

Review Essays



Children of Rus': From the Little Russian Idea to the Russian World

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Abstract

This is a review of a book that traces the rise of Russian nationalism in Russia's "south-western borderlands" during the long 19th century. What gave rise to it was the so-called "Little Russian idea" that emphasized the existence of the Russian Orthodox organic nation that had originated in the right bank of the Dnieper. The elements of that idea survived well into the 20th century.

Keywords

southwestern borderlands – the right bank – Little Russian idea – Little Russian lobby – Russian nationalism – radical populism – anti-Semitism – antiliberalism

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"What experience and history teach is this — that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it." These often quoted (and even more often misquoted)

words of German philosopher Hegel from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1832) are very much applicable to the current crisis in eastern Ukraine. This “crisis” itself is a misnomer as it is to a large degree caused by external actors and cannot be understood without acknowledging the role of Russia – its specific political legacy, historical ideology, and cultural imagination (aside from providing troops on the ground). These long-term factors have shaped a dangerous perception, shared by many in present-day Russia, of independent Ukraine as a historical curiosity, as a sham state that should not have come into being in the first place. Hegel’s pessimistic maxim can be addressed both to the Russian elites and to their Western counterparts that are currently forced to relive another esoteric one-liner: “Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it,” attributed to Edmund Burke. If only those who “know history” also knew how to learn proverbial lessons from it in order to avoid painful historical repetitions!

People draw the wrong lessons from history all the time and repeat it in most horrible ways. The following is a review of a timely and ambitious book written by Faith Hillis, a professor of Russian History at the University of Chicago who has attempted to trace a history of Russian xenophobic nationalism as it developed in what today is Right Bank Ukraine (the territories west of the Dnieper River). I would very much like that we all learn a few important lessons from her book. If only books could stop the wars!

In many ways, the larger story behind the book’s major argument is how natives of Ukraine – first clerics educated at Kyiv Mohyla College (later Academy), then secular academics and political activists – created the fundamentals of Russian political and historical ideology, starting from the late 17th century (suffice it to mention the figure of Teofan Prokopovych, Peter’s the Great right hand and creator of Russia’s earliest imperial ideology). By the mid-18th century around 50% of Russia’s new intellectual class came from what today is Ukraine (mainly from its central and northeastern parts). Just as Scots were partners of the English in building the British maritime empire, Ukrainians (known then primarily as Little Russians or Southern Russians) partnered with ethnic Russians (Great Russians) in building the Russian Empire.¹ In the meantime, the western half of Ukraine – the so-called Right Bank Ukraine (later known as the Southwestern Region for Russians) – was still under Polish domination until the late 18th century. In

1 Stephen Velychenko, “Empire Loyalty and Minority Nationalism in Great Britain and Imperial Russia, 1707–1914: Imperial Institutions, Law, and Nationality in Scotland and Ukraine,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, No 3 (July 1997), pp. 413–441.

1793 and 1795, during the second and third partitions of Poland, the region was annexed to the Russian Empire, under the pretext of the defense of the Orthodox believers and in the tradition of the gathering of the lands of Rus'. But even after the disappearance of Poland-Lithuania, Roman Catholic and Polish-speaking elites continued to rule in Russia's "Southwestern Region", in which peasants were Orthodox and Ukrainian-speaking, the urban traders mostly Jewish, and key political and police officials Orthodox "Russians" or Lutheran Germans.² Although situated geographically on the right bank of the Dnieper River, the city of Kyiv for more than a century was politically attached to Left Bank Ukraine, or the Hetmanate, a state of Ukrainian Cossacks who had pledged allegiance to the tsar of Muscovy in 1654. Only after Right Bank Ukraine or "Southwestern Region" was annexed to Russia, did Kyiv return to its natural hinterland. In many ways, however, the city remained the Russian imperial outpost in the *southwestern borderlands*, a politically sensitive zone of continuous tensions between the imperial government and Polish Catholic elites.

But could this borderland status of Kyiv sufficiently explain why the city and the three southwestern provinces – Kyiv, Volhynia, and Podolia – acquired such an immense importance for Russian political discourse until well into the 20th century? Partly this can be explained by the city's remote past – by the fact that it was the famed capital of Kyivan Rus' – the "mother of Rus' cities" (according to the Primary Chronicle) and the *first* capital of Russia, as the city was universally viewed at the time. Partly Kyiv's increasing prominence for Russian imperial public and the authorities alike could be explained by the city's numerous holy sites and its function as the spiritual center of the Orthodox Slavs. Some intellectuals, like the first rector of Kyiv's St. Vladimir University Mykhailo Maksymovych, mapped the "holy" city of Kyiv as Russia's *spiritual* capital, alongside Saint Petersburg (*political* capital) and Moscow (*national* capital).

It can be argued, however, that it was the presence of enemies such as Poles and Jews that led to the growing politicization of Kyiv's past and present. I have suggested elsewhere that throughout the entire 19th century Orthodox observers, both Russian and Ukrainian, continued to note menacing signs of a Polish Catholic presence in Kyiv, which only led to a search for other signs—those of the ancient and Orthodox (*non-Polish*) city dating back to medieval times, prior to its absorption by Poland. One can argue that if it had not been for the Poles,

2 On the complex interethnic and social situation in Right Bank Ukraine, see Daniel Beavois, *Le Noble Le Serf and Le Ravizor* (Paris, 1985).

Kyiv would not have been mapped as an ancient and holy Orthodox city.³ This politicization of the past perhaps best explained the continuous fixation of Russian elites on the city and the region, an attitude that can still be found these days in Russian cultural imagination and in the official political discourse. The prime expression of that centuries-old fixation today is the idea of the *Russkii mir* (Russian world) shared by wide segments of people in Russia but also by many in Ukraine, at least until the recent bloody events. According to the proponents of that idea (which has much in common with the “Little Russian idea,” a main subject of the reviewed book), Ukraine, especially the right bank of the Dnieper with the city of Kyiv, was the cradle of *Russia*, its religion and culture, and therefore the region’s connection with Russia should be restored by whatever means possible. Hence there has been a growing presence of the Russian Orthodox nationalists as fighters in eastern Ukraine, some of them sporting the emblems of the shadowy Russian Orthodox Army. The real goal of many of these Orthodox nationalists has been neither Donbas nor southeastern Ukraine but Kyiv itself, as a historical symbol of the *Russkii mir*. More importantly, the idea about Ukraine as a cradle of Russia was once widely shared by Ukraine’s own intellectuals, most of whom in the 19th century came to be based in Kyiv.⁴

Although Faith Hillis’s extraordinary book does not deal with the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict over eastern Ukraine, the author elucidates a number of timely issues pertaining to Russian nationalism and its historical links to Ukraine. More precisely the book’s main theme is how Right Bank Ukraine (or what she prefers to call the “southwestern borderlands” or simply the “right bank”) contributed to the formation of modern Russian nationalism that combined a strong xenophobia against region’s minorities (Jews, Poles, and later the proponents of a separate Ukrainian identity) with populism in its social agenda. According to the author, this combination of radical populism and an organic concept of nation characterized a unique *local* brand of Russian nationalism which eventually inspired (and also reshaped) Russian nationalist movement all over the empire. Populism seemed to have been a mainstay of the so-called “Little Russian idea” that “combined socially emancipatory ideas,

3 Serhiy Bilenyk, “Battle of Visions: How Was Kiev Seen in the 1780s–1840s?,” *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 13 (2005), 16–21, <http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/13/bilenky13.shtml>. Compare Bilenyk, “Inventing an Ancient City: How Literature, Ideology, and Archeology Refashioned Kyiv during the 1830s and 1840s,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* (forthcoming).

4 On the participation of ethnic Ukrainians in Russian culture see David Saunders, *The Ukrainian Impact on Russian Culture, 1750–1850* (Edmonton and Toronto, 1985) and Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Ma, 1992), pp. 189–275.

traditional defenses of Cossack corporate privileges, and a fierce loyalty to Orthodox traditions" (p. 44).

Right-wing populists' major concern since the 1860s was the introduction of rural self-government (*zemstvo*) in the southwest, a demand also supported by several governors-general but rejected by the cautious ministers concerned about Polish and Jewish influences in the region. So a major issue was how to limit the political and economic influence of the non-Orthodox in the southwest after *zemstvos* shall have been introduced there. As a possible solution, as some populists suggested (again backed by governors-general), was the division of the prospected *zemstvos* along ethnic and religious lines. On the eve of the elections to Russia's new State Duma in 1909 the demands of Kyiv-based Russian nationalists became even more radical, this time dangerously contradicting absolutist Russia's sacred cow – the estate system. Now these right-wing populists suggested that in order to further limit the influence of Polish landlords in the southwest Polish electors should be placed in a separate national curia, so that their electoral share did not exceed the overall share of Poles in each province (around 10%). Another proposal recommended a similar principle for the elective *zemstvos*, in which the representation of Orthodox peasants and clergy should be enhanced, while that of Catholic nobles limited.

This preference for peasants at the expense of their landlords would have seemed controversial for conservative monarchists everywhere else in the world but not in Kyiv where Russian nationalists rallied against landowners if the latter were Catholic Poles. Faith Hillis imaginatively calls all these proposals the efforts "to nationalize the region's governing institutions" and the Empire as a whole (p. 225). In her accurate view the various proponents of the Little Russian idea were first in the empire to have suggested bringing the nationality principle in the administrative and political practice of the borderlands. She particularly emphasizes the role of local activists in the imagining of the imperial society in national terms – as a "conglomeration of distinct and mutually exclusive national collectives" (p. 11). The book also convincingly shows how local patriots (among them figures often seen as key players in the Ukrainian national revival) "helped to invent a Russian nation" in an attempt to reinforce the integrity of the empire. In doing so the local Russian nationalists and right-wing populists could claim a few major successes: their organizations were the most numerous in the empire, and the Kyiv-based activists defined the empire's Russian nationalist scene, particularly after 1905.

Populists' most tangible success in local politics was the introduction of "nationalized" *zemstvos* in 1910–1911. Backed by Prime-Minister Petr Stolypin, the Russian nationalists introduced to the Duma the bill that established national curiae in six western provinces, also lowering economic qualification

for Orthodox voters. Countering opposition from liberals, Poles, and even conservative Octobrists, in mid-March 1911 Stolypin persuaded tsar Nicholas II to dismiss the Duma, so he could singlehandedly implement the western zemstvo bill over the heads of opposition deputies. Impressive were also electoral successes of right-wing populists from the southwest in the elections to the Fourth State Duma in 1912. Thanks to the introduction of national curiae in most districts of the southwestern borderlands, “the truly Russian” coalition came to dominate the popular vote in the region (pp. 255–257). Around the same time, Russian populists and nationalists also shaped much of Kyiv’s municipal politics through their large share among the city duma’s deputies. In addition, by 1911 the Kyiv club of Russian nationalists claimed 1,500 members, which allowed the author to call the club “the southwest’s most powerful political lobby” (p. 249).

Aside from populism and xenophobia, Hillis also insightfully points to another crucial element of the Little Russian idea – its major preoccupation with the historical role of the southwest and Kyiv in particular as *the* cradle of Russian Orthodox civilization. The city and the region were also a prime scene of primordial (and a still ongoing) struggle against Russia’s various enemies and the villainous exploiters of the local Orthodox folk. The Little Russian idea thus rested on the belief that “East Slavs from all walks of life belonged to a single nation defined by its historical, historical, and religious traditions; that the children of Rus’ needed help to defend their culture from external onslaughts; and that the struggle unfolding in the southwest between Orthodox believers and their putative enemies would determine the future of the East Slavs and the Russian Empire” (p. 72). What made this idea specifically *Little Russian* remains rather unclear from the author’s argument, but we can guess that it was the idea’s emphasis on the folk traditions of the right bank and a widely shared belief that the East Slavic (and by default Russian) civilization had originated in the southwestern borderlands. The author’s argument would benefit, however, from a slightly different terminology: “Little Russia” in majority of cases referred to Left Bank Ukraine (the former Cossack Hetmanate) divided into two imperial provinces – Chernihiv and Poltava. The term “Southern (or Southwestern) Rus’/Russia;” by contrast, had a much broader meaning and referred to all lands of present-day Ukraine. This latter term was specifically designed to unite various parts of Ukraine (including the formerly Polish right bank) with each other, while simultaneously linking them to both the legacy of Kyivan Rus’ and Great Russia.⁵ Hence, a more appropriate term

5 See Oleksii Tolochko, “Kyievo-rus’ka spadshchyna v istorychnii dumtsi Ukraïny pochatku XIX st.,” In V.F. Verstiuk, V.M. Horobets’, and O.P. Tolochko, *Ukraïns’ki proekty v Rosiïskii imperii* (Kyiv, 2004), pp. 279, 309.

would be the “Southern (Southwestern) Russian idea.” Another confusing term is a “historical East Slavic nation” (p. 99). We never get to learn what this mysterious term meant and how different it is from other historical metaphors, such as the “all-Russian nation,” a term used by Aleksei Miller in his influential study of Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms.⁶

Ideas often speak for themselves, but who were the lead characters in this drama of ideas? Hillis introduces an intriguing and diverse cast: most of them were intellectuals and professionals (academics, lawyers, journalists) – the products of modernity and an attendant social mobility in the post-1860s Russia. There were also social leftovers from the previous times – monks, priests, and peasants. What united them all was that they were contributors to a rising force of Russian Orthodox nationalism and self-proclaimed defenders of the Orthodox folk of the “southwestern borderlands.” All these varied characters appear in the book under the general (and a bit problematic) label of the “Little Russian lobby.” Initially it comprised Orthodox intellectuals based in Kyiv who claimed to have represented the Orthodox masses of the right bank and also defended them against their real and putative enemies – Roman Catholic landlords (“Poles”) and economic “parasites” (Jews). Among the leading members of the “lobby” was a close-knit group of monarchist intellectuals associated with Kyiv University and Kyiv Theological Academy – of both Ukrainian and Russian ethnic origins.

In many ways, Russian nationalism in Kyiv was a family affair. Several of these people, the author notes, were connected by familial relations, sometimes of questionable nature. For instance, Dmitrii Pikhno, a legal scholar and conservative journalist, inherited from Professor Vitalii Shulgin not only the editorship of the main mouthpiece of local conservatives – newspaper “Kievlianin,” but also his wife, just weeks after her husband’s death, and after she herself passed away several years later, Pikhno eloped with Shul’gin’s underage daughter (his own stepdaughter!). Another example was the Iuzefovich family. Mikhail Iuzefovich came from a noble Ukrainian family from the left bank but made his career as a Russian loyalist and monarchist in governmental institutions in Kyiv. A man of questionable integrity, he was a main opponent of the so-called Ukrainophiles, denouncing them to the authorities; he was also a driving force behind the Ems decree of 1876 that banned Ukrainian publications and much of Ukrainian public culture in the

6 On the term see Aleksei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the 19th Century* (Budapest, 2003), pp. 20–30. In his Russian works he uses the term *bol'shaia russkaia natsiia* (literally the “large Russian nation”). See also his *Imperiia Romanovskh i natsionalizm* (Moscow, 2006), pp. 87–91.

empire. His two sons – Boris and Vladimir – were also active in the “Little Russian lobby.” Particularly his son Boris, whose reputation was once tainted by a homosexual scandal, grew to become a leading anti-Semitic and anti-Polish voice in fin-de-siècle Kyiv. In 1907 he even accused prime minister Stolypin of serving the “Yid press” and Jewish revolutionaries (p. 208). Another similar example was the family of Golubevs (p. 234). Stepan Golubev was born in Great Russia but became an influential history professor at Kyiv Academy and University. In his numerous works on the history of the Orthodox Church in the southwest he castigated Catholic Poles and espoused moderately conservative views. But he was also rumored to have denounced a colleague for his use of Ukrainian in a private letter.⁷ His son Vladimir further radicalized his father’s Orthodox nationalism and became a prominent member of Kyiv Russian nationalist and chauvinistic groups – the Double-Headed Eagle and the Union of the Russian People. Usually sons of founding fathers of the “Little Russian lobby” turned out to be more “modern” Russian nationalists, with more overtly chauvinistic, anti-Polish, anti-Semitic, and anti-Ukrainian views.

The very term – the “Little Russian lobby” – is a bit imprecise, as the group (according to the author) at various times included people of diverse ethnic descents (Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, Greek, and perhaps even German) and opposing sociopolitical convictions (from populist Ukrainophiles to conservative monarchists to overt Russian nationalists and pogromniks). More importantly, however, Hillis traces the disintegration of that lobby into the two separate and increasingly mutually hostile camps – Russian nationalists on the right and Ukrainian nationalists on the left. On the eve of the 20th century both camps represented (or rather constructed) two different national identities, in the process erasing their common cultural legacy and their origins in the “Little Russian lobby” (which I would prefer to call the “Kyiv Orthodox lobby”).

Arguably, the most groundbreaking point of the book is about the longevity of that lobby and the persistence of personal links between the individuals who apparently adhered to the two hostile national visions – that of pro-Ukrainian activists (the so-called “Ukrainophiles”) and that of loyal “Little Russians,” later known as the “truly Russians.” The latter are the real focus of the book. But the borders between the two camps remained blurred for decades. For example, the already mentioned Mikhail Iuzefovich, a pillar of Little Russian ideology, used to patronize young Ukrainian intellectuals, among them Ukraine’s national poet Taras Shevchenko. However, after the persecution of the St. Cyril and Methodius Society in 1847 the figure of Iuzefovich was irreparably compromised

7 Oleksander Lotots'kyi, *Storinky Mynuloho* (Warsaw, 1932), Vol. 1, p. 127.

in the eyes of Ukrainian activists who justifiably suspected this servile tsarist bureaucrat of provocative role in the whole affair. But then, as Hillis informs her readers (p. 52), Iuzefovich's elder son Vladimir was on friendly terms with the next generation of pro-Ukrainian intellectuals, among them Mykhailo Drahomanov and Pavlo Zhytets'kyi, and together they worked in Sunday school movement, criticizing the attempts of Poles to "subordinate" the Orthodox peasants of the borderlands. In other words, the author proves that Ukrainian national activists ("Ukrainophiles") and "Little Russians" shared not only common origins but also retained common views on the history and the present sociopolitical circumstances of Eastern Slavs in the southwestern borderlands. It should be stressed, however, that the significant differences between the two camps became already apparent by 1860,⁸ a fact that the author seems to have disregarded, instead emphasizing their personal links and ideological similarities.

It is also hard to agree with the way the author treats diverse (and often ideologically opposing) figures that have been grouped together as "proponents of the Little Russian idea" and members of the "Little Russian lobby." What united Ukrainian Romantic nationalists such as Taras Shevchenko and Panteleimon Kulish with the Russian-born conservative journalist Vasiliï Shul'gin save for the fact that they happened to reside in Kyiv? People like Drahomanov and Iuzefovich might have participated in the same scholarly institution, but their identities and ideological preferences were mutually incompatible. The very term "Little Russian" can hardly be applicable to Ukrainophiles such as Volodymyr Antonovych, let alone to local peasants (and why not call the latter simply Ukrainian, the term many of them, especially those living in the middle Dnieper region, applied to themselves?).

Also, the author seems to have attributed the idea about Ukrainian separatism with its hostility toward Russia to *Galician* Ukrainians (pp. 73, 106–107), an assumption that reflected official Russian perceptions rather than historical reality. Of course, Galicia's Ukrainian activists (or "radicals" as they are referred

8 On page 99 Hillis ascribes the creation of rival camps "within Little Russian circles" to the developments following the 1876 Ems decree. However, the example of early Ukrainophiles pointed to a much earlier split within the group of Kyiv's Orthodox intellectuals. Volodymyr Antonovych, the leader of Kyiv Old Hromada that united Ukrainophiles, in 1881 presented a history of Ukrainian movement as separate from the so-called Little Russian lobby from the very beginning. He also attributed a growing conflict between the Ukrainophiles and the hostile Russian public to the early 1860s. See his article "The Views of the Ukrainophiles," in Serhiy Bilenky, ed. *Fashioning Modern Ukraine: Selected Writings of Mykola Kostomarov, Volodymyr Antonovych, and Mykhailo Drahomanov* (Edmonton-Toronto, 2013), pp. 255–265.

to in the book) enjoyed much more freedom to express their national ideas in Austrian public space, but those ideas were implanted there by Ukrainians from the Russian Empire (most notably by Volodymyr Antonovych and Mykhailo Drahomanov). Moreover, Antonovych was somewhat misrepresented in the book as a father of the “Little Russian idea” (pp. 221, 269). Although famous for his stance against Polish Catholic landlords in the southwest and overly cautious in his public pronouncements, he was by no means a loyal “Little Russian.” For example, his close associates knew that this ostensibly apolitical academic would side with Austria against Russia in case the war broke out between the two empires. Hence Antonovych brokered a political deal with Polish elites in Galicia, as a result of which his favorite disciple Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi landed a really nice job at Lviv University in 1894. While the author mentions this fact, she has not elaborated on Antonovych’s personal politics behind the deal.

But Hillis is definitely correct when she writes that it was Hrushevs’kyi who in the early 20th century attempted to rewrite the history of Ukrainian national movement by largely erasing the common origins and prolonged links with their “Little Russian” rivals. The latter, too, began to distance themselves from the Little Russian idea that used to emphasize the cultural peculiarities of the Orthodox population from the right bank. As the author shows, the more “Little Russians” transformed themselves into Russian nationalists (the so-called “truly Russians”), the fewer local peculiarities of the southwestern folk they were prepared to recognize. By 1913 a group of particularly ardent Russian nationalists even called Taras Shevchenko, a cultural icon for older Little Russians, “an agent of the Jews” (p. 266). Yet one element of the Little Russian idea – radical populism – was continuously shared by both Ukrainian nationalists on the left and Russian nationalists on the right, as they equally claimed to defend the common folk of the right bank against their exploiters (primarily Polish landlords). One unexpected example of how far reached the influence of the Little Russian idea was the figure of Ukrainian radical nationalist Dmytro Dontsov in the 1930s and the 1940s. Thanks to Hillis’s extraordinary insight we indeed see that Dontsov’s vision of nation as an organic unit, his aversion to liberalism, and his interest in violence against “aliens” all were rooted in the Little Russian idea and the pre-revolutionary Russian nationalism (p. 283).

Hillis also rightly mentions a few figures who navigated between the two (or even more) mutually hostile camps all their lives. For instance, historian and archeographer Orest Levyts’kyi was employed by the state-sponsored research institution – Kyiv Archeographic Commission, and still earlier he had been a student of Volodymyr Antonovych, a long-time leader of Kyiv’s Ukrainophiles. In 1918 Levyts’kyi became one of the first members of the Ukrainian Academy

of Sciences (UVAN) and then served as its second president in 1919–1922, already under Soviet regime. However, not long ago, in 1905, right after the infamous Jewish pogrom, an already elderly scholar now elected a deputy of Kyiv municipal дума, took part in what Faith Hillis has called a “coalition of antiliberal merchants and professionals” (p. 170). That coalition was overtly anti-Semitic and claimed to have represented the “truly Russian people,” urging them to continue their struggle against their Jewish and Polish oppressors. The author has also emphasized that despite Levyts’kyi’s earlier Ukrainophile sympathies, he remained very much a part of the “officially sanctioned Little Russian milieu” that flourished in Kyiv (p. 90). His fellow historian Mykola (Nikolai) Storozhenko was an even more controversial figure. A former member of Kyiv Old Hromada, a clandestine Ukrainophile club, an author of Ukrainian poems, and a friend of prominent Ukrainian writers, among them Panteleimon Kulish, in the beginning of the 20th century Storozhenko gradually moved to the right, taking part in the infamous antiliberal Russian nationalist coalition in Kyiv municipal дума. Storozhenko’s crowning achievement in this milieu became his status of a full member of the Kyiv Club of Russian Nationalists – an anti-Semitic and Russian chauvinist organization. Just like his friend Levyts’kyi, Storozhenko drifted back to Ukrainian circles only during the Ukrainian Revolution.

Faith Hillis has also very convincingly showed that the Russian government lacked any consistent strategy not only towards national and religious minorities but also towards Orthodox Russians themselves (pp. 255–256), an assumption supported by other research on nationalism in Russia’s western borderlands.⁹ Not only was it unclear who was “Russian,” but, more importantly, the central and local officials were not sure how (and if at all) to promote the interests of the local Orthodox people – especially if it entailed the restriction of sociopolitical privileges of Catholic landowners – a clear threat to Russia’s estate system. The author demonstrates how continuous efforts by right-wing populists to broaden the political rights of the western borderland’s Orthodox people at the expense of Catholic nobles were constantly thwarted by imperial authorities concerned with preserving Russia’s conservative social system.

9 See for example, Mikhail Dolbilov, “Russification and the Bureaucratic Mind in the Russian Empire’s Northwestern Region in the 1860s,” *Kritika*, vol. 5, no. 2, (2004), pp. 245–271; Darius Staliunas, “Did the Government Seek to Russify Lithuanians and Poles in the Northwest Territory after the Uprising of 1863–1864?,” *Kritika* 5, No 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 273–291; and Theodore Weeks, “Religion and Russification: Russian Language in the Catholic Churches of the ‘Northwest Provinces’ after 1863,” *Kritika* 2, No 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 87–111.

All in all Hillis's book is remarkably accurate when it comes to facts and factoids. I have encountered only a few factual mistakes. Most noticeable of them all was the incorrect information about Taras Shevchenko's punishment following the persecution of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood: the author forgot to mention that the poet was exiled as a private with the Russian military garrison near the Ural Mountains, instead informing us, incorrectly, about his "bureaucratic post in Saratov" (p. 46). Another example concerned the heavily Jewish village of Demiiivka, just south of Kyiv. Hillis writes that the village had been annexed by Kyiv city already by 1902 (p. 142, n.124), whereas in reality Demiiivka was added to the city only in 1918. There were also minor inaccuracies in the characterization of Kyiv municipal elections in the 1870s (p. 129). Again, a couple of factual mistakes and inaccuracies by no means tarnish Hillis's surprisingly accurate account.

The author's conclusion is hard to refute: the byproducts of the Little Russian idea, such as the antiliberal, mass-oriented, and organic nationalist movement that had taken shape still before 1914, remained remarkably adaptable in the "violent new world" of the 20th century. I should add that unfortunately the current century has so far proven even more suitable environment for the legacy of pre-revolutionary Russian nationalists. The today's concept of the "Russian world" combines Russian imperialism and Russian nationalism, two forces hardly compatible under the Old Regime. As a simulacrum for both empire and nation, the "Russian world" seems to be totally incompatible with the *separate* existence of the former southwestern borderlands, the legendary cradle of Russia, now a heartland of independent Ukraine. That explains why the stakes are so high in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. If Putin's Russia loses, then the "Russian world" and the surviving elements of the "Little Russian idea" will most likely be put to rest. Hopefully for good.