

***Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine.* By Tatiana Zhurzhenko. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2010. 330 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Paper.**

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Reading Tatiana Zhurzhenko's book leaves one with mixed emotions. On the one hand, there is much to recommend in it; on occasion, one finds truly impressive insights in its pages. On the other hand, the book's structure is somewhat puzzling, the absence of a bibliography or an index makes it hard to navigate, and the author frequently makes bold statements for which she provides little, if any, support. Zhurzhenko admits the book's loose structure, indicating that it is "not a monograph in a strict sense, but rather a collection of texts united by a common subject" (37). Most of its content is based on articles published individually and later revised for this volume. The book aims to tackle both the broad socio-historical concern with "the emergence of new borders and the transformation of collective identities in the processes of post-Soviet disintegration and nation building" (20) and the specific "elitist [sic—VC] discourses produced by politicians and intellectuals" and "narratives of ordinary people living near the new border and experiencing it in their everyday lives" (22).

The volume's main focus is close study of a segment of the Ukrainian-Russian border in the historical region of Slobozhanshchyna or Slobids'ka Ukraïna (Sloboda Ukraine). A part of the former Dyke Pole, or "Wild Field," a sparsely populated area between the core part of Left-Bank Ukraine and the lands of the Don Cossacks, it was settled jointly by ethnic Ukrainians and Russians in the 17th—18th century. While ethnic Ukrainians constituted a majority of the population in it, ethnic Russians formed a sizeable minority from the outset. Claimed by Ukraine in 1918–1919, the region was divided between Ukraine and Russia within the USSR in the 1920s. Effects of collectivization and the ensuing famine, Russification policies beginning in the 1930s, population resettlement, industrialization, and World War II created by the final decades of the Soviet Union's existence an area with a hybrid, heavily russified identity, with the administrative border between Russia and Ukraine viewed by local residents as something of little consequence. When it became a border between two states, this caused an upheaval and transformation of local identities on both sides of the border. More recently, Slobozhanshchyna was resurrected as the first "Euroregion" on the Ukrainian-Russian border, although the project remains largely on paper. Zhurzhenko's in-depth fieldwork study of five villages in the border area (three on the Ukrainian side and two on the Russian side), as well as her discussion of the region's history and present discourses concerning identity construction constitutes the strongest and the most valuable part of the volume. Her detailed focus on the area and its problems is truly pioneering and is to be commended.

Problems begin, however, when this valuable microethnography is integrated into a larger narrative. The book's title is symptomatic: while the heading, "Borderlands into Bordered Lands," is an insightful description of the core project, the subheading "Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine" does not logically follow from the heading or the author's core focus. Her work is primarily on *one* border region, and on *both* of its sides; additionally, one other chapter discusses post-independence relations between Ukraine and Belarus. It is misleading, therefore, to claim, as the book appears to do, that Slobozhanshchyna can synecdochically stand for *all* of Ukraine, and for the Ukrainian side of the border *only*. A more fitting subheading would have been "Identity Construction and Performance at the Ukrainian-Russian Border," as other regions of Ukraine or its other borders are mentioned only in passing, and the author does not appear to have tackled them in depth, as evidenced by her erroneous claim (127-28) that all of Ukraine's border with Moldova is, in fact, the border with the breakaway region of Transnistria, while the Transnistrian portion only accounts for about a third of the border between these two states. Another alternative would have been to go with the well-formulated original title of the author's research project which she cites in the acknowledgements: *The Ukrainian-Russian Border in National Imagination, State Building, and Social Experience* (15).

The chapters comprising the first half of the book are structured more as discourse analysis. After considering in the introduction the postcommunist-era discourse on borders within Europe, and Eastern Europe in particular, in the first chapter the author moves to a review of the discourse on Eurasia as it developed in the Russian émigré intellectual circles and discusses some of its uses in the post-Soviet context. Regrettably, she engages in facile labeling of liberal, pro-Western Ukrainian writers and their supposed view that Russia "represents a culturally and politically different civilization" (no room for nuance is given by the author), claiming that their "approach is rooted in the long tradition of an orientalizing of Russia and Soviet communism, characteristic of right-wing and conservative political forces in the West" (59). Curiously, Zhurzhenko neglects the rich contemporary literary discourse of her native city, Kharkiv, the capital of Slobozhanshchyna, as well as the emergence of new non-totalitarian leftist discourses among Ukrainian intellectuals, which enriches and complicates the dynamics of their interaction with peers inside Ukraine and internationally. Later in the volume, the author shows surprising lack of awareness of ideologies present in her own text, when immediately after noting "the stigma of being labeled a 'Ukrainian nationalist'" in the Soviet and post-Soviet context she makes another unsupported claim regarding "Ukrainian nationalist discourse" (174). This tendency to affix labels and box hybrid, often self-contradictory discourses into a strict taxonomy is probably the weakest part of Zhurzhenko's book. I was also surprised by how little she engages with Western scholarship in Ukrainian studies. I therefore would recommend the reader to focus on Zhurzhenko's fieldwork projects and approach her theoretical schemas with caution.

On the theoretical level, the book engages productively with studies of border politics and identity construction in modern Europe and references Frederick Jackson Turner on the American frontier, but curiously downplays scholarship on other parts of the world (while the *contemporary* US-Mexico border, for instance, in terms of its discussion in Chicano/a Studies, could have made a fascinating comparison). Zhurzhenko's use of the term "hybridity" is hardly theoretically sophisticated, and her take on the discourse on postcolonialism is likewise reductive (in this book postcoloniality, if mentioned, is either judged negatively or downplayed, and in most instances referenced in quotation marks). I also missed a more thorough engagement in her ethnographic study with an autoethnographic dimension. The author states that she identifies as a Russian-speaking Ukrainian, but does not pursue the possible implications stemming from this further.

I must note with regret that the book contains a fair number of errors in transliteration from the Cyrillic (the most telling is "Rivno" [78, 79], which is neither the Ukrainian "Rivne" nor the Russian "Rovno") and errors and infelicities in English that occasionally obfuscate the author's argument. However, this and other problems notwithstanding, many academic readers will find the fieldwork portion of Zhurzhenko's volume, as well as some of her theoretical analysis, informative and thought-provoking.