Intimacy and Antipathy

Ukrainian–Russian Relations in Historical Perspective

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When protests began in Kyiv in November 2013, no one could have predicted that they would ultimately result in the collapse of the Yanukovych government, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and a war in eastern Ukraine that would claim thousands of lives. Yet the crisis in Ukraine is not merely the product of a perfect storm of contingent events; it has deep historical roots in that nation's crucial but ambivalent relationship with Russia. Ukraine played a central role in the consolidation of the tsarist empire, the invention of Russian nationalism, and the creation of the Soviet regime. It has also generated bold liberationist schemes that have shaken the very foundations of Russian/Soviet hegemony. Over the centuries, numerous parties have endeavored to simplify this complex history of intimacy and antipathy—to align Ukraine with a single ethno-religious group, ideological tradition, or cultural idea. Each of these efforts, however, has only generated new conflict and violence. The 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine—the most recent iteration of this cycle of simplification and brutalization—provides a tragic reminder of the suffering that this pattern produces as well as the difficulty of escaping from it.

The Ukrainian lands played a crucial role in the definition of the Russian imperial project. In the mid-17th century, the Zaporizhian Cossacks wrested control of contemporary east-central Ukraine from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and established a polity of their own, the Hetmanate, under the protection of the Muscovite tsar. Claiming to defend ancient Rus´ customs that supposedly had been defiled by the region's non-Orthodox populations, the Cossacks transformed a contested border zone into the spiritual center of Orthodox civilization, creating the Russian Empire's densest network of Orthodox churches, seminaries, and printing presses. The cultural capital of the Hetmanate and the key role that it played in defending the Orthodox Church on its vulnerable western frontier offered its native sons the opportunity to

propagate the Cossacks' unique cultural concerns and historical memory across the empire. Russia's tsars relied on Ukrainian clerics to run the church and on Kyiv monks to write the first history of the East Slavs; it was a Hetmanate native, Feofan Prokopovych, who defined the mission of the autocracy under Peter the Great.[1]

In spite of its contributions to the institutions and the ideology that undergirded the autocracy, the Hetmanate generated a potent critique of the tsarist system's centralizing ambitions. Insistent that the Hetmanate's long-standing traditions of martial democracy and decentralization reflected "authentic" Slavic values that dated back to Rus´, members of the Cossack elite denounced the autocracy as a German innovation. Pointing to the key role that they had played in advancing Orthodox interests on a sensitive frontier, they insisted that they were equals of the Russian tsars—not merely the "slaves" of the autocrat. The imperial state responded to these challenges with further infringements on Cossack rights, and eventually abolished the Hetmanate altogether. Yet the Cossack dream of freedom survived; well into the 19th century, the descendants of Cossack generals continued to nourish the culture and memory of their ancestors.[2]

In the 19th century—by which time the Russian Empire had marched west to claim almost all of contemporary Ukraine, with the exception of the Austrian province of Galicia—the Ukrainian lands became the empire's major center of Russian nationalist agitation. Although the rise of Russian nationalism was aided by the "Russification" efforts promoted by the imperial state, local actors generated much of the ideological content of the movement. Building on the early modern discourse that portrayed Ukraine as the center of Orthodox civilization, local clerics and intellectuals now insisted that their native land was the cradle of an Orthodox, East Slavic nation that had originated in Rus´. The Russian national idea that emerged from 19th-century Ukraine, however, proved unstable. In the 1870s, Kyiv's Russian nationalist lobby began to splinter; one-time participants in the effort to define an East Slavic nation ultimately developed an alternative national project that claimed Rus´, the Cossacks, and

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[1] N. M. Iakovenko, *Narys istorii seredn´ovichnoi ta rann´omodernoi Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2006), 285–369, 398–528; Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161–298; Barbara Skinner, *The Western Front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox Conflict in 18th-Century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 88–111.

[2] Zenon E. Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s–1830s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Serhii Plokhy, *The Cossack Myth: History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

local folk culture as expressions of a separate Ukrainian nation. Meanwhile, the Poles and Jews who resided in the Ukrainian lands—whom Russian nationalists considered unwelcome interlopers at best and enemies of the Rus´ people at worst—organized nationalist movements of their own.[3]

The rival nationalist groups that struggled for control of the Ukrainian lands in the last decades of the tsarist regime had common origins in a multi-ethnic borderland culture and even borrowed tactics and rhetoric from one another.[4] Yet each constructed monolithic historical narratives that treated well-bounded, self-evident, and primordial nations as the protagonists of history, thereby obscuring the interconnections betweem national movements. Ukraine's Russian nationalists denied the very existence of a Ukrainian nation and denounced its champions as servants of Polish and Jewish interests. Ukrainian nationalists highlighted their native land's suffering under imperial rule without acknowledging the contributions that it had made to the tsarist system (or that they had made to Russian nationalist ideology before they had embraced the Ukrainian project). Nationalist thought soon transcended narrow circles of intellectuals, transforming everyday life and social practice. Many nationalists presented antipathy as a civic virtue, placing new strains on communities that had long relied on interethnic accommodation for survival.[5]

In the 20th century—the age of ideology—Ukraine played a central role in the creation of the Soviet system. Many of the avant-garde artists (Mikhail Bulgakov, Isaak Babel, Vasilii Kandinskii, and Kazimir Malevich) and Bolshevik activists (Lev Trotskii, Anatolii Lunacharskii, Grigorii Zinov´ev, and Mykola Skrypnyk) who envisioned a new society emerging on the ruins of the old empire boasted Ukrainian roots.[6] By the 1920s, Ukraine had become the testing ground for the "affirmative action" campaign that aspired to uplift and acculturate the Soviet Union's non-Russian nationalities and to reverse the damaging effects of imperialism and Russian chauvinism.[7]

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[3] Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus´: Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 21–113. See also A. I. Miller, *"Ukrainskii vopros" v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii (vtoraia polovina XIX v.)* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2000); Ricarda Vulpius, *Nationalisierung der Religion: Russifizierungspolitik und ukrainische Nationsbildung 1860–1920* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005); and Andreas Kappeler, *Russland und die Ukraine: Verflochtene Biographien und Geschichten* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012).

[4] Serhii Bilen´kyi, *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian Political Imaginations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[5] Hillis, *Children of Rus´*, 117–80.

[6] Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 123–54; Mayhill Fowler, "Mykola Kulish, Mikhail Bulgakov, and Soviet Theater: Internal Transnationalism Remaking Center and Periphery," forthcoming in *Kritika*.

[7] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 35–124; Kate Brown, *A Biography*

But the Ukrainian lands were also a major center of resistance to Soviet rule. Peasant communities resisted the breakneck collectivization instituted in the 1930s—an impulse driven at times by ideological opposition to Bolshevik rule and at others by local communities' efforts to preserve their traditions. Convinced that nationalist saboteurs were to blame for slow progress in Ukraine, Stalin unleashed a manmade famine and a national terror that killed millions. The violence that unfolded in Soviet Ukraine provoked an extreme backlash in Galicia, which Poland claimed after World War I. Intellectuals there formulated a potent challenge to the Soviet system—an integral nationalist movement that regarded Poles, Jews, and Bolsheviks as enemies of the Ukrainian people. By the 1930s, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which propagated this ideology, was staging regular attacks on its adversaries—and even on Ukrainian activists who rejected its radical views.[8]

Although it was Stalin and Hitler who brought World War II to Ukraine, the devastating conflict there could also be described as a civil war pitting local residents intent on preserving the Soviet empire against those who wished to destroy it. Loyal Soviet citizens hailed the war as an opportunity to eliminate fascism once and for all and to "reunite" Soviet Ukrainians with their Galician brothers; Soviet Ukraine provided much of the manpower and matériel that sustained Stalin's war effort. But Ukraine also became a leading center of anti-Soviet activity. The followers of Stepan Bandera, the wartime leader of the OUN's most militant branch, launched a national revolution amid the chaos of the war. Defining national liberation as the creation of a "Ukraine for Ukrainians," Bandera's men participated in the ethnic cleansing of local Jews and Poles and conducted a partisan war against the Red Army that lasted until the 1950s.[9]

In the war's aftermath, the deep contradictions in Ukraine's war experience gave rise to conflicting monolithic narratives. Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev—both of whom had served as war commissars and party bosses in

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of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 18–47.

[8] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 21–58, 89–118; Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 142–53.

[9] Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian–Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 24–52; Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, "The Ukrainian 'National Revolution' of 1941: Discourse and Practice of a Fascist Movement," *Kritika* 12, 1 (2011): 83–114.

eastern Ukraine—created a cult of the war, which recognized and celebrated the sacrifices that Soviet citizens had made to defeat Hitler. (The official Soviet narrative of the war was, however, replete with silences, as it refused to acknowledge the atrocities committed by Soviet forces, the special suffering that Ukrainian Jews endured, and the complicity of Soviet citizens in ethnic cleansing).[10] Galicia, which came under Soviet rule only with Stalin's invasion of Poland in 1939, nourished a separate memory of the war, which celebrated Bandera and the OUN as freedom fighters. Galicians' devotion to this alternative narrative sustained an active national resistance movement in the region throughout the late Soviet years.[11]

The first 15 years of Ukrainian independence offered a temporary respite from repeated attempts to transform a complicated history of intimacy and antipathy into a monolithic narrative. Although Ukraine's proper relationship with Russia remained a controversial topic, the founders of the new state endeavored to build a civic nation that affirmed ethnic, linguistic, and ideological diversity.[12] Trends in Ukrainian historiography reflected the pluralistic turn in society at large. A new generation of historians, bolstered by institutions such as the L´viv-based Center for the Urban History of East Central Europe and the journal *Ukraina moderna,* created a post-Soviet history for Ukraine that highlighted its heterogeneity and complexity.

Two trends of the 2000s imperiled these promising developments. The first was the rise of Vladimir Putin, who resurrected old legacies of authoritarianism, imperialism, and nationalism, treating Ukraine as a vassal state rather than a sovereign nation. The second development that undermined Ukraine's pluralistic politics was the 2004 Orange Revolution. In attempting to cleanse Ukraine of the harmful remnants of the Soviet past and to protect it from renewed threats of Russian domination, its leaders initiated their own campaign to simplify and purify the nation's history. The government of Viktor Yushchenko strongly aligned itself with Galician memory politics, declaring Bandera a national hero, offering pensions to veterans of the OUN's paramilitary units, and presenting

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[10] Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 106–57; David Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 125–202.

[11] William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 53–81, 119–219.

[12] Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 277–94; Andrei Portnov, "Istorii dlia domashnego upotrebleniia," *Ab Imperio,* no. 3 (2012): 309–24.

the 1932–33 famine as a genocide directed against the Ukrainian nation.[13] In addition to replicating the totalizing worldview that many Ukrainian patriots despised in Russian imperial and Soviet politics, this new historical orthodoxy alienated the sizable segment of Ukrainians who identified with Soviet culture and viewed Bandera as a villain.[14] The actions of the "Orange" politicians also radicalized Putin, whose efforts to keep Ukraine in Russia's imperial orbit now seemed to be jeopardized.[15]

Over the past year, Ukrainian society has again revealed its ability to imagine alternatives to Russian hegemony but has also produced dangerous new totalizing discourses. The Euromaidan movement testified to the civic maturity of the Ukrainian nation, uniting protesters from all walks of life. Yet in their fervent attempts to create a more democratic and less corrupt Ukraine, the protestors engaged in rhetoric and actions that undermined their stated commitment to pluralism. Images and slogans of Bandera figured prominently in the demonstrations; extreme right-wing groups resorted to violence, which they presented as redemptory.[16] When confronted by opponents of the Euromaidan—who constituted around 40 percent of the Ukrainian population and much more in the East and South—supporters of the revolution dismissed their critics as "dregs" (*sovki*) of Ukrainian society unsuited for membership in the nation.[17] Rather than initiating a dialogue with the revolution's critics, the governments created after the collapse of the Yanukovych regime endeavored to marginalize them. Recent legislation will effectively destroy the two most popular political parties in eastern and southern Ukraine.[18] President Petro

[13] The Ukrainian Institute for National Memory, established by Yushchenko in 2006, played an important role in these efforts. See, for example, Volodymyr Viatrovych et al., *Ukrains´ka povstans´ka armiia: Istoriia neskorenykh* (Kyiv: Ukrains´kyi instytut natsional´noi pam´iati, 2008).

[14] John-Paul Himka, "The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Ukraine," in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe,* ed. Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 626–61.

[15] Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 179–80.

[16] For prescient warnings about these dangers, see David Marples, "Ukraine: The View from the West," 20 February 2014 (www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/david-marples/ukraine-view-from-west, all websites accessed 14 December 2014); and Tarik Cyril Amar, Omer Bartov, and Per Rudling, "Supporting Ukraine Means Opposing Anti-Semitic Nationalism Now, Not Later," 24 March 2014 (http://tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/166945/no-time-to-waste-in-ukraine).

[17] Andriy Portnov, "Ukraina ta ii 'dalekyi skhid': Pro halyts´kyi reduktsionizm ta ioho henealohiiu," 1 August 2014 (www.historians.in.ua/index.php/avtorska-kolonka/1231-andrii-portnov-ukraina-ta-ii-dalekyi-skhid-pro-halytskyi-reduktsionizm-ta-ioho-henealohiiu).

[18] The Communist Party, which won 13 percent of the national popular vote in 2012, has been banned outright, and "lustration" legislation will destroy the infrastructure of the Party of Regions. See Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL), "Ukraine's Lustration Process

Poroshenko has signaled that he will resume Yushchenko's efforts to rehabilitate the OUN and its paramilitary units.[19] Volodymyr Viatrovych, the controversial historian who now heads the Institute for National Memory, has opened an "historical front" that aspires to use Ukrainian history as a weapon in the ongoing "information war" against Russia.[20]

The postrevolutionary governments' disregard for their critics led to protests and violent clashes across Ukraine's East and South in the winter and spring of 2014.[21] It also emboldened Russia's most extreme imperialist and nationalist voices, providing imagery and sound bites for an elaborate propaganda campaign claiming that a "fascist junta" had seized control of Ukraine.[22] Putin invoked this fantasy to justify his annexation of Crimea as well as his repeated incursions into the Donbas in support of the separatist insurgency that coalesced there in April. Meanwhile, the separatists and Russian nationalists active in the Donbas embarked on their own attempts to simplify and purify Ukraine's complex history. Denying Ukraine's very existence, they imagine the nation's eastern and southern periphery as "New Russia," and they rely on terror and repression to silence those who challenge their political agenda and historical memory.[23]

The war in the Donbas further radicalized Ukraine's government and civil society. Kyiv relied on right-wing militias—some of which adhere to neo-Nazi ideology—to combat the insurgency and offered nationalist vigilantes a carte

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Unlikely to Be Smooth Sailing," 12 April 2014 (www.rferl.org/content/ukraines-lustration-process-unlikely-to-be-smooth-sailing/25330579.html).

[19] Mat Babiak, "Poroshenko: 'UPA Are Heroes,' Will Consider Giving Veterans Legal Status," 26 September 2014 (http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/09/26/poroshenko-to-consider-giving-upa-veterans-legal-status). In October 2014, Poroshenko announced that he will change the "Day of the Defender of the Fatherland" to 14 October, a day traditionally commemorated as the anniversary of the creation of the OUN's paramilitary army.

[20] Viatrovych's martial tropes and his very terminology for this effort—which he describes as a "likbez" operation to eliminate "historical illiteracy"—are indebted to Bolshevik rhetoric. (http://likbez.org.ua/uk) Several scholars have charged that Viatrovych's memory politics whitewash the wartime atrocities of the OUN and nationalist paramilitary units (Portnov, "Istorii dlia domashnego upotrebleniia," 324–38).

[21] For a detailed study of regional attitudes, see "Stavlennia do situatsii na Skhodi," 22 July 2014 (www.ratinggroup.com.ua/products/politic/data/entry/14098). Vice News provided remarkable reporting on events in eastern and southern Ukraine as they unfolded (https://news.vice.com/show/russian-roulette).

[22] The "biker show" staged during Putin's visit to Sevastopol´ in August 2014 offers a glimpse into the violent Ukrainian fantasies of Russian nationalists. It portrayed the Ukrainian revolution not only as a Nazi coup but also as an international conspiracy directed by satanic forces (www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPnb97ybtiU).

[23] In September 2014, for example, separatists seized control of the History Department at Donetsk National University and demanded that all employees swear loyalty oaths ("Boiovyky rozihnaly kafedry istorii Ukrainy v DonNU," *Ukrains´ka pravda*, 19 September 2014 [www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/09/19/7038338]).

blanche in eastern Ukraine.[24] It endorsed sweeping laws on censorship and arbitrary detention aimed at silencing Ukraine's internal "enemies."[25] Some Ukrainian patriots have even presented mass murder as a legitimate solution to the nation's "eastern" problem.[26] Society at war produced violent and authoritarian impulses that further complicated Ukraine's evolution into the functional and democratic state of which the Euromaidan protesters dreamed.[27]

Efforts to create monolithic historical narratives, to develop anti-Soviet cults of personality, and to silence dissenting voices will not alleviate the threats that a bellicose Russia poses to Ukrainian sovereignty; on the contrary, attempts to simplify and purify a complex space will only entrap Ukraine in continuing cycles of violence. Ukraine's best defense against aggressors who deny its very existence is to develop a capacious understanding of its past that acknowledges the suffering that its population endured under imperialism, national chauvinism, and communism, as well as the role that its inhabitants played in creating these systems in the first place. Its best response to threats to its territorial integrity is a rigorous political pluralism that celebrates the diversity of its residents, past and present.

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[24] Anton Shekhovtsov, "Look Far Right and Look Again," 11 July 2014 (www.opendemocracy. net/print/84383); Amnesty International, "Impunity Reigns for Abductions and Ill Treatment by Pro-Kyiv Vigilantes in Eastern Ukraine," 6 August 2014 (www.amnesty.org/en/news/ Impunity-reigns-for-abductions-ill-treatment-eastern-Ukraine-06-08-2014).

[25] RFERL, "New Sanctions Bill Raises Free-Press Fears in Ukraine," 13 August 2014 (www. rferl.org/content/ukraine-sanctions-russia-free-press/26529268.html); Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, "President Signs Repressive Anti-Terrorist Laws," 22 August 2014 (http:// khpg.org.ua/en/index.php?id=1408631275).

[26] For a thoughtful treatment of this rhetoric, see Keith Gessen, "Why Not Kill Them All?" *London Review of Books*, 11 September 2014, 18–22. For a striking example, see the comments of the journalist Bohdan Butkevych on Hromads´ke.tv, the Internet television station that served as the voice of the revolution (www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhYyj5l9Lx0). This episode was recycled endlessly on Russian social media.

[27] For a poignant illustration of this point, see Anastasiia Rozhkova's comic strip "Skaz pro Ivana" (http://commons.com.ua/skaz-pro-ivana-skaz-pro-ivana).