

Reflections on the Ukrainian *Maidan*

Ukrainian memory and identity

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The 2013–2014 events in Ukraine have been eagerly observed by Poles in western Poland in particular. Many of them have roots in present-day Ukraine, in Podolia and Volhynia, the territories from which their ancestors were expelled by the decision of the Great Powers after the Second World War. In Kudowa Zdrój, the resort town on the Polish-Czech border where I live, there are many Polish “Volhynians.” Across the border there are Czech “Volynians.” The *Maidan* events in Kyiv in spring 2014 made them all pay attention. A romantic undertone to the *Maidan* gathering provided additional stimulus. Where else in Europe would people be able to stay put in spite of minus twenty degrees Celsius? And in such numbers? Nowhere. This brings back the echoes of the traditional Ukrainian Cossack endurance. In spring 2014 pictures from Kyiv resemble the description of Ukraine by Eric Lassota in 1594 or, half a century later, by Wilhelm de Beauplan, or finally by Władysław A. Serczyk in *The Faraway Ukraine* written in the late seventeenth century.

Europe’s eyes have also been fixed on Ukraine. What attracted attention and sympathy was not romanticism but great determination and willingness to fight for liberty of the *Maidan* demonstrators. The patient inhabitants of Kyiv have endured many inconveniences because of the *Maidan* that is located in the very center of the city. Obviously, the thousands of people gathered there have had to wash themselves somewhere, eat, go to the bathroom, remove garbage, and keep warm in their chilly tents, and at the same time remain alert and help one another in enduring the weather and separation from families, as well as danger from the well-armed Berkut police. After twenty-three years of independence, Ukrainians finally noticed that their state had been stolen from them, that they were being cheated and made poor partly by

their own oligarchs. Unemployment forces them to emigrate. Some are ashamed to realize that in their own country they cannot live well without yielding to corruption. They do not want to live on their knees. On February 11, 2014, a Ukrainian intellectual wrote to me: “In what kind of country do we live? It is inhuman and shameful on the part of this government to arrest people for carrying national flags. The *Maidan* will stand as long as we are not free of this shame.”

The appropriation of state property by private individuals, gigantic differences in the standard of living between rich and poor, and a total lack of prospects for a livable future are not only Ukraine’s problem; they are a general neoliberal and postcommunist problem. The occasional outbursts of people outraged by these developments are reported by newspapers throughout Central and Eastern Europe in particular. They are also occurring in Western Europe and America, such as the “Occupy Wall Street” movement. The *Maidan* is an example of such protests. In a sense, it is a warning. It strives to show that the spirit can overcome evil. *Peremoha* means *victory* in Ukrainian. *Maidan* was a victory, one that was paid for in blood. Even if the victory was temporary, it was still a victory, a demonstration that the human spirit can overcome evil. The evil ones ran away, if only for a while. The people of Kyiv went to see the indescribable riches of the former Soviet communist who played the role of president in their country. How typical that was of the Soviet system where prominent people believed one thing, verbally advocated another, and did still another. The people of Kyiv looked at Yanukovych’s palace in shock. As one reads Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine* and hears of torture being used routinely by “liberal” governments; as one observes the right to vote being manipulated so that one has the right to vote but not to choose; as one observes the passing of laws that deprive people of their freedom and property; as the ethics of public discourse is thrown out the window—in such moments the people are readying themselves for the *Maidan* solution.

Yes, the red-black flags were present there too. Nothing that humans undertake is one-hundred-percent good. For Ukraine’s neighbors,

these flags are associated with the murderous bands of the Ukrainian Liberation Army that killed in indescribable ways women, men, and children—if they were Polish or Ukrainian, if they tried to shield the Poles. Today Stepan Bandera's memory is revered by the political party Svoboda. Yet for Poles Bandera is also a symbol of anti-Polish terror during the Second World War—even though the real culprit was Roman Szuchewycz (Bandera spent the years 1941–1944 in a German concentration camp). To Polish eyes, the red-black flags on the Kyiv Maidan were a dissonance.

I was curious how Ukrainians viewed them, so I reported to my electronic acquaintance, a Ukrainian journalist and writer, that I saw these flags there and also anti-Semitic comments; they did not bode well for future dialogue and reconciliation. She wrote me the following: *As to the red-black flags, it cannot be helped. These are our own [Ukrainian] issues, what flags we choose and which heroes we admire. Half of Ukraine admires Lenin and Stalin, and the other half Bandera and Szuchewycz. This is a historical inevitability.* I wrote her that I admire the toughness of the Maidan resisters but the situation is bad because Ukraine seems to be alone in the struggle, and therefore all dialogue and contact with the outside world should be highly valued by the protesters. She retorted: *We are aware of the fact that Europe will not move a little finger even if all of us here were killed. We have to stand up for our freedom alone. Tomorrow, I am returning to the barricades.* This militancy of a Ukrainian intellectual shows a heroic readiness to sacrifice, but it also shows that the revolutionary movement in the Maidan may not be contained within the limits of democratic rules. I do not have in mind the anti-Polish slogans of some members of the “Right Sector,” such as the claims that Przemyśl and other Polish cities in southeastern Poland should be handed over to Ukraine. Such demands are as silly as the (hypothetical) Polish demands that Lviv should return to Poland. While one should not take such declarations seriously, one should not pass them over in silence either. One has to remind both one’s own people and foreigners that reality is what it is.

The Ukrainian intellectual I mentioned above said that Ukrainians should have the right to

select their own flags. It seems to be true; however, as a Pole, I have to ask about the significance of these flags. I perceive them as the flags of murderers and criminals. In western Ukraine Stepan Bandera is treated as a hero of the struggle for Ukrainian self-determination; he fought against Poles, Soviets, and Germans. His Ukrainian patriotism and courage (he opposed the Polish state even before the Second World War and, even though he supported the Germans at first, he eventually changed his mind and was imprisoned by them), his family history (his brothers were killed by Hitler’s henchmen and his parents were deported to Siberia)—all this could speak in his favor. However, he also gave the signal to start the crudest imaginable terror against the Polish population of Volhynia and Podolia. For a Pole the word *banderistas* is synonymous with “bandits and criminals.” Thus the display of Bandera’s red-and-black flag is not a good choice. For me personally, for my generation of refugees from Volhynia and Podolia who saw horrors surpassing those of the gulag, this flag is even worse than the red flag. I have too much knowledge of what happened to children, men, and women of Polish Catholic background when they fell into the hands of the *banderistas*.

What does this flag mean today as it waves over the heads of young Ukrainians on the Maidan? Is it enough to say that *these are our own Ukrainian issues?* Will eastern Ukrainians agree with you?

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

My friends in Kudowa Zdrój discuss why the division between eastern and western Ukraine is so pronounced. This division may become the major cause of Ukraine’s disintegration. Its removal is crucial if Ukraine is to remain a unitary state. I believe that after gaining independence in 1991, too little attention was paid in Ukraine to the necessity of firming up national identity after the traumas Ukrainians experienced in the twentieth century. The identity of nations requires a planned rebuilding after each political earthquake, and what happened to Ukrainians in the twentieth century was worse than an earthquake. Like a house damaged by fire, identity has to be strengthened so that people can live together.

I do not recall that Ukraine has ever undertaken a deep analysis of two fatal events: the *Holodomor* of 1932–1933 in eastern Ukraine (then a part of the USSR) and the activities of the Ukrainian Liberation Army (UPA), or the *banderistas* in western Ukraine during the Second World War. Both issues were swept under the carpet, so to speak. While western Ukrainians know a little about the *Holodomor*, eastern Ukrainians generally share the Polish view of the *banderistas* as murderers of peaceful villagers without being aware of the fact that UPA's intended goal was to fight for Ukrainian independence. When the Kyiv Maidan events were taking place, one heard voices from Crimea, Kharkiv, and Donetsk to the effect that “we do not want fascist *banderistas* here.” What does this mean? To whom were such exclamations addressed and why? Who is afraid of what? One might say that this is merely a Russian provocation. However, provocations work when there is a willing base in which they are spread. Let us not confuse the spark with the powder keg.

The *Holodomor* was engineered by the policies of the Stalinist terror apparatus, and it caused from 3.5 million to 7 million deaths in eastern Ukraine. The very fact that the range of figures is so great speaks to the horror of this communist crime. No one knows how many people died of hunger and how many of various diseases caused by malnutrition. In western Ukraine, which was under Polish rule at that time, there was no hunger. Poland has consistently pointed the finger at the Stalinist system and called it a genocide. After 1945, when eastern and western Ukraine became the Ukrainian republic of the USSR, the Great Famine was not spoken about. To speak of the *Holodomor* in Ukraine was like speaking about Katyń in Poland: both led to jail. The Kremlin was aware that the issue was not dead and tried to compensate Ukraine for it in some fashion. In 1954 it gave Ukraine Crimea. For Russia it was marginal—the USSR served its interests and was supposed to do it forever. Thus the issue of the *Holodomor* was papered over.

When the USSR disintegrated and Ukraine became independent, nothing prevented Ukrainians from allowing the victims of the Great Famine to speak. Why did they not speak

up? Why did not their descendants speak up, accusing the Moscow authorities of engineering and implementing such horrors? Twenty-three years have passed, and the generation of Ukrainian Yanukovyches has adopted the slogan “Don't speak over that coffin.”

A day of commemoration for the Great Famine was established, but what was said about it was wrapped up in generalities so as not to accuse anyone. Millions died, but no culprits were named. An immunity has been imposed on those who conceived of the Famine. Every tenth Ukrainian died a Famine-related death, but the only issue discussed was cemeteries in eastern Ukraine—a marginal issue indeed. These cemeteries are neglected to this day. The *Holodomor* could have been invoked to teach eastern Ukrainians that one has to have one's own independent state if a nation is to exist and develop.

One Kudowa resident, Józef Haber, lived in Tarnopol (now Ternopil in Ukraine) during the war; he managed to escape from the Soviet train carrying Polish prisoners to Siberia but did not succeed in escaping the Germans who sent him to Germany to do forced labor. An old man now, he tersely described the situation: “When you lose your country and state you lose everything.” The Ukrainian state and law have not yet found a necessary place in the minds of Ukrainians, in spite of the fact that so many died to make it possible. Those who live today are occupied with survival. Eastern and western Ukrainians desperately need a lengthy reflection on these issues in every home, every school, and every church and house of prayer of any religion. Only by means of such a reflection and discussion can Ukraine regain its unity. This has not been done. Shevchenko's “late descendants” [a quotation from C.K.Norwid. Ed.] did not come to life. A modern nation was not created after crossing the Red Sea. The victims of the Great Famine continue to call on western Ukrainians from the cemeteries of eastern Ukraine, but in western Ukraine people are not that interested. They are interested in invoking their ambivalent Second-World-War heroes that distinguished themselves by engaging in ethnic cleansing.

After the Second World War western Ukraine's fate was different from the eastern. From Poland came the resettled Ukrainians, or

rather the *Lemki*, who settled in houses left by those Poles who were killed by the *banderistas* or died in Siberia. The remnants of those Poles were forcibly resettled in postwar Poland. When the communist party fell apart in 1991 and independence beckoned, the new social and religious organizations in Ukraine were still too weak to assume a leading role. Memories of the wartime Ukrainian Revolutionary Army (UPA) gained first place. The UPA veterans were everywhere, and since they were persecuted by the Soviets they profited from the general anti-Soviet sentiment and were made into pure and noble patriotic fighters for Ukrainian freedom. Red-and-black flags began to wave. All this happened in western Ukraine only because UPA was absent in the east. Furthermore, eastern Ukraine had a substantial Russian minority. UPA raised its flag, but it paid no attention to eastern Ukraine where UPA soldiers were largely perceived as criminals. UPA did next to nothing to educate the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine about all aspects of the UPA struggle. The truth is UPA would have had difficulties explaining itself: among its victims were not only some 150,000 Poles but also some 80,000 Ukrainians.

If the Kyiv government had organized a great debate on these issues, a debate in which the east and the west of Ukraine participated, perhaps all Ukrainians would have agreed that a great number of the crimes committed by UPA have to be attributed to a lack of enlightenment and understanding among the peasant masses. There were some positive elements of UPA activity that could have been foregrounded, such as those related to Ukrainian national interest. Ukrainians in the east would have been able to separate grain from chaff, and would have stopped calling western Ukrainians fascists and *banderistas*. The UPA leaders, starting with Stepan Bandera, would have been carefully analyzed in the same vein. But this great national debate never took place. The great and necessary historical discussion has not been undertaken.

In March 2014 I discussed these problems with a fifty-year-old Ukrainian born near Chortkiv. He does not dislike Poles, but he did not want to speak about UPA victims, and finally stated that the Poles were killed by . . .

Russians dressed as Ukrainians. The longer I listened to him, the more I realized that he was not ignorant of the truth (he heard about it from his parents), but had decided to deny it. Thus the victims of the *Holodomor* were not spoken about, nor were the victims of UPA. In this last case the official narrative was that UPA was anti-Soviet and therefore it was good.

After the Second World War, both Ukrainians and Poles fell victim to Soviet neocolonialism. Professor Ewa Thompson wrote thus about this development: "Modern colonialism amounts to a situation where well-formed ethnic, territorial, and linguistic identities are forcibly squeezed into the political and social structures alien to them, the structures that have been created to benefit linguistic, economic, territorial, and cultural interests of the hegemon" (2007). Today the process of liberation from such structures is going on, but in some cases we seem to be returning to them.

By comparison, in Poland such debates have taken place. Much less is swept under the carpet in comparison to Ukraine. We remember our own victims and also those of other peoples. The Parliament has condemned the forced relocation of the *Lemki* people from the Bieszczady Mountains (part of the "Wisła" project engineered by the postwar communist government). The resolution of the *Sejm* concerning this action was not unanimous, but it did pass. The *Sejm* expressed the will of the majority of the people: it ordered the Polish people to be open to others' suffering in order to bring in truth and make a better future possible. In Ukraine the intellectual elites have not initiated debates about the wrongful and rightful ways toward Ukrainian independence; this painful debate will have to take place some time in the future.

Another very reasonable Ukrainian told me: "Stepan Bandera spent the Second Word War in a Nazi concentration camp. What do you want of him?" I answered that I did not want anything, because I won't be able to hear what he had to say. He is dead. But I want to hear from you, I want to know what you think about the facts of history. I want to know what you really think about the way UPA was fighting for Ukrainian independence. What do you think about those murdered Poles and also murdered Ukrainians? I

do not want anything else except to hear your voice. If you do not hear what I say or do not accept my question, do not be surprised that I won't trust you because in the end I will not know what values you hold. It is my opinion that Poland cannot push aside its historical guilt toward Ukrainians, and I am ready to tell it to anyone. We have to talk openly, otherwise there will be no useful dialogue.

The modern Pole knows that the so-called *Kresy* are not Polish assets but Polish moral obligations. During the hot days of the Kyiv Maydan and annexation of Crimea by Russia, I wrote an invitation to some Ukrainians from the Ivano-Frankivsk oblast' to come to Poland. One of them lives on Bandera Street, the other on Szuchewycz Street. "It is our personal business what heroes we respect," wrote the Ukrainian friend whom I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. I began to doubt our moral obligations toward the Ukrainians, especially when I saw the second name [it was Szuchewycz who issued the order to murder all Poles with any tools available. *Ed.*].

After 1991 the former UPA members remembered their leaders such as Szuchewycz, but forgot not only about Poles but also about eastern Ukrainians. The myth of the anti-Soviet UPA replete with heroes gained strength as Ukrainians rose from their knees to proclaim an independent state. After Crimea and Putin's declaration on 18 March 2014, the road to Donetsk and Kharkiv in search of national unity became even more difficult: it now led through Moscow.

We do not know what these young Ukrainians think as they march under their red-and-black flags. My intuition tells me that they are not at all like the UPA members two generations ago, that they have more in common with the Maydan, that they represent hope for the future. But they have to tell each other how it really was during the Second World War, and what the *banderistas* and UPA members stood for. Without such confession they will not become one nation, east and west. △

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Germany's Wild East Constructing Poland as Colonial Space

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Sally Boss

This scholarly study details the ways in which Germany's eastern neighbors, Poland in particular, became subject to German political and economic expansion the author identifies as colonial. She is meticulously impartial in presenting these ways, but she fails to emphasize, or indeed mention their military aspect.

The author begins by making a distinction between material colonialism—acquiring economic and political power over a territory and discursive colonialism—creating a discourse in which the conquered area is presented as undeveloped and therefore requiring foreign tutelage. In the Polish case, both aspects of colonialism have been successfully practiced. German literature and expository writings are replete with *idées reçues* concerning Poland as a perpetually inferior and primitive territory that would erupt into barbaric chaos were it not ruled by the enlightened Germans. The author rightly points out that in comparison with the actions and writings described in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the German colonial narrative concerning Poland was much more instrumental, i.e., oriented toward achieving goals advantageous for Germany at a particular historical moment. Rhetorical colonization was particularly deadly to Polish interests since, as Tomasz Zarycki pointed out in his recent book, "any act of naming an object reinforces its social existence" (Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness*, 8). German texts were imbued with the prestige of a rising empire, and therefore German writings on Poland as a weak and inferior territory gained wide acceptance in Europe's intellectual life. One should add here that in Poland these negative stereotypes were only vaguely perceived; Polish discourse emphasized the injustices and cruelties of the Prussian conquest. In a medieval Christian way Poles have hoped to