CHAPTER 5

Biography as Political Geography

Patriotism in Ukrainian Women's Life Stories

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Introduction

The history of Ukraine in the twentieth century abounds in events that have altered the country's political, social, and economic landscapes, yet the part that Ukrainian women played in that history during the past hundred years is only marginally visible. The gender dimension of that entire epoch is especially important; it represents an era when Ukrainian women obtained broad rights and opportunities for self-realization in their public lives, a transformation that changed both the women and the public space. For all that, women's lives remained virtually unseen in the historical records.[1] This is a serious lapse in our study of Ukrainian history, especially in light of the fact that women are the key agents of socialization.

In a search for a more profound understanding of the ways in which post-Soviet Ukrainian women make sense of their past, this chapter examines the life stories of women from three separate regions. I seek to gain some insight into the ways in which their historical experiences have shaped their perception of the present. Through an analysis of the women's biographical narratives, this chapter will show the fundamental differences in their patriotic sentiments, as determined by their differing political loyalties—whether to the Soviet regime, or to the independent Ukrainian nation-state. I will also pay special attention to the role of early socialization and the expectations of upward social mobility as they influenced the formation of the women's attitudes toward the respective regimes.

A research project titled "20th Century Ukraine in Women's Memories,"[2] was conceived in 2002 as an autonomous branch of an international undertaking titled "Women's Memory: Searching for Lives and Identities of Women under Socialism."[3] Its main goal was to document the experiences of women in Soviet Ukraine by recording and analyzing their life stories. The theoretical basis of the project derives from the feminist idea of the distinctive character of women's historical experiences, and the special women's agency in history.[4] Women's talk (Devault 1990: 96–116) constitutes the methodological framework of this project and correlates with the narrative biographical interview process (Rosenthal 2004: 48–64). Primary analysis revealed the main thematic fields, key concepts, and the categories that frame and structure narratives.

Between 2003 and 2005 approximately thirty life stories, narrated by elderly retired women (born in the 1920s and 1930s) from western, eastern, and southern Ukraine, were recorded, transcribed, and archived.[5] The interviewees had all spent at least their adult years under state socialism; most were born in Ukraine. Interviews were conducted with minimal intervention from the interviewers in order to encourage spontaneity. Each conversation comprised four consecutive phases, beginning with a request for each woman's life story, from beginning to end, which allowed the respondents to organize the narration in their own unique way. Next, so-called internal questions, focused on the personal experiences of each individual, allowed the researcher to probe more deeply into some aspects of a life story, or to clarify certain details. The third phase consisted of so-called external probes, which broadened the interview scope with a series of carefully designed questions aimed at going beyond the life story itself by directing the interviewees' reflections toward more general issues.[6] The final stage returned them to the present, and encouraged some positive sentiments with a standard question: "Of what in your life are you most proud"? The women's narratives proved to be a rich source for exploring their reflections upon, and (re)evaluations of, the political systems under which they live(d)—an independent Ukraine or the Soviet regime. In this study, the concept of political loyalty is of special relevance, as it allows for a scrutiny of the very essence of the women's political allegiance.

Loyalty is the attitude and associated pattern of conduct of an individual taking something's side, and doing so with a specific motive: namely, one that is partly emotional in nature, involves a response to the thing itself, and makes essential references to a special relationship that the individual believes exists between her and the focus of her loyalty (Keller 2007: 21). According to James Connor, loyalty is one motivating force for human responses: it brings meaning, direction, and purpose into a person's life and unifies his/her activities. Loyalty is an emotion on a par with the likes of trust, hope, and shame. It helps to guide action and furnish identity, operates on various layers, and requires the existence of competing loyalties (2007: 51, 115). Political loyalty is defined

as devotion to, and identification with, a political cause or community, its institutions, basic laws, major political ideas, and general policy objectives.

Given the totalitarian monopoly enjoyed in the USSR by the Communist Party, it appears reasonable to view political loyalty as a complex category, which includes loyalty to the party and its ideology, loyalty to its way of governance (Soviet rule), and the transformation of empire into the USSR. Indeed, one is hardly able to imagine an ordinary Soviet person (excluding dissidents) being loyal to the Communist Party and disloyal to the state, or loyal to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and disloyal to the Soviet regime. Accordingly, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term *Soviet regime* to mean a complex and inclusive category signifying the totality of the Soviet political realm.

In contemporary Ukraine, with its multiparty system and pluralism of political ideas, market economy, and controversial social policies, such a holistic approach to political loyalty appears somewhat problematic. I will use the term *contemporary Ukraine* to mean the formation that replaced the Soviet regime and is considered its antipode in many ways.

Some core elements of both systems, however, are comparable. The women's attitudes to the formation of a state that became known as the USSR, in contrast to an independent Ukrainian nation-state; the socioeconomic regimes and corresponding social policies, socialism versus a market economy/capitalism; and official policies on ethnicity as derived from the two predominant ideologies, Soviet internationalism and Ukrainian nationalism, might all be used as points of reference for an analysis of the respondents' political loyalties. Such a comparison is appropriate inasmuch as all three elements are inherently interrelated and their dramatic transformations took place simultaneously at the beginning of the 1990s.

For this particular study, oral history proved to be the most appropriate research tool; it tells us less about events than about their meaning. In the words of Alessandro Portelli, "Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" (1998: 67). The women's answers to direct questions regarding the significance of the Soviet regime and Ukrainian independence in their lives, as well as their respective attitudes toward various ethnicities, provided rich material for analyzing their political loyalties and disloyalties. In examining such allegiances, one might easily draw a dividing line between the western region and the rest of Ukraine, inasmuch as the majority of women who expressed their overall approval of the Soviet regime were ethnic Russians (or Russified Ukrainians), residing in eastern and southern Ukraine, whereas the nationalistically inclined western Ukrainians openly censured the Soviet regime. A closer reading of the women's life stories, however, reveals a more complex set of contributing factors to the respondents' attitudes toward past and present.

Earlier research works, based on an analysis of the same set of interviews, led their authors to similar conclusions. For instance, Viktoria Sereda examined the structure and regional peculiarities of historical identities, as constructed and represented in the women's biographical narratives. This produced a claim that when women refer to certain historical personages, events, and holidays in either a positive or negative way, it can signify allegiance to a specific version of the past. Her data show that women from western Ukraine, and those from the two other regions of the country, clearly identify with two different historical narratives—Ukrainian and Soviet respectively (2007: 84). Another study has also proven that women's evaluations of the same historical event, in which they participated personally, differed radically—depending on the ideology (communist or nationalist) they had interiorized in the past, and to which they remain committed (Kis', in Carlson et al).

Two Regimes

On the surface, the focus and intensity of the responses—positive and negative—correlated with ethnic origins and regions the respondents called home. To one extent or another, all of the women, even the most critical, conceded some measure of good in the Soviet regime, yet they exhibited radical differences in their evaluations of its blessings. Women from the south and east placed a high premium on social policies. They also praised Soviet discipline and expressed a feeling of pride in belonging to a strong, world-class state as well as an appreciation of the sense of community that a collectivist society brings. They repeatedly stressed their approval of unity and friendship as a basic principle of interethnic relations within the USSR, and supported the universal use of Russian as a medium of communication.

Larissa from Crimea is a typical pro-Soviet example.[7] Her father, a physician, was repressed and condemned to ten years in the gulag. Although she recalled with regret his pointless arrest, after a few minutes passed, she subordinated her terrible personal loss to the common good: "I consider myself a happy person despite my troubles, despite this cruel experience. … Irrespective of my father's ten-year sentence … and this is my personal opinion, without such injustice many would never have had access to an education, they … would not be the people they are today" (US1–04: 357–68). In response to the question, "What did the Soviet regime signify in your life?" even as she praised the regime, the subtext of Larissa's response suggested something more ambiguous. It was as though she was trying hard to present the Soviet era in the best possible light—out of some sense of loyalty, or perhaps a need to refute the harsh criticisms from western Ukrainian women:

> There were pluses and minuses, but I grew up in that life. I have an education, I had a job, I earned money, and I could afford nice things. So for me personally … True, my parents' life was not so sweet, but my own was blessed. I cannot pass judgment on the years 1933 or 1937, or even later,[8] I did share those events with others. Still, as any sober-minded person understands, it is a sad fact that every war, every change, every reconstruction produces its own victims. (US1–04: 363–71, 1510–28)

Valeria, from eastern Ukraine, began her narration with reminiscences about the loss of her father when she was still a child, and the hardships which she, her mother, and her two siblings were forced to endure after his death (UK1–04: 1195–202). Nevertheless, she refused to reduce her story to one of victimization, and as if to dispel any potential charges of bias against a system that gave her so much, her testimony became more positive, as she continued: "Children's health was monitored in the schools . . . there was order. Of course, the general food situation was very bad … but children were well fed; they received dairy products, stewed fruit, a little meat. … School was exacting, the rules harsh, and marking strict; but we were taught well" (UK1–04: 110–13; 733–37, 890–92).

Valeria also recalled that, while still a young man, her husband felt free to write a letter to Stalin requesting permission to enroll in an aviation college. Her references to the dictator were charitable, quite in keeping with the positive aspects of her recollections of Soviet life, yet her body language ["she clenches her fist"], her praise, and relatively mild condemnation of Stalin suggested an ambivalent view of communist rule. "Today, I tell you, they malign Stalin, malign him terribly. There was something very wrong with him, but there was good in him too. So sift it like flour through a sieve; take the good and discard the lumps. Yes, he was cruel, but this is our [trails off] … many people today are returning to the idea that this was necessary [she clenches her fist, her voice resolute and emotional] so that people would understand" (UK1–04: 1195–202).

When asked "What was the significance of the Soviet regime in your life?" Valeria reiterated her approval of the communist system: "The Soviet regime was immensely important in my life [speaks enthusiastically]. We survived; we went to school and studied diligently. When we needed healthcare, it was provided. Could I, an orphan in any other society, have received a higher education? No! But I got it then, I worked, and always there were good people around me; when I needed something, they helped" (UK1–04: 2279–90).

In the life narratives of women from the east and south, one finds little condemnation of any limits on freedom and civil rights, as well as an insistence that the failures of the Soviet regime are grossly exaggerated. Natalie's statement is exemplary:

> Simply put, my attitude toward the former regime is very positive. Education was free, healthcare was free, and as a little girl I often attended pioneer camps at little or no cost. The only thing I did not like was, you know, a kind of hypocrisy. When you submitted a report, it never reflected what you really wanted to say. There were prescribed formulas. … Today's democracy does allow for creativity, and provides ample opportunity for expressing one's thoughts. But in principle I think that the former regime was more just. People were treated like human beings. As for Soviet repressions, I don't believe in the innocence of *everyone* who was ever punished. (US3–04: 31–46)

Valentina, another Russian woman from Crimea, was more effusive in her praise of the regime. This was a woman who once held a prestigious position in the local government, and her praise of the Soviet system reflected immense pride in her empowerment:

> I cannot accuse the state for depriving me of liberties. Today it is being said that there was no democracy. I am a forthright person. I never liked to speak behind somebody's back, and I always spoke the truth at party gatherings (I was a member for more than twenty years); I was able point to people's faults or expose misdeeds. On the whole, people treated me well, even when I criticized our university. When I was a member of the city council, I was free to stand up and criticize any chairman, any deputy. And now it is claimed that our freedom was violated, that one was persecuted for a single criticism. I never experienced this. I knew that I was free to say what I thought and felt. Just like that! The Soviet regime is not always judged fairly. (US6–04: 1352–94)

All of the narratives testify to the women's awareness of the key defects in the Soviet system and the tragic consequences (Stalin's personality cult, political repressions for innocent people, massive deaths during the artificial famine, ethnic discrimination, etc.) The comments of those loyal to the Soviet regime are rarely tinged with sorrow. On the contrary, they try, if not to justify somehow the vices of the Soviet regime, then at least to question the charges against it or to diminish the appalling repercussions of Soviet policies. The women who considered the Soviet regime a cause of, or a contributory factor to, their life achievements, tended to express their loyalty. Their allegiance was articulated in the form of gratitude for the favorable conditions and special opportunities presented for personal growth and development. Those who think their lives improved substantially under the Soviets, and who consider their achievements noteworthy when compared to what they might have been without the Soviet regime, express unconditional loyalty. Some of their statements sound like a pledge of devotion that they would never betray, even after the demise of the Soviet Union. Here is how that allegiance was expressed:

> I came from a poor peasant family, I grew up to become a professor, I was respected in a collective, in the city. … I am grateful to the Soviet Union first and foremost, as I lived in it almost my entire life. I don't like many of the things in

> our life today—the way children are brought up, or education, or healthcare. I think one ought not to revile the former Soviet Union. There were many interesting things in it: we were great patriots, we were great internationalists, and so we remain. We loved our country; we loved it in the right way! But today [there is no] such feeling of affection for one's country, one's Fatherland. … It is declining somehow, and instead of the collective We, the individual I is moving to the fore. I never knew a regime other than the Soviet until the year 1992, and I believe that I became what I am because of it and the Soviet state. (US6–04: 1335–54)

Valentina's patriotic sentiments are obviously intertwined with her political loyalty to communist ideology (represented here by internationalism and collectivism). Tania's statement makes it even stronger, with her refusal to recognize the legitimacy of any regime but the Soviet one: "There is no other authority for me. I am a thorough Soviet person—I love it; I esteem it. Naturally I was distressed over the disintegration of our Soviet country [*sic*]. I hate to see it torn to pieces! There used to be one country, one currency, one people" (US2–04: 837–55; 908–10). It is no accident that these women express their loyalty to a country (*страна*) and/or to Soviet rule (*советская власть*) interchangeably. At the same time, however, none of the pro-Soviet women demonstrated outright their fidelity to the Communist Party, Marxist-Leninist ideology, socialism, etc.

Loyalty to the former regime does not condone simultaneous loyalty to the current one. Indeed, for them the two states and their political systems are antagonistic in many ways. They expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the current state, its social policies, economy, dominant ideological trends, and so on. In so doing, the women pointed to problems in the socioeconomic sphere: corruption and bribery, bad and expensive education and healthcare, the high cost of living and miserable pensions, complicated connections with relatives and friends residing in other post-Soviet countries, and more. When it came to making a clear statement about one's attitude toward an independent Ukraine, however, pro-Soviet women found themselves in deep water. Throughout their entire lives they had been socialized to express loyalty to a political authority, so an open display of disloyalty to any state was unthinkable.

Many of them find it difficult to articulate clearly their discontent; they feel uneasy about putting into words their negative attitudes or critical opinions to the extent that their speech appears choppy, uneven, reiterative. The pressure of deeply internalized political correctness impedes criticism, even when dissatisfaction with some aspects of former or current politics is palpable. To get out of this embarrassing situation, women apply several escapist strategies that allow them to conceal, or to soften, their negative attitude toward the Ukrainian nation-state. These strategies include: (1) refusal to answer the question or to discuss the issue in depth; (2) denial of the very existence of Ukrainian independence; (3) brief and formal recognition of a legitimate right

of Ukraine—just like any other country—to sovereignty and statehood; (4) avoiding personal opinions by feigning political incompetence, lack of expertise, or failure to understand correctly the true sense of political transformations, and so forth.

For contrast, we turn briefly to testimonials from western Ukrainian women. They manifested conflicted attitudes toward the communists, but the women were markedly less sympathetic to the Soviet regime than their counterparts to the south and east. Those clearly disloyal to it reflected upon socialist times from a different angle; they were most critical of the regime and blamed it for its inherently unjust nature, which prevented their self-fulfillment and/or impeded the achievement of certain goals. The following defects in Soviet rule were emphasized most frequently: ethnic inequality, namely, disdain towards and discrimination against Ukrainians; forced Russification (the total obtrusion of the Russian language); violation of civil rights and liberties (freedoms of speech and religion, and property rights); massive political repressions; and excessive punishments for minor transgressions.

Although it is easy enough to criticize a fallen regime, the pro-Ukrainian women did their best to maintain a fair balance between a totally negative evaluation of the Soviet regime and acknowledgment of certain benefits enjoyed under state socialism. Higher education free of charge and generally full-time employment elicited the most appreciation, even among those most critical of the Soviet system. As far as education is concerned, it has special value for the women, as their life stories attest: it is viewed as a necessary cornerstone for their life success.[9]

Mykhailyna was a Ukrainian from L'viv, for whom life under the Soviets began after the war. The border between Poland and Ukraine was redrawn in 1946–47, and Ukrainians were expelled in large numbers from Polish territory to the Ukrainian SSR. Her family was forcibly resettled in a rural area outside of L'viv. Mykhailyna did not fault the Soviet authorities for this forced relocation. In her mind, the hardships of settling in a new place seemed trivial enough when compared to the Polish cruelty that her family had endured prior to their deportation. Slowly, however, her narrative shifted to the fears and pressures she felt at first contact with Soviet authorities—how she dreaded recruitment to forced labor in Russia (UL4–05: 132–40), how she was pressed to join Komsomol[10] and the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), which she managed to escape only by a fluke (UL4–05: 172–200, 578–85). She also recalled the exhausting work on state-owned fields for a miserly food allocation (UL4–05: 557–78) and the exorbitant compulsory state grain requisitions placed on collective farms. Finally, she referred to the state expropriation of the family's land (UL4–05: 535–54), which had prompted her relocation to the city of L'viv.

Perhaps what is most remarkable about her recollections, however, is the fact that there was no condemnation of the regime's overall policies. She focused

instead on her contacts with authorities only as they touched her personal life. Even when she referred to her unwillingness to join either the Komsomol or the *kolkhoz,* Mykhailyna underscored her own security and health concerns over any ideological consideration, as the following attests:

> Well, for us—it was to be the *kolkhoz.* Then mother fell ill, and what was I to do in the *kolkhoz* by myself? I couldn't manage! My feet hurt so from the stubble in the field. Everybody in the village was driven to the MTS [Machine Tractor Station]. Those who agreed to join the *kolkhoz* were permitted to return home. Because my mother was old and sick, they took me instead. Throughout the night and the following day, authorities attempted to persuade us to become members. … I told them I could not sign on! I knew that once I joined, we would never leave that village! When I worked in the village, the Komsomol District Committee kept me there; they tried to coerce me into joining the Komsomol! But I said: if I do join and am killed on the way home, what about my mother? What will become of her? Komsomol members were often murdered [by nationalist guerillas] in those days. (UL4–05: 172–83)

As she went on, Mykhailyna's recollections of the relocation began to produce progressively negative feelings toward the Soviet authorities. She stressed especially the ban on both her native Ukrainian language at the workplace (a kindergarten) and church attendance. The latter was punishable by dismissal from work (UL4–05: 240–49; 355–60; 430–41). Her narrative moved toward collective memory, as her increasing use of plural pronouns such as we, us, and our testified. Gradually her wording became more politicized, and further negative judgments of the Soviet regime crept in. Yet, paradoxically, even as she talked about the limitations on civil rights and liberties under communism, as opposed to those same liberties in a free Ukraine, Mykhailyna was still able to express a limited appreciation of Soviet social policies, although she was careful to emphasize their appalling cost: "Compared to life under the Soviets, things today have changed dramatically. Dramatically. Whether it was free speech, the right to attend church, a chance remark, or a song. You know what it was like. Yes, we were given an apartment, even though the process took its toll on our health; still—we got one. But there was no freedom; a person could not draw a free breath" (UL4–05: 525–32).

When asked about the Soviet impact on her personal life, Mykhailyna strove for objectivity. As she weighed the advantages and disadvantages of communism, her most profound feelings about what was good and what was bad created a tension that was reflected in her rising condemnation of the Soviet system:

> It is important that I enrolled in the university, and finished evening school. But that was the only good thing. The rest—that *kolkhoz*—it was torment when they forced us into it. … that was a negative. And the low wages, no free speech, no worshipping in church. But it was easier to get a free apartment, so we got one.

> We studied free of charge, and enrolling in a university was less problematic. As for the rest … it was not good. I had no right to say anything, I was afraid they would take me away if I made a single questionable remark. And let me tell you about church; I attended even though it was prohibited. (UL4–04: 1435–48)

Nadiia, another Ukrainian woman from L'viv, offered similar testimony, although she was considerably less charitable in her assessment of life under the Soviets:

> It was important for me that I finished normal school. The major thing is that I received an education and became a teacher, so my dream came true. But life was hard. … What can I say! We had no rights, no voice in anything. Mother lived in constant fear. We stopped observing religious holidays. I remember when I was a first-year student at the vocational school, we always attended church. But then a certain teacher arrived. If she caught any of us in church, she threatened: "If I see you there one more time! What kind of teachers are you that you go to church?! You will never see a school or teach again!" UL2–04: 1179–235)

The subject of the Soviet regime first emerged in her testimony as she related the story of the Red Army entering her native town at the end of World War II, followed by the onset of Soviet rule (UL2–04: 66–71). Normal life was destroyed for her family; her father was accused of collaborating with the Nazis (he was an accountant at the post office during the Nazi occupation). He was arrested and condemned to ten years' incarceration. Her mother, left with the couple's three children, was branded a wife of the people's enemy and dismissed from her job as a school teacher. From her narrative, it appears that virtually every negative experience in Nadiia's life, except her education, was associated with Soviet rule: her childhood memories of postwar hardships, which the family barely survived (UL2–04: 134–38), her forced membership in Komsomol (UL2–04: 201–6), and the unremitting fear of persecution for any incautious criticism of the regime (UL2–04: 253–56), not to mention humiliations suffered on account of her ethnic origin. Nadiia never doubted that her Ukrainian ethnicity was the reason for discrimination and scorn on the part of Soviet authorities. Summarizing her experience, she stated: "One day, some women from Volgograd were seated in the courtyard. I greeted them in Ukrainian. Their response was: "*Banderivka* has arrived, *zapadenka* is here."[11] They had nothing but contempt for us, saying: "You're a *banderivka,* you're a *zapadenka.* Poles didn't respect us, and Russians didn't respect us. Poles called us louts, and Russians called us *banderivtsi,* and today they still refer to me as *zapadenka* or *banderivka.* This was true at school as well" (UL2–05: 1081–82, 1202–15).

The women who are disloyal to the Soviet regime (mainly Ukrainians from the west) tended to maintain their painful recollections of Soviet times. Although they did acknowledge some of the benefits of socialism, they were

not prepared to forget or to forgive its serious shortcomings. Above all this applied to the limitations on civil rights, as well as the ethnic and religious discrimination to which they were subjected under Soviet rule. In other words, the women who considered the Soviet regime a key obstacle or a restrictive factor in their life achievements openly revealed their disloyalty to it.

Another remarkable aspect of the western Ukrainian appraisals of the Soviet regime was the manner in which the women expressed their negative attitude. They used pejorative terms (such as *moskali* and *soviety*) to describe the hated Soviet regime and its agents, even though they too had been Soviet citizens. Conversely, the language of those loyal to the Soviet system rarely breached political correctness. Indeed, this group used the insulting denominations (e.g., *banderivtsi, zapadentsi*) only in a few instances when recalling very personal negative encounters with Ukrainian nationalists. At the same time, neither side resorted to mutually pejorative terms outside the politically charged lexicon, such as *khokhly* for Ukrainians and *katsapy* for Russians.

Women expressed their disloyalty to the opposite regimes when they applied a specific linguistic tool: the pro-Soviet women invoked the Ukrainian term *nezalezhnist'* (not the Russian *nezavisimost'*) to name the independence of Ukraine in order to emphasize its unacceptability for loyal Soviet citizens. The pro-Ukrainian women emphasized their estrangement from the oppressive Soviet regime by constantly using its Russian variant—*soviety* (instead of the Ukrainian *radians'ki*). Research in cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics suggests that word choices have significant framing effects on the perceptions, memories, and attitudes of speakers and listeners alike.[12] By failing to translate the name of an opposite regime into one's native language, women stressed its alien status, and in so doing implicitly denied its relevance to their own lives.

Social (In)Equality

One of the key concepts of the communist ideology to be implemented by state socialism is the theory of equality and equal opportunities for all. Contrary to this rhetoric, most of the women's life narratives contained references to social stratification and inequality (privilege and discrimination). Also noteworthy was the fact that diverse regional origins made it possible for these women to view and understand disparities in Soviet citizens in different ways. Women from the east and south underscored inequality based upon social status and material wealth, and praised the communist system as a great leveler. Valeria from Kharkiv, who frequently emphasized equality as a hallmark of the communist system, recalled two incidents from her life as a child in order to highlight the earlier social stratification and discrimination:

> In the primary school, there was a female teacher who came from the nobility, and what a noble dame she was, how she disdained us poor children. There were times when I turned in a very good test, but Verochka, the daughter of a factory director, received the highest marks even though she didn't know a thing; she copied my work. I also had a friend, a weak student, who copied everything from me. … Her father was the chief of police; he owned a car and a large house. (UK1–04: 914–35)

Valeria's positioning of a noble school teacher, a factory director, and a chief of police into a single "wealthy" category revealed the extent to which she viewed prosperity as the key factor in the inequality and social injustice she had suffered in childhood. Despite the declared elimination of differences between rich and poor under state socialism, the theme of social stratification, to which she returned repeatedly, also figured prominently in the narrative of Agafia from Kharkiv: "She [mother] brought us all up, earning a living as a seamstress for wealthy families in their homes, where they fed her. She left early each morning and returned at night. We could see that this upset her. … Children from the wealthy families attended school with me; they were well dressed, especially the girls, and I could only envy them" (UK2–04: 24–25, 124–28).

Agafia equated affluence with high social status, an object of dreams and envy for her. It was clear that she perceived her own lack of wealth as something distressing even unfit for public discussion. Nevertheless, even though it could not be measured by prosperity, she did consider a success her life in the communist system: "Life went on. We were far from wealthy, but we lived well; we attended the cinema, the theater, vacationed in resorts, traveled and saw so much" (UK2–04: 545–46; 1869–71). Larissa echoed Agafia's sentiment: "I've got an education, I've got a profession, I had a job, I earned, and I could afford nice things for myself. True, I did not live in luxury, but I vacationed" (US1–04: 1512–16).

As far as other kinds of social discrimination are concerned, we also have here a clear indication of the ethnic prejudices represented by unequal relationships between the dominant and the colonized nations. A hierarchical scheme exemplified the imperialistic mindset of Valentina from Simferopil', a lifelong Russian language teacher. The cultural hierarchy model she constructed for herself relegated all nationalities in the USSR, apart from the Russian, to inferior status. Valentina repeatedly referred to the enlightening and civilizing mission of Russians toward the culturally backward non-Russians. At the end of the interview, in answer to the question, "What does Ukrainian independence signify for you?" She reiterated this conviction:

> Russia was the foremost country. It dispensed generous assistance in every sphere—financial, cultural, the spiritual growth of national republics. We were

> sent to Uzbekistan, to Georgia, to Armenia, to every place in need. I know this well. All kinds of data show that before the Bolshevik revolution, the Trans-Caucasian countries, all Central-Asian regions, and even Ukraine, not to mention Moldova and the others, were in fact illiterate societies; language was underdeveloped, scholarship progressed slowly. The Soviets did everything possible to raise their literacy rate. (US6–04: 1476–85)

Valentina incorporated Soviet propaganda-style clichés into her own biographical narration, and skewed information such as the degree of illiteracy and its geographical distribution in the Russian Empire, to conform to the dominant political discourse. Attesting to her ideological indoctrination was the fact that Russia and the Soviet Union were implicitly identified as being interchangeable.

Vira, a Ukrainian from the eastern city of Kharkiv who, with her husband, was sent to work in western Ukraine in 1939, expressed similar views, but she was more circumspect in her comments. She offered more justifications for the anti-Soviet attitudes in western Ukraine than her eastern Ukrainian counterparts were prepared to concede. To be sure, as an ethnic Ukrainian, she might not have felt altogether comfortable with her pro-Russian Soviet identity:

> The Central Committee of the Communist Party appointed my husband director of a school in the L'viv region. We tried so hard to treat the local population well. The regime provided rice, butter; and it sent children to pioneers' camps. What can I say? These poor people had suffered so much, under the Poles, the Austrians, the Hungarians, others. Now they trusted no one; all they wanted was independence, a free Ukraine. They didn't want [Soviets there]. … Well, they did suffer. I understand. They suffered in Polish bondage, in Hungarian bondage. (UK3–04: 390–418)

Consciously or not, all of the respondents reflected prejudice of one kind or another, as well as often contradictory or ambivalent reactions. Applying ethnically determined social stratification paradigms, Russians and Russophones presented themselves as culturally superior to the backward peoples residing on the peripheries of the empire. The empire had done its work well. One of Agafia's remarks makes the correlation between the Russian language, with its elite status, and social divisions, especially clear

> There was a woman, a Kazan Tatar and her husband, a Lezghin, with three adult children. Today Sara is a pediatrician, her daughter Marianna is a midwife, and son Akliper an oil industry engineer. This is the kind of thing that the Soviet regime made possible. Just imagine, children of such illiterates, with a poor command of the Russian language, trained as specialists! (UK2–04: 2245–47)

The prejudice against non-Russians is difficult to ignore here.

Language Divisions

Freedom of speech is also closely interwoven with the interviewees' native language. Language disparity is a particularly sensitive issue for Ukrainians. Supporters of the Soviet regime approved Russian as the universal language of international communication for the new Soviet "nation" [*sic*]. When the Soviet state collapsed, its adherents agonized over the loss of their radiant socialist utopia in which the Russian language had served as a unifier. Here is how Larissa and Valentina, both from Simferopil', described it:

> I was teaching various peoples: there were Tatars, Georgians, and Uzbeks in my class. … There never was a problem with ethnicity. We paid no attention to such things. So what is considered a problem today was not an issue then. As someone, Stalin I think, said: "There is a nation—the Soviet people." (US1–04: 1529–54)

> Teaching in a multinational environment was very stimulating. Russians, Azerbaijani, Jews, Armenians, Georgians, and others all studied there. I recall with much fondness those days of no discord, no references to Jews or Azerbaijani, or Armenians. We were like one extended family. … There were children of all nationalities, and one never heard a single reference to someone's ethnic background. The attitude toward the Russian language was marvelous; everybody aspired to learn it. (US6–04: 393–405, 432–37)

Naturally it came as no surprise to hear that "everybody aspired to learn Russian," in light of the fact that its privileged status opened so many doors to resources and careers. Its alleged benefits notwithstanding, western Ukrainians resisted this kind of national and linguistic homogenization to a far greater extent than their counterparts in other parts of Ukraine. To the former, it signified the destruction of a well-developed and cherished ethnic identity, of which language is the core. For those who embraced the Soviet existence, together with all that it exemplified, it represented the halcyon childhood days of national harmony, a return to a happier time when every ethnic group purportedly was respected as an equal.

Independence finally eradicated the two forces that western Ukrainian women hated most—a totalitarian political system and its official language. Two of these women, Nadiia and Mykhailyna, were adamant in their response to the question, "What does Ukrainian independence signify in your life?" Here again we have a clear indication of the differing sentiments that women in separate regions of the former Soviet Union expressed:

> What does it signify? At last one can draw a free breath, live in [what had once again become] our own country, on our own land. Our parents promised that one day Ukraine would be free, independent. … And now it has become easier to breathe. Pensions are meager, but we live in our own free Ukraine. We walk freely, breathe freely, feel like human beings. (UL2–04: 1394–1400)

> God grant that we preserve this independence. Let there be just bread and water, as long as we can speak freely and worship without fear; that is all we need. (UL4–05: 1612–14).

By way of contrast, the Russophones in the east and south (ethnic Russians or Russified Ukrainians) expressed their unconditional support of Russian as a universal language and prestigious vehicle for international communication. They saw no problem in its superior stature, insofar as it had never imposed limitations or created any inconveniences for them personally. Scholars in different contexts have made similar observations when they examined the connection between national borders and mental boundaries elsewhere. Children who grow up in the heart of large and powerful states and societies tend to feel no restrictions (Davis 2002: 329–44.) It is as if they reside at the center of the universe. But when circumstances change, and, as in this case, the dominant power becomes a national minority in the breakaway non-Russian states, their perception of the language situation changes radically. Russophones now exhibited extreme anxiety over the loss of the once-favored status of the Russian tongue. Although Ukraine issued formal guarantees of unfettered development for the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities in the country (and this included Russian), legal equality does not necessarily translate into prestige, or the absence of discrimination in practice. Russophones fear being forced to speak the official language of the Ukrainian state, although non-Russians were forced to speak Russian in the former Soviet state. Agafia expressed her concerns by referring to her unpleasant experience in the 1960s:[13]

> I learned the Azerbaijani language with pleasure—but not Ukrainian. When we came to Kharkov after a long journey, we needed to learn so many languages that our children rebelled. At the time, children of military men were legally exempt from learning Ukrainian. But in Kharkov my son was humiliated in front of his entire class when he was told that those who consume Ukrainian bread must learn the Ukrainian language. I don't believe in such coercion. (UK2–04: 2282–95)

The same Russophones also equated the Russian language with the powerful Soviet state. Women from the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine now consider independence as something destructive of their national integrity. This notion also has triggered the kind of hostility that Natalia from Crimea displayed toward the very notion of Ukrainian sovereignty, and it helps to explain why she and Agafia were so nostalgic about their lost international paradise:

> Ukraine is no sovereign country; it lacks genuine economic and political independence. This ill-considered independence affects us all. Our union with Russia is gone. As Soviets, we were not all Russians, of course. For instance, I am half Ukrainian because my father was Ukrainian, but I identify myself as Russian, and for me this represents the loss of my roots. All my life, we lived as citizens of one

> state, but today we find ourselves on opposite sides of the divide. I think this was a very stupid development, and I would welcome a reunion if it should happen. Slavic nations must cling to each other. (US3–04: 884–94)

Yet the policy of forging a melting pot, in which no one was concerned with a separate ethnicity, was not successfully internalized by all respondents. The very fact that the women referred so frequently to the ethnicity of non-Russians (relatives, neighbors, classmates, colleague, and others) testified to their acute awareness of ethnic differences, all affirmations of unity to the contrary:

> I recall our Crimean class. Its composition was international: Russians, a few Ukrainians, many Jews, two Armenian boys, a Greek girl, and two Tatars. Classmates were very friendly, and there were no negative allusions to ethnicity, never. We all saw ourselves as equals, and nobody cared about ethnicity. (US3–04: 786–95).

> I was educated in the spirit of internationalism, so this was not an issue for me. This is what we were taught. (US3–04: 864–68)

> Our apartment house was international: Crimean Tatars, Lezgins, Kazan Tatars, and Azerbaijanis. There were some Russians, but basically it was a unified family, a unified family. (UK2–04: 124–26, 180–85)

This contradiction between proclaimed principles and reality is perhaps the most salient feature of the Soviet era. The similarity of the respondents' wording (in the biographical narrations and answers to direct questions) serves as additional evidence of their deep ideological indoctrination by Soviet propaganda.

Conclusion

To summarize, this study of the notion of patriotism can serve as an analytically valuable tool. Loyalty can mean a special kind of political allegiance that assumes a strong commitment to one's native land. Unlike other political loyalties, however, patriotic loyalty is normally not a question of a person's conscious choice. Various agents of socialization cultivate it.

Patriotism is all bound up with a fairly well-articulated portrayal of the beloved country, with all of its valuable features. Patriotic loyalty requires certain beliefs about its object, without necessarily being premised upon an independent judgment that such beliefs are true. As a result, Simon Keller claims, the patriot tends to make uncritical judgments about the qualities of his/her own country. That is patriotic bad faith, which is likely to play a central role in the patriot's construal of the world and the person's own moral obligations

(2007: 91–92). And it is very likely that a patriot's bad faith will have the effect of distorting thinking about other serious matters (2007: 53). The rigidity of one's political beliefs, and the distorting effect of political loyalty over one's own perception and over the evaluation of new data, is paralleled in a separate study (Przybyszewski 2004: 47–67).

This distorting quality of political loyalty (represented as Soviet patriotism) is visible in the women's attempts to deny, lessen, or justify the avowed failings of the Soviet regime. In the face of proven facts and data, they still prefer to keep their fidelity pure. Those sincerely loyal to contemporary Ukraine express their total and unconditional devotion to the independent Ukrainian nation-state, including all of its institutions, policies, and so on. And again, even an awareness of the serious shortcomings of the current politics (including corruption, economic instability, political quarrels, tensions between regions, unsolved ethnic problems, etc.) does not prevent them from explaining away these vices as temporary privations of transition and expressing their Ukrainian patriotism. Although their statements of loyalty do not rise to the level of a pro-Soviet-style pledge, the western Ukrainian women were bursting with enthusiasm and declared their readiness to bear any adversity for the sake of their long hoped-for and recently (re)gained country as an independent state.

Each interviewee recalled a specific past with longing. Western Ukrainians longed for their pre-Soviet way of life, only without Polish oppression. Women from the other two regions recalled with longing their Soviet reality. "Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement" explains Svetlana Boym (2001: xiii). "At first glance it represents a longing for place, but in fact it is a yearning for a different time—childhood—the nostalgic desire to turn history into a private and collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to that irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition" (xv). The geography in women's memories is politically charged; it also has its temporal dimension. Thus it is impossible to overlook the east-west dichotomy that permeated the perceptions of women from opposite sides of the divide—L'viv and Kharkiv—as the best and most extreme examples in this particular study. On the women's mental maps, the regions are not only separated by geography; they belong to two different eras, and each is seen as the Other—alien and hostile.

Attitudes toward the Soviet regime versus an independent Ukrainian state, on the part of women from the three discrete regions in this study, reflected more than their territorial affiliations. They were each products of the discrete communities in which respondents were born and raised. The women's respective historical experiences shaped the constructs of the past in their narratives. Women from western Ukraine were born under a nontotalitarian social order (although they did know a measure of ethnic discrimination), and their early

socialization was not impacted by communist propaganda. Before the Soviets arrived in the 1940s, their families were not subjected to the terrible Stalinist repressive machinery. Even if life for Ukrainians in Halychyna (Galicia, or western Ukraine) during the interwar period was anything but unproblematic, they had dodged all of the atrocities of Stalinist-style communist construction. They remembered their pre-Soviet lives, and developed a critical attitude towards Soviet-era discriminations. During the entire phase of their incorporation into the Soviet Union, they lived in a kind of spiritual exile. Not unexpectedly, they regarded the collapse of the USSR as a restoration of historical justice, and their own liberation a true return to their once-lost homeland.

The women's longing for a Soviet-free existence was tantamount to the nostalgia for the Soviet era on the opposite geographical and ideological divide, on the part of those who never knew a regime apart from the Soviet, any ideological order other than communism. Some of them admitted that had their socialization begun under other circumstances (as it did for the western Ukrainians), they might have evaluated socialism in more rational terms (UK3–04: 1325–28). Under the circumstances, however, how else could they perceive the collapse of this empire than as both a collective and a personal defeat? The disintegration of the USSR meant the crumbling of an entire value system in which they had placed their trust, their faith, their being. They had lost their homeland—the USSR—and thereafter were destined to feel like refugees in an independent Ukraine, a country that they were never able to love.

Loyalties to the two different political systems are indissoluble from the two state formations—the USSR and independent Ukraine—which represent for the women two incompatible objects of patriotic sentiments. Some comprehension of the origins of their respective attitudes toward both Russia and independent Ukraine would go a long way toward eliminating their respective prejudices, perhaps even lead to a mutual understanding and reconciliation of the past and, even more important, of the future.

Notes

1. In the history of Ukraine, women's studies became an actual field of research only in the 1990s. For a detailed overview of recent developments of women's and gender history in Ukraine, see Oksana Kis' 2010, and 2004: 291–302.
2. The project was conducted at the Institute of Ethnology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and was supported by a research grant from the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta.
3. For more information about this cross-national venture, its goals, methodology, chronology, etc. see http://www.womensmemory.net.
4. Gluck 1977: 3–13; Sangster 1994: 5–28; Gluck and Patai 1991. For a further discussion on gender differences in historical memory see Leydesdorff 1996.

5. Eight interviews in L'viv, ten in Kharkiv, and ten in Simferopil' were recorded by the end of 2005.
6. The external questions were: (1) What does the Soviet regime mean in your life? (2) What do you think about people of various ethnicities living next to you? (3) Identify the historical events which have had the most influence on your life. (4) What is the significance of Ukrainian independence in your life? (5) What was most helpful for overcoming hardships in your life?
7. The policy of anonymity precludes the inclusion of interviewees' personal data (including names, date and place of birth, current address, etc.). Each interview was assigned a special code: the first letter U means the country, the second (L, K, or S) indicates the city where the interview was recorded, the subsequent digits identify the interview's number; the numbers after a dash refer to the year of recording, and the figures after the colon refer to the number of lines excerpted from the transcript.
8. In 1932–33 between 4.5 and 8.1 million Ukrainians died as a result of the famine engineered by Stalin; the year 1937 is known for mass political repressions throughout the USSR.
9. For a detailed analysis of this issue, see: Kis' 2009: 337–52.
10. Komsomol—abbreviation for *Komunisticheskyi Soiuz Molodezhi* (Communist Union of Youth), the youth subdivision of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
11. *Banderivka*, *banderivtsi* are followers of Stephan Bandera (1909–1959), leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, and a key figure in Ukraine's national liberation movement of 1930–1950. He was murdered by a KGB agent in Munich. *Zapadenka*, *zapadentsi* are people from western Ukraine. These designations are associated with the nationalist struggle against the Soviet regime, together with its Russification policy, and generally carry negative connotations. Also known as *Petliurivtsi*—followers of Semen Petliura (1877–1926)—Ukrainian politician, statesman, and one of the commanders in the "Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic," which opposed the Bolshevik regime between 1918 and 1920.
12. Kahneman and Tversky 1981: 4553–58; Hutton 2001.
13. It was during "Khrushchev's thaw" and Shelests's Ukrainianization agenda in the late 1960s.

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