identity that was pining for answers, already suspecting that these answers would likely result in even greater, unanswered questions" (9).

Referencing an array of social science studies and concepts, the chapters on the first two (Georgian and Russian/Soviet) Stalins and those on personality cults, trauma, nationalism, and nostalgia have the feel of a thesis literature review. Despite the extensive citations, the framing on Stalin—however multifaceted—seems to me ultimately a somewhat limited lens through which to understand Soviet history and its legacies and consequences. In the reflections on Georgia, for instance, it seems to me that Soviet nationality policy, with its ascribed ethnic individual and territorial identities and resulting ethnoterritorial hierarchy of nationalities in competition for status and resources provides for a more comprehensive and profound understanding both of the paradox of Stalin's centrality to Georgian nationalism (resulting in and deriving from, as I've argued elsewhere, a "Georgian national Stalinism" or a "Stalinist Georgian nationalism") as well as for the dominance of primordial ethnonationalism there by the end of the Soviet period. Japaridze at points discusses a larger "*sistema* of Soviet totalitarianism," in the construction and elaboration of which clearly Stalin played a gargantuan role. Yet that *sistema,* its fundamental ideologies, aspirations, and structural forms, as well as the ways in which they functioned and were understood and internalized in various periods, surely went far beyond either the individual or the mythologized constructions of Stalin. What is more, while the author purposely sets out to ask questions that provoke further ones, the endlessly pondering style of the prose tends to become a bit exhausting ("Gazing through a kaleidoscope of memories, a mosaic of diverse pieces culminating in a legible portrait, we find that there are few definitive answers and even less accurate ones—swirling in perfect harmony, as though casting pebbles upon water, constantly reverberating in additional question marks like never-ending ripples on a blank shore that are meant to remain unresolved" (12) and "the broken, often disjointed fragments of the past that construct identities in the present will continue to build and grow upon the ashes of a ruptured past, constantly and inevitably returning to their roots like circles wrapped in a mysterious spiral, possessing no concept of an ending or a beginning, spinning endlessly, trapped inside the perpetual wheel of time" (131).

Nevertheless, the author makes clear from the outset that the work is neither a biography nor an academic historical study but rather a subjective and personal reflection on her own journey (figuratively and literally) to understand the legacies that shape the outlooks of her generation and her multiple homelands. This is surely a first foray of a voice that has much to say and will be worth listening to.

Timothy Blauvelt
Ilia State University

Stalin as Warlord. By Alfred J. Rieber. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. xiv, 360 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Glossary. Index. Plates. $38.00, hard bound.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.67

The experience of World War II was arguably the central moment in the Soviet experiment. It legitimized Iosif Stalin's regime, made the USSR a superpower, and persists as a formidable episode in historical memory in the region. The policies that Stalin enacted to contend with the war are a source of curiosity that Alfred Rieber examines in this volume.

https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2024.67 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rieber asserts that Stalin's policymaking was a "paradox." The book uses the term or a variation sixty-four times, excluding chapter headings and notes. One suspects that the author would have preferred a title like "The Paradox of Stalin at War" if Stephen Kotkin's 2014 biography, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power*, had not used the term prominently in its title. (Rieber notes that his use of the term predates Kotkin's, 274). The main paradox was that the construction of the Stalinist state involved processes that were immensely destructive. This framing is broad enough to carry a history of the Soviet state from the 1920s until Stalin's death in 1953. The book synthesizes secondary sources, a large number of Soviet and post-Soviet published document collections, memoirs, and a handful of unpublished archival documents. Stalin is the book's central interest, but it spends many pages with elite figures from scientific and academic circles, industry, the military, and politics. The "warlord" of the title just means a wartime leader and does not herald a reinterpretation of Stalin as a regional strongman.

The work is divided into three chronologically ordered sections. The first part examines the prewar years, where the destruction of cadres in the purges developed parallel to the construction of a state capable of conducting a modern war. The cultivation of non-Russian loyalists at home and abroad coincided with policies that repressed them as perceived threats to national security. The second section, on the war itself, is the core of the book. Its three chapters cover military-industrial developments, the regime's relationship with scientific and technical elites, and the role of culture and propaganda. Rieber identifies Stalin's paradoxical impulses during the war to centralize political decision making while decentralizing aspects of technical implementation. The final section enters the postwar period, arguing that the victory in WWII propelled the USSR to the apex of its geopolitical power but at the cost of immense human and economic losses.

The framing of paradox is worth considering. Rieber interprets Stalinism as a cohesive but contradictory approach to waging war, and regards Stalin as an intentional state builder in the mold of Peter the Great. He dismisses moments of radicalism during collectivization or WWII as times when Stalin made "irrational decisions" (119). Yet another framing of those episodes would cast them as the choice of a Marxist-Leninist who saw the world through the lens of class conflict and the irrational aspect of Stalinism as the pragmatic compromises it made that seemingly contravened ideological preferences. At the risk of splitting the hair of paradox, another interpretation would be that Stalinism meant the tension between these aspects rather than their paradoxical concurrence. Along similar lines, it is worth considering whether Stalinism was the product of intentional, paradoxical policies or the sum of reactions to crises.

A paradox of this book is that it focuses on wartime policies but dismisses their importance in the long run. The major policy changes of the wartime years were "discarded or repressed" after 1945 (268). This argument, though valid, misses an opportunity to meditate on the continuities between the Stalinist state of the prewar and postwar periods as connected by the threat and reality of war. It is a strange omission because a strength of the book is its recognition that the prospect of war was a central influence on Stalinist policies from the 1920s and the war's impact continued for decades after it ended.

This volume serves as an elegant account of the Soviet state in the crucible of WWII with many excursions into the biographies of significant figures. It is a useful introduction, and more, that would work well in fostering classroom discussions about the complexities of Stalinism. The bibliography, collected over Rieber's long career, is worth consulting for anyone writing about the Soviet experience of WWII.

Seth Bernstein
University of Florida

https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2024.67 Published online by Cambridge University Press