 December 1793), and the recapture of the federalist cities of the Midi restored to power the Jacobin fanatics whose thirst for revenge on their opponents had brought on the crisis in the first place. After the victory, here was a chance for the followers of Châlier in Lyon or Isoard in Marseille to initiate the all-cleansing bloodbath. It was not that the representatives on mission were hostile to these fantasies in principle. After all, Barras and Fréron had permitted the Jacobins released from the prison hulks in Toulon simply to identify 800 of their federalist enemies who were then shot on the public square without trial. An appalling terror sponsored by local factions was thus possible, but not always. In Marseille, for example, Fréron fell out with the club over military priorities, priorities that postponed executing local enemies until after the capture of Toulon. In Nantes, it was much the same where Carrier and the club disagreed over plans to capture the Vendean general Charette. In Lyon, Fouché closed the club after it denounced the *Commission Temporaire* for “moderationism.”

In all of these cases, the representatives clashed with the clubs who retaliated by denouncing the representatives for being soft on counter-revolutionaries. In all of these cases, the Committee of Public Safety sided with the clubs and recalled the representatives. These men had listened to the Committee's leading orators exhort limitless destruction, had often acted on these directions, yet they returned to Paris disowned by their colleagues and accused of moderation. After the fall of the Indulgents, such accusations were lethal. The violent and extravagant talk of the revolutionary generation threatened to engulf everyone.

An examination of the interaction of government policy and provincial terror thus complicates the frequent dichotomy of extremist representatives on mission and an essentially moderate and legal minded Robespierre. The concept of “politicians’ terror” is too narrow because the world of the politicians was not enclosed and because other terrors kept intruding on their intimate world.

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