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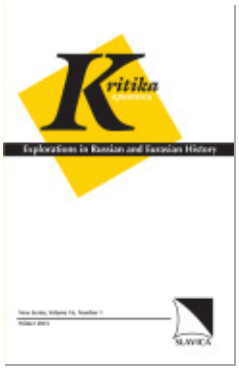

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William Jay Risch

Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity has multiple meanings. For some, it demonstrates Ukrainians' ability to organize themselves, fight a corrupt police regime, and champion the rule of law, human rights, and freedom from imperial Russian rule. For others, the presence of the Far Right among its leaders symbolizes the return of the most aggressive, violent features of Ukrainian nationalism.

The specter of extreme right-wing nationalism has haunted Ukraine's revolution since late November 2013, when students and young professionals began demonstrating on Kyiv's Independence Square, the Maidan, to protest President Viktor Yanukovych's decision on 21 November not to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union the following week. Yanukovych's government hinted that further aid from Russia, and possibly membership in its Eurasian Customs Union, would substitute for EU assistance. Thus it looked as if Ukraine was about to lose its sovereignty and become a satellite state of Russia or part of a resurrected Soviet Union. Such developments encouraged activists in right-wing organizations to take the lead. Already in the first days of protests, there appeared the black-and-red flags of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), first adopted by Stepan Bandera's wing of the organization during World War II. Far-right political chants such as "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!" "Ukraine above all!" and "Glory to the nation! Death to the enemies!" resounded on the Maidan. Students from the right-wing political party Svoboda (Freedom) were among those mobilizing protesters around these slogans. These nationalist-motivated calls for justice grew fiercer after Ukraine's Berkut security forces beat up demonstrators and drove out the Euromaidan on the early morning hours of 30 November. "Glory to Ukraine!" became a rallying call the next day, 1 December, as people in Kyiv in the tens and hundreds of thousands took to the streets and demanded not just closer

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relations with Europe but justice against the police, the resignation of Ukraine's government, and even the ouster and imprisonment of their own president.

Over the next three months, symbols attributed to the Far Right appeared whenever violence flared up. After Ukraine's parliament, the Supreme Rada, passed the so-called Dictatorship Laws on 16 January 2014, clashes broke out on Kyiv's Hrushevsky Street between protesters and security forces. A far-right organization connected with the Maidan's self-defense units, Right Sector, took credit for sparking the scenes of flying Molotov cocktails, burned-out buses, and flaming tires that spread across the world's media. When a peaceful march to the Supreme Rada on 18 February turned into nearly three days of bloodshed, resulting in at least 100 dead, the chant, "Glory to the nation! Death to the enemies!" took on special meaning. It resounded in the makeshift morgue in the Hotel Ukraine, up the hill from the Maidan, after doctors and priests had given the dead their last rites.

When President Yanukovych fled Ukraine on 21 February, it looked to some as though the forces of the Far Right had triumphed in Kyiv and were threatening the country's future. Right Sector took over the Hotel Dnipro and some shops on Kyiv's main street, Khreshchatyk. Members of parliament from Svoboda became government ministers. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and uprisings orchestrated and managed by Russian military intelligence in the Donbas region prompted violence between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian forces that led to up to 40 pro-Russian activists being killed in a fire in the Trade Unions Building in Odessa on 2 May. Right Sector activists allegedly claimed credit for the act, though the details remain murky.[1] When armed men, some of them from Russian military intelligence, seized administrative buildings in the Donbas, volunteer battalions, some of them led by people of the Far Right, took up arms and helped the government wage its war against pro-Russian forces, known as the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO). These battalions included the Azov Battalion, whose leaders come from the neo-Nazi political party called the Social-National Alliance (SNA). The Wolfsangel cross, a symbol on SNA banners and Azov Battalion insignia, represents for some a return to the ethnic intolerance, one-party dictatorships, and wanton violence that characterized Ukrainian nationalism between the world wars and during World War II.

Claims that the Far Right has taken over Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity risks ignoring the many voices in the revolution itself and forgetting the context in which the rhetoric resonated in the past. The OUN, founded in Vienna in 1929, emerged out of the defeat of Ukrainians' revolution of 1917–20. Eastern

[1] On the problems sorting out what happened in Odessa, see Halya Coynash, "Odesa 'Massacre': Propaganda vs. the Facts," *Human Rights in Ukraine* (Kharkiv), 11 August 2014 (http://khpg.org.ua/en/index.php?id=1407453894, accessed 9 November 2014).

Galicia was placed under Polish rule, while the Soviet Union took over nearly all the rest of present-day Ukraine. Even though Poland's leaders had assured Western allies that Ukrainians in eastern Galicia would enjoy autonomy, over the next two decades they deprived Ukrainians not just of autonomy but of free and fair elections, Ukrainian-language schools, and access to higher education. Under the influence of the right-wing National Democrats, led by Roman Dmowski, Poland's government turned to aggressive assimilation policies and antisemitism. While Polish rule allowed a multiparty system, and moderate political parties such as the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance (UNDO) sought greater reconciliation with the Polish state, state assimilation policies and the Great Depression considerably limited opportunities for young Ukrainians in eastern Galicia and thus made the OUN's ideas more attractive.

The OUN's leaders rejected principles of liberal democracy and embraced the ideals of integral nationalism—which stressed authority, solidarity, faith, and organization as compensation for the socialism, democracy, and the perceived lack of will that allegedly led to the defeat of Ukrainian independence movements in the war years.[2] In the 1930s, young OUN activists desperately fought a national liberation struggle through bombings, sabotage, "expropriations," and assassinations of major Polish and Ukrainian political figures, Polish policemen, undercover agents, informants, and suspected Ukrainian "collaborators" in eastern Galicia and Volhynia, Ukrainian territory also annexed by Poland after World War I.[3]

Such acts of terrorism prevented the OUN from gaining a mass following in eastern Galicia and Volhynia on the eve of World War II. Nonetheless, its war against the Polish state indicated the degree to which a failure to gain statehood, national discrimination, and increasingly authoritarian rule in interwar Poland had alienated Ukrainians. Iryna Vil´de, a Soviet Ukrainian writer whose literary career began in eastern Galicia before World War II, captured this sense of alienation in her novel *The Richyns´ki Sisters* (1958). Set in 1937–38 in a small town not far from L´viv—eastern Galicia's administrative, economic, and cultural center—its Ukrainian characters faced the decision whether or not to change their religion (and thus their national identity) in order to attend university or receive state jobs in an economy wracked by the Great Depression.

[2] Alexander J. Motyl, *The Turn to the Right: The Ideological Origins and Development of Ukrainian Nationalism, 1919–1929* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 1–2.

[3] See Alexander J. Motyl, "Ukrainian Nationalist Political Violence in Inter-War Poland, 1921–1939," *East European Quarterly* 19, 1 (1985): 45–55. Motyl notes that of 63 actual and attempted killings by Ukrainian nationalists between 1921 and 1939, the majority, 36, were made on the lives of Ukrainians, while 25 Poles, one Russian, and one Jew were affected (ibid., 50).

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Older generations feared for their children's future. One of the novel's main characters, Nelia Richyns´ka, falls in love with Markiian Ivashkiv, who joins the OUN and winds up in prison after someone betrays him. In prison, Ivashkiv keeps a diary in which he addresses future generations and explains why he joined the OUN. He remarks that he had no plans to engage in mass murder or ethnic cleansing. Instead, he writes, "I don't want to be spit in the face for the mere fact that I speak the language that my peasant mother taught me to speak. I don't want to work on the prairies of Argentina, nor in the offices of New York, but on my own land." He wants to be master of his own land, "that which again for millions seems to be the most natural of the natural." Not merely claiming to speak for millions, Ivashkiv takes on the voice of the whole nation at one point, saying that he has wanted these things—freedom and dignity—"like water, like bread," "because I became very hungry for it in the course of all history." For him, the ideals of integral nationalism, or any of the other isms of his time, have no relevance compared to these basic needs. "When I've had enough bread and water, then speak to me about communism, about nationalism, socialism, and fascism. Meanwhile, good people, understand that I am famished."[4]

Ivashkiv for Vil´de represents a revolution of dignity that Ukrainians were waging in eastern Galicia on the eve of World War II, one in which the OUN offered the most radical solutions. Vil´de had in mind, no doubt, later events that would turn people like Ivashkiv into collaborators with Nazi Germany and participants in the mass murder of Poles and Jews. Bandera and other OUN leaders not only cooperated with German military intelligence before the war to overturn the Polish state but also adopted some elements of the racist ideology of the Nazis. On the eve of the war, Yaroslav Stetsko, one of Bandera's aides, stressed the Jews' involvement in an international conspiracy.[5] When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, OUN activists took part in battalions that helped orchestrate pogroms against Jews in L´viv and other parts of eastern Galicia, which soon led to the extermination of eastern Galicia's Jews.[6] Bandera

[4] For this article, I rely on a later edition of Vil´de's novel: Iryna Vil´de, *Tvory,* 5 vols. (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1987), 3: *Sestry Richyns´ki,* 373–74.

[5] John-Paul Himka, "The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 53, 2–4 (2011): 209–43, here 222–23. See also Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, "The 'Ukrainian National Revolution' of 1941: Discourse and Practice of a Fascist Movement," *Kritika* 12, 1 (2011): 83–114. Rossoliński-Liebe has recently published a biography on Bandera dealing further with the OUN as a fascist movement that collaborated with Nazi Germany (*Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult* [Stuttgart: ibidem, 2014]). For a more nuanced survey of interwar Ukrainian nationalism, see Oleksandr Zaitsev, *Ukrains´kyi intehral´nyi natsionalizm (1920-ti–1930-ti roky): Narysy intelektual´noi istorii* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2013).

[6] See Himka, "The Lviv Pogrom of 1941."

and Stetsko proclaimed an independent Ukrainian state under Nazi Germany's protection in L´viv on 30 June 1941. While German occupation authorities quickly arrested this fledgling state's leaders and went on to kill up to four-fifths of the leadership of Bandera's OUN faction in 1941–42, radical members of Bandera's faction (the OUN-B) went on to take over the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). Formed in Volhynia, the UPA was made up of former members of police auxiliary units who had taken part in the mass murder of Jews there. In the spring of 1943, under the leadership of the OUN activist Roman Shukhevych, the UPA instigated mass murder against the 200,000 Poles living in Volhynia, killing between 40,000 and 60,000 of them in the grizzliest fashion. To frighten surviving Poles into fleeing "western Ukraine," UPA guerrillas put beheaded, dismembered, and disemboweled bodies on display. Violence between Poles and Ukrainians spread to other parts of former eastern Poland, including eastern Galicia, and it went on even after the Red Army had "liberated" western Ukraine.[7]

The OUN's role in World War II cast a long shadow over everyone who had belonged to it. Their organization had collaborated with Nazi Germany. To some degree, they were responsible for the mass murder of Poles and the annihilation of Eastern Europe's Jews. While the UPA after World War II fought a heroic struggle against the Soviet reconquest of eastern Galicia and Volhynia (now called "western Ukraine"), UPA guerrillas killed other Ukrainians who allegedly had collaborated with the enemy, Soviet security forces, and anyone who represented the Soviet state. In that sense, they alienated fellow Ukrainians in western Ukraine, as well as Ukrainians from other parts of Soviet Ukraine.

Yet then, just as now, the Far Right in Ukraine did not represent all the people's voices, though it expressed their frustrations and fears. When Iryna Vil´de attended a public discussion of a dramatized version of *The Richyns´ki Sisters* in 1968, she reportedly claimed that the "falsification of history" needed to come to an end, and that what had happened to Ukrainians in eastern Galicia on the eve of World War II could not be divided into "black and white." "Communists and nationalists were only 20 percent [of Ukrainians in western Ukraine], while all the rest were patriots," she allegedly said.[8] Vil´de's point was that Ukrainians in eastern Galicia were neither fanatical followers of Bandera nor committed Communists hoping for liberation by the Soviet

[7] Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 164, 169, 175–77. On the UPA's role in directing and orchestrating such violence against Poles, see Grzegorz Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji "Wisła": Konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo literackie, 2011).

[8] Tsentral´nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads´kykh ob´iednan´ Ukrainy (TsDAHOU) f. 1, op. 25, spr. 20, ark. 181.

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Union. Instead, across the board, people were deeply concerned about the fate of their nation under policies that discriminated against Ukrainians in interwar Poland and threatened their community's very existence.

Vil´de may have been romanticizing the past, as the Far Right was very much embedded into Ukrainian politics in eastern Galicia. Villages and towns across eastern Galicia paid tribute to the memory of the OUN founder Yevhen Konovalets after Soviet agents assassinated him in Holland in 1938. Still, the OUN's presence was no stronger than that of similar groups in other parts of Europe in the 1930s, where the politics of the Far Right, inspired by Mussolini and Hitler, were on the rise. We can say for sure that today's Far Right, which is not a direct descendant of the OUN due to Soviet repression of it, is even weaker in its influence over Ukrainian voters. The leaders of Svoboda and Right Sector (SNA's key leaders at the time were in jail) did not speak for the Maidan. On 20 December 2013, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology reported that an overwhelming majority of Kyiv's Euromaidan protestors—92 percent—belonged to no political party, civic organization, or civic movement. Only 4 percent declared affiliation with one political party or another.[9] Activists at the Maidan were a diverse lot. They included LGBT advocates, anarchists, feminists, liberals, national democrats, young professionals, Afghan War veterans, and the unemployed from small towns and villages. They belonged to dozens of groups and organizations that loosely coordinated their actions and sometimes did not even know of one another's existence.

Results from presidential and parliamentary elections this year only further demonstrated the marginal support the Far Right has had in the Revolution of Dignity. In the presidential elections of 25 May, Svoboda's Oleh Tiahnybok scored a mere 1.16 percent, Right Sector's Dmytro Yarosh only 0.07 percent, and the Radical Party's Oleh Liashko just 8.32 percent of the vote. Altogether, the leaders of Ukraine's Far Right won no more than 10 percent of the vote.[10] Parties of the Far Right did not do well against other parties in the parliamentary elections of 26 October. While the Radical Party polled as much as 7.44 percent of the vote, it was far behind more centrist parties like the People's Front led by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk (22.14 percent); the Petro Poroshenko Bloc led by the country's current president (21.82 percent); Self-Help, led by L´viv's liberal mayor Andriy Sadovyi (10.97 percent); and the Opposition Bloc, made up mostly of the remnants of Yanukovych's Party of Regions (9.42 percent).

[9] "Maidan-2013: Khto stoit´, chomu i za shcho?" (www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=216&page=1&y=2013&m=12, accessed 15 October 2014.

[10] Central Election Commission results (http://cvk.gov.ua/info/protokol_cvk_25052014.pdf, accessed 3 November 2014).

Svoboda polled only 4.71 percent and Right Sector just 1.80 percent, short of the 5 percentage points needed to enter parliament.[11]

The political fortunes of Ukraine's Far Right and its ideological ancestor, the OUN, suggest how easily we confuse symbols with their meanings. The OUN acquired a decisive role in Ukrainian history only when the first Soviet occupation of Galicia and Volhynia in 1939–41 resulted in the destruction of more moderate political forces like the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance (UNDO), as well as a number of civic organizations such as the Enlightenment (Prosvita) educational society.[12] Until then, it represented a desperate, extremist attempt at standing up for Ukrainians' dignity against the forces of assimilation and discrimination in interwar Poland, and it was a movement that reflected the Central European politics of racism and militant nationalism of its time. Bandera and the OUN wound up being the only force left to stand up to the Soviets and later the Nazis. After World War II ended, the UPA's insurgency, however many Ukrainian casualties resulted from it, was the only resistance movement against Soviet rule. The dissident movement that emerged in Soviet Ukraine after Stalin's death advocated the improvement of Soviet socialism; only underground movements inspired by the OUN and UPA depicted the Soviet Union as an empire that dominated and oppressed Ukrainians.[13]

Finally, by focusing exclusively on symbols attributed to the OUN and the UPA during World War II, we risk obfuscating these symbols' history and ignoring other symbols on the Maidan. The chant "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!" has its origins in the Ukrainian revolution of 1917–20. Soldiers of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) came up with the slogan, "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Cossacks!" Interwar nationalists changed the latter part of the chant to "Glory to the heroes!"[14] The more militant chant of "Glory to the nation! Death to the enemies!" was not connected with the OUN at all. It originated in the 1990s, in independent Ukraine, among the ranks of the right-wing organization Ukrainian People's Self-Defense (UNSO).[15]

[11] Official Central Election Commission results, 99.92 of the votes counted, issued 2 November 2014 (http://cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/wp300pt001f01=910.html, accessed 3 November 2014).

[12] Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations,* 154–78.

[13] See, e.g., the Ukrainian National Front (UNF), which operated in the Ivano-Frankivs´k region of western Ukraine in the mid-1960s (Mykola Dubas and Iuriy Zaitsev, eds., *Ukrains´kyi natsional´nyi front: Doslidzhennia, dokumenty, materialy* [L´viv: Instytut ukrainoznavstva im. I. Kryp´iakevycha, Natsional´na akademiia nauk (NAN) Ukrainy, 2000]).

[14] See, e.g., Roman Koval´, "Iuriy Artiushenko, khorunzhyi polku Chornykh zaporozhtsiv," in *Chorni zaporozhtsi: Spomyny komandyra 1-ho kinnoho polku Chornykh zaporozhtsiv Armii UNR,* ed. Petro Havrylovych Diachenko (Kyiv: Stiks, 2010), 350.

[15] Olena Sharhovs´ka, "'U UPA suchasni povstantsi maly b povchytysia zavziattia'—istoryk," Gazeta.ua (Kyiv), 6 December 2013 (http://gazeta.ua/articles/history/_u-upa-suchasni-povstanci-mali-b-povchitisya-zavzyattya-istorik/530240, accessed 9 November 2014).

There were other chants that enjoyed equal or even greater popularity on the Maidan, such as "Bandits out!"—a clear reference to Yanukovych's corrupt regime. The Maidan's symbols included not just portraits of Bandera but also a portrait of the Soviet dissident and national democrat Viacheslav Chornovil and fortifications reminiscent of the Cossacks and their 17th-century liberation struggle under Bohdan Khmel´nyts´kyi. Some symbols motivating protestors and their supporters were not even Ukrainian. On Facebook, I saw some Euromaidan supporters, including Dmytro Voytko from Odessa in late December 2013, circulate a photo of U.S. civil rights activist Rosa Parks. Voytko claimed Parks demonstrated that individual actions in the long run could lead to the victory of Euromaidan ideals. For Voytko, these ideals most likely included achieving equality before the law.

Admittedly, Ukrainians have not had a meaningful dialogue concerning the OUN's role in mass violence during World War II. Many simply know nothing about it. At the same time, the symbols of the Far Right have more complicated origins, and they do not represent a return to the politics of ethnic violence or ethnic exclusion. The people who called out "Glory to Ukraine!" and paraded the OUN's black-and-red banners during the Euromaidan protests articulated Ukrainians' pent-up anger toward a state that for years had flouted the constitution, ignored laws, manipulated elections, suppressed the press, and encouraged a level of corruption that not only had produced great social injustice but also had turned Ukraine into a private business for oligarchic clans. Beating up activists, kidnapping and torturing them, and shooting dozens of demonstrators only further fueled the anger. The hundreds of thousands who showed up for demonstrations in Kyiv and in other cities have now voted for centrist parties who have promised meaningful reform of Ukraine's political system. Ukrainian voters have not endorsed in overwhelming numbers those members of the Far Right who openly share racist views. For the moment, we scholars should consider what is making Ukrainians hungry and thirsty before we lecture them about the dangers of right-wing extremism.

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