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Poland's and Ukraine's Incompatible Pasts

Coping with the history of World War II is no easy thing. The notion impressed on Europe in the years immediately following the war and valid for the following two or three decades was much simpler than present discourses disclose. The basic narrative went: There was a fight going on between evil and good, and in the end the good ones won. There were some differences on the composition of the good ones (in the "East" the Soviet Union was presented as being good from the beginning; in the "West" the inclusion of the Secret Protocol to the German-Soviet Treaty on Non-Aggression into the sources corpus, and the Soviet-Finnish Winter War marred this picture), but the overall setting remained clear. In fact, most school books – still the most direct way of implanting historical perceptions into a society – presented this overall pattern, though differing in minor and not so minor aspects. When dealing with a touchy subject as this, it might be necessary to state that it is still and without any doubt very clear, that Germany started the war and committed enormous atrocities and acts of genocide. It was only the German initiative that set a situation where the other aspects of that period developed in the way they did. My following remarks do not change a iota in this direction, because they do not even rise questions pertaining to the political planning of the German side. The Germans (and not only the Nazis) wanted to rule Europe for their own benefit and that's it. But there were others who wanted to participate in these benefits in one way or other. The Germans, however, were not very eager to let others consume pieces of the cake they wanted to bake for themselves. In this way, the Soviet system, though the sheer number of victims of its actions was not lower, had a much more idealistic mission – in theory at least, it wanted to liberate an assumed majority of the world population, whereas the German new order's ideal was intended as a service to a racial minority by a majority.

Development of the historical narrative

The hitherto seldom disputed narrative became more diversified since the 1980s. There were two central reasons for these changes: One was more scholarly motivated, though less important: "Post-modernism", a discourse oriented historical way of thinking, detached itself from the closed shop of "big stories", a perception of history possessing an overall structure where clearly identifiable groups and parties acted in a way one could analyze, predict and evaluate by using a fixed set of material tools and markers so important to the school of social history. Though many representatives professed doubts in this direction, they still were convinced to some degree that there was an "objective" background to historical acts historians could discover. No matter if this background was governed by ideas or material frames, both parties (fighting each other) agreed that there was a leading narrative in which one could position the historical informations.

One of the early blows to this perception came from "political history". This school of thought operated with the model of identifiable decision makers who made their decisions based on different frames of reference, one still could identify. In German history, it was

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Andreas Hillgruber who applied this school's thinking to the history of World War II.[1] Still, there was an "objective" element to it, because it was power politics (whatever might be understood by "power") that shaped political acts and offered an explanation to historical development. In the case of the Hitler-Stalin-pact, both perceptions of power were very different, but the historian still found in it a common ground for very diverse currents of political activity.

Discourse-oriented scholarship lives on more diversified plots that can easily contradict each other and assume – cultural – value for the respective discourse group. There is no common "objective" ground anymore except for the discourse itself. Different discourse groups create their own reality – which is in fact a construction, and the group constructs itself by these creations. Alliances and overlappings happen, but they need no meta-explanation anymore. If some group creates an own system of orders, this is the first base to analyse its acts and thoughts. Of course, a dialectical effort to "objectivate" this highly subjective approach exists – in claiming the existence of anthropological "facts", rules of perception etc. We will not discuss these, but stop at a less radical discourse-oriented interpretation of history. The multitude of possible and existing discourses creates a multitude of perceived "realities", which in turn influence the acts of those who adhere to a specific discourse universe. Where there was an either-or discussion on "historical truth" before, and historians engaged in shaping theories that were mutually exclusive, now a both–and structure developed and competing parallel narratives were allowed into the realm of serious scholarship. Terms of "culture" serve now as an interpretation for practically every aspect of human life, blurring the divide between fiction and non-fiction. In practice, this was not totally new – novels by Sienkiewicz and poems by Shevchenko were much more successful in shaping visions of the past than scholarly works, and for the Second World War and its aftermath novels on partisans and literature on the Polish-Ukrainian fights from a pro-communist perspective served a similar purpose.[2]

The second development was the defeat of historiographical monopolies – with the downfall of the Soviet domination, hitherto unquestionable interpretations of history were opened to discussion. People discovered that former interpretations were not sacred anymore, and that a pluralism of positions was acceptable. But instead of discussing different approaches to a subjective reality, even scholarly trained historians still believed that there was one truth – not a different one for each of the participants.

What might have been a liberation for historiography, was not an easy process: societies and scholars, now free to discuss the past, were not only **unprepared** to do so, with notable exceptions among the younger generation, many were simply **unable** to do what they had not learned before. For them, history was a scholarly pursuit aiming at truth, not at a discussion of constructions. Whereas in Anglo-American scholarship, and with a notable delay in the western and central countries of the European continent terms like "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson) or "invention of traditions" (Eric Hobsbawm) became everyday food, some scholars of the "new Europe" responded to the

[1] ANDREAS HILLGRUBER Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt und die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Situationsanalyse und Machtkalkül der beiden Pakt-Partner, in: Historische Zeitschrift 230 (1980) pp. 339–361.

[2] For the Soviet side, there is a large literature on the partisan movement that had little to do with reality, but tried to glorify partisan activities. For the Polish-Ukrainian sector, fiction like JAN GERHARD Łuny w Bieszczadach. Warszawa 1959 or HENRYK CYBULSKI Czerwone noce. Warszawa 1966 did a lot to shape post-war perceptions in communist Poland.

new challenge by simply changing directions. What was wrong before, became right – and vice versa.

In the field of the Second World War, however, the situation was much more complicated. Hitherto "white spots" were filled and resulted in the perception that the history of that war might have been presented in a totally wrong way before. The reason for this was that World War II had a many layered history. Whereas the main narratives dealing with the German aggression against most European countries (including the Soviet Union) were only disputed by a lunatic fringe and the racist and genocidal activities remained as true as they had been before, temporally and regionally very different aspects acquired an importance they had not enjoyed before for the simple reason that discussions on them had been a taboo.

In March 1939, it had been the Soviet Union's desire to divert an already existing war – as Stalin stated in his speech before the 18th Party Congress – from the Soviet borders. For this reason he was prepared to make a German war against Poland and a war between "capitalist" powers possible. Prevention and support of war were both at the same time parts of Soviet policy. Though ideologically still at odds, between 1939 and 1941 Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were able to act as allies bound by a "friendship" treaty and, to make things a little bit more difficult, on this base Ukrainian *sobornist'* (unification of Western and Eastern Ukraine) propaganda was installed on the Soviet side, and Ukrainian nationalists (both from the OUN factions and the UNDO) undertook well documented efforts to collaborate with the Germans.[3] In Poland, there had been a close relationship with the Germans between 1934 and 1939 – only in the latter part of March 1939 the breakup of these links and the relationship that would shape the following years had evolved.

These topics were difficult to enter into the post-1945 narratives – in fact, they were incompatible with what most had learned to accept as "reality". All these informations clashed with a narrative in which the roles of perpetrators and victims were distributed in a stable way. Whereas sometimes historians were ready to accept additional perpetrators, they would not accept them on their own side. And the own side was not necessarily shaped by the fascist/antifascist boundaries, but by nationally defined ones. Different perspectives were not limited to the first years of the war:

Whereas the German aggression of 1941 brought about murder and oppression both to Jews, non-Jewish Poles, and many Ukrainians, Ukrainian narratives tended sometimes to view this as a "liberation" (this was in fact the impression of a majority in the first weeks after the invasion), in the light of nationalist development – at least in Western Ukraine –, and to stress the nation-building influence of the German occupation on Ukrainian press, cooperatives, schools and paramilitary or – as they are mostly described – military formations.[4]

[3] Whereas this does not demand closer explanation for the OUN whose operational centers were in Berlin, it is also true for the UNR adherents who tried to cooperate with the Germans since 1935. In October 1939 they presented themselves to the German authorities as "Ukrainian national representatives", wanted to take over the administration of Ukrainians, and form a "Ukrainian militia" (VASYL' MUDRYJ Odyn propam'jatnyj lyst i joho naslidky, in: VASYL' LEV, MATVIJ STACHIV [eds.] Na poshanu simdesjatyrichchja narodyn Romana Smal'-Stots'koho. New York 1963, pp. 340–346). Further informations on these efforts will be presented in a book by this author.

[4] One example are the memoirs of Ostap Tarnavs'kyj, a journalist who worked for Ukrainian papers during the German occupation, and whose memoirs were published in Ukraine shortly after his death in 1992. In these memoirs he stated: "The cultural part of our work in those three war years

On the other hand, the defence fight against the fascists, underground and partisan activities against the occupant, and, finally, the liberation of Ukraine from German or Rumanian occupation remained a part of the discourse – though more prominently in the areas east of the Zbruch, whereas in the West, atrocities were mainly attributed to the Soviet period before June 1941. In fact, Western Ukraine suffered both from Soviet and German overlordship – it is a matter of discourse, however, which form of oppression is stressed more, overshadowing the one of the opposite side.

What was the official policy? One way to assess this is a look on public celebrations and holidays. Catherine Wanner[5] dedicated only few pages of her book to World War II festivals – few, if we consider what veneration the Great Patriotic War enjoyed in Soviet times and still does. And still, Victory day is one of the few holidays that remained unchanged, deeply routed into post-Soviet conscience as well. Another festival day that remained was September 17, the day the Soviet Union attacked Poland in 1939 and started the "reunification" of Western and Eastern Ukraine. In many aspects this factual observation is incompatible with the Ukrainian nationalist atmosphere prevailing in Western Ukraine: After all, the Soviet attack and final victory meant – if we follow official OUN/UPA historiography – that Ukrainian nationalists had to face the Soviets alone and were surely bound to be defeated sooner or later. And the Soviets as national unifiers? Here you clash with the Polish narrative where the same act is nothing more than a criminal breach of treaties and the occupation of rightfully owned undisputedly Polish territory. Even today, in a textbook issued by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Soviet action is described as follows: "This was a unique chance [...] to reach in an easy and almost bloodless way [...] the objective of the biggest national scale – the *sobornist'* of lands which had not been possible earlier due to the lack of historic conditions." The authors then refute the interpretation of those facts as "occupation".[6]

Ukraine: Combining the Soviet and the Nationalist Past

Catherine Wanner mentions two different aspects of festival importance: One is that Victory Day has both personal and national components. The personal component is undisputably linked to family histories and a specific traditionalism developed during Soviet ritualizations. The "national", however, is much more complex than in Wanner's book: For her the day "kept alive a mythology of Soviet grandeur, of solidarity among the sovetskij narod, and of a sense of self as citizen of a superpower state".[7] If this is so in Russia and in Eastern Ukraine, it is open to dispute in Western Ukraine. There are two mutually exclusive explanations to the Ukrainian situation: Did Victory Day, then, mean something different in different parts of Ukraine or did it not? But we might also suggest that the former all-Soviet sense was even earlier reduced to a personal, apolitically traditional one. In any case, we have to wonder, how the past is incorporated into the post-Soviet perceptions.

under German occupation showed that our culture can develop, if it does not encounter obstacles." (OSTAP TARNAVS'KYJ Literaturnyj L'viv 1939–1944. L'viv 1995, p. 135).

[5] CATHERINE WANNER Burden of Dreams. University Park, PA 1998.

[6] IVAN RYBAK, ANDRIJ JU. MATUJEJEV Istoriia Ukraïny u problemnomu vykladi, v osobakh, terminakh, nazvakh i poniattiakh. Navchal'nyj posibnyk. Sec. Ed. Kyïv 2005, S. 63–64.

[7] WANNER Burden of dreams p. 167.

Another of Wanner's observations is even more strange. Based on ONE statement she refers to the problem of celebrating on May 8 or 9 and connects this with the question of being European – by commemorating victory on the same day as most other European nations.[8] This is not really convincing as the question of the legal quality of the Reims and Karlshorst surrender procedures and the time shift are very technical reasons. In many western countries, Victory Day was only very recently essentialized as a European event (D-Day was more prominent in performance) – so we might think that Wanner's is a very specific construction. The two localities are on the other hand of importance, if you back them up with another aspect: The Soviet reason to have the surrender repeated in Berlin was bound to the question whose effort contributed more to the final victory. A surrender on the western front (in France) minimized the Soviet effort, if it was considered to be the decisive surrender. Again, D-Day celebrations reduced the war to a Western powers performance with only minimal Soviet participation, not an unimportant factor in the Cold War days.

What can be made out as a political issue, prevails on the Ukrainian textbook level as well. Though we do not pretend to present a school-book survey here, the overall picture in the first post-Soviet years combined chapters on Red Army resistance, Red partisans and the Great Patriotic War victory virtually unchanged with additional chapters on the UPA. Later, most positive adjectives were deleted from the part dealing with the communist side. Sometimes, the independentist discourse was stressed more: now OUN/UPA were qualified as both anti-Soviet and anti-German, but surely aiming at independence from foreign (German) invaders. To this end, all aspects of collaborationism with the Germans (the treaties between the Germans and UPA in the first half of 1944 are well-documented) had to be passed by or covered up.[9]

This followed a long-standing practice in emigration circles where Orest Subtelny's statement that until 1941, there was a "brief honeymoon" between the "Ukrainian integral nationalists" and the Germans is still an exception. If referred to at all, it is usually marginalized and declared to be a deviation by some ill-oriented individuals or "the price of survival" (Subtelny).[10] Why is this so? Because we still encounter the desire to present a unified history, a history where there are friends and enemies, and where we are with the friends. The whole problem consists in the fact that this was not true. There were different groups representing different codes and values, and they were not compatible with the later interpretations. To make them compatible their respective cultural frames had to be rephrased.

[8] Ibidem p. 162.

[9] This picture still persists in the prep texts for high schools exams. Here I give one example only: Under the heading "Resistance movement in the years of the second world war", the author states: "In the Anti-Hitler resistance movement, there were two currents that had different political positions: the underground communist organizations (guided by bolshevist slogans) and the nationalist underground (oriented towards the creation of an independent Ukrainian state)." Then the efforts of both "currents" are described on half a page each. The final sentence says: "The Resistance movement against the fascist invaders on occupied Ukrainian territory played a big role in the defeat of Nazi Germany. It became a constant factor that plagued the back of the enemy" (M. V. BARMAK, O. IA. BARMAK Istoriia Ukraïny XX stolittia. Posibnyk dlia pidhotovky do derzhavnoï pidsumkovij atestaciï. 11 klas. Ternopil' 2003, pp. 14–15).

[10] OREST SUBTELNY Ukraine. A History. Sec. ed. Toronto 1994, pp. 465, 471. It was neither brief nor ended it in 1941, however.

SS and Statehood – The treatment of the Galicia division by two authors

In this context, the question of SS Galicia is a very interesting example. Emigrant veterans have successfully abolished the earlier names of this division and mainly refer to the 1st Division of the Ukrainian National Army, though this name was used from March 1945 on only, and practically all battles before went under the SS heading. Andrii Bolianovs'kyi, basing himself on thorough research, tries to detach the division from the Germans, even stating that it practically never used the SS letters "except in official German documents"; Hunczak states that the division's "political agenda had nothing in common with the policies of the Third Reich" and makes a point of the fact that the relations between the German commanding personnel and the Ukrainians were very bad.[11]

This is counterbalanced by pictures of a train waggon where the SS letters appear quite prominently placed along the "Tryzub" (which was formally not accepted thus showing that the soldiers themselves had placed it there) and the labels issued by the Ukrainian command.[12] The question is further complicated by the assignment of an important part of the Brody survivors to the SS-Panzer Division Wiking, where ca. 500 of them perished and the commander praised the Ukrainians' contributions.[13] The materially rich study by Andrii Bolianovs'kyi – using mostly material from Ukrainian archives and not so exposed to later corrections like Hunczak's who based himself largely on "personal memoirs of the Division's members"[14] – might serve as counter-balance for the latter's narrative (though Hunczak's contribution is to be praised nevertheless), but at the end, he makes a move that is significant in the light of modern efforts to whitewash the division. Bolianovs'kyi bases his last evaluations and a retrospective view of the division's history on a memorandum produced by division officers in **August** 1945. He presents the division as an exclusively independentist military body, never really strongly linked to the Germans etc.[15] It is fully understandable that division officers after May 1945 undertook all kinds of efforts to present themselves in a non-German light to the Allies (and they succeeded in the end). It is interesting to see, how and to establish why the Allies accepted these interpretations, but it is undisputable contrary to the requirements of source criticism to present them without comment as the "last position" in a respectable historical study. Thus, both Hunczak's and Bolianovs'kyi's narratives end in apology. They try to hook up the incompatible SS division to a permanent independence drive by Ukrainians.

Hunczak believes in the "patriotic intentions" of the "individuals involved in the entire process of creating the Division", he questions, however, "their sense of political realism".[16] But for him they remain heroes – and he sees no wrong in that they associated themselves with the Germans at a time, when even the OUN nationalists tried to change fronts by disclaiming authoritarian views. Pointing out the German-Ukrainian relationship is for him the "principle of 'guilt by association'" which he calls "repugnant". And he claims to have told "the whole story" which he has not, of course.[17] Bolianovs'kyi also

[11] ANDRII BOLIANOVS'KYI Dyviziia ‚Halychyna'. Istoriia. L'viv 2000, p. 393; TARAS HUNCZAK On the Horns of a Dilemma. Lanham, MD 2000, p. 64.
[12] BOLIANOVS'KYI Dyviziia ‚Halychyna' pp. 472, 485.
[13] Cf. HUNCZAK On the Horns of a Dilemma p. 112.
[14] Ibidem p. VII.
[15] Cf. BOLIANOVS'KYI Dyviziia ‚Halychyna' pp. 358–359.
[16] HUNCZAK On the Horns of a Dilemma pp. 168–169.
[17] Ibidem.

wants to "divide the concept of forming the division itself – on which there may be both positive and negative thoughts – from the acts of the Ukrainian activists and the objectives of the volunteers, who went into her ranks with the good belief to fight for Ukrainian statehood".[18] This last sentence puts the fight for statehood – "derzhavnist'" – above all other considerations. Statehood – the unquestionable desire of Ukrainian nationalists – is used to sanctify everything in Ukrainian history. But neither wanted the Germans to use the division for the creation of Ukrainian statehood, nor was Ukrainian statehood, based on Galicia only, an unquestionable issue. Whatever the intentions of the division organizers (both Germans and Ukrainians) were, one cannot oversee that a collaborationist military body was introduced into the genealogy of Ukrainian statehood and independence.

None of the two authors has come to realise that, though every historian (as every human being) has a moral concept of his own, history in a scholarly sense is not a part of the judicial branch. "Guilt" as a moral concept varying in time is no permanent category upon which historical erudition can be based. Guilt and moral judgment can be viewed by historians within a formulated code only. So, it is important for historians to describe the social and idea-oriented/ideological frameworks in which activities developed. Historians have to evaluate the historicity of these codes and the discourse background of the researched institutions. Nowhere in the discussed books, there is a mention of only the slightest possibility that the discourse might have changed between 1943 and the after war period. Thus, post-war apologetics are accepted at face value. The authors do not take into account that historians should not play politics (though, surely, often they do), but establish what code of values (surely different from a modern democratic one) was shared by the people in the 1940s. And they should point out the problems – and leave beatifications to the Vatican.

Approaches of this kind do not, however, serve the demands of a general public and politicians. A general public and politicians of any brand prefer "clear" statements which in most cases are intellectually impossible. In this way, the past as such is incompatible with political demands, unless one treats the past in a way that makes it subservient to them.

East Ukrainian examples

This kind of political prostitution of the past is only partly overcome in two other interesting Ukrainian books. One of them is late Mykhailo Koval's book in the series "Ukraine across the Centuries" (*Ukraïna kriz' viky*), published in 1999. The first thing that astonishes is the title: "Ukraine in the Second World and the Great Patriotic Wars".[19] It is, of course, a peculiarity of Slavic languages that the plural form "wars" has to be used, but you gain the impression that there are two separate wars in which Ukraine was entangled. What is visible, is a persistance of Soviet terminology – which separated the German-Soviet war between progress and reaction from the earlier war between imperialist countries. Koval' did not always endorse this view in his text. He wrote for example: "The Soviet-German front was the main one in Europe during the Second World War",[20] but the title of the book transports a different picture. Koval' covered white spots: He dis-

[18] BOLIANOVS'KYI Dyviziia ‚Halychyna' p. 394.

[19] MYCHAILO KOVAL' Ukraïna v druhij svitovij i velykij vitchyznianyj vijnach (1939–1945). Kyïv 1999.

[20] Ibidem p. 322.

cussed the Soviet-German alliance, though as a "secret of the Soviet-German relations".[21] He rightly refused Suvorov's theses on a German "preventive war", combining this with a warning to mix politics and history.[22] After an overview of the military events he comes to political and local ones. Here we find departures from earlier discourses: There is a chapter "OUN i Tretij Rejch u namahanni vykorystaty odne odnoho" (OUN and the 3rd Reich trying to exploit each other) which is a positive departure from Volodymyr Kosyk's "standard" book on "The Third Reich and Ukraine".[23] Whereas in Kosyk's book Ukrainians (there are practically only Bandera affiliated OUN nationalists) are essentially good, fought by the Germans and tragic heroes of independentism, Koval', who (with his Soviet past) is not a friend of Ukrainian nationalism, tries only to acquit nationalists of the charge of treason. Again, this is more of a judicial than a historical question, but what Koval' really wanted was to integrate the "misguided" OUN into a "nationalized" discourse.

He operated in the same way discussing the UPA in his chapter on local administration and the final chapter, where he dealt with the "Western Ukrainian tragedy", the UPA fight against the Soviet liberator. In this case, Koval' deplored the hopeless (*beznadijna*) fight, which it surely was in military terms. Again, we witness an effort to combine two mutually exclusive directions, now from a side different from the Ternopil' textbook. A desire to form a national discourse makes it impossible to state that the two were not only fighting each other, but considered each other to be traitors within their own respective frame of reference. Instead, we witness the effort to make incompatible pasts compatible by setting them in a parallel world.

Probably, for a person socialized in the Soviet scholarly system this was as far as Koval' could go. To enter a common discourse with historians of a different creed seemed useless, the difficulty to find a common language unsurmountable. That is why I think that all the books I write about are – notwithstanding all the deficiencies – serious though not fully convincing efforts to make incompatible things compatible.

Another book I would like to draw your attention to is a small volume by Dmytro Malakov presenting recollections of the German occupation of Kyïv from the perspective of a teenager.[24] What is really touching is the untouchedness of the author when he describes September 1941. The death march of the Kyïv Jews towards Babyn Jar is described in the same matter of fact words as the shortage of gas and the looks of new living quarters.[25] Why do I mention this? Because it is a departure from the pathos presented in the volume "Following Kyïv's Call",[26] where Mel'nyk adherents describe their efforts to establish Ukrainian national life in Kiev at exactly the same time. Two different worlds are described – and by this difference alone one may grasp the historical dimension of the time. Different perspectives form different discourses – and accepting different perceptions of reality (and thus, subjective realities) is the only fruitbearing method to approach what life was like then.

To put it together: In present-day Ukraine, there are different approaches to World War II – some are based on the Soviet and some on the nationalist narrative. Both tend to

[21] Ibidem p. 24.
[22] Ibidem p. 54. – VIKTOR SUVOROV Der Eisbrecher. Stuttgart 1989; Ledokol. Moskva 1991.
[23] WOLODYMYR KOSYK The Third Reich and Ukraine. New York [et al.] 1993. – Earlier editions in French and Ukrainian.
[24] DMYTRO MALAKOV Oti dva roky... U Kyjevi pry nimcjach. Kyïv 2002.
[25] Ibidem pp. 104–107.
[26] Na Zov Kyjeva. Toronto 1985.

be mutually exclusive though they try their best to present their perspective as a unified and acceptible one. What is virtually absent on both sides is a discussion on perpetrators or not so ideal fellows on the "own" side – at best there are "tragedies" and "naïveté". A discussion on perception differences, on different discourses, on mutual exclusion of the communist and the OUN/UPA discourses is not detectable. Is this so because this might destabilize a fragile *sobornist'*? This kind of discussion will have to happen, whatever the obstacles might be. Perspectives of victims and perpetrators are in fact incompatible, but they are linked to each other by the common event. Keeping this in mind, there is a way for the following generations to bridge the gap between incompatibilities.

Poland: Ethnical and social exclusion

The situation in Poland is different from the one in Ukraine. We have practically no competition between emigrants and the home country. On many fields, there is not even competition between different schools, practically nobody tries to save discourse elements from the people's republic era. Unthinkable that some serious historian could put forward the interpretation that what the USSR annected in 1939 were Belorussian or Ukrainian territory – it WAS Eastern Poland. Many more publications appeared than in Ukraine, where the income level is much lower. The publications were for a long time mainly concerned with the filling of "blank spots", tabooized by the previous regime. These spots were to be found in the broad field of Polish-Russian/Soviet relations with a special focus on the Katyn' problem. Whereas the first Russian governments cooperated with Poland in this case, since the beginning of Putin's presidency no progress was made. The KGB leadership of Russia is not eager to put a blame on their institution and still living colleagues. Another field, where progress has been made is in the history of the German-Polish relations. Though interpretational differences were used by political groups, solid scholarship covers both the expulsion of Germans and the German periods of history of the territories acquired in 1945.

One of the reasons for this rather smooth transition is the fact that Polish scholarship tried hard not to touch theoretical interpretations before the end of communist rule. A positivist national perspective prevailed which is still visible now. Many of the history publications are much more concerned with the saving of sources than with commenting on them. So, the published works transported more source value than that they contributed to a scholarly discourse.

In Poland in many fields, archival studies concerning World War II were possible before 1989, and only some aspects became accessible only thereafter. In some cases, research could be conducted – only the publications still had to pass some kind of censorship. One of the restricted areas was the broad field of Home Army activities in former eastern Poland, another one the complex of demographical operations linked to the war – be it the population exchange between Poland and her eastern neighbours, be it the ethnic cleansing operations by Ukrainians and the Polish parallels within Poland's borders, including the expulsion of Germans. In these fields we have a quite typical situation in that we have a high number of archival editions, but only few efforts to cope with these events from a scholarly narrative point of view.

There are areas of dispute. One of them is the problem of the Polish society's composition. To a certain degree, this issue was triggered by the normalization of the 1990s. Where – as in the years before, the catholic component was important as a quasi-legal

opposition to the pseudo-communist regime, and never put in question, westernization, modernization and secularization of Polish society progressed thereafter (in spite of the Pope factor). Disputes on the role of national minorities – very prominently concerned with Jews, but also with Ukrainians and to a lesser degree Germans – shaped public and scholarly discussions. The mental frame of "the Polish people" became a prominent topic with the crosses affair in the Auschwitz concentration camp and the Jedwabne topic. Within this context, the situation in the Soviet annected territories of 1939 acquired importance.

Whereas earlier unifying narratives mostly operated with a non-defined national terminology, differences in this field appeared now. What was the meaning of ethnicity and how does one define it in the Polish case? Were there separate – incompatible – histories for non-Jewish and Jewish Poles? Were Polish citizens of Ukrainian descent part and parcel of Ukrainian or of Polish historiography? In all seriousness, these questions were discussed in a world where national histories seemed to be a thing of the past. They were a semiotic hint to the fact that ethnicity still mattered.

Even stranger questions were asked. Was the Warsaw Ghetto a part of Warsaw? Since the early post-war days Polish scholarship periodically disputed ethnicity – not only in the historical field, but sometimes even more successful in psychology, philosophy and now in ethnology. The question of the construction of national identities is no new topic to Polish scholarship.[27] It was, however, not discussed, but implicitly applied in the context of World War II history.

Discourses evolved now around the question of collaborationism and the victimization of the people. The easiest earlier way was to exclude those who did unpleasant things from the national group: Antisemitic perpetrators were considered to belong to the "social margin" (*szumowiny*), whereas saviours were declared to be typical Poles.[28] Only after the political change, Tomasz Szarota conceded that in the anti-Semitic Warsaw events in 1940 not only the "szumowiny", but also members of a young elite participated.[29] The question of who is to be included into the "Poles" group is the reason, why the Jedwabne debate won such an impact. It was not so much the question of the events' facticity, or of the generalized perception of the population in 1941 which can be discussed with some hope for finding common grounds. More problematic were the mental implications that tended to destroy both the monopoly on a victim's role and a constructed coherence of Polish society. When Jan Tomasz Gross published his book on the events, he chose the title "Neighbours" with the same premeditation with which Christopher Browning called his German police perpetrators "ordinary men".[30] Both tried to fight the assumption that outsiders (here the Germans, there some exotic Nazi groups that took over the state) were responsible for the evil events in history, whereas the main national body remained free from immoral acts. On this base, analytical findings of different patterns of behaviour within the respective nation were incompatible with older beliefs.

[27] Think only of books like JERZY JEDLICKI Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują. Warszawa 1988.

[28] Most clearly expressed by W. BARTOSZEWSKI, Z. LEWINÓWNA Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Sec. ed. Kraków 1969.

[29] Cf. TOMASZ SZAROTA U progu zagłady. Warszawa 2000; first hints in this direction appeared earlier: cf. IDEM "Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie", in: Holocaust z perspektywy półwiecza. Warszawa 1993, pp. 153–175, here pp. 153–154.

[30] JAN TOMASZ GROSS Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka. Sejny 2000; CHRISTOPHER R. BROWNING Ordinary men. New York 1992.

Whereas scholarship dealing with Ukraine has learned to acknowledge that there were Ukrainians on both sides of the front, and to include both sides into the discourse, Polish historical scholarship had learned to export unpleasant aspects of national history. A second blow came when a young unspoiled historian published a book on the German ideological institute in occupied Poland and discovered that Poles collaborated with this undisputedly anti-Polish agency.[31]

In order to put things right, historians and a specific brand of politicians engage in reconstructing historical narratives. One of the efforts in this direction is the detachment of "Akcja Wisła" (the deportations of Ukrainians from post-war south-eastern Poland to the post-German territories in the West and the North) from the Volhynian Ukrainian-Polish fratricide in 1943. Whereas one nationalist current links the two events,[32] in order to give a justification for the Polish acts, efforts are also going on to disconnect them from each other: In this light, Volhynia was the work of Ukrainian nationalists to which the AK reacted only in 1943, whereas the expulsion of Ukrainians was the work of communists of Russian, Polish, Jewish descent, whereas the real Poles, the WiN and AK remnants rather cooperated with the Ukrainians and were against the expulsions.[33] The main reason to put it in that light is to acquit non-communist Poles from any evil – and to declare on the other hand that communist Poles have more to do with ethnically different (Russian, Jewish) groups. Given the high argumentative potential that is given to ethnicity, we witness an effort to construct a narrative that helps to solve problems of self-identification by creating a positive reference group. The reaction to fact-finding is similar to the task of a "public committee" in the "defence of the good name of Jedwabne".[34]

The picture would not be complete, however, without mentioning that there were very prominent efforts to overcome some of the problems mentioned in this article. Polish and Ukrainian historians conducted a series of conferences in which burning topics were presented by historians from both countries and discussed thereafter. Some of these conferences were more successful than others and some members had the impression that after all, in the course of the years – after a cooperation euphoria in the beginning – many participants retreated to more nationalist views. In the end, however, the series on "difficult questions" was completed by a common volume on "a difficult answer" that shows a silver lining on the horizon. Still, there were differences. One example is very telling: Ihor Iliushyn held up his view that the Polish underground terrorized the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the Chełm/Cholm region in order to polonize the territory. Grzegorz Motyka, on the other side, declared that actions of this kind were directed against collaborators with the Germans, irrespective of their nationality.[35]

Even here, however, we do not deal with denial, but with different perceptions. In many cases, historians from both countries found common ground which gives reason to hope for an understanding irrespective of repercussions on what people call their "good

[31] ANETTA RYBICKA Instytut Niemieckiej Pracy Wschodniej – Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit Kraków 1940–1945. Warszawa 2002.

[32] WŁADYSŁAW FILAR (ed.) Przed Akcją Wisła był Wołyń. Warszawa 1997.

[33] Cf. GRZEGORZ MOTYKA, RAFAŁ WNUK Pany i rezuny. Współpraca AK-WiN i UPA 1945–1947. Warszawa 1997.

[34] An excellent commentary on the "good name" problem is presented by JAN BŁOŃSKI Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto. Kraków 1996, pp. 18–19.

[35] Polska – Ukraina. Trudna odpowiedź. Warszawa 2003, p. 39.

name". Perhaps even the good name can be reestablished by admitting that there were groups in the own realm who were not really helpful in its preservation.

The good name is of highest importance when group structures based on ethnicity are a part of the mental grammar. This has to compete with the fact that memories of these events are divided by a number of different lines, only one of them being the ethnicity line. And only the desire to harmonize in reality incompatible memories leads to the heated debates we witnessed these last years.

The discourse field is divided in Poland: We have a strong "party" that fights for the "good name" and sees Poland confronted by evil powers that want to rip it not only of its mental present, but also of a heroic past. This group is not only made up by old generation members, but young mostly male scholars in some institutions play a prominent role. On the other hand, many younger generation members have discovered the usefulness of deconstruction of a behaviour the other group has accepted as her own.[36]

Useful pasts

Personally, I think that the greatest danger that can befall a historian is to become the victim of a pre-conceived perception of the past and to harmonize openly imcompatible narratives by endorsing politically expedient shapes they should take. Of course, narratives, including scholarly historical narratives, are products of historians. And historians should not forget that they are selecting and evaluating information. At this point, tasks of historians and politicians come close to each other. Historians are trying to save facts from the past and to bring them into an order.

The second task tends to influence the first one – though we mostly try to create the impression that it is the other way round. That historians, not differing in this from other "shapers" of historical consciousness, do not always strive to come as close as possible to the "truth", but to create "a useful past", is very old knowledge. Useful not only in terms of political expediency, but also in terms of self-esteem, in-group-creation and compensation of deficits. Or in the words of Edmund Jacobitti: "Establishing a historical cause for the problem constitutes a form of political argument for the present. [...] The reason history is important [...] is not to find out why something really happened [...] but that different people believe that it happened that way. History, therefore, helps to define a person or a people's position in the historical flux and to argue their political point of view."[37]

And another point should be underlined: Here, we have talked about scholarly discourses only. We should not close our eyes to the fact that scholarly discourses are closely related to memory politics. Not so much in that they shape memory politics, but the other way round – they are more often than not shaped by them.

Manifestations of this relationship are evident not only in scholarly works and textbooks, but in street names, the creation and destruction of memorials and the glori- or vilification of groups, peoples and actions. To declare the "return of memory" a concrete task for historians (as done openly in the Polish "przywrócenie pamięci" phrase) describes a very political undertaking.

[36] Grzegorz Motyka has presented a classification of the different Polish-Ukrainian currents on a conference in 1998. Cf. GRZEGORZ MOTYKA Problematyka stosunków polsko-ukraińskich w latach 1939–1948 w polskiej historiografii po roku 1989, in: PIOTR KOSIEWSKI, GRZEGORZ MOTYKA (eds.) Historycy polscy i ukraińscy wobec problemów XX wieku. Kraków 2000, pp. 166–178.

[37] EDMUND E. JACOBITTI Composing a Useful Past. Albany, NY 2000, p. 27.

The political situation in World War II was much more complicated than a simple A versus B picture might suggest. If one thing can be shown, it is the degree to which the political framework can make humans hate, kill each other. Of course, the strongest impact came from the German national-socialist racist policy. But, in Raul Hilberg's terms, there were helpers and by-standers, groups that pursued own ideas and did not find it wrong to make use of the Germans for their own good, though their interests were in reality incompatible with the German ones. In short, this is the reason why we find so many contradictory evidence in the history of those days, and I do not envy people whose political or pedagogical vocation motivates them to compile a convincing singular national narrative.

Some years ago, German historian Lutz Niethammer suggested to concentrate on the memory of the genocidal destruction ("Vernichtung") only. His warning meant that any positive historical memory created the "temptation to symbolize a positive sense" and continue a vicious circle. Only the "memory of destruction [...] creates no sense, does not strengthen a collective identity [...] her critical potential keeps culture going".[38] Whereas this was the way in the old West German Federal Republic, it was and is highly disputed now that German political circles try to "normalize" German history. East European scholarly communities have even more difficulties to arrive at admitting that there is something "bad" in their history. They have never learned to do that and fear for their role in building new and fragile nations. It takes time to learn that "right or wrong, my country" includes the wrong.

Summary

The article starts with developments in historical scholarship to use different historical narratives as a tool to deconstruct national mythology. In Ukraine, efforts are described to combine Western (nationalist) and Eastern (Soviet) historical positions in order to develop a unified national narrative. In order to do that, some aspects of collaborationism are reinterpreted as nationally positive. In Poland, different camps of historical thought fight for the past. Whereas revisionist nationalist historians exclude negative aspects of World War II history and delegate them to groups marked as non-Polish, a notable and rising sector arrives at the conclusion that the acceptance of negatively connoted elements is not detrimental to the shaping of a national identity. Still, a common language on Polish-Ukrainian events is only found by few historians from both sides. Deconstruction of historical narratives is better developed in Poland than in Ukraine – though there exists goodwill of better qualified historians on both sides.

[38] LUTZ NIETHAMMER Diesseits des ‚floating gap', in: KRISTIN PLATT, MIHRAN DAGAB (Hrsg.) Generation und Gedächtnis. Opladen 1995, pp. 25–50, here pp. 49–50.