This valuable collection of articles expands and enriches our understanding of the overall impact of the ‘Great War’ in Eastern Europe. It is of course tremendously topical in this period of the centenary of the war, and its perspectives alter many earlier commonplaces. The work published here is the result of a workshop held at the Imre Kertész Kolleg in Jena in 2012.

The editors first provide a lucid introduction focusing on the larger problems of the record of the war from an Eastern European perspective. Joachim von Puttkamer’s ‘Collapse and Restoration: Politics and the Strains of War in Eastern Europe’ argues that ‘World War I can be seen as a catastrophic incubator of twentieth-century modernity, arising from the crisis of the nineteenth century’ (p. 10). Thus is introduced a theme resonating throughout many other articles in the volume, that in Eastern Europe, one needs to think of a ‘long First World War’ extending beyond the usual 1914-18 from 1908 (the Bosnian annexation crisis) or 1912 (the outbreak of the Balkan Wars) to the 1920s. Mark Biondich’s ‘Eastern Borderlands and Prospective Shatter Zones’ surveys the eve of the war with particular attention to Macedonia. Jochen Böhler’s ‘Generals and Warlords, Revolutionaries and Nation-State Builders’ identifies the war as a ‘transitional phase linking the nineteenth with the twentieth century’ (p. 52), so that historians must look both forwards and backwards in time to trace the deployment of patterns of violence.

The section on occupations is opened by Jonathan Gumz, who examines international norms of occupation as a key attribute of an international system of state sovereignty, and how that norm collapsed. Stephan Lehnstaedt compares diverging models of economic policy in separate regions. Robert Nelson’s ‘Utopias of Open Space’ is provocative in linking ‘forced population transfer policies’ to prewar internal colonization schemes and to the enormities of World War II.

The section on radicalization features Maciej Górny’s fascinating overview of how anthropology was energized and transformed behind the Eastern Front. Piotr Wróbel’s ‘Foreshadowing the Holocaust’ concisely and most effectively surveys anti-Jewish violence throughout the wars of 1914-1921. Robert Gerwarth’s overview of counter-revolutionary violence in the states that lost the war is reprinted from an earlier volume edited by Gerwarth himself on paramilitary violence, yet fits here most usefully as well.
The final section on the aftermath of war features Julia Eichenberg’s ‘Consent, Coercion and Endurance in Eastern Europe’, which eloquently summarizes the fluidity of the war experience and the challenges of commemoration in Poland, with significant implications for how we think of the total experience of the war, whether in the West or the East. Philipp Ther’s ‘Pre-negotiated Violence’ expands the conceptual scope by focusing on state practices of diplomatically sanctioned and legalized ‘population transfers’, predating 1914 and establishing a continuity of ‘legalization of violent means of conflict resolution in international politics’ by states (p. 282). The last article by Dietrich Beyrau is a masterful summation of how the Soviet Union deployed violence, institutionalizing it in deep ways. The very last contribution is that of Jörn Leonhard, who provides a ‘commentary from a comparative perspective’ (p. 319), highlighting three themes: historiography, concepts of time and space, and contrasts and unities between Western and Eastern Europe. In the last case, Leonhard concludes that Eastern Europe proved distinct from the West in that it ‘never generated a suggestive language of the First World War that could have turned into a stable point of collective reference’ (p. 325). He closes with the urge to devote further effort to producing ‘questions that have never been asked before’ (p. 326). In that vein, this volume most admirably points the way forward.
