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# Introduction:

## Essays in the Historical Interpretation of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists

Yuliya Yurchuk and Andreas Umland

This is the second installment of a series of thematic *JSPPS* sections dedicated to the memory and history of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) as well as its military arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).<sup>1</sup> The present foreword is also the second introduction to this topic. It is thus shorter than, and will not repeat what we have already outlined in, the first special section's introduction which is freely available online.<sup>2</sup>

The papers of the first section focused on some contentious issues in the memory of the OUN-UPA and their comparatively informed interpretation.<sup>3</sup> They also tackled questions of these

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<sup>1</sup> *JSPPS* herewith invites proposals for further special sections for its subseries "Issues in the History and Memory of the OUN." Such proposals' contents and composition should follow the example of the two paper collections presented in the previous *JSPPS* issue and here.

<sup>2</sup> Andreas Umland and Yuliya Yurchuk, "Introduction: The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Memory Politics, Public Debates, and Foreign Affairs," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 3, no. 2 (2017): 115–28, [https://www.academia.edu/36059737/The\\_Organization\\_of\\_Ukrainian\\_Nationalists\\_OUN\\_in\\_Post\\_Soviet\\_Ukrainian\\_Memory\\_Politics\\_Public\\_Debates\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Affairs](https://www.academia.edu/36059737/The_Organization_of_Ukrainian_Nationalists_OUN_in_Post_Soviet_Ukrainian_Memory_Politics_Public_Debates_and_Foreign_Affairs) (accessed 16 April 2018). This second introduction, like the one to the first special section within this series, does not list many of the previous scholarly studies on this section's topic in as far as most of the relevant articles and books are listed in the two special sections' papers' footnotes. We are very grateful to Julie Fedor for her extremely careful and patient final editing of the contributions to these two special sections (including this introduction). Responsibility for any remaining imprecisions and misinterpretations here and below lies, however, solely with the respective texts' authors.

<sup>3</sup> Per Anders Rudling, "Yushchenko's Fascist: The Bandera Cult in Ukraine and Canada;" Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Ukrainian Memory Culture Post-1991: The Case of Stepan Bandera;" Yuliya Yurchuk, "Rivne's Memory of Taras Bul'ba-Borovets': A

organizations' adequate ethical assessment and the contemporary use of their history against the background of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2014.<sup>4</sup> This section has similar general foci, yet deals with some different subthemes in the OUN's and UPA's history as well as their legacy for present day Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

The political scientist Ivan Gomza (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy) offers a sociological explanation for the expansion of radical nationalist sentiments and the reinforcement of Ukrainian radical nationalist movements in the Second Polish Republic from 1918 through the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> He argues that, under the specific conditions of this period, a particular political opportunity structure unfolded that became more and more beneficial to the effectiveness and popularity of the radical politics represented by the OUN. These novel conditions allowed the OUN to turn from a fringe phenomenon into the most decisive political force, among Ukrainians in Poland, that even

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Regional Perspective on the Formation of the Founding Myth of the UPA;" and Lukasz Adamski, "Kyiv's 'Volhynian Negationism': Reflections on the 2016 Polish-Ukrainian Memory Conflict," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 3, no. 2 (2017): 129–290.

- 4 See also, earlier in this journal, on the same topic, the following review essays on Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist. Fascism, Genocide, and Cult* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2014), by: Oleksandr Zaitsev, "De-Mythologizing Bandera: Towards a Scholarly History of the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement;" André Härtel, "Bandera's Tempting Shadow: The Problematic History of Ukrainian Radical Nationalism in the Wake of the Maidan;" and Yuri Radchenko, "From Staryi Uhryniv to Munich: The First Scholarly Biography of Stepan Bandera," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 411–58.
- 5 These English-language collections run in parallel to a related larger 2016–2018 multi-author Russian-language project comprising four special sections on the history and memory of the OUN-UPA in volumes 13–15 (issues 26–29) of the Bavaria-based web-journal *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropaiskoi istorii i kultury* (Forum for Contemporary East European History and Culture), with contributions by, among others, Timothy D. Snyder, Yaroslav Hrytsak, John-Paul Himka, Myroslav Shkandrij, Grzegorz Motyka, Oleksandr Zaitsev, Kai Struve, Heorhii Kas'ianov, Per Anders Rudling, and others—some of them also contributors here. See <http://www.ku-eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forumruss.html> (accessed 16 April 2018).
- 6 See, also in English language: Ivan Gomza, "Elusive Proteus: A Study in the Ideological Morphology of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48, nos. 2–3 (2015): 195–207.

partially suppressed other parties. The author presents five indicators of the specific political opportunity structure that facilitated the increasing legitimacy, reach and persuasiveness of radical (rather than more moderate) Ukrainian nationalism in inter-war Poland. Gomza introduces the concept of “catalytic mobilization,” a type of mobilization that occurs despite governmental attempts to restrain it. Thanks to such catalytic mobilization, the author argues, the OUN overtook other Ukrainian nationalist groups active in the inter-war period.

The Russian historian Igor Barinov (IMEMO) tackles the particularly difficult and controversial question of the occurrence, kind, degree, frequency and magnitude of Ukrainian collaboration with the Third Reich, in Eastern Europe’s occupied territories, during World War II. As Barinov demonstrates, there is no simple answer to the question about the nature, motives and aims of Ukrainian collaboration. Barinov outlines why researchers dealing with this issue of collaboration have to take into consideration diverse factors. Thus, there are differing drivers of the behavior of populations that have to interact with an occupying power. There was even considerable difference between various interactions between Nazi authorities and Ukrainian nationalists—not to mention those with common people stuck in the occupied territory.

The purpose of collaboration of nationalists and the general population ranged from ideologically motivated behavior to merely situational decisions to cooperate dictated by the desire to survive or to improve one’s status under the peculiar circumstances of occupation. Moreover, there was no stable and coherent approach to the future of the occupied territories among the Nazis whose policies were oscillating between the (moderate) “Ostministerium line,” potentially allowing the establishment of some Ukrainian autonomy, and the (brutal) “SS-line,” aiming to merely utilize the guerrilla experience of Ukrainian radical nationalists for the fight against the Soviets—and then eliminate the collaborators once they were no longer needed. There were profound misunderstandings, numerous miscalculations, and widespread situational thinking within all parties related to the collaboration exercise.

Barinov also deals with the widely accepted view that the local population eagerly welcomed Germans. He draws attention to the fact that, by the time of the German advance into the USSR, many people in Ukraine were disoriented as, in a short period of time from June 1939 to June 1941, the Soviet state propaganda had changed its position towards the Germans three times—from “fascists” to “strategic allies” again to “fascists.” When approaching the Nazis’ relations to the two factions of OUN, the Melnykites and Banderites, one also has to take into account the diverse facets of the Ukrainian nationalist factions’ varying motivations and types of interaction. The author concludes that one cannot easily speak about collaboration per se or only about one type of alliance between the Nazis and OUN, as the situation was complex and had many nuances making a clear-cut and encompassing evaluation of the relations between the Third Reich and Ukrainian collaborators a difficult task.

In his chapter, Myroslav Shkandrij (University of Manitoba) reviews Volodymyr Viatrovych’s, in Ukraine, influential, yet, outside Ukraine, highly controversial *Second Polish–Ukrainian War*.<sup>7</sup> Shkandrij’s critique illustrates how Viatrovych’s work is designed to serve not so much cognitive as propagandistic purposes within the current memory politics in post-Soviet Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> As Shkandrij shows, Viatrovych’s book was written using several new and unpublished archival sources, but nevertheless misses the opportunity to present an innovative exploration of Polish–Ukrainian relations during the war-time and inter-war periods. The book succumbs to

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<sup>7</sup> See also: Myroslav Shkandrij, *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929–1956* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); and Heather Coleman, Yaroslav Hrytsak, Tamara Hundorova, Oleksandr Zaitsev and Myroslav Shkandrij, “A Roundtable on Myroslav Shkandrij’s *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929–1956*,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers - Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 59, nos. 1–2 (2017): 131–52.

<sup>8</sup> Shkandrij’s critical assessment partly continues an earlier discussion of Viatrovych’s controversial book, in the quarterly *Ab Imperio*. See: Sofia Grachova, “Introduction to the Forum;” Per Anders Rudling, “Warfare or War Criminality?;” Igor Il’iushin, “Plokhо zabytoe staroe: o novoi knige Vladimira Viatrovicha;” Gzhegozh [Grzegorz] Motyka, “Neudachnaia kniga;” Andzhei Zemba [Andrzej Zięba], “Mifologizirovannaia voina;” and Vladimir Viatrovich [Volodymyr Viatrovych], “Vtoraiа pol’sko-ukrainskaia voina i diskussii vokrug nee,” *Ab Imperio* 12, no. 1 (2012): 351–433.

nationalist biases that lead Viatrovykh to ignore various nuances a more neutral consideration of which could have contributed to a better understanding of the difficult history of inter-ethnic conflict during the Nazis' occupation of Eastern Europe.

Shkandrij identifies several problematic aspects in the way Viatrovykh's book presents the Polish–Ukrainian conflict. These include the assertion of an equivalence between the killing of Poles in Volhynia and the killing of Ukrainians by Poles; a total identification of the Ukrainian national liberation struggle with the activities of the OUN(b); Viatrovykh's tendency to ignore or misrepresent elements in the OUN's political program and ideology; the omission of Ukrainian participation in the Holocaust; Viatrovykh's refusal to assign responsibility to the higher leadership the OUN(b) and UPA for the decision to begin the destruction of Poles in Volhynia in 1943, and his reluctance to fully recognize the guilt and responsibility of Ukrainians for the conduct of these massacres. Shkandrij comments on each of these themes adding his own interpretation based on the available sources.

As Shkandrij shows, Viatrovykh's text represents a contemporary apology for the OUN(b).<sup>9</sup> A pattern emerges in Viatrovykh's widely read book: many groups are made responsible for atrocities, but when it comes to the OUN(b), its violence is either minimized or explained as an allegedly inevitable consequence of the ongoing

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<sup>9</sup> This should not come as a surprise, as Viatrovykh's main non-governmental affiliation is the Center for the Study of the Liberation Movement (Ukr. abbrev.: TsDVR), in L'viv. In the words of an OUN(b) representative: "The Organization [of Ukrainian Nationalists] is today a global (world-wide) closed structure, and much of the [work] done remains unannounced [...]. At the same time, a large segment of [its] activity is known thanks to various façade structures [*zavdiaki riznym fasadnym strukturam*] founded by the OUN: from political [...] to academic [ones, like] the 'Center for the Study of the Liberation Movement' (TsDVR) [...];" Sviatoslav Lypovets'kyi, *Orhanizatsiia ukrainskikh natsionalistiv (banderivtsi): fragmenty diial'nosti ta borot'by* (Kyiv: Ukrains'ka Vydavnycha Spil'ka, 2010), 84. As quoted in: Rudling, "Yushchenko's Fascist," 159. It is also worrisome that, Rudling rightly notes (*ibid.*), as manifestly a partisan organization as the TsDVR has been given control over the National Memory Policy Experts Group within Ukraine's major and otherwise reputed NGO umbrella organization "Reanimation Package of Reforms." See: <http://rpr.org.ua/en/groups-rpr/17policy-of-national-memory/> (accessed 16 April 2018).

war. Viatrovych fails to analyze the different shades of guilt, responsibility, and co-responsibility among bystanders and perpetrators, and various forms of individual and collective participation in crimes. His outspokenly apologetic approach is symptomatic of the memory politics conducted by various contemporary Ukrainian publicists and organs, among them the Institute of National Memory, whose director Viatrovych has been since 2014.

As the four research papers of the first special section on the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, within the previous *JSPPS* issue,<sup>10</sup> the three articles presented below add to the recent wave of new scholarly publications, on the history and memory of the OUN.<sup>11</sup> They make contributions to the increasingly sophisticated scholarly discussion of OUN's ideas and activities before and during World War II, as well as their contemporary interpretation. At the same time, they constitute important expert interventions into the ongoing Ukrainian public debate about the role of the OUN in and for Ukraine's national history.

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<sup>10</sup> Rudling, "Yushchenko's Fascist;" Hrytsak, "Ukrainian Memory Culture Post-1991;" Yurchuk, "Rivne's Memory of Taras Bul'ba-Borovets';" and Adamski, "Kyiv's 'Volhynian Negationism'."

<sup>11</sup> For brief surveys of the recent literature, see the review articles: Jared McBride, "Who Is Afraid of Ukrainian Nationalism?" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 3 (2016): 647–63; and Per Anders Rudling, "Dispersing the Fog: The OUN and Anti-Jewish Violence in 1941," *Yad Vashem Studies* 44, no. 2 (2016): 227–45.