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**A REVOLUTION'S HISTORY,
A HISTORIANS' WAR***

Even good historians have a questionable record when reflecting on events contemporary to them – especially when dealing with revolutions – whether they look at the revolution from a distance, as Edward Gibbon did in 1789, or confront it as Francois Guizot did in 1848, or try to embrace it as Pavel Miliukov, Mikhail Pokrovskii, and Mykhailo Hrushevsky did in 1917. In all cases, we find their interpretations of the events neither rigorous nor convincing. Well aware of these limitations and disadvantages of contemporaneity, historians, nonetheless, cannot refrain from commenting on radical changes that happen before their eyes. The Ukrainian Maidan and the war that followed are no exceptions. How historians make sense of those events, however, reveals as much about history and historians as about the events they are trying to interpret. Disagreements about the nature, meaning, and causes of the events are to be expected, but the divergence of opinions is striking. In this paper I examine the rift that has divided the historical community and shows no possible signs of being bridged in the near future.

Two types of approaches can be detected in historians' accounts of the recent Ukrainian events. The first group of historians sees these events as the

* I would like to thank Marko Pavlyshyn (Monash University), Yuliya Ilchuk, Ilya Gerasimov, Anton Kotenko, and Ostap Sereda for their comments and suggestions. The article was written during my tenure as Eugene and Daymel Shklar fellow at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute.

outcome of a fundamental conflict between elemental forces that are deeply embedded in the country's history. These forces coincide with two alleged identities that divide Ukraine and have long histories of their own. (1) There is a strong, militant, and virulent Ukrainian nationalism of the fascist brand, that emerged in Galicia in the 1930 and the 1940s. The Galician vision of Ukraine is incompatible with the memory, identity, and political convictions of the majority of Ukrainians, but the Galicians impose their vision on all Ukrainians. (2) Then, there is a more inert majority of Ukrainians, who do not separate themselves from Russians as sharply as Galicians do – many of them are Russophone and live in the orbit of Russian culture. These two antagonistic forces have been kept, with varying degrees of success, under wraps by the Ukrainian state. When the Galician version of the Ukrainian identity received support from the state under President Yushchenko, the precarious balance between the two forces was destroyed. The shattering of the state in January–February 2014 released them entirely. These historians as a rule acknowledge that Russia also played a role in these events but they do not discuss it in any detail.¹

The second group of historians perceives the Ukrainian revolution of 2014 as a turning point in the country's history, changing Ukrainian society and challenging the analytic frameworks and narratives used by the region's historians.² According to this school of thought, the revolution defies the dogmatic categorizations historians like to apply and cannot be reduced to nationalism or class interest. It was directed against a brutal political authority that was sliding into dictatorship and trying to turn Ukraine into a police state. When these historians discuss identities in the context of the Ukrainian revolution, they see the birth of a Ukrainian civic nation that has come to terms with its regional and cultural diversity and its bilingualism. The new nation is founded on shared values rather than an inherited cultural canon. It plays with symbols from the past and defies the binding definitions that have been imposed from the outside. For them the new Ukrainian nation is a *civitas* created by the society rather than manufactured by the state. It exists

¹ Most contributions to *Kritika's* forum on “the Ukrainian crisis” exemplify this approach. This essay will focus in particular on Faith Hillis. Intimacy and Antipathy: Ukrainian-Russian Relations in Historical Perspective // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2015. Vol. 16. No. 1. Pp. 121-8; John-Paul Himka. The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine // *Ibid.* Pp. 129-136; Alexei Miller. The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Multiple Histories / Translated by Paul W. Werth // *Ibid.* Pp. 145-8.

² All historians who contributed to the forum “Ukraine and the Crisis of ‘Russian Studies’: Participant Observation of History in the Making” (Ab Imperio. 2014. Vol. 15. No. 3. Pp. 22-228) follow this approach.

as a civil society in the myriad of volunteer initiatives persevering through the times of economic hardship and war and in the sacrifices of wealth and life coming from the people's heightened sense of civic duty. Some of them also point out the crucial role played by Russia in the events that led to the Maidan – supporting Yanukovich's corrupt regime, and afterward invading Ukrainian territory and trying to destroy the Ukrainian state.

While this divide has some political overtones, setting the history profession's Edmund Burkes against its Thomas Paines, it also points to two distinct kinds of historical imagination. In the remarks that follow I examine these historical imaginations in greater detail in an attempt to establish whether these two approaches to history are equally helpful in making sense of the Ukrainian events. I want to assess historians' depiction of war and revolution in Ukraine as one would judge any other writing by historians: by looking at how they handle their evidence, at their methodological and theoretical frameworks, and finally at their ethical and political judgments. Throughout this essay, for reasons that will become apparent later, I will use "essentialism" as a shorthand for the approaches of the first group of historians and "contextualism" for the approaches of the second.

Evidence

Historians commenting on contemporary events often rely on contemporary evidence. Although we often encounter historical evidence only in the context of historical narratives, those who follow contemporary events are familiar with contemporary evidence *ex ante*. Looking at the references to familiar news pieces, video footage, journalism, and sociological polls, I was often astonished to find how unrecognizably different they became in the context of some narratives.

When writing about contemporary events, some historians drop the caution we normally expect from them and jump to sweeping generalizations on the basis of very scarce evidence. The opening article of *Kritika's* forum on the "Ukrainian Crisis" serves as a good illustration of this thesis. Faith Hillis, for example, claims that in "the war in the Donbas" "Kyiv relied on right-wing militias – some of which adhere to neo-Nazi ideology." Kyiv also "offered nationalist vigilantes a *carte blanche* in eastern Ukraine."³ The text of her footnote discusses the Azov battalion, which was, indeed, created by members of a neo-Nazi organization. However, Hillis seems to be unaware that there are more than forty volunteer battalions on the Ukrainian side, with only two

³ Hillis. *Intimacy and Antipathy*. Pp. 127-128.

or three qualifying as “right-wing” and linked to right-wing political parties. As evidence of the “carte blanche” the nationalists allegedly received from Ukrainian state authorities, Hillis cites a news piece by Amnesty International. The piece presents several videos as evidence of abduction – showing the captures of several separatist officials by Oleh Liashko during his electoral campaign. While disgusting, possibly staged, and undertaken with violations of procedure, properly speaking, Liashko’s actions constituted a citizen’s arrest. All the officials in question were handed over to law-enforcement agencies and provided with legal aid.⁴ Except for the Right Sector, all volunteer battalions are subordinated either to the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Defense. Moreover, regular and military police and *prokuratura* consistently investigate crimes involving members of volunteer battalions, the accused are subject to trial, and those found guilty are sentenced.⁵

Even more alarming is Hillis’s claim that “Some Ukrainian patriots have even presented mass murder as a legitimate solution to the nation’s ‘eastern’ problem.”⁶ The accusation is so serious that it merits closer examination. Hillis supports this claim with two references. The first one is to Keith Gessen’s “Why Not Kill Them All?” The article is about Gessen’s Donetsk experiences and contains vivid biographical sketches of people who ended up on the separatist side. People from Donetsk are properly quoted, with names and sometimes exact phrases. The headline of the piece, however, comes from a fragment that recounts views of an anonymous journalist from Lviv. Later these views are also attributed to the professional and intellectual milieu in Kyiv:

All the enemies of progress in one place, all the losers and has-beens: wouldn’t it be better just to solve the problem once and for all? Wouldn’t it be a better long-term solution just to kill as many as you could and scare the shit out of the rest of them, for ever? This is what I heard from respectable people in Kiev. Not from the nationalists, but from liberals, from professionals and journalists. All the bad people were in one place – why not kill them all?⁷

⁴ V Amnesty International sturbovani diiamy Liashka na Donbasi // BBC. 2014. August 6, <http://goo.gl/JgqZBD>; Aleksandr Belokobyl’skii. Mery-separatisty ili izbiratelnoe pravosudie v deistvii // RIA Novosti Ukraina. 2014. November 5, <http://rian.com.ua/story/20141105/359142402.html>.

⁵ U Kharkovi za tiazhki zlochyny sudytymut’ p’iatiokh biitsiv teroborony // Unian. 2015. March 12, <http://goo.gl/WSFGfL>.

⁶ Hillis. Intimacy and Antipathy. P. 128.

⁷ Keith Gessen. Why Not Kill Them All? // London Review of Books. 2014. September 11. Pp. 18-22.

I spent most of the past year in Ukraine, mostly in Kyiv and Lviv. No matter how far on the right my interlocutors were, none of them ever suggested killing civilians or prisoners of war. I have a hard time imagining that anonymous respectable and liberal people would express such a view to an American journalist they have just met. The shift of voice, from the views of a single journalist to an opinion shared by many is also interesting.

A statement like this is impossible to verify, and some corroborating evidence is needed. Hillis finds this in her second reference, which she sees as a “striking example” of the genocidal intentions of Ukrainians. Whereas she speaks of an interview given by journalist Bohdan Butkevych on Hromads’ke TV,⁸ her footnote sends us not to the interview itself, but to a hoax crafted by some anonymous foot soldiers of the great patriotic media war. What these video editors did was to splice two nonsequential fragments from a real interview into one piece.⁹ In the first part Butkevych speaks of “surplus people” in Donbas, claiming that close to 1.5 million people were artificially kept on substandard wages in the economically declining industrial region. In the second fragment he speaks of those among the separatists who are implacable and will not put down their weapons. Those, according to Butkevych, “should be killed.” We may find the very idea of killing people reprehensible, but it is untruthful to impute an intention to commit genocide to someone who wants to defeat the enemy in a war. The hoax makes it look as if Butkevych is in favor of killing 1.5 million “surplus people” of the Donbas, but in fact he explicitly says that negotiations and compromise are possible in the majority of cases.

Any selection of evidence to support an argument starts with choosing the facts to be adduced. While the Ukrainian side is accused of grave crimes and intentions to commit mass murder, the oppressive side of the new “people’s republic” is described in passing and its very real murders are not mentioned at all. The Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior documented fifty-four intentional murders perpetrated in 2014 by those associated with the structures of the Donetsk People’s Republic.¹⁰ Not a single one made it into the essentialists’ accounts of these events, and neither did the instances of torture, kidnapping, and public humiliation that are well-documented in

⁸ Hillis. *Intimacy and Antipathy*. P. 128.

⁹ For the full interview, see Bohdan Butkevych. *Za Slov’ians’k potribno po-diakuvaty chudovii Partii Rehioniv*, April 29, 2014 // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCD4RS9LsTI>.

¹⁰ MVS otrymalo dokazy prychetnosti “DNR” do 80 tizhkykh zlochyniv // *Hromads’ke*. tv. 2015. January 19, <http://goo.gl/6OI3c4>.

the media.¹¹ One can also relate the case of a well-known professor from Moscow State University encouraging his audiences “to kill, kill, and kill” the supporters of the Ukrainian interim government.¹² The only incriminating fact about the separatists that Hillis mentions in her text is the oath of loyalty to New Russia, which the History Department of the Donetsk National University was forced to swear.¹³

Similar inaccuracies can be noted even when historians discuss trivial things. When Alexei Miller mentions a torchlight procession in Kyiv to celebrate Bandera's birthday, he claims there were “more than 15,000 participants,” without providing any source. I checked the available reports. The Radio Liberty journalist who filmed that march reported “several thousand,” and even the Right Sector, which can be suspected of inflating numbers, estimated participation in the range of 5,000 to 12,000.¹⁴ In this case Miller uses the greatest number possible to prove that the march represents the ideology prevailing among the Maidan protesters. But this number itself is meaningless – we can assess its significance only by comparing it with others.

It appears that many essentialist historians confronting the avalanche of events and narratives concerning Ukraine in 2013–2014 have problems placing them in perspective. There is a glaring absence of standard historical procedure: cross-examination of all available sources and analysis of the circumstances under which they were produced. The facts are selected to fit particular preconceived narratives. The essentialists also ignore the fundamental fact that their sources are generated in the midst of a veritable media war raging all over the internet, in newspapers, and on TV. Moreover, the essentialists seldom account for the accuracy of social media, treating them as a straightforward record of events and attitudes.

The contextualists, on the whole, do a much better job with the contemporary sources. When they analyze Facebook posts, they approach them systematically. Even though their treatment of the current Ukrainian discus-

¹¹ We can take as an example the story of artist Sergei Zakahrov: Dmitrii Volchek. Menia trizhdy vyvodili na rasstrel // Radio Svoboda. 2014. October 18, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26640867.html>.

¹² Aleksandr Dugin. Ubivat', ubivat' i ubivat' // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX4r1eXpUSI>. Posted by Randy Mandy, June 15, 2014.

¹³ Hillis. *Intimacy and Antipathy*. P. 127.

¹⁴ Anastasiia Moskvychova. Smoloskypnyi marsh na chest' Stepana Bandery u Kyievi // Radio Svoboda. 2014. January 1, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/media/video/25218356.html#>; U Kyievi natsionalisty spil'nyim marshem vshanuvaly providnyka Stepana Banderu // Pravyi Sektor. 2014. January 1, <http://goo.gl/WTkvKt>.

sions is far more nuanced than anything produced by the essentialists, they acknowledge that their account is “simplifying complex developments.”¹⁵ Moreover, they approach utterances as speech acts made not only in a particular political context but also in the context of language wars and games, and they discuss specific social media practices, such as “trolling,” as well as creative responses to it from the Ukrainian side.¹⁶ By contrast, the essentialists show little feeling for language and its uses. Hillis, for example, believes that “when confronted by opponents of the Euromaidan ... supporters of the revolution dismissed their critics as “dregs” (*sovki*) of Ukrainian society unsuited for membership in the nation.”¹⁷ Neither Russian nor English are my native languages, but there is a problem with translating *sovok* as a “dreg.” Literally meaning “a dustpan,” it is also a shortened version of “a Soviet,” and refers to the Soviet mental frameworks and modes of behavior that allegedly survived the dissolution of the Soviet Union unchanged. The term has been used in Russian since about 1990, and reached its peak of popularity in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the consensus was that things Soviet were inferior to their “Western” counterparts. Moreover, systematic analysis of the language used against the Revolution’s opponents would show that if there is a single most popular term used to ridicule and diminish the opponents of the revolution, it is *vata* or *vatniki*, and not *sovki*. *Vatnik*, a cheap mass-produced quilted cotton jacket, became a popular label for the pro-Kremlin jingoist Russian patriots who reject and despise the outside world, and take pride even in the most questionable parts of the Russian past.¹⁸

Hillis not only misses the dialogical dimension of articulations so important to Gerasimov’s argument, she also fails to notice that her reference sends us not to an instance of the derogatory application of this label, but to a critique of it by Andrii Portnov, one of the most vocal supporters of the revolution in the historian community. Hillis overlooks the fact that the supporters of the revolution are a wide and heterogeneous camp, unlikely to surrender the revolution either to radical nationalists or “Galician reductionists,” as Portnov calls his opponents in this case.

¹⁵ Volodymyr Kulyk. Ukrainian Nationalism Since the Outbreak of Euromaidan // *Ab Imperio*. 2014. Vol. 15. No. 3. P. 96.

¹⁶ Ilya Gerasimov. Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum // *Ab Imperio*. 2014. Vol. 15. No. 3. Pp. 28-31.

¹⁷ Hillis. *Intimacy and Antipathy*. P. 126.

¹⁸ For a short comment on the two terms, see Aleksandr Genis. *Sovki i vatniki* // *Radio Svoboda*. 2014. June 30, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/25438392.html>.

The only shortcoming common to both contextualists and essentialists is their neglect of the debates, imagery, and institutions on the separatist and Russian side. The language of separatism and of the rejection of the Revolution also merits attention. It is neither unanimous nor static.¹⁹ Finally, we should remember that there is also a pro-Ukrainian Donbas, even though those who have taken an open pro-Ukrainian position had to leave the territory occupied by separatists and Russian forces.²⁰

History

The editors of *Kritika* begin their forum on the “Ukrainian crisis” by indicating how they see the role of history in explaining current situation: “The geographical distribution of support for Viktor Yanukovich before his ouster in February 2014, and for the new government after that” becomes “virtually unintelligible without reference to the historical trajectories of the different territorial pieces from which contemporary Ukraine was assembled.”²¹ This sentence also encapsulates some of the most problematic practices with regard to the historical explanations of essentialist historians. Support for Yanukovich in February 2014 would be very hard to measure and quantify, not to mention its geographical distribution. But we have already discussed the poor handling of contemporary evidence. There are also problems with the language in this sentence: Ukraine is hardly more “assembled” than the Russian Federation, or for that matter, than the majority of states, both existing and long gone.²² Of even greater

¹⁹ One can compare Antony Butts’s documentary *The Donetsk People’s Republic, or the Curious Tale of the Handmade Country* (2015) with the interview of Aleksandr Borodai and Aleksandr Zakharchenko.

²⁰ Many writers and artists took a strong pro-Ukrainian position, Olena Stepova and Sergei Zakharov being best known. Yuliya Ilchuk. Hearing the Voice of Donbas: Art and Literature as Forms of Cultural Protest during the War / Talk delivered at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, March 23, 2015. Numerous sources, including Aleksandr Zakharchenko himself, confirm that many residents of the Donbas are taking part in the conflict on the Ukrainian side. For a conversation between two natives of Donetsk fighting each other: Dialog Aleksandra Zakharchenko s ofitserom VSU, January 15, 2015 // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dXpSgm5Uf4>.

²¹ From the Editors. The Ukrainian Crisis and History // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2015. Vol. 16. No. 1. P. 1.

²² Alexei Miller. The Empire and the Nation in the Imagination of Russian Nationalism: Notes on the Margins of an Article by A. N. Pypin // Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Eds.). *Imperial Rule*. Budapest, 2004. Pp. 9-26; Thongchai Winichakul. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu, 1994; Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein.

significance, but no less questionable, is the view of history this sentence espouses. It is based on the assumption that one can delineate territories (or for that matter, any other part of social reality) that possess sufficient internal integrity to share the same “historical trajectory,” and that those trajectories can explain contemporary events.

Even a cursory overview of Ukrainian history shows that it does not have stable historical regions. In the nineteenth century the so-called Galicia was part of the Habsburg Empire but it spent most of the twentieth century in the company of territories of the former Russian Empire. In the nineteenth century the so-called Eastern Podolia was part of the Russian Empire, but for most of the eighteenth century it constituted parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, together with future Galicia. Furthermore, the ethnographic and economic divisions do not coincide with the former state or administrative boundaries.

The repertoire of the past is literally inexhaustible. If needed, a “fact” from the past superficially resembling the present configuration can always be found. Such a procedure, however, usually severs it from the most valuable part of historical knowledge – its ability to reconstruct the embeddedness of the fact in a concrete historical context. The temptations of such over-historicizing have been a common occurrence in the familiar projections of historical boundaries onto the maps showing the distribution of votes in various Ukrainian elections. Explanatory models such as “East against West,” “Steppe against Forest,” and “Galicia against the Rest” have circulated with great regularity after every Ukrainian election. Since we see maps as true representations of our world, mapping, with its ability to deceive by rendering reality visible, becomes a tempting exercise. The *Kritika* editors fell into this trap when they mistook geographical variations for the fragments of separate histories.

The only reliable indication of support for the new government that formed after Yanukovych’s flight is seen in the results of the 2014 presidential elections. Even though there are regional variations, the only two regions showing an unmistakably distinct pattern on the maps of the 2014 presidential elections are the Crimea and parts of the Donbas, occupied by the Russian and separatist forces (Figures 1 and 2). There is also a district in which Mykhailo Dobkin won the elections, but hardly because of the district’s unique history.

Does India Exist? // Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. *Unthinking Social Science*. Philadelphia, 2001. Pp. 130-134.



Figure 1. Winners of the Presidential Elections in May 2015 by electoral district.²³

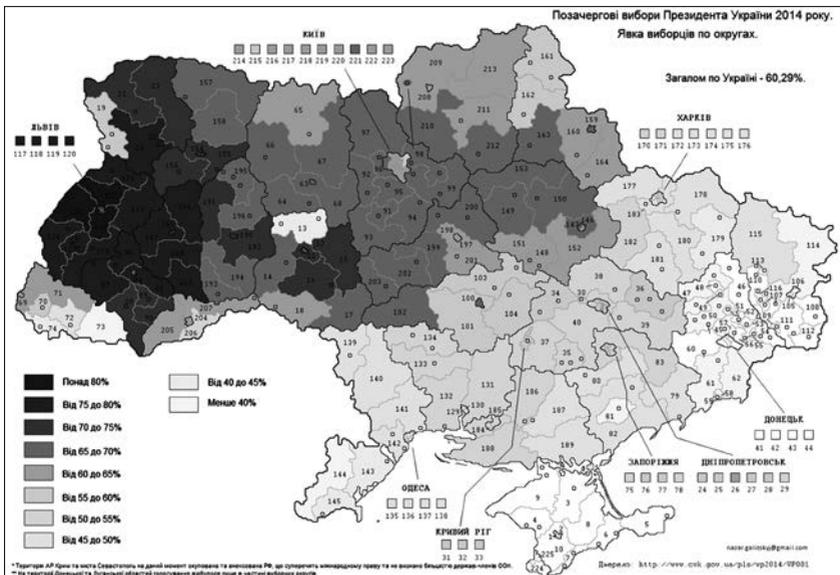


Figure 2. Voter Turnouts for the Presidential Elections in May 2015 by electoral district.²⁴

²³ Wikipedia. Creative Commons. Uploaded by Andrew J. Kurbiko. <http://goo.gl/n5KYnv>.

²⁴ Wikipedia. Creative Commons. Uploaded by Nazar Galitskyj. <http://goo.gl/7iqnYN>.

The monstrous “Simplified historical map of Ukrainian borders: 1654–2014” that made it into an academic book from Wikipedia is a good illustration of how the search for territories, from which Ukraine was “assembled” can easily turn into an absurdity (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Simplified historical map of Ukrainian borders: 1654–2014.²⁵

The essentialists’ propensity to use maps as visual aids for the simplification of complex processes is echoed in their enthusiastic embrace of the explanatory power of other visual images. In the historical interpretation of events, I have never before seen such a strong reliance on the symbols used by the participants. The nineteenth-century history of the red flag will be of little help if we are trying to understand the nature and politics of Pol Pot’s regime, and the genealogy of the motto “proletarians of all countries, unite” will not tell us much about Stalin’s domestic and foreign policy. In their accounts of the Maidan, however, essentialists place much emphasis on the nationalist paraphernalia that evokes the Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists of the interwar period, and World War II occupies a prominent place in their

²⁵ Nikolai N. Petro. Understanding the Other Ukraine: Identity and Allegiance in Rus-sophone Ukraine // Agnieszka Olkulińska-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa (Eds.). *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*. Bristol, 2015. P. 20. Original map from: Wikipedia. Creative Commons. <http://goo.gl/PxeIE7>.

accounts of events.²⁶ Black and red flags, as well as some slogans – “Glory to Ukraine” being the most popular – are central to their explanations.

Whereas contextualists emphasize the fact that old symbols often acquire new meanings and point out that, with the exception of “Glory to Ukraine” – “Glory to the Heroes,”²⁷ the slogans and symbols of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) were not accepted by the majority of protesters, the essentialists take them as a proof of protesters’ readiness to embrace the xenophobic ideology of hatred and criminal actions of the wartime Ukrainian “integral nationalists.” The essentialists overlook the ability of Ukrainian protesters to appropriate and subvert symbols – not only those taken from the Ukrainian past but also symbols that were created as offensive and demeaning to them. The remarkable story of dill (*ukrop*) that has virtually replaced the traditional viburnum as Ukraine’s floral emblem, while initially was used by the Russian nationalists and separatists as a pejorative nickname for Ukrainian patriots, is told by the contextualists but completely ignored by the essentialists.²⁸

Even if one focuses on members of Ukraine’s extremist right alone, it is clear that their symbolism is more complex than a simple adoption of the OUN visual heritage. The *Wolfsangel* of the nationalist Patriot of Ukraine organization and of the Azov regiment, together with other neo-Nazi imagery in contemporary European use is definitely a departure from it. Black and red stand not only for the OUN, they are also used by the anarchist movement worldwide. Moreover, those using red and black flags and the slogan “Glory to Ukraine” trace the origins of these symbols to the 1917–1918 revolution,²⁹ just as the interwar integral nationalists did. The dominant colors of the Ukrainian revolution, however, were blue and yellow, just as they were in 1917. When it comes to the historical traditions and periods on which the Revolution drew, the Cossack era overshadows any other. Ukraine has not seen so many shaved heads with Cossack forelocks since the 1917 revolution, if not even since the eighteenth century. Essentialist historians, however, do not choose to interpret this as a sign that Cossack tradition survived the abolition of the Hetmanate and Zaporizhian Sich, lay dormant for two centuries, and reappeared in 2013 turning the Maidan into a Cossack rebellion. And just as essentialists in general devote little attention to the separatists and Russians in their discussion

²⁶ From the Editors. *The Ukrainian Crisis and History*. P. 4.

²⁷ William Risch. *What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us about the Maidan // Kritika: Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2015. Vol. 16. No. 1. Pp. 143-144.

²⁸ Gerasimov. *Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution*. P. 31.

²⁹ Risch. *What the Far Right Does Not Tell Us about the Maidan*. P. 143.

of contemporary Ukrainian events, they also remain totally silent about the separatists' carnival of symbols. Icons carried on tanks, the Romanov dynasty's black and yellow, and also the appropriation of the Confederate battle flag associated with white supremacism by the "New Russian" military are just as fascinating as the symbols used on the Ukrainian side.

Essentialists' preoccupation with OUN symbols becomes understandable only when we realize that they are trying to explain the events of 2013–2014 through the legacy of OUN. Their narratives also focus on those whom they see as bearers of those symbols and carriers of the OUN legacy, the "Galicians." Allegedly, the "Galicians" "nourished separate memory of the war, which celebrated Bandera and the OUN as freedom fighters,"³⁰ managed to preserve the OUN tradition through all the years of Soviet rule, and have been trying to impose it on the rest of Ukraine since Yushchenko's presidency.³¹ The "Galicians" of these explanations appear as *kulturträger*s on a Gargantuan scale, wielding awe-inspiring power and bending to their will a population eight times larger than theirs.

John-Paul Himka offers a close analysis of the Galicians' role in present events. He believes that "in the present crisis, the most salient regional division is between Galicia, on the one hand, and eastern and southern Ukraine, on the other."³² This observation owes more to the inner logic of his analytical framework than to any empirical observations. The most salient division in present-day Ukraine runs along the front line. Regional variations on the Ukrainian side of the front line do exist but they cannot be reduced to the "Galicians against the rest" dichotomy. Himka is probably right in saying that Galicians were overrepresented in both the 2004 and 2013–2014 Maidans. However, the sociological polls do not single out "Galicia" in their statistics of protesters and operate with the much larger "Western Ukraine" that includes not only Bukovina, Transcarpathia, and Volhynia but also Khmelnytska oblast, which was part of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century and of Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, the polls Himka cites indicate that during Maidan's numerical peaks in early December 2014 the weight of people from Ukraine's West was very close to their weight in Ukraine's total population: 26 percent against 23.4 percent.³³

³⁰ Hillis. *Intimacy and Antipathy*. P. 125.

³¹ *Ibid.* Pp. 125–6.

³² Himka. *The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine*. P. 130.

³³ *Vid Maidanu-taboru do Maidanu-sichi: Shcho zminylosia? // Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*. Press release of 6 February 2014. <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=226>; Himka. *The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine*. P. 130.

Himka's claim that "it was the Galicians who articulated the vision of Ukrainian identity that informed the Euromaidan Revolution and inflamed heated resentment in the East and South" does not stand up to empirical examination either. He does not seek to describe the Euromaidan vision of Ukraine and its history, but instead shifts his focus to slogans used in the Maidan that allegedly originated in the nationalist Galicia of the 1930s.³⁴ In fact, Galician nationalism in both its moderate and radical versions can be traced to nineteenth-century Ukrainian thinkers within the Russian Empire. The main opponents of Mykhailo Drahomanov's socialist and federalist articulation of the Ukrainian identity were not Galicians. His opponents were Borys Hrinchenko and Fedir Vovk, and both were intellectuals from the Russian Empire. Mykola Mikhnovs'kyi, one of the founders of radical Ukrainian nationalism, spent his whole life in the Russian Empire and its Ukrainian and Soviet successors, with only occasional trips abroad. Even Dmytro Dontsov, the chief ideologue of Ukrainian integral nationalism, left the Russian Empire only at the age of twenty-five. Today's extremist nationalist organizations, such as the Socialist Nationalist Assembly and the Right Sector, are also predominantly based in Eastern Ukraine, and not in Galicia.

By 1900, according to Himka, the so-called Galician version of Ukrainian identity had crystallized itself as an exclusive nationalism. But the Galician Ukrainians of the 1900s and 1910s were not as exclusivist or unanimous as Himka suggests. Many Ukrainian socialists in Galicia successfully worked in the largely Polish and Jewish urban milieus of Galicia and saw themselves as cosmopolitan members of several cultures. Even greater numbers were in the orbit of the strong Russophile movement and defined themselves as opponents of the Ukrainian movement.³⁵

While Himka's earlier work taught us that the identity of Galician Ukrainians in the nineteenth century could be compared to "Icarian flights in almost all directions,"³⁶ somehow in his interpretation from 2014 it appears as a frozen constant in the even more volatile twentieth century. In his story of twentieth-century Ukrainian Galicia, moderate and democratic nationalism disappears altogether, and the OUN becomes a dominant force in the 1930s, once Stalin has destroyed the Communist alternative. The problem is that

³⁴ Himka. *The History behind the Regional Conflict in Ukraine*. P. 130.

³⁵ Anna Veronika Wendland. *Die Russophilen in Galizien. Ukrainische Konservative zwischen Österreich und Russland, 1848–1915*. Vienna, 2001.

³⁶ John-Paul Himka. *The Construction of Nationality in Galician Rus': Icarian Flights in Almost All Direction* // Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (Eds.). *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*. Ann Arbor, 1999. Pp. 109-164.

despite postwar radicalization, throughout the 1930s, the dominant political force among the Galician Ukrainians was still the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance, with the Ukrainian Socialist-Radical Party, a member of the Socialist Labour International, as its junior ally. Only the destruction of the pluralistic political system and organized civil society by the Soviet Union in 1939 secured the domination of integral nationalism, which then continued during World War II.

As Himka himself acknowledges, the objects of historians' inquiries have an uncanny ability to structure their perceptions of the present. But this is also true of the past. Saying that "the political culture produced in Galicia by these historical experiences can be adequately summed up by an old OUN slogan that was revived in the Euromaidan: 'Ukraine above all'," Himka confuses Galician political culture with that of the OUN. It is also a mystery how this political culture, or identity, managed to survive unchanged through nearly half a century of Soviet rule. Could the two decades of exposure to integral nationalism have had a stronger impact than more than seventy years of the experience Galicia shared with the rest of Ukraine in the Soviet Ukrainian Socialist Republic and independent Ukraine? How is the alleged Galician adherence to "Ukraine above all" slogan compatible with the highest level of service-dodging, or with the fact that the Dnipropetrovsk oblast bears the brunt of fighting, as reflected, among other things in the highest number of combat deaths?³⁷

The differences between "Galicians" and Ukrainians from the Russian Empire were discussed passionately when they really mattered and the boundaries between the Romanov and Habsburg empires were part of people's lived experiences. Summing up those discussions, Mykola Shlemkevych defined the list of features that set Galicians apart from "Easterners." In his interpretation, the Galicians' rationalism, traditionalism, legalism, ability to self-organize through associations, and self-discipline, is contrasted with the spontaneity, individualism, rebelliousness, and impulsiveness of the "Easterners."³⁸ And although, as Shlemkevych observed, these elements of Galician political culture had been seriously eroded in the 1930s and 1940s, they could not be completely eradicated by the new ideology of "revolutionary" nationalism. Interestingly, when Maidan protesters from

³⁷ Zakhidna Ukraina lidyruie za kil'kistiu vypadkiv ukhylennia vid mobilizatsii – radnyk prezidenta // Tyzhden.ua. 2015. January 27, <http://tyzhden.ua/News/128570>; Zahybly za mistsem narodzhennia (stanom na 4.02.2015 r.) // Pam'iataiemo zahybylykh. 2015. February 4, <http://memorybook.org.ua/indexfile/statistic.htm>.

³⁸ Mykola Shlemkevych. *Halychanstvo*. New York, Toronto, 1956.

Eastern Ukraine tried to describe the distinctive features of their Galician comrades, they emphasized their ability to self-organize, not the Galicians' alleged integral nationalism.³⁹ The only "Galician" political project that entered national politics in the aftermath of the Maidan is the Samopomich (Self-Help) party. Achieving the third largest number of votes among those voting for the party lists, it is as nationalist as any other European liberal party and seems to draw on this other Galician political culture. Its leader, Andrii Sadovyi, has spent his whole tenure as mayor of Lviv fighting the representatives of the nationalist Svoboda in the City Council, whereas the party demands broader powers for the local self-government and emphasizes community self-organization.⁴⁰

The alleged perseverance of the frozen Galician version of Ukrainian identity fails to explain the turn of events that most surprised the Kremlin and numerous experts on Ukraine. While they expected the "ferocious" Galician minority to be left isolated, with Eastern and Southern Ukraine reconfirming its belonging to the "Russian World," in fact Galicia, the East, and the South were able to find and articulate a common language. There are differences and debates within the Ukrainian camp, but the latter is neither linguistically nor culturally exclusive. If there is a single shared version of the Ukrainian identity forged in the Revolution and war, it resembles that of the nineteenth-century historian Mykola Kostomarov more than anything else. In his essay on two Rus' nationalities, Kostomarov describes the Little Russian identity as one that values freedom, equality, and individualism, but has problems with state building. The Great Russian identity is expansionist, readily surrenders individual freedoms in service to the state, accepts social and political hierarchies as natural, and finds self-realization in uniting with the state body.⁴¹ Although essentialists will not use something as old-fashioned as Kostomarov's nineteenth-century scheme, I do not see how their depictions of Galician and pro-Russian identities are more sophisticated or provide a better explanation of current events. In their search for clashing identities, essentialists ignore numerous instances when differences have been articulated differently than in their schemes, and used by the participants in their self-representations.

³⁹ Liubov Velychko. Odyn namet na Maidani. Liudy pryikhaly sami, sami zrobyly zhytlo, sami orhanizovuiut' pobut (spetsproekt Mekhanizm Maidanu) // Teksty.org.ua. 2014. January 10, <http://goo.gl/0IP9HP>.

⁴⁰ Tsentral'na Vyborcha Komisiia. Pozacherhovi vybory narodnykh deputativ Ukrainy 2014 // <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/wp300?PT001F01=910>.

⁴¹ Nikolai Kostomarov. Dve russkie narodnosti // Osnova. 1861. No. 3. Pp. 33-80.

It seems that the essentialists have discarded several decades of constructivism in social science and nationalism studies. Essentialists talk about nations and national identities as if they were actual entities with a true ontological existence. There is also a danger that the war will only strengthen this approach in both scholarly discourse and popular discussions, thus giving credibility to a simple “us against them” distinction. Schemes that operate with the ideas of stable identities grounded in history can also be seen as a strategy for avoiding substantial analysis of actual situations. As a rule, revolutions and wars are brought about by concrete decisions made by certain people and the inaction of others. As Andrew Wilson says, the current Ukrainian story “was also of Russia’s making and was about Russia’s future.”⁴² While everyone acknowledges the crucial role Russia played in the Ukrainian events, many essentialists and contextualists shy away from that elephant in the room, preferring to see the war in Eastern Ukraine as a Ukrainian domestic conflict.

Timothy Snyder is probably the only contextualist historian who analyzes the events in terms of political goals and strategies. In his explanation, the Ukrainian mass protests in fall 2013 were a reaction not only to the actions of Ukraine’s own corrupt government but also to Vladimir Putin’s intention to re-create the Russian empire in the guise of the Eurasian Union. The Maidan curbed the attempts of the Kremlin to reduce Ukraine to the status of a vassal state and challenged the Russian model of state and society that the Kremlin presents as the only viable one for the post-Soviet space. The Russian invasion was a response to this Ukrainian challenge. As Snyder points out, Russian aggressive foreign policy is accompanied by the revision of history. The rise of the nationalist right is far more threatening than its Ukrainian counterpart.⁴³

In contrast to Snyder’s approach Alexei Miller presents Russia’s historical role in the conflict as an impersonal predestination grounded in history. He uses two historical frameworks to explain the situation. The first one is that of international politics, which for him is tantamount to geopolitics. The “crisis” is merely “part of a long struggle for control of territory in

⁴² Andrew Wilson. *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*. New Haven and London, 2014. P. VII.

⁴³ Timothy Snyder. *The Ukrainian Extremists Will Only Triumph if Russia Invades* // *New Republic*. 2014. April 17. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117395/historic-ukrainian-russian-relations-impact-maidan-revolution>; Timothy Snyder. *Putin’s New Nostalgia* // *NYR Blog*. 2014. November 10. <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/nov/10/putin-nostalgia-stalin-hitler>.

Eastern Europe that constituted a borderland between several empires for centuries.”⁴⁴ According to Miller, this explains Russia’s concern with its western border – it was invaded from the west by powerful enemies three times in the past two centuries, in 1812, 1915, and 1941. Apparently, these invasions were a more serious business for Russia than for other countries invaded during the same wars because “among European countries over the course of the last four centuries, only Russia and Britain ... did not lose their sovereignty at any point.” This sovereignty seems to go hand in hand with great-power status, which “Russia’s governing class” has always seen “as an unconditional priority,” except for the early 1990s, “a period on which Moscow generally looks back with shame and rue.”⁴⁵

What is the analytical value of this scheme? Unfortunately, it is the same as that of its mirror counterpart in the Ukrainian nationalist mythology. In the latter, Ukrainians have always lived in borderlands without any natural barriers to protect them from foreign invasions. After a prolonged struggle against several empires, Ukraine allied with the Russian Empire, only to be gradually conquered by it. This conquest was crucial to Russia’s rise as a great, and European, power. Because Ukraine was crucial to the Russian Empire, the latter tried not only to control Ukraine politically but also to swallow it culturally. Modern Ukrainian history has been a struggle against this cultural domination, whose goal could be fully realized only in an independent Ukrainian state. The whole twentieth century was a period of Ukraine’s struggle for independence, which was finally achieved in 1991. (In addition to these two narratives, as Miller knows very well, there is also the story of “East-Central Europe” as the lands and people squeezed between Germany and Russia, threatened and periodically invaded by them.)⁴⁶

Neither story can withstand closer historical examination. The claim about Russia’s special relationship with “sovereignty” is a rhetorical device. The span of 400 years is chosen not by accident. If we try to stretch it even by a decade, we encounter “the time of troubles,” and the claim about Russia’s continuous sovereignty is no longer tenable. One can also wonder how much sovereignty Russia had left in March 1918, or whether Sweden was no longer a European country. By the same token Ukraine can claim that it has never lost its sovereignty – in all twenty-four years

⁴⁴ Miller. *The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Multiple Histories*. P. 145.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* P. 146.

⁴⁶ Alexei Miller. *Tema Tsentral’noi Evropy: istoriia, sovremennye diskursy i mesto v nikh Rossii // Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*. 2001. No. 52. Pp. 75-96.

of its proud existence. One can also argue that in the condition of a tightly interconnected globalized world, absolute sovereignty is impossible even for a superpower.

In all three cases when, according to Miller, Russia's very existence was threatened (1812, 1915, and 1941), Russia had not only enemies but also important allies in the West. One could also point out that when Russia faced an external threat without any allies in the West, as in the Crimean War or the Russo-Japanese War, it lost dismally. At least in the twentieth century, Russia saw serious threats not only in the West but also in the East, as was the case during the Russo-Japanese war and, again, in the 1930s. Moreover, Miller seems to conflate the practice of effective *Realpolitik* with the acquisition of territories. The United States, arguably the only successful twentieth-century empire, renounced direct control of territories in favor of the politics of indirect influence. The strategy worked much better in the new conditions of the post-World War II world. What Russia did in 2014 was a far cry from *Realpolitik*, insofar as it has brought more damage than benefit to its great power status. Moreover, to see history as a struggle between sovereign states or great powers conceived of as real actors is to ignore the whole twentieth-century tradition of social and cultural history. Such a vision is rooted in a very conservative tradition of political history that ignores any agency other than that of governments.

This preoccupation with political factors at the expense of other ones is clearly seen in Miller's discussion of his second framework, "a struggle over the national identity of contemporary Ukraine."⁴⁷ In this scheme, modern Ukrainian history can be understood as a struggle between the Russian and the Ukrainian national identities over the souls of Ukrainians, the fortunes of both identities being strictly determined by the states involved with them. What in the nineteenth century was the struggle of the "Ukrainian" project against the "Little Russian" project, according to Miller, became a conflict between the Western and Eastern versions of Ukrainian identity with their "irreconcilable visions of the past." Closer examination shows that these "irreconcilable" differences are limited to the memory of World War II, the famine, and attitudes toward Russia.

Miller arbitrarily selects the demolition of the Lenin Monument in December 2013 and the torchlight procession on Bandera's birthday as turning points of the Maidan that blurred the boundary between "civil protests and neo-Nazi" groups, while those "who used to perceive themselves as part

⁴⁷ Miller. *The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Multiple Histories*. P. 146.

of both Ukrainian and Russian cultural spaces, were now torn apart by the growing radicalization in the society.”⁴⁸ Somehow Miller forgets that Lenin is not an unconditional element of Russian culture, much of which in the twentieth century has been created by those who rejected and condemned him. To assess the proper weight of the torchlight procession, its several thousand participants should be compared to the hundreds of thousands who joined the protest in Kyiv on December 1, 2014. This proportion roughly reflected the proportion of radical Ukrainian nationalism in the Revolution's camp.

Another problem with Miller's account of events is that it views Ukraine through Russian imperialist lenses. While Anna Veronika Wendland has brilliantly shown how a Russian neo-imperialist perspective coupled with appalling ignorance shapes the view of Ukrainian events on the left,⁴⁹ Sergei Zhuk is absolutely right that the problem is not limited to leftist discourse.⁵⁰ When Miller says that the population of the “Ukrainian East” “was always maltreated in Ukrainian discourse as ‘dregs’ (*sovki*), the primitive product of Soviet indoctrination,”⁵¹ he assumes that something cohesive enough to be called a “Ukrainian discourse” still exists, as was the case in the nineteenth-century Ukrainian project, which he has written about and which was limited to a handful of intellectuals. Today there is a proliferation of “Ukrainian discourses”: those of Ukrainian literature, Ukrainian political thought, and Ukrainian historiography, each with multiple voices and conflicting opinions. To speak of a “Ukrainian discourse” today makes as much sense as to speak of a Russian discourse. As to the “maltreatment” of the “Ukrainian East,” it was in this “Ukrainian East” that Ukrainian literature was founded. The industrial Donbas, in particular, has been eulogized by twentieth-century Ukrainian writers from Volodymyr Sosiura's poem about “blue nights of Donetsk” in the 1920s to Serhii Zhadan's novels of the 2000s. This Donbas is hardly present in “Ukrainian discourse,” and only as a locus of unreformed Soviet attitudes.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 147.

⁴⁹ Anna Veronika Wendland. *Levyi neoimperializm i sostoianie “rossiiskikh” issledovani: participant observation nemetskogo diskursa ob ukrainskom krizise* // Ab Imperio. 2014. Vol. 15. No. 3. Pp. 183-194.

⁵⁰ Sergei I. Zhuk. *Ukrainian Maidan as the Last Anti-Soviet Revolution, or the Methodological Dangers of Soviet Nostalgia (Notes of an American Ukrainian Historian from Inside the Field of Russian Studies in the United States)* // Ab Imperio. 2014. Vol. 15. No. 3. Pp. 195-208.

⁵¹ Miller. *The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Multiple Histories*. P. 148.

Language, as historians' most important tool, also betrays them more than anything else. I have in mind not only the structure of their narratives and how they encode them but also the most basic elements such as terminology. When the editors of *Kritika* chose to use the term "crisis" to describe the situation in Ukraine, they automatically related it to other "crises" familiar to us from historical narratives: the Cuban Missile crisis, the crisis of the Eurozone, or the economic crises of 1972 and 2008. How often is this term used to describe military operations where casualties are counted in thousands, while whole towns are destroyed by the artillery fire? Normally, we describe such situations as wars. We speak of the "Wars of Yugoslav succession," not of the "Yugoslav crisis," of the Russo-Georgian War, not of the "Georgian crisis." Even the violence on the streets of Kyiv in February 2014 and the overthrow of Yanukovych qualify as much more than a "crisis." The term is never applied to the structurally similar events that took place in Tehran in 1979, or in Petrograd in February and October 1917. Using the term "crisis" helps authors and their audiences to distance themselves from the Ukrainian events; it helps to reduce the significance of these events, sanitize the violence, death, and suffering that characterize them, and maintain the appearances of neutrality and detachment. Terminology, however, and especially in social science, is never neutral. Any idiom has a power and inertia of its own: it guides researchers and structures their narratives.

Some historians shy away from terms like "revolution" and "war". I can understand how someone might have qualms about applying the term "revolution" to Ukraine in 2014. One can have doubts about whether the events actually measure up to the term, or whether the change was radical enough to merit such a designation, or whether an overturn of existing social relations was involved. What I do not understand, however, is how speaking of the winter protests in Ukraine as "the latest Maidan gatherings"⁵² can be justified on either analytical or ethical grounds. It is as if I opened an academic journal and read there about the Wehrmacht's tour of the Soviet Union in 1941.

On the other hand, perfectly legitimate ideas and explanations can be presented as fascist:

Some claim that the war in eastern Ukraine is shaping a new Ukrainian nation – by sacrificing the cultural ambivalence of previous times,

⁵² Miller. *The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Multiple Histories*. P. 147.

by confirming beyond any doubt what was only asserted earlier: that 'Ukraine is not Russia.' For historians, this should all sound quite familiar, and it resonates with the interwar period, with all characteristic features of nationalism in that time and that place.⁵³

Is there any doubt that wars can create a strong sense of us against them? Do we not know that wars leave scars that can sometimes never heal completely? Do wars not force people to take sides and confirm their unquestionable loyalty and identity? To the best of my knowledge, the fascist glorification of war was about something else.

Even though we have been taught to approach difficult subjects with care and sensitivity, there is very little self-reflection among historicists on their own position vis-à-vis the events. These, however, are the same historians who chastise others for insensitivity, simplification, and manipulation in their approach to public memory. The clumsy attempts of the Ukrainian state to come up with a single narrative of national suffering and national heroism have been justly criticized. But historians have too easily assumed that the two mutually exclusive narratives about World War II that have dominated Ukraine's public space represent irreconcilable differences between the two Ukrainian collective memories. When Georgiy Kasianov looks at the present war he sees it as a continuation of the memory wars raging in post-Soviet Ukraine. On one side of the fighting we see an anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalist narrative glorifying the OUN-UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), and on the other side is the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War.⁵⁴ World War II, which in Ukraine and Russia is the Great Patriotic War, indeed looms large in media and combatants' self-representations. The picture, however, is far more complex than that suggested by Kasianov. For example, the separatists draw heavily on the memory of the Civil War. Some imagine themselves as descendants of Makhno, others as White Russian officers. This role has been most famously personified in the self-identity adopted by Igor Girkin. Separatist tanks carrying Orthodox icons after the fashion of medieval hosts do not fit well into the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War either. The imagery on the Ukrainian side is no less heterogeneous. Many elements of the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War are appropriated and extensively used by the Ukrainian side, to the disappointment of those who would like to see a clear break with both Soviet and Russian heritage. President Poro-

⁵³ Ibid. Pp. 147-8.

⁵⁴ Georgiy Kasianov. How a War for the Past Becomes a War in the Present // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2015. Vol. 16. No. 1. Pp. 154-155.

shenko declared that the war in the Donbas was the Ukrainian Great Fatherland war, and media were quick to baptize the battle for Donetsk airport as “our Stalingrad.” The Ukrainians were quick to appropriate the notion of a just defensive war against a perfidious, more numerous, and better-armed enemy. Anton Shekhovtsov captured this paradoxical catholicity of identity symbols in his Facebook post during the Russian invasion of Crimea: “the only true Russians left out there are Ukrainians.”

Since, with the exception of the occupied territories, the rest of Ukraine seems to be more united than ever, the two Ukrainian historical narratives endlessly recycled by the historians of public or collective memory may prove to be far less irreconcilable than we were told. The famine of 1932–33 has proved to be a strong uniting factor, not a dividing one. It resonates well with family memories of those whose ancestors lived in Ukraine in the 1930s. Attitudes toward Russia do not show any divided nation, either. For at least six years, all the way up to February 2014, on the eve of the Russian aggression, there had been a remarkable consensus among Ukrainians about how they would like to see the relationship between Russia and Ukraine: 65–73 percent of respondents wanted them to remain independent but friendly states sharing an open border with no customs barrier, neither state requiring visas for the other’s citizens. Indeed, before the Maidan the consensus on that issue had a tendency to strengthen over time.⁵⁵

The current war will almost definitely influence the memory of World War II. The Russian propaganda’s abuse of fascist and Nazi labels and the discrepancy between them and the reality on the ground is undermining the Soviet myth about World War II. The fact that separatist and Russian forces are facing people who speak the same language and share the same cultural background neutralizes all the attempts to present them as Galician Ukrainian nationalists or neo-Nazis.⁵⁶

The two memories of World War II, being a product of deliberate media manipulations, have many shared features. The valorization of combat and death, the cult of heroes, and panegyric narratives characterize not only the myth of the UPA’s struggle but also that of the Great Fatherland War.

⁵⁵ Ukraintsi ne khochut’ viz i kordoniv z Rosiieiu, ale i ob’iednuvatysia z Rosiieiu ne khochut’ – zahal’nonatsional’ne opytuvannia // Fond Demokratychni initsiatyvy imeni Il’ka Kucheriva. http://www.dif.org.ua/ua/polls/2014_polls/-ukrainci-opituvannja.htm.

⁵⁶ Sergei Loiko emphasized this in his reports from the battlefield. Sergei L. Loiko. Ukraine Fighters, Surrounded at Wrecked Airport Refuse to Give Up // Los Angeles Times. 2014. October 28, <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-c1-ukraine-airport-20141028-story.html#page=1>.

Historians routinely slip into the rhetoric of these commemorative myths when discussing the memory of the wars. Were those who happened to be on the Soviet side in World War II really “intent on preserving the Soviet empire”?⁵⁷ World War II experiences of death and suffering were much deeper and more intensely personal, and they are shared on both sides of the public memory divide.

Attempts to whitewash the OUN and its wartime crimes are unacceptable. Ukrainian nationalists, however, have no monopoly on revising history. Ukrainian elites, as Kasianov shows,⁵⁸ have also incited battles over history to earn political dividends. Moreover, since 1991 Ukraine has been completely open to the powerful Russian propaganda machine. In the age of TV and Internet, even 100 monuments to Bandera influence people's ideas of history less than a single episode from the Russian TV program *The Meaning of History*. For understanding historical narratives behind the conflict, both Ukrainian and Russian historical narratives and their dissemination are of crucial importance. When analyzing historical narratives we should also remember that the war in Ukraine was started not by memories but by concrete political leaders. The historians who serve bodies that provide expert advice to the Russian government on matters of foreign and defense policy hardly have a moral right to castigate those advising the Ukrainian government on matters of collective remembrance.

Finally, both essentialists and contextualists should pay attention to the fact that the Ukrainian Revolution did not permanently dispel the cynical world of “postmodern” political technologists, as depicted in Viktor Pelevin's *Babylon*.⁵⁹ The appropriation of the Revolution by moneyed interests and their political lobbyists is as plausible and dangerous as the hijacking of it by the radical right. Politicians and oligarchs might use the Revolution and war merely as powerful backdrops for staging another convincing political show. Those commenting on radical nationalism in Ukraine should also remember that since its very beginning during the last years of the Soviet Union it has been infiltrated by agents of the political police, which, allegedly, even founded some of the nationalist political parties.⁶⁰ While much has changed in Ukraine since the early 1990s, the number of agent-provocateurs

⁵⁷ Hillis. *Intimacy and Antipathy*. P. 124.

⁵⁸ Kasianov. *How a War for the Past Becomes a War in the Present*. Pp. 151-2.

⁵⁹ Andrew Wilson. *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. New Haven, 2005.

⁶⁰ Paul Khlebnikov. *Godfather of the Kremlin: The Decline of Russia in the Age of Gangster Capitalism*. Orlando, 2000. Pp. 66-67.

has probably not declined. Although it is too early for the well-documented stories of Ukrainian Azefs and Malinovskys, the allegations are numerous and some of them may eventually prove true.

Patterns

As readers can see from my comments, in the debate between the essentialists and contextualists my sympathies are with the latter. But if we acknowledge the novelty of the phenomena under discussion and the new possibilities offered by this historical moment, should we forget about historical patterns altogether? What would be the possible ways of thinking about history in the middle of this gigantic “history workshop”? Nietzsche’s distinction between genealogy and a search for origins as elaborated by Michel Foucault may help us to develop a more nuanced nonessentialist historical approach: genealogy “must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most uncompromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history,” but at the same time, “it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engage in different role.”⁶¹

The most obvious recurrent pattern in the Maidan protests is that of a revolution. Even the national character and nationalist articulations of the Ukrainian revolution, with which many commentators and experts feel unease, are not unique but rather conform to the historical pattern of revolutions. As Martin Malia has argued, all revolutions are national.⁶² Nation has been the most common idiom for articulating the equal rights of members of a community to political representation. Just like other revolutions, the Ukrainian one styled itself as an unheard-of experiment. Its voices claimed that its direct democracy and grassroots civic organization could be exported not only to Russia but also to the West, giving new life to its founding values and concepts.⁶³ Just like the French Revolution, it was accused of being plotted; just like the Russian one it was presented as a geopolitical intrigue and a duel between two intelligence services. The course of events during the Maidan, when long standoffs suddenly spiraled into rapid action, after

⁶¹ Michel Foucault. *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* // Michel Foucault. *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* / Ed. by Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca, 1977. Pp. 139-140.

⁶² Martin Malia. *History’s Locomotives: Revolutions and the Making of the Modern World* / Ed. Terrence Emmons. New Haven, 2006.

⁶³ Serhii Datsiuk. *Peredumovy ta sut’ Maidanu* // Antin Mukhars’kyi (Ed.). *Maidan. Revoliutsiia dukhu*. Kyiv, 2014. P. 103.

which a new point of balance had to be found, are also familiar to us from historic revolutions. The Maidan had its own sansculottes in the form of its Self-Defense, and its own moderates connected with the government and sitting in the parliament. Just like all proper revolutions, it was followed by a war launched by outside forces trying to squash it. Just like other revolutions, it has its own Vendée or Don.

As a proper revolution, the Ukrainian one is a highly emotional affair. Actual people are living through revolutionary times. The revolutionary whirlwind shatters not only political and economic structures but also the foundations of people's self-orientation. One has to cope not only with material hardship but also with conditions of uncertainty, existential threats, and violence and death, which enter life more emphatically than at any time before. International resonance – the fact that the revolution is dividing not only Ukrainians but also international observers and the community of experts – is also a common feature of all revolutions. For participants and outside observers alike, the revolution has been a global event. From the very beginning it has been not only about Ukraine, but about Russia, Europe and the world.

The war that follows is also part of the historical pattern. That pattern tells us that this war is not only about the survival of the Ukrainian state. The wars that follow revolutions have a tendency to undermine or even completely subvert revolution's original emancipatory promise. The wars of revolutionary France that mutated into imperialist conquests and paved the way for Napoleon's dictatorship are an obvious case. There is also a danger that the war will strengthen the radical and nationalist elements in the revolution's camp. As Sheila Fitzpatrick has famously argued, the Russian Civil War profoundly transformed the society and the Bolshevik Party itself. It became a formative experience for the generation that joined the cause during the war and in its immediate aftermath, and paved the way for Stalin's dictatorship.⁶⁴

The story of the revolution is also intimately connected with the history of the Ukrainian identity and Ukrainian national movement. Here, too, there is a repetition of a certain historical pattern. A century before the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian army occupied eastern Galicia. The Russian propaganda of the time presented this occupation as a liberation of “primordial Russian lands,” which for centuries were artificially

⁶⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick. *The Civil War as a Formative Experience* // Abbot Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (Eds.). *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. Bloomington, 1985. Pp. 57-76.

separated from the Russian motherland. On the eve of the 1914 invasion there were strong pro-Russian sympathies among the Galician Ukrainians, with a quarter of them voting for Russophile candidates to the Austrian parliament. Many of them still used old etymological orthography and a written language similar to Russian and read Russian literature or popular adaptations of it. The reunion was to last forever, with new Russian-gauge railroads tying Galicia to the Russian heartland. While the Russian control of the Straits connecting the Black and Mediterranean Seas was a desirable but uncertain outcome of a future Russian victory, the retention of Galicia was beyond any doubt.

As we know, in 1914–1915 history took a different turn. A hundred years later even staunch Russian ultra-patriots no longer see Galicia as Russian or pro-Russian and prefer to blame “Galicians” for all the failures of the “Russian World” in Ukraine. While the games of great powers over the Ukrainian territory, the vagaries of World War I and of the postwar settlement help to explain the outcome, they are only part of the story. Another part of the explanation has to do with the nature of the Ukrainian projects and their relations with the Russian ones. As Roman Szporluk has argued, the Ukrainian project was not only about the “unmaking” of the historical empires and imperial projects but also about direct access by Ukrainians to the larger world.⁶⁵

The year 1914 was also the time when the first in modern national Ukrainian military formation was created. A single battalion of Ukrainian volunteers, later turned into a regiment, entered the war against the Russian army on the Austrian side. Not only Galician political parties but also Ukrainian political émigrés from the Russian Empire, most of them adhering to one or another version of socialism, sided with the Central Powers in this conflict. Their decision was not based on some innate hatred of everything Russian – on the contrary, many of them grew up on Russian culture. For them Russia was a threat to the constitutional rights and freedoms they enjoyed in Austria, only one of which was freedom of national cultural expression. Russia threatened, and during the brief period of occupation tried to destroy the dense network of voluntary associations, the organized forms of civil society, on which the Ukrainian national project in Galicia relied and which it had helped to create. At stake here was the very existence of the mechanisms that gave the Ukrainian peasants in

⁶⁵ Roman Szporluk. From an Imperial Periphery to a Sovereign State // *Daedalus*. 1997. Vol. 126. No. 3. Pp. 85-119.

Galicia political weight and voice, and allowed them the opportunity to defend their interests.

A hundred years ago, just as today, the conflict and the choice were not between a nationalism, or a would-be nation-state, and an empire. It was, rather, between an organized civil society that adhered to and depended on liberal freedoms and democratic political mechanisms and an illiberal authoritarian state. In Ukrainian-Russian confrontations the issue has never been national self-expression and culture alone. It has always been about multiple concomitant political, social, and cultural ideas and practices that the Ukrainian and Russian projects entailed at any given moment of history.⁶⁶ Moreover, I would argue that the Russian Empire in 1914 presented a far more attractive option for the Ukrainians than Putin's Russia today.

The Russia that Ukrainians confront today is not simply a Russian state. For the Ukrainian side, Russia is a dictatorship swept up in an ultranationalist frenzy, in which the arbitrary decisions of officials substitute for the rule of law, and where media are not only controlled by the state but also used to indoctrinate citizens on a scale rarely, if ever, met in history. Even though war is raging in Ukraine, and to counteract aggression the state has introduced a number of measures limiting individual rights, Ukraine is still a much freer country than Russia. According to the Freedom House ratings, Ukraine falls within the "partly free" category, while Russia is listed among countries that are "not free."⁶⁷ Moreover, according to the same ratings, from 2006 to 2010, Ukraine belonged among the "free" states, for which the credit goes to the Orange Revolution and Yushchenko's presidency, which are eagerly demonized by the essentialists.

One of the main problems with historical explanations of current situations is often a plain lack of knowledge. As Yaroslav Hrytsak has correctly pointed out, at the roots of Russian aggression in Ukraine was a miscalculation born of ignorance.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the state of expert knowledge outside Russia, including Ukraine, the rest of Europe, and North America is only slightly better. Even the issues that most grab experts' attention have not been properly studied. Radical nationalism, in both the Ukrainian

⁶⁶ Yaroslav Hrytsak makes a similar argument, saying that the new Ukrainian identity is about shared values and socioeconomic modernization. Yaroslav Hrytsak. *Ignorance Is Power // Ab Imperio*. 2014. Vol. 15. No. 3. Pp. 218-228.

⁶⁷ Their respective scores were 3 against 6 on a scale of 1 to 7: *Freedom in the World 2015 // Freedom House*, <https://goo.gl/INzVyy>.

⁶⁸ Hrytsak. *Ignorance Is Power*.

and Russian versions,⁶⁹ needs to be studied in its own right rather than as a continuation of trends from the second quarter of the twentieth century. This task, however, should probably pass from historians to political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists. In these disciplines there are people who have already spent considerable time and effort researching the Ukrainian far right and have built up formidable expertise.⁷⁰

As to the historical topics that can help us to better understand present events, I agree wholeheartedly with Alexei Miller that the Soviet, especially post–World War II and late Soviet periods, deserve particular attention. I disagree, however, that we should focus only on the Donbas and “its capacity to create its own political subjectivity.”⁷¹ We have seen more than enough teleological studies servicing certain political projects. There is little doubt that the separatist enclaves will have no problems finding historians willing to furnish them with a historical narrative supporting their political claims and their accidental boundaries. The irony is that the Soviet Donbas belongs to the better-studied regions of Soviet Ukraine.⁷² The Soviet history of the rest of Ukraine is just as important. Instead of searching for predecessors of current political projects we are in desperate need of good old social history, as well as history from below. We need histories that treat people and people’s agency seriously instead of seeing them merely as objects of manipulation by the “real” actors of history. Finally, we need real experts on Ukraine, who intimately know its literature and lore, are familiar with the texture of its everyday life, and do not see Ukraine through the Russian nationalist and imperialist gaze.

For better or worse, historians confront present events pretty much as other people do. We do not enjoy some privileged position that provides us with a better overview or opens deeper perspectives. The events we face serve more as Proust’s proverbial madeleine – able to vividly evoke a past

⁶⁹ As Alexander Motyl argued in the aftermath of Yanukovich’s downfall, representing the new Ukraine as fascist, the Kremlin was accusing Ukraine of the crime it was committing itself. Alexander Motyl. *Is Ukraine Fascist?* // *The World Post*. 2014. March 2. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alexander-motyl/putin-calls-ukraine-fasci_b_6600292.html.

⁷⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov. *Entwicklungsperspektiven der rechtsradikalen Kräfte in der Ukraine* // *Ukraine-Analysen*. 2015. No. 144. January 28. <http://www.laender-analysen.de/ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen148.pdf>; Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov. *Pravoradikal’naia partiinaia politika v postsovetskoï Ukraine i zagadka elektoral’noi marginal’nosti* // *Ab Imperio*. 2010. Vol. 11. No. 2. Pp. 219-247.

⁷¹ Miller. *The Ukrainian Crisis and Its Multiple Histories*. P. 148.

⁷² Hiroaki Kuromiya. *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s–1990s*. Cambridge, 1998.

long gone. Even though the past that we historians recall comes from the texts we have read and the narratives that we immerse ourselves in, and not from the vagaries of our lives, that past is still an important part of ourselves. Some of us see the pasts brought to life by current events mostly as ghosts of previous generations, weighing like an unbearable burden on the shoulders of the living. For others it is about people learning to live with those ghosts and, despite them, to make their own history. Consensus among historians about the current Ukrainian events is hardly possible or desirable. But whichever stance historians take, self-reflexivity and a heightened sense of responsibility are mandatory. We are not only interpreting events, we are also providing repertoires of social cognition and self-recognition on which people rely and draw. Our stories not only describe and explain events, they also have the power to shape them.

SUMMARY

The article explores the ways in which historians of Ukraine are trying to make sense of modern political developments: the Maidan revolution and the Russo-Ukrainian war. It argues that much of the historical commentary on the Ukrainian events is shaped by the essentialist understanding of both identity and history. Scrutinizing the use of evidence, references to history, and moral judgment in recent texts of historians discussing Ukraine, the author argues that attempts to find explanations for a contemporary crisis in the cultures and structures of the past are not only historically inaccurate but also much less insightful than experiments with applying only the methods of historical inquiry, removed from any teleological explanatory frameworks. Pointing to the gaps in our knowledge of Ukraine, the author also urges historians to be more circumspect and considerate when dealing with still unfolding events that affect millions of our contemporaries.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В статье обсуждается сложившаяся недавно ситуация: историки Украины выступают в качестве экспертов современной политической ситуации, анализируя революцию Евромайдана и российско-украинскую войну. Автор приходит к выводу, что большая часть комментариев историков пронизана эссенциалистским пониманием идентичности и исторического процесса. Исследуя работу со свидетельствами, обращение к историческим примерам и моральные оценки в недавних текстах

историков, обсуждающих Украину, автор приходит к следующему выводу: попытки найти объяснение современному кризису в культурах и структурах прошлого не только исторически некорректны, но и мало что объясняют. Гораздо продуктивнее использование методов и моделей исторического исследования, очищенных от любых телеологических объясняющих схем. Указывая на лакуны в наших знаниях об Украине, автор также призывает историков быть более осмотрительными и тактичными, когда они пишут о разворачивающихся на наших глазах событиях, затрагивающих миллионы наших современников.