



Serhy YEKELCHYK

**A LONG GOODBYE:  
THE LEGACY OF SOVIET MARXISM IN  
POST-COMMUNIST UKRAINIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY\***

One of the common assumptions about history writing in the post-Soviet political space is that it is undergoing a long process of liberating itself from the legacy of Soviet dogmatism. In fact, as is also the case with other aspects of post-communist transition, the old traditions die hard and the interim results can be just as disappointing as the starting point. In this case, moreover, it appears that the Marxist methodological ghosts of the past ritualistically denounced in present-day Ukrainian historical works have much in common with the equally reductionist nation-centric theories of the present. In the meantime, the Marxist baby was thrown out with the Soviet bathwater, as much of traditional social history is now written descriptively, bereft of the

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sophisticated, if essentially Marxist, framework so characteristic of Western social history of the 1960s–1980s. The transition to the most recent Western historical methodology “after the linguistic turn” is thus encumbered in today’s Ukraine by missing the Marxist social-history link and proceeding instead from a nation-centric starting point that is still unwittingly Marxist in methodology but in denial of its Soviet lineage.

This article argues that Soviet-style historical methodology persists in contemporary Ukrainian historiography at the level of both terminology (itself reflecting historians’ understanding of causation) and the conceptual framework, in which the dominant grand narrative of the nation hinders the transition to modern microhistorical, regional-history, and cultural-history approaches. The reign of traditional national history has only recently been challenged from within the Ukrainian historical profession, and a serious debate about historical methodology has yet to unfold.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Bringing Back the Nation***

There are few signs of methodological self-awareness in the body of literature that was generated during the period of “revelations” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Of course, Soviet Ukrainian historians realized the inadequacy of their general theoretical and methodological premises, but it was easier to speak of overcoming Soviet dogmatism than to analyze its structures or offer a recipe for the future. In the July 1991 issue of *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal* (Ukrainian Historical Journal), which was published literally on the eve of the Soviet collapse, the director of the premier historical research institute in Ukraine, Yuri Kondufor, announced that “the majority of the institute’s researchers had managed to overcome (or was overcoming) vulgar sociologism, politicization, dogmatism, descriptiveness, simplification, and other shortcomings.”<sup>2</sup> However, this short and rather superficial reference to methodology came in the middle of a long interview devoted primarily to previously proscribed topics and the legacy of prerevolutionary Ukrainian historians. Likewise, the leading authority on the Soviet period, Stanislav Kulchytsky, focused, in his 1991 introduction to a new collection

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<sup>1</sup> See, most recently, H. V. Kasianov and O. P. Tolochko. *Natsionalni istorii ta suchasna istoriohrafia: vyklyky i nebezpeky pry napysanni novoi istorii Ukrainy // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. 2012. No. 6. Pp. 5-24; Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther (Eds.). *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*. Budapest, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Iu. Iu. Kondufor. *Sohodennia Instytutu istorii Ukrainy AN URSR // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. 1991. No. 7. P. 58.

of essays supposedly representing a break with Soviet models, on issues such as the famine of 1932–1933, the Terror, and the abolition of special-access library collections containing the works of prerevolutionary and diaspora historians. He did offer some excellent observations on where the theoretical frameworks of Soviet historical scholarship came from (namely, from the Stalin-approved 1938 *Short Course* on party history and later party documents).<sup>3</sup> The “vulgarized concepts” from the *Short Course* became “an obligatory matrix of all historical works.” Later, the “stillborn but obligatory concepts of the ‘complete and final victory of socialism,’ ‘developed socialism,’ ‘socialist way of life,’ [and] ‘Soviet people as a new historical entity’ led to primitivism in historical works.”<sup>4</sup>

However, like other historical writings of the time, even Kulchytsky’s subtle analysis reflected the ethos of “liberating” historical scholarship from external constraints that should have resulted, almost by default, in “a new picture of a historical process” that would be “stripped of the elements of totalitarian thinking heretofore imposed on historians ‘from above.’”<sup>5</sup> Yet, in the very next sentence, listed first among the new features of the projected survey, was the phrase “great attention devoted to the problems of the formation of Ukrainian statehood” – the very crux of the traditional national-history canon and a regression from the contemporary directions of Western historical scholarship.

As Ukrainian historians celebrated their liberation from totalitarian thinking, their colleague on the other side of the Atlantic, Orest Subtelny, cautioned them against the wholesale abandonment of Marxism. In his 1993 article on “The Current State of Ukrainian Historiography,” Subtelny suggested that it would be more productive “to concentrate instead on applying the Marxist approach more creatively.”<sup>6</sup> He thought that it would be possible for Soviet-trained Ukrainian historians to move into a mainstream Western field such as social history, in particular, labor history, urban and rural studies, and the history of women. Subtelny also expressed his unease with the mechanical replacement of one “correct” methodology with another

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<sup>3</sup> For the English edition of this Stalinist canonical text, see *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* / Ed. by a Commission of the Central Committee of the CPSU. New York, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> S. V. Kulchytskyi. *Istoriia Ukrainy: sproby novoho bachennia // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. 1991. No. 4. Pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* P. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Orest Subtelny. *The Current State of Ukrainian Historiography // Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. 1993. Vol. 18. No. 1-2. P. 42.

as Ukrainian historians were absorbing diaspora scholarship, “still dominated by the traditionalist ‘history from above.’”<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, it was the enormously popular Ukrainian edition of Subtelny’s own history of Ukraine that heralded the transition from class analysis to the story of the nation during the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> What most Ukrainian historians took from it was not the author’s attention to social processes or his overarching modernization paradigm, but the historical narrative’s recentering as the story of the nation-in-the-making. Instead of either recovering the creative side of Marxist methodology or adopting diaspora-style political history, established historians in Ukraine began constructing the new master narrative of the ethnic nation from the same pseudo-Marxist clichés they knew so well. The same issue of *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal* that featured another installment of Subtelny’s text also included, for example, Vitaly Sarbei’s article, “The Development and Consolidation of the Nation and the Growth of the National Movement in Ukraine in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century.” This historian argued that the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation was “closely connected with the gradual development of capitalist relations,” which strengthened “an objective trend toward the reunification of all Ukrainian lands.”<sup>9</sup> However, Sarbei still emphasized that the development of capitalism underlined the nation-building process “even before the consolidation of capitalist socioeconomic order,” because for him, as for all Soviet historians, capitalism in the Russian Empire formally began only in 1861.

Such periodization was reversed in the space of only a few years, with the nation triumphing over Marxist economic formations, at least on the surface. This process is well illustrated in Oleksandr Reient’s 1994 article on “Ukraine’s Proletariat and the Central Rada.” In making the point that the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century ushered in a new period of Ukrainian history, the author seeks to distance himself from Soviet historical scholarship’s definition of this period as “imperialism.” Instead, he employs the name proposed by the diaspora historian Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, “the modernist age,” and also claims that the influence of economic and social factors actually decreased during this period, which was marked first and foremost by advances in nation building. However, Reient’s topic is the working class, and therefore he needs somehow to bring it back into the picture now dominated by the nation. This is achieved by

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pp. 42 -43.

<sup>8</sup> Orest Subtelny. *Ukraine: A History*. Toronto, 1988, and Idem. *Istoriia Ukrainy*. Kyiv, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> V. H. Sarbei. *Stanovlennia i konsolidatsiia natsii ta pidnesennia natsionalnoho rukhu na Ukraini v druhii polovyni XIX st. // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. 1991. No. 5. P. 3.

stating that the time in question “marked the beginning of a qualitatively new period in the history of the Ukrainian people and, therefore, also their working class.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the term “proletariat” is used in the article’s title, and the text discusses things such as the “development of market relations and industrial production.”<sup>11</sup>

One can argue that at the time Ukrainian historians were misreading the message from their Western colleagues, none of whom would have recommended a simple change in the subject of history without the rejection of Soviet clichés. Today it is curious to read the contemporary report by the young Ukrainian historian Serhy Yekelchyk about a meeting that took place between Ukrainian colleagues and the Canadian historian John-Paul Himka. Even though the visitor was best known for his work on the history of socialism in Galicia, the report is framed as a summary of advice received from the “well-known researcher of the history of the Ukrainian national movement.” Himka’s comments on the diaspora’s potential role in helping Ukrainian historians master modern methodology, which were probably intended as cautionary words against borrowing from outdated nation-centric narratives produced in the diaspora, are also presented as a further appeal to learn from the West about how to study nation building.<sup>12</sup>

Tellingly, Himka’s first book, on the development of Polish and Ukrainian socialism in Galicia (1983), was not published in a Ukrainian translation until 2002, and even then it was issued by a publishing house associated with the Social Democratic United Party of Ukraine (itself a misleadingly named political project having little in common with the early Radicals about whom Himka wrote) rather than a mainstream publisher specializing in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the more influential Ukrainian translation of Bohdan Krawchenko’s book on the social composition of Ukraine during the twentieth century was generally perceived in Ukraine as the story of the nation overcoming the “incompleteness” of its social structure (meaning, the underdevelopment of the native working class and educated strata), and the Marxist framework and political implications of Krawchenko’s analysis failed to register fully with

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<sup>10</sup> O. P. Reient. *Stavlennia proletariatu Ukrainy do Tsentralnoi Rady // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. 1994. No. 4. P. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* P. 5.

<sup>12</sup> S. Yekelchyk. *Zustrich z kanadskym istorikom Dzh.-P. Hymkoiu // Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*. 1991. No. 12. P. 152.

<sup>13</sup> *Dzhon-Pol Khymka [John-Paul Himka]. Zarodzhennia polskoi sotsial-demokratii ta ukrainskoho radykalizmu v Halychyni (1860–1890)*. Kyiv, 2002.

his Ukrainian readers.<sup>14</sup> To serious historians in contemporary Ukraine, his book serves simply as the best example of applying to Ukrainian history the modernization approach, which in retrospect appears increasingly outdated.<sup>15</sup> The image of “diaspora scholarship” as it is constructed in Ukraine today gives short shrift to the Ukrainian Marxist tradition abroad, which traces its origins through the influential neo-Marxist émigré historian Roman Rozdolski, whose works have also been slow in coming to the Ukrainian reader, all the way back to Matvii Yavorsky and other “national communists” of the 1920s.

It is also possible that in the wake of the Soviet collapse, Western colleagues in turn were misreading their Ukrainian interlocutors. In his recent book Andrii Portnov calls Subtelny’s 1993 appeal “both tragic and comic” because Soviet Ukrainian historical scholarship was not really Marxist, but used quasi-Marxist clichés to justify whatever version of the past was most convenient for the Soviet authorities at any given time.<sup>16</sup> Just as historians in Ukraine assumed that their diaspora counterparts must all be studying nation building, visitors from the West could take for granted the Marxism of their Ukrainian colleagues, based on what they knew about Marxist categories of contemporary Western social history. An authority on Soviet Ukrainian historiography, Vitaly Yaremchuk, shares Portnov’s overall skepticism about its connection to classical Marxism. He writes that the obligatory references to Marx, Engels, and Lenin served to justify changing historical interpretations that were themselves merely part of the Soviet “ideological discourse.”<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Yaremchuk does not see the Soviet Ukrainian historical grand narrative as a totally flexible political tool devoid of established theoretical concepts. For the postwar period, he singles out at least three theoretical notions commonly found in historical works: periodization by economic formations, emphasis on class analysis, and discussion of the beneficial role of the “fraternal” Russian people.<sup>18</sup> It is perhaps telling that a post-Soviet Ukrainian historian would not include in this list either the development of the revolutionary movement or the guidance of the Communist Party. Why

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<sup>14</sup> Bohdan Kravchenko [Krawchenko]. *Sotsialni zminy i natsionalna svidomist v Ukraini XX st.* Kyiv, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Yaroslav Hrytsak. *Paradoksy ukrainskoi modernizatsii // Hrytsak. Strasti za natsionalizmom: istorychni ese.* Kyiv, 2004. Pp. 37-45.

<sup>16</sup> Andrei [Andrii] Portnov. *Uprazhneniia s istoriei po-ukrainski.* Moscow, 2010. P. 113.

<sup>17</sup> Vitalii Iaremchuk. *Mynule Ukrainy v istorychnii nautsi URSR pisliastalinskoi doby.* Ostroh, 2009. Pp. 464 and 471.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* P. 471.

these notions appear less prominent from a distance is actually a question about the optics employed by the present-day Ukrainian historical profession, which focus on another “movement” and other guiding forces.

In any case, it is significant that no serious discussion of the inadequacy of “Marxist” methodology or the need for methodological change took place in Ukraine during the first post-communist decade. The only book-length study of post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography, the work of Polish historian Tomasz Stryjek, documents the 1990s debates about the “blank spots” of Ukrainian history and the origins of the nation, but not methodological issues. Whatever opposition there was to the now-dominant conception of national history, it was largely limited to questioning the primordialist understanding of the nation.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps even more tellingly, Stryjek’s book has not been translated into Ukrainian, indicating how little interest there is in conceptualizing the transition to the nation as the new subject of history.

### *A New History in the Old Style*

Yet, it was probably the level of conceptualization, called the “mode of emplotment” by Hayden White – rather than the mode of argument or of an ideological implication – that truly defined the nature of Soviet historical writing.<sup>20</sup> The “mode of emplotment” may also represent its longest-lasting legacy. As a leading authority on the early modern period, Natalia Yakovenko has shown in her scathing review article of a book about the central event of the new nation-building narrative, the Khmelnytsky Rebellion (1648–1654), the decades of writing about the revolutionary movement have left even good historians stuck in the Soviet linguistic and conceptual apparatus. Although Valerii Smolii and Valerii Stepankov wrote a book about what they termed “the Ukrainian national revolution” and not the Great October Socialist Revolution, at key junctures in the text one encounters very familiar Soviet terminology. Notions such as “exacerbating socioeconomic contradictions,” “the powerful rising of the masses,” and the political avant-garde “formulating a program” make sense to the two historians and their readers

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<sup>19</sup> Tomasz Stryjek. *Jakiej przeszłości potrzebuje przyszłość?: interpretacje dziejów narodowych w historiografii i debacie publicznej na Ukrainie 1991–2004*. Warsaw, 2007. See also Yaroslav Hrytsak. *Ukrainian Historiography, 1991–2001: The Decade of Transformation* // *Österreichische Osthefte*. 2003. Bd. 44. No. 1-2. Pp. 107-126.

<sup>20</sup> These notions, albeit not in application to the Soviet historical profession, are elaborated in Hayden White. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore, 1973. P. 5 *passim*.

precisely because this is how history was written during the Soviet period.<sup>21</sup> Far from being examples of playful postmodern intertextuality, these are actually indications of the nation-state being mechanically inserted, as the teleological aim of the historical process, into a familiar narrative that previously pointed toward the union with Russia and the victory of socialism. Or perhaps one could speak of the narrative being simply recentered from socialism to the nation because, after all, Soviet historical accounts did not ignore the existence of the Ukrainian nation, but presented incorporation into Russia and the Bolshevik Revolution as best reflecting the interests of the Ukrainian toiling masses.<sup>22</sup>

It is instructive to compare the Introduction to the last edition of Ukrainian historical scholarship's crowning achievement, the multivolume *History of the Ukrainian SSR*, with the Introduction to the current most authoritative, one-volume history of Ukraine. (Tellingly, a post-Soviet multivolume, collectively written history has failed to materialize thus far, although the Institute of Ukrainian History, the leading historical research institution of the National Academy of Sciences, has been working on its prospectus for at least a decade. The realization is setting in that the very format is somehow not fully appropriate for modern historical scholarship.) In the Soviet-era Introduction, one finds a certain hierarchy of conceptual and methodological statements. It begins by asserting that the history of the Ukrainian people is inseparable from that of the great Russian people and other peoples of the USSR and that the struggle of the Ukrainian people for their social and national liberation could not be separated from the role of the Communist Party. Following some token references to Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the methodological principles are introduced, such as Marxist-Leninist teachings about socioeconomic formations, the class struggle, the masses as the true makers of history, and the party's leading role. Then, however, the text mentions the concept of "Ukrainian statehood," which began forming during the Khmelnytsky Rebellion, called "the war of people's liberation."<sup>23</sup> The development of capitalism forms the basis of subsequent history, yet the nation-state theme reappears in the section on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Ukrainian Soviet Republic: "With the victory of October, the Ukrai-

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<sup>21</sup> Natalia Yakovenko. U koliorakh proletarskoi revoliutsii // Ukrainskyi humanitarnyi ohiad. 2000. No. 3. Pp. 58-78, here 61-64.

<sup>22</sup> Serhy Yekelchyk. *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*. Toronto, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Predislovie // Iu. Iu. Kondufor (Ed.). *Istoriia Ukrainskoi SSR*. Kyiv, 1981. Vol. 1. Pp. 5-7.

nian people created a sovereign nation-state (*natsionalnoe gosudarstvo*) for the first time in their history.<sup>24</sup> In a sense, the legacy of Soviet Ukrainian scholarship has made it easy for historians to refocus their narratives on the nation-state by getting rid of Marxist rhetoric, but not necessarily Soviet methodology.

It is telling, then, that clear methodological statements or long introductions became a rarity in post-Soviet Ukrainian historical scholarship. No new multivolume, collectively written history of Ukraine having been produced to this day, the most representative and coherent expression of mainstream scholarship's position remains a one-volume history of Ukraine authored by the leading historians of the Institute of Ukrainian History. In the very short Introduction to the book's third edition (2002), the institute's director, Valerii Smolii, writes:

Absent from this text is the Soviet historical concept that originated from Stalin's [*Short*] *Course on the History of the VKP(B)* and successfully survived both de-Stalinization attempts, under Khrushchev as well as under Gorbachev. The authors have developed their own approaches to the periodization of historical processes, to the clarification of true causal connections between events, and to the evaluation of historical actors. These approaches are based on the firm foundation of Ukrainian historiography from the late nineteenth and the first third of the twentieth century, and above all on the works of M. Hrushevsky.<sup>25</sup>

As in so many other works written by contemporary Ukrainian historians, the reference to the legacy of Mykhailo Hrushevsky here is misleading and very much serves the same purpose as obligatory mentions of Marx and Lenin in Soviet-era histories. In fact, it can be argued that the Hrushevsky cult in post-Soviet Ukraine was created with the aim of legitimizing the political regimes of the 1990s and perhaps also to recycle the familiar Soviet model of paying homage to great visionaries.<sup>26</sup> In reality, the 2002 *History* has very little in common in its theoretical and methodological approaches with the writings of the populist and positivist Hrushevsky, who wrote the history of the people rather than that of the state. The post-Soviet *History* is based explicitly in its periodization on the development

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. P. 10.

<sup>25</sup> V. Smolii. *Peredmova* // V. Smolii (Ed.). *Istoriia Ukrainy: Navchalnyi posibnyk*. 3d ed. Kyiv, 2002. P. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk. *The Location of Nation: Postcolonial Perspectives on Ukrainian Historical Debates* // *Australian Slavonic and East European*. 1997. Vol. 11. No. 1-2. Pp. 161-184.

of Ukrainian statehood, sometimes in an unashamedly teleological fashion, as, for example, when the chapter on Gorbachev's reforms is titled "On the Road to Independence." However, a closer look at the text reveals some very recognizable language about the prefeudal and feudal periods and the role of the development of capitalist relations of production in the "objective process of nation building."<sup>27</sup> The book's longest chapter, titled "The National Revolution: The Creation of the Cossack State," features all the terminological and epistemological holdovers of Soviet historical thinking that Natalia Yakovenko spotted in the book by the same two authors. Moreover, the "revolutionary movement" makes an appearance in the title of a chapter devoted to the attempts to establish a Ukrainian republic in Galicia and the subsequent Ukrainian–Polish war there – essentially the story of nationalist mobilization leading to an ethnic conflict that had little revolutionariness in it. As if to emphasize that the Ukrainian statehood on which the authors focus refers primarily to a nation-state for ethnic Ukrainians, there is little mention of minorities, yet the entire concluding chapter is devoted to the Ukrainian diaspora. Naturally, it begins with the more influential Ukrainian diaspora in North America and ends with the much more numerous "eastern diaspora" in Russia and other post-Soviet countries. It is the former that "supported nation-building processes" in the hope that "this time the building of an independent and democratic Ukrainian state will be completed."<sup>28</sup>

### *Searching for the Other Marxism*

The more that structural and rhetorical post-communist Ukrainian historical narratives had in common with their Soviet predecessors, the less willing they were to seriously engage the legacy of Soviet Marxism. Abandoning the concept of class for that of nation provided an easy solution and a convenient excuse for the slow transition to the contemporary mode of historical writing. This is particularly obvious in situations where the evaluation of Marxist (or pseudo-Marxist Soviet) methodological legacy would have seemed inescapable.

One noteworthy example is the recent two-volume *Economic History of Ukraine*, also prepared by a group of authors under the aegis of the Institute of Ukrainian History. A two-page Introduction, written by the head of the Editorial Board and the then-speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, Volodymyr Lytvyn, a trained historian, does not mention any common theories or

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<sup>27</sup> Istoriiia Ukrainy. Pp. 40 and 152.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. P. 454.

methodological principles of the work. The chapters are very uneven, the authors of some clearly trying for a positivist description of the “facts,” but more often than not still relying on Soviet terminology, while others simply abide by the old Soviet narrative, if slightly tilted toward the nation. The chapter on the economic development of Eastern Ukraine in 1861–1900 demonstrates with particular clarity that present-day Ukrainian historical scholarship has not developed a new conceptual or terminological apparatus to describe what is still termed in the text “the development of capitalist relations” and the emergence of “two new social strata – the bourgeoisie (industrialists) and the proletariat.”<sup>29</sup> Of course, substituting “social strata” for “social classes” does not change the essence of the analysis offered in the text, and neither does special attention to just how “Ukrainian” these two groups were in the Ukrainian lands.

In general, the introduction of nation as the central category of historical analysis made it difficult for Ukrainian historians to recover the inner dynamics of social and economic history that did not always coincide with major advances in nation building. For example, the chapter on the Gorbachev period in *Economic History* is titled “On the Road to Independence,” an exact copy of the chapter title from the 2002 *History*, yet the text does not establish any logical progression toward the nation-state. In fact, it speaks of halfhearted attempts at reform and the descent into economic chaos, neither process logically connected with the supposed historical progression toward a Ukrainian nation-state.

The national history’s difficulty with social-history categories is nothing new, of course, even in the Ukrainian case. When the advent of Solidarity in Poland sparked Western scholars’ interest in the condition of industrial workers in the Eastern Bloc, the leading journal of the Ukrainian diaspora, *Suchasnist*, only with great difficulty managed to put together a special issue on Ukrainian workers. The editor, Yuri Shevelov, felt it necessary to add to the issue his personal postscript explaining that it was a year late primarily because he could not find contributing authors. They were willing to write about urbanization in general, about Ukrainian literature in the Donbas, or the representation of workers in Ukrainian literature – just not about workers. Shevelov concluded that the diaspora wanted to perpetuate the traditional myth of Ukraine as a peasant nation with a small but committed stratum of the intelligentsia. The potential authors he approached did not know, and preferred not to know, that one of every two Ukrainian

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<sup>29</sup> V. M. Lytvyn (Ed.). *Ekonomichna istoriia Ukrainy*. Kyiv, 2011. Vol. 1. P. 604.

residents at the time was either a worker or a dependent of one.<sup>30</sup> Shevelov was able to secure a solid historical and statistical overview of the Ukrainian working class from Bohdan Krawchenko, a Canadian sociologist in the Marxist (perhaps, even Ukrainian national-communist) tradition, and two elegant essays from the historians Roman Szporluk and Alexander Motyl, both of whom, however, looked at workers as a problem for the nation or the national movement.

Ironically, history repeated itself in 2009, when the most interesting historical journal in post-Soviet Ukraine, *Ukraina Moderna*, decided to publish a special issue devoted to “Marxism in Europe’s East.” The editor, Andrii Portnov, was having difficulties securing contributions from Ukrainian historians, who apparently just did not find stimulating his intellectual project of reexamining Marxism either as a method or as a history. Sociologists, philosophers, and historians from elsewhere in Eastern Europe proved more responsive. One of the editor’s most interesting questions for the forum that opened the special issue – about Marxism’s future as a methodology – did not receive serious attention from the participants. The only article in the issue penned by a contemporary Ukrainian historian, an excellent piece by Volodymyr Masliichuk, who wrote about the Ukrainian Marxist historians of the 1920s, dealt with Marxist methodology as history and also as part of the suppressed heritage of the Ukrainization period, a topic that could still be seen as a legitimate part of a nation-centric narrative. The only article in the issue that even briefly touched on the relevance in today’s Ukraine of “working class” as a category of social analysis and political action was written by the sociologist Anastasiia Ryabchuk, which was further confirmation that in post-communist Ukraine sociologists and art critics are far more likely than historians to engage creative Marxism seriously.<sup>31</sup> In part, this is because their absorption of modern Western theories is mediated to a lesser degree by the Ukrainian diaspora, but also because neo-Marxist theories (for example, those of Michael Burawoy or Zygmunt Bauman) retain worldwide recognition in these disciplines.

It is significant, for example, that during the book launch of the special issue in Lviv, a local authority on historiography and historical methodology challenged Portnov’s statement that Eric Hobsbawm was a member of the

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<sup>30</sup> Postskryptum redaktora // Suchasnist. 1980. No. 2. P. 158.

<sup>31</sup> Volodymyr Masliichuk. Marksystski skhemy ukrainskoi istorii: Matvii Iavorskyi, Volodymyr Sukhyno-Khomenko, Mykola Horban // *Ukraina Moderna*. 2009. No. 3. Pp. 63-77; Anastasiia Riabchuk. “Formuvannia” i “zanepad” robitnychoho klasu (Sproba ohliadu) // *Ukraina Moderna*. 2009. No. 3. Pp. 126-142.

Communist Party of Great Britain.<sup>32</sup> Ukrainian historians' own rejection of Soviet Marxism can blind them to Marxist structures in the Western historical works that they admire. In contrast, younger Ukrainian sociologists and art critics have no problem accepting the neo-Marxist thought of Michael Burawoy, Terry Eagleton, or Slavoj Žižek. The two interesting, new neo-Marxist journals in Ukraine, *Spilne* (Commons) and *Politychna Krytyka* (Political Critique) both originated in the circle of leftist cinema historians and art critics associated with the Visual Culture Research Center at Kyiv Mohyla Academy, which has since been closed by the new conservative president of this university. A recent special issue of *Spilne* is devoted to the topic of class exploitation and class struggle, and features an interview with Michael Burawoy and a series of articles by Ukrainian authors arguing that these Marxist concepts no longer seem passé under the corrupt oligarchical regime of President Viktor Yanukovich.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, there is a small number of historians in Ukraine who, instead of writing about the nation in a quasi-Marxist language, continue professing Marxist views. Perhaps tellingly, one of the most outspoken of these historians is the independent researcher Andrii Zdorov from Odessa, who has little connection to the world of mainstream academic history writing. He is known primarily for his unrepentantly Marxist (but not pro-Soviet) book on the Revolution in Ukraine, *The Ukrainian October*, in which he argues that the Bolsheviks were the only party offering the Ukrainian people true social and national liberation.<sup>34</sup> Zdorov has also published a small book devoted to a Marxist critique of Soviet state capitalism.<sup>35</sup> Viktor Yakunin, an established historian from Dnipropetrovsk with similar views, became well known in the early 1990s for his critique of Stalinism, but even in post-communist Ukraine he continues to defend the promise of Soviet Marxism against the distortions of state socialism.<sup>36</sup>

Still, neither dogmatic Soviet Marxism nor neo-Marxist theories that keep arriving from the West have provided current Ukrainian historiography with a methodological base from which to deconstruct the traditional grand narratives. Inasmuch as neo-Marxist theories hold such a promise at all, it

<sup>32</sup> Andrii Portnov, personal communication.

<sup>33</sup> *Spilne*. 2012. No. 4. Available online at <http://commons.com.ua/?p=12239>.

<sup>34</sup> Andrii Zdorov. *Ukrainskyi Zhovten: Robitnycho-selianska revoliutsiia v Ukraini (lystopad 1917–liutyi 1918 r.)*. Odessa, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> A. A. Zdorov. *Gosudarstvennyi kapitalizm i modernizatsiia Sovetskogo Soiuz: marksistskii analiz sovetskogo obshchestva*. Odessa, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> See V. K. Iakunin. *I. V. Stalin, stalinizm i istoricheskaia nauka*. Dnipropetrovsk, 1991; V. K. Iakunin. *Krakh KPSS*. Dnipropetrovsk, 2003.

seems to be mediated through mainstream Western historical scholarship as it is emerging after the “linguistic turn.” When two prominent Western practitioners of “new social history,” Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, attempted in 2000 to resurrect the notion of “class” as a category of historical analysis, they could do so only from the position of considering “class” as a discursive construct.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, the Soviet history specialist whom they invited to contribute to the special issue, Stephen Kotkin, immediately pointed out that this was precisely the Bolshevik understanding of turning theory into practice, that is, institutionalizing the discursive construct of “class” as a category of governance and violence, and of forging classes according to the ideological blueprint.<sup>38</sup> Untangling the layers of political practice under each discursive construct proposed for revitalization could indeed be a fruitful exercise.

Yet, for the Ukrainian historical profession overall, a productive way of moving forward, beyond the dogmatic Soviet model of Marxism or its often unacknowledged legacy, would probably consist of engaging some of the most popular clichés of Soviet and nation-centric historical scholarship with the new instruments that modern Western methodology has provided, such as cultural history, microhistory, or gender studies. Take, for example, a chapter from Yaroslav Hrytsak’s brilliant biography of the literary figure Ivan Franko (1856–1916), a great ancestor of Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainians alike, because he could be presented as both a socialist and an ideologist of the national movement. Hrytsak demonstrates that Franko’s identity as a “peasant son” and an ethnic Ukrainian was the writer’s own ideological construct. Franko also imagined the “peasantry” in a certain way, which explains the misunderstandings that developed between his radical friends and peasants when they encountered each other in village reading rooms. In the end, abstract socialist concepts were translated into the “national” language that the peasants found more accessible – “Polish land for the Poles and Ruthenian land for the Ruthenians.” This reverse influence of the peasantry’s worldview on political discourse can be seen in the program of the Radical Party that Franko helped to establish.<sup>39</sup> Hrytsak then examines Franko’s prose works, which in Soviet times served as the best example of narrative realism, as well as his socialist convictions, the famous “Boryslav cycle” of short novels. Through microhistorical analysis

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<sup>37</sup> Geoff Eley and Keith Nield. *Farewell to the Working Class?* // *International Labor and Working-Class History*. 2000. No. 57. Pp. 1-30.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Kotkin. *Class, the Working Class, and the Politburo* // *Ibid.* Pp. 48-52.

<sup>39</sup> Yaroslav Hrytsak. *Prorok u svoii vitchyzni: Franko ta ioho spilnota, 1856–1886*. Kyiv, 2006. P. 272.

of the actual industrial settlement of Boryslav, he shows that Franko does not so much describe as invent new character types in Ukrainian literature, including that of a worker activist. Like other socialists of his time, Franko was looking in his imaginary Boryslav for an industrial proletariat at the very same time that he was translating parts of *Das Kapital* into Ukrainian. As Hrytsak shows, the writer's imagination ran ahead of the times: the workers' strike at the Boryslav oil fields depicted in *Boryslav Is Laughing* actually happened twenty years after the novel's publication.<sup>40</sup>

Andriy Zayarniuk's book on the Galician peasantry before and after the 1848 abolition of serfdom in Austria-Hungary pursues somewhat similar strategies, but with a more explicit methodological positioning more appropriate for an academic monograph as opposed to a biography. The author registers his unease with the unproblematic transition from the Marxist category of "consciousness" to a more nation-friendly "identity," as well as with the general rewriting of the same events as part of the national movement. He does not shy away from quoting Marx on the significance of the property question for the Galician peasantry, which for them meant the transformation of feudal ownership of the land into petit-bourgeois ownership.<sup>41</sup> More important, however, is Zayarniuk's microhistorical approach informed by the fusion of social and cultural history. He studies the language of peasant emancipation, which shaped the social practice of emancipation, in an effort to go beyond the grand narratives of social and national liberation – both problematic frameworks for understanding the events because both, like Kotkin's "class," were developed by the emancipation's contemporaries, who used them as political mobilization tools.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Zayarniuk uses his close reading of a series of events in the rural Sambir district between 1846 and the 1860s, set against the background of emancipatory discourse of all varieties, to uncover the social expectations that the codes of emancipation developed among villagers, a stratum that we would now categorize as "peasants." A social history with discourse left in and grand narratives left out, this book is also an example of Ukrainian historiography's new international horizons. Although first published in Ukrainian, it was based on the PhD dissertation that Zayarniuk wrote in English in Canada, in an environment where methodology is learned directly from mainstream Western historical scholarship rather than through the diaspora's mediation.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Pp. 285 and 301.

<sup>41</sup> Andrii Zaiarniuk [Andriy Zayarniuk]. *Idiomy emansypatsii: "vyzvolni" proekty i halyske selo v seredyni XIX stolittia*. Kyiv, 2007. P. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Pp. 18-19.

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The overcoming of Soviet historical methodology has not been addressed in Ukrainian historiography for a very good reason, namely, that it has not really happened yet. The wholesale restoration of the canon of national history as preserved in the diaspora was accomplished in Ukraine without abandoning Soviet narrative models or conceptualization tools. As a result, belated resistance to this Soviet legacy is taking the form of questioning the national-history paradigm, although both the teleological vision and the template of multivolume, collectively written histories point to the historiographical practices of the Soviet past. At the same time, the new social history, which is cognizant of social categories as discursive constructs, is making inroads into the traditional territory of the grand narratives. Ironically, both schools have legitimate claims to a Marxist pedigree.

## SUMMARY

This article argues that Soviet-style historical methodology persists in contemporary Ukrainian historiography at the level of both terminology (itself reflecting historians' understanding of causation) and the conceptual framework, in which the dominant grand narrative of the nation hinders the transition to modern microhistorical, regional-history, and cultural-history approaches. The reign of traditional national history has only recently been challenged from within the Ukrainian historical profession, and a serious debate about historical methodology has yet to unfold.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Автор статті доказує, що методологічні підходи радянських часів до сих пор утримують свої позиції в українській історіографії як на рівні термінології (свідечуючи про певне розуміння причинно-наслідкових зв'язків істориками), так і на рівні концептуальних моделей. Домінуючий національний мажоритарний нарратив лише перешкоджає переходу до сучасних підходів (таким як мікроісторія, регіональна або культурна історія). Всередині української історическої професії лише недавно був брошений виклик пануючій традиційній національній історії, і серйозні дебати, присвячені історическому методу, ще впереди.