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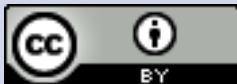
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Book Review: Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People, and Culture Revisited

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Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People, and Culture Revisited

Edited by Olena Palko and Manuel Férrez Gil

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The book *Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People and Culture Revisited*, edited by Olena Palko and Manuel Férrez Gil, is a multidisciplinary volume which offers historical, sociological, political science, literary, and artistic perspectives on Ukraine's present and past. It was first published in 2023 by transcript Verlag in Bielefeld (Germany) and includes newly-written essays as well as some previously published materials.

The manuscript makes an important contribution to literature on Ukraine since it does not avoid complexities and controversies, it unveils a variety of perspectives, and it raises

awareness of the distorted perceptions resulting from unconsciously perceiving Ukraine through the lenses of Russian imperial narratives. The manuscript can either be read in full for a panoramic perspective or consulted on a particular topic of interest.

Ukraine's Many Faces is structured in three parts: pre-Soviet times ('Modernity at the Crossroads of Empires'); the Soviet period ('Ukrainian Selfhood in the Soviet Era'); and Ukraine as a sovereign state after the collapse of the Soviet Union ('Sovereignty Regained: Ukraine in the Post-Soviet Age'). Each part contains three types of materials: 'Primary Sources', 'Conversation Pieces', and 'Analytical Articles'.

Overall, the manuscript brings together over 30 items, most of which are scholarly perspectives. Besides articles and essays, it contains some historical documents, dialogues, and poetry to help readers gain a deeper understanding of Ukraine. In the Introduction (pp. 29–35), the editors highlight all of the book's contributions and how this variety of perspectives unites into a comprehensive vision. While it is impossible to discuss each of the several dozen contributions in this brief review, let us have a glimpse of selected themes which readers can discover through this book.

The volume starts with a map of Ukraine, a brief timeline of Ukrainian history, and a foreword by Olesya Khromeychuk who urges her readers to become aware that uncritical perceptions of Russian history and culture blinded many Westerners to the dangers of Putin's emerging neo-imperialism. She illustrates this unconscious bias with a simple illustrative question: "What, exactly, is the difference between Ireland and England?" (p. 22) – if you find it badly-worded, insensitive, strangely uneducated, or at least bizarre, then you should feel the same way when someone asks how Ukraine is different from Russia. The materials collected in this book help readers transcend the mental trap of perceiving Ukraine through the Russian lenses which purposefully portray Ukraine as an inalienable part of Russia.

One of the strong aspects of this book is that it examines historical complexities. Was Soviet communism in opposition to any nationalism? Or, on the contrary, did the Soviets attempt to stimulate support for their regime by supporting national revivals? Alternatively, did the Soviets attempt to marginalize the plurality of ethnic identities within the Soviet Union to the advantage of the Russian identity? Surveying this closely over the years, one could answer affirmatively to each of these questions because politics and policies are often inconsistent; moreover, they may change drastically even over a short period of time. "In the early days of communism, the slogans about the "nationless" communism transformed itself into Russian

chauvinism” (p. 57), explains Ewa Thompson in conversation with Manuel Férrez Gil. To broaden historical perspectives, Olena Palko and Roman Korshuk highlight that, while ethnic heterogeneity was presented as “one of the defining features of Soviet society” (p. 175), in reality, Soviet policies regarding ethnic identities took a number of abrupt twists, many of which took a heavy toll on human life.

Another strong aspect of this manuscript is that readers can familiarize themselves with the contexts of some grave tragedies and their specific complexities. For example, the Holodomor, the artificial famine created by Soviet authorities that starved millions of people to death, is discussed by Daria Mattingly. Martin-Oleksandr Kisly examines the tragedy of the mass deportation of Crimean Tatars organized by the Soviet regime. Oleksandr Zabirko introduces readers to the Donbas region – the eastern part of Ukraine that became the warfare frontier military frontline shortly after the Russian Federation annexed Crimea in 2014. Volodymyr Kulyk explains that Russian speakers in Ukraine are often not Russian by ethnic origin and self-perception, which is a cultural phenomenon resulting from the political privileging of the Russian language and the marginalizing of Ukrainian in both tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union.

Besides examining complexities and tragic trajectories, the book allows readers to obtain a glimpse of a wider range of topics, from Ukraine’s progress towards gender equality (Tamara Martsenyuk) to Ukraine’s economy (Boris Belge), from the life of street children in early Soviet Odesa (Matthew D. Pauly) to the economic, political, and religious dimensions of Jewish life in Habsburg Galicia (Vladyslava Moskalets). Thus, the volume extends beyond examining major historical events, Russia’s current war against Ukraine, and the perils of imperialism: it indeed aspires to show Ukraine’s “many faces”.

The book not only discusses challenges but also offers some solutions. It concludes with an afterword by John Vsetecka, who not only underlines the concern that “For too long, Western academia put Ukraine on the periphery, preferring to engage with histories of Moscow instead of Kyiv.” (p. 375), but also makes specific practical suggestions on how to integrate scholarship on Ukraine into classrooms, either as a ‘General Historical Overview of Ukraine’ or specifically focusing on ‘Understanding Russia’s War on Ukraine in Historical and Contemporary Perspective’. Furthermore, it provides helpful suggestions how to highlight specific 20th century events in Ukraine in European history courses, and how to introduce students to 21st century Ukraine.

Hence, this book is likely to be appreciated by readers who are looking for a deeper understanding of Ukraine's historical context and contemporary realities, particularly Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. This volume can be appreciated by scholars as well as by a wider readership. It is important to stress that the manuscript is easily accessible: it is available as a free download, as well as for purchase as a printed volume.