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Ukraine Faces Its Soviet Past: History versus Policy versus Memory

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Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukrainian society has remained in limbo, caught between communism and nationalism, between the former identity of Ukraine as a Soviet socialist republic and its current identity as a formally independent nation state. The conceptualisation of (post-)Soviet Ukraine appears to be an extremely difficult task. Both Ukrainian national space and time belong to several overlapping symbolic geographies and to various transnational, intertwined histories. Accordingly, they are viewed from a great variety of different research perspectives. No wonder the field of contemporary Ukrainian studies is replete with such terminology as ‘contradictions’, ‘paradoxes’, and even ‘schizophrenia’. Obviously, something must be wrong either with Ukraine or with Ukrainian studies.

The inertia of the Soviet way of life in contemporary Ukraine increasingly compels some scholars to declare it a post-Soviet, neo-Soviet, or post-communist entity.¹ Stephen Kotkin describes the period 1970–2000 of Russia’s history as ‘an integrated whole’, as ‘the sudden onset, and then inescapable prolongation, of the death agony of an entire world comprising non-market economics and anti-liberal institutions’.² I consider his observation to be applicable to contemporary Ukraine as well. History there, as in other post-communist countries, is in no way perceived as a remote phenomenon: it is a living system of institutions, norms and values. No wonder history has turned out to be the key to the theory and practice of nation and state building undertaken in Ukraine.³

The impact of history on the transformation of post-communist societies has been analysed from numerous different angles.⁴ Yaroslav Hrytsak, for example, emphasises ‘the crucial role’ that historical legacies play ‘in shaping different patterns of post-communist economic, political, and cultural developments in Eastern Europe’.⁵ Other historians

are more cautious in their evaluations of the impact of the past on the post-communist present.⁶ Recently the focus in some of the debates has shifted from 'The Past' to many 'Pasts', and toward the concept of multiple historical legacies with multiple roles in the post-communist transformation.⁷

All former communist republics, as Taras Kuzio put it, 'are in the process of searching for their "lost" history in the pre-imperial era in order to confirm that they possess "golden eras" and a workable past that can be used to legitimise their newly independent states'.⁸ In other words, national historical legacies are being employed to oppose communist legacies. However, Soviet Ukraine was neither colony nor nation state *sensu stricto*: it was engineered as a mini-Soviet Union and has acquired both modern Soviet ideological and pre-modern Rus'-Orthodox components of the Soviet historical legacy, complementing them with its own modern national identity. Nowadays these components are institutionalised and politically articulated, laying the foundations for both Russian/Soviet and Ukrainian identities in the Ukrainian *socium*, with a vague 'middle ground' between the two.⁹

The combination of modern with pre-modern components makes the Ukrainian 'burden of history' extremely heavy to manage.¹⁰ The concept of multiple historical legacies is rarely employed to analyse the Soviet past, despite a few exceptions.¹¹ The Soviet phenomenon is sometimes perceived as supra-national or even international in contrast to modern national or local particularism. My understanding of the nature of the Soviet epoch is different. I consider the Soviet identity to be at least two-fold, compounded of both ideological Soviet (communist) and imperial-religious Rus' (Orthodox) elements. Lenin's communist utopia and Stalin's more pragmatic blending of modern Sovietness with premodern Russianness laid foundations for the two main Soviet myths, respectively: 'The Great October Socialist Revolution' and the 'Great Patriotic War'.

Contemporary post-Soviet Ukraine is the product of a particular period of Soviet history, namely the Brezhnev epoch of the late 1960s to the early 1980s, which was the formative period for the present generation of Ukrainian politicians. This epoch was ridiculed by Soviet democratic intellectuals and despised by political dissidents as a period of 'zastoi' (stagnation), but it has come to be perceived as a Golden Age of stability and prosperity for the ordinary people.¹² From this point of view the Brezhnev epoch has in itself been turned into a kind of new historical mythology, aspiring to synthesise both Leninist and Stalinist myths in the national post-Soviet narrative.

Coming to terms with the national past is considered to be a precondition for a successful post-Communist transformation, including that of Ukraine. If so, this means that a newly created national narrative must be acceptable to all three major public actors in the realm of national public discourse: to the professional community of scholars, to the state, and to society. This in turn means that historical narrative, history policy and collective memory are all in a process of an endless negotiation, or so this chapter argues. In what follows I will try to answer three central questions: How is the recent Ukrainian past¹³ being conceptualised by Ukrainian professional historians? How is it being exploited by political elites? How is this past being perceived by ordinary people? I will focus on three periods of Ukrainian history: the revolution and civil war of 1917–1920; the Stalin period; and the Brezhnev epoch, as they are all represented in post-Soviet Ukraine.¹⁴

Professional historical writing

Who holds the key to the Ukrainian past? Professional historians, of course, or so they think. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union Ukrainian Soviet historians were challenged by three main tasks: to reconsider their professional and personal identities; to dismantle the old and create the new historiographical canon; and to answer to up-to-date intellectual challenges in the humanities. Responding to these challenges has triggered a complex process of political, ideological and methodological differentiation within the professional community of scholars.¹⁵

However, post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography still resists any strict classificatory systemisation, because the vast majority of Ukrainian historians seek to avoid any methodologically articulated statement. Almost all texts produced by these professionals are highly eclectic. Sometimes it is even difficult to recognise the author's individual identity behind the agglomeration of quotations, references and factual findings. Because of this, any attempt at taxonomy must be limited. For the purposes of this chapter, I will review three central trends in contemporary Ukrainian historical writing, taking into account not only 'normative' academic texts – with their hidden or open messages – but their authors' styles of thinking and writing as well.

The first and the most influential trend or school in contemporary Ukrainian historical writing is represented by official, 'normative' texts produced by academic historians. They are a well-entrenched community of scholars, based on the unreformed Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, which in the Soviet era was embedded in the party-state bureaucratic

hierarchy. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union this school of historical writing has formally adopted the nation state paradigm as its guiding principle, but generally speaking, methodological eclecticism and the production of semi-normative texts still remain the principal features of this amorphous and contradictory academic historiography. That is why I call it 'post-Soviet' historical writing. It dominates professional interpretations of the recent Ukrainian past.¹⁶

The next is a national school of historical writing based on the nation state paradigm. It is represented by two main versions – a traditional one, elaborated in the first half of the twentieth century, and a second one that was modernised in the second half of the same century by Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky and the first generation of specialists in Ukrainian studies trained in Western Universities. The national school of historical writing seems to be less influential compared with the aforementioned post-Soviet school, in terms of institutional structure.¹⁷ The traditional Ukrainian historical narrative is based on a semi-religious approach to the past (salvation through suffering, glorification and victimisation), a primordialist concept of nation and the idea of the '1000 years of Ukrainian state'. The modernised version of Ukrainian national history could be called revisionist, for its proponents question some of the fundamental tenets of traditional historical writing such as the continuity and discontinuity of the Ukrainian nation-building process, the colonial status of Ukraine within the Russian empire and the role of the Soviet elite in Ukrainian history.¹⁸

The third or modern (post-national) school of historical writing is influenced by the cultural turn in the Western humanities of the second half of the twentieth century and acts as a merciless critic of the traditional nation state paradigm of Ukrainian past. Modern Ukrainian historians are sometimes seen as mediators between the native and the Western humanities. Compared with the two aforementioned historiographical schools, this trend is the weakest, with limited institutional, normative and political influence. It is represented mostly by a comparatively few western-oriented individuals and is connected with some NGOs and new periodicals.¹⁹

Generally speaking, contemporary Ukrainian historiography is not yet ready for discussion and reassessment of the Soviet past at the level of modern methodology. According to Yaroslav Hrytsak, 'in itself, the unwillingness of Ukrainian historians to study this theme [of the Soviet past] is the sign of deep Sovietisation of Ukrainian society. If it would have greater resolve to get rid of the communist legacy, discussions [on this topic] would be inevitable'.²⁰ Instead, the majority of Ukrainian

historians – being incapable of restoring their autonomous, corporative professional status within post-Soviet society – are still involved in the ideological and political struggle between the Ukrainian and Soviet/Rus' nationalisms and their respective historical mythologies.

In chronological terms the leading field of study in academic research on Ukrainian Soviet history is the Stalinist epoch.²¹ After or near to it in prevalence comes the history of the revolution and civil war of 1917–1920. The second half of the twentieth century is of considerably less focus compared with the first one in terms of scientific preferences and number of publications.²² The main interest of scholars is in the state-political and national aspects of the Ukrainian historical process, the creation and the functioning of the Soviet party-state system, and the history of elites.

The history of the revolution of 1917 and the civil war once laid the very foundation of Soviet historiography and historical mythology. Ukrainian historians are trying to re-conceptualise this historical epoch by employing the nation state paradigm.²³ They have created a concept of the Ukrainian national revolution as an integral and original phenomenon different from the Russian Revolution. However, there is a notable variation among them in approaching and interpreting the events: for example, between such a prominent scholar as Valerii Soldatenko, committed to the Soviet style of historical writing, on the one hand, and national and modern-oriented historians such as Vladyslav Verstiuk or Yaroslav Hrytsak, on the other.

The traditional nation state historiography is inclined to mythologise events in Ukraine, exaggerating the state-leading political potential of Ukrainian national leaders, emphasising for example episodes of martial glory such as the Battle of Kruty – the 'Ukrainian Thermopylae' – and interpreting them in terms of a national Ukrainian-Russian struggle. In the writings of Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky and his followers, along with the rhetoric of 'Soviet Russian occupation', one finds observations on the 'unreadiness' of the 'Ukrainian people' for political independence and on the 'underdevelopment' of the modern Ukrainian nation, which did not attain an appropriate 'condition' or 'maturity' until the late 1920s in the course of the communist national policy of 'Ukrainisation', only to have its development set back by the Stalinist terror of the 1930s.

Numerous efforts to 'nationalise' the Soviet paradigm of the 'Great October' in contemporary Ukraine have so far failed to offer a satisfactory explanation for why the modern project of Ukrainian national statehood came to grief; or to come up with a coherent explanation of the political chaos that prevailed in the fragmented Ukrainian territory

during the disintegration of the Romanov and Habsburg empires; or to solve the problem of reconciling of competing national historical narratives – Ukrainian, Russian, Soviet, Polish and Jewish. In this regard, some of the specialists question the very applicability of the nation state paradigm to Ukrainian and Russian histories of the post-imperial period.²⁴ Thus, Heorhii Kasianov, who represents the modern trend in Ukrainian post-Soviet historical writing, deconstructs the phenomenon of the ‘Ukrainian national revolution’, emphasising that the course of events in the Ukrainian lands was determined by a variety of factions, none of which garnered notable social support.²⁵ By contrast, another representative of modern Ukrainian historiography, Yaroslav Hrytsak, denies the notion of the weakness of Ukrainian national movement before and during the disintegration of the Russian Empire and stresses the ‘normality’ of the Ukrainian national revolutionary experience in principle. Still, the poorly discussed term ‘Ukrainian national revolution’ looks more like rhetoric than a concept, yet in this capacity dominates professional historical writing.

In Ukrainian historiography, both Lenin’s and Stalin’s political regimes are considered to be the epoch of the establishment and evolution of the Soviet totalitarian system. The concept of totalitarianism has provided Ukrainian post-Soviet historiography with its basic methodological orientation in the general interpretation of Soviet history. The leading Ukrainian expert on the Soviet era, Stanislav Kulchytsky, inclines to the view that the Soviet system was totalitarian from the very beginning. Violence and state terror are considered immanent features of the totalitarian regime, to be explained by the very nature of the communist system.

The Stalin era is regarded as the apogee of Soviet totalitarianism. Ukrainian academic historiography generally describes Stalinism in the spirit and accusatory tonality of the *perestroika* period, with its characteristic emphasis on the political repression and crimes of the communist system. In the traditional national historical narrative, Ukraine appears mainly as a victim of that system. The totalitarian regime is regarded as something external, forcibly imposed on Ukraine by Russia. One of the exponents of this idea is Serhii Bilokin, a historian of the ‘nation state’ orientation who has written a source study of the system of political repression in the USSR (awarded the Taras Shevchenko National Prize in 2002) and depicts the Soviet period as a mere interruption in the course of Ukrainian history. Contrary to this notion, Yaroslav Hrytsak inclines to the views that even ‘the Red terror was not all that great a deviation from Ukrainian history’.²⁶

The Holodomor or the Great Famine of 1932–1933 is considered the apogee of Ukrainian national martyrdom in the Soviet period,²⁷ and the discussions surrounding it have continued unabated. Was the Famine man-made and deliberately organised, or the result of ‘objective’ circumstances? Did it acquire a social dimension or the Ukrainian national one? Can the Famine be considered genocide? Who is responsible for the death of millions of peasants – communism as a system and an ideology, or the Stalinist leadership in particular? What criteria are to determine the understanding of this tragedy: legal, moral, or political? Finally, what does the concept of the ‘Ukrainian people’ mean in this instance – an ethno-culture or a political community?

In the Ukrainian (post-)Soviet academic mainstream, the conceptualisation of the Famine as genocide has been institutionalised by the academic Research Center on the Genocide of the Ukrainian People, established in 2002. Stanislav Kulchytsky emphasises the territorial and political, not the ethno-cultural sense of ‘Ukrainian people’, using this concept to encompass all ‘national, ethnic, and religious groups’ living on Ukrainian territory.²⁸ Ukrainian nationalist historiography, by contrast, accents the ethno-cultural factors, resorting at times to openly anti-Semitic and xenophobic expressions. Contrary to this, the official Russian historiography denies that the Holodomor had an ethnic – in particular, a specifically Ukrainian – aspect and that it can be termed genocide at all. Modern Ukrainian historians prefer to focus on representations of the Famine in contemporary public and academic discourses.²⁹

The world of the academic community of scholars is split in its attitude to this theme. Some Western historians (Andrea Graziosi, Bohdan Krawchenko, Taras Kuzio, Elizabeth Haigh) share the view, with certain reservations, that the Famine in Ukraine bore all (or at least the main) characteristics of genocide. Others acknowledge the man-made character and scale of the Famine but deny that it was the genocide of ethnic Ukrainians (Hiroaki Kuromiya, Mikhail Molchanov, David Marples, John-Paul Himka, Terry Martin). It seems that the topic of the Ukrainian Holodomor is capable of reanimating the old ‘totalitarianists-revisionists’ discussions in Western Russian/Soviet studies of the second half of the twentieth century.

The historiography of Ukraine in World War II is no less, or even more, replete with passion than that of the Holodomor.³⁰ It ties several competing national narratives into a tight knot: the Polish narrative, which emphasises the heroic struggle of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) against two totalitarian regimes (Stalinist and Hitlerite), as well as the Ukrainian nationalists; the Jewish narrative, based on the paradigms

of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust; the Ukrainian narrative, which resembles the Polish one in its depiction of Ukraine as the victim of Hitler and Stalin, while its heroic discourse is associated with the activity of the OUN-UPA; and, finally, the Russian/Soviet narrative, rooted in the mythology of the Great Patriotic War and the 'struggle of the whole Soviet people' against the external enemy.

With reference to the latter, it is worth noting that for some Western historians it is difficult to grasp the double nature (*Neslitnost' i nerazdel'nost'*) of the Soviet/Rus' phenomenon.³¹ Sometimes in giving preference to the 'communist' component of the Soviet ideology over the Rus'-Orthodox one, even well-known specialists in the field turn out to be poor prophets. This was recently brought to mind by Sheila Fitzpatrick, who in 2004 predicted that the myth of the 'Great Patriotic War' would gradually lose influence in Russian society.³² She based this on the disappearance of the Soviet nation and the Soviet superpower, for which the Great Patriotic War had been the principal legitimising myth. This prognosis turned out to be the exact opposite of what actually happened.

Not only did the mythology of the 'Great Patriotic War' fail to disappear, but it laid the main foundations for the Russian post-Soviet, neo-imperial ideology and policy, heavily seasoned with anti-Westernism and Orthodoxy along with an almost inevitable glorification or even sacralisation of Stalin.³³ Like the Jewish national narrative of the war, the Russian one has a religious basis and, as Lev Gudkov points out, it is undergoing intensive sacralisation that blocks all attempts to take a rational view of the past. Unlike the Jewish narrative, however, the Russian one is based on motifs of martial glory and victory, not tragedy and suffering. In this instance, the drumbeat drowns out motifs of remembrance, reconciliation and empathy. It should be noted that some Ukrainian historians share the contemporary Russian interpretation of the Great Patriotic War mythology in their political struggle with Ukrainian nationalism.

Ukrainian national historiography strives to represent Ukraine as a conquered nation that fought heroically against two totalitarianisms, Nazi and Soviet, at once.³⁴ The place occupied by the Home Army in the Polish national narrative is reserved in the Ukrainian narrative for the OUN-UPA, whose programme announced a struggle for Ukrainian national statehood against Nazis, Communists and Polish nationalists. But the attempt to include the OUN-UPA into Ukrainian historical narrative encounters insurmountable difficulties associated with evaluations of the ideology and the representative nature of these organisations.

Should the OUN and the UPA be regarded as nationalist or fascist organisations? Whom exactly did they represent: the western region, or

the whole Ukrainian nation? These questions – raised by efforts to arrive at a rational assessment of the recent past – encounter competition on all sides, either from the tradition of a Manichean distinction between communism and fascism inherited from the times of the Second World War, or from resistance to the Ukrainian traditional, Russian, Jewish and Polish national narratives.³⁵ Ukrainian-Polish debates about the Volhynia massacre of 1943 have demonstrated the immanent incompatibility of the two respective national myths of WWII.

Ukrainian post-Soviet historians, unlike Russian ones, have resorted to an eclectic combination of the national and Soviet paradigms of the 'Second World War' and the 'Great Patriotic War'. David Marples has noted the contradictory coexistence in some Ukrainian history textbooks of assertions about Soviet 'slavery', 'Victory Day', and 'liberation from fascist slavery'.³⁶ The same historians, in his words, are capable of coming out simultaneously with opposing assessments of the role of the Red Army in battles on Ukrainian territory, depending on the genre of the publication and the prevailing political conjuncture. Consequently, the prospects of a Ukrainian 'nationalisation' of the Second World War look rather cloudy.

Post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography attempts to present Ukraine as an independent subject, not only an object of military operations, by stressing the fact of Soviet Ukrainian statehood. Naturally, this endows the Soviet version of the Great Patriotic War with a certain 'Ukrainocentrism', but only at the price of distorting historical perspective. It is also clear that this largely official interpretation of the problem looks particularly unconvincing against the background of Russian 'statist' historiography. The symbolic capital of Soviet Ukraine in the Stalin era is insufficient to provide either academic respectability or a competitive national mythology.

In general, most Ukrainian historians remain not only hostages of, but also active participants in the wars over nationalised historical memories and their respective mythologies.³⁷ However, the Ukrainian historical mythology of the Second World War in its nation state version yields substantially both to the Soviet/Russian and Polish national mythologies of military glory. Against this background it puts up a pessimistic tableau of suffering and defeat, but in this case the Ukrainian narrative is challenged openly by Jewish mythology and the Holocaust. To make matters worse, the Ukrainian national paradigm of the War not only entails a war of mythologies but has also provoked an open split within the professional historical community both in Ukraine and beyond.³⁸

In recent years, Ukrainian historiography has seen growing efforts to go beyond the framework of a national paradigm. Yaroslav Hrytsak, for instance, does not relieve the UPA leadership of responsibility for unleashing mass terror against the Polish inhabitants of Ukrainian territory, but he acknowledges that in the suicidal struggle between two nationalisms, Ukrainian and Polish, 'neither side ... was either completely right or completely guilty'.³⁹ A new generation of Ukrainian scholars, rather than calculating who was good and who was bad, is turning to an anthropological perspective, focusing on Ukrainian ordinary people and dealing with oral history, historical memory, and replacing 'social reality' with the problems of representation.⁴⁰

Generally speaking, the subjects of the Ukrainian Holodomor and Ukrainian War now seem so politicised that public discussions increasingly obscure not only the tragedies of particular individuals but also the strictly scholarly aspects of the problems. Under such circumstances, it is very hard to expect the attainment of a consensus in the academic community. The only viable intellectual alternative to the war of national mythologies, as Olexandr Zaitcev suggests, may be found in the gradual desacralisation and demythologisation of the history of the War⁴¹ and, it should be added, of the whole recent history of Ukraine. However, this seems an unlikely scenario, at least for the near future.

All the main trends of Ukrainian post-Soviet historiography, in their own ways, vividly reveal the limits of the nation state paradigm in depicting the Brezhnev epoch of Ukrainian history. In the Ukrainian national narrative it is coloured darkly as the period of stagnation, economic decline and moral degradation, and is perceived in terms of dissidents' heroic struggle with a corrupt regime and Brezhnev's neo-Stalinist policy of persecuting Ukrainian culture and Russification. Political history traditionally dominates the Ukrainian historical narrative of the period, while the influence of the cultural anthropology or memory studies in the field are still insufficient to have a major impact.

Generally speaking, neither the national nor the post-Soviet schools of historiography in Ukraine have put forward new approaches or versions for the interpretation of recent Ukrainian history. The mythology of national suffering and heroic resistance that oppose the founding Soviet myths – those of the Great October Socialist Revolution and the Great Patriotic War – often do not stand up to criticism, since Ukrainians are to be found not only among the victims but also among the perpetrators as well.

The traditional nation state paradigm is unable to draw a clear line between imperial and modern nation state. That is why it sometimes

describes imperial political and ideological phenomena as national, which is misleading, as the history of the Russian empire and Soviet Union suggests. The same could be said about another dichotomy – national and modern phenomena: all that is ‘Ukrainian’ is often depicted by Ukrainian historians as inherently ‘modern’, although in social reality the two sometimes were and are hardly compatible.

Employing dubious national terminology – the *Naród*/Nation dichotomy – is another original sin of Ukrainian historical writing, reflected in the Ukrainian language. The Slavic equivalent for ‘nation’, *naród*, coined by Polish intellectuals and borrowed by Russian and Ukrainian authors, has acquired a double meaning in the Ukrainian cultural context: it is social as well as national. Any English translation of the definition of ‘*naród*’ seems inadequate. The *Naród*/Nation dichotomy has given rise to many controversies and mutual misunderstandings not only between socialism and nationalism but between Ukrainian and Russian interpretations of their recent history as well.

In the search for alternatives to both the Soviet and national paradigms of Ukrainian history, at least some Ukrainian intellectuals take into account that the Soviet regime would not have existed so long or left such deep traces in society unless it had enjoyed social support. In this connection, the observations of the prominent literary scholar and essayist, Ivan Dziuba, also deserve attention. I would like to emphasise the importance of this author, for he represents the ‘lost’ generation of the 1960s with its leftist, national-Marxist state of mind and its orientation toward social history. This trend in Ukrainian historiography was suppressed first by the bureaucratic academic discourse of the Brezhnev epoch and second by traditional national discourse, but it still holds intellectual, theoretical potential that could be useful under the current Ukrainian circumstances.

Another alternative to the nation state paradigm in the interpretation of Ukrainian recent history was offered recently by a group of modern historians under the leadership of Natalia Yakovenko.⁴² Participants in the project of elaborating the new version of the Ukrainian history textbook

renounced the previous view of Ukraine as a victim of the communist system.... On the contrary, an effort is being made to show that the Ukrainian SSR was a co-participant in the functioning of that system in both positive manifestations (education, industrialisation, and the like) and criminal ones—mass political repression, collectivisation, and the Holodomor.⁴³

The new conception is oriented less toward a total condemnation and rejection of the Soviet system than toward 'a discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of the Soviet order in everyday human life'. In other words, the search for an alternative to the nation state paradigm of Ukrainian history is leading in the direction of cultural anthropology. Naturally, a project of this nature has already been subjected to sharp and uncompromising criticism by representatives of the national Ukrainian and Soviet traditionalists.

There are several other intellectual, scholarly alternatives that could be employed in the process of renovation and modernisation of Ukrainian historiography in its attempt to come to terms with the Soviet past. For example, cultural anthropology, memory studies, border studies and modernisation paradigm, to name just a few, offer viable approaches and interpretive frameworks that could be applied to recent Ukrainian history. The problem, however, is that the Ukrainian community of scholars is still half-closed, has no motivation to adopt intellectual innovations or is not yet ready to act on the principles of constructive dialog. At the same time, it must be said that Ukrainian studies reveal not only significant political and emotional implications but some theoretical limits of contemporary Western Soviet and Russian studies as well, especially those ones dealing with the phenomenon of nationalism.⁴⁴

History as politics

Once again: who holds the keys to the Ukrainian past? Professional politicians, of course, or so they think. In what follows, the discussion includes the ways in which Ukrainian post-Soviet political elites are participating in the process of shaping, re-shaping and manipulating narratives of the Ukrainian Soviet past for political purposes, beginning with the first President, Leonid Kravchuk, and ending with the incumbent President, Viktor Yanukovych.⁴⁵

President Kravchuk's politics of history were based on the concept of a Ukrainian national revival, developed by the founding father of Ukrainian national historiography, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, enhanced by the 'state' school of Ukrainian historical writing in the first half of the twentieth century and adopted by Ukrainian post-Soviet historiography. This formula combined an imagined '1000 years of Ukrainian state' with a European geopolitical identity that was conceptualised in opposition to the Russian imperial and Soviet/Russian official narratives.

The history of Ukraine, previously downplayed, became the main tool in a process of political legitimisation of the new political regime under

Kravchuk. Historians were promoted to high-ranked administrative positions in the state apparatus at all levels, much like those occupied earlier by professional party ideologists in the party bureaucratic hierarchy. For example, the position of Vice-Premier in charge of the Humanities during Kravchuk's and Kucham's presidencies was usually reserved for representatives of the respective academic institutes of Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

During this period, Cossack mythology became an important component of the 'Ukrainisation' of the previously Soviet cultural landscape.⁴⁶ The history of the short-lived Ukrainian national state of 1917–1920 (Ukrains'ka Narodna Respublika [UNR] or Ukrainian People's Republic) became of no less political importance. President Leonid Kravchuk, a former leading Communist party ideologue, solemnly accepted the symbols of state authority of their predecessors – the Cossack hetman's mace along with the regalia of the UNR government. National symbols of the UNR – the 'trident' coat-of-arms and the yellow-blue flag – acquired official status in Ukraine.

During Kravchuk's presidency, the mythology of the Great October Socialist Revolution began to be replaced by the mythology of Ukrainian modern national statehood and its main representatives such as Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Pavlo Skoropadsky, Symon Petliura and other 'great statesmen'. Two national historical myths were inherited from this epoch by the new political regime. The first symbolised the idea of Ukrainian territorial and national unity, when the two parts of Ukraine – the Western Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian Peoples Republic – were proclaimed a one and 'indivisible' nation state in 1919. The second myth was an embodiment of national glorification and victimisation known as the Battle of Kruty of 1918, when several hundred Ukrainian students were killed by Bolshevik detachments approaching Kiev.

As to the Soviet mythology of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, it began to be counterbalanced by the mythology of Stalinist crimes. The government opened the doors of the Communist Party and KGB archives to professional historians and sponsored several publishing projects aiming at revealing Soviet crimes during the Great Terror and the Great Famine of the 1930s. A special editorial board and institution, 'Rehabilitated by History', was created, with the academic historian Petro Tron'ko, a representative of the republican Soviet nomenclatura of the 1960s, at its head. It was followed by the newly established and officially sponsored periodical 'From the archives VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB', which published some of the documents of the Soviet secret police. In order to marginalise the mythology of the Great Patriotic War, an attempt

was made to replace it with the more universal, more neutral and more Western-oriented term 'World War II'.

President Leonid Kravchuk was replaced in 1994 by the former Soviet manufacturing director from Dniepropetrovsk, Leonid Kuchma, whose professional background seemingly made him more suitable under the hard economic circumstances. The new political elite of his time in office had spent its formative years during Leonid Brezhnev's reign. No wonder the political regime established in Ukraine in 1994 turned out to be, according to Ilia Prizel, 'national by form and Brezhnevite in essence'.⁴⁷ President Kuchma began the ten-year period of his presidency with political maneuvering between nationalism and communism, using the rhetoric of 'national revival' in parallel with the familiar rhetoric of Soviet-era propaganda. The new political regime, as was expected, demonstratively rejected the 'national romantic' concept of Ukrainian nation state building, and began a cautious, selective rehabilitation of the Soviet/Russian historical legacy. At the same time, President Kuchma continued the policy of historical legitimisation of the independent Ukrainian nation state with its current borders.⁴⁸ The official politics of history underwent some important symbolic changes in terms of both time and space. In terms of chronology, the new political regime gradually re-oriented its historical preferences from the remote past to the modern epoch. A new generation of the political elite preferred to initiate the history of a Ukrainian independent state not with Kievan Prince Volodymyr the Saint, or Cossack hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, or even historian-politician Mykhailo Hrushevsky, but with themselves. Hence, the slogan of the 'young Ukrainian state' began to replace the previously popular slogan of the '1000-year' Ukrainian state; it became visible especially during the pompous official celebration of the tenth jubilee of Ukrainian independency in 2001. In Kharkiv, the new monument to Ukrainian independent statehood erected that year represented the image of a 10-year-old girl.⁴⁹

President Kuchma also decided to restore the Soviet-era mythology of the Great Patriotic War, which was reinstated in the Ukrainian educational curriculum. The celebration of Victory Day on 9 May once again became one of the most important state rituals, as it had been in Brezhnev's epoch.⁵⁰ However, the Soviet version of the Great Patriotic War appeared to be incompatible with the Ukrainian national mythology of heroic military resistance to the Soviet army led by OUN-UPA.⁵¹ Thus, the annual official celebration of the Great Patriotic War came to be marked by street clashes between Soviet veterans and their nationalist counterparts. The government, unable to reconcile these competing national mythologies, not unreasonably turned to the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences: a special

commission of historians was established to investigate the political nature and activity of the OUN-UPA. Several monographs, articles and primary sources were published by this commission, but both sides of the struggle over this topic in history refused to recognise its findings.

In order to counterbalance the mythology of the Great Patriotic War, President Kuchma continued the policy of his predecessor of revealing the crimes of Stalin. So the state continued to support both the 'Rehabilitated by History' and the 'From the archives VUCHK-GPU-NKVD-KGB' initiatives that were devoted to the theme of the Great Terror. In parallel with this, the Great Famine of 1932–3 was for the first time officially christened 'genocide of the Ukrainian people' by the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament). However, the inconsistencies of Kuchma's politics of history were revealed as the government officially commemorated the seventieth year of the Great Famine while simultaneously celebrating achievements of Stalin's industrialisation such as the Dnieproges dam.

In contrast with the Great Patriotic War theme, the mythology and celebration of the Great October Socialist Revolution suffered further decline in Kuchma's Ukraine. This greatest of the Soviet state holidays was officially abolished in 2000 and replaced by the obscure Day of Social Workers. It is worth stressing that in Russia the Great October holiday was replaced by the pure nationalistic Day of National Unity, marked by the expulsion of 'unholy' Catholic Poles in 1612 from behind the 'sacred wall of the Kremlin'. At the same time, President Kuchma's government continued to exploit the mythology of Ukrainian National Re-unification of 1919 and the Battle of Kruty of 1918; Mykhailo Hrushevsky's cult was also preserved and widely popularised. This kind of policy met with comparatively weak resistance in Ukraine but came into collision with both the Polish mythology of national revival, and the Jewish mythology of national suffering on Ukrainian territory.⁵²

President Kuchma's regime attempted to reconcile the conflicting memories of the most important epoch of Soviet history, namely the Brezhnev epoch, of which contemporary Ukraine is a direct product. The official commemoration of the former political dissident Viacheslav Chornovil, who died in an accident under suspicious circumstances in 1999, was followed by the official commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the head of the Ukrainian branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Shcherbitsky. Needless to say, both camps – orthodox Communists and orthodox Nationalists – remained dissatisfied.

President Kuchma's 'Change of Signposts' in his politics of history resulted in even more contradictory consequences. He managed to achieve economic stability partly through concessions to regional post-Soviet

elites who in turn won a significant opportunity to correct the historical policy of official Kiev. The cultural landscape of Ukraine during Kuchma's presidency began to absorb local historical symbols in growing quantity: Ukrainian ones in the Western part of Ukraine, along with Soviet and neo-Soviet ones in its eastern and southern regions. The President, visiting these various regions, addressed local groups of auditors with what each of them wanted to hear: in Lviv he expounded on the glories or sorrows of the national past, while in Donetsk, on the great achievements of Soviet power.

Kuchma's regime offered no ideological alternatives; instead, he simply canned mutually antagonistic communist and nationalist myths and stereotypes. This approach resulted in the further regional and political polarisation of Ukrainian society. Besides, the Brezhnev-style double-thinking was accompanied by widespread corruption, political criminality, and 'wild' privatisation; no wonder it had alienated a new, western-oriented generation of the middle class. In the end, Kuchma's regime, sharing some of its most basic features with those of Brezhnev's, shared also its political fortune. Kuchma lost all moral legitimacy and was swept away by the Orange Revolution of 2004.

The newly elected Ukrainian President, Victor Yushchenko, refused to pursue the tactics of political maneuvering between nationalism and communism that had been employed by his predecessor. Instead, President Yushchenko decided to activate the good old 'national revival' mythology with its theme of '1000 years of Ukrainian state'. The new political regime relied upon the nationally oriented segments of Ukrainian academia and society. However, for the first time since 1991, professionals from academia were not represented in the new government. It seemed that the new President was not happy with the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Maybe that's why he entrusted himself with the task of being the primary expert in Ukrainian history.

President Yushchenko was personally attracted to the mythic abyss of the Trypillia archaeological epoch and Ukrainian Cossackdom. However, political expediency forced him to pay most attention to recent, mainly Soviet, history. Thus, the new regime decided to rush into a frontal attack on both Soviet foundation myths simultaneously. The myth of the Great October Socialist Revolution was confronted by the traditional mythology of the National Re-Union and the Battle of Kruty. The mythology of the Great Patriotic War, the main target of the new politics of memory, was challenged by the Holodomor and OUN-UPA mythologies. These tactics were accompanied by a new wave of the war on Soviet symbols, the dismantling of monuments to Soviet leaders

involved in Stalin's crimes, and the renaming of streets and other public spaces.

President Yushchenko made the reasonable decision to institutionalise his anti-Communist politics of history. He created the State Institute of National Memory, following Polish and Slovak models. The Institute began to collect and study all materials related to the mass repressions of Stalinism, especially the Famine of 1932–1933 and the anti-Soviet resistance movement of the OUN-UPA. At the same time, museums of Soviet occupation were created in Kiev and Lviv. However, none of these institutions, poorly equipped, with modest budgets and small staff, bore much resemblance to other similar institutions established in former socialist countries.⁵³ President Yushchenko entrusted the SBU (the Ukrainian secret service, former republican branch of the Soviet KGB) with the task of revealing Stalin's crimes, but the conviction of Stalin-era officials by the Kiev Court of Appeal, hastily prepared on the evidentiary basis of documents delivered by SBU on the eve of the next Presidential election of 2010, looked rather like political farce.⁵⁴

The Great Famine (Holodomor) of 1932–1933 occupied the central place in the President's Yushchenko's politics of memory. Its commemoration became perhaps the greatest campaign in the official politics of history since 1991, resulting in large-scale publishing projects, monuments, public ceremonies, conferences, and films. At the same time, I would be cautious about accepting the conclusions of analysts who maintain that the affirmation of the Holodomor was an achievement of Viktor Yushchenko's politics of historical memory and that it served to consolidate Ukrainian society. In fact, it deepened political confrontation in Ukrainian society by exacerbating the regional polarisation in Ukraine on the one hand and contributing to a prolonged opposition between Ukraine and Russia in the realm of historical memory on the other.

While the national paradigm of Ukrainian history saw very little change during that time, the Soviet paradigm in neighbouring Russia underwent an active ideological transformation, combining the historical mythology of World War II with neo-imperial Orthodoxy. Consequently, the historical politics of Ukraine's President Yushchenko came to be subjected to increasing criticism in both Ukraine and Russia. Almost every step he took or action he made was confronted by vehement public protest and opposition from the Russian government. In fact, President Yushchenko's five-year term in office can be summarised as a Ukrainian-Russian war of national mythologies, which often turned into diplomatic and even economic wars.

Although little time has elapsed since Viktor Yanukovich came to power in 2010, the central tendencies of his politics of history have already manifested themselves clearly, especially given that in the southern and eastern parts of the country the now governing Party of Regions has been in power for quite some time. Yanukovich and his team perceived the Orange Revolution of 2004 in very much the same way the Russian political elites did. Both saw it through the lens of conspiracy theories and of belief in the subversive activities of Western secret services in post-Soviet space whose objective was to control local resources and fight against their post-Soviet rivals in the world market.⁵⁵ Thus the historical politics of the new regime have been mostly premised, at least so far, on denying the strategy of Yanukovich's predecessors rather than on working out a new course for national and state development aimed at national consolidation.

The humanities are manifestly excluded from priority in the policies of the Yanukovich post-Soviet technocratic government. They have, it seems, simply ceased to exist for the incumbent authorities. In fact, they are controlled and articulated by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, or more specifically, by its head, pro-Russian public intellectual, Dmytro Tabachnyk. The new regime initiated its attack on any historical institutions that demonstrated signs of having a national agenda. The government reshuffled the management of the Institute of National Memory and appointed as its new director Valery Soldatenko, a historian with an orthodox, Soviet-type reputation. Consequently, even by comparison with the post-Soviet Academy of Sciences, the Institute today resembles a typically Soviet ideological department. Its influence on the interpretation of the recent past is limited by the framework of Soviet historical discourse.

The new Ukrainian government doesn't complicate its existence by attempting to develop its own historical politics. Instead, it draws heavily on ready-made examples from official Russian sources. Therefore, the dimensions of contemporary historical policy in Ukraine are currently being shaped under the influence of neo-Soviet (Orthodox and Communist) ideology; hence the steps to partially rehabilitate Stalin and his policies. Today, the Ukrainian state archives and the Institute of Historical Memory are controlled by orthodox communists, who also erect monuments to Stalin in the south-eastern cities of Odesa and Zaporizhzhia. High-ranking politicians and administrators make public statements that seek at least partially to justify Stalin's repressions.⁵⁶

One bizarre example of this new policy on historical memory comes from the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine decree of 11 August 2010

on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Stakhanovite movement – the mass movement of shock workers during Stalin’s industrialisation named after the Donbas coal miner Alexei Stakhanov. The movement was originally intended to raise the efficiency of the socialist economy and to create a model Soviet worker. Shortly before the decree was issued, Ukrainian mass media reported on a coal miner from the ‘Novodzerzhynska’ mine, Serhiy Shemuk, who, with the blessing of the Metropolitan of Mariupol of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, beat Stakhanov’s productivity record by producing 2023 per cent of the required daily output.⁵⁷

The attempt to revive the official enthusiasm for Stalin’s industrialisation in the oligarch-controlled and robbed post-Soviet country failed. President Yanukovich’s regime has decided to focus instead on the symbols of World War II, referred to as the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet tradition. This focus, however, is framed not so much by the earlier Soviet discourse on ‘the friendship of peoples’ but rather by the contemporary Russian discourse with a strong emphasis on Orthodoxy. One testament to this comes from the large-scale celebrations of Victory Day (May 9) as well as an insistent public display of the corresponding symbolism.

It seems highly unlikely that President Yanukovich will be able to repeat President Kuchma’s politics of maneuvering between national and Soviet historical discourses.⁵⁸ The room for political maneuvering is much more limited today, while Yanukovich’s intellectual resources pale in comparison with those of his predecessors. On the other hand, following Kuchma’s geopolitical approach to historical memory, which was basically ‘tacking’ between Russia and Europe, also appears problematic as Ukraine, which increasingly begins to resemble the notorious case of Belarus, finds itself gradually surrounded by a wall of international self-isolation.

Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky once noted that ‘the regime which has become entangled in insoluble contradictions with the principles from which it derives its legitimacy cannot endure for very long’.⁵⁹ The only plausible way out of this situation for the new government is to engage in an open dialogue with civil society, which, however, is quite unlikely. Another, albeit theoretical, possibility could be a symbolic reorientation toward the historical legacy of Ukrainian national communism. But most contemporary Ukrainian communists have no affinity for this idea, and the number of genuine followers of this tradition, the generation of the ‘sixties’ is clearly declining.

Overall, the historical policies of previous Ukrainian governments were controversial and thus largely ineffective. The newly born political elites in Ukraine appeared to be unprepared to execute a national project at the

theoretical level. They hardly anticipated that their task would be not so much to revive the Ukrainian nation with its political rather than ethnic culture, as essentially to create it. Ukrainian politicians, at least some of them, widely believed that it would suffice to 'enlighten' the masses and 'explain' to them 'the historical truths', and that as a result people would eagerly support the new political regime as they did during the 1991 independence referendum. Instead, Ukrainian society has witnessed political, social, national, cultural, linguistic and religious differentiation.

Neither were the Ukrainian political elites ready to implement the national project at the practical level as they relied primarily on old institutions and a cadre that compromised themselves by their closeness to or even affiliation with the Soviet Communist Party nomenclatura. However, they proved quite ready to divide and privatise the Soviet material – rather than symbolic – legacy. In fact, they completed the property and assets division so quickly and cynically that the trust of society, which was still naively governed by the concept of social justice, was completely lost. Consequently, other initiatives of the Ukrainian government in the realm of nation-building and historical policy could not but be morally discredited, especially after an economic collapse and the growing sentiment of protest in all spheres of social life.

The government does not possess many resources to implement its decisions, because of a catastrophically low level of state prestige, an absence of moral legitimacy and popular trust, widespread cynicism in an atomised society, miserable financial resources and the decrepit infrastructure of the cultural process. Since Ukraine regained its independence, it has even failed to revitalise 'the most popular art among the masses' – the national cinema. Ukrainian television is brimming with propagandistic Soviet and contemporary Russian nationalistic films that glorify militarism and the daily feats of the police and national security agencies.

None of the Ukrainian presidents has made any attempt to elaborate a new, more sophisticated politics of history. They have all borrowed *finished articles* from the past or from outside. One may speak of growing incompetence in managing those politics in Ukraine over the past several years. All of them have followed the Soviet pattern of implementing identity politics from above and avoiding an open public dialogue with Ukrainian civil society.

Naród/society

Ukrainian society still demonstrates its virtuosity in the culture of survival, but until now it has had nothing to contribute to the cultural

model of development.⁶⁰ As Catherine Wanner has observed, the practice of adaptation and survival in such a society promotes the maintenance of the Soviet component of identity, finding support on the individual level.⁶¹ According to a survey conducted by Kiev-based Razumkov Centre in 2005, more than 25 per cent of Ukrainian citizens would at that time have liked to return to the Soviet Union,⁶² while in 2011 more than 54 per cent of them think that it would be better for the Soviet Union to have been preserved.⁶³ Soviet-like isolationism is also recognisable: suffice it to say that about 77 per cent of Ukrainians have never been abroad;⁶⁴ it is no wonder that 45 per cent of them maintain a negative attitude toward Western culture.⁶⁵

The problem of (re)shaping collective as well as individual memories in (post-)communist societies under the new political circumstances has begun to attract more scholarly attention.⁶⁶ Taras Kuzio has pointed out that a 'black-and-white' picture of the recent past has proved too simple to find acceptance and support in Ukrainian society.⁶⁷ From the one side, the Soviet historical legacy was only partly in conflict with the national legacy and did not come down to the mere destruction of everything Ukrainian. From the other side, 'it is debatable whether Ukraine can be considered a complete nation' on the eve of the Communist revolution or even before 1991.⁶⁸ Much of the population does not accept a wholly negative representation of the Soviet past at the level of either the individual or the group. Traumatized by the collapse of the USSR, collective psychology has tended to reject the memory of even greater traumas and sufferings of the Soviet past or has sought to reformulate them in a more optimistic light.

To be sure, nostalgia for communist times is typical not only of Ukraine but also of the other post-communist countries, where on average more than half the population now holds a positive view of the communist past.⁶⁹ That indicator is even higher in Russia: in 2005 up to 60 per cent of young Russians with no personal experience of life in the USSR felt nostalgia for it.⁷⁰ It is only in Ukraine, however, that different attitudes to the recent past take on existential significance, as they are deeply associated with problems of collective identity and the very legitimacy of the post-Soviet 'Ukrainian project'.

Reactions to the 'nationalisation' of the recent past in Ukraine have been varied. Abandonment of the Soviet schema and conceptualisation of Ukrainian history in the Soviet period provoked an active resistance on the part of the communists and Rus'-Orthodox nationalists that grew into a full-scale war over the content of school textbooks. Ukrainian parliamentary commissions have considered the demands of

communist deputies that the Great October Socialist Revolution be reinstated in academic literature; that the enthusiastic labour and heroic achievements of the first Five-Year Plan be given due recognition; that the Great Patriotic War regain its previous status; that positive assessments of the OUN-UPA be eliminated, and so on. In the Crimea, there have been incidents involving the public burning of Ukrainian history textbooks.

For a society that finds itself in difficult circumstances, mythological consciousness promotes psychological adaptation and offers a refuge from traumatic historical experience.⁷¹ Such a society becomes habitually dependent on myth; hence its collective consciousness remains open to new mythologies that relieve society itself of collective responsibility for the state of affairs. As a result, the mythology of the Soviet period gradually has been transformed into the new myth about the Soviet Union. The Great October Socialist Revolution mythology no longer plays the same social role as it did in the 1980s: only about 10 per cent of Ukrainians consider the 7th of November – when the Russian Communist revolution occurred – a major holiday, while for about half of them it's just one among many ordinary days.⁷² Instead, the mythology of the Great Patriotic war is rising as a new manifestation of Russian neo-Soviet Orthodox nationalism.

The myth of the Great Patriotic War associated with Stalin appears to be at the heart of the new mythology about the Soviet Union as a whole. According to data collected by the Razumkov Center, 71.7 per cent of Ukrainian residents polled in 2003 considered Victory Day a major holiday; in 2010 their number grew up to 74.9 per cent.⁷³ In general, the collective historical memory of Ukrainian society shows a steady dependence on the politics of memory in Russia, dominated as it is by historical amnesia and the glorification of Stalinism.⁷⁴ The same may be said about the memory of Stalin himself. Thus, in 1991, if 27 per cent of Ukrainians agreed that Stalin was a 'great leader', while 44 per cent disagreed, by 2006 there were more in the first group (38 per cent) than in the second (37 per cent). Moreover, Stalin's popularity is increasing in every segment of Ukrainian society, especially among young people (by 10 per cent) and the middle-aged (also by 10 per cent).⁷⁵

Clear manifestations of this influence are apparent to the naked eye: the St. George ribbon, symbolising the 'nationalised' Russian mythology of the Great Patriotic War, continues to wave from the antennas of many passenger cars in Ukraine, although several months have passed since the solemn celebration of Victory Day. It is perfectly obvious that the meaning of this symbol has gone beyond the bounds of a particular

holiday and turned into a manifestation either of Russo-Slavic national identity or of support for the pro-Russian political orientation of the current government. In southern and eastern Ukraine at least, the new Russian orientation of (the victors of) the Great Patriotic War easily outweighs the historical mythology of the Holodomor and the OUN-UPA (the defeated).

Collective memory of the Brezhnev era of relative stability and more or less satisfactory material status has advanced to the forefront of historical priorities in post-Soviet Ukrainian society. It has become the main source of nostalgic moods, stimulated by means of well-known cultural symbols and rituals. Many people in Ukraine and Russia see it as a Golden Age rather than an epoch of stagnation and persecution. Characteristically enough, the Brezhnev era of Ukrainian-Soviet history remains one of the periods least studied and represented in academic historiography while being highly praised by political elites.

Widespread cynicism and indifference to the traumatic past in Ukrainian society, or efforts to reduce it to the level of a culture of ridicule and parody, may be regarded not only as one form of such collective escape but as a collective spiritual heritage of the Brezhnev epoch as well. Ukrainian (post)Soviet society has sunk into a state of deep depression brought about, on the one hand, by the inertia of the Soviet way of life and, on the other, by the openly cynical and incompetent policies of the Ukrainian elite. Ukrainian society is also afflicted by profound cynicism and the devaluation of many socio-cultural and professional values and norms. It is alienated from the ratification of important political decisions and from government institutions, which it treats more or less as it did Soviet institutions – with simultaneous fear and desire to deceive or bribe them.

Back in the late 1990s James Mace, the well-known American historian of the Holodomor, was already struck by the fact that the publicising of events previously covered up had not endowed them with national significance in Ukraine, and that a good many people completely denied what had actually happened.⁷⁶ Tanya Richardson, who studies the historical memory of current residents of Odessa, writes about young people's indifference to traumatic history.⁷⁷ Tatiana Zhurzhenko describes local 'memory wars' on the Holodomor issue in Kharkiv, on the Ukrainian-Russian borderland.⁷⁸ Liudmyla Hrynevych attests to the aggressive public reaction to the official politics of memory of the Holodomor during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko all over Ukraine.

There has been a palpable decrease in the level of tolerance and a coarsening of the tone of discourse among groups representing different viewpoints. There is a general lack of public dialogue about the past;

of a common search for answers to difficult questions in which the process is regarded as more important than the result. Society has become used to truth 'with no right of appeal,' orienting itself on dogma, canon, and winners and losers. Given the relentless struggle of diametrically opposed mythologies – communist and nationalist – in Ukraine, people take one side or the other or, alternatively, seek a complete escape from history so as to relieve stress or avoid yet another dilemma of consciousness and responsibility.

In sum, the Ukrainian academic and political elites have not managed to effect any radical change in the traditional 'autonomist' or 'imperial' models for the representation of Ukrainian history in the imperial and Soviet eras. According to a poll conducted by the Razumkov Center in 2005, an average of almost 44 per cent of Ukrainian citizens still consider Ukrainian history 'an inalienable part of the history of the great East Slavic people, as is the history of Russia and Belarus'.⁷⁹ Those who consider Ukrainian history wholly autonomous and Ukraine the sole successor of Kyivan Rus' constitute about half that number – 25 per cent. In the third place are those who found it hard to respond to questions dealing with Ukrainian history at all. Thus, about half the Ukrainian people deny their state a national history of its own: in other words, they reject its political legitimacy.

Conclusions

It is sometimes said that Ukrainians are so obsessed with their past that they become prisoners of their imagined history. In this regard, Ukrainians are quite similar to other Eastern European peoples. Is it possible for them to get rid of history? Or at least to overcome the 'burden of history', to 'escape' from history somehow? I do not think so ... the Soviet past/present cannot be simply rejected, or ousted from contemporary Ukraine. The Soviet heritage is the only one that is commonly shared by all Ukrainian citizens. So the only possible way to come to terms with such a historical legacy is a historical revisionism – a complete reinterpretation of the communist past in a positive way, as an integral part of a new national narrative.⁸⁰

It seems as if Ukrainian post-Soviet historians have erred in rejecting a nuanced approach to the whole Soviet era by uniting the Brezhnev, Stalin and Lenin epochs into a single unit defined by the totalitarian paradigm. An alternative approach that distinguishes nuances among the various political regimes of the Soviet era could serve better from the viewpoint of creating a Ukrainian 'usable past'. For example, it could be

argued that there are two different kinds of Soviet history: that of the Communist-reformists (Lenin, Khrushchev and Gorbachev), and that of Communist-traditionalists, or, better, Russian national-Communists (Stalin and Brezhnev).⁸¹ Soviet Leninists-Westernisers could base their political legitimacy on the mythology of the Great October Socialist Revolution, while the Stalinists-Russophiles emphasise the Great Patriotic War.⁸²

Such an approach would at least make it possible to come to terms with the Leninist historical and cultural legacy in Ukrainian history, which was actively employed by Soviet reformers of the 1960s and the late 1980s but is rejected by the contemporary Russian political and intellectual elite. In this context, for example, Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky's and Roman Szporluk's observations about Lenin's understanding of the modern phenomenon of nationalism, and his constructive role in a positive communist solution of the 'Ukrainian question', deserve more scholarly and political attention.⁸³ The problem is that there is no social, political or intellectual gropes that could be a main carrier or promoter of such an ideology in Ukraine.

The post-Soviet Ukraine of today does not present a convincing alternative to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The official nation state paradigm that replaced the Soviet conception of the 'friendship of peoples' under the aegis of the 'more equal' Russian people is in many ways reminiscent of the Polish conception of an enslaved nation, subsequently liberated, which fought heroically against the totalitarian Russian and German regimes. In contrast to the Polish situation, however, the paradigm of Ukrainian national statehood did not become a consolidating factor in socio-political life or a worthy alternative to the Soviet Russian paradigm of the history of the 'short' twentieth century.

It would be worthwhile, however, to attempt to replace the traditional mythology of suffering and heroic struggle for salvation with a more optimistic and more secular historical mythology based on the concept of modernisation, in the broad sense of the word. The Soviet historical and cultural legacy, its reformist aspect first and foremost, also holds the potential to facilitate modernisation that a renewed Ukrainian national discourse could 'appropriate' and even turn to the advantage of its own democratic transformation. In the Ukrainian context, the modernisation paradigm could and should be employed not for the rehabilitation of Stalinism and its 'revolution from above,' nor for the aping of Russian contemporary neo-imperial historiography, but in order to reveal in the recent Ukrainian past basic characteristic features that defined its present. Those include the nature of relations between ecclesiastical and secular

rule; institutions of private property; the interplay of law and morality; corporative and individual cultures; relations between elites, government and society; mechanisms of political and cultural domination; interaction of a centre and a periphery and so on. In this way the Ukrainian traditional political culture of survival could be supplemented with a culture of development or modernisation.

Condemning Soviet totalitarianism and Russian nationalism is not the same thing as being prepared to take responsibility for the Soviet past. Are Ukrainian historians prepared to discuss personally unpleasant aspects of authoritarian traditions of political culture; and to seek the roots of such widespread social phenomena as antidemocratic, antiliberal values, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism, conformism and lack of freedom? Are they prepared to overcome the mental traditions of conservatism that condemn Ukrainian society to chronic stagnation? Are they prepared to reform their own professional milieu according to the principles of an open society? For the time being, these questions remain open.

The creation of an alternative to the Soviet/Russian paradigm of a 'common history' requires a rethinking not only of its Ukrainian component but also the reformulation of the entire Soviet historic-cultural legacy that still weighs upon Ukrainian society. Russia and Ukraine now interpret their joint Soviet cultural legacy in different ways, according to the needs of their own national projects. Nevertheless, these interpretations are directly linked. Considering that Soviet, Russian and Ukrainian national discourses are intertwined in the Ukrainian historical legacy, it must be admitted that the simple rejection of any of them in favour of another seems problematic. Ukraine cannot rid itself of its Soviet/Russian legacy: it can only strive to reinterpret it. In other words, it is impossible to create a *national text* in Ukraine representing an alternative to the Soviet Russian one without transforming the *transnational context*.

A 'good' Ukrainian historical mythology can become 'workable' only if the political elite is able to integrate the broader population into the decision-making process and to share political responsibility with civil society; the intellectual elite, in its turn, must be able to reconcile 'Ukrainian' and 'modern', at least symbolically. However, this is unlikely to happen in the near future. Nascent Ukrainian politicians have in no way proved themselves different from those of the Soviet party *nomenklatura*. Ukrainian academia in general has not passed through a stage of institutional and methodological transformation, and continues to be more responsive to the volatile political conjuncture than motivated by the desire for intellectual innovation. Since neither political nor intellectual

elites are ready to adopt the principles of an open society, Ukraine remains a battlefield of competing mythologies and identities as well as memories and histories.

Notes

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11. Robert Tucker, for example, emphasised that Soviet political history progressed in distinctive stages under different leaderships (R. C. Tucker, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* [New York: Norton, 1987]).
12. See: Edwin Bacon, 'Reconsidering Brezhnev', in E. Bacon and M. Sandle (eds), *Brezhnev reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 1–21.
13. In this article the definition of 'recent past' is used as an equivalent of Ukrainian Soviet past, beginning with 1917.
14. The paper is based on my essay 'Ponevolennia istorieju' [Enslaved by history: Soviet Ukraine in contemporary historiography] published in the collection of articles: V. Kravchenko, *Ukraïna, imperiia, Ros iia: vybrani staty z modernoi istorii ta istoriografii* [Ukraine, Empire, Russia: Selected Articles on Modern History and Historiography; in Ukrainian] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2011), pp. 455–528.
15. O. Subtelny, 'The Current State of Ukrainian Historiography,' *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* vol. 18, no. 1–2 (1993), pp. 34–54; M. von Hagen, 'Does Ukraine Have a History?' *Slavic Review* vol. 54, no. 3 (1995), pp. 658–73; Y. Hrytsak, 'Ukrainskaya istoriografiya: 1991–2001. Desyatiletie peremen', *Ab imperio*, (2003) [online]. Available at: <http://abimperio.net.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/aishow.pl?state=showa&idart=734&idlang=2&Code=> [Accessed 30 May 2012]; G. Kasianov, 'Sovremennoe sostoyanie ukrainskoi istoriografii: metodologicheskie i institutsionalnye aspekty', in L. Zashkilniak (ed.), *Ukrains'ka istoriografiya na zlami XX I XXI stolit: zdobutky i problemy. Kolektyvna monografiya* (Lviv: Lviv National University Press, 2004); T. Stryjek,

- Jakiej przeszłości potrzebuje przyszłość? Interpretacje dziejów narodowych w historiografii i debacie publicznej na Ukrainie, 1991–2004 (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN and Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, and others, 2007).
16. V.A. Smolii (ed.), *Ukraina kriz' viky*, tt. 1–15 (Kyiv: Al'ternatyvy, 1998).
 17. It is represented, among others, by the Institute of Ukrainian Studies affiliated with Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, the Ivan Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies in Lviv, and the Mychailo Hrushevsky Institute of Ukrainian Archaeography and Source Studies of the National Academy of Science in Kyiv, not to mention numerous NGOs of national-patriotic orientation.
 18. Regarding Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, see: O. Pritsak, 'Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, Scholar and "Communicator"', in P.L. Rudnytsky (ed.), *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 1987), pp. XV–XXII.
 19. Such as 'Ukraina Moderna' (Lviv) or 'Krytyka' (Kyiv), or 'Ukrainian Humanities Review' (Kyiv).
 20. Y. Hrytsak, 'Chorni knyhy chervonogo teroru', *Krytyka* vol. 31, no. 5 (2000) pp. 4–6.
 21. Z.E. Kohut, *History as a Battleground: Russian-Ukrainian Relations and Historical Consciousness in Contemporary Ukraine* (Saskatoon: Heritage Press, 2001), p. 36.
 22. V. Holubko and L. Zashkilniak (eds), *Ukrains'ka istoriohrafija na zlami XX I XXI stolit: zdobutky i problemy. Kolektyvna monohrafija* (Lviv: Lviv National University Press, 2004) p. 184.
 23. V. Verstiuk (ed.), *Problemy vyvtchennia istorii Ukrains'koi revoliucii 1917–1921 rr.* (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2002); O. Pavlyshyn and L. Zashkilniak (eds.), *Ukrains'ka istoriohrafija na zlami XX I XXI stolit: zdobutky i problemy. Kolektyvna monohrafija* (Lviv: Lviv National University Press, 2004), p.168–83; S. Velychenko, 'Ukrainians Rethink Their Revolutions', *Ab Imperio* no. 4 (2004), 1–16; C. Ford, 'Reconsidering the Ukrainian Revolution 1917–1921: The Dialectics of National Liberation and Social Emancipation', *Debate: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* vol. 15, no. 3 (2007), 279–306; V.F. Soldatenko, *Ukrains'ka Revoliucia: kontseptsia ta istoriohrafia (1918–1920 rr.)* (Kyiv: Knyha Pamiati Ukrainy, 1999).
 24. V. Buldakov, 'Attempts at the "Nationalisation" of Russian and Soviet History in the Newly Independent Slavic States, The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia', in H. Tadayuki (ed.), *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia, Proceedings of the July 2002 International Symposium at the SRC* (Sapporo: SRC, 2003), pp. 3–34.
 25. Polit.ru. *Rossia-Ukraina: kak pishetsia istoria. Beseda Alexeia Millera i Georgia Kasianova. Tchast' 5. Pervaja mirovaja*, (2009) [online]. Available at: <http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2009/07/02/worldwar.html> [Accessed 30 May 2012].
 26. Y. Hrytsak, *Strasti za natsionalizmom. Istorychni esei* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2004), p. 84.
 27. L. Grynevych, 'The Present State of Ukrainian Historiography on the Holodomor and Prospects for its Development', *The Harriman Review* vol. 16, no. 2 (2008), 10–20.
 28. G. Kasianov, 'Revisiting the Great Famine of 1932–1933. Politics of Memory and Public Consciousness (Ukraine after 1991)', in M. Kopecek (ed.), *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe After 1989* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2008), p. 215.

29. G. Kasianov, *Dance Macabre: holod 1932–1933 rokiv u politytci, masovij svi-domosti ta istoriohrafii (1980—potchatok 2000)* (Kyiv: Nash Tchas, 2010); Millera i Kasianova (2009); Kasianov, 'Revisiting the Great Famine of 1932–1933. Politics of Memory and Public Consciousness (Ukraine after 1991)', pp. 197–220; J. Dietsch, *Making Sense of Suffering: Holocaust and Holodomor in Ukrainian Historical Culture* (Lund: Lunds universitet, 2006); F.E. Sysyn, 'The Famine of 1932–1933 in the Discussion of Russian-Ukrainian Relations', *The Harriman Review* vol. 15, no. 2/3 (2005), 77–82 and so on.
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32. Sh. Fitzpatrick, 'Introduction: Soviet Union in Retrospect—Ten Years after 1991', in W. Slater and A. Wilson (eds.), *The Legacy of the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 9.
33. L. Gudkov, ' "Pamiat" pro vijnu ta masova identytchnist" Rosijan', *Krytyka* vol. 91, no. 5 (2005); T.J. Uldricks, 'War, Politics and Memory. Russian Historians Reevaluate the Origins of World War II', *History & Memory* vol. 21, no. 2 (2009), 60–82.
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36. Marples, *Heroes and Villains*, p. 244.
37. O. Zaitcev, 'Vijna mitiv pro vijnu v sutchasnij Ukraini', *Krytyka* no. 3–4 (2010), 149–50; V. Hrynevych, 'Mit vijny ta vijna mitiv', *Krytyka*, no. 5 (2005) .
38. 'Ukrainisty ta Bandera: rozbizhni pohliady', editorial, *Krytyka* no. 3–4 (2010), pp. 149–50.
39. Y. Hrytsak, *Narys istorii Ukrainy. Formuvannia modernoi Ukrains'koi natsii XIX–XX stolit'* (Kyiv: Heneza, 1996), p. 254.
40. G. Grinchenko, *Ukrains'ki ostarbaityery v systemi prymusovoi pratci Tretioho Raichu: problemy istorytchnoi pamiaty. Dysertacia na zdobuttia naukovoho stupenia doctora istorytchnykh nauk* (Rukopys. Kharkiv, 2011); V. Hrynevych, *Suspil'no-politytchni nastri naseleattia Ukrainy v roky Druhoi svitovoi vijny (1939–1945 rr.)* (Kyiv: NAN Ukrainy, 2007).

41. O. Zaitcev, 'Vijna mitiv pro vijnu v sutchasni Ukraini', *Krytyka* no. 3–4 (2010), 149–50.
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45. See: O. Ohorchak, *Role of Memory Policy in Constructing National Identity*. Case Study: Ukraine (Master of Arts Thesis, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Germany and Palacky University in Olomouc, Czech Republic. Göttingen, Germany, 2011) http://theses.cz/id/d6v4ad/MA_Thesis_Ohorchak.pdf; V. Ishchenko, 'Fighting Fences vs Fighting Monuments: Politics of Memory and Protest Mobilisation in Ukraine', *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* vol. 19, no. 1–2 (2011), 369–95; A. Portnov, 'Historical Legacies and Politics of History in Ukraine. Introductory Remarks', in H. Best and A. Wenninger (eds), *Landmark 1989: Central and Eastern European Societies Twenty Years After the System Change* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2010), pp. 54–59; A. Kappeler, 'The Politics of History in Contemporary Ukraine: Russia, Poland, Austria, and Europe,' in J. Besters-Dilger (ed.), *Ukraine on its Way to Europe: Interim Results of the Orange Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 217–32; Kasianov, 'Revisiting the Great Famine of 1932–1933. Politics of Memory and Public Consciousness (Ukraine after 1991)', pp. 197–220, and others.
46. F.E. Sysyn, 'The Reemergence of the Ukrainian Nation and Cossack Mythology', *Social Research* vol. 58, no. 4 (1991), 845–59.
47. Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine*, p. 428.
48. V. Sereda, 'Osoblyvosti reprezentacii nacjonal'no-istorychnykh identytchnostej v ofitcijnomu dyskursi presydyntiv Ukrainy I Rosii', *Sotciolohia: teoria, metody, marketynh* no.3 (2006), 191–212.
49. V.V. Kravchenko, *Kharkiv/Khar'kov: stolitca pogranych'ia [Kharkiv/Kharkov: A Frontier Capital; in Russian]* (Vilnius: EHU Press, 2010).
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51. L. Hrynevych, (ed.), *Protystoiannia. Zernennia, zajavy, lysty hromads'kykh orhanizatcij, politychnyx partij, hromadian Ukrainy do komisii z vyvtchennia dial'nosti OUN-UPA, 1996–1998 rr* (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy, 1999).
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54. T. Snyder, 'Ukraine's Past on Trial', *The New York Review of Books*, (3 February 2010) [online]. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/feb/03/ukraines-past-on-trial/> [Accessed 30 May 2012].
55. T. Kuzio, 'Soviet Conspiracy Theories and Political Culture in Ukraine: Understanding Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions', *Communist and*

- Post-Communist Studies* vol. 44, no. 3 (2011), 221–32. I've found it difficult to agree with Taras Kuzio who explains the conspiracy-driven worldview of Yanukovich's team in terms of the political culture of the Brezhnev era. Such an explanation would be more relevant in the cases of Kravchuk and Kuchma, whereas Yanukovich and his team could be considered outsiders and marginals by Brezhnevite standards. Thus, their political culture is not a culture of the Communist Party *nomenclatura* but rather a culture of the notorious Homo Sovieticus, raised on the stereotypes of struggle with both internal and external enemies. From that perspective, the Party of Regions along with its political ally, the Communist Party of Ukraine, represents perhaps the most anti-intellectual power of post-Soviet Ukraine with a corresponding electorate.
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 57. Ura-inform. Donbass. *Na Donetchine pobili record Stakhanova*, (2010) [online]. Available at: <http://ura.dn.ua/10.08.2010/99210.html> [Accessed 31 May 2012]. It is not accidental then that the monument to the glory of a coal miner (1967), the visit card of the industrial eastern-Ukrainian city of Donetsk, is now presented against the background of a newly erected Russian Orthodox church.
 58. Andriy Portnov reached a similar conclusion in his 2011 talk on Viktor Yanukovich's policy on historical memory (<http://polit.ua/print/articles/2010/11/11/history.html>)
 59. I.L. Rudnytsky, 'Soviet Ukraine in Historical Perspective', in P.L. Rudnytsky (ed.), *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 1987), p. 472.
 60. R. Inglehart and G. Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
 61. C. Wanner, *Burden of Dreams*; V. Kulyk, 'Tiahar sproshchen', *Ukraïns'kyi humanitarnyi ohliad* vol. 3, (2000), 168–69.
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 63. Glavnoe: Internet-obozrenie iz Kharkova. *Dve treti Ukraintcev ne schitajut 20-letie nezavisimosti znatchimoi datoi*, Opros (2011) [online]. Available at: <http://glavnoe.ua/news/n71413> [Accessed 31 May 2012].
 64. Glavnoe: Internet-obozrenie iz Kharkova. *Tri tchetverti Ukraintcev nikogda nie byli za granitsej*, (2012) [online]. Available at: <http://glavnoe.ua/news/n101934> [Accessed 31 May 2012].
 65. Razumkov Centre. *15 let spustia: strana ta zhe, liudi te zhe, vot tol'ko...* (2006) [online]. Available at: http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/article.php?news_id=459 [Accessed 31 May 2012].
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 68. Rudnytsky, *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History*, p.46; Kasianov, G. *Teorii natsii ta natsionalizmu* (Kyiv: Lybid', 1999), pp. 296–97.
 69. M. Velikonja, 'Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries', *East European Politics&Societies* vol. 23, no. 4 (2009), 544–45.

70. M. Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 155.
71. M. Riabchuk, *Dvi Ukraïny* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2003), p. 35.
72. Razumkov Centre. *Sociological Survey on the Day of 7 November (formerly the Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution)*, (2009) [online]. Available at: http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=505 [Accessed 31 May 2012].
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78. T. Zhurzhenko, "'Capital of Despair": Holodomor Memory and Political Conflicts in Kharkiv after the Orange Revolution', *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 25, no. 3 (2011), pp. 597–639.
79. Razumkov Centre. *Sociological survey on Ukrainian history*, (2005) [online]. Available at: http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=285 [Accessed 31 May 2012].
80. M. Velikonja, 'Lost in Translation', p. 537.
81. The myth of 'good' Lenin and 'bad' Stalin was invented and employed both politically and academically in the second half of the twentieth century in order to corroborate the idea of a transformation of Communist regimes into 'socialism with a human face'. Chronologically this type of mythology was rooted in the two-fold process of de-Stalinisation and technological advance in Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the new leftist turn in the West after the WWII on the other. Here I'm considering the possibility of using the same mythology in the process of Ukrainian post-Communist transition.
82. Within specific Soviet/Russian intellectual and ideological framework, the two intellectual legacies could be connected to, respectively, 'Westernisers' and 'Slavophiles', two mainstreams of the Russia's pre-Communist geopolitical and national identification, well known to the students in the field.
83. R. Szporluk, 'Lenin, "Great Russia", and Ukraine', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* vol. 28, no. 1/4 (2006), pp. 611–26.