

UKRAINIAN CASE TO UKRAINIAN CAUSE

Mykola Ryabchuk

Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams. History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998. xxvii pp. + 255 pp.

Just a few years of Ukrainian independence have prompted in the West more books and articles on the country than in all the preceding decades of Ukrainian (non)existence. Like many newcomers to the subject, Catherine Wanner arrived at Ukrainian topics from her rather substantial Russian studies—an ambivalent background for all who approach an (ex)colonial periphery from an (ex)metropolitan center. One can speculate whether or not another approach is possible and preferable, but the pitfalls of Russocentrism are obvious when trying to explore Ukraine from the historically biased and often largely distorted Russia-based perspective.

In most cases, Wanner avoids the temptation to follow the easy road of prevailing Russophile stereotypes and anti-Ukrainian biases. This is not an easy task, and sometimes she makes dubious references. With no additional explanations for such complicated, controversial and extremely sensitive matters, she would have us take for granted the "Ukrainian nationalist collaboration with the Nazis," as masterminded by Stepan Bandera (p. 130); a "military alliance with Nazi Germany," forged by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (p. 163); oversimplistically defines OUN as "an armed force that originally collaborated with the Nazis during World War II" (p. 223); unjustifiably labels Kyiv Mohyla Academy as "highly nationalistic" (p. 110); discovers a "hypernationalist" private school in Lviv (p. 115); and uncritically states that "Petliura is also associated with the vicious pogroms committed by the UNR troops" (p. 223).

Occasionally she makes unsubstantiated statements about Ukrainian culture and media, apparently purchased at secondhand Russian colonial stores: "With little cultural capital at their disposal, political and cultural leaders [of Ukraine] turned to history" (p.

75); "Fewer and fewer Russian newspapers, magazines, books, and television programs are making their way into Ukraine, exacerbating an already sizeable information vacuum" (p. 196). Some harmless but noticeable factual mistakes that should have been avoided in such a scrupulous and otherwise well-elaborated study might also distress some pedantic readers (e.g., Volodymyr Ivasiuk, the composer, died in Lviv, not Chernivtsi, as the author claims; Vitaly Korotych, the journalist, hails from Kyiv and not Kharkiv; Volodymyr Vynnychenko, a writer, was not a historian; the huge Lenin monument in Kyiv was erected in 1977 and not 1946, etc.).

As a cultural anthropologist, Wanner carried out extensive anthropological field research in Ukraine in 1990-96, which included both courageous trips throughout the country and interviews with various people on different occasions. Her book, as a result, contains exciting pieces of "creative reporting" supplemented, however, with perceptive academic analyses of numerous primary and secondary sources. In her introduction to *Burden of Dreams*, Wanner defines her work as a "multi-sided ethnography of processes, specifically the processes and dynamics involved in converting a nationalist ideology into an institutionalized national culture and a meaningful national identity in the aftermath of the socialist experiment [...]. As such, this ethnography becomes an anthropological study of the state, of how the state, through a negotiated settlement among competing interests and visions, attempts to establish the categories, periods, and events that give meaning to individual and collective experience, and of how such attempts by the state are challenged and even overruled by individuals through everyday practices" (p. xvii).

The book consists of two unequal parts, divided into three and four chapters respectively. The first,

THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

smaller portion of her book, entitled "The Legacy of Soviet Culture," provides an excellent account of "how a sense of nationality was constituted by the Soviet system" and how various loyalties and allegiances were incorporated into a larger, supranational Soviet identity (chapter 1, "Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine"); how a secessionist project succeeded in heavily Russified Ukraine and the role of historical revisionism in generating support for this cause (chapter 2, "The Rise of Nationalist Opposition"); and finally, how "Soviet-era patterns of discourse and practices [...] remain salient and give life to the values and practices embodied in Soviet culture even though the Soviet Union has collapsed" (chapter 3, "On Being Soviet").

The second part of the book, entitled "Sites of Nationalizing," deals extensively with the "sites at which national culture is articulated, contested, negotiated, and perhaps, institutionalized" (p. xix). Subsequently, in four chapters, four such sites are examined (namely, schools, festivals, the state calendar, and urban space) which "serve as arenas where a post-Soviet national culture can be articulated and, of course, contested as part of an overall project to fortify or challenge the new state" (p. 75). Such a choice is well justified by the critical importance of these sites in state efforts to "convert the meaning of historical events into personal events and turn a national identity into a personal identity" (p. 206). Naturally, there are other sites of equal or even greater importance that could and probably should be explored—the national media, for example, or sporting events (in September 1998, over 90% of the respondents to a poll in the Crimea supported the Ukrainian soccer team in her victorious match against the Russians). Nonetheless, the general paradigm for the research has been firmly established, and the results seem to be very plausible.

The major assumption of Wanner's research is that any state has a vested interest in nationalizing processes, because "their success or failure directly affect perceptions of state legitimacy" (xvii). And for Ukraine, a "new state steeped in economic crisis legitimating itself against a culturally oppressive multinational empire [...], the institutionalization of a national culture is a project of paramount importance" (p. xxi). Yet, Wanner argues, "the legacy of statelessness, combined with the mosaic of influences it produced and comparatively close cultural and geographical proximity to Russia, makes the process of

articulating a national culture and a sense of national identity to reflect new political realities [in Ukraine] particularly complex" (p. xviii).

In the author's view, there are two major obstacles to nationalizing efforts in Ukraine: first, the 11 million members of the Russian minority, more than 20% of the Ukrainian population; and second, the largely Russified Ukrainian majority (at least one-third of ethnic Ukrainians are apparently Russophone). Therefore, Wanner claims, any attempt to nationalize "the people of Ukraine" (*narod Ukrainy*) into the "Ukrainian people" (*ukraïns'kyj narod*) triggers not only interethnic tensions but also intraethnic discord: the Russified Ukrainians have little, if any, wish to be renationalized. They feel they were rather freely assimilated into Russian culture than brutally victimized by Russian and Soviet cultural policies (p. xix).

The author seems to be of two minds—caught between the nationalistic depiction of the "historic relationship between Ukrainians and the Russian and Soviet states in terms of cultural subjugation, economic exploitation, forced assimilation, and genocide"; and the "creolic" concept of peaceful and voluntary assimilation into the dominant culture through "intermarriage, mobility, and the media" (p. xix). The numerous facts and historical references in the book confirm the former, nationalistic view, but the latter creolic view remains unquestioned and unexplained.

Occasionally Wanner comes very close to the problem, but never close enough to reveal it. For example, at many points she writes about "confusion and apathy toward national re-identification in post-Soviet Ukraine" (p. 50), and about "cultural and historic amnesia collectively experienced by Ukrainians" (p. 123); she quotes common people who claim that "earlier [in the USSR] we never had any problems with nationalities" (p. 69) and that their nationality had "no meaning" for them and never did (p. 15). She also describes the "process of stripping down the individuality and dignity of every citizen to create *homo sovieticus*" and "peeling back the histories and cultures of many nationalities in the Soviet Union to create the Soviet people" (p. 49).

This "stripping" and "peeling" was not merely metaphorical. Powerful propaganda was effectively supplemented with secret police terror, concentration camps, and mass killings. Referring to the manmade famine of 1932-33, which resulted in the deaths by starvation of at least 5 million Ukrainians, Catherine

THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

Wanner states that "for a peasant-based people, this meant that the nation and its 'soul' had been destroyed" (p. 43). Wanner, however, does not take the next step to draw a proper conclusion from all these general observations, namely, Ukrainians, in general, were not just "freely" assimilated into the "mainstream" culture, but rather, were brutally dispossessed from their linguistic and cultural identity. Therefore, in actuality, the Ukrainian people had been "raped" throughout the centuries in a most violent and humiliating way. Now, the rape victims typically defend their traumatized consciousness, widely exposing their "cultural amnesia," their "confusion and apathy," and claiming that they had not been "raped" but, rather, got married quite voluntarily.

Actually, they avoid any talk on the topic as potentially dangerous and, again, traumatizing. Wanner has perfectly captured this phenomenon: "We don't care what a person's nationality is," says one of her interviewees. "The whole idea is strange to us" (p. 19). The explanation she offers is good but hardly sufficient: "Many people feel Soviet out of recognition of having collectively endured the ill-fated Bolshevik experiment. Soviet culture was, of course, supported by an entire ideological system, a way of life perceived as unique, and the institution of citizenship... The enduring practices created by the Soviet system [...] sustain the social relations they spawned and influence the pace and nature of social change in post-Soviet society" (p. 50).

One must realize that no "ideological system" per se, no "way of life," no "institution of citizenship" could ever create such a dreadful phenomenon as the Soviet identity—not without total and permanent coercion. Soviet identity was not just a social experiment, but was also a genetic one that lobotomized the weak and obedient species, while euthanizing the strong and resistant breeds. The people who therefore claim to "never [have] had any problems with nationalities" (p. 69) or that their own nationality had "no meaning" for them (p. 15) are only speaking a half-truth. They are probably right when they say that they themselves have no problem with nationalities—after all, they had chosen (or inherited) the right nationality, language, and identity—the Soviet identity. But ask a Ukrainian about their fellow citizens who do grapple with their own national identities, and they will certainly say that these people are "nationalists"—people who care about their nationalities, and who fully deserved the treatment they

received under Soviet rule. The message is clear: we don't care what a person's nationality is—as long as it is Soviet (or Russian), like ours; nationality has no meaning for us—as long as it is truly meaningless under the Soviet/Russian superidentity. On one hand, this makes a good excuse for the "raped" to accept violence as progressive development; on the other hand, it is an equally good excuse for the "rapists" to persecute "nationalists" who devote too much thought to their non-Soviet nationalities, their "virgin" non-Russian cultures, and their languages.

Catherine Wanner is essentially aware of the ambiguity of Soviet "internationalism" and "anti-nationalism" as peculiar forms of Russian nationalistic ideology. "Even though the Soviet Union was never organized as a Russian state per se," she notes, "Russians were the dominant nationality. They controlled the key Party and state positions in the government. Russian was the *lingua franca* of the state, the media, education, and printing, and this created formidable pressure to assimilate to the Russian language" (p. 13).

Wanner is also aware of how the term "bourgeois nationalism" was misused by the Soviets, who applied it in the witch hunt against all who resisted the "progressive" pace of Sovietization/Russification. "This was particularly so in Ukraine," Dr. Wanner writes, "where various decrees celebrated 'internationalist' values as the police apparatus rooted out 'bourgeois nationalism' and 'hostile foreign influences', Soviet labels for national and religious sentiments and activities" (p. 24). And since "Ukrainian nationalism was" not just an ideological label, but a criminal accusation, it was effectively used to eliminate any "nationalistic" sentiment or attachment, and to discredit nearly all Ukrainian leaders and activists throughout history.

Yet this ideological brainwashing would never have resulted in such a profound Sovietization of Ukrainian society were it not for the purges, terroristic witch-hunts and other genocidal forms of Soviet "psychotherapy." The Ukrainian (and Belorussian and even, to some extent, the Russian) case is clear when compared with those of the Baltics, Poles, or the western Ukrainians who had not been exposed as long or hard to the Soviet and Russian imperial "engineering" system. "The ability to externalize socialism and to conceive of Soviet rule as a foreign imposition is a critical culture difference between the western provinces and other regions of Ukraine,"

THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

Wanner writes (p. 122). In eastern Ukraine, we might continue, since the "Sovietism" had been internalized, peculiar psychological ties between the victims and the victimizers emerged—a kind of conspiracy or, more accurately, pervasive solidarity between the "raped" and the "rapists" which to this day stands as a major obstacle to further de-Sovietization and "Ukrainization."

Perhaps the notion of the deep psychological trauma experienced by Ukrainians could have given the author a better key to understanding the problems she vigorously discusses in her well-documented book. At one point she insightfully writes: "The pervasiveness and persistence of a Russian-based Sovietized culture impinges upon a redesign of Ukrainian society by hampering reform in numerous ways..." A little effort is needed to interpret the "persistence" through the "pervasiveness." The author, however, largely seems to ignore the anthropological methodology elaborated by contemporary post-colonial studies (no classic book of the sort is actually referred to in the bibliography, nor is the term "colonial" listed in the index, despite the fact that it is employed in the text at least twelve times). This makes the author's approach rather positivistic: the Sovietization/Russification of Ukraine is treated as an essentially social and cultural phenomenon—a sort of "inertia," inherited, socially constructed, and imposed on the society's way of life, thought, and behavior. Implicitly this suggests that, in the newly independent Ukraine, these old patterns could be gradually replaced with new ones, and this is what "Ukrainization/ de-Sovietization" could mean. But these changes are not progressing well, if progressing at all, to the growing irritation of Ukrainian patriots and Western observers.

The Ukrainian state, of course, cannot forge and impose a new identity with the same means used by the Soviet state. The new Ukraine seems to rely first and foremost on the "natural" development of democracy, where the return to the norm is the ultimate goal. Yet the notion of the "norm" in a heavily Sovietized country is largely distorted and mystified; there is no public consensus on things "normal," nor a dialogue between the adherents of opposing views on "normality." In reality, Ukraine still lives today in a "cold civil war"—cold only because the Ukrainian people are too tired, indifferent, and alienated. They still live in mythical worlds of "cultural and historic amnesia," as Wanner has aptly noted; they seldom respond to intrusion from the outer world with militancy, but rather with "confusion and apathy."

To understand this phenomenon, the psychological consequences of historical victimization should be considered, and some methods from psychoanalysis could be applied to deconstruct both the consciousness and subconsciousness of Sovietized Ukrainians. Wanner comes close to the problem when writing about the "harrowing and haunting images of the past," and about the "erased or significantly altered" memories (p. 45), but again, she does not attempt to answer why Ukraine has no "independent social criteria for evaluating and eventually accepting or rejecting rival interpretations of the past." Or, in other words, why Ukrainians are not listening to each other, to scholars, to politicians, or to anyone who could destroy their psychologically settled "ignorance" and rekindle the traumatizing feeling of being "raped"—or, equally uncomfortably, of being a "rapist."

This may well explain why "Chernobyl symbolized the exploitative nature of the system and the victimization of Ukraine under Soviet rule" (p. 32) much more persuasively than the Great Famine or any other historical event for Ukrainian national leaders, who used it to mobilize people toward independence. The Chernobyl atomic disaster was made by "them" (Moscow) to "us" (all the inhabitants of Ukraine). The Famine was less clear: it affected only some of "us" (rural Ukrainians), while others (urban Ukrainians and Russians) enjoyed relative comfort and prosperity, largely because of the enslavement and cruel exploitation of the Ukrainophone kolkhoz serfs. The question of active and, especially, passive collaboration of many (if not the majority) of "us" with "them" makes modern Ukrainian history more divisive than unifying. Therefore, modern Ukrainian history played a minor role in public mobilization for the secessionist cause (except for Western Ukraine). Ancient history proved to be much more appealing: Kyivan Rus', considered a common history for both Ukrainians and Russians, and the Cossacks, whose conflicts with Russians were ignored while their fights against Poles and Tatars were overemphasized. Yet, of paramount appeal was the vision of the economic prosperity of an independent Ukraine—a vision that looked forward rather than to the past.

As soon as this vision faded, and the new social order proved to be, in many aspects, "far crueler and more unpredictable than the old" (p. 202), the Ukrainian state faced a "burden of dreams" which might well become unbearable. Despite some achievements and positive changes, carefully noted by

THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

Wanner in the examined realms, a "fragile [Ukrainian] state mired in economic chaos [...] with russification, sovietization, and sharp regionalization as legacies to overcome and little in the way of broad cultural unifiers, such as a common language or religion," seems to be rather unsuccessful, so far, in forging a "collective identity to unify [its] highly indifferent, diverse, and disenfranchised population" (p. 75).

What surfaces instead, is the profound eclecticism of Ukrainian life and an essential ambivalence of people's views and behaviors. Wanner discovers these symptoms at every site she considers. For example, "In 1992 [in order to de-Sovietize schools] a government decree was issued, stating that each school had to remove all Soviet propaganda, portraits of Lenin, slogans, etc." Yet, Wanner reports, "the enforcement of such decrees has become random and ineffective" (p. 218). And the situation at the universities is no better: "Departments of atheism became departments of religion; departments of political economy transformed themselves into departments of management and marketing; departments of the history of the USSR now focus on the history of Ukraine; former departments of philosophy now call themselves departments of culturology; and so on. Needless to say, few professors and administrators, nearly all of whom have retained their jobs, are able to 'restructure' themselves, their disciplines, their courses, and their work routines from one year to the next" (p. 87).

The same ambiguity is also discovered in the analysis of the official Ukrainian calendar, where new national and reestablished religious holidays mix grotesquely with the old Soviet ones. And the urban symbolic landscape—monuments and street signs—considered in the last chapter provides the scholar with further arguments to conclude that a "newly institutionalized Ukrainocentric perspective on historical interpretation of the Soviet period must engage the representations of official Soviet narrative [...]. The signs emerging from this encounter [are] read alongside the old signs of Soviet ideology, new signs of capitalist consumerism, and above all, signs of confusion" (pp. 198-99).

The confusing, eclectic nature of Ukrainian life, Wanner convincingly argues, results from the ambivalent nature of Ukrainian society, which is deeply divided along regional, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, generational, and many other lines. From the very beginning of her book, Wanner refuses to conceptualize nationalism in Ukraine "in overly stark

terms, such as 'diaspora Russians in the east versus nationalistic Ukrainians in the west' with language as the sole criterion delineating group membership." Instead, she argues that "the fracturing of Ukraine goes beyond an east-west dichotomy and creates national and linguistic divides that are far more blurred than the national allegiances that are assumed to follow linguistic lines" (p. xxvi). There are many concrete examples in her book which confirm such a multidimensional fracturing of Ukrainian society; however, some conceptual generalization cannot be avoided.

It is clear that there is a large group of "committed" Ukrainians, primarily located in the west, whose ethnic identity coincides with their cultural and linguistic identity, as well as with their political loyalty to an independent Ukraine. There is also a large group of "committed" Soviets, for the most part located in the southeast, whose ethnic identity is irrelevant ("has no meaning," as one sincerely said), but whose cultural and linguistic identity is predominantly Russian-Soviet, and whose political loyalty largely rests with some sort of old-new Empire. For better or worse, each group still remains a minority in Ukraine, while the (relative) majority consists of russified Ukrainians whose loyalties and identities are, in truth, blurred. The tendency of their social behavior is much clearer: politically, they tend to be Ukrainian, while culturally they are Russian, or rather, Soviet.

In December 1991 these Russified Ukrainians supported the committed Ukrainians in their struggle for political independence, but at the same time they supported the Soviet presidential candidate as a guarantee that relatively minimal cultural changes would occur, and that the Soviet way of life would largely be preserved. This paradox does not go unnoticed in Catherine Wanner's book: "Political borders," she writes, "were quickly redrawn following the failed coup, but cultural barriers are not so easily dislodged. In spite of widespread support for an independent Ukrainian state, many living in Ukraine are less supportive of the cultural changes that have followed new state formation" (pp. 46-48).

Of course, this ethno-linguistic group is far from being monolithic and uniform in its cultural and political orientations. One cannot deny, however, that this group is a major source of ambivalence in Ukrainian society, as well as the ambiguity of its political, economic and cultural (under)development. On one hand, they seem to play a positive role by

THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

preventing the committed Ukrainians and the committed Soviets from direct clashes, thereby granting Ukraine some sort of stability. On the other hand, this ambivalent and largely disoriented ("confused" is Wanner's term) majority serves as a powerful social base for the ruling post-communist nomenklatura which effectively hinders any radical changes and keeps the country deeply stagnated.

Regrettably, Catherine Wanner does not sufficiently explain the essence of the ruling regime, whose very political existence is largely determined by the ambivalent character of Ukrainian society. In particular, it is determined by the confused, partly Russian and partly Ukrainian, identity of the majority of the people. From some of Wanner's remarks, however, one could conclude that "nationalist leaders" (p. 48) came to power in 1991, that the nationalist ideology elaborated by Rukh ("the umbrella opposition movement advocating a nationalist platform" [p. 22]) became a quasi-official ideology in the newly independent Ukraine, and that since that time Ukrainian elites have done their best "to promote a national culture based on an alternative [nationalistic] historical interpretation that repositions the historic relationship with Russia and sets the parameters of a new independent, European-oriented, Ukrainian nation-state" (p. 171). The most overt expression of this view is offered in the author's statement that "even Leonid Makarovich Kravchuk, a former leading anti-nationalist, head of ideology, and chairman of the Supreme Soviet in Ukraine, began to swiftly 'restructure' himself into a proponent of nationalism in 1990 in time to campaign to be the first president of independent Ukraine by adopting 90 percent of the Rukh program" (p. 46).

This position, however, leaves room to explain why the state has failed actually to achieve any of its presumably "nationalizing" goals. The author seems simply to believe that a "nationalistic" Ukrainian leadership sincerely seeks to "Ukrainize" the country, but wavers "for fear of alienating the large Russified constituencies" (p. 120). Again, Catherine Wanner seems to yield to a positivistic view of the "nationalizing" state versus the resistant, heavily sovietized/russified population. Such a view is certainly better than the folk-tale notion of a "good" Ukrainian pro-reform tsar at the top and "bad" anti-Ukrainian, anti-reform servants below—the notion promoted by some pro-government advocates. However, the view largely ignores the ambivalent (again, "wavering")

character of the ruling elites who themselves are a part of the Sovietized/Russified population, perhaps even more Russified than on average due to career requirements. In any case, these elites are far from committed to any ideology except that of their own personal enrichment. They would never pursue any ideologically determined, reformist policy (including "Ukrainization") that would threaten their non-ideological, overriding interests in power and property.

Thus, these elites not only reflect the ambivalent feelings and attitudes of the majority of the people, but also do their best to preserve this ambivalence as a source of their societal dominance. As a result, Ukraine seems to have no coherent and comprehensive policy—be it in culture, in the economy, in state-building, in international relations, or in anything else. The ruling elites pursue no set strategy but the strategic goal of day-to-day survival in order to grab the maximum benefit from "privatized" power and state property. Such a policy lacks any articulated principles and transparent decisions, since it is largely based on "under the table" arrangements and "share-holding" concessions to different regions, clans, or political groups (including, on occasion, Ukrainian nationalists as well as "Soviets"). Of course, any nation-state by definition "nationalizes," regardless of which foreign or native "dynasty" rules it—and Ukraine is no exception. "Nationalizing," however, does not necessarily mean "nativizing"; in neighboring Belarus, for example, "nationalizing" means further Russification and sovietization, accompanied with the inevitable repression of the Belorussian language and culture. In Ukraine, the situation is more complicated; neither Russification-Sovietization tendencies have thus far succeeded, as they have in Belarus, nor have Ukrainianization-Westernization tendencies gained the upper hand, as they have in the Baltics.

Such widespread ambiguity in the Ukrainian state, neither communist nor capitalist, neither pro-western nor pro-Russian, neither quite Soviet nor quite Ukrainian, is occasionally perceived as a kind of postmodern and/or post-colonial pluralism, which in an inclusive way integrates exclusive historical and cultural narratives and promotes a much-needed reconciliation within the society. Unfortunately, however, it is eclecticism rather than pluralism which reigns supreme over Ukraine. It results from the fact that no rival force, so far, has proved to be strong enough to overcome its worst enemy and to push the country, like the Baltics, forward or, like Belarus, back.

THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

Since both the committed Ukrainians and the committed Soviets are only a minority, they are easily manipulated by the ruling non-ideological nomenklatura that still controls the majority of "confused" Ukrainian Russophones. The latter group, however, due to its unstable and ambiguously ambivalent identity, is often a major target of both committed Ukrainians and committed Soviets, who lay equal claim to the group as their own.

Apparently the "cold civil war" cannot persist forever. Ukrainian "Soviets" can no longer withstand a shock without a therapy, an existence without any economic rewards from the independent state. And committed Ukrainians can no longer be satisfied with their marginal role in a would-be Ukrainian state. Catherine Wanner proves to be quite aware of this contradiction: "For a population that has been russified and sovietized, the prospects of now being ukrainized can seem daunting. For those who have long awaited the institutionalization of a Ukrainian national culture under its own state, the feelings are one of elation, relief, and disappointment" (p. 198). Hence, the "hybrid forms of economic, political, social, and cultural life" she foresees emerging from Ukraine are far from being the worst outcome of the current situation. Yet the author's suggestion to "be prepared to witness and analyze the unexpected" (p. 207) should encourage us instead to better analyze what we witness, and to make the unexpected rather expectable.

In this light, Catherine Wanner's book, despite some analytical shortcomings and minor errors, gives an insightful view of contemporary Ukraine, and contributes significantly to further studies of a peculiar yet very important region.

Mykola Ryabchuk is Deputy Editor of Krytyka Monthly (Kyiv).