

Revolution and War in Contemporary Ukraine: The Challenge of Change. Ed. Olga Bertelsen. Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Societies, no. 161. Ibidem: Stuttgart, 2017. 430 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Figures. \$50.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.41

Ukrainian-Russian relations today are extremely tense, indeed, one of the most politicized topics researchers can embark upon. As Igor Torbakov writes in a thoughtful chapter in this volume, the war in eastern Ukraine is fought not only with military means, it is also “a war of narratives” (89). While certain elements of the Russian discourse, such as the need to “make Russia a great empire again,” have no counterpart in Ukraine, some of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko’s storylines, Torbakov points out, mirror Vladimir Putin’s narrative. A study of the perceptions and language on both sides that inform and change collective identities, as this book is presented as doing, is therefore most welcome. Strangely, however, several of the authors do not so much give us *analyses* of the war of narratives as they engage in it as active combatants, on the Ukrainian side. In my view, Russia’s actions in Ukraine after 2014 should be clearly condemned, but intellectuals must make a decision whether they want to write an academic text or a political pamphlet—two legitimate but distinct endeavors. In that regard, this book is a hybrid.

Iurii Sherbak, a veteran Ukrainian politician and political commentator, maintains that Moscow has been for centuries disseminating a “poisonous narrative” among the “subjugated Ukrainians” about an alleged special relational link between the Russians and Ukrainians (75). Today, Russia acts as an arrogant imperial and “racist force” in a war which outsiders may regard as local, but which in the future may well be seen as the beginning of the Third World War (71 and 76). Sherbak finds the ultimate causes behind the war not in the realm of politics, but in incompatible ethnic identities: millions of Ukrainian citizens in the east and the south, he claims, are “not rooted in the Ukrainian soil, and were poisoned by the Russian-Soviet propaganda . . . They *hate* and *disrespect* the Ukrainian state” (74). George O. Liber regards ethnic differences in themselves as a cause of conflict, and sees the contrast between an overwhelmingly Russian urban environment and the Ukrainian-speaking countryside in Ukraine as “a social and political tinderbox” (45).

Myroslav Shkandrij presents Putin’s Russia as an aggressive, “quasi-fascist state” in which propagandists of Russian fascism such as Aleksandr Dugin and Aleksandr Barkashov allegedly are “influential” (131, 133). This characterization would probably surprise Barkashov and tickle Dugin’s self-esteem. At the same time, Shkandrij dismisses out of hand Russian accusations that elements among the Maidan defenders were sympathetic towards fascist ideas. He acknowledges that many Ukrainians have accepted the label “Banderite” for themselves and adopted the slogan “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!” used by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army which collaborated with the Nazi-Germans during World War II but this, he explains, is done “as an act of defiance, a way of throwing the challenge back at Putin” (130). Not all readers will be convinced.

A very different understanding of Ukrainian-Russian relations is presented by Laada Bilaniuk in her chapter on “Ideologies of Language in Wartime,” in my view the best contribution to the book. She dismisses any notion of linguistic-political determinism and points out that many defenders of Ukrainian independence are themselves Russian-speakers. She acknowledges that cases of linguistic conversion—in which Russian speakers in Ukraine consciously switch to Ukrainian as an act of patriotism—do occur, but deplores this phenomenon: conversion, she explains, “reinforces an essentialization of ethnolinguistic identity—the idea that true or good Ukrainians should speak Ukrainian, and that Russian speakers are not true patriots” (148).

Even if Russia is not referred to in the book's title, several authors nevertheless write more about Russian politics than about Ukraine. The longest chapter is devoted to an analysis of Russian hegemony in the Black Sea basin through the lens of the Russian "Third Rome" ideology. Together with the co-author, the book's editor, Dale A. Bertelsen, maintains that this medieval idea still "greatly influences Russian self-identity and Russian nationalism" today, and can be used as a framework not only to assess but also to "anticipate" Russian foreign policy (236–37). They argue that Russia is currently engaged in a scheme to encircle the Black Sea basin and fulfill an age long Russian geopolitical dream: gain control of the Turkish Straits. They interpret the serious but short-lived quarrel between Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2016 in this light: the lack of a contagious landmass makes it difficult for Russia to invade Turkey and gain control of the Straits, but "recent provocations may provide just such an excuse" (237). As far as I can see the book was published after Russian-Turkish relations had already been patched up again.

Several of the chapters towards the end of the book address more specific aspects of Ukrainian politics and society, and by avoiding grand interpretations they can present more balanced analyses. Tamara Hundorova discusses the Euromaidan as social and cultural performance and Nedim Useinov gives a useful recapitulation of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Andrij Kravchuk, an expert on the Ukrainian religious scene, presents reactions to the current turmoil among three smaller religious communities—Muslims, Jews, and Baptists. Peter Tanchak takes us into the war-room of Russian informational warfare—disinformation and trolling. The two last chapters in the book are valuable introductions into two topics not directly related to the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation: political corruption (Oksana Huss) and police reform in Ukraine (Bohdan Harasymiw).

In her epilogue, Olga Bertelsen wraps up the book by maintaining that Russian propaganda plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and western scholarship on the war in Ukraine: "Words and notions often migrate unchanged from the Russian mass media to scholarly works" (385). This volume is intended as a counterweight to this alleged tendency. Even if it is often regarded as a useful strategy to fight "fire with fire," I am not sure whether the authors accomplish their objective.

PÅL KOLSTØ
University of Oslo

Educating the Hungarian Roma. Nongovernmental Organizations and Minority Rights. By Andria D. Timmer. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017. xxxvii, 163 pp. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. \$80.00, hard bound.
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Andria Timmer's volume is a persuasive and rich-in-detail account of the hindrances and shortcomings of the modus operandi of educational Roma NGOs and organizations that work with Roma in Hungary. The approach is problem-centered and critical, sometimes offering unequivocal hints on approaches NGOs should take in order to have an effective impact on the larger society, to loosen constraints and to avoid the perverting effects of their actions.

Chapter 1 raises the fundamental question of who is a Rom (and who should be considered Roma) and which issues (besides identity politics) currently define not only academic discourses, but also everyday practices of project development and implementation. See, for example, Eben Friedman & Victor A. Friedman, eds.,