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 instrumentalized 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 postindependence memory politics in Ukraine have been shaped in crucial ways by the tension between two different frameworks 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 or coming to terms with the past, which emphasizes a critical view on the difficult aspects of the past, on the other.

PostSoviet Ukrainian memory politics need to be viewed first and foremost 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 function 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 antifascism that symbolically divided the world into two camps: fascist and antifascist. The antifascist 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 Armys 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 Armys victory as liberation. For many, especially in the Baltic republics, the victory over Nazism marked the beginning of Soviet occupation. AntiSoviet narratives of World War II now laid the ground for new national identities in the postSoviet 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 Peoples 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 remembered 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 reunification 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 fighters and martyrs for Ukraines 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 knowledge*, that is, knowledge about a groups 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 attitudes 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 Ukraines chances of independence and that Nazi Germany would support the Ukrainian cause. But the Nazis were not even prepared to countenance creating a Ukrainian puppet state, let alone granting Ukraine its independence. Soon after the OUN B proclaimed the establishment of a Ukrainian state in Lviv on 30 June 1941, the day the Wehrmacht entered the city, the Nazis moved to arrest many OUN members, including their leader, Stepan Bandera. Especially from this point, the OUN

relations with Nazi Germany became complicated; sometimes they collaborated, and sometimes they fought against the Germans, improvising and adapting their position as they went along (Bruder [2007](#_bookmark4)). Consequently, the term collaboration does not fully or accurately reflect the OUNs 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 prevent 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 proponents who have been trying to establish heroic visions of the OUN and UPA in Ukraine since the 1990s.

In the early years of Ukraines independence, the Soviet Great Patriotic War myth, now adjusted to the nationbuilding 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 Lviv, IvanoFrankivsk, Rivne, Lutsk, and Ternopil oblasts. At the national level the heroic cult of the OUN and UPA was in fact rather marginal 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 public opinion and contributed to the political conflict which split Ukrainian society and the ruling elites. Since the 2013 2014 Euromaidan in particular, the history of radical Ukrainian nationalism has been instrumentalized 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 todays fight against the Russian aggression.

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 nationand statebuilding processes. The concept of reclaiming the past in the process of nation building as a way of dealing with colonial legacies in the postSoviet 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 postcolonial state still struggling to emancipate 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 formation 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 inherently selective nature of the process of constructing ones 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 counternarratives aimed at resisting and undermining the oppressive identity and replacing it with one that fosters dignity and respect. Counternarratives can thus become tools for repairing the damage inflicted on identities by abusive power systems. In what follows I argue that the heroic narrative of the OUN UPA was formed as a counternarrative that followed the logic of reclamation. In this

connection, the Soviet narrative about the OUN UPA as fascist collaborators has been denounced as false and violently imposed by the Soviet regime, and in its place a counternarrative has been formed which presents the OUN and UPA as heroic fighters for Ukraines independence, a national resistance movement, and an antiSoviet underground.