CHAPTER 4

Reclaiming the Past, Confronting the Past: OUN–UPA Memory Politics and Nation Building in Ukraine (1991–2016)

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Controversies over the history and memory of the wartime nationalist movement represented by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its military arm the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA)[1](#_bookmark0) occupy center stage in Ukrainian public life today. For more than two decades now, this issue has dominated Ukrainian debates on mem- ory politics, with successive political leaders using their position on the OUN–UPA as a primary means of self-definition. And yet the promi- nence of this topic was not inevitable or pre-ordained. Rather, we are dealing with a process whereby what was originally a regional and rather marginal narrative has gradually become more prominent since the 1980s. In this chapter, I trace the history of this memory from 1991

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to the present. Via an analysis of the changing official political discourse over this period, I investigate what role the issue of the OUN and UPA has played in Ukrainian political debates, and how it has been instrumen- talized by different political actors. Which political forces supported and which opposed the establishment of the heroic narrative of the OUN and UPA, and why? My account traces how memory politics changed with the major transformations in Ukrainian political and social life during this period. I argue that post-independence memory politics in Ukraine have been shaped in crucial ways by the tension between two different frame- works of dealing with the past: reclaiming the past, which involves the reordering of hierarchies between previously dominant and subordinate groups in a society, on the one hand; and *Vergangenheitsbewälting* or “coming to terms with the past,” which emphasizes a critical view on the difficult aspects of the past, on the other.

COMPETING MYTHS: THE “GREaT PaTRIOTIC WaR”

VS UKRaINIaN “NaTIONaL LIBERaTION”

Post-Soviet Ukrainian memory politics need to be viewed first and fore- most in the context of the enduring legacy of the Soviet war myth. The significance of World War II in the foundational mythology of the Soviet Union cannot be overestimated; the importance, workings and func- tion of the Soviet war myth have been well established by distinguished scholars (see in particular Tumarkin [1994](#_bookmark63) and Weiner [2001](#_bookmark65)). The nodal point of this foundational myth was an emphasis on a pronounced anti- fascism that symbolically divided the world into two camps: fascist and anti-fascist. The anti-fascist banner was used as a key justification for Soviet ideology and as proof of the superiority of the Soviet system (Grunenberg [1993](#_bookmark12)). In the interests of preserving the purity of this myth, no questioning or criticism of the Soviet leadership or the Red Army’s actions during or after the war was permitted (Kattago [2008](#_bookmark21)).

In the last years of the Soviet Union, the official narrative of the Great Patriotic War started to be questioned in some former Soviet republics. Not everyone within the former Soviet Union saw the Red Army’s vic- tory as liberation. For many, especially in the Baltic republics, the victory over Nazism marked the beginning of Soviet occupation. Anti-Soviet narratives of World War II now laid the ground for new national identi- ties in the post-Soviet space. In Ukraine, the history of the OUN and UPA became one of the new themes taken up by national democratic

groups that formed in the late 1980s under the umbrella of the People’s Movement of Ukraine (*Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy*). Some of the national democrats who emerged from the dissident sphere had personally encountered former UPA fighters in the Gulag. Many UPA veterans were still alive at this point, and now joined the local associations of the victims of political repressions that were set up in the late 1980s. Thus, despite its suppression by the authorities, the history of the UPA was preserved as a living memory in Ukraine. The UPA fighters were remem- bered first and foremost as victims of the Soviet regime.

Two competing narratives of the history of the OUN and UPA have tended to define them categorically as either “villains” or “heroes” (Marples [2007](#_bookmark32)). During the Soviet period, the OUN and UPA were stigmatized as a small anomalous group of “bourgeois nationalists” and “fascist collaborators” against the broader picture of the “normal” “brethren” Ukrainian people who welcomed Soviet rule and “reunifica- tion” with the Russian people (Yekelchyk [2004](#_bookmark69)). Partly as a reaction to this Soviet narrative, the Ukrainian national democratic opposition has tended to present the OUN and UPA first and foremost as heroic fight- ers and martyrs for Ukraine’s independence—a narrative that had long been promoted by the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and the USA and which elides or airbrushes the negative aspects of the organizations’ actions and ideology.

The history of the OUN and UPA can be classified as *difficult knowl- edge*, that is, knowledge about a group’s past which is hard to position in the realm of glory, pride, or victimhood, in other words, in the space of positively laden affect (Yurchuk [2014](#_bookmark71): 41). This applies in particular to the issue of collaboration with Nazi Germany and OUN–UPA atti- tudes towards ethnic minorities living in the territory of Ukraine, first of all Jews and Poles (Himka [2005](#_bookmark13); Melamed [2007](#_bookmark33); Berkhoff [2008](#_bookmark3)). With World War II approaching, the OUN accepted support from Nazi Germany. The OUN leadership believed that the German aggression against the Polish state and the Soviet Union would increase Ukraine’s chances of independence and that Nazi Germany would support the Ukrainian cause. But the Nazis were not even prepared to counte- nance creating a Ukrainian puppet state, let alone granting Ukraine its independence. Soon after the OUN–B proclaimed the establishment of a Ukrainian state in L’viv on 30 June 1941, the day the Wehrmacht entered the city, the Nazis moved to arrest many OUN members, includ- ing their leader, Stepan Bandera. Especially from this point, the OUN

relations with Nazi Germany became complicated; sometimes they col- laborated, and sometimes they fought against the Germans, impro- vising and adapting their position as they went along (Bruder [2007](#_bookmark4)). Consequently, the term “collaboration” does not fully or accurately reflect the OUN’s complicated relations with Nazi Germany.

The OUN members, many of whom joined the auxiliary police, were involved in the extermination of the Jewish population in Western Ukraine in the first weeks and months of the German occupation (Himka [2011a, b](#_bookmark14)). In 1943–1944 the UPA committed mass killings of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia as the OUN leaders believed that once the war was over the Polish population would pose the main threat to forming an independent Ukraine in these territories (Motyka and Libionka [2002](#_bookmark36); Ilyushyn [2009](#_bookmark16); Motyka [2011](#_bookmark34)). Complicity in the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing of the Polish population (officially declared a genocide in Poland in 2016) corresponded with the ideology of the OUN, a radical form of ethnic nationalism influenced by Italian fascism (Bruder [2007](#_bookmark4); Zaitsev [2013](#_bookmark73)). Nationalism, however, did not pre- vent the persecution of ethnic Ukrainians deemed insufficiently loyal by the OUN (Snyder [2003](#_bookmark60): 164). Most of these difficult aspects of the past are often ignored, neglected, simplified, or outright denied by propo- nents who have been trying to establish heroic visions of the OUN and UPA in Ukraine since the 1990s.

In the early years of Ukraine’s independence, the Soviet Great Patriotic War myth, now adjusted to the nation-building agenda, remained at the core of the official memory politics. The heroic cult of the OUN and UPA was relevant only in those regions of Western Ukraine where the OUN and UPA were active, that is in the L’viv, Ivano-Frankivs’k, Rivne, Luts’k, and Ternopil’ oblasts. At the national level the heroic cult of the OUN and UPA was in fact rather mar- ginal up to 2005 when, in the wake of the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yushchenko embarked on the official “rehabilitation” of Ukrainian nationalism, seen as the long awaited restoration of historical justice. In subsequent years, two alternative, indeed mutually exclusive narratives of the OUN and UPA and their role in Ukrainian history polarized pub- lic opinion and contributed to the political conflict which split Ukrainian society and the ruling elites. Since the 2013–2014 Euromaidan in par- ticular, the history of radical Ukrainian nationalism has been instrumen- talized by Russian state propaganda that demonizes the OUN and UPA and equates Ukrainian nationalism with “fascism.” At the same time, the

Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance promotes the heroic cult of the OUN and UPA as a model for today’s fight against the Russian aggression.

“RECLaIMING THE PaST” VS “COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PaST”

The memory of the OUN and UPA has resonated so strongly in Ukrainian society in part because it goes in tandem with the need to reclaim history as part of the national liberation project that has been closely connected to nation- and state-building processes. The concept of “reclaiming the past” in the process of nation building as a way of dealing with colonial legacies in the post-Soviet space was introduced by Taras Kuzio ([2002](#_bookmark28)). Indeed, “reclaiming the past,” or regaining control over the narrative of national history which during the Russian and Soviet rule was imposed from the imperial center, has been on the agenda of national democrats since the late 1980s. It corresponds with the vision of Ukraine as a post-colonial state still struggling to emanci- pate its national identity, collective memory, and culture from colonial legacies (e.g. Riabchuk [2008](#_bookmark47)). My usage of the term “reclamation” also draws upon the scholarship on the discursive and narrative forma- tion of identity (Godrej [2011](#_bookmark11)). Here, reclamation is viewed as a strategy employed as part of the effort to create a new order after the fracturing of an old one. In this way, reclamation can be an effective strategy for resistance, giving the silenced the power to tell their own story.

The American philosopher Hilde Lindemann Nelson conceptualizes the telling of stories as a method of resistance. She underlines the inher- ently selective nature of the process of constructing one’s narrative of the self: “By selectively depicting and characterizing the acts and events of my life that are important to me … by plotting these various elements in ways that connect my stories to other stories that give my stories their overall significance, I come to an understanding of who I am” (Nelson [2001](#_bookmark37): 6). In this sense, telling stories about the past can become a resource for counter-narratives aimed at resisting and undermining the oppressive identity and replacing it with one that fosters dignity and respect. Counter-narratives can thus become tools for repairing the dam- age inflicted on identities by abusive power systems. In what follows I argue that the heroic narrative of the OUN–UPA was formed as a counter-narrative that followed the logic of reclamation. In this

connection, the Soviet narrative about the OUN–UPA as “fascist col- laborators” has been denounced as false and violently imposed by the Soviet regime, and in its place a counter-narrative has been formed which presents the OUN and UPA as “heroic fighters for Ukraine’s independence,” a “national resistance” movement, and an “anti-Soviet underground.”

At the same time, the controversial history of the OUN and UPA, in particular its abovementioned dark sides, requires a criti- cal attitude towards the past. Consequently, the concept of *Vergangenheitbewältigung* or “coming to terms with the past” is also rel- evant here. This term refers first of all to the German model of dealing with the Nazi past, whereby history is approached with awareness and recognition of the nation’s own guilt (Leggewie and Meyer [2005](#_bookmark30): 30; Fischer and Lorenz [2007](#_bookmark9)). The notion of coming to terms with the past posits a critical attitude and moral responsibility for a nation’s wrongdo- ings in the past as a crucial part of democracy and human rights culture. While the German case remains exceptional, *Vergangenheitbewältigung* lies at the core of what has been labeled “European memory culture” (Leggewie [2008](#_bookmark29)). There is a dynamic tension between the two princi- ples operating here: as a new nation-state, Ukraine seeks to reclaim its history and identity; at the same time, as a nation which has declared a commitment to European values and made European integration its strategic goal, it is learning to deal with its past in a responsible way. As a post-colonial state, Ukraine needs to produce its own history, dis- tanced from the Soviet master narrative; as a (potentially) European state it is expected to be self-reflexive and self-critical about its past. The post-colonial agenda of reclaiming the past may be questioned on the grounds that glorifying national heroes and silencing or even denying their involvement in perpetrating atrocities and human rights violations runs counter to the proclaimed adherence to European values. This ten- sion is most visible in the case of OUN–UPA memory politics. While some critics of the politics of glorification of the OUN–UPA wonder why democratic Ukraine should choose to take up the legacy of such an undemocratic organization as the OUN (see Rudling [2010](#_bookmark54): 268), nationalist-oriented Ukrainian historians such as Volodymyr Viatrovych claim that the OUN and UPA fighters for national independence still serve as an important role model in a country that continues to be engaged in a struggle against Russian imperialism. In the following sec- tions I demonstrate how this dynamic tension between reclaiming the

past and confronting the past has unfolded in Ukraine during the post- Soviet decades.

FILLING IN THE “BLaNK SPOTS”

OF HISTORY UNdER GORBaCHEV aNd BEYONd

The policy of perestroika (*perebudova* in Ukrainian) proclaimed by Gorbachev in 1985 brought along the politics of glasnost’ that allowed open discussion of previously silenced historical issues. Alexander Etkind has pointed out that the drive for truth was strong in Soviet society, where access to knowledge about the past (even the past of one’s closest family) was limited and where memory had a largely prescriptive char- acter, whereby the forms and content of remembering were censored and filtered by the state ([2013](#_bookmark8): 74). Political developments in the final years of the Soviet Union from the mid-1980s through to the defini- tive Soviet collapse in late 1991 were shaped in important ways by the struggle to recover historical truth. Civic activists and journalists worked to map the so-called “blank spots” of Soviet history, to generate public debate around these previously silenced issues and to bring this new his- torical knowledge to society. The blank spots included the state terror of the Stalin period, the man-made Great Famine of 1932–1933, and the Ukrainian nationalists’ armed struggle for independence. Activists from Narodnyi Rukh, the Memorial Society, and other civic initiatives were the first to respond to Ukrainian society’s growing demand for historical knowledge.

It was only upon the attainment of national independence in 1991 that the Ukrainian state adopted the agenda of “reclaiming the past,” first of all by means of symbolic politics and reform of the educa- tion system. But the official politics of memory waged during the early years of independence was quite ambiguous, and the figure of the first president—Leonid Kravchuk, the former Ukrainian Communist Party head of ideology who now embraced the nation-building agenda— reflected this ambiguity. A compromise between the old and new politi- cal elites resulted in the emergence of a hybrid state in which political power remained in the hands of the former communist elite, but was now adorned with a facade of national symbols promoted by national democratic groups (Wilson [1997](#_bookmark66), [2005](#_bookmark67); Riabchuk [2008](#_bookmark47)). As Mykola Riabchuk has argued, the post-Soviet former communist elite (the

“sovereign communists,” as he called them) did not embrace all the national symbols and narratives wholeheartedly; rather, they accepted them “opportunistically as something to be further bargained, negoti- ated and re-interpreted” ([2008](#_bookmark47): 4). Meanwhile, the former communist elite managed to retain some power by transforming its social capital into economic assets. By contrast, the democrats were mainly in charge of “soft politics”—identity politics, education, and culture. The key task in this realm was to replace the dominant historical narrative of the Soviet era with a new narrative of Ukrainian national history that would enable “reestablishment of a unified historical memory” (Kuzio [1998](#_bookmark27): 214). During the Soviet period, as we have seen, the history of Ukraine had been presented as the continuous striving for unification with the Russian “elder brother”; in the post-Soviet years, Ukrainian history was re-narrated as a centuries-long struggle for independence.

The new national narrative which was established in the early inde- pendence years draws on the populist Ukrainian historiography based on the traditions of romanticism and positivism that was established by mid-nineteenth-century historians. This scheme underlines the distinc- tiveness of the Ukrainian people among other Slavs and demonstrates that Ukraine has always followed its own separate historical path (Kohut [2011](#_bookmark22)). Within this scheme, the goal of Ukrainian history is national independence and state sovereignty. In this framework, the Ukrainian nationalist struggle for independence during World War II came to be seen as one of the pivotal elements in the history of national liberation.

The Ukrainian diaspora in the USA and Canada played a key role in developing the heroic image of the OUN and UPA after World War II (Himka [2005](#_bookmark13); Rossoliński-Liebe [2010](#_bookmark52); Rudling [2011b](#_bookmark56), [2013](#_bookmark57)).[2](#_bookmark0) During the early years of independence, this role became even more important, as members and organizations of the Ukrainian diaspora were active in bringing this heroic narrative to Ukraine. For instance, the diaspora worked closely with local patriotic organizations such as *Prosvita* and *Plast* in the early 1990s in organizing commemorative events in Hurby (the site of a major battle between the UPA and the Soviet NKVD in spring 1944) or in smaller villages where the UPA conducted their actions (Yurchuk [2014](#_bookmark71)).

Ukrainian diaspora historians played an important role in changing paradigms of history writing. Before Ukraine produced its own post- Soviet history textbooks, Canadian historian Orest Subtelny’s *Ukraine: A History* (Subtelny [1988](#_bookmark62); first published in Ukraine in 1991) often

served as a textbook in Ukrainian schools and universities. Subtelny’s book features only a couple of pages on the topic of the OUN and the UPA, but it was the first to fill in the blank spot on this topic. Subtelny’s approach largely corresponded with the narrative promoted by the national democrats. In his book, the OUN is presented as an organiza- tion that “strove to become a broadly based ideological/revolutionary movement, whose objective was the achievement of integral nationalist goals” ([1993](#_bookmark62): 444) and the UPA is labeled the “underground resist- ance” (473). Subtelny dealt with the UPA massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in a rather cursory fashion, underlining the recipro- cal character of the mass killings. It is important to note, however, that the very fact of mentioning these events was revolutionary for its time (474–475).[3](#_bookmark0)

Schools and universities were the main channel for disseminating the newly formed national historical narrative after 1991. Thus, while his- tory education was used to establish *Homo Sovieticus* during the Soviet period, in independent Ukraine, history education was used to establish *Homo Ukrainicus* (Richardson [2004](#_bookmark48); Kas’ianov [2008](#_bookmark19); Kasianov [2012](#_bookmark20)). As the Swedish historian Johan Dietsch has argued, in independent Ukraine “‘nationalization’ became a lens through which all education was to be filtered and with which it was possible to rid the educational apparatus of Soviet remnants” (Dietsch [2006](#_bookmark7): 80). In this connection, history education can be seen as an instance of what Pierre Ricoeur has called the “forced memorization” of past events “held to be remarkable, even founding, with respect to the common identity” (Ricoeur [2004](#_bookmark49): 85). In school and university textbooks the OUN and UPA were pre- sented as an integral part of the history of Ukrainian national liberation and state building.[4](#_bookmark0) The liberation struggle became the dominant lens through which the ideology and activities of these organizations were interpreted. The formation of this memory of national liberation and underground resistance, like the formation of any memory, was a highly selective process. In this case, any facts that could undermine the flaw- less status of the resistance movement were suppressed, while the strug- gle against the Soviet regime, on the contrary, was underlined wherever possible (Dietsch [2006](#_bookmark7); Marples [2007](#_bookmark32)). Of course, the actual teaching practice on the ground often diverged from the official curriculum, as demonstrated by Peter Rodgers’s study of history teaching in eastern Ukraine ([2008](#_bookmark50)). Still, at the level of the official state education poli- cies, the contents of the history textbooks demonstrate the new master

narrative of the heroic OUN and UPA as a “liberation movement.” Moreover, the broader narrative of World War II history also changed during this period because the Soviet concept of the Great Patriotic War was dropped and replaced in textbooks with World War II. To sum up, during the early years of independence the Soviet taboo on the topic of the OUN and UPA was broken and the newly formed heroic narrative of the national liberation struggle during and after World War II entered media coverage, history writing and education.

THE KUCHMa PRESIdENCY: a dECadE OF aMBIVaLENCE

The 1994 presidential elections were held in the context of widespread economic hardship linked to the post-Soviet transition. The elections brought to power Leonid Kuchma, who ran on a platform centered on promising to stabilize the country. In his election campaign, Kuchma appealed to the Russian-speaking population of Eastern Ukraine, prom- ising better relations with Russia and an end to the “reign of Galician nationalism,” by which he meant the influence of the Western Ukrainian elites on Kyiv (Wolczuk [2001](#_bookmark68): 139).[5](#_bookmark0) A former “red director,” Kuchma presented himself as an “efficient administrator” free of ideological senti- ment, and as a commonsense politician whose aim was maintaining the status quo and avoiding conflict (Kulyk [2010](#_bookmark24): 320–321).

During his term in office (1994–2004) Kuchma made some conces- sions to national democrats, whose support he often needed in order to break the Communist majority in the parliament. Thus, for example, it was under Kuchma that Holodomor commemorations were added to the official calendar. At the same time, however, Kuchma did not touch the foundations of the Soviet commemorative culture; in fact, he even ordered the official celebration of the jubilee of Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, the leader of the Communist Party of Ukraine from 1972 to 1989. Acutely aware of the controversial nature of the OUN–UPA issue and the strong prejudices against Ukrainian nationalism in the east of the country, Kuchma adapted his speeches to the political preferences of the local population. Thus, when in L’viv, he praised the UPA; when in Donbas; the Soviet Army veterans (Portnov [2013](#_bookmark38)). Commemoration of the OUN and UPA remained a local phenomenon limited to small towns and villages in the L’viv, Luts’k, Ternopil, and Rivne regions, where the UPA was active. Even in these regions, it was only after 2000 that the first monuments appeared in big cities, and these were for the most

part local initiatives financed by local councils, private businesses and individuals.

Kuchma justified his reluctance to address the UPA issue at the national level by citing the lack of consensus among the ruling elites. At the time, heated debates were raging on this issue in the parliament, with the national democrats and the Communists representing opposing posi- tions. The national democrats demanded recognition of the UPA veter- ans as equal to Soviet Army veterans in terms of official status, rights, and pension provisions. The left forces in the parliament, who contin- ued to see the history of the OUN and UPA from the Soviet perspec- tive, vehemently opposed this demand. Kuchma initially played a waiting game. Eventually, in 1997, on his initiative, a special governmental com- mission was established with the aim of investigating and evaluating the history of the OUN and UPA. The commission included a working group of professional historians, led by Stanislav Kul’chyts’kyi.

In its concluding report, published in 2005, the historians’ working group noted the extreme complexity of the issue. The working group concluded that it would be problematic to establish a single non-con- tradictory narrative of the history of the OUN–UPA which would be accepted unconditionally in all regions of Ukraine, given how much local experiences of World War II had differed (“Conclusions” [2005](#_bookmark5)). The concluding report addressed controversial issues such as the situa- tional alliance with Nazi Germany, and strove to do so in a non-partisan manner, avoiding the stereotypes and biases of the standard Soviet and heroic narratives alike. In this way, the commission’s work constituted an important step towards contemporary European practices of coming to terms with the past and set clear limits on the reclamation of the past paradigm within which the national democrats operated.

Overall, in the early 2000s, the heroic memory of the OUN and UPA continued to be cherished to a greater degree in those regions where their activities still remained in the communicative memory of the local population. In Eastern and Central Ukraine, however, the popular atti- tude to the OUN and UPA remained largely negative, as these organi- zations were still associated first and foremost with radical Ukrainian nationalism and collaboration with the Nazis. At the national level, as far as commemorative practices were concerned, Kuchma adhered to the conclusions of the historians’ working group and made no attempt to impose a single narrative of the OUN and UPA. Nevertheless, his- tory textbooks nationwide continued to disseminate the narrative of the

OUN and UPA as a “liberation” and “resistance” movement. Later, after the Orange Revolution and especially after the Euromaidan, it would be this heroic narrative that was institutionalized in the memory politics at the national level.

MEMORY aT WaR:

THE PaST ENTERS UKRaINIaN ELECTORaL POLITICS

Kuchma’s last years in power were characterized by a deep political crisis. Following the murder of an independent Ukrainian journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000, allegations of Kuchma’s role in the murder led to the political isolation of the Ukrainian president in the West and pushed him to seek closer relations with Moscow. Some of his former allies turned into political rivals. Viktor Yushchenko, the Prime Minister in 1999– 2001 and Yulia Tymoshenko, the vice prime minister on energy issues in Yushchenko’s cabinet, created their own parties. Viktor Yushchenko’s “Our Ukraine” bloc, which united a number of small national demo- cratic and nationalist parties, won successes in the 2002 parliamentary elections. The strengthening of the national democratic opposition and the fragmentation of the left (Oleksandr Moroz’s Socialist Party, unlike the Communists, had now joined the anti-Kuchma coalition) created a new political constellation on the eve of the 2004 presidential elections. Viktor Yushchenko, the popular leader of the parliamentary opposi- tion, represented the national democratic camp, combining a national emancipation agenda with the pro-European choice. His opponent from the “party of power,” chosen by President Kuchma as his succes- sor, the acting Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, was a representative of the Donetsk oligarchic clan. While Yushchenko’s pro-Ukrainian and anti-Communist electorate was concentrated in the west and center, the Russian-speaking Yanukovych appealed to voters in the east by labeling his opponent a “nationalist” and even “fascist.” Both candidates built their election campaign on divisive historical narratives and symbols.

As early as 2002 Yushchenko began to attend local UPA commem- orative ceremonies on a regular basis. For instance, on 13 October 2002 he took part in the unveiling of a UPA memorial (in the form of the Ukrainian coat of arms on the top of a hill) in the small village of Hutvyn, in Kostopil’ region, about 80 km from Rivne (Fomenko [2002](#_bookmark10); Kolodiazhnyi [2002](#_bookmark23)). Never before had small villages attracted so much attention from such high-ranking state officials. It was precisely

during this period of Yushchenko’s growing popularity as a leader of the national democratic opposition that the OUN and UPA commemora- tions that had started in villages and small towns in the 1990s moved to the cities. In 2002, the first monument to the UPA in an oblast capi- tal center was built in the West Ukrainian city of Rivne. The monument was dedicated to Klym Savur, a UPA leader notorious for his role in the mass killing of Poles in Volhynia in 1943 (Motyka [2011](#_bookmark34), [2013](#_bookmark35)). In 2003 the construction of an impressive monument to Stepan Bandera started in L’viv (unveiled in 2007). At the regional level the attitude to the OUN and UPA among the local elites strongly correlated with affili- ation to the rival camps. Such affiliation was often demonstrated through participation in a memory project, such as construction of a monu- ment, or a commemorative ceremony. In Rivne, for instance, support for Yushchenko was demonstrated through memory projects dedicated to the OUN and UPA, while support for Kuchma was displayed through memory projects dedicated to Soviet partisans (Yurchuk [2014](#_bookmark71)).

Yushchenko’s exhortations to the memory of OUN and UPA touched the hearts of many in the western regions of the country, where this mem- ory had a strong emotional charge conveyed through family stories and its pronounced anti-Soviet associations. Moreover, by the 2000s throughout the country a new generation of voters appeared who had been raised on the textbooks in which the OUN and UPA were represented as fighters for liberation, in line with the “resistance” narrative. This narrative in turn contributed to the attractiveness of the idea of resistance more broadly, including resistance to the present Kuchma regime.[6](#_bookmark0)

The struggle between President Kuchma and the national democratic opposition was reflected in the debates and activities around the 60th anniversary of the Volhynia massacre which coincided with the begin- ning of the presidential election campaign in 2003.[7](#_bookmark0) Both Kuchma and Yushchenko faced the difficult task of stating a clear position on the Volhynian events without alienating Ukrainian or Polish public opin- ion. As president in office, Kuchma prioritized Ukrainian–Polish coop- eration and thus supported the politics of reconciliation. In July 2003 Kuchma and Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski met in the vil- lage of Pavlivka to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Volhynia events, now declared a “common tragedy” shared by the Ukrainian and Polish peoples. Kuchma was deeply unpopular in Western Ukraine at the time, and his politics of reconciliation with Poland was rejected by the nationalist-minded public who saw it as an admission of Ukrainian guilt.

At the same time, at the peak of the “Kuchmagate” scandal over the Gongadze killing and other crimes, Ukrainian liberals and pro-European public intellectuals aspiring to Ukrainian–Polish reconciliation at the civil society level denied Kuchma’s legitimacy as a leader and his moral right to apologize on behalf of the Ukrainian nation (Hrytsak [2004](#_bookmark15): 134). Against this background, Yushchenko’s ambivalent position was gen- erally perceived as more “balanced.” With an electoral base in Western Ukraine, Yushchenko emphasized the Ukrainian victimhood narrative and the legitimacy of the memory of Polish atrocities against Ukrainians. In his letter to Adam Michnik on the theme of Ukrainian–Polish rela- tions during World War II, Yushchenko stressed that Ukrainian efforts aimed at studying the crimes committed against Ukrainians by Poles were not driven by any “desire to belittle the Polish tragedy” but instead reflected a striving on the part of Ukrainians to “know their own his- tory better” (Yushchenko [2003](#_bookmark72)).[8](#_bookmark0) In this way Yushchenko positioned the history of the conflict firmly within the framework of *reclamation* of the past. His main argument was that Ukraine had long been deprived of knowledge about its own history and was now struggling to regain this knowledge. Yushchenko’s image as a pro-European politician was so strong before and shortly after the Orange Revolution that his sympathy for the OUN and UPA did not affect his popularity in Poland. It was due to Yushchenko’s personal involvement that the protracted conflict around the Polish “Eaglets’” war cemetery in Lviv was finally settled in 2005: with his high moral credit in both Poland and Western Ukraine, Yushchenko was able to achieve more in terms of practical reconciliation than the outgoing and rather unpopular President Kuchma.

During his official visit to Poland on 9 May 2003, Yushchenko made a point of visiting Auschwitz. In this way, he connected a symbolic ges- ture demonstrating his commitment to European memory culture with his own family history (his father was in Auschwitz as a Soviet POW). In June 2004 the “Our Ukraine” faction in the Ukrainian parliament expelled Oleh Tiahnybok, the future leader of the radical national- ist Svoboda, for his anti-Semitic and xenophobic public statements. Seeking to reach a broader electorate in the 2004 presidential elections, Yushchenko also spoke in favor of reconciliation between the UPA and Soviet veterans and tried to embrace the anti-fascist narrative, as his visit to Auschwitz shows.

At the same time, Yushchenko’s opponent Viktor Yanukovych denounced him as a “fascist.” Yanukovych was a proponent of the

neo-Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War which had already been reinstitutionalized in Russia by this stage by President Putin. On 28 October 2004, three days before the preliminary ballot, a pompous pub- lic celebration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Ukraine from Nazi occupation was organized in Kyiv (*Radio Svoboda* [2004](#_bookmark42)). On the occasion of this celebration, Putin made a three-day visit to Ukraine in order to demonstrate Russia’s support for Yanukovych.

Ultimately, Yanukovych’s stake on Russian support misfired. The younger generation of voters firmly supported Yushchenko’s drive to emancipate Ukraine from its Soviet and communist legacy and his pro- European orientation. The Russian government’s strongly negative reac- tion to the Orange Revolution and its continuing denunciation of the Ukrainian leadership as “nationalist” and “fascist,” together with Russian official memory politics around the war more broadly, all contributed to a strengthening of the heroic narrative of the OUN and UPA as part of the new national consciousness in Ukraine. Especially after Putin’s rise to power in 2000, Russian memory politics had become increasingly hostile to the new national history narratives of other former Soviet republics. In the official Russian narrative of World War II, Russians were por- trayed as the only participants in the victory over Nazi Germany while Ukrainians along with representatives of other nationalities were increas- ingly bracketed out of this narrative (Astrov [2012](#_bookmark2)). Russian neo-impe- rialist and nationalist interpretations of the Great Patriotic War myth alienated many Ukrainians, and a new understanding of World War II as a national tragedy in which Ukrainians fighting in both the Soviet Army and the UPA were seen as victims and heroes started to gain popularity.

CONTROVERSY OVER NORMaLIZaTION OF THE

OUN–UPa MEMORY

Yushchenko’s victory in the 2004 presidential election marked the begin- ning of the normalization[9](#_bookmark0) of OUN–UPA memory at the state level by both discursive and institutional means. The narrative supported by President Yushchenko can be called “integration-oriented” (Portnov [2013](#_bookmark38): 175), as it was an attempt to merge the heroic cult of the UPA and some elements of the Great Patriotic War myth. In the first months of his presidency Yushchenko spoke about reconciliation through dia- logue between the veterans of the Soviet army and the UPA and prom- ised to provide the same social benefits to both groups. In practice,

however, Yushchenko failed to translate these declarations into any con- crete political steps.[10](#_bookmark0) His attempt at initiating a “joint” celebration of Victory Day by both UPA and Soviet Army veterans in Kyiv in 2005 was a dismal failure. Reconciliation was not a popular idea in a society torn by “memory wars” while Soviet veterans’ organizations often supported the Party of Regions and the Communist Party against the Orange coalition.

With the purpose of institutionalizing the new politics of memory, in 2006 Yushchenko sanctioned the foundation of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. The Institute was established as a central executive body operating under the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers with the aim of “restoration and preservation of the national memory of the Ukrainian people” (Postanova [2006](#_bookmark43)). In 2008, Volodymyr Viatrovych, a young historian from L’viv who had previously worked at the Center for Research of the Liberation Movement and was known for his affirma- tive nationalist approach to Ukraine’s past, was appointed the academic adviser to the head of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) in charge of its archives. President Yushchenko assigned the SBU the new functions of managing archives, conducting historical research, and popularizing the new official approach to Ukrainian history. The archives related to the history of the OUN and UPA were to a large extent declassified and opened to historians.

The Institute of National Remembrance cooperated with the SBU and the Center for Research of the Liberation Movement (L’viv) to organize an exhibition “The UPA: History of the Unbowed” which traveled throughout Ukraine from September 2008 to May 2009. The exhibition presented the UPA as heroic fighters for Ukraine’s independ- ence while avoiding controversial issues of complicity in the Holocaust and mass killings of the Polish population. About 60,200 people visited the exhibition and more than 350 different mass media outlets covered the event, resulting in more than a hundred articles in the printed media, and dozens of mentions on national and local TV and radio programs (INR [2009](#_bookmark17)). Luts’k and Rivne boasted a record number of visitors to the exhibition; here, excursions for schoolchildren and students were organized. By contrast, in the east and south of the country where local councils were largely in the hands of the Party of Regions, the exhibition met with a negative reaction, and at best with indifference. In Luhans’k the exhibition was sabotaged by the municipal authorities and ended up being canceled. In Odesa a parallel anti-UPA exhibition was organized

and in Zaporizhzhia, a local Communist Party deputy destroyed one of the exhibits (INR [2009](#_bookmark17)). Moreover, in spring 2010 Vadym Kolesnychenko, a notorious pro-Russian deputy from the Party of Regions, organized a counter-exhibition “The Volhynia Massacre: Polish and Jewish victims of the UPA,” which was shown in Kyiv and Odesa. The fact that Kolesnychenko did this in cooperation with a nationalist Polish “association of victims of Ukrainian nationalism” caused particular outrage in the Ukrainian media.

In 2007 Ukrainian society split over memory politics once again when Yushchenko granted the title of Hero of Ukraine to Roman Shukhevych, the commander of the UPA. Even more controversially, in January 2010, during his last days in office, Yushchenko granted the same title to Stepan Bandera, the icon of radical Ukrainian nationalism.[11](#_bookmark0) This controversial decree also had significant international resonance. It was criticized by Polish President Lech Kaczyński (who otherwise personally sympathized with Yushchenko and shared his conservative agenda), as well as by other Polish politicians and by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Jewish organizations such as the Simon Wiesenthal Center declared their deep concern regarding the decree which was seen as part of the relativization of the Holocaust (Rudling [2010](#_bookmark54): 263). On 22 February 2010 the European Parliament, at the initiative of its Polish members, passed a special resolution denouncing Yushchenko’s deci- sion (“Resolution” [2010](#_bookmark46)). The resolution was welcomed by the Russian authorities, while Yushchenko personally wrote a letter to the European Parliament seeking to justify his action.

Despite this widespread criticism, Yushchenko considered memory politics to be one of the main successes of his presidency. Lacking any notable achievements in the realms of the economy or international rela- tions (the EU membership which he had promised was still a very distant prospect), he focused instead on his less tangible victories in the field of memory politics. For Yushchenko, history had been reclaimed, and this was his victory.

The Yushchenko era resulted in rather controversial outcomes. The politics of memory institutionalized by Yushchenko at the state level was aimed at creating a new affirmative narrative of national history which included the OUN–UPA as heroic fighters for Ukraine’s independence. This politics was criticized by many Western and Ukrainian historians and intellectuals who saw it as a one-sided attempt to whitewash con- troversial aspects of history of Ukrainian nationalism (Amar et al. [2010](#_bookmark1)).

Favoring *reclamation of the past* the Ukrainian Institute of National remembrance showed little interest in a more critical approach. Certainly, Yushchenko’s politics were permanently under attack, but the criticism by his political opponents came mainly from the left, pro-Russian and Soviet-nostalgic perspective and was dismissive of the whole phenome- non of Ukrainian nationalism by indiscriminately labeling all UPA fight- ers “fascists,” “Nazi collaborators,” and “traitors.” This criticism had little in common with European practices of “coming to terms with the past,” which call for a non-ideological approach based on grounded his- torical research and education. And yet, the very attempt at normaliz- ing the memory of the OUN–UPA, despite its highly divisive effects on Ukrainian society, internationalized the debate about Ukrainian history, stimulated public discussions about the controversial issues of the past, and actually made possible a critical approach to the OUN and UPA from a pro-Ukrainian perspective.

EUROMaIdaN aNd BEYONd

The victory of Viktor Yanukovych in the 2010 presidential elections brought about a new radical turn in the Ukrainian politics of memory. In May that year, a joint Ukrainian–Russian–Belarusian celebration of the Victory in World War II was held, and the notion of the Great Patriotic War returned to the public utterances of high-ranking politi- cians. This was the first time that a military parade with the participa- tion of the Russian military took place in Kyiv; previously such parades had taken place only in Sevastopol, as host of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. In May 2011, the Ukrainian parliament amended the Law “On the Immortalization of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945” which ordered the use of the Soviet flag—the “Banner of Victory”—next to the national flag on the Victory day and other occasions such as the anniversary of the liberation of a given city from German occupation. This amendment, which was later canceled by the Constitutional Court, provoked violent clashes between the pro-Russian Soviet veterans and nationalist “Svoboda” activists in L’viv on 9 May. The Institute of National Remembrance’s status was now downgraded from a state executive body to a research institution. It was assigned a new director: Valeriy Soldatenko, a Soviet-trained historian and a mem- ber of the Communist Party. The theme of the OUN–UPA disappeared almost entirely from the official political discourse—it was now confined

to the rhetoric of the nationalist “Svoboda” party, whose xenophobia and exclusive nationalism made the ruling Party of Regions look like the lesser evil.

The dramatic events of 2013–14—the Euromaidan revolution, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the subsequent war in Donbas— radically changed the political context of Ukrainian debates about the past. Historical symbols and myths played an important role during the Maidan protests, mobilizing people and helping them make sense of the rapidly changing reality. During the first weeks of the peaceful protests, EU flags and the blue-and-yellow flags of Ukraine dominated the scene. The more resolute the resistance to the Yanukovych regime became, the more visible were references to the Ukrainian Cossackdom, which embodied the fight for freedom and national liberation (Jilge [2014](#_bookmark18): 239). The red-and-black flags of the Ukrainian nationalists (historically a symbol of the OUN–B)[12](#_bookmark0) were part of this collage of symbols and histor- ical myths—and this raised an important question about the role of radi- cal nationalism in the Maidan revolution. The OUN and UPA symbols (including portraits of Stepan Bandera) were displayed mainly by nation- alists from “Svoboda” party and the newly formed “Right Sector,” and although far from being non-controversial, they “were not flatly rejected by more liberal or cosmopolitan protesters for fear of splitting and weak- ening the movement” (Kulyk [2014](#_bookmark26): 100). The OUN and UPA greeting “Glory to Ukraine!”—“Glory to Heroes!” rang out in the speeches from the Maidan stage and from the crowds. The greeting was “appropriated by the bulk of the protesters and imbued with a new meaning, free of the original claims to ethno-national superiority and exclusivity” (ibid.: 101). The crowds also sang UPA songs. “Glory to Ukraine!”—“Glory to Heroes!” sounded at the mourning ceremony for the “Heavenly Hundred” on the Maidan. In this way, the greeting that served dur- ing the clashes with the riot police as a symbol of courage, devotion to Ukraine and willingness to fight, now came to stand for grief, self-sacri-

fice, and gratitude of the living to the dead.

In general, Stepan Bandera and the OUN–UPA largely lost their neg- ative meaning for many Kyiv protesters during the Euromaidan (Jilge [2014](#_bookmark18): 247). One of the reasons was that “the very embrace of violence as a legitimate means of resisting the repressive regime led many of them to accept the violent nationalist resistance of the past as one of their role models” (Kulyk [2014](#_bookmark26): 104). At the same time, the use of the OUN and UPA symbols on the Maidan was criticized by many liberal and leftist

protesters who saw in them a threat of splitting the protest movement and a pretext for Russian propaganda denigrating it as “fascist.” This criticism became especially vocal when “Svoboda” Party organized its traditional torch-lit march on 1 January, Stepan Bandera’s birthday.

With the war in Donbas unfolding, the greeting “Glory to Ukraine!”—“Glory to Heroes!” became increasingly connected to the memory of the fallen Ukrainian soldiers. In the new political context symbols of Ukrainian nationalism acquired new meaning as the current fight against the Russian aggression made some aspects of the OUN– UPA legacy more acceptable for the Ukrainian society. On the one hand, the war legitimized the tradition of radical Ukrainian nationalism and gave new impetus to the politics of “reclaiming the past,” as the current activities of the Institute of National Remembrance demonstrate. On the other hand, as L’viv historian Vasyl’ Rasevych ([2014](#_bookmark44)) has noted, we are dealing here with a new Ukrainian history—since the beginning of the Maidan, the history of an emerging political nation is being written, and this new history is more appealing than the divisive legacy of the OUN– UPA. An empowered civil society with strong pro-European aspira- tions—the main outcome of the Revolution of Dignity—is an important precondition for “coming to terms with the difficult past.” This process is, however, hampered by the continuing military conflict in Donbas, which serves to strengthen nationalist sentiment.

dILEMMaS OF dECOMMUNIZaTION aNd THE MEMORY OF THE OUN–UPa

Although Ukraine had already experienced various political cam- paigns and legislative initiatives aimed at removing Soviet symbols and denouncing the Communist ideology (most notably in the early years of independence and after the Orange Revolution), it was only in April 2015 that a wide-reaching official “decommunization” program was launched. Four memory laws were adopted by the Ukrainian parlia- ment, comprising the Law on Commemoration of the Victory over Nazism in World War II (1939–1945); the Law on Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Propaganda of their Symbols; the Law on the Legal Status and on Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine’s Independence in the 20th Century; and last but not least, the Law on Access to the Archive of Repressive Organs of the

Communist Totalitarian Regime (1918–1991) (Decommunization Laws [2015](#_bookmark6)).

The laws were prepared under the auspices of the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance, whose status as a government body was restored in 2014. Volodymyr Viatrovych, the director of the Institute appointed by the new Ukrainian government, was one of the motors of Yushchenko’s memory politics between 2005 and 2010. But, despite a certain continuity with previous attempts, the “decommunization” launched in 2015 is taking place in a completely new political context. First, the Maidan protests all over Ukraine were followed by the dis- mantling of Lenin statues, which were associated with the Yanukovych regime and his neo-Soviet and Russia-oriented identity politics. This movement from below, supported by nationalists as well as liberals, gave strong legitimation to the Institute’s initiative. Second, the appropriation of symbols and myths of the Great Patriotic War by the pro-Russian sep- aratists in spring 2014 prompted the Ukrainian government to dissoci- ate itself from the Russian–Soviet narrative of World War II. Against the ongoing military conflict with the Russia-backed separatists, the Institute and the Ukrainian government consider memory politics as a national security issue.

As far as World War II memory is concerned, the message and thrust of the “decommunization laws” is far from unambiguous—some- thing which is not surprising in the Ukrainian case. Replacing the Great Patriotic War with the “victory over Nazism” and establishing 8 May as the Day of Memory and Reconciliation, the new legislation did not, however, cancel Victory Day on 9 May—a holiday that is still highly popular in Ukraine. In this way, while embracing the European approach to commemorative politics, the government also made a con- cession to those parts of the Ukrainian population who still identify with the traditional meaning of Victory Day. In addition, the Institute of National Remembrance moved to reappropriate the symbolic capi- tal of the Victory for the contemporary Ukrainian cause. In April–May 2015 the Institute launched a public campaign on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Social advertisements on TV and public billboards on the streets underlined both Ukraine’s con- tribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany and its fight for an independ- ent state. Ukrainian heroes, men and women, who had fought against Nazi Germany in the Soviet army, in the UPA and in the Allied forces, were presented side-by-side. By recommendation of the Institute, a

new Ukrainian symbol of victory was also launched: a red poppy flower inscribed with the slogan “1939–1945. Never again.” Referring to both the European and Ukrainian traditions, the poppy replaced the St George’s Ribbon, now associated with the imperialist and revanchist pol- itics of Putin’s Russia.

Probably the most controversial of the decommunization laws (and the one which received the most media attention) granted the OUN and the UPA the official status of “fighters for Ukrainian independence”—some- thing Viktor Yushchenko had failed to pass through parliament during his time in office. It should be noted, however, that the law does not prior- itize the OUN and UPA; rather, they are mentioned among dozens of other organizations and groups who now belong to the officially estab- lished canon of independence fighters. The law also forbids the “public expression of derogatory attitudes” towards these organizations, as well as “public denial of the legitimacy of the struggle of Ukraine’s independ- ence in the twentieth century”; moreover, the law declares that “dissemi- nation” of Communist propaganda and symbols is an offence punishable by a prison sentence of up to ten years. These provisions prompted sharp criticism from professional historians in Ukraine and in the West (“Letter” [2015](#_bookmark31)).[13](#_bookmark0) As Oxana Shevel summarizes the arguments, “critics have noted that the laws have the potential to stifle open debate over his- tory by introducing legal punishment for publically expressing ‘wrong’ opinions about the communist period or about fighters for Ukraine’s independence” ([2016](#_bookmark61): 261). The new legislation has the potential to hin- der independent scholarly inquiry and academic publications containing information that might damage the heroic image of the “independence fighters.” In the case of OUN and UPA history—a subject still await- ing non-biased specialist study, especially when it comes to aspects such as complicity in the Holocaust and ethnic violence in Volhynia—the new legislation seems likely to have a particularly negative impact.

The decommunization laws and their treatment of the OUN and UPA in particular have also been criticized as potentially aggravating political divisions in Ukrainian society, alienating the east and south of the country, as well as for their damaging effect for Ukraine’s interna- tional reputation and the prospects for its European integration (Umland [2016](#_bookmark64)). Indeed, as the public protests against the renaming of Moscow Avenue to Bandera Avenue in Kyiv in June 2016 demonstrate, such deci- sions are far from non-controversial and bear the potential to generate and exacerbate conflicts. On the international front, some consequences

of Ukraine’s memory politics can be observed in Poland where in sum- mer 2016 the Senate voted to establish 11 July as a memorial day for “the Poles who were the victims of the genocide committed by the OUN and UPA”—in other words, officially recognizing the 1943–1944 massacres of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists as an act of genocide.[14](#_bookmark0) It should be noted, however, that this move was only partly a reaction to Ukrainian developments, and in many ways it had more to do with domestic political tensions in Poland. A joint statement issued by the presidents of Ukraine and Poland in August 2016 underlined the fact that despite the “tragic pages of history of Ukrainian–Polish relations,” the two countries remained partners (“Spil’na deklaratsiia” [2016](#_bookmark61)). But in any case, it is clear that the glorification of the OUN–UPA is not going to win friends for Ukraine in the world and will not help it to integrate in the European institutions.

To sum up, “decommunization” bears the idea of reclamation of the past at its core, and the new legislation privileges and prioritizes this par- adigm by establishing the national canon of “fighters for independence” which includes the OUN and UPA. Those aspects of the new legislation which politicize history, reduce its complexity by establishing “correct” heroes, and forbid alternative opinions pose a danger of hindering inde- pendent historical research and free public debate. In this way, the post- colonial politics of reclaiming history clashes head on with the principles of coming to terms with the past, and thus with the European princi- ples to which Ukraine aspires. Some other elements of decommuniza- tion, however, such as the opening of the former Soviet archives, on the contrary, facilitate independent historical research and open discussions about the past.

CONCLUSION

Oxana Shevel has pinpointed the difficulties faced by Ukraine in a pas- sage that is worth quoting at some length. She writes:

The fundamental dilemma in Ukraine’s decommunization process is how to undo the legal, institutional, and historical legacy of the Soviet era without repeating the Soviet approach of mandating one “correct” inter- pretation of the past and punishing the public expression of dissenting viewpoints. This dilemma is further complicated by the fact that criticism of the decommunization laws has come both from intellectual circles in

the West and in Ukraine that are genuinely concerned with upholding freedom of expression and fostering free historical inquiry, and from retro- grade forces in Ukraine and Russia concerned first and foremost with keep- ing Ukraine in the Russian sphere of influence and preserving the Soviet era memory regime with its assessments of events, groups and individuals (Shevel [2016](#_bookmark58): 263).

In other words, Ukraine faces a twofold challenge: it must find a way to confront the nation’s difficult past in a critical and responsible man- ner, but one that does not render impossible the task of reclaiming the past, that is, of emancipation from old imperial narratives. The histo- rian Andrii Portnov, a strong proponent of the *Vergangenheitsbewälting* paradigm, has noted the effort that this dual task requires. The honest and complete appraisal of “the history of ethnically exclusivist national- ism, the terror politics of the OUN, and the anti-Polish and anti-Jew- ish crimes of the UPA,” Portnov writes, must be combined with careful attention to avoiding the ideological traps entrenched in this territory. In particular, historians need to work to move beyond the old binaries, and to be aware of the ways in which a critical approach to the history of Ukrainian radical nationalism has all too often entailed the downplay- ing of Soviet crimes and the denial of Ukrainian historical subjectivity or agency, whether intended or otherwise (Portnov [2016a](#_bookmark39)).

Both paradigms—reclaiming the past, and coming to terms with the past—can be powerful tools for constructing new stories and new iden- tities, but they also have the potential to silence and oppress. As this account of the past 25 years of Ukrainian memory politics has shown, these two frameworks are often in stark opposition to one another; but at other times, they feed on and fuel one another. Handling the complex legacies of the history of the OUN and UPA is a daunting task by any measure, and it has become even more so now that it has been taken out of the regions where this history was primarily played out, and into the center of the national political arena. As this chapter has shown, the politicization of history and the instrumentalization of the complex leg- acy of the OUN and UPA in electoral politics are fraught with the risk of further polarizing Ukrainian society. The Ukrainian state still has to learn how to handle its difficult past in the international arena; the importance of *Vergangenheitsbewälting* is difficult to overestimate in Ukraine’s rela- tions with Poland and Israel, and for the country’s European aspirations in general. (This is true at least for the moment; it does seem likely that

the rise of nationalism that is underway in many EU countries at the time of writing (2016) will destabilize the established consensus on cop- ing with the difficult past as a precondition for European stability and security.) Russian aggression against Ukraine which Putin’s regime legit- imizes as the “fight against Ukrainian fascism” perpetuates the histori- cal pattern of the nation as a “collective victim” and does not make the task of coping with the past any easier. One thing is certain: at the level of national memory, the legacy of the OUN and UPA will surely con- tinue to present ground for disputes and discontent. The way Ukrainian scholars, civil society activists, and the Ukrainian state deal with this dif- ficult past will be one of the most important tests of the maturity of the Ukrainian democracy.