Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. xix + 524 pp. New York: Basic Books, 2010. ISBN-13 978-0465002399. $29.95.

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The overarching concept of this book is intriguing. "In the middle of Europe in the middle of the twentieth century," writes Snyder, "the Nazi and Soviet regimes murdered some fourteen million people. The place where all of the victims died, the bloodlands, extends from central Poland to western Russia, through Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States" (vii–viii). These people were not victims of war but were killed through a "murderous policy." They were not soldiers but "women, children, and the aged" (viii). Snyder thus analytically interlocks the two most murderous regimes of the first half of the 20th century by identifying an East European space. In so doing—25 years after the *Historikerstreit,* in which German historians fought bitterly over the singularity of the Shoah—he repudiates the uniqueness of the German murder of the Jews and instead situates the Holocaust in a spatially circumscribed history of violence. Yet the pitfalls of this brilliant concept are apparent from the outset: if the spatially defined domain fails to hold empirically, the entire concept falters.

Ever since the arrival of the spatial turn in history, it has seemed promising to write a history of 20th-century state violence through the prism of the East European space where most of the Stalinist and Nazi mass murders actually took place. Both Nazi and Stalinist hit squads acted in this space; both regimes occupied this part of Europe; and both regimes had grand plans of how they were going to integrate—and exploit—these regions in their empires. Yet it should be stated right away that Snyder does not present any new empirical research in this book but rather takes a fresh look at the existing scholarship from the perspective of his spatial conception, the "bloodlands." His main concern is not to identify the causes of mass murder or to provide explanations for the Holocaust but rather to compose a synoptic picture of practices of mass murder or, put differently, a panorama of violence in Eastern Europe.

Snyder starts with a short sketch of Hitler's and Stalin's respective rise to power among the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. Both Hitler and Stalin drew radical conclusions from the collapse of the Old Europe, but with very different aims in mind. If Stalin saw the only

chance for the Soviet Union's survival and for the consolidation of the power of the Bolsheviks in rapid industrialization, even if against the will of its own population, Hitler devised a racist vision of a *Großeuropa* under German domination, which would provide East European "living space" (*Lebensraum*) for the German "master race." When Hitler came to power in 1933, Stalin had long eliminated all rivals and was the undefeated leader of the Soviet Union. And while the Nazi regime killed about 10,000 people in concentration camps and prisons before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the Stalinist leadership had already allowed millions to die from hunger and had shot about one million people.

Here we already encounter one of the major problems of this book. By focusing on Stalin's crimes, the millions of people who died during the Russian Civil War, and especially the famine of 1921–22, get no attention at all. True, Snyder mentions these victims in passing (11), but he does not go into any depth, probably because they fit into neither his temporal nor his spatial framework. These people died in the "bloodlands" and in many other parts of the former tsarist empire. For the violent policies of the Bolsheviks in general and the Stalinist leadership in particular, the experience of the Civil War was formative, and the Ukrainian famine of 1932–33 also in many ways constituted a reliving of the famine that had preceded it by ten years. A history of Soviet violence has to be able to include the Civil War and the 1921–22 famine; if it cannot, its analytical framework is in peril.

The first events Snyder recounts are the deaths from hunger during the early 1930s of millions of people, not only in Ukraine but also in Kazakhstan and other parts of the Soviet Union. These deaths were due to the arbitrary and rash collectivization of agriculture organized by the Stalinist leadership in Moscow. In the relevant chapter Snyder—and here I should register the caveat that I am a specialist of Nazism, not Soviet collectivization—successfully weds an analysis of Stalinist industrialization policy (based on the ruthless exploitation of peasants) to a narrative of everyday death from hunger and the merciless repression through the secret police and communist militias—a narrative that is as impressive as it is horrific.

After the catastrophic harvest of 1931, which was partly a result of collectivization, the Stalinist leadership exported grain in order to be able to purchase industrial goods abroad. It consciously accepted the mass deaths that resulted from this policy. In December of that year, Stalin decreed that kolkhozes that could not meet their grain delivery quotas should also deliver their seeds to the authorities. Thus in 1932–33 death from hunger became an ineluctable fate for millions of people. Hunger was even worse in the

countryside than in the city, and escaping to the city had become impossible because the cities were cordoned off by the secret police. Stalin was certain that the peasants' falling short of grain delivery quotas was proof of their collaboration with foreign enemies and of their resistance, both of which had to be quashed ruthlessly.

In addition to various domestic causes, the paranoid fear of encirclement by Poland and Japan also triggered the repressions and mass shootings of interior "enemies of the people" during the Great Terror and resulted in the persecution of entire ethnic groups in the Soviet Union. The Western public in general and antifascist intellectuals in particular concentrated on the struggle against the Hitler regime and regarded the Soviet Union, the acknowledged Marxist enemy of the Nazis, as its ally, thereby making criticism on an equal footing impossible. Between 1934 and 1939, when popular fronts against fascism were forged in Europe, the Soviet repressive organs shot about 750,000 people as alleged enemies of the people and deported an even greater number to the Gulag. The local secret police arrested and murdered according to quotas from above.

In Germany, too, the Nazis created an unprecedented system of terror, which combined concentration camps, the SS, and the Gestapo. Tens of thousands of political opponents, Jews, homosexuals, Roma, and Sinti were interned; and thousands were also murdered. But "class terror" and "national terror," to invoke the titles of Snyder's chapters, with which he creates a semantic proximity between these regimes, differed in important ways, and not only with regard to the number of victims. The guiding principle of Nazi policy was clearly antisemitism and racism. After the political opposition had been decimated, the main goal was to purge the German *Volksgemeinschaft* of Jews, "gypsies," and "asocials" (later "aliens to the community," *Gemeinschaftsfremde*). In the prewar period, legal and social exclusion were accompanied by expropriation, forced emigration, open expulsion, and internment in concentration camps, but systematic mass murder became possible only under radicalizing conditions of total war in the east. Thus before the attack on the Soviet Union, Heinrich Himmler, in a May 1940 memorandum to Hitler, distanced himself from the "Bolshevik method of physical annihilation of a people," calling it "un-Germanic," whereas two years later he was overseeing the "physical annihilation of a people" on a scale and in an industrialized fashion that was unprecedented in history.[1]

[1] Heinrich Himmler's memorandum, "Einige Gedanken über die Behandlung der Fremdvölkischen im Osten," May 1940, Bundesarchiv Berlin NS 19/3282, Nbg. Dok. NO-1880, repr. in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte,* no. 5 (1957): 196–98.

True, the Stalinist regime also murdered according to ethnic criteria, as, for instance, in the so-called "Polish operation." But the assumption that Soviet citizens of Polish nationality were enemies of the Soviet system did not result in their systematic extermination. Hundreds of thousands were deported to the Gulag for forced labor, but not to be exterminated in industrial fashion. The Nazi regime's murders until 1939 lagged behind those of the Stalin regime's, but its antisemitic and racist intentions were more radical from the very beginning. Jews were to be killed as Jews, even if the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" in those years still signified systematic expulsion, not murder. If Stalinist practices during the 1930s were far more murderous than those of the Nazis, National Socialism always had a genocidal nucleus, which could lead to systematic genocide under specific circumstances. The key difference between the Stalinist and the National Socialist regimes of mass murder, in short, is that the ethnic and racist perspective was the basis for Nazi actions from the beginning, whereas Stalin occasionally resorted to the tool of ethnicity but did not depend on it when defending Bolshevik power by mass violence.

Poland in 1939, then, saw the encounter of the two regimes. Hitler's plan to wage a war for *Lebensraum*—a war he originally wanted to fight together with Poland against the Soviet Union—could not be put into practice because of the Polish equidistance to both neighbors. The Germans abruptly and unscrupulously changed course and decided to fight Poland together with the USSR. Since time was key if the war was to start during the fall of 1941, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop concluded a nonaggression treaty on 23 August 1939, which amounted to nothing less than yet another German–Russian partition of Poland.

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact is the central axis of Snyder's book, for it offers an opportunity to highlight the common imperial goals of both regimes and to show that the practice of murder in the respective occupied territories was very much comparable. Both regimes did not merely occupy but rather annexed and sought to subjugate, exploit, and integrate their portions of Poland into their empire over the longer term. Nazi Germany usurped the western Polish territories as *Reichsgau Wartheland* and *Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreußen* and immediately started "Germanizing" them. The SS, the police, and ethnically German militias murdered the Polish elite, Catholic priests, teachers, doctors, and political functionaries. All Polish Jews were to be expelled to central Poland, the *Generalgouvernement,* and the same applied to non-Jewish Poles, whose apartments and farms were given to those ethnic Germans who poured into Poland from the Baltics and other Soviet territories.

Himmler's early plans spoke of one million deportees from western Poland. The remaining Polish population was to be exploited as slave laborers and to be kept at a low living standard or to be displaced to the German Reich. The Polish historian Bogdan Musial estimates that until the end of 1939 in the German-occupied territories, a significantly higher number than 45,000 Polish civilians were killed, among them 7,000 Jews.[2]

The Soviet Union acted in similar ways in eastern Poland. The Polish elite was shot or deported. The systematic murder of about 15,000 Polish officers, who had fled from the German troops in the east, literally decapitated the Polish army. Approximately 140,000 Poles were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan for forced labor; and administrative positions were filled with Sovietophile bureaucrats, many of them Jewish, to whom collaboration meant an opportunity for emancipation.

In the German-occupied part, by contrast, Jews were persecuted, humiliated, mistreated, and murdered from the beginning. The German–Soviet negotiations to relocate Polish Jews to the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in the Soviet Far East collapsed, and since deporting the Jews to the Generalgouvernement would have overburdened the infrastructure there, the German occupiers first forced the Jews into large ghettos, intending to deport them later, after the victory over the Soviet Union, to the Gulag camps close to the Arctic Sea—where they, the Nazi planners knew perfectly well, had no chance of survival.

Snyder is correct in emphasizing the commonalities in the violent practices of the two regimes in Poland. Both Germany and the Soviet Union desired the "decapitation of Polish society" (125) and the ruthless exploitation of the remaining civilian population through forced labor. Both sides waged an ethnic war against the Poles. Yet differences abound: the German leadership, in contradistinction to the Bolsheviks, unapologetically and publicly called this policy "ethnic clearance" (*völkische Flurbereinigung*); and unlike in Stalinism, radical antisemitism is patently obvious in the Nazi treatment of the Jews.

Like Prussia and tsarist Russia, both sides could have profited from the Polish partition for over a hundred years, but Hitler clung to his plan to conquer *Lebensraum* in the east by means of war. After an invasion of Great Britain in the summer of 1940—following victorious campaigns against Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and especially France—

[2] See Bogdan Musial, "Das Schlachtfeld zweier totalitärer Systeme: Polen unter deutscher und sowjetischer Herrschaft 1939–1941," in *Genesis des Genozids: Polen 1939–1941,* ed. Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Musial (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004),13–35.

failed because of the British population's resistance and Germany's own lack of military strength, Hitler returned to his old plans of attacking the Soviet Union. In this—third, according to Snyder—phase of 1941–44, Nazi Germany clearly became dominant in mass murder.

Snyder's analysis focuses not on the Nazi murder of Soviet Jews but on the German policy of starving the Soviet population and on the so-called Generalplan Ost.[3] Since the Nazi and Wehrmacht leaders calculated that the attacking army of three million German soldiers, who were expected to advance rapidly, could not be supplied through the usual chains, they issued the order that soldiers should feed themselves from the lands they conquered. And since the Soviet Union, too, only had limited supplies, this meant, as a May 1941 protocol of a meeting of state secretaries in Berlin laconically noted, that "undoubtedly many millions of people will die from hunger when we extract what we need from the countryside."[4]

The murderous policy regarding "superfluous eaters" (*überflüssige Esser*) was directed first and foremost against Soviet prisoners of war (POWs). Food rations were barely sufficient until September 1941, but then the military High Command and the Reich Ministry of Nutrition and Agriculture decided to drastically reduce them and to literally let the exhausted and undersupplied POWs die from hunger. More than half of the 3.7 million Soviet soldiers who had been taken prisoner in 1941 had died by the spring of 1942, a mass crime for which the Wehrmacht alone was responsible.

In a similar vein, the aim of the depopulation policy vis-à-vis Soviet cities was to prevent the population from becoming "a nuisance" to the German occupiers. The siege of Leningrad was not a sign of military weakness; instead, the Germans did not conquer this metropolis so they could avoid having to feed it. The ring of encirclement was designed literally to starve the city to death. More than one million Leningraders died from hunger, epidemics, exhaustion, and the Wehrmacht air raids.

Yet no matter how many similarities in the deployment of hunger as a weapon against civilians by both regimes, differences are palpable. The millions of dead from famine in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1930s were the consequence—no doubt, a foreseeable consequence and one that the Stalinist regime deliberately accepted—of a brutal industrialization

[3] Snyder here mainly relies on Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); and Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940–1941* (New York: Berghahn, 2006).

[4] "Aktennotiz über Ergebnis der heutigen Besprechung mit den Staatssekretären über Barbarossa," 2 May 1941, in *Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof* (Nuremberg: n.p., 1947), 31:84.

policy carried out at the expense of the rural population. The millions of deaths from hunger in 1941–42 were premeditated by the German leadership from the outset. The people in question were *meant* to die, so that German soldiers and the German *Volksgemeinschaft* could be adequately fed. This does not belittle Stalin's violent policies, but Snyder blurs the difference when claiming that "the policies of Hitler and Stalin conspired to turn Soviet soldiers into prisoners of war and then prisoners of war into non-people" (176).

The reduction of political decisions to very few actors, essentially to Hitler and Stalin, has gained wide currency in U.S. historiography on the Holocaust, but it unfortunately tends to oversimplify the dynamics of violence and murder. When Snyder starts his chapter on the "Final Solution" by claiming that there were four utopias in the summer of 1941—"a lightning victory that would destroy the Soviet Union in weeks; a Hunger Plan that would starve thirty million people in months; a Final Solution that would eliminate European Jews after the war; and a *Generalplan Ost* that would make of the Soviet Union a German colony" (187)—he conflates very different political goals of different Nazi institutions from different phases. A part of this is simply incorrect, because no hunger policy was ever meant to "starve thirty million people in months."[5]

It is also an unacceptable oversimplification to claim that Hitler, six months after Operation Barbarossa was launched, "had reformulated the war aims such that the physical extermination of the Jews became the priority" (187); the Nazi leadership never renounced its goal to break up the Soviet Union, and Generalplan Ost had been designed with an intended time frame of several decades; it was never just an affair for the summer of 1941. When next explaining that Göring, Himmler, and Heydrich "scrambled amidst the moving ruins, claiming what they could" (187), Snyder turns exterminationist policy into an arbitrary vying for Hitler's favors. He continues in this vein: "In the summer and autumn of 1941, Himmler ignored what was impossible, pondered what was the most glorious, and did what could be done: kill the Jews east of the Molotov–Ribbentrop line, in occupied eastern Poland, the Baltic States, and the Soviet Union" (189), or "The origins of Operation Reinhard lie in Himmler's interpretation of Hitler's desires" (254). In short, Snyder's portrayal of the "Final Solution" falls short of the standard set by contemporary scholarship, since it reduces the murder of European Jewry

[5] Numbers on this scale can be found only in Generalplan Ost, which was, however, meant to be implemented over the course of several decades; see the exhibition "Wissenschaft, Planung, Vertreibung: Der Generalplan Ost der Nationalsozialisten," organized by Isabel Heinemann, Willi Oberkrome, Sabine Schleiermacher, and Patrick Wagner at Wissenschaftsforum Bonn, opened 27 September 2006 (www.dfg.de/generalplan-ost/index.html).

to the personal ambitions of Hitler, Himmler, and Heydrich, rather than analyzing multiple radicalizing dynamics both on the periphery and at the center in Berlin, by historical actors in the occupied territories and by Gauleiters within the German Reich, by the occupation administration and the Wehrmacht, by the SS and the Foreign Ministry or Rosenberg's ministry, and, of course, of Hitler himself.[6]

Here Snyder does not live up to the current level of Holocaust research, which has been invigorated by important books by Donald Bloxham, Dirk Moses, and Christian Gerlach.[7] Regional studies, such as those by Dieter Pohl on Galicia, Karel Berkhoff on Ukraine, or Christoph Dieckmann on Lithuania paint a more complex picture of multiple actors, including locals, cooperating in carrying out mass murder.[8] (Characteristically, the murderous pogrom by the Polish population of its Jewish neighbors in Jedwabne in 1941 does not even enter Snyder's book.) This multiperspectivity has set the tone of the debate in recent years. The empirically rich studies of Bloxham, Moses, Gerlach, Pohl, Berkhoff, Dieckmann, and others have substantially advanced our knowledge, much as microanalyses of murderous actions have illuminated the dynamics of violence and the rather wide spectrum of options available to the actors operating within a given field.

The challenge for scholars, then, is to study the interaction of the two violent regimes inside the "bloodlands"—the possible transfer of knowledge about shooting sites, about the selection of victims and violent practices, mutual perceptions and the learning processes from one another. Snyder points to the fact that anti-Jewish pogroms took place where the Wehrmacht had earlier invaded, that "they were a joint production, a Nazi edition of a Soviet text" (196), but he only touches on the problem without delving into it.

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[6] See, esp., Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews,* 3rd ed., 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

[7] See Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn, 2008); and Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[8] See Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996); Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944,* 2 vols. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012).

The same goes for partisan warfare, to which Snyder devotes an entire chapter. In partisan warfare multiple actors exercise violence against different groups. Because of the brutal German occupation regime, many people—including a significant number of Jews—went into hiding and joined the partisan movement. Snyder rightly points out that partisans also harassed the civilian population, requisitioned foodstuffs, and killed alleged traitors, and in the late phase of the war engaged in violent ethnic cleansing. Some partisan groups were antisemitic and did not admit Jews. Many groups were indeed integrated in official Soviet politics, especially after the central leadership in Moscow from the fall of 1941 onward tried to unite the variegated groups of partisans under a unified military command and was increasingly successful at this effort. The Germans themselves and their antipartisan warfare, which consisted in burning entire villages and in murdering the civilian population en masse, laid the groundwork that drove locals to join the partisan movement in the first place. But Snyder's conclusion that partisan warfare "was a perversely interactive effort of Hitler and Stalin, who each ignored the laws of war and escalated the conflict behind the front lines" (250) again reduces a long and complex story to the actions of the two dictators.

In sum, however, Snyder's book is an important endeavor, because it poses the right question and offers an interesting methodological approach. Concentrating his analysis on a space defined not by the nation-state but by violence enables him to study different actors and practices of violence in interaction. Even if Snyder's dramatic elevation of Eastern Europe to "bloodlands" downplays other violent regions and times of the world, which were no less lethal than this region in the mid-20th century, the spatial turn opens new vistas on violence. The category of space, we learn from the debate surrounding the spatial turn, includes much more than just a territory. Spaces of violence are defined by practices, the transfer of knowledge, the ad hoc enablement of violence, the overlap of violent actions, not least through borders that are not fixed but subject to constant redrawing and redefinition. A spatial perspective allows us to move beyond state actors, such as the military, and to foreground local groups, which contributed to the escalation of violence, even if out of vastly different motives. The new spatial perspective also broadens our temporal horizon. Snyder's book does not end in 1945 but includes the expulsions of Germans, Poles, and Ukrainians toward and after the end of the war.

Moreover, the fact that historical actors opened up—and closed—spaces of violence for a variety of reasons confounds monocausal explanations of the 20th-century mass murders. Snyder's book explicitly includes the destruction

of the European Jews in the list of other major 20th-century mass crimes, thus questioning the singularity of the Holocaust. In placing the Nazi and Stalinist regimes in a common frame of reference, *Bloodlands* opens up possibilities for comparison, which shows how long a way the current discussion surrounding genocide and the Holocaust has come since the timidity that characterized the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s. It is Snyder's achievement to have shaken up the stagnant analytical paradigms, and this is welcome and will surely be followed by many studies in his footsteps. *Bloodlands* combines in impressive fashion West European and East European history, as no other book on this period has before. The wide response that the book is getting shows that it was published at the right time, a time when there is great willingness to research the history of 20th-century violence from new perspectives.

Translated by Jan Plamper

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