

Ukrainian ‘Working through the Past’ in the Context of the Polish–Ukrainian Dialogue on Volhynia-43: Asymmetry of Memory

JULIA RYSICZ-SZAFRANIEC

Instytut Filologii Słowiańskiej, Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego,
ul. Poczтовая 9, 53-313, Wrocław, Poland. Email: julia.rysicz-szafraniec@uwr.edu.pl

The modern Polish–Ukrainian dialogue is the second interstate dialogue of the twentieth century, in the development of which the historical and political discourses have played an important role. The so-called Volhynia discourse poses the most serious challenge in this dialogue, while at the same time being its main component. The article claims the Volhynia discourse plays a major role in bringing about the asymmetry of historical memory between the two states. The events of Volhynia-43 have remained in Polish historical memory as an act of genocide perpetrated in 1941–1943 by Ukrainian nationalists, mainly from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), on over 100,000 Poles and citizens of the Polish state inhabiting Galicia and Eastern Małopolska, including Volhynia. These territories, considered by the Ukrainian nationalist party OUN as indigenously Ukrainian, were to be included in the future independent Ukrainian state. The Ukrainian historiography, apart from sparse exceptions, avoids the term ‘massacre’ and ‘genocide’ in reference to the events in Volhynia, defining them as a conflict or a Polish–Ukrainian war with a comparable number of casualties on both sides. The article, analysing speeches and announcements by political leaders of Poland and Ukraine, focuses on explaining the causes and effects of this shift in accentuation in the Ukrainian discourse on Volhynia, and, broadly, in Ukraine working through its past.

This article examines the asymmetry in Ukrainian and Polish representations of a difficult historical topic – Volhynia-43. ‘Volhynia-43’ refers to the ethnic purge carried out by Ukrainian nationalists, and mostly by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, on the Polish civilian population from 1941–1943 in Volhynia (today’s Ukraine, but then a part of the Polish State under the German Nazi occupation). The Ukrainian

Insurgent Army (UIA) (1942–1956) was fighting for the independent Ukrainian state against the Soviet and Polish guerrilla troops and also against the Nazis, with whom it nevertheless entered local alliances, earning in this way the charge of collaboration.

The asymmetry is most visibly seen in political narratives surrounding the topic of Volhynia-43 and grounded in the diverging memory between Ukrainians and Poles about the ethnic cleansing of Polish civilians perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists in 1943 in territories they considered ethnically Ukrainian. While the Polish side claims the scale and atrocity of massacres qualify them as genocide, the Ukrainian side tends to view these events as part of the ongoing war actions whose criminal acts against civilians were not on a large scale, not always perpetrated by Ukrainians and, also, retaliated by Poles. The goal of this study is to seek an explanation for the divergence behind the Ukrainian and Polish perspectives on these events and its impact of the inter-state dialogue between Ukraine and Poland. Simultaneously, this study examines the ways in which the dialogue is influenced by the process of working through the past,¹ which is still happening in both countries, and how this influences that process itself.

In order to show the difference in the way the topic of Volhynia-43 functions in Ukraine and Poland, I will analyse speech acts comprising the so-called Volhynia discourse. The speech acts included can be grouped as follows: Ukrainian and Polish politicians' enunciations concerning the topic, political acts received at the highest level in both states, historians' and journalists' arguments, artistic enunciations in literary and film works, the enunciations of the broader public in social media, mostly referring not only to Volhynia, but also to the general issue of Ukrainian–Polish relations during the Second World War and the pre-war time when these territories belonged to the Polish state.

It took a relatively long time for the Volhynia discourse to enter the contemporary Ukrainian–Polish dialogue. The dialogue itself started in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR and the gaining of independence by Ukraine, and was geared towards building new political, economic and cultural relations. It is worth noting that in the history of relations between Poland and Ukraine, this has been the first dialogue between both states, but the second pertaining to relations between the Polish and Ukrainian nations and has been ongoing since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first attempt to start a dialogue was held between the Polish State and the Ukrainian national minority of Eastern Galicia during the interwar period (1918–1939). Unfortunately, the Volhynia-43 discourse has managed to completely dominate the political side of the contemporary Ukrainian–Polish dialogue, showing that because of the absence of a shared perspective on the tragic events of the past, good neighbourly relations seem unlikely to be achieved.

It is due to these entangled historical threads that the Volhynia-43 discourse has hindered the Ukrainian–Polish dialogue. The narrative around the Volhynia discourse has regrettably proven that in Polish–Ukrainian relations, ethnic-based

1 The term 'working through the past' is a calque of the German *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*, existing in tandem with 'coming to terms with the past' or 'struggle to overcome the negatives of the past' (German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) as components of the psycho-mental, social and political-cultural transformation in post-war Germany. First described by Theodor Adorno in 1959.

stereotypes are still the burden that weighs heavily on political and social communication, forestalling in official relations constructive dialogue that has been developing in historical research on both sides. Assessing the communication potential of this interstate dialogue, we can see it as a failure in the political sphere. The reasons for this are the following: the multi-dimensional nature of Volhynia-43 as thematic discourse, which is confirmed by the different accentuations of problems in Polish and Ukrainian enunciations of witnesses to the tragedy, as well as the asymmetrical representation of the topic in historical research and the political narration of both states. Another significant factor is the politicisation of this particular historical event for internal ideological and political purposes both in Poland and Ukraine, especially in recent years.

Volhynia-43 as a Thematic Discourse

It is worth emphasising that, in Polish memory, Volhynia-43 has been asserted as an act of genocide committed from 1941–1943 by Ukrainian nationalists, among others by UIA (UPA). Victims of these massacres were Poles, numbering more than a 100,000, who were citizens of the Second Polish Republic, inhabiting then Galicia and Eastern Lesser Poland, including Volhynia. These areas were considered by the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists), the Ukrainian nationalist party, as Ukrainian territory, which, ‘cleansed’ of the national minorities standing in the way of a mono-ethnic community, was to be included in the future independent Ukrainian state after the Second World War. The ‘cleansing’ of the area became the ethnic purge of Polish civilians, organised mainly by Ukrainian nationalists. As a result, the Polish Home Army began to help Polish settlements and villages strengthen their defences and carried out retaliatory or preventive actions against Ukrainian villages. These actions often had war crime characteristics, resulting in around 10,000 Ukrainian civilians being killed by Poles.

Undoubtedly, the criminal nature of Polish retaliatory actions exists in Polish historical memory. It is condemned by Polish historians, writers, journalists, film directors and publicised by some media, but in the officially practised political narrative it can be described as a ‘single-sentence’ gesture.² Similarly, in Ukrainian historical memory, the issue of responsibility for the crimes committed is difficult to accept on a broad social basis. The Ukrainian historiography, apart from some exceptions, especially in the narrative adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science or in history textbooks for schools, avoids the terms ‘slaughter’ or ‘massacre’ to describe the events in Volhynia. Instead, they are defined as a ‘conflict’ between the Home

² President of Poland Andrzej Duda during 2018's commemorative event for the tragedy in Volhynia expressed the opinion that the disproportion of the fact that about 100,000 of Poles and about 5000 of Ukrainians died in Volhynia is ‘striking.’ ‘It really makes a huge impression. This is historical truth’ (Prezydent Duda oddał hołd ofiarom rzezi wołyńskiej, 8 July 2018. Available at <http://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2018-07-08/prezydent-duda-oddal-hold-ofiarom-rzezi-wozynskiej/>, 8 July 2018 (accessed 28 July 2018).

Army and the UIA (or often by its uncontrolled gangs), or as a Polish–Ukrainian ‘war’ whose civilian victims on both sides are comparable in number, or at least difficult to verifiably estimate.

The radical divergence of views in the Polish–Ukrainian Volhynian discourse became manifest in 2003. On the occasion of the joint celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the tragedy, the issue of crimes committed by the Ukrainian nationalists in Volhynia appeared for the first time in the arena of Polish–Ukrainian political communication. The presidents of Poland and Ukraine, respectively Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma, took part in the commemoration of Polish victims of the genocide. A few months later, the first Polish–Ukrainian debate took place between historians. That year, a Polish high state official, also for the first time, demanded a unilateral apology from Ukraine for the ethnic purge. This demand, the discussion about the Volhynia tragedy in the Ukrainian parliament and preparations for joint celebrations of the anniversary of the tragedy gave rise to a heated debate in Ukraine.

It was only then that the Ukrainian Volhynian discourse arose as such. In Ukrainian journalism and historical discourse, the following propositions in the narrative about Volhynia appeared:

- We need first to explain the reasons behind the crime and the course of the conflict, only after that can we apologise to anybody (Viatrovych 2003; Berdychowska 2003, 5–7; Hunczak 2003; Bondarenko 2003);
- Let us admit that there was an ethnic purge carried out by some UIA units, but we should acknowledge UIA participation in the struggle for an independent Ukraine (Berdychowska 2003, 5–6);
- Let us recognise this historical truth, otherwise we are doomed to retouching history ‘in the Soviet style’ and to immaturity as a nation; (Berdychowska 2003, 11–12, 17; Vozniak 2003; Oleksiuk 2003);
- We do not have such a level of conscience to admit our guilt, we still remain at the stage of finding the causes of being hurt by others (Berdychowska 2003, 12);
- We do not have to apologise to anyone because we defended our own land (Berdychowska 2003, 10), which was occupied by Poles, and now they treat Ukraine from the position of imperialist superiority (Berdychowska 2003, 12, 16).

Some of these theses, over the next 15 years (!) of direct and indirect Polish–Ukrainian dialogue, have not only not disappeared, but have even intensified.

Returning to the complexity of the Volhynia topic raised by Poland in the dialogue with Ukraine, it should be emphasised that in the traditional historical narrative adopted in Soviet Ukraine and continued in independent Ukraine, a strong focus was put on the perennial struggle of Ukrainians for a more dignified life or independence. Therefore, for a part of Ukrainian society, the UIA and its 10 years (1941–1953) of guerrilla struggle in the western Ukrainian territories with the Soviets (above all) and Germany (to a lesser degree) remained until 2003 a certain ‘sacred cow’, the logical

successor of the legendary Cossackdom and Zaporozhian Sich,³ as well as the only non-Soviet (read Ukrainian) military formation of the twentieth century.

The above shows that even after 10 years of Ukrainian independence, there is still no question of facing its dark past. The activity of the UIA, perceived by the majority as a perfect epitome of everything pro-Ukrainian, pro-national and anti-Soviet, provided a necessary myth for the nation, especially at the beginning of Ukrainian breaking with the influence of Russia and in the process of an intensive search for Ukraine's own identity. Therefore, Poland's demand for an apology for the murder of over 100,000 Polish civilians could not be satisfied: the Ukrainian emphasis was shifted from responsibility for the massacres to the laborious investigating of the causes of the tragedy, which one of the Polish researchers, for years struggling for an equal dialogue between the two countries, called 'an attempt to find an explanation that would alleviate at least a part of the Ukrainian responsibility for the tragedy' (Berdychowska 2003, 9).

However, I think that this arduous work was a kind of beginning for Ukraine to start working through the past, inadvertently initiated by Poland's insistence on including in the mutual dialogue the Volhynian discourse. This initiated working through the past is important for the pro-communist, as well as liberal and pacifist parts of Ukrainian society. For these groups, the fact that some members of the UIA were collaborationists with the SS 'Galicia' division, and that the OUN had been grounded in fascist ideas developed by the party ideologue Dmytro Doncov from integral nationalism, should not be erased from public consciousness, even though this aspect of the UIA activity had been part of Soviet propaganda.

As a result of this internal division, since 1991 the historical and social debate on the role of the UIA in the struggle for independence continued. What was further at stake was that if the UIA were recognised as an army fighting the enemy in the Second World War, it would imply granting them the status of war veterans with equal privileges to Soviet partisans. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2015 finally adopted the law which glorified the OUN and UIA, after 14 years of public debate. The law was a result of several external factors: it was a gesture of challenging Russian propaganda in a broader programme of cutting Moscow's influences, and a reaction to a series of prior political acts and declarations issued in the Polish *Sejm* since 2009 aimed at defining the Volhynia crime and bringing the perpetrators to justice (about which more below). On the home front, it was the result of changing the internal politics in Ukraine.

Politicisation of the Volhynian Discourse

The observable reliance in Poland and Ukraine on the Volhynian discourse (and, concomitantly, the politics of historical memory) in both internal and foreign politics

3 Zaporozhian Sich was the main, fortified centre of political and military power of Ukrainian fighters (Cossacks) against feudalism in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is symbolically treated in Ukrainian historical memory as the first well-organised and politically powerful force in a proto-national state form.

is the second reason why the process of reaching an agreement between Poland and Ukraine on that issue has been slowing down. The opposite politics of memory effectively impeded other areas of mutual dialogue between the states. After the Kuchma and Kwaśniewski joint but divergent celebrations in 2003, it was only in 2006 that the presidents of Poland and Ukraine, respectively Lech Kaczyński and Viktor Yushchenko, still spoke on the subject of Volhynia during the opening ceremony of the monument commemorating the Ukrainian victims of the Pawłokoma massacre. Since then, the Polish–Ukrainian dialogue within the scope of the Volhynian discourse has been gradually losing its most important functions: phatic, i.e. directed towards sustaining the dialogue and keeping it open, and cooperative, specifically in the political sphere. Since 2003, no mutual declarations regarding this historical topic were made at the highest level. We can speak only about mediated, indirect communication in this respect, via comments on a certain position, or enunciations made elsewhere. The two-track course has been functionally confirmed by subsequent political statements and actions on both sides.

In the years 2006–2008, the efforts to reach an agreement on erecting other memorials to the Ukrainian victims of Polish retaliatory actions in some Polish towns failed. A monument built in Sahryń in 2008 did not have a common Polish–Ukrainian opening ceremony, and, despite previous arrangements, presidents Yushchenko and Kaczyński did not attend it. This fact can be explained by the changing eastern politics in Poland, diverging from the so-far broadly received Giedroyc doctrine⁴ and the Polish side's disapproval of Ukraine's lagging with an apology. The consequence of the change of the course of politics was the voting by the Polish *Sejm* on the 66th anniversary of the Volhynia massacres in 2009 with a resolution commemorating the tragic fate of Poles in the eastern borderlands and identifying the UIA actions as 'mass homicides typical for ethnic cleansing and of genocidal character' (*Uchwała Sejmu* 2009).

In the meantime, in Ukraine, the communication strategy likewise started to re-orientate itself towards ethnocentrism, which can be illustrated by the following: in 2008, a TV channel in Ukraine conducted a poll and 2.5 million persons voted Stepan Bandera⁵ the second to be included among the Great Ukrainians in the history of the country; and in 2010, by the decree of President Yushchenko, Bandera was granted the status of the Hero of Ukraine. From this time, the Polish–Ukrainian dialogue on the subject of Volhynia has been dominated by national megalomania, while the accompanying political narrative has run on propaganda and mutual accusations of the falsification of historical facts.

4 The Giedroyc doctrine was a concept of foreign policy created in the 1960s by Polish emigre activists Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, proclaiming the principles of Poland's good neighbour relations with the future independent Soviet republics (among others, Ukraine), which implied the renunciation of revisionist claims on the Polish side.

5 Stepan Bandera (1909–1959) was a politician, leader of the more radical faction of the OUN party (so-called OUN-b). In the Polish discourse on Volhynia he has been made directly responsible for the murders of Poles.

In Poland, after 2010 and the tightening of internal politics, Volhynia-43 has become a political playing card. ‘The beating of the national drum,’ as rightly, asserted by Olena Babakova (2018) now accompanies the Polish *Sejm* at each successive anniversary of the events. Thus, the debate in Poland in 2013 concerning the 70th anniversary of the massacre, according to a Polish political essayist Bogumiła Berdychowska:

... as none of the previous [debates] were influenced by the current Polish politics. The characteristic features of this discussion were: an attempt to question the current achievements in the Polish–Ukrainian dialogue, a radicalisation of the language of the debate, a questioning of the competence and reliability of historians and the patriotism of politicians, who were in favour of a dialogue with the Ukrainians. (Berdychowska 2013, 63)

In Ukraine, in turn, at the end of 2013, an unprecedented opposition started against the pro-Russian direction of the state’s foreign policy. This social protest called ‘Euromaidan’ seemed to promise a new stage in the dialogue between Poland and Ukraine, as it was supported by the majority of society and political parties in Poland. Unfortunately, the subsequent Russian hybrid warfare and hostilities against Ukraine after its revolutionary declaration of separating from the former imperial centre increased the sympathies amongst the Ukrainians for the right-wing and nationalist parties and organisations openly manifesting their support to the OUN ideas and actively fighting for Donbass. With the silent consent of both – the electorate and the ruling Ukrainian politicians, in May 2015, the newly-elected president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, signed a law that glorified the UIA as fighters in the struggles for Ukrainian independence and created a legal basis for punitive charges against public denial of the role of the OUN and UIA in the fight for Ukrainian sovereignty.

The subsequent course of action taken up by the Polish *Sejm* was a mirror reaction to the Ukrainian laws: in 2015, the Polish *Sejm* voted a resolution accusing the OUN and the UIA of an ethnic purge of Poles in Volhynia in 1943. Then in 2016, 11 July was established as a public holiday – the National Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on citizens of the Second Polish Republic. Here, the naming of the crime as genocide irrevocably determined the reciprocal politics of memory between the two states. Furthermore, in 2018, the amendments to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance (the same Act that has earned notoriety as the ‘Holocaust law’) were adopted, with the possibility of prosecuting the UIA and Ukrainian nationalists’ crimes, along with an unjustified extension of the period of responsibility for crimes up to 1925–1950, despite the fact that those guilty of these crimes could have already been prosecuted and sentenced by the pre-war Polish judicial system (Belavusau and Wójcik 2018).

It is easy to get the impression that the political culture of Poland and Ukraine has developed in neat symmetry after these acts. Both countries started to rely directly on barely concealed nationalism in evoking history and in delineating the course of current politics on the home and international front. During Andrzej Duda’s presidency and the Law and Justice’s right-wing majority in parliament, the Volhynian

discourse in the language of Polish politicians (and of the more radical part of the public) has been transformed into a strongly emotive rhetoric, with the predominance of negative affect manifest in speech acts with a clear nationalist grounding⁶ and with a strong victimhood accent.

As for now, one can observe the lack of a mirror reaction on the Ukrainian side, a telling change in the reciprocal politics of memory between the two states. On the one hand, this may point to the redirecting of the attention of those who are responsible for conducting the dialogue in this important historical dispute to Ukraine's internal problems before the recent presidential elections, which took place in spring 2019. On the other hand, abstaining from the equally directive response may mean that Ukraine has ultimately stopped having any illusions about the strategy chosen by the right-wing Polish establishment in relation to the Volhynia events. Some Ukrainian and Polish publicists posit, however, that reticence on the Ukrainian side may ultimately lead to a change of the so-far subordinate and indeterminate way of Ukraine's voicing its position in the dialogue with Poland (Babakova 2018; Rasevych 2018; Isaiev 2018; Wroński 2018).

And indeed, not hypothetically, but realistically, the July 2018 celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Volhynia massacres, separately, in both countries clearly showed that 'the gruelling historical dialogue that had been going on for years between Poland and Ukraine has died away' (Wroński 2018, 2). It has died indeed at the political level mostly as a result of the pertinent politicisation of the Volhynia issue central to this dialogue and because of the attempts of politicians and officials to keep the narrative of victimhood in the Polish and Ukrainian historical memory equal.

During the 2018 commemorations of Volhynia-43, carried out separately by President Poroshenko who travelled to Poland and President Duda who travelled to Ukraine, their respective speeches clearly showed the loss of cooperation in the Ukrainian–Polish dialogue. President Duda said, referring to the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory: 'I would like the Ukrainian authorities [...] let each of those Poles, who were murdered and are buried in this land, regain their name and surname; that it should be marked in the place where he or she rests.'⁷ President Poroshenko also referred to the same institution on the Polish side in a similarly directive way. He said: 'We support initiatives to change the well-known amendment to the Polish Act on the Institute of National Remembrance. We hope that it will also change the provisions concerning the perception of Ukrainians,'⁸ referring to the fact that although the punitive measures against all those who would speak of 'Polish

6 Thus, the Deputy Speaker of the Sejm Stanisław Tyszka in his speech in the Polish parliament accused Ukrainian women and nurses working at Polish hospitals of having low qualifications (Prończuk 2018).

7 Prezydent Duda oddał hołd ofiarom rzezi wołyńskiej, 8 July 2018. Available at <http://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2018-07-08/prezydent-duda-oddal-hold-ofiarom-rzezi-wozynskiej/> (accessed 28 July 2018).

8 Poroshenko oddał hołd pomordowanym w Sahryniu Ukraincom, 8 July 2018. Available at <http://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2018-07-08/petro-poroshenko-przybyl-do-sahrynii-odda-hold-pomordowanym-ukraincom/?ref=wyszukiwarka> (accessed 28 July 2018).

death camps’ was removed from the ‘Holocaust law’, it was only Ukrainians who remained labelled as the ‘enemies of the Polish nation’. The words of both presidents clearly show that, after 15 years of the dialogue on Volhynia-43, the top-level political establishment of both nations still more conspicuously articulates its own expectations towards the other side than expresses readiness to come to a mutual understanding on this sensitive historical issue.

What’s Next with Ukrainian ‘Working through the Past’?

As mentioned above, an intensive surge in attempts to answer questions pertaining to Volhynia-43 began in Ukraine in 2003. At that time Ukraine, in my opinion, did not yet have a vision for the strategy of the dialogue with Poland on the subject of Volhynia-43, in contrast to the Polish persuasive and assertive communication strategy based on the presentation of facts. The following has been represented by the Polish side as facts: the estimates of the scale of Volhynia murders, the demand of one-side’s apologies for crimes committed by Ukrainian nationalists, as well as accepting the Polish vision of the events as the correct one also for Ukrainian historiography, and, last but not last, the request to exhume the victims and for their adequate commemoration and/or burial. The Ukrainian side was not quite prepared for accepting these facts as objective.

At that time, the Ukrainian problem with identity and Ukrainians’ professed lack of mature perception of themselves as a nation became conspicuous. One of the most ardent critics of the OUN and UIA, the philosopher Myroslaw Popovych, explained it by the long-standing practice of totalitarianism, which imposes the unlearning of how to take responsibility (Berdychowska 2003, 11). All this in 2003 led to Ukraine’s adoption of a communication strategy of delay in responding. It is not surprising, then, that over time the Polish–Ukrainian dialogue, including the Volhynian discourse, was increasingly reminiscent of cultural paternalism where the wise father imparts wisdom to the child, but the child does not necessarily appreciate it. This metaphorical image shows the antagonistic course of the dialogue. In addition, this is also why in the ongoing Ukrainian working through its own history, there are voices about the Polish neo-imperialist rhetoric (Opoka 2017, 246) and about the Polish resumption of the colonial narrative from a century ago. Literary scholar Ola Hnatiuk (2016) pins the problem down in the following way:

The national megalomania of Poles and Ukrainians is extremely disturbing for finding common ground, although it manifests itself in various forms. For example, on the Polish side there may be resentment, hatred or e.g. seeming kindness as well, but in fact it’s paternalism – when it is said that Ukrainians are not a nation yet, that they got this independence by accident, and besides they have no other heroes than Bandera, so do not be surprised that they honour the UIA.

The alleged Polish paternalism was responded to in Ukrainian journalism and research of the last 5 years, and the dialogue on Wolhynia-43 was complemented with the following items as an appeal for non-interference in the internal

Ukrainian policy of remembrance and non-imposition of the Polish vision of its heroes onto Ukraine (Machun 2017); a proposal to plead guilty by both sides of the dialogue (Rudnytskyi 2017; Viatrovyh 2016, 9, 11); a subsequent appeal for a change of the not-entirely-honest exposure of crimes committed by Home Army soldiers in Polish historiography (Zinchenko 2017) and the removal of manipulation and misrepresentations in the written history of the Second World War and Polish–Ukrainian relations from that period (Hnatiuk 2017; Riabenko 2017; Viatrovyh 2016, 95).

Moreover, in Ukraine there is a widespread perception of the Polish strategy of exerting pressure as a position in line with Russian politics, which makes UIA and OUN clear pro-Nazi movements, forgetting conveniently that it was the Stalin–Ribbentrop secret truce that enabled Nazi Germany to invade these territories. The Polish adamant position, parallel to the Russian discourse on Euromaidan, prompted on the Ukrainian side the appearance of a convenient idea about the provocateurs (Soviet partisans or NKVD units impersonating the UIA) as the cause of the slaughter in Volhynia and Eastern Małopolska (Sverstiuk 2017; Viatrovyh 2016, 117–118, 189–194). While the latter has been documented in historical archives, it definitely does not absolve the UIA guerrilla actors from perpetrating the massacres. The more populist the rhetoric of Volhynia becomes, the more dangerous it is for settling scores with the past, because what it reinforces is the self-perception of Ukrainians, both at a political and social level, as a ‘victim with a clean conscience ...’ (Portnov 2017, 279).

The acts of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, banning the screening of *Wołyń*, a 2016 film by Polish director Wojciech Smarzowski, was further proof of the refusal of Ukraine to enter a phase of critical self-reflection. It is then regrettable that the wider public debate did not have a chance to develop, had the Ukrainian audiences had an opportunity to see the Polish perspective represented in this shockingly thorough film. As a consequence of such politicisation of the Volhynia discourse, the dialogue was further blocked, and the film with Ukrainian subtitles is available on several web pages with the message: ‘Warning: this film contains anti-Ukrainian propaganda.’⁹

To an external observer, it may be challenging to understand how politics can so entirely appropriate and determine historical memory. But knowledge of the Ukrainian context is crucial at this point. Ukraine, as a country ailing from ubiquitous corruption and struggling with its own identification with either Russia or Europe, has also for the last four years been at regular war over its territory, exhausting its economy, been harrowing for the population, and at least to a degree, strengthening nationalist sentiments in considerable parts of the society. The Soviet stereotype of a Ukrainian as a pro-Bandera-nationalist figure returned to

9 Film *Volyn*, April 2016. Available at https://ukr.to/film/volin_wolyn_2016_ukr_subtitri_onlajn/4-1-0-8368 (accessed 28 July 2018).

the Russian and Ukrainian mass media in a new version.¹⁰ While the Russian use of the stereotype is clear in its purposes of justifying the Crimea annexation, the Ukrainian glorification of the UIA and Bandera is a response to the post-1991 need to rewrite Ukrainian history. This endeavour foregrounds the UIA and its leader as twentieth-century heroes and direct inheritors of the Cossacks and Hetmanate in their fight for independence. In this light, the Bandera units, in their persistent, long-term fight against the Sovietisation of Western Ukraine and anti-German actions, embody patriotism. As such, they are also the guideposts of current Ukrainian memory politics, additionally having a role of helping the populist politics flirt with nationalists.

During the current armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia in the Donbas region, there is no need for a critical look at each other from a distance, therefore, the willingness to forget or even the reluctance to know about the committed crimes that is noticeable among Ukrainians, is just as dangerous as the short-sighted statements and actions of politicians in power in both countries. Working through the past continues among Ukrainian intellectuals and translators. This work, very thorough and solid, based on cooperation and mutual readiness to create bridges of understanding, may not make too much sense at the moment to the broader social spaces in both countries – their hard-core nationalist awakenings notwithstanding, but it is of utmost importance for future generations, hopefully not burdened by the ‘subordination’ complex, free from restraining historical and cultural *ressentiment* and ready to enter an equal dialogue of merit.

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10 At the beginning, the term ‘Banderowiec’ (Bandera supporter) existed in Soviet historiography as the name of the members of the OUN-b organisation and the UIA. Marked by a powerful negative connotation, this definition in fact gained in the language of propaganda in the Soviet times the stereotypical identification with a Ukrainian-speaking citizen of Soviet Ukraine. Because of the rise of patriotism after the Euromaidan also among Russian-speaking Ukrainians, in the Russian propaganda media there appeared the oxymoron ‘Russian-speaking Banderowiec,’ defining the Ukrainian patriot who speaks Russian (Russkoyazychnye banderovtsy yavlyayutsya ugrozoy dlya Zapadnoy Ukrainy, 2 December 2014. Available at <https://topwar.ru/63902-russkoyazychnye-banderovcy-yavlyayutsya-ugrozoy-dlya-zapadnoy-ukrainy.html> (accessed 28 July 2018).

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About the Author

Julia Rysicz-Szafranec has a PhD in languages, and since 2009 has been assistant professor at Chair of Ukrainian Studies, Institute of Slavic Philology, Faculty of Philology, Wrocław University, Poland. Her research and didactic interests involve teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language, modern Ukrainian slang, history of Ukrainian translation studies, modern Ukrainian–Polish translation, and the Volhynia discourse in Ukrainian and Polish texts (literature, mass media, social networks, state narrative).