Book Reviews

Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon, eds.


The volume *Stalin and Europe* is the result of a wonderful project hosted by IWM (Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna) and coordinated by Timothy Snyder: “United Europe – Divided History.” The present collective editorial project reflects some of the main ideas advanced by the research endeavor chaired by the author of *Bloodlands* (2010): history as counterbalance to memory discourses; former Eastern Europe’s experience with an authoritarian continuum (royal/military dictatorships, fascism and/or Nazi occupation, Soviet occupation and/or communist rule) as the source of region wide interest in comparative totalitarianisms; and, overcoming national narratives that often foster competitive martyrlogies.

*Stalin and Europe* is an excellent exercise on how to tackle these grand historiographical issues. It exemplarily integrates the traumatic experience of Europe’s East and Center into more general continental evolutions from the 1930s until 1950s. The contributions are structured chronologically. First, Lynn Viola, Sarah Cameron, Hiroaki Kuromiya and Andrzej Pełłoński deal with topics characteristic of mature Stalinism: the Gulag and Soviet development as internal colonization; famine and the stabilization of imperial borderlands; and, Soviet espionage/counter-espionage in the context of a society and political establishment saturated with war scares. Second, and this is the bulk of the volume, there are chapters discussing various aspects of the war experience in the highly volatile geographical area encompassing Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus. This was the territory where Hitler and Stalin experimented, between 1933 and 1944, with radical social engineering and exported their visions of Europe. There are six texts in this section: Rafał Wnuk provides a comprehensive analysis of the Polish underground during the Soviet occupation; Marek Wierzbicki examines Soviet economic policy in Eastern Poland; Christoph Mick offers a fascinating account of Lviv between 1939 and 1941 as the Red
Army took over the city; Alex Kay proposes an illuminating analysis of German economic plans for the occupied USSR; Dieter Pohl tackles the relationship between the history and memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine; Timm Richter writes about the complexities of the partisan war in Belarus. The last three contributions in *Stalin and Europe* bring together nicely some of the main ideas advanced earlier in the volume. Geoffrey Roberts examines Stalin's wartime vision of the peace, while Mark Kramer's two texts show how the Soviet dictator's goals and the successive traumatic experiences during the war (Sovietization, mass murder, economic spoliation, etc.) created the conditions for the establishment of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, setting Europe (along with the entire world) on the path to Cold War. Though some of the topics dealt with by the authors are familiar, one needs to underline that most analysis is based on original archival research.

In a very insightful introduction, Timothy Snyder emphasizes that war consolidated and expanded beyond previously imaginable limits the principle of development and export of socio-political models through massive state violence. He stresses the fact that Stalin had embarked on such path since late 1920s and with particular ferocity in the second half of the 1930s. In this sense, there is a continuum between Stalinist internal colonization geared on achieving socialist development and state security regardless of the cost in human lives, and Hitler's vision of the Soviet Union as Nazi colony founded on starvation, mass murder, and vicious exploitation of resources. The Yale professor, as well as other contributors such as Lynn Viola or Alex Kay, echoing previous scholarship, such as Mark Mazower's *Hitler's Empire* (2008), insist that the model of colonization employed by the two totalitarians was inspired by pre-existing European practices. Each of the two had though their own specificities. In the Soviet case, Viola judiciously remarks that it "departed from its European counterparts by substituting a native peasantry for foreign aboriginals, class for race, 'socialist reeducation' for 'Christian' enlightenment, and the use of colonized as colonizers in opening up the great expanses of the north" (25).

In contrast, the Nazis' drive east was a process of permanent radicalization of already genocidal aims. Kay shows that there were no “serious attempts within the corridors of power to analyze critically the economic implications of an invasion and occupation of the Soviet Union or to develop potential alternative scenarios should the military campaign and, by extension, the program of economic exploitation falter.” Under the circumstances, as “the ‘immediate requirements’ of the troops constituted the economic priority of the campaign, the failure to defeat the Red Army and the subsequent continuation of full scale combat operation meant that it was never possible to readjust and