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Managing the difficult past: Ukrainian collective memory and public debates on history

Anna Wylegała*

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

This article analyzes the status of difficult historic events in Ukrainian collective memory. Difficult elements of collective memory are defined as those which divide society on basic matters, such as identity and national cohesion, and events which are being actively forgotten because of the role of Ukrainians as perpetrators. Three such issues were analyzed: World War II and the role of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), the Holocaust, and the ethnic purge of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1943–1945. Utilizing data from quantitative and qualitative studies, the author showcases the significance of these issues for contemporary Ukrainian identity and Ukraine's relations with its neighbors. In particular, the evaluation of World War II and the role of the UPA in Ukrainian history polarizes Ukrainian society to a great degree. At the same time, this element of national history is used to construct a common, anti-Russian identity. The difficulty of relating to the memory of the Holocaust and the ethnic purge in Volhynia is of a different character. These events are problematic for Ukrainian collective memory because they demand a painful settling of accounts with the past. At present, only Ukrainian elites are willing to work on these subjects, and only to a limited degree, while the common consciousness either denies or ignores them altogether.

Keywords: collective memory; national identity; Ukraine; Holocaust; OUN-UPA

Introduction

In every cultural and national context, a difficult past means something different. Usually, it is associated with certain events which refuse to simply become a part of history and instead trouble contemporaries, demanding attention and provoking strong emotions. Central and Eastern European societies have to deal with a difficult past stemming from experiences of totalitarianism, war, and occupation (often two or even three occupations) as well as the brutal establishment of a new postwar order accompanied by repressions, forced resettlement, ethnic purges, and genocide. Fifty years of Communist rule have either deprived the region's inhabitants of the opportunity to reflect upon and critically analyze these experiences or severely limited their freedom to do so (Blacker and Etkind 2013, 3).[1] Ukraine is not an exception in this regard. The twentieth century brought its citizens a multitude of traumatic experiences, none of which were fully worked through before 1991. Reflection on historical traumas became possible in independent Ukraine. However, for various reasons, there are still matters which can be considered as belonging to a difficult

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*Email: annawylegala@gmail.com

past. I would divide them into two categories. The first should contain those elements of Ukrainian history which are judged in fundamentally different ways by large parts of society. Such events are naturally present in the history of every nation or society, but in the case of Ukrainians they are crucial for determining national identity and one's place in the larger historical process. Hence, these elements define national survival, separate traitors from heroes, and include or exclude individuals from an imagined national community (Anderson 1991). Today, the most important of these issues is one's assessment of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army's (UPA) role during World War II, including fights against the Soviets and collaboration with the Germans.[2] The second type of problematic event consists of uncomfortable matters which endanger the positive image of the entire national community, and which most Ukrainians would either prefer to forget or have already forgotten. Ukrainian "skeletons in the closet of national memory," as they were aptly described by Ziółkowski (2001, 3–22) in the context of Polish memory, have a common character: they pertain to significant Others/Aliens with whom the nation used to share its life, but whose "disappearance" has been in some way aided by it. Although Ukraine continues to be a multiethnic state to a certain degree, multiethnicity in a more than ethnographic sense ended after World War II. This is especially true in Western Ukraine – Galicia and Volhynia, currently almost entirely mono-ethnic regions. Thus, skeletons of Jews and Poles sometimes fall out of the Ukrainian "closet," illustrating that this mono-ethnicity has not been achieved without bloodshed.

In this text I would like to focus on collective memory about three important elements of Ukraine's[3] difficult past: World War II and the OUN-UPA, with a particular focus on the conflict between the UPA and the Soviet regime; the Shoah; and the Polish–Ukrainian conflict from World War II. What interests me the most is vernacular memory, which constitutes a specific aspect of collective memory: what do "regular" people, and not (just) the elite, think, and how do they communicate it to the outside world.[4] Writing about collective memory always requires a context; therefore, my analysis will include significant actors who shaped the politics of memory, and the general issue of the presence of selected topics in the public sphere. Without engaging in deep discussions about definitions, in this text I will be using the commonly accepted understanding of collective memory developed by Welzer (2008) and Earll (2008), whose works are based on the classical concept by Halbwachs (1992). For stylistic reasons, I will use the terms "collective memory" and "cultural/social memory" interchangeably. The focus on vernacular memory in Ukraine, instead of historical or commemorative politics per se, has far-reaching consequences because it has not been well studied. The vast majority of works on memory in Ukraine have been dedicated to the connections between commemoration and politics; while studies concerning both vernacular collective memory of various generations and historical experiences of the oldest Ukrainians do exist, they usually focus on certain regions or present only specific case studies.[5] In Ukrainian memory studies, there is a dearth of large overview studies (both quantitative and qualitative) that could showcase the scale of the analyzed phenomena.[6] Hence, wherever possible, I will base my conclusions on my own studies conducted in Galicia and Central Ukraine,[7] searches in oral history archives, and existing case studies. An equally important source for my discussion will consist of nonacademic materials, especially public opinion polls.

Between unity and divisions: World War II and the OUN-UPA

As already mentioned, the most visible example of Ukraine's difficult past consists of memories about the Ukrainian nationalist underground and its military branch – the UPA, and,

more generally, about World War II, which is still often referred to as the "great patriotic war." Of course in reality a compound entity called the "OUN-UPA" did not exist – the OUN was a political organization founded in 1929, outlawed already under Polish rule; the UPA, the OUN's military branch, was founded only in 1942. However, since in this text I am not interested in history as such, but in how history is remembered on the vernacular level, I will often use the nonfactual term "OUN-UPA," because it reflects the way most Ukrainians think about the subject (adding "Bandera" as the third element of the construct). Many scholars wrote on the importance of this problem for Ukrainian national identity, and most considered it an issue of "divided memory" (Hrynevych 2005; Himka 2015a). The war remains the most common and key biographical experience among Ukrainians: in a 2013 poll, 68% of Ukrainians claimed that they had family members or relatives who died during the war.[8] Eighty-seven percent of the respondents can describe, in more or less detail, the wartime fate of their family, and 60% talk to their family about the war. In part, this situation is most likely the result of the objective brutality of the German occupation in Ukraine, combined with long years of official Soviet historiography in which, as some researchers claim, the war replaced the October Revolution as the foundational experience of the Soviet nation (Yekelchyk 2004; Kysla 2009). The profound historical significance of World War II for Ukrainians can also be seen in data regarding commemorative practices: in 2013, 82% of Ukrainians considered Victory Day (9 May) a great holiday, and 75% intended to celebrate on that day.[9] It might seem that the agreement regarding the significance of World War II for the country's history should constitute a unifying factor for Ukrainians, along with the Holodomor, but this could not be further from the truth. The memory of the war does not unite Ukrainians because, apart from the objective "evil" of German occupation and the undeniable good of the defeat of Nazism (84% of Ukrainians consider it to be an unambiguously positive event in the history of their country[10]), their outlook on the war differs in a great deal of aspects.[11] The most controversial issue is the role of the UPA: some Ukrainians believe, thus perpetuating ideological clichés from the Soviet era, that soldiers from this organization were collaborators and fascists; for others, Stepan Bandera's insurgents were a force for Ukrainian independence. Of course between these two polarized opinions a great number of more moderate, less radical, or simply "I don't care" positions exist. A mirror reflection of these views can be found in attitudes toward the Red Army, which liberated or "liberated" Western Ukraine in 1939 and 1944. All quantitative studies (here I mean the available opinion polls) point toward a clear regional, ethnic, and age-based differentiation of these memories. In a 2014 poll asking about attitudes toward Bandera, which are a good indicator of opinions on broader subjects I am interested in, 31% of the general Ukrainian sample responded positively and 48% negatively. If one breaks down these results into specific regions, the data will paint a radically different picture: in the West, 76% of the respondents had positive attitudes toward Bandera; in the center this number dropped to 28%; in the East to 8%; and only 3% in Donbas. Positive opinions were voiced almost exclusively by ethnic Ukrainians, with attitudes warming up among younger and better educated respondents.[12] In a large study from late 2014 and early 2015, which asked about opinions concerning various events from Ukraine's history, 41% of respondents regarded the creation of the UPA in 1942 as positive, and 30% as negative (the regional discrepancies proved to be significant as well).[13] The latest October 2015 poll confirms the existing connections between positive attitudes toward the UPA and age, education, income level, and place of residence. Most importantly, however, for the first time in the history of such studies, the percentage of those who supported recognizing the UPA as a faction fighting for Ukraine's independence was higher than the number of opponents (41% to 38%).[14] Together with the poll discussed

previously, these results point toward a very important change in Ukrainian attitudes toward this aspect of their history.[15]

The results of the quantitative research illustrate significant general tendencies, including the most important one – a steady growth of the number of Ukrainians with a positive perception of the UPA. The regional differentiation is particularly valuable in this case, as it seems to support the popular view of the West as pro-Bandera and the East as anti-Bandera. However, the real depths of the divisions are only revealed by qualitative research. The studies I conducted for several years in Galicia clearly proved that the distinction between the "pro-Bandera West" and the "red East" was not – at least in the case of the West – so obvious. Although the dominant historical narrative in Galicia extols the heroics of the UPA and the OUN, even there it is not universally accepted. Due to postwar migrations, even the regions which are perceived as very traditional (e.g. Western Ukraine) are in reality inhabited by populations with diverse origins. These "mixed roots" of Galicia's people constitute one of the factors that explain the existence of a large group which distances itself from glorifying the UPA. Among my respondents, these attitudes were most visible in families in which at least one of the grandparents came from Eastern Ukraine or Russia. In these families, members of the UPA were remembered as bandits stalking peaceful citizens, not as freedom fighters. The situation was similar in families whose members suffered at the hands of the insurgents during the war or as a result of the postwar conflict between the UPA and the Red Army. This includes families with Polish as well as Ukrainian origins, where for some reason one member fell into conflict with the independence underground (e.g. they joined a kolkhoz, got a job with the Soviet administration, or refused to join an insurgent unit) and lost his or her life as a result. In such households, and especially among the not-uncommon mixed families (e.g. a father from a local household who supported the underground movement and a mother whose family was resettled from the East), memories had to be painstakingly negotiated, leading to fierce clashes of incompatible narratives. Intra-familial arguments about these aspects of the past are particularly painful in Galicia because they concern principles, matters of utmost importance for one's belonging to the national community, and the definition of the limits of national identity: who was the traitor and who was the hero, who was the oppressor, and who was the victim. The intimacy of these conflicts and divisions are most painful on the family level. One of the conversations from Zhovkva near Lviv which I remember particularly well was an interview with a Polish woman who was born in the Zhytomyr region in the 1930s. She complained that her grandson did not believe her story about the slaughter of Polish villages, which she heard upon coming to Galicia after the war: he preferred to listen to his paternal grandfather who belonged to the UPA.[16]

The conflict within that family points to another important division: the generational gap. Ukrainian memories about the OUN-UPA and World War II are conditioned not only by one's place of residence or origin, but also by age. Every poll shows that the younger the respondents, the more positive their attitudes toward the rehabilitation of the UPA. Each year, a small but steady increase in the number of UPA proponents can be observed, leading to the aforementioned studies from 2015 in which, for the first time in the history of such research, the supporters outnumbered the opponents. This might be a result of the current political situation, but also of a generational change – the oldest people, for whom the war was a personal and painful experience (and hence are less prone to be influenced by new official historical policy) are passing away. The changing historical policy of Ukraine, especially in the school syllabus, is also a factor. Although the various presidencies slightly influenced the tone in this aspect (when Viktor Yushchenko was in office, the UPA was glorified, while Viktor Yanukovych tried to turn

away from this course), the narrative about the UPA as a force for national independence, fighting for a free Ukraine, and liberating the country to the same extent as the Red Army, never really disappeared from school syllabuses and textbooks after being introduced in 1991.[17] The attitudes of the youngest generation of Ukrainians toward history mainly reflect the tendencies present in Ukrainian historiography (and more generally, in Ukrainian historical policy) after 1991. Among the various founding myths of an independent Ukrainian historiography, Wilson (1998) considers the myth of resistance and national revival embodied by the UPA to be of particular importance. He connected this with glorifying the organization and presenting it as a pan-Ukrainian movement, for example, by overestimating the number of participants. In turn, Marples (2008) notes that an essential trait of the historiography of Ukraine's independence movement consists in its simultaneous victimization and glorification, while Rasevych (2009) claims that the victimization of national history is a general property of the postimperial, postcolonial, and post-Soviet policy of memory in Ukraine (and elsewhere). Although the works of professional historians rarely have a direct influence on the common person's perception of the past – with occasional exceptions of publicly engaged professionals such as Yaroslav Hrytsak or Volodymyr Viatrovych in Ukraine, or Jan T. Gross in Poland – in this case they clearly do. Unfortunately, there is a lack of good qualitative research which could illustrate how young Ukrainians from regions other than Galicia assimilate the heroic narrative about the UPA (there is no specific data on the subject available, but one can guess that the supporters of this narrative who live in the East probably belong to the youngest generation), which bypasses family memories, and how these positive views look among young people in the East.

I would risk the claim that historical content transmitted via school and pop-culture has an advantage over family memories, and this advantage will only grow stronger. The reason for this disproportion is an amalgam of typical factors shaping contemporary Ukrainian society, including the disappearance of multigenerational families and migration to cities. The grandparents – who carry direct memories – die or become less trustworthy, while young people choose the version of memory and historical identity which seems more attractive and more adequate to the needs of the present moment. It is easy to predict that in the current political situation, the more attractive option is the one which fosters anti-Russian attitudes, and hence is pro-UPA. In addition, it is worth mentioning the ideological offensive on this subject that was initiated by the new Ukrainian government, and in particular, by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR), which has been restored as a central institution of executive power and headed, since 2014, by Volodymyr Viatrovych, a historian from the younger generation whose area of specialization includes the history of the UPA, among other subjects.[18] Changes in Ukrainian historical policies aim toward developing a historical narrative that differentiates Ukraine from Russia to the greatest possible extent. This includes guidelines regarding naming ("Second World War" instead of the "Great Patriotic War" which returned to school textbooks during Yanukovych's presidency); emphasizing Ukraine's services and sacrifices during the war (instead of focusing on the Soviet Union as a whole); and, more importantly, explicitly recognizing the UPA as a force fighting for the Allies and for Ukrainian freedom.[19] A small sample of UPA-related material promoted by the UINR can be found online in the form of a documentary entitled "Khronika Ukrains'koii Powstanchoii Armii 1942–1954," made by the independent hromadske.tv but recommended by the UINR, in which the UPA is presented in an entirely uncritical fashion.[20]

The memory of World War II and the OUN-UPA is undoubtedly an element of Ukraine's difficult past, as it continues to divide people and holds great potential for

conflict, while remaining an incredibly important and active aspect of social discourse. In addition, in the current political context, it is also capable of mobilizing citizens against Ukraine's historical and present enemy – the USSR/Russia.

An uncomfortable past: the Holocaust

The difficult heritage of the Shoah went completely unmentioned in the Soviet Union. In most of Ukraine, the killings took place not in secluded camps whose existence one could be ignorant of, but on the spot, locally, in full sight of the Christian neighbors (Desbois 2008). Hrytsak (2011a) calls this an intentional amnesia, the removal of uncomfortable, difficult elements of history from the social consciousness; other researchers write about an intentional policy of erasing traces or destroying memory. Whatever one might call it, the fact remains that the subject of the extermination of Jews did not exist in the USSR. In the "History of the Ukrainian SSR," published in the 1980s, the Jews were not mentioned at all. Soviet historiography counted the Jews who died in the Holocaust among the general number of Soviet war casualties as "civilians," and they were commemorated in the same way – if at all. As a matter of course, the subject of Ukrainian collaboration in the Holocaust was also entirely absent from the public sphere. After 1991 the external directives disappeared, but Ukrainian historiography continued to repeat the Soviet narrative on the Shoah in a passive way. The Holocaust appeared in school textbooks, but it was mentioned mainly in the context of death camps in Poland, in complete detachment from the local, Ukrainian context (Podols'kyi 2009). No important public museum dedicated to the history of Jews in general or the Holocaust in particular was created in Ukraine after 1991. This does not mean that no advances have been made – recently, minor but important initiatives have taken place, for example, the founding of new memorial sites in Lviv and Chernivtsi. However, the overwhelming majority of research and educational activities on the subject are carried out by nongovernmental and community organizations which receive little to no funding from the state.[21] Important discussions concerning the Holocaust and Ukrainian participation in it are being held in intellectual circles, but they never extend beyond academic communities on a scale comparable to, for example, the discussions following the publication of Jan T. Gross's books in Poland.[22] In short, aside from minor changes during the terms of successive presidents and the enforcing of successive political paradigms, the Holocaust has never been a priority in Ukrainian historical policy; it plays no important role in commemorative processes and does not disturb the conscience of the larger Ukrainian public interested in history.[23]

We know very little about the place of the Holocaust in Ukrainian vernacular memory. No large-scale quantitative research concerning collective memory has been done in Ukraine, but simple statistical data on many important historical events can be found on the websites of Ukrainian centers for analyzing public opinion. The statistics on the war and the OUN-UPA were taken from these sources. Despite my efforts, I did not manage to find any current data regarding attitudes toward or knowledge about the Holocaust: it appears that no such studies have been carried out. The most recent available data come from research on anti-Semitism carried out in 2003 by a Polish–Ukrainian team directed by sociologists Natalia Chernysh from Lviv and Ireneusz Krzemiński from Warsaw (2004, 124). Their study reveals several interesting facts; for example, 9.7% of the respondents claimed that Ukrainians often collaborated in the extermination of Jews, while 42.2% said that collaboration was limited to individual cases. Most likely, however, the data are no longer valid. The existing, singular qualitative studies do not provide a full overview of the issue. Therefore, I will refer to my own research (which is also partial) to sketch a few

hypotheses concerning the vernacular aspect of Ukrainian collective memory about the Holocaust.

My first hypothesis is the peripheral importance of the Holocaust in Ukrainian collective memory. This is already visible at the stage of conducting oral history interviews, or the documentation of biographical memory. All of the interviews I conducted in Ukraine – whether in Galicia, Volhynia, or Central Ukraine – employed the classic biographical method, beginning with a free narrative section, followed by my questions. Among the nearly 200 interviews which I analyzed, there were only a few in which the respondents mentioned the Holocaust in the first autobiographical section. In that part they usually talked about their experience, about the events which they considered important: hence, at a very early stage of analysis, it became apparent that the Holocaust was not felt as something directly pertaining to themselves or their group (the local, regional, or national community). The importance of this is even greater because when asked about the Holocaust – without using the term – it turned out that the respondents were indirect or direct witnesses of it, and were able to talk about it in greater or lesser detail. The consequences of this marginal status of the Holocaust in biographical memory could be seen in interviews with younger persons. The majority of them had never heard of the plight of the Jews in their hometowns, even if conversations about historical events or family/local histories were frequent in their households.[24] Whenever they learned anything regarding the Holocaust at home, it was the result of asking a question or some other outside factor – a film watched together, an article in the newspaper, etc. Hence, it is clear that despite the fact that the Soviet Union dissolved over two decades ago, the burden of silence borne from that period still influences Ukrainian memories of the Shoah. Here we arrive at my second hypothesis: the peripheral status of Holocaust memories is rooted in Ukrainian–Jewish relations spanning several centuries, in which Jews were the Alien, not the Other, but the Alien, a concept both stronger and more profound. In my view, the main difference between the Other and the Alien, a term that I use intuitively rather than on the basis of the existing literature, lies in the scale of otherness and the acceptable limits of intra- and inter-group interaction. The Other, although different from "us," can, under some conditions and to some extent, be a part of the community (see the example of Poles in ethnically mixed villages in Galicia); the Alien cannot, because his or her otherness is much more difficult to overcome. In the Soviet Union many problems were never mentioned; this was brilliantly illustrated by Orlando Figes in his book *Whisperers* (2007). Everywhere in Ukraine people were afraid to mention those who died during the Holodomor and those who perished during repressions and Stalinist purges; and yet, when children grew older, they usually learned why they did not have a father or grandfather. Fostering informal memories about the UPA in Galicia carried the risk of repressions and harassment from the authorities for a long time, and yet people mourned the fallen "boys from the woods" and transmitted the memories to their children and grandchildren, who, in large part, are now proud of their heritage. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, a sudden "thawing of memory" took place in these areas, a "carnival of memory" as Bogumił (2012) described it in her study of gulag memories in the USSR – places of memory were spontaneously created, books were published, etc. No such outburst took place in the case of memories of the Holocaust, and this can be explained in two ways. First, with the status of Jews as Aliens, as not-our-own victims, resulting from the fact that when Jews lived in Galicia they appeared more foreign to the local Ukrainians than Poles, who constituted an important minority in the discourse of memory. It sometimes happens that people act heroically and risk their own lives to pass on memories about important members of their community, even if it does not agree with the current historical narrative and brings no pragmatic benefit despite the risk. In such

situations, hushed and unofficial stories about "our" victims and "our" heroes are circulated. But the heroism ends when it comes to whispering about those who were not "our own," be they victims or heroes. Since the Shoah was not a part of official Soviet memory, it is hardly surprising that it was not passed on the level of the family or the local community – especially because Jews were no longer a part of the latter and could not demand remembrance. Thus, Ukrainian Jews found themselves not only on the geographical and political peripheries of the Holocaust, but also on the peripheries of memories of the Shoah, and memory in Ukraine in general (Rohdewald 2008).

The second reason for which no frantic efforts to remember and document the Holocaust took place in Ukraine after 1991 can be found in the character of Ukrainian collective memory as a whole. Nearly all important historical events which constituted, or could constitute, Ukrainian national identity in opposition to Russia/USSR were glossed over prior to 1991 for obvious reasons. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukrainians began to zealously fill in the blanks, retell history, rehabilitate heroes, and mourn victims. Because Jews were not perceived as "our" victims, they had to give up their place in the queue for historical justice in favor of other groups and persons – the victims of the Holodomor, UPA insurgents, and Soviet dissidents. In fact, the Holocaust became a larger topic in Ukrainian historical policy only during the presidency of Yushchenko, but it was used instrumentally – to promote (both internationally and in Ukraine) the concept of the Holodomor as the "Ukrainian version of the Holocaust;" thus, the memory of the Shoah had to be mentioned as well (Hrytsak 2011b). Another reason might be the small size of the Jewish community in postwar Ukraine, which decreased even further at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s because of mass emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel. Those who stayed were simply unable to form a significant group of influence in the new Ukrainian state. The lack of continuity within mutilated local Jewish communities is also worth mentioning: in the postwar period and after 1991, Galician Jews were often newcomers from other parts of the Ukrainian SSR rather than local survivors and their ancestors.

Thus, it might be said that the Jews simply lost in a race of victims,[25] and that when the Ukrainian fever of memory cools down, their time will come. We might say that if not for the fact – and this is my third hypothesis concerning Ukrainian remembrance of the Holocaust – that the memory of the Shoah is inconvenient for Ukrainians for more reasons than the potential overshadowing of the Holodomor victims. When talking about the Holocaust, Ukrainians have not yet faced their past, and without such reflection it is difficult to propagate honest remembrance of the victims. Discussions about Ukrainian participation in the Shoah are held – with minor exceptions – primarily outside the country's borders. In some Ukrainian intellectual circles, this elicits an understandable, critical response to a (post)colonial imposition of the only true and politically correct version of Holocaust discourse. However, it is also certain that Ukrainian armed units – be it OUN militia in 1941, Ukrainian auxiliary militia in 1941–1943, or UPA partisans after 1942 – took an active part in the Holocaust during the war (Finder and Prusin 2004; Himka 2011; Rudling 2011). This fact is not only completely absent from vernacular memory about the OUN-UPA, the Shoah, and World War II in general, but also entirely nonexistent in Ukraine's official historical policy. The first issue is easy to understand from the isolated perspective of the mechanisms of biographical memory, which becomes the material of collective memory, and, conversely – whereby collective memory provides the content for biographies (Welzer 2002). People do not like to remember that they were the perpetrators – they prefer the image of their collective selves as victims. The second issue – a persistent absence of the tendency to regret and ask for forgiveness in Ukrainian historical policy – can also be explained. Taking the blame for one's cooperation in the Holocaust cannot be made into a priority of Ukrainian

historical policy, because the central issue has been – ever since Yushchenko's presidency, with a short regression during Yanukovych's term, and a triumphant comeback in 2014 – constructing a positive image of the UPA as an organization which fought for Ukraine's independence, and the chief World War II indicator of Ukraine's separation from Russia as the heir of the Soviet Union (Rossliński-Liebe 2012). The decision to base Ukraine's historical identity on the history of a nationalist-independence movement does not necessitate a binary choice in the matter of critical reflection concerning the Holocaust. Nevertheless, until the movement itself is not scrutinized in a critical fashion – of which there are no signs – that will continue to be the case.

Guilt once again: the Polish–Ukrainian conflict in Ukrainian memory

Ukrainian memory about the Polish–Ukrainian conflict is similar to the memory of the Holocaust, in that the Ukrainians do not want to appear in the role of perpetrators, and that the UPA is also the "anti-hero." A short summary of the facts, based on the most balanced opinions of Polish and Ukrainian historians (Iliushyn 2009; Motyka 2011), reveals that in 1943–1945 in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, an ethnic purge of Poles was perpetrated by Ukrainians. The violence reached its peak in the summer of 1943 in Volhynia. The initiators and main perpetrators were UPA troops, under whose supervisions the murders were carried out with the participation of Ukrainian neighbors. The victims were Polish civilians, predominantly from rural areas, and mostly women, children, and the elderly. The murders were extraordinarily brutal and constituted a part of the UPA's strategy to purge ethnically mixed territories of their Polish population. After the first wave of attacks, the Poles began organizing self-defense units, which participated in equally brutal retaliatory strikes. Careful estimates place the number of victims at least 60,000 Poles and 5000 Ukrainians. The destruction was completed by the flight of the surviving Poles and postwar forced resettlement, masquerading as "repatriation," organized by the Soviet authorities. Poles disappeared almost completely from Volhynia and Eastern Galicia.

How are these events remembered today in Ukraine? Unfortunately, the amount of research on the subject is similar to that concerning the Holocaust. The Polish–Ukrainian conflict or, more specifically, the purge of Volhynia does not feature in standard public opinion polls focused on history. The last large-scale quantitative studies of Ukrainian attitudes toward the conflict in Volhynia were conducted in 2003 during the sixtieth anniversary of the purge. They coincided with commemorative activities transmitted in the media, held in memory of Polish and Ukrainian victims and attended by presidents Leonid Kuchma and Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The results of the polls showed that 48.9% of the respondents had no knowledge of the Volhynia events, while 28.4% claimed that they had heard about the purge but were uncertain about what had really happened. We might conclude that at the time of the anniversary, when the subject was frequently mentioned in the media, over 75% of all Ukrainians did not know what had taken place in Volhynia in 1943–1944. Among those who knew, only 4.8% blamed the Ukrainian side; 37.6% felt that both sides were guilty, 15.1% blamed the Poles, and 25% thought that outside circumstances were to blame (Berdychowska 2003).[26] Hence, it is hardly surprising that only 8.7% of the respondents claimed that Poles were owed an apology, 41.7% were against apologizing, and 34.3% thought that the apologies should be mutual. Analogous studies conducted in Volhynia reveal an almost identical distribution of opinions in terms of identifying victims and perpetrators (41.3% of the respondents thought that Ukrainians were the main victims in the conflict, 14.4% that only Ukrainians were victims, 25.7% believed

that both sides suffered equally, 38.7% claimed that Poles started the conflict, 16.1% blamed Ukrainians, and 23.2% blamed Germans or Soviets), but unlike the general Ukrainian population, in Volhynia 89.7% of the respondents knew what events they were being asked about (Berdychowska 2003).

In contrast to the equally old quantitative studies concerning the extermination of Jews, we might assume that an analogous poll today would find similar results. An analysis of Ukrainian public discourse, official policies of remembrance, and qualitative studies show that no new tendencies emerged in Ukrainian collective memory. First, let us turn to an analysis of qualitative research materials – interviews from various research projects conducted by the author in Galicia and Volhynia since 2007, as well as accounts gathered for the projects "Remembrance through difficult memory. Volhynia 1943" and "Remembrance through difficult memory. Galicia 1944," conducted in 2012–2015 by the Brama Grodzka Centre in Lublin in cooperation with Ukrainian partners.[27] Data collected in recent years repeat the most important trends from the quantitative studies: the ethnic purge of Poles is perceived as a fratricidal conflict provoked by outside forces, in which both sides suffered equally. Respondents in Galician towns often believed that the Poles had only themselves to blame, due to their brutal behavior from before the war and during the times of the Second Republic of Poland. There were also voices claiming that innocent Poles were not harmed, and only those who deserved punishment suffered; one of the respondents from the oldest generation had this to say about his Polish friend from that period: "There was this R. here, he was a reasonable Pole, they never touched him."[28] Another line of argumentation aimed at reducing the blame on Ukrainians suggests that Soviets or Germans caused the conflict – disguised as UPA troops, they began killing Poles to provoke them into retaliatory actions against Ukrainians. It is worth noting that interviewees who presented such opinions did not attempt to completely exculpate the Ukrainian insurgents, or deny that the mass murders against Poles actually took place; instead, their reasoning might be described as justification or rationalization. However, a more common stance argues that there was no planned operation directed against Poles, and that what really happened was a fratricidal conflict cunningly provoked by outside forces. When the problem is framed in this way, all mention of blame and responsibility is removed, and the only thing remaining is mutual suffering. Whereas such opinions voiced by older people may simply reflect their wartime experiences, among younger generations it often leads to further erasing of the issue of responsibility; the murders are thrown into a general category of calamities brought about by the war, terrible but so distant that it is difficult to understand the sides and goals of the conflict. An example of such reasoning can be found in the statement of a 30-year-old from Zhovkva:

> There were some conflicts a long time ago, I know, my grandma talked about them. … Well, whether it was because of the war that the conflicts happened, I don't know … As my grandma said, during the war Poles killed Ukrainians, Ukrainians killed Poles, they shot each other, yeah, things happened.[29]

A detailed analysis of interviews with respondents shows that the Polish victims in Volhynia and Galicia are still present in biographical memory but not in social memory. The vast majority of my youngest interviewees were simply not aware of any wartime conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians. The middle generation seemed to possess a vague notion that "something like that happened," but the dominant narrative spoke of a fratricidal struggle in which Poles and Ukrainians suffered equally.

It appears that the key to explaining this lack of remembrance may be found in two issues: the direct perception of the conflict, and the postwar and contemporary narrative

about it. As Assmann (2009) noted (referencing Freud), something that was never truly noticed cannot be remembered or forgotten. Assmann's example of such an "un-noticed" event was the Holocaust in Germany, but we may see a similarity to the "noticing" in the tragedy of Poles in Western Ukraine by their Ukrainian neighbors. Those who lived in cities might never have directly experienced it. The others did not notice it because, for various reasons – fear, shame, strong emotions, or the desire for national heroes to remain untarnished – they did not want to.[30] People who came to Western Ukraine after 1945 – emigrants from Eastern Ukraine and other Soviet republics – never heard about the slaughter of Poles from the locals (including Poles who decided to remain in Ukraine and were afraid to reveal their identity), for obvious reasons. Deprecating the UPA lied within the interests of the Soviet authorities, but not at the cost of reminding citizens about the presence of Poles in Galicia and Volhynia. In Soviet historiography, the Polish–Ukrainian conflict could only be perceived in social terms: Poles were described using clichés such as "Polish sirs," "bourgeois fascists," and "invaders," while uncomfortable subjects were omitted. Simultaneously, on the level of vernacular and local memory, a myth was being spread in Galicia that during the war Poles collaborated with the Germans and killed Ukrainians, while the latter only killed Poles in retaliation (Ruda 2009). The slaughter that went unnoticed could not be described to children and grandchildren – and if it was noticed, it was probably not a subject joyfully brought up at family gatherings.

In the case of the youngest generation, which grew up in an independent Ukraine, an additional factor influencing the lack of remembrance of Polish victims is socialization outside one's family. At this point, it would be worthwhile to once again reference the statistics from 12 years ago and recall the hypothesis that studies conducted today would produce similar results. In 2003, the majority of the respondents claimed that their knowledge about Volhynia came from the mass media; since the last witnesses of these events are dying, it would be unreasonable to expect any changes in the matter. One glance at the status of the murder of Poles in Ukrainian public discourse is enough to understand why such a low number of Ukrainians from regions other than Volhynia and Galicia know anything about the subject, and if they do, why their knowledge looks the way it does. As Portnov (2015) bitterly notes, the new school textbook published in 2011 makes no mention of the events that happened in Volhynia. In the previous textbook, the mass murder of Poles was reduced to a misfortune of "the civil population on both sides of the conflict." The fate of the Poles is seen similarly by the UINR. In the aforementioned documentary film recommended by this institution, *Khronika Ukrainskoi Povstanskoi Armii 1941–1954*, the role of the UPA in the purge of the Poles is discussed in two and a half minutes, while the commentary offered by the narrator (while the screen shows a shot of a burning village) claims:

> The situation in the region was made more difficult by the conflict between Poles and Ukrainians. … The provocative policy [of the Germans] was the reason for the bloody conflict which spread all throughout Volhynia and Eastern Galicia. Tens of thousands of innocent people on both sides died.

From this narrative, it is difficult to understand why these tens of thousands had to die. Since 2003, nothing in the sphere of state-sanctioned historical policy changed that could influence Ukrainian memory about the Polish–Ukrainian conflict. Even the ostensible dialogue in the spirit of "reconciliation" pursued by politicians at the highest level stopped. Meanwhile, the firm position of the UINR, headed by Viatrovych who as a historian has propagated the idea that the events which took place in 1942–1947 were not ethnic purges but a regular war between Poles and Ukrainians, offers no basis for expecting any changes in these matters.

Any discussion about the events in Volhynia is practically absent from wider public discourse. Ukrainian "public intellectuals" do talk about Polish heritage in Ukraine, but such activities are pursued by persons from Western Ukraine and liberal intellectuals from Kyiv. Furthermore, their reflection concerns cultural heritage, responsibility for historical monuments, and the continuity of urban identities, for example, in Lviv (Narvselius 2015). Discussions about the Polish–Ukrainian conflict take place in a small circle of professional historians who have had some success in preparing balanced opinions, but their voices are rarely heard outside their milieu (Portnov 2013). Among those who write for a wider audience, the rhetoric of the "fratricidal conflict" and the search for guilty parties from outside, blaming the Germans, is dominant. The killings in Volhynia are euphemistically described as "the anti-Polish action" or even more enigmatically as the "Volhynian tragedy." Only a small group of historians use the term "Volhynian massacres," and only one historian speaks about an ethnic purge (Portnov 2013). Independent associations working toward Polish–Ukrainian reconciliation tend toward a compromise, instead of openly (and hence painfully, and with an initial polarizing effect) speaking about clear responsibility.[31] Under such circumstances, it is difficult to expect that Ukrainian citizens might possess a deep knowledge about the ethnic purges of Poles during World War II. Hence, in regions where these events took place, collective memory regarding the purges is fragmentary, disappears in younger generations, and is characterized by whitewashing the perpetrators. In Central and Eastern Ukraine, such memory simply does not exist.

Conclusion

The most significant problem in Ukrainian collective memory consists of in diverging views about what happened in that country during World War II – and it seems that this situation will not change for a long time. As I have attempted to show with the example of my research in Galicia, Ukrainian memory of the OUN-UPA and World War II is far from a black-and-white opposition, as it is commonly believed. However, it still serves as a memory that divides Ukrainians, instead of building a common identity for the Ukrainian political nation. The example of President Yushchenko's failure in this regard (during his term, the percentage of Ukrainians who believed in the validity of mutual forgiveness and forgetting about suffered wrongs fell from 65% to 46%[32]) warns us that an aggressive ideological offensive is not the best tool for developing a common standpoint. In 2010 almost a third of all Ukrainians did not believe that reconciliation between former UPA and Red Army troops was possible.[33] Hence, it appears that Eastern Ukraine is still not capable of accepting the Western historical narrative concerning the UPA – this is illustrated by the increasing polarization of views on accepting the UPA as a side fighting for Ukrainian independence – the West is becoming more "pro," and the East is increasingly "against."[34] As long as the memory of blood spilled on both sides of the conflict is alive, and as long as none of the sides can be pushed out of the boundaries of the national community with which Ukrainians want to identify, the UPA will not be a good candidate for a collective national hero for all Ukrainians. In order for this to change, it would be necessary to either externalize guilt (to borrow a term from Assmann [2009]) on a massive scale, that is, agree on a sort of internal social contract whereby all the wrongdoings were perpetrated on both sides (the UPA and the Red Army) by evil people, with whom we will not associate and who were not "our own;" or stage another instance of collective amnesia, referring to Hrytsak (2011a), who described amnesia, activation, and ambivalence as the foundations of Ukrainian collective memory. Amnesias in nation-building processes are commonplace; after all, as Ernest Renan claimed, a nation is primarily a community

which forgets many things together, and in the history of European nations, many examples can be found where historical amnesia, or a "thick line" policy, managed to preserve internal cohesion, for example, in Spain after the return to democracy in the 1970s. The strategy chosen by the current Ukrainian government is a form of amnesia (although paradoxically it might also be seen as a process of combating the amnesia from Soviet times), but it works differently from the Spanish policy of a memory "freeze" (which proved ineffective in the long run), because it only forgets about a chosen aspect of recent history – the one which seems to stand in the way of the national project's success according to the authorities. The gradual promulgation of the heroic narrative about the OUN-UPA among representatives of the younger generation seems to suggest that such an amnesia may take place in Ukraine over a long period, but whether the effects it carries will meet the expectations of the authorities is difficult to determine. A fragmentary externalization of guilt, as described by Assmann, would demand that the difficult memory about Others, including the UPA's involvement in the Holocaust and the massacre of Poles, becomes a Ukrainian problem. In other words, it would demand a painful settling of accounts, with no certainty of success, at a time when Ukraine is facing great difficulties. In a longer perspective, glossing over Ukraine's involvement in the Holocaust might block the country's integration not with the European Union, but with the European community and culture of memory, in which the politics of regret, rather than amnesia, became an obvious choice in the face of a difficult past (Olick 2007). Indirectly, this also pertains to coming to terms with the ethnic purge of Poles. Here, international pressure may not play as important a role due to the locality of the conflict, but a Ukrainian unwillingness or inability to deal with this subject internally, and then in honest dialogue with Poles, in a manner that might resemble Polish–German talks about the past, might result in a deepening and mutual lack of understanding between Poles and Ukrainians. And this might also have political consequences, especially in the context of furthering Poland's potential role of Ukraine's advocate in the European Union. A significant asymmetry can be seen in this subject: while the Volhynian genocide is a constant element of collective memory and historical politics in Poland,[35] the problematic issue of the Galician and Volhynian events, and, more generally, the subject of a shared and difficult history are not perceived as a priority in Ukrainian political dealings with history. This is apparent even in the questions included in the quoted large-scale public opinion polls on historical issues: there were no questions even indirectly concerning relations with Poland, in any historical period (the questionnaire included events such as the Swedish–Russian battle of Poltava from 1709 and Russia's victory over Napoleon in 1812).[36] This situation is understandable in the current, tense political situation in Ukraine: it should not be surprising that Ukrainian political elites are geared toward constructing a national and state identity in opposition to Russia, founded on national myths that inspire pride instead of the "politics of regret." It seems, however, that in the long run this strategy might prove unsuccessful. A historical identity founded exclusively on pride, one which denies the nation's faults, might succeed in a short perspective. But it is almost certain that unsolved problems, especially in the context of relationships with neighbors, will continue to return.

Notes

1. There exists a vast literature on the subject of the specificity of collective memory, especially concerning policies of remembrance in Central and Eastern Europe. Apart from the collaborative tome edited by Blaecker and Etkind, see also Pakier and Wawrzyniak (2015) and Kubik and Bernhard (2015).

2. Ukrainian disputes about the subject were described by Marples (2008), among others. An exhaustive review of Ukrainian intellectual discussions on this issue can also be found in the anthology "Strasti za Banderoiu."

3. Here and elsewhere, unless I state otherwise, whenever I use the term "Ukrainians" I mean all the citizens of Ukraine, regardless of their ethnicity. This simplification is necessary due to the limited length of this article and the sources that were used.

4. The term "vernacular" refers to Will Kymlicka's book *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Mulitculturalism and Citizenship* (2001); it is a conscious reference and an attempt to transfer this term from the area of nationalism studies to memory studies.

5. Some of the more interesting works of this kind include Richardson (2004), Jilge (2007), Ivanova (2008), Grinchenko and Olynyk (2012), Rodgers (2006), Zhurzhenko (2013), Narvselius and Bernsand (2014), and Yurchuk (2014).

6. The last such studies were conducted in the 1990s by Yaroslav Hrytsak and Natalia Chernysh, and dealt with the diversity of opinions about the past in Eastern and Western Ukraine, as well as other subjects. See the special issue of the journal *Ukraina Moderna* from 2007, entitled "Lviv-Donetsk: socialni identychnosti w suchasnij Ukraini." There are currently two very interesting, large international projects devoted to this issue, but their results are not fully available yet: "Region, Nation and Beyond. An Interdisciplinary and Transcultural Reconceptualization of Ukraine" (http://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researchprojects/stgallenproject/) and "Memory of Vanished Population Groups in today's East-Central European Urban Environments. Memory Treatment and Urban Planning in L'viv, Chernivtsi, Chisinau and Wroclaw" (https://memoryofvanishedurbanpopulations.wordpress.com/).

7. The author's own research includes over 90 qualitative interviews conducted in Zhovkva in Western Ukraine in 2007–2010 (with representatives of various generations) and a similar number of interviews (with representatives of the older generation) collected between 2006 and 2010 in Central Ukraine and Volhynia (Zhytmoyr, Kyiv, Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and Volhynia Oblasts) for the project "Poles in the East" (http://polacynawschodzie.pl/) by the KARTA Centre Foundation.

8. REB Group Page, http://rb.com.ua/PR_Pobedy_2013.pdf. Accessed December 15, 2015.

9. REB Group Page, http://rb.com.ua/PR_Pobedy_2013.pdf. Accessed December 15, 2015.

10. Fond Demokratychni Initsiatyvy, http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/sho-obednue-ta-rozednue-ukrainciv.htm. Accessed December 15, 2015.

11. Recently (in 2014 and especially in 2015) some moderately successful attempts at reaching an agreement over memories of World War II took place – see, for example, the celebration of Victory Day in Kyiv in 2015, which retained most of the Soviet symbols, but added some new, Western-oriented ones – for example, focusing on the victims, and the introduction of the poppy flower as a leading symbol of the ceremony. However, it is too early to tell whether these attempts have been successful. See Pastushenko (2015).

12. Rating Group, http://ratinggroup.com.ua/products/politic/data/entry/14092/. Accessed December 15, 2015.

13. Fond Demokratychni Initsiatyvy, http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/sho-obednue-ta-rozednue-ukrainciv.htm. Accessed December 15, 2015.

14. Rating Group, http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_upa_ua_102015.pdf. Accessed December 15, 2015.

15. It is important to note that the Demokratychni Initsiatyvy poll did not include annexed Crimea and the Luhansk oblast, where rejection of the OUN-UPA and Bandera as national heroes is overwhelming. The Rating Group does not specify which oblasts of the East were included in the survey, but it is likely that they excluded the abovementioned regions too. This does not invalidate the entire argument about the increase in OUN-UPA approval, but it indicates that the shift might not have been so dramatic.

16. Interview with Y., female, born in 1932 in Berdychiv (Zhytomyr oblast), conducted in 2008 in Zhovkva by the author.

17. For more information about the shaping of national history in Ukrainian textbooks, see for example Popson (2001), Richardson (2004), and Zashkilniak (2009). For a more recent overview of the UPA issue in broader Ukrainian historical politics, see the chapter "Dynamics of Memory 1985-2014" in Yurchuk (2014, 64–155).

18. Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich Page, http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2015-02-04/nowe-tendencje-w-ukrainskiej-polityce-historycznej. Accessed December 15, 2015.

19. In this regard, the laws concerning national remembrance which were passed in May 2015 are of special importance. For an analysis of the laws, see Himka (2015b). To read the laws in English, see the Institute's website: http://www.memory.gov.ua/laws/law-ukraine-legal-status-and-honoring-memory-fighters-ukraines-independence-twentieth-century; http://www.memory.gov.ua/laws/law-ukraine-condemnation-communist-and-national-socialist-nazi-regimes-and-prohibition-propagan. Accessed April 4, 2016.
20. Part one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1bX6em5PRs, part two: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxGbJ-RyuTU. Accessed December 15, 2015.
21. See for example the activities of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies: http://www.holocaust.kiev.ua/eng/. Accessed April 4, 2016.
22. A good example of this is the discussion surrounding Omer Bartov's book *Erased* (2007) at *Ukraina moderna* http://uamoderna.com/arkhiv/11-pamiat152009. Accessed November 4, 2016.
23. A good summary of the status of the Holocaust in Ukrainian memory and historical policy is a text written by possibly the best expert in this subject, Himka (2013).
24. Ivanova (2008) reached the same conclusions in her studies on Ukrainian youth: in the families of her respondents, the Holocaust was mentioned only if one of the grandparents/parents had Jewish roots.
25. A useful term here is the concept of competitive victimhood. See Noor, Shnabel, and Halabi (2012); used in the Ukrainian context – Jilge (2007).
26. The text is also the fullest analysis of Ukrainian debates about Volhynia up to the year 2003. Another interesting study is Kasianov (2006).
27. See Panorama Kultur Page, http://pk.org.pl/publikacje/Pojednanie_Galicja_PL_A.pdf; http://www.pk.org.pl/publikacje/pojednanie_przez_trudna_pamiec_wolyn1943.pdf. Accessed December 15, 2015.
28. Interview with S., male, born in 1931, conducted in 2008 in Zhovkva by the author.
29. Interview with I., male, born in 1978, conducted in 2010 in Zhovkva by the author.
30. The lack of remembrance of Poles murdered in a neighboring village is discussed in Jacek Nowak's book (2011).
31. A project dedicated to commemorating the "Righteous" – Ukrainians who saved Poles and Poles who saved Ukrainians during World War II, organized by "Brama Grodzka" and "Panorama Kultur" in Lublin and the Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University in Lutsk may serve as an example of such activities. Some publications mentioned in this text are the results of this project.
32. Tsentr Razumkova, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=454. Accessed December 15, 2015.
33. Tsentr Razumkova, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=550. Accessed December 15, 2015.
34. Fond Demokratychni Initsiatyvy, http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/sho-obednue-ta-rozednue-ukrainciv.htm. Accessed December 15, 2015.
35. It is worth mentioning that the discussion concerning the Polish–Ukrainian difficult past in Poland is not limited to events in which Poles were the victims. Considerable attention is also devoted to the postwar "Operation Vistula," a mass deportation of Ukrainians who remained in Poland to the newly obtained Polish northwest, which was taken from Germany. Perhaps an issue that could receive more public scrutiny (and thus could somehow encourage Ukrainian partners to respond) is the interwar period, and in particular Polish authorities' contemptible policies toward the Ukrainian national minority.
36. Fond Demokratychni Initsiatyvy, http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/sho-obednue-ta-rozednue-ukrainciv.htm. Accessed December 15, 2015.

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