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REVIEW ESSAY

Geography, identity, nationality: mental maps of contested Russian–Ukrainian borderlands

Romantic nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian political imaginations, by Bilenky Serhiy, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2012, 408 pp., US$65 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0804778060

Russia on the edge: imagined geographies and post-Soviet identity, by Clowes Edith W., Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2011, 200 pp., US$25.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0801477256

Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the invention of a Russian nation, by Hillis Faith, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2013, 348 pp., US$55 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0801452192

The Cossack myth: history and nationhood in the age of empires, by Plokhy Serhii, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 408 pp., US$32.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1107449039

When notions of "ancient ethnic hatreds" in Eastern Europe make their casual blogospheric return, history in packaged national or east/west geopolitical form becomes a popular way to explain the motives for conflict. But it should arouse suspicion: When a state's sovereignty is violated and territories break down by region – for example, in Russian "historical" claims first over Crimea and now in Putin's so-called Novorossiia (New Russia) in independent Ukraine's east – history itself is used as a *fait accompli* to annex and occupy lands while minority voices, such as those of the Crimean Tatars, are muted on the ground.[1] Yet loose and loud affirmations of nationality have not led to resolution, nor has the saber-rattling of empires with bruised egos (and Russia is hardly alone in this category) disappeared. Map-themed appeals to territorial revision, visual schemes of monoethnic identity, or dichotomous clefts of a purportedly civilized "Western" bastion and "Eurasian" east are hardly a thing of the past (Case 2009; Suslov 2011). So what is to be done? We might return to one of history's messier terms, the nationality principle, which before the Soviet Union's formation marked, grouped, and objectified nineteenth-century Central and Eastern European populations by language and/or confession. As a tool of statecraft and instrumental reason, nationality is never a value-neutral term. Although nationality gained validity in strategies of imperial conflict management after the Vienna Congress in 1814–1815, it continued to be debated by intelligentsias, among experts and statistical demographers, and in international scientific congresses after 1848 (Kertzer and Arel 2001; King 2005; Mazower 2009).

To take a relevant statistic, according to the 1897 All-Russian Census, there were 125.6 million souls in imperial Russia. Less than one-quarter were literate. Under Nicholas II, the

last Romanov tsar, his subjects comprised 44.3% of the ethnonym of "Great Russians" and 17.8% of "Little Russians" (so labeled), according to the equally problematic category of native tongue. Hence we arrive at two central problems of nationality studies: first, claims of nationalities to "historic" victimhood and their political offshoot, national self-determination in regional processes of modernization (Karch 2012) and, second, the banality of tales of heroes and villains, the default modes of over-selective pop-national memory and teleological histories (Marples 2009; Norris 2012). At its best, nuanced scholarship can counter such polarizing tendencies by offering alternative models of national identity, investigating the structures and pertinent discourses of nationalizing myths, and mediating dialogues, informed by theory and historiography, about the patriotic uses and abuses of the past (Oushakine 2009).

Even with the Russian–Ukrainian war in the background, in these four books there is plenty of cause for optimism concerning the state of Russian, Ukrainian, and East European scholarship. Readers interested in new interdisciplinary angles for the study of nations and empires will find room for dialogue and a wealth of historiographical knowledge, as well as literary, archival, and periodical research on geography, nationality, and identity. The books proceed from two historiographical turns in the study of East European and Eurasian borderlands: one imperial, one spatial. The "imperial turn," as described comprehensively in a 2012 essay on H-Soz-u-Kult by Theodore R. Weeks, has featured excellent source- and archive-based investigations from the 1990s and 2000s up to the present. Studies of the Russian/Soviet empires have aimed to locate, compare, and contrast it with other empires; to emphasize the presence and significance of non-Russians as subjects and agents of their own history; and to reexamine nationality policies and their effects (Weeks 2012). The books surely follow this "turn," but the authors have in common an appreciation for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intelligentsia studies, in addition to pre-1914 studies of minority peoples in multiethnic empires. Their focus is rather more sober than debates on postwar memory in the "bloodlands" of the 1930s and 1940s, as Timothy Snyder had termed them – generally, the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth dually occupied by Nazi Germany and Stalin's USSR (Snyder 2003 and 2010). This second vein reflects another major body of scholarship: The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies published five seminal essay collections on Ukraine's history and historiography relative to its neighbors, on Ukraine and Poland (Potichnyj 1980), Ukrainian–Jewish relations (Potichnyj and Aster 1988), German–Ukrainian relations (Torke and Himka 1994), and Russian–Ukrainian relations (Potichnyj 1992 and Kappeler et al. 2003).

While studies of Ukraine's interethnic ties are not exactly new, the comparative dimension and Central European perspective of such research give critical distance both from a Moscow/St. Petersburg imperial core and the labeling of "Little Russians" as once part of Rus' or Russia's southwestern borderlands (Kamusella 2012). At the same time, regional questions about collaboration and resistance in Eastern Europe at the heart of Europe's twentieth-century genocides are usefully extended back to the early modern era and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Case 2009; Thum 2011; Bartov and Weitz 2013). Hillis, for instance, seems especially interested in revising Ernest Gellner's seminal 1983 *Nations and Nationalism* book to show the persistence of local "national indifference" (Bjork 2008; Zahra 2008 and 2010) from pre-modern times into modern politics; how nationalities overlapped in their historical geographies before 1914; and how non-Russians became national "questions" and interacted in provincial, transnational, and cross-imperial contexts (Miller 2003; Dolbilov and Miller 2006; Mogilner 2013). All the authors want to know how and when groups laid "historic" claim to spaces (such as Rus') that were viewed as cultural givens. More concretely, each is interested in human geography: how

people forge their surroundings and come to locate, endow, and configure specific locations with specific value (Bhahba 2004; Randolph 2007; Costlow 2013). Finally in their focus on historical geography, the books add to scholarship on the "spatial turn" (Döring and Thielmann 2008; Warf and Arias 2014) and "mental maps" (Schenk 2002 and 2013) across the humanities; the attention to space has returned researchers usefully to economic, political, and cultural geography, while not neglecting borderland power structures and the minutiae of landscape and place-making (Burbank, von Hagen, and Remnev 2007; Baron 2007 and 2008; Bassin, Ely, and Stockdale 2010; Rolf 2010).

The historians Bilenky, Hillis, and Plokhy have differing fields and periods of expertise compared with literary scholar Clowes, but in fact all of their monographs are deeply time- and place-specific across the decades of their expertise. For Bilenky, it is the Russo-Polish-Ukrainian triangle of romantic national discourse in the 1830s and 1840s; for Plokhy, the legacy of the dismantled eighteenth-century Cossack Hetmanate through the lens of a single text, the *History of the Rus'* written in 1846; for Hillis, the role of imperial Kyiv's city elders and "Little Russian" political activists (by which she generally means mixed local Russo-Ukrainian nation-, state-, and empire-builders in right-bank Ukraine) from the 1830s through the "modern" 1860s into the pre-revolutionary 1910s; and for Clowes, the contemporary urban defenders of and challengers to Russocentric historical geography in the nineteenth-century Slavophile/Westernizer traditions of the Russian intelligentsia, in literary texts published in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1990s and early 2000s. With respect to space and borderlands, their approaches in turn may be described as: (1) phenomenological and ontological; (2) urban history and imperiological; (3) sociology of knowledge; and (4) transnational/world history. By spotlighting geography as a neglected spatial factor in cultural history and the set of discourses about the self and other(s), they revisit the projects of East Europe's intelligentsias before 1914 to show the persistence of myths in borderlands, challenges to hegemony and literary canons, and when and where symbolic notions of east and west, north and south have acquired meanings in Russia and Ukraine. To engage more directly with their arguments and evidence, I will work in reverse chronological order from Clowes' research on the 2000s, back to the 1860s–1910s for Hillis, to the 1830s–1840s for Bilenky, and finally into the 1750s–1760s for Plokhy's analysis of Cossack legacies in Russia and Ukraine.

Integral to the first book, Clowes' *Russia on the Edge*, is her analysis of ethnic Russian monoculturalism and post-Soviet constructs of the Russian nation and its others. She draws from the religious and philosophical writings of Slavophiles and Westernizers, and the geography and geopolitics of Eurasianism (Bassin 2003; Laruelle 2012). Clowes does not engage, unfortunately, with Ukrainian literature, but she does offer a vast literary triptych across a Russocentric Third Rome landscape that appears as a kind of postlapsarian, grab-bag Middle Kingdom.[2] Traditional Russia is revived as an "oikumene," a center on its own pseudo-religious terms (2011, 137). Clowes aims to understand the spatial grammar of poetic metaphors and symbols by focusing on the phenomenology and ontology (both words are used regularly) of the works of nine major Russian writers: Vladimir Makanin (b. 1937), Aleksandr Prokhanov (b. 1938), Dmitrii Prigov (1940–2007), Liudmila Ulitskaia (b. 1943), Mikhail Ryklin (b. 1948), Tatiana Tolstaia (b. 1951), Anna Politkovskaia (1958–2006), Viktor Pelevin (b. 1962), and Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962). While Clowes is attentive to postcolonialism, she does not diverge far from Russian visions of the West. Clowes is concerned with Ryklin's poststructuralist use of fluid concepts such as "border;" the magical realism of Ulitskaia, which, she argues, challenges not only Putinist culture in Russia but also colonial prejudice, while complicating notions of north/south civilization

and primitivism; and the laudable civic-minded outlook of the late Politkovskaia, in her journalistic defense of minorities and human rights.

In her thematic division, Clowes profiles selected authors and organizes the chapters in a point-counterpoint manner. In "Deconstructing Imperial Moscow," Clowes looks at how Soviet-era Moscow also became a dissenting dream space for ordinary people in the works of Prigov, Ryklin, Pelevin, and Tolstaia, and their antecedents Venedikt Erofeev and Vladimir Voinovich. In "Postmodern Empire Meets Holy Rus'," she takes on Aleksandr Dugin, showing the inconsistencies of his fantasies of a Russian-led Eurasianist state system. In "Illusory Empire," she looks at Pelevin's allegorical critique of Russian imperialism and Eurasianist nationalism. In "Russia's Deconstructionist Westernizer," she praises Ryklin's "cultural-psychological project [that] starts with a reconsideration of the meanings of the word border can have – whether territorial, psychological, or philosophical" (2011, 100). In "The Periphery and Its Narratives," Clowes examines Ulitskaia's multiculturalist strategies and the topos of the Black Sea coast as a "metaperiphery." In "Demonizing the Post-Soviet Other," Clowes looks at the "other South" of the Caucasus and Chechnya, a historical blind spot for Russocentric claims. Clowes' analysis in these chapters is detailed and engaging.

The way in which Clowes supports her argument about geopolitical "edges" is generally convincing, since she mainly restricts herself to Russian literature. One of her best examples is in showing how Dugin's anti-Western, anti-Semitic appeals for a Eurasianist empire are revisited poses for Russians' special historical-geographical mission to remake the world. To bring out the point, she juxtaposes Dugin's psychologizing of geopolitics to Ryklin's taking apart Dugin's infusion of xenophobic neo-Slavophilism and his rhetoric of a racist, Western-phobic, and essentialist Eurasianism. The impact of German geopolitical thinkers (such as Karl Haushofer) from the Weimar period is mentioned, but this is not too developed. Clowes detects in Russia's "psyche" (she does not say "soul!") the older structural tensions of an intelligentsia on the margins of Europe – the Europe/Asia divide, the inclination toward utopian ideas, iconographies of sacred/secular space, and cultural notions of Russian uniqueness (2011, 47–48). Clowes' reading of Dugin's works is insightful in that Dugin's geographical rantings become more than a "straw man" for an urban liberal intelligentsia. Rather, he is symptomatic of the persistence, well into the early twenty-first century, of Russian ethnonationalism. Dugin's subjective fantasies of Russia's place in the world represent a failure to become reconciled to the loss of empire.

Clowes' criticism has its strengths, for instance in the sections on Dugin, Ryklin, and Ulitskaia which are quite well developed. She commends the translation ventures of Ad Marginem, a form of intellectual opposition to Putin's revolution, as a way to introduce Western philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, and critical theory shared by a transnational republic of letters to Russian-reading audiences (2011, 99). The book is sometimes sprawling, and paragraph sequences seem hard to follow. Clowes has a tendency to choose favorite authors, it seems; curiously enough, no writers born after 1962 are profiled. In her unstated defense of the urban intelligentsia's traditional soothsaying ways, she gravitates toward those who "expose the state's implied claim that ethnic differences do not matter, and … insert into the post-Soviet debate the notion that all citizens, no matter what their ethnic background, have rights and should be proactive in defending them, in many cases against the state" (2011, xii). A quote from Tatiana Tolstaia's The Russian World (2003) sums up her views on the contradictory needs for writer liberty and pluralism beyond the Putinist state's increasing monopolization of history and ideological encroachment, "Russia is a country with an unpredictable past … everyone thinks up his own past,

his own history for this madhouse, and one narrative is no better and no more correct than another, there are as many pasts as you like" (2011, 43).

The second book, Faith Hillis' *Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation*, is one of the best monographs in the field in recent years – a timely and critical venture into both imperial Russian and Ukrainian history and historiography. Hillis draws from work on national indifference to build a counterintuitive thesis: that neither Russian nor Ukrainian (Little Russian) political projects in Kiev/Kyiv had clear outcomes, and that the struggles for power and control by city elders and bureaucrats in imperial Russia's southwest were a "dynamic and contingent process through which national ideas took root in the borderlands" (2013, 11). She offers an elegant analysis of how the category of "little Russians" was created and then reinvented in imperial Russia – namely by the activists and lobbyists of right-bank Ukraine, on the west side of the Dnieper/Dnipro River, annexed by the Russian empire only in the late eighteenth century, from the 1830s to the development of Kiev/Kyiv as an urban metropolis up to 1914. She explores the tensions of accommodation under imperial rule. Hillis is deeply knowledgeable about monographic literature and empirical studies of "imagined noncommunities" (Zahra 2010) and "national amphibianism" (Bryant 2007) as they affect current Russo-Ukrainian identity politics, right down to the neighborhoods of Kiev/Kyiv and the everyday nationalizing sites of modern urban life.

In her overview of the Ukrainian movement in chapter one, Hillis provides an excellent background by locating the dynamic myths and practices of Rus'-oriented civilizing patriots, both Ukrainian and Russian. She excludes Polish sources and the history of Poland–Lithuania (which she calls, misleadingly, a "Catholic state"). She has a solid background section on Rus' in antiquity and early modernity, and the tsarist de-Polonization of gentry lands. She brings in research on imperial localism and provincialism (Evtuhov 2011). The book's second section asks "how residents of the right bank came to conceive of local society in national terms in the first place" (2013, 10). Following Burbank and Cooper's award-winning 2011 book, *Empires in World History*, Hillis investigates "how European empires endeavored to use national ideas to serve their own interests" (2013, 3). This part is devoted to how Little Russian activists reimagined the empire's diversity ethnonationally by language and confession in the lands of right-bank Ukraine.

Central to Hillis' thesis are three interlinking efforts of Russian and Ukrainian patriotic Rus'-projects starting in the 1860s, which were spearheaded mainly by Orthodox or philo-Orthodox notables. Lobbyists who saw Russians as the empire's titular nationality urged officials to expand Russian engagement in economic and political life and to minimize the influence of non-Russians. They also advocated for strong state oversight of culture, industry, and politics, of, by, and for Orthodox East Slavs (2013, 2). Nothing was predestined about Russian or Ukrainian national awakenings. (It is unfortunate that Hillis treats the "eastern" imperial/national project of "Little Russia" as separate from the "western" history of nationalism in Habsburg Galicia, but this is perhaps beyond her scope.) She points out that scholarship on the 1860s to the 1910s has focused on narratives of decline rather than the lasting effects in provincial urban climes of the economic, social, and cultural power of the Russian titular nationality. She adds a wrinkle:

> Although the borderlands sometimes witnessed social and confessional conflict, their economic and cultural life served as powerful forces of integration. Peasants, nobles, and urban merchants relied on each other for survival, and the region's elites created a unique, multilingual hybrid culture of their own. (2013, 4)

Putting hybridity in the center of her analysis (this point is also accentuated by Clowes in her preface, 2011, xi), Hillis takes the history of late imperial Kyiv's governors and bureaucrats out of trajectories of nation-building into complex notions of indifference or shared allegiance. Once the praxis of nationalism transformed everyday life in the 1860s, right-bank Ukraine became a provincially designated "civilization" for the lovers of Rus'. Hillis skillfully unpacks the empire's pluralism into local agitation efforts by conservatives, liberals, and radicals in the city.

In the last section, Hillis demonstrates how right-bank activists codified the local-as-national after the 1860s, and in the age of imperial Russian mass politics following the October Manifesto of 1905. As Kiev/Kyiv's capitalist economy developed unevenly, in their traditionalism they tended to denigrate, with ever more protests and signs of mass violence, multiethnic diversity. They centered on Rus' as a "civilization" for the Orthodox by calling for the liberation of Ukrainian Russians and appealing to "suffering" at the hands of foreign others, namely Jews and Poles. By World War I, Little Russians became illiberal elites who were hardened by the urban crucible; they enlarged their social base across classes by calling for "true Russian" values (2013, 243). Hillis historicizes the course of Ukrainian–Jewish relations and the lobbying efforts of right-wing nationalists in the story of anti-Semitic pogroms, and infamously in the Beilis case of 1911–1912. She rightly points out that during the period of the Four Dumas after the October Manifesto of 1905, Russian ethnonationalism threatened not only Ukraine's stability but also the composition of the multiethnic empire itself.

Hillis' study is insightful and formidable. The historian rereads Kiev/Kyiv's pan-European, pre-1914 social and economic history back diagnostically from the twentieth century, through the lens of urbanization, culture wars, and multiethnic political struggles. A particularly strong section is her "Portrait of Capitalist City," in which she details the roles of Polish families (Branickis, Potockis), Orthodox absentee landlords (Balashevs, Bobrinskiis), and Jewish families (Brodskiis, Gintsburgs), all of whom were prominent (2013, 120–125). She brings in the history of pogroms at key junctures in the city's history, examining the Russian and Ukrainian press and how populists exploited the divides of 1905 to rally people around the perception of shared moments of ethnonational suffering (2013, 170).[3] To her credit, Hillis is versed in historical literature in English, French, German, and some Polish; *Children of Rus'* has a vast array of references in the back to pertinent newspapers, journals, books, pamphlets, and memoirs. Greater knowledge of Polish historiography and German-Polish borderlands would bolster her argument, but her pan-European approach to imperial rule has a clear advantage: Instead of seeing nations or empires as self-evident, she focuses on how empires "made" nations out of self-interest.[4] Hillis' study of alternative forms of nationality raises questions about the persistence of empires after their fall, and of ethnonational politics in Ukraine. She shows that more research on knowledge regimes, indifference, hybridity, and alternative forms of belonging remains to be done (Aktürk 2012; Mizutani 2013).

The third book, Serhiy Bilenky's *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, is also a fine achievement in the fields of East European intellectual, cultural, and political history. Bilenky revises the Isaiah Berlin-inspired histories of early nineteenth-century Russian and Polish intelligentsias, a tradition that was notably carried on from the 1960s to the 1990s by Andrzej Walicki (Walicki 1982 and 1991). As he argues, "Many Ukrainians, in mapping the Ukrainian nationality, were not consciously unmaking the 'All-Russian nation.' Quite the contrary: the project of a Ukrainian Romantic nationality, at least for its proponents, was compatible with a Russianness that encompassed all East Slavs in higher unity"

(2012, 303). This issue of difference and compatibility – of Ukrainians to Poland and Ukrainians to Russia, and also Russophone Ukrainians to Ukraine – is central to Bilenky's book.

Instead of a mere history of men and ideas, Bilenky focuses on the importance of what he calls "mental geography" and "idioms of nationality." Though his gender history might be better developed, Bilenky applies these two ideas to an original reading of intellectuals' travel-writings in Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian. Bilenky's taxonomic tables for Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian geography/mapping and idioms/rhetoric of nationality in the 1830s and 1840s are really quite fascinating (2012, 11). He shows the metaphysics of romantics and how "nationality" suggested the totality of a mental or spiritual view, or of an institutional, religious, or social group. He provides a superb overview of the major participants in ideological fields, such as Vissarion Belinsky, and he takes into account the lack of a public sphere for Ukrainians (2012, 13). Similarly to Hillis, creators of fields for making/unmaking mental maps were, variously, (1) conservatives, loyalists, and pro-governmentalists; (2) liberals, centrists, and democrats; and (3) radicals and leftists. Bilenky's thesis about the lack of *Rossiiskii* strategy and Ukrainian imagined Russo-Ukrainian unity of East Slavdom prior to 1848 is quite well supported. Nationality as a schematic concept to the empire did not reach its heyday in Russia until the high age of positivist statistical demography – after the effects of 1863–1864, rather than 1830–1831, and then in an ad hoc way in the tsarist bureaucracy. Moving past Walicki's history-of-ideas approach, Bilenky draws instead from Larry Wolff, Benedict Anderson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Rogers Brubaker to produce an original analysis of how places become one's "habitus" and are invested with cultural capital and meaning. In the crucial decades of the 1830s and 1840s, these invocations of home were keys to the production of space, and to long-held stereotypes and prejudices that became geopolitical maps of Russia, Poland, and Ukraine.

Bilenky's focus throughout the book is on how Ukrainians' agency is lost, objectified, or marginalized in the geographical imaginations of Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and the West. He takes seriously the subjective aspect of individual cultural topographies of nationality – how writers exoticized or eroticized the borders of, and drew places within, Russia, Poland, and Ukraine. In the book's two main parts, on mapping and mental geography, and on representations of national community through idioms of nationality, Bilenky focuses painstakingly on the semantic codes and toponymy of mapping. He shows carefully how romantic writers became obsessed with high culture as well as ethnic difference. Bilenky details the strong impact of German idealism in Russia, Ukraine, and Poland in the early nineteenth century, particularly among East European romantics who had to reconsider markers of difference by "organic" language and legacies of historical statehood. He notes the impact of German thinkers such as Gottfried Leibnitz, Johann Herder, Johann Fichte, and Georg Hegel. Romantics in Europe's east were intensely inspired by German idealism in which identities embodied the spirit, soul, and harmony of the nation.[5]

Unlike Hillis' mostly urban-focused sociopolitical rejection of modernization theory and Miroslav Hroch's teleological model (Hroch [1985] 2000) for nineteenth-century nation-building in Kyiv, Bilenky ventures out rurally to tease out intellectual-history questions about how and when literary-cultural nationalism (phases A and B) changes into political-territorial (phase C) goals.[6] Here, he mainly restricts himself to the 1830s and 1840s, noting four issues in particular: the roles of language, religion, history, and institutions in shaping national identities; the presence of neighboring communities and how it changed self-representation (the dialectics of self and other); when and where the imagined communities intersected, and what their borders were; and at what point the national communities were destroyed or reconstructed. Bilenky's period-based thesis is perhaps stated a little too

geopolitically for Ukraine before the era of the twentieth-century homogeneous nation-states. After Russian writers "unmade" the historic Polish nation, it was Ukrainians who "unmade" the all-Russian nation. But he notes, correctly, that "Ukrainians indeed greatly benefited from the geopolitical consequences of the Russo-Polish conflict" (2012, 303). Bilenky understands a similar point about decline in imperial Russian and Soviet worlds that the "making" of one nationality (whether in the 1860s–1870s or the 1920s–1930s or the 1970s–1980s) meant the "unmaking" of others. At least for imperial Russia, he is right that multiethnic empires tended to treat the potential members of a "new" nationality as a test case or opportunity. Yet the Ukrainians, unlike the Poles, came to be seen in both Russian and Soviet eyes as an integral part of "civilized" and established communities of nationality.

The spatially informed discourse analysis offered by Bilenky is mainly targeted toward the metaphysics of nationality, before 1848, of Ukraine's geographical (or geopolitical) imagination in Russia, Poland, the West, and beyond. Bilenky refocuses our attention toward the inherent fallacies, prejudices, and inconsistences in how mental maps are made. Many unresolved tensions remain: For instance, he ends with Mikhail Bakunin, who in fact becomes a counter-hegemonic mapper of empire, and a radical hero of imagined Western *and* East Slavic unity as a radical Russian *and* Pole *and* Ukrainian. Bilenky writes, "Poles had long understood that imperial Russia, if deprived of its 'grand' nationality, would not be able to refashion itself successfully. In the late 1840s, only one Russian, Bakunin, clearly realized (and enthusiastically suggested) that by 'unmaking' the unity of the 'all-Russian nation,' he was destroying the empire itself – at least in the imagination of his listeners and readers" (2012, 306). This is a sly taxonomic trick: Would the "mental map" of Bakunin, an avowed international anarchist, really belong in the same category as the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko?

Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe is a fine overall interdisciplinary study of the maps and idioms that were used by early formulators of nationality. Its method may not always be clear, and cultural geography is not too theorized, but the book offers a lot. It demonstrates an encyclopedic knowledge of Russian and Ukrainian history, literature, discourse theory, sociology, and the geopolitics of nationality. Bilenky's analysis, while sometimes sparse in reference to secondary literature, is based on a mixed poststructuralist and sociological reading of the aims, intentions, slippages, and silences in the unstable texts produced by romantic writers of the 1830s and 1840s in Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian. The end result is a new Walickian guide to spaces of intelligentsia, which every student of intellectual history and of Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian historiography ought to read. Especially in the present day, Bilenky should be commended for writing a balanced history of contested Russo-Ukrainian cartographies and Russo-Polish-Ukrainian topoi of belonging.

In the fourth book, the most tenaciously experimental of the lot, Serhii Plokhy has written an erudite, suspenseful page-turner. It is a grand philological detective story, by genre between Agatha Christie's pulp mysteries and Burbank and Cooper's path-breaking *Empires in World History. The Cossack Myth* is both a pleasurable historical read and a sophisticated academic study of Russian–Ukrainian relations. Plokhy gives the reader a masterful "whodunnit" of perhaps the most famous story of Ukraine, the *History of the Rus'*, which, ironically, was written in 1846 in imperial Russia. It pivots on the authorship of the anonymous 1846 work, which described the struggles of the Cossacks and was one of the most anti-Polish and anti-Catholic works of the modern era. He outlines the historiography in detail, showing how the *History of the Rus'* was a venerable myth of shared identity for Russians and Ukrainians alike; the poets Kondraty Ryleev, Alexander Pushkin, and

Shevchenko; novelists such as Nikolai Gogol, the painter Ilya Repin; and nationalists of many stripes in Russia and Ukraine to this day.

In Plokhy's quest for authorship of the *History of the Rus'*, he makes a plausible case for Stepan Shyrai, a retired major general and marshal of the Chernihiv nobility. Shyrai was a master chronicler of his milieu, who told stories of Cossack rights and privileges in the Starodub region. Before the grand unveiling of Shyrai, Plokhy lures readers into his philological forensic investigation. He turns up a list of suspects. He interrogates the long-suspected author, the Belarusian Orthodox bishop Heorhii Konysky, a professor at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy. When he eventually drops the bombshell, he uses the newfound historical knowledge to pose new and open-ended questions, and not to deliver definitive nationalist answers. After he makes a logical case for Shyrai, Plokhy comes up with a stunning rhetorical question: "Could the *History of the Rus'* have been a product of collaborative authorship? Can the answer to the riddle … be akin to the one offered by Agatha Christie in her *Murder on the Orient Express*, where all twelve suspects turn out to be guilty of stabbing the victim and committing the crime?" (2012, 345). The critical investigation of Cossack society serves both as a backdrop and an alternative to ethnohistory.

Plokhy's broad research on the Cossacks reads in five parts: The Mystery, On a Cold Trail, Pieces of a Puzzle, Unusual Suspects, and A Family Circle. He succeeds in avoiding the double pitfalls of ethnonationalism and origins by resorting to hermeneutics, in close and critical readings of texts in context. Like the sleuthing Christie, he follows leads and floats hypotheses. He holds readers in suspense with lots of red herrings. Plokhy refuses to accept, at face value, the modern association of religion (in this case, Orthodox vs. Catholic) and nationality (in this case, Ukrainian vs. Russian on an East/West spatial gradient) in popular nineteenth-century imaginations. His agenda is twofold: first, to study the grand issue of imperial Russia's incorporation of Cossacks' national-fraternal rights and privileges in the lands of the former Hetmanate, and, secondly, to reframe, outside of plainly ethnonationalist narratives, the story of the lost microworld of Ukrainian–Russian borderland society in Starodub. To accomplish these goals, he first addresses the Cossack myth by reflecting upon the problem of frontiers for the North American West and Eurasian steppes. In the eighteenth-century imperialism of Peter the Great, Plokhy is well aware that forms of tolerance were not present in Starodub society; he problematizes the nationality principle by showing how Cossacks were typecast into Orthodox fighters against Poland and the Ottoman Empire. He resists the temptation to cast Bohdan Khmel'nytskyi as a kind of pre-modern state-builder. Plokhy critically covers the reception of *History of the Rus*' in the modern period, while also dealing with the transformation from early modern to modern forms of nationhood in Eastern Europe.

In his double role as scholar and detective, Plokhy next vets his suspects. He shows how the view in the 1860s that the Orthodox bishop Konysky wrote the *History of the Rus*' was in fact a product of its time. The book represented an *idée fixe* of Ukraine as a borderland of empire by nationality and confession, a cleft "ethnic" country on the cusp of the Orthodox and Catholic worlds and lodged between Poland and Russia. The view was responsible in the modern period for romanticized views of Cossacks as strugglers against the triple scourges of Poland, the West, and Catholicism. To make this point clear, he alludes to the work of the romantic poet Kondraty Ryleev in the 1820s, in the milieu of Ukrainophilism, Romanticism, and the struggle of Rus' (Russia) against Poland.[7] But (Ukrainian) Cossacks and Russians were not entirely united by common faith in the *History of the Rus*'. Slowly, a more complex picture emerges: from an early modern historical vantage, Plokhy adopts a late eighteenth-century strategy for conceiving of nationality in the Ukrainian "West." He offers a fascinating take on the durability of integrated Cossack kinship

networks – an appendix and schematic for the Bezborodkos, Borozdnas, Lashkevyches, Myklashevskys, Radkevyches, and Shyrais (of the author Stepan Shyrai) appear at the end of the book (2012, 369–370). Plokhy's compelling answer to the authorship question grows out of this period between the late Enlightenment and the rise of romantic (and organic) nationalism. The answer is not merely the person of Shyrai, but the *mentalités* of his milieu. What "did the deed" was multinational culture: the lost local world of Starodub society itself, on the permanently fuzzy mental map of the Cossack Hetmanate's borderlands between Ukraine, imperial "Little Russia," and Russia.

If Plokhy's reasonable hypothesis proves correct, it challenges the way in which "premodern" origins of nations are commonly treated, and Ukrainian–Russian histories have become so disentangled. It offers a new understanding of pre-modern nations, by taking apart Zenon Kohut's influential classification of early modern Ukrainian noble attitudes toward the Russian empire as too rigid a framework (Kohut 1988). It revives a local, regional, and transnational Starodub model of narrative outside of the Russian state school. Shyrai, who was well-integrated with members of his Starodub circle into the Empire, seems to have relied on oral tradition and a handful of colorful Cossack chronicles. Plokhy argues compellingly for the "humanist historiographic tradition in their [the Cossacks'] love for stories of heroes and battles and in their reliance on speech allegedly delivered by their protagonists to explain their motives and feelings." He shows how this model of historical writing, though largely abandoned in Western Europe by the end of the seventeenth century, "survived in Europe's eastern borderlands and were brought back just at the time when Romanticism revived interest in heroic deeds and passionate speeches" (2012, 355–356). Long after it went out of fashion in the age of empire, and in the twentieth-century debates over the merits of structuralism and post-structuralism, Plokhy effectively locates an East European outpost of humanism.

In terms of the actual issue of authorship of the *History of the Rus'* from the 1820s to the 1840s, and during the high romantic period, Plokhy follows the fascinating, long-neglected work of the Soviet-Ukrainian historian Oleksandr Ohlobyn in the 1930s and 1940s (2012, 347). Ohlobyn's main purpose, described in 1942, is continued by Plokhy: to reconstruct the sociopolitical background, historical milieu, and intellectual circles of Cossack myth-making society. Plokhy's multinational network is a:

> largely forgotten circle of Starodub patriots, caught forever between their Cossack past and the new imperial realities, between empire and nation, and ultimately between Russia and Ukraine. Starodub, which happenstance has placed on the Russian side of the Soviet-era border, needs to be reexamined as part of the world to which it once belonged – the world defined by the borders of the Hetmanate and the Russian Empire, not those of present-day Russia and Ukraine. (2012, 347–348)

In the end, the lives of the figures in Starodub society were multicultural co-authors with the storyteller Shyrai. Plokhy's exacting research shows that the "premodern" and "preindustrial" are not equivalent for either Russia or Ukraine's multinational past and identities. *The Cossack Myth* shows the value of source-based history, showing that the best history books are often those which open questions by providing an opportunity to challenge nationally packaged frames, conventions of identity, and monocausal histories. Plokhy leads researchers to the possibility of writing world history and transnational history, beyond geopolitics and misleading east/west ethnoschematic lines of nationality which are commonly drawn through Ukraine (Plokhy 2006, 2012).

Why should we be interested in these early-modern-to-modern issues of geography and nationality in Russian–Ukrainian borderlands before 1914? One answer is the high emotions and prevailing presentism of the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war, not to

mention the modern bent of political scientists and some historians, who become normatively stuck with notions of mutually exclusive nationalities and territorialized states. Another answer is preventative: that it is all but impossible to understand the salience of ethnonationalism in Russia and Ukraine, and alternatives to it, without taking into account "imperial" and "spatial" turns into geography and its subdisciplines. Hillis' detailed history of Kiev/Kyiv as an urban crucible of ideology serves as a wise reminder that "what went wrong" in the history of Europe's empires and Russian–Ukrainian relations happened much earlier than the "bloodlands," for instance as Ukrainian illiberal proponents of integral nationalism such as Dmytro Dontsov and V.V. Shul'gin adapted the "Little Russia" idea to their own purposes in the name of turf wars and modern ethnopolitics. That right-bank nationalists turned to violence as a political means to an end is evidenced, she notes, by the emergence of party apparatchiks during the purges of the Soviet Ukrainian intelligentsia; by integral nationalists and Ukrainian paramilitary squads during and after World War II; and by xenophobic, right-wing fascist émigrés in Russia and Ukraine who (to this day) oppose "Western" foreignness in the name of a "pure" country. Hillis shows from her sources that the connections between right-wing nationalism, illiberal popular movements, and fascism in Eastern Europe have by no means disappeared.

A final angle in how these books might alter the existing field is the trans-border methodology more common to studies of Central Europe, a way to see contested borderlands beyond the geopolitics of states and as zones of transit, illicit commerce, and contact, to move empirically beyond the "imperial turn" in the 2000s and theorizing of the 1980s and 1990s on nationality and imagined communities, once so effectively distilled (and subsequently canonized) by Anthony D. Smith into camps of primordialist, perennialist, modernist, constructivist, ethnosymbolist, and other approaches.[8] Trans-imperial historians of borderlands in Russia, Ukraine, East Central Europe, and Eurasia borrow liberally from these approaches, in the best case in extensively researched archival, comparative, and relational studies that employ multiple languages (Ateş 2013; Sunderland 2014). The four books show that as elites imagined, invented, and constructed identity, they framed and embedded "historical" geographies by the trajectories of their projects in discourses of separateness – in other words, according to the principle of nationality. They allow for applications of a trans-imperial and transnational paradigm that takes the contingent paths of modernization into account, and focuses on the cultural-psychological aspects of power, place, and identity (Budde, Conrad, and Janz 2006; Levitt and Khagram 2007; Kasianov and Ther 2008). For after 1848, elites managing borderlands proffered stereotypes of entire groups with the aim to merge, separate, or "unmix" peoples by language, confession, or alleged level of civilization, though in fact such blueprints were not always executed (Brubaker 1996; Staliūnas 2007; Bartov and Weitz 2013).

What we learn about nationality from these studies is probably a hackneyed point for the academic specialist, but still worth mentioning. Among the over 170 subject nationalities in the tsars' multiethnic lands, the "Little Russia" project was a complex enterprise of local empire-building, as such a negotiated cultural endeavor (Andriewsky 2003). Ahistorical notions of ethnic hatreds in their revived form fail to apply, for Russians and Ukrainians made mental maps cooperatively and separately well before 1914 to forge a mass-political consciousness. In the modernization process and ultimately in the great unraveling of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, their national projects lacked a clearly defined end (Szporluk 2000; Plokhy 2008 and 2014). Nor were "Great" and "Little" Russian identities of the hybrid Russian/Soviet empires always mutually exclusive, contrary to popular ethnography; rather, exclusionary aspects of "Russians" and "Ukrainians" (most Ukrainians today are bilingual or multilingual) reflected the

context and prepossessions of those who structured notions of ethno-territorial nationality in the first place (Martin 2001; Yekelchyk 2007 and 2014).[9] In Ukraine's borderlands between the German, Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian empires, varied geo-imaginaries of belonging were prevalent well before twentieth-century East European histories of genocide and ethnic cleansing. All roads did not lead to the catastrophic violence of World War I, or the fall of empires, or the 1930s and 1940s, or to present antagonisms (Bartov and Weitz 2013). As a consequence, it is all the more useful and timely to look back critically before 1914, to see how romantic purveyors of history and geographically inspired myths have used and misused nationality. War dictates the need to restate the obvious: Geography, identity, and nationality in Russia and Ukraine were not fixed for all times and places.

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Notes

1. The late-eighteenth-century partitions of Poland–Lithuania are one of the best examples of such a *fait accompli* by Europe's dynastic empires. Putin's revival of the old empire's "Novorossiia" (New Russia) to lay claim to "eastern Ukraine" is another case in point. On geography as fantasy, see Wolff (1994) and (2010).
2. For a comparative analysis of the Ukrainian literary landscape, Chernetsky (2007) and Andryczyk (2012).
3. Some of Hillis's conclusions warrant further debate: in the source-based discussion of merged regional and national politics, the author tends to conflate methodology with historiography. For urban politics, she relies less on models of urbanization than on periodicals such as *Kievlianin*: "From its inception, the brand of liberalism championed by Kiev's city fathers was tainted by its association with bad governance and cupidity" (2013, 134). This may be true, but the idea of Rus'-as-civilization, an obsession of Great/Little Russians and Ukrainians alike, was not a given either; these sources tend to reflect an "eastern" orientation from Kiev/Kyiv, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, rather than, say, Warsaw, Prague, Berlin, Paris, or London.
4. In terms of prospects for Russian–Ukrainian relations, the work of Central Europeanists in the history of German–Czech and German–Polish relations is especially germane. For instance, see Bryant (2007); Zahra (2010); Chu (2011); Thum (2011) and Karch (2012).
5. Bilenky uses the differentialist term "nationality." This places Ukraine in the East Central European universe of Johann Gottfried von Herder and therefore on the cultural/political terms of German and Russian nation-building projects. Such projects presupposed ethnolinguistic uniqueness rather than the political "nation" in English and French traditions dating back at least to 1689 and 1789, based on constitutional rights and citizenship.
6. Hroch's influential model on the making of nationalities is the one favored by Paul Robert Magocsi in his magisterial *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*. Magocsi's multicultural work came out in a second edition in 2010. For a critique of Hroch's model applied to Ukraine, see Yekelchyk (2007) and Szporluk (2008).
7. Plokhy is justifiably critical of selective readings of the text by Alexander Pushkin, who picked elements of struggle for politically Russocentric purposes. He also mentions the Russian–Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol' (aka Mykola Hohol'), who wrote about Cossack martyrdom in *Taras Bulba*, and of the poet Taras Shevchenko who seized upon anti-Catholic themes.
8. This approach is suggested in an extensive study of "twin towns" on both sides of the Habsburg–Russian imperial borders between 1772 and 1918 in Adelsgruber, Cohen, and Kuzmany (2012).
9. Peter Gould and Rodney White wrote the canonical work in cultural geography on "mental maps" in 1974, revised into a second edition in 1986.

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