

Marci Shore, *The Ukrainian Night: An Intimate History of Revolution*. New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2017. 290 pp.

This book starts from the premise set by the Polish philosopher Stanislaw Brzozowski, when he wrote that “what is not biography—is nothing at all.” Shore undertakes the important task of highlighting the individual stories, voices, and experiences of those who participated in the 2014 Ukrainian Maidan Revolution, otherwise known as the “Revolution of Dignity.” The first half of *Ukrainian Night* deals with this mission exclusively, chronologically exploring the main events on the Maidan from the end of November 2013 up to the start of the war in the Donbas in March 2014. Shore utilizes the powerful stories of protestors and activists who were on the Maidan to reveal a new side to the crisis, one that was often overlooked in mainstream media coverage and subsequent political analysis. The second half of the book continues in this biographical style, but addresses the evolving war in the Donbas, as the author solicits further insights into the conflict that rapidly engulfed the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in 2014. In this fascinating exploration into the emergence of the war, Shore engages not only with the subjects who featured prominently on the Maidan in Kyiv, who provided the bulk of the insight for the first half of the book, but she also tells the stories of Ukrainians in the restless cities of Odessa, Dnipro, and Kharkiv, enriched with occasional narratives of those from Donetsk and Luhansk.

The highly readable *Ukrainian Night* sets a quick tempo, employing short chapters often centred around particular questions from the author or a particularly illuminating response from an interviewee. This style creates an ascending crescendo of anticipation, as the reader is brought into the lived experiences of those who protested, fought, and died on the Maidan, always with the sense that a new crisis is just around the corner. The interview style of this book, threaded together masterfully by Shore, gives it this great strength of allowing the reader to relive both the depths of human tragedy and the heights of exuberant triumph experienced by those on the Maidan. However, *Ukrainian Night*'s biggest asset is

also a methodological weakness. Throughout the entirety of the narrative focusing on the Maidan, there appears to be much greater time and space given to those of a similar cultural, class, and geographical background; namely, Ukrainians originating from the west of the country, with at least middle-class credentials, and a high level of education (a pertinent illustration is a lone critic of this aspect of the Maidan cited in the book, who describes the Maidan as “a bourgeois interest in the well-being of the upper classes”). This demographic is certainly not the sole focus of Shore’s narrative, but it seems that the views and experiences of these individuals are given much greater attention and credence. Partly because of that, there is an intense romanticism in Shore’s account of Ukraine’s European integration, when it comes to her handling both of the political union itself and of the “idea” of Europe that Shore attributes to the Maidan protestors, as comprising “human rights, the rule of law, the dignity of being treated as a subject, not an object.” Although European integration, in either a political or idealist form, is certainly supported by many Ukrainians, and was a major motivating factor in the Maidan, the monocular focus on this aspect of the Maidan also diminishes the voices of those who may have had different reasons to struggle. This stance further glorifies a process that has still not brought a lot of tangible benefits for many Ukrainians, and mystifies the pain that economic reforms and restructuring, demanded by the European Union, has inflicted on most Ukrainians. A richer exploration of the Maidan would have included a diverse range of voices from varying backgrounds, and further problematized the European integration from a more holistic perspective with the inclusion of dissenting standpoints.

The stories of heroism and civic resistance continue in the second part of the book, told through from the perspective of Ukrainians at the front line of tension and conflict in the country’s east. Shore skilfully documents the immense role that the Ukrainian civil society played in defence of their homeland as pro-Russian separatists took control of government buildings and claimed to have founded people’s republics in Donetsk and Luhansk. With the Ukrainian government in disarray, civilian volunteers and trained soldiers supplied the army with equipment and food, negotiated

hostage exchanges, and provided medical care for the wounded. The narrative switches between a focus on the heroism of the Ukrainian people in government-controlled areas, and the horrors committed by separatists in the Donbass, which is a compelling read. However, this type of story-telling sets up a huge divide between the good and “glorious Ukraine” of the west, and the evil demagoguery of the east. There is quite a bit of brushing-off of alleged Ukrainian Army crimes against prisoners and civilians, which have been extensively documented by Amnesty International, the United Nations (UN) Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, and the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission. Although Shore also, very briefly, addresses some concerns over the activities of Ukrainian volunteer battalions, such as the Right Sector whom the author visits, there is a minimal critical exploration of these groups, who have, at best, been described in the academic literature as ultraconservative groups with a neo-Nazi fringe.

*Ukrainian Night* is an engrossing study of key perspectives on the Maidan protests from 2013 to 2014 and presents a lived experience of these tumultuous and uncertain days for Ukrainian society. The pace and style of the book thrusts the reader intimately inside this uncertainty, as the anticipation quickly builds to materialize in the crisis of Ukraine’s east, as pro-Russian separatists take control of Donetsk and Luhansk, and war explodes in the Donbas. Shore’s unique account of the events guarantees a stimulating read, though the apparent bias in the interview method does make *Ukrainian Night* a biography of, and for, a particular audience.

ELLIOT DOLAN-EVANS

PhD candidate

Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre

Monash University