The equivalency canard

An innovative historical approach lumps Nazi and Soviet murder campaigns together, ignoring the implacable ideological roots behind the Shoah and giving Holocaust collaborators a free ride.

Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin
by Timothy Snyder. Basic Books, 524 pages, $29.95

By Efraim Zuroff

In this bold attempt to reframe a critical period in modern Eastern European history, Yale historian Tim Snyder redraws historical boundaries to create an artificial geographic entity that he dubs “the Bloodlands,” taking in the area from central Poland to western Russia through Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltics. It is in this region that, by his account, more than 14 million civilians were murdered as a result of deliberate policies of mass annihilation implemented by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during the years 1932-1945. These murderous campaigns are the central subject of Snyder’s book, which has earned lavish praise from historians, as well as considerable public attention, not normally the case with similar academic studies.

Snyder identifies six major murder campaigns carried out by the German and Soviet dictatorships...
The problem is that this book is already on its way to being the bible of the Holocaust distortors in post-Communist Eastern Europe.

No longer center stage

Thus, most of the treatment of the Shoah in this book focuses not on its uniqueness or historical significance, but rather on a fact that reinforces its connection to the other tragedies, namely, that the overwhelming majority of the Jews murdered were killed in the Bloodlands and not in their countries of origin, all over Europe. That is a true historical fact, and Snyder’s explanation of why this important element of Holocaust history is often overlooked is accurate. The two main reasons he cites for this phenomenon (that is, the looking-over) are that the Western Allies liberated the German concentration camps (photographs of which became iconic images of the Shoah), whereas the bulk of the mass murder of Jews took place in the death camps, all of which were located in the Bloodlands, which were overrun by the Red Army and were virtually inaccessible to Westerners after World War II. The second reason is that the far larger number of survivors from concentration camps, as opposed to death camps, Auschwitz is the exception, since it also functioned as a labor camp.

Snyder’s well-taken points on these Holocaust-related issues do not make up for the major flaw in his treatment of the Shoah, which he relativizes by acknowledging all the other murder campaigns the status of “genocide,” although none truly fit the definition coined by Raphael Lemkin, the person who defined genocide, something that will relieve the world of its guilt for not preventing this atrocity in the past, since they will then be able to point to the participation of Jewish Communists in the Ribbentrop agreement was signed, and it was deliberately chosen to reflect the ostensibly “equal blame” of Hitler and Stalin for the atrocities of World War II—a theme that Snyder has presented in a book in which not a word is mentioned about the role of the Soviets in defeating Hitler.

Holocaust historian Dr. Efraim Zuroff is coordinator of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and director of its Israel office. His latest book is “Operation Last Chance: One Man’s Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice” (Palgrave/Macmillan).