The history of national ideas and nation building in Ukraine is well explored and there exists an impressive body of reference works. As a state, Ukraine became independent for the first time in 1918 but only for a short period. During the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Ukrainian Soviet Republic declared its independence in August 1991, some months before the end of the USSR in December 1991. Ukraine has been a sovereign state since 1991; its borders were guaranteed by international treaties, including the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Theoretically, a nation does not need a defined territory, but a modern state has to mark its space via borders. The collaborative volume titled Making Ukraine, edited by the historians Olena Palko and Constantin Ardeleanu, brings together international experts to give for the first time a concise tour d’horizon about the border making of Ukraine from a historical perspective.

The volume includes surveys by scholars who specialize in Ukrainian and East European history. They provide a broad range of guidance to archival materials in various countries, conceptual approaches, reference works, and further research topics. The book is introduced by Ulrich Schmid, who works at the Centre for Governance and Culture in Europe at the Swiss University in St. Gallen that organized a workshop on the topic. He implicates the role of actors, as without them a border would not be created, negotiated, accepted, or guaranteed. The changing of borders is closely connected to war in history. Ukraine has been unfortunately experiencing the threat to its statehood from Russia since 2014, when Crimea was occupied, and Russia intervened in the Donbas region. The book was planned and written before February 24, 2022, but the topic is highly relevant regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The first informative chapter, by Palko and Ardeleanu, refers to the main developments in Ukrainian history since the nineteenth century when there was a national awakening and formation of the idea to create a state of its own. It is connected to the history of knowledge as geo-
graphers like Stepan Rudnytsky produced maps and thus meanings of spaces for national identifications. Linguists explored differences between languages including Russian and Ukrainian; historians gave competing narratives about the past. Ethnic differences became visible and were followed by political demands. But only with the breakdown of the Habsburg, German, and Russian Empires at the end of the First World War did the borders have to be redrawn in Eastern Europe. For the first time in history the Ukrainians, belonging until 1917/18 to different sovereignties, had the opportunity to create a state of its own. It lasted only for a couple of months, as the new Ukrainian state was a borderland between competing powers and had no protection for its territory. Palko and Ardeleanu use the terminus “revolution of perception,” as for the first time the demand from the Ukrainians for a state of its own was recognized in international politics. They also stress the meaning of perspectives when writing about borders: depending on the point of view one can regard the creation of Soviet Ukraine during the Soviet period as incorporation or reunification.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part explores the western borders, the tensions between Poland and Ukraine about Galicia, and the role of the peace treaties after the First World War. The second part shows the border making in the Soviet Union, followed by articles focusing on the interdependencies that involve western neighbors.

Borislav Chernev describes the great-power diplomacy after the First World War. The peace conference in Brest-Litovsk in 1917/18 was important for the definition of Ukrainian borders, preparing the Paris Peace Conference in 1919/20. But the diplomatic results had no long-lasting effect due to the Polish-Soviet war that lasted until 1921. In the end the Ukrainians belonged to different states (Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union.)

Poland, being liberated from foreign rule after 1917/18, tenaciously fought against Ukrainian statehood at the Paris Peace Conference. Elżbieta Kwiecińska argues that there was a strong Polish civilizing mission, a hierarchical thinking arguing that Ukraine was not yet “mature” enough and rectifying the Polish colonial approach toward Ukraine. In international diplomacy, Poland’s demands were acknowledged as the country should work as a fortress against Bolshevism. The Ukrainian delegation in Versailles had no official status and the Polish-Soviet border was fixed in the treaty of Riga in 1921.

The path to this important agreement, its consequences for Ukraine, and the contest between Poland and Ukraine concerning the western parts of Ukraine are described by Jan Bruski.

Damian Karol Markowski explores how the Polish-Ukrainian border was negotiated and relocated between 1939 and 1952. The process started with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact signed by the German Reich and the Soviet Union in 1939, defining spheres of interest. With the beginning of the Soviet-German war in June 1941 the borders, especially in western Ukraine, again changed massively. After the liberation of these territories from the German occupation in 1944, it took until 1952 to fix the new Polish-Ukrainian borders. Markowski sees the border changes as a tragedy as many people were deported, had to flee, or suffered displacement (Vistula action 1944-46).

Dorota Michaluk focuses on the Ukrainian-Byelorussian border, drawn in 1918 and regarded as stable, as it was approved in 1992.

Stephan Rindlisbacher argues that a territory mirrors power relations. His case study is about the eastern border of Ukraine including the Donbas region and is based on rich archival material. Only Moscow could make decisions about the borders; at the same time, local voices were regarded as “nationalistic,” even during Korenisatztya.

Alexander Voronovici explains the impacts of the Bessarabian question and the foundation of
the Moldovan Republic in 1924 for the Ukrainian Soviet Republic.

Austin Charron sheds light on the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, when Nikita Khrushchev decided to connect the peninsula to Ukraine. Officially, this decision was presented as act of commemorating the Treaty of Pereiaslav that had taken place three hundred years before. In 1954, this border change was little recognized, and the belonging of Crimea became a conflict between Russia and Ukraine only after 1991.

Other understudied regions (e.g., Transcarpathia and the Danube Delta) are analyzed by Iaroslav Kovalchuk and Constantin Ardeleanu. The conclusion, written by Tatiana Zhurzhenko, takes the reader to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, showing conflict lines since 1991.

The volume is a good reference work for the history of the Ukrainian borders in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They changed very often and many different actors were involved, thus showing power relations and economic or military interests. For the local residents, border changes entailed massive impacts on their lives. Based on these findings, the book contributes to the theoretical debates in border studies and opens new research topics.

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