Michael T. Westrate. *Living Soviet in Ukraine from Stalin to Maidan: Under the Falling Red Star in Kharkiv*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. xx, 232 pp. Illustrations. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. $85.00, cloth.

In this monograph, historian Michael Westrate delves into daily life in the Soviet Union, specifically with regard to its lingering effects in post-Soviet Ukraine. He conducted sixty-five oral history interviews with military officers in Kharkiv, Ukraine, during fieldwork in 2010-11. His study eschews many of the stereotypes of identity in Ukraine as it explores the complex levels of identifications and identity-making processes in a region where people "did not move across borders; rather, the borders moved across them" (148). Rather than repeating the eastern-Ukraine-versus-western-Ukraine paradigm—one of the most prevalent, but also most problematic, dichotomizations of Ukraine—his analysis goes beyond the national element to elucidate how Sovietism remains a salient marker of community at the same time that a local, Kharkivian identity permeates daily life in the former capital of Ukraine.

Westrate situates his research in the *Alltagsgeschichte* school of history, that is, the history of everyday life. He argues that his goal is "to study the down-to-earth, basic experiences of ordinary people in a society, and to find and prove the links between them and the broad cultural and socio-political changes which occur in that society" (3). The majority of his interviewees were military professors and their families at the Marshall Leonid Aleksandrovich Govorov Higher Academy for (Air Defense) Radio Engineering, locally known as VIRTA. As the reader learns about their daily lives, it becomes clear that these families were a unified cohort within the Soviet, and later the post-Soviet, society. They often lived in the same housing complexes and shopped in the same stores; their children played together; and they worked together at VIRTA for decades.

The author also interviewed fifteen civilians for the purpose of comparison: to provide contextualization to help "define the relationship of the individual interviewees and their small groups to the larger society and history" (10). While these interviews, no doubt, assisted Westrate in formulating his analysis, their role in the monograph is largely implicit. The reader does not learn much about the civilians or about how their lives differed from those of the military elites. Some demographic information regarding all of the interviews is provided in Appendix A.

Chapter 2 situates VIRTA and its officers within the context of Kharkiv and the Sloboda Ukraine area of eastern Ukraine. Kharkiv was the capital of the Ukrainian SSR for a little over a decade, but it has a much longer history of high cultural and economic status, as it was a gateway to the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. Individuals from Kharkiv—similarly to the

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residents of other urban spaces, such as Lviv in western Ukraine and Odesa in the south—maintain a strong regional identity, and this is frequently referenced in the interviews analyzed in the book. Many of the officers were not originally from Kharkiv or even from Ukraine but still felt strong ties to the city.

Westrate describes the elite VIRTA officers as "personifications" of Soviet ideology and of the New Soviet Man—evolved beyond egocentrism and nationalism. In chapter 3, he reviews the historiography to argue that the large Soviet military was a means by which to control and perform violence; and the performance of violence was not for the purpose of maintaining a nation-state but was oriented internationally, aiming to spread Soviet ideology worldwide. His arguments in this chapter are supported by a wide range of excerpts from his interviews and from secondary sources.

One of the book's most important contributions appears in this chapter. Westgate reveals that the socio-economic periodization and historical timeline of the late Soviet and the post-Soviet era as typically described by the media and academics do not hold the same meaning for his respondents. For example, in their view, 1991 was just one point in a much longer period of transition lasting from the Gorbachev era into the 2010s. Such insights are a strength of microhistories or studies of the daily lives of individuals, as grand narratives of socio-cultural change are complicated by the lived experiences of agentive actors.

Chapter 4 breaks from the male-centred narrative to focus on military wives. Westrate briefly explores the changing role of women during the Soviet period, as this role shifted from the ideals of the New Soviet Woman to the more traditional family values of motherhood and child-rearing. He highlights two specific interviews with military wives, whose lives took very different trajectories. In this chapter, the author points out some of the obstacles that he faced in his fieldwork, in particular how some of his interviewees responded differently when in the presence of their spouse as compared to when they were alone with Westrate. Such discrepancies are worth mentioning, but, at the same time, the author fails to seriously address other research obstacles, such as his positionality as an American. He quotes one individual as saying, "I took a sacred oath, and—no offense intended, young man—I still consider you Americans the enemy" (84). The reader is left wondering how this sentiment might have coloured the interview and whether other respondents held similar views.

The penultimate chapter of the book reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Westrate complicates the topic of identity in Ukraine and, more broadly, in post-Soviet states. He rejects the common framing of Ukraine as bifurcated into a Russia-oriented eastern part and Europe-oriented western part, by extension also rejecting the bifurcation of

Ukrainian identity. His respondents identified as Soviet, Ukrainian, Russian, and Kharkivian. However, his argument about the complexity of identifications in Kharkiv would have been strengthened by the inclusion of insights from the civilians that he interviewed. In fact, the lack of analysis of these responses is a weakness throughout the book, particularly in light of the author's insistence that he has gained "insights at the grassroots level" (135) while elsewhere describing his respondents as "elite" and "personifications" of Soviet ideology.

Overall, the book is well written, and it incorporates substantial primary- and secondary-source material. The monograph's exploration of the daily lives of military officers from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era contributes to Ukrainian studies and, more broadly, to our understanding of identities in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet countries.

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