Introduction

A couple of years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, an American historian, Mark von Hagen, astonished by the tempo of the conversion of former Marxist-Leninist historians into devoted followers of the national paradigm, asked: "should Ukraine have one official history?" and suggested looking more broadly at possible avenues of development, claiming that:

> "Ukraine represents a case of a national culture with extremely permeable frontiers, but a case that perhaps corresponds to postmodern political developments in which subnational, transnational and international processes need as much attention by historians, social scientists and 'culturologists' as those processes that were formerly studied as national."[1]

Von Hagen suggested overcoming both Soviet and nationalist dogmas and turning Ukrainian history into a very modern field of inquiry:

> "Ukrainian history can serve as a wonderful vehicle to challenge the nation-state's conceptual hegemony and to explore some of the most contested issues of identity formation, cultural construction and maintenance, and colonial institutions and structures".[2]

Commenting on von Hagen's essay, Andreas Kappeler asked rhetorically if "the time for a post-nationalist approach to Ukrainian studies" had already come.[3] The question could also be re-formulated like this: where might one find an antidote to the official Soviet historical narrative?

The Soviet regime believed in the importance of historical education and in the proper planning and control of historical research. In 1926, the all-mighty Soviet Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovskiĭ claimed categorically that "the Academy could not continue playing the role of a cloister

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[1] Mark von Hagen, 'Does Ukraine Have a History?', *Slavic Review* 54, 3 (1995): 658–73, here 670.

[2] Ibid., 673.

[3] Andreas Kappeler, 'Ukrainian History from a German Perspective', *Slavic Review* 54, 3 (1995): 691–701, here 698.

for the 'impartial seeker of truth' and merely maintain a benevolent neutrality towards Soviet rule".[4]

In the 1960s, one of the most open-minded Ukrainian émigré historians in Canada, Ivan Lysiak-Rudnyts'kyĭ, wrote that in a totalitarian state scholarship "has no autonomy and must directly subordinate itself to politics".[5] Another prominent diaspora historian and, before 1941, one of the leading scholars in Soviet Ukraine – Oleksandr Ohloblyn – concluded in 1978 that "historical scholarship in the Motherland [Soviet Ukraine] has ceased to exist",[6] because "the trend in official Soviet historiography has inevitably pushed it towards an anti-scientific and anti-Ukrainian synthesis of Ukrainian history".[7] Ohloblyn labelled official Soviet historiography as both "anti-Ukrainian" and "anti-scientific" in contrast to "scientific" and "Ukrainian" diaspora scholarship. Certainly the situation was not so simple and neither diaspora nor Soviet Ukrainian historiographies were homogeneous, even though the degree of direct political pressure in the Soviet Union was much stronger. Still, the pressure of 'patriotic duty' and the logic of the Cold War should not be underestimated either.

Not surprisingly, Ohloblyn's own publications were criticized for the "patriotic phraseology" and "poetic attachments" which devalued the quality of their analysis. The critic Lev Bilas pointed out that "history should deal with knowledge and not with the arousal of emotions. The patriotic or any other 'poetic' history is not true history, because it is not true thought".[8]

The same point was made – even more strongly – by another émigré historian and Turkologist, Omeljan Pritsak, founder of the 'Harvard miracle' – the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute – and its first chair in 1968. For Pritsak, "If history-writing does not want to become an instrument of the totalitarian state, it must stand firmly on the principle of historical truth, whether that historical truth is pleasant or painful. The

[4] M.N. Pokrovskiĭ, 'K otchetu o deiatel'nosti Akademii nauk za 1926 g.', *Zven'ia: Istoricheskiĭ almanakh*, 2 (1992): 580–99, here 591.

[5] Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, 'Do stanu ukraïns'koï nauky v SRSR', *Suchasnist'* 8, 7 (1964): 80–6, here 80.

[6] Oleksander Ohloblyn, 'Zavdannia ukraïns'koï istoriohrafiï na emihratsiï', in *O. Ohloblyn, Studiï z istoriï Ukraïny. Statti i dzherel'ni materialy*, ed. Liubomyr Vynar (N'iu-Ĭork, Kyïv, Toronto: UIT, 1995), 287–291, here 291.

[7] Idem, 'Problema skhemy istoriï Ukraïny 19–20 stolittia (do 1917 roku)', *Ukraïnsk'kyĭ istoryk*, 1–2 (1971): 5–16, here 9.

[8] Lev Bilas, 'Ideolohiia iak istoriia i iak poeziia', *Suchasnist'* 5, 7 (1961): 45–62, here 50.

highest criterion for historical truth should remain the scientific conscience of the researcher".[9]

Maybe during the Cold War and in the diaspora it was easier firmly to claim such a division between truth and falsehood and between a scientific and an unscientific approach. At least, as Pierre Nora argued recently, over the last thirty years we have experienced a profound change which could be called a "*general politicization* of history" and which he understands as "the inevitable process of transforming what they [historians] produce into an ideology, of transforming the world in which historians work and with which they have to deal into an ideological system".[10]

Throughout the twentieth century a lot of historians and other intellectuals proved to be attracted to master-ideologies involving mass violence, engaging with apologetics on behalf of Stalinism, Fascism and Maoism as well as with often self-deceiving discussions of Israeli–Palestinian or Russian–Ukrainian issues.[11] Concluding his analysis of the struggle of French intellectuals with politics and ideology, Tony Judt suggested that "a *refusal* to occupy the post of the (engaged) intellectual may be the most positive of the steps modern thinkers can take in any serious effort to come to terms with their own responsibility for our common recent past".[12] This proposal seems still to be relevant nowadays. How are the intellectual choices made by historians today influenced by the long twentieth-century experiences of Eastern Europe? What could 'official history' mean for a stateless nation or a self-proclaimed 'republic'? How did Ukrainian historiography become or how was it forced to

[9] Omeljan Pritsak, *Chomu katedry ukraïnoznavstva v Harvardi?* (Kembridzh, MA, N'iu-Ĭork: Fond katedr ukraïnoznavstva, 1973), 105.

[10] Pierre Nora, 'Recent History and the New Dangers of Politicization', *Eurozine*, 24 November 2011, available at https://www.eurozine.com/recent-history-and-the-new-dangers-of-politicization/ (last visited March 22, 2020).

[11] Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953); Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957); Stanley Weintraub, *The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War* (London: W. H. Allen, 1968); Alistair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 1998); idem, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (New York, London: New York University Press, 2011); Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016); Susie Linfield, *The Lions' Den: Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2019), and others.

[12] Judt, *Past Imperfect* (see note 11), 318.

become Soviet? What spaces for individual research initiatives or even for modest disagreement with obligatory planned research existed in the official history institutions of Soviet Ukraine and socialist Poland? How were Russian textbooks on history re-written during the post-Soviet years? What role do literature, film, monuments, holidays or rituals play in the politics of history? How have memories of the Second World War been instrumentalized in the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian conflict and how have images of the ongoing war in the Donbas influenced memory debates in neighbouring post-Soviet states?

The spectrum of questions mentioned above were among the topics under research in two international projects: one at the University of Geneva called *Divided Memories, Shared Memories. Ukraine / Russia / Poland (20th–21st Centuries): An Entangled History* (supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation) and the other, at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuania, called *Modernisation of Identity? Challenges of 'Europeanisation', Nationalism and Post-Sovietism for Memory Cultures* (Nr. MOD-17006, supported by the Research Council of Lithuania).

The preliminary findings of both projects were discussed at the conference *Official History in Eastern Europe. Transregional Perspectives* at the German Historical Institute Warsaw on June 13–14, 2018. Our conference aimed at making research perspectives broader (both chronologically and geographically) as well as developing a sense of complexity and promoting differentiated comparative approaches to the topic.

We also tended to reserve room for disagreement. That is why our book consists of very different contributions – different both disciplinarily and stylistically. Some authors distance themselves from their topics and strive to treat them as dispassionately as possible; others speak of 'us' and clearly sympathize with or disapprove of the heroes of their essays. We decided to preserve this variety of approaches and styles, hoping for a careful and critical readership.

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