

## Scholarship of Imagination

Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

Aiming to introduce “Belarusian nationalism” (why not “White Ruthenian,” “Belorussian,” or “Byelorussian” is not explained)<sup>1</sup> to Western scholarship, Per Anders Rudling has written two works under one cover. One is a true believer’s regurgitation of leftist theories of nationalism. The other is an awkward attempt to ram the modern historical experience of the people of Belarus into the ideological paradigm which guides him. The result is a mixed bag of misinterpreted historical gems and predictable post-modernist clichés. The greatest flaw is that the author does not sufficiently know the history of the lands and peoples of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where, in his view, Belarusian nationalism was “imagined.” Despite all this, the historian amazingly distills a sound conclusion, namely that modern ideologies imposed on the denizens of Belarus were calamitous for them. Since neither his theoretical baggage nor empirical evidence rendered themselves to this conclusion, we must assume that the scholar arrived at it largely intuitively.

By his telling, the “invention of Belarus,” “its imagination,” took place “at the turn of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century” (p. 3). Although Rudling’s periodization spans from 1906 to 1931, he is mostly interested in the period of 1915-1926: “the efforts of nationalists on both sides of the border to root a national consciousness among the masses” (p. 17).

The narrative part follows a chronological path. From 1918 or so, it alternates between geographical parts in the east and west. After a germinating period, Belarusian nationalism bloomed with the German occupation (“to weaken the Poles,” p. 73) of the western part of the Russian Empire during the First World War. From then on, “the nationalists became a part in a larger geopolitical game” with Germany, Lithuania, and Poland participating (p. 307). Following a false dawn of several aborted attempts to proclaim and maintain an independent state, the

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<sup>1</sup> The historic name of this particular region of ancient Rus’ (Ruthenia) was White Ruthenia (as opposed to Great Ruthenia [Muscovy], Little Ruthenia [Kiyvian Rus’, hence contemporary Rus’], Red Ruthenia, or Black Ruthenia). Hence, White Ruthenia is an archaic expression harkening to the old Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania, where it was a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. White Ruthenian is archaic, harkening to the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century and later the Muscovites (Great Ruthenians) referred to the denizens of the Grand Duchy as “Litovtsii” (Litovets in singular). This was a Muscovite propaganda device to deny that most of them were Ruthenian Orthodox Christians, including much of the nobility, successors of Kyivian/Kievian Rus’ who preferred the Grand Duchy and the Commonwealth over Moscow. At the same time, a Litovets was understood, broadly, to be a subject of the Grand Duke of Lithuania. More narrowly, a Litovets denoted an ethnic Samogitian (Lithuanian, *lietuvis/lietuvė*, or *lietuviai* in plural). The Poles likewise used the word Litwin to denote either an ethnic Lithuanian or, more frequently, an inhabitant of the Grand Duchy, particularly a noble one. None of this is to be confused with Litvak, a Jew from Russia, which was of a 19<sup>th</sup> century coinage. Belorussian and Byelorussian are variants used by the Soviets to conflate “belo” (white) and Russian, thus pretending that there was no substantial difference between the Russians and the denizens of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. They were all Russian. This idea was developed earlier in the empire of the Tsar. For those reasons contemporary nationalists prefer to call their country Belarus and its people Belarusians. Rudling fails to explicate this. On this and other issues see Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: The Land between the Black and Baltic Seas* (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Transactions, 2012).

Belarussian leftist nationalists settled on collaborating with the Soviets, who allowed them initially to establish a realm “socialist in content, national in form,” an oxymoron, of course, although for Rudling the “Belarusian” [sic! Belorussian] Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was “for the first time in modern history a Belarusian polity” (p. 67). How could it be if “the top positions in the soviets and party were occupied by non-Belarusians” (p. 134)? The Belarusians were underrepresented in all fields: from education through party to administration at the local level. “It largely reflected the predomination of Jews in the cities of the BSSR” (p. 234). According to Rudling, the Soviets maintained an “affirmative action and multiculturalism” regime (p. 309). It was based upon the complementary policies of *korenizatsyia* and Belarusianization. The author allows, “the concessions to the nationalists was a tactical move rather than a sincere belief in the necessity of dividing up humanity into nations... They [the Bolsheviks] feared that nationalism could be used against Soviet power by diverting the working class from its class interests” (p. 127).

Nonetheless, until 1929 or so, the Soviet government forcibly imposed national identities upon the denizens of BSSR, sometimes against still opposition of the majority either clinging to their pre-modern identities or wishing to Russify themselves. Meanwhile in Poland, the authorities left the local people alone with the pre-modern identities. As far as the Belarusian elites, a minority Christian Democrat Belarusian nationalist orientation vainly expected to be allowed a far reaching autonomy. Their pro-Soviet majority detractors turned to subversion of the Polish state. “The strategic goal of Soviet foreign policy – to undermine Poland by encouraging Belarusian irredentism – was an important political priority” (p. 139). Bolshevik commando raids, guerrilla warfare, and political agitation intensified. “A majority of the Orthodox peasantry in West Belarus supported the communists” (p. 269). Consequently, Poland cracked down on both pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet orientations, demobilizing their supporters and suppressing leaders, while permitting some forms of cultural life to continue, in particular the anti-Communist ones.

Simultaneously, the Soviet Union crushed all Belarusian forms of expression, including the national Bolshevik option, eventually exterminating physically nearly all accused, truthfully or not, of Belarusian nationalism, a slaughter Rudling clinically, or cynically, sees as stemming from “the reorganization of the Soviet society after 1928” (p. 299). This is a curious way, to use an understatement, to refer to mass murder, including the Terror-Famine, collectivization, and purges. And so is this sanitized description of Bolshevik policies: “Modeling itself [sic themselves] on European precedents, the Soviets sought to build a modern, Soviet Belarus through standardization, homogenization, and education” (p. 132).

Imagine if one dared to write in a similarly sterile manner about “the reorganization of the German society after 1933” and “modeling themselves on European precedents, the Nazis sought to build a modern, Nazi state through standardization, homogenization, and education.” Such strange detachment from the mass murdering Soviet regime makes one wonder whether Rudling simply pays lip service to the convention when he refers to the Nazis and Soviets as “two totalitarianisms” (p. 31). This eerie suspicion gains credence when we consider that the scholar consistently downplays the mass murder by the Communists which should be the

centerpiece of the period under discussion. Instead, he has elected to give us a minimum victim count of the Great Terror in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR, p. 297-298). He consistently underestimates the scale of the murder. According to him, “over 132,168 people were repressed in the BSSR between 1917 and 1940; 80,168 between the years 1935 and 1940 alone, of which 28,425 were shot.” (p. 313). Rudling then buries in an endnote a far more realistic estimate of 1.6 million killed in Belarus between 1917 and 1953 (p. 393 n. 125).<sup>2</sup> And not a sign of moral revulsion at the international socialist experiment of the Soviets. That is just one of the most important, fundamental flaws of *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*.

I shall now concentrate my review on the theoretical part, including sources and methodology, as well as the historical background the author prefaced his story with. As far as Rudling’s sources, the monograph is heavily *Zeitungeschichte*, in particular as far as Belarusian nationalist thought. The author examined government records, which, in Soviet case at least, consists of mostly propaganda. Swedish diplomatic records are a welcome novelty; Polish intelligence dispatches and court documents have been accessible for a while, but traditionally underutilized in the English speaking world. Alas, one was unable to juxtapose all this with the Soviet secret police files. Further, one must exercise great caution dealing with Soviet records. Unfortunately, the scholar sometimes seems to take Communist propaganda at face value, for example as far as the predicament of the Jewish community in BSSR (p. 226-227). In his reading the Soviet Union was good for the Jews, a view congruent with contemporary anti-Semitic perceptions but long debunked by scholars such as Elissa Bemporad in her urban narrative on Minsk and Merle Fainsod in his seminal study of Smolensk. Both traced the vicissitudes of the Jewish community, concluding that traditional, religious Jews, who had constituted a majority, nearly disappeared. Recent research of the early stages of Communism Jews suffered relatively less repression than most others, and many secular Jews achieved prominence in the new power structure. That hardly warrants Rudling’s effusions.<sup>3</sup>

The conceptual part of the monograph is quite problematic, confusing, self-limiting, and sometimes contradictory. “Essentially, this book is a study of a few hundred nationalist intellectuals and their construction of a new ethnicity east of Poland and west of Russia,” warns us Rudling (p 8). And “a Belarusian nationalist” is “someone dedicated to the idea of

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<sup>2</sup> Best estimates remain of Robert Conquests, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and his *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Revisionist and post-revisionist scholars, J. Arch Getty, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Igal Haflin, and others habitually minimize the body count, basing themselves on the lowest numbers selectively available from the NKVD.

<sup>3</sup> See Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013); Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958); Alfred D. Low, *Soviet Jewry and Soviet Policy* (New York and Boulder, CO: Columbia University Press/East European Monographs 1990); Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival*, 2 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 2001); Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). And, more broadly, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

establishing a nation state” (p. 16). However, “Belarus lacked a middle class and the Belarusian-speaking peasantry was largely apathetic towards national allegiances. Belarusian nationalism as a political cause or a cultural movement had almost no popular backing” (p. 306). Rudling observes that “As the development of national identity is inseparably linked to collective memory, nationalist movements are preoccupied with the appropriation of historical memory, and use it instrumentally for their political projects” (p. 21). And so do the anti-nationalists, including Rudling. One should be fair.

Therefore the author is much more interested in the ideas animating a handful of enthusiasts and their actions than in the people they purported to represent. He fails to provide a developed definition of a Belarusian. Rudling marvels that at least until the 1930s most adhered to a religious identity. Although he also muses that “the local peasants spoke Belarusian” (p. 22), elsewhere he contradicts himself, claiming, rather, that they used “*prosta mova*” (p. 24). Needless to say the “*prosti*” has regional variations. The author fails to explain how can non-standardized dialects be a language? Further, most people identified themselves as “locals” (*tuteishii*), rather than “Belarusians,” or even White Ruthenians. Rudling admits this much. He also concurs that “Belarusians mainly maintained a religious identity” (p. 43). He claims that they were aware of their “Belarusian” identity by negations for they knew that as peasants they were neither “lords” (*pany*) nor Jews; and as Orthodox they were neither Jews nor Catholic Poles nor Catholic Lithuanians. But what of the Catholics who spoke *po prostemu* (a Polonism still current) as most of them did in the countryside? Negating others simply fails to produce a national identity. It can generate hatred of others, but a nation is a constructive enterprise. There must be a community which none of the White Ruthenian peasants was capable of relating to or, if one prefers, “imagining” at that time. And what of early Belarusian nationalists who counted both the *pany* and the *muzhiki* as their own? (p. 54). In fact, most of them came from the former estate.

Amazingly, therefore, in practice (as opposed to nationalist theory) Rudling is unable to identify common threads that usually weave the nationalist tapestry. Simply put, the people he sets out to describe lack a national identity. Why does he keep referring to them Belarusians then? Why not? For him “the concept of the nation... is a social construct” (p. 15). Never mind he possesses no empirical evidence that would indicate that the rural denizens of White Ruthenia were Belarusians. Rudling simply socially constructs them as such, in congruence with the reigning theory *du jour*. So here, in lieu of empirical evidence, we have the scholar’s imagination at work. He imagines things to comport with the contemporary imagination theory. This is a very dangerously self-limiting and self-fulfilling prophecy, not solid scholarship. One supposes that a hundred years ago the author would be “imagining” Belarusians in congruence with the social Darwinist model, which was sexy then, albeit as flawed as the current one.

This is where the Marxist class scheme comes to the rescue of sorts. A cliché that the “the Belarusians were peasants” satisfies Rudling (p. 17). Yes, but they were not peasants in a modern sense, that is free farmers. Theirs was a post-feudal identity. They were peasants with pre-modern peasant, religious, and localized identity. They were, as Belarusian nationalists admitted, “the dark people,” “the benighted ones” (*tsemni*, p. 60), not much different from their

counterparts in central, ethnic Poland, a generation or two prior. The people of Belarus were a social estate. That should not be confused with the Marxist division into conscious classes. Rudling notes that “Belarus remained an agrarian, preindustrial society” (p. 25), and, again, that “the vast majority of the Belarusian masses retained premodern identities, identifying with religion rather than ethnolinguistic association” (p. 131), but fails to draw proper conclusion from that and jettison the straight jacket of his post-modernist, neo-Marxist theory. He even mentions in passing the fact of “multiple identities” in the Borderlands (p. 32), yet fails to either elaborate or square it with his rigid theoretical framework.

Conceptually, the author’s ignorance of the early modern era, in particular the past of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and its implications for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prevents him from handling this phenomenon in a multifarious, flexible manner. Thus, even though Prince Sapieha would be surprised, Rudling embraces a narrow, ethnic definition of nationality that also tallies with class: “Belarusian peasants.” To buttress his invention, he also anchors his “Belarusians” rustically. They were “overwhelmingly rural.” But if their condition and mentality were pre-modern, why apply industrial era nomenclature to them? Why call them Belarusians at all? Why not refer to them as locals?

Rudling somehow manages to conflate all this into ethnonationalism, where the ethnos/class hybrid of a “Belarusian” creates a perfect, downtrodden, exploited (in a national and class way) underdog and his nationalist champions, who happen to be leftist, agrarian socialists often or “national bolsheviks” (even the oxymoronic “Belarusian national communists,” p. 18) -- at any rate: “liberal, progressive, and peaceful” (p. 20), as well as “quite internationalist in outlook” (p. 23), thus worthy of the author’s admiration. “Like the two leading Jewish nationalist movements in the region, Poale Zion and the Bund, the early Belarusian nationalists merged class and national awareness into a radical left-wing program” (p. 3), enthuses Rudling, perhaps mirror-imaging too much from the experience of Sweden’s folk nationalism and social democracy. “The two aspects, nationalism and socialism, complemented each other, and class-based concerns were articulated in the name of the Belarusian nation” (p. 53).

According to the scholar, “the form of nationalism... [they] advocated contrasted sharply with the chauvinism of the Russian extreme right and the emerging Polish national democrats... associated with reaction and class-based oppression” (p. 58). Somehow the historian fails to note here that by conflating the peasant class with the ethnos, the Belarusian nationalists excluded others. On the other hand, “Polish nationalists of various stripes articulated their mission in the east in cultural terms. Their notions of Polish superiority vis-à-vis Belarusians were not, as a rule, presented in racial terms but through various forms of assimilationist discourses” (p. 52). That is, of course, bad because that means the Polish brand was “colonial” and “hegemonic” (p. 35). Yet, the enemy was chiefly within the Belarusian orientation. Aside from combating competing nationalisms and imperial Russian, communist Soviet, and various Polish governments, “the Belarusian nationalists... had to combat the ignorance and poverty of the Belarusians themselves, which served as an effective barrier against national mobilization” (p. 63). Despite having “imagined” Belarusians, “small circles within the

tiny Belarusian intelligentsia” were incapable of mobilizing the people for the most part, and without outside assistance (p. 61). In other words, there were leaders, and very few followers.

Rudling sticks to the imagination/invention theory, primarily a concoction of Stalinist Eric Hobsbawm and other leftists, including Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner (but sadly no magisterial Hugh Seton-Watson). Despite its post-modernist veneer, the invention theory has an older pedigree. The Communists “believed that national identities were constructed, a byproduct of modern capitalism” (p. 143). Further, “the Bolsheviks believed it possible to construct a national consciousness of a socialist kind, national in form but socialist in content” (p. 125). This was a *prima facie* attempt to appropriate nationalism by the Marxists.

That Rudling thinks little of “nationalistic imagination” is obvious as he refers to it as “fiction” (p. 108), which required “the manufacturing of a Belarusian consciousness” through “an alternative narrative” (p. 13). He is consistent in his theoretical schemes: “If Belarus is an invented tradition and artificial construction, so by necessity are its neighbors” (p. 15). That is a big “if.” On the other hand, if one rejects the imagination or invention theory and sticks with logocentrism and empiricism, then Belarus is just as any other nation, albeit at a different stage of its historical development, gradually, as opposed to out of an intellectual’s imagination. And what of the authors who claim that Belarus is “an artificial construct”? From the theoretical standpoint embraced by Rudling it is entirely possible. If so, why devote so much time to nationalism in general, and Belarus in particular? To prove that it is just a delusion? From a Marxist or Freudian position that would be very convenient.

Perhaps all conscious Belarusian, Ukrainians, and others are simply confused and need to be deprogramed by Rudling and his partisans? Hitler and Stalin tried that. Both needed deracinated slaves. What does the current anti-nationalist school need? A self-fulfilling Foucaultian prophecy of power relationships? This is not an empty rhetorical device to castigate the scholar. It does have serious implications. Rudling repeats after Marx: “the writing of history has primarily been in the service of empires, states, and ruling elites” (p. 14). What empire does Rudling serve? What class? The empire of the leftist academia, the class of leftist clerks, one presumes. The sooner he admits this handicap openly, the sooner he can force himself to self-reflect and return to the original mission of a classical scholar.

This leftist ideological affliction would explain why the author is often so helpless with the disparate people who populate the historic lands of White Ruthenia or Belarus. He cannot “imagine” anything beyond the straight jacket confines of the theory of imagination he yoked himself to. For example, the scholar refers to the Belarusian socialist-nationalist manifesto of 1904 as “internationalist” (p. 52-53). It was no such thing. The manifesto was historic and regionalist *par excellence*. It was issued in four languages because it pertained to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, hence, Belarusian, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish. What about Yiddish though? That should have been included. Why wasn’t it? There is no explanation.

Further, Rudling is sometimes confused about the intricacies of Jewish politics. For example, he lists “the Jewish Bund, Poale Zion, and the left-wing Zionists...” (p. 82), but Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) was a left-wing (Marxist-nationalist) party; its extremist splinter, Poale

Zion left, was national communist. Elsewhere, after a serviceable definition of a *Litvak* (“Jew from Lithuania”), Rudling ascribes Yiddish roots of “*Litovets* [who] was a gentile Pole, Belarusian, or Lithuanian from that region” (p. 33). In fact, a *Litovets* was an archaic, 15<sup>th</sup> century Muscovite word to describe a denizen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in particular a device to “otherize” the White Ruthenians. Since the Muscovites laid a claim to “All of Russia,” they understandably deployed propaganda to undercut the legitimacy of White (and Little) Ruthenia’s status as a successor to *Rus*’.

Rudling struggles mightily to understand the interwar Hramada, which was just like any “national liberation movement,” i.e., any other Communist-front organization: from the Sandinista National Liberation Front through the Viet Cong to the African National Congress. Accordingly, Hramada consisted of many dupes manipulated by a cadre of committed Communists. It would be nothing without Soviet resources, logistics, and personnel. The scholar admits so himself: “The BSRH was funded by Soviet money, and its leaders were simultaneously members of the Communist Party of West Belarus” (p. 207). Yet, in a rather typical leftist case of cognitive dissonance, he refuses to draw a logical conclusion. He writes: “The BSHR [Hramada] issued instructions to a mostly illiterate minority community for how to set up the basics of a civil society and how to organize and assert itself in the face of social discrimination” (p. 192). This sentence should rather be re-written as: “how to set up totalitarian structures and communist front organizations.”

Moreover, some of Rudling’s comparisons are spurious, based on mirror-imaging. For example, he argues that “much like the Scandinavian labor movements, the Belarusian national communists... adopted a rhetoric that presented the ‘toiling masses’ as the true representatives of the nation” (s. 23). But this is rather disingenuous. First, national communism is an oxymoron to a large extent since this orientation was simply a manifestation of tactics at a given point of the development of Bolshevik power, and neither an ideology nor a strategy. Second, most of the Soviet leadership in Belarus was not Belarusian: the leaders were Russians, Poles, Jews, and others. Thus, it made the leading strata “Belarusian” to a similar extent that just as the Christian British were “Indian” when they lorded over the Hindus and Muslims in India. Or another example: Were Sweden’s nationalist social democrat leaders Finns or Lapps? If so, which is highly unlikely, that made them “Swedish” only to the extent that they happened to be in top positions in an imagined community called the Swedish state, as per the author’s ideological preference.

Throughout, Rudling is less than respectful to the Belarusian language. Otherwise why force the *lacinka* into the Library of Congress (LOC) Russian system? Imagine if one tried to standardize Czech and Lithuanian Latin alphabet to square with their phonetic pronunciation? Why not get rid of all the annoying Polish diacritical marks? LOC can help. The Belarusian *lacinka* was elected by some Belarusian intellectuals as a form of written expression voluntarily tying Belarus to the West. Admittedly, the Cyrillic one reflected a glorious history of the Old Church Slavonic in writing (Chancellery Ruthenian, while “old Belorussian, or *ruski iayzk*” functioned in speech, but also Latin, p. 145). However, Cyrillic also evoked the Russifying past of the Empire of the Tsars and the terrorist period of Stalin’s Sovietization. What about the

involuntary imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet to force the people of Moldova to write their Rumanian in? Should that also be transliterated according to LOC?

Proper names of people and places are daunting and Rudling has struggled somewhat with consistency. By applying modern rules, he indulges in anachronism. Why call Vilna/Wilno – Vilnius, when it was mostly a Jewish and Polish city until the Second World War? Same goes for “Hrodna” and “Belostok”. Why Krakow, which is misspelled without the diacritic (Kraków), and not Krakau because Rudling uses Posen instead of Poznań? Nowogródek (p. 170) or Navahrudok (p. 181)?

Some consistency in spelling names would be good. One should perhaps defer to the preferences of the people involved. Why use the Polish form of Klaudiusz Duż-Duszewski who was a Belarusian nationalist (s. 88)? What happened to transliterating the *łacinka*? Why spell Stanisław Bułak Bałachowicz in Polish, when he self-identified as a Belarusian military leader, although it could have been a deception for he favored the White Russian forces (s. 115)? On the other hand, why identify Tadeusz Iwanowski as Ivanouski? It was his brother, Waclaw, who considered himself a Belarus (p. 4). Why make Aleksandr Miasniknian, who was an Armenian Bolshevik in charge of BSSR, into Belarusian Miasnikou, when he Russified his name to Miasnikov (p. 96)? It should be Ludwik and not “Ludwig” Kalinowski (s. 110), Leopold and not “Leapold Skulski” (p. 168), and Witold Kamieniecki, and not Kamenetski (p. 113).

Much confusion concerns “the first Belarusian *narodnik* Kastus’ Kalinouski” (p. 36). However, this particular hero of the 1863 Rising always spelled his name Wincenty Konstanty Kalinowski. That is how he always signed himself. He was a nobleman; his coat of arms was Kalinowa; his family was from Mazovia in the Crown lands. The Kalinowskis had moved to the Grand Duchy several hundreds year prior to 1863. The name Kastaus’ did not appear anywhere until a pro-Bolshevik author made it up after 1917 to feed the myth that Kalinowski was a peasant and an ethnic Ruthenian. It is important to cross check Communist propaganda.

The case of Kalinowski is quite instructive on another level, too. Namely, Rudling claims anachronistically that “he regarded himself a Lithuanian, in the sense of identifying himself with a geographic region” (p. 37). Yes, he regarded himself as a Lithuanian in historical terms. He considered himself a citizen of the Grand Duchy. During the Partitions, it was a sign of rejecting the Russian authority and invoking the old Commonwealth. Again, Rudling misunderstands: “and even though he mastered the Polish language, Kalinouski never referred to himself as a Pole, nor did he think of himself as being Polish” (p. 37). Of course, he mastered the Polish language because that is what his mother and father spoke at home. And he referred to himself as a *Litwin*, which again meant his historical designation from the Grand Duchy, and not a *Koroniarz*, which denoted his identity was not from the Crown lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This is neither a geographic nor an ethnic, but a civic designation. But then Rudling contradicts himself and writes about “early Belarusian ‘patriots’ such as Kalinouski (despite his Polish nationality)” (p. 132). So what nationality was Kalinowski already? Rudling can’t seem to make up his mind. He was a patriot of the old Commonwealth, more precisely, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in particular its White Ruthenian part. That is precisely where multiple identities apply, a point sadly lost on the author.

For the same reason the scholar gets the great Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz wrong: “To Mickiewicz, ‘Lithuania’ was simply the notion of a geographic area” (p. 33). No. It was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: the political system of the Commonwealth, its culture, economy, people, flora, fauna, and land.

There are more similar mistakes. “Mikhal Romer [sic]” was, according to Rudling, who quotes Andrew Wilson, “a Polonized Lithuanian.” In fact, erstwhile Piłsudskite legionary Michał Pius Römer (1880-1945) came from an ancient Polonized Baltic German/Livonian noble family of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He elected to assume an ethnic Lithuanian cover and, from 1921, spelled his name as Mykolas Römeris, to advance his conservative program of the *krajowcy*, which was an anachronistic, doomed attempt to translate the universalism of the old Commonwealth into a modern, ethno-nationalist context. Alas, after Rudling’s meandering, the reader would be hard pressed to appreciate how conservative, indeed delightfully reactionary Römer’s program was. Alas, the author avoids anything conservative like the plague.

It would be also useful to note, which Rudling predictably fails to (p. 84), that the nobleman Roman Skirmunt (1868-1939) was also a *Krajowiec*, and not a Belarusian nationalist, when he presided over the Minsk Belarusian Representation in 1918 and served as prime minister of the Belarusian People’s Republic (he later sat in the Polish Senate, 1930-1935). Also, Rudling confuses Walerian Meysztowicz (1893-1982), who served as a lancer in the Polish-Bolshevik War and, later, having entered Catholic priesthood, as a professor of classics at the University of Stefan Batory in Wilno, with his father, conservative politician of the *krajowcy* persuasion, Aleksander Meysztowicz (1864-1943), “whom Piłsudski had appointed Minister of Justice” (p. 257). Rudling blames Meysztowicz for crushing the BSHR, but makes it appear like he was a toady of the Sanacja dictatorship when the conservative was simply making his beloved White Ruthenia safe from Communist subversion.

Nowhere is this ugly anti-Polish bias more manifest when the Rudling excludes the “Polish lords” as viable denizens of what was for them historic White Ruthenia. For him the likes of, say, Prince Sapieha should be excluded from the narrative of Belarus. And he is quite lost among the *szlachta*. The author is completely innocent of the stratification of the nobility and makes silly mistakes, for example, equating “landed gentry” with “szlachta zagrodowa” (p. 24). The former usually refers to middle nobility and the latter to petty gentry (literarily, “farmstead nobility,” not to be confused with *szlachta zaściankowa* (hamlet nobility), or even *szlachta brukowa* (slum nobility). This telling confusion of anything historic bedevils Rudling even into the Soviet times. He writes: “It mattered little that most of the local Poles were small farmers and that most of the Polish *szlachta* and landowners had fled during the Civil and Polish-Soviet Wars. Soviet terminology often described local Poles as *kulak szlachta...*” (p. 228). Regrettably, Rudling is wrong again: it was *szlachta zagrodowa*, so the Soviet calumnies were correct, conflating better off farmers with petty gentry.

To understand such nuances, Rudling should read, at minimum, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Florian Czernyszewski for the Niemen and Berezyna petty nobility, respectively; Józef Mackiewicz for astute insights about the pervasive poverty and unbearable officialdom as far as White Ruthenians and Polesians; and Sergiusz Piasecki for a depiction of fighting and smuggling

around the north-eastern Polish-Soviet frontier. The memoirs of Mieczysław Jałowiecki prince Perejesławski, Father Walerian Meysztowicz, and Prince Eustachy Sapięha are simply indispensable for an understanding of the traditional elite. From a plethora of historians, as an antidote to his prejudices and an aid to his serious lacunae in early modern times, Rudling should familiarize himself primarily with Oskar Halecki. Katarzyna Błachowska and her *Wiele historii jednego państwa* will perhaps help the writer to navigate the apparent labyrinth of the Grand Duchy's historiography.<sup>4</sup>

Quite indicative of Rudling's prejudices is his "Othering" of the Poles. This concerns not only the conservative *krajowcy*, and not only the nobility, but all Poles across the board as a nationality. Since the Poles are a "hegemonic" and "colonial" power Rudling considers them invariably wrong. Unless they are Communists or other pinks, he dismisses all their arguments automatically and nearly always sides with their detractors, crafting a narrative that is little distinguishable from leftist Belarusian nationalist philosophy. The sole exception is this obvious non-brainer that in the 1930s "Poles were collectively condemned as an alien enemy nation and singled out for unprecedented persecution by the authorities" (p. 229). Otherwise "the Poles" in Rudling's imagination play the role of "the Jews" of an anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist.

For example, in one of the most egregious examples of disparaging the Polish predicament under the Russian rule Rudling parrots Theodore R. Weeks's deeply controversial conclusion that "contrary to assertions by Polish nationalists, Russian policy was never intended to crush Polishness, but rather to reconcile the Poles with the idea of Russian rule. State preservation rather than Russification was the main goal of the Russian government between 1863 and 1914" (p. 40). Of course this policy was about reconciling the Poles with the Russian state by making them Russian. Did the state preservation campaign need to entail cultural extermination of the Poles? This is silly, unless one holds that it was not a de-Polonization when one was barred to learn in one's one language at school or use it officially for any transaction, including store signs or even in Catholic Church records which had to be maintained in Cyrillic (baptism, marriage, and death certificates). I'm sure that the Finns enjoyed a much milder version of Sweden's similar policy, as did the Koreans vis-à-vis the Japanese. Rudling relies on Weeks whose specialty is Jewish history, and not Polish (both Christian and not) experience in the Russian-occupied Poland. Rudling should have consulted others. If he is prejudiced against "Polish nationalists," perhaps progressive Marie Skłodowska-Curie's account of the Russification policies she experienced would be a good start for remedial reading. In distinction to his anti-Polish bias, however, Rudling is somehow capable of noticing that "public conversations in German were banned" in the Russian Empire from 1915 (p. 67). Did that count as a policy of Russification of the German minority?

All in all, a sure sign of "othering," in the Kresy, Rudling treats the Poles as newbie interlopers. "Of the emerging new nationalisms in the western borderlands, Polish nationalism caused the authorities the most concern" (p. 34). For the record, Polish proto-nationalism arrived

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<sup>4</sup> Katarzyna Błachowska, *Wiele historii jednego państwa: Obraz dziejów Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego do 1596 roku w ujęciu historyków polskich, rosyjskich, ukraińskich, litewskich i białoruskich w XIX wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2009).

in the Grand Duchy at least with the Christening of Lithuania in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century. It eventually evolved the proto-ideology of “Sarmatism,” which peaked in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Modern Polish nationalism as a form appeared in the mid- to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, most notably during the Bar Confederacy (1768-1772) and the Kościuszko Insurrection (1794). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it manifested itself under the slogan of “For Your Freedom and Ours” in various conspiracies which culminated in the Great War of 1812, the November Rising of 1830, and the January Rising of 1863. (Parenthetically, to downplay the importance of the old Commonwealth and Polish nationalism, Rudling treats us to a thoroughly inadequate discussion of the January Rising, where he failed to consult any solid monographs on the topic (p. 37-38).)

Afterwards, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Polish nationalism re-emerged in two forms: the nationalistic socialism of Józef Piłsudski and its national democratic competition under Roman Dmowski. This is so elementary that one is shocked that Rudling is unaware of such basic facts. His ideology of “imagined” nationalism jumping like a jack in the box out of an intellectual’s head blinds him to the historical reality of continuity and evolution of such forms of collective identity that apparently defy leftist imagination.

Incidentally, Rudling lacks credibility when he refers to “the narrow, ethnocentric Polish nationalism of Roman Dmowski” (p. 45) without citing any solid studies on the topic, e.g., Marcus Alvin Fountain’s monograph, which is the only truly scholarly endeavor in English to analyze the early days of the nationalist leader. Rudling further misstates Dmowski’s position in 1918, falsely asserting that “Dmowski... demanded a smaller but ethnically homogenous nation” (p. 101) On the contrary, the Polish leader demanded *inkorporacja*, a virtual restoration of the pre-1795 Commonwealth through incorporation. Asking the author to read Polish sources on Dmowski would probably be too much.

During the First World War and its aftermath Rudling covers all nationalities in White Ruthenia but the Poles, whom he treats as an afterthought or a contrast to his favored ethnicities. In one of a few references Rudling cites Professor Wiktor Sukiennicki to the effect that the Poles “manipulated” the German census in Wilno-land in 1916. But Sukiennicki specifically debunks such Lithuanian allegations in his *opus magnum*. Again, Rudling plays favorites (p. 72). Further, he claims that during the First World War: “Roman Catholic refugees were rare” (p. 70). This is unclear at best. In 1915 the Russians evacuated hundreds of thousands of Catholics from the Kingdom of Poland/Privislanskyi Krai and even more from the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Later, the Grand Duchy was awash with Catholic refugees from Bolshevik Russia. Incidentally, Rudling’s assertion that “the [German] occupation was relatively mild” (p. 70) seems correct only by contrast with the Nazi experience. The latest scholarship holds that the first Teutonic occupation eerily augured the following one.<sup>5</sup>

Further, Rudling overlooks nearly completely Bolshevik atrocities and peasant anarchy from 1917 on. They targeted the propertied strata, most frequently Poles and Jews, which the author fails to comment on. Somehow, fortunately, he remembers the pogroms. While

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<sup>5</sup> See Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

righteously giving justice to the Jewish suffering for ethnic reasons, why neglect all others who also experienced horrors? Do only Jewish pogroms pass the author's mark of worthiness in persecution and death? Or is it another case of apologizing for leftist violence by glossing over it in silence? Such selective sensitivity is rather off putting.

While selectively shedding politically correct tears over the victims of anti-Semitic violence, Rudling is quite flippant about the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1921). He sarcastically dismisses "these writers [who] presented the Polish-Soviet War as a saintly crusade to save Christian Europe from godless infidels, depicting Polish culture as the easternmost outpost of [Western] civilization, facing brutal Bolshevik hordes who stormed Polish manor houses, destroying books, and breaking up pianos with hatchets" (p. 254). Spare us the ignorant sarcasm and read at least Zofia Kossak Szczucka, Maria Dunin Kozicka, and Norman Davies. The Poles did save Europe from the horrors of Lenin and Stalin, a point sadly lost on gleefully pro-Communist Rudling. Communist terror was not imagined; it was real.

Despite that, the scholar appears helpless throughout to understand negative attitudes of the Polish minority towards its overlords in the USSR: "a considerable part of the Polish population in the western Soviet borderlands remained politically apathetic or outright hostile to the Soviet government and showed little enthusiasm for their 'cultural autonomy'." (p. 229). Of course – the government was Bolshevik. Who would want to collaborate willingly with a totalitarian dictatorship? At least, referring to the Great Terror, the author admits that "ethnic Poles were heavily overrepresented among the victims" (p. 313). But he underestimates the total victim count and fails to footnote the Polish martyrdom properly as Rudling is unaware of the pioneering work of Tomasz Sommer on the "anti-Polish operation of the NKVD."<sup>6</sup> Next, he also undercalculates the Polish victims of the Soviet deportations to the Gulag after 1939 (p. 329 n. 103).

While rather cavalier about Polish victimhood, Rudling is positively contemptuous of interwar Poland. In the author's telling, the USSR almost invariably emerges as a preferable entity.<sup>7</sup> For example, Rudling positively contrasts "inclusive civic nationalism based upon allegiance to certain political rules rather than on ethnicity" in the BSSR with "the increasingly brutal treatment of the national minorities in Poland" (p. 240). In fact, the scholar frequently uses the alleged failings of the Polish Republic to relativize the real horror of the Soviet Union. For example, he uses the word "elected" without any qualifiers to describe Communist power in

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<sup>6</sup> Tomasz Sommer estimates the victim count at ca. 200,000-250,000, including perhaps 30-40,000 in the BSSR. See Tomasz Sommer, *Operacja antypolska NKWD, 1937-1938: Geneza i przebieg ludobójstwa popełnionego na Polakach w Związku Sowieckim* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Wolności, 2014); idem, ed., *Rozstrzelać Polaków: Ludobójstwo Polaków w Związku Sowieckim w latach 1937-1938: Dokumenty z Centrali* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Wolności, 2010); idem, ed., *Dzieci operacji polskiej mówią: 45 relacji* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Wolności, 2013). See also, Wojciech Lizak, *Rozstrzelana Polonia: Polacy w ZSRR, 1917-1939* (Szczecin: Prywatny Instytut Analiz Społecznych, 1990); Mikołaj Iwanow, *Pierwszy naród ukarany: Polacy w Związku Radzieckim, 1921-1939* (Warszawa and Wrocław: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991); and Jewgienij Gorelik, *Kuropaty: Polski ślad* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm and Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> This is in stark distinction to such thoughtful scholars of Belarusian nationalism as, say, Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus: A Perpetual Borderland* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2009).

Soviet Belarus (p. 97). Surely, nowadays we agree that all elections were falsified and the candidates were appointed by the Politburo and other Bolshevik authorities. In contrast, according to Rudling, elections in democratic Poland were “relatively free” (p. 168). How relatively? As relatively as in the USSR?

Further, while giving the Soviet secret police a free pass in much of the monograph, the scholar brazenly hints that, indeed, Warsaw maintained a police state. He even claims (*sans* a footnote) that “the Polish police were better organized and more efficient than the old tsarist authorities had been” – better than the infamous Okhrana (p. 248). Does the scholar mean that unlike its tsarist counterpart it was virtually incorruptible? That would be correct for the most part. Sadly, however, he seems to be referring to the Polish police’s relative ability to contain dissent which should be laughable for anyone who knows anything about police repression in imperial Russia. Rudling’s treatment of the Polish police is just one example of his merciless skewering of the interwar Polish state, even when it practiced parliamentarism until 1926. Yet, until then Poland was a democracy no more dysfunctional than contemporary Italy is.

However, it is Józef Piłsudski, undoubtedly because of his symbolic status, whom Rudling targets with most vehemence. The author draws spurious parallels between Stalin and Piłsudski throughout. For example, the author sees Stalin and Piłsudski as nearly identical twins. “Their parallel ascent was followed by the relapse of the political decision-making process in their respective countries into conspiratorial and secretive workings” (p. 252) Did the government in Warsaw run like the Politburo in Moscow? Also, before Stalin, i.e., under Lenin, was the Soviet system not “conspiratorial and secretive”? Was it open and transparent?

Rudling also blames the crushing of Belarusian nationalism equally on the Soviets and Poles. The Poles crushed “their Belarusian minority’s connections” to the Soviets, just like the Soviets smashed “their Belarusian intelligentsia” because of their links to the Poles (p. 277). Please note that in this telling the Poles targeted the entire “minority,” while the Soviets only the “intelligentsia.” And since the latter was puny, the repression, it is implied, did not amount to much. Still, “Piłsudski’s and Stalin’s mutual distrust of each other constituted a tragedy for the people who inhabited the border areas” (p. 301). This is ridiculous. In the USSR Belarusian nationalism was exterminated together with its adherents. In Poland, only the Communist *agentura* and its fellow travelers were repressed. Other forms of Belarusian nationalism were permitted to continue on, albeit in a limited way.

There are other problems. Rudling comes across as ignorant of the dynamics and politics of Piłsudski’s *coup d’état* in 1926. He amazingly discovers that “many” Communists fought on the Marshal’s side (p. 250). Yet, he fails to explain how a tiny, conspiratorial, and fringe party was capable of fielding “many” fighters. The scholar next advances a false analogy about Stalin’s indirect support for Piłsudski and Hitler by undermining the social democrats. As far as Germany, this assertion is not controversial. But what of Poland? Was the cause and effect factor clear there? Unlike in Germany, where the Social Democratic Party (SDP) opposed Hitler from the start, in Poland the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) staunchly supported Piłsudski as fleetingly did the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). However, Stalin was dismayed by it and the KPP immediately returned to opposing the Marshal. It took the PPS a few years to change its

mind about its erstwhile comrade Piłsudski. Thus, the Kremlin's opposition to Germany's socialists expedited the rise of the Nazis, while legitimizing their patriotic credentials. The Sanacja dictatorship did not need Moscow's imprimatur as it enjoyed its own socialist and patriotic credentials. If anything, the initial Communist assistance damaged Piłsudski's pure image of a patriotic socialist. He did better with the Communists as detractors. Thus, in Poland, Stalin's offensive against the socialists was largely immaterial to the success of the dictatorship.

The sustained attack on Piłsudski is part and parcel of Rudling's continuous besmirching of Poland. The latter likewise fails the scholarly standard. The scholar is incorrect, for instance, to insist that "the victorious Entente Powers ensured that Piłsudski's legions took over much of the territory the Germans surrendered" (p. 99). Keep in mind that Piłsudski saw Russia as Poland's main enemy. He thus supported the Central Powers and even in 1917 viewed them as a lesser evil, if not tactical allies. Consequently, Germany ensured that Piłsudski took over in central Poland precisely to thwart the Entente. In western Poland and the eastern borderlands the Poles (many of whom were rarely in agreement with Piłsudski at this point) had to fight tooth and nail against the retreating Germans and surging Bolsheviks. But according to Rudling in February 1919 the Poles, of course, were the aggressor: "in the west the Bolsheviks faced an attack from the Poles" (p. 99).

Likewise, we can only wring our hands over Rudling's ill-informed statement on the treaty of Riga of 1921 in the wake of the Polish-Bolshevik War. The scholar predictably repeated the canard that Lenin was in a giving mood but the right-wing Polish politicians did not want eastern Belarusian lands. One should refer to Jerzy Borzęcki's masterful study of Polish-Soviet peacemaking for a corrective (p. 119).<sup>8</sup>

There are some other annoying flaws and mistakes. For instance, Rudling sneers at "racialist narratives" of Belarusian nationalists "about Mongol-blooded Russians" but he fails to relate those views with the latest DNA studies of the Slavic people (s. 51). The scholar ponders the Soviet War Scare of 1927. "The central question – whether Stalin indeed feared an invasion of the Soviet Union in 1927 – remains unanswered," unless one reads Bogdan Musiał, Simon Sebag Montefiore, and even Stephen Kotkin, who have answered the question unequivocally yes (p. 280). Perhaps it would be also beneficial to read the memoirs of Stanisław Patek, Warsaw's ambassador to Moscow at the time. Indeed, Poland was considered enemy number 1. But that is nowhere to be found in Rudling's leftist imagination which can only construe Poland as an equivalent monster to the USSR.

Moreover, Rudling misidentifies, and misspells, the name of Boris Kowerda (not "Kowarda," p. 283), who was a White Russian émigré, and not exactly a Belarussian nationalist. He attended a Belorussian highschool because he was an Orthodox Christian believer. Later, having served time in a Polish jail for shooting one of the assassins of Tsar Nicholas II, who happened to be the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, Kowerda moved to Yugoslavia and fought against the Communists during the Second World War. The scholar also mislabels "the endecja-

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<sup>8</sup> Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

leaning Vilnius paper *Słowo*” (p. 383). In fact, under Stanisław Cat Mackiewicz, this was a famous conservative-monarchist newsheet which supported Piłsudski.

There are mistranslations (e.g., Klub Pracy is not workers club but Labor Club, p. 251), and misspellings, in particular of Polish words (e.g., Niezależna “Partya” Chłopska should be Niezależna Partia Chłopska, p. 258; and “polslow” should be posłów p. 384 n. 108 & 109). The work could use a good editor with working knowledge of foreign languages. But that is relatively minor.

Perhaps most revealing of the inadequacy of Rudling’s intellectual framework is his surprisingly incisive conclusion. It is as if he got things right despite himself: “For most people in Belarus nationality had little to do with their daily lives, until it was violently thrust upon them; nationality was for them less a vehicle for liberation than a tool for dominance. The majority of the Belarusian peasantry was indifferent to and resisted that form of control. The new nationalized identities offered to them by the nationalists and the Soviets had little to do with, but often complicated their lives. They dodged this form of control that was imposed upon them, resisting for as long as they could the identities projected upon them by ethnographers, specialists, nationalist intellectuals, Soviet central planners, and German, Polish, and Lithuanian strategists” (p. 315-316). So, nationalism is bad and Communism likewise. Is it more of the scholars’s cognitive dissonance or has Rudling finally admitted that the social, political, economic, and cultural arrangements as generated gradually over hundreds of years under the Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian Commonwealth were preferable to whatever modernity dragged in? If that is what emerges from this muddled, deeply flawed monograph, we can only concur.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz

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