

**Krytyka.** *Krytyka: Hefte 3-4; 7-8; 9-10.* Kiev: Krytyka, 2010. 144 S.

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Former Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko's designation of Stepan Bandera as an official hero of Ukraine on 22 January 2010 triggered an international debate. Professional historians clashed with diaspora nationalists and post-Soviet myth makers over the legacy of Bandera and the OUN (The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists), the most important Ukrainian fascist movement, which the myth-makers present as a valuable part of Ukrainian identity and an integral part of Ukrainian patriotic culture. Although few of the nationalist diaspora and post-Soviet participants in the debate had specialized in the topic of Ukrainian fascism, they were in virtual agreement about its non-existence and were willing to deny the war criminality of the OUN and its armed wing, the UPA (The Ukrainian Insurgent Army).

The debate was not limited to the journal *Krytyka*, the leading Ukrainian intellectual journal, established in 1997 and modeled after the *New York Review of Books*, but the articles published in the Kyiv journal in 2010 are representative for the discussion on the multi-totalitarian past in the post-Soviet space. The discussion is also quite representative for the discussion on the multi-totalitarian past in the post-Soviet space.

Given the experience of the Holocaust and other forms of political mass murder, the Bandera debate contains several noteworthy aspects. It not only highlights how neo-fascist apologetics has entered the Ukrainian political mainstream, but

also the extent to which academics and public intellectuals are prepared to rationalize and justify war criminality, anti-Semitism, fascism, and racism.

In his article "A Fascist Hero in a Democratic Kiev", Timothy Snyder muses on the well-established fact that Bandera and the OUN sought "to turn Ukraine into a fascist one-party dictatorship without national minorities" and that Bandera became the "symbol of the struggle for Ukrainian independence" (no. 3-4, p. 8). Snyder provides some of the basic facts concerning Bandera and the OUN-UPA: he discusses how OUN activists infiltrated the Ukrainian police, how they collaborated in the annihilation of Ukrainian Jews in 1941-1942 and, how after 1943 they formed the backbone of the UPA, which carried out the mass murder of tens of thousands of Poles, several thousand Jews, and several thousand Ukrainian civilians who did not support the OUN-UPA's racist policies. Snyder reminds his readers that Bandera remained a supporter of fascism until his death on 15 October 1959 at the hands of a KGB assassin in Munich. While Snyder says nothing about how unrealistic and hopeless the struggle of the suicidal romantics from the OUN-UPA against the incomparably stronger Soviet forces was, nor discusses how many Ukrainian civilians were killed in this armed rebellion by the OUN-UPA and the Soviets, he introduces all basic facts on the problematic surrounding Bandera and the OUN-UPA (no. 3-4, p. 9).



John-Paul Himka, who for over two decades has specialized in the problems of the Ukrainian fascist movement, particularly the war crimes and anti-Jewish violence of the OUN-UPA, described the history of the organization in similar terms. Yet Himka also offers a commentary on the present: on how apologists present fascism as patriotism and totalitarians as “freedom fighters”, denying their war criminality in the process. One such historian, Zenon Kohut, an expert on pre-modern Ukrainian history who has not published anything on the OUN-UPA, reproaches critical scholars for their assessment of Ukrainian fascism (no. 3-4, pp. 10-11). Himka brings attention to the problem of historians who identify with the political tradition of Bandera and the OUN-UPA and have a vested interest in denying the war crimes of that organization. The editors of *Krytyka* do not appear to have reflected upon such matters, but equate Himka with Kohut by reprinting their exchange of opinion in the *Edmonton Journal* and other forums in early 2010 with the title “Ukrainists and Bandera: Different Opinions” (no. 3-4, p. 10).

*Krytyka* provides Anatolii Rusnachenko with a platform to criticize Snyder and Himka. Rusnachenko takes offence at Snyder’s categorization of Bandera as a fascist and sets himself up to correct Snyder, who, according to Rusnachenko, “does not master the topic very well.” Rusnachenko claims that “attributing fascism to Bandera is a clear exaggeration, even if there were [fascist] tendencies.” For his “correction” of Snyder Rusnachenko relies on Alexander Motyl, who since the 1980s has been an active denier of the fascist nature of the OUN (no. 9-10, p. 7). For Motyl’s denial of the fascist nature of the OUN in the 1980s, see Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, *The “Ukrainian National Revolution” of Summer 1941*, in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 12,1 (2011), p. 88. On Motyl’s misuse of the term fascism and his definition of contemporary Russia as an “unconsolidated fascist state,” see Andreas Umland, *Is Putin’s Russia really “fascist”?*

A response to Alexander Motyl. <<http://www.globalpolitician.com/print.asp?id=4341>> (21.04.2011). Rather than denying the OUN crimes Rusnachenko diminishes them. “True, the OUN did carry out terror (even though it was not on a significant scale), but we should not forget about the terror, which the Poles carried out in the conquered Eastern Galicia.” (no. 9-10, p. 7) What exactly constitutes a “significant scale” can of course be debated. As far as the numbers of Polish victims of the OUN-UPA ethnic cleansing are concerned, Ewa Siemaszko has established 35,259 by name in Volhynia in 1943 and 14,467 in Eastern Galicia in 1944. A realistic estimation of Polish victims of the OUN-UPA’s “ethnic cleansing” might be 60,000 in 1943-1944 in Volhynia and 32,000 in Eastern Galicia in 1944, see Ewa Siemaszko, *Bilans Zbrodni*, in: *Biuletyn instytutu pamieci narodowej* no. 7-8 (116-117) (July-August 2010), p. 85, 88, 92. Grzegorz Motyka, a specialist of the OUN-UPA, estimates that OUN and UPA killed between 70.000 and 100.000 Poles, see Grzegorz Motyka, *Ukraińska partyzantka 1942-1960. Działalność Organizacji Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów i Ukraińskiej Powstańczej Armii*, Warszawa 2006, p. 411. Rusnachenko does not elaborate on why anyone investigating the crimes of the OUN-UPA would forget the Ukrainian victims murdered by Poles during and after World War II. Finally Rusnachenko takes Snyder to task for his unwillingness to separate Bandera the fascist leader from Bandera the heroic symbol of Ukrainian patriotism: “[Snyder] does not want to admit that Bandera was and remains simply a symbol of the liberation movement and a personification of the idea of uncompromising struggle against all enemies of Ukraine and Ukrainianhood” (no. 9-10, p. 7).

Whereas Rusnachenko is content to relativize war crimes, *Krytyka* has also published direct denial. Vitalii Ponomar’ov insists that both Himka’s and Snyder’s characterization of the OUN as a fascist organization is wrong. His first “evidence” for this claim is that Soviet propaganda also described the OUN as fascist. Another is that the



OUN could not possibly have been fascist because “as the historian Iaroslav Hrytsak rightly remarked, it is contradictory to the nature of fascism to write about ‘Polish’, ‘Czech’ or ‘Ukrainian’ fascism because fascism sought a partial or total destruction of these nations.” Ponomar’ev assumes nationalistic positions and repeats the OUN(b)’s own narrative of denial, going as far as to claim that the “OUN(b) stopped subscribing to nationalism in 1943” (no. 7-8, p. 22). Yet, 1943 marked the beginning of the UPA’s campaign of ethnic cleansing of Volhynia, which it, on orders of the OUN(b), extended to Eastern Galicia.

Similarly, Andrii Portnov is unconcerned by the heroization of Bandera and other war criminals. Untroubled by the designation of fascists as national heroes, Portnov regards the cult of “integral nationalists” as a legitimate pursuit and part of the de-Sovietization of Ukraine. Rather, his main concern is how this impacts the image of Ukraine, given the international condemnation of Yushchenko’s decision. Portnov hesitates whether one solution to the problems of contemporary Ukrainian politics of memory could be a “regional pluralism of symbols” which in the Ukrainian case means monuments to Stalin in the East and to Bandera in the West and thus a double negation of democracy (no. 3-4, p. 14). His attitude is indicative of the confusion found amongst parts of a Ukrainian intelligentsia, which conceptualizes multi-totalitarianism as pluralism.

The equating of apologetics and denial with professional inquiry into the past becomes even more evident in Volodymyr Kulyk’s article “The Inevitable Bandera.” Kulyk does not deny the OUN’s fascism, its anti-Semitism, or the OUN-UPA’s war criminality. Rather, he argues that these do not matter, because he regards Bandera as a symbol of anti-imperialism and of the struggle for independence (no. 3-4, p. 13-14). A similar relativism in post-colonial disguise appears in an article by Kulyk’s follower Niklas Bernsand, a Ph.D. student from Lund. Bernsand attempts to deflect

outside concerns by comparing the cult of Bandera to that of the Croatian general Ante Gotovina, who in April 2011 was sentenced to 24 years for crimes against humanity. “Should the Croats be judged for their public expressions of sympathy for a person who is responsible for the ethnic cleansing of non-Croat cities and villages?” Bernsand asks. He answers his question in the negative and applies this logic to the Bandera cult in Ukraine: “I will not [...] argue ‘for’ or ‘against’ the presidential decree about turning Bandera into a Hero of Ukraine” (no. 7-8, p. 22). Bernsand applies the conceptualization of multi-totalitarianism as pluralism to the larger post-communist space. Like Yushchenko’s Ukraine, Franjo Tudjman’s Croatia sought and found national heroes in its fascist past, including the Ustaše, a close partner of the OUN. From Bernsand’s perspective, Croats and Ukrainians have a right to celebrate war criminals or fascists and should be left alone to develop their own subjective truths. To Bernsand, the cults are in themselves less of a concern than the critical scrutiny of outsiders.

Vitalii Nakhmanovych agrees with Kohut that “science should study the nationalist past, and not evaluate it” (no. 9-10, p. 9). He believes that historians who study Ukrainian fascism should ignore the OUN’s racism, the UPA’s ethnic cleansing, and Bandera’s attempts to establish a fascist Ukraine. In other words, historians should forget the universal values which are a requirement for open inquiry. According to Nakhmanovych, in order to avoid hurting the feelings and values of patriotic Ukrainians who identify themselves with Bandera, the OUN-UPA should be characterized as a continuation of the nineteenth-century Ukrainian national tradition. Bandera should only be studied as a symbol of patriotism, not as a real politician who sought to establish a fascist Ukrainian state and introduce racist policies against its national minorities (no. 9-10, p. 10).

This “neutrality-to-fascism-and-genocide” approach is untenable. Equating myth making with



academic inquiry, defending apologetics for fascists and war criminals while being alarmed by critical inquiry constitutes an active political choice by the myth makers and their legitimizers. A more serious problem still is that Nakhmanovych and others are mistaken in their assumption that the polemics between Himka and Kohut are simply a discussion between two specialists in the field, rather than that between a critical scholar, who is an expert in the field of Ukrainian fascism and war criminality, and a proponent of nationalist ideology. What we are witnessing on the pages of *Krytyka* is the mix-up of academic inquiry and post-Soviet and ultranationalist myth making, and an alarming inability of its editors to distinguish the two. The reader is left to pick and choose whatever version of the past they feel most comfortable with: Himka's and Snyder's research, or Kohut's, Ponomar'ov's, Kulyk's, Bernsand's and Rusnachenko's ideological narratives of either relativization and/or denial. Legend or research, political myth or inquiry – your choice. This is the message of the editorial board of *Krytyka* to their readers.

The debate in *Krytyka* shows that a significant section of the liberal intelligentsia in Ukraine – aided by some academics in the West – are prepared to embrace legitimizing narratives which deny crimes against humanity, collaboration in the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, and fascist activism. Instead of challenging the rather Soviet traditions in Ukrainian studies they follow in the footsteps of Yushchenko, who presented fascists, anti-Semites and war criminals as virtuous national heroes and role models for the young. By doing so they place nation building and state consolidation above democratic principles and respect for the victims of the OUN and UPA. The members of the editorial board of *Krytyka* appear to be struggling between whether to examine the recent Ukrainian past or to deny the war criminality of Ukrainian fascists, continuing the Soviet legacy in modified form.



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