

Crossroads of East and West: Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv on the Threshold of Modernity

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RECENT SURVEYS ON POST-SOVIET Eastern Europe reveal that ethnicity and ethnic differentiation are gradually losing their salience among local citizens, while social identification (for example, identities of workers or businesspeople) has become increasingly important as a way for people to perceive both themselves and ongoing political and economic changes. This tendency purports to herald the emergence of a society in which citizens compete for rewards and opportunities on the basis of merit rather than ethnic heritage. In Lithuania and Western Ukraine, however, this is not the case. National identification axes are the most important, and a strong national identity promotes democracy and opposition to communism.¹

From a longer perspective, these two different patterns of identification may reflect differences in historical trajectories for the two regions: the Eastern European core, where communism established itself in the wake of World War I, and the western borderlands that were annexed by the Soviet Union during and after World War II. One wonders, however, whether the twenty interwar years were so crucial in shaping attitudes that proved to be so persistent some sixty to eighty years later. Or, are we dealing with some *longue durée* history of nationalism?

In his seminal study, *Nationalism Reframed*, Rogers Brubaker uses the example of interwar Poland—a state that covered a large part of the region in question—to illustrate how a “nationalizing state” increased the salience of national identity. This was the case especially in the zones of mixed settlement,

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¹Arthur H. Miller et al., “Social Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1998): 248–86.

such as the eastern borderlands, which, before 1919 and after 1939, happened to be western borderlands of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union.² Harald Binder and Anna Veronika Wendland suggest a promising new perspective that results from shifting the focus of analysis from the national/state to the regional/city level. In their fine analyses, they demonstrate persuasively how the politics of national integration during the period from 1870 to 1939 heavily influenced urban identity in L'viv, the largest city in that region. According to Wendland, the identification of *lwowskość* with *polskość* evolved exclusively as a result of the "nationalizing politics" of the 1920s and 1930s, which relied heavily on the mythologization of some elements of the recent war memories. These politics left only small groups of the city inhabitants unaffected. Harald Binder moves beyond the interwar chronological framework and thus helps us to see that there was continuity between prewar and postwar practices in L'viv. A main topic in the discourse of interwar Polish nationalism—a fear of ubiquitous danger and a need to defend L'viv from rival Ukrainian, German, and Jewish nationalisms—was a notion that became central long before 1914. Paradoxically, the constitutional practices of the supranational late Habsburg monarchy worked in the same nationalizing direction because they provided Polish intellectuals and politicians with the means and venues to transform the Austrian *Lemberg* into the Polish *Lwów*.

Both articles combine to show that, besides "a nationalizing state," there were "nationalizing cities." Indeed, a nationalizing city could perform this function even better in the absence of a nationalizing state. Given the local focus of both articles, neither attempts to discern to what extent local L'viv politics were exceptional within the larger regional context. Hence, the merit of Wendland's point that comparison with another metropolis like Vilnius could be very instructive.

It seems that the easiest way to underscore the exceptional character of the city is to state that L'viv was the largest metropolis in that region. This was already the case in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the city flourished as a result of its special role as a nexus of continental commerce. L'viv subsequently experienced a brief period of decline as European commerce reoriented itself from continental to overseas trade routes, and the Rzeczpospolita suffered from internal crises and foreign invasions. But Habsburg rule (1772–1918) opened a new window of opportunity. The city experienced spectacular growth due to its special role as the capital of the largest Austrian province, securing large investments for L'viv that could be channeled into the development of urban infrastructure.³

Amid the plain and poor Eastern European urban landscape, L'viv impressed everyone with its size and glamour. After her arrival in L'viv in 1825, Austrian Countess Anna Revertera—who was married to a high-ranking Habsburg officer, whom she followed to different garrison towns throughout

²Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996), passim.

³Stanisław Hoszowski, *Ekonomiczny rozwój Lwowa w latach 1772–1914* (Economic developments in L'viv, 1772–1914) (L'viv, 1935), 107.

his military career—wrote, “I have really never seen such a populous city.” Endowed with fine musical tastes and a member of the Schubert-Kreis, she was pleasantly surprised by the richness and variety of cultural life in what was supposedly a provincial city. The local theater had the best singers, and the L’viv musical society boasted the best musicians, including the son of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.⁴

It is true that the Habsburg monarchy was not the most efficient state in world history. But for the countries of Eastern and Central Europe it still constituted “the most rational among anything that existed in the region before and since.”⁵ The same was true for L’viv, for which the Habsburg period represented the peak of its development as an urban metropolis. Habsburg L’viv suffered from housing and infrastructural problems, insufficient energy and water supplies, and social instability, but, contrary to what Wendland suggests, it can hardly be judged “underdeveloped” by the putative standards of Western urbanization, or lacking in “many of the institutional preconditions that make a mere urban agglomeration a city.” Measured by the standards of “modern” civilization, the benefits it offered to the needs of everyday life and cultural development, L’viv by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, in contrast to Cracow, Kiev, Vilnius, and Warsaw, possibly the only truly *modern* city within the realm of former RzeczPospolita.⁶

Its metropolitan character implied a special role for L’viv in shaping new, modern identities for the whole region. As the largest administrative center and a major source of cultural production, the city was a mediator of modern Western ideologies—socialism, liberalism, and nationalism—in a very responsive milieu of local politicians and intellectuals. One has to be reminded that Habsburg L’viv, in contrast to Cracow, was home for Galician liberals. It was in L’viv, not Kiev or Warsaw, where Eastern Europe’s first May Day was celebrated in 1890, and where the first Polish and Ukrainian social democratic parties were founded. L’viv publishers also produced the four principal texts of Polish and Ukrainian nationalism: Roman Dmowski’s *Mysli współczesnego Polaka* (Thoughts of a modern Pole, 1904), Iulian Bachynskyi’s *Ukraina irredenta* (1895), Mykola Mikhnovskyyi’s *Samostiina Ukraina* (Independent Ukraine, 1900), and Dmytro Dontsov’s *Nationalism* (1926).

Its extreme multiethnic character—even by Eastern European standards—added another important aspect to that story. No other city in the early modern RzeczPospolita—or, perhaps, in all of Europe—could claim five ethnic groups (Poles, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, Armenians), each comprising over 5 percent of the population.⁷ During Habsburg rule, the multiethnic structure

⁴Walburga Litschauer, ed., *Neue Dokumente zum Schubert-Kreis. Aus Briefen und Tagebüchern seiner Freunde*, vol. 2, *Dokumente zum Leben der Anna von Revertera* (Vienna, 1993), 16.

⁵Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House of Habsburg* (London, 1981), 3.

⁶Krzysztof Pawłowski, “Narodziny nowoczesnego miasta” (Birth of a modern city), in *Sztuka drugiej połowy XIX wieku* (Arts in the second half of the nineteenth century) (Warsaw, 1973), 57–58, 61–68.

⁷Myron Kapral’, “Demohrafia L’vova XV–pershoi polovyny XVI st.” (Demography of L’viv in the fifteenth century through the first half of the sixteenth century), in *L’viv. Istorychni narysy*

was somewhat simplified by the assimilation of most of the Armenians and a significant number of the Germans into the Catholic (Polish) culture. But as the largest center of cultural production, the city was home to numerous educational and cultural institutions for the three remaining indigenous groups (Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians). Through the media of cultural artifacts and local school alumni, its cultural influences radiated throughout Eastern and Central Europe to the farthest borders of each groups' territory of settlement. Moreover, this was increasingly the case as their native cultures became subject to repression in the neighboring Russian Empire. Many Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish political activists—both socialists and nationalists (who were, in some cases, one and the same)—migrated from the Russian Empire and turned L'viv into a center of their activity.

Therefore, besides its actual existence as a metropolitan city, L'viv played a symbolic role as a "hidden" national capital for each of three modern nationalisms in Eastern Europe (Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian). One could say that the symbolic image of the city was much more important than its more tangible, "physical" status. During the momentous geopolitical changes that swept through Eastern Europe from 1914 to 1923, control over the city did not have any significant strategic importance for either of the emerging Polish or Ukrainian nation-states. Their future was sealed in military theaters farther west and east of L'viv. Both, however, had chosen the city as a focal point of their bitter confrontation. The mere idea that "their" L'viv might be left outside of their national borders was intolerable for both sides. In the words of a contemporary historian, "[T]he battle for [Polish] Lwów—the battle that formally started before the proclamation of the Polish state—had itself become a very important 'state-building element'—a term that was much preferred by interwar Polish publicists for the Poland that reemerged after 123 years of [foreign] yoke."⁸

Victorious Polish nationalism, both in 1870 and in 1919, faced a difficult task. It could claim that Poles had a numerical preponderance in the city. But numbers did not matter much in the city that had the character of a modern cosmopolitan metropolis. As a matter of fact, before 1870, L'viv—as Harald Binder reminds us—had a "German" appearance. According to some memoirs, its "Germanness" stemmed not only from the Magdeburg planning of the old city, but from a sense that it was protected by a just government, from its flawless order, and, last but not least, from German-style *Kaffeehäuser* that seemingly left those of Dresden far behind.⁹ This German character resulted from a large influx of state bureaucrats, who arrived in large numbers from

(L'viv: Essays on history), ed. Yaroslav Isaievych, Feodosii Steblii, and Mykola Lytvyn (L'viv, 1996), 72.

⁸Maciej Kozłowski, *Miedzy Sanem a Zbruczem. Walki o Lwów i Galicje Wschodnia 1918–1919* (Between San and Zbruch: The struggle over L'viv and Eastern Galicia) (Cracow, 1990), 160.

⁹J. G. Kohl, *Reisen im Inneren vom Rußland und Polen. Die Bukovina. Galizien. Mähren*, vol. 3 (Dresden, 1841), 88, 103–5; Myxajlo Kril', "L'viv u opysax inozemciv (kinec' XVIII—persha polovyna XIX st.)" (L'viv in descriptions of foreigners [end of the eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century]) in *L'viv: misto—suspi'ltvo—kul'tura* (L'viv: City—society—culture), ed. Marian Mudryi, vol. 3 (L'viv, 1999), 300.

core areas of the Habsburg Empire and who considered it their mission “to re-educate Sarmatian beasts [that is, Polish nobles] into human beings.”¹⁰

Austrian bureaucrats were hardly champions of German nationalism; they tried to impose loyalty to the ruling house, not loyalty to a nation. But they introduced a theme that recurred in further “nationalizing” discourses on and in L’viv, namely, the city as a bulwark of civilization against the “barbarian” East. This was initially the kind of discourse that Polish patriots were forced to confront, since, in the eyes of both German clerks from Austria and German nationalists from Prussia, it was the Poles who were the “barbarians.” By the middle of the nineteenth century, L’viv’s high society was divided into a German “party of Schiller” and a Polish “party of Mickiewicz,” each adopted from the names of those poets who best symbolized the cultural achievements of their nation. By the end of Habsburg rule, Polish nationalism had won this battle. But it did so by facing new enemies: Ukrainian and, to a lesser extent, Jewish nationalisms that matured in the shadows of confrontation between the local Polish administration and the central Habsburg power. The Polish nationalists emulated the familiar tactics of branding their enemies as “a threat from [the] East” to the “bulwark of civilization,” which Polish *Lwów* represented in their imagination. Many Polish defendants of L’viv against Ukrainian troops in November 1918 felt as though they were fighting against hordes of Cossacks and *hajdamaks* that crawled from the “wild steppe”—an image that was used frequently by the interwar Polish propaganda in commemorations of the *Lwów* defense.

Harald Binder and Anna Veronika Wendland offer numerous examples of how, in L’viv, one nationalism provoked and reinforced the other, and that in mutual confrontations, national patriots borrowed and emulated ready-made themes, symbols, and clichés. Most of what Binder and Wendland portray is easily recognized in post-Soviet L’viv, with the principal difference being that, in today’s Ukrainian L’viv, it is the Soviet Russians who play the role of “Eastern barbarians.” The issue of the reopening of the Polish Military Cemetery (Orląta Lwowski) in L’viv recently provoked a heated dispute that threatens to destroy the heretofore generally very good relations between post-communist Warsaw and post-communist Kiev. There is no other place in Ukraine—and probably few in the Eastern Europe—where discussions on national issues are taking place with such an intensity.¹¹ At the same time, there are few other places where public life and the number of non-government organizations have reached such a high level. Both tendencies seem to demonstrate the long-term impact of the ambivalent Habsburg legacy: on one hand, it promoted the civic activity of all groups; on the other hand, civic solidarity and cooperation among citizens failed to cross religious, social, ethnic, or, later, national boundaries.¹²

¹⁰Cited in Vadym Adadurov, “L’viv u napoleonivs’ku epokhu” (L’viv in the Napoleonic era), in *L’viv*, ed. Mudryi, 212.

¹¹On contemporary L’viv, see the special issue of the the Kiev-based journal “‘Krytyka’: Strazi za Lvovom,” *Krytyka*, no. 7–8 (2002).

¹²Walentyzna Najdus, “Kształtowanie się nowoczesnych wieżów społeczno-organizacyjnych ludności ukraińskiej Galicji Wschodniej w dobie konstytucyjnej” (Making of modern social and

One may take a step further back and look at the long-term role of the Habsburg legacy in the making of modern nations in the region. John Armstrong, a leading specialist in modern East European history, suggested a few years ago a scheme of nation-building that underscores the role of major urban centers like L'viv. In his view, long before Habsburg times, local ethnic and religious groups were still indistinguishable in terms of national identity. Most of them spoke mutually comprehensible patois and had a diffuse historical memory of their common descent, as well as a sharper sense of religious distinction between Western and Eastern Christian and non-Christian affiliations that did not necessarily coincide with future national cleavages. Only gradually, under the centrifugal influences of large cultural centers—such as Kiev, L'viv, and Vilnius—did distinctive national identities emerge.¹³ At first glance, there is nothing specifically “regional” about this model, which could also be applied elsewhere. Armstrong himself suggests as a close parallel the Mediterranean world of Roman languages. Another comparison that comes to mind is the large German-speaking area of Central Europe, even though, as some philologists suggest,¹⁴ the differences between German dialects were much more pronounced than was the case with numerous Slavic dialects in Eastern Europe. What was specific in Eastern Europe was the mixture of Eastern Christianity with local political traditions,¹⁵ resulting in premodern identities and intellectual practices that proved to be extremely persistent. They were symbolized in the perseverance of Rus', a vague notion of Eastern Christian community that used Church Slavonic, and, in comparison with Western standards, was rather poor in its cultural achievements. A Ukrainian socialist from the Russian Empire wrote in the 1870s: “[B]esides three groups, Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, there exists a fourth one: *all-Rus'*, something hopeless, a dense stratum that covered the *Rus'* of [different] ethnic groups and nationalities.”¹⁶

The making of modern Ukraine was not just the unmaking of modern Poland, Rus', or Russia. It was also the unmaking of premodern Rus'. Therefore, modern nation-building among those Habsburg Ruthenians who also belonged to Rus' (Ruthenia) was, in a sense, more complicated than for the Habsburg Poles. Until the very beginning of World War I, they were engaged

organizational bonds among the Ukrainian population of Eastern Galicia in the constitutional era), in *Lwów. Miasto. Społeczeństwo. Kultura* (L'viv. City. Society. Culture), ed. Henryk W. Zalin-ski and Kazimierz Karolczak, vol. 2 (Cracow, 1998), 166–67; Marian Tyrowicz, *Wspomnienia o życiu kulturalnym i obyczajowym Lwowa 1918–1939* (Memoirs on cultural and habitual life in L'viv, 1918–39) (Wrocław, 1991), 186–87, 196–97, 200–201.

¹³John A. Armstrong, “Myth and History in the Evolution of Ukrainian Consciousness,” in *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyj et al. (Edmonton, 1992), 129–30.

¹⁴George Y. Shevelov, “Language,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, ed. Danylo Huzar Struk (Toronto, 1993), 3:36.

¹⁵On these topics, see George Schoepflin, “The Political Traditions of Eastern Europe,” *Daedalus* 119, no. 1 (1990): 55–90; Ihor Ševcenko, *Ukraine between East and West* (Edmonton, 1996), passim.

¹⁶Cited in Mykhailo Hrushevskyy, *Z pochyniv ukraïnskoho sochialistychnoho rukhu. Mykh. Drahomanow i zhenevskyyi sochialistychnyi hurtok* (From the beginnings of the Ukrainian social movement: Mykh. Drahomanov and the Geneva Socialist Circle) (Vienna, 1922), 64.

in ideological disputes over whether they were Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, or a special breed—Ruthenians. Some of these options were quite reconcilable within a broader and vague identity of Rus'. Only by the end of the nineteenth century did a majority of local Ruthenian elites abandon the Rus' identity and accept the more exclusive concept of a modern Ukrainian nation. They did so partly in response to the challenge of Polish nationalism, but also because of the efforts of Ukrainian migrants from the Russian Empire who were eager to dissociate themselves from the Russian nationalizing project.¹⁷

By 1939, the Ukrainian identity won the battle in the former Habsburg Galicia, as it did in the Soviet Ukraine, as a result of the "Ukrainization" imposed by the Stalinist regime. Still, what was definitely missing in the Soviet case was a more durable and organic construct on a civic level, which was more in keeping with the local Ukrainian national movement in the Habsburg monarchy and interwar Poland.¹⁸ Little wonder that a large part of the urban population in the east and south of contemporary Ukraine suffers from a crisis of identity. While they seem to accept the Ukrainian identity, they try to reconcile it with Russian, Rus' (pan-East Slavic), and Soviet options—very much as contemporary Belarussians and Russians do in the large urban centers both within and outside their own national states.¹⁹ One may tentatively say that modern Ukrainian nationalism beyond the former Habsburg space, as well as Russian and Belarussian nation-building, never had a "nationalizing city" that was also a great metropolis like L'viv. Further studies must be done, however, to confirm or refute this hypothesis. In any case, the contributions made here by Harald Binder and Anna Veronika Wendland appear to present a very good start in that direction.

¹⁷John-Paul Himka, "The Construction of Nationality in Galician Rus': Icarian Flights in Almost All Directions," in *Intellectuals and Articulation of the Nation*, ed. Ronald G. Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor, 1999), 109–64; Ivan L. Rudnytsky, *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Edmonton, 1987), 315–52; Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 2000), 361–94.

¹⁸I tried to trace this pattern of nationalizing politics using the naming of children after "national heroes." Yaroslav Hrytsak, "History of Names: A Case of Constructing National Historical Memory in Galicia, 1830–1930s," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49 (2001): 163–77.

¹⁹See Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine*, passim; Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), passim; as well my article "National Identities in Post-Soviet Ukraine: The Case of Lviv and Donetsk," in *Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe: Essays in Honor of Roman Szporluk*, ed. Zvi Gitelman et al., Harvard Ukrainian Studies, 22 (Cambridge, 1998), 263–81.