

ALEXANDER V. PRUSIN. *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992*. (Zones of Violence.) New York: Oxford University Press. 2010. Pp. 324. \$65.00.

TIMOTHY SNYDER. *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books. 2010. Pp. xix, 524. \$29.95.

These books by Alexander V. Prusin and Timothy Snyder try to explain mass violence in parts of Eastern Europe in the twentieth century in different ways. Snyder deals with territories that were ruled for some time by both Nazi Germany and the USSR from 1930 to 1953. He covers most of today's Poland and Ukraine (the focus of his interest), Belarus, the three Baltic countries, and the most western strip of Russia. Prusin examines a smaller area (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, western Belarus, East Galicia, Volhynia, Bukovina, and Bessarabia—largely the western border areas of the former Soviet Union) over a longer time span (1870–1992).

Both address, in relatively short texts, the murder and death of millions of people. This poses great challenges in terms of mastery of the material, of analysis, and of the narrative. Almost by necessity, texts with such encompassing topics are prone to mistakes and simplifications. But both books provide knowledgeable overviews of complex political processes on a high level of scholarship.

Both authors are experienced Eastern Europeanists who know the relevant languages, do not ignore Eastern European scholarship, and venture into German history and that of other relevant countries. Their books are more or less based on published studies and sources (in Snyder's book, two percent of the footnotes refer to archival material, in Prusin's twelve percent). Most of the facts are not new. So the value of each volume is dependent upon how incisive the analysis is and what new, insightful connections the authors make.

Prusin and Snyder synthesize innovative tendencies in recent scholarship by taking a multicausal approach to explaining mass violence, tying the fate of multiple victim groups together instead of concentrating on one, and by examining a broader geographical zone, thereby trying to move beyond national histories and their somewhat more limited explanatory power.

Yet these two books offer very different narratives. Snyder gives a rich account of political history. He interweaves stories of individuals, showing them often just when they were facing death, personalizing their suffering. Using emphatic language in a moving, haunting account, he instills in the reader images of horror. By contrast, Prusin, embedding his more analytical narrative in a much broader prehistory, links a rather depersonalized and sober social history with eruptions of violence, but is stronger on the background than on depicting violence itself.

By and large, Snyder offers the more conventional argument. His book lacks a clear research question. His comparison of Nazi and Soviet violence has no clearly stated purpose. Snyder voices skepticism about the

“overtheorized but misunderstood” European mass killings (p. 383), but in underconceptualized studies underlying assumptions may enter through the back door. For example, Snyder rejects the concept of “genocide” (pp. 412–413) but says “deliberate policies of mass murder” are his topic (p. 410), which lets him largely set aside what he sees as the “few million” unintended deaths that resulted from forced labor or mass resettlement (p. 324). His analysis, which concentrates a great deal on planning, is as focused on intention and the state as is the concept of genocide.

Snyder criticizes Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism (pp. 380–383, 485, n. 21) but lists as important results of his study that Nazism and Stalinism were tyrannies, one-party states that made certain groups scapegoats for their own failures, indoctrinated or misled their followers, and relied on bureaucratic functionaries who, either willingly or under pressure, chose to act violently (pp. 388–399). These unsurprising results resemble the outdated totalitarianism theory.

Snyder also claims to move beyond national histories (pp. xviii–xix, 402–406), but his account in fact reconfirms convenient Polish, Ukrainian, and Baltic mainstream narratives of victimization. Snyder only deals with “Soviet or Nazi killing policy” (p. x). “The bloodlands were no political territory” but “simply where Europe's most murderous regimes did their most murderous work” (p. xviii). The problem is that, in Snyder's account, the violence seems not to have much to do with the locals—including the victims.

Accordingly, Snyder tends to leave out indicators of internal conflict that may have contributed to violence and death; he does not examine them thoroughly and does not tie them into his analysis. The author devotes one line each to the Russian Civil War and to Polish anti-Jewish policies and attitudes in the interwar years (pp. 4, 283). He states that kulaks never existed as a “social class” (p. 78); they were just the “best farmers” (p. 33) and “natural leaders” (p. 29). Pogroms against Jews in the recently Soviet-annexed territories attacked by Germany in June and July 1941 had little to do with local nationalism; for Snyder, who gives a low-end victim number, they resulted from anticommunism and were “orchestrated” (p. 392) by the Germans, “a Nazi edition of a Soviet text” (p. 196). The pogroms in Bessarabia and Bukovina, reconquered by Romania from the Soviets, do not fit this argument, so Snyder only speaks of Romanian state violence. Denunciations of Jews by non-Jewish Poles or Belarusians, helping the German persecution of Jews, are downplayed. The civil war between Ukrainian and Polish nationalists in 1943–1944 that claimed tens of thousands of lives—an event that Snyder has previously published on—is allotted no more than half a page, in part declared a responsibility of the Germans, and appears mainly significant as a pretext for Stalinist ethnic cleansing (p. 326).

The reader learns little about locals adopting and reshaping ideas that promoted violence. If Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Poles killed each other, this is mainly explained as an “accumulation of Nazi and Soviet rule”

(p. 393). Snyder mentions that internal conflicts divided cities, villages, and families, but there is no further analysis. “Only a small minority” even of local collaborators are supposed to have “had political motives of any discernible sort”; they just obeyed, were indoctrinated, or wanted to save their skin (pp. 397–399). From Argentina to Vietnam, from Kenya to North Africa and Iceland—everywhere on the planet people were politicized in World War II, just not in Eastern Europe?

Nearly everything is blamed on foreign intruders, and communism is presented as an idea alien to Ukraine and other areas under examination. According to Snyder, Soviet rule as such was foreign; there was only Nazi “colonization” versus Stalinist “self-colonization” (p. 391). What remains in such a construct are the well-known stories of the suffering or resistance of Poles, Ukrainians, and Belarusians that are highly compatible with official national historiographies.

Prusin delivers a more penetrating analysis that regards the people in the region as actors. Where Snyder blames imperialism and radical regimes, Prusin brings in the role of young nation-states and their distrust and persecution of minorities. He tries to link imperialist policies to homegrown conflicts in the borderlands that the former exacerbated. Prusin argues that nationalism and various socioeconomic factors charged conflicts in remote border areas and led to their expression in increasingly ethnic terms, and that imperialist war twice resulted in further politicization and multipolar outbreaks of violence, including violence by non-state actors. In these eruptions, state persecutions of certain groups and changes of rule almost fused each time with civil war (chapters three and seven), especially toward the end of each world war. Thus Prusin offers a conclusive phase model whereas Snyder’s sequence of phases seems unsystematic (Snyder, pp. 415–417).

Prusin’s volume concentrates on precisely the internal conflicts that Snyder sets aside. In Prusin’s account, however, the scope of destruction often remains unclear, and he frames conflict increasingly in ethnic terms, although he tries to show how this was connected to issues like class. Prusin’s analysis of imperialist aims is patchy and at times contradictory (compare pp. 147 and 256). His social history seems clearer than his economic analysis. For example, he mentions economic disruption but provides few details and leaves issues of starvation and forced labor aside.

Snyder correctly places much more emphasis on the exploitation of the countryside and enforced hunger, which claimed half of the fourteen million victims in the “bloodlands.” Economically speaking, he emphasizes the extraction of resources by imperialists as the cause of mass starvation—but not the additional factors of economic disruption, loss of livelihood, and lack of labor, as the many famines during World War II, including in the Soviet Union on both sides of the front, would suggest. Snyder boils down Amartya Sen’s entitlement theory to unequal distribution and direct violence (p. 42), paying little attention to the functioning of markets, social inequalities, and social conflict—also, for ex-

ample, among Ukrainian peasants. Another simplification is that Snyder partially mixes up the German plan of 1941 to immediately starve to death tens of millions of Soviets with the *Generalplan Ost* for future German settlements (pp. 160–170), although the latter had other, conflicting objectives, concentrated on victims in other areas, and was designed by other authorities at a different time than the hunger plan. This is also an example of Snyder portraying German policies as more centralized than they may actually have been. His account focuses strongly on Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin.

Snyder and Prusin provide us with complementary accounts of violence in twentieth-century Eastern Europe, tying various victim groups together in multifactorial accounts. In this sense, their important studies should stimulate further specialized research.

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ANDREJ ANGRICK and PETER KLEIN. *The “Final Solution” in Riga: Exploitation and Annihilation, 1941–1944*. Translated by RAY BRANDON. (Studies on War and Genocide, number 14.) New York: Berghahn Books. 2009. Pp. xi, 517. \$80.00.

The Society of Survivors of the Riga Ghetto in New York commissioned Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein’s excellent monograph on the history of the Riga ghetto. It was published in German in 2006 and has now been translated into English. The authors aim to write the history of the people who were forced to live—and in most cases die—in the Riga ghetto, but also the history of the perpetrators and the evolution of their crimes. They do this in great detail and with vast knowledge about the genesis of the Holocaust. They do not concentrate only on Latvia, but they integrate what was happening there into the history of the annihilation of the European Jewry. This is the first exhaustive monograph on the Riga ghetto, and it is a study of great importance.

Persecution in Latvia was radical from the very beginning. Angrick and Klein write that: “a month of German occupation had brought destruction, destitution, and primarily murder, with the mass executions in the woods of Bikernieki following the pogroms. The synagogues were destroyed, Jewish shops and assets confiscated. A large part of the Jewish intelligentsia and many able-bodied men had been murdered, community life extinguished. Jewish Riga had already ceased to exist” (p. 82).

As in occupied Poland, German officials were sure that the ghetto would be only a temporary solution, but it existed longer than expected. German occupation authorities started registration for forced labor (there was great demand for workers in Riga) and ghettoization in July 1941. In August the Jewish population was forced to move to one of the most neglected areas of the city, the Moscow suburb. The so-called large ghetto was sealed off with barbed wire by October 25.