



The Fault Line: Traveling the Other Europe, From Finland to Ukraine

Paolo Rumiz , Gregory Conti (Translation)

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An award-winning writer travels the eastern front of Europe, where the push/pull between old empires and new possibilities has never been more evident. Paolo Rumiz traces the path that has twice cut Europe in two--first by the Iron Curtain and then by the artificial scaffolding of the EU--moving through vibrant cities and abandoned villages, some places still gloomy under the ghost of these imposing borders, some that have sought to erase all memory of it and jump with both feet into the West (if only the West would have them). In *The Fault Line*, he is a sublime and lively guide through these unfamiliar landscapes, piecing together an atlas that has been erased by modern states, delighting in the discovery of communities that were once engulfed by geopolitics then all but forgotten, until now. The farther south he goes, the more he feels he is traveling not along some abandoned Eastern frontier, but right in the middle of things: Mitteleuropa wasn't to be found in Viennese cafés but much farther east, beyond even Budapest and Warsaw. As in Ukraine, these remain places in flux, where the political and cultural values of the East and West have stared each other down for centuries. Rumiz gives a human face not just to what the Cold War left behind but to the ancient ties of empire and ethnicity that are still at the root of modern politics in flash-point areas such as this.

The Fault Line: Traveling the Other Europe, From Finland to Ukraine Details

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From Reader Review The Fault Line: Traveling the Other Europe, From Finland to Ukraine for online ebook

Louise says

Paolo Rumiz and his translator/companion/photographer Monika travel light. With only backpacks and one change of clothes they take trains and buses from northernmost Finland to the Ukraine. Their route is vertical but often zig zags crossing Russia's western "border zone"/Europe's frontier" several times.

Paolo and Monika enjoy most the places tourists visit least. They acquainted me with remote places such as Kirkenes (the place of the northernmost internet connection), Monchegorsk (" the meringue city"), Karelia (the start/end of the arctic circle) and the Solovetskys (the monastery islands). Once they cross over to Estonia, Latvia, Kaliningrad, Poland and points further south they see the influence of the EU, the USA and an intense pace of life.

The descriptions are wonderful, from the processing of crabs with 6 foot claws in Kamchatka, to varied and often ominous border crossings (days long lines for Estonia-Russia) to the curfew for men (not women or boys) in Belarus cities to a shakedown in the Ukraine.

Throughout the trip they note synagogues and an historical Jewish presence, but few Jews. They learn that most who survived the war left in 1990's when visas became easier to get.

Through conversations with locals (Paolo says you can't learn what is happening from diplomats in airports) you hear that not all are thrilled with the collapse of communism. Alya Andreyevna mourns her job in a now vanished day care center and the team spirit of the past. She worries that the wooden houses of her town will be bulldozed to make room for cement buildings. Another woman longs for the order of the past and says there is too much drinking now. The market economy is bringing tourists to the arctic who shoot reindeer for only their antlers and businesspeople who exploit the once shared lands.

I liked the narratives about people with quotes from the everyday conversations. The best was that of Tatiana and Vitaly of Lovozero glimpsing their lives and showing the worry foreign house guests can cause. The portraits of places were good, but had me going to the internet for orientation (how big is this city? Where, exactly is this?).

Despite the depth and beauty of the prose, (kudos to writer and translator) I can't give it 5 stars. The borderless map was not much of a help and Monika's photography was frequently cited, but not one picture is included.

IreneElle says

C'è chi dice che "il vento è forte" oppure che "Il vento soffia", qualcuno invece scrive così:
"Mi affaccio sul fiume che va nella sera. Il vento di nordovest lo gonfia e lo spinge verso il mare come farebbe con una vela nel maestrale, porta profuma di stoppie dal mare di grano intorno, sostiene due cicogne ferme nell'aria come deltaplani, entra nella bottiglia semivuota di birra Sarmat -sentite che nome!- che tengo in mano e la fa suonare come un'auto. Passa una vela, il Dnestr si inargenta, il cielo diventa violetto e le rive paiono ancora echeggiare delle grida dei soldati, mercanti e doganieri". Trans Europa Express

Rumiz è stata la mia lettura estiva, con lui ho viaggiato attraverso l'Europa seguendo una rotta del tutto originale. Tutti viaggiano più o meno ma poi ci sono i viaggiatori-narratori come Rumiz e Terzani che ci regalano certe pagine.

Ingrid says

Resoconto interessante e, a tratti appassionante, del lungo viaggio fatto dal giornalista Rumiz da Rovaniemi, in Finlandia, fino ad Odessa, in Ucraina, passando dalle lande fredde della Russia, alla scoperta della "frontiera", la crisi ucraina e lo scenario geopolitico a venire (la Crimea, l'est filorusso e il desiderio di occidentalizzazione del resto del paese).

Attraverso mezzi di fortuna, piccoli giacigli e il costante inguaribile desiderio di trovarsi "in mezzo alle cose", vivere gli incontri, lasciarsi raccontare le esistenze delle persone, Rumiz restituisce un quadro fantasmatico della dolorosa e toccante catastrofe che sta attraversando i confini europei, profetizzando in parte sui fatti ucraini.

“I nomadi lo sanno: le mappe non servono a orientarsi, ma a sognare il viaggio nei mesi che precedono il distacco”.

“Un uomo con buone scarpe può rispondere a qualsiasi emergenza. Ha un'andatura migliore, diventa meno goffo, infonde più fiducia. La posizione eretta lo fa pensare meglio, gli regala una scrittura più rotonda, una cadenza metrica migliore. Un buon paio di scarpe conta più di tanti libri. E io, confesso, scrivo con i piedi”.

“[...] si rinuncia a un insopportabile armamentario di certezze, senza affaticarsi troppo a immaginare quello che verrà. Inutile prepararsi, tanto poi il viaggio farà del suo meglio per far saltare i nostri schemi. E tutto pare una metafora della vita, una preparazione al grande trasloco. Talvolta penso che chi ha passato molte frontiere è anche più preparato a morire. Non teme l'incognita come un sedentario”.

“Ho imparato nei viaggi a non far troppe domande. Meglio raccontarsi. Offrire qualcosa di sé e della propria storia perché il dialogo diventi un baratto di primizie”.

Simona says

"Mai come questa volta non sono stato io a fare il viaggio, ma le persone che ho incontrato. come a dire che è stato il viaggio a fare se stesso, ignorando i miei schemi mentali".

Questa citazione riassume perfettamente il senso di questo libro e del viaggio che Rumiz ha intrapreso. Non sarebbe corretto definire questo libro un romanzo, in quanto è una sorta di documentario di viaggio. Un viaggio lungo, un viaggio che non è turistico, un viaggio fatto di persone diverse, di persone incontrate tra la Finlandia, la Norvegia, i Monti Carpazi, la Cecenia fino a giungere ad Odessa, in Ucraina. Forse è vero che sono gli incontri lungo il percorso a fare il viaggio incontrando pescatori di aragoste, raccoglitrice di mirtili, persone comuni che lottano in ogni paese del mondo e che ti arricchiscono, facendoti comprendere quanto sia bello questo modo di viaggiare, di esserci, semplicemente esistere, con il sole a mezzanotte della Norvegia, vivendo attimi di eterna, meravigliosa, struggente bellezza.

Kristen Abram says

A deep look into cultures quickly fading.

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to travel to Middle Europe. It gave me the travel itch for sure.

Laurie says

Borderlands and frontiers have long fascinated me. Paolo Rumiz, long time Italian journalist and world traveler, has journeyed the traditional borderlands of Europe made new by the European Union; what Rumiz calls "fortress Europe." Rumiz and his traveling companion prefer their Europe wild and raw which is why they commit to traveling the non-EU side of the vertical border from Murmansk Russia to Istanbul by train and bus for most of their journey. Through a portion of Europe which is little written about we meet gregarious grandmothers, gangsters, surly youth and back-to-the-land authors who share their stories about life and history.

Rumiz and his companion have an open attitude to the people and places they experience which is very refreshing. They also understand the deep historical and cultural nuances of lands where there is a deep void resulting from the forced deportations, relocations and exterminations of peoples over the last century. About the market square in Chernivtsi Ukraine, the former Czernowitz, center of Jewish culture and learning, Rumiz has to say: "All around are Cossack butchers with cascading mustaches, buxom Moldovian farm women, vociferous Romanians selling strings of braided onions, bony-faced Carpathian natives with baskets of mountain herbs and greens. The only missing player in this chaotic scene is the Hassidic Jew with his wide-brimmed black hat, black long coat, and curls down to his shoulders." He understands what has been lost. And the rich strangeness that yet remains.

Tuck says

fast paced, thoughtful, off the tourist path trip from far north in murmansk (and farther north than that)) zig zagging south crossing and recrossing borders between russia and not-russia in finland, estonia, latvia, Lithuania, poland, ukraine, Belarus, ending in odessa. did i leave some countries out? he and his partner travel mostly by local bus and train, so they get to meet lots of local folks, and they de-train in the unlikeliest places, so get to see lots of local sights, and most any given spot in this zigzag line has 100's and 100's of years of history and happenings, which author deftly folds into his modern narrative. he totally calls and reports on what has happened in ukraine, and what will happen with this border lands in the future too? he goes on and on about his partner's photographing, but not one single one in book, and just a hand drawn map, no citations , no index.

a bit maddening, that no-pic policy, as rizzoli ex libris produces mostly illustrated books. but it seems that is situation <http://www.rizzoliusa.com/book.php?is...>

Philip Dingle says

A fascinating read that sheds light on an under-reported part of the world. Shows how much more an inquiring mind can discover by traveling on public transport rather than by car.

As Rumiz notes, politicians should travel on buses and trains more often.

Was disappointed not to have seen some of traveling companion Monika's photographs; Rumiz is good at painting a picture with words, but photos have their value too.

Highly recommended.

Nathan Albright says

Reading this book as part of my contextual reading for my upcoming trip to Estonia [1], I was struck by the elegance of this author's prose as well as the general sense of melancholy the author demonstrated in his desire to go to fault lines and to explore the unfinished business of the 20th century in Eastern Europe, which is peripheral in terms of knowledge and familiarity but central in terms of sheer geography. For those who enjoy sad tales of forgotten lands inhabited by people whose lives and whose struggles form the fuel for the fires of revolution and warfare, and who are the inheritors of a difficult destiny of oppression and the horrors of nationalism and fanatical political movements like fascism and communism. The role of psychology and personal background in influencing a writer's path is also notable, given the fact that as an Italian of Trieste, with personal experience in living on the fault lines of complicated geography it is not surprising that the author would be drawn to other such places in his own backyard. What is surprising is the degree of poignancy about his writing, and the pervasive sense of sadness about the trip, despite the fun it must have been for the author and his companion.

The book consists of a series of thoughtful travel essays that begin at the end of the journey and that take the reader on a fascinating and elegantly told trip from the frozen reaches of the Arctic Ocean to the sunny shores of the Black Sea, and through many contested and forgotten borderlands and small regions in between. A great deal of time is spent in the Barents Sea, in Kola, around the White Sea, and in Karelia, that Finnish territory stolen by the wicked Soviets in the Winter War [2], before the author examines the silence of the Estonians, the friendliness of most Russians, the tension between Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, and Pagan in the pale of former imperial Russia, the way to tell beautiful Austro-Hungarian cities in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine, and continual discussions with commonfolk on the rapacity of corrupt elites and the dangers of nationalism as well as criminal organizations, which at times includes the government, as in Belarus and its overly paranoid police state. The author shows himself to be full of startling insights and a strong willingness to share his stories and belongings with those he meets, with a generosity of spirit as well of possessions, and possessing a good way with words and even a willingness to help provide cover for some smugglers along the way.

The author is not necessarily the most appealing person in terms of his leftist and somewhat anarchic political worldview, but it cannot be overestimated just how gorgeous the prose of this book happens to be [3]. It takes a special kind of person, someone not entirely sane, to go to the frozen north and to willingly trek along an epic vertical cultural boundary within Europe that is only imperfectly represented on maps while recovering from a broken foot. This author may not be perfectly sane, but in many ways I found myself rooting for the old man, appreciating his sensitivity and generosity of spirit to the people around him, enjoying his love for Old Believers and his respect and regard for the importance of Jewish culture and the immense violence done against them by Hitler and Stalin and others of their ilk. This book in many ways is haunted by the ghosts of the past, like any good book about the area, and the author appears like the best sort of remnant of a more tolerant and ecumenical Austro-Hungarian mindset, like the explorers of Franz Josef Land who he praises so heartily in these pages. Anyone writing a travelogue would do as well to be as quirky and as pleasant to read as this man, who appears like the sort of writer one would like to get to know personally, and spend a few hours eating and chatting with along one's mutual journeys.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.wordpress...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.wordpress...>

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<https://edgeinducedcohesion.wordpress...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.wordpress...>

[2] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.wordpress...>

[3] See, for example:

"We cross the tracks of platform one, our legs turned to mush from sadness, our black rosary in hand. Alexander. We'll carry in our hearts forever the gaze of this orphan with the tender heart, stranded on a troubled road (84)."

"We stop at a bar. It's full of well-mannered, round-faced Estonians, and the place is, obviously, silent as a tomb. A family is sitting at a table eating a quick lunch in perfect silence. I begin to understand Adamov. It's impossible to learn a language from people who never talk (136)."

"My journey along the new Iron Curtain is over. I went looking for a real frontier, and I found it. At times it coincided with national borders; at other times, not. In Ukraine I had the impression that it was dangerously threatening to split the country in two, and now in Istanbul I have the impression that this white line runs right through me and is cutting through my soul like barbed wire. I wonder what will become of the old Europe, of its martyred peasant and Jewish heart swept away by too many wars. The train for Belgrade is waiting for me at the Sirkeci Station. I've got very little time to close the circle (253)."

Iana says

A very interesting exploration of the (no longer so) new frontier between Schengen Europe and what lies further East, namely Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. We get to discover remote and unfamiliar places such as the frontier between Finland and Russia, where it snows even in June, while at the same time the sun never

sets because of the summer solstice. It's an on-the-ground exploration of what life is along that frontier. I am a bit sceptical of some of Rumiz's sentimentalism. He idealises some supposedly genuine old, 'real' Europe, and rejects everything modern. I am always wary of that kind of romanticism. But apart from that it's a very good story that keeps you engaged and actually is very interesting and fun to read. And by the way his romanticism might help bring down more Western prejudices about people in the East, prejudices which sadly are an unpalatable reality. He is also very receptive to the big blank left in towns, villages, cities and neighbourhoods by the destruction of the Jewish community during the Nazi era, but also in the 1990s, when the community emigrated after the fall of Communism. I felt and sensed that "blank" and absence myself when travelling to Poland and Ukraine more or less at the same period as Rumiz.

Soobie's scared says

Dal punto di vista geografico, credo di aver imparato di più da questo libro che da x anni di scuola.

Sto cominciando ad apprezzare Rumiz. Lo conoscevo solo per i suoi reportage su Repubblica, non come scrittore. Poi, quest'estate, ho ascoltato l'audiolibro di La cotogna di Istanbul: Ballata per tre uomini e una donna e ho sentito il profondo amore di Rumiz per i Balcani. E mi piaceva il Max bambino, che vedeva un confine e gli veniva voglia di attraversarlo.

Qua cosa succede? È il reportage di un viaggio fatto nel 2008 da Rumiz e da Monika Bulaj, interprete e fotografa. È partito dalla Norvegia e ha seguito l'asse nord-sud fino al porto di Odessa, in Ucraina, passando sempre vicino al confine russo o attraversandolo. Si attraversa la Norvegia, la Finlandia, i tre staterelli baltici, Kaliningrad, la Polonia, la Bielorussia, per arrivare in Ucraina. Ci sono dei ritratti di persone incontrate durante il viaggio che rimangono impressi nella memoria.

Rumiz è triestino, è gente di confine. E non capisco la sua nostalgia per un confine che non c'è più. Sì, se non c'è il confine, non lo si può attraversare. Ma... Non è forse più semplice poter viaggiare in un'Europa senza confini?

Anche il discorso della nonnina di Rumiz che andava in treno da Trieste alla Transilvania in un solo giorno mi lascia un po' perplessa. Perfino in Veneto ci sono tratte ferroviarie che sono più lente adesso rispetto a cinquant'anni fa. E sono in Veneto. La nonnina di Rumiz, suddita dell'impero austro-ungarico, aveva il vantaggio di vivere in un grande stato che faceva di tutto per stare in piedi mantenendo le differenze tra le diverse regioni conquistate. Ovvio che il treno fosse il trasporto per eccellenza.

Rumiz prova nostalgia per un mondo che non esiste più. Per le regioni storiche che i confini nazionali hanno cancellato: Galizia (quella in Polonia, non quella in Spagna), Dobrugia, Carelia e altre che non ricordo. E sembra prendersela con l'UE, la causa ultima della cancellazione dell'identità di quest'Europa minoritaria. Sì, dice che dopo la Seconda Guerra mondiale si sono mossi - contro la loro volontà - milioni di persone ma lo stesso: tutto era meglio prima. Non sembra nostalgia del periodo comunismo, bensì qualcosa di molto più antico.

L'autore accenna spesso a Monika, la sua compagna di viaggio fotografa e interpreta. E la descrive mentre scatta foto molto particolari. Beh, mi sarebbe piaciuto vederne qualcuna di queste foto. Un libro di viaggi senza neanche un'immagine... Peccato!

A parte tutte queste cose è un libro molto bello e dettagliato. Ecco, forse scorre troppo veloce mentre uno vorrebbe che l'autore si soffermasse e spiegasse meglio un determinato punto. Lo comprenderò sicuramente!

Elizabeth says

A photographer traveled with him throughout his entire journey and there's not a single picture in his book.

Inertiatic85 says

Non è il mio genere, ma mi è stato regalato, e dunque mi son sentito in dovere di leggerlo e l'ho fatto volentieri. L'inizio del libro mi ha lasciato perplesso, mi sembrava che Rumiz stesse affrontando un viaggio molto personale, in cui non c'era poi tanto spazio di condivisione con il lettore. Inoltre lo stile di scrittura non mi convinceva, con l'utilizzo di sinonimi a volte ripetuti per sottolineare con più enfasi certe descrizioni di emozioni o di ambienti e paesaggi o ancora di situazioni storiche. Man mano il libro si riprende e se ne apprezza soprattutto l'attenzione che si dà alle persone incontrate durante il proprio viaggio. Un viaggio fatto di individui e non solo di luoghi.

Day O'Dea says

The subject matter is interesting, but the book is marred by the fact that its writer is at heart an orientalist who writes about the eastern stretches of Europe in a way that is more commonly associated with works about Africa and Asia written by Westerners (and, no, that attitude isn't welcome in those books, either). As much as I enjoyed the descriptions of places and people, I grew weary of Rumiz's simplistic ideology wherein Western = bad, boring, bland and Eastern = mysterious, earthy, good. Good points about things like environmental destruction and the way it impacts people who rely on the land, but the underlying assumptions and biases are nagging throughout.

The failure to include any of the photos that Rumiz's photographer Monika took and was described taking throughout the journey feels like a serious misstep, and I wonder if they were missing, too, from the original printing in Italian. Maybe there was a copyright issue, but its still disappointing.

I'm glad I read it, but I wouldn't do so again, and I had to start skimming when Rumiz started in on his exotic East versus soulless West thing, or I would've never been able to finish it. For all that he wants us to have greater awareness of far-flung places like Karelia and Podolia, he sure enjoys boiling it down to the exotic Other.

Sandra says

Alla fine della lettura sono più brava in geografia, precisamente nella geografia dei paesi baltici e dell'est: il viaggio di Rumiz inizia dal profondo nord, quasi dal Circolo Polare Artico, da quelle terre frastagliate, dai confini incerti, tra Finlandia, Norvegia e Russia, pianure sconfinite senza alberi e pochissimi esseri viventi, per scendere in verticale fino al Mar Nero. Il viaggio si svolge sul filo delle frontiere che in alcuni punti sono diventate le frontiere tra l'Europa, tanto vituperata da Rumiz, e l'Est, la vecchia Russia, oggetto di nostalgica ammirazione da parte di Rumiz. Il suo viaggio di frontiera va in cerca delle minoranze etniche che, in passato, erano la ricchezza di quelle terre: ciò che emerge alla fine è che "i diversi" sono cambiati, non ci

sono più gli ebrei, che erano parte della storia e della cultura di quelle zone, ci sono gli zingari, ci sono soprattutto i russi che ora sono una minoranza odiata in terre come quelle baltiche e in Ucraina. Sarebbe potuto essere un viaggio più coinvolgente, invece l'ho trovato a volte superficiale: Rumiz è nostalgico dell'epoca in cui c'era la vecchia URSS, non tanto per la politica ma più per come funzionava, simpatizza con tutti i russi che incontra lungo la strada. Saranno pure simpatici 'sti russi, però scriverci un intero libro sull'argomento è esagerato.
