ALEXANDR OSIPIAN

WORLD WAR II MEMORY POLITICS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE AND THEIR USES DURING THE CONFLICT IN THE DONBAS (SPRING–SUMMER 2014)*

In his speech on Victory Day on 9 May 2018 in Moscow, President Putin emphasized that Russia would not allow what he called the falsification of history regarding the Second World War:

> "But attempts are being made today to remove from the story the deeds of the people who saved Europe and the world from slavery and from the horrors of the Holocaust; to distort the events of the war and to bury its true heroes in oblivion; to rewrite, corrupt and forge accounts of history itself. We will never allow this to happen."[1]

Putin did not identify those who are allegedly attempting to falsify accounts of Russia's contribution to WWII. Why? Because they are well-known to his audience in Russia and to 'compatriots' abroad. Through many years of official memory politics, WWII has been used to sustain an updated national identity in Putin's Russia and has become its soft power in the 'near abroad'. It is propaganda discourse that, rather than shedding light on the past, accuses of lying those who question Russia's greatness.[2]

The critical deconstructions of Soviet narratives of WWII which formed during the 1990s[3] were put aside on Putin's accession to power.

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[1] Vladimir Putin, 'Speech at the Military Parade', 9 May 2018, available at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57436 (last visited 23 July 2020).

[2] Miguel Vázquez Liñán, 'History as a Propaganda Tool in Putin's Russia', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, 2 (2010): 177.

[3] Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

After a severe identity crisis during the 'freewheeling 1990s', Russia's military glory, internal cohesion, and impact on international affairs had to be restored through the official glorification of Russia's particular role in WWII.[4] The war was re-interpreted by historians, men of letters, moviemakers, painters, and singers; instrumentalized by politicians and journalists; and re-enacted by the growing re-enactment movement, supported with money by senior officials, by statists, and by an audience including the Minister of Defence himself.[5] Thus in Putin's Russia the cultural memory of WWII effectively became a substitute for the ideology evidently lacking in the authoritarian regime. This updated myth of WWII is deployed by Russia in its relations with the newly independent states which experienced both Nazi and Soviet occupation during WWII. In post-Soviet Ukraine both narratives, anti-Soviet and Russified Soviet, have been used by competing elite factions to manipulate the electoral behaviour of voters.[6] The growing escalation of the narrative competition instrumentalized and communicated in Ukraine during 2011–13 was smoothly channelled by Russia into the 'Russian Spring' and insurgency in the Donbas in 2014, represented by the Russian mass-media as a sequel to WWII, this time fought between 'Ukrainian fascists' and 'the people's militia of the Donbas'. Thus, the ground for Russia's interference in Ukraine and for igniting the military conflict in the Donbas was prepared long before 2014.

This paper explores how competing narratives of WWII were turned into the symbolic political resources finally used in the military conflict in the Donbas. Accordingly, it starts with an analysis of how in the 2000s the Soviet-style memory of WWII was integrated into Russian foreign

[4] Elizabeth A. Wood, 'Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, 2 (2011): 172–200; Julia Sweet, 'Political Invasions into Collective Memories: Russia', *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016), 4512–31; Igor Torbakov, 'The Past as Present: Foreign Relations and Russia's Politics of History', in *After the Soviet Empire: Legacies and Pathways*, eds. Sven Eliaeson, Lyudmila Harutyunyan, and Larissa Titarenko (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), 358–80; Nikolaï Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 207–37.

[5] Shaun Walker, 'Replica Reichstag Stormed at Russian "Military Disneyland" ', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2017, available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/24/russians-storm-replica-reichstag-military-disneyland-patriot-park (last visited 23 July 2020).

[6] Alexandr Osipian and Ararat Osipian, 'Regional Diversity and Divided Memories in Ukraine: Contested Past as Electoral Resource, 2004–2010', *East European Politics and Societies* 26, 3 (2012): 616–42.

policy in order to oppose what Russians see as Western expansionism, particularly in relations with Poland and the Baltic states. It then goes on to examine what commemorative practices were selected and employed to legitimize and stabilize the authoritarian regime in Russia. Then it analyses how memory politics were used in Ukraine to divide society and manipulate electoral preferences. The final section focuses on the uses of WWII symbols reinvented in Putin's Russia and adopted by pro-Russian insurgents to legitimize the insurgency in the Donbas in 2014.

Competing War Memories in Post-Communist Europe

In Russian cultural memory and official commemorations, the Second World War of 1939–45 is reduced to the years 1941–5 and called the Great Patriotic War. Left out of this are thus almost the first two years, from 1 September 1939 to 22 June 1941, as well as the final defeat of Japan in August 1945. Moreover, all the other theatres of military operations, in the Pacific, in North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and Western Europe, are represented as secondary in comparison to the German–Soviet war. The main message of the Soviet narrative, which has also been fully adopted in post-Soviet Russia, is therefore that Nazi Germany was defeated on the 'Eastern Front' and that the USSR and its 'Red Army' were the main liberators of Europe from the 'brown plague' of fascism. The separation of the Great Patriotic War from the Second World War helps to construct a narrative of Soviet / Russian exclusiveness: the number of German divisions defeated by the Red Army is much bigger than the number defeated by the Western Allies; the number of 'Soviet people' who perished because of the war is much bigger than all the casualties of other nations put together; the material losses of the USSR are much bigger than all the destruction suffered by other nations.

After 1991, and particularly during the Putin presidency, the terms 'USSR' and 'Red Army' were gradually replaced by 'Russia' and 'Russian soldiers'. Thus, Russia appropriated the 'Great Victory' in the same way that it inherited all the other assets of the USSR: financial assets, embassies and real estate abroad, nuclear weapons and navies, permanent membership of the UN Security Council, etc. This approach culminated in a statement made by Putin (then Prime Minister) at his annual press conference on 12 December 2010 in which he claimed that Russia would have won the war against Nazi Germany even without Ukraine since "seventy per cent of the casualties were suffered by Russia". According to him, "the

war was won because of Russia's human and industrial resources".[7] Interestingly, when he made this statement, Ukraine was ruled by the Russia-friendly president Viktor Yanukovych, who subscribed to the Soviet narrative of the war in his rhetoric and official commemorations.

These chronological, topical, and narrative manoeuvres are also reflected in the history curriculum. In the USSR and, after 1991, in Russia, as well as in some other post-Soviet states, there are two historical subjects on the secondary school and university curriculum: General History (*Vseobshchaia istoriia*) and National History (*Otechestvennaia istoriia*). In General History, students are taught about the Second World War of 1939–45 while in National History, they are taught about the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5. In National History, the USSR is represented as the victim of Nazi German aggression on 22 June 1941 while the early period of the war, from 1 September 1939 to 21 June 1941, seems to have happened somewhere abroad and is studied as part of General History. During the Soviet period this way of teaching was used to hide the fact that the USSR had taken part in WWII from the very beginning, in September 1939, when it acted as an ally of Nazi Germany.[8]

The notorious secret protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939, which had resulted in Stalin's westward expansion of the Soviet Union in 1939–40, were long denied by the Soviet leadership. In Soviet schools, students learned about the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 in the framework of General History, whereas National History taught them about the liberation of the fraternal west Ukrainians and Belarusians from the Nazi menace on 17 September 1939.

[7] Television channels Rossiia and Rossiia 24 and radio stations Maiak and Vesti FM have started broadcasting the annual Q&A session. For the transcript, see 'A Conversation with Vladimir Putin, Continued', available at http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/13427/; for the video, see 'A Conversation with Vladimir Putin, Continued 2010 (English Subtitles)', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8B9wGcDWVI (both last visited 24 April 2018).

[8] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, 'From the "Reunification of the Ukrainian Lands" to "Soviet Occupation": The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in Ukrainian Political Memory', in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, eds. Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 229–48; Germ Janmaat, 'Identity Construction and Education: The History of Ukraine in Soviet and Post-Soviet Schoolbooks', in *Dilemmas of State-Led Nation Building in Ukraine*, eds. Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 171–90; Lina Klymenko, 'World War II in Ukrainian School History Textbooks: Mapping the Discourse of the Past', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 44, 5 (2014): 756–77.

Nazi–Soviet military cooperation during 1939–41 and the Soviet mass atrocities against the populations of the territories between them are thus comprehensively glossed over.

From Controversies to Memory Wars

In Russia some earlier activities were criticized as revisionist efforts aimed at diminishing Russia's role in the liberation of Europe and thereby questioning its privileged status as a superpower and permanent member of the UN Security Council. The Russian leadership saw these critical deconstructions of Soviet narratives of WWII as a part of Western expansion into the former Soviet sphere of influence, the enlargement of NATO (1999 and 2004) and the EU (2004 and 2007). Since then, the use of WWII in Russia's foreign and internal politics has reflected the growing revanchist mood in the Russian leadership and Russian society. On 10 February 2007 at the Munich Security Conference, Putin openly criticized the USA for its striving for a unipolar world and thereby, from the Russian point of view, breaking the post-WWII world order.[9]

Putin's efforts to restore the bi-polar (or multi-polar) world order were accompanied by the growing use of memories of WWII for the mobilization of ethnic Russians, Russophones, and 'people of Russian culture' in the 'near abroad', ambiguously described in Russia's official discourse as compatriots (*sootechestvenniki*).[10] For the first time, shortly after Putin's Munich speech, there was violence. On 15 February 2007, the Estonian parliament took the decision to relocate the Soviet WWII memorial in Tallinn, the so-called Bronze Soldier, from the city centre to the military

[9] Vladimir Putin, 'Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy', 10 February 2007, available at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlY5aZfOgPA (both last visited 24 April 2018).

[10] Mikhail Suslov, ' "Russian World": Russia's Policy Towards its Diaspora', *Russie. NEI. Visions / Notes de l'Ifri*, 103 (2017), particularly pp. 22–7, available at https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/suslov_russian_world_2017.pdf; Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun, 'Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union', *CNA's Occasional Papers*, November 2015, available at https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DOP-2015-U-011689-1Rev.pdf; Igor' Zevelev, 'Granitsy russkogo mira. Tranformatsiia natsionalnoĭ identichnosti i novaia vneshnepoliticheskaia doktrina Rossii', *Rossiia v global'noĭ politike* 12, 2 (2014), available at https://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Granitcy-russkogo-mira--16582 (all last visited 24 April 2018).

cemetery.[11] On 26–27 April 2007, hundreds of ethnic Russians, accompanied by some Russian citizens, took part in night riots in Tallinn, known as the Bronze Nights, to prevent the relocation.[12] For several months Russian mass-media provided almost daily coverage of the controversy which was represented as an effort by Estonian nationalists, the descendants of Nazi collaborators, to delete all traces of the heroic deeds of the Soviet Army.[13] For nine days protestors in Moscow besieged the Estonian embassy and physically attacked the ambassador.[14]

On 3 June 2008, the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism was signed by prominent European politicians, former political prisoners, and historians, calling for "Europe-wide condemnation of, and education about, the crimes of communism".[15] On 23 September 2008, the European Parliament adopted the Declaration and proclaimed 23 August the European Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism.[16]

In response, Russia's president established the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests on 19 May 2009.[17] According to an official statement, the commission was established to "defend Russia

[11] Pilvi Torsti, 'Why do History Politics Matter? The Case of the Estonian Bronze Soldier', in *The Cold War and the Politics of History*, eds. Juhani Aunesluoma and Pauli Kettunen (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2008), available at https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10224/4043/bronz_soldier2008.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (last visited 24 April 2018).

[12] Ivo Mijnssen, *The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia I: Back to Our Future! History, Modernity and Patriotism According to Nashi, 2005–2013*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 105–10; Marko Lehti, Matti Jutila, and Markku Jokisipilä, 'Never-Ending Second World War: Public Performances of National Dignity and the Drama of the Bronze Soldier', *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, 4 (2008): 393–418.

[13] Torsti, 'History Politics' (see note 12), 28–30.

[14] Mijnssen, *Ideal Youth* (see note 13), 110–14.

[15] See 'Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism', 3 June 2008, available at http://www.praguedeclaration.eu/ (last visited 24 April 2018).

[16] See 'Declaration on the Proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism', 23 September 2008, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0439+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN (last visited 24 April 2018). See also: Stefan Troebst, 'Der 23. August 1939. Ein europäischer Lieu de memoire?', *Osteuropa* 59, 7–8 (2009): 249–56.

[17] President of Russia, 'O Komissii pri Prezidente Rossiĭskoĭ Federatsii po protivodeĭstviiu popytkam fal'sifikatsii istorii v ushcherb interesam Rossii', available at http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/29288 (last visited 24 April 2018).

against falsifiers of history and those who would deny the Soviet contribution to victory in WWII".[18] The commission existed for less than three years and was dissolved on 14 February 2012. Probably it was found to be ineffective. Although the commission included some historians, its goal had not been to uncover 'blank spots' from the past, as had been the case in other post-Communist countries, but to 'stop the falsifications'. The commission could not by definition be successful. However, the Russian leadership had recognized the importance of memory politics and the year 2012 was proclaimed a 'Year of History' in Russia. But this time the state authorities preferred to appropriate grass-roots initiatives.

'The Great Patriotic War' Reinterpreted and Instrumentalized as Russia's Primary Myth and Instrument of Soft Power Abroad

After the dissolution of the USSR and what was in large part the unjust privatization of former socialist state property in the 1990s, Russian society was deeply divided between a minority which had 'won' in the course of the transformation and the majority which had substantially lost out. In order to stabilize the regime, the Russian leadership needed a substitute for communist ideology to unite the nation and manipulate it. The myth of the Great Patriotic War makes Russian citizens aware of their mission in the world, proud of their history, and united around their leadership.[19] However, this 'renovated' myth lacks some important features: it makes no reference to the leading role of the Communist Party or to socialist society and its superior values. So an internally coherent continuity has been constructed from the pre-1917 Russian Empire through the USSR to post-1991 Russia.

An authoritarian regime was gradually established in Russia after 1993, when the State Duma was shot at and set on fire from tanks under the orders of the Russian president. Supreme power was then handed from the president to his heir (*preemnik*): from Yeltsin to Putin in 1999, from Putin to Medvedev in 2008, and back again in 2012. In this way, presiden-

[18] President of the Russian Federation, 'Dmitriĭ Medvedev's Keynote Speech at the Assembly of the Russian Organizing Committee "Victory" ', 27 January 2009, available at http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/2958 (last visited 24 April 2018).

[19] Olga Malinova, 'Political Uses of the Great Patriotic War in Post-Soviet Russia from Yeltsin to Putin', in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, eds. Julie Fedor et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 43–70.

tial elections were transformed into a ceremonial display of the people's loyalty to the regime. The Russian leadership was consequently busy developing an uncontroversial cultural memory as a corollary: a state-centred narrative involving a strongman leading the country from victory to victory through every hardship.

Putin's regime claims that Russia was the main contributor to the defeat of Nazism in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5, and thereby makes itself immune to criticism from abroad as well as from inside the country. The Russian leadership, shocked by the victory of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in December 2004 which was seen as part of the West's expansion, started to look for alternative symbols. In 2005, on the 60th anniversary of Victory Day, the news agency *RIA Novosti* and a civic youth organization launched a campaign calling on volunteers to distribute the St. George's Ribbon[20] (*Georgievskaia lenta*) in the streets ahead of Victory Day. The ribbon has been adopted by Russian nationalist and government loyalist groups. The 'Victory Banner', that is, the red banner of the 150th Idritskaia Rifle Division (Order of Kutuzov 2nd Class), which was raised over the Reichstag in Berlin on 1 May 1945, was made the main symbol of the victory in WWII by the Russian parliament on 7 May 2007.[21]

The regime also uses grass-roots initiatives to refresh and instrumentalize collective memories. On 5 May 2010, a bus decorated with a portrait of Stalin and called a *stalinobus* operated on Nevskiĭ Prospect, the main street in St. Petersburg. Then in 2011–13 on Victory Day, in early May, the *stalinobuses*, renamed as Victory buses, operated in two dozen Russian cities. Money for decorating them was raised online. Since Stalin is too controversial a figure, the *stalinobus* idea did not receive the necessary support from the authorities and shortly afterwards was abandoned.[22]

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[20] The St. George's Ribbon is a replica of the Guards' Ribbon (*Gvardeĭskaia lenta*) introduced in 1942 in the Red Army. In turn, the Guards' Ribbon was a replica of the St. George's Ribbon established in 1769 in the Russian Empire.

[21] Anne M. Platoff, 'Of Tablecloths and Soviet Relics: A Study of the Banner of Victory (*Znamia Pobedy*)', *Raven* 20 (2013): 55–83.

[22] Fabian Burkhardt, ' "Stalinobus" Cruises While Russians Debate', *Radio Free Europe*, 6 May 2010, available at https://www.rferl.org/a/Stalinobus_Cruises_While_Russians_Debate/2034682.html; Ostap Karmodi, ' "Stalinobus" Kills the Mood ahead of WWII Victory Day Festivities', *The Observers France24*, 23 April 2012, available at http://observers.france24.com/en/20120423-russia-estonia-latvia-stalinobus-kills-mood-ahead-world-war-two-victory-day-festivities; 'Stalinobus Gets Cold Reception in St. Petersburg', *transpress nz*, 24 April 2012, available at http://transpressnz.blogspot.com/2012/04/stalinobus-gets-cold-reception-in-st.html (all last visited 24 April 2018).

But local journalists in the city of Tomsk, Siberia, came up with an alternative initiative. On 9 May 2012, they organized a march by city residents carrying the portraits of their late relatives who had taken part in the war. They called the initiative the Immortal Regiment (*Bessmertnyĭ polk*). Next year the march spread to many other cities in Russia. Because almost every family in the USSR had suffered losses in WWII, the introduction of the Immortal Regiment march made it easy for ordinary Russians to adopt the official narrative of Victory Day as promoted by the regime. Then in May 2014, this grass-roots initiative received official support and on 9 May 2015 the Immortal Regiment march joined the 70th anniversary celebrations on Red Square in Moscow. This time, and for all subsequent celebrations of Victory Day, the march in Moscow was led by Putin with a portrait of his late father. Thus, the regime appropriated a grass-roots initiative.

Russia's irremovable president, who had lost some popular support in the course of the anti-government rallies of 2011–12, now demonstrated his unity with the masses and the unification of the Russian people around a common memory and leader. In 2013 and the years that followed, the march was held in the capital cities of some of the former Soviet republics, in Kyïv, Tallinn, Riga, and Bishkek, as well as in countries with large Russophone diasporas (e.g. Israel and Germany) which shared this Soviet cultural memory. The Immortal Regiment march and the demonstrations on 9 May thereby became an important demonstration of Russia's soft power, particularly in Ukraine and the Baltic states.[23]

Competing Narratives of the Second World War in Ukrainian Politics

Ukraine's political model could be defined as 'competitive'; however, it is far from a truly competitive democracy, mainly due to the presence of a rampant kleptocracy. Also, from the very beginning, memory was used competitively in Ukrainian politics. Until 2003 the political leadership tried to present the leader as maintaining a balance between two competing narratives, the Soviet and the nationalist (this latter having been preserved in the Ukrainian diasporas of North America and, after 1991, imported to Ukraine). Since 2003, the tensions between both 'memory factions' have grown: each side presents itself in the public sphere as the

[23] Julie Fedor, 'Memory, Kinship, and the Mobilization of the Dead: The Russian State and the "Immortal Regiment" Movement', in *War and Memory* (see note 20), 307–45.

defender of the only 'true history' and creates strong identificatory markers for the electorate by accusing the opposing faction of falsifying history.[24] Although Ukraine's history is full of events and figures which are susceptible to controversial interpretation, ultimately the Second World War emerged as the most conflict-inducing of all of them, and as such was seen by some members of the elite as the most suitable for the purposes of dividing the electorate.[25]

In the 1990s, a new master-narrative of recent Ukrainian history was created by means of the cursory combination of the conventional nation-state (nationalist) narrative with the old Soviet one. At the same time, there was much space left for non-mainstream memories, especially at a local level and in different regions: to the glorification of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its leader Stepan Bandera and to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and its leader Roman Shukhevych in western Ukraine (mostly in Galicia), as well as to celebrations of the 'socialist industrialization of the 1930s' in the South-East. This balancing of competing narratives enabled presidents Leonid Kravchuk (1991–4) and Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004) to position themselves between the two opposing poles in society – the communists and the nationalists.[26]

By the early 2000s the political parties in Ukraine had turned into political lobby groups owned by various oligarchs, whose main purpose

[24] Lina Klymenko, 'World War II or Great Patriotic War Remembrance? Crafting the Nation in Commemorative Speeches of Ukrainian Presidents', *National Identities* 17, 4 (2015): 387–403; Olesya Khromeychuk, 'The Shaping of "Historical Truth": Construction and Reconstruction of the Memory and Narrative of the Waffen SS "Galicia" Division', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, 3–4 (2012): 443–467; Volodymyr Kravchenko, 'Fighting Soviet Myths: The Ukrainian Experience', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 34, 1/4 (2015–16): 447–84; Wilfried Jilge, 'The Politics of History and the Second World War in Post-Communist Ukraine (1986/1991–2004/2005)', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* 54, 1 (2006): 50–81.

[25] Wilfried Jilge, 'Competing Victimhoods: Post-Soviet Ukrainian Narratives on World War II, Shared History – Divided Memory', in *Jews and Others in Soviet Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, eds. Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth Cole, and Kai Struve (Leipzig: Leipziger Univ.-Verl., 2008), 103–31; Oxana Shevel, 'The Politics of Memory in a Divided Society: A Comparison of Post-Franco Spain and Post-Soviet Ukraine', *Slavic Review* 70, 1 (2011): 137–64; Oxana Shevel, 'No Way Out? Post-Soviet Ukraine's Memory Wars in Comparative Perspective', in *Beyond the Euromaidan: Comparative Perspectives on Advancing Reform in Ukraine*, eds. Henry Hale and Robert Orttung (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 21–40.

[26] Andrii Portnov, 'Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Ukraine (1991–2010)', in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, eds. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 238–9.

it was, and still is, to control and abuse state-owned property and the state budget. Political parties which could be qualified as left or right, liberal or conservative, in accordance with the conventional criteria of political science, are not to be found in Ukraine today. All the parties are structured around a leader with strong support from an oligarch or group of oligarchs. All parties make active use of populist rhetoric: they do not identify themselves with a certain social group, but rather with regional ones. In political contests, therefore, the past has increasingly been used to maintain regional difference and to link the regional identity of the electorate with particular narratives from Ukrainian history.[27]

With President Viktor Yushchenko, who was elected president after the so-called Orange Revolution of 2004–5, the official politics of memory shifted markedly. There were two basic dimensions: the first involved a narrative of victimization and the representation of national history as martyrdom, with the Great Famine of 1933 (*Holodomor*) as the apotheosis of the suffering of Ukrainians under Russian / Soviet rule. The second dimension revolved around the glorification of the OUN–UPA and other historic groups, figures, and battles fought by Ukrainians against Russians. The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (*Ukraïns'kyĭ instytut natsional'noï pam"iati*) was established in 2006 by the government in order to study both the Great Famine and the OUN–UPA, as well as all other crimes of the Communist regime. That same year the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill defining the Holodomor as a deliberate act of genocide against Ukrainians.[28] The National Memorial Museum of the Victims of the Holodomor was opened in Kyïv in 2008. President Yushchenko officially rehabilitated two of Ukraine's most controversial World-War-II-era figures, the commander of the UPA Roman Shukhevych and the leader of the OUN Stepan Bandera, and awarded them both with the title of Hero of Ukraine in 2007 and 2010 respectively. Yushchenko's decision was celebrated in western Ukraine, which had been the main site of OUN–UPA anti-Communist resistance between 1939–53, dismissed in south-east Ukraine, and condemned by the European parliament as well as by many in Poland and Russia. Elected in 2010,

[27] Alexandr Osipian, 'The Overlapping Realms of Memory and Politics in Ukraine, 2004–2012', *Interstitio* IV, 1–2 (7–8) (2012): 39–60.

[28] 'Law of Ukraine No. 376–V "On Holodomor of 1932–33 in Ukraine", 28 November 2006', published on the website of the Embassy of Ukraine to Canada on 24 April 2013, available at https://canada.mfa.gov.ua/en/embassy/3572-zakon-ukrajini-376-v-pro-golodomor-1932-1933-rr-v-ukrajini (last visited 24 July 2020).

President Viktor Yanukovych announced on 5 March 2010 that he would repeal the decrees. On 2 April 2010 the Donetsk District Administrative Court ruled that Yushchenko's presidential decrees awarding the title of Hero of Ukraine had been illegal. In January 2011, the award was officially annulled.[29]

Inventing the 'Ukrainian Fascist' Threat, Drawing the Dividing Lines, Performing the Battles

By the end of 2013 and thanks to the memory politics of the Party of Regions, the ground was well prepared for Russian proxy intervention in Ukraine. This, however, had not been the intention of the party's leadership. The use of history by the administration of President Viktor Yanukovych (2010–14) was mainly geared towards securing re-election in the presidential elections of March 2015, while most of the institutions set up by his predecessor remained intact. As Yanukovych's Party of Regions received its strongest support from voters in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, much of his campaigning aimed at generating among his electoral base a fear of other (i.e. mostly central and western) regions. To this end he made active use of historical myths and stereotypes originating from Soviet historiography and propaganda about 'Banderite nationalists'[30] and 'Nazi collaborators' in the western parts of Ukraine.

Through a series of highly controversial commemorative activities, WWII was re-invented as a war between cruel Ukrainian nationalists, the so-called Banderites, and their opponents, i.e. peaceful Ukrainians and Russians and the soldiers of the Red Army. In this way Nazi Germany as the main enemy in the war was gradually and relatively successfully substituted by 'Ukrainian fascists' and, in more recent terms, by 'neo-Nazis' (the Svoboda Party and other far-right groups like Tryzub and Patriot Ukraïny).

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[29] Oksana Myshlovska and André Liebich, 'Bandera Memorialization and Commemoration', *Nationalities Papers* 42, 5 (2014): 750–70; Eleonora Narvselius, 'The "Bandera Debate": The Contentious Legacy of World War II and Liberalization of Collective Memory in Western Ukraine', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, 3–4 (2012): 469–90.

[30] Banderites (*Banderivtsi*) – colloquial term for members and supporters of the fraction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN–B) led by Stepan Bandera. This term has been used pejoratively in Soviet propaganda. For more details, see David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007).

The construction of the image of the 'Ukrainian fascist' enemy was developed further during the spring of 2011, when competing historical myths clashed in the course of preparations for the Victory Day celebrations, provoking a hysterical reaction in the government- and oligarch-controlled mass media. The 2011 controversy was sparked by the official introduction of a new commemorative symbol that year: the Victory Banner adapted from the one used in Russia. On 21 April 2011, with a majority vote from the Party of the Regions and its supportive junior partner the Communist Party, a bill was passed in the Ukrainian parliament according to which replicas of the original Victory Banner should be used in official Victory Day ceremonies countrywide.[31]

In western Ukraine, however, regional and city councils refused to comply with the law. Provocations were then organized with the help of the pro-Russian nationalist organizations Russian Unity (*Russkoe edinstvo*) (Crimea) and Motherland (*Rodina*) (Odesa) supported by the Party of Regions. Activists from these organizations were bused into L'viv on 9 May 2011 with the aim of provoking clashes with local Ukrainian nationalists.[32] This was followed by the creation of the International Anti-Fascist Front shortly thereafter.[33]

The logic behind these political tactics was simple: the aim was to convince Yanukovych's disillusioned electorate that fascism was gaining strength in Ukraine, that only Yanukovych was capable of protecting

[31] Platoff, 'Of Tablecloths' (see note 22), 74–5.

[32] Volodymyr Musyak, 'Clashes Break Out in Lviv During Victory Day Events', *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 15 May 2011, available at http://ukrweekly.com/archive/2011/The_Ukrainian_Weekly_2011-20.pdf (last visited 24 April 2018).

[33] 'The International Anti-Fascist Front' was created in Kyïv on 9 September 2011. According to Wikipedia, this was the initiative of more than thirty different NGOs, including veterans' groups, military groups, and peacekeeping groups from Ukraine and abroad, and the Ukraine-wide NGO Human Rights' Public Movement 'Russophone Ukraine'. The URL given for the Front on Wikipedia (http://www.antifashyst.org) does not appear to be operational. The Front is affiliated with another organization – World Without Nazism (WWN; in Ukrainian *Mir bez natsizma*). The organization was founded and is led by Boris Spiegel, a Russian oligarch with close ties to Putin. It was founded in Kyïv on 22 June 2010. The organization claims to campaign against 'neo-fascism' in the countries of the former Communist Bloc, particularly in the Baltic states and Ukraine. The URL given for the WWN on Wikipedia (http://worldwithoutnazism.org/) does not appear to be operational. Also see Orysia Lutsevych, 'Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood', *Chatham House Research Paper: Russia and Eurasia Programme*, April 2016, particularly pp. 16–18, available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf (last visited 24 April 2018).

ordinary people from this threat, and that therefore it would be best to vote for Yanukovych rather than for his likely main rival, the Svoboda leader Oleh Tiahnybok. High-ranking politicians from the Party of Regions frequently referred to their political opponents from Svoboda openly as fascists or neo-fascists.[34]

In the run-up to Victory Day in 2013, the Party of Regions organized a Ukraine-wide 'Memory Watch' campaign called We Are Proud of the Great Victory.[35] Later, the Party also initiated a series of rallies under the slogan 'Into Europe – Without Fascists' (*V Evropu – bez fashistov*). The rallies started off in various parts of the country on 14 May and culminated in a final 'Anti-fascist March' accompanied by brawling between Svoboda and the Berkut riot-police on St. Sophia's Square in Kyïv on 18 May.[36] On 17 May, around 20,000 people gathered for a rally in Donets'k under the slogan "Donbas against Neo-Fascism".[37]

Re-enactors were widely used by the Party of Regions and by Svoboda to re-enact battles from WWII. They did this to help the public visualize the war in the course of the commemorations, to attract as many specta-

[34] Oleksiĭ Byk, 'Partiia Rehioniv vidkryvaie "antyfashysts'kyĭ front" ', *Glavkom*, 31 October 2013, available at https://glavcom.ua/publications/122632-partija-regioniv-vidkrivaje-%C2%ABantifashistskij-front%C2%BB-dokument.html; 'Donetskie "regionaly" prosiat zapretit' "Svobodu" kak neofashistskuiu organizatsiiu', *LB.ua*, 13 May 2013, available at https://lb.ua/news/2013/05/13/199214_donetskie_regionali_prosyat.html; 'Luganskikh studentov sgoniaiut na antifashistskiĭ marsh Partii regionov', *LB.ua*, 14 May 2013, available at https://lb.ua/news/2013/05/14/199447_luganskih_studentov_silom_gonyat.html; Nazar Tymoshchuk, ' "Antyfashysts'ki" temnyky', *LB.ua*, 21 March 2014, available at https://lb.ua/news/2014/03/21/260239_antifashistski_temniki_.html (all last visited 24 April 2018).

[35] 'Spasibo za zhizn'!', *Luganskaia oblastnaia organizatsiia Partii regionov*, available at http://www.pr.lg.ua/tags/%E2%E0%F5%F2%E0+%EF%E0%EC%FF%F2%E8/ (last visited 24 April 2018, currently not available).

[36] 'Draka v tsentre Kieva glazami ochevidtsev', *Korrespondent.net*, 20 May 2013, available at http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/1560673-draka-v-centre-kieva-glazami-ochevidcev; Stanislav Kozliuk, 'U Kyievi startuvav "antyfashysts'kyĭ marsh" rehionaliv', *Tyzhden.ua*, 18 May 2013, http://tyzhden.ua/News/79826; Milan Lielich, 'U Kyievi vynykla sutychka mizh "svobodivtsiamy" i "Berkutom" ', *Tyzhden.ua*, 18 May 2013, available at http://tyzhden.ua/News/79835 (all last visited 24 April 2018).

[37] 'Donbass protiv neofashizma!', official website of the Party of Regions, 18 May 2013, available at http://partyofregions.ua/news/51975c4fc4ca42047c000320 (last visited 18 May 2013, currently not available). See also: ' "Donbass pashet, a oni kulakami mashut": Donetsk trebuet zapretit' "Svobodu" fotoreportazh,' *REGNUM*, 18 May 2013, available at https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1660180.html (last visited 30 July 2020).

tors as possible,[38] and to intensify the emotional effect on the public and on TV news audiences, thereby increasing empathy towards 'our' soldiers and 'our' politicians.

The re-enactors' (role-play) movement has been gaining in popularity in Ukraine since the 1990s. The total number of the various re-enactors' clubs in Ukraine is estimated to involve up to 10,000 people.[39] Initially, the re-enactment of medieval and early modern history received more news coverage as something exotic and entertaining but also for the more practical purpose of attracting more tourists and visitors to the re-enactment events (festivals, tournaments, etc.) held in provincial towns with well-preserved medieval castles.[40] During 2011–13 the re-enactors re-creating WWII received much more mass-media coverage than ever before. However, the WWII commemorations and accompanying re-enactments were organized differently in south-east Ukraine and in Galicia (west Ukraine). These re-enactments were supported by the local authorities – the Party of Regions in the south-east and Svoboda in Galicia. In south-east Ukraine the re-enactments represented battles between Soviet and German soldiers. Red Army veterans and guests from Russia were invited to attend the events.[41] The role games in Galicia showed battles between the UPA and NKVD.[42] UPA veterans were invited to the re-enactments

[38] The re-enactment in the big industrial city of Zaporizhzhia in 2013 had attracted over 80,000 spectators. 'U Zaporizhzhi vidbulasia naĭmasshtabnisha v Ukraïni viĭs'kovo-istorychna rekonstruktsiia chasiv Velykoï Vitchyznianoï viĭny', official web site of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast' State Administration, 14 October 2013, available at http://www.zoda.gov.ua/news/21105/u-zaporizhzhi-vidbulasya-naymasshtabnisha-v-ukrajini-viyskovo-istorichna-rekonstruktsiya-chasiv-velikoji-vitchiznyanoji-viyni.html (last visited 24 April 2018).

[39] Maksim Butchenko and Timur Vorona, 'Srednevekov'e kakoe-to. Ukrainskie rekonstruktory dobyvaiut sebe mirnye pobedy', *Novoe vremia*, 15 June 2016, available at https://nv.ua/publications/srednevekove-kakoe-to-ukrainskie-rekonstruktory-dobyvajut-sebe-mirnye-pobedy-148050.html (last visited 24 April 2018).

[40] Khotyn, Kam'ianets'-Podil's'kyĭ, Luts'k, Sudak, to mention a few.

[41] 'U Zaporizhzhi vidbulasia' (see note 39); 'V Zaporozh'e sostoialas' samaia masshtabnaia v Ukraine voenno-istoricheskaia rekonstruktsiia vremen Velikoĭ Otechestvennoĭ voĭny', official website of the Party of Regions, 4 October 2013, available at http://partyofregions.ua/project/511cfaaa3fcad0bb730000d3/news/525be701c4ca423d6f0000a6 (last visited 14 October 2013, currently not available).

[42] NKVD – the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs was the interior ministry of the Soviet Union. The NKVD undertook mass extrajudicial executions of great numbers of citizens and conceived, populated, and administered the Gulag system of forced labour camps. NKVD units were also used to repress the UPA partisan war in west Ukraine in 1944–53.

and refreshments. The events were accompanied with Svoboda political meetings and "UPA glory marches".[43] The WWII re-enactors are well-connected with the amateur archaeologists (*poiskoviki*) involved in excavations on WWII battlefields.[44] Some of them are busy discovering, identifying, and burying the remains of Red Army soldiers, while many others (*chërnye kopateli*)[45] are looking for Soviet and German arms and ammunition to be sold on the black market into private collections.[46] Many WWII re-enactors took part in the military conflict in east Ukraine in 2014, well-indoctrinated and zealous in fighting the enemy.

From Memory War to Proxy War: WWII Performed During the Military Conflict in the Donbas[47]

The well-elaborated narrative of the 'fascist threat' was used by the Russian mass-media and by pro-Russian activists during the insurgency in the

[43] 'V Ivano-Frankovske sostoialas' rekonstruktsiia boia UPA s NKVD', *Korrespondent.net*, 27 May 2012, available at https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/events/1353760-v-ivano-frankovske-sostoyalas-rekonstrukciya-boya-upa-s-nkvd; 'Vo L'vove proshla istoricheskaia rekonstruktsiia boia voinov UPA s voĭiskami NKVD', *UNIAN fotobank*, 14 October 2012, available at https://photo.unian.net/rus/themes/35823 (both last visited 24 April 2018).

[44] See 'Soiuz poiskovykh otriadov Ukrainy', available at http://www.spou.com.ua/; 'Spisok poiskovykh otriadov Ukrainy...', 8 September 2010, available at http://1941-1945.at.ua/blog/spisok_poiskovykh_otrjadov_ukrainy/2010-09-08-25 (both last visited 24 April 2018); 'U seli Pereviz pid Kyevom siogodni khovaly soldativ velykoi vitchyznianoi,' *TSN channel*, 20 July 2013 (last visited 20 July 2013).

[45] *Chërnye kopateli* – literally, "the black diggers". For more details, see https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A7%D1%91%D1%80%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B5_%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8 (last visited 24 April 2019).

[46] Warren Jane, 'Grave Robbing Ghouls Who Trade in Nazi Relics', *Express*, 8 September 2012, available at https://www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/344760/Grave-robbing-ghouls-who-trade-in-Nazi-relics (last visited 24 April 2018).

[47] In this paper, analysis is limited to late August 2014 since by that time the Russia-backed insurgency was gradually turning into Russian military invasion. It was established by Bellingcat Investigation Team that cross-border artillery attacks from Russia against Ukraine occurred on or before 16 July 2014. See Sean Case and Klement Anders, 'Bellingcat Report: Putin's Undeclared War, Summer 2014 – Russian Artillery Strikes Against Ukraine', available at https://www.bellingcat.com/app/uploads/2016/12/ArtilleryAttacks_withCover_EmbargoNote.pdf (last visited 30 July 2020); see also 'Bellingcat Report: Origin of Artillery Attacks on Ukrainian Military Positions in Eastern Ukraine between 14 July 2014 and 8 August 2014', available at https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2015/02/17/origin-of-artillery-attacks/ (last visited 24 April 2018).

Donbas in spring 2014. The military conflict was intended to be perceived by the TV news audience as a kind of sequel to WWII.[48] The so-called Euromaidan revolution in Kyïv was presented as a neo-Nazi *coup d'état* and the interim government was called a 'fascist junta'. The Russian mass-media ascribed the main role in this *coup d'état* to a small radical nationalist group, the 'Right Sector' (*Pravyĭ sektor*), and described them as fascists.[49] In this way calls for the federalization of Ukraine, demands for a referendum, and, finally, for secession from Ukraine, including appeals to Putin to send Russian troops to Ukraine, were legitimized by the spreading of fears that 'Ukrainian fascists' were approaching the Donbas to persecute the locals as alleged supporters of the ousted President Yanukovych.[50]

On 12 April 2014 the Russian commandos of Colonel Girkin (*nom de guerre* Strelkov), with the support of local insurgents seized the central police departments in Slov''ians'k and Kramators'k. On the night of 19–20 April the insurgents faked a 'Right Sector' assault on one of their road-blocks. Among other items supposedly retrieved from the wreckage following the attack on the checkpoint and displayed on Russian television (*LifeNews*) as proof of *Pravyĭ sektor*'s involvement were a machine-gun. The self-proclaimed 'People's Mayor' of Slov''ians'k, Viacheslav Ponomarëv, commented as follows in a press conference devoted to the incident: "On the battlefield we also found this Yugoslav machine gun – an analogue of the German MG 42, used by the German army during the Great Patriotic War".[51] Though it was a Yugoslav machine gun, Pono-

[48] Alexandr Osipian, 'Historical Myths, Enemy Images and Regional Identity in the Donbass Insurgency (Spring 2014)', *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, 1 (2015): 109–40.

[49] Irina Khaldarova and Mervi Pantti, 'Fake News: The Narrative Battle over the Ukrainian Conflict', *Journalism Practice* 10, 7 (2016): 893–4; see also: 'Ukraine's Far-Right Leader Moves HQ to the East, Forms New Squadron', *Russia Today*, 24 April 2014, available at https://www.rt.com/news/154452-right-sector-yarosh-unit/; 'Viacheslav Likhachëv: V Rossii v 2014 "Pravyĭ sektor" upominalsia v SMI tak chasto, kak i Edinaia Rossiia', *UKRLIFE.TV*, 29 May 2017, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4hUeKWO4uY (both last visited 24 April 2018).

[50] Here and further, if the source is not specified, a statement is based on my own personal observations and conversations.

[51] 'Mer Slavianska: u ubitogo boevika pri sebe byl zheton "Pravogo sektora" ', *TASS*, 20 April 2014, available at https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1134411; 'Glava opolcheniia Slavianska: U ubitogo pod Slavianskom boevika pri sebe byl zheton "Pravogo sektora" ', *Russia Today*, 20 April 2014, available at https://russian.rt.com/article/28614 (both last visited 24 April 2018).

marëv deliberately referred to the German army and WWII to evoke associations between *Pravyĭ sector* and the Wehrmacht. Ponomarëv also commented: "Our opponents continue to advance their fascist ideology by using the weapons of their teachers".[52] Ponomarëv then called on Putin to send Russian troops to Ukraine.[53]

The insurgents used the WWII symbols inherited from the USSR and promoted in Putin's Russia. In the early stages of the insurgency, in March–April 2014, when the insurgents lacked the symbols uniting all the south-eastern provinces into the imagined 'Novorossiia', they used the Victory Banner alongside the flags of the Russian Federation, the Russian Empire, and the USSR. The St. George's Ribbon, worn by the 'militia' as a marker of their identity,[54] has been transformed into the main symbol of the insurgency,[55] thereby establishing a link with the memory of the Great Patriotic War.

In late April and early May, the insurgents and their adherents spread rumours that celebrations of Victory Day would be forbidden in Ukraine by the government in Kyïv as proof of the fascist nature of the 'junta'.[56]

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[52] '"Vizitka Iarosha", ili Piat' punktov TV-propagandy', *BBC Russkaia sluzhba*, 22 April 2014, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/04/140422_russia_ukraine_propaganda_5points (last visited 24 April 2018).

[53] Andreĭ Kots, ' "Narodnyĭ mer" Slavianska poprosil Vladimira Putina vvesti rossiĭskih mirotvortsev v Donetskuiu i Luganskuiu oblasti', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 20 April 2014, available at https://vm.ru/news/185406-narodnyj-mer-slavyanska-poprosil-vladimira-putina-vvesti-rossijskih-mirotvorcev-v-doneckuyu-i-luganskuyu-oblasti (last visited 30 July 2020).

[54] In 2015, Russia's Kazan Textile Factory upped its production of orange-and-black ribbon from 4,000 kilometres to 10,000, much of which has turned up in Crimea, separatist-held territories in eastern Ukraine, Transdniester, and Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ihar Karney and Daisy Sindelar, 'For Victory Day, Post-Soviets Show Their Colors – Just Not Orange And Black', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 7 May 2015, available at https://www.rferl.org/a/victory-day-st-george-ribbon-orange-and-black/26999911.html (last visited 24 April 2018).

[55] On 16 May 2017 the St. George's Ribbon was officially banned in Ukraine. 'Ukrainian Lawmakers Back Ban on Ribbon Embraced as Patriotic Symbol in Russia', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 16 May 2017, available at https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-bans-st-georges-ribbon-separatist-symbol/28491961.html (last visited 24 April 2018).

[56] At that time, when describing the conflict, the Ukrainian leadership made only case-by-case references to some Soviet symbols of the Great Patriotic War, which could be explained by the strong inertia of Soviet education and mass culture imbedded in the minds of older and middle generations. Andrii Portnov, 'The "Great Patriotic War" in the Politics of Memory in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine', in *Civic Education and Democratisation in the Eastern Partnership Countries*, ed. Dieter Segert (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2016), 191–2.

Equally, Victory Day celebrations on 9 May 2014 were used to mobilize the masses in the Donbas to vote in the secessionist referendum on 11 May. In the city of Mariupol' the celebrations on 9 May were used by local paramilitary insurgents to attack the central police department.[57] An 'anti-fascist' meeting was organized by the insurgents in Donets'k on 28 May 2014, on the day after their unsuccessful attempt to seize Donets'k International Airport. Next, efforts were made to mobilize locals for the illegal paramilitary grouping People's Militia of the Donbas. Well-known Soviet-era visual images were used to build historical continuity. In a series of billboards set up in Donets'k in summer 2014, the insurgency was put in a sequence with the Civil War of 1918 and the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5, thereby representing the insurgents as fighting 'on the right side'. In this way the deployment of historical narrative helped to legitimize the insurgency in the eyes of some locals as well as to mobilize many Russian nationalists, Cossacks, criminals, and adventurers to fight against 'fascism' in Ukraine.[58]

In some cases, material objects from WWII were used by the insurgents to prove their direct connection with the 'holy war against fascism'. For instance, on 26 July, the insurgents of the 'Steppe' Battalion took from the museum in the town of Ienakiieve a banner of the Ienakiieve–Danube 40th Rifle Division with the legend "Death to the German Occupiers".[59] On 5 June the insurgents removed from its pedestal a memorial tank in the town of Kostiantynivka. They mounted a modern machinegun on the old tank. On its fuel tanks they wrote "On Kyïv" and "On L'viv", thus expressing their plan to attack in future the two strongholds of 'Ukrainian fascism'.[60]

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[57] Shaun Walker and Oksana Grytsenko. 'Ukraine Crisis: "Three People Killed" in Fighting at Mariupol Police Station', *The Guardian*, 9 May 2014, available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/09/ukraine-crisis-mariupol-police-station (last visited 24 April 2018).

[58] For more details on Russia's interference, see Nikolay Mitrokhin, 'Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion: Russia's War in the Donbass', *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, 1 (2015): 232–6.

[59] 'Narukavnye znaki (nashivki) vooruzhennykh formirovaniĭ DNR i LNR', available at http://www.sammler.ru/index.php?showtopic=144117&page=8. See also photos on pro-insurgent forums, available at http://phorum.bratishka.ru/viewtopic.php?f=40&t=11421 (currently not available) and https://www.yaplakal.com/forum28/st/50/topic869104.html (all last visited 24 April 2018).

[60] 'Opolchentsy "ozhivili" pamiatnik tanku vremen voĭny', *TV Zvezda*, 6 June 2014, available at https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201406052305-zy5e.htm; 'Ukrainskie voennye pokazali otbityĭ u opolchentsev tank IS-3', *TV Zvezda*, 3 August

By using this form of words they made reference to the siege of Berlin when Red Army soldiers daubed on their tanks, canons, and artillery shells "On Berlin!" It was thereby as if they were re-enacting WWII by fighting against the 'Ukrainian fascists'. In reality, however, the memorial tank never took part in the Great Patriotic War. That particular model, the IS-3 ('Joseph Stalin'), only went into production after May 1945. On 4 July the insurgents seized from the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Donets'k two canons, and on 7 July a Soviet T-54 tank.[61] Though, as the insurgents themselves acknowledged, they did it for practical purposes: to renovate the weapons and use them against the approaching Ukrainian Army.[62] In the end only a few insurgent units tried to appropriate some material symbols of WWII, since the majority of them were busy looting banks and car shops.

The 'performance' of WWII by the insurgents culminated on 24 August 2014. On that day Ukrainians celebrated their Independence Day with a military parade in Kyïv. In Donets'k the insurgents staged a 'Parade of the Defeated' – a parade mocking the Ukrainian army and celebrating the death and imprisonment of its soldiers. Up to 100 captive Ukrainian soldiers, policemen, and volunteers, bruised and unshaved, some with bandaged arms and heads, wearing fetid camouflage uniforms, were marched down the main street of the city, guarded by insurgents with bayonetted guns. About a thousand onlookers[63] shouted "fascists!" and "murderers!" and pelted the prisoners with empty beer bottles, eggs, and tomatoes. Three street-cleaning machines followed the column, spraying water onto the street in a theatrical gesture to indicate that the men were unclean. The mockery parade received broad coverage in the Rus-

2014, available at https://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201408030956-ujgh.htm; 'Opolchentsy zaveli IS-3 s postamenta Konstantinovki', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvdCsXevMnI (currently not available); 'Ukrainskiie voiennyie pokazali otbityï u opolchentsev tank IS-3', *Weazel News*, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUvFgXoGeP4 (all last visited 24 April 2018).

[61] The first T-54 prototype was completed by the end of 1945. Then various models of the T-54 were produced in 1946–1961.

[62] Sergeï Chernykh, 'Donchane panikuiut', *Munitsipal'naia gazeta*, 11 July 2014, available at http://mungaz.net/line/14447-donchane-panikuyut-no-sluhi-oprovergayutsya.html; 'V Donetske terroristy pokhitili tank iz gorodskogo parka (Foto. Video)', *24TV*, 7 July 2014, available at https://24tv.ua/ru/v_donetske_terroristi_pohitili_tank_iz_gorodskogo_parka_foto_video_n461760 (both last visited 24 April 2018).

[63] Mostly family members of the insurgents who had fled from their initial stronghold in Slov''ians'k, Kramators'k, Druzhkivka, and Kostiantynivka on 5 July 2014.

sian, Ukrainian, and Western mass-media.[64] Very few Western reporters noted that the rules of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war prohibit parading them in public.[65]

All the Western reporters missed the main message of the organizers, easily recognized by middle-aged and older Russians and Ukrainians with a Soviet background. The mockery parade performed by the insurgents was an exact copy, though on a much smaller scale, of the 'Parade of the Defeated' held in Moscow on 17 July 1944 when 57,600 German prisoners-of-war were marched through the city centre.[66] The only difference was that the thousands of Muscovites were completely quiet. The documentary of 1944 'parade' was used constantly in the course of Victory Day celebrations during the later years of the USSR and thereby deeply embedded in the memory of its citizens. The main message of the parade was therefore to convince the audience that in East Ukraine local insurgents alongside Russian volunteers were fighting a reincarnated 'Ukrainian fascism' now.[67] The Russian mass-media emphasized the similarity between the parades in 1944 and 2014 to explain the main message to a younger generation lacking the Soviet-era memory of WWII.[68] On the day before, on 23 August 2014, regular detachments of the Russian army covertly entered eastern Ukraine in a counteroffensive

[64] Richard Balmforth and Thomas Grove, 'Ukraine Defiant on National Day, Rebels Parade Captives', *Reuters*, 24 August 2014, available at https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-idINKBN0GO0HJ20140824; 'Ukraine Conflict: Donetsk Rebels Parade Captured Soldiers', *BBC*, 24 August 2014, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28919683; Aleksandr Kots and Dmitriĭ Steshin. 'V Donetske proshël "parad" plennykh', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 24 August 2014, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-EzdyyHQRA (all last visited 24 April 2018).

[65] Andrew E. Kramer and Andrew Higgins, 'In Eastern Ukraine, Rebel Mockery Amid Independence Celebration', *New York Times*, 24 August 2014, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/25/world/europe/ukraine.html (last visited 24 April 2018).

[66] 'Prokonvoirovanie voennoplennykh nemtsev cherez Moskvu', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pcMdCkgVAo; 'Marsh plennykh nemtsev v Moskve 17 iiulia 1944 goda', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYpighgVl-A (both last visited 24 April 2018).

[67] We may suppose that the actual idea and scenario of the parade was initiated by Aleksandr Borodaĭ, a Russian nationalist and Moscow political technologist, who became 'prime minister' of the Donets'k insurgents 16 May–7 August 2014 and then the main adviser of new 'prime minister' Aleksandr Zakharchenko until early October 2014.

[68] 'V den' nezavisimosti Ukrainy v Donetske ustroili "marsh voennoplennykh" ', *Moskovskiĭ komsomolets*, 24 August 2014, available at https://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/08/24/opolchency-otvetili-voennomu-paradu-poroshenko-marshem-voennoplennykh-v-donecke.html (last visited 24 April 2018).

to safeguard the insurgents besieged in Donets'k and Luhans'k.[69] The mockery parade was therefore performed, among other reasons, as a way of opening a new chapter in the military conflict.

Despite these most telling incidents of re-enacting or referencing symbols and items from the time of the Second World War, in general the insurgents did not pay too much attention to issues relating to WWII. The names they choose for their battalions – Batman, Leshyĭ (Sylvan), Oplot (Stronghold), Prizrak (Ghost), Somali, Sparta, Step' (Steppe), Vostok (East), Zaria (Sunrise) – make no reference to the War or to Russian history more generally.[70] Whereas the propagandist framework for the insurgency mostly created by the Russian mass-media has over-exploited the cultural memory of WWII, the insurgents' imagination is shaped rather by mass-culture consisting of a mixture of Hollywood movies, football, and crime news.

Conclusions

After the proclamation of Ukraine's independence in 1991 two competing historical narratives strove for dominance in Ukrainian politics. The Soviet narrative (a modernized version of Karamzin's Russian imperial one) inherited from the USSR depicts Ukraine as a more or less autonomous part of the 'Russian World' or Moscow-centric 'Slavia Orthodoxa'. Alternatively, the nationalist narrative (normal for any emerging nation-state) focuses on the centuries-long struggle for independence. The memory of WWII was re-interpreted by both narratives. Political parties sometimes defined as pro-Russian re-interpret the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5 as a high point in Ukraine's history when Ukrainians alongside Russians defeated 'German fascism' and freed the world from the 'brown plague'. The proponents of that narrative are trying to convince their

[69] Mitrokhin, 'Infiltration' (see note 59), 241–6.

[70] Zaria was named after the football club of Luhans'k, while Somali makes evident reference to the Somalian pirates. In September 2008, the pirates captured the Ukrainian cargo ship Faina and held it till February 2009. All that time the destiny of the ship and its Ukrainian-Russian crew was in mass-media coverage, making the story quite popular in Ukraine and Russia. Finally, despite the aggressive anti-Americanism of the insurgents, two of their units – Batman and Sparta – were named after the famous Hollywood movies – *Batman* (2005, 2008, 2012) and *300* [Spartans] (2006). It was the same with the nicknames (*noms de guerre*) the insurgents took for themselves as well as for their tanks and armoured vehicles – there are no traces of the triumphalist memory of WWII.

voters in favour of economic (and political / cultural / religious) integration with Russia in the present. Political parties sometimes defined as pro-Western when arguing for maximum distancing from Russia re-interpret WWII as involving Ukrainian resistance against two totalitarian regimes, the Stalinist USSR and Nazi Germany, though the role of the latter has gradually been marginalized and the 'Ukrainian segment' of WWII is represented as a fight between Ukrainian OUN–UPA and Soviet NKVD troops.

The Soviet narrative dominates collective memory and public commemorations in south-east Ukraine while the nationalist one triumphed in the early 1990s in western Ukraine and then spread gradually to the centre of the country which is still ambivalent in its preferences. This regional diversity enables the instrumentalization of the competing narratives by political parties. By representing themselves as the defenders of 'historical truth' they manipulate electoral preferences, masterfully shifting the attention of the electorate away from their own inefficiency in public reform and replacing the actual social and economic agenda with a commemorative one. At this point Russia enters the game using the WWII narrative as its main form of soft power in Ukraine – as well in other former Soviet republics – to keep it in the Russian sphere of influence. Particularly after the Orange Revolution of 2004 in Ukraine, the Russian leadership gradually elaborated a multifaceted strategy to mobilize 'Russian compatriots' abroad against integration with the EU. Since then pro-European governments and parties have been blamed by Russia for revisionism in the memory of WWII, for the glorification of 'German-fascist collaborators', or even for being neo-Nazis / neo-fascists as was the case with the 'fascist junta in Kyïv' in 2014.

Soviet-style WWII commemorations were actively deployed by President Yanukovych and the ruling Party of Regions during 2011–13 to mobilize his disappointed electorate to vote for him again in March 2015. At the same time, Yanukovych campaigned in support of the Association Agreement with the EU to win over the moderate pro-Western electorate. In both cases he intended to reduce his opponents' electoral base to the ethno-nationalist minority represented by the far-right Svoboda Party. In the course of the opposing commemorative programmes (glorifying the Red Army and the OUN–UPA) supported by the two parties the re-enactor clubs were deployed. These re-enactments were intended to attract numerous spectators, create visualizations of the image of the enemy and draw clear-cut borders between 'us' and 'them'.

The series of commemorations and re-enactors' performances intensified between February–October 2013 when Russia's efforts to invite Ukraine to join its Customs Union failed. Finally, in the course of the insurgency in spring–summer 2014, narratives and symbols were used in Russian propaganda to legitimize the illegal actions of the insurgents in the eyes of local residents in the Donbas. The new government in Kyïv and the Ukrainian armed forces were represented as the ideological descendants of WWII fascists while the insurgents were represented as fighting a second round of the war against the 'fascist threat'. The few cases when the insurgents used the memorial-tanks, the banner, and the mockery-parade were perceived by the pro-insurgent audience as a sequel-performance of WWII, this time fought against 'Ukrainian fascists', as evidenced by the hundreds of comments they left on Youtube.