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Euromaidan revolution, Crimea and Russia–Ukraine war: why it is time for a review of Ukrainian–Russian studies

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ABSTRACT

This review article seeks to launch a debate on the state of Ukrainian–Russian studies which have become quite active among Western scholars since the 2014 crisis unfolded. Through discussion around two recently published books by Richard Sakwa and Anna Matveeva, the review investigates five common themes found in Western scholarship about the crisis and Russia–Ukraine war. These include blaming the West for the crisis, downplaying Russian military involvement, justifying Russian annexation of the Crimea, describing the conflict as a “civil war” and minimizing Russian nationalism while exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism. The review points to serious scholarly flaws in all five areas and calls for a thorough review of Western scholarship on Ukrainian–Russian studies.

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“Our historical, spiritual and other origins give us the right to say that in the main we are one people. There is nothing that differentiates Ukrainians from Russians. Nothing at all.”

President Vladimir Putin, 14 December 2017.

The Russia–Ukraine crisis that unfolded in late 2013 early 2014, with the Euromaidan Revolution of Dignity, Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and Russian hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine has led to nearly 400 scholarly and think-tank books, journal articles and papers (Kuzio 2017a). In this debate article, I review two recently published books: Richard Sakwa’s *Russia Against the West: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* (2017) and Anna Matveeva’s *Through Times of Trouble: Conflict in Southeastern Ukraine Explained From Within* (2018), using them as a springboard to initiate a wider conversation on the status of contemporary Eurasian studies. The two books under review would be included within the second of nine categories (“Russia as the Victim”) that these publications are divided into.¹ A survey of these publications shows the West is not dominated by a pro-Ukrainian perspective and official Ukrainian interpretation of the conflict, the latter being impossible as

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is rarely cited by Western scholars. American-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Canadian academic institutions do not traditionally cover politics and international relations, and have largely ignored the Donbas conflict and Crimea. Matveeva (2018) writes, without providing sources, the Ukrainian diaspora mobilized recruits to fight as volunteers when in fact only two people have been documented (Jajecznyk and Kuzio 2014). The Ukrainian diaspora proved to be a paper tiger compared to the Croatian which collected huge sums of money and sent thousands of volunteers to the Croatian war of independence in the first half of the 1990s.

The overwhelming majority of Western authors writing about the crisis and war have never traveled to Ukraine. A Ukrainian expert noted, "Many people participate in the discussions about the Donbas. Far fewer of them actually went there. The lack of real experts on the region is noticeable" (Mairova 2017, 83). While many scholars may not wish to travel to the Donbas frontline of the war, this does not excuse the absence of fieldwork research in Kyiv, and Eastern and southern Ukraine. Barely any of these publications, including both books under review, include interviews with Ukrainian officials, civil society activists, and soldiers at the central and local levels.

Anna Matveeva (2018) is an exception to the above as she traveled to Russian-controlled Donbas enclaves and to Moscow where she conducted many interviews in the course of her fieldwork. Unlike the majority of scholars writing on the crisis who use primarily secondary sources (Toal 2017), her book's great value is in providing a bottom-up view of the Donbas rebels through interviews with local and Russian actors. Matveeva's (2018) book would have been greatly improved if her research had been balanced with similar fieldwork in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, including Ukrainian-controlled Donbas, and in Kyiv.

A large group of the authors are Western scholars of Russia, often commanding leadership positions in University centers and departments focusing on the former communist world. Russian-language media remains prevalent in Ukraine and many publications have Russian and Ukrainian versions. Three of Ukraine's five political weeklies are published in Russian.² All official websites have Russian-language pages. Ukrainian media and official websites can be accessed from anywhere. Nevertheless, few scholars use sources from Ukraine and for Western Russianists, the default is always to use sources from Russia. In Richard Sakwa's (2015) first book on the crisis, his only sources from Ukraine are the English-language *Kyiv Post*, in contrast to 75 sources from Russia. Mark Galeotti's (2016) study of hybrid warfare uses no Ukrainian sources from a country which has experienced the most from hybrid warfare and which has published many studies of this phenomenon (*Russia's "Hybrid" War – Challenge and Threat for Europe* 2016; Horbulin 2017). This not only influences analyses, but also which political leaders are cited, with Russian President Vladimir Putin usually the politician of choice. Sakwa (2015) cites Putin 31 times but never once

Ukrainian President Poroshenko. That this is a far wider problem than merely scholars of Russia, can be seen in contemporary geographer Gerard Toal (2017) who cites Mikhail Gorbachev twice and Poroshenko only once.

Scholars writing about the crisis from the perspective of the two books under review can be understood by analyzing their work through five themes. First, blaming the West for the crisis and portraying Russia as a victim. Second, downplaying Russia's military involvement. Third, justifying Russia's annexation of the Crimea. Fourth, portraying the crisis as a "civil war" between Russian and Ukrainian speakers arising from a clash between Euromaidan "monist" nationalism and Donbas pro-Russian "pluralism." Fifth, downplaying and ignoring Russian nationalism, and exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism.

Blame the West and Russia as the victim

This area is a favorite theme of a large number of scholars writing about the crisis with them routinely providing endorsements for each other's books (Kaspar de Ploeg 2017; van der Pijl 2018; Hahn 2018). One aspect of this is the creeping integration of conspiracy theories and information from Russia's disinformation arsenal into academic studies, as seen in the book about the shooting down of MH17 in July 2014 and the loss of 298 civilian lives by Kees van der Pijl (2018) published by the prestigious Manchester University Press. Matveeva (2018) surprisingly devotes only half a page to the shooting down of MH17 by Russian troops in July 2014 while devoting an entire page to Russian disinformation denying its involvement.

Russian "neo-revisionism" was a response, Sakwa (2017) believes, to the spread of American exceptionalism and liberalism, and EU hegemony and the lack of respect accorded to Russia as a great power. Sakwa (2017) traces the sources of the current crisis to the end of the Cold War when the West did not build an "inclusive peace" that included Russia. Europe could never be whole and free without Russia while Russia would never join an expanding "West."

Russia is not a "genuine revisionist power" (Sakwa 2017, 106) because it aims to "ensure the universal and consistent application of existing forms" (Sakwa 2017, 131). The West is the source of the problem with Russia pushing back against Western hegemonic practices and values. Russia's fight back began in Putin's February 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference after which "the stage was set for confrontation" (Sakwa 2017, 27).

Believing that Russia's problem with the West began in 1991, or in the 2000s, ignores a long history of Russian nationalism claiming moral superiority over a "degenerate West." Alexander Solzhenitsyn complained about a "degenerate West" during his US exile in the 1970s and 1980s. Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz (2015) write how Eurasianism is a substitute for de-colonization claiming Russia has succeeded in managing ethnic diversity more successfully than the West. Even more so, "Eurasianism treats Russia not as a colonial

power, but as a community which is itself under threat of being colonized by the West” (Hutchings and Tolz 2015, 162). Eurasianism claims Russia’s values are superior to European, rejects Western political models and embraces the Mongol-Tatar-Eurasian heritage. The origins of Putin’s “neo-revisionism” is therefore to be found in long held Russian nationalistic attitudes and inferiority complexes vis-à-vis the West – and not just with the ending of the Cold War.

Sakwa (2017) downplays Russian imperialism writing Russia was not “seeking to destroy the sovereignty of its neighbors” (Sakwa 2017, 35). Ukrainian polls show a high majority believe Russia *is* seeking to destroy Ukrainian sovereignty. Both Russian Presidents Borys Yeltsyn and Putin supported hybrid warfare towards the dismembering of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. Russia believes it can be a great power only by controlling, and the West recognizing its sphere of influence in Eurasia. Hence, Putin’s desire for a “grand bargain” with US presidential candidate Donald Trump which would recognize Russia as an equal to the US and Russia’s “privileged zone of interests” in Eurasia.

Sakwa (2017, 263) denies Russia ever sought “a return to spheres of influence,” quite unlike Mikhail Suslov (2018), who writes that “the idea of a sphere of influence” is hardwired into the “Russian World” imagery.” The *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) is used to justify an exclusive sphere of influence beyond the Russian Federation based on culture, values, and language. The “Russian” presence abroad is where Russia’s sphere of influence extends, and this includes Ukraine and Belarus as these are not separate peoples but branches of the “Russian” people. “The Russian World is where Russians are” (Suslov 2018) and if Ukrainians and Russians are “one people,” as Putin says, then Ukraine is part of the *Russkiy Mir*.

Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) seek to downplay Viktor Yanukovych as a friend of Russia thus minimizing Russian pressure upon Ukraine. Sakwa (2017, 153) writes, “Yanukovych had never been a particular friend of Russia” and “relations with Moscow during his presidency remained strained.” Yanukovych, in fact, granted everything that President Dmitri Medvedev (2009) had demanded in his August 2009 open letter to President Viktor Yushchenko (Kuzio 2017a).

This line of argument ignores or minimizes an entire array of evidence of Russian interference in Ukrainian affairs in the decade prior to 2014. Matveeva (2018, 272) writes, “Before the crisis, Moscow’s role in Ukraine was not particularly active” and “Moscow did not support any independent activism of a pro-Russian nature in Ukraine.” Russia actively supported Yanukovych in the 2004 presidential elections with political technologists, financial assistance and visits by Putin during both rounds (Kuzio 2005). From 2005–2006 up to 2014, Russian intelligence provided paramilitary training to pro-Russian groups (Shekhovtsov 2016), including training the extremist pro-Russian Donetsk Republic which came to power in the November 2014 DNR (Donetsk People’s Republic) election with 68.3% of the vote. The origins of the Donetsk Republic organization lie in earlier Russian chauvinistic and pan-Slavic organizations, including Movement for the

Rebirth of the Donbas, International Movement of the Donbas and Civic Congress (which changed its name to the Party of Slavic Unity) (Kuzio 2017a).

The Donbas and the Crimea, two strong holds of the Party of Regions and President Yanukovich, possessed a regional and Soviet identity different to the remainder of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. It is therefore not surprising that the Party of Regions was more pro-Russian and Sovietophile than Eastern Ukrainian centrist parties that had existed during Leonid Kuchma's presidency in 1994–2004 (Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Kuzio 2015). In 2005–2006, the Party of Regions signed a cooperation agreement with United Russia after which Russian political technologists brokered an alliance between the Party of Regions and Crimean Russian nationalists, bringing them out of marginalization, and together they ruled the Crimea until Russia's 2014 invasion. The Party of Regions established alliances with the Communist Party and United Russia, steps Kuchma and Ukrainian centrist parties would never have contemplated.

In 2010, President Yanukovich gave Russian leaders everything they had demanded in Medvedev's open letter in the domestic realm by commemorating the Great Patriotic War, accepting Russia's position on the 1933 *Holodomor* and in the foreign arena by dropping NATO in favor of "non-bloc status." Senior Russian citizens were appointed as his personal bodyguard and Minister of Defense, Chairperson of the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) and commander of Ukrainian naval forces. Under Yanukovich, the SBU *de facto* became a branch of its Russian equivalent, the FSB (Federal Security Service) (Kuzio 2012).

Russian leaders were never satisfied with Ukrainian presidents because they wanted to see a Belarusian-style dominion in Ukraine. Putin was angry with the Euromaidan Revolution because it upset his plans for Yanukovich to be re-elected in January 2015 followed by Ukraine joining the Eurasian Economic Union (as the CIS Customs Union was renamed). That Russia had poor relations with all five Ukrainian presidents, even though four were from Eastern and Southern Ukraine (the only exception being Leonid Kravchuk), was not due to the factors outlined by Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018). Indeed, the common misnomer that Russia only had poor relations with Ukraine when it was led by "nationalists" Kravchuk and Yushchenko is wrong. The problem is deeper and a product of Russia's inability to recognize Ukraine as a sovereign country and Ukrainians as a separate people – areas largely ignored by Western scholars who see "Russia as the Victim" (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, 61–85).

Downplaying Russian military support to Donbas proxies

Matveeva (2018) presents Yanukovich and the Party of Regions as not cooperating with pro-Russian groups. Russian intelligence trained Donbas and Crimean pro-Russian groups since the Orange Revolution and in Summer 2009, Russian diplomats were expelled for supporting extremist pro-Russian and separatist groups which led to Medvedev's open letter. Russian intelligence was actively

financing, training, and cooperating with Anti-Maidan activists during the Euromaidan (The Battle for Ukraine 2014). Russian *spetsnaz* led by Igor “Strelkov” Girkin invaded Ukraine in early April 2014, Russian volunteers who were trained in Russian camps joined the conflict and Russian weapons were being brought into Ukraine before Russia’s full invasion on 24 August 2014 – a date deliberately chosen to humiliate Ukraine on its Independence Day. Ukraine could not have lost so many aircraft and helicopters, and been ultimately defeated at Ilovaysk³ without Russian military assistance.

Matveeva (2018, 112) writes that Putin “was elusive, zig-zagging and non-committal.” In support of her claim that the rebels were not Russian proxies, Matveeva (2018, 217) writes that “military supplies switched on and off.” Following the Minsk 1 agreement, Russia transformed its Donbas proxy groups into a large army with an impressive array of weaponry. Are scholars to believe Putin that these weapons came from Ukrainian bases or were captured from Ukrainian forces? The former is completely implausible because the Donbas had very few military bases in the Soviet era, as the latter were mainly built in western Ukraine closer to Western Europe and NATO.

Evidence of Russia’s massive build up is available from a huge array of official sources, think tanks and academic studies, including within Ukraine. In August 2018, the OSCE monitoring mission filmed Russia supplying military equipment to its Donbas proxies (Coynash 2018).⁴ US Ambassador Kurt Volker, Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations, said,

Russia consistently blocks expansion of OSCE border mission and its forces prevent SMM from reliably monitoring the border as it sends troops, arms, and supplies into Ukraine; all while claiming it’s an ‘internal’ conflict and spouting disingenuous arguments about Minsk agreements.⁵

The DNR 1st Corps and LNR (Luhansk People’s Republic) 2nd Corps has a combined 35,000-strong army which is bigger than half of NATO’s 29 members and could only have been created with Russia’s active military assistance. It cannot be true, as Sakwa (2017) writes, that Russia sought to extricate itself from the Donbas at the same time as it built up a huge army and military arsenal controlled by GRU officers and 5,000 Russian occupation troops. Sakwa (2017) adds to this denial of Russia’s military support to Donbas proxies by downplaying Russian hacking in the 2016 US elections and Russia’s chemical weapons attack in Britain on former GRU officer Sergei Skripal.

Matveeva (2018) devotes little space to Russia’s massive information war against Ukraine which played a central role in the 2014 crisis; while not denying the power of the Russian media at the same time, Matveeva (2018) barely mentions it. It was not the case that Russia had “few soft power instruments at its disposal” (Matveeva 2018, 273). Until 2014, Moscow supported pro-Russian groups in Sevastopol and Crimea, corruption in the gas sector tied Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs, Russian media, Russian books, and Russian social media were

bought and used extensively by Ukrainians (VKontakte, the major Russian social media site, had more Ukrainian members than Facebook up to 2014). Russian soft power has declined since 2014, most noticeably with the granting of autocephaly (independence) to Ukrainian Orthodox leading to the loss of influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (and therefore of Putin) over Ukraine (Kuzio 2019).

Since 2014, many scholars believe Putin's military aggression has extensively undermined Russian soft power (Cheskin 2017). There is no better way to view the collapse of Russian soft power than to analyze polling data of Ukrainian attitudes to Russian leaders to see how a perspective commonly found only in western Ukraine prior to 2014 has since become pan-national. In 2012, 53% of Ukrainians held a positive view of Putin which by 2016 had collapsed to 10. Even among the dwindling supporters of Ukraine joining the Eurasian Economic Union, 67% held negative views of Russian leaders; in contrast, among those supporting EU membership, 96% were negative.⁶ Joanna Szostek (2018) concluded that Russia needs legitimacy, "that comes from mass popular acquiescence to the Russian leadership. In Ukraine, the Russian state's communicative tactics are not serving this goal at all."

The collapse of Russian soft power is particularly noticeable among the Ukrainian youth, two-thirds of who believe Ukraine and Russia are in a state of war (Zarembo 2017). Only 1% of young Ukrainians support their country adopting the Russian model of development (Kulchytsky and Mishchenko 2018, 183), with 69–71% opposed to this throughout Ukraine, including 56% of Russian speakers. Widespread opposition to Ukraine adopting the Russian model of development is an outgrowth of Russia associated with "aggression" (65.7%), "cruelty" (56.9%), and "dictatorship" (56.9%).⁷

Re-identification of Ukrainians had been taking place slowly up to 2013 and although this has dramatically increased, current research, and polling data of changes in Ukrainian identity is often ignored by scholars writing on the crisis.⁸ In 1996, 50% of Ukrainians supported elevating Russian to an official language which has declined to 16. The 2012 language law making Russian an official language, which by-passed changing the constitution and was criticized by the Council of Europe, has therefore little public support.

Ethnic Russians made up 17% of Ukraine's population in the 2001 Ukrainian census, itself a decline from 22 in the 1989 Soviet census. Today, only 2% of young Ukrainians continue to view themselves as ethnic Russians (Zarembo 2017, 184). The share of the population identifying itself as Ukrainians has increased to 92% making Ukraine the fourth most nationally homogenous country in Europe. Although this problem is decreasing, scholars continue to use outdated 1990s stereotypes about a heavily regionally divided Ukraine based on the outcome of the 1994 and 2004 presidential elections. The east: west divide was not present in four other presidential elections in 1991, 1999, 2014, and 2019.

In 2006–2017, Ukrainians who associated with Russian identity declined from 11 to 2% and with Soviet identity from 16 to 10, with most of these changes taking

place in the east and south (Kulchytskyy and Mishchenko 2018). Volodymyr Kulyk's (2018a) research found "sweeping re-identification in favor of Ukrainian" identity since 2014. Although this has not immediately translated into growing numbers of Ukrainian speakers, it has made them less demeaning towards the Ukrainian language and more amenable to learning Ukrainian. Bilingualism denoted a shift from Ukrainian to Russian-speaking in the USSR and today that process is reversing with growing numbers of Russian-speakers becoming bilingually Russian and Ukrainian – especially at home. Kulyk (2018a, 133) describes this process as the addition of a second language "to one's active repertoire" in a "bottom-up de-Russification."

Ukrainians who only use the Russian language have declined in number to 13%. Describing Ukrainian as one's "native language" in a census and opinion poll may not necessarily reflect one's language use, but it has been shown to reflect a sentiment to the language. Importantly, these changes lead to a growing number of Russian speakers giving Ukrainian as their native language, itself an indicator where their loyalties lie in the conflict. Becoming bilingual by adding Ukrainian is an act of patriotism by Russian-speakers who refuse, "to identify with the entity they came to perceive as the enemy" (Kulyk 2018a, 134).

Scholars writing from the perspective of "Russia the Victim" are failing to consider these important changes in identity brought on by Russia's military aggression that have led to the demise of a "pro-Russian east" (Zhurzenko 2015) and the growth of Ukrainian identity in Ukrainian government-controlled Donbas. Predictions by Western scholars writing in the 1990s of the rise of a Russian-speaking group identity in Ukraine have not happened; instead, Russian-speakers have evolved from Soviets into Ukrainians. Kulyk (2018b) writes that Ukraine's Russian speakers, "have actually lost much of their distinct ethnocultural identity which should have informed such mobility." Kulyk (2018a, 121) adds that a "post-imperial Russian 'superminority' in Ukraine has ceased to exist" while Zhurzenko (2015) concludes that Ukraine's "pro-Russian east" has shrunk to the Donbas.

Justifying Russia's annexation of the Crimea

Surprisingly, a large body of Western scholars, particularly historians of Russia, view the Crimea as historically Russian. Sergei I. Zhuk (2014) found to his surprise his North American colleagues in Slavic and East European studies and historians of Russia and the USSR, refuting Ukraine's right to defend its territorial integrity while defending "Russia's historical territorial rights in both Crimea and Donbas." Zhuk, a Russian speaker from Ukraine with Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish and Greek ethnic backgrounds, was criticized for his "pro-Ukrainian nationalistic position." On occasion these criticisms repeated Russian media clichés about the "Fascist, anti-Jewish, and anti-Russian" goals of the Maidan" (Zhuk 2014, 200).

Defense of Russia's actions against Ukraine is broader than the question of who owns the Crimea and has its origins in the continued use of nineteenth-century imperial historical frameworks of "Russia" that deny the existence of Ukrainians and proclaim Kyiv as the birthplace of "Russians" and "Russia" (Kuzio 2001). Similar to President Putin in his March 2014 address welcoming the Crimea into the Russian Federation, Sakwa (2015) describes the Crimea as the "heartland of Russian nationhood." The "normality" of the Crimea returning to its "natural home" leads Sakwa (2015, 2017), Neil Kent (2016), Kaspar de Ploeg (2017, 117) and other scholars to take at face value the March 2014 referendum results. Russia's annexation of the Crimea was merely correcting a historical injustice as allegedly the Crimea had always been "Russian." Kent (2016) writes that the "reunion" of Crimea and Russia returned the peninsula to its natural home.

It would seem that Western historians of Russia not only do not interact with Western historians of Ukraine Orest Subtelny (2009), Paul R. Magocsi (2010), and Serhii Plochy (2015), they also do not interact with their counterparts teaching the history of North America and Australia, and are not up to speed in the field of post-colonialism. No serious scholars would begin the history of Canada, US and Australia in 1604, 1607, and 1770 respectfully, and therefore one is perplexed as to why the history of the Crimea should be treated differently and begin in 1783 when it was conquered by the Russian Empire?

Related to this question is that of who are the "First Nations?" In Canada, the US and Australia it is not European colonialists who are defined as "First Nations" and again one is left perplexed as to why Russians should be viewed as "First Nations" in the Crimea? (Kuzio 2018b, Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018). Magocsi (2014b) says the "First Nation" in the Crimea are Tatars who lived there for 600 years before the peninsula's conquest by Tsarist Russia (Magocsi 2014a). One could also include the Greeks as a "First Nation" who had lived in the Crimea and the northern Black Sea coast for over a thousand years, of whom 50,000 were deported from the region in three successive waves in 1942, 1944, and 1949. Importantly, Ukrainian historiography (in Ukraine and the West) does not claim "First Nation" status for Ukrainians in the Crimea while Russian and surprisingly Western histories of Russia does lay claim to the status of "First Nation" for Russians.

Presenting Crimea's annexation as a "return to normality" is undertaken by taking sociological data out of context to prove there was always majority support for separatism.⁹ Sakwa (2017) ignores the conclusions of the Razumkov Center's sociology pointing to disorientation of Crimeans over the status of their autonomous republic and "supporting at times mutually exclusive alternatives." Half (50.1%) chose "at least one of the options, which involves the Crimea leaving Ukraine, and one of the other alternatives that will allow it to stay in the future within Ukraine." The Razumkov Center concluded that, "half of the Crimeans, depending on circumstances, can support both the separation of Crimea from Ukraine as well as the opposite scenario."¹⁰ This is not the endorsement of

separatism that Sakwa (2017) claims it is, but rather that of the confused identities which were commonplace in post-Soviet states. In writing the Crimea “never reconciled itself with its place in an independent Ukraine” Der Pijl (2018: 40) aims to prove the Crimea eagerly awaited its “liberation” and return to Russia in 2014

Support for separatism in the Crimea, as well as in the Donbas, has never been higher than a third of the population, although higher than elsewhere in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. Kharkiv, which had the second highest support after the Crimea and Donbas, had 16% support for separatism. Nevertheless, two-thirds of the Donbas wished to remain in Ukraine showing that separatism was not backed by a majority of the population anywhere in Ukraine. In the Donbas there were the same confused nuances about identity as found by the Razumkov Center in the Crimea. The 31.6% who supported separatism in the Donbas did not have a united vision of what that meant with 4.7 backing independence, 18.2 incorporation into Russia and 8.7 the Donbas existing in a federal union with Russia (Stebelsky 2018).

A second nuance was that identities mattered in the Donbas where 30% of Russians but only 11% of those with a dual Russian-Ukrainian identity, supported separatism (ethnic Ukrainian support was even lower). Only two of the six issues in the 2014 separatist program had majority support: (1) support for joining the CIS Customs Union over the EU; and (2) fear of extreme Ukrainian nationalism. Elise Giuliano (2018) concluded that a majority of Russians, Ukrainians, and Russian-Ukrainians in the Donbas did not therefore support separatism.

A similar lack of majority support is found in other areas of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The takeover of official buildings was supported by only 24, 18, and 10% respectively in Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv. Although anti-Maidan sentiment was prevalent in support given their local man (Yanukovych) who was in power, 32% of the Donbas opposed the use of lethal force by *Berkut* riot police, which in eastern and southern Ukraine dropped to 16 (Giuliano 2018). Participation in pro-Russian allies was backed by 25% in Donetsk and Luhansk, and 15% in Kharkiv; in the remainder of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, this received only 3–7% support (Stebelsky 2018). Without direct Russian support transforming protests into armed rebellion, pro-Russian separatists could not have taken power and created the DNR and LNR Russian proxy states.

The 2014 *Novorossiya* (New Russia) project and 2015 threat of Russia creating a land bridge from the Russian border east of Mariupol to Odesa, would have been impossible because of miniscule support in Kherson and Mykolyiv supporting the intervention of Russian troops. Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) do not provide answers as to why the *Novorossiya* project was an abysmal failure, presumably because to delve into this matter would undermine their “monist” versus “pluralism” framework. A low of 12–13% in Luhansk

and Donetsk, and eight in Kharkiv supported Russia's military intervention (Giuliano 2018). With such low support, Russian forces in the Donbas could be classified as occupation troops because they do not have popular local consent to be present in this territory.

The conflict as a “civil war”

Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018, 2) describe the conflict as a “civil war” and a leaderless, bottom-up revolt with local roots. Describing the Donbas conflict as a “civil war” is closely correlated to three factors. First, denial or downplaying of Russia's military involvement. Second, claims that Russian speakers were oppressed or threatened with Ukrainianization. Third, focusing on Ukraine's regional divisions. All three claims are either not backed up by evidence or exaggerated by not placing the subject within a comparative context. For example, Ukraine is a country where 92% identify themselves as ethnic Ukrainian making it more nationally homogenous than the Russian Federation, Canada, UK, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia which all have regional and separatist threats. France, the quintessential centralized nation-state, granted autonomy to Corsica after a violent rebellion.

To emphasize a bottom-up revolt, Matveeva (2018) writes the Donbas elite were not interested in rebellion. Nevertheless, these elites did not support Kyiv either and their neutrality provided a vacuum and window of opportunity for separatists and their Russian backers to step into. In Luhansk, there is evidence that Party of Regions parliamentary faction leader Oleksandr Yefremov supported Russia's proxies. Between January and April, oligarch Rinat Akhmetov was playing both sides and only after the Donbas had slipped out from his control, did he shift to a pro-Ukrainian position. If Akhmetov had mobilized workers and coalminers against the rebels they would have been probably defeated. In Mariupol in May 2014, Akhmetov brought his workers on the streets and they, together with the Azov battalion, defeated pro-Russian proxies. It is wrong to give credence to rebel claims Mariupol was within their hands as there was limited local support; one reason being because the local Greek minority did not harbor fond memories after three waves of deportations by Joseph Stalin's USSR.¹¹ In Kharkiv, Mayor Hennadiy Kernes shifted to a pro-Ukrainian position after discussions with Dnipropetrovsk (Dnipro) oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky and following the assassination attempt upon him in late April 2014.

The Crimea and Donbas are different in that Ukrainians were willing to fight for the Donbas but not for the Crimea, which undermines the exaggerated view of the influence of Ukrainian nationalism. If there indeed was a “surge of ethno-nationalism” (Matveeva 2018, 65) in Ukraine, why did Ukrainian nationalists not travel to the Crimea to fight Russian occupation forces? Sakwa (2017) blames Ukrainian nationalists, while Matveeva (2018) ascribes moral equivalence upon Ukrainian and Russian activists on 2 May 2014 Odesa clashes that led to the

deaths of 52 activists. Extensive evidence from Odesa journalists and civil society NGO's, as well as video footage (in most cases ignored by Western scholars), shows the first violence as the shooting and killing of pro-Ukrainian activists which, not surprisingly, then spiraled out of control (Kuzio 2017a, 334).¹²

Matveeva (2018, 2) is one of a small number of scholars who correctly describes the conflict as one between civilizations, and she emphasizes allegiance to the *Russkiy Mir* in what she defines as "politicized identity." Scholars writing about identity in the Euromaidan have also talked about "civilization choices" (Surzhko-Harned and Turkina 2018, 108). "Ethnicity is a poor marker in Ukraine, and loyalty and identity are weakly correlated with it" (Matveeva 2018, 25). From 2006, Putin began to talk of Russia as the center of a Eurasian civilization with superior values and distinct to the EU. The EU began to be portrayed as a harmful actor (Foxall 2018), three years before the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership and four years before the creation of the CIS Customs Union.

Civilization, rather than language, is a better marker of loyalty in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Nevertheless, Matveeva's (2018) discussion of civilization is confusing as she wrongly defines it in civic terms as corresponding to *Rossiyskie* citizens of the Russian Federation. Tolz (1998a, 1998b) and other Western scholars have long noted that civic identity is weak in the Russian Federation. The *Russkiy Mir* is in fact a claim to an alleged common *Russkiy* ethno-cultural, religious and historical identity of the three eastern Slavs – and therefore ethno-cultural and not civic. These three eastern Slavs are allegedly one Russian (*Russkiy*) people.

Russia is a "state-civilization" and Russia is re-collecting "Russian" lands that are part of the *Russkiy Mir*. Taking their cue, leaders of the Russian Spring talk of an "artificially divided Russian people" (Matveeva 2018, 221). In both cases, they are saying Ukraine is a "Russian land" and Ukrainians are a branch of the "Russian" people. Ukraine as the origin of "Russian" civilization where Kyiv Rus adopted Christianity forging an ever-lasting unity of Russians and Ukrainians was clearly laid out in Putin's March 2014 speech to the State *Duma* and Federation Council welcoming Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation (Putin 2014). This historical framework of Russian statehood beginning in Kievan Russia (Kyiv Rus) and moving to Vladimir-Suzdal, Muscovy, Russian Empire, USSR and Russian Federation is commonly found in Western histories of Russia and mirroring that used in contemporary Russia.

Matveeva (2018) does not take her discussion of civilization to its logical conclusion of why Ukrainians were divided in their attitudes to the conflict. The first division was over whether their homeland was the USSR, with the *Russkiy Mir* as its contemporary incarnation, or Ukraine. In other words, did they feel themselves to be Soviet/Russian or Ukrainian patriots? The second division is over whether they look with nostalgia to the Soviet past or with hope to a European future. Russian speakers are therefore found on either side

of the Donbas conflict line as civil society volunteers, politicians and combatants.

The majority of Ukraine's Russian speakers have supported Kyiv in the crisis, 60% of Ukrainian troops are Russian speakers and the highest proportion of casualties of Ukrainian security forces are from Russian-speaking Eastern and Southern Ukraine (with Dnipropetrovsk by far the highest).¹³ Scholars writing from the perspective of "Russia the Victim" find it difficult to bring in Russian-speaking soldiers playing a prominent role in fighting for Ukraine as this completely undermines the "monist" versus "pluralism" myth.¹⁴

An important factor undermining claims of a "civil war" is the low level of importance Ukrainians ascribe to language issues. In fact, grievances over alleged discrimination against Russian speakers has always been low. In Donetsk and Luhansk, 9.4 and 12.7% respectively were anxious at the imposition of one language while 59% in Donetsk and 80% in Eastern and Southern Ukraine did not believe there was discrimination against Russian speakers (Giuliano 2018; Kulyk 2018a, 20). Exaggerated concern about threats to Russian speakers do not tally with only two percent of Ukrainians feeling concerned about the protection of the Russian language in Ukraine.¹⁵ As low as 5% of young Ukrainians had witnessed discrimination by language (Zarembko 2017, 19). Giuliano (2018, 170) writes that because no common Russian-language community existed, there was little support for *Novorossiia* and therefore Ukrainians, "failed to respond to attempts to politicize cultural and ethnolinguistic issues."

Matveeva (2018) follows Sakwa (2015, 2017) and other scholars in applying a nationalistic "monism" versus Eastern Ukrainian "pluralism" mythical framework to the conflict. Scholars who have analyzed the Party of Regions have never described them as supporters of "pluralism" but rather as monopolists and authoritarians, beginning in the Donbas up to 2004, spreading to Eastern and Southern Ukraine in 2005–2009 and attempting to spread a monopoly of power throughout Ukraine from 2010.

The Party of Regions was the main source of financing for the Ukrainian nationalist *Svoboda* (Freedom) party which took votes away from its competitors but did not threaten them in the Donbas or Russian-speaking Eastern and Southern Ukraine.¹⁶ The Party of Regions cannot be defined as "pluralists" if they financed ethnic nationalists and provided free air time for them on Ukraine's most popular television channel, Inter.

Describing pro-Russian proxies in the DNR-LNR and occupation forces in the Crimea as "pluralists" has no basis in facts on the ground and ignores extensive evidence from scholarly work and human rights organizations. Ignoring the denial of minority rights to Ukrainians, Russification, and repression of Ukrainian language and culture is similar to Western scholars writing about national minorities in the Russian Federation who traditionally ignore the second largest minority – Ukrainians (Prina 2016).

Three examples undermine the “monist” versus “pluralism” framework. First, nearly two-thirds of Ukrainian troops fighting in the Donbas are Russian speakers¹⁷ and the highest number of casualties of security forces are from Eastern and Southern Ukraine.¹⁸ Second, the largest church in Ukraine until the creation of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine in January 2019 was the Russian Orthodox while Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches are banned or severely repressed in the DNR-LNR and Crimea. Third, the Jewish community fled from Russian-controlled Donbas to Ukraine (Kuzio 2017a, 141–170). Ukraine’s Jews, who are primarily Russian-speaking, supported the Euromaidan and support Ukraine’s side in the war with Russia.

Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian minorities in the Crimea and DNR-LNR are repressed, their institutions are closed down (the Crimean Tatar Mejlis is banned) and many of their leaders have been forced to flee to Ukraine, imprisoned or exiled. Seventy Ukrainian political prisoners are imprisoned in Russia on trumped-up charges, including ethnic Russian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov from the Crimea who is close to death after a hunger strike. Sakwa (2015, 2017) ignores the plight of Crimean Tatars in both of his books. Russification has been re-introduced after the closing down of Ukrainian language schools. Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian media outlets have been closed down (Lukanov 2018).

Ukrainian history is no longer taught in the DNR-LNR or Crimea because it is described as “nationalist” (Matveeva 2018, 78). But, defining history as “nationalist” is always subjective. Ukrainian history writing (Subtelný 2009; Magocsi 2010; Plokhý 2015) has never denied the existence of a Russian people whereas Russian history (and western histories of Russia) routinely deny the existence of Ukrainians. Which history writing – Ukrainian or Russian – is, therefore truly “nationalist”?

Matveeva (2018, 197) over-focuses on Ukrainian portrayals of the “Other” without any commiserate discussion of the far more extensive Russian and Donbas rebel “Othering” of Ukrainians. Nationality policies in the DNR-LNR and Crimea drawing on decades of Ukrainophobia and Tatarophobia can be traced back to the 1930s and 1940s. Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) could analyze extensive examples of Russian chauvinism and Tatarophobia in *Krymskaya Pravda*, Crimea’s most popular newspaper. Hate language against Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars is propagated by the Crimean and DNR-LNR authorities and the language of enmity is unprecedented and aggressive.¹⁹ Yevhen Mahda (2018, 153) lists 21 books published in Russia from 2007–2014 which disparaged Ukraine and Ukrainians and warned of a pending war. The EU’s weekly *Disinformation Review* has found no sign of any reduction in Russian xenophobia and Ukrainianophobia²⁰ and reported ‘Almost five years into the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Kremlin’s use of the information weapon against Ukraine has not decreased; Ukraine still stands out as the most misrepresented country in pro-Kremlin media.’ An April 2018 Levada Center poll found Ukraine to be second only to the US in being perceived by Russians as a threat to Russia.²¹

Matveeva (2018) writes about the “politicization” of culture in Ukraine and the “banning” of Russian-language media. The first claim is not reflected in the weak importance of language issues discussed earlier while the second claim is not reflected in official policies. In the Crimea, the number of Tatar schools has been reduced from 16 to 7 while all Ukrainian schools have been closed²²; Ukraine’s government has not retaliated by closing down Russian-language schools.²³ If scholars were to look in any media kiosk in Ukraine, they would find many more Russian-language than Ukrainian-language newspapers and magazines. Freedom House found no “national intolerance” in Ukraine’s media environment and recorded improvement in media freedoms since 2014. Matveeva (2018, 53) wrongly claims President Yushchenko closed Russian language television broadcasts “with no Russian permitted until the 2012 language law was passed.” Ukraine’s most popular television channel Inter has always broadcast primarily in Russian, including under Presidents Yushchenko and Poroshenko, and, as discussed earlier, purposefully gave free air time to ethnic nationalists.

Matveeva’s (2018) discussion of de-communization does not provide an understanding of what lies behind the processes. De-Nazification was central to Germany’s democratization and Europeanization and de-Communization could be viewed in the same way in Ukraine. Four de-communization laws adopted in April 2015 continue Ukraine’s three-decade long de-Stalinization (Kuzio 2017b). The laws remove Soviet and Communist monuments, make Communist and Nazi symbols illegal (the reason the Communist Party was banned), and integrate Ukraine into World War II history by celebrating May 8 as the end of the war (rather than the Great Patriotic War [GPW] on May 9). One of the four laws honor Ukrainian nationalist partisans in the 1940s but at the same time exclude any military formations under Nazi control.²⁴ One of the laws provides the freest access to Soviet secret police archives anywhere in the former USSR outside the three Baltic states. A large number of Western scholars have worked in these archives. The above could be contrasted with Russia with its GPW as a state-sanctioned religion, a cult of Stalin, downplaying of Soviet crimes against humanity, and lack of access to archives. Russian policies of re-Sovietization and a cult of Stalin have been exported to the DNR-LNR and Crimea.

Matveeva (2018) takes at face value the symbols that the Donbas rebels and Russian supporters are promoting when she writes that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) stands at the center of their identity. The majority of ROC (until 2018 registered as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church) parishes are in Western and Central Ukraine with the Donbas having far fewer Orthodox parishes – as seen in the few Churches found in villages. Although Matveeva (2018) writes that Protestants were mainly to be found in western Ukraine, Protestant denominations represented half of the religious parishes in the Donbas until 2013 because they had been able to expand in a region where organized religion

had been weak. Four Protestant leaders were murdered by Russian occupation forces in Slovyansk. “The rebel movement richly drew upon the Russian Orthodox signifiers” (Matveeva 2018, 202) only because it was imported from Russia and was made the monopoly state Church after all Ukrainian religious denominations were repressed.

Downplaying Russian and exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism

Downplaying the influence of Russian nationalism in the USSR and contemporary Russia has long had many Western adherents (Gessen 2017). Sakwa (2017, 159) writes “the genie of Russian nationalism was firmly back in the bottle” and distances Putin the pragmatist from Russian nationalists. Pål Kolstø (2016) and Laruelle (2017) write that the nationalist rhetoric of 2014 was novel and subsequently declined. Hale (2016) believes Putin was only a nationalist in 2014, not prior to the annexation of the Crimea or since 2015.

In fact, marginalized nationalism became mainstream nationalism in Russia in the 2000s when the “emergence of a virulent nationalist opposition movement took the mainstream hostage” (Clover 2016, 287). In downplaying nationalism in Russia’s political system, scholars ignore the hyper-nationalism underpinning Russia’s authoritarian political system, including in the United Russia party, as well as nationalist party projects that receive state support, such as the LDPR (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) and *Rodina* (Motherland).

Nevertheless, Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) have difficulty in finding any nationalists in Russia where they only see “militarized patriotism” (Sakwa 2017, 119) or elites divided into “Westerners” and “patriots” (Matveeva 2018, 277). Their same inability to find nationalists is found in their published work on the DNR-LNR. Meanwhile, after Putin’s 2012 re-election he is speaking “Russian identity discourse” (Sakwa 2017, 189) while his “conservative values” are allegedly not the same as a nationalist agenda (Sakwa 2017, 125). Putin was not dependent upon Russian nationalism “and it is debatable whether the word is even applicable to him,” Sakwa (2017, 125) writes. Such classifications are only applied by these scholars to Russian political elites but never to Ukrainians.

Matveeva’s (2018) interviews with leaders of the Russian Spring in the Donbas are an original contribution to the scholarly literature. At the same time, she sidesteps their political affiliations because to do so would show that Russian neo-Nazi’s and other similar extremists led the Donbas Russian Spring. Toal (2017, 252) writes that many Donbas and Crimean Russian proxies were “genuine neo-Nazis.” Matveeva (2018) makes no mention of the presence of the neo-Nazi RNE (Russian National Unity) party although there are ample photographs of their military activities in eastern Ukraine (Shekhovtsov 2014).

Matveeva (2018, 224) disagrees with Laruelle’s (2016) excellent analysis of Russian supporters of the Russian Spring as an alliance of “White” Tsarist

Monarchist, “Brown” fascist and “Red” Soviet politicians. At the same time, Matveeva (2018, 97) writes that volunteers from Russia consisted of “nationalists, monarchists, spiritual heirs of ‘White Russia,’ ultra-leftists, National Bolsheviks and Communists.” (2018).

Pavel Gubarev, Donetsk “People’s Governor” in spring 2014, is one of Matveeva’s (2018, 182) sources of information, and she describes him as one of the “uprisings original ideologues.” Alexander Borodai and Alexander Prokhanov edited the fascist, Stalinist and imperialist newspaper *Zavtra* (Tomorrow), which began as *Den* (The Day) in 1990. Borodai is quoted by Matveeva (2018, 218) as saying Russian leaders provided the “organizational, ideological” support to the Russian Spring. Similar to Sakwa (2017)’s denial of Putin’s conservatism as not equating to nationalism, Borodai is described by Matveeva (2018, 95) as a “Russian conservative thinker.” Gubarev’s and Borodai’s membership of the neo-Nazi RNE is ignored (Shekhovtsov 2014) and instead they are described as “patriots” and “conservatives” while Matveeva (2018: 221, 223) denies that Borodai is an ethnic nationalist. Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) never describe any Russian political leaders as “nationalists” or “neo-Nazis;” these terms are reserved for Ukrainians.

In the Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, who was installed by Russian occupation forces as Crimean Prime Minister, was the leader of the extreme right-wing nationalist Russian Unity party. Similar to other Russian nationalists and Cossack groups in a region which has always had high levels of xenophobia, Aksyonov’s political party espoused an extreme form of Russian chauvinism toward Tatar and Ukrainian minorities. Russian nationalists and communists, the Party of Regions and Communist Party of Ukraine have long upheld Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s claim of “Nazi collaboration” to justify the ethnic cleansing of Crimean Tatars in 1944.

Sakwa (2017) undertakes academic somersaults to downplay Russia’s support for populist-nationalists and neo-Nazi’s in Europe. Russia’s European allies are described as “anti-systemic forces,” “radical left,” “movements of the far right,” “European populists,” “traditional sovereigntists, peaceniks, anti-imperialists, critics of globalization,” “populists of left and right,” and “values coalition” (Sakwa 2017, 275, 276, 60,75). Russian support for fascists, neo-Nazis, Trotskyists, Stalinists, and racists in Europe and the US is ignored (Shekhovtsov 2018) as is the hundreds of European populist nationalists and neo-Nazis who have flocked to join pro-Russian rebels.²⁵

Downplaying nationalism in Russia is coupled with an exaggeration of nationalism in Ukraine. President Poroshenko does not promote or cite works by Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera, who is often accused of fascist sympathies, and does not recommend them to his governors and presidential staff. This is unlike Putin who enjoys reading works by Ivan Ilyin, a White émigré and fascist who denied the existence of Ukrainians. President Putin cites him in his speeches and recommends his governors, senior adviser Vladyslav Surkov and Prime Minister Medvedev to read Ilyin’s published

work. One wonders what would be the reaction if Poroshenko cited Bandera and put him forward as recommended reading to his staff? Bandera continues to be buried in Munich, Germany while Ilyin's remains were brought back by the Russian government and re-buried in Russia. Timothy Snyder (2018) writes that Ilyin was integrated into Putin's ideology during his re-election campaign in 2012 and Ilyin's chauvinistic views have guided Putin's policies towards Ukraine.

It is Ukraine, not Russia, that allegedly is the only country in Europe with "militant nationalist rhetoric" (Sakwa 2017, 155) and where "militant nationalist views" are "incorporated into official discourse" (Sakwa 2017, 127). Such claims depict Ukraine as the negative "Other" by purposefully ignoring many examples of populist nationalists in European countries; for example, Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban and using a Soviet definition of 'nationalism' to include anybody who does not desire to live in the *Russkiy Mir*. "Ukrainian nationalists" are understood by Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) in the Soviet and contemporary Russian sense as a broader group opposed to Soviet, Russian and Eurasian values and believing their country to be part of Europe.[i] The term "bourgeois nationalist" in the USSR was applied by the Communist Party and KGB to any Ukrainian holding national communist, liberal or nationalistic views. Communist Party of Ukraine First Secretary Petro Shelest was deposed in 1971 and accused of "nationalism."

If Ukrainian nationalists are understood in the same way as populist-nationalists in Europe, they are unpopular among voters as seen by their failure to be elected in October 2014. Ukraine's far-right has only won seats in one of seven elections in 2012. If "Ukrainian nationalists" are understood in the Soviet and contemporary Russian sense as a broader group opposed to Soviet, Russian and Eurasian values and believing their country to be part of Europe, which is how they are analyzed by Sakwa (2017), Matveeva (2018) and many other scholars, they represent a larger group.²⁶ This though, is a product of a quarter of a century of evolutionary nation-building and four years of rapid identity change brought on by Russian military aggression. As discussed earlier, different Ukrainian attitudes to Russian citizens and Russian leaders exhibit patriotism – not ethnic nationalism. To understand how wrong scholars are exaggerating the influence of Ukrainian nationalism, one should compare Ukrainian attitudes to Russian leaders with those to Russian citizens. Negative Ukrainian attitudes to Russian citizens is far lower at 22.4%, up slightly from 16.6. A majority of Ukrainians continue to hold positive views of Russian citizens in all regions – including in western Ukraine (Kermch 2017).

Downplaying Russian and exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism leads to the apportioning of blame on Kyiv for the violent conflict. President Poroshenko is blamed for unleashing a war after he was elected in May 2014 rather than seeking compromise. Just as the West is blamed for democracy promotion, NATO and EU enlargement leading to the crisis, so too are Ukrainian leaders

blamed for fighting rather than negotiating. In such an analysis, Putin presumably shares no, or little, responsibility.

Sakwa (2017) and Matveeva (2018) both use derogatory terms for Ukrainian nationalists. Matveeva (2018, 200) wrongly writes Nazi symbols were commonplace on the Euromaidan when in fact only one then small group, the Social National Assembly/Patriot Ukraine who transformed into the National Corps party, used them. *Svoboda* party and *Pravyi Sektor* (Right Sector), two more mainstream nationalist parties, have never used Nazi symbols. All of these nationalist political parties are electorally unpopular because patriotism – not ethnic nationalism – is dominant in Ukraine.

When Western scholars, such as Sakwa (2015, 2017) and Matveeva (2018, 2018), use the Soviet and contemporary Russian non-political science definition of “nationalism” they will see it as dominating post-Euromaidan Ukraine where Russia is rejected. If “nationalism” is defined in the political science understanding of that term it is a weak phenomenon in Ukraine as reflected in one of the weakest electoral results of nationalist parties anywhere in Europe.

Conclusion

This review article has discussed how Western scholars of the former USSR need to get up to speed with the rapid changes taking place in Ukrainian–Russian relations, within Ukraine and in Ukrainian identity. Western scholars have yet to take on board the dramatic changes that these developments will bring to post-Soviet and Eurasian studies; perhaps Russian studies are thriving in other areas but scholarly work on the Russia–Ukraine crisis and war has been poor and at times Putin-centric (Frye 2017; Kuzio 2018a). Ukraine no longer has a “pro-Russian east” and no Russian “superminority” while two-thirds of Ukrainians no longer believe, or never did, that Russians and Ukrainians are “brothers” (Kulchytskyy and Mishchenko 2018, 192).

The “last anti-Soviet revolution” (Zhuk 2014) encompassing both the Euromaidan and subsequent de-communization and Ukraine’s European integration, “destroyed the traditionally accepted Moscow-centered and Russian-focused (in fact, Russian imperialist) approaches to an analysis of recent political, social, cultural and economic developments in the post-Soviet space” (Zhuk 2014, 207). It is time for Western historians of Russia to write histories of the nation-state in the manner of histories of France, Britain and Italy – and not as is common until now, of the Russian Empire masquerading as the Russian state. Historians of Russia should modernize their approach to the Crimea so that it is integrated with historical writing about other post-colonial countries. Old stereotypes need to be abandoned, fieldwork research needs to be undertaken (here Matveeva [2018] can be commended), primary

sources from Ukraine need to be used and greater balance observed between both sides of the conflict.

Matveeva (2018) is unfortunately right not to be optimistic about an end to the Donbas conflict. Kyiv will never accept Russia's three demands of acceptance of the loss of the Crimea, granting autonomy ("special status") to the Donbas and maintaining close ties to Russia and Ukrainian membership of the Eurasian Economic Union or neutrality (Matveeva 2018, 287). These three demands are unacceptable to all Ukrainian politicians, except the Opposition Bloc (former Party of Regions) which is unelectable because sixteen percent of voters who traditionally voted for pro-Russian forces live in Russian-occupied areas (D'Anieri 2019). Federalism has always had minimal popular support, including in the Donbas.

But, the main barrier to peace is Russia's inability to recognize Ukrainian sovereignty and Ukrainians as a separate people. And it is this fundamental question that continues to elude most scholars writing on the crisis and war, including in the two books under review.

Notes

1. Euromaidan Revolution; (2) Russia as the Victim; (3) Russia in Geopolitical Competition; (4) Russia the Troublemaker; (5) Russia as the Aggressor; (6) Domestic Russia; (7) External Russia; (8) Ukraine: War, National Minorities, Regionalism; (9) The Donbas and Eastern Ukraine.
2. *Novoye Vremya* (Ukraine's most popular political weekly), *Korrespondent*, and *Fokus. Krayina* and *Ukraynsky Tyzhden* are published in Ukrainian.
3. Matveeva's (2018) figure of thousands of Ukrainian dead at Ilovaysk is exaggerated. The official figures are 286 dead, 429 wounded and 300 taken prisoner (eight of whom remain in captivity). https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=127&v=gPiBENV6dfc.
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ani2YWDLXl0&feature=youtu.be&app=desktop>.
5. <https://twitter.com/specrepukraine/status/1028739476074450945?s=12>.
6. http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/otnoshenie_ukraincev_k_mirovym_lideram_yanvar_2016.html.
7. *Razumkov Center Newsletter*, 51 (February 2018). http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/newsletter/Newsletter_51.pdf.
8. Extensive polling data on identity can be found in *Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona*, 3–4 and 7–8, 2016 and 1–2, 2017: http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD161-162_2016_ukr.pdf; http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD165-166_2016_ukr.pdf and http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD169-170_2017_ukr.pdf.
9. http://old.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/files/category_journal/NSD104_ukr.pdf.
10. "Perspektyvy AR Krym: Status Rehionu," *Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona*, 10, 2008: 19. http://old.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/files/category_journal/NSD104_ukr.pdf.
11. Interviews conducted in April 2015 in Mariupol with Mariya Podybaylo and Vadym Dzhuvaha of the *Novyy Mariupol* (New Mariupol) NGO and Olena Mokrynychuk, *Soldatska Pochta* (Soldiers Post) NGO in Volnovakha.

12. Neither Sakwa (2017) or Matveeva (2018) cite the objective “The Odesa Tragedy: Bloody Trail of Russian Spring” documentary made by the Odesa-based May 2 NGO. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qDtDZlg3nY>.
13. See the statistics and map of casualties by regions at: <http://memorybook.org.ua/indexfile/statistic.htm>.
14. A Russian-speaking Ukrainian soldier says that he has served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and he could not believe that something similar could happen to Ukraine. He is disinterested in politics and nationalist movements and he just wants to defend his home and his family from foreign aggressors. Ukraine may have its problems, but it is the responsibility of Ukrainians to resolve them – not Putin. The soldier believes if Putin and Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov would take over Ukraine, his children would not have a decent life or any future, which is why he is fighting for his children and their future. “Obrashcheniye ukrayinskogo soldata k rossiyanam,” 16 December 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOXFIRdijr8>.
15. <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/2608701-sociologists-reveal-what-worries-ukrainians-the-most.html>.
16. The American Institute of Ukraine, which promoted a pro-Russian perspective, published two papers by James G. Jatras criticizing the Party of Regions for financing *Svoboda*: “A Kind of ‘Freedom’ Ukraine Doesn’t Need” (12 March 2011), <http://www.aminuk.org/index.php?idmenu=12&idsubmenu=213&language=en>; and “May 9 Lesson from Lviv: Svoboda a Ukraine’s Democracy, Not a Card to be Played for Political Advantage” (20 May 2011). <http://www.aminuk.org/index.php?idmenu=12&idsubmenu=229&language=en>.
16. <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/3497931-poroshenko-bilshist-tykh-khto-vouie-za-ukrainu-na-donbasi-rosiiskomovni>.
18. <http://memorybook.org.ua/indexfile/statistic.htm>.
19. The Crimean media vilifies Crimean Tatars as “jihadists,” “Russophobes,” “karateli” and “radical Islamicists” and Euromaidan supporters as “anti-Semites” and “followers of Bandera.” Ukrainians are vilified as “Banderites,” “peasant people and khokhly,” “Little Russians,” “Galician Nazi’s,” “Nazi karateli units,” “Western puppets,” “followers of Hitler,” “nationalist extremists,” “UkrNazis,” “ultranationalists,” “Russophobes,” and “fascists.” Aleksandr Burmagin, Iryna Sedova, Tetiana Pechonchuk, and Olha Skrypnyk, *Yazyk vrazhdyi v informationom prostranstve Kryma, Informatsionno-Analytycheskyy Doklad*, March 14–17 July 2018. <https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Hate-book-RU.pdf>.
20. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>.
21. <https://www.levada.ru/2018/06/14/druzya-i-vragi-rossii-3/>.
22. <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-iz-16-krymskotatrskih-shkol-v-krymu-ostallos-7/29456110.html>.
23. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/08/29/7190538/>.
24. The law “On the legal status and honouring of the memory of fighters for independence of Ukraine in the 20th century” lists the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) alongside many other organizations as fighters for Ukrainian independence. The Galicia Division (one of 40 Waffen SS divisions) and other units controlled by the Nazis are not honored in the law. <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/314-19>.
25. <https://www.rferl.org/a/italy-moves-to-crack-down-on-its-fighters-in-ukraine-s-don-bas/29437946.html>.
26. The term “bourgeois nationalist” in the USSR was applied by the Communist Part and KGB to any Ukrainian holding national communist, liberal or nationalistic views.

Communist Party of Ukraine First Secretary Petro Shelest was deposed in 1971 and accused of “nationalism.”

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