

Serhy YEKELCHYK

**NATIONAL HEROES FOR A NEW UKRAINE:  
MERGING THE VOCABULARIES OF THE DIASPORA,  
REVOLUTION, AND MASS CULTURE\***

In April 2015 the Ukrainian parliament passed a series of so-called decommunization laws, which forcefully asserted the nationalizing version of the country's history. In addition to designating Soviet rule as criminal and banning the use of Soviet symbols, the legislation established an authoritative list of "twentieth-century fighters for Ukraine's freedom and independence." Starting with the national governments of the Revolution period, the list went on to include the Ukrainian nationalist guerrillas of the 1940s and the dissidents of the late Soviet period.<sup>1</sup> The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) were perhaps the most controversial entries in this new canon of national heroes, but it was the Soviet-style attempt to legislate obligatory homage to designated groups and declare any denial

---

\* The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and Marta D. Olynyk for her help in editing the text.

<sup>1</sup> Detailed analysis of this legislation lies beyond the scope of this article. See the following insightful, early reactions to the decommunization laws: Andrei Portnov. *Ob "istoricheskikh zakonakh" 9 apreliia* // The Network of Empire and Nationalism Studies. 2015. April 13. <http://net.abimperio.net/node/3437>; Oxana Shevel. *De-Communization Laws Need to Be Amended to Conform to European Standards* // Vox Ukraine. 2015. May 2. <http://voxukraine.org/2015/05/01/de-communization-laws-need-to-be-amended-to-conform-to-european-standards/>.

of their heroic status “illegal” that elicited protests from some academics.<sup>2</sup> Cosponsored by the director of Ukraine’s Institute of National Memory, the series of bills was indeed an attempt to establish an obligatory version of national memory for the Ukrainian nation, which is facing external aggression and inner splits, both encoded in conflicting attitudes to the Soviet past.

However, any change in collective memory is necessarily a gradual process predicated upon transformations in education and popular culture rather than simply administrative actions.<sup>3</sup> This article will attempt to analyze how the changing politics of memory in post-Soviet Ukraine have succeeded in establishing some new national heroes but not others, and what factors contributed to the success or failure of memory projects promoted by the state, the Ukrainian diaspora, and patriotic intellectuals. Cinematic representations of the wartime nationalist insurgents and a popular novel about the peasant rebels in the early 1920s will serve as two main case studies of unsuccessful attempts to create a historical memory that would fit with the uniting, civic identity of a democratic Ukraine as it was imagined by the rank-and-file participants of the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions.<sup>4</sup>

In Ukraine as well as in other Soviet republics the disintegration of party ideological controls in the late 1980s brought to prominence new symbolic markers of collective identity. These symbols usually came from the rich depository of the national past and were presented to the public as the restoration of the nation’s historical memory. Patriotic activists, who served as the promoters of the new canon, depicted it rhetorically as the opposite of Soviet dogma and a revival of the organic, anthropomorphized nation, which needed to shed the imposed Soviet memory in order to recover its true national self.<sup>5</sup> Focusing on the cult of national heroes in literature and

---

<sup>2</sup> Open Letter from Scholars and Experts on Ukraine Re. the So-Called “Anti-Communist Law” // Krytyka. 2015. April. <http://krytyka.com/en/articles/open-letter-scholars-and-experts-ukraine-re-so-called-anti-communist-law>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg (Eds.). *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*. New York, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that this “civic” or “political” vision of the Ukrainian nation was not anti-ethnic, yet it was put forward as both national and political liberation from the past and presented as both authoritarian and pro-Russian. See Ilya Gerasimov. *The First Postcolonial Revolution // Ab Imperio*. 2014. No. 3. Pp. 22–44.

<sup>5</sup> Recent works on the politics of memory in independent Ukraine include Wilfried Jilge. *Nationale Geschichtspolitik während der Zeit der Perestroika in der Ukraine // Helmut Altrichter (Ed.). Gegenerinnerung. Geschichte als politisches Argument im Transformationsprozess Ost-, Ostmittel- und Südosteuropas*. Munich, 2006. Pp. 99–128; David Marples. *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*. Budapest, 2007; and Andrei Portnov. *Uprazhneniia s istoriei po-ukrainski*. Moscow, 2010.

cinema, this article will argue that the real mechanism of constructing a new historical memory for the new Ukraine was quite complex and, in fact, relied on the tropes inherited from the Soviet discourse of national identity. The latter's uneasy amalgamation with nationalist mythologies preserved in the diaspora determined the ideological content of the new historical memory, which came to include both the overarching national and diverse regional memory canons.

With Ukraine's historical and cultural hierarchies in flux in the aftermath of the Euromaidan Revolution and the Donbas war, it is instructive to analyze the past transformation of ethnic memory anchors, such as the Cossacks and the Holodomor, into widely accepted national symbols of Ukrainian civic patriotism. It is even more important to make sense of the limited regional and political appeal of divisive memory anchors that are often constructed by using the dogmatic blueprints of Soviet Socialist Realism or nineteenth-century ethnic nationalism. The Euromaidan Revolution and the war in the Donbas provide an opening for the creation of a new Ukrainian historical memory not based on Soviet foundations, but the powerful impact of these events on national memory can work both ways. The revolutionary reassertion of the Ukrainian civic nation can grant new meaning to the symbols that had long been coalescing into the national canon, but it can also be hijacked by radical nationalists promoting exclusivist and xenophobic mythologies and interpretations.

### ***The Post-Soviet Memory Imbroglia***

The transition from Soviet discourse on the past to a new national one, which took place in 1989–1991, did not involve a clear break or systematic replacement of one orthodoxy with another. On the contrary, the new narrative of the national past became institutionalized more through compromise than through antagonism, as Ukraine's communist elites gradually switched to a more "nationalized" version of history. It was not accidental that the Ukrainian Cossacks became the first national heroes in the new narrative. Because they were also glorified in Soviet times – albeit not all of them and largely for their role in Ukraine's "reunification" with Russia in 1654 – their promotion to the role of the nation's forefathers did not challenge the Soviet canon directly but, rather, built upon it.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The class criterion was also present in the late Soviet appraisal of the Ukrainian Cossacks, but since the 1940s it has played a secondary role. See Serhy Yekelchuk. *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*. Toronto, 2004.

In 1990 and 1991 mass festivals took place throughout Ukraine to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Zaporozhian Host, the Cossack stronghold on the lower Dnipro. The Cossacks provided a classic example of an “invented tradition” as a component of a national identity, a component that became enshrined as an identity marker in the age of nationalism in the nineteenth century and subsequently appropriated by others as they identified with the nation.<sup>7</sup> During the jubilee celebrations patriotic activists from Kyiv and western Ukraine traveled to the southeastern provinces, where the historical Cossacks originated, in order to instill a stronger sense of Ukrainian identity in the local residents.<sup>8</sup> There was no mass Cossack movement in what is now western Ukraine; moreover, the historical Cossacks actually laid siege to the region’s main city, Lviv, and attacked the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the present-day pillar of western Ukrainian identity. Nevertheless, in the late twentieth century, western Ukrainians could come to the southeast to tell the locals about their past, because the Cossacks had long been part of the modern Ukrainian national identity, having become well-entrenched in western Ukraine and relatively weaker on the lower Dnipro. Against some resistance from the local authorities, the campaign proved to be a successful effort in mass mobilization in the name of the nation.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, the Ukrainian SSR’s legislature, still dominated at the time by communist functionaries, issued a declaration in 1990 presenting the Cossack jubilee as proof that Ukraine was a great European nation “with its own heroic past.” The document also called the festivities an important occasion for the “rebirth of historical memory” and national consolidation.<sup>10</sup>

There remained one important bridge to cross: the rehabilitation of the Cossack leaders who had resisted Russian rule. Patriotic intellectuals took the first step in this direction in a curious campaign that merged the dream of prosperity with the Cossack past and played out in the best traditions of a sensationalist, mass-culture extravaganza. The writer and parliamentarian Volodymyr Yavorivsky helped popularize the legend of Polubotok’s gold,

<sup>7</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Eds.). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, UK, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Sysyn. *The Reemergence of the Ukrainian Nation and Cossack Mythology* // *Social Research*. 1991. Vol. 58. No. 4. P. 858.

<sup>9</sup> Serhii M. Plokyh. *Historical Debates and Territorial Claims: Cossack Mythology in the Russian-Ukrainian Border Dispute* // S. Frederick Starr (Ed.). *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. Armonk, NY, 1994. P. 159.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Karel Berkhoff. *Brothers, We Are All of Cossack Stock: The Cossack Campaign in Ukrainian Newspapers on the Eve of Independence* // *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. 1997. Vol. 21. Nos. 1–2. P. 122.

the colossal deposit in the Bank of England that Hetman Pavlo Polubotok allegedly made before being imprisoned by Tsar Peter I in 1723, bequeathing it to a future independent Ukraine. The legend generated immense popular interest in Polubotok as well as the separatist Cossack leaders.<sup>11</sup>

This episode paved the way for the rehabilitation of the more controversial Hetman Ivan Mazepa, although the latter did not become a national hero immediately. Mazepa's portrait has graced the ten-hryvnia bills since 1996, but his incorporation into the new national canon proved slow and gradual, probably because of the very negative image of the hetman in Imperial Russian and Soviet history textbooks and the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church has anathematized him for centuries. An unquestionably positive character in diasporan and western Ukrainian narratives, in eastern and central Ukraine Mazepa's entry into the pantheon of national heroes took place only after the Orange Revolution, under President Victor Yushchenko, and remains incomplete. In 2007 the Kyiv city council named one of the city's central avenues after Mazepa, but three years later, during President Yanukovich's term, it renamed the section where the Kyivan Monastery of the Caves (Lavra) stood as Lavrska Street. Reportedly, this was done as a personal favor to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose monastery it was; three centuries after Mazepa went against the Russian tsar, the church still has not annulled its anathema on the Ukrainian hetman.<sup>12</sup>

The Yanukovich presidency (2010–2014) generally marked a return to the historical symbols common to the Ukrainian and Russian national narratives, such as ancient Orthodox churches and princes of Kyivan Rus'; the divisive ones were deemphasized. Whereas Yushchenko devoted considerable personal efforts to promoting public and international awareness of the Holodomor, the Ukrainian Famine of 1932–1933 that was engineered by the Soviet state, Yanukovich downplayed this issue for fear of offending the Russian authorities. The Holodomor topic, like the Cossacks, began returning to public discourse in the late 1980s and more decisively in the 1990s, but it represented a drastic break with the Soviet legacy of denying the famine. That, as well as Russian opposition to portraying the Holodomor as an exclusively Ukrainian tragedy, resulted in the famine's significantly

---

<sup>11</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk. *Cossack Gold: History, Myth, and the Dream of Prosperity in the Age of Post-Soviet Transition* // *Canadian Slavonic Papers*. 1998. Vol. 40. Nos. 3–4. Pp. 311–25.

<sup>12</sup> Chomu v Kyievi pereimenuvaly vulytsiu Ivana Mazepy? // *Radio Svoboda*. 2010. July 14. <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/2099001.html>.

longer path to widespread public acceptance as a unifying national symbol. It truly became such only under Yushchenko, when commemorative marches and the tradition of candlelight vigils to remember the victims won popular acceptance nationwide. As was the case with the Cossacks, the campaign to raise public awareness originated in the diaspora and was embraced to various degrees by successive national governments.<sup>13</sup> The campaign focused on eastern and central Ukraine, precisely those regions that were hit hardest by the Holodomor, but also the ones where a modern Ukrainian national identity with its attendant historical narratives remained weak.<sup>14</sup>

A story of victimhood offering post-Soviet Ukrainian audiences various strategies of acceptance and identification with the long-suffering “people,” the Holodomor was nevertheless a story without heroes. In the 1990s the Ukrainian authorities remained cautious about denouncing Soviet heroes of the Revolution and the Civil War era and rehabilitating Ukrainian nationalist leaders from that period. They were even more afraid of burning their fingers on the highly controversial World War II period. In the 1990s the Communist and Socialist parties still commanded significant voter support in Ukraine, and they often fought back on these issues. Soon, the politics of class became enmeshed with the politics of ethnicity, an association that continued when Yanukovich’s Party of Regions took over in the 2000s as the main political force in the same regions where the mainstream leftists previously predominated. The Party of Regions largely abandoned the social-justice rhetoric of its predecessor, but retained and further developed the identity project of defending Russian speakers and the Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War. The creation of a unifying national identity thus became even more challenging.

Until the Yushchenko presidency, the Ukrainian authorities had managed to rehabilitate only one twentieth-century political figure previously condemned by Soviet ideologists but prominent in the diasporan canon. That was the distinguished historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky, who served as the chairman of the Ukrainian revolutionary parliament, the Central Rada, 1917–1918. The real leaders of the Ukrainian Revolution, Volodymyr Vyn-

---

<sup>13</sup> Frank E. Sysyn. *The Role of the Ukrainian Diaspora in Research and Public Discussion of the Famine of 1932–1933* // Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian (Eds.). *Studies in Comparative Genocide*. New York, 1999. Pp. 182–215.

<sup>14</sup> Considerable literature exists on the political uses of the Holodomor in independent Ukraine, which falls beyond the scope of this article. See, for example, H. V. Kasianov. *Danse macabre: Holod 1932–1933 rokiv u politytsi, masovii svidomosti ta istoriohrafii* (1980-ti–pochatok 2000-kh). Kyiv, 2010.

nychenko and Symon Petliura, did not fit into the post-communist memory project. Vynnychenko was too much of a communist, while Petliura lacked any record of military victories or state-building achievements. Even the Ukrainian diaspora as a whole did not view Petliura as a suitable symbol, not so much because of the chaos and violence he could not contain, as because of his alliance with Poland that later surrendered the eastern – Ukrainian – part of Galicia. Hrushevsky's nonpartisan candidacy represented not simply a safer choice but an inevitable one. Unlike Petliura with his failed military dictatorship, Hrushevsky's reputation rested on his monumental historical works, which the post-Soviet Ukrainian elites adopted into the new national canon soon after independence was proclaimed. Hrushevsky's interpretation of the past helped establish Ukrainian history as separate from Russian, and the former party ideologues and red directors who ruled Ukraine in the 1990s found it useful in legitimizing their rule.<sup>15</sup> In 1996 a majestic monument to Hrushevsky was unveiled in Kyiv, and his portrait appeared on the fifty-hryvnia banknote. A Hrushevsky Street appeared in central Kyiv immediately after independence, in September 1991, providing the parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers with a much more appropriate address than the previous Kirov Street. Yet a number of monuments to Soviet revolutionary figures still dotted the landscape of central and eastern Ukraine, and streets named after them remained a common sight as well.

By the mid-1990s the Ukrainian elites stopped discussing the diaspora's role as a custodian of national memory during the dark decades of Soviet rule. The leaders of the newly independent state busied themselves trying to fit some core Soviet symbols into the new nationalized memory framework, while the diaspora threatened to upset this delicate balancing act. A conflict soon developed over the role of radical Ukrainian nationalists during World War II. A significant and vocal part of the Ukrainian diaspora in the West saw the nationalist leader Stepan Bandera and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army as national heroes and martyrs in the nation's struggle against its enemies. Yet they were also the villains in the traditional Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War, which the authorities remained reluctant to challenge for fear of consequences at the ballot box. In the 1990s the diasporan cult of Bandera and the UPA became established as the new orthodoxy in the

---

<sup>15</sup> See Yaroslav Hrytsak's perceptive essay in Ukrainian titled "The Rehabilitation of Hrushevsky and the Legitimation of the Nomenklatura" in the newspaper *Den* (October 29, 1996, p. 6); Serhy Yekelchuk. *The Location of Nation: Postcolonial Perspectives on Ukrainian Historical Debates // Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*. 1997. Vol. 11. Nos. 1–2. Pp. 161–84.

western region of Galicia, the UPA's stronghold in the 1940s.<sup>16</sup> The new provincial and municipal authorities there eventually erected several impressive monuments to Bandera, all looking stylistically similar to Soviet-era Lenin statues. Yet, the key to an electoral victory in post-communist Ukraine lay in winning the center in addition to either the east or the west. Residents of central Ukraine were still not ready to accept the rehabilitation of the UPA, while in the east the local elites cultivated the vilification of "Galician nationalists" as a strategy of rejecting modern Ukrainian national identity. For the authorities in the capital, taking any firm stand on the UPA and Bandera would have been politically costly. In fact, scholars have noted the ambiguous and heterogeneous character of the politics of memory in Ukraine as its main distinguishing feature under all presidents.<sup>17</sup> An uneasy symbiosis of conflicting regional narratives was actually in the interests of the Kyiv authorities.

Even the Orange Revolution did not resolve this deadlock. Earlier in his term, President Yushchenko called more cautiously for reconciliation between the UPA and Red Army veterans, as well as for state pensions and benefits for the former. None of this happened, though, and the planned parade of UPA veterans in Kyiv on the sixtieth anniversary of victory in World War II was canceled. It was only when Yushchenko faced a political crisis in 2007 that he made a decisive statement by awarding the Hero of Ukraine medal to Roman Shukhevych, supreme commander of the UPA. The president's symbolic move was probably calculated to rally support in the western regions, but the Party of Regions and the Communist Party, as well as Russian state media, widely available in Ukraine, all jumped at the chance to equate the civil-society protest movement that was the Orange Revolution with wartime radical nationalism. Yushchenko took the final step by awarding the same medal to Bandera at the very end of his term, in 2010, having just scored a miserable 5 percent in the presidential election. Whether he merely wanted to fire a loud parting shot or was hoping to lay the groundwork for his small right-wing faction in the parliament – or even simply to undermine his former ally-turned-archenemy, Yulia Tymoshenko, remains a mystery. The award resulted in an international scandal, with the European Parliament, Poland, and Israel condemning Yushchenko's decree, and led to further polarization of historical memory in Ukraine.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> See an extended treatment of the political struggles over the legacy of the UPA in Marples. *Heroes and Villains*.

<sup>17</sup> Portnov. *Uprazhneniia*. Pp. 101–2.

<sup>18</sup> See Timothy Snyder. *A Fascist Hero in Democratic Kiev* // NYR Daily. 2010. February 24. <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/feb/24/a-fascist-hero-in-democratic-kiev>.



**Fig. 1.** Stepan Bandera monument in Lviv (2007). Photo by the author, 2014.

However, the 2010 Bandera scandal helped usher in the long-overdue intellectual discussion in Ukraine about what kind of national memory a democratic, European Ukraine needs. Some commentators have noted

insightfully that for Yushchenko and many other Ukrainian patriots of the post-communist period, Bandera is the best available symbol of Ukrainian resistance to Stalinism rather than an icon of totalitarian radical nationalism. Just as the Soviet ideologues labeled all Ukrainian patriots as Banderites, embracing Bandera as a national hero signified resistance to Soviet mythologies.<sup>19</sup> Another important aspect of the 2010 debate was its transatlantic dimension. As intellectuals in Ukraine were reassessing the version of national memory that had been transplanted from the diaspora, the diasporan canon also experienced an attack from within. John-Paul Himka and some other scholars questioned the UPA's near-sacred status in mainstream diasporan politics, sparking a dispute that became far more acrimonious than the one in Ukraine.<sup>20</sup>

The extremely divisive nature of Bandera and the UPA as national symbols explains the relative dearth of nonpartisan books on these topics. In March 2015 a leading Ukrainian historian, Yaroslav Hrytsak, asked the audience of a Ukrainian television show on history to name at least one Bandera biography in Ukrainian. After a few seconds of silence, he concluded: "That's it in a nutshell: in 25 years Ukrainian historians have not managed to write a single good biography related to the topic of such great interest in both Ukraine and Russia."<sup>21</sup> Some biographies of Bandera did appear in independent Ukraine, of course, but Hrytsak wanted to emphasize that none of them became a best seller or an intellectual sensation; none stood out as a fresh new look on the familiar nationalist icon. Moreover, laudatory treatments of Bandera read much like Soviet biographies of Lenin or Stalin, which is also true of cinematic treatments, a topic that is discussed in the next section.

---

<sup>19</sup> The materials of the Ukrainian debates about Bandera are conveniently collected in T. C. Amar, I. Balytsky, and Ia. Hrytsak (Eds.). *Strasti za Banderou: staty ta esei*. Kyiv, 2010. Several participants in this collection, most notably, Volodymyr Kulyk, Mykola Riabchuk, and Andrii Portnov, make the point about Bandera becoming a symbol of resistance to Soviet myths, which is distinct from the historical Bandera.

<sup>20</sup> See Amar et al. *Strasti za Banderou*. Pp. 129–71.

<sup>21</sup> Shchob peremohty Putina, treba zrobyty ioho smishnym // *Gazeta.ua*. 2015. March 26. [http://gazeta.ua/articles/history/\\_sob-peremogti-putina-treba-zrobiti-jogo-smishnim-istoriki/617469](http://gazeta.ua/articles/history/_sob-peremogti-putina-treba-zrobiti-jogo-smishnim-istoriki/617469).

*Nationalist Heroes on the Silver Screen*

The radical reconfiguration of national historical memory, which the 2015 decommunization law attempted, made relevant the previous experience of introducing into the Ukrainian cultural space potentially divisive memory anchors from the nationalist canon. Some of them failed to take root – and not just because of their political divisiveness at the time; deeper reasons must be sought in the limitations that the very architecture of the nationalist mythology imposed on the cultural products, as well as in the holdover of Soviet artistic concepts and the new symbol's incongruity with Soviet mass-culture clichés.

Many commentators have noted a stylistic similarity between the statues of the radical nationalist leader Stepan Bandera erected in the western region of post-communist Ukraine and the statues of Lenin that they replaced.<sup>22</sup> Of course, similarity between statues is but one expression of the deeper parallels between the ideologies, cults, and symbols of the two totalitarian projects that could not be reduced to the simple holdover of Soviet artistic concepts or sculptors having been trained in Soviet times. The radical nationalists share with their sworn enemies, orthodox communists, not just a leader cult and an organicist vision of social categories (nations or classes), but also the aesthetics of power and a didactic understanding of culture. For this reason, it would be productive to examine the cultural products celebrating nationalist heroes with the help of interpretive instruments developed for the analysis of Socialist Realism. In fact, George G. Grabowicz has long suggested a fundamental affinity between the mainstream postwar Ukrainian literature in the diaspora and Soviet Ukraine by labeling the former “national realism.”<sup>23</sup>

This section analyzes two Ukrainian biographical films about nationalist heroes, both of them produced and directed by Oles Yanchuk. *Assassination: An Autumn Murder in Munich* (1995) is a film about Bandera, and *The Undefeated* (2000) portrays Roman Shukhevych, a prominent Banderite and commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Both films were funded by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, and the latter one (dur-

---

<sup>22</sup> Istorik Georgii Kasianov: Leninu i Bandere možhno sdelat odin pamiatnik. Meniat tolko golovy na rezbe // Tsenzor.net. 2013. March 12. [http://censor.net.ua/resonance/235563/istorik\\_georgiyi\\_kasyanov\\_leninu\\_i\\_bandere\\_mojno\\_sdelat\\_odin\\_pamyatnik\\_menyat\\_tolko\\_golovy\\_na\\_rezbe](http://censor.net.ua/resonance/235563/istorik_georgiyi_kasyanov_leninu_i_bandere_mojno_sdelat_odin_pamyatnik_menyat_tolko_golovy_na_rezbe).

<sup>23</sup> Hryhorii Hrabovych [George Grabowicz]. U poshukakh velykoi literatury // Do istorii ukrainskoi literatury. Kyiv, 2003. Pp. 535–574.

ing Yushchenko's presidency) also received funding from the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and the local authorities in Ivano-Frankivsk. Needless to say, both films are conceived and executed in the genre of eulogy or, perhaps, to use a Soviet subgenre category, as "historical-revolutionary" films. Yet, they display telling similarities with and differences from the Soviet model.

If one employs the analytical approach developed in Katerina Clark's classic work *The Soviet Novel: History as a Ritual*,<sup>24</sup> which has been used successfully to deconstruct Soviet films as well as literature, one notable difference immediately becomes apparent. Classic Socialist Realist novels (and films, such as *Chapayev*) feature as a central plot line the acquisition of socialist consciousness, the transition from an instinctive commitment to the cause to becoming a conscientious communist. This transition often took place under the tutelage of a mentor and almost always in the process of fighting for the revolutionary cause or building socialism. Nothing like that is found in the nationalistic narratives of the two films. Not only the main protagonists but also the rank-and-file activists are depicted as faithful sons and daughters of Ukraine who are fully committed to the nation. Such an incongruity cannot be attributed simply to the solemn-biographical genre, which does not allow for such a portrayal of the greats, because even Soviet films about Marx and Lenin showed the development of their personalities and political views. It is more likely that the dissimilarity is related to an opposition between the primordialist, essentializing vision of the nation that radical nationalists embrace and the Marxist-Leninist theory of transition from spontaneity to consciousness. To put it simply, for the nationalists their kin were "born Ukrainians," whereas for Marxists, they have to be shown the right path.

Beyond the fact that there is no character development in the two movies (which already makes them bad cinema), they share a great many plot models and tropes with Socialist Realist literature and film. Such parallels go beyond the positive hero, the family metaphor, and the native land: they are recognizable tropes from Soviet films and intertextual references to them.

Although Bandera looks a lot like Lenin in the film, it is more productive to compare this work to the last and best-known portrayal of Stalin in a film, Mikhail Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* (1949). In both cases, the leader's biography is narrated against the background of a major conflict that

---

<sup>24</sup> Katerina Clark. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. 3d ed. Bloomington, 2000.

he directs from afar. This limitation necessitates the inclusion of a proxy, a junior figure who can do the fighting and also sustain a love intrigue, an area that was obviously off-limits for the main protagonist. In *The Fall of Berlin* this is the steelmaker-turned-soldier Aleksei, who is in love with the teacher Natasha, whereas in *The Assassination* it is Captain Orlyk, whose love interest is Bandera's courier, Marta. Bandera is also like Lenin and Stalin in numerous Soviet films in that he speaks as if dictating a political document and practices a visionary's gaze (staring off to the side or above people's heads into some abstract ideological space accessible only to him). He is always dressed in a perfectly ironed white shirt and usually wears a suit and tie. Needless to say, the leader is always right, a point usually emphasized by some secondary character, as if it were not obvious enough: "Bandera was right. Ukraine can count only on its own forces."<sup>25</sup>

In terms of narrative framing, *The Assassination* presented the filmmakers with significant challenges. It opens with a muted scene filmed in color at Bandera's grave "in the present," but continues in black and white "in the past." Unfortunately, inserted between the two is a subtitle with the Banderite motto "You will achieve a free Ukraine or you will die fighting for it," as well as a long historical introduction (voiceover in Ukrainian, subtitles in English). The film begins with NKVD troops pursuing a UPA detachment near the Czechoslovakian–Bavarian border, an important introductory visual characterization of the Soviets as an invading, killing force, and the Ukrainian guerrillas as defending themselves. The film should have ended after Orlyk's suicide in the marshes, when the NKVD troops were about to catch him. Indeed, musically and visually this is the proper end of the plot, as well as of the organized armed resistance to Soviet rule, but the main protagonist, Bandera, is still alive, and therefore the film must continue. The last part of the movie then deteriorates into a poorly crafted spy intrigue leading to the leader's assassination by a Soviet agent.

Unlike the character of Stalin portrayed in *The Fall of Berlin*, Bandera is not implicitly presented as the head of a symbolic family (the nation). He is not shown caring for his subordinates or giving them advice on their love life.<sup>26</sup> Until the very last scene before his assassination, he appears cold and withdrawn with his own wife and children, at best kissing them in passing

---

<sup>25</sup> Atentat: Osinnie vbyvstvo v Miunkheni / Dir. Oles Yanchuk. Oles-Film and Natsionalna kinostudiia khudozhnikh filmiv im. O. Dovzhenka, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> For a subtle analysis of *The Fall of Berlin*, see Lilya Kaganovsky. *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin*. Pittsburgh, 2008. Pp. 146–53.

on his way somewhere. As his small son says in the film, “Daddy will be writing something until late at night again.”

Whereas one can attribute the lack of character development to the ideological background rather than to simply inferior filmmaking, it is more difficult to make this connection with regard to the lack of individualized psychological characterization of the UPA fighters. They are portrayed as a cohesive mass; one undistinguishable from the other. Even *The Fall of Berlin* does a better job of this, and other Soviet war films have created a gallery of unforgettable heroes. The nationalist guerrillas, however, are religious, always diligently praying before a mission. Attempts to humanize them for the audience are rather pathetic, ranging from fraternizing with American soldiers after the latter give them chewing gum to repeated complaints about the absence of women. The fighters’ love for Ukraine is abstract and declarative.

The motif of the forest or the native land in general also remains undeveloped in *The Assassination*. “We will remain there forever,” says one of the UPA officers about the forests, but he says this in West Germany. The film ends with a landscape, a high hill over the river with a white cross atop, thus establishing western Ukraine as the symbolic homeland.

By the year 2000, when *The Undefeated* was made, director Oles Yanchuk and his diasporan sponsors had learned to market their version of history with more subtlety. No more nationalist slogans as epigraphs or long, didactic introductory voiceovers; instead, this film begins like a Hollywood thriller, with an armed man standing quietly in the snowy forest listening to what is going on around him. The cinematography has also improved greatly. Slow camera movement and low angles contrast perfectly with the agility and constant alertness of the main protagonist. In fact, there is so much of the spy thriller in this biography of Shukhevych that a post-Soviet viewer would need only a few hints to identify its cultural pedigree – and then watch for the expected intertextual clues. They are sure to come: disguised as a Soviet colonel, Shukhevych looks great in the enemy uniform, and he is characterized as “an excellent athlete, the champion of Galicia in swimming and the 400-meter sprint.”<sup>27</sup> If one has not yet recognized the references to the famous Soviet spy series *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, the meeting over coffee at a noisy café with German chatter and music in the background should do it. The only thing is that Shukhevych is not at the café with his wife, but with Bandera.

---

<sup>27</sup> Neskorenyi / Dir. Oles Yanchuk. Oles-Film and Natsionalna kinostudiia khudozhnikh filmiv im. O. Dovzhenka, 2000.

A dashing action hero in this film, Shukhevych is nevertheless no James Bond. He is constantly surrounded by adoring female Banderites, but these romances are never consummated in the film (unlike in real life) because his thoughts always return to his wife.<sup>28</sup> In this, the cinematic Shukhevych is also the descendant of Soviet intelligence officers, whose loyalty to the Motherland was represented through their longing for their wives and mothers. Shukhevych's emotionality is another tribute to the Soviet cinematic tradition, in which strong male heroes were always allowed an emotional moment in order to underline their humanity and heartfelt commitment to the cause. In the movie, we see Shukhevych crying when he finds the body of his murdered brother in an NKVD prison.

This episode also allows the filmmakers to weave in one of the key elements of the diasporan narrative of Ukrainian martyrdom: the NKVD's mass killing of political prisoners during the hasty Soviet retreat from Western Ukraine in the summer of 1941. Yet its inclusion only underscored the incongruity of using a Soviet narrative model to market the nationalist memory project to audiences enamored with Soviet films – and their historical interpretations. Perhaps tellingly, the central leitmotif of the film is typologically Soviet too, that of a winter forest, where the UPA guerrillas swear an oath to Ukraine, fight, and die. This is a version of the Motherland paradigm. As in other films portraying the nationalist insurgents, we see them attacking the German army, but never the Soviets. It is the latter, usually in NKVD uniforms, who are on the offensive – an important signal to the audience that the UPA soldiers are defending their land.

*The Undefeated* also reflects widespread disillusionment in Ukraine with politicians and their sloganeering in the late 1990s. Shukhevych is “closer to the people” in that he is skeptical of the ideological debates taking place abroad. On one occasion, he distinguishes himself from Ukrainian émigré politicians, who should all “go to hell (*do dupy*) with their arguments.” However, he also sounds a conciliatory note by saying later that “it is difficult to do anything about the bickering of those politicians.” This statement implies that his job and that of his warriors is to fight the enemy, while leaving the dirty business of politics to others.

It is instructive to compare these two films, which faithfully represent the mainstream diasporan line on the UPA, to another Ukrainian movie, this

---

<sup>28</sup> On the personal life of the real Shukhevych, see Olena V. Petrenko. Chytaiuchy pro “zhinok Shukhevycha” // *Ukraina Moderna* online. 2014. March 27. <http://uamoderna.com/blogy/olena-petrenko/pro-zhinok-shuxevicha>.

one funded by a wealthy UPA veteran living in Australia, who wanted his memoirs adapted for the screen.<sup>29</sup> *Zalizna Sotnia* (“The Iron Hundred”; the official English title is *The Company of Heroes*, 2004) demonstrates that, when an individual sponsor insists that a film script scrupulously reproduce his story, the film’s narrative can easily miss crucial ideological accents.<sup>30</sup>

Although the film begins with UPA insurgents ambushing German troops, as if to underscore that they were not on the German side during the war, the principal enemy in the subsequent storyline is Poland and not the Soviets. It is Polish guerrillas who rape and pillage Ukrainian villages and are punished by death. Unlike the standard evil and foul-mouthed Russians in *The Undefeated*, they come in all varieties in *The Company of Heroes*: antagonistic, frightened, confused, and even sympathetic. The nationalist guerrillas are individualized as well, and moments of comic relief have a humanizing effect on the storyline.

Overall, though, none of these three films portrays the often ambiguous identity choices and difficult political dilemmas of the 1940s generation in the way that UPA veteran Maria Pyskir-Savchyn does in her memoir or the Ukrainian writer Oksana Zabuzhko in her novel *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*.<sup>31</sup> Both writers strove to comply with the basic outlines of the national narrative, but ended up producing a more subtle and complex picture than the cinematic biopics of Bandera and Shukhevych. Ukrainian film distribution companies, which at the time were filling movie theaters with a mix of Western and Russian products, did not pick up any of the three films. The director of the first two, Oles Yanchuk, complained in an interview that only Galician schoolchildren knew his films, because local television stations broadcast them regularly.<sup>32</sup> In other words, he was preaching to the converted, thus merely cementing the regional divide in how Ukrainians remember World War II.

---

<sup>29</sup> The book in question went through many editions under slightly different titles, most recently as Iurii Borets. *UPA u vyri borot'by: Spohady uchasnyka povstan'skoi borotyby (1941–1948)*. Kyiv, 2004. This edition is illustrated with stills from the film.

<sup>30</sup> *Zalizna sotnia* / Dir. Oles Yanchuk. Oles-Film, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> See Maria Savchyn Pyskir. *Thousands of Roads: A Memoir of a Young Woman's Life in the Ukrainian Underground during and after World War II*. Jefferson, NC, 2001; Oksana Zabuzhko. *Muzei pokynutykh sekretiv*. Kyiv, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Halychyna. 2012. March 31 // <http://www.galychyna.if.ua/publication/culture/oles-janchuk-znovu-znimatime-film-na-prikarpatti/>.

*Unexpected New Heroes*

Obscured by the spectacular clashes over Bandera, a grassroots movement of regional history clubs developed in central Ukraine in the late 1990s, focusing on local traditions of anti-Bolshevik insurgency in the early 1920s, especially in the Cherkasy region. This topic did not fit well into the nationalist canon preserved in the diaspora. For patriotic Ukrainians abroad, Colonel Yevhen Konovalets would probably stand out among the other personages of Ukrainian history in the 1920s as the most consistent fighter for the nation, not least because of his subsequent role as the founder of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. A smaller section of the diaspora, especially the supporters of the OUN's Melnykite faction, still cherished the memory of Petliura, but more as a martyr who was killed by an alleged Soviet agent than a statesman. Neither of these two figures generated any significant following in central Ukraine. Amid growing disillusionment with politics and ideologies, a native cult of *otamans*, or warlords, in the centuries-old Cossack tradition flourished instead.

Tellingly, it did not focus on any weak Ukrainian polity or government of the revolutionary era but on the period after their defeat, when the “people” took up arms to fight off the Bolsheviks. The glorification of the rebels also did not seem connected to the cult of Bandera or the ideology of radical nationalism. Yuri Horlis-Horsky (1898–1946) first introduced the rebels to the Ukrainian public outside the Soviet Union in the 1930s with his book about Kholodnyi Yar, the forest where they held out the longest. A former tsarist officer who spent a year among the rebels there, Horlis-Horsky was a follower of Petliura and sought to present their struggle as confirming the vitality of the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic (or UNR, 1918–1920). His views did not reflect the mainstream political thinking of Ukrainian émigrés.<sup>33</sup> Yet any resistance to the Bolsheviks made for a good story, and diasporan publishers kept releasing new editions of his books; after independence they started appearing in Ukraine as well.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> In the radicalized émigré milieu of the DP camps after World War II Horlis-Horsky joined the minority that was searching for democratic alternatives to militant nationalism. He received death threats from the Banderites, who suspected him of being a Soviet agent, and died in mysterious circumstances in West Germany in 1946. See Roman Koval. “Ukraina... Chomu tse slovo take boliuche” // Kryms'ka svitlytsia. 2006. No. 11. <http://svitlytsia.crimea.ua/index.php?section=article&artID=3674>.

<sup>34</sup> As far as I could establish, the first edition in independent Ukraine came out in 1992 in the Lviv-based literary journal *Dzvin*.

The Kholodnyi Yar history club, led by the amateur historian Roman Koval, and a whole network of related historical clubs that sprang up later helped popularize the new heroes. At different points in its history the club (founded in 1997) published a newspaper, ran a radio show, sponsored two documentaries, and published a book series. The rebels had several important advantages as an anchor of national memory. They embodied the spontaneous revival of the Cossack tradition in a historic location near the ancient Motronynsky Trinity Monastery, which had a long association with the Cossacks beginning in the sixteenth century. It was also the site of a bloody eighteenth-century rebellion against Polish rule, which left a deep mark in popular memory. In the age of modern national imagination, Taras Shevchenko affirmed in his poems the locale's image as the memorable site of the national struggle; he also painted a watercolor of the monastery. As a legend within the national narrative, the otamans of the 1920s became estranged from the failed Ukrainian People's Republic, emerging instead as direct successors of the historic Cossacks. They also represented popular anger in general rather than any political party or ideology.

The club published a number of books about the otamans, most of them written or edited by Roman Koval. These works occupied a certain niche in the Ukrainian book market, which may be defined as regional studies in a right-wing, patriotic mode. Soon Koval settled on the genre of historical biography as one that was more popular with the public, although the structure of his books did not change significantly; they still focused on the locality where a given otaman had fought. One can detect several common threads in the club's publications: the rebels' decisiveness as opposed to the feeble Ukrainian People's Republic, the ethnicization of the enemy, and the general colloquial style. The enemy's ethnic "othering" is usually straightforward: they are local Jews or Russians from Russia. The emphasis on "Jewish exploitation" and the Jews' Bolshevik sympathies stands out in most of these books, their narrative often colored by anti-Semitic prejudices. Thus, the second chapter of the book *Otaman Zeleny* is titled "The Jews in Trypillia," as if one needs to bring in the Jewish factor before proceeding to explain the revolution and the subsequent struggles in Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

These niche publications turned the otamans from the Cherkasy region in the early 1920s into general national heroes for a smaller audience of right-wing patriots and local history enthusiasts in central Ukraine, but their breakthrough moment on the Ukrainian cultural scene came with the

---

<sup>35</sup> Roman Koval. *Otaman Zelenyi: Istorychnyi narys*. 2d ed. Kyiv, 2011. P. 18.

release of Vasyl' Shkliar's novel *The Last One* (2009). Also known in other editions as *Black Raven*, this work skillfully combines a highly ideological interpretation of historical events with fiction and mystical fantasy to create a successful "niche" mass-culture product for a right-wing audience not taken aback by the author's overt xenophobia.

The novel focuses on the guerrilla warfare that Otaman Black Raven and his comrades are waging against the Bolsheviks. The connection between the main heroes and the Ukrainian People's Republic is ephemeral at best: they refuse to accept the first liaison officer from the republic's government-in-exile, and the second officer turns out to be a Soviet agent. Thinking back to the UNR period, the narrator, who is Black Raven himself, regrets not knowing "the truth about our army, our government, about the confusion among our top leaders."<sup>36</sup> Yet, the idea of Ukrainian independence lives on among the rebels, even if their immediate motivation seems to be avenging their plundered land. In rather traditional metaphorical language, Ukraine's plight under the Bolsheviks is manifested by rape stories inserted throughout the novel.

Importantly, though, the rebels are not "born Ukrainian patriots," but they accept a modern Ukrainian identity. We first meet Black Raven as an officer in the tsarist army, his family name having been changed to sound more Russian. It takes the Revolution and the Ukrainization of the army – and perhaps a beautiful Ukrainian woman, as in the book – to bring him back to his roots. Another rebel leader in the novel comes to the Ukrainian camp after reading Taras Shevchenko's poetry, much in the way historians describe the process of national mobilization.<sup>37</sup> In this framework, Otaman Black Raven and the other heroes in the novel rebel against the oppressive empire when they become politically and culturally aware Ukrainians. Perhaps the most telling episode in this respect is the one featuring the theater performance. When the Bolsheviks organize an amateur theater group at the local sugar factory, they select not a revolutionary play but the nineteenth-century comedy *Shelmenko the Orderly*, in which a Ukrainian trickster makes fun of his assimilated landlord but does not challenge the colonial power hierarchies. One of the rebels, Vovkulaka (Werewolf), plays the role of Shelmenko. Suddenly, in the middle of the performance, he shows the audience his gun and a hand grenade, forcing all of them to sing the Ukrainian anthem "Ukraine Has Not Perished Yet." The scene ends with the execution of all the Red

---

<sup>36</sup> Vasyl' Shkliar. *Zalyshenets*. Chornyi voron. Kharkiv, 2011. P. 48.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* P. 44.

dignitaries in the theater, who are escorted in parties of three or four to be shot in a basement room with a cement floor.<sup>38</sup>

The whimsical storyline is well-crafted, in particular the development of Black Raven's two love interests, a mysterious Cossack Amazon named Dusia, and Tina, a modern urban woman. The motifs of disappearing corpses, werewolves, and blind healers establish connections both to Ukrainian folk mythology and the modern Hollywood imagination. Intertextual references abound in the novel, such as Black Raven's undercover trip to Poland with Tina and the son of his fallen otaman comrade – a trek that Tina herself compares to Maria's escape with Joseph and baby Jesus. While everybody around is talking about the Cossack treasure hidden in the forest, what the rebels expect to find there is consecrated knives, a motif from Taras Shevchenko's poem about the eighteenth-century revolt that took place in the same locale. What they do find in the end, however, is a UNR banner with the trident coat-of-arms – a symbolic treasure, to be sure. The novel's conclusion offers a perfect way to weave together into a national-memory recipe the themes of the Cossacks, Shevchenko, otamans, and the Ukrainian diaspora. Black Raven did not die in his last fight with the Reds, as it was thought, but made his way abroad and returned for a brief visit in 1964, the year of the Shevchenko jubilee, when many diasporan visitors visited the poet's grave nearby.

The rebels are encoded as explicitly premodern, their world a fusion of peasant utopia with fantasy using some familiar fairy-tale motifs, such as a wise old raven or a protective forest. In this sense, Shkliar skips the Soviet ethos of modernity and ideological transformation heading back to nineteenth-century populism and Shevchenko's mythical vision of Ukraine.<sup>39</sup> Otaman Black Raven rejects imperial Russian modernity to assume a mythical "Cossack" identity, which the explicitly "modern" Bolsheviks cannot defeat. Affirming primordialism with tropes that are at once folkloric and suitable for Hollywood, Shkliar's strategy worked better than the attempts to craft a Lenin-like Bandera or a Stierlitz-like Shukhevych.

There is another aspect to the novel, however, one that is extremely controversial. First, the author is too keen on providing graphic descriptions of how the rebels cut their enemies down with their sabers, or hanged and shot them. Second, and more important, is how he constructs these enemies. Most rank-and-file Bolsheviks are ethnic Russians, although they are referred to

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Pp. 59–62.

<sup>39</sup> See George G. Grabowicz. *The Poet as Myth-Maker*. Cambridge, MA, 1982.

in the text as “Muscovites,” *katsaps*, “aliens,” “foreigners,” and “the horde.” They are described as “pushy and arrogant,” “short, bandy-legged, and red from the blood rushing to their broad faces.”<sup>40</sup> They “quack” rather than speak. Among the Reds the author also singles out “thick-skinned Latvians with eyes cold as ice; the wolf-like and always ravenous Chinese, whom our peasants called ‘blind’; and dreadful-looking Chuvashes and Bashkirs.”<sup>41</sup> Their leaders are usually Jews, who are portrayed with venom. When the rebels capture a GPU officer, Yasha Galperovich, they make him kill his comrades with a saber, but that does not save him from a similar fate, death by hanging. Galperovich kneels before the rebels and eats the blood-soaked soil under their feet, begging for his life, but in vain. One literary critic in Ukraine noted that this scene exploited the blood libel motif, in addition to the theme of punishing the Jews for Bolshevik crimes.<sup>42</sup> Most of the other Jewish Red officers and officials in the novel are speedily murdered, except for one frightened Jewish civilian on the train who is detained by the “Cossacks.” While the latter consider the options of hanging or torturing him, Otaman Veremii orders the Jew to eat pork lard and then lets him go as a “good Jew.”<sup>43</sup>

The two female Jewish characters in the novel are portrayed as being especially threatening because they give orders to men, dress like modern women, and use their sexuality aggressively. One of them, Tsilia, also becomes the head of the Bolshevik self-defense unit in town. She personally interrogates and tortures arrestees; when she persuades one rebel to switch to the Bolsheviks’ side, she does so by seducing him.<sup>44</sup> This predictable image combines civil-war propaganda stories about female Jewish commissars in Cheka torture chambers with traditional anti-Semitic gender fantasies.

As if to offset these troubling racist, anti-Semitic, and sadistic overtones, Shkliar also attempted to create one positive Chinese character and a few Jewish ones. As the rebels finish beheading all the Red Chinese, Black Raven decides to spare the last one, who becomes his faithful aide. The otaman also discovers that the Bolsheviks hanged six Jews for making clothes for the rebels, among them Benio the tavern owner, who had been a friend of Black Raven’s father.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the only truly good Jew in Ukraine is dead.

---

<sup>40</sup> Shkliar. *Zalyshenets*. Pp. 18 and 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* P. 25.

<sup>42</sup> See Yevheniia Bilorusets. *Pro heroiv i liudei: Prymitky do romanu Vasyliia Shkliara “Zalyshenets. Chornyi voron” // Politychna krytyka*. 2011. No. 2. P. 165.

<sup>43</sup> Shkliar. *Zalyshenets*. P. 66.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 94–95.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 38–40.

It is only after crossing the Polish border that Black Raven, Tina, and the baby encounter a kind, traditional Jewish family, the only one in the village to let them stay overnight. This episode is a play on biblical motifs, but it can also be interpreted as constructing a distinction between the traditional Jews elsewhere and the “Sovietized” ones in Ukraine; ultimately, it is just another way to normalize prejudice.

*The Last One* sold well and collected several literary awards. A fellow patriotic writer and parliamentarian, Volodymyr Yavorivsky, even spoke in the Ukrainian parliament about this novel, calling it a major nation-building event.<sup>46</sup> But the book truly became a national best seller two years later, after Shkliar sparked a series of political scandals. In March 2011 he declined the nation’s most prestigious and lucrative award for achievement in literature and the arts, the Taras Shevchenko Prize, in protest against the “Ukrainophobic” policies of the minister of education. In April, Shkliar’s supporters raised the same amount of money and awarded him “The People’s Shevchenko Prize”; the ceremony took place in Kholodnyi Yar.

President Yushchenko welcomed the novel, promising to find sponsors to turn it into a film, and Shkliar spoke hopefully of casting Mel Gibson as Black Raven, but nothing came of these pipe dreams. The only big-name film director who was approached about the project, the Pole Jerzy Hoffman, declined outright. He stated later in an interview: “For me *Black Raven* is a nationalistic book, an anti-Russian rather than an anti-Soviet one. It is a xenophobic book, it is a road to nowhere.”<sup>47</sup>

In April 2011 Shkliar spoke at the opening of a traveling historical exhibit on “The People’s War, 1917–1932” at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, a leading Ukrainian university, declaring: “It was not a civil war, but a Ukrainian–Russian war.” He then went on to announce that this war was “still ongoing” and that, “as they said in Kholodnyi Yar, the only possible answer to a question asked in Russian is a gunshot.”<sup>48</sup> Activists from the right-wing Svoboda (Freedom) party, who attended the event in large numbers, greeted his statements with hearty applause, but protests from the faculty and the student union followed. Meanwhile, the exhibit, consisting of twenty-nine stands, continued its journey across Ukraine, but not without difficulty. In

---

<sup>46</sup> Literaturna Ukraina. 2009. November 19.

<sup>47</sup> Segodnia. 2011. October 24 // <http://www.segodnya.ua/life/interview/ezhi-hofman-zacluhi-upa-v-ocvobozhdenii-ukrainy-necomnenny.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Olha Briukhovets’ka. Shcho bude zi svobodoiu? // Historians.in.ua. 2011. November 25. <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/dyskusiya/39-olga-bryukhovetska-shcho-bude-zi-svobodoyu>.

some eastern provinces it was banned by the local authorities, in others Communist Party activists raided it.<sup>49</sup> If not (yet) a Ukrainian–Russian war, then the memory war within Ukraine itself clearly was under way in 2011, and Shkliar’s novel played a major role in helping to cement the fault lines. Ironically, however, it promoted an ethnic-exclusivist version of national memory – precisely the one that the Russian state-owned media required as a useful bogeyman for their own captive audience and that in the Donbas.

\* \* \*

The Euromaidan Revolution of 2013–2014 had an ambiguous effect on the formation of the new national-memory canon. On the one hand, it produced a cult of revolutionary martyrs, the Heavenly Hundred, who were killed in Kyiv during the protests. A mixed group not defined by ethnicity or political views – the first of the Heavenly Hundred was an Armenian – they offered the new Ukrainian authorities an opportunity to create a new type of national heroes, who represented a diverse civil society rising against oppression and corruption. At the same time, however, the Maidan and the subsequent war in the Donbas brought to the forefront self-proclaimed “captains” and field commanders, who often resembled the otamans of a hundred years ago. The new Ukrainian authorities soon came to see them as troublesome and embarrassing, often pursuing their particularistic economic and political gains rather than the national cause. Still, portraits of Bandera and the black-and-red UPA banner became more acceptable in mainstream Ukrainian politics and mass culture after the Euromaidan Revolution, although one could argue that the public embraced them more as the most recognizable anti-Russian symbols than as actual tokens of radical nationalist ideology.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the revolution, a major Ukrainian publisher, KSD (an abbreviation for the Club of Family Leisure), specializing in mass editions of popular literature, released laudatory biographies of Bandera and Shukhevych, both authored by Lviv-based historians and appearing in pocketbook format in a new series titled “Ukrainians: The History of the Undeclared.”<sup>51</sup> The volume on Bandera in particular reads much like a Soviet

<sup>49</sup> Vystavka “Narodna viina 1917–1932 rokiv” // Khmelnytsky portal. 2012. November 15. <http://www.proskurov.info/news/society/8929--1--1917-1932-r>.

<sup>50</sup> See Serhy Yekelchuk. *The Conflict in Ukraine*. New York and Oxford, 2015. P. 56.

<sup>51</sup> Mykola Posivnych. *Stepan Bandera*. Kharkiv, 2015; Olesia Isaiuk. *Roman Shukhevych*. Kharkiv, 2015. Isaiuk’s book is well-written and much more sensitive to the historical context. She presents Shukhevych as a military leader, who would have found legal politics difficult; in peacetime he probably would have been a moderate-authoritarian figure (P. 254).

biography of some prominent Bolshevik revolutionary. Although the blurb on the back cover promises the “overcoming of stereotypes” and a narrative devoid of “artificial mythologizing,” the author in fact meant to deconstruct Soviet, rather than nationalistic, mythmaking surrounding Bandera. Much of the text is borrowed from the author’s earlier short book, which appeared in Canada with diasporic funding under the not-so-neutral title *Stepan Bandera: A Life Dedicated to Freedom*.<sup>52</sup> Uncanny parallels with Bolshevik biographies can be seen in the chapter on “The Leader’s Conceptual Legacy.” The author begins by stating that Bandera wrote numerous works that established “the foundations of Ukrainian nationalism,” but “unfortunately” not all of them are easily available. Contemporary Ukrainians often discuss Bandera’s ideas but “rarely read his works.” There follows a long quote from Bandera’s lieutenant, Yaroslav Stetsko, from which the readers learn that Bandera’s “teachings” (*vchennia*), the term previously applied to the classics of Marxism-Leninism, had a major influence “on the success of the revolutionary struggle.” All his works feature the same “golden thread” and “iron logic of argumentation,” while the main source of Bandera’s inner strength was, of course, his religious faith.<sup>53</sup> The previous chapter on Bandera’s personality traits is equally hagiographic. Just like Lenin, he was kind to children, loved hiking in the mountains, and was an attentive listener. The Leader also had a “penetrating gaze” that could read his interlocutor’s innermost thoughts.<sup>54</sup> The author ends his book on a disarmingly honest, didactic note: “It is impossible to inculcate in the younger generation a feeling of national pride without the popularization of such heroic fighters for independence as Ivan Mazepa, Symon Petliura, and Stepan Bandera, who should become apposite examples of patriotism.”<sup>55</sup>

As the conflict in the Donbas dragged on, in April 2015 the Ukrainian parliament passed a set of decrees banning communist symbols and establishing an official list of “twentieth-century fighters for Ukraine’s freedom and independence.” The list, which starts with the Ukrainian People’s Republic, also includes “rebel partisans who were active on the territory of Ukraine in 1917–1930, whose struggle was aimed at establishing, defending, or renewing Ukrainian independence, including the Kholodnyi Yar Republic.” It also features the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

---

<sup>52</sup> Mykola Posivnych. *Stepan Bandera – zhyttia, prysviachene svobodi*. Toronto and Lviv, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 199–200.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 197–98.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* P. 254.

and the UPA.<sup>56</sup> In the midst of the war with the Russian-backed forces in the Donbas, the Ukrainian authorities took the radical step of embracing the ethnocentric canon of national memory. None of their predecessors dared do so out of fear of splitting the country, but now the split with Russia appears complete and is sealed by warfare.

It remains to be seen how nationalist mythology can be reconciled with the universalist values assigned to the Heavenly Hundred, and which of these components will offer a better unifying potential for a nation trying to define its past and its future. One interesting early signal was the two television commercials that the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense released in advance of Victory Day, May 9, 2015. Instead of celebrating the present-day Ukrainian military in the Donbas as the successors of the UPA, the videos actually connected them to Soviet army veterans. Two elderly actors, familiar from Soviet-era war films, portray decorated World War II veterans who receive phone calls from their grandchildren currently serving in the Ukrainian army. At the end of their brief conversations in Russian, the present-day soldiers congratulate their grandparents on Victory Day, to which they reply, also in Russian, “Glory to Ukraine!”<sup>57</sup> Linking Soviet imagery of the Great Patriotic War with the UPA slogan that entered mass politics in a new connotation during the Euromaidan may appear incongruous to some, but one can also see here an affirmation of the productive heterogeneity in Ukrainian historical memory; a possible recipe for a civic identity based on loyalty to the country rather than an ethnic nation.

## SUMMARY

Taking as its point of departure the 2015 “decommunization” legislation in Ukraine, this article looks at the transformation of historical memory in that republic from the late 1980s to the present. The author argues that the new canon of national heroes developed through the gradual transformation rather than the radical rejection of Soviet historical narratives, with the Cosacks being the most successful example of a historical symbol supporting

---

<sup>56</sup> Proekt Zakonu pro pravovyi status ta vshanuvannia pamiaty bortsiv za nezalezhnist' Ukrainy u XX stolitti // Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy. Ofitsiinyi veb-portal, [http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4\\_2?id=&pf3516=2538-1&skl=9](http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_2?id=&pf3516=2538-1&skl=9).

<sup>57</sup> Rozirvalo shablon: Sotsmerezhi pro roliky do Dnia Peremohy // BBC Ukraina. 2015. April 28. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/entertainment/2015/04/150428\\_victory\\_day\\_video\\_ko?ocid](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/entertainment/2015/04/150428_victory_day_video_ko?ocid).

a uniting, civic identity for a new Ukraine. Two case studies are used to demonstrate the challenges of merging the nationalist mythologies preserved in the Ukrainian diaspora with the models inherited from Soviet times: that of diaspora-funded films about the Ukrainian insurgents of the 1940s and the cult of the *otamans* developed by a network of regional historical clubs in central Ukraine. Both projects produced highly divisive historical mythologies that often employed incongruent cultural models reusing the Soviet clichés. Both also constructed an ethnically exclusive vision of Ukraine's past, as opposed to an inclusive, civic one. The Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine and the subsequent war in the Donbas gave a powerful impetus to the process of memory work in Ukraine, while at the same time furnishing the inclusive, multinational canon of the "Heavenly Hundred," who died for a democratic Ukraine. However, there exists a very real danger that the process of constructing a new Ukrainian historical memory can be hijacked by radical nationalists or discredited by Soviet-style administrative feats.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Отталкиваясь от сюжета с принятием весной 2015 г. в Украине "исторических" законов, направленных на десоветизацию общества, статья обращается к проблеме трансформации исторической памяти в республике, начиная с конца 1980-х гг. и до настоящего времени. Согласно автору, новый канон национальных героев сформировался в результате постепенной трансформации, а не радикального отторжения советских исторических нарративов. Казаки служат наиболее удачным примером исторического символа, приспособленного для обоснования единой гражданской идентичности новой Украины. Трудности совмещения националистических мифов, культивировавшихся в украинской диаспоре, с советским историческим наследием иллюстрируются двумя историями: о производстве на средства диаспоры художественных фильмов об украинских повстанцах 1940-х гг. и культе "отаманов", продвигаемом сетью региональных исторических клубов в Центральной Украине. Оба проекта предлагают крайне поляризующие исторические мифологии, зачастую использующие несовместимые культурные модели, эксплуатирующие советские клише. Оба формулируют этнически эксклюзивное видение прошлого Украины в противоположность инклюзивному, гражданскому. Революция Евромайдана и последующая война на Донбассе дали новый важный толчок процессу работы над исторической памятью в Украине. Они способствовали

оформлению нового инклюзивного, многонационального канона Небесной сотни, погибшей за демократическую Украину. Тем не менее, сохраняется весьма реальная угроза того, что процесс конструирования новой украинской исторической памяти будет захвачен радикальными националистами или дискредитирован административными усилиями в советском стиле.