
Historians at War: History, Politics and Memory in Ukraine

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The on-going military conflict in eastern Ukraine has revitalised historical discussion and history battles in the country rendering history more relevant than ever before. Since 2014 different sides in the conflict have used historical references, specifically to the Second World War, to validate their actions. Moscow most notably claimed to be protecting the population of eastern Ukraine from Ukrainian ‘fascists’: the story of a three-year Russian boy allegedly crucified by Ukrainian nationalists on Russian state television was enhanced by references to atrocities that Ukrainian nationalists allegedly perpetrated during the Second World War.¹ It is not, of course, the first time a regime has used history as a justification for military aggression or territorial annexation. Across Europe in the twentieth century, history has been used to defend political goals, and politics has been used to write history. The bellicose politicisation of history became the norm in Ukraine in 2014.

Against this background, in 2015 a group of Ukrainian historians headed by Kyrylo Halushko, the Kyiv-based historian affiliated with Ukraine’s Academy of Sciences and author of several scholarly and popular books, launched a new project, ‘Likbez: History without Censorship’.² Likbez is Halushko’s response to the current conflict and his contribution to Ukraine’s efforts in the field of historical propaganda. ‘Historical Front’ is an alternative name for the project, and both titles reflect its mission. Likbez in particular refers to the Soviet campaign to erase illiteracy in the early twentieth century. Halushko recontextualised Likbez for twenty-first century Ukraine to combat historical illiteracy. Over the course of 2015 and 2016 the team published ten volumes covering the history of Ukrainian territories from the Middle Ages to the mid-twentieth century. Even though the quality of texts

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¹ The story about a crucified Russian boy: https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-07-12/37175-bezhenka_iz_slavyanska_vspominaet_kak_pri_ney_kaznili_malenkogo_syna_i_zhenu_opolchentsa; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgfkWExDrUQ>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TVV5atZoQk>; <http://polit.ru/news/2014/12/22/crucified/> (last viewed 7 Jan. 2017).

² <http://likbez.org.ua/ua/> On Halushko: <http://likbez.org.ua/ua/author/kigal> (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017).

varies, the project itself is an enormous undertaking for the historical profession in Ukraine.

What is remarkable is not just the number of publications but the mobilisation of scholars around a common cause during one of the most severe crises in the country's recent history. As a leading Ukrainian historian of the younger generation, Halushko mobilised a cohort of scholars from across the country who work on different aspects of Ukrainian history. Most of them, like Halushko himself, held positions in Ukrainian academic institutions, universities or research centres.³ Even though most authors represent Kyiv-based institutions, some come from other parts of Ukraine. All volumes except for one are co-authored. The project is designed as a cooperative, and the authors' names only appear at the beginning of each volume; the reader does not know who authored specific chapters. All texts target a broader audience in an effort to address gaps in historical knowledge and memory.

Likbez started as a volunteer initiative – one of many to emerge in Ukraine between 2014 and 2015 during the remarkable awakening of Ukraine's civil society. The project expanded and transformed with time; the publication and the presentation of the books were made possible by a range of partners. The Kharkiv-based non-academic publisher 'Family Leisure Club' issued thousands of copies of each volume. Other partners have provided logistical and material support: the Council on National Unity at Ukraine's Presidential Administration, Ukraine's Institute of National Memory, a non-government project 'Informational Resistance' and several others. As the project expanded authors were offered honoraria for publications. All books are distributed throughout Ukraine, including at book stores, research institutions and libraries in large cities as well as small localities. Aligned with its mission of popularising history, the team has also carried out dozens of lectures, presentations and book talks across Ukraine. Blog entries and short articles on the project's website supplement the larger texts, and some of them address old and new controversies as they make their way into political debates.

The purpose of the project defined its approach, methodology and impact. The series is organised thematically, but the discussion progresses chronologically. All texts are based on secondary materials – monographs and articles – some of them published previously by members of the Likbez team themselves. The standard academic requirements are non-applicable here: footnotes are non-existent, and bibliographical references are rare. The major value of the collection is not in providing innovative approaches and interpretations but in the cumulative presentation of the existing research on the history of Ukrainian territories over the long run. As such, Likbez offers a first major review of Ukrainian history and historiography in nearly a century.

³ Scholars contributing to the project work (and some teach) at Ukraine's National Pedagogical Institute in Kyiv, Institute of History at Ukraine Academy of Sciences, Kyiv; Institute of National Memory, I. I. Mechnikov National University, Odessa; Institute of Historical Urbanism at Ukraine Academy of Sciences, Kyiv, Institute of History and Philosophy, Cherkasy.

Likbez and Ukrainian Historiography

The immensity of the project should be seen against the backdrop of the overall state of Ukrainian academia. The absence of professional standards has affected the quantity and quality of historical research. Historians in Ukraine are neither required nor encouraged to publish monographs. Even though the number of publications itself is not insignificant, many of them are of questionable quality: Ukraine has no peer-review requirements to vet publications before they go to print.⁴ Additionally, the educational and academic systems define a choice of subject areas to study: language training is of poor quality in Ukraine, and research funding is practically non-existent. Ukrainian historians, almost without exceptions, produce histories related to Ukraine. These histories moreover often reveal a national bias: while focusing on Ukrainians and writing a national history, scholars give little or no voice to those groups who once had a large presence on the lands of today's Ukraine, notably, the Poles and the Jews.

The predominance of national narratives is also a product of Ukraine's historical past. National history was stifled by the seventy years of Soviet rule. With its focus on unity among different peoples, the Soviet regime rendered any expressions of nationality dangerous professionally and personally. Pre-Soviet national histories were consigned to oblivion and their authors, if still alive, subjected to persecution. Unlike their colleagues in the West, Ukrainian scholars produced no major narratives of Ukraine's national history during the Soviet era. It was only after 1991 that Ukrainians got a chance to explore national history, and national historians from the pre-Soviet period again became relevant.

Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi has been a dominant figure in Ukrainian national historiography. Back in the 1900s, living in Kyiv, at a time part of the Russian Empire, and then in L'viv – part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – Hrushevskyyi published his major work, a ten-volume history of Ukraine-Rus.⁵ In it, he constructed a new narrative of Ukrainian history that emphasised the continuity of Ukrainian statehood from the Middle Ages to the modern era, arguing most notably that Ukrainian statehood preceded Russian statehood. In 1931 Hrushevskyyi was tried for alleged participation in national conspiracies. He confessed and was released within a year, but died shortly thereafter, in 1934. His works were banned under communism.⁶ After independence, however, Hrushevskyyi's works were reprinted in several editions. By rescuing Hrushevskyyi from oblivion after 1991, Ukrainians took a leap back in

⁴ One exception to this rule is the periodical *Ukraina Moderna*, which runs peer reviews for select publications: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D0%Bo_%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%Bo (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017).

⁵ Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi, *Istoria Ukrainy-Rusy*. 10 vols. (Kyiv-L'viv: 1905–1936).

⁶ An English translation was published in Canada: Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi, *History of Ukraine-Rus*. 12 vols. (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1997–). On Hrushevskyyi see Serhii Plokhyy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

history. Hrushevskiy's narrative was a typical example of history written for a stateless people, with its focus on national history, that was prevalent across Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. National histories, however, came under scrutiny in the West in the 1990s. Just when Western academia moved away from nation-oriented narratives, Ukrainian historical scholarship moved in the exact opposite direction – towards, not away, from the nation.⁷ Likbez is one example: a century after Hrushevskiy's publication, the project is driven by some of the same motives – to counteract Russian narratives in scholarship and propaganda.

At the same time Likbez is an important step in shifting norms for the craft of history in Ukraine. Some (but not all) texts address national stereotypes and introduce the readers to the unknown aspects of the history of Ukraine. The series also time reveals historiographical imbalances: a shift away from national paradigms has been taking place in research on earlier periods; but recent history, specifically the twentieth century, remains immune to change.

Ukrainian Statehood: Continuity and Ruptures

The Likbez collection begins with a volume on maps and national symbols. Both became relevant in the wake of the 2014 military conflict.⁸ For many in Russia, much of Ukraine is still Malorossia (Little Russia) or Novorossia (New Russia): both terms were used to define Ukrainian provinces under the Russian Empire between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. The terminology lived beyond 1918: in the Soviet Union, Ukrainians became 'little brothers' to the Russians.⁹ Novorossia and Malorossia became political categories in 2014, employed by Russian state propaganda to define territories in Ukraine.¹⁰ Understanding history should help us make sense of the current crisis, write Likbez's authors.¹¹

By analysing European and Russian maps, the first volume in the series traces changes in territorial definitions of the lands of today's Ukraine. One issue of contention, with political consequences, is the name and the legacy of 'Rus'. The name first appeared on maps during the Middle Ages with references to Kyivan Rus'

⁷ On a shift beyond nation in Western historiography see Tara Zahra, 'Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis', *Slavic Review* 69 (Spring 2010): 93–119; Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans. A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole. Catholicism and National Indifference in Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁸ Kyrylo Halushko et al., *Narodzhennia kraïiny. Vid kraïu do derzhavy. Nazva, symbolika, terytoriia i kordony Ukraïny* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016).

⁹ On ethnic hierarchies see Andreas Kappeler, 'Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly: Ukrainians in the Ethnic Hierarchy of the Russian Empire', in Andreas Kappeler, Zenon E. Kohut, Frank E. Sysyn and Mark von Hagen, eds., *Culture, Nation, and Identity. The Ukrainian-Russian Encounter (1600–1945)*, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2003), 162–81.

¹⁰ On Novorossia in Russian political and historical discourse see <http://novorus.info/news/history/> (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017). Recent works on Malorossia and Ukrainians as Malorussians include D.A. Beziiev, *Ukraïna i Rech Pospolitaia v pervoi polovine XVII v.* (Moscow: Prometei, 2012), specifically 92–119.

¹¹ Halushko et al. *Narodzhennia kraïiny*, 1.

– a proto-Slavic state centred around Kyiv. When it disintegrated in the thirteenth century, three different variants of Rus' appeared on maps: one centred around the Carpathian regions in today's Ukraine, another one around Novgorod in today's Russia and yet another one around Moscow, also in Russia. Rus' becomes a derivative for Russia. Territories around Kyiv eventually became known as Ukraine.

The name 'Ukraine' emerged after Rus'. It was introduced on European maps by the French geographer, Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan, in the mid-seventeenth century, meaning quite literally the 'frontier'.¹² Before the middle of the eighteenth century Ukraine and Rus' were used as synonyms, both referring to the same territorial entity, while Russia was a different area. In the late-eighteenth century, Rus'/Ukraine was annexed to the Russian Empire and became known as Malorossia. Ukraine and Malorossia were different entities; the former emerged earlier than the latter.¹³ By reconstructing the evolution of names across centuries, this Likbez volume seeks to deconstruct Russia's claims to Ukraine's present territory or parts of it.

The volume *Ancient Ukraine: Rus' and the Origins of Ukrainians* similarly attempts to integrate contemporary and historical questions and develop the discussion of territory and its nomenclature. In particular, it discusses Kyivan Rus' including territories from today's Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Poland. Its history has been at the forefront of the current political debates. 'You all know of the Russian Anna, a Queen of France, a younger daughter of our great Prince Yaroslav the Wise', commented President Putin in his speech in France in late May 2017, with reference to historical ties between Russia and France.¹⁴ Putin's claims reflect the dominant view in Russian historiography – dating back to the nineteenth century – that Rus' was the beginning of Russian statehood; Soviet scholars identified it as the cradle of different Slavic peoples; Ukrainian national historians have defined it as the beginning of Ukrainian statehood instead.¹⁵ Likbez draws attention to omissions in Russian interpretations of Kyivan Rus'. Notably, Prince Yaroslav and his daughter Anna influenced European politics from Kyiv at a time when Russian cities either

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ The most recent Likbez publication on Ukraine and Malorossia is Kyrylo Halushko, 'Ukraina i Malorossia – tse odne i tezh same?' <http://likbez.org.ua/ua/ukraine-and-little-russia-are-one-and-the-same.html> (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017).

¹⁴ Story in English: <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/princess-discord-anna-kyiv-and-her-influence-medieval-france> <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/30/politics/ukraine-russia-twitter-fight-simpsons-gif/index.html>; <http://www.stopfake.org/istoriya-na-sluzhbe-rossijskoj-politiki-kak-anna-yaroslavna-stala-rossijskoj-knyazhnoj/>; <http://politikus.ru/articles/95188-anne-de-russie-anna-yaroslavna-russkaya.html>; <https://www.obozrevatel.com/society/46502-v-hod-poshli-simpsonyi-i-sherlok-ukraina-i-rossiya-vzorvali-set-sporom-ob-anne-yaroslavne.htm> <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2893602> (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017).

¹⁵ For the classics of Russian historiography from the nineteenth century, see Vasilii Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*. 5 vols. (St.-Petersburg: 1904–1922). Recent works on Kyivan Rus' as the beginning of Russian statehood include Yurii Denisov, *Istoriia russkoi zemli ot Avarskoi do Mongolskoi imperii* (Moscow: Finta, 2016); Igor' Froianov, ed., *Lektsii po russkoi istorii: Kievskaiia Rus'* (St.-Petersburg: Russkaia kollektsiia, 2015). The Soviet classic on Kyivan Rus' is Boris Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1944). Essential reading on the beginning of Ukrainian statehood includes Hrushevskiy, *Istoria Ukrainy-Rusy*.

did not exist or where marginal compared to Kyiv.¹⁶ Russian principalities were peripheral during centuries of Rus's existence. Even though Rus became a derivative for Russia, they are different terms that refer to different territorial entities, explain Likbez's authors.

The volume also addresses some of the myths in Ukrainian narratives of Kyivan Rus'. Discussion of Prince Volodymyr (980–1015) serves as a symbolic example for the volume's broader efforts to rethink national myths. Volodymyr, who (allegedly) brought Christianity to Ukraine, held a prominent place in the Ukrainian pantheon of national heroes. However, Christianisation, explain the authors, was a brutal process, and it birthed an even more violent era after Volodymyr's death, when different members of the same family started dividing territories. For decades Ukrainian historians explained the disintegration of Kyivan Rus' as a result of Mongol invasion in the 1240s. Likbez draws attention to the history of violence caused by Ukrainian political infighting – a lesson that is especially relevant today.

The volume *Rus' after Rus'* focuses on different principalities that emerged after the collapse of Kyivan Rus'. Older histories point out that the Halych-Volynia principality, overlapping more or less with today's western Ukraine, not only continued to exist after the fall of Kyivan Rus' but also became the cradle of Ukrainian statehood through the next century. In reality, the period after the collapse of Kyivan Rus' was one of the most international of all in the history of Ukrainian lands argue Likbez's authors. Hungarian princes ruled over the Halych-Volhynia principality during part of the thirteenth century; another ruling dynasty with roots in Kyiv maintained strong ties to the Kingdom of Poland. All notables were educated in the Latin West-European Catholic tradition. Earlier Ukrainian and Soviet historiography underplayed those moments, denying heterogeneity and emphasising Ukrainian aspects instead. By contrast, the Likbez initiative draws attention to the country's distinctly multinational character.

The Halych-Volhynia principality marked an end of an era in what Ukrainian national historians describe as the history of Ukrainian statehood. The principality disintegrated in the fourteenth century, and its territories became divided between the Kingdom of Poland and the Lithuanian Principality. The two concluded a union in 1569 in the form of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that controlled a large part of the territories of today's Ukraine.

The name 'Ukraine' first appeared on European maps during the time when its territories belonged to Poland-Lithuania at the same time that the term 'Ukrainian Cossacks' began to be used, the emergence of both being contingent upon one another. 'Ukraine' referred to the frontier regions between Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ Starting from the mid-sixteenth century, those territories became

¹⁶ For a discussion of Queen Anna in Likbez, see Mykhailo Videiko et al., *Tini zhadanykh predkiv. Vid sklavyntiv do rusyniv. Pradavnia Ukraina, Rus' i pohodzhennia ukrainciv* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016), 308–10; on Yaroslav and his place in Ukrainian and Russian historiography, see *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁷ Halushko et al., *Vid kraiu do derzhavy*, 57–8.

home to Ukrainian Cossacks. Initially formed as volunteer seasonal paramilitary formations designed to protect Poland–Lithuania’s south-eastern frontiers, they eventually evolved into a permanent self-governing institution with a degree of autonomy from the Polish government. The Cossack areas became the heartland of today’s Ukraine. In the twenty-first century, they yet again serve as the borderland, this time between Ukraine and Russia.

The Likbez volume *Princes and Hetmans of All Ukraine* addresses the Cossack period as one of the consecutive phases in the history of Ukrainian statehood starting with Kyivan Rus’. The focus of the volume is upon the Cossack ‘revolution’ in the seventeenth century, when during their clashes with the Polish government over issues of autonomy, the Cossacks turned to Russia for support.¹⁸ In 1654 their leader, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, concluded the Pereyaslav agreement with the Russian tsar. Khmelnytsky’s successors, according to the Likbez authors, soon realised that Ukrainian and Russian interests did not overlap and rose up in revolt against the Russians.¹⁹ The Russians, however, maintained and eventually expanded their control over Cossack territories.

Cossack history is another controversial domain in the Ukrainian and Russian historiography covered by Likbez. For Russian and Soviet historians, the Pereyaslav agreements symbolise the reunification of Russian and Ukrainian territories that formerly belonged to one Rus’. Presenting Pereyaslav as proof of historical friendship between two brotherly peoples, Russian historians have also stressed the Russian role in liberation of Ukrainians from Polish oppression.²⁰ The liberation rhetoric became common in Russian state propaganda in 2014. Ukrainian national historians have a different interpretation of Pereyaslav and post-Pereyaslav developments. They applaud the Cossacks’ attempt to break with Poland–Lithuania²¹ but point to the subsequent violent absorption of Ukrainian territories by Russia.²² What Russian historians see

¹⁸ Viktor Horobec’, *Kniazii i het’many usiiei Ukrainy. ‘Cherez shabliu maiem pravo’. Zlety i padinnia kozac’koi derzhavy 1648–1783 rokiv* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016), 1–8.

¹⁹ Horobec’, *Kniazii i het’many usiiei Ukrainy*, 147.

²⁰ For the thesis about re-unification see K.A. Kochegarov, *Russkoie pravitelstvo i semia ukrainskogo getmana Ivana Samoilovicha v 1681–1687* (Moscow: Institut Slavianovedenia, 2012), 3; A.C. Almazov, *Politicheskii portret ukrainskogo getmana Ivana Samoilovicha v kontekste russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii, 1672–1687* (Moscow: 2012), 7. An old Soviet account in celebration of unity: *Vossoiedinenie Ukrainy s Rossiei, 1654–1954. Sbornik stattei* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1954).

²¹ Some examples of scholarship on the Cossack Ukrainian state include Valerii Smolii, ed., *Ukrains’ka derzhava druhoii polovyny XVII–XVIII st: polityka, suspil’stvo, kul’tura* (Kyiv: Instytut Ukrainoznavstva Ukrainy, 2014); Yuri Fihurnyi, *Ukrains’ke etnoderzhavonatsiïetvorennia (XV–XVIII st.) v ukrainoznavchomu vymiri* (Kyiv: 2014); Taras Chukhlib, *Kozats’kyi het’manat. Problemy miznarodnoho utverzhennia* (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2007).

²² An English-language monograph on the ‘making of the Cossack myth: Serhii Plokhly, *The Cossack Myth. History and Nationhood in the Ages of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

An English language account is Zenon Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s–1830s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Recent Ukrainian works with a similar argument include Viktor Brekhunencko, *Moskov’s’ka ekspansii i Pereiaslavs’ka rada 1654 roku* (Kyiv: 2005); Taras Chukhlib, *Sekrety ukrains’koho polivasylytetu. Khmel’nytskyi-Doroshenko-Mazepa* (Kyiv: Vydavnychiy dim “Kyievo-Mohylians’ka academia, 2011).

as liberation, their Ukrainian counterparts consider as violent intervention. Similarly irreconcilable views shape the conflict between Russia and Ukraine today.

The Likbez volume on Cossack history at the same time reflects the current state of Ukrainian historiography. The scholarship on the Cossacks is vast and growing. Yet most questions are old. With some exceptions, discussion is limited to political history; too many works replicate one another without adding anything to the debate. New works on social history are few.²³ It is fair to say that methodologically research on the Cossacks in Ukraine has not progressed much since the publication of the monumental history of the Cossacks by Volodymyr Yavornyc'kyi more than century ago.²⁴ His works have become classics in today's Ukraine.

These four volumes nevertheless raise issues that are critically important today. Western scholarship on Ukraine and Eastern Europe too often takes the Second World War as a reference point for present day politics; earlier periods are overlooked. Likbez demonstrates that Kyivan Rus', post-Rus' and the Cossack eras are still relevant in the twenty-first century. Disputes over the legacy of Kyivan Rus', and the resurgence of the concept of 'Malorosia', all took place concurrently with the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. Even though these and similar history battles are not new, their escalation, as a cause or a result of a war, makes history – both recent and more remote – more alive than ever before.

A Multinational Ukraine

Aligned with the main mission of the project are two other volumes that address the history of Crimea and the imperial legacy in Ukraine. Both topics became relevant in 2014. The history of Crimea and the history of continental Ukraine are two different fields in historiography that rarely overlap, but they are nevertheless interrelated. In 1954 the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev marked the 300th anniversary of the Pereyaslav agreement by granting Soviet Ukraine control over Crimea – a peninsula that had been earlier administered from Moscow. When Ukraine gained independence it retained Crimea. In 2014 Russia annexed it after a staged referendum.

The mainstream Russian narrative presents Crimea as a Russian territory, drawing attention to its historical legacy as part of Russia from 1783 to 1954.²⁵ Likbez offers an alternative reading of history: Russian claims to Crimea underplay centuries

²³ Some examples of novel and interesting social history of early modern Ukraine that do not necessarily focus on the Cossacks include Natalia Yakovenko, *Dzerkala identychnosti. Doslidzhennia z istorii idei v Ukraini XVI–XVII. st.* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2002); Natalia Starchenko, *Chest', krov i rytoryka. Konflikt u shliahets'komu seredovyskhi Volyni. Druha polovyna XVI–XVII stolittia* (Kyiv: Laurus, 2014).

²⁴ Yavornyc'kyi works were published in the Russian Empire in Russian. They have been translated into Ukrainian and reprinted in several editions after 1991. The original publication is Vladimir Yavornitskii, *Istoria zaporozhskikh kozakov*. 3 vols. (St-Petersburg: 1892–1895).

²⁵ Examples of recent works on 'Russian Crimea' include Valerii Chudinov, *Russkii Krym i Russkoie more: tysiacheletniaia istoria* (Moscow: Tradicia, 2015); Nikolai Starikov, *Rossia, Krym, istoria* (Moscow: Piter, 2015); Sergei Cherniakhovskii, *Vershina Kryma: Krym v russkoi istorii i krymskaia samoidentifikacia Rosii* (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2015); D. Volodikhin, ed., *Rossia i Krym: 1000 let vmeste. Sbornik stattei*

of its history outside of Russia and the fact that Tatars are only autochthonous populations of the peninsula.²⁶ Some cities allegedly ‘founded’ by the Russians, in fact existed before Crimea’s annexation by the Russian Empire. Moreover, the Likbez authors contend, Russification of Crimea was a violent process, both during the annexation in the eighteenth century and in the twentieth century, when in 1944 Stalin expelled all Crimean Tatars on charge of collaboration with the Nazis. Tensions between the Tatars and the Russians escalated again in 2014 when the Tatars, who had since returned to their homeland, protested against Crimea’s annexation to Russia.

Imperial History

Russia expanded its control over Ukrainian territories in the late eighteenth century. During the three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during that period Russia annexed the so-called ‘Left-Wing Ukraine’ – territories east of the Dnieper River (today’s eastern Ukraine), while Austria took Galicia and part of Volhynia (today’s western Ukraine). For the duration of the next century the region remained divided between Russia and Austria.

The volume titled *At the Claws of Two-Headed Eagles* addresses this imperial legacy.²⁷ Specifically, the authors explain the historical reasons for regional differences in today’s Ukraine. By bringing different empires in to one narrative, Likbez opens a new page in Ukrainian historiography. Until now, the two parts of Ukraine appeared separately, as did the two empires that controlled them for over a century. This volume at the same time reveals imbalances within Ukrainian historical scholarship. Analysis of Russia is more sophisticated than the overview of the Austrian Empire. In their discussion of Galicia, the authors focus on Ukrainians, who formed less than half of the population of the province: with some exceptions, the Poles and the Jews, who had a large presence until the Second World War, have no voice in Ukrainian accounts.²⁸ The image of Galicia as a Ukrainian territory affects interpretations of the twentieth century: it is easy to forget that when Ukrainian nationalists tried to incorporate Galicia into a Ukrainian state – as they did between 1917 and 1921 and between 1939 and 1944 – they laid claims to an ethnically mixed territory where Ukrainians never formed more than 50 per cent of the entire population.

pamiaty akademika B.D. Grekova (Mosow: Rossiiskii institut strategicheskikh issledovani, 2015). All defined Crimea as a Russian territory.

²⁶ Olena Bachyns’ka et al., *Lycari dykoho polia. Pluhom i mushketom. Ukrainins’kyi shliakh do Chornoho moria* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016), 4.

²⁷ Andrii Halushka et al., *U kihtiakh dvohlavykh orliv. Tvorennia modernoi nacii. Ukraina pid skipterom Romanovykh i Habsburhiv* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016).

²⁸ Notable exceptions are works by Yaroslav Hrytsak. See for example his *Prorok u svoii vitchyzni. Ivan Franko ta ioho spil’nota* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2006).

Twentieth Century: Victims or Perpetrators?

A final group of studies in the Likbez initiative deal with Ukraine's twentieth century. *The Fight for Freedom* examines the First World War, the 1917 revolutions, the civil war and Ukrainian statehood after 1917.²⁹ Here, too, the focus is upon Russian-Ukrainian relations. Bolshevik rule in Ukraine, contend the authors, was imposed by military means, thus making it illegitimate. Yet the volume also shows how Ukrainians were partly responsible for the failure of independence: the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917–21) 'committed grave errors when defending the country from the Bolsheviks'; the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic was a rather dysfunctional unit, many of its members 'demoralized because of the revolutionary orders'.³⁰ The elites could not reach consensus even during the most critical moments. The message to contemporary audiences on the consequences of disunity in the face of violent aggression would not go unnoticed.

The study of Ukraine during the Second World War is particularly relevant to contemporary debates. References to Ukrainian fascists and their collaboration with the Nazis became instrumental in Russian propaganda in 2014.³¹ In *From Reichstag to Ivodzima: In the Flames of War*, the Likbez authors address some of the most sensitive issues of Ukrainian history: the Ukrainian underground movement and nationalism before and during the war, collaboration (or non-collaboration) with the Nazis and the Polish-Ukrainian conflict. While introducing these topics, they deny Ukrainians' responsibility. 'The notion of collaborationism', they argue, 'can only be applied to Ukrainians with reservations'.³² The Danes, the French, the Belgians and others who had states could be classified as collaborators, but Ukrainians were fighting for their independence from the Soviets. The absence of statehood and Polish and Soviet oppression are used here to justify Ukrainian nationalists' choices after 1939.³³

The volume also mentions the lesser-known Polish-Ukrainian conflict that occurred in 1943–1944, during which time tens of thousands of people, mostly Poles and many of them civilians, perished in Volhynia. Discussion here overlaps partly with the official narrative put forth by Ukraine's Institute of National Memory: that Ukrainians only responded to Polish provocations, and the Poles hold the lion's share of the blame for the mass casualties.³⁴ Specifically, the authors note

²⁹ Andrii Rukas et al. *Na bii za voliu. Peremoha cherez porazky. Ukraina u viinakh i revoliuciakh 1914–1921 rokiv* (Kharkiv: Klub simejnogo dozvillia, 2016).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37, 43.

³¹ Volodymyr Viatrovych et al. *Vid Reikhsstahu do Ivodzimy. U polum'ii viiny. Ukraina ta ukrainci u druhii svitovii* (Kharkiv: Klub simejnogo dozvillia, 2016).

³² *Ibid.*, 89.

³³ On collaboration, memories and responsibility see, for example, Olesya Khromeychuk, 'Undertermined' Ukrainians. *Post-War Narratives of the Wäfflen SS 'Galicia' Division* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013); John-Paul Himka, 'The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 53, 2,3,4 (June, Sept., Dec. 2011): 209–43.

³⁴ See Volodymyr Viatrovych, *Za lashtunkamy, 'Volyni-43'. Nevidoma pol'sko-ukrains'ka viina* (Kharkiv: Klub simejnogo dozvillia, 2016). An alternative and in my view more nuanced Ukrainian analysis is Ihor Iliushyn, *Protystoiannia v Zakhidnii Ukraini 1939–1945* (Kyiv: Vydavnychiy dim

that in the late 1920s and the 1930s, the Polish government shut down Ukrainian schools, crushed the local Ukrainian national movement and persecuted civilians. Ukrainian nationalists saw the outbreak of war in 1939 as an opportunity to achieve independence from Poland and the Soviet Union, and they acted accordingly.³⁵ The Ukrainian interpretation contributed to diplomatic tensions between Poland and Ukraine in the summer of 2016, with the right-wing government in Poland adopting a resolution that labelled the conflict a genocide against the Poles.³⁶

Sensitivity to narratives of blame and the complex of victimhood plagues Ukrainian historical scholarship.³⁷ Both are self-defeating. ‘There is no textual evidence that the Ukrainian national underground intended to carry a mass-scale extermination of Poles’ – insist the authors.³⁸ Such an argument is a sophism based upon flawed logic: the absence of documented instructions towards an act would have, in this case, implied the absence of an act itself.

Such lines of argumentation are also damaging to Ukrainians, in general, and Ukrainian historiography, in particular. They undermine the historical logic used to explain the most well-known example of Ukrainian suffering in the twentieth century, the famine of 1932–33. This aspect of Ukrainian history is covered in part of a Likbez volume that focuses on repression and politics in the early Soviet era.³⁹ In 1932 and 1933, between two and five million Ukrainians died in the famine. Historians, both in Ukraine and in the West, have argued that the Soviets intentionally let Ukrainians die.⁴⁰ Even though most of the Soviet Union experienced food shortages, Ukraine was hit particularly hard with punitive operations and food requisitions that

Kyievo-Mohylianska Akademia, 2009). One of the best, in my opinion, Polish accounts with balanced interpretations is Grzegorz Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji “Wiśla”. Konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011).

³⁵ There is a large body of literature on the Ukrainian nationalist movement between and during the wars. For some representative publications see Oleksandr Zaitsev, *Ukraińs’kyi integral’nyi nacjonalizm (1920–1930-ti roky). Narysy intelektual’noii istorii* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2013); Tarik Cyril Amar et al., *Strasti za Banderou: statti ta esse* (Kyiv: Hrani, 2010); Ivan Patryliak, *Peremoha abo smert’: ukraińs’kyi vyzvol’nyi rukh u 1939–1960 rr.* (L’viv: Chasopys, 2012).

³⁶ ‘Poland’s Parliament Declares Volyn Massacres “Genocide”, Ukraine Laments Move’: <http://www.rferl.org/a/poland-parliament-declares-volyn-massacres-/27874252.html> (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017).

One example of Polish nationalist interpretation that describes the Volhynia events as a ‘massacre’ is Ewa Siemaszko and Władysław Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludność polską Wołynia 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Von Borowiecki, 2000).

³⁷ On the politics of memory in Ukraine see, for example, Oxana Shevel, ‘The Politics of Memory in a Divided Society: A Comparison of Post-Franco Spain and Post-Soviet Ukraine’, *Slavic Review*, 70 1 (Spring 2011): 137–64.

³⁸ Viatrovykh et al., *Vid Reihstahu do Ivodzimy*, 177, 180.

³⁹ Henadii Iefymenko et al., *Ukraina radians’ka. Illuzii ta katastrofy ‘komunistychnoho raiu’ 1917–1938 roky* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016).

⁴⁰ On intentional famine in English see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012); Norman Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

resulted in mass death.⁴¹ The famine also had significant demographic consequences, which affect the ways that Russia and Ukraine conceive of eastern Ukraine today. Before 1932 the Donbas area in Eastern Ukraine, now partly controlled by the pro-Russian separatists, had one of the largest percentage of ethnic Ukrainians. Millions died in the famine. The Soviets then sent Russians to repopulate the region. By the second half of the century the Donbass had become one of the most Russified areas in the country. It is these people that Moscow claimed to defend from Ukrainian ‘fascists’ in 2014.

The fact of famine is not in itself disputed by Russians or Ukrainians. But the underlying causes are. If the famine was intentional, as many believe, then it should be called a genocide – and indeed, many historians in Ukraine, and some in the West, use this term.⁴² Russian scholars and political observers reject this interpretation, arguing that there is no evidence that Stalin targeted Ukraine in particular; the famine, the argument goes, was a common tragedy of all Soviet people.⁴³ The Ukrainian argument in favour of calling the famine genocide would be stronger if they applied the same standards of historical evidence to their analysis of the Polish–Ukrainian conflict. There was, after all, no documented Soviet instruction to kill Ukrainians en masse or destroy the nation.

Likbez’s several volumes on Ukraine’s recent history reflect the intersection of politics, history and propaganda. Yet a politically motivated history affects academic standards and the overall quality of scholarship. A defensive history can create new traps for historians by undermining the intellectual credentials of history and prioritising the political one, thereby making a propaganda-driven history into a norm. Likbez also reflects the existing academic standards of history in Ukraine: with no internal or outside peer reviews, the publications do little in the way of initiating a discussion of history and historiography among Ukrainian historians. By reproducing the knowledge that already exists without questioning its academic quality, the authors in a way legitimise the current state of scholarship and if only indirectly negate any need for change.

And yet the first ten books in the Likbez initiative were an incredible feat. The project brought together more than two dozen historians to write ten books in less than two years and sold thousands of copies of each volume. No other country, to my knowledge, has carried out such a major review of its history on a similar scale over such a short span of time. Designed to debunk historical myths and propaganda, it should mark a new phase in historical discussion in Ukraine as well as create new

⁴¹ The literature in Ukrainian on the famine is too big to list here. For a general overview of history and historiography see Georgii Kasianov, *Danse Macabre: Holod 1932–1933 rokiv u polityci, masovii svidomosti ta istoriografii. Holod 1932–1933 (1980-ti – pochatok 2000-kih)* (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2010).

⁴² See for example: Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides*.

⁴³ For an overview of the argument see Oleh Nazarov, ‘O holode v SSSR i mife o holodomore’ *Istoriik*, Nov. 2015: http://xn--h1aagokeh.xn--p1ai/special_posts/%D0%BE-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5-%D0%B2-%D1%81%D1%81%D1%81%D1%80-%D0%B2-1930-%D0%B5-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%8B-%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%84%D0%B5-%D0%BE-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BE/ (last viewed 30 Oct. 2017).

professional standards in Ukrainian historiography. By covering over one thousand years, it also demonstrates the contingency of history, drawing our attention to events and processes from the Middle Ages and even earlier eras that affect memory, historiography and politics today.