

Olena Stiazhkina

# ZERO POINT UKRAINE

Four Essays  
on World War II



Ukrainian Voices, vol. 10

*ibidem*

Olena Stiazhkina

# **Zero Point Ukraine**

Four Essays on World War II

Translated from Ukrainian by Svitlana Kulinska

# UKRAINIAN VOICES

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Verlag 

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-7550-5

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First published in Ukrainian by Dukh i Litera Publishing House

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# Contents

Preface .....	7
Essay I: World War II in the Life and Death of Ukrainians: An Attempt to Adjust the Methodological Framework .....	15
Essay II: The Regime of Continuous War: Mobilization, Militarization, and Practices of Maintaining an Undeclared State of Emergency in Soviet Ukraine From the 1920s to the 1940s.....	47
Essay III: Occupation Regimes in Ukrainian Lands: Establishment and Fall/Stabilization, Similarities and Differences.....	95
Essay IV: Ukraine in 1943–1953: Re-Sovietization and an Unexpected Turn of the Unfinished War .....	173
Abbreviations .....	275
Index.....	279



## Preface

Lateral roads are the conduits parallel to the forward edge of the battlefield. They may be railroads, highways or dirt roads. What matters is not their properties but the opportunities they offer.

Lateral roads are about providing space for maneuver and a basis for lateral communication between the units, about preparing for an offensive, supplying weapons, evacuating the wounded, about reinforcement potential, about communications. And, along with all this, they are about war as such.

It was historian Tamara Vronska who introduced me to the term “lateral road.” And she, in turn, was introduced to it by Mykhailo Koval, a World War II historian who undertook the burial of the “Great Patriotic War” myth, under which, as part of the concept of the “Great Russian People,” Ukrainians were interred. Koval was among the first to reveal the struggle and tragedy of Ukrainians, to give voice to the prisoners of war, Ostarbeiters, the displaced, to those who endured occupation, to those who did or did not survive the war. In some sense, these potent attempts of the 1990s were lateral roads—forgotten/banned, but utterly important trends that enabled the unbiased study of the course of World War II and its consequences for Ukraine.

My book is about lateral roads as well. It is about the possibility and necessity of Ukrainian “maneuver” and intensification of communications between historians, philosophers, social anthropologists. It is about the “visibility mode” that is being developed and opened for Ukraine with the change of methodological framework, with the incorporation of Ukraine into the European context, with reassessment and “reclassification” of spatial and temporal categories, with restoration of agency for the communities and groups that were “appropriated” by “outsider” historical narratives and “dissolved” in broad generalizations.

The idea of the book and its realization are linked to the important project of the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. The overall idea of the project is



to produce the “Outlines of the History of Ukraine,” based on anti-colonialism/postcolonialism principles, from the standpoint of Ukraine and Ukrainians as a political nation.

The themes offered to me under the project turned out to involve both a challenge and a risk. A challenge — because World War II was not part of the core of my research endeavors. Even my book *Stigma of Occupation: Soviet Women in Their Self-Imagination of the 1940s* (2019) was aimed not so much at describing war events as the scenarios of surviving it, of “blending in” with the state concepts; it was important for me to set the problem of the nonlinearity of different experiences, of burden and total fear that marked the choice of the “Soviet” side made by the women who survived or did not survive occupation. Certainly, as often happens, after it was finished and published, some concern grew about whether the book could have been better, as not all the plots/ideas were totally clear and polished.

Thus, there were some “reserves” that could be used for the project. The risk lay in the question: are these reserves sufficient? Would the social and temporal distance between the subjects I usually focus on and the ones I happened to be immersed in due to analysis of the enormous scope of historiographical material by Ukrainian and foreign historians be a drawback or an advantage? Would personal experience of war (one launched against Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2014) — my own experience of witnessing aggression and occupation — help?

All these questions are still open. Yet these questions allowed me to realize that the texts on the project were nothing else than lateral roads — a space for maneuver out of letters and paper, for communication, connection between historians working on World War II, between the histories of European states, between the general trends that defined and accompanied the global catastrophe and its features in Ukrainian lands.

While working on the project the text turned out to be lengthier than planned and its style appeared to be slightly different from the usual classical academic writing. Therefore, while my work in the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine goes on, the work conducted conducted so far,

probably, already needs a reader. Such, at least, is the opinion of the Dukh i Litera publishing house and of Leonid Finberg, one of its leaders and inspirers. He came up with the idea of publication. Yet the responsibility for all possible faults, is the author's — mine — alone.

The four presented outlines are not linked by the logic of systematically presenting all the events of World War II. The first is about the methodological framework applicable to the analysis of World War II Ukrainian history. I shall reason the need to continue discussion about the chronology of World War II, about temporal cracks engulfing both certain events and the memory of them. I propose to rethink the concepts of "betrayal" and "collaboration," especially in the context of people's accounts about who was and who was not an occupying force in Ukrainian lands. Also worth reconsidering are the complex categories of Good and Evil that could be useful not only for a philosophical understanding of the events, but also for their historical analysis; ideas of "historical wounds" and responsibility; perceptions of the "heated time," not ending in 1945, etc.

The aim of the second outline is to analyze pre-war mobilization and to rethink this established, politically loaded, and "conceptually stressed" plot in Soviet mythology. It should be noted that, aside from providing the factual outline, determining the chronological and political sequence of events, this "mobilization story" played a significant role in forming the myth of the "Great Patriotic War." It painted a historical picture that emphasized the unexpectedness, abruptness, suddenness of war, which, although "ripening in the militarist circles of Western imperialism," nevertheless caught the "peaceful Soviet state" by surprise. Arguments in favor of this picture were the facts of the clear unpreparedness for war of the military and productive facilities. The concept of "Germany attacking without a declaration of war" backed up the idea of abruptness and explained the gaps in defense preparedness. In the second outline, analyzing the social and political processes orchestrated by the Bolshevik authorities during the 1920s and 1930s, I contend that mobilization and militarization were integral parts of the policy of the Soviet state; also, most of the constituent components of the

state of emergency and martial law that were set out in legislation (namely, obligatory labor, rationing, regulation of working hours, requisitions, restrictions of entry and exit, courts-martial, administrative exile, expulsion, etc.) were a constant of everyday life and formed a specific, undeclared state of perpetual war well before the start of World War II and the official declaration of “martial law” on June 22, 1941.

The idea of the third outline was to form a consistent picture of establishment/ruin/restoration of the occupation regimes; also, it was an attempt to answer the question: how similar and different were the occupation regimes in Ukrainian lands? What were the differences rooted in? What were the expectations, fears and hopes of people amid the fall of one regime and the establishment of the other state and quasi-state structures? How did the occupation (occupations) influence personal relationships and relations between communities? How did the strategies of life under occupation develop? How did these strategies change during occupation, or did they remain the same? How did violence and the response to violence create the notion of boundaries, interests and aspirations, specific to the Ukrainian community alone? It is not so much the factual material (previously thoroughly studied by Ukrainian and foreign researchers) that is new in this outline as the rejection of the logic of occupational regimes. This logic implied differentiation, the “thematic” separation of the regimes from one another, one-sided determination of the scope of their influence, as well as their polarization. Consequently, the Nazi occupation always served as a “useful” contrast (something that was, to a certain extent, true, considering its inhuman acts) not only for understanding the Soviet occupation, but also for the occupation regimes of the German allies — Romania and Hungary.

The fourth outline presents an analysis of the processes that took place after the Nazis and their allies were expelled. This part of the research focuses on reconfiguring relations between the Soviet state and communities. Such a reconfiguration was, on the one hand, a result of war and occupation, but, on the other hand, it was a dangerous challenge to Bolshevik power. My basic position is that restoration of the pre-war status quo for the Soviet regime meant

not only or not so much rebuilding the economy, as the repression and suppression of various tendencies in people's thinking. With people's different experiences of surviving war, they developed a different understanding of their personal fate, their strength and their capabilities. They gained this understanding in various ways, on different levels and based on different—pragmatic and symbolic—foundations. The outline investigates how the Kremlin, regaining control over the territories of Ukraine, scattered in two world wars, rediscovered the formula of its existence: not as a potentially classless society, but as a renewed version of the Russian Empire. The mechanisms and means of suppression of all the tiny bits of civic interaction and the disabling of any kind of social and national solidarity are the focus of attention in this study. An attempt was made to find out how the new “social contract” emerged and what kind of people and communities became the social basis for the renewed empire model, and who developed into consistent fighters against it. The outline presents arguments substantiating the concept of the “Great Patriotic War” as the ground zero not only for the emergence of the USSR and a Soviet empire, but also as the start of the countdown to its fall, a fall caused by the unexpected consequences of World War II.

Attentive readers will notice some repetitions that survived the editing. There are not many and consist mostly of methodological remarks transferred from the first outline to all the others. This is a conscious move, as a claim to change methodological framework, when not implemented in your own research, is worthless. One repetition—at the end of both the methodological outline and the whole book—is intentional and principled. It is an important remark made by Kersti Kaljulaid, Estonia's president, in August 2019. For Estonia, as the President noted, World War II ended only 25 years ago, in 1994, “when the last wagons left our soil, with the equipment of the occupation forces.”<sup>1</sup> This is its third repetition. No matter how compulsive and politically loaded it may appear in a

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1 President of the Republic of Estonia. “President Kaljulaid will attend the World War II commemorative event in Poland,” August 31, 2019, <https://www.president.ee/en/meedia/press-releases/15400-president-kaljulaid-will-attend-the-world-war-ii-commemorative-event-in-poland/index.html>.

historical study, the cited words are crucial, as they define the chronology of the “heated time,” the symbolic and pragmatic duration of World War II, which is very different for some states. This statement allows us to raise the question: has World War II ended for Ukraine?

Without the company of like-minded people, their institutional and personal support, this book would not exist. Thus, I express my gratitude to the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, an institution that made me feel at home again and granted me the possibility of professional realization; to the Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine and to all its staff who have made every effort to ensure that historians “meet” the sources they need for their studies; to the Dukh i Litera publishing house that tirelessly continues to shape the space of the humanities in Ukraine.

Also, I express deep gratitude to my dear colleagues. First of all, to Tamara Vronska who helped me along the way with documents, advice, who provided honest criticism, editing, and who truly cared for the manuscript; to Larysa Yakubova whose reading and questions on the margins prompted me to clarify and specify some important arguments and conclusions; to Iryna Gridina whose support was always so timely and her advice essential.

I express my gratitude yet again to Leonid Finberg, without whose determination and ardor for working with books (including mine) many of my writings would languish in the zone of doubts and would remain unpublished. I admire and am thankful to the Dukh i Litera editors Anastasia Nehrutska and Oksana Zhmyr, to layout designer Svitlana Nevdaschenko, and to designer Galina Lichtenshteyn. I admire and am deeply thankful to the artist Olena Turyanska whose work from the *Abandoned Windows* series became the semantic focal point of the book’s cover.

Friends provided me moral support, invisible approval and gave me useful feedback. The company and help of Inna Hiurenina and Yevhenia Kovaliova (the latter being not only my friend but also my daughter) were a great comfort and joy in the moments when I tried to “escape” finishing work or sank into despair because of the seemingly overwhelming nature of the subject.

In addition, I express my greatest gratitude to all fellow historians working on the subject, whose works inspired me and became pieces of my internal historiography, who provided the opportunity for discussion, and introduced new facts into scientific circulation.

There may be some mistakes and typos in the book, even after proofreading by me and a few other people—the responsibility for this nuisance is mine. Some statements may be questionable and certain subjects consciously or unconsciously omitted—yet again, responsibility for that lies with me. My only excuse is that I have not intended to create a thorough and comprehensive picture of World War II in its Ukrainian dimension. I am sure that historians already working in the field and those who will come afterwards will deal with this ambitious challenge better.

*Olena Stiazhkina,*  
Kyiv, April 2020



# Essay I

## World War II in the Life and Death of Ukrainians: An Attempt to Adjust the Methodological Framework<sup>1</sup>

What were Ukrainians like when they entered World War II and how did they become so? What were they like when they came out of it and how did they become so? Did that war truly end for Ukrainians (especially with regard to the attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2014)? The aim of this work is to search for and reflect on the explanatory concepts that would allow the description and analysis of catastrophe and betrayal, of the modes of survival and the search for joy, the growth of national self-awareness and the abandonment of national roots, the heroic deeds and cowardice, the righteousness and involvement in killing, the violence and escape, the guilt and sacrifice of the people who lived in Ukraine and who were dragged into the maelstrom of World War II. It is an attempt to approach the analysis of the life of ordinary citizens, while avoiding the logic of binary oppositions, artificial categorizations, and divisions into relatively “good” and relatively “bad” Ukrainians.

The scope of the problem raised seems overwhelming, but every journey begins with a single step. As we take such a “step,” it is too early to expect some definitive conclusions and decisions.

The objective of the research is to think on the obstacles that prevent adequate description of the personal experiences of World War II in Ukrainian lands. Among such obstacles are: their non-uniqueness; the “unfinished past” with its political and ethical challenges; the specifics of the visibility and invisibility of Ukrainians

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1 First published in: *Academia. Terra Historiae. Studii na poshanu Valerii Smolii* [Academia. Terra Historiae. Studies in honor of Valeriy Smolii], vol. 1, *Prostory istorii* [Spaces of history], ed. H. Boriak, S. Blashchuk, V. Horobets, A. Kudriachenko, V. Matiakh, V. Tkachenko, V. Soloshenko, and O. Yas (Kyiv: NAN Ukrainy. Instytut istorii Ukrainy, DU “Instytut vsesvitnoi istorii Natsionalnoi akademii nauk Ukrainy,” 2020), 587–608.



that marked both historical and political global discourse; the notions about the geographical and political borders of Ukraine; features of Ukrainians' existence as a community and as a society; the diversity and instability of identification models for people who did or did not deal with the experience of war; the problem of an adequate vocabulary to describe life under occupation and the lack of an established chronology and chronotope of World War II from the perspective of its contemporaries.

The depiction of the human experience of surviving (or not surviving) war always encounters a series of obstacles when the stories about valor, sacrifice, despair, betrayal, death enforce the impossibility of unbiased analysis and sometime give rise to strategies of intentional omission. And politics, including the politics of memory, encourages selective historical amnesia that may have various objectives: from ensuring unity of the nation to justifying the conduct of elites; from the needs of economic modernization to creating a system of international unions; from legitimizing social changes to restoring trust in civil society. As Tony Judt<sup>2</sup> notes, all European states with wartime experience failed to adequately describe it. Fear of being prosecuted for collaborationism,<sup>3</sup> non-heroism of people under occupation,<sup>4</sup> assigning all responsibility for the war to Germany,<sup>5</sup> different vocabularies to describe things done by Germans and things done by "us," myths of Resistance Movements,<sup>6</sup> artificial ideological concepts of national unity in the face of the enemy,<sup>7</sup> the long-lasting invisibility of the victims and executors of the Holocaust, propaganda claims about the state being

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- 2 Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and Its Aftermath*, ed. István Deák, Jan Tomasz Gross, Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 293–325.
  - 3 Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 400.
  - 4 István Deák, Norman M. Naimark, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution during World War II* (Boulder: Westview Press., 2015), 288.
  - 5 Judt, "The Past Is Another Country," 296.
  - 6 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Tea Sindbæk, *Usable History. Representations of Yugoslavia's difficult past from 1945 to 2002* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2012), 248.
  - 7 Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution Against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 410.

the “victim of an insidious enemy” —all were both the cause and the result of the fact that “Europeans (governments and peoples alike) postponed any collective effort to come to terms with the memory of war that had rounded them out. ... [T]hey simply left the matter unresolved, buried, neglected, and selectively forgotten.”<sup>8</sup>

Timothy Snyder labels the history of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, the history of “bloodlands,” as at least fourteen million people died there during the 1930s and 1940s. As Hannah Arendt mentions in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1951, “Stalin’s war against the Ukraine in the early thirties was twice as effective as the terribly bloody German invasion and occupation.”<sup>9</sup>

Anne Applebaum states: “This region was also the site of most of the politically motivated killing in Europe —killing that began not in 1939 with the invasion of Poland, but in 1933, with the famine in Ukraine. ... During the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, the lethal armies and vicious secret policemen of two totalitarian states marched back and forth across these territories, each time bringing about profound ethnic and political changes.”<sup>10</sup>

In Tony Judt’s account: “If the problem in Western Europe has been a shortage of memory, in the continent’s other half the problem is reversed. Here, there is too much memory, too many pasts on which people can draw, usually as a weapon against the past of someone else.”<sup>11</sup>

According to Chris Lorenz, “most historians regarded 50 years’ distance as the absolute minimum for (warm) memory to ‘cool down’ and to transform into (cold) history.”<sup>12</sup> Yet “too much

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8 Judt, “The Past Is Another Country,” 303.

9 Hannah Arendt, *Dzherela totalitaryzmu* [The origins of totalitarianism] (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2005), 467.

10 Anne Applebaum, “The Worst of the Madness,” *The New York Review of Books*, November 11, 2010, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2010/11/11/worst-madness/>.

11 Judt, “The Past Is Another Country,” 307.

12 Chris Lorenz, “Unstuck in Time, or The Sudden Presence of the Past,” in *Performing the Past, Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2010), 85;

memory,” encountered by historians in the second half of the twentieth century, not only did not “cool down,” but also set the problem of the inevitability of the past, remaining a burdensome part of the present.<sup>13</sup> And this has changed and continues to change historical science. Aleida Assmann observed that historians “renounced the idea that the past is a sphere of something that no longer exists and thus is unreachable for human influence.” Assmann emphasizes that the past, considered as done and dusted, “under certain circumstances may return to the sphere of relevance and active involvement in the present.”<sup>14</sup> The Russian war against Ukraine, started by the Kremlin in 2014, is the best illustration of this point.

Besides “too much memory,” history as an academic discipline and the historiography of World War II over the last thirty years were influenced, sometimes even pressured in a positive way, by the “politics of recognition”<sup>15</sup> that emerged and flourished not in academic circles but among social activists and campaigners in Europe and North America.

The “politics of recognition” is a story about people who may or should be present and accepted in society with all their misfortunes and moments of happiness. Charles Taylor describes it as follows: “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.” Therefore, the “politics of

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see Mark Salber Phillips, “History, Memory and Historical Distance,” in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004), 86–109.

13 See Johannes Czwalina, *Movchannia hovoryt. Teperishnie zalyshaietsia, tilky chas mynaie. Zmitsniuvaty myr, osmysliuvaty mynule* [Silence speaks: The present remains, only time passes. Strengthening peace through making sense of the past], trans. Olha Plevako (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2016); BerberBevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence. Time and Justice* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 262.

14 Aleida Assmann, *Raspalas svyaz vremen? Vzlet i padenie temporalnogo rezhima Moderna* [Is time out of joint?: On the rise and fall of the modern time regime] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 125.

15 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–73.

recognition" is a way to avoid harm, oppression, "imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being."<sup>16</sup>

For historical science such a notion of human nature was an absolute novelty that eventually introduced as themes for historical research the following: the past as it is and its influence on the present and the future; stories about the price paid by the "speechless" and oppressed for successful military interventions and great victories; the problem of the suffering, violence, oppression, and responsibility of those who performed these acts, both ordinary people and high-ranking officials. The "politics of recognition" does not make the historians' work easier, yet it enables a "mix of history and memory" that Dipesh Chakrabarty called "historical wounds."

According to Chakrabarty, "Historical wounds are not the same as historical truths but the latter constitute a condition of possibility of the former. Historical truths are broad, synthetic generalizations based on researched collections of individual historical facts. They could be wrong but they are always amenable to verification by methods of historical research. Historical wounds, on the other hand, are a mix of history and memory and hence their truth is not verifiable by historians."<sup>17</sup> Thus, to focus on "historical wounds" is quite problematic. Nevertheless, the emancipatory potential of this focus can hardly be overestimated. Those who carry historical wounds (be they individuals, certain groups and communities) now become not only "visible" but also included as part of the range of historical problems, with all the complexity of their wartime experience as prolonged in memory up till now.

"Historical wounds" are not "permanent formations," their presence in experience and memory may be overcome through working on the past, in particular, through the practices of analysis and the description of this past, through the honest and painstaking verification of historical facts. "The social consensus on which they

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16 Ibid., 25.

17 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "History and the Politics of Recognition," in *Manifestos for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 77–78.

are based is always open to new challenges and this, in principle, can be undone.”<sup>18</sup>

Concepts of the “politics of recognition” and “historical wounds” emerged under the umbrella concept of subaltern studies, while working on the colonial past of the oppressed and of the oppressors. To a certain extent, these concepts install metaphor into the field of historical knowledge. However, this metaphor sets up a framework of broad understanding, in which the victimization of the subdued nations modulates to a more moderate view of the complex and contradictory interplay between metropolis and periphery, in which the one-way diktat of “Big Brother” and the one-man tyranny of Stalin or Hitler are supplemented by the acknowledgment of the involvement (whether forced or voluntary) of those who shaped the strategies and conditions of subdual.

Nevertheless, “historical wounds” – both as a concept and as an element in the politics of memory – are oriented not only to national historical narratives. They demand compensation and activation of the mode of visibility and recognition; not only do they request historical visibility but also political apologies from those who inflicted violence, ignored and hushed up genocides and social catastrophes. “Historical wounds” do not let the past “cool down,” locking it instead in a perpetual and inescapable present. As Chris Lorenz says, “the idea of a hot present transforming into a cold past is by itself a desired time model for those who would wish to see the past as over and done with. Usually they are the ones who face a sentence themselves.”<sup>19</sup>

In the history of the 1930s through the 1950s, whether or not survived by the Ukrainians, there are numerous historical wounds, acknowledged in the condemnation of Nazism by the Nuremberg

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18 Ibid., 78.

19 Chris Lorenz, “Geschichte, Gegenwartigkeit und Zeit,” in *Phänomen Zeit. Dimensionen und Strukturen in Kultur und Wissenschaft*, ed. Dietmar Goltschnigg (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2011), 134, quoted in Aleida Assmann, *Raspalas svyaz vremeni? Vzlet i padenie temporalnogo rezhima Moderna* [Is time out of joint?: On the rise and fall of the modern time regime] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017).

trials, in the recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide,<sup>20</sup> in the European politics of regret<sup>21</sup> and in actual official apologies by Ukraine to the nations of Israel<sup>22</sup> and Poland,<sup>23</sup> as well as by Poland<sup>24</sup>—to the Ukrainian nation. Yet the fact that on the scales weighing crimes against humanity the actions of the Nazi and Soviet powers were not deemed comparable becomes a stumbling block for “cooling down” the “heated time.” It also complicates choosing the most suitable framework for the historical analysis of the success or failure of coming to terms with World War II in Ukrainian lands. Nazism was condemned, while communism as the Soviet variant of totalitarianism was not. Only recently — on July 3, 2010 — was another attempt to condemn communism made. Initiated by the Czech government, a number of renowned European politicians, historians, and dissidents signed the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism.<sup>25</sup>

The authors of the Declaration called on the European community to recognize Nazi and communist regimes as the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century and to develop unified criteria to identify the victims of both totalitarianisms. Those who signed the declaration emphasized “reaching an all-European understanding

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20 National Holodomor-genocide Museum, “Recognition of Holodomor as genocide in the world,” accessed June 1, 2020, <http://old.memorialholodomor.org.ua/eng/holodomor/genocide/act/>.

21 Jeffrey K. Olick and Brenda Coughlin, “The Politics of Regret. Analytical Frames,” in *Politics and the Past. On Repairing Historical Injustices*, ed. John Torpey (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 37–62; Karolina Wigura, *Wina narodów, Przebaczenie jako strategia prowadzenia polityki* [Nation’s guilt. Forgiveness as a political strategy] (Warsaw-Gdansk: Scholar, 2011), 269.

22 “Speech of the President of Ukraine in the Israeli Knesset,” Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, December 31, 2015, <https://ukrainianjewishencounter.org/en/news/speech-of-the-president-of-ukraine-in-the-israeli-knesset/>.

23 “Ukraińsi znowu prosiat proshchennia za Volyn,” [Ukrainians again apologize for Volyn], *Istorychna pravda*, June 3, 2016, <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2016/06/3/149102/>.

24 “Bracia Ukraińcy,” *Liberté!*, July 4, 2016, <http://liberte.pl/bracia-ukraincy/>; “Poliaky prosiat v ukraintsiv vybachennia za istorychni kryvdy” [Poles again apologize to Ukrainians for historical wounds], *Istorychna pravda*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2016/07/4/149125>.

25 Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism. June 3, 2008, <http://www.pragedeclaration.eu/>.

that both the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes ... are destructive in their policies of systematically applying extreme forms of terror, suppressing all civic and human liberties, starting aggressive wars ... and that as such they should be considered to be the main disasters, which blighted the 20th century."<sup>26</sup>

Still, this proposition was received with some ambivalence, so the question about recognizing the crimes of the communist regime remains open<sup>27</sup> not only for politicians, but for historians as well. For instance, attempts at a synthetic view of Stalin's and Hitler's crimes before and during World War II<sup>28</sup> made by Timothy Snyder in his milestone work *Bloodlands* received significant criticism from historians and intellectuals.<sup>29</sup> They also labeled as controversial his statement regarding the interconnection and mutual reaction in plotting genocides, as well as the framework that presents Stalin and Hitler as equal criminals.

Significant efforts were made toward recognizing the equal culpability of Nazism and communism in starting World War II when the European Parliament adopted the resolution of September 19, 2019 "On the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe." The document emphasizes that the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact paved the way for the outbreak of the most devastating war in European history, "dividing Europe and the territories of independent states between the two totalitarian regimes and grouping them into spheres of interest."<sup>30</sup> However, despite these efforts, the academic vocabulary used in telling the story of World War II is still formed in a way that practically disables any

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26 Ibid.

27 See Yana Primachenko, "Sovetskoe vs natsionalisticheskoe: protivostoyanie diskursov i praktik v postsovetskoj Ukraine" [The Soviet vs the nationalistic: Confrontation of discourses and practices in post-Soviet Ukraine], *Studia Universitatis Moldaviae*, no. 10 (2017): 270.

28 This attempt was not the first one. For example, Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951, outrightly compared Stalin's communism with Hitler's Nazism as similar systems of people's extermination.

29 For discussions on Timothy Snyder's book see Daniel Lazare, "Timothy Snyder's Lies," *Jacobin*, September 9, 2014, [www.jacobinmag.com/2014/09/timothy-snyders-lies/](http://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/09/timothy-snyders-lies/).

30 "Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe," European Commission, September 19, 2019, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.pdf).

kind of justification of Nazism, yet tends to “normalize” communism.<sup>31</sup> The Soviet Union’s contribution in the defeat of Nazi Germany was one of the reasons for such “normalizing.” Thus, the historical wounds inflicted upon the subdued nations remain open, aggravating not only political coping with the past but also scientific research on it. Ukrainians who survived or did not survive the war are trapped in the space formed by several standpoints, the most powerful of which are the narratives of the “victors over universal evil” and the “victims who suffered atrocities under all the regimes.” Both of these narratives are quite problematic.

Thus, the powerful narrative of victory is partly invented by the Soviet historical canon when Ukrainians are depicted as part of the victorious Soviet-Russian nation, but is also partly appropriated by the new Russian political rhetoric in which only the “Russian nation” is presented as the victor. As Peter Dickinson rightly observes, “Western histories of the war routinely refer to Soviet forces collectively as ‘the Russians.’ We learn that ‘the Russians’ suffered twenty-seven million losses.” Western historians and intellectuals omit Ukraine, millions of Ukrainian soldiers who served in the Red Army, as well as the scale of losses among Ukrainian civilians. Therefore, under the influence of the Soviet (and subsequently Russian) discourse, “this staggering omission demonstrates the sheer size of Europe’s Ukraine-shaped blind spot,”<sup>32</sup> instead of presenting the true Ukrainian contribution.

Thus, the narrative produced by historical research about the overall tragedy, the mass killings, deportations, and violence, becomes problematic, as there is no actual “full stop” to it. The problem is not one of including capacity and agency alongside victim-

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31 Arguments in favor of such stand mostly are similar to the following: “Stalin’s Soviet Union opportunistically seized former territories of the Tsarist Empire, and established the inhuman Gulag system. But it was not the aggressor against Nazi Germany and fascist Italy but the victim of aggression; and Soviet resistance was the major factor in the destruction of Nazism and restoration of democracy in Europe.” Robert William Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (Houndmills, London: Macmillan Press, 1997), 56.

32 Peter Dickinson, “History as a Weapon in Russia’s War on Ukraine,” October 4, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/history-as-a-weapon-in-russia-s-war-on-ukraine/>.



hood and “being an object” in the list of the components of “tortured life”<sup>33</sup> (a term coined by Alexander Etkind). The problem is also about Nazi crimes against humanity receiving symbolic and real punishment, while the crimes of the Stalin regime (and of the communist regime in the broader sense), the crimes of those who executed or instigated mass violence, though recorded, analyzed and to some extent memorialized,<sup>34</sup> lack the legal basis of condemnation of communism. Thus, these unrequited crimes turn what should be “full stops” into ellipses, creating a danger of misreading them as “to be continued”<sup>35</sup> and preventing the “hot present” from cooling down into the “cold past.”

The above-mentioned methodological challenges are not the only difficulties encountered by Ukrainians when conceptualizing the history of World War II. The intricate complexity of what was happening in Ukrainian lands from the 1930s to the 1950s is still such that eighty years’ distance makes the geographical borders of these lands perfectly clear. Yet they were not so clear and visible to those involved in the maelstrom of war and in the “Soviet nation-

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33 Alexander Etkind, *Krivoie gore: Pamyat o nepogrebennyih* [Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied], trans. Vladimir Makarov, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2018), 49.

34 Oleg Bazhan and Vadym Zolotaryov, “‘Velykyi teror’ na Kharkivshchyni: masshtaby, vykonavtsi, zhertvy” [“Great Terror” in Kharkiv region: scale, executors, victims], *Kraieznavstvo*, no. 1 (2012): 85–101, [http://history.org.ua/JournALL/kraj/kraj\\_2012\\_1/12.pdf](http://history.org.ua/JournALL/kraj/kraj_2012_1/12.pdf); Halyna Denysenko, “Mistsia pamiati i pamiatnyky zhertvam ‘Velykoho teroru’” [Memory sites and monuments to the victims of the ‘Great Terror’], *Kraieznavstvo*, no. 1 (2012): 101–108; Valeriy Vasyliiev and Roman Podkur, *Radianski karateli. Spivrobitnyky NKVS – vykonavtsi “Velykoho teroru” na Podilli* [The Soviet punishers. NKVS staff as the executors of ‘Great Terror’ in Podillia region] (Kyiv: Vydavets V. Zakharenko, 2017); *Vidlunnia Velykoho teroru. Zbirnyk dokumentiv u trokh tomakh* [Reverberations of a Great Terror. Collected documents in three volumes], vol. 3, *Chekisty Stalina v leshchatakh “sotsialistychnoi zakonnosti.” Ego-dokumenty 1938–1941 pp.* [Stalin’s Cheka agents in the grip of “socialist law.” Ego-documents from 1938–1941], comp. Andri Savin, Oleksii Teplakov, Mark Yunhe (Kyiv: Vydavets V. Zakharenko, 2019), 936.

35 The war against Ukraine, the cruelty of the occupiers, expansionist rhetoric of the Kremlin, and brutality of the “special operations” are very similar to the legitimization of the Soviet Union’s aggression against Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland; and respectively Hitler’s—against Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. It is yet another proof that “to be continued” turned into reality of practical actions.

building" of the period. Due to the colonial practice of cutting up the borders (both of administrative regions within Ukraine and between other republics) implemented by Moscow in the acquired territories, many Ukrainians happened to be "thrown out" beyond Ukraine's borders. Local communities were ruined or (as in the case of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR) other nations were considered as "almost Ukrainians." Incorporation into Ukraine was not an obvious step for the people of Zakarpattia, whose leaders at the time of the fall of Czechoslovakia envisioned their self-preservation in a union with the Reich. Ukrainians in Poland were perceived as a problem and a threat, so the Polish government by means of "pacification," encouraging "osadnik" settlers, and "consolidation of the state" imposed colonial practices and assimilation policies aimed at forming some "Polish Ukrainians." Meanwhile, a powerful Ukrainian diaspora in Europe and in North America already existed, being almost the only Ukrainians who knew for certain that they lived not in Ukrainian lands.

What makes all the attempts to analyze the life and death of Ukrainians during the World War II even more problematic and acute is the modernized definition of "Ukrainians." Using the term today, we mean a political nation, one which was still in the making at the beginning of the twentieth century. As George Liber rightly pointed out, "this history of the first half of the twentieth century recognizes that unspoken assumptions about national identity and political engagement in the past do not necessarily coincide with those of the present."<sup>36</sup> Thus, it would be fair to acknowledge that Ukrainians entered the World War II not as a political nation but as a group of various communities with very different levels of national consciousness and identity. Along with the Ukrainians who saw themselves as a community with a long-lasting historical tradition, there also were the "Soviet Ukrainians," "*malorosy*" [Little Russians, a pejorative term], "Polish Ukrainians," Rusyns, Hutsuls,

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36 George O. Liber, *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914–1954* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 11.

Lemkos, etc. Still, this “self-identification” was not necessarily stable: some may have become self-aware as Ukrainians during the war while the others preferred to see themselves as part of the “great Russian people.” In addition, survivors and non-survivors of the war included other nations and communities: Poles, Jews, Germans, Belarusians, Moldovans, Greeks, Tatars, Armenians. Their strategies and tactics of survival when caught in the maelstrom of war, and afterwards, dealing with its unfinished tragedy, were at times based on the effort to preserve their identity and at other times on the forced or voluntary change of this identity as an alternative to death or repression. The concept of “enemy nations”<sup>37</sup> (and practical punitive actions against them) was invented not only by the Nazis: Stalin’s totalitarian apparatus started demonstratively designating “enemy nations” and punishing them beginning in the 1930s. Timothy Snyder describes it as follows: “Stalin was a pioneer of national mass murder”;<sup>38</sup> long before Hitler, Stalin’s “achievements” included “Polish,” “German,” “Romanian,” “Bulgarian,” “Greek” and other national purge “operations”<sup>39</sup> that caused

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- 37 Amir Weiner, “Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (October 1999): 1114–1155; Terry Martin, “Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York, 2000), 348–367; Terry Martin, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing,” *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (1998): 813–861.
- 38 Timothy Snyder, *Krovavyye zemli: Evropa mezhdru Gitlerom i Stalinyim* [Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin], trans. Lukiya Zurnadzhi (Kyiv: Duliby), 127.
- 39 Oleksandr Rublov, Volodymyr Repryntsev, “Represii proty poliakiv v Ukraini u 1930-ti roky” [Repressions against the Poles in Ukraine during the 1930s], *Z arkhiviro VUChK-HPU-NKVD-KHB* 1/2 (2/3) (1995): 116–156; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Volodymyr Nikolskyi, Oleksandr But, Petro Dobrov, and Victor Shevchenko, *Knyha pamiati hrekiv Ukrainy. Naukove vydannia* [The book of memory of the Greeks of Ukraine] (Donetsk: Region, 2005); Ivan Dzhukha, *Grecheskaya operatsiya. Istoriya represiiy protiv grekov v SSSR* [The Greek Operation of the NKVD. The history of repressions against the Greeks in the USSR] (Saint Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2006); Oleksandr Rublov and Larysa Yakubova, “‘Natsionalni spravy’ ta yikhniy vplyv na zhyttia natsmenhromad Ukrainy” [“National cases” and their influence on the minorities’ life in Ukraine], in *Orhany etnopolitychnoho rehuliuvannia v konteksti polityky korenizatsii: ukrainskyi dosvid* (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2014), 225–235.

bloody tragedies for entire nations living alongside the Ukrainians. Hitler in turn also started his mass killings with the Poles. Christopher Browning writes: "If the Nazi regime had suddenly ceased to exist in the first half of 1941, its most notorious achievements in human destruction would have been the so-called euthanasia killing of seventy to eighty thousand German mentally ill and the systematic murder of the Polish intelligentsia. ... The Jewish Holocaust ever since has overshadowed National Socialism's other all-too-numerous atrocities."<sup>40</sup>

However, the atrocities of Soviet communism against the "enemy nations" did not stop after the Nazis were defeated:<sup>41</sup> targets of mass deportation-murders were Crimean Tatars, so-called "Ukrainian nationalists," "cosmopolitans" (a euphemism covering up an antisemitic campaign that only Stalin's death brought to a halt). The regime performed violence by the hands and actions of people<sup>42</sup> who were members of the power and party structures, career ladder-climbers and exploiters, ideological fanatics, true sadists, and conformists, the "ordinary people."<sup>43</sup> Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Belarusians, Armenians, etc., all were of their number. Their names are recorded in the ordinances and directives of the NKVD (MVD)–NKGB(MGB), in party documents, and memoirs. Still, in the midst of total terror there were also those who helped,

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40 Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ix.

41 Brian Glyn Williams, "Hidden Ethnocide in the Soviet Muslim Borderlands: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Crimean Tatars," *Journal of Genocide Research* 4:3 (2002): 357–373; Stephen Blank, "A Double Dispossession: The Crimean Tatars After Russia's Ukrainian War," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 9:1 (2015): 18–32. See also Lyman H. Legters, "Soviet Deportation of Whole Nations: A Genocidal Process" in Samuel Totten et al., *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 112–135.

42 Classification by Alette Smeulers. Quoted in Daria Mattingly, "Zhinky v kolkhospakh—velyka syl'a": khto vony—ukrainski pryzvidnytsi Holodomoru" [Women in kolkhozes—a great power: Who were they, Ukrainian perpetrators of Holodomor?], *Ukraina moderna*, September 20, 2018, <http://uamoderna.com/md/mattingly-women-in-kolkhoz>.

43 Christopher Browning coined the term "ordinary people" as a specific proper name for the Germans who participated in the "final solution of the Jewish question" as the members of the police battalion. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and The Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper, 1992), 271.

saved, and showed humanity. The names of the latter were captured, if at all, in family lore, as to speak about and to remember those who disobeyed the system even in the slightest way was dangerous both for those saved and for their saviors.

It is clear that situations of prolonged terror that caused “historical wounds” were brought about not only by the regimes in power but also by local communities, neighbors, local instigators of deportations and mass murders. Yet the “politics of recognition” as a conceptual approach enables seeing “historical wounds” of another kind: “wounds” made by the invisibility, devaluation or non-recognition of the sacrifice and heroism of some people who were omitted in the post-war heroic canon.

Attempts to see people caught in the war requires words and terms that would allow the description of certain general processes or those sharing similar traits. Usually, the word “society” is used in such an analysis. This term is useful but still deceptive and a subjective analytical category that contributes to the fixation of certain Soviet dichotomies (though rooted in the logic of the Enlightenment), such as “party and people,” “state and society,” etc. The search for “society,” that is, social interests and values, consciously recognized by all or by a majority of people, and for which the community is eager to work together, in the Soviet state (that included most of the Ukrainian lands) faces, on the one hand, an evident process of atomization. The latter was the result of the “submission by fear”<sup>44</sup> that gripped all categories of society. On the other hand, the search for “society” encounters occasionally manifest “polyphony”<sup>45</sup> and situational, short-lived, changeable systems of solidarity that emerged and dissolved under the threat of dangers and the fear of “purges,” Holodomor, war, or another wave of repressions.

The concept of “state” is equally problematic for analyzing what happened to people in the period. In the stories about the

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44 Tamara Vronska, *Upokorennia strakhom: simeine zaruchnytstvo u karalnii praktytsi (1917–1953 rr.)* [Submission by fear: Family members as hostages in the punitive practice (1917–1953)] (Kyiv: Tempora, 2013), 624.

45 Vladyslav Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznoolossia: druha svitova viina i suspilno-politychni nastroi v Ukraini, 1939 – cherven 1941* [Untamed polyphony: The Second World War and socio-political moods in Ukraine, since 1939 up to June 1941] (Kyiv; Dnipropetrovsk: Lira, 2012), 508.