

# Łukasz Adamski

## HISTORY BETWEEN THE DROPS\*

Book Review: Yaroslav Hrytsak, *Podolaty mynule. Hlobal'na istorija Ukrajiny*, Kyjiv: Portal, 2021, 432 pp.

As a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Ukrainian nation united in its opposition to the foreign invasion and the crimes perpetrated by the occupiers. The countries of the Western world responded by giving the invaded country unprecedented military, economic and political aid, as well as moral support. One negative outcome of the war, however, has been the fact that intellectual debates in Ukraine, including critical reflection on the past, have practically ground to a halt. This is hardly surprising. The existential struggle for the survival of the state demands the greatest possible national consolidation, increased fortitude, and the mobilization of the free world to provide further help – not just the charging of emotions and stoking of social divides that tend to come with critical reflection on the past and coming to terms with national myths.

The prominent Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak's synthesis of Ukraine's history "Overcoming the past: the global history of Ukraine" arrived in Ukrainian bookshops just before the outbreak of war, in winter 2021/2022. It was thus denied the chance to arouse much discussion on the arguments it presents. It is also yet to be reviewed outside of Ukraine, and the Ukrainian reviews that were published were polemical columns rather than academic analyses. This is not a criticism, incidentally, as Hrytsak has written a popular history book which at times – especially in the conclusion, and as the author makes clear – even veers towards essayism.

His book is well worth a read, even for somebody who thinks he knows the history of Ukraine and imagines that reading another work on it – even such an extensive one, at over 400 pages – would simply be a waste of time. The book itself is a source that shows how an influential Ukrainian scholar views his native country's history and how he tackled the task of integrating Ukraine's past into global history.

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The second and equally important key to reading this book should be the position of Yaroslav Hrytsak himself – a professor at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv and Central European University in Vienna. He is a renowned figure in the Ukrainian and Western academic world, often figuring as a “public intellectual” and long engaged in the process of

Ukraine’s political and intellectual integration with the rest of Europe. Given the influential nature of his statements and their treatment, especially in the West, as the authoritative voice of a Ukrainian intellectual democrat and European, we can assume that Hrytsak’s work (the author has said on social media that it is being translated into English) will also be treated as a reliable source of balanced views and knowledge about Ukrainian history. In Ukraine itself, however, the views presented by this Lviv scholar will be treated as polemical towards authors identifying – or identified – as Ukrainian nationalists. Hrytsak’s opinions certainly inspire many influential circles’ views on history, as is shown by the fact that the blurb on the book’s cover is written by Archbishop Borys Gudziak, founder and president of the Ukrainian Catholic University, and Pavlo Klimkin, minister of foreign affairs in 2014–2019.

For the attentive reader from outside Ukraine, reading the work of a historian known as a liberal will also be important for inferring which interpretations or terminology constitute a certain engrained consensus in Ukrainian historiography, and where there is contradiction with the views of, for instance, Polish historians.

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Let us begin the review of Hrytsak’s book with its merits. Perhaps the biggest is the lively narrative, which makes the book an easy read and allows non-historians to discover or gain better insight into many historical phenomena. I emphasize this because not all popular-history syntheses are actually written in an interesting way and with a light touch – especially in Ukraine, where historians are accustomed to a very heavy academic style – yet this should be one of the main requirements of such works. Hrytsak meets this criterion. Meanwhile, by constantly showing the context – phenomena occurring throughout Europe – he manages to avoid the pitfalls of many Ukrainian syntheses of “national history”, namely relaying the history of Ukraine as if this country were on another planet.

In terms of its objectives, Hrytsak’s book can also be appreciated for a patriotism not marked by the patriotic exaltation or even showiness that is common among Ukrainian authors. The final parts of the book are abundant with journalistic interjections – for example, on the attitude of contemporary Ukrainians to property law – suggesting that Hrytsak

would like to show his compatriots that it is impossible way to repair their country without changes in mentality. It is another matter that this Lviv scholar – ignoring the good rule of the historian maintaining distance of time to the events he describes – writes things that were out of date a few weeks after publication, such as a passage criticizing Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency (p. 402).

Hrytsak would also evidently like to point out other values in the politics of history to his compatriots: for example, his words, printed in bold, that “to build a new Ukrainian nation, apart from heroes ready to give up their lives for ideals, we need heroes demonstrating elementary human decency and sacrificing their lives for others”. His desire to explain history to his fellow Ukrainians is evident, as well as many other issues from history that are of significance for the present. This tendency is illustrated by four reliable examples that arise in the discussion on subjects such as the richness of Ukrainian culture, the nature of the Ukrainian lands' dependence on Moscow, evaluation of the actions of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, and the balance of Bolshevik rule for Ukraine.

The author states plainly that Kyivan Rus' was an area of intellectual poverty (p. 70), on the grounds that 3000 times more books were printed in the Western Christian cultural world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries than in that of Eastern Christian culture (p. 71); however, he does not mention, for instance, the mutual relationship between these two parts of the Christian world. Hrytsak also voices an unpopular view in Ukraine, again printed in bold (p. 190), that “if we are to speak about the colonial status of the Ukrainian lands as a whole, this outline is a better fit for a description of the state of affairs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire [or in fact Austria-Hungary, because Hungary was not an empire in the legal sense of that word, but a separate kingdom being in union with the Austrian Empire]. On the other side of the Russo-Austrian border, the Ukrainian lands were not a colony but part of the political and economic core of the Russian Empire”. He describes the OUN as an organization that also used terror against Ukrainians and those Poles who backed Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation (p. 285). Moreover, he soberly points out (p. 311) that the Bolsheviks were successful in unifying all the Ukrainian lands, and without revolution and war the Ukrainian nation might have taken a different shape.

The author evidently realizes that by making such arguments he is exposing himself to criticism from large parts of “patriotic” public opinion, especially when it comes to the past of what could in simple terms be called Russo-Ukrainian relations. It is therefore telling that he frequently mitigates them elsewhere in the book, and sometimes even on the same

page. Cynics might even sense design in this – “keeping both sides happy” – while pedants might go as far as to accuse Hrytsak of a casual approach to careful expression of his ideas and, more broadly, the requirements of diligent analyses. For example, his categorical assertion that Ukraine was not a Russian colony is weakened by the reflection (p. 384) that it in fact was and had an influence, both in the eighteenth century and after the death of Stalin, on the administration of the empire, as well as a considerable impact on the language and culture of the metropolis. Elsewhere (p. 202), Hrytsak mentions “German and Jewish colonizers”, although Ukrainian differentiates between “colonists” and “colonizers”.

Regarding the OUN, meanwhile, Hrytsak avoids answering the question in the ongoing debate over whether it was a fascist organization – as many scholars, especially those from outside Ukraine, argue. He does this by using an eristical device, proposing a reformulation of the question: “to what extent was [the OUN] fascist, and to what extent was it not?” As for the claim that the Ukrainian nation could have taken a different form, this Lviv historian does not draw the obvious logical conclusions for his own shaping of the book’s narrative. I will discuss this question in more detail later in this review.

In any case, Hrytsak’s framing of his ideas tries to avoid a direct polemic with the historical myths entrenched in Ukrainian public opinion. Often, as we shall see, he even surrenders to them or reproduces them, even if the substance of his arguments is clearly opposed to the historical myths entrenched in Ukrainian public opinion. It is easy to criticize this position as lacking principle, so Hrytsak anticipates this objection by identifying with the stance of a “conservative-liberal socialist” (p. 422), i.e., turning fluid views into a virtue.

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This book has many evident shortcomings and errors. I will give a lot more attention to these, not so that readers get the impression that they exceed its virtues – that is up to everybody to decide for themselves – but because the primary objective of a review is to debate and criticize.

Let’s begin with a fundamental matter. It is impossible to reconcile two methodological premises in a logically coherent way without succumbing to teleological presentism. One premise is the nineteenth-century origin of nations, which are clearly distinct from ethnic communities, or peoples, as they used to be called. The other is the possibility of writing the history of Ukraine as a distinct country inhabited by the Ukrainian nation or its protoplasts from the time of the old Kyivan Rus’. The thing is that a history of Ukraine cannot be based on an exposition of the history

of the Ukrainian state – a palpable, indisputable entity, and its population – as this was formed briefly in 1918, and for good in 1991. So, we are to understand that the nation existed previously, but without a state, and then we have to describe this history of the nation. But how can this be done when Hrytsak writes that the nation emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? “If nations had passports, then the Ukrainian one would have 1914 as its date of birth. That is not to say it did not exist earlier. It existed, but in the minds of several tens of thousands, and at best a hundred thousand inhabitants of the Ukrainian territory who called themselves Ukrainians” (p. 223). How, then, does one justify identifying a Ukrainian territory prior to 1914, when there was no Ukrainian state or nation? To maintain logical coherence, one could write that the emergence of this nation was a natural and obvious consequence of earlier historical events. And this is what practically all researchers writing about the history of Ukraine do. What this means is that from the mass of different events and processes that have taken place in the lands they are describing, they choose those that explain the premise, accounting for the emergence of the contemporary nation in the form familiar to the researcher.

The shape of the Ukrainian nation in its contemporary form thereby becomes a starting point for creating a narrative about the history of its emergence, development of culture, and the Ukrainians’ struggle for their own state, while ignoring, or at best diminishing, the probability of historical processes going in the other direction. There is no discussion of – or at least the narrative does not emphasize – data, figures and events suggesting that the nation-forming processes in the region could have occurred quite differently. These processes could lead, for example, to the formation of one Ruthenian nation comprising the population of today’s Ukraine and Belarus, a “triune” Russian nation (the Great Russians, Little Russians and Belarusians) or a “triune” Polish/Commonwealth nation (Poles, Lithuanians, and Ruthenians), or several distinct nations on the territory of today’s Ukraine (“Halychian”, “Ukrainian-Cossack”), and thus to the emergence of a Ukrainian state in a different territorial form.

But an exposition of history that does not refer to these problems would be characterized by teleological presentism, as the causes that are supposed to explain the present are described from the perspective of knowledge about the present. Events or processes that might potentially have had different consequences are discussed from the perspective of the actual outcome. This will lead less critical readers astray, even if they call themselves professional historians. They will get the impression that,

since the Ukrainian nation and state exist, they had to exist, which is a logical fallacy that is known as retrospective determinism.

I discuss this at length because at no point, even in the introduction, does Yaroslav Hrytsak refer to these methodological problems, even though he is aware of them. He writes (p. 375) that a nation that included today's Ukrainians and Belarusians might have arisen. He cites Benedict Anderson and his ideas about nations being "imagined communities" (p. 140), and Miroslav Hroch's model (not mentioned anywhere in the book) about phases A, B, and C of national movements (p. 158). In his own reflections on nations (pp. 17, 39), Hrytsak argues that nations are "products of the last few centuries", and that "most nations are very young, although they all want to be old". Why, then, does he not explain his justification for distinguishing the territory of the modern-day Ukrainian state as a subject of historical narrative in the period before 1918?

Furthermore, the author's specific reasoning frequently contradicts his general assumptions about the course of the Ukrainian nation-forming process, thus suggesting an attachment to the "traditional model of Ukrainian history" and the formation of the Ukrainian nation as soon as the late Middle Ages. For example, we read (p. 91) that "the Ukrainian nation [*natsiia*], when, having in the early modern period almost entirely lost its elites to Polish or Russian assimilation or acculturation, became a peasant nation". Ergo, in the sixteenth century it was a "full" nation. Elsewhere (p. 103), the author argues that "from the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, all the Ukrainian lands found themselves in one state", thus suggesting that one could speak of the existence of the Ukrainian lands as a distinct entity as early as 1569. This does not mean that the author of this review is denying that the elites of Kyiv, Podolia, Volhynia and Red Rus' felt certain national or pre-national ties. I simply wish to point out the logical inconsistency between this hypothesis and the claim regarding the twentieth-century emergence of the nation.

In the guise of constructing a Ukrainian national historical narrative from the perspective of knowledge about the effects of the Ukrainian nation-forming process, the teleological presentism is accompanied by analytical and terminological presentism as the author uses contemporary analytical categories to examine the past from a perspective unknown or unrecognizable to the actors of that same past. He refers, for example (p. 153), to 85% of Ukrainian lands after the Partitions being in the Russian Empire, and 15% (Galicia, Bukovina, and Carpathian Ruthenia) being in the Austrian Empire. He then (p. 154) includes a table: "ethnic make-up of populations of the Ukrainian governorates of the Russian Empire" (1897 census according to the language used) with the Taurida Governorate,

where the percentage of the Ukrainian-speaking population was 42.2%. Finally, he notes (p. 215) that almost half of the “Ukrainian ethnic territory” was made up of steppes, continuing on the same page that the “Wild Fields” were colonized from the second half of the seventeenth century by various peoples and nations.

I would be amazed if anybody could prove that the residents of Uzhhorod, Lviv, Chernivtsi, Poltava, and Odesa in the late eighteenth century had any sense of community, especially one strong enough to justify distinguishing the region encompassing all these provinces as one research subject called “the Ukrainian lands”. Clearly, the only criterion that justifies incorporating these areas into Ukrainian lands is the fact that Crimea and the old “Wild Fields” today belong to Ukraine. This is outright presentism, and Russia’s questioning of their belonging to Ukraine and criminal war should not affect our judgement of whether it is permissible to retrospectively view them as Ukrainian.

Another example of terminological presentism – albeit one shared by practically the whole of Ukrainian historiography – is the regular use of the term “Western Ukraine” to refer to Galicia and Volhynia in the interwar period. These were in fact internationally recognized parts of Poland – regions, in fact, to which the Ukrainian People’s Republic itself abandoned its claims in 1920, as Hrytsak honestly notes (p. 269).

It is telling that the author – as if forestalling future criticism – justifies the use of this term: “Western Ukraine was Ukrainian as Ukrainians constituted the majority here” (p. 270). I wonder, in that case, if he would agree with the assertion that “Crimea is Russian because Russians constitute the majority there”, or if he would accept a reference to the Vilnius Region, an indisputable part of the Republic of Lithuania, as “North-East Poland”, since Poles are in the majority there (note that, more than 80 years after Poland’s actual loss of Vilnius, the number of Poles in Lithuania’s capital is still larger than the percentage of Ukrainians in interwar Lviv, and in much of the Vilnius Region they constitute a majority similar to Ukrainians in the area of prewar Lviv). A very clear illustration of the problems caused by the presentism of the author’s narrative is provided by his specific conclusions on Polesia and Carpathian Ruthenia, which, incidentally, appear just one page after his reflections on Volhynia and Galicia (p. 271). On the one hand, Hrytsak notes – rightly of course – that the inhabitants of Polesia in the interwar period often described themselves as “from here”, since they did not think in terms of nationality. Among the population using Ukrainian dialects in Carpathian Ruthenia, the author points out, there was rivalry between the Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian forms, and a separate “Ruthenian” one. On the other

hand, however, he attributes the history of these regions and their population to that of Ukraine.

It is, of course, obvious that popular national history is simplified and can employ less stringent criteria than purely academic works. Nevertheless, one might expect at least that readers would be informed of methodological problems and the simplifications used would be explained – all this is missing in Hrytsak's book.

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Another major disappointment of this book is the Lviv historian's analytical sloppiness. Hrytsak's pursuit of pithy expressions and preference for catchy phrases over precise reasoning means that his interpretations sometimes become convoluted. This is less of a concern when they are minor issues that do not lead the reader to draw wrong conclusions – surely everyone will realize that the sentence (p. 399) stating that “the best evidence for the existence of a Ukrainian nation is the fiasco of the Russian aggression [of 2014]” is misguided, because the contrary argument would be that victory of the aggressor would prove the non-existence of the Ukrainian nation, as well as the Polish one in 1794 or 1939, for example. Similarly unfortunate is the claim (p. 370) – founded on the convoluted premise that wars break out when there is no agreement or reconciliation between two nations – that the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation rendered a new Polish-Ukrainian war over Galicia and Volhynia impossible.

There are, however, also more serious issues. For example, the author writes (pp. 94–95) that: “the drama of Jewish-Ukrainian relations was that hostility reigned between these two social groups, which were at the very bottom of the social ladder [...] Along with social motives [Ukrainian hostility towards Jews] there were also religious ones. Jews were not Christians, and in the minds of Christians they were ‘Christ-killers’. [...] The [anti-Jewish] stereotypes led to violence. In the modern and contemporary era, the Ukrainian lands became the main site of mass anti-Jewish pogroms from the time of Khmelnytsky's Cossack revolution of 1648, the Koliivshchyna in 1758, the Russian pogroms in 1881, the 1905–07 and 1917–20 revolutions, and summer 1941 in Western Ukraine, to the Holocaust in all the Ukrainian lands for the next two years. Not all these pogroms were connected to Ukrainians. Let's say that in 1881 the chief perpetrators of the pogrom – workers – were mainly not Ukrainians. But in Jewish historical memory, Ukraine is strongly associated with pogroms, and Ukrainians with antisemitism”. A twofold conclusion can be drawn from this: the Holocaust was the result of Ukrainians' anti-Jewish stereotypes; or the historical memory of Jews, viewing Ukrainians as antisemites, is a sufficient reason for a historian



writing about the Holocaust in Ukraine to situate it in the context of centuries of social and religious Ukrainian antisemitic stereotypes.

Meanwhile, when Hrytsak describes the pogroms in the former Russian Empire (p. 241), he notes that the majority, 75%, took place in the Ukrainian lands. He does not mention the percentage of Jews who lived in these lands; this is a pity, because if the author had added the information that in tsarist Russia, excluding the lands of the Kingdom of Poland, more than half of Jews lived in governorates lying in present-day Ukraine, this would give a different impression of this data.

A further example of Hrytsak's lack of respect for analytical discipline might be his conclusions on the impact of religion on the processes of modernization. He writes, for example, that the literacy level was linked to the dominant denomination in a given nation: it was highest for Protestants, lower for Catholics, and lower still for Orthodox Christians (pp. 73–74). Yet, the author gives as the source of his reflections a table with data on the literacy level among the nations of the Russian Empire and Austria–Hungary, in which, I swear, the majority of Germans and Czechs were not Protestants. Not to mention the fact that the differences in reading and writing skills could also stem from factors other than religious denomination, and sources should be official data with the results of relevant statistical censuses, not the author's own work.

And what can we say about this kind of interpretation (p. 83) that suggests that Western Europe achieved economic success thanks to religion? “The first and almost infallible impression about a country's political order and prosperity can be gained from the appearance of its main places of worship: be they peaked Catholic churches or simple and well-maintained Protestant kirks or Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques with high minarets or Orthodox churches with onion domes”. This sentence was undoubtedly written deliberately as it is highlighted and takes up half a page. But these views, citing Max Weber, could be criticized for the same reasons for which the German sociologist's views have been criticized for over a century.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere, the author writes (p. 80) that “the nations of Rus” before the First World War were less educated than their Catholic neighbours. It is puzzling that a professor at the Ukrainian Catholic University regards Galician Ukrainians, who at this time were practically all Catholics (the vast majority of the Greek Rite), as “non-Catholics”. Another lack of

<sup>1</sup> Suffice to say that in Germany, which given its relative cultural uniformity as well as its denominational splits offers a good case study for testing this theory, a contemporary economic historian, analysing data from 272 cities, found no corroboration of Weber's hypothesis; cf. Davide Cantoni, “The Economic Effects of the Protestant Reformation: Testing the Weber Hypothesis in the German Lands”, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 13:4 (August 2015).

terminological precision is the reference to the “Orthodox rite” of the Uniate Church: it would be more correct to speak of the Greek rite, which is separate from the Latin one. Also surprising are passages referring to the ‘Vatican’ in the sixteenth century (p. 28), rather than using the correct wording of the ‘Holy See’, or possibly ‘Rome’; after all, at this time the Papal States occupied a large expanse, and their capital was in Rome.

And what value is there in the author’s musings about the Union of Brest, which match the views of nineteenth-century Ukrainian and Soviet historiography but contradict the findings of later research, such as that of his prematurely deceased colleague from the Ukrainian Catholic University, Ihor Skochyliak? We read (p. 121) that “in 1587–1632, a devout Catholic, Sigismund III, came to the throne. Together with the Jesuits he forged plans to convert Orthodox Christians to Catholicism” – the same Jesuits about whom a little earlier (p. 120) we are told that “they marched with the Protestants like hunting dogs with game...”. There is nothing of the danger to Orthodoxy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth caused by the Reformation and the mass transition of the elites of Kyivan Rus’ to Protestantism as well as the low intellectual level of the Rus’ clergy. Moreover, historians usually mention that the decision that was taken in Brest to form the Union Church was influenced by such factors as concerns about the consequences of the formation of a patriarchy in Moscow for the Greek Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or the will of the Orthodox hierarchy itself. Hrytsak, however, ignores these circumstances completely.

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But the most astonishing thing about Hrytsak’s book from the perspective of a Polish historian, as well as others with at least some idea of the history of Central and Eastern Europe, is the number of errors, inconsistencies or interpretations pandering to patriotic tastes, often coinciding with the views of Ukrainian nationalist historiography of nineteenth-century origin.

Let’s start with interpretations pandering to patriotic tastes. It is understandable that Hrytsak describes the history of the name “Ukraine” and bases it on the widespread occurrence of the concept in folk tradition as the “land of the family”, disputing the incomparably more convincing hypothesis that it originally denoted a periphery or borderland; vide the similar names in other Slavic languages to denote a borderland, such as “Krajna” in Poland and “Kraina” in Croatia. Admittedly, the etymology of Ukraine as a borderland is no worse than that of Poland from “field” or

Russia as the land of (Germanic) rowers, but emotionally “land of the family” sounds better than “borderland”.

One can also understand the exaggeration of the influence of Ukraine’s culture on Europe. “Romanticism brought with it a fashion for everything Ukrainian – one need merely look at the popularity of the painting of Mazepa among European Romantics”, writes the author in a passage printed in bold (p. 173). But he does not give any other examples of this fashion for “everything Ukrainian” among European Romantics, and neither is this reviewer familiar with any. Analytically, such techniques are scarcely credible, but they take place almost everywhere, not just among Ukrainians.

What is worse is that this Lviv historian perpetuates inane myths. “On the Ukrainian national flag one can see a field of wheat under a blue sky. The Ukrainian culture of the early modern period was intentionally created as a culture of the countryside” (p. 91). If we reject the hypothesis that a professor of history in Lviv has never heard of the coat of arms of the medieval Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, the flag of the Galician Ruthenians during the Revolutions of 1848, and is unfamiliar with the basic principles of heraldry, we must assume that, for reasons known only to himself, he is deliberately reproducing a fairy tale once invented to make it easier for Ukrainians living in the Russian Empire to identify with these originally Galician colours.

The lack of consistency is similarly surprising. For instance, the author uses place names (p. 81) based on the native language, i.e., Helsinki, not Helsingfors; Tallinn, not Reval; Tartu, not Dorpat. But he makes an exception for Gdańsk, which, upon my word, in Ukrainian in the past and present has always been called Gdańsk, not “Danzig”. Likewise on a map (p. 217) titled “The Ukrainian lands in the nineteenth century – battle of nationalisms” we find “Breslau” and “Danzig” – although in Polish and Ukrainian these two cities have always been called Wrocław and Gdańsk (just as in German they are still called Breslau and Danzig) – but also Bratislava, the name given instead of Pressburg after the First World War.

Such inconsistencies also appear in the section on the nineteenth century, which, given his specialization, the author ought to know better. The map “Serfdom in 1800” (p. 211) shows a picture of contemporary Europe, not that of 1800. Another map (p. 118), purporting to show the ethnic origin of Cossacks, also contains the contemporary borders of European states and a strange array of origins: “Poles, Kashubians, Masurians, from Prussia, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Volhynians, Germans, ‘from Kolomyia’ [sic]”. But when Hrytsak lists the nations (p. 157) that did not have their

own state in the nineteenth century, he names, for example, the Silesians and the Provençals but does not do this by analogy to the Galicians or Carpathian Ruthenians. With this comes a rather dismissive remark about minor nations: “Who today remembers the Lusatian Serbs?” (p. 159). In fact, many people remember, and above all they themselves do.

Let’s move on to incorrect interpretations. It is not true, as the author writes (p. 9), that “the historical works of Mykhailo Hrushevsky became a kind of republican revolution in writing about Eastern Europe”. The idea that the history of Rus’ is different from that of Russia, and the latter traces its origin to not Kyiv but Moscow, formed the basis of Polish national ideology in the nineteenth century and justified the rejection of Russian rule of the “Lithuanian–Rus’” lands (today Lithuania, Belarus and most of Ukraine). History was also described in this way. After all, as early as 1839, more than 60 years before Hrushevsky, Joachim Lelewel wrote: “Along with the main fairy tales, lies and errors with which the history of Rus’ was filled, there is the fact is that these histories are interpreted as being the same as Muscovy’s and Russia’s, the same as those of the tsars and emperors”. This Polish scholar bemoaned the lack of differentiation between Muscovy and Old Rus’ “to which historians tended to succumb”.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, however, elsewhere Hrytsak writes things that evidently contradict Hrushevsky’s ideas and are clearly closer to the meaning of the sources, for example that Old Rus’ was neither a Ukrainian nor a Russian state – incidentally, the concept of a state in the eleventh century differed from the modern one – or that the name “Kievan Rus’” was invented by Russian historians in the nineteenth century (p. 54).

The author’s discussion of the situation of Kyivan Rus’ and the Ruthenians in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is immensely one-sided, perpetuating views that contradict the interpretations presented by contemporary Ukrainian specialists on this period, such as Natalia Yakovenko and Natalia Starchenko. These claims about the Polish “annexation of the Halychian lands” (p. 102) – in fact, rather incorporation – or the phrases printed in bold on the same page about the “Polish Drang nach Osten”, reproduce the views of Ukrainian historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for which the delegitimization of Polish claims to Halychian Rus’ was a patriotic issue.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the assertion that “the Commonwealth elites” were Polish (p. 103) is hard to maintain in the light of contemporary research of the aforementioned

<sup>2</sup> J. Lelewel, *Dzieje Litwy i Rusi aż do Unii z Polską w 1569 w Lublinie zawartej* (Lipsk, 1839), pp. 35–36.

<sup>3</sup> This expression is used, for example, by Mikhailo Hrushevsky; cf. M. Hrushevsky, *Istoriya Ukrajinny-Rusy*, vol. 6 (New York, 1955), p. 279.

Ukrainian scholars as well as their Polish colleagues (Henryk Litwin) regarding the mid-seventeenth century. And there are striking interpretations in the description of the Khmelnytsky Uprising: there is nothing about recognizing it as a civil war, but much about a “Ukrainian revolution” (pp. 124–25). There are surprising errors too, e.g., “the Right Bank [of Ukraine]” following the Truce of Andrusovo “went to Poland” (p. 127). So, which country did it belong to before? It was actually the Left Bank that went to Moscow.

Hrytsak’s interpretations of the Pereiaslav Agreement are also superficial (see p. 129). It cannot be compared to the Treaty of Zboriv of 1649 or the Treaty of Hadiach of 1658, as he does, since these concerned the status of lands captured by the Cossacks (not “the Ukrainian lands”, because neither of these agreements involved, for example, the Halych Land) within one state, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, while the Pereiaslav Agreement meant a change of sovereign, and thus also of state affiliation. Meanwhile, “the local peasants seldom saw their lord – who lived far away in a palace in Warsaw, Krakow or Lviv” (pp. 93–94) is an example of a huge, different simplification. After all, it was not just the landed gentry or aristocracy who possessed land, but also the middle nobility, who did not live in the palaces of Lviv or Warsaw.

Bizarre and incomprehensible simplifications also appear in the parts of the book describing the period in which the author specializes – the nineteenth and twentieth century. He claims, for instance, that “the Ukrainians as a nation” emerged not thanks to but against the wishes of the Polish elites (p. 102). This is a bold theory when the author himself gives the moment of the origin of the Ukrainian nation conventionally as 1914, although half a century earlier, in 1863, the elites of the Polish nation in the guise of the National Government unanimously recognized the Ruthenian nation as separate – albeit also assuming that it would naturally become part of the rebuilt Commonwealth. And it was Polish agitation, carried out in Ukrainian, and the January Uprising that in July 1863 led the Russian government to issue the infamous Valuev Circular, which placed stringent restrictions on publishing in Ukrainian.

Certain assertions seem to result from the pursuit of *bons mots* and a disregard for the need for diligent analysis: “Józef Piłsudski compared the Commonwealth to an *obwarzanek* [a ring-shaped bread] – a big hole in the middle, and everything good on the outside. He knew what he was talking about, because he too was a man ‘from the Borderlands’. Other famous Poles were also ‘Borderlanders’: the poets Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Czesław Miłosz; the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, Marie Skłodowska-Curie [sic]; the world-famous writer Joseph Conrad – the list

is too long to continue. And it reflects an important tendency – the peripheries were areas of heightened creativity” (p. 104). This claim about creativity is in bold. Yet it goes without saying that the list of famous Poles whose activity or works were significant not only within Poland certainly includes many more Poles from the lands of the Polish “core”, and the theory of the peripheries as areas of increased creativity is groundless.

Passages such as (p. 177) “Pushkin perceived the battle of the Polish nationalists and the Russian Empire as a zero-sum game” and a similar claim on p. 165 are truly bemusing. They evidently show that the author uses the term “nationalists” in the same way as some Western literature to mean “supporters of the national idea as the basis of settling relations between states”. Yet, as the book uses the same term for authentic nationalists (i.e., advocates of the nationalist worldview), e.g., writing about nationalists and socialists (p. 204) or nationalists and liberals (p. 208), it creates the misleading impression of an ideological continuation between, for instance, the Polish independence movement, based on the rules of democracy and a voluntaristic vision of the national idea, and twentieth-century Ukrainian nationalism, based on an ethnic and often anti-democratic understanding of nation. It is an open question whether the author intended to connect Mickiewicz with Bandera and the UPA (p. 219) or it just “came out like that” owing to carelessness, but it gives the impression of manipulation.

There are also a number of fairly elementary factual errors: “The Peace of Westphalia introduced two principles: the borders between states are to be inviolable, and no state may interfere in the affairs of another”, the author claims (p. 104). In fact, the principle of non-intervention of a state in others’ affairs began to form at the time of the French Revolution and was codified only in the twentieth century, in the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Charter of the United Nations. International law is yet to hear of the inviolability of borders; if anything, it is familiar with the principle that borders may not be changed by force, but this is a result of the development of international law starting in 1929, when first the Kellogg–Briand Pact came into force, delegatising war as a foreign policy instrument, followed by the UN Charter, and finally the Helsinki Accords of 1975.

“In 1610, the last Rurikid, Tsar Vasili Shuisky, died in Moscow”, the author writes. “His death, combined with the previous rule of Ivan the Terrible (1547–1584), resulted in the long-lasting Time of Troubles in the Tsardom”. In fact, Vasili Shuisky died not in 1610 but in 1612, and in 1610 he was dethroned. Indeed, he came from the Rurikid dynasty, but a subsidiary branch, and he was preceded by two rulers not from this dynasty – Boris

Godunov and False Dmitry I – and it is generally thought that the Time of Troubles began with False Dmitry's arrival in Russia in 1604, not with the dethroning of Shuisky, when, if anything, it reached its peak.

We also learn (p. 106) that in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth “it was indeed the magnates, and not the nobility, who elected the king and limited his power”. This is another argument showing the author's lack of understanding of the history of not just Poland but also Ukraine; after all, if we look at the various elections, which were indeed free (until the late seventeenth century), as a rule it was the candidates of the nobility, not the magnates, who prevailed.

Hrytsak twice (pp. 157 and 163) wrongly dates the Kościuszko Uprising to 1793 and places the famous Krzemieniec Lyceum in Volhynia (today Kremenets) in the city of Kremenchuk (p. 172). He claims that Ukrainians in the Russian Empire were “inorodtsy” (p. 16), although in fact they were regarded as Russians, and they were only called “inorodtsy” in Stolypin's circular from 1910. Compared to all other legal acts, this can hardly be seen as representative. In addition, the author himself soon disavowed this circular, calling the inclusion of “Little Russians” an accidental mistake. There is even an error involving Hrytsak's home and university city: Mykhailo Hrushevsky (p. 161) is described as a professor of “Ukrainian history” at the University of Lviv. In fact, he was a professor of the chair of “general history with a particular emphasis on the history of Eastern Europe”. The fact that in practice his lectures often boiled down to the history of Ukraine is another matter. And then there is the imprecise claim that his main work – a history of Ukraine–Rus' – was written in Lviv. The historian in fact wrote it throughout his life; he indeed began it in the “Lviv” period (only publishing half of the series, the first five volumes) but continued in the “Lviv-Kyiv” period, between 1905 and 1914, and then in exile in Russia during his emigration (1919–1924), and upon his return to Ukraine – in the USSR.

In the section on the nineteenth century (p. 382), the author claims that the Germans ridiculed Polish attempts to set up their own university, but the Poles did so anyway. It is worth remembering that Jagiellonian University in Krakow was founded as early as 1364 and operated continuously from the beginning of the fourteenth century onwards. Hrytsak makes similar mistakes when discussing his own *alma mater*, Lviv University (p. 159), which in his interpretation opened in 1807. This may not be a new interpretation, stretching back as it does to the time of Hrushevsky, but it goes against not only historical sources – as King John II Casimir founded the college in Lviv in 1661 – but also against the identity of the university itself, which in 2021 celebrated the 360th anniversary of its

formation.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it is worth noting that Erich Koch was not Gauleiter of “West Prussia” (p. 337) – a term from the period of the German Empire and Third Reich used to describe Gdańsk Pomerania – but rather East Prussia.

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Absolutely the biggest disappointment, however, comes with Hrytsak’s description of Polish-Ukrainian relations, especially in the twentieth century, where his hasty judgements, lack of analytical precision, deficits in knowledge and tendency to write history “between drops” results in a first-class example of reproduction of the stereotypical views of mainstream Ukrainian historiography, with the possible exception of his description of the effects of the OUN’s activity.

Reading the book, one is left with the strong impression that Hrytsak – despite his knowledge of Polish and his popularity in Polish liberal circles – actually knows little about Poland. It is telling that in his bibliography, with the exception of Sławomir Tokarski’s English-language book about Jews in Galicia, there is no Polish historiography on Ukraine, but there are many Ukrainian, Western, and even Russian books. The author’s arguments suggest a similarity in Poland’s and Russia’s approaches to Ukraine in the nineteenth century. We hear, for example, that “the Russian Empire could exist without Baltia [sic – this is what the author calls the Baltic states] or even the Caucasus. The loss of Ukraine would become the beginning of the end. [...] Control of the Ukrainian lands was also critically important for Polish nationalism. In the ideas of the Polish elites, ‘the Borderlands’ were as important as the ‘Okraina’ of Little Rus’ for the Russian authorities” (p. 163). In fact, it was mainly Polish nationalism that demanded the division between Poland and Russia of the lands that representatives of the Ukrainian national movement treated as their own, while other streams of political thought, especially socialism, saw Ruthenia (*Rus*) as federalized, and then – after the failure of the January Uprising – a state organism confederated with Poland (only Galicia’s status might have been disputed).

The author’s lack of sensitivity to Polish history is also illustrated by his musings on the intelligentsia (p. 180). “The members of the intelligentsia resembled the early Christians: they were united by their readiness for self-sacrifice for the public good. Unlike the Christians, however, most of them were indifferent to religion, and some were outright hostile. They believed in not God but progress”. This is a description that applies

<sup>4</sup> Information from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv website: “360 – Lviv’skyi universytet” <<https://lnu.edu.ua/360-l-vivs-kyi-universytet/>> [accessed 25 June 2023].



to the Russian intelligentsia, not the Polish variety, who were often characterized by deep religiosity.

Hrytsak gives as an example of “debasement of national dignity” (sic) Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel *With Fire and Sword*, in which “the Ukrainian Cossacks were presented as savage barbarians from the East”. Disregarding the fact that Sienkiewicz gleaned this image of the Cossacks largely from Panteleimon Kulish, one of the leading Ukrainian intellectuals of the nineteenth century, in all fairness we should note that the main female protagonist in his novel bears the hallmarks of a typical Shevchenko Ukrainian and is a Ruthenian from a knyaz family, just as a few of the other main protagonists come from Ruthenia (Jeremi Wiśniowiecki, Michał Wołodyjowski) and some, clearly portrayed positively, are even Cossacks (Mikołaj Zaćwilichowski, serving Jeremi Wiśniowiecki, and Zakhar, serving Khmelnytsky). Indeed, the historical background of the novel, the Khmelnytsky Uprising, is portrayed as a civil war, a revolt instigated even by justified causes, but a savage, untamed one against the idea of statehood and social order; the author’s sympathies are evidently on the side of the Ruthenian elites, not the Cossacks, although in parts he also tries to show the Cossacks’ rationale. Seeing Sienkiewicz’s book as anti-Ukrainian might result either from Hrytsak’s unfamiliarity with it and the influence of Volodymyr Antonovych’s review of 1885<sup>5</sup>, or Hrytsak’s mental identification with the “traditional model of Ukrainian history”.

The author presents the Polish-Ukrainian war over Lviv and Eastern Galicia from the Ukrainian perspective, based on the conviction that it was waged on “Ukrainian lands” (p. 238). This is accompanied by a map on which the West Ukrainian People’s Republic (WUPR) stretches from a line running west from Przemyśl (p. 240), although in fact the map shows the area claimed by the WUPR, which is not the same. The WUPR, of course, proclaimed its uprising in all parts of the former Austrian Empire where Ukrainians lived but in practice controlled only part of Eastern Galicia, and the army and administration of the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic was even ousted from Lviv after three weeks of battles. We might therefore ask the author how he defines the WUPR territory, since he speaks about it as something self-evident (p. 233). He lays the blame for the Lviv pogrom squarely with Czesław Mączyński (p. 335), which is odd as historians researching investigation files are far more cautious in their assessment. There is also a claim regarding Poland’s “annexation

<sup>5</sup> Vladymyr Antonovič, ‘Polsko-rusckije sootnošenija XVII v. v sovremennoj polskoj prizme’, in id., *Moja spovid: Vybrani istorični ta publicystični tvory*, ed. by Ol’ha Todijčuk and Vasyl’ Ul’janovs’kyj (Kyiv, 1995), pp. 106–35.

of Volhynia” in 1919 (p. 269), which is evidently false. No such thing took place, and throughout that year Poland was the occupier from the point of view of both international and domestic law.

Elsewhere in the book, we can read that interwar Poland “swallowed up so many [Ukrainian] lands that it could not digest them” (p. 272), or that its policy was inconsistent because it sought to “Ukrainize Volhynia and de-Ukrainize Galicia” (p. 273). There is not the slightest reference showing the dominant perspective among the Poles at the time, who treated at least Eastern Galicia, and sometimes also the entirety of the lands up to the Dnieper, as part of the Polish national territory. There is also no attempt to show the foundations of Poland’s interwar policy towards Ukrainians, by which of course I do not mean that the author should not criticize the instruments used, which were indeed harmful as they gave rise to new resentments. In any case, the Galician Ukrainians were perceived as disloyal to the Polish state, resulting in efforts to use administrative means to limit what was seen as Ukrainian national agitation. Meanwhile, in Volhynia – where the local Ukrainians, culturally different from their Galician compatriots, identified much less with the version of the Ukrainian national idea, which was confrontational towards Poland – the voivode Henryk Józewski wanted to create an area where the Ukrainians would have better chances of personal development and furthering their national culture than in Soviet Ukraine.

However, Hrytsak, who repeatedly stresses the cultural diversity of Ukraine and polemicizes against the template approach to the Donbas population of Ukrainian nationalists, might be expected to reflect comparatively on the challenges, means and effects of the policy of the authorities of the Second Polish Republic towards lands inhabited by a population different in culture and religion from the core of pre-war Poland on the one hand and, on the other, of the Ukrainian authorities towards the linguistically and often mentally alienated eastern, southern Ukraine and the Crimea. One can expect that he would compare the challenges faced by the Polish authorities and the means of implementation (utraquist schools, an exclusively Polish-language university in Lviv or the requirement of military service in the Polish army for Ukrainian students) with those which Ukraine – quite rightly from the point of view of its state interests – undertook towards its Russian-dominated lands, especially as the challenges were somewhat similar. Upon its foundation in 1991, Ukraine had the task of integrating a Catholic (Eastern Rite) population in the west with an Orthodox (or more often agnostic or culturally Orthodox) one in the east, using two languages (Russian and Ukrainian) and torn between two visions of Ukrainian identity – national and European,

anti-Russian and Russophile – invoking the civilizational community of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians.

There were, of course, differences, such as the legitimization of the foundation of independent Ukraine in the referendum of 1 December 1991 in all the regions of Soviet Ukraine, followed by the holding of further democratic elections, acceptance of the constitution, and also the conviction dominant among Ukrainians that, irrespective of religion and language, self-declaration as a Ukrainian was the key factor in national identification. Post-1918 independent Poland started from a different position: the Partitions had annihilated the project of creation of a Polish political nation existing at elite level but not that of the people in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century, and created conditions that made it easier to distinguish separate nations within the pre-Partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Nevertheless, knowledge of this should lead a Ukrainian historian to exercise some caution in his judgements, yet these are lacking.

Hrytsak's antihero is Roman Dmowski, whom he calls "the ideologue of the chauvinistic and antisemitic National Democracy party" (p. 274), without any attempt to define antisemitism (opposition to the role of the Jewish elites in economic and political life, but not "racial") or "chauvinism". Elsewhere, he writes that the Ukrainian "national democrats", unlike the Polish ones, were indeed democrats (p. 280). The author missed the fact that among Polish national democrats there were many politicians and activists with overtly democratic views who were persecuted under Piłsudski. However, he mentions that after 1926 it was Piłsudski who pursued Dmowski's line – meaning, we can assume, antisemitism and chauvinism. This is a hefty charge when the only example he gives is the pacification, or "anti-terrorist operation", of autumn 1930, which was directed at the terrorism of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists. The Ukrainian civilian population were also affected as they were suspected on the grounds of national solidarity – i.e., collective responsibility – of favouring the terrorists, thus they were often the victims of the excesses and crimes committed during the operation. Hrytsak also accuses Piłsudski (p. 263) of preparing plans for another march on Kyiv and issuing a relevant directive to this end to the General Staff, although historiography knows nothing of this – those who do speak of it, frequently, are Russian commentators.

Hrytsak's portrayal of the Soviet aggression against Poland on 17 September 1939 is extremely disappointing. He writes that "the Red Army crossed the Soviet-Polish border and entered the territory of Galicia and Volhynia" (p. 290, similarly on "crossing" p. 293), claiming that these areas

as well as “Western Belarus” (there is, of course, no mention of the fact that the Belarusian-speaking population comprised less than 25% of the population there according to the census, and Orthodox Christians around 45%) thereby came to be part of the USSR in 1939. The author seems not to understand that annexation is by definition illegal, and annexed areas continue to be occupied. Legally, 90% of the area that the Red Army occupied in 1939 came to be part of the USSR only on 5 February 1946, when the border treaty of 16 April 1945 between Poland and the USSR entered into force. This treaty involved Poland ceding 90% of its territory occupied by the Soviets in September 1939 to the USSR, with 10%, including Białystok and Przemyśl, remaining in Poland, from which nobody had ever detached them.

Only ignorance of the foundations of international law can account for the repetition of the Soviet terminology regarding “former Poland” (pp. 291, 324) to refer to the times of the Second World War, or the assertion (p. 297) regarding the “detachment of Galicia from Ukraine in 1941 and its annexation to the occupied Polish lands”. I wonder on what basis Hrytsak distinguishes the status of the Polish territory entered in 1939 by Germany (“occupied”) and by the USSR “incorporated into the USSR”? The explanation that he might be using a definition of occupation that is different from that of international law helps little because inconsistencies can also be seen in other cases. For example, when discussing the occupied areas of Ukraine, the borders of 1991 are visible, while Carpathian Ruthenia – until 1939 part of Czechoslovakia, with contested status in 1939–45 (part of Hungary or Czechoslovakia) – is marked as “occupied by Hungary”.

It is hardly surprising that, ignorant of the status of the territory of the Polish Republic under international law, Hrytsak makes a common mistake by considering (pp. 308, 326) Ukraine’s population losses during the war and comparing them with the Belarusian ones. Yet the Soviet and Polish statistics partly cover the same categories owing to a different perception of the state affiliation of Galicia, Volhynia, Polesia, the Navahrudak Region and the Vilnius Region. It is true that this is seldom discussed, but it would certainly be easier to discern the problem if the Soviet and Russian claims of “incorporation of Volhynia and Galicia to Soviet Ukraine” in 1939 were not taken in good faith.

Last but not least, the description of the Volhynia Massacre. Hrytsak is one of few Ukrainian historians to accept what is obvious for Polish and Western historians: that the UPA carried out ethnic cleansing in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (on p. 212, the author mentions solely Volhynia in 1943, while on p. 296 there is a reference to “preventative ethnic

cleansing”). He has in fact been active in discussions on Volhynia for over 20 years: in 2003, he signed a letter by Ukrainian intellectuals stating that the UPA murdered Poles, so he can hardly be accused of a lack of knowledge on this matter. For some reason, however, in his synthesis Hrytsak notes that the Volhynian Massacre was not the only genocide encountered in the Ukrainian lands, and that “the Polish underground” conducted an operation exterminating Ukrainians that was also genocide (p. 212). In practice, therefore, the description that emerges in this book is one of unabashed symmetrism.

The description of the massacre (pp. 302, 327) is also disappointing, although the author devotes several paragraphs to it in all. He claims twice that the massacre began in summer and one of the UPA’s first acts was the extermination of the Polish population in Volhynia, and on the night of 11–12 July it attacked between 50 and 100 Polish villages. But in one place we are told that it is unclear who gave the orders, while in another it is clear that it was Dmytro Klyachkivsky. Atrocities such as those committed in Parośla, Pendyki, Lipniki, and Janowa Dolina go unnoticed, although these are just some of the best-known examples of villages that were victims of UPA’s cleansing in late winter and spring 1943. The lack of information on the number of victims, which ran into the tens of thousands, and of any mention of Galicia, where Shukhevych also ordered a repeat of the massacre, produces the impression that the author is deliberately diminishing the significance of the Volhynia Massacre so that information about it does not confound his efforts to write a popular history of Ukraine to raise spirits and boost faith in modernization and Europeanness, especially as amid all this he relativizes terror thus (p. 331): “It was not the Banderites who unleashed the terror. As the Ukrainian poet Marianna Kiyanovska succinctly noted, were it not for Piłsudski, Bandera would be a little-known agronomist”. Such explanations are disappointing, especially as the author reaches for another eristic device of dubious merit, namely “whataboutism”, to relativize the massacre. He writes that “the current Polish government [headed by the Law and Justice Party] treats the Volhynian Massacre as a genocide of Poles but prefers not to speak of Poles’ participation in the extermination of Jews and Ukrainians” (p. 331). As an illustration of Polish atrocities, Hrytsak mentions the village of Pawłokoma, somewhat simplistically attributing it to the Polish Home Army (AK, which actually no longer existed, although it was indeed a post-AK unit that was responsible). Unfortunately, the author bemoans the fact that those responsible were not punished for their crime perpetrated in Ukraine (p. 338) – the thing is, though, that Pawłokoma is in fact in Poland.

Overall, Hrytsak's book might increase Ukrainians' identification with their country and its history, and it might somewhat reduce the popularity of radically nationalistic interpretations of history in Ukraine. But the cost of this is an enormous number of simplifications, logical inconsistencies, and conclusions based on convoluted methodology and reproduction of nationalist stereotypes, especially concerning the situation of Ruthenia in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Polish-Ukrainian relations in the later period. And on top of this there are numerous substantive errors.

Not only is this not how to write a history that allows the neighbour's perspective to be understood; it is also not how to write a history that satisfies the criteria of an academic popular history book. Rather, it is how to write a new historical mythology that is only superficially pro-European and liberal.