

## 8 Between Heroes and Traitors: The UPA and the Soviets in Zhovkva<sup>310</sup>

### Bandits or Heroes? Troubled Autobiographical Memories

The Ukrainian Insurgent Army is undoubtedly the most controversial candidate for the status of collective hero in Zhovkva. One section of interviewees considered the fighters of the UPA to be national heroes, whereas others deemed them unquestionable villains.<sup>311</sup> This polarization was most visible among the oldest generation, whose members had been witnesses or even participants of hotly disputed events. Ukrainians born in or near Zhovkva were most likely to praise the UPA, alongside some of the Ukrainians resettled from Poland. For people from these groups, giving a positive appraisal of the UPA was so ingrained that there was no need to verbalize it fully; it was signaled by the tone of voice or in the use of prepositions – the insurgents were “our boys.” At the same time, these respondents were determined to help spread a positive reputation of the UPA: this is why even before any confrontational questions had been posed, many of them began to justify and defend “their boys.” One important element of this mode of argumentation was the theme of Soviet soldiers dressing up as UPA members and carrying out atrocities in disguise:

People said it was the *Banderites*... One day they [a family of acquaintances] were all killed, absolutely all of them, just one child survived by hiding under the wardrobe. [...] And [after the war] he [Zygmunt Lajner] revealed that it really was true that this R. [a Jewish woman who married a Ukrainian man] and her family were killed not by the *Banderites*, but by the *Moskals*. In a great many cases, they disguised themselves as *Banderites* and killed people. They killed both Poles and Ukrainians to show how

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310 The first part of this chapter was published as a stand-alone article: “Bohaterowie czy kolaboranci? Pamięć o UPA na Ukrainie Zachodniej,” in: Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper, ed., *20 lat rzeczywistości poradzieckiej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2012), pp. 134–154.

311 This is not a phenomenon specific to Zhovkva: many studies have shown that Ukrainian memory is deeply divided in this field, see: Yulia Yurchuk, *Reordering of Meaningful Worlds: Memory of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2014); Oxana Shevel, “The Politics of Memory in a Divided Society: A Comparison of Post-Franco Spain and Post-Soviet Ukraine,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (2011), pp. 157–163.

evil those *Banderites* were. [...] But the *Banderites* were people who fought against the *Moskals*. Just like in Poland, where there was a resistance movement (Z1Af).

There were, of course, exceptions: the apologists of the UPA included a woman from eastern Ukraine. The fact that her statement – which was replete with equivocation – both praised Bandera (as a broader symbol of Ukrainian nationalism) and explicitly justified her own views shows the extent to which her attitude is untypical for her group (in this case, the Easterners in Zhovkva). The statement also displays clear traces of Soviet propaganda, for which the UPA were Nazi collaborators and “bourgeois nationalists” and were therefore anathema to good taste.

It's only now that people talk about fascism, nationalism, and *Banderites*. But I for example, maybe I am wrong here, I've had unpleasant conversations even with my relatives about this... I, for one, believe that the Bandera faction, just like the first Cossacks, they just wanted the freedom of Ukraine. What did Bandera do that was bad? Is giving your life for the freedom of your people a crime? (Z25Af).

As always with cases of “non-standard” or surprising memory, this statement should be understood in the broader context of the interview as a whole. One of the speaker's key experiences was the *Holodomor*, the Great Famine of 1932–1933, in which her grandmother died. Thus, it appears that the respondent had trouble reconciling the contradictions between her personal negative experiences of the USSR and the propaganda in which she had been immersed her whole life. In her narrative, staples of Soviet ideology are mixed with patriotic (Ukrainian) phrases, and Bandera is glorified on a similar level with Lenin. Talking about any one side always provoked a defensive, safe counternarrative.

The second type of memory of the UPA among the oldest generation was a stance of passive objectivity, as embodied in a phrase that recurred in the majority of interviews with Ukrainians resettled from Poland – “we didn't get involved.”

There were gangs roaming, yes... Who knew who they were? [...] I never got involved in anything. I was terrified even to ask, is it this or that. I was deaf, dumb and blind, and so was my whole family. [...] [Now there is a lot of talk about rehabilitating and honoring the soldiers of the UPA...] I don't care about that. People fought, that is well known. I never poke my nose into things, I don't protest and I don't support (Z16Af).

The resettled Ukrainians usually said less about the UPA than they were able. Despite the passage of time, they still believed that it was safer to claim no knowledge and to have no opinion (especially if one was married to a Russian retired soldier, as in the case of the respondent cited here). This passive stance also appears in some statements by Ukrainians who migrated to Zhovkva from

the East. Again, these attitudes are better explained with reference to broader circumstances of their biographies: as a rule, these interviewees endured difficulties under Soviet rule and life taught them that it is better not to stand out. One such respondent lost both her parents in the Terror of the 1930s and 1940s and grew up in an orphanage. After the war her husband was a director of a factory in Zhovkva, but as she put it, “he knew nothing, he kept his silence.” She herself avoided walking home from work in the evenings by herself, usually being accompanied by male acquaintances, but she was reluctant to remember whom exactly she was afraid of: “There were men roaming the streets, but who were they... No one bothered us and we didn’t bother anyone. Who were they? They didn’t bother us...” (Z11Af).

Sometimes, an apparent indifference slipped unnoticed (also for the speaker) into condemnation of the UPA – as a military formation, of the methods they used, or more generally of the entire episode of senseless fighting over lofty ideas that had no real significance for “ordinary people” – “There were young boys fighting, they fought and they died. Now they are all gone” (Z4Af). Such words are only a few steps from open condemnation of the UPA. Other than the exceptions already noted, migrants from the East were unanimous in their negative assessment of the UPA – many of them had been fed scare stories of murderous *Banderite* gangs before they left for western Ukraine. In their view, the UPA soldiers were Nazi collaborators and, above all, criminals responsible for the murder of innocent people – Russians, Poles and Ukrainians. For these respondents there could be no question of equating the importance of the Red Army with the UPA, whether in moral terms or in the realm of veterans’ rights and privileges. They often buttressed their criticisms of the UPA with stories they had heard from locals in the period immediately following the war.

Now people are supposedly saying that the Ukrainians liberated Ukraine themselves, that it was the UPA and all that lot... Well my relatives told me that it was horrific, what happened here. The *Banderites* murdered people from the East. [...] Those were terrible times. I organized meetings with people fairly often, it was a form of educational work, and people would cry and tell stories about Poles being hideously murdered. There was a Polish village not far from here, where they drove people into a barn, and threw kids into a well, and they burned the whole thing down. And now they claim that it was the *Moskals*. That’s not true! (Z10Af).

Yet Zhovkva’s ethnic Poles offered more emotional assessments of the UPA. The main difference between their statements and those of the Easterners was that the Poles still recalled the nationalist militias with fear and dread: they hushed their voices, some requested to speak off the record, and others garnished their stories with sparse detail so that I was unable to identify any individuals therein.

Unlike the Easterners, the Poles usually spoke of their own, often very traumatic, experiences:

If our people [i.e. Poles] hadn't gone to Poland, if they hadn't been moved over there, they'd have all been killed. My dad's side of the family is almost all in Poland! [cries] Because, just between us, we were living over there at the factory where my dad worked, and the *Banderites* came and wanted to kill us. [cries] [...] Yes! And now they want to elevate the UPA. The people who were in the UPA, they were in the UPA, but a lot of them [Ukrainians] fought for the Germans!<sup>312</sup> They served the Germans, and they murdered us, Poles, you know! [cries] It's true! I remember, and my sister remembers, the day they came to get us. They didn't get us, and we escaped to the second floor, and there was such a solid door that they couldn't do it in. We screamed and screamed, we were still kids. What could we do? Dad wasn't there, it was just our mum and us... [cries] (Z14Af).

Importantly, local Ukrainians from western Ukraine also voiced some negative assessments of the UPA. However, these respondents were even more afraid to voice their opinions than the Poles, and if they did make the decision to open up, they were visibly uncomfortable; for example, the respondent already cited in the previous chapter on Poles (Z23Af) described the murder of a Polish family by a Ukrainian nationalist militia, then concluded that “you don't need to record this, no, it's not necessary.” A completely isolated instance is that of a respondent from a Galician village whose views on the past were fully compatible with the memory of the Easterners. A retired police officer is a typical example of a person who benefitted from Soviet social mobility, his desire to discredit the UPA was mixed with a clear dislike of Poles; he was reluctant to speak badly of the Ukrainians in front of a Pole. Asked about his opinion of the UPA, he initially started to passionately declare that it was the Poles who had stoked the flames of conflict during the war, and that the UPA – like the Home Army in Poland – had primarily defended innocent civilians. However, after a short while the tone of his response changed:

God knows what they wanted, I don't know, I never spoke to them. But just consider the fact that I was educated by the Soviet system. Since I was this small, I was a member of the communist party. I was a police detective, I was a major, now I am retired, but I have this thing inside me, this... I believe that no one has right to deprive anyone else of life! Do you agree or not?! [raising his voice] [...] So I am telling you, now they are trying

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312 The speaker has in mind the Ukrainians who fought in the “SS Halychyna/Galizien,” the 14<sup>th</sup> Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, which was created by the Nazis with the participation of volunteers from western Ukraine in April 1943. For the memory of SS Galizien in contemporary Ukraine, see: Khromeychuk, “*Undetermined*” Ukrainians.

to make heroes out of all the people who died at the hands of the KGB, they're rehabilitating them, saying they were all repressed. [...] But the people who were killed by the *Banderites* – no one talks about them, but there were a great many people who died at their hands, tens of thousands! (Z20Am).

The respondent concluded his narration, after a brief pause, with a story about his brother-in-law's Polish relatives who were murdered by the UPA because they refused to leave for Poland. It was nonetheless visible that airing this negative assessment of the UPA in this specific situation – talking to a Pole – was not a simple matter for him, and that it required a certain amount of self-censorship and negation of his own identity.<sup>313</sup>

### **Pride and Prejudice: Ukrainian Nationalists in Collective Memory**

The younger the respondents, the more positively they spoke of the UPA. With ideas and narratives being sourced not from autobiographical, but from collective memory, responses had diverse shades and hues and used different strategies of argumentation; nonetheless, the common thread was the heroization of the nationalist underground. The majority of members of the middle and youngest generations considered the UPA fighters to have been national heroes. Above all they emphasized their dedication:

I, for one, couldn't imagine being able to leave everything behind, my whole life essentially, and take up arms [...] in those horrific circumstances, under a totalitarian regime. [...] And nevertheless, in those horrific circumstances putting up such serious resistance, and resistance that was completely conscious and directed towards defending your native land against people trying to conquer it, not for the sake of conquering others. That's both the fascists and the Bolsheviks. And they didn't get the better of us – neither the Germans, nor the Russians (Z33Bm).

Defenses of the UPA were the more passionate, the more positively the given individual could associate the history of the nationalist underground with their own family history. As David Lowenthal argues, the very function of memory is to transform great historical events into personal experience.<sup>314</sup> Sometimes this link is almost entirely imagined, as in the case of a respondent who *post factum* interpreted the evening noises from his grandfather's story as the voices

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313 On the modification of narrations because of the nationality of the interviewer, see: Rosenthal and Bar-On, "A biographical case study;" Wylegała, "Badacz z Polski na Ukrainie."

314 Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*.

of UPA partisans: “Granddad used to tell me about people coming to visit. Under the stairs at our house, there were these noises, they must have been from the insurgents. I think that it could have been the insurgents” (Z4Dm). At other times, the link has a doubly inclusive character – one interviewee from the middle generation seemingly “participated” in the heroic history of the UPA through family remembrances, also simultaneously including all other Ukrainians and creating clear divisions between “us,” the supporters of the nationalist militia, and “them” – all enemies.

We had our underground *Banderite* organizations, and there was the Russian army. At that time they were fighting against each other. He [the respondent's father] used to tell stories about that period all the time, those were tough experiences, and often our Ukrainians had to shelter the insurgents, they risked their lives but they sheltered them anyway, because everyone felt sorry for them. That's what he talked about, all the time (Z6Cf).

Two particular threads of this statement stand out: the speaker's conviction that the nationalist insurrection was universal, and her belief that the UPA soldiers were above all victims. For the creation of national heroes, mere heroism and virtue are insufficient; heroes must also suffer as victims of the highest order, sacrificing their lives and standing out as the heroes of all Ukrainians. Interestingly, vernacular, informal memory mainly reflected the principal tendencies that characterized Ukrainian history after 1991, as noted by the existing scholarly literature. Andrew Wilson, a historian and political scientist researching Ukrainian politics of memory, identifies the myths of resistance and of national rebirth as embodied by the UPA as being among the most important foundational myths of independent Ukrainian historiography. This was combined with its heroization and presentation as a nationwide movement, for example through inflation of the number of participants.<sup>315</sup> Historian David R. Marples, in turn, notes that victimhood and glorification worked in tandem as inseparable elements of Ukrainian historiography on the nationalist movement. Ukrainian scholar Vasyl Rasevych, meanwhile, draws attention to the centrality of victimhood as an organizing metaphor of national history as a broader characteristic of post-imperial, postcolonial and post-Soviet memory policy in Ukraine.<sup>316</sup> Although the work of academic historians rarely has a direct, observable effect

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315 Wilson, “National history and national identity.”

316 Marples, *Heroes and Villains*; Vasyl Rasevych, “Polityka pamiaty i podolannia mizhnatsionalnykh stereotypiv v suchasni Ukraini,” in: *Istorychni mify ta stereotypy*, ed. Leonid Zashkilniak (Lviv: Instytut Ukrainoznavstva im. Krypiakievycha NAN Ukrainy, 2009), pp. 53–71.

on the means by which ordinary people remember the past, in this case there is a clear influence.<sup>317</sup> This is especially visible among the youngest generation, i.e. people who were schooled in post-independence Ukraine, who learned history using textbooks that were conceived in a patriotic vein. It was indeed the youngest residents of Zhovkva who most idealized the UPA, sometimes taking their passion to absurd lengths – like the respondent who stated that there were many Poles in the Ukrainian underground because it was, above all, an anti-totalitarian movement.<sup>318</sup>

Poles, for example, a lot of Poles, well, half-Poles, were in the UPA, Jews too... Because they were just defending this specific land... They had this regional way of thinking, they didn't accept that someone would want to deport them somewhere else, expel them, throw them into other living conditions or another way of life. I mean, the point is not that this was an army with a purely national aim. Its aims were more against than for... I mean, the basic idea was that it was anti-totalitarian (Z41Dm).

The people who idealized the UPA protested much more than others against the pressuring of Ukraine by neighboring countries unsatisfied with its memory policies, namely Poland and Russia. In particular, they were critical of the negative comments that arose in Poland in September 2010, after outgoing president Viktor Yushchenko posthumously awarded Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine (the highest honor bestowed on citizens for exceptional service to the country).<sup>319</sup> According to these respondents, Ukraine had a right to honor its own heroes, especially after foreign value systems and foreign heroes had been forced on the country for so long by those very same neighbors that were now expressing criticism.

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317 On academic history in this period, see: Stryjek, *Jakiej przeszłości potrzebuje przyszłość?*; Georgiy Kasianov, “‘Nationalized’ History: Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Future...” in: *A Laboratory of Transnational History. Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, ed. Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther (Budapest – New York: Central University Press, 2009), pp. 7–22.

318 This form of argumentation overlaps with the strategy adopted by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory after 2014, see: Jared McBride, “Ukraine’s Invented a ‘Jewish-Ukrainian Nationalist’ to Whitewash Its Nazi-era Past,” <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/ukraine-nationalists-are-using-a-jew-to-whitewash-their-nazi-era-past-1.5464194>, last accessed 8.10.2018.

319 Both official memory in Ukraine and the polarization of collective memory in the country have become more radical since 2014. For one of the most perceptive analyses of Ukrainian memory disputes after 2014, see: Olszański, *Wielka dekomunizacja*.

And now they are condemning Bandera because Yushchenko gave him the [title of the] Hero of Ukraine. I would also condemn it, because Bandera doesn't need that Hero of Ukraine at all – better to give it to someone who's still alive. It was completely unnecessary. But I also condemn the fact that Poland and Russia protested. We don't protest when the Russians canonize Tsar Nicholas [II, in 2000]. We don't protest when the Home Army is showered with awards in Poland. We don't protest when the *Vlasovites*<sup>320</sup> have all kinds of monuments to them all over the world. That's the historical memory of a certain nation. For our nation, [Bandera] was a hero. And the UPA for us was an army that wanted the independence of Ukraine, that fought for this independence (Z42Cf).

Respondents in Zhovkva who considered the UPA to have been heroes very often felt a need to defend it from supposed accusations. The fact that they were speaking to a Pole almost certainly played a role. Whereas broader nationwide debates treat the collaboration of the UPA (and the auxiliary Ukrainian police during the German occupation, whose members deserted *en masse* to join the UPA) in the Holocaust as the thorniest question,<sup>321</sup> my interviewees were fastest to shield the insurgents from accusations of murdering Poles and Ukrainians.<sup>322</sup> The most frequently offered justification, cited at the beginning of this chapter as a quote from a respondent of the oldest generation, had been filtered through family memory, school education and social norms, and now appeared in the statements of younger people. As one such interviewee put it:

I know that none if it is true, all of what people say about the UPA, that they carried out atrocities, that they were *Banderite* gangs, all those negative opinions. I know with complete certainty from my grandmother, N., my mother's mother, that it's not true, that they really had a true Ukrainian spirit (Z27Df).

Other voices tried to justify the UPA's actions, rather than to completely dismiss the accusations. A recurring theme was that the wrongdoings of the insurgents

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320 The respondent has in mind the Russian Liberation Army, a Russian military formation led by General Andrei Vlasov that collaborated with the Nazis. Informally known as the *Vlasovites*, this term is often used in the former USSR as well as Poland to denote all Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian collaborationist militias.

321 Cf. Gabriel N. Finder and Alexander V. Prusin, "Collaboration in Eastern Galicia: The Ukrainian Police and the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2004), pp. 95–118; Grzegorz Rossiliński-Liebe, "Ukraińska policja, nacjonalizm i zagłada Żydów w Galicji Wschodniej i na Wołyniu," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały*, Vol. 13 (2017), pp. 57–79.

322 David R. Marples discusses at length the Ukrainian debates from the 1990s of the darker sides of the UPA's activities in his aforementioned book *Heroes and Villains*. As a result of these self-critical debates among Ukrainian intellectuals, the volume *Strasti za Banderoiu*, edited by Amar, Balynski and Hrytsak was published in 2010.

should be seen “in the context of wartime,” in which different rules applied than in peacetime. In other words, perhaps the UPA was not entirely free of sin, but it fought for Ukraine, its fighters suffered, and so there was plenty of room for forgiveness. “It was wartime. And when there is a war on, negative human characteristics come to the surface, things that are kept in check by the state in times of peace” (Z44Df).

The trope of the Soviet NKVD carrying out crimes disguised as UPA insurgents also appeared in the form of a specific story from the 1940s, involving a group of children who died in consequence of a fire in a village club. Whilst officially the UPA were held responsible, the unofficial version blamed Soviet functionaries working under cover of UPA uniforms. The following statements by a grandmother and her grandson demonstrate the intergenerational interplay of memory:

The fair was in town, there was a film showing. There were lots of children, lots of horse-play... The building was drenched in petrol, and it had a porch... They covered it in petrol, and the children ran away and some got burned. I think one even died. [But who? Who did it?] How should I know? [But you said that they covered it in petrol, right?] It was at night, in the evening. Who did it, we didn't know. How could we know? [Was it the NKVD, or someone else...?] No, no, I think it was our own people, more likely, that's what I think. There were those young lads around, local boys, you know... But what do I know? (Z4Af).

My grandmother told me that one child was killed there. If I understood correctly, there was dancing and other fun. People were dancing, maybe someone took offence or something... And it happened. [But was it the UPA that burned the building down, or was it the NKVD who then said that it was the UPA?] I'm sure that is what happened. There were situations when the Russians disguised themselves as insurgents and pretended to be Ukrainian partisans (Z4Dm).

Neither of these respondents – neither the grandmother nor the grandson – knew what had actually happened, but the older woman admitted with some difficulty that “our own people” had probably been settling accounts, whereas the grandson was inclined to believe that it was the NKVD that had carried out the killing – because he had heard of other similar instances. It is not surprising that the two interpretations diverged: the grandmother was a Ukrainian resettled from Poland, whose father was killed by UPA fighters for joining a collective farm; the grandson believed, on the other hand, that there would be no Ukrainian nation today without the activities of the UPA. The woman was still living in fear, afraid to talk about the first post-war years: in her interview with me she mentioned neither the death of her father nor the children who died in the fire (this interview was coincidentally carried out twice, once by myself and

once by my Ukrainian colleague). She had also never mentioned the incident concerning her father to her grandson. These examples demonstrate the malleability of memory and how often the picture of the past is created *ad hoc*, as an effect of interaction, depending on whom one is talking to and why.

While accusations of killing “one’s own” for the sake of the “greater good” caused difficulties for the interviewees – as evidenced by numerous attempts to justify such events even before a related question had been asked – the collaboration of Ukrainian nationalists with the Germans (in the Ukrainian auxiliary police, and above all, in the SS Galizien division) was much less controversial. People often answered that allies can only be chosen in accordance with the circumstances of a given time. Sometimes this question was dismissed altogether as unimportant, and was raised only later in the course of deflecting other accusations. This is easy to understand given the extremely strong anti-Soviet attitudes that are prevalent in Ukrainian Galicia – both in reality and in memory, the enemy of one’s enemy becomes a friend, and collaboration with that friend appears as a lesser evil that is easily justifiable by claiming the national interest.

They had a common goal, to defeat the Soviet Union and the whole of that communist cabal [...] They were fighting for Ukraine, for the independence of Ukraine using all available means, doing whatever it took, doing the inevitable and necessary. [...] And you can only choose your method from those that are available. And you can only look for allies where it might bring some benefit (Z37Cf).

The extreme position taken by interviewees was to argue that the UPA had done nothing other than defending Ukrainians against the Soviets and Germans. This is easy enough to comprehend if the respondent claims that they have simply never really given the question any deeper consideration. It becomes more problematic when people who declare an interest in history cleanse their memories of the darker sides of the UPA’s activities. A specific form of ethnocentric memory was observable especially among the middle generation of Zhovkva residents, a form of remembrance that focused above all on the suffering of Ukrainians whilst more or less consciously rejecting information about other groups – especially when those other groups competed with the martyrdom of the Ukrainians. Their perception of the UPA was clearly shaped by “social frames of forgetting.”<sup>323</sup> The respondents who remembered the past in this selective manner did not only ignore the crimes of the UPA; as a rule, the Polish-Ukrainian conflict and the Holocaust had also never taken place.

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323 Hirszowicz and Neymann, “Społeczne ramy niepamięci.”

At least from what I have read in the archives and from what I have heard from eye witnesses – I have not heard even once that, say, the insurgents attacked Ukrainians in some village here or their own village. I don't know anything about that. [And what about the Poles and the Jews?] What do you mean, the Poles and the Jews? (Z33Bm).

Analogous statements act as evidence of the strength of Ukrainian nationalism in its heroic-martyrological vein, an ideology that has dominated the social space of Galicia since 1991 and whose basic fundament is the memory of the UPA. The unfettering of memories that had previously been banned caused a plethora of commemorative activity: plaques and monuments were erected, articles were printed, memoirs were published. Needless to say, most space was given to positive narratives of the UPA, which explains why the respondent cited above may really have never read about the more controversial aspects of the militia's activities in the generally patriotic press. The underpinning of this "fever" of memory is easy to understand. On the one hand, the memory actors who have worked to restore "defrosted" memory after half a century of communist restrictions have tried simply to compensate for previous losses, i.e. to obtain that which was unjustly lost. On the other hand, the two decades of independent Ukraine's existence have been a time during which the actual participants of those historical events have been gradually passing away; they, in turn, are aware that there will soon be no more witnesses and that there will be no more living (autobiographical) memory, or communicative memory, to borrow Jan Assmann's term – and for this reason they are interested in the preservation of the past and its conversion into social memory. There is a clear analogy with what several commentators have called a "memory boom," an era of memorialization in which the elder generation is slowly passing; Jan Assmann has drawn attention to the fact that there was a real interest in the Holocaust in the 1980s, when the youngest survivors who experienced the Holocaust as conscious adults began to enter pension age and pass away.<sup>324</sup> A similar phenomenon was observable in Poland after 1989, when the gradual passing of Home Army veterans and the last residents of the Eastern Borderlands created equivalent explosions of memory.<sup>325</sup>

The fact that a huge majority of the youngest respondents had a positive view of the UPA shows the attractiveness of the memory of the nationalist underground to the younger generations, especially for those born in the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike for the middle generation, family background and biographical

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324 Assmann, *Cultural memory*.

325 See: Lewicka, *Psychologia miejsca*; Głowacka-Grajper, *Transmisja pamięci*.

experience played no role here: there were fierce supporters of the UPA even among the descendants of elders who believed the insurgents had been bandits. This was also true of families with Polish roots: one interviewee (Z9Af) spoke with unconcealed disgust about her son's participation in nationalist rallies in the 1990s; he even brought home a portrait of Stepan Bandera from one of them, and the mother burned the image in secret using the kitchen stove. Neither her son nor her grandson agreed to be interviewed by me, and the woman herself requested that I turn off the recording device when she recounted the story of the burned portrait. Another Polish woman (Z10Af) complained that her grandson had hung a red-and-black UPA battle flag on his wall and was more willing to listen to the stories of his Ukrainian grandfather, who had fought in the UPA, than those of his Polish grandmother. The results are thus unequivocal: the positive image of the nationalist underground is dominant because it can be used to build an attractive identity at both group and individual levels, and that is precisely what young people in Galicia are yearning for.<sup>326</sup>

The few members of the youngest generation who equated the UPA with banditry formed an exception that proved the rule. They were all from Easterner families or from families with Polish backgrounds. Interestingly, they all emphasized that their negative assessment of the nationalist militia was not connected to their own ethnic background, but was the product of a general disagreement with the kind of nationalism represented by the OUN and UPA.

They weren't soldiers, they were just bandits in every way. The UPA was something totally specific, it's another topic. [...] It's as clear as day. Just go to the cemetery, have a look what's going on there, how many soldiers are buried there. That all happened under

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326 The results presented here are from the period before 2014, but more recent quantitative studies carried out after the Russian invasion of Crimea show that the demand for a heroic identity are on the rise in Ukraine, see: Anna Wylegała, "Managing the difficult past: Ukrainian collective memory and public debates on history," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 45(5) (2017), pp. 780–797. The broader scholarly literature contains many studies that confirm the importance of positive identity narratives to societies that are in period of crisis or rebuilding – as well as the unimportance of how "objectively" true those narratives are. The case of Israel, for example, shows the importance of "invented tradition" in the process of building a sense of belonging to the "imagined community;" hero myths of the first settlers from the 1920s have been constructed and re-deployed in numerous ways since the war of independence, see: Yael Zerubavel, "The Historic, the Legendary and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel," in: *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 105–128.

the sign of the UPA. What is there to say...? I personally have a negative opinion... And I am not ashamed to say so (Z38Cm).

Whilst those who expressed positive assessments of the nationalists were more light-minded in their opinions, the interviewees who were critical were uncompromising and had clearly defined views, often also stating that they were unashamed of their attitudes. Their isolation and even – to a certain extent – sense of being under threat among the UPA-supporting majority was clearly observable in the following statements by a mother and son, who were descended from the family of a Ukrainian resettled from Poland and a Russian soldier.

If only it had been a peaceful struggle... But the way it was, a teacher who came from eastern Ukraine or, say, a young Polish woman who married one of them, they would come the very next day, burn her alive, cut her head off and drown all the family's children in a well. You call those people soldiers? And then they're all like, "it's the Russians' fault, the Russians." Not all Russians did that kind of thing and not all Ukrainians either. And now many of those people, those Ukrainian nationalists, the one who sat in the forest... They're proud of their insurgent past. You know, I can't say the idea they fought for was a bad one, but... (Z16Bf).

When I was small, they called me a *Moskal* too, the same people who had fought... [...] The people who are now being held up as Ukrainian national heroes, with Stepan Bandera at their head, they were just bandits and murderers. They killed civilians – Ukrainians, Poles, Russians – it didn't matter who you were, if you didn't want to fight on their side, against the Soviet army, you were shot on the spot – children, women, old people. My grandmother told me that, she saw it all herself (Z16Dm).

The memories of the children and grandchildren of UPA members, as well as the descendants of their victims, form a separate topic for analysis: in each case, memory is more alive and painful than in the case of people with no such family history. The children and grandchildren of UPA insurgents spoke about the difficulties that they had endured, about the fear that dominated in their families and the enforced silence about the nationalist past that resulted from this fear. Testimonies were replete with references to the persecutions that had plagued the families. As one respondent put it: "You know, I've probably inherited it in my genes, that is how these things are passed on after all. And that's why it hurts so much. It's a painful topic for me [cries]" (Z19Cf).

The descendants of victims of the UPA that I managed to reach were mostly children and grandchildren of local Ukrainians and Ukrainians resettled from Poland. Their manner of speaking – as well their stated reasons for refusing to talk to me – still show traces of the post-war terror that was deeply inscribed into their family memories. Some respondents suppressed the deaths of their family members – I learned of these from third parties, for instance in the case of one

interviewee (Z9Bf) whose uncle and his family, all of whom were Poles, were killed by the UPA during the war. Others said nothing about their murdered relatives because they simply knew nothing about them – such as the respondent from the youngest generation (Z4Dm) whose great-grandfather was killed by the UPA. Two people did agree to talk about this theme in their interviews; however, for diverse reasons they refrained from directly discussing the perpetrators. The first avoided categorical statements as if she was afraid of mentioning the guilty parties by name:

My grandfather was killed in 1947 on the steps of his own house. He went outside and... I don't know what to say, who did it... But then... [So you never found out who did it...?] There were *Banderites* then, so who knows whether it was the NKVD or the *Banderites*. They wore each other's uniforms as disguise. Then my grandfather was buried. Two months later, in 1947 as well... the children were called together, there was a free film screening for the children. [...] Then they blocked all the doors, closed it all with wire so that nobody could escape. And they set fire to it, they burned the children alive in front of everyone's eyes. [...] He [the speaker's uncle] was burned, but he made it home with his older brother, my older uncle. [...] The poor boy was in agony for three days before he died. [cries] And now they are being held up as heroes. Who knows what really happened? Heroes! [bitterly] (Z32Cf).

The second testimony was completely different in tone: it bears no similarities to the previous speaker's fragmentary statement, which was regularly interrupted by tears. This interviewee was torn between her belief, inculcated by her family, that the UPA had been responsible for the death of her grandfather and her own personal desire to exculpate the organization. Indeed, she said so herself, completely openly:

Some men came to our house in the evening, and they said: "Collect your things, you're coming with us." And he [the speaker's grandfather] said: "Guys, wait. Where am I going? Have mercy, I have a wife and three small children." They said nothing, just shot him in the head. [But who was it, insurgents or who...?] That's a good question, we still don't know for sure. You have to understand, they used to say to us that it was the *Banderites*. But then it also turned out that the NKVD disguised themselves as *Banderites*, that is also true. We can't say any more who it really was, whether it was those *Banderites* after all... But why would they shoot one of their own, a simple peasant, who was neither a communist nor a rich man, nothing? I find that hard to believe. But, of course, we want to believe what we want to believe. We want to be able to say that it was the NKVD disguised as *Banderites* (Z39Cf).

Like with other historical issues, there were also people in Zhovkva who were indifferent to the issue of the UPA. One young woman argued that from today's perspective, the things that the UPA had fought for were now completely

irrelevant, especially to younger people – only old people cared – “I don’t really have an opinion. That was in the past, I don’t see any reason to dig around in things that happened long ago” (Z10Df). However, the basis of this neutrality is only visible in the context of the interview as a whole: this interviewee was one of a substantial number of young people in Zhovkva who were generally indifferent to historical questions, irrespective of the era or specific event.

There were also some young people in Zhovkva who held the UPA to have been an important part of their nation’s history but were able to subject it to objective assessment. On the one hand, they admitted that the insurgents had committed crimes, and that they had mistreated Poles; on the other hand, they contested that the UPA had grown above all out of a desire to fight for the nation and its territory, which had always previously been ruled by outsiders. One interviewee concluded her narration with the following statement:

Of course we wanted something for ourselves at last, something purely Ukrainian. And you see – it was precisely the UPA, and Bandera, they wanted something like that, something Ukrainian. I mean, they wanted to separate the Ukrainian nation from the Poles, from Austria, from Russia, from everyone else. [...] That is why it is a difficult truth for us (Z39Cf).

A small number of respondents were fully in favor of the rehabilitation of the UPA whilst also refusing to support the nationalist political movements that built their identities on positive memory of the wartime resistance movement. Many also spoke of a need to carry out objective research on the activities of the UPA – free of any ideology or political movement. As one interviewee put it: “If in the next fifteen years, we don’t see a full re-evaluation of the truth of how the UPA is understood, we won’t have anything left to study. Because the history of the UPA is so censored, distorted and doctored...” (Z1Cf).<sup>327</sup>

## “Liberators” and Liberators – or Two Types of Soviets

Memories about Soviet power in Zhovkva form both a mirror image and a perfect complement to memories about the UPA. To greatly simplify this complicated picture: in the particular puzzles that comprise the past as seen by the residents of Zhovkva, the heroic UPA needs Soviet criminals, just as much as Soviet liberators would not exist without Ukrainian nationalist traitors.

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327 In the context of the present-day (2018) state of research on the UPA in Ukraine, these words have turned out to be prophetic.

The very description of the Soviet army as “liberators” has a strongly ironic tone when pronounced by the great majority of people in Zhovkva. Almost all of the pre-war locals and their families (both Poles and Ukrainians), as well as some people from families of Ukrainians resettled from Poland, spoke in this way. Respondents discussed the Red Army soldiers who appeared in Zhovkva in 1939 with a biting irony and a condescending pity, describing them as barbarians from a lower rung of civilization – often in a humorous manner. In the context of the narrations that subsequently ensued about the atrocities that the Soviets had committed in occupied Galicia, such statements played an important neutralizing role.

[Mother] remembers them in 1939, when they came to Lviv [...] The women would go out in their night gowns... Mother told me that it was a nightmare, they weren't those Russians who were good masters, who stayed on their land. These were complete vagabonds, such Ivan the Fools [a character from Russian folklore]. Supposedly lots of [people] here greeted them with flowers, they thought at really would give land, like in the slogans of the day... [...] Then, well, it all kicked off. We knew all about it, what it was like in Lviv, and what was going on here. They were occupiers (Z41Bf).

They were so uncultured. We still had a large garden back then, the *Moskals* hadn't confiscated it yet. We had a big garden, and we grew strawberries and flowers, and just outside our window there was a bakery. [...] And they wouldn't look around at all, they just went through like a battering ram, they just walked through... through the gardens, through the strawberries and wild strawberries, the flowers, that's what they were like... They were terrifying, really terrifying (Z1Af).

The two images here are connected by, on the one hand, a condescending attitude towards eastern barbarism: the characteristic theme of Russian women parading in their night gowns – worn as ordinary dresses – appeared in the testimonies of many people who had lived through the Soviet occupation of former eastern Poland, and can be considered a sort of canonical image, i.e. what Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall call a “topos of memory,”<sup>328</sup> a staple element of collective remembrance. On the other hand, this condescension is combined with fear. The older woman recalling the destruction of her garden spoke of this event with dissatisfaction and irritation, but also lowered her voice towards the end of the phrase and described the Soviets as “terrifying.”

It should be noted, however, that a sense of superiority over the Soviets appeared only in statements by people originally from Zhovkva and other towns; it was less ethnic in character than cultural and class-based. This was the

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328 Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, “*Opa war kein Nazi*.”

superiority of the urban middle class over the vulgarity of a peasant in uniform. Residents of Zhovkva who had moved from rural areas, whether from villages near Zhovkva or in today’s Poland, often spoke about the Soviets with distaste, but never with condescension. Among interviewees originally from Galicia, a conviction that the arrival of the Red Army was a joyful event that brought positive change was completely exceptional. One woman, born in a village near Zhovkva, spoke very emotionally about the events of September 1939:

And then it was 1939, the liberation of 17 September. [...] And I have it etched into my memory, you know, those stables [that belonged to the Polish landowners] were all decorated in white, and people were so moved to start with. Some said that it was the liberation of Ukraine, that Ukraine would be Soviet now, independent and sovereign. People were so pleased that they set up a stage, and arranged a concert, I even recited a little verse, and there were artists from as far as Lviv (Z23Af).

This interviewee was the only member of the oldest generation from Galicia who used the term “liberation” [Ukr. *zvilnennia*] to describe the Soviet invasion. Everyone else preferred more down-to-earth words such as “arrived,” “invaded,” “entered,” etc. The lofty idea of “liberation” was characteristic of people who migrated to Zhovkva from the East, who also frequently spoke of the “unification” of western Ukraine with the Ukrainian SSR (or with “Great” Ukraine, the motherland). Interestingly, the phrase “unification” often appeared in a completely unreflexive manner in statements by members of the middle generation, irrespective of their family background and their individual attitudes to the Soviet legacy. Like the expressions “return to Poland” and “Recovered Territories” in the Krzyż testimonies, such usage shows the astonishing extent to which propaganda clichés infiltrated the thinking of people who grew up in the communist era. The word “unification” had completely different connotations when spoken by the oldest Easterners in Zhovkva and their family members; they were convinced to this day that the Red Army had invaded the territory of Poland in order to protect it from the Germans. The respondent cited below was exceptional amongst the youngest generation, but similar statements were made by almost all of the Easterners and many of their children – they all justified the Soviet aggression.

No, they weren’t invaders. They came here in 1939 in order to deploy troops in western Ukraine because it was 30 kilometres to the border, in case a war broke out. Although Stalin gave assurances that there would be no war, that the Germans wouldn’t dare attack the Soviet Union. [...] And that is why Soviet power came here. It was a special strategic manoeuvre, to prevent the war (Z16Dm).

One of the most important events in relation to memory about the Soviets is the massacre in the Zhovkva prison that was carried out shortly before the Soviet retreat from the town in 1941. Almost all of the respondents knew about it and remembered it (with the exception of a very few older people who migrated from the East and individuals from the youngest generation who declared no interest whatsoever in local history), and it was clear that this event had become a central pillar of the town's history thanks to commemorative acts in the 1990s; no one could remain indifferent. Among the most passionate statements were those by individuals who had witnessed the macabre discovery of human remains in Zhovkva castle and people who participated in the spontaneous demonstrations and commemorations that followed – these have now become important “memory events” in the local memoryscape:<sup>329</sup>

It happened when the Russians were leaving here. On their way out, they murdered those people, right at the end, and two days later the Germans arrived. It was, well, a real nightmare, seeing those things. Were they such activists, those people, that it was necessary to break their arms, cut off their heads and bore out their eyes? Because that is what they did, it was completely inhumane, do you get what I am saying? It was horrific [with voice raised] (Z31Am).

People who were resettled to Zhovkva were also aware of the NKVD killings; they mentioned repeatedly that locals had told them about the massacre after they had arrived. For understandable reasons, they discussed this topic in less detail, with the prison murders sometimes overlapping with other crimes committed by the NKVD that were discovered in the 1990s. They did, however, condemn the Soviet atrocities in similarly harsh terms to the autochthonous residents. The murders of the prisoners were also discussed by younger people, especially those who at the beginning of the 1990s, during the most heated period of the “memory boom,” were young adults who actively became involved in the restoration of local memory.

There were meetings where we discussed the events and showed photographs, to see what it was like. Around 18 to 20 people were killed then – it was awful. One woman had her skin peeled off and was hanging upside down. My dad... My dad worked with

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329 Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind define “memory events” as “acts of revisiting the past that create ruptures with its established cultural meanings,” see: Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1–24.

an electrician whose grandmother was killed there. Do you know how many were murdered...? They included women... (Z5Cm).

This fragment is important not only because of the emotions contained therein: here, the man recalls conversations between his father and the grandson of one of the victims, which, in all probability, were his first source of information about the event. This shows once again how important direct contact between locals and new arrivals was in the first post-war years, as well as the extent to which such contacts created a divide between those who remained “deaf and blind” to the town’s past and those who gained knowledge of key events. It is unlikely that the autochthonous residents would have discussed the NKVD massacre with the wives of party functionaries.

Interviewees with a positive opinion of the Red Army spoke in an especially compelling manner about the prison murders. None of them openly negated it, but most did make covert attempts to mask the event or to cast doubt on its authenticity, showing clear irritation.

[Have you heard about the massacre in the prison?] I don’t know. To be honest, I can tell you that... Here we have a cemetery for people who were killed by the nationalists, it’s a cemetery, they call it the military one. And there is a similar cemetery for soldiers of the UPA, so... [...] There was a home for invalids here [...], and there was a woman who worked there, I knew her pretty well, and she told me that there were some shootings here, and something was up... There was some kind of operation... [But what shootings...? Who did the shooting?] Well, it was... the NKVD that did the shooting. But how they did it, where... I never really asked about that, I don’t find that [of any interest]... (Z38Cm).

The interviewees who made such statements had in common a hardly concealable unwillingness to talk about the crimes committed by the NKVD in Zhovkva. One woman from central Ukraine (Z10Af) expressed surprise that she had not heard about the massacre from her mother-in-law, who was from Zhovkva; and since she had not heard anything, perhaps it had not really happened after all? Considering her testimony as a whole, it seems entirely plausible that her Galician mother-in-law had indeed never discussed such matters with her – as the respondent herself noted, the mother-in-law considered her a *Moskal* and their relations were generally tense. The man cited above answered the question about the prison massacre in a very chaotic manner, intermixing stories about the victims of the UPA whose remains lay nearby the site of the prison – as if to compensate for the Soviet murders. He repeatedly equivocated with phrases such as “some kind of” or “somewhere,” giving the whole affair an air of vagueness and unverifiability. The reasons for such a way of speaking are understandable enough: admitting that the Soviet authorities were guilty of crimes

against the Ukrainian nationalists is difficult because it would mean that the UPA, whom they despise, would gain the status not only of heroes, but also of martyrs.

Another important moment in the memory of the Soviets is the end of the war, when the Germans retreated from Zhovkva and the Red Army took the town. Many respondents of Galician origin remembered their initial joy at the arrival of the Red Army. Unlike in their accounts of 1939, they described the return of the Soviet military as “liberation” in complete earnest, with no irony. Nonetheless, interviewees were also unanimous in their belief that this joy was short-lived, and they quickly transitioned to memories of the “old new order” that the Soviets began to reinstate: deportations and more mass murders, some of which were only uncovered in the 1990s.

Once they were done with the Jews, the *Moskals* arrived. And our people were so happy: “The *Moskals* are here!”. [...] But then the *Moskals* started to oppress us! How many of our people were killed... [...] Even in the church, you know, how many of our church people were murdered? Awful! [...] Even the Germans took people to labor, and when people came back, they said that had even sent some money, the people whom they worked for, yes. And if they wanted, they were allowed to go abroad. Nothing like that with [the Russians]! (Z35Af).

This fragment demonstrates the high importance of comparison with the Germans as an element of memory of the Soviets in Zhovkva; and in this evaluation, it is the Germans who come out more favorably. This theme was also present in a large proportion of interviews with younger residents, some of whom even reduced the German occupation to a near-non-event.

Some people will tell you that when the Soviets came, they liberated us Ukrainians. That’s not true, it’s all lies. Quite on the contrary, they oppressed the Ukrainians and the local people had to hide and live in fear when the Soviets came, the Soviet army. But when the Germans came, it was the opposite. They were happy, because the Germans were polite and humane to our people (Z27Df).

This statement shows a specific characteristic of social memory in western Ukraine – similar statements would never be heard from someone who had lived through the German occupation in central or eastern Ukraine, where the Nazi occupation was incomparably more brutal.<sup>330</sup> Individuals from mixed family backgrounds would also be unlikely to relativize the harshness of the

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330 For the different realities of German occupation in western and eastern Ukraine, see: Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

German occupation. This is only characteristic of a particular group of western Ukrainians with strong anti-Soviet attitudes, many of whom have relatives who fought in the UPA. They were most likely to express a belief that the reappearance of the Red Army in Zhovkva was no liberation, but simply an act of invasion and occupation.

### **Stalinism, Stabilization, Veterans: Memories of Soviet Zhovkva**

Memory of the Soviet regime in the first post-war years was dominated by the terror that engulfed practically every aspect of everyday life. With very few exceptions – mostly the wives of Soviet officers, who enclosed themselves in a communist party ghetto and were untroubled by contacts with locals and their lowly world – and to similar extents, all of the oldest respondents remembered the post-war years as difficult times. The main differences were in emphasis, in terms of where the accents were placed in judgements of perpetrators and victims. For the Easterners who most ardently sympathized with Soviet power, the Soviet pioneers had been the victims of Ukrainian nationalist gangs; in contrast, for the locals, the Soviets had carried out massacres of the local population. Younger respondents from Easterner families gave more balanced replies, discussing the post-war terror with regret; nonetheless, they clearly tried to differentiate levels of responsibility, for example by arguing that it was the NKVD that had carried out the persecutions, not the rank-and-file of the Red Army. In other words, they were arguing along the lines: my father, who was a Red Army soldier, had nothing to do with it.

Well that is what happened. Both sides killed. What do you think happened to those young nationalist boys who were killed, eh...? Wasn't it the case that they were tied to trees by the police station, young twenty-year old boys and a young lady who carried food out to them? [...] Was that a humane way to do it? [...] The KGB did that, not soldiers, but the KGB – that was the punitive organ of the state, they were crazy when it came to politics, just kill, destroy, they're not people, so kill them, destroy them like the others... You see, the KGB men, they were fighting against the *Banderites*, and the Ukrainians were fighting against all the Russians and the KGB (Z16Bf).

It also happened that Easterners in Zhovkva found it hard to unequivocally identify perpetrators and victims, or “good” and “bad” people. On the one hand, they were able to understand the tragedy of the local population, whilst on the other, they were convinced that in the bigger picture the Soviet system had been generally beneficial. Moreover, they struggled to come to terms with the way migrants who had been sent to Galicia from the East had been treated. However, people from the families of locals and Ukrainians resettled from Poland did not have any

difficulty giving a clear assessment of the Stalinist era in Zhovkva. They were all critical in their evaluations, although there was some variation in how strongly they condemned it. In some cases these accounts had humorous elements, which were strikingly similar to the description of the “barbarian invasions” in 1939. The difference was that, whilst the barbarians of 1939 had only stayed for two years, the post-war era of Soviet rule had lasted for most of the interviewees’ adult lives.

We had nothing to do with the military. Although, once we had moved in here, it was quiet to begin with, but then the invasions started and people started stealing potatoes from the mounds. [Who did that?!] The Russian army. They put the wheelbarrow down, there was a little mound about 100 metres from the house, and... off they went to find potatoes! Once they came in the middle of the night, they stole some things, took some clothes, you know. Why would they... A great army [with anger]! (Z6Am).

The most strident criticisms were voiced by individuals whose families had suffered during the terror, regardless of their backgrounds (although most were locally born Ukrainians). The Soviet government in Stalinist times was, according to these speakers, responsible for crimes and killings not only against Ukrainians, but also against other ethnic groups. Indirectly, it was also responsible for the negative consequences that continue to affect independent Ukraine and its residents. The following statements of a mother and a daughter show the cultivation of such memories within a family:

The Soviet government destroyed all of the nationalists, the entire clergy, all of the priests, the doctors, all of the best people. Not only here; it also destroyed [them] in Russia. It destroyed [them] everywhere. What remained was common folk, you know, how to put this, well, common folk. They don’t need to read books, or have any interests. They wake up, eat a piece of bread, have some soup, eat something – that is the kind of people who are left here. That’s why Ukraine is in such a mess now (Z19Af).

I’m completely, what’s the word... For example, I don’t recognize the Soviet army. I grew up with that, it shaped my upbringing, but now I don’t recognize it. It’s nothing to do with me. [Why?] [...] They just destroyed the people, they decimated the people – that’s why I have no respect for them. None at all (Z19Cf).

Whilst condemnation of the crimes of Stalinism was universal, almost all respondents clearly differentiated the Stalinist period from the later decades of Thaw and stabilization. People who lived relatively well in Soviet times spoke firstly, with great compassion, of the mass murders of Stalinist times, before smoothly moving on to a positive appraisal of the communist system *per se*. Many interviewees spared no effort to argue that the idea of communism had been a good one, although it had been abused. Older respondents originally from the

East were most likely to praise communism; some locals who had moved up the social ladder also voiced approval. In many cases, the latter openly admitted that they owed all of their achievements in life to the Soviet regime. Their responses varied in their level of cynicism, but they all had a common thread: the crimes of communism were inexcusable, but the Soviet system itself was not at fault.

I don't know who I would be now if we had been in Poland. So I can't say that the Soviet Union was all that bad. [...] You see, under Soviet rule, I, a simple human being, a poor person with poor parents, I had an opportunity to study and to have a career. No one persecuted me, no one did anything bad... [...] We were all the same. And relations were normal. All local people could go to university, they could study and work, they received a pension, they lived and built their houses. To begin with it was difficult in the kolkhoz. It was tough, and there were some wild times after the war. But afterwards it became better with every passing year (Z20Am).

Two issues that appear in this quotation deserve commentary. First, the nostalgic assertion that “we were all the same.” This phrase clearly demonstrates a yearning for a time when loyalty and moderation guaranteed social security, if not necessarily material abundance. This specific economic nostalgia for the USSR was equally present (if not, indeed, more so) in conversations with representatives of the middle generation, i.e. with people who did not personally experience the challenges of building a new world in the post-war years, but who had a very clear memory of the relative comfort of the Brezhnev era. Their testimonies frequently featured comparisons between the orderliness of those times and the chaos of post-independence Ukraine. The son of the man cited above (Z20Cm) remembered bitterly that in his own youth, the state had provided childcare, whereas his children were being forced to spend their afternoons on the streets. When he claimed that the Soviet regime had done no harm to local people in Zhovkva, I asked him about deportations to Siberia in the post-war years. His reply was that the Stalinist period was a different era to that in which he had lived.

Idealization of one's youth – even if that youth was spent in times of war and occupation – is easy to understand, and is encountered frequently in studies of individual autobiographies. In the case of Zhovkva's residents, this is a surprising phenomenon when a positive attitude to Soviet rule appears in people whose families were persecuted by the Soviets.

That's what those times were like, yes. But when people come to me and say the *Moskals* did this or that, I tell them: “I have nothing to say about that, they didn't do anything bad to me or my family.” I mean, to me, my mother and her kids. [...] [But, in spite of everything, it was the Soviet regime that took away the men in your family, wasn't it?] Yes, yes, I already said that, that it was in the first period, when collectivization was underway.

[But afterwards it was OK?] Later – yes. You see, I went to study, no one persecuted us. I came here, I was allocated an apartment, I educated my children, and no one charged me any money for it like they do today (Z10Af).

The roots of this attitude are very complex. On the one hand, part of this woman's family had died in the 1930s during collectivization (she hailed from central Ukraine) and she spoke about this past openly. On the other hand, she had been loyal to the ruling regime for all of her later life and was convinced of the correctness of this stance (working in the community library in Zhovkva, she conducted so-called educational work with the local population). At home her family never discussed the persecutions that had beset them – the speaker's daughter only found out about the fate of her great grandparents after 1991, and her granddaughter was to this day unaware of those events. These contradictions are partly explained by a consideration of the respondent's broader biography. The main axis around which her testimony revolved was the war, especially the atrocities committed by the Germans – against this background, the persecution of her kulak grandparents and the post-war famine appeared to her as minor aberrations. In her account, the Germans appear as savage beasts, whereas the Red Army and the Soviet authorities emerge as the force that defeated Nazism – and, therefore, they deserve our gratitude. Such an entanglement of identity and autobiography is fairly typical for a particular group of residents who migrated from central and eastern Ukraine, and whose relatives were persecuted by the Soviet security forces.<sup>331</sup> The autobiographical narratives of such individuals featured a dominant theme that they themselves had not been harmed by the Soviet regime; on the contrary, it was thanks to the victory of the Red Army over the Germans that they had escaped a terrible fate – they owed their lives and livelihoods to the Soviets. For this reason, the fate of the persecuted relatives had to be erased from memory, or, as in this particular instance, it had to function in a parallel but less significant autobiographical space.

This separation of experiences also filters through, seemingly imperceptibly, to the younger generations; it was not only the daughter of the above respondent who voiced similar views, but also several other members of this cohort.

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331 I analyze this problem in an article on autobiographical memories among Poles from central Ukraine, see: Anna Wylegała, "Negacja, separacja, marginalność. Represje i wojna w narracjach biograficznych najstarszego pokolenia Polaków z Żytomierszczyzny, Kijowszczyzny i Podola," *Studia Socjologiczne*, Vol. 4(199) (2010), pp. 144–170.

One such person, from a family of Russians who settled in Galicia after the war, spoke at length about the near-death of his grandmother as a result of famine and the persecution she had suffered at the hands of the Soviet security apparatus. However, he finished with the words “But we didn’t suffer, no, not at the hands of the UPA, not anyone else. No one persecuted us, I completed my school education without any issues, that was in a Russian school...” (Z38Cm). In the middle generation of Zhovkva residents, it appears that internalization of gratitude towards the Soviet regime at the expense of a part of one’s own identity has flourished, thanks in part to people becoming socialized in totalitarian conditions.

The opposite approach to Soviet rule was a clear disapproval of the communist regime as a whole: condemnation of the aggression of 1939 and the Stalinist terror, as well as criticism of the Soviet system *per se*. Such attitudes were encountered mainly among people from local families or among Ukrainians resettled from Poland, who had suffered as a result of the Soviet rule. The memories of Soviet-sanctioned injury that were cultivated at home – in the close family circle, among neighbors or in the larger neighborhood community – resulted in clear anti-Soviet and anti-communist attitudes being voiced by subsequent generations. As a young respondent from a family that had been deported to Siberia during the war put it: “On the whole, our attitude to Soviet rule was always, so to speak, negative. What I mean is, it was always clear that we were against all that” (Z45Dm). Sometimes respondents admitted that they had reached these attitudes gradually – especially people from the middle generation, who grew up in communist times.

At home we talked all the time [...], they [the speaker’s parents] definitely remained as dissidents, they were against the regime. [...] I used to think that after all of those camps, they had simply got messed up, that they were prejudiced against the system, and that all those things they were saying could not be true. They told me one thing in school and something completely different at home. Later I came to understand that my parents were right. It was difficult to believe that those things had really happened. If you, as a child, had had all those things rammed into your head, to put it an unpleasant way... [...] But it really happened, I understood eventually. It just took a while to recognize that it was the truth (Z41Bf).

One of the most interesting and complex issues of memory is the evaluation of regular soldiers of the Red Army. Other than residents with the most ardent anti-Soviet views, most people expressed a certain respect for the rank-and-file soldiers, as people who had experienced a great deal and were not involved in the atrocities of the Stalinist era. According to Andrii Portnov, a tendency to emphasize the heroism and suffering of ordinary people whilst also accenting the errors

and crimes of the Soviet system is a very characteristic feature of contemporary Ukrainian memory of the Second World War.<sup>332</sup> To simplify, this interpretation can be summarized in a single phrase: condemn the system but sympathize with the people. Such an attitude also applied to those respondents who held the UPA to be heroes whilst generally being critical of the Soviet legacy: “Well veterans, veterans had their difficulties too. [...] So in my opinion, everyone who lived through that hell deserves respect” (Z6Cf).

Of course, it was older residents originally from the East and their families who expressed the most respect for Red Army veterans. In their eyes, the soldiers had defeated Nazism, the greatest evil. A reliable indicator of an individual's attitude to the Red Army is their participation in commemoration practices, especially Victory Day celebrations – both today and in the past. The oldest Easterners spoke with great emotion about the 9 May commemorations and their protagonists. Ukrainians with a more ethnocentric view of history were more likely to consider this holiday a foreign imposition. With all due respect for the Soviet soldiers, they treated this Soviet ritual with contempt and mild mockery. In accounts of their lives before 1991, many people described their attendance in marches and demonstrations as reluctant but necessary. Asked about the status of Victory Day in independent Ukraine, one interviewee replied: “9 May? Everyone sits on their allotment. They celebrate the Day of the Potato” (Z41Dm).

A large proportion of respondents argued that the veterans deserved respect above all because they had defeated the Germans, even if that victory had come at a cost. Interestingly, one of the most graphic and outspoken statements to this effect was voiced by one of the youngest interviewees, who reacted passionately against the recent re-evaluations of the role of the Red Army in the Second World War:

You need to understand that many people who fought on the side of the Soviet army weren't somehow evil or anything like that. They were just fighting for an idea. It's thanks to them that we are living here, because who knows what would have happened if the Germans had decided to wipe this town off the map and plant a forest here? They could have put two little huts here for two Germans to live in (Z11Dm).

People who clearly divided the Red Army soldiers from the functionaries of the Soviet security apparatus disagreed very strongly with the post-1991 tendency to devalue the contribution of ordinary soldiers, as well as to describe them – alongside the NKVD, Komsomol and Party enthusiasts – using derogatory terms such as “Russkies” or the “Reds.” Especially those residents whose fathers and

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332 Portnow, “Wielka Wojna Ojczyźniana.”

grandfathers had fought on the front line (as in the example of the man cited above) spoke not so much with anger, but with disappointment.

## Heroes and Traitors: Summary

In Zhovkva, local memories of the UPA and the Soviets as heroes/anti-heroes complement each other. Whenever the conversation turned to the Red Army, it was very often the case that the interview would come full circle and return to the UPA. For many respondents, a rational assessment of the two sides remained possible, when talking about one in isolation; when veterans of both military formations crossed unexpectedly in the course of a narration, the speaker often reacted with consternation or strongly negative emotions. This was especially true among older people, members of the post-Soviet community of memory,<sup>333</sup> for whom the very thought of measuring the Red Army and the UPA with the same yardstick was an assault on the basic essence of their worldview. This issue is still very topical in Ukraine, to the extent that since the presidential term of Viktor Yushchenko, debates have raged on whether to endow veterans of the UPA with the same rights as Red Army veterans – not only in the symbolic realm, but also (and for some, above all) in the material realm. This discussion, which was still unresolved at the time of the interviews,<sup>334</sup> aroused great passion among residents of Zhovkva. The material analyzed in this chapter shows a clear division of respondents into two memory groups, for whom the roles of heroes and villains are played differentially by the same actors. The borders of membership within these groups run across the generations. The larger memory group, which we can call “patriotic,” comprised some of the oldest generation (those from Zhovkva and Galicia), most of the middle generation and almost all of the youngest generation. As a form of memory it is “on the attack,” on the ideological offensive: having been suppressed throughout the Soviet period, it has now been rehabilitated and raised to the status of an official discourse. It was representatives of this group who formed the symbolic landscape of Zhovkva after 1991, and who defined the borders of the symbolic domains:<sup>335</sup> they decided what monuments to erect,

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333 In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of 2014, we could use the phrase: members of the imagined community of the “Russian world” [*Russkii mir*].

334 As of 2018, UPA veterans have still not received formal recognition as “war veterans” at the state level. The issue is delegated to regional [*oblast*] authorities, which especially in the west of the country have recognized a number of additional financial benefits to supplement the basic pensions of former UPA fighters.

335 Nijakowski, *Domeny symboliczne*.

whose names would adorn the town's streets, and – at the nationwide level – which version of history would be enshrined in school textbooks. This last factor is especially important because of its influence on socialization; it goes a long way towards explaining the near-total hold of positive memory of the UPA among the youngest respondents, as well as their distaste for the Soviet legacy.

The second group, which is much smaller but also has more clearly defined views, is the post-Soviet memory group, whose members retained the Soviet attitude to the UPA and Soviet rule, albeit with a somewhat different emphasis. This group consists of Zhovkva residents originally from the East and their descendants, the oldest Poles and Poles of the middle generation, as well as select individuals – from different generations – whose life experiences were conducive to a negative assessment of the Ukrainian nationalist underground. This group has a marginal voice in the public sphere, where the new discourse of heroism and martyrdom is dominant.<sup>336</sup> This form of memory is “in retreat,” and full of bitterness because of its loss of the dominant position within Ukrainian society and a sense of unwarranted injury.

Interviewees who did not fit into either of these categories – who, in terms of sheer numbers, could have comprised a third group – did not have in common a vision of the past that differed from the two main narratives, but a specific attitude to the very past. They were generally indifferent to the debate on the UPA and the Soviets that divided the Ukrainian society, and careful in the views that they did articulate. This stance appears to have two sources. One section of interviewees – many of whom were Ukrainians resettled from Poland – avoided making clear evaluations out of fear: the same fear that they had previously felt when confronted with Ukrainian militias and/or the Soviet system, as well as a fear encountered today, as a result of being in opposition to the dominant vision of the past. For this group, none of the fighting factions had the status of a hero, thus it was preferable to stay on the sidelines of the current debates. The memory philosophy of this group might be summarized as follows: one side was bad, and the other was not good. The following summarizing statement describing the war demonstrates this attitude very well:

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336 On memories of the Soviet past in Ukraine in the realm of memory policy (before 2014), see: Oxana Shevel, “Memories of the Past and Visions of the Future. Remembering the Soviet Era and Its End in Ukraine,” in: *Twenty Years After Communism. The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 146–167.

The people who brought order [after the arrival of the Red Army in 1944], the KGB, the Red Army officers, had several names... They were terrifying. And so were the Ukrainian partisans. Those were tough times. But if you survived, you survived (Z15Am).

Meanwhile, other representatives of this group – mostly from the youngest cohort, simply claimed to have no interest in the past, irrespective of the particular aspect that was being discussed.

The memory groups of Zhovkva are quietly in a state of undeclared war: their members accuse each other of falsifying history and imposing a “single correct version” – both now and in the past. This war has periods in which hostilities are more heated and periods of relative calm, but it has been ongoing since 1991; as the Kyiv-based historian Vladyslav Hrynevych has noted, it is a merciless war over myths that is no less fierce than the armed confrontation between the Soviet army and the UPA.<sup>337</sup> Paradoxically, the group that is more determined to advance its interests is the smaller one, the post-Soviet group. Perhaps a sense of living in a besieged fortress increases their energy and desire to go on the attack. The patriotic memory group is less vehement in its opposition to the other side, showing more understanding by making allowances for certain nuances. A sense of their currently favorable position is no doubt a factor, but this mildness in relation to the post-Soviet side is also a result of other factors. As much as Galician Ukrainians with anti-Soviet sympathies would like to believe otherwise, service in the Red Army was a much more common phenomenon in Galicia than participation in the UPA – not least because of conscription by the Soviet authorities. In a great many families that were far from being supporters of the new regime, men of conscription age joined the Soviet army. Even if this part of one’s family history is now unlikely to be enthusiastically displayed, it can still significantly influence an individual’s attitude to the Red Army as a collective of ordinary soldiers.

A different issue altogether is the permissive, and in some cases even nostalgic, attitude to the Soviet system as a whole that appears especially in interviews with the middle generation. As Vladimir Kravchenko, Ukrainian-Canadian scholar, argues, Soviet mentalities and official Soviet attitudes to questions of history were internalized by the residents of Ukraine to a much greater extent than anyone could suppose – such that after the collapse of the USSR, it was impossible to enact a state policy of complete separation from the Soviet heritage in Ukraine,

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337 Hrynevych, “Mit viiny,;” Vladyslav Hrynevych, “Gesplante Erinnerung. Der Zweite Weltkrieg im ukrainischen Gedenken,” *Osteuropa*, Vol. 4–5 (2005), pp. 88–102.

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in contrast for example to the Baltic states.<sup>338</sup> Even though western Ukraine was under Soviet rule for a shorter period than the eastern half of the country, for a majority of the middle generation the formative years that they spent living under the communist system still play an important role in their evaluation of the Soviet legacy.

The generational distribution of memory in Zhovkva leads one to conclude that the patriotic memory group has the better chance of establishing its vision of the past as the dominant master narrative. Referring to Hrynevych again: it was this faction that won one of the key battles in the memory war, when it succeeded in having its version of events enshrined in school textbooks and the history curriculum. Whereas the post-Soviet memory group is comprised mainly of older people and members of the middle generation, young people in Zhovkva were nearly unanimous in their belief that the UPA were heroes; they spoke about the Red Army with understanding at best, even if the older members of their own families remembered the Soviet military in much rosier hues. Not a single young respondent used the phrase “Great Patriotic War,” a staple term of the Soviet memory lexicon, although some of their parents and grandparents did.<sup>339</sup> There were also practically no instances of Soviet nostalgia, a fact that harmonizes with the results of available quantitative survey work.<sup>340</sup> This shows the ineffectuality of family transmission of memory, and also, above all, demonstrates how attractive and socially powerful a positive memory of the UPA is in today’s western Ukraine – as a memory on which it is possible to build a strong group identity in opposition to the Soviet legacy.

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338 Vladimir Kravchenko, “Boi s tieniu: sovietskoie proshloie w istoricheskoi pamiaty sovremennogo ukrainskogo obshchestva,” *Ab Imperio*, Vol. 2 (2004), pp. 329–368.

339 During the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010–2014, this term was again employed in school textbooks.

340 Olena Nikolayenko, “Contextual effects on historical memory: Soviet nostalgia among post-Soviet adolescents,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, No. 41 (2008), pp. 243–259. Only 8.2 % of respondents in Lviv were dissatisfied with the collapse of the USSR, in contrast to a figure of more than 30 % for Ukraine as a whole.