Serhiy Bilenky. *Laboratory of Modernity: Ukraine between Empire and Nation, 1772–1914.*

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023. xxiv, 596 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Index. Tables. Maps. $100.00, hard bound. $49.95, paper.

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As I write this review, air raid alerts disrupt life almost daily across Ukraine as Russian missiles and drones target cities and critical infrastructure, terrorizing the population. A war of attrition grinds on across the front lines with heavy casualties. Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, as the casualties mount on both sides, as cities have been destroyed, and as millions of Ukrainians have fled from the war zone, historians of the former Russian imperial space have been trying to understand how it came to this. This moment calls for us to emerge from our silos of specific research interests, out of our comfort zones of familiar regions, peoples, issues, or time periods to learn and think more broadly about the greater framework of the current tragedy. Serhiy Bilenky has written a book that can help us do just that. He began writing this book well before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and changed the geopolitical dynamics in Europe, but its publication in 2023 could not be more timely.

This 500-page narrative of the Ukrainian experience in the long nineteenth century pulls the story away from the centers of imperial power to the developments on the ground in the vast space of Ukraine when it was divided between the Austrian and the Russian empires and comprised critical peripheral territory for both regimes. In doing so, *Laboratory of Modernity* succeeds in three critical, difficult, but eminently useful approaches to the broad history of this region during the century that shaped the modern Ukrainian national idea. First, the book deftly stitches together the varied experiences from all geographic spaces of Ukraine: from Galicia inside Austria to the Russian-controlled right bank of the Dnieper River, the former Hetmanate or "Little Russia" on the left bank, and the southern regions of "New Russia" and Crimea. Each of these multiethnic regions has its own historical complexities, and addressing all of them is a prodigious undertaking. Secondly, while the book centers on the experiences of the ethnic Ukrainian population and the development of their national project, "it is also a study of a pluralistic society, culture, and political arena" (xi) that weaves in the perspectives and experiences of Poles, Jews, Russians, Germans, and others who called Ukraine their home. The interethnic dynamics differed in each of the various Ukrainian territories and presented each empire with unique challenges. Bilenky leads us through the maze of imperial responses and the multiethnic reactions to those policies, handling every group with sensitivity, portraying no evident bias, and striving to present the situation of each one in an even-handed approach that is both admirable and necessary for promoting an understanding of the tangled histories of this part of Europe. Finally, Bilenky has done all of this in engaging and accessible prose, writing with the non-academic reader in mind to produce, as he terms it, "a cross between textbook and monograph" (x). He succeeds. Packed with specific historical detail on events, persons, intellectual trends, economic developments, social realities, political movements, imperial policies, and global influences, and peppered with insightful quotes from contemporary literature and publications, the result is eminently useful to serious academics as well, helping us to comprehend the larger forces behind this

history and to weigh the varying perspectives of the historical stakeholders as a framework for more specific scholarly pursuits.

Laboratory of Modernity's overarching argument—as its subtitle suggests—follows the tensions between "competing national and imperial projects" (xiii) that led to "both the making and the unmaking of empire" (xi) from the first partition of Poland to the eve of World War I. Bilenky examines this history through the prism of global modernity, viewing Ukraine "as a 'laboratory of modernity' in which issues of universal concern were first posited and tested" (xiii). The author's previous monographs have laid the groundwork for this wide-ranging analysis. *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian Political Imaginations* (Stanford University Press, 2012) mined the writings of the Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian intelligentsia for their diverging perspectives on the land, people, and historical vision of Ukraine during the rise of nationalism in the 1830s and 1840s. This work also engaged the concept that the making of a new nation involved the "unmaking" of a larger one, as earlier elaborated by Roman Szporluk. Bilenky's 2018 *Imperial Urbanism in the Borderlands: Kyiv, 1800–1905* (University of Toronto Press) serves as a smaller case study on the social-economic and intellectual-political modernization that the author considers for all of Ukraine in *Laboratory of Modernity*.

Bilenky organizes this hefty 2023 study into three chronological parts, book-ended by critical events of the first partition of Poland, the Polish uprising of 1830–31, the Ems Decree, and World War I: 1772–1831 (a slim 84 pages in two chapters), 1831–76 (113 pages in three chapters), and 1876–1914 (a massive 261 pages in three chapters, the final two exceeding 100 pages each). He openly relies on and credits the works of well-regarded historians and scholars to provide the ballast for his argument, while interspersing the text with apt quotations from the primary literature he knows so well. Each part integrates developments in Austrian-ruled Galicia (and Bukovyna and Subcarpathian Rus') and Russian-ruled Ukraine, though events in the Russian empire command a much larger portion of the text, given the complex dynamics of the different social, economic, political, and cultural environments in the left-bank, right-bank, and southern regions. End-notes take interested readers to the relevant literature for further reading, and rather than a bibliography, a useful bibliographic essay highlights the critical sources (mostly English-language) for each of the eight chapters.

Modernity emerges in Part One within imperial policies of enlightened absolutism that promoted the impersonal state, natural law, religious tolerance, and rational governance, countered by the romantic era's intellectual focus on local heritage and culture that pushed against those universal norms. In Part Two, the intellectual elites of all ethnic groups drove modernity. Revolutionary movements rocked the Ukrainian lands in both empires—the two Polish uprisings inside Russia and the 1848 revolution inside Galicia—even as Ukrainian literary and historical pursuits gave rise to a Ukrainian national movement on both sides of the imperial borders. Constitutional reforms in Austria and the Great Reforms in Russia created new local political institutions with some level of representation; education was further developed, and the Ukrainian intelligentsia was born. Part Three sees economic and political forces pushing modernity to the masses as industrialization, urbanization, migration, and political activism brought capitalism, socialism, feminism, and radicalism to the Ukrainian experience. Bilenky's longest chapters comprise studies of the social and ethnic composition of the new working classes–chock-full of statistics from the 1897 census and other sources—as well as literacy efforts and achievements, and the rise of various political parties within the Ukrainian space. Overall, however, the Ukrainians seemed to be mostly left out of the modernizing projects. The vast majority of ethnic Ukrainians in all regions were impoverished peasants. Bilenky writes of the miserable rural poverty and illiteracy of the peasants in Galicia in the early twentieth century: "in many ways, Galicia was still untouched by modernity" (344); it was a "provincial hell" (355) from which hundreds of thousands escaped to America. Under Russian rule, the Ukrainian peasants made little economic advancement, with few joining the working classes in the industrializing cities in the southeast even as more skilled Russian peasants migrated there to take these jobs. The

lack of Ukrainian-language schooling and the general dearth and poor quality of schools in imperial Russia that left most Ukrainians illiterate, however, might have been a "dubious blessing" (402), Bilenky argues, since the Ukrainian language and culture was not erased by the Russian curriculum.

The more compelling argument in the study traces the tension between the imperial and national projects and the making and unmaking of identity. What distinguished the Ukrainian experience inside Austria from their situation inside Russia was the fact that the Austrians *saw* them. Joseph II extended toleration to the Greek Catholic Church, which became the national church for the Ukrainians in Galicia, and Austria recognized the Ruthenian/Ukrainian language. There, the Ukrainians' greatest struggle for rights and recognition was against the local Polish landowning elites in a continued "unmaking" of the historical Polish nation.

For the Russian government, however, Ukrainians were invisible; they were seen as "Russians." Catherine II categorized her 1793 acquisitions in right-bank Ukraine as the "recovery of lands inhabited by peoples of the Russian faith and race" (12). She discarded the Cossack heritage, abolishing the Zaporozhian Host and Sich in 1775 and dissolving the Cossack Hetmanate in the left bank in 1782. After the first Polish uprising in 1830–31, the Russian state began russifying the right bank without recognizing a native Ukrainian culture. The new Kyiv University's "strong ideological mandate was to promote Russian cultural presence in the borderlands" (102). In 1843, the "ultimate aim" of the Kyiv Archeographic Commission "was to prove that the southwestern borderlands were 'Russian' and 'Orthodox' from time immemorial" (102). Taking the story through the more familiar history of the suppression of Ukrainian language in the 1863 Valuev Circular and the 1876 Ems Decree while seeking the "annihilation of Polish language and culture" (195) in the right bank after the 1863 Polish uprising, Bilenky makes the critical distinction: "Whereas Polish identity was both recognized and suppressed, Ukrainian identity was not recognized while still being suppressed" (196).

Bilenky ties this conscious effort to ignore any separate Ukrainian identity inside Russia to the economic status of Ukraine vis-a-vis the Russian empire on the question of whether the exploitative economic relationship could be considered a colonial one. After parsing the relevant scholarly arguments from Vladimir Lenin through Alexander Etkind, Bilenky concludes: "Perhaps the most conspicuous case for Ukraine's colonial treatment by the imperial center was that the Russian government did not *see* any Ukraine at all. In the government's view, it was not a real territorial entity, nor were its native people a distinct nationality . . . It is this invisibility of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the eyes of the government that spoke more than anything else to their colonial status. Thus it was not so much economic exploitation as blind cultural negation and political repression that made Ukraine into some sort of colony, whether internal or not, and whether or not the Russians themselves perceived it as one" (307–8).

Poignantly, given the current tragic events, Bilenky explains that even as chauvinistic Russian nationalism was on the rise on the eve of WWI and Ukrainian cultural life once again subject to suppression, most Ukrainian nationalists advocated not for an independent state, but for autonomy within a federalized and democratized Russia. But Russian sentiment decreed any Ukrainian political autonomy "unacceptable" and federalism a threat that would "'unmake' Russia as a state and nation" (485). For Russians then and again now under Vladimir Putin: "without Ukraine, neither the 'all-Russian nation' nor the Russian Empire was possible" (483).

This outline of overriding arguments does not do justice to the sophisticated and honest rendering of the situation of all ethnic, social, and political groups in the Ukrainian space that Bilenky offers in this rich study. Averse to the idea that Ukrainians were uniquely disadvantaged, he presents the descendants of Cossack officers who helped build the Russian empire and wield its power, and he admits that all commoners in the Russian empire were equally oppressed, Ukrainian or otherwise. The fate of the landless Polish nobility, Jewish

traders, German settlers, Russian industrial migrants and political activists, and their various intellectual pursuits enrich and complicate the Ukrainian story. For those of us familiar with parts of this history, virtually every page provides some new information or sharpens our understanding of known facts, deepening our comprehension of this region. For those who come to this topic for the first time, this book is invaluable.

Veronika Siegl. *Intimate Strangers: Commercial Surrogacy in Russia and Ukraine and the Making of Truth.*

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023. vii, 287 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Tables. $125.00, hard bound. $32.95, paper.

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Veronika Siegl's book *Intimate Strangers* is an empathetic investigation into the moral economy of surrogacy in Russia and Ukraine. Analysis centers around the concept of "ethical labor," as actors craft truths of surrogacy as morally upright. These "right understandings" contest two critiques—that surrogacy arrangements are corrupt or coercive. Actors instead flexibly describe surrogacy arrangements as business-like, altruistic, win-win, or free choice. The book is organized into three parts, with an afterword that addresses the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine. Part 1 explores the cultural context and secrecy of surrogacy in Russia. Part 2 turns to surrogates, the business-like relations, and agency surveillance that ensure they are effective, not affective, workers. Part 3 focuses on intended parents from western Europe and the agencies that facilitate their surrogacies. These parents' concerns about surrogates' exploitation leads to narratives of happiness and free choice. Siegl's primary contribution lies in the concept of ethical labor, which shows how the economic is made moral. Surrogacy literature has illustrated how surrogacy is both framed by moral understandings and generative of them. Siegl builds on this literature using concepts of moral economy and regimes of truth to demonstrate how different actors advance truths about surrogacy that, despite their fragility, offer moral certainty.[1]

Reproductive technologies have enabled cross-racial and cross-ethnic surrogacy arrangements, contributing to the global growth of surrogacy even as the practice remains contentious. In the mid-2010s, legal changes restricted surrogacy or made it illegal in some countries in Asia; in response, surrogacy expanded in Russia and Ukraine, where the practice was less regulated and less expensive than in the US. At the time of Siegl's research, surrogacy markets in Russia and the Ukraine were connected. Lower prices and income levels in Ukraine meant that some Ukrainian women served as surrogates in Russia and intended parents in Ukraine were almost all foreign. Agencies promoted Russia and Ukraine as a "moral middle ground" between the unaffordable but ethically superior US and affordable but ethically inferior lower-income countries. It is important to note that Russia banned

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York, 2010); Edward P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crown in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* 50 (February 1971): 76–136.