

# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

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## Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

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This book uses the term academic orientalism to describe how western historians of 'Russia' and some political scientists with expertise on Russia selectively use sources when writing about Ukraine and other non-Russian countries of the former USSR. Using sources mainly published in Russia is both lazy and biased. Academic orientalism is lazy because we live in an Internet era where sources from Ukraine are available online and in the Russian language; therefore, scholars do not necessarily need a command of Ukrainian. Publications, sociological polls, think tank publications, and official web sites – which as this book shows are available online – are largely ignored by most western scholars of Russia who have written about Ukraine, Crimea, Donbas, and Ukrainian-Russian relations.

Until World War II, orientalism was reflected in western scholars writing about overseas colonies through the eyes of London, Paris, and other imperial metropolitan cities. Today, academic orientalism is reflected in western scholars writing about Ukraine through the eyes of Moscow. Academic orientalism is biased because it produces a subjective, Russo-centric outlook on Ukrainian-Russian relations. This form of academic orientalism is taken one step further when western scholars writing about Ukrainian-Russian relations cite Russian leaders *ad infinitum*, but rarely cite Ukrainian politicians. Sakwa (2015), for example, never once cites Poroshenko, but quotes Putin 31 times. Toal (2017) cites Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev on 44 occasions and Poroshenko only once – fewer than his two citations for Soviet President Gorbachev. Charap and Colton's (2017) work is full of citations of Russian leaders with only four of Poroshenko.

Changes in Ukrainian historiography since 1991 and identity since 2014 have been recognised to some degree among historians in North America (but not in the UK and western Europe) and to varying degrees among political scientists. Academic orientalism remains an issue within Russian studies, whose political scientists are usually the gatekeepers in most western academic centres on post-communist Europe and Eurasia. One example of academic orientalism on Ukraine is that of political scientist Sakwa (2015), an expert on Russian politics. The only Ukrainian source used by Sakwa (2015) was the English-language *Kyiv Post*. This is because 'the author has no intention of delving into the Ukrainian material comprehensively' (Kravchenko 2016). Writing a book on the Russian-Ukrainian War 'had no impact on his [Sakwa's] preconceived notions and interpretation of Russia, Eastern Europe, and the world order' (Kravchenko 2016). Other examples of academic orientalism are given throughout this chapter.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section applies Edward Said's (1994, 1995) concept of orientalism to western writing on the 2014 crisis and the Russian-Ukrainian War. The second section uses orientalism to analyse how the Russian-Ukrainian War is imagined through a biased use of sources. The third section discusses manipulation of opinion polls, and the fourth section discusses non-scholarly review processes and analyses. The final section is a critical discussion of four conspiracies of the Euromaidan Revolution: first, that it was a US-backed operation to install western Ukrainian nationalists in power; second, that Ukrainian nationalists murdered protestors during the Euromaidan; third, that the May 2014 fire in Odesa was organised by Ukrainian nationalists; and fourth, that Ukraine's military strategy (in the same manner as the country as a whole) is controlled by the US and NATO.

# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

## Academic Orientalism

Said's (1994, 1995) description of western nationalist (imperialist) imagining of the Orient is found in Russian nationalist (imperialist) imagining of Ukraine and in the imagining of Ukraine by western historians and some political scientists. The Orient and Ukraine are treated as passive, subaltern subjects of the world order who are denied the dignity of choosing their own destiny.

The imaging of European colonies and Russia's neighbours was – and remains – a relationship of power, domination, and hegemony that allegedly benefitted the lives of those who were ruled over. This is a relationship of the strong over the weak, best served by a great power awarded a sphere of influence to maintain order over subaltern people incapable of ruling themselves. Such views were found in British imaginings of Ireland and Polish and Russian imaginings of Ukraine (see Kuzio 2020a). Ukraine was imagined in Polish and Russian literature as *terra incognita*, an empty land where chaos reigned and where there was a need for the imposition of order by more 'civilised' peoples.

Said's (1995, 7, 15) orientalism is reflected in the relationship of power and cultural hegemony in western writing of 'Russian' history, Crimea, and the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Said (1994, 96) points out, 'Almost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, "equal," and fit.' To legitimise colonial rule, the colonies of European empires, Irish, and Ukrainians were treated as backward, ignorant, barbarians, dangers to civilisation, children, gullible, devoid of energy, cunning, dishonest, treacherous, liars, and cheats (Said 1995, 35, 38–40, 39–40, 59, 228, 232, 328).

In the Russian-Ukrainian 'colonizer-colonised' relationship, 'Russia endures disobedience from these leaders in the way adults endure naughty children' (Minchenia, Tornquist-Plewa and Yurchuk 2018, 225). When Lukashenka and Yanukovych have behaved in support of Russia's interests, they were encouraged and pardoned. When they did not, they were castigated as 'traitors' and 'Russophobes.' Russian nationalism (imperialism) is presented as benevolence that conserves 'Russian feelings of superiority over its neighbours and endorsing among the Russians the ruling logistics of dominance' (Minchenia, Tornquist-Plewa and Yurchuk 2018, 226). Igor Gretskiy (2020, 19) writes, 'What the Kremlin wants from the Ukrainian government is the public demonstration of compliance with Moscow's preponderance.' When this did not take place in 2004 or 2014, the Kremlin became angry and retaliated against Ukraine. Russian political technologist Gleb Pavlovsky described 2004 as 'Putin's 9/11' (Krastev 2005). Would Hiroshima or Nagasaki be the best way to describe 2014 for Putin?

Western imperialists brought 'civilisation' to 'backward peoples' who were unable to rule themselves. The colonies are 'a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves' (Said 1995, 35). Colonial rule was justified in the name of progress by a more 'civilised' people.

There is a long history of Russian national identity, which claims moral superiority over a 'degenerate West.' Solzhenitsyn complained about a 'degenerate West' during his western exile in the 1970s and 1980s. Russian nationalists (imperialists) believe that Tsarist Russian and Soviet rule were beneficial to Ukraine and other peoples, and therefore that life in the Russian World would be better than in the EU. Eurasianism claims that Russia's values are superior to European values, rejects western political models and embraces the Mongol-Tatar-Eurasian heritage.

The origins of Putin's 'neo-revisionism' are found in long-term Russian inferiority complexes, where nothing negative is found in Russia's past. The most extreme example of this is the rehabilitation of Stalin (Kuzio 2017b). A cult of Stalin during Putin's presidency has made him the second most popular historical figure in Russia (Tsar Nicholas II came first).

Laruelle (2020b, 345) denies that a full-blown Stalinist cult is emerging in Russia, instead describing it as an 'ambivalent rehabilitation of Stalin by some segments of the Russian political elites.' Cohen (2019) also denies that there is a cult of Stalin in Russia. Putin's cult of Stalin has led to high numbers of Russians holding a positive view of Stalin. By 2019, 52% of Russians held a positive view of Stalin, compared to only 16% of Ukrainians. In contrast to Russians, nearly three-quarters of Ukrainians (72%) believed, 'Stalin is a cruel, inhuman tyrant, guilty of the

# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

destruction of millions of innocent people' (Stavlennya Naselennya Ukrayny do Postati Stalina 2019).

In 2019, the Russian Levada Centre, the last remaining independent think tank and polling organisation in Russia, wrote:

There is no significant age differentiation in relation to views of the leader – in all age cohorts and generational groups, a positive perception of Stalin now dominates over a negative one, although 18–24-year-olds in Russia are generally more indifferent than others. At the same time, the dynamic trend of opinions between 2012 to 2019, even in the youngest age group, indicates acceptance of the norm of the older generations with young people beginning to express positive assessments more often to avoid answering questions about the leader. Support for the positive image of Stalin and the romanticisation of the Soviet era are characteristic not only of respondents with communist views, but also of supporters of other political parties (Stavlennya Naselennya Ukrayny do Postati Stalina 2019).

Academic orientalism describes European colonies and Ukraine as artificial entities, regionally divided and weak states with immature rulers. European depictions of cunning colonial peoples are similar to Russian depictions of sly (*khytryy*) Ukrainians, who excel at intrigue, lying, and deception. Left to themselves, colonial peoples and Ukrainians would produce instability and threaten 'civilised' order (Said 1995, 328–367). From the nineteenth century to the present day, Russian scholarship, literature, novelists, travelogues, military expeditions, judges, pilgrims, and bureaucrats have written about Ukrainians as disorganised, uncivilised, despotic, backward, and bloodthirsty people (see Riabchuk 2016).

Russian nationalists (imperialists) imagine Ukraine as an artificial, failed, and divided state, whose ruling elites have sold their souls to the West (see chapter 4). Being incapable of their own initiative, Ukrainians are manipulated by the West to pursue 'Russophobic' policies and 'anti-Russian conspiracies' (Belafatti 2014). Ukraine is viewed as a puppet state of the West because, as Said (1994, 1995) observed, colonists always imagine those they conquer to be passive subaltern subjects unable of becoming active subjects (Belafatti 2014).

Ukraine's artificiality is allegedly compounded by its lack of history. European colonies and Ukraine are marginalised as 'un-historic peoples' in what Said (1994, 1995) describes as a western-imposed, racist hierarchy. European and Russian identities hold greater significance than that of the subaltern subjects in the Orient or Ukraine.

Western writing on post-communist countries has been written from 'a distorted, hierarchical and, ultimately, orientalist (if not outright racist) perspective on the small countries of Eastern Europe' (Belafatti 2014). Condescending mentalities have long shaped how the West views central-eastern Europe and the former USSR. In the mid-twentieth century, Hans Kohn (Kuzio 2002) wrote about 'good' western and 'bad' eastern nationalisms and Said (1994, 1995) wrote about colonial imagining of the Middle East.

## *Liberals, Realists, and Nationalists (Imperialists)*

Since the nineteenth century, hegemonic imperial ideologies in cultures have been part of European and Russian imaginings of the territories over which they ruled. There was little dissent then in western Europe and there is little dissent now in Russia over the right of certain races to rule over others (Said 1994, 62). British and Russian liberals (e.g. John Stuart Mill, Pyotr Struve, Pyotr Stolypin, Russian liberal *Kadets* in 1917, and the White army) supported the building of empires and a racist hierarchy of peoples (Said 1994, 96, 129; Procyk 1995).

Mill opposed Irish and Indian independence (Smart 1992, 529) because he believed some countries were not ready to take this step (Said 1994, 96, 97). European countries such as Britain had a 'schizophrenic adherence to both racism and liberalism' (Weight 2000, 437). Russian intellectuals have 'granted the empire the role of a Western "civilizing" power with license to repress national resistance in the name of modernization and social reform' (Shkandrij 2001, 103).

Russian liberalism has always ended at the Russian-Ukrainian border. The concept of Russians and Ukrainians as 'one people' harks back to Struve, a member of the liberal *Kadets* and after 1917, the anti-Bolshevik Whites. 'In

## Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

2014, Putin brought about the reincarnation of Struve's ideas at the highest levels of Russian politics' (Plokhy 2017, 341). The phrase 'Russian Westernisers' is an oxymoron, as they had always been suspicious of any Ukrainian movement (Plokhy 2017, 115). In the nineteenth century, a leading Russian 'Westerniser,' Vissarrion Belinsky, criticised Ukrainians such as Shevchenko for seeking independence for Ukraine because a union with Russia gave them an opportunity to overcome their earlier 'semi-barbaric way of life' (Shkandrij 2001, 121). Similar colonial racism typified British views of Ireland (see Kuzio 2020a). Belinsky wrote, 'Oh those *khokhly!* [a racist term for Ukrainians]. They are just dumb sheep, but they liberalise in the name of dumplings with pig fat!' (Plokhy 2017, 116). Ukrainians are stereotyped as eaters of lard (pig fat [*saló*]) just as Irish are of potatoes.

There were a small number of exceptions, such as Aleksandr Herzen, the father of Russian populism and socialism, as well as Russian dissidents Bukovsky and Amalrik. Writing in January 1859 in *The Bell* published in London, Herzen described the suffering inflicted upon Ukrainians by 'Muscovites' and asked why Russians were surprised that Ukrainians do not wish to be either Poles or Russians: 'As I see it, the question is to be decided very simply. In that case, Ukraine should be recognised as a free and independent country' (Plokhy 2017, 128). Herzen had let the cat out of the bag.

During the Cold War, the Russian diaspora in the West was dominated by the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists (NTS), which continued supporting Tsarist Russian and White *émigré* views of Ukraine and Ukrainians. *Émigré* Eurasianists who, like NTS, emerged from the younger generation of White *émigrés*, came around to supporting Stalin's national Bolshevism. NTS's monopoly was challenged beginning in the 1970s with the arrival in the West of exiled democratic Russian dissidents, such as Bukovsky. Russian democrats were not anti-Ukrainian, but they rarely commented on nationality questions in the USSR. Ukrainian dissidents and nationalists had good relations with Jewish dissidents and non-Russian nationalists.

In the post-Soviet era, most Russian liberals evolved into nationalists during the 1990s. Alexei Navalnyi (2012a, 2012b) began talking of Russians and Ukrainians as 'one people' at the same time as Putin (see Laruelle 2014b, 281). In 2014, Navalnyi said, 'I don't see any kind of difference at all between Russians and Ukrainians' (Dolgov 2014; Bukkvoll 2016, 270). It is therefore strange that nearly all western political scientists working on Russia have ignored how many parts of the Russian opposition have taken Putin's chauvinism towards Ukrainians on board. At the same time, it is wrong for scholars to describe opposition politicians such as Navalnyi as professing 'liberal nationalism' because there is nothing liberal in Navalnyi's attitudes towards Ukraine (see Kolsto 2014; Laruelle 2014b; Hale 2016).

There are a few exceptions that could be described as Russian liberals. Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the *Yabloko* party, believes that Crimea has a right to self-determination, but he opposed the use of Russian troops to achieve this (see Bacon 2015). Boris Nemtsov (who was assassinated in February 2015) and Garry Kasparov opposed the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. In the 1990s, Nemtsov had different views and supported the integration of the three eastern Slavs and Russian 'economic expansion' (rather than military aggression) into 'Crimea, beginning in Sevastopol.'

On Crimea, there is no such thing as Russian 'liberalism.' Nemtsov supported Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's claims to the port of Sevastopol, describing it as a 'Russian city acquired with Russian blood.' [1] The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), LDPRF, Just Russia, Other Russia (successor to the National Bolshevik Party led by Eduard Limonov), and exiled oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky have supported Crimea's annexation. Russia's most popular opposition leader, Navalnyi, has said on many occasions that Crimea will not be returned to Ukraine (see Dolgov 2014).

Russian and European imperialists believed that they possessed 'inalienable' rights to Eurasia and the Middle East, respectively. Russia is viewed as possessing a 'hierarchical superior position' in Crimea, Ukraine, and Eurasia, which Ukrainians have no right to question. Ukrainians should accept their place in 'an order of things in which Russia' dominates (Belafatti 2014).

The 2014 Russia-Ukraine crisis has brought together the western left- and right-wing realists (Mearsheimer 2014;

## Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

Menon & Rumer 2015), who agree that Ukraine is naturally part of Russia's sphere of influence, and non-Russians in Eurasia 'are denied the dignity of actors in the process' with no right to choose their alignment (Belafatti 2014). Such views permeate realist proposals about how Eurasia should be configured by Russia and the West in a new grand bargain[2] – over the heads of Ukrainians, just as this was undertaken in 1945 over eastern Europe in the Yalta Agreement signed by the victorious allied powers.[3]

Left-wing critics and right-wing realists *both* deny agency to Ukraine and small countries to determine their future, believing that the fate of countries such as Ukraine should be decided by the great powers. Bizarrely, therefore, left-wing scholars became fans of populist nationalist Trump (Cohen 2019). In seeking Trump's election, 'Russia wanted the deal clinched by the great powers and imposed on Ukraine' (Charap and Colton 2017, 131).

Downplaying Russian and exaggerating Ukrainian nationalism lays blame on Kyiv for the Donbas War. Just as the West is blamed for democracy promotion and fomenting colour revolutions, and as NATO and EU enlargement are blamed for leading to the crisis, so too are Ukrainian leaders blamed for fighting, rather than negotiating. While Putin presumably shares little to no responsibility, President Poroshenko was blamed for unleashing a war after he was elected in May 2014, rather than seeking compromise.

Hahn (2018, 253, 264) blames the Ukrainian authorities for launching an 'unnecessary war' accompanied by war crimes, human rights abuses, and a 'dehumanising' discourse. Pijl (2018, 8) compares Ukraine's military actions from April 2014 as similar to those conducted by Georgia, which launched an 'invasion' of South Ossetia in 2008. Pijl (2018) is obviously unaware that countries cannot 'invade' their own territories.

### Imaging the War Through Russian Sources

The crisis in relations between Russia and the West following Russia's annexation of Crimea and military aggression in eastern Ukraine has led to a large number of publications and the proliferation of poor scholarship. Scholars have written about the crisis from the vantage point of their field of speciality, whether Russian and Eurasian area studies, international relations, realism, and security studies. Other have added chapters on Ukraine to books that were already in production.

The Euromaidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and Russian hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine have led to the publication of over 500 scholarly and think tank books, journal articles, and papers (for a partial bibliography see Kuzio 2017c, 363-399). Western scholarship on the crisis is not dominated by a pro-Ukrainian perspective or an official Ukrainian interpretation of the conflict. Claims to this effect rest upon stereotypes that exaggerate the influence of the Ukrainian 'nationalist' diaspora (see Matveeva 2017, 276; Molchanov 2018, 73, 227; Sakwa, 2015, 257). The Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) do not traditionally cover politics and international relations and have largely ignored Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian War. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* and the *East-West/Journal of Ukrainian Studies* have published no articles on the 2014 crisis, Crimea, or Donbas War.[4]

Scholars of Russian politics have continued to claim expertise on the non-Russian countries that emerged as independent states after 1991. In the Soviet era, travel was restricted beyond Moscow to sensitive republics, such as Ukraine, but this is not the case today. The Internet also provides scholars with widely available primary sources from Ukraine, many of which are in Russian. The official websites of the Ukrainian president, parliament, and government are available in Ukrainian and Russian.[5] The majority of Ukrainian media have Russian-language pages or are published in both Russian and Ukrainian. Three of Ukraine's five weekly political magazines are published in Russian: *Fokus*, *Korrespondent*, and *Novoye Vremya*, and two are published in Ukrainian: *Kray* and *Ukrayinskyi Tyzhden*.

MA and PhD students are instructed to use primary sources and undertake fieldwork in pursuing their research. This advice is ignored by scholars of Russia writing on Ukraine (Sakwa 2015, 2017a; Toal 2017; Charap and Colton 2017), who rely heavily on secondary sources and quotes from official Russian sources.

# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

While citing sources from Russia on 75 occasions, Sakwa's 16 Ukrainian sources are all from the English-language *Kyiv Post*. One wonders whether external reviewers would provide positive reviews of a manuscript about a hypothetical Ukrainian invasion of Russia if it only used sources from the English-language *Moscow News*. Mark Galeotti's (2016) study of hybrid warfare uses no Ukrainian sources from a country that has experienced the greatest impact of Russian hybrid warfare and which has published many studies of hybrid warfare (see Russia's 'Hybrid' War – Challenge and Threat for Europe 2016; Horbulin 2017).

The overwhelming majority of western authors writing about the crisis and war have never travelled to Ukraine. One Ukrainian expert notes, 'Many people participate in the discussions about the Donbas. Far fewer of them actually went there. The lack of real experts on the region is noticeable' (Mairova 2017, 83). While many scholars may not wish to follow in the footsteps of this author in travelling to the Donbas warzone, this does not excuse the absence of fieldwork research in Kyiv, and southeastern Ukraine. Few western publications on the crisis include interviews with Ukrainian officials, civil society activists, and security forces in Kyiv, and in southeastern Ukraine.

Anna Matveeva (2018) travelled to Russian-controlled Donbas enclaves and to Moscow, where she conducted interviews in the course of her fieldwork, and her book provides a bottom-up view of the Donbas War. This could have been more balanced if similar fieldwork had been undertaken in Kyiv and southeastern Ukraine, including in Ukrainian-controlled Donbas. Seemingly, academic orientalism does not believe that the Ukrainian viewpoint is worthy of study or citation.

Interviews in southeastern Ukraine would have illuminated the views of Russian speakers, traditionally wrongly stereotyped as 'pro-Russian' by Western scholars and journalists writing about Ukraine. The failure of Putin's 'New Russia' project in Ukraine's eight southeastern *oblasts* brings out the importance of interviews with primary sources on the ground (see O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2016; Kuzio 2019a). Ukrainian opinion polls available on the Internet are useful for researchers; however, nothing is more illuminating than talking to people in the midst of a conflict because, throughout history, wars have sped up the crystallisation of national identity (Smith 1981). By not doing fieldwork, scholars ignore an intellectually rewarding opportunity to research a crucial moment in the remaking of Ukrainian national identity and Russian-Ukrainian relations.

## Manipulating Opinion Polls

Manipulation of polling data to provide 'evidence' for pre-conceived views that seek to prove that there is support for pro-Russian separatism in Crimea. In 1991, 93% of Crimeans did not vote for a 'separate Crimean republic,' but rather for upgrading their *oblast* into an autonomous republic of Soviet Ukraine (Pijl 2018, 87). In writing that Crimea 'never reconciled itself with its place in an independent Ukraine,' Pijl (2018, 40) aims to prove that Crimea eagerly awaited its 'liberation' and return to Russia in 2014. This unscholarly claim has no relationship to historical facts.

Presenting Crimea's annexation as a 'return to normality' has been undertaken by some western scholars misusing sociological data to make the case that a majority of the peninsula's population have always supported separatism. This was never the case. In his desperation to find sociological data showing a majority of Crimeans supporting separatism, Sakwa (2017a, 155) writes, 'Already in 2008 the Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies (hereafter Razumkov Centre) 'polling agency' found that 63.8 percent of Crimeans wished to secede from Ukraine to join Russia.' Sakwa's manipulation of Razumkov Centre polling data to portray majority support in Crimea for separatism is cited by other *Putinverstehers* scholars, Ploeg (2017), Pijl (2018, 40), and Hahn (2018, 235). Sakwa's (2017a, 157) description of Crimea's annexation as 'democratic secession' is based on opinion polls that do not exist. In a rare moment of doubt, Sakwa (2017a, 157) concedes that it was also 'imperial annexation' because Russia had not reached an 'agreement with the country from which the territory seceded.' Elsewhere Sakwa (2017b, 10) admits that there was no majority support for separatism in Crimea or the Donbas.

The Razumkov Centre (AR Krym: Lyudy, Problemy, Perspektyvy 2008, 19-22) explained that the polling data cited by Sakwa (2017a, 157) show a disorientation of Crimeans over the status of their autonomous republic, which meant 'supporting at times mutually exclusive alternatives.' Half (50.1%) chose 'at least one of the options, which involves the Crimea leaving Ukraine, and one of the other alternatives that will allow it to stay in the future within Ukraine.' The

## Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

Razumkov Centre concluded that 'half of the Crimeans, depending on circumstances, can support both the separation of Crimea from Ukraine as well as the opposite scenario' (AR Krym: Lyudy, Problemy, Perspektyvy 2008).

This was not an endorsement of pro-Russian separatism that Sakwa (2017a) claimed; rather it reflected confused identities that were commonplace in post-Soviet states, such as in Ukraine during the 1990s. Prior to 2014, no opinion poll had ever given majority support for separatism in Crimea, and certainly nothing of the magnitude that Russia claimed in its March 2014 referendum. Typically, polls gave support for a Crimean independent state and union with Russia, both wrongly conflated under the label of 'separatism,' with approximately 40% support. Not a single opinion poll prior to 2014 gave over 50% support for 'separatism' in Crimea.

### Non-Scholarly External Review Process and Unscholarly Analysis

Factual errors in much of the writing about the Russian-Ukrainian War are a product of poor, ideologically driven scholarship that should have been flagged by external reviewers. Pijl's (2018) book cannot, for example, be described as academic when it includes citations from Wikipedia and conspiracy theories from Putin's propaganda television channel *Russia Today*.

A similarly curious case of the absence of a diligent external review process is that of Boris Kagarlitsky, Radhika Desai, and Alan Freeman (2018), whose book compiled proceedings from a conference held in May 2014 in what was then Russian occupied Crimea. Indeed, why would established western scholars attend such a conference three months after Putin annexed Ukrainian territory? One wonders how the external reviewers used by Routledge allowed this to slip through.

It is suspicious that *Putinverstehers* scholars provide endorsements on the outside covers of each other's books, leading one to wonder if they were the 'blind reviewers' for Pijl (2018) and Kagarlitsky, Desai, and Freeman (2018). They cite one another liberally, especially Sakwa (2015).

Poor knowledge about Ukraine leads to numerous mistakes in books about the crisis and again leads one to ask about the low quality of the external review process. Hahn (2018) includes so many mistakes that it would require a separate chapter to discuss them. Just some of them include (Hahn 2018, 118, 165, 249) western Ukraine described as 'Catholic,' when four of its seven *oblasts* are Orthodox, *chesno* translated as garlic and honesty, when the Ukrainian word for garlic is *chisnyk*. Not only has Hahn (2018) never visited Ukraine, he most likely has never studied a map of Ukraine as he describes Chernihiv as a 'western region,' when it is located in northeastern Ukraine. Hahn's determination to pigeonhole all 'Ukrainian nationalists' as coming from western Ukraine is most likely why he has geographically placed Chernihiv in Ukraine's west. Doing so is because many of these scholars cannot accept the existence of Russian-speaking Ukrainian and Jewish patriotism in eastern Ukraine.

Claiming that western and central Ukraine are the poorest regions of the country ignores Kyiv, which is the wealthiest city in Ukraine (Hahn 2018, 121). To prove his point that Ukraine is an artificial construct, Hahn artificially lowers the proportion of the population that is ethnic Ukrainian. Current figures show that 92% of the population declare themselves to be ethnically Ukrainian, while only 6% are ethnic Russians (among 18–29-year-old, only 2%).

Pijl (2018, 25) ignores the fact that the *Holodomor* has been accepted as an act of genocide by every Ukrainian president (Kuzio, 2017b). During Kuchma's presidency, the Party of Regions upheld the official position of the *Holodomor* as a genocide, only adopting the Russian position after 2005–2006 and especially during Yanukovich's presidency in 2010–2014. Throughout his book, Pijl (2018, 40) portrays eastern Ukrainian politicians as pro-federalist, which is factually inaccurate; no president, including eastern Ukrainians Kuchma and Yanukovich, and no political party, including the Party of Regions and Communist Party of Ukraine, has supported federalism.

In downplaying Yanukovich's plunder of Ukraine, Pijl (2018, 83) writes that he sent his 'private possessions' to Russia before fleeing Kyiv. In fact, as security camera footage at his palace showed, a huge amount of stolen loot, such as gold bars, art, and other valuables were taken with him when he fled Kyiv in February 2014. While downplaying Yanukovich's looting of Ukraine, Putin is presented as a president who placed 'limits on oligarchic

# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

enrichment' (Pijl 2018, 158), a statement which has no relationship to the kleptocracy that Russia has become on his watch (see Dawisha 2014; Belton 2020; Sakwa 2017b, 19, 22).

## In Love with Conspiracy Theories

Academic orientalist writing about the Donbas War loves conspiracies (see Ploeg 2017, 36–68), which could have been taken from Russian information war templates. There are four key conspiracies.

The first is that the Euromaidan was a US-backed conspiracy by 'Ukrainian nationalists,' who dominated the ranks of protestors and who continue to influence Ukrainian politics heavily. Hahn (2018, 285) writes that the 'deep political paralysis' in Ukraine is 'driven by the ultranationalist and neo-fascist wings of the Ukrainian polity.' Ukrainian nationalists dominate post-Euromaidan Ukrainian politics (Sakwa 2015, 99, 320; Cohen 2019, 61, 84, 91, 126, 144, 180, 181; Pijl 2018, 1, 5).

An 'extraordinary level of repression in post-Euromaidan Ukraine' was allegedly the norm (Ploeg 2017, 176). 'Galicia-based Ukrainianness' and the 'inordinate influence' of the Ukrainian diaspora were omnipresent (Molchanov 2018, 73). Cohen's (2019, 44, 144) claim of 'pro-Yanukovych' parties being banned is complete fiction. The Opposition Bloc and Opposition Platform-For Life, two successors to the Party of Regions, have participated in every election held since 2014. D'Anieri (2018) has analysed how the loss of 16% of Ukrainian voters in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine is one of the reasons for the reduction in the pro-Russian vote, not because Ukrainian polls manipulate Ukrainian views of Russians (Petro 2016, 2018).

Matveeva (2018, 53) wrongly claims that President Yushchenko closed Russian language television broadcasts, claiming there was 'no Russian permitted until the 2012 language law was passed.' Ukraine's most popular television channel *Inter* has always broadcasted primarily in Russian, including under Presidents Yushchenko, Poroshenko, and Zelenskyy. Far more Russian-language print media are published in Ukraine than are Ukrainian-language print media. Medvedchuk, Putin's representative in Ukraine, owns three television channels – NewsOne, 112, and Zik, and exerts a high level of influence over *Inter* through his political allies in Opposition Platform-For Life.

Seeking to claim that Ukrainianisation took place, Matveeva (2016, 27) writes that Yushchenko's presidency 'dealt a decisive blow to Russian language in Donbas.' That this is untrue is beyond question, because there were few Ukrainian-language schools in this region prior to 2014. What is bizarre is that Matveeva's accusation is based on a citation from an undated article in *RusBalt News Agency*, which was closed down in October 2013 by the Russian government, and from an undated interview with Alexei Volynets. Presumably official Ukrainian statistics and opinion polls would not have backed up her claim and hence were never used.

The second conspiracy is that the snipers who killed Euromaidan protestors were Ukrainian nationalists, not *Berkut* special forces from the Ministry of Interior. Russia later re-modelled this conspiracy theory by claiming that Georgian snipers, organised by former Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, killed the protestors.[6]

This conspiracy theory was developed by Ivan Katchanovski (2016), who is the only source cited by all *Putinversteher* scholars for this alleged false flag operation on the Euromaidan. Katchanowski's (2016) work reflects that of a political technologist more than that of a scholar through his highly selective compilation of sources gleaned from conspiratorial corners of the Internet and YouTube. That the conspiracy is bogus can be seen in the six imprisoned *Berkut* officers whom Russia sought in the December 2019 prisoner exchange (see chapter 6).

Katchanowski (2016) is cited by all *Putinversteher* scholars (Sakwa (2015, 320; Hahn 2018, 199; Ploeg 2017, 38, 41; Pijl 2018, 80; Cohen 2019, 144, 179). Ploeg (2018, 174–176) cites Katchanowski (2016) on thirty occasions, some of them being very long quotations. David Lane (2018, 146) praises the 'detailed research of Ivan Katchanowski' (2016). Hahn (2018, 200–201) writes that there is 'no evidence' of police shootings, and that security forces 'seemed to demonstrate some restraint,' downplaying human rights abuses by the security forces and Party of Regions vigilantes. One particularly brutal kidnapping in the Euromaidan is described as a 'faked' abduction (Hahn 2018, 218).



# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

Proof that the killings were undertaken by *Berkut* has been shown by journalists (Harding 2014), 3D research (Schwartz 2018; Chornokondratenko and Williams 2018), and academic studies (see bibliography in Kuzio 2017c, 363–367). There is little dispute among the broad mainstream of scholars, experts, and policymakers that Yanukovych's vigilantes and *Berkut* riot police killed and wounded Euromaidan protestors.

The third conspiracy is that 'Ukrainian nationalists' are to blame for the 2 May 2014 fire in Odesa, which killed 48 protestors, 42 of whom were pro-Russian activists. The Odesa fire was planned by Kyiv using 'Ukrainian nationalists' who were 'disguised as civilians and pretending to be "separatists" who fired at Ukrainians' (Hahn 2018, 109, 260, 262; Pijl 2018, 109; Ploeg 2017, 129). Sakwa's (2015, 97–99) main source of information for this conspiracy is the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' White Book (he uses no Ukrainian sources). This unsurprisingly exaggerates the number of deaths into the hundreds as a 'massacre' with 'beatings' and 'rapes' committed by 'Ukrainian nationalists' to the chants of 'Glory to Ukraine.'

This conspiracy ignores the presence of nationalists (imperialists) and neo-Nazis from Russia and the Trans-Dniestr region, who were active in Odesa from February 2014. Russian neo-Nazi leader Anton Raevskyj, who called for violent attacks against Ukrainians and Jews in Odesa, was expelled from Ukraine on 29 March 2014.

Fieldwork and interviews in Odesa were never undertaken, and Ukrainian sources were ignored. The extensive work of Odesa journalists and video footage was used by this author to compile 'The Odesa Conflict on 2 May 2014: A Chronology of What Took Place' (see Table 11.1. in Kuzio 2017c, 334–337). In Odesa, the first deaths on 2 May 2014 were of pro-Ukrainian protestors. *Both* sides were shooting at each other from and into the Trade Union building. *Both* sides threw Molotov cocktails from inside and into the building, which set fire to the building. Of the 48 people who died, six died from gunshot wounds, 34 from smoke inhalation and burns, and eight from jumping from the fire to their deaths.

The fourth conspiracy is that US and NATO led Ukraine's military strategy. Ploeg (2017, 226) writes, 'It seems reasonable to suggest that Ukraine's war strategy is heavily influenced by Washington.' US 'directed regime change' in Kyiv by 'neo-conservatives in the US government and NATO' worked through 'fascists,' 'nationalists,' 'Blackwater' mercenaries, the CIA, and the FBI (Pijl, 2018, 30, 69, 105). Perhaps Pijl (2018) and his external reviewers at Manchester University Press were unaware that, in 2014, the US was led by Democratic President Barack Obama, who was not a neo-conservative and neither supported democracy promotion nor NATO and EU enlargement.

Pijl's (2018) purpose is to deflect blame for the shooting down of MH17 from Russia to Ukraine and the West. Pijl (2018, 29) discusses MH17 as part of a Western conspiracy of the EU Eastern Partnership (which he describes as the 'Atlantic project'), where Ukraine would be transformed into an 'advance post for NATO' (Pijl 2018, 147). Ukraine would be used 'to destabilise the Putin presidency' (Pijl 2018, 76).

## Conclusion

A large number of scholarly articles, think tank papers, and books have been published on the 2014 Russia-Ukraine crisis, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and Russian military aggression against Ukraine. Many of these are excellent. They are cited in this book and can be found in the references. There is a large number of scholarly articles based on ground-breaking research, often conducted by a new generation of political scientists.

Academic orientalist imagining of Ukraine is, however, evident in scholars mainly using sources from Russia when writing on the Russia-Ukrainian crisis. The roots of academic orientalism lie in Western histories of 'Russia' and Crimea, political scientists who work on Russia acting as 'gatekeepers' to Russian and Eurasian studies in the western world, and western journalists continuing to cover the entire former USSR from Moscow. Academic orientalist views of Ukraine are fleshed out in the next chapter, in which nationalism in Ukraine and Russia is discussed. Orientalism always depicts nationalism in colonies in a negative manner and the nationalism of the imperialist hegemon in a favourable light. In the same manner, contemporary academic orientalism – as shown in the next chapter – exaggerates the influence and cruelty of Ukrainian nationalism and downplays the existence and nationalist (imperialist) drive of Russian nationalism.

# Academic Orientalism in Russia-Ukraine Scholarship

Written by Taras Kuzio

[1] *Tass*, 20–21 January 1997.

[2] <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/a-24-step-plan-to-resolve-the-ukraine-crisis/379121/>; <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/group-statement/easlg-twelve-steps-toward-greater-security-in-ukraine-and-the-euro-atlantic-region/>; <https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/saying-no-to-nato-options-for-ukrainian-neutrality>

[3] <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/response-boisto-peace-plan-ukraine-russia-us/379428/>

[4] <https://www.husj.harvard.edu/> and <https://www.ewjus.com/>

[5] The official Russian-language pages of the websites of the Ukrainian president: <http://www.president.gov.ua/ru>; parliament: <http://portal.rada.gov.ua/ru>; and government: <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/ru>.

[6] <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/georgian-snipers-admitted-that-they-shot-euromaidan-protesters-in-2014/>

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## About the author:

Taras Kuzio is professor of political science at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy and co-author of the forthcoming *The Four Roots of the Russian-Ukrainian War*. He is the author and editor of 23 books, including *Fascism and Genocide: Russia's War Against Ukrainians* (2023); *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War: Autocracy-Orthodoxy-Nationality* (2022); *Crisis in Russian Studies: Nationalism (Imperialism), Racism and War* (2020); *Putin's War Against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime* (2017, 2019); and *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism* (2015). He has also published six think tank monographs, and 165 book chapters and scholarly articles.