

Elizabeth A. Wood, William E. Pomeranz, E. Wayne Merry and Maxim Trudolyubov, *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016. 147 pp.

Although it may have receded from daily media attention, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is still among the most important developments in geopolitics since the end of the Cold War more than twenty-five years ago. A new buildup of military forces and materiel along Russia's border with Ukraine over the last several months of 2016 provides an example of why this is still the case.

The roots of this conflict are multifaceted and therefore deserve a multifaceted treatment. This is in large part the thesis of *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine*, recently published by the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. In this volume, four eminent scholars and/or practitioners, Elizabeth A. Wood, William E. Pomeranz, E. Wayne Merry, and Maxim Trudolyubov, provide different perspectives on the "roots" of the war with the aim of understanding it in a "more nuanced way."

In the introduction, Elizabeth A. Wood provides some historical context to the conflict as a whole. Interestingly, this context is divided into two parts: on Crimea, and on Ukraine. Whether this is a stylistic or substantive choice is not entirely clear. It is clear however, that from the Russian perspective Crimea and Ukraine are different both in terms of symbolic importance and in terms of actions on the ground. Stated another way, Crimea holds great symbolic importance in the "mythology and imagination of many Russians." For example, it was denoted "Russia's Paradise" by Grigory Potemkin (3). It also holds great strategic importance as the home of the Black Sea Fleet since 1783 (3). This explains in part why the annexation of Crimea was so popular among the Russian populace.

The book begins with a chapter by E. Wayne Merry addressing differing views of sovereignty between the EU and Russia. It continues with a chapter by William E. Pomeranz that examines EU–Russia trade issues. The chapter by Maxim Trudolyubov addresses issues of how Russians view Russian national identity.

Finally, the chapter by Elizabeth A. Wood explores the use of symbolic language and actions by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

There are at least three common themes that serve to unite as well as define the authors' attempts to understand the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. These over-arching themes are the focus of this review and include the roles played by: geography and imagined geography; perception and misperception; and symbolism in political discourse and political campaigns.

Elizabeth A. Wood's introduction points to the "deep roots of the crisis" (5). A key aspect of this crisis is the terms used to describe the "imagined geography" of the conflict. Terms such as "Novorossiya" and "independence" are crucial to understanding how the conflict is framed and have their roots not just in the current conflict but extend back at least to the break-up of the Soviet Union a quarter century ago. The use of these terms also gives some insight into the "expansionism ... of Russian political, economic and social priorities in this historical moment" (2).

Secondly, perception and misperception, especially of the actions and motives of each side of the conflict, is integral to understanding the roots of Russian actions in Ukraine. E. Wayne Merry's chapter on "The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine" aptly points to how two radically different perspectives on sovereignty between Russia and the EU can be used to better understand the current war. From the official Russian perspective, *Derzhavnost'* or the idea of Russia as a great power is integral to understanding Russia's actions. *Derzhavnost'*, embodied best in the writings of Aleksandr Dugin, is a complex construct that has come to have great influence on both international and domestic Russian political elites. This term is discussed extensively in Maxim Trudolyubov's chapter on "Russia's Grand Choice" (29–30, 76, 86, 91). Specifically, Trudolyubov's argument focuses on how domestic economic and political considerations including that of Russian national identity affected the crisis. In this chapter he argues that Russian elites face a dilemma: should Russia act as a great power, or provide economic prosperity for its citizens?

Finally, the symbolism of state action as explicated in Wood's chapter "A Small Victorious War: The Symbolic Politics of Vladimir

Putin” reveals that Russian actions in Ukraine are used by Vladimir Putin as symbolic gestures to great effect in maintaining and even increasing his power during his time in office. Moreover, the current war in Ukraine is just the latest example of how Putin plays a double role of “lawful hero” and “tough guy” (97). Whether during the war in Chechnya or the Crimea, Putin has used a “broad scenario of power” based on three things: 1) “appearances of personal masculine strength”; 2) “the ritual obeisance of others”; and 3) “reliance on power for its own sake” (99) to ensure his place at the center of Russian political and even economic policy.

What *Roots of Russia’s War in Ukraine* reveals yet again is the importance of contextualization. Moreover, this work should remind us that large-scale changes in the post-Soviet space are “embedded,” to quote Karl Polyani, in an institutional and even cultural context. In terms of the crisis in Ukraine this means taking into account the effect of previous regimes on the current conflict. Previous regimes contributed important structural factors (i.e. Soviet, Imperial Russian geographic conceptions) and processes (such as Russification) that have an important impact on the events that are happening even today. Russian aggression is real. Understanding Russian actions requires that they be “embedded” within the larger socio-cultural transformation that is occurring in the post-Soviet space.

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Paul Hare and Gerard Turley, *Handbook of the Economics and Political Economy of Transition*. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. xxviii, 495 pp.

The Russian economist Igor Birman, commenting on post-communist transition trajectories, once remarked that the centuries-long development of capitalism had never depended on educated or uneducated economists, their advice and recipes. Against this backdrop the *Handbook of the Economics and Political Economy of Transition* constitutes one of the most comprehensive