

Alexandra Wachter

Tarik Cyril Amar. *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015. xii + 356 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-5391-5.

Alexandra Wachter is a researcher at the Austrian Society of Contemporary History. Address for correspondence: C/o Department for Contemporary History, University of Vienna, Spitalgasse 2-4/Hof 1, Tür 1.13, 1090 Vienna, Austria. alexandra.wachter@univie.ac.at.

Present-day inhabitants of Lviv often combine a certain nostalgia for their city's multinational past under Habsburg rule with a stress on its Ukrainian nature. That Ukrainian Lviv was created at the expense of the Jewish population murdered by the German occupiers and their local collaborators during World War II and the Polish population expelled by the Soviets afterwards, is not part of the city's official identity. And reflections on the Soviet period are often reduced to black or white narratives—either presenting Soviet rule as a criminal occupation committed by external perpetrators or celebrating Soviet victory over fascism, Polish bourgeois oppression, and backwardness.

Tarik Cyril Amar's study *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* is not the first to put its finger into these often-neglected wounds, and is one in a series of recent academic publications on the topic. While other scholars have chosen a more distinct focus, for example on the Lviv pogroms of July 1941 (Struve 2015) or on violence and ethnic conflict in and between the World Wars (Mick 2015), Amar's attempt takes a broader approach, both in terms of time span and topics. He traces the transformation of a multinational, predominantly Polish city that was shaped by one and a half centuries of Habsburg rule to a location where violence escalated around WWII up to the more peaceful Soviet-Ukrainian Lviv of the 1960s–1980s. The book can roughly be divided into these three eras, and in each of them Amar endeavors to take alternately the viewpoints of the city's three former primary ethnic groups: Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians. Being able to draw from research and sources in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian, Amar sticks to this concept in the first two sections, but partly abandons it in the more interesting case studies of the postwar phase.

The first two chapters provide the reader with a fast-track summary of the city's multinational period, including the time of the first Soviet rule between 1939 and 1941. Both are largely based on secondary literature, thus offering little new historical evidence. Amar's merit here lies with the breadth of sources, which include some less known Polish and Ukrainian studies, and with the balanced perspectives. Formative forces and concepts like imperial modernity, backwardness and urban renewal, Polish cultural dominance and peasants "learning to see themselves as Ukrainians" (p. 29), Polish and Ukrainian antisemitism, "Polish Lwów triumphant" and "Ukrainian

Lviv defeated" (p. 38), Soviet repression and nationality policy are presented from the viewpoints of ethnicity and ruling powers (Habsburg, 1772–1918; Poland, 1918–1939; and Soviet, 1939–1941). Although the growing interethnic tension and military conflict of this period did not result in the same drastic demographic changes as in the decades following, adding this context is helpful in regards to the questions of continuity and discontinuity raised in later chapters and as a prelude to the ethnical cleansing on a large scale.

When it comes to numbers and details on the Holocaust, Amar relies on the expertise of colleagues like Dieter Pohl (1996, 2000), Christoph Mick (2010, 2011), and John-Paul Himka (2011), without avoiding controversial subjects, like the Lviv pogrom of July 1941 and local collaboration by both Ukrainians and Poles. He presents the annihilation of Lviv's Jewish population as "the deepest, most visible, and most dramatic change wrought by Lemberg's German occupation" (p. 94) and the expulsion of Poles as the completion of the "violent ethnic simplification of the Second World War" that shaped the city's first Ukrainization (p. 145). Most of this is not new, but Amar also pays attention to the way the respective occupiers imagined the city and their role in it, as well as how the atmosphere of fear and survival established by one regime survived the transition to another. A less known but interesting aspect are attempts at collaboration between the Polish underground and Ukrainian nationalists—which failed. When Lviv had become "the nightmare utopia of European antisemitism, a city without Jews" (p. 115), Ukrainians and Poles concentrated on their own animosities. And once the Red Army reconquered Lviv in July 1944, the Poles became the next target for ethnic cleansing. Their slow expulsion is described in detail, and Amar also addresses a question that is still delicate today: the city that inhabitants present with so much pride to both guests and future generations is primarily filled with non-Ukrainian cultural heritage. In 1947 the Kyiv Central Committee of the Communist Party "fretted over the 'enormous' amounts of literature in foreign languages left in Lviv." The new rulers shipped whole libraries to Moscow but, luckily, were unable to complete the cultural cleansing, and "postwar Lviv was literally crammed full with a past that had no place in the Soviet present" (p. 157).

Amar's central and controversial thesis is that the "Ukrainization" of Lviv is not primarily the result of Ukrainian nationalism and not even of the purging forces of Nazism and Stalinism, but of Soviet nationality policies. "Ukrainization and Sovietization," he maintains, "were inseparable in Lviv" (p. 11). Amar is certainly aware of the provocative nature of such a claim and perhaps wanted to address just this discomfort when he chose the book's title. There is some truth in the "paradox" that it was the fiercest enemy of Ukrainian nationalism who at least "helped" to complete the dream of a Ukrainian Lviv. Yet one has to be careful when putting Soviet nationality politics on the same level as "grand strategies pursued by conquering states" eager to fulfill "violent, ideology-driven projects with an account of local experiences" (p. 44).

Even during the first Soviet period, Amar maintains, Soviet terminology attempted to "draw on traditional Ukrainian nationalist slogans" (p. 47). This was in line with the Stalinist claim of cultural politics that were "nationalist in form and

socialist in content," a strategy to give the Russian-dominated social order a national coating, or, in other words, a superficial appeal to nationalist sentiment in order to enforce a new order with the help of repression—against all ethnic groups—and cadres imported from Russia or the East. Amar pays a lot of attention to the dichotomy between "Easterners" and "Westerners" in the study's final and most interesting section on Soviet Lviv cleansed of Jews, Poles and, to an extent, Ukrainian nationalists. Drawing on his own archival research, he casts light on tensions in post-war and postrepression Lviv from the viewpoint of workers, the old local intelligentsia, and the Jewish community, concluding with a chapter on the politics of memory. He claims that Soviet Lviv became "a key site of the next round in the struggle over hegemony between eastern and western Ukrainian elites" and that eastern Ukrainians "helped impose a version of Ukraine that was Stalinist and subordinate to a Russian 'elder brother'" (p. 145). Industrialization played a key role in implementing this vision, as many enterprises were under direct control of Moscow bureaucracies, and a place where easterners and locals interacted on a daily basis. Both are presented as perceiving the "other" as underdeveloped and primitive. Ideas of backward, non-Russian provinces and industrialization were indeed features of Soviet nationality policies and, in Lviv, clashed with the local idea of a backward East, uncultured Bolsheviks, and Galician Europeanness. Whether and how these notions were reflected in people's life experiences is mostly examined through statistics showing how locals failed to climb the career ladder and not through interviews with the many witnesses still alive. This is a pity, as the question appears predestined for an oral history project or, at least, for an attempt to underline the assumed narrative with personal testimony.

But the main limitation of the otherwise excellent case studies is the narrowing of focus to the assumed dichotomy. That the experience of Poles remaining after 1947 was less central in the making of Soviet Ukrainian Lviv might be arguable, at least when based on numerical evidence; according to the sources cited by Amar, their number was reduced from 108,000 of 150,000–160,000 in 1944 to 8,600 of 380,500 in 1955 (p. 143), a drop from 72 percent to about 2 percent of the population. And Amar does offer a short—and highly recommended—detour on the post-war fate of Lviv's Jewish community, mostly newcomers from eastern regions, that became the target of antireligious policies in the early 1960s, a time when the rulers promoted antisemitic stereotypes to distract from corruption, scarcity, and social inequality. But the perspective of the growing Russian population remains largely neglected.

Having said that, all four of the last chapters offer many new viewpoints and facts about life under communism in Ukrainian Lviv that are all too often left out today. Amar has written an original and mostly balanced contribution to the city's urban history, combining existing knowledge and adding new case studies. His mostly chronological journey through Lviv's twentieth-century history challenges the many myths that continue to (mis)shape the city's own reflection of its past. It also adds to our understanding of recurrent tensions in Ukrainian society and the armed conflict between Ukrainian and (pro-)Russian forces in the country's East.

REFERENCES

- Himka, John-Paul. 2011. "The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd." *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistes* 53(2–4):209–243.
- Mick, Christoph. 2010. *Kriegserfahrungen in einer multiethnischen Stadt: Lemberg 1914–1947*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz.
- Mick, Christoph. 2011. "Incompatible Experiences: Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews in Lviv under Soviet and German Occupation, 1939–1944." *Journal of Contemporary History* 46(2):336–363.
- Mick, Christoph. 2015. *Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv, 1914–1947: Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Pohl, Dieter. 1996. *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens*. Munich: Oldenbourg.
- Pohl, Dieter. 2000. "Schlachtfeld zweier totalitärer Diktaturen: Die Ukraine im Zweiten Weltkrieg." *Österreichische Osthefte* 42:339–362.
- Struve, Kai. 2015. *Deutsche Herrschaft, ukrainischer Nationalismus, antijüdische Gewalt: Der Sommer 1941 in der Westukraine*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg.