

George O. Liber. *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914-1954*. U of Toronto P, 2016. xxxiv, 454 pp. Maps. Tables. Notes. Index. \$41.95, paper.

Ukkraine's location between Russia and the European West has been a vital factor in recent political events. Whether Ukraine will remain in the shadow of the Russian Federation or complete its pivot toward the European Union (EU) has yet to be seen. Ukraine's geographical position between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and the EU and the Russian Federation has played an integral part in its development as a state and in the evolution of its people. George O. Liber's work *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914-1954* seeks to explain how the Ukrainian state and nation progressed as a product of a period of total war. This extensive study of forty years of Ukrainian history provides a missing link between authoritative textbooks of Ukrainian history and monographs analyzing Ukraine's importance as a geographical flashpoint. Liber argues that a forty-year period of total warfare, from World War I up until Nikita Khrushchev's assumption of power following Stalin's death, fundamentally shaped the Ukrainian nation and nation-state. Mass violence, mass politics, mass deportations, industrialization, and collectivization during this period were catalysts for Ukrainian nation-making as these events spread and shaped ideas of Ukrainian identity throughout the Ukrainian-speaking regions of Eastern Europe.

In the book, Liber uses two important theoretical constructs for his argument. First, he modifies Zbigniew Brzezinski's idea of geopolitical players and geopolitical pivots to explain Ukraine's importance as a pivot point between multinational empires and, later, powerful states (6). The idea of Ukraine as a geopolitical pivot point flows throughout the work and is salient to Liber's understanding of how Ukraine was in a nearly constant state of change during the total-war period. Second, Liber divides forty years of Ukrainian history into individual periods of total war: The first total war was World War I and the revolutions that followed in the 1910s (see 37-108 [part 1]). The second period of total war was the time of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly with the industrialization of Soviet Ukraine and the Holodomor, which occurred during collectivization (see 109-97 [part 2]). And the third period of total war includes World War II and Stalin's deportation program and the Red Army's killing of Ukrainian nationalists in Western Ukraine (see 199-290 [part 3]).

Liber builds on the historiography of Ukraine as a part of the Eastern European "Bloodlands." Timothy Snyder's work *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* is the main point of comparison for this geographical conceptualization. Liber expands Snyder's limited time frame of the 1930s

and World War II to include the devastation and change of World War I and the interwar period—he does so in order to discuss how the effects of those earlier events facilitated the solidification of the idea of a Ukrainian nation. A particularly interesting aspect of this is his discussion of the exposure of Ukrainian-speaking Russian imperial subjects to Ukrainian-speaking refugees from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and how this exposure illustrated the idea of a greater Ukrainian “nation” (48). Liber then takes an expanded view of the factors of total war that impacted the Ukrainian-speaking lands. Snyder’s focus on mass death and violence are important, but Liber’s addition of an analysis of social, cultural, and political change following the death; immigration; and forced deportation of Ukrainian-speaking people by the Russian Empire and, later, the Soviet Union adds nuance to the long-term effects of said violence on the population.

Liber’s discussion of the Great War and its effects on both the western and eastern Ukrainian lands is edifying and gives credence to his argument that the first era of total war must be included in our understanding of modern Ukrainian national identity. However, his argument that the period of Soviet industrialization and collectivization in the 1920s and 1930s constituted a total war is less than convincing. There is no doubt that collectivization and industrialization in Soviet Ukraine fundamentally reshaped culture and society and that these drastic economic changes came with mass violence in the countryside. However, Liber does not show that this period constituted a total war, particularly in comparison with World War I and World War II. Nevertheless, Liber’s discussion of the period adds much of the analysis and contextualization of the impact of these events that was missing in Snyder’s work.

At times, *Total Wars* reads more like a reference work than a conventional monograph. Liber’s commanding use of an exhaustive list of secondary works speaks to the book’s strengths. But greater use of non-data-driven primary sources would have helped to further illustrate his early points about the impact of World War I on Ukrainian national understanding and his points in parts 1 and 2 about the indelible impact of the Holodomor and industrialization on Ukrainian identity during the Soviet period. His argument that World War I radicalized the Ukrainian-speaking masses and encouraged a Ukrainian imagined community would have been strengthened by the inclusion of more primary-source material illustrating this change in individuals (see 44-45).

This book is appropriate for Ukrainian-history specialists and general audiences. Each section (that is, part) provides a discussion that contextualizes events in both western and eastern Ukraine—this can be helpful for readers who are not well versed in Ukrainian history. The maps included at the beginning of the book also help readers understand the

occasionally confusing geography of, and geographical changes in, Ukraine during the total-war period.

Overall, Liber makes a convincing argument about the importance of the total-war period to the creation of the modern Ukrainian nation. He shows the impact of the earth-shattering events of the world wars, of revolutions, and of violent economic changes on Ukrainian national identity. Liber asks questions about the future of Ukraine at the end of his work that remain unanswered, but his book can help us understand how Ukraine has thrived and can continue to thrive as a critical juncture for Eastern Europe.

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Work Cited

Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. Basic Books, 2010.