

# Ukrainian Nationalism in the Age of Extremes.

Apr 22, 2022

*Peter Piaseckyj sent me this longer version of his book review of Ukrainian Nationalism in the Age of Extremes. I found it very informative and am glad to share it. Graham*

## Ukrainian Nationalism in the Age of Extremes,

### An Intellectual Biography of Dmytro Dontsov

Harvard University Press (Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies) – May 4, 2021

by Trevor Erlacher

This book is a breath of fresh air in the arid intellectual writings about the Ukrainian struggle for independence in the 20th century and the struggle to form a political Ukrainian nation in the 21st century. This is the first English-language biography of, Dmytro Ivanovych Dontsov (1883–1973), the “spiritual father” of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. He was a Ukrainian nationalist writer, publisher, journalist, and political thinker whose ideas were a major influence on the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. (1)

It is unconscionable that a political philosopher of his stature and a controversial political figure to be ignored by the English writing intellectual writing world, until now.

Dmytro Ivanovych Dontsov is fortunate to have a biographer of the stature of Dr. Trevor Erlacher who courageously undertook a political biography in today’s politically correct academic environment, which to a great extent, applies current ideals and moral standards to interpret historical figures and their actions.

Dr. Erlacher completed his Ph.D. in Russian and East European History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2017 and was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Basel’s Ukrainian Research in Switzerland initiative in 2018. In 2014 he received a Fulbright fellowship to conduct research in Lviv and Kyiv, Ukraine, and a Neporany dissertation grant from the Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies in 2016. His research and teaching interests center on radical politics, culture, nationalism, and imperialism in twentieth-century East and Central Europe and Eurasia.

Currently he is an Academic Advisor of the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (REEES) and Program Coordinator and Editor for the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) at the University of Pittsburgh.

The author succeeded with this book to do what wrote, ... “Few researchers have traced the appearance and evolution of Ukrainian integral nationalism within its broader European, Eurasian, and transatlantic contexts, leaving Dontsov, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and the Vistnykites secluded in time and space, seemingly aberrant or entirely derivative. I have sought to remedy this omission by elucidating what made twentieth-century Ukrainian nationalist intellectuals and organizations typical or idiosyncratic in light of the contemporaneous ideas, individuals, and movements with which they interacted worldwide.” ... page 434

According to John Armstrong... “Integral nationalism became a powerful force in much of Europe during the 1920’s and 1930’s. The OUN’s conceptualization of this idea was particular in several ways. Because Ukraine was stateless and surrounded by more powerful neighbors, the emphasis on force and warfare was to be expressed in acts of terrorism rather than open warfare, and illegality was glorified. Because Ukrainians did not have a state to glorify or serve, the emphasis was placed on a “pure” national language

and culture rather than a State. There was a strain of fantastic romanticism, in which the unsophisticated Ukrainian rejection of reason was more spontaneous and genuine than the cynical rejection of reason by German or Italian integral nationalists.”... (2)

The author has widened my understanding of the interwar intelligentsia by writing about the interaction between the intellectuals surrounding Dontsov in the journal “Вістник/Vistnyk”. (3) The influence of the writers on each other was so very interesting and intriguing. They were the contributors to the journal Vistnyk, Yevhen Malaniuk, Oleh Olzhych, Olena Teliha, Leonid Mosendz, Yurii Klen (Osvald Burghardt), Yurii Lypa and Ulas Samchuk. I have read them individually, but somehow did not group them together or know of their interactions.

Yurii Lypa wrote a brilliant book in 1941, “Розподіл Росії/ The Partition of Russia” which foretold the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1989-1991 and now we await the future collapse and dismemberment of the Russian Federation. (4)

I read Ulas Samchuk and found his description of life and social relations among the population during the war, enlightening. (5) I have read the writings of all seven of the authors and found their level of talent and writing extraordinary. Especially significant was Dontsov’s influence on Mykola Khvylovy (1893 –1933) the preeminent novelist, poet, publicist and one of the founders of the post-revolutionary Ukrainian prose in Soviet Ukraine. Committed suicide to protest Stalin’s repression of Ukrainian culture. This dynamic between Dontsov and Khvylovy is extraordinary, it increases Dontsov’s stature in the cultural sphere! How fascinating. (6) (7)

I had a different opinion of Mykola Stsiborskyi than the one the author described in his book (8). I always admired his humanity, see the paragraph written in the Wikipedia, ... “Mykola Stsiborskyi was married to a Jewish woman and in his writings opposed antisemitism. An article he wrote in 1930 in an official organ (OUN), denounced the anti-Jewish pogroms that occurred in Ukraine during the time of what they claim was a Russian civil war, stating that most of its victims were innocent and not Bolsheviks. Stsiborskyi wrote that Jewish rights should be respected, that the OUN ought to convince Jews that their organization was no threat to them, and that Ukrainians ought to maintain close contacts with Jews nationally and internationally.” ...

The Russian Civil War is a misnomer when referring to Ukraine. The Ukrainian National Republic was recognized by Soviet Russia as a sovereign state by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918. Ukraine was fighting both the Red (Communists) and White (Czarist) Russians to defend its sovereignty. The civil war was the fighting between the Red the White Russians.

An in-situ history of Ukrainian Nationalism and biography of Dmytro Dontsov, avoids the presentism of viewpoints found in current historical writings. On page 433 the author writes ... “to examine each step of Dontsov’s journey “on its own terms” and in situ.” ...

In-situ in a historical setting, means being in the original political environment, place and time!

Because I am critiquing this book it is only fair that the reader knows my position on Ukrainian Nationalism. I share Prof. Alexander J. Motyl’s position on Ukrainian Nationalism. I share Motyl’s views based on my many years of reading about the struggles for Ukrainian Independence and experience in my discussions with many Nationalists in the Diaspora, who participated in the struggle in Ukraine in 1939-1960’s. (9)

Prof. Myroslav Shkandrij “Ukrainian Nationalism, Politics Ideology, and literature, 1929-1965” quotes prof. Alexander J Motyl on page 4 in the Introduction... “In contrast to fascism, "nationalism cannot and does not presuppose an existing type of regime, political system, or state. Quite the contrary, nationalism presupposes the nonexistence of an independent state and therefore concludes that the existence, or creation, of such a state is imperative"... (Motyl 2013, 14 June) (9). Since nationalism is interested primarily in creating a state, and not in the type of state to be created, it is not surprising that different nationalisms have adopted various political ideologies, fascism among them.

This political flexibility, which includes the ability to change political ideology whenever circumstances demand it, in Motyl's view is not opportunism:

... "Nationalism and nationalists can be so chameleonic precisely because their ideology is fundamentally indifferent to the type of regime, political system, or state that emerges within the newly created state" (ibid., 25 June) (9). He therefore sees the interwar OUN as most usefully compared to other nationalist movements that have aspired to national liberation and the creation of nation-states, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Algerian National Liberation Front, the Irish Republican Army, the interwar Croatian Ustashe, and the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, and not to fascist regimes or movements.

There were elements of fascism in the OUN's ideology, but these are not the determining factor. As will be seen, the OUN itself consistently used a similar argument when it objected to the fascist designation." ...

Prof. Motyl's compares the OUN to other nationalist movements such as the Irish Republican Army and this recalled, when reading the "Cruel Sea" by Nicholas Monsarrat, 1951, where the author writes about Irish nationalism. When the ship's captain during WWII is returning to port on the Irish Sea, see page 178, ... "But it was difficult to withhold one's contempt from a country such as Ireland, whose battle this was and whose chances of freedom and independence in the event of a German victory were nil. The fact that Ireland was standing aside from the conflict at this moment posed, from the naval angle, special problems that affected, sometimes mortally, all sailors engaged in the Atlantic, and earned their particular loathing." .... The author turned me off with his jingoism and to some extent this is the attitude of North American and European scholars towards the OUN. This is my understanding of their presentism and which the author has to a great extent avoided!

In further reading of the book, however, I find a weakness in the authors aversion to discussing the blank pages of Ukrainian history, namely the participation of Jews in the Soviet (read Russian) organs of state repression, such as for example NKVD and the Ukrainian Communist Party. I know this is a subject fraught with high emotions and many canards, but if we want to understand the reality of Ukraine in the 20th century it behooves historians to take up the cudgel of good scholarship and not avoid the subject.

I find that the purpose of the deliberate drum beat about Ukrainian Anti-Semitism, is to deflect the knowledge about the complicity of the Jewish NKVD participation and leadership in the execution of the Holodomor, where they constituted 67% of the NKVD of the personnel. (10)

It is imperative that historians write about people like my father, one of the thousands of Ukrainians, risking the lives of their families (namely, me as well) where in years 1941-1944 he saved 2,000 Jews!! He was the forest administrator of the Metropolitan Yaktoriv-Univ forests. His foresters, and the villagers of Yaktoriv, Halychyna, all participated in saving them. (11)

This occurred after my father's incarceration in 1939 in Stalin's dungeons in Peremyshliany, where he told me, half (50%) the NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) were Jewish, 25 % were Latvians and 25 % composed of Russians, Georgians, and Ukrainians!

The Jews in Israel and the Jewish diaspora know this well. Sever Plocker correspondent of the Ynet an Israeli online news outlet for Yedioth Ahronot wrote about this. Ynet is considered a center-left newspaper and the most widely read newspaper in Israel. Plocker writes... "Turns out that Jews too, when they become captivated by messianic ideology, can become great murderers, among the greatest known by modern history. ... The article was headlined, "Stalin's Jews, we must not forget that some of greatest murderers of modern times were Jewish." ... Sever Plocker, 12/21/06, (12) (13)

On page 4 the author writes... "The official celebration of figures such as OUN leader Stepan Bandera and the military figure Roman Shukhevych (a commander of the Abwehr's "Nachtigall" Battalion and of the UPA, which massacred thousands of Polish civilians in the western Ukrainian/ southeastern Polish region of Volhynia/Wolyn in 1943-44) cause particular offense in Poland, the country most likely to serve as a model and a vital source of support for Ukraine's European integration. Historians have documented the OUN and UPA's collaboration with Nazism and participation in the Holocaust. (3) Nevertheless, governmental organizations such as the Ukraïnskyi instytut natsional 'noï pam'iaty (Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance) have used official apologies, strategic oversight of key archives, and "de-communization" laws to promote and enforce a politicized history of the OUN and UPA that whitewashes their crimes. (4)"...

Citation (3) ... John-Paul Himka, "Ukrainian Collaboration in the Extermination of Jews during World War II: Sorting Out the Long-Term and Conjunctural Factors," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, ...and in citation (4), Timothy Snyder, "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing, 1943," *Past & Present* 179 (2003): 197-234.

Prof. Himka a historian for hire, has acknowledged getting paid by writing as a fellow for the Holocaust Memorial Museum. I would suggest that his primary sources be checked before citing him. "Rewriting history: An evidentiary perspective" *Kyiv Post* February. 16, 2010 by Askold S. Lozynskyj.

Timothy Snyder should not be cited in the Ukrainian Polish conflict. He is an excellent historian, but he is a Polonophile who should not be considered an authority of the Polish-Ukrainian conflicts. In his book "Blood Lands he threads lightly on the Polish operation "Akcja Wisła / Operation Vistula" a codename for the 1947 forced resettlement of the Ukrainians from the south-eastern provinces of post-war Poland (Western Halychyna / Lemkivshchyna) to the German Recovered Territories in the west of Poland.

The Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO), OUN and UPA conducted an armed struggle against the Polish regime, which was a typical 20th century anti-colonial struggle/war. These types of wars were categorically brutal but not necessarily genocidal. Western Ukraine was to Poland what Algiers, Algeria was for France. "A Savage War of Peace, Algeria 1954-1962", (2006) by Alistair Horne.

On page 8 the author writes... "Ukraine is and continues to be a multi-ethnic kaleidoscope, hosting large populations of Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Greeks, Tatars, Roma, Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Armenians, as well as a Ukrainian majority." ...

This constant dirge of a multi-ethnic kaleidoscope is an anti-Ukrainian FAKE put out by the Western and European Academia to imply that Ukrainians are just one of many nationalities on its territory. Ukraine is the most nationally homogeneous country in Europe! According to Wikipedia the national structure of the population of Ukraine (2001). In 2001, the national composition was: Ukrainians 77.8%, Russian 17.3%, Romanian 1.1% (including Moldovan 0.8%), Belarusian 0.6%, Crimean Tatar 0.5%, Bulgarian 0.4%, Hungarian 0.3%, Polish 0.3%, Jewish 1.0%, Pontic Greeks 0.2% and other 1.6% (including Muslim Bulgarians, otherwise known as Torbesh and a microcosm of Swedes of Gammalsvenskby). It is also estimated that there are about 49,817 ethnic Koreans (0.12%) in Ukraine that belong to the Koryo-saram group. Their number may be as high as 100,000 as many ethnic Koreans were assimilated into the majority population.

On page 236 and page 299, the author describes the Ukrainian Genocide in all its forms in the 1930's but does not identify it as a Genocide, this is very troubling. See attached article "Moroz Nationalism and Genocide\_ The Origin of the Artificial Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine". (14)

Prof. Roman Serbyn writes that Raphael Lemkin meant that ... "Ukrainian genocide beyond the peasants starving in 1932-1933 and speaks about the destruction of the intelligentsia and the Church, the 'brain' and the 'soul' of the nation. He puts emphasis on the preservation and development of culture, beliefs and common ideas, which make Ukraine 'a nation rather than a mass of people'." ... (15)

The author accuses Dontsov of pushing the OUN on a path of collaboration with Nazi Germany, this word has a moral dimension, it should be used carefully and judiciously. For example, Roosevelt and Churchill collaborated with Stalin! page 237

It seems it is hard for an academic in North America and Western Europe to avoid the new orthodoxy of thought about Ukrainian nationalists and nationalism in Ukraine as well as in newly independent Ukraine. Academics continue kowtow to words about nationalists and nationalism such as collaboration, fascism, anti-Semitism, ultra-nationalism, and the study of intercultural legal extremism, these are words currently used by Russian propagandists. The Ukrainian Nationalists had no one to turn to for military training or arms, so the word collaboration is absurd and meaningless in historical discourses! There is wisdom in the aphorism, "the enemy of my enemy, is my friend".

On page 275 the author uses the word myshugizmy (мишугенізму) and since it is a word of pre-WW II Halychyna, some of the readers may not know the meaning of the word. I hope I am not presumptuous to translate the word into English, namely madness or insanity.

On page 297 the author writes ... "took the lives of approximately four million inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine's cities and villages a staggering 15 percent of the population, between 1932 and 1933. In citation 220 the author cites Oleh Wolowyna the demographer of the MAPA at HURI. One should take note that MAPA is a failed attempt to put a scientific sheen to the four (4) million victims of the Holodomor! The unsustainable information technology in the study of the Holodomor, the Digital Atlas of Ukraine "MAPA" program, spews out the magical 3.9 million Holodomor victims. The demographers themselves (Wolowyna) on this project say ... "Another set of limitations we had to face was the absence of reliable data on population losses in Ukraine at the oblast and raion levels." ... There just is not enough data to fill the gaps in the information model. The Holodomor itself wiped out whole villages that have disappeared from the face of the earth. Eight (8) years later, there is the Second World War, massive destruction, the Security Service of Ukraine, and Russia destroyed many of their files during the second world war and again in 1991 during the Collapse of the USSR. The remaining files still in Moscow have been closed off to researchers.

Robert Conquest one of the most authoritative western voices, finally broke the back of the Holodomor deniers with his "The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-famine", published in 1986. In it he gives seven (7) million victims as the minimum number, which is based on the most conservative figures. The number may well be over ten (10) million!

Page 302 the author discusses anti-Semitism in Ukraine/Dontsov. This is the "Bull in the China Closet" that all academics are afraid to touch. Namely the blank pages in Ukrainian history concerning the Jewish contribution and participation in the Communist revolution and government in Ukraine!

On page 314 the author touches upon Jewish colonization in Ukraine and Dontsov' jaundiced reaction to the Jewish agricultural colonization of Ukraine. Jonathan Dekel-Chen of Hebrew University of Jerusalem writes that ... "Few scholars, even specialists on Jewish and Soviet history, can say much about the Jewish agricultural colonization movement from the traditional towns (shtetls) of the former Pale of Settlement to Crimea and Southern Ukraine, which took place between 1923 and 1941." (16)

On page 351 the author touches upon the Ukrainian National Democratic Union (UNDO) the largest political party in the interwar period in Halychyna. It was the largest Ukrainian political party in the interwar

period from its formation in 1925 to 1939. It dominated the political life of Ukrainians and yet the author does not provide sufficient information upon its relationship with UVO and OUN. The author gives the impression that the Nationalists were the dominant political force in Halychyna. It is a fact that all Ukrainians were nationalist with a small “n” because most Ukrainians supported an independent Ukraine.

On pages 378-379 the author conflates Dontsov’s ideology and the OUN’s politics! This is contrary to the author’s position. In his conclusion on page 433 he writes ... “to examine each step of Dontsov’s journey “on its own terms” and in situ.” ... In situ is the crucial concept in the book, this avoids the presentism of viewpoints found in current historical writings.

Page 380 on this page the author confuses the reader with contradictory information when he equates the OUN (B) and OUN (M). The author writes, ... “The OUN(B) nevertheless continued to operate, dispatching clandestine expeditionary groups into Eastern Ukraine to inspire and organize nationally conscious Ukrainians, participate in the extirpation of the Soviet-Russian system and its hidden supporters and lay the groundwork for independent statehood.?? The OUN(M) also cooperated with Nazi?? Germany included members who adhered to fascist and Dontsovian ideas and sent expeditionary groups into formerly Central and Eastern Ukraine behind the advancing Wehrmacht. These expeditions traveled as far as the Donbas region, distributing Dontsov's works and other propaganda, but they won few converts among locals.”

Page 448 the author touches upon the new orthodoxy of Western Opinion with regards to today’s Ukrainian Nationalists and Nationalism in Ukraine. The opinion of Nationalists in post-independent Ukraine continues the academic genuflecting to words such as collaboration, fascism, anti-Semitism, ultra-nationalism, cross-cultural right-wing extremism studies to name a few “superlatives”.

Here is an example of how the new orthodoxy is written by Ukrainophiles!

-- JSPPS 6:1 (2020) --, THE OUN DURING WORLD WAR II pp202-203

These are the writings of reputable authors and Ukraine’s friends, Andreas Umland Research Fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm and Yulia Yurchuk Umeå University!

In their article’s Conclusions ... “Dulić’s and Miljan’s paper supports the ongoing integration of descriptive explorations and historic classifications of the OUN into the comparative analysis of war-time European ultra-nationalism, and cross-cultural right-wing extremism studies. All three papers thus make consequential contributions to the increasingly sophisticated scholarly discussion of the OUN’s ideas and activities before and during World War II, as well as their contemporary interpretation. At the same time, they constitute important expert interventions into the ongoing Ukrainian public debate about the role of the OUN in and for Ukraine’s national history. Last but not least, they are important novel contributions to the recently consolidating field of comparative fascist studies. They should thus find a readership beyond the narrow confines of Ukrainian historical research and East European area studies.” ...

On page 435 the author writes, Dontsov’s ideas are still relevant in the current confrontation with Moscow. This may be the reason that many Ukrainians support his writings.

On page 435 the author grasps Dontsov’s character and significance in a short succinct paragraph, .... “He crossed the national boundaries-geographic, linguistic, and cultural-that he claimed to regard as sacrosanct with remarkable ease, switching codes and tailoring his persona to new environments, publics, and geopolitical realities. Dontsov not only moved through these contexts, he changed them as well, forcefully articulating a view from within the borderlands of Eastern Europe that epitomized the dilemmas of collaboration and resistance, and of imitation and opposition, faced by those who lived between the two most ideologically virulent and murderous states of Europe's twentieth century. Too often ignored or marginalized, perspectives such as Dontsov's help us understand the definition and redefinition of nations and borders in interwar Eastern Europe as the people who were most directly affected by this bloody process saw it.” ... BRAVO!

## Bibliography & Citations

- (1) <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CD%5CO%5CDontsovDmytro.htm>
- (2) John Armstrong (1963). *Ukrainian Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 20–22
- (3) <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CV%5CI%5CVistnykjournalIT.htm>
- (4) <https://diasporiana.org.ua/ideologiya/286-lipa-yu-rozpodil-rosiyi/>
- (5) <https://diasporiana.org.ua/?s=%D0%A1%D0%B0%D0%BC%D1%87%D1%83%D0%BA>
- (6) <https://diasporiana.org.ua/miscellaneous/7991-rozstrilyane-vidrodzhennya-antologiya-1917-1933/>
- (7) <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CK%5CH%5CKhvylovyMykola.htm>
- (8) Alexander J. Motyl, "On Nationalism and Fascism," in Alexander J. Motyl, *Ukraine vs. Russia: Revolution, Democracy, and War* (Washington, DC: Westphalia Press, 2017, pp. 524-529).
- (9) <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CS%5CT%5CSsiborskyMykola.htm>
- (10) <https://qdoc.tips/top-ranking-officers-of-the-nkvd-of-the-ukrainian-ssr-in-the-mid-1930s-pdf-free.html>
- (11) [https://www.academia.edu/33814028/Ukrainians\\_and\\_Jews\\_A\\_Symposium\\_1966\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/33814028/Ukrainians_and_Jews_A_Symposium_1966_pdf)
- (12) <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3342999,00.html>
- (13) Also read
  - *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* by Simon Sebag Montefiore , 2003
  - *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, by Leonard Shapiro, 1960
- <https://qdoc.tips/top-ranking-officers-of-the-nkvd-of-the-ukrainian-ssr-in-the-mid-1930s-pdf-free.html>
- (14) [http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v06/v06p207\\_Moroz.html](http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v06/v06p207_Moroz.html)
- (15) [http://history.org.ua/LiberUA/RaphaelLemkin\\_1953/RaphaelLemkin\\_1953.pdf](http://history.org.ua/LiberUA/RaphaelLemkin_1953/RaphaelLemkin_1953.pdf)
- (16) [https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Colonies\\_of\\_Ukraine/Jonathan%20Dekel-Chen.htm](https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Colonies_of_Ukraine/Jonathan%20Dekel-Chen.htm)

## Contributor

Peter Jaroslaw Piaseckyj, Native of Jaktoriw, western Ukraine, has worked and traveled all over the world as an engineer, entrepreneur, and merchant mariner. Retired ship's captain and professional engineer. A lifelong bibliophile, voracious reader and book reviewer, currently involved in research.

242 191Street, Sunny Isles Beach, FL, 116320, USA, piaseckyj@gmail.com

Trevor Erlacher, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, Center for Russian East European and Eurasian Studies,

230 S. Bouquet Street, 4215 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Emails: "Erlacher, Trevor" [trevor.erylacher@pitt.edu](mailto:trevor.erylacher@pitt.edu) and [tfe3@pitt.edu](mailto:tfe3@pitt.edu)

Tel: 412-648-7403