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Alexander V. Prusin. *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 324 S. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-929753-5.

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Violence and Conflict in the Eastern European "Lands Between"

For researchers interested in the "clash of civilizations" or "zones of violence" (the title of the series in which this volume appears), the lands between Germany and Russia provide an obvious and tragic case study. In this study Alexander Prusin examines the ideology, historical circumstances, and attitudes that exacerbated tensions and conflict in this region stretching from Estonia to Moldova. While there is much of interest here, ultimately the book is deeply unsatisfying due to flaws in conception, historical nuance, and writing.

The book proceeds mainly chronologically, from the pre-World War I period ("1870" is apparently used out of convenience, though 1867 or 1871 might have been more historically precise) to the end of the USSR. The first chapter, "The Land and the People," sets the scene, describing in broad strokes this region which as of 1870 was divided between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Here statistics are given on the different ethnic groups who made this region their home and the government policies toward them are sketched. The region is described, rather infelicitously, as a "security complex" by which Prusin appears to mean that this area was correctly seen as a potential arena of international struggle between these two empires, in which nationalism could play a significant role. Unfortunately the summation of nationality policy is stereotyped to the point of caricature: the Russian Empire pursues "aggressive Russification" while Austria-Hungary learned "a valuable lesson" from the revolution of 1848-49 (p. 31). This crude "good Empire, bad Empire" dichotomy hardly does justice to the complex situation or to the competing and contradictory policies emanating from St. Petersburg, Vienna, and (after 1867) Budapest.

Chapter 2 rushes forward to the period of World War I (up to the Russian Revolution of 1917) and is aptly entitled "The Reign of the Generals." Incorporating recent insights from Peter Holquist, Vejas Liulevicius, and Peter Gattrell, Prusin convincingly argues that these three years witnessed increasing brutality and the instrumental use of nationalizing policies. However, he may be overstating his case: while there is no doubt about the crude brutality of Russian policies (and the curtailing of civil rights by Austro-Hungarian military officials), one may question his relentless interpretation of these policies as aiming to russify the local population. In the Kingdom of Poland, for example, the Russian military's consistent antisemitism tended to strengthen the position of local Poles rather than buttressing Russian power. Russian policy was simply not as logical and well thought through as one would gather from this account. The concluding statement that "the war transformed the borderlands into a testing ground for imperial ideological and economic experiments" well sums up Prusin's major argument here (p. 69).

Most specialists agree that World War I in East-Central Europe did not end on November 11, 1918, but either the previous November or, more likely, in 1920 or 1921. Prusin's book reflects this fact with a chapter specifically covering the period 1918-20. It is probably impossible to describe adequately in some twenty-five pages the complicated struggles between Whites, Reds, the *Freikorps*, newly independent Poland, and the various incarnations of Ukraine, not to mention newly independent Baltic states and a Romania eager to incorporate Bessarabia. Matters are not helped by sweeping and quite inaccurate generalizations, like "by the end of the First World War many Jews regarded Poland's independence as the least desirable solution" (p. 93). While this statement could possibly be debatable for 1913, five years later the inevitability of Polish independence was quite clear, and Jewish organizations specifically welcomed (to be sure, perhaps with misgivings) this development. More correct, if not particularly novel, is Prusin's statement that the general association of Jews with the Bolshevik

revolution would prove far more dangerous than previous ethnic hatreds.

The period most interesting to Prusin, and appropriately so for the topic of this book, is the short five years between 1939 and 1944 which witnessed stark and tragic changes in this region. Three chapters are devoted to this period: the first covers the early years of Soviet rule (1939-41); while the other two consider the same three-year period from the viewpoint of the Holocaust and collaboration, and from the perspective of a civil war. While specialists will not always be satisfied with the necessarily short and often superficial treatment of this murderous period, these chapters do provide a concise overview of the national dynamics at work in these years.

Rather less satisfying are the book's final two chapters, which cover the periods 1944-53 and the two generations from Joseph Stalin's death to the end of the USSR. Prusin is correct in emphasizing the chaos and violence of the immediate postwar period, but he may give a one-sided picture in only emphasizing the resistance of local nationalities to Soviet power. He also fails to distinguish between russification and Sovietization, two processes that could but did not always run parallel. Indeed, in Soviet Lithuania, to name only one example, every effort was made to emphasize the Communists' achievements in building Lithuanian culture (as part, to be sure, of the "larger homeland" of the USSR). To see the USSR's treatment of non-Russians as an extension of tsarist russification is to misunderstand fundamentally the aims and essence of Soviet nationality policy. The final chapter wishes to take the story to the 1990s, arguing that the USSR returned to "the pattern established by the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian empires" (p. 225). In the end this seems to mean that the USSR endeavored to define its population both in ethnic terms and in terms of an overarching, super-national identity. But surely this insight is very far from new and, indeed, is what any modern state from Finland to India to the United States tries to do.

The fundamental problem with this book is its desire to do too much, to cover too long of a period, and to bunch together territories that in the end have only one thing in common: after 1944 all are incorporated into the USSR. This faulty conception means that the author is forced to make generalizations that are either banal or inaccurate. Despite the considerable scholarship exhibited here, in the end this volume fails to satisfy, even as general synthesis. Alexander Statiev's excellent *Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands* (2010) no doubt appeared too late to be incorporated here; one would have expected, however, some reference to Statiev's earlier articles. The main problem, however, is not in a failure to do justice to existing scholarship, it runs much deeper. One wonders just who the intended readership was: undergraduate students or nonspecialists would probably find this essay-style narrative confusing, and specialists will be irked by the very questionable sweeping statements and numerous inaccuracies. These problems are compounded by the fact that Oxford University Press apparently thinks it superfluous to employ a copyeditor: the book fairly bristles with bad English, incorrect use of articles, confusing and even baffling sentences. In short, it is difficult to recommend this book to either student or specialist audiences.

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