

## **Memory of the Past and Memory for the Future: History on the Crossroads of Nation-building**

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The paper focuses on the nationalisation of history and changes in memory politics of Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The questions of history re-writing and re-evaluating is endemic to transitional societies. The very possibility to approach certain events is a direct consequence of freedom of speech that followed the disintegration of the socialist bloc. As a case study the paper scrutinizes new conceptualisations and interpretations of history of the WWII with a special focus on Ukrainian nationalist movements that acted in Western Ukraine in 1929-1956: the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army. There have been constant attempts to place the heroic narrative about these movements into the core of a national history, yet this narrative failed to cross the invisible walls within Ukraine and the narrative purposed for the whole nation remains regional in its significance. The paper is to fill the gap in an existing debate and to show how complex the memory work is in the modern world. A lot of interferences on international, regional, and local levels make the representational take-over of a state-sanctioned view on history more difficult and complex. While the facts about the above-mentioned movements and their leaders were silenced and misrepresented under the Soviet rule, there are traces of new mythologization of these movements nowadays. This study analyzes politics of history in the post-soviet Ukraine as it is realized through erection of new monuments.

## MEMORY OF THE PAST AND MEMORY FOR THE FUTURE: HISTORY ON THE CROSSROADS OF NATION-BUILDING

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and establishment of the independent state, Ukraine started the process of nationalization. This paper aims to investigate one aspect of this process - the nationalisation of history. National history hardly develops without any state support. This is well demonstrated in the example of Ukraine. The endeavours of intellectuals to nationalize history in the 1980s did not reach the higher - truly national – scale. The same can be added for the Diaspora and émigré scholars who preserved a national canon but whose works did not have a deep influence inside Ukraine before it became a sovereign state. In order to become national, a particular representation of history has to be promoted through the nation-wide channels: education, popular culture, commemoration, rituals, national calendar, etc. Because of the institutional system only a state has an access to all of these channels.

In her meticulous study of the Ukrainian nation-building Catherine Wanner noted that as it was in other former Soviet republics, nation-building in Ukraine involved converting nationalist ideology of respective titular nation into institutionalized culture which, in its turn, is perceived as an essence of the national identity<sup>1</sup>. In the midst of nation and state-building processes Ukraine has held a shilly-shally tempo in carving its own way of ‘multi-vector’ politics that was so rigorously defended by the second Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma (presidency 1994-2005). Famous or infamous, the ‘multi-vector’ politics has been characteristic - to smaller or larger degree – during the whole period from 1991 up to the present to all the spheres of the state politics, whether it refers to education, international relations, or language policies<sup>2</sup>. This opacity and ambiguity also penetrate politics of history. A result of such politics remains obvious: it proliferates uncertainty and serves a fruitful ground for conflicts that can be frozen and un-frozen when needed, on the other hand it also serves as a ground for multi-vocal representations of the past on the local level since the lack of institutionalisation allows more space for grassroots memory work.

The present study involves questions of collective memory, or rather memories, since national history tends to select only certain memories of a certain group which are purposed to form a truthful and legitimate picture of the past for the whole nation<sup>3</sup>. Key questions in our investigation are which and whose memories are thematised and promoted as ‘national’? What meaning is ascribed to national identity through framing of national historical narrative? What do the new ways of remembering tell us about national identity formation? What political messages they transmit? Which memories are activated for remembrance and which are forced out from the memory space? Finally, these questions will lead us to further and deeper questions of relationship between individual and collective, suppressed and promoted, experienced and learnt memories, or to use Pierre Nora’s wording, ‘true’ and ‘ingrained’ memories<sup>4</sup>, or in Jan Assmann’s terminology, *communicative* and *cultural* memories<sup>5</sup>.

I see struggle of different representations of history in nowadays Ukraine as a struggle of communicative memory of certain communities to become cultural memory of a whole nation. Communicative memory is shared and transmitted within a social group defined by

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wanner, Catherine: *The Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Kulyk, Volodymyr: *Constructing Common Sense: Language and Ethnicity in Ukrainian Public Discourse*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, March 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Nora, Pierre: *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, in: *Representations*, No. 26, Spring 1989, pp. 7–24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*: p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Assmann, Jan: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich: Verlag C.H.Beck 1992.

common memories of personal interaction through the means of verbal communication. It covers a relatively short span of time: from 80 to 100 years (Assmann 2008, 117). Communicative memory is an unstructured type of memory due to the fact that everyone takes part in the interaction where autobiographical memories are being communicated (Assmann 2008, 111). Communicative memory seldom leaves material traces. In contrast, cultural memory has a more differentiated and exclusive character. Not every member of the community can influence the content of cultural memory. It is intrinsically related to power and tradition. Hence it covers a much longer period of time than communicative memory. In contrast to communicative memory, cultural memory is encapsulated in material culture. National archives would be a most illustrative example of reservoirs of cultural memory.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Maurice Halbwachs wrote: “society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other”<sup>6</sup>. What the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Ukraine seemingly demonstrates, though, is the unwillingness of Ukrainians to ‘erase from their memory all that might separate individuals’ and the willingness, instead, to remember some of the things that divide.

Maybe it is the only way of doing memory politics in the society that strives to build functional democracy by giving voice to every group and hearing all the silenced and subaltern voices?

This question is related to the democratisation of history, where history is perceived as plural in contrast to monoist history in totalitarian societies.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, politics of memory is regarded as a litmus test for the preparedness of the state to transformation from totalitarian view on history to plural histories without necessarily heroic glorification and ‘monumentalisation’ of the past. Such a pluralistic view on history gives a chance to build an inclusive nation based on the principle of ‘everyday plebiscite’, to use Renan’s metaphor, whereas the people are aware of both heroic and barbaric deeds of their ancestors but this knowledge does not prevent them from envisioning their common future.

Rapid changes in society that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union opened a Pandora box stuffed to the brims with contradictory memories. Since history is very sensitive issue that easily resonates in hearts of people, the politicians of all political hues are eagerly using it. In Ukraine, where the political programs of the parties are almost the same, history replaces the agendas the people vote for. The presidential elections in 2010 in Ukraine illustratively demonstrated this: the discussions in media did not go around the political programmes of the main candidates, they were going around the debates whether Stepan Bandera (the OUN revolutionary leader) is a hero or not, since the last presidential decision of President Viktor Yushchenko was to grant the posthumous Order of Hero to Stepan Bandera. Moreover, Viktor Yushchenko considered history per se as one of his main gains during the presidency. History sells; hence it is a good political economy to use it.

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<sup>6</sup> Halbwachs, Maurice: *On Collective Memory*, ed. Translated and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago and London, 1992, p. 182

<sup>7</sup> On ‘monoism versus pluralism’ in totalitarian and democratic societies see: Kattago, Siobhan: Agreeing to Disagree on the Legacies of Recent History. Memory, pluralism and Europe after 1989, in: *European Journal of Social Theory*, no.3/2009, pp. 375-395, pp. 387-391.



The presidential election campaign 2010. The billboard with Yushchenko's portrait reads: "Own history. We have gained!" Photo: Yuliya Yurchuk.

Nationalisation of history in Ukraine has multifaceted effects: on the one hand, liberation of historic studies enables the research of silenced topics and significantly broadens the scope of historical knowledge; on the other hand, nationalization of history often succumbs to silencing the topics which can denigrate the picture of the national past. Ukrainian elites as well as some theorists of nationalism consider the coherent history as a necessary element for a nation's existence; that is why so much effort is made to forge a coherent and glorious picture of the past. At the same time, these efforts reveal the deep-rooted legacies of the Soviet historical tradition which are still present in the Ukrainian historical culture. The Soviet legacy becomes most evident when we approach the ways in which the politics of memory in the independent Ukraine is fulfilled on a state, regional, or group level. The main feature of the Soviet legacies in memory politics is a monistic view on history that promotes only one view on history and adheres to one doctrine. In this regard, Marxism-Leninism was replaced by nationalism. Another characteristic feature is a strong belief in a given destination of history and its instructive function. In such a teleological tradition history is seen as a predestined to reach a certain purpose. In the Soviet canon the history of Ukrainian Soviet Republic was subordinated to the final goal of the "re-unification" of Ukrainian people with their 'older brother' – the Russian people. In the Ukrainian national tradition of history-writing this final goal is substituted with a new one: the final goal here is national liberation and independence.

Hence, the process of construction of 'new' memories is influenced by the old legacies. Moreover, 'new' history is not a mere replacement of the Soviet memories with the Ukrainian ones; it is rather a continuous and a complex process of re-writing that involves deconstruction, re-construction and replacement of old conceptualisations and interpretations. Furthermore, the process of deconstruction has a two-fold nature. On the one hand, a process of deconstruction is aimed to shape a modified collective memory that would include "blank spots" which were silenced or misrepresented in the Soviet historical culture. This deconstruction is institutionalised through the memory politics in educational and cultural policies on the all-national level. It aims at a coherent picture of the past that is called to legitimize the nation. Generally, the process of deconstruction is intensified by three main

factors: 1) local and regional identity politics (both on administrative and grassroots levels), 2) international relations politics/geopolitical situation and 3) simultaneous existence of contradictory representations of history on the whole territory of the state and in the media, blogs, internet forums, literature, films, TV series, broadcasts, news, etc. of both national and foreign production.

## PRESENT HISTORICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF OUN AND UPA IN UKRAINE

As it was shortly stated above, the aim of the Ukrainian history as understood in the national canon has always been a struggle for national liberation. In this understanding of national history, the Ukrainian nationalist movements and organisations of the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century are conceptualised as decisive nodes of Ukrainian history that had set foundation for Ukrainian statehood. The UPA struggle is embedded into the national history as a continuation of the Cossack liberation wars against all the enemies of the Ukraine, be it Poles, Turks, or Russians. By the same token, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) are represented as liberators of Ukraine from two main evils of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - Nazism and Communism. To put it concisely, the UPA is conceptualized as the closest approximation to a national army; the OUN and UPA activities are perceived as a liberation movements fighting for the independence and liberation from the two occupant regimes; consequently, both the OUN and UPA ensure the continuity of national struggle for independence and function as constitutive part of the new grand narrative where raison d'être of Ukrainian history is a permanent struggle for liberation. The scheme published by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory demonstrates the lineage of liberation movement generally as it is accepted by the Ukrainian historiography and as it is taught in history textbooks. Grand narrative treats the independence as a result of a glorious struggle and tracks the genealogy of the national independence from the (1) national revival at the beginning of XX century through (2) national revolution in 1917-1921 to (3) the armed clandestine struggle of Ukrainian Liberation Organization (UVO) and OUN in 1920-30s to (4) the struggle of the UPA and the armed underground OUN in 1940-50s through (5) the dissident movement of 1960-80s up to (6) national-democratic movement at the end of 1980-90s and finally up to (7) the proclamation of the Act of Independence on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1991<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>8</sup> Vjatrovych, V.: UPA: Slid v istorii, The Institute of Ukrainian Memory, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/ua/455.htm>. See also a popular book Vjatrovych V., Zabilyj R., Derevjanyj I., Sodal P. (eds): *Ukrajinska Povstanska Armija. Istorija neskorenyh*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Lviv, 2008, that summarizes the documents and extensive commentaries to the exhibition *Ukrajinska Povstanska Armija. Istorija neskorenyh* ("UPA: The History of the Unsubdued") which was organized in 2008-2009 by the Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy (Security Service of Ukraine), Center of Research of Liberation Movement in cooperation with the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory.

Therefore, the history of OUN and UPA occupy important place in the narrative of liberation and serve as cornerstone of the liberation struggle that finally led to the independence. By such a conceptualisation two crucial conclusions are possible: the uninterrupted struggle for liberation is ensured and interpretation of the Soviet rule as the occupation is justified. Should the period be dropped out of the outlined scheme, the whole construct of national history would shatter and its main stance— struggle for liberation – would be weakened. Thus, thematisation of this period in the Ukrainian historical culture very often takes on the myth-making functions. Although opening up of history of the OUN and UPA was supposed to fill in the ‘blank spot’ in history of Ukraine and to shed light on the topics which were silenced by the Soviet historical culture, this aim has not been reached. The conceptualization per se of the OUN and UPA as a cornerstone of Ukrainian liberation sets limitations to historical representations of these themes. As an integral part of the liberation movement the history of OUN and UPA can only be glorified and celebrated. This involves silencing and suppressing deeds which do not correspond to the glorious picture, as mass killings of Poles by the UPA soldiers in Volhynia in 1943, or partaking of UPA soldiers in killings of Jews. The need in glorious past and, consequently, the conceptualisation of history of OUN and UPA in accordance with this need results in externalization of communism and fascism as some foreign evils and depicts the Ukrainian people as victims who fell prey in the name of their cherished dream – that of the independence of Ukraine. Moreover, as the history of OUN and UPA refers to the past of only a part of the people of Ukraine – those who live on its western territory, its conceptualisation as the all-Ukrainian liberation movement succumbs to over-generalisations and misrepresentations that were characteristic to the Soviet historical culture that glorified the vast participation of Ukrainian people in ranks of the Red Army and underestimated the number of those Ukrainians who were in ranks of the UPA. In general, the total area involved in the insurgent movement in 1944 was made up of 150,000 square kilometres where nearly 15 million people lived. It was approximately a quarter of the present Ukrainian territory. On the rest of the area of the present day Ukraine the insurgency was not popular, the Red Army was seen as a force that could overthrow the Nazi enemy. These differently experienced ‘pasts’ still divide the perceptions of the war among the population and form the ways of remembering. Taking into account these differently experienced pasts there is no wonder that the confrontation in perceiving the past still exists. Can this confrontation be overcome? The question rather is whether a nation which is in the midst of process of its formation is ready to deal with history only as the time bygone without succumbing to its mythologizing and sense-giving nature and giving orientation to the future? Even nations with long-lasting nationhood and statehood are not ready for such an enterprise, not to speak of nations that achieved their statehood comparatively recently. Thus, the confrontation and conflict seem to be endemic for a nation whose members’ memories are divided by the experienced past.

In my discussion further discussion I will outline how new memories of OUN and UPA were promoted by the memory politics in the period 1991 up to the present.

## MEMORY POLITICS IN UKRAINE 1991–2010

Presidents Leonid Kravchuk (presidency 1991–1994) and Leonid Kuchma (presidency July 1994 - January 2005) took up Ukrainian national historiography based on Hrushevskiy’s conceptualisation which was banned in 1930s but which was adhered to by the Diaspora. The outcomes of their memory politics became visible in changes of curricula, toponymes, alteration of national calendar, in replacing Soviet era monuments (mostly to Lenin) with monuments to Ukrainian national heroes. In some cities, the monuments to Lenin remained, although, they were shifted from the central sites to remoter streets. These alterations have not resulted in alterations of rituals, though. So, if in the Soviet times just married couples laid

flowers to Lenin's pedestal, the in the independent Ukraine they lay flowers to the monuments of Shevchenko, a Ukrainian 19<sup>th</sup> century national bard. At the Soviet times the portraits of Lenin decorated each official's office and even classroom, now this 'decorative' function in the office is superseded by the portraits of the president or the prime-minister whilst in the classroom the portraits of Shevchenko or Lesya Ukrainka (Ukrainian poetess) are more frequent. Such a continuation of tradition reveals a deep incorporation of the Soviet ritual forms of representations of the Soviet identity into the 'new' representations of Ukrainian national identity. Such a close adherence to the old tradition might well reveal both the nostalgia for the cult of personality still present in Ukraine and impossibility of the community to go beyond the inherited and accustomed forms of self-representation. The same impossibility to surpass the old tradition is traced in the forms of monumental representations of heroic figures. By and large, the new national heroes are meshed into the same aesthetic forms as their Soviet predecessors. Sometimes such monuments give us a feeling that the only parts changed to the old hero is the head and an inscription.

As the entire politics of 1991 - 2005 was marked with incongruity and multi-vector character, the same is valid to the memory politics in relation to OUN and UPA. On the one hand, the school textbooks started to represent members of OUN and UPA as heroic warriors for Ukrainian independence, equal in their heroism to Cossacks<sup>9</sup>; on the other hand, the themes of OUN and UPA did not reach the wide sphere of historical culture which would construct a common collective memory nation-wide. As it was mentioned before, memory politics was concentrated primarily on educational policy; the whole panoply of cultural policy was overseen. So, in 1997 Kuchma established a committee where historians had to approach OUN and UPA and make their conclusions on the role of these organisations in history of Ukraine. The committee came out with the conclusion which was published in 2005 with 300 issues only. In their conclusions, scholars estimated the high complexity of the history and suggested that it would be problematic to establish the same congruent picture of the OUN and UPA in all the regions of Ukraine that had differently experienced the war and the UPA activities<sup>10</sup>. The long debated question of granting social privileges to the UPA veterans equal to those enjoyed by the Red Army veterans remain unsolved up to these days.

In 2005 Viktor Yushchenko came to power with a huge 'historical agenda' in his hands with promises to make Ukrainian national history free of 'blank spots'. Yushchenko referred to the OUN and UPA themes as if they had a potential to generate points of reference in the identification of the whole nation. His politics of memory was declaratively aimed at incorporating OUN and UPA into national history not only on the educational level but also in some normative institutionalised practices. Yushchenko declared his intentions to solve the long lasting problem of the former UPA soldiers who did not enjoy any state aid. As veteran pension is aimed only for those who fought against the Nazi the welfare system excludes a number of former soldiers of the UPA who fought against the NKVD units. President's declarations have, though, remained mere declarations and had no effect on the lives of UPA veterans. The problem of financial support of the UPA veterans is partly addressed on the

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<sup>9</sup> See Wilfried, Gilje (2006), Marples, David (2007)

<sup>10</sup> Conclusions of the commission "*Organizacija Ukrajinskyh Nacionalistiv I Ukrajinska Povstanska Armija: Fakhovyj vysnovok robochoji grupy istorykiiv pry uriadovij komisii z vyvchennia dijalnosti OUN I UPA*" can be downloaded from the web-site of the Institute of National Memory under <http://www.memory.gov.ua/ua/454.htm>.

local level. The city councils in some of the bigger West-Ukrainian towns make monthly additional payments for the UPA veterans<sup>11</sup>.

Nevertheless, if the politics of memory under Yushchenko was not efficient in practical matters, it was productive in the symbolic space. First step with the heavy symbolic weight was made through granting the Order of Hero to Roman Shukhevych – the commander of the UPA<sup>12</sup>. Then in January 2010, at the very end of his presidency, Yushchenko granted the Order of Hero to Stepan Bandera<sup>13</sup>. These orders caused heated debates and even court suits. So, on April 2010 a district administrative court in Donetsk cancelled the presidential decree on the Order of Hero granted to Bandera as he was not a Ukrainian citizen. The logics of the accusation against allegedly unlawful presidential decree went as follows: since before 1991 there was no Ukrainian state and no one before the year 1991 could be a citizen of Ukraine, Bandera as a non-citizen of Ukraine could not be given such an Order. In response to the court's resolution, Yushchenko addressed a court of appeal but finally he lost the case.

With a purpose to institutionalize the politics of memory, in 2006 Yushchenko sanctioned the foundation of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. On its activities, Vladyslav Verestiuk, a vice-director of the Institute, commented that the Institute did not have a clear directive on the executive actions, it was rather an educational institution, which was called to distribute a correct vision of history and develop recommendations on how to approach history, especially its problematic periods and events which were defamed and misrepresented by the Soviet propaganda. The most 'painful' themes in his view are Holodomor, the World War II, and the UPA<sup>14</sup>. Although, the Institute does not have the extensive normative power, it had a potential to become a strong propagandistic instrument. During the years 2008-2009 the scholars from the Institute of National memory cooperated with scholars of the Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukraïny (Security Service of Ukraine) and the Center of Research of Liberation Movement in organisation of the exhibition "The UPA: History of the Unsubdued" that took place in many cities of Ukraine and abroad. The archives related to the history of the UPA were subordinated to the Security Service of Ukraine, a slow process of disclosure of the archives began, especially intensive it was during two last years of Yushchenko's presidency (2008-09).

The politics of memory promoted by Yushchenko was not welcomed in all the regions of Ukraine. In the state's memory politics the oppositional parties found the stimulus to protect, preserve and claim their own 'righteous' views on history. Yushchenko's politics was criticised by his opponents for attempt to instil 'foreign' views on history and even to 'Halicia-nize' the entire Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> The reaction towards state's nationalizing politics in the

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<sup>11</sup> On the situation of the Red Army veterans and the UPA veterans in Ukraine, see Portnov, Andrij and Portnova, *Tetjana: Der Preis des Sieges. Der Krieg und die Konkurrenz der Veteranen in der Ukraine*, Osteuropa, 2010, No. 5, s. 27–41, particularly p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Decree of the President of Ukraine № 965/2007 On Granting the Order of Hero of Ukraine to R. Shukhevych, can be retrieved under <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/6808.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Decree of the President of Ukraine № 46/2010 On Granting the Order of Hero of Ukraine to S. Bandera, can be retrieved under <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/10353.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Field notes, February 6<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>15</sup> It seems that the comments about the 'Galicia-nization' first appeared after a partisan of the Party of Region, Dmytro Tabachnyk, published a series of articles in "Argumenty I Fakty" (a boulevard-press paper which belongs to the oligarch close to the Party of Regions) with overtly Ukrainophobe tones, depicting all the population of the Western Ukraine as "halychany", "banderivets" who "genetically are not even Slavs". Paradoxically, Dmytro Tabachnyk was appointed as a Minister of Education by Yanukovych in new Cabinet 2010. For references see: <http://www.gazeta.lviv.ua/articles/2010/04/29/41202/>; <http://unian.net/ukr/news/news-309763.html> (accessed 20 August 2010) Tabachnyk's statements were eatedly confronted in the media, see e.g. a series of critical responses from a well-known Ukrainian dissident-shestydesiatnyk Ivan Dziuba: <http://www.day.kiev.ua/301498>.



eastern regions was blatant. The monument to ‘the residents of Luhansk who were murdered by chastisers-nationalists from OUN and UPA’ was inaugurated in 2010, just after the Order of Hero was granted to Bandera. The ceremony of inauguration was opened by the officials of Luhansk city council together with Alexander Yefremov, a leader of the Party of Regions, Konstantin Zatulin, a deputy of the Russian State Duma and the priests of Moscow Orthodox Church who solemnly consecrated the monument.

A series of counter-actions in other cities of eastern Ukraine followed the example of Luhansk. When Yushchenko granted the Order of Hero to Stepan Bandera, in Odessa Bandera’s effigy was set on fire. Together with the effigy protestors were burning history textbooks, declaring in such a way their attitudes to the ‘national’ history project. At the same time, in Simferopol the exhibition *‘Repressions of NKVD against the supporters of the national liberation movement in Western Ukraine’*, organised by the charity foundation of Kateryna Yushchenko, was boycotted. The protestors were waving Russian flags, some were holding portraits of the Patriarch of Russian Orthodox Church, and all this accompanied by the anthem “God save the tsar!” Although these protests never gathered a vast mass of people, they vividly demonstrated the main actors who are engaged in the use of history: political parties, both Ukrainian and Russian, church, civil actors and charities have their own interests in faming and defaming the UPA. In East- and South-Ukrainian cities steered representations of the UPA were rejected as a forged picture of the past, a blatant lie, alien to the local population. Consequently, such a rejection resulted in counter-representations of the past, reflected in the monuments and exhibitions.



Boycotting the exhibition in Simferopol, February 2010. Photo by Iryna Gnativ. The protests were accompanied by songs like “God save the Tsar!” Some protestors held portraits of the Patriarch of Russian Orthodox Church. As a result the exhibition was cancelled, only some placards about repression by the NKVD against Orthodox priests were shown for the public.

In the Western Ukraine the memory works differently from that in Eastern Ukraine, but it is not less complex. Some scholars tend to see western Ukrainians as exclusionist ethnic nationalists unable to bear the heavy luggage of ethnic and historical diversity inherited by the Ukrainian state. Be it so, the state-sponsored memory with its nationalising stance would have been unanimously welcomed

and celebrated. This is not the case, though. We can speak about a complex patchwork of memories that very often include opposite poles. This becomes particularly evident when we look at the publicly sited places: here the monuments to Red Army soldiers stay close to the monuments of the UPA leaders that appeared after 1991. One more characteristic feature in representations of history here is the appearance of the all-inclusive monuments that commemorate the victims of the “famines, repressions, and war” without any indications to perpetrators to whom these victims fell prey. Such wording does not make distinction between the nationalities of victims or of perpetrators. It consequently contributes to the general victimisation of nation and its martyrology.



The all-inclusive monument to the victims of the famine, repressions and the war. Zytomyr Oblast.  
Photo: Yuliya Yurchuk.

This monument vividly demonstrates the patchwork-like character of memory work that unites in the space of one monument seemingly “un-unitable” features. Here we see the dates of the war 1941-45 which represent the Soviet historical canon and excludes experience of those who suffered from the Nazi-Soviet intrusion in 1939 (among others there were Ukrainians), but this episode is shifted out from the memory space of this monument. Another controversial element of the monument is a symbol of cross that clearly refers to the Christian tradition and excludes Jews and other convicts or unbelievers who also suffered from the war and repressions. This monument though excludes these groups from the commemorative space of “all those who were innocently murdered and killed” as inscription on the plate reads.

During our observations we noted a distinct feature in a geographical distribution of monuments. To put it schematically, L’viv, Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivs’k, and Ternopil oblasts are the most ‘rich’ in monuments for the UPA leaders. Farther to the east, with Volyn’, Rivne, up to Zhytomyr oblast monuments to the UPA heroes share the space with monuments to the Red Army heroes, although UPA movement was very popular in Volyn and Rivne regions where the armed insurgency actually began under the command of Taras

Bul'ba-Borovets' in 1940-41. Starting with Chernihiv oblast and further to the east and the south, monumental representations are getting intensified and exclusively focused on the Soviet era heroes. Luhans'k and Donets'k oblasts as well as Crimea can be seen as an opposite pole to L'viv, Zakarpatska and Ivano-Frankivs'k oblasts in respect of 'distribution' of the monuments glorifying the UPA. As we noted before, Luhansk and Simpheropol e.g. provide us with counter-representations of the UPA history.

Such complex texture of monuments reflects not only the political struggle of the elites in different regions of Ukraine; it also reflects the complexity of the past experienced by the people and its further conceptualisation by the Soviet and post-Soviet historical culture. In western Ukraine the war memories combine the struggle in the ranks of the UPA as well as that in the ranks of the Red Army. It was not a seldom case that one biography encompassed membership in rival camps. These memories still remain on their communicative level – they are reproduced from generation to generation, thus the take-over of the Soviet propaganda was not so decisive and cardinal as it was in the rest of Ukraine. Quite opposite is the situation in the eastern Ukraine. Although the ideas of OUN were disseminated in the east and found some popularity there, they never led to such a mass movement as it was in the Western Ukraine<sup>16</sup>. Hence, the memories of OUN and UPA are actually absent as memories *per se* and the knowledge about these organisations is formed primarily by Soviet historical culture which silenced these topics and denigrated the mere notion of Ukrainian nationalists. That is why each step to commemorate the UPA heroes on national level raises the waves of protests in the Eastern regions.

With the election of Viktor Yanukovych as the President of Ukraine in 2010, the politics of memory started to take on some new features, especially what refers to the OUN and UPA. First steps towards alterations were already made. The first illustrative step was a common Ukrainian-Russian-Byelorussian celebration of the victory in the WWII and the come-back of the naming 'Great Patriotic War' to the terrain of Ukraine. Victor Yanukovych appointed a new director of the Institute of National Memory – Valeriy Soldatenko, born in Donetsk oblast and a partisan of the Communist Party of Ukraine. In the opinion of many commentators, the newly appointed director represents an overtly pro-Russian version of history. His views of the Famine of 1932-33 which he hesitates to call 'Holodomor' and his 'negative attitude' to Shukhevych and Bandera became the most discussed issues among the intellectuals, journalists and some politicians<sup>17</sup>.

## INTER-RELATIONS OF MEMORIES

Memories unlike states do not have boundaries. Therefore, when we speak about memories that constitute Ukrainian historical culture, we cannot overlook historical cultures in the neighbouring countries, primarily Russia and Poland. Since the historical cultures in these countries as well as their politics of memory penetrates into the Ukrainian terrain and influences the attitudes and views on history of the people in Ukraine. The strongest influence comes from the Russian side, since there are no linguistic barriers between Russia and Ukraine which make the flow of information fluent and unhindered. Furthermore, a wide range of Russian mass media products are distributed throughout Ukraine. As it was

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<sup>16</sup> On attitudes to the OUN in Donbas see e.g. Stakhiv, Ye.: *Kriz tiurny, pidpillia i kordony. Povist mogo zhyttia*, Kyiv: Rada, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> See the article of Soldatenko in *Ukrainska Pravda* 'Pro holodomor, Shukhevycha i Banderu' <http://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2010/08/16/5303963/> (accessed 18.08.2010). It is worth mentioning that in the article the word 'holodomor' is spelled with small letter with purpose to emphasize the mistaken nature of such naming. Elsewhere in historical and media discourse it is spelled with capital 'H'. This purposeful spelling was often mentioned in the discussions aroused in the electronic media.

mentioned before, historical culture is formed not only by historians and their writings; it is to a larger extent formed by media, cinema, literature, etc. Easy accessibility and vast availability of the Russian TV and radio broadcasts, cinema and literature contribute to existence of parallel memories in Ukraine. The richness and availability of the information expose people to different historical cultures simultaneously. The Soviet and Russian films that depict the UPA in the tradition of the Soviet propaganda exist together with some Ukrainian films which show the UPA heroic past. Noteworthy, the number of the Soviet and Russian films well outnumber the Ukrainian ones. Moreover, the films and series of Russian production are of higher quality and some of them are shown in cinemas<sup>18</sup>. Ukrainian films, on the contrary, are of a poorer quality, have a rather documentary character, are not shown for the mass audience, and are available only for the people interested (via Internet, or rarely, in DVD shops). Taking into account, a gamut of common collective memories that are transferred from generation to generation on both sides of the Ukrainian-Russian border, the Russian historical culture not only forms but also reflects collective memories of a part of the Ukrainian population.

## CONCLUSIONS

‘New’ memories in Ukraine are often cast in the old mnemonic moulds shaped by the Soviet historical culture. At the same time they are shaped with certain aspirations for the present and the future. So, we can speak not only about the coming to terms with the past but also about coming to terms with the present and coming to terms with aspirations for future.

The Soviet era rituals and monuments are still present not only in the commemorations of old heroes but also in celebrating the new ones. Nineteen years of independence were not sufficient for a cardinal change in a general approach to history and re-evaluation of the role of historian and historical knowledge. A monistic view on history still prevails in the Ukrainian historical culture. Historians are still seen as main judges who are called to legitimize the existing order.

History of OUN and UPA presents a challenging case for establishing a national canon in history: on the one hand, it is a case that delineates specifically Ukrainian experiences from those which were perceived as all-Soviet experience of the war which actually was seen as a core of the envisioned Soviet nation. On the other hand, the past of OUN and UPA is related to a part of Ukrainians; institutional attempts to establish it as a national past are rejected by other parts of the population.

Experienced memories seldom refer to the entire population of a country. Even in situations when some memories are common for the majority of the population, there are minorities who do not share them. In order to become common for a bigger community, memories of a certain group need to be promoted by the state through all the channels available to the state: education, identity politics, international affairs, cultural policies, etc. When entire project of nationalisation, though, fails, the nationalisation of history also fails. In the situation, when we have a divided society where both elites and civil groups are not willing to cooperate and do not have a common vision of the future, the process of coming to terms with the past is saturated with conflicts and tensions.

The given case of OUN and UPA in Ukraine demonstrated that learnt memories and experienced memories are equally strong in their meaning-generating potential. The revealed secrets of ‘blank spots’ of history did not result in replacement of old memories. Old memories persist and influence present; furthermore, they enforce the discourse that created

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<sup>18</sup> As e.g. “We Are from the Future” directed by Andrei Maliukov that glorifies the Red Army and denigrates the UPA.

them. Hence, the Soviet discourse does not vanish entirely; it still exists in the realm of memory. Far too often a historian is called for as an arbiter in the arguments with political claims and little space is left to a professional historian when the national identity and national memories are at stake.