

Review Article

From 'Borderland' via 'Bloodlands' to Heartland? Recent Western Historiography of Ukraine

Making Ukraine: Studies on Political Culture, Historical Narrative, and Identity.
By ZENON E. KOHUT (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies
P., 2011; pp. 340. \$59.95; pb. \$34.96);

The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv. By
WILLIAM JAY RISCH (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 2011; pp. 360. \$52.50);

Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin. By TIMOTHY SNYDER (London:
The Bodley Head, 2010; pp. 524. £20);

The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1980–1992. By
ALEXANDER V. PRUSIN (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010; pp. 324. £35);

Die Ukraine: Prozesse der Nationsbildung. Edited by ANDREAS KAPPELER
(Cologne: Böhlau, 2011; pp. 453. €59.90).

It is almost axiomatic to point out that 'Ukraine' means 'borderland' in studies of the country written by Western scholars and observers.¹ The first comprehensive English-language survey of the country's history, by Orest Subtelny, initially published before the fall of Communism, begins with this observation;² it is the title of a popular journalistic account by Anna Reid;³ and a potent leitmotif of the numerous academic articles and historical surveys that deal with the country either in whole or in part ever since—including the recent works by Alexander Prusin and Timothy Snyder (both from 2010), to be discussed in more detail here. Ukraine's liminality for western scholars is, inevitably, a reflection of more than geography. Its late attainment of lasting, independent statehood in 1991, having spent the modern period almost entirely under foreign subjugation (Muscovite, Polish-Lithuanian, Habsburg, Russian, Polish, Nazi, Soviet, and Romanian on its western fringes), has shaped historiography accordingly. At least until the 1990s, its affairs were typically treated by Western scholars as marginal: fragmented and single-issue, or else subsumed into Sovietology and Russian Studies. Even the

1. The term requires clarification: for the purposes of this article, the 'West' refers to countries not part of formerly Communist East or East-Central Europe for reasons of differing political trajectories until 1989 and ongoing differences in historiographical tradition.

2. O. Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (Toronto, 1988), now in its fourth imprint (2009).

3. A. Reid, *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of the Ukraine* (2nd edn., London, 2003).

question of whether to use a definite article in front of the country's name (the equivalent in Slavic languages being the question of whether one is 'within' or 'on' the territory) reflected an enduring uncertainty as to whether this was a regional adjunct of something larger, or sovereign territory *per se*. The Western exception until 1991 was diaspora scholarship, which worked hard to underscore aspects of Ukraine's emotionally and intellectually separate (if institutionally intertwined) trajectory from the Russian, and later Soviet, empire. Such work has traditionally clustered in institutions in North America, notably Harvard (with the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, and its journal, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*) and Toronto; the doorstopper volume by Subtelny mentioned above arguably being the most distinguished (and frequently updated) monograph emerging from this line of scholarship.

Independence in 1991 necessarily gave a new impulse to historians, with contemporary Western methodologies and scholarship offering a counterweight to the primordialist traditions that still held sway among many Ukrainian scholars, and among some within the diaspora. Early contributions to the emergent critical strand included Andrew Wilson's emblematically titled *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (2nd edn., New Haven, CT, 2002). Other works, notably from Germany and Austria, served as introductions for academic and lay readers to this (apparently) 'new', large and resource-rich nation that laid a powerful claim to geopolitical and strategic importance, at the crossroads of religions, languages, ethnic boundaries, cultures and continents.⁴

Such perceived importance fuelled a parallel upsurge in works tending more towards political science than traditional empirical history, especially in the wake of the Orange Revolution of 2004. This event catapulted Ukraine into the consciousness of even averagely informed consumers of the mainstream news in a way that even independence did not. The details were front-page news and had the strange, compelling elements of fiction: a telegenic, seemingly pro-Western leader as the victim of a mysterious and disfiguring poison plot (Viktor Yushchenko); a glamorous, firebrand female ally (Yulia Tymoshenko); and an overthrown fraudulent election result, apparently thanks to mass protests in central Kiev involving banners and T-shirts in a lurid shade of orange, in a broader wave of media-friendly colour-branded revolutions in the region. In this context, Wilson's own work is again emblematic, joined by others in German and English which sought to predict how the events of 2004–5 might play out in the future.⁵

4. The most noteworthy example is Andreas Kappeler's *Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine* (Munich, 1994).

5. For instance, A. Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven, 2005); A. Åslund, *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough* (Washington DC, 2006); I. Bredies, *Zur Anatomie der Orange Revolution in der Ukraine: Wechsel des Elitenregimes oder Triumph des Parlamentarismus?* (Stuttgart, 2006); P. D'Anieri, *Orange Revolution and Aftermath: Mobilization, Apathy, and the State in Ukraine* (Washington DC, 2010)

However, the limitations of speculation are now obvious, with events taking further turns. President Yushchenko's failure to steer the promised Western course, as he turned towards a divisive form of nationalism, contributed to his subsequent election defeat; he in turn fell out with Prime Minister Tymoshenko, who struck a gas deal with Russia that became the excuse for her later imprisonment—a *cause célèbre* that continues to dominate Western headlines about Ukraine at the time of the writing of this article.⁶ In other words, in less than a decade, predictions of a Western course for Ukraine were thrown off balance by no less a result than the complete reversal of the 'Revolution', as the selfsame bogeyman it defeated was installed in power—the crypto-authoritarian and apparently pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich. The consequences for subsequent historiography in the West especially have been palpable, and partially explain its marked self-reflexivity: 'traditions' as such are still very much in development; political events render speculation obsolete and attempts at critical distance difficult.

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Even without contemporary uncertainties, Ukraine's development and definition as a nation are atypical, posing a challenge to historiography. This theme is taken up directly in the volume edited by Andreas Kappeler, a distinguished regional historian based at the University of Vienna. *Die Ukraine: Prozesse der Nationsbildung* is a collection of essays originally presented at a conference, and does not escape the typical issues connected with its genesis. Yet it provides, on balance, an important snapshot of the state of the discipline at the time of publication (2011), bringing together contributions from some of the key names involved in history writing on Ukraine within a Western ambit, but from different traditions and locations. Indeed, this heterogeneous character is a fitting reflection of the post-nationalist turn in studies of Ukraine itself—a country that, as Veronika Wendland points out in her historiographical contribution, attracts Western scholars in particular for its sheer diversity, not to mention transnational components (language variance and hybridity; religious complications; legacies of belonging to different empires which have left their own imprints on thought, culture, and institutions). The volume makes a good fist of addressing that diversity, and its ramifications for defining a state that lacks the obvious ethnic and linguistic homogeneity available to others, and by which nineteenth-century nationalism and its manifestations in post-Communist countries have been defined.

6. 'No Release in Sight for Tymoshenko', *Deutsche Welle*, 31 July 2013, <http://www.dw.de/no-release-in-sight-for-tymoshenko/a-16988473> (accessed 20/07/2013); 'Ukraine Violated Tymoshenko's Rights—European Court', *BBC News*, 30 Apr. 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22351931> (accessed 20/07/2013).

The best contributions use focused case-studies to highlight telling contradictions that escape the reach of broader-brush portrayals of Ukraine. One of the few in this collection to cite directly from original research, Matthew Pauly's contribution 'Odessa-Lektionen' (pp. 309–18), examines Ukrainianisation through a single example, a school from that city in the period 1928–30. The case follows the USSR's 1923 policy of *Korenisacja* (indigenisation), which allowed for the limited flowering of national cultures as part of a wider concept of a unified Soviet people. Although the study is narrow in scope, Pauly's conclusion (drawn from local records surveying the implementation of the policy, including eyewitness reports) is telling for Ukrainian identity: a strong identification with place (in this case the city) was more readily cited than a Russian or Ukrainian bias *per se* (p. 310). Robert Magocsi's piece, 'Eine rusynische Nation?' (pp. 269–78), chooses as its focus a people recognised as a minority across seven countries, but whose (primarily Carpathian, West-) Ukrainian population is viewed from Kiev as a 'sub-ethnos' (p. 276). His main intent is to flag the need for more sociological work in the field and problematise the easy transposition of a 'Ukrainian' identity. In her excellent contribution on religion, 'Religion und Nation: Unierte Kirche, Orthodoxie und die "Schutzmacht Russland"' (pp. 81–96), Ricarda Vulpius advances a thesis (p. 81) that no church authority in Ukraine can fully claim to represent the (problematically defined) 'nation' (p. 93). She challenges the prevailing focus in research on hostility between the Uniates and Orthodox in the west of the country, pointing out fissures within Orthodoxy to the east; in particular, she notes the limitations on Russification until at least the mid-nineteenth century.

Such research as that of Vulpius poses a challenge to the 'west-centric' view of Ukraine (i.e., skewed away from Russia and towards the Galician and Austrian elements) that has prevailed in historiography, both domestically and abroad, with the obvious exception of Ukrainian works from the Soviet period. There have been good reasons for such a bias: Galicia, as the largest region in the Ukrainian west, was administered by the Habsburgs until 1918, and from the mid-fourteenth century until its partition at the end of the eighteenth largely by Poland. Ukrainian language and identity followed a different developmental trajectory from that in the more Russified east; the city of Lviv (until shortly after the Second World War mainly inhabited by Poles) became the 'Piedmont' of Ukrainian nationalism—a fact widely covered in both local and Western historiography, with cultural, civic and academic institutions to match.⁷ There is also the matter of archival access—still not the easiest of feats across the former USSR. However,

7. Various essays address this theme in J. Czaplicka, ed., *Lviv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

this corrective challenge to the bias towards the Ukrainian west emerges as a leitmotif of the volume. Essays by Michael Moser on language, 'Die Ukrainer auf dem Weg zur Sprachnation' (pp. 97–110); Philipp Ther on multinationalism, 'Die Nationsbildung in multinationalen Imperien als Herausforderung der Nationalismusforschung' (pp. 37–50); Kai Struve on peasants under the Tsars, 'Bauern und ukrainische Nation in der Habsburgermonarchie und im Zarenreich' (pp. 159–74); and Kappeler himself, 'Ukrainische und russische Nation: Ein asymmetrisches Verhältnis' (pp. 191–202), variously restate this problematic over-reliance on the Galician perspective in research. As a partial corrective, Moser notes the Russian-language influences on the proto-Ukrainian bard Taras Shevchenko, who is credited with helping to fix and codify literary Ukrainian in the late nineteenth century (p. 102). In a similar vein, Rudolf Mark's satisfying piece on the short-lived Republic of 1917–21, 'Revolution und Nationsbildung: Die Ukrainische Volksrepublik 1917–1921' (pp. 295–308), argues convincingly that parallels with Ukraine after 1991 need to be treated with care, since the agitators of 1917 saw Ukraine principally within a Russian framework (p. 308). Meanwhile, Katrin Boeck gives a useful, if perfunctory, run-down of the concept of the 'Soviet people' and the waxing and waning fortunes of the Ukrainian language within that paradigm until 1991, 'Das Konzept des "Sowjetvolks" und die ukrainische Nation' (pp. 249–60); and Martin Malek, in 'Russische Stimmen zur ukrainischen Nationsbildung seit 1991' (pp. 389–402), surveys the predominantly negative Russian attitudes expressed by publicists and ideologues such as Rodin, Orlov and Pugachenko towards Ukraine, culminating in Putin's public assertion (pp. 391–2) that it is not a separate nation from Russia.

However, attitudes to the historic encounter with Russia are not the only faultline in Ukraine's peculiarly divisive history, as the volume also shows. In his contribution, the prominent Lviv historian Yaroslav Hrytsak, who has published widely in English, examines the political uses and abuses of historical memory after 1991 in 'Geschichte und Erinnerung: Amnesie, Ambivalenz, Aktivierung' (pp. 403–18): that is, the specific celebration (or forgetting) of events, symbols and historical figures. He identifies three principal phases: immediate amnesia of the Soviet period, followed by ambivalence around the time of President Leonid Kuchma's re-election campaign in 1995; then activation of a narrowly 'national' narrative under Yushchenko, through the use of historical symbols and events to buffer this narrative, such as promoting knowledge of the Holodomor (the mass starvation caused by Soviet policies in the early 1930s), and attempting to gain recognition of it internationally as genocide; finally, the promotion to 'national hero' of Stepan Bandera (1909–59), the controversial leader of the inter-war and wartime radical nationalist resistance organisation, the OUN-B. In this, as in his earlier work published elsewhere, Hrytsak notes patterns of regional difference and similarity in attitudes that do not necessarily

map neatly onto an East–West axis (‘pro’ versus ‘anti’ Russian), but seem to be rooted in pockets of regionalism.⁸ The theme of intra-Ukrainian differences is also suggested by Andriy Portnov’s essay, ‘Die ukrainische Nationsbildung in der postsowjetischen Historiographie: Einige Beobachtungen’ (pp. 29–36): he notes the move within Ukrainian historiography towards the cosmetic adoption of Western terms after 1991, but with the continuation of thought patterns and approaches to history evident under Brezhnev (p. 36). Few examples are cited, but the fact alone that it is Portnov writing these critical lines about compatriot historians is itself interesting. The presence of scholars such as Hrytsak and Portnov underscores the complexities of Ukrainian historiography and the polyvalence that it is gradually achieving—albeit through a limited number of internationally active voices such as these.

Despite these considerable pluses, the volume is far from perfect. It would have benefited from the culling of weaker essays which betray their origins as conference papers. The recurring explanation that these offer a ‘stimulus for further investigation’ is arguably insufficient in a volume that aspires to survey status. There is also too much repeated material: for instance, Frank Sysn’s useful mini-historiographical survey of the switch between Soviet and non-Soviet forms of history writing, ‘Die ukrainische Nationsbildung in der Frühen Neuzeit: Neuere Ergebnisse der Forschung’ (pp. 67–80), recurs in very similar form in at least two other other pieces. The academic apparatus could also have been improved, with too many instances of whole books quoted *passim*; and although there are useful short bibliographies after each essay, there might have been a fuller overall one. Finally, the three contributions on Jewry suffer from over-generalisation, and fail to cite the explosively critical but important work, *Erased*, by Omer Bartov, published in 2007.⁹ It falls only to Hrytsak to mention (briefly) the continuing problems with anti-Semitic attitudes in Ukraine in this volume (pp. 414–17).

This is not to undermine the usefulness of a maximalist work which finds space for such varied micro-topics as feminist writing since 1991 (Tatiana Zhurzhenko’s contribution, ‘Gefährliche Liebschaften: Nationalismus und Feminismus in der Ukraine, pp. 127–44) or the stymied attempts to build an independent army and republic construed along ‘Cossack’ lines (by Mark von Hagen, “Kriege machen Nationen”: Nationsbildung in der Ukraine im Ersten Weltkrieg’, pp. 279–94). However, those seeking a more immediate, succinctly framed introduction to the twists and turns of Ukrainian historiography might be better served by a slimmer, English-language work, *A Laboratory of Transnational History*, edited by Philipp Ther and Georgiy Kasianov

8. Cf. Y. Hrytsak, ‘National Identities in Post-Soviet Ukraine: The Case of Lviv and Donetsk’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, xxii (1998), pp. 263–81.

9. O. Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton, 2007).

(the latter is another Ukrainian historian with a more ‘Western’ profile).¹⁰ The Ther and Kasianov volume exerts a spectral influence over several of the papers in the work edited by Kappeler, in particular the idea that Ukraine has particular appeal today to Western historians. Ther and Kasianov state the case as follows:

In traditional national historiography, diversity has been regarded as a problem, rather than an asset. Whatever one’s attitude to diversity it is an essential feature of modernity, making Ukraine a prime laboratory for the study of modern politics and culture.¹¹

Indeed, the defining statement on the matter comes from Hrytsak in the Ther and Kasianov volume, in which he observes that the historiography of Ukraine is forced into self-reflexivity, both because of the disagreements within Ukraine about defining the nation itself, but also by virtue of the postmodern approach favoured by some Western scholars that encourages a ‘hall of mirrors’ effect. Ther and Kasianov’s book is therefore a useful conceptual starting-point for those new to Ukrainian historiography, and avoids straying into speculation about contemporary Ukrainian politics; Kappeler’s volume (for those with German), when used selectively, and avoiding the speculative elements that more recent events have rendered obsolete, provides valuable additional nuance and detail.

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Of course, treatments of the more distant past are no less bound by contemporary historiographical controversies. A prime example is *Making Ukraine*, by the Ukrainian scholar Zenon Kohut. The book comprises essays on aspects of Ukraine’s history mainly from the early modern period to the 1800s, with a smaller number on the impact of these events today, whether through the still-modish prism of memory, aspects of (more recent) historiography, or else via one excursus into the 1990s (an attempt to assess ‘Ukraine’s Russian Legacy’ in the latter part of President Kuchma’s tenure [1994–2005]). Fundamentally, Kohut’s use of the more distant past is a tool for suggesting continuities in Ukrainian history beyond the periods of external domination. His essays (all published elsewhere and collected here in translation for the purposes of dissemination by a Canadian diaspora press) focus heavily on Cossack history and relations with Muscovy and Russia (as well as, to a lesser extent, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). These are the main pillars of nationalist historiography, in so far as it attempts to posit a pre-existing, interrupted tradition of separate statehood—albeit in early modern form.

10. P. Ther and G. Kasianov, eds., *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography* (Budapest, 2009).

11. Ther and Kasianov, ‘Introduction’, in *ibid.*, p. 2.

Accordingly, the anti-Polish Cossack uprising led by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky (c.1595–1657) is the focus of at least one essay and merits numerous mentions elsewhere. Khmelnytsky's contribution, in Kohut's eyes, was to cement control over a coherent territory (ch. 2, p. 36) and begin a process of nation-building *avant la lettre* through his armed challenge. Indeed, Kohut goes on to conclude, with respect to Russia, that the cultural relationship with Ukraine was in the latter's favour until at least 1780, particularly in aspects of the literary language (p. 51). Similarly, the Pereiaslav Agreement of 1654 is singled out more than once as the most pivotal moment in Ukrainian history (e.g., p. 222). The interpretation is clear, as in the lucid opening piece where Kohut argues that the Cossacks' deal with the Muscovite Tsar to maintain semi-autonomy in return for accepting his overlordship proved fateful, since it paved the way for Russianisation by 'salami tactics'. This instigated the gradual erosion of privilege and autonomy in affairs of state, religion, especially under Catherine the Great (pp. 28–9) and, crucially, the assimilation of the noble class into the Imperial *dvorianstvo* from 1789 (p. 30). 'Ukrainian' aspects that lived on in some residual aspects of customary law were removed, with only folklore and cultural traditions remaining (these are not analysed here in detail) and the sporadic, pragmatic revival of Cossack legions, for instance, to help quell the Polish uprising of 1830.

Indeed, the interest in Cossackdom as an incubus of a proto-Ukrainian identity, and its weakening from the 1660s to 1680s in the period known as 'The Ruin' (a protracted struggle for control of territory now broadly called 'Ukraine') is the backbone of this collection. It also informs Kohut's interest in the re-emergent 'Cossackophilia' since 1991 (p. 231), in tandem with other aspects that were previously taboo under the Soviets. These aspects are touched on more briefly, but follow the same pattern of affirming a Ukrainian slant on history, namely: the famine of the early 1930s; the Insurgent Army (UPA) and the radical inter-war nationalist organisation (OUN); plus Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1687–1709), who fought against Russia in the Battle of Poltava of 1709.

Although Kohut's slant and intentions are clear, his writing is none the less circumspect and judicious: this is no browbeating revisionist history, but a cogent and clear-eyed presentation of the separatist Ukrainian position. Balanced asides make this clear, such as his admission that Ukraine's long historical encounter with Poland 'coloured the behaviour or Ukrainians as they encountered Muscovy and the Russians' (p. 8). His careful treatment of religious affairs throughout the volume is also illustrative, offering a corrective to political histories that tend towards a fully assimilationist position, but treading carefully in so doing. For instance, his treatment of the Orthodox church looks beyond the subordination of the Kiev Metropolitan to Moscow in 1685 and the demotion of the city to an Archbishopric in 1772 (ch. 7, pp. 136–40) to note the dominant presence of Ukrainians in the hierarchy (p. 144). Yet he acknowledges that the Empire's concerns were put first. In other words, Kohut is aware of

the 'interrupted' nature of Ukrainian traditions, as with his analysis of Ukrainian proto-national narratives within the Russian Empire, which are summarised in Chapter Ten. Of particular interest here is the discourse of 'Little Russia' (also the subject of ch. 2), with attention being drawn to two influential publications: the four-volume *Istoriia Maloi Rossii* of 1822, and Mykola Markevych's *Istoriia Malorossii* (1842–3), which recognised those who we now know as Ukrainians as 'ours but not us'. Once again, Kohut concludes that there were limits to the development of a separate identity rooted in cultural or institutional expression: relevant in this context were censorship of the Ukrainian language from 1863, and the fact that many of the earlier texts, while broadly suggesting the 'older' prior existence of the Kievan Rus' over Muscovite Russia, ended up reaffirming the Muscovite, Imperial grand narrative (p. 190).

The main drawback of this volume is that some of the essays (the oldest of which go back to the 1970s) inevitably show their age, both in failing to reflect recent historiographical developments, and in their methodology: examples are the sketched pieces on the Ukrainian elite after Khmelnytsky (ch. 3) and the Haidamaka movement (ch. 13), plus a relative lightness of touch when it comes to citing research beyond local historians and the work published by *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* (e.g., p. 227, n. 28). Also, the editor might also have excised the almost verbatim repetition in survey material at the beginning of certain chapters (for instance between chs. 10 and 11). These points aside, Kohut's contribution does a service to the historiography he broadly represents; and in contrast to the more elliptical works on Jewry in the Kappeler volume, his observations on stereotypes (in this case during the Khmelnytsky era) are to the point. Most of all, Kohut's contribution is a redress to the 'borderland' theme: his focus is on Ukraine as a *heartland*, deriving from a pre-existing entity that was later hijacked—not least for its very name—by Muscovy, which became 'Russian' thanks to the *Kievan Rus'*.

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The struggle for independent statehood is clearly a lesser concern in survey works about regional conflicts between larger powers (Poland, Russia, Germany). These feature Ukraine prominently, but more incidentally: the concept of 'borderland' is the primary lens through which Ukraine is again viewed, not in terms of Ukrainians' own complex national identity, but as the victims of more powerful neighbours. Alexander Prusin's aptly titled volume *The Lands Between* is a case in point: Ukraine is not the only country covered in his wide-ranging survey, which also has sections on the Baltic States and Belorussia, as well as embracing Moldova in its definition of 'borderland' (p. 4). Ukraine, however, features most prominently as a victim. Surveying such diverse countries and ethnic groups over such a long period poses obvious challenges, and Prusin by

and large handles them competently; his knowledge of the Ukrainian case is also a reasonable introduction (for those who might only be sketchily acquainted with them) to some of the tragedies suffered by its people between, during, and just after the wars. The best features of his work include a summary analysis of the ways in which the Soviets consolidated power in the borderlands, using the example of the west Ukrainian city of Lviv, and arguing that very few natives to the region were installed in positions of power to the benefit of 'imported' ethnic Russians (p. 212). Although these facts are well known to specialists, it is good to see them included in a survey of this kind. He also deals snappily with the failure of Stalin's crash-collectivisation (pp. 216–19) and makes substantial use of statistics (foreshadowing the method made famous by the Yale historian Timothy Snyder) to underscore the tragedies.

There are some useful and interesting perspectives on the inter-war period, too, notably Prusin's focus on the 'frontier wars' that took place in the region, which he convincingly frames as one of the overlooked longer-term causes of the Second World War (p. 106). His use of statistics from secondary sources throws up some arresting comparisons: for example, on the relative leniency shown by the Germans to the (admittedly far less numerous) Balts, as opposed to Ukrainians and Belorussians: the ethnic origin of 125 thousand versus 2.5 million deportees respectively (p. 167). Indeed, his treatment of the Ukrainian tragedy is for the most part compelling. This is a survey work, rather than one which draws mostly on new research, but the range of sources consulted is solid (p. 115–16). The possible exception is his treatment of Ukraine's neighbour, Poland, where over-generalisations arise. For instance, the assertion of there only being small Polish and Ukrainian elites ignores considerable differences in social composition between the two, not least that around 10 per cent of Poles considered themselves to be (minor) nobility, *szlachta*, and that a far larger proportion of them were urbanised, in contrast to the more rural pre-Second World War Ukrainian population (p. 6). More importantly, the immensely difficult subjects of Polish–Ukrainian and Polish–Jewish relations might have merited additional space and historiographical attention. Prusin's least satisfying chapter (ch. 6) bases its comments about anti-Semitism on the work of Jan T. Gross, but without referring to the voluminous debate and not insubstantial controversy surrounding that historian's conclusions, in Poland especially (p. 150).¹² Similarly, comments about

12. Cf. two books by Jan T. Gross drawing conclusions about Polish anti-Semitism based on a wartime event and a post-war pogrom respectively: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001); *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (Princeton, 2006). For a summary of the discussion arising from *Neighbors*, see A. Polonsky and J.B. Michlik, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, 2003). For an emblematic response to *Fear*, see D. Stola's review, partially validating Gross's findings but questioning his conclusions as too sweeping: *ante*, cxvii (2007), pp. 1460–63.

Polish fascism, and the repressive treatment of Ukrainians, do not include a comparative treatment of (well-documented, if controversial) Ukrainian instances of 'fascism', such as the SS-Galizien division; and, while Prusin admits, in passing, that Polish fascist groups were non-mainstream, he arguably risks generating the opposite impression by devoting disproportionate space to them (pp. 115–17). To have documented these cases more thoroughly would not have lessened the idea of Ukrainian victimhood, but given a more nuanced picture of the broader human tragedies that befell the region, of whatever ethnicity or national orientation.

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Timothy Snyder's by now well-known and widely discussed work, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, aims to do precisely this: focus on the human tragedy first and foremost. His opening and closing gambits are designed to foreground this intent, depicting and then naming single victims as a way of speaking synecdochally about the horrifying, widespread victimhood suffered across the region at the hands of Hitler and Stalin:

[I]t might be easier to imagine the one person at the end of the 33,761 Jews shot at Babi Yar: Dina Pronicheva's mother, let's say, although in fact every single Jew killed there could be that one, must be that one, is that one.¹³

The 'region' in question, for Snyder, is broader than Prusin's 'Lands Between': it focuses on most of occupied Poland in addition to Ukraine and Belorussia. Again, Ukraine is seen mainly through the prism of loss and tragedy, although its national narrative does come into play. This is a weighty, detailed and ambitious book that devotes whole chapters to different phases of the killing that occurred; among them, some forty pages on the man-made famine in Ukraine in the early 1930s. Snyder rightly draws on a broad array of existing literature, including work in Polish that otherwise tends to remain unused by Western researchers for linguistic reasons alone; he also weaves in archival material. Snyder's main tool, however, is statistics, but used far more remorselessly and bluntly than by Prusin, and the numbers of casualties pile up on every page. This is not a light or easy read, despite its pitch toward accessibility. The purpose is spelled out in the work's closing lines:

The Nazi and Soviet regimes turned people into numbers, some of which we can only estimate, some of which we can reconstruct with fair precision. It is for us as scholars to seek these numbers and to put them into perspective. It is for us as humanists to turn the numbers back into people.¹⁴

13. Snyder, *Bloodlands*, p. 408.

14. *Ibid.*

Snyder's account of the Ukrainian famines is broadly representative of his approach. While this is not revisionist history, it certainly has in its sights a re-education of what he sees as a Western misperception of the extent of suffering in the region. It is in this way that ethno-national groups emerge as foci of Snyder's study—that is, as victims singled out by the two dictatorships. It is also the pivot of well-documented criticism about the book since its publication, which is impossible to ignore here, as it in turn says much about the development of opinion on Ukrainian history in the west.

Donald Rayfield, writing in the *Literary Review*, criticised Snyder's comparison between Hitler and Stalin, noting the imbalance between Hitler's four years of killing versus Stalin's twenty-five-plus years, in waves; he also suggests that Snyder overlooks too readily the mass killing wrought on Stalin's 'own' people (i.e., ethnic Russians), which racked up similarly murderous statistics 'at home'.¹⁵ This rebuke also underpins Richard Evans's prominent, much-discussed and highly critical piece in the *London Review of Books*.¹⁶ Indeed, responses to Evans's review seem to have crystallised into two main opposing approaches to the period and countries in question, with a spirited defence mounted by two well-known scholars of Polish and East-European affairs, Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky.¹⁷

Perhaps inevitably, in a work as long and ambitious as Snyder's, Evans finds factual errors, mainly regarding treatment of the decision-making process leading up to the Final Solution; Evans argues that this was far messier and more non-linear than is allowed by Snyder. However, he goes on to lambast Snyder's core focus and approach: as well as finding the technique of 'rehumanising' a small number of victims ineffective, and criticising Snyder's blunt, statistic-heavy style, Evans suggests that the book fails due to the artificiality of its central construct, the very notion of 'bloodlands' as applied to certain parts of East-Central Europe. The notion is defined by Snyder not least in terms of the deliberately genocidal policies of Nazis and Soviets, separately and through indirect collusion, as with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that divided Poland. Snyder's purpose is to re-direct the Western gaze onto tragedies suffered by the ethnic, linguistic and national groups explicitly not part of the titular nations which suppressed them, hence the 'neglect' of Russian deaths outside the zone in question.

In his reaction to the review by Evans, Norman Davies makes the point, true to his own oeuvre and convictions, that Western historians have tended to put less emphasis on the victims of our allies (i.e., of the Soviets) than of our enemies (the Germans), and is thus inherently

15. D. Rayfield, 'Killing Fields', *Literary Review*, Sept. 2010, available online at http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/rayfield_09_10.html.

16. Richard J. Evans, 'Who Remembers the Poles?', *London Review of Books*, xxxii/21, 4 November 2010, pp. 21–2.

17. 'Letters', *London Review of Books*, xxxii/23, 2 Dec. 2010.

sympathetic to Snyder's slant—errors by the latter notwithstanding. Moreover, Davies's reaction is instructive for a different reason. Whichever side one takes in the discussion, Snyder's concern is with documenting, primarily, the suffering and survival of ethnic Poles, Ukrainians and Belorussians as identifiable groups, in addition to the Holocaust exacted upon the Jews, and in parallel with (although distinct from), for instance, the Kazakhs, Tartars, Russians, kulaks, and other class-based or ethnic groups, who are mentioned or discussed more peripherally by Snyder. This accounts for the perspective chosen, the geographic focus, the use of examples and statistics, but also much of the criticism.

Indeed, another prominent criticism by Evans is that the Polish case which Snyder documents is already well known and therefore over-emphasised. As others have since argued, this is only partially true. Antony Polonsky has noted, for instance, that Snyder quotes from the bottom end of current research statistics on deaths among the Polish elites; and while Evans is right that the murder of 22,000 Polish officers by the Soviets at Katyn', which Stalin initially blamed on the Germans, has had a wide audience, Snyder also exposes in some detail the Stalinist fear of a Polish-Japanese alliance—a fact that is surely less well known to anyone but regional specialists. Furthermore, while Snyder certainly focuses on the suffering of his chosen ethnic groups over, for instance, Russians living outside the self-defined 'bloodlands', he is far from being their reckless supporter. Where the Poles are concerned, attention is drawn to facets of Polish anti-Semitism, and later chapters set the Polish case in context, noting in parallel the extent of Stalinist actions against Jews after the Second World War. It seems the main problem, therefore, lies with Snyder's specific focus on, for instance, the many Polish deaths within Russia at Stalin's hands in the pre-Second World War years, part of a wider paranoia about 'enemies within'. As I have already argued, it does make sense in terms of Snyder's apparent focus on national or ethnic suffering; but one can see how this could be more open to criticism when set against (as Evans or Rayfield would have it) wider Russian (or other ethnic) suffering within the USSR, which is not Snyder's chosen focus.

Perhaps because of these reservations, Snyder's critics to my mind have overlooked some useful broader insights. First, he has useful observations to make about the simultaneity of apparently opposing narratives, for example within Communism about the victimhood and perpetratorhood of Jewry (pp. 376–7). Snyder's end point in analysing Soviet anti-Semitism is to stress the legacy of Nazism (as he puts it, Hitler 'laid a trap' for Stalin in that capacity), and again, the parallel horrors of Stalin and Hitler (p. 377). These are controversial assertions in themselves and they detract from his earlier and pointed dissection of the contradictions facing Jews under Stalin: for instance, the need on the part of Jews to prove Communist credentials but

while simultaneously being seen as 'Western'; and their experience of seeing the specifically Jewish experience of the Holocaust relativised in the name of a fictional, all-encompassing 'anti-fascist' victimhood (pp. 376–7), while also sensing that the West underplayed the role of the Red Army in securing victory in the Second World War. These are still not mainstream themes in Western historiography of the period, given its general bias towards Germany and the non-Eastern European experience.

A second important insight concerns the dangers of using past victimhood for present-day political or ideological ends: a subject with obvious relevance to the ongoing (and increasingly voluminous) discussion around the uses and abuses of 'memory' in a swathe of recent work on the region.¹⁸ Snyder's conclusion about the dangers of repurposing these difficult and contentious legacies is framed as follows: 'what begins as competitive martyrology can end with martyrological imperialism'—a statement the sentiment and lesson of which applies equally to the recent regime of the divisive, historically revisionist Kaczynski twins in Poland (Lech Kaczynski, President, 2005–10; Jarosław Kaczynski, Prime Minister, 2006–7), the ideologues on both sides of the Yugoslav conflict in the early 1990s, or countless other cases concerning the politics of memory. Ukraine, with its fissured present-day identity politics, is an interesting exception that proves the rule, where nationalist narratives such as that of the Holodomor are not automatically unifying features.¹⁹

* * *

Amid such divisions, the monograph by William Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv*, points the way to a more granular understanding of the country's fissured identity politics by way of a case-study. On one level, the work is part of a recent wave of interest among Western scholars in Lviv's history very specifically, one that began approximately a decade ago and that found a local home and outlet in the form of a very active, privately-funded regional Center for Urban History. The Center, opened in 2004, conducts micro-historical research on Lviv and fosters strong links with local and international scholars, as well as city councillors and urban planners.²⁰ As with Ukraine in macrocosm, the apparent attraction of Lviv as a

18. This is the subject of a large research project running at the time of writing at the University of Cambridge, called 'Memory at War', run by Professor Alexander Etkind (see <http://www.memoryatwar.org>), resulting in a recent volume of essays: U. Blacker, A. Etkind and J. Fedor, eds., *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* (London, 2013).

19. Snyder, *Bloodlands*, p. 406.

20. For a brief survey of recent western historiography on Lviv, see R. Pyrah, 'Questions in Urban History: The Case of Lviv, Ukraine', *Antropologicheskii Forum*, xii (2010), pp. 100–14 (originally published in Russian).

subject for Western scholars is its marked historical heterogeneity—ethnic, political and cultural, at least until the Second World War. This stands in obvious contrast to its subsequent, radical re-mapping as a ‘Soviet Ukrainian’ city under Stalin and subsequently. Its two dominant population groups were replaced by mainly rural ethnic Ukrainians and smaller numbers of imported, ethnically Russian technocrats: the former majority group, the Poles (c.55%) were deported after 1945; its Jews (up to a third) were lost largely to the Holocaust.

However, while most of the recent (Western) historiography focuses on ethno-national questions, and thereby the period from the late nineteenth century to 1939, Risch’s concentration on the Soviet years helps to fill a gap that only a handful of other scholars in the West have worked to fill—notably Tarik Amar, a former director of the Lviv Center for Urban History, whose dissertation is a springboard for some of the earlier sections in Risch’s book.²¹ Another wider historiographical trend visible within Risch’s work is the move toward an urban micro-history of other cities in the post-Soviet space: for example, Davies’s volume (with Roger Moorhouse) and the more recent work by Gregor Thum, both on Wrocław/Breslau, and others on Odessa and Vilnius (which also replaced its primarily Polish and Jewish population), are some of the more obvious and superficially similar examples.²² Where Risch differs is in his use and treatment of popular culture as the main vehicle for understanding responses to the drive to shape identity as ‘Soviet Ukrainian’, in a context where cultural narratives, historical legacies and demographics all stood (and arguably still stand) in dynamic tension.

The background is by now well known, and Risch sketches it adequately using (mostly) secondary material. This was a city with a strong non-Ukrainian legacy visible in the urban fabric: architecture, street names, signs, abandoned homes, and a post-war population with little or no connection to its history and culture. Simultaneously, the rhetorical status of Lviv as the centre of Ukrainian intellectual institutions and nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries propelled another challenge to the construction of the ‘Soviet Ukrainian’. This background is covered without an explicit analysis of historiography on the subject. Given the absence of a bibliography, too, one might assume these were editorial decisions to gain greater accessibility—although to my mind slightly odd ones, given the relatively niche nature of the book’s coverage. Nevertheless, Risch excels in the book’s empirical second half, where archival material and

21. T. Amar, ‘The Making of Soviet Lviv, 1939–1963’ (Princeton University Ph.D. thesis, 2006).

22. N. Davies and R. Moorhouse, *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City* (London, 2002); G. Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions*, tr. T. Lampert and A. Brown (Princeton, 2011); P. Herlihy, *Odessa: A History, 1794–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); L. Briedis, *Vilnius: City of Strangers* (Vilnius, 2008).

interviews illustrate how identity construction, as pursued by the state or examined by 'top-down' historians, was in practice more conflicted, hybrid, or hazily defined in subjective experience—drawing on examples from popular counterculture (hippies), western rock music, theatre, television. In this respect his work stands alongside the excellent *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, by Alexei Yurchak, about late Soviet culture from the perspective of those who experienced it;²³ as in the case of that work, Risch's volume offers important and hitherto neglected perspectives on the political history of Soviet Ukraine: namely, cultural and subjective.

To begin with, Risch's observation that much of L'viv's 'Western' cultural contact was filtered through its proximity to and (in Soviet terms) relative ease of contact with Poland (the country to which L'viv itself once belonged) is emblematic of the paradoxes on which this Soviet construction of a Ukrainian identity rested in this specific context. He goes on to elaborate how the idea of it belonging to a 'Soviet abroad' was also relative, drawing usefully on examples he clearly knows well from the Baltic states. Risch notes how the city's status depended upon a blend of rhetorical inflation for the (underground) nationalist cause; Western associations beyond its boundaries, thanks to geography and Polish influences; and yet its increasing provincialisation, overshadowed by Kiev in matters political and also cultural as part of a strongly centralising state (esp. p. 113). A useful observation is that young people's experience of counterculture might not necessarily be attributed to dissidence, but a youthful spirit of adventure (p. 210)—in other words, an important reminder that form and content are not necessarily imbued with the same meaning, and an indirect lesson to historians of identity politics. These and other examples by nature resonate beyond the bounds of L'viv as a case-study. A good example is his examination of how influential individuals manoeuvred to introduce elements of national discourse into cultural publications, with differing degrees of success. While the Soviet definition of nationality permitted limited national self-expression, there was always the risk of proscription on the grounds of a narrower (anti-Soviet) 'bourgeois nationalism', and some of the cases Risch cites walked that line successfully (p. 138); others—as his case-study of Rotislav Bratun, editor of the local cultural journal *October*, shows—did so only fleetingly (ch. 5, p. 150).

Broadly speaking, therefore, this is an important contribution to our understanding not only of the history of Soviet L'viv, but of aspects of subjectively experienced Soviet popular culture, and local identity politics on the margins of the USSR. It also, for our purposes, represents a local and regional polarity in Ukrainian historiography.

23. A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006).

As a number of scholars have pointed out in more recent work, regionalism, albeit not defined along strict East–West, or even fully along linguistic, lines, is an important present and future impulse in Ukrainian historiography, reflecting complicated patterns of affiliation and (self-)identification within the country.²⁴ Further, as studies of L'viv themselves are showing, there is an evolving notion of 'place-patriotism' that stands alongside other categories, according to survey material ('nation'—Ukrainian; ethnicity; profession; gender; religion; region; 'European'; 'Soviet').²⁵ This perhaps offers the ultimate challenge (but also opportunity) to the historiography of Ukraine: to incorporate and build upon a more regionally nuanced understanding of identity that does not necessarily challenge the integrity of the nation-state on the one hand, while helping bridge the divide between primordialists and modernists on the other. As Andrew Wilson pointed out, assuming one is of the constructivist school of national identity, Ukraine is not necessarily any more 'constructed' than other nations; it is just that this process is more visibly ongoing and more contested there than elsewhere.²⁶ Therefore, whether one is primordial in one's thinking about nations or not, a concept of 'home' that is flexible enough to incorporate multiple vectors and layers of identity—regional, local, ethnic and so on—interacting in complex ways, shifting over time, and subject to different narrative constructions imposed from above, might offer a way out of the impasse. For instance, the German case may be very different in ethnic terms and historical experience, but national unification in that case occurred relatively late (1871, and without Austria or Germanic-dialect-speaking Switzerland), and definitions of German identity remain bound in part by strong regional differences and identifications. In this context, the term 'Heimat' offers a way of understanding persistent faultlines that national, or in some cases some regional, borders simply elide.²⁷ The meaning in English translation falls somewhere between 'home place', 'locality' and 'homeland'; the term is deliberately geographically flexible: it reflects affective affinities over (necessarily) ethnic ones. Perhaps when thinking about the similarly fissured Ukrainian case, an idea of 'Heimat' might offer a useful way of

24. P. Rodgers, *Nation, Region and History in Post-Communist Transitions: Identity Politics in Ukraine, 1991–2006* (Stuttgart, 2008).

25. Cf. Hrytsak, 'National Identities in Post-Soviet Ukraine'; C. Sabic, *Ich erinnere mich nicht, aber L'viv...! Zur Funktion kultureller Faktoren für die Institutionalisierung und Entwicklung einer ukrainischen Region* (Stuttgart, 2007).

26. 'Ukraine does have a problem ... with constructing relative unity out of the past. The Ukrainians have not always existed as a nation. They were "made" or "invented" in the same way as any other nation but this construction began late and is still going on': Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, p. 310.

27. C. Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990), pp. 4–5. For a more recent study of Germany looking at non-national vectors in identity formation, see O. Zimmer, *Remaking the Rhythms of Life: German Communities in the Age of the Nation-State* (Oxford, 2013), see esp. pp. 296, 302–6 (with thanks to Martin Conway for this reference).

re-conceptualising its identity from a range of more instructive, granular perspectives—incorporating the subjective and the local. It might also bridge gaps between enduring external perceptions of liminality (the ‘borderland’); some internal ones of centrality (the ‘heartland’); and more subjective ones simply of ‘home’, variously defined, but in ways that incorporate Ukraine’s perhaps uniquely layered elements in their full complexity.

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