

Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds. *Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013. xii, 528 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Index. \$37.00, paper.

Until a century ago, the eastern part of the European continent was dominated by four big empires: the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman. Clashing regularly, they crashed fatally in the end. Before their ultimate collapse, the shocks coming from constant altercations were cushioned by the borderlands in between; hence the name “shatterzones” in historical literature. In this volume, the term designates a broad strip of territory all the way from the Baltic Sea to the Balkans continuing through Anatolia up to the Caucasus. “Empires crashed together like tectonic plates” here, to quote one of the authors of this volume, Peter Holquist (335). Even long after the empires had disappeared, the shattering rumbled on.

In the words of Kai Struve, another contributor, the borderlands were “a contested space where competing claims of states, nations, religions, and ideologies clashed with one another” (463). They were zones of coexistence and multiethnicity, but also of violence and devastation. Up to the early twentieth century, the diverse ethnic groups managed to live, if not in harmony, then at least without major outbreaks of violence. Nationalists, however, wanted to replace the diversity and hybridity with fixed borders. After 1914, the mutual indifference turned into hostility, at times even assuming genocidal traits. Ultimately, war and totalitarian rule shattered the delicate political balance between the ethnic groups. The complex history of a multiethnic past became violently “unmixed” (a term used by Lord Curzon during the Balkan wars) not merely by external forces but also by local protagonists, the “neighbours.”

One of the most horrendous manifestations of this process occurred in the summer of 1941 when the Nazi crusade against “Judeo-Bolshevism” coalesced with the aspirations of local nationalist groups that embraced anti-Communism and anti-Semitism as the crucial building blocks of national independence. Historical literature defined this phenomenon as the “Jedwabne state,” after the infamous massacre in a village in the eastern part of Poland, described by the Polish-American historian Jan T. Gross. Similar anti-Jewish violence took place in many other places, such as Lviv and other Eastern Galician towns in late June–early July of 1941.

The shatterzone between Germany and the Soviet Union has lately been baptized the “Bloodlands” by the American historian Timothy Snyder as these lands got the full blast when Hitler and Stalin attempted to expand their empires. In actuality, as the editors argue, the regions of bloody

conflict were far larger than the territory contested by Hitler and Stalin. In their opinion, violence was determined not only by the conflict between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, but much of it was generated from within the borderlands rather than strictly imposed from without. Rather undeservedly, in a recent review in *Kritika*, Gross has even downrightly accused Snyder of “denying agency to the locals” in his “colonial history” (595). Playing the card of integral nationalism was an important element indeed, but, as one of the *Shatterzones* authors, Theodore Weeks, remarks, we cannot forget that force from outside “took this conflict to its most murderous conclusion” (94).

All twenty-six articles, and an introduction, are excellently researched and written. They deal not only with the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. Apart from the usual suspects like Galicia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and northern Anatolia, they also cover territories as unexpected as Eastern Thrace, the Istrian peninsula, and Upper Silesia. Prominently missing, however, is the northern Black Sea coast and the northern Caucasus, a shatterzone between the Russian and Ottoman empires, where the Crimean Tatars and the Circassians were decimated in the end. Whereas all regions discussed have seen interethnic conflict, there is one notable exception: Carpathian Rus' in the borderland between Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. This gave Paul Robert Magocsi the reason to subtitle his contribution about the Rusyns as “Interethnic Coexistence Without Violence” (although during World War II violence from outside resulted in the extermination of the local Jews here as well).

The ethnic cleansing persisted until the late 1940s. Tens of millions of people were expelled and massacred, leaving little of the ethnic heterogeneity that once characterized Central Europe's borderlands. They gave way to countries with rather monocultural societies, where the multiethnic past was easily forgotten and the memory of the slaughtered and expelled has largely been wiped clean. Echoes from the past are still reverberating, however, as has been shown by later conflicts in former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and, most recently, Ukraine, where state borders were changed once again, resulting in the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the continuing unrest in the east of Ukraine.

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Work Cited

Gross, Jan T. “A Colonial History of the Bloodlands.” *Kritika* 15.3 (Summer 2014): 591–96. Print.