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“Nationalization” of the Past and the Problem of the Social Relevance of History in Contemporary Ukraine¹

As various observers have noted, history has played and continues to play an important role in the political life of independent Ukraine.² In a related development, the questions of the creation of a new narrative of Ukrainian history and the place of history in public life have taken on a new importance among Ukrainian historians, becoming the subject of a rather unprecedented discussion among intellectuals about concepts and methods, a discussion which has continued for almost twenty years.

An adequate understanding of the purport and effects of this discussion requires, first of all, the search for an appropriate analytical language with which to describe it. Initially, this language was borrowed from the discipline of nationalism studies. In the second half of the 1990s, Georgy Kasianov proposed to distinguish between adherents of the traditional patriotic version of Ukrainian history (dubbed primordialists), who wrote what he called “nationalized” history, and their opponents the modernists, who supported a modernized version of national history that would include new approaches ranging from multinational to transnational history.³ The various interpretations of the term “nation” as well as the specifics of

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² See: Andrej Portnov, *Upraznennia s istoriej po-ukrainski*, Moskva, 2010.

³ G. Kasianov, *Teorii natsii i natsionalizmu*, Kyiv: Lybid', 1999; G. Kasianov, “Nationalized” History: Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Future..., [in:] G. Kasianov and P. Ther (eds.), *A Laboratory of Transnational History. Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009; G. Kasianov, “Natsionalizatsia istorii.

nation-building in Ukraine were at the heart of this distinction. Kasianov's classification emphasized an important aspect of the discussion and achieved deserved popularity among specialists in Ukrainian history. Tomasz Stryjek's thorough monograph has added new details to our understanding of the political and ideological context of these debates, demonstrating the impact of historians' current political orientations on their research.⁴

In this article I would like to turn our attention to another important dimension of the debate; that is, to the views of its participants on the problem of the social relevance of history. There exists no study devoted to this problem in Ukrainian historiography, and the few scholars who touched on some aspects of the topic used the language of the participants themselves to describe it, which negatively affected their conceptual frameworks. My point here is that the study of this question will contribute to a better understanding of the Ukrainian discussion on the interpretation of national history and the impasse in which it appears to have found itself—and will perhaps help find a way out. At the same time, a study of this sort would propose new answers to the problem of the relationship between the roles of historian and public intellectual, which has been actively discussed in Ukraine since 1991.

Such a reconceptualization is possible only if one broadens the context in which one analyzes Ukrainian debates on the interpretation of national history and the role of history in public life. In my opinion, the best way to do so in this situation is to consider the Ukrainian case not only in the context of theoretical changes in nationalism studies, but also in the context of a discussion in postwar Western historiography about “the use and abuse of history” as well as the social relevance of history writing.

This article is not intended to be a thorough analysis of Ukrainian and Western debates on these topics. Its goal is, on the one hand, to signal the problem of the absence of an agreed-upon positive understanding of history's role in public life in today's Ukrainian historiography; and on the other hand, to show how propositions from Anglo-American theory of history may help to describe and conceptualize Ukrainian attempts to answer this question.

From the end of the 1980s through the first half of the 1990s, Ukrainian historiography developed within the framework of a return to “truthful, unfalsified history” and as an effort to fill in the “blank spots.” These years saw the beginning of the “nationalization of history,” which consisted of “the

Normatyvna istoriohrafia, kanon ta jihni supernyky,” [in:] L. Zashkil'niak, ed., *Ukrainska istoriohrafia na zlami XX i XXI stolit'*. Lviv: LNU im. I. Franka, 2004.

⁴T. Stryjek, *Jakiej przeszłości potrzebuje przyszłość? Interpretacje dziejów narodowych w historiografii i debacie publicznej na Ukrainie, 1991–2004*, Rytm, Warszawa 2007.

separation of ‘one’s own’ history from an earlier common history and its construction as a history of a nation.”⁵ This nationalization presupposed the creation of a new master narrative of Ukrainian history, which was in fact a modified version of the master narrative created by Mykhailo Hrushevsky at the beginning of the 20th century. This narrative found its place first of all in synthetic works, such as university and secondary school textbooks, but also had an impact on the interpretation of certain events in academic research. The traditional or canonical version of this master narrative sees Ukrainian history as a history of the origin and development of the Ukrainian nation, explains the nation’s differentiation from its neighbors, and emphasizes the continuity of the nation’s history over the course of more than 1,000 years. This continuity came at the cost of methodological shortcomings, including teleology, essentialism, presentism, and ethnocentrism.

The main practical goals of this kind of history writing were the initial historical legitimation of the newly emergent state and the patriotic education of its citizens. It is worth mentioning that these aims were mostly implicit rather than explicitly stated. In spite of the heterogeneity of “nationalized” history in terms of academic quality, methodologies, and self-reflexivity of the authors, the common aim of this history writing was to show that the modern Ukrainian nation had a continuous common past that could become the basis for modern national identity. The famous non-conformist historian Yaroslav Dashkevych, one of the most consistent promoters of this idea in the 1990s, formulated it as follows:

...In spite of all this, I believe that the true history of Ukraine, the history of the struggle of the Ukrainian nation against occupiers and collaborators of all hues, for the construction of a truly independent Ukrainian state, will be written and will become the reference book for every honest politician, every honest statesman, every Ukrainian.⁶

In 1996 Vitaliy Sarbey, a representative of the old Soviet academic establishment, formulated his vision in the same vein as did the Soviet dissident Dashkevych:

We think the core of the political history of the Ukrainian people is its struggle for liberation, for its survival as ethnos, nation, and for the civil rights of every Ukrainian.⁷

⁵ G. Kasianov, “Nationalized” History, p. 7.

⁶ I. Dashkevych, „Pravdyva istoria Ukrainy bude napysana” (1999), [in:] I. Dashkevych. “...Uczy neloznymy ustamy skazaty pravdu”. *Istoryczna publitsystyka (1999–2008)*, Kyiv, 2011, p. 296.

⁷ V. Sarbey, “Rozdumy z pryvodu fundamental’noi “Istorii Ukrainy,” “Kyivska starovyna,” 1995, no. 2, p. 9.

A conceptual critique of this type of history writing appeared almost at the same time. One of its most interesting examples is the programmatic article “One Clio, Two Histories” by Natalia Yakovenko, one of the most authoritative figures within contemporary Ukrainian historiography.⁸ In this text Yakovenko builds her argument on the contraposition of science and “truths dear to one’s heart,” in other words, of academic history and the nation’s cultural memory. While revealing the numerous methodological and interpretative shortcomings of patriotic, “nationalized” history in independent Ukraine, however, Yakovenko acknowledges the importance of this type of history writing for the confirmation of social (national) identity. Thus she doesn’t condemn “nationalized” history completely, but highlights “the urgent necessity of ‘differentiation between the genres’ of didactic history (i.e. textbooks and popular history books) and research literature.”⁹ For Yakovenko, the task of patriotic and civil education, counterbalanced by an emphasis on tolerance and multiculturalism, has to be the mission of didactic (secondary school) history. As for professional historians, the author proposes they “take off the uniform of the fighting propagandists and relegate the kettledrums, trumpets, and other instruments for the glorification of the Fatherland to the museum of the history of science.”¹⁰ Thus the task of academic history is the unprejudiced and critical research into the past based on the methodological approaches and theoretical principles common to modern history writing worldwide. In this interpretation, academic history writing doesn’t seek to perform any social function; its only practical role, in fact, is to deconstruct historical myths and stereotypes that function in public space.

Due to the essential and rhetorical persuasiveness of these arguments, as well as the considerable personal authority of their author, this interpretation gained broad support, at least among western-oriented Ukrainian historians who adhere to modernist views of different kinds. This position was pushed to its logical conclusion by another well-known Kyiv historian, one of the most consistent critics of “nationalized” history in independent Ukraine, Georgiy Kasianov.

In this connection, the most important is his most recent (2010) book *Danse Macabre: The Famine of 1932–1933 in Politics, Mass Consciousness, and History Writing (1980s–early 2000s)*, which is an innovative study dealing with how the vision of the 1932–1933 Famine as a Holodomor (murder by hunger) was formed. While deconstructing stereotypes about the Famine,

⁸ N. Yakovenko, “Oдна Кліо, дві історії,” “Крытыка,” 2002, no. 12, pp. 12-14.

⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., s. 14.

which he argues have become part of Ukrainian historical myth, the author scrutinizes the role of professional historians in this process and stresses that the subordination of research to political suitability and state interests ultimately leads to a situation in which “the historian disappears and is replaced by the popularizer and the propagandist who *has the obligation* to fulfill a certain social mission, who must *prove* and *convey, interpret* and *persuade*”¹¹ [italics in original—V.S.]. Kasianov’s analysis of the role of historians in myth-making about the Famine shows that this is an exemplary case of the interaction between history and politics in which historians go beyond the boundaries of their profession and try to influence political and social life. This allows him to conclude that “in this interaction power *always* wins—power as an institution as well as a discourse—if the historian surrenders his inviolable right to intellectual sovereignty” [italics added—V.S.].¹² This radical statement, which ultimately constitutes one of the basic theoretical arguments of Kasianov’s study, is related to his declaration at the beginning of the book:

...the speculations, reflections, conclusions, and generalizations are meant exclusively for academic discussion... I am not a member of any political party or movement, I don’t fulfill any political or ideological orders, and I don’t consider the judgments, conclusions and generalizations in this book suitable for use in historical politics, civic education, or propaganda [italics added—V.S.].¹³

Kasianov understands that a defense of this radical position requires not only a serious empirical base, but also an effective theoretical legitimation. In *Danse Macabre* he applies the concept of the well-known American theoretician of history Allan Megill,¹⁴ who in fact follows a reductionistic approach to understanding the social relevance of historical studies. Megill identifies three basic types of history writing: affirmative, which attempts to form the basis for contemporary identities and the social order; didactic, which offers concrete recommendations for the present and the future; and critical, which is oriented primarily at a critical rethinking of the past and tradition. Among these Megill prefers the last type (though with some reservations). Megill’s reductive approach to the social relevance of history is expressed in the following thesis, which eloquently echoes Kasianov’s

¹¹ G. Kasianov, *Danse macabre. Holod 1932–1933 rokiv u politytsi, masovij svidomosti ta istoriografii (1980-ti–pocztok 2000-h)*. Kyiv, 2010, p. 188.

¹² Ibid., p. 189.

¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴ In this case I have in mind the book by Megill *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

statements above: “A critical historiography does not prescribe for the present. It only shows what is different and surprising—astounding, even—in the past.”¹⁵

As we have seen, the opponents of “nationalized history” reject the ambitions of academic history to perform an affirmative function for contemporary society. But they do not propose any other practical function, apart from the deconstruction of myths and stereotypes, that could be performed by history writing. Naturally, for the majority of historians, trained in an understanding of history as “magistra vitae,” this negative (deconstructive) understanding of the practical role of their discipline in contemporary society seems unsatisfactory. Ukrainian historians, accustomed to combining historical research with the roles of either national awakeners or fighters on the ideological front, are inclined to see history writing as performing an important positive role within society; they mostly fail, however, to reformulate this role adequately for the world of the 21st century. For example, Yaroslav Isaievych admits in an interview with the “Day” newspaper: “I’d like history to fulfill some higher social mission... .”¹⁶ His subsequent comments make clear that what he had in mind was primarily history’s role in the formation of national consciousness, with the caveat that historians should not distort historical facts in the name of this high mission. In a speech delivered to a conference titled “Historical Science on the Eve of the 21st Century,” another well-known historian, Valeriy Smoliy, while reflecting on the social significance of history, highlighted the risk of a new mythologization of the past and noted: “I am far from idea that historical science can be depoliticized and deideologized completely. That is a utopia. But historical research ought to be out in front of politics and help politicians in solving complicated problems of state. This is how I see the intersection of historical science and politics.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, Smoliy did not identify the mechanisms of these interactions.

One could cite numerous similar examples about the ambitions of Ukrainian historians for their discipline to have a “high social mission.” This desire has forced several representatives of the historical community to try the role of public intellectual and to comment on current social and political problems. Indeed, this new role for Ukrainian historians implies its own hidden hazards and dilemmas, which were, in my opinion, brilliantly

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁶ Y. Isaievych, “Piznajte pravdu i pravda vas vriatue”—interv’iu z Irynoiu Ehorovoiu, “Den”. 10 bereznia 2006 roku.

¹⁷ V. Smoliy, “Vstupne slovo” do uczasnykiv vseukrainskoi konferentsii istorykiv u Kharkovi, “Kharkivskij istoriohraficznyj zbirnyk.” Kharkiv, 1997, vol. 2, p. 12.

analyzed by Yaroslav Hrytsak in his article “Playing with Poker: In a Serious and Ukrainian Way” (2003). In this text Hrytsak shows that the structural incompleteness of Ukrainian culture reveals itself in the lack of qualified specialists in certain fields of study, as well as the absence of other important research specializations altogether. This situation

...forces Ukrainian intellectuals to be “Jacks of all trades,” that is to go beyond the boundaries of their specializations and to intervene into neighboring ones in order to simulate the structural completeness of Ukrainian culture. ...Ukrainian intellectuals often are specialists in nothing or just cease to be specialists in anything. Yet they attempt to offer thoughts on everything: today about Derrida, tomorrow about recent sociological polls, on the day after tomorrow about the possibility of European integration... It’s no secret that this universality is gained at the expense of quality.¹⁸

Here Hrytsak has formulated the problem quite clearly. And, at the same time, he has explained why the majority of professional historians are critical of their colleagues acting as public intellectuals, and consider texts written in that vein to be publicistic texts written to chase fashion and social relevance, ultimately denying their right to be called real research articles.

In this article, Hrytsak does not go beyond formulating the problem in this way: “Ukrainian intellectuals neglect their essential role—to articulate new situation in accordance with changing circumstances of society.”¹⁹ He states that the mere deconstruction of traditional biases and myths in this case is not enough, because “deconstruction without construction borders on irresponsibility.”²⁰ In that part of the text where Hrytsak formulate his positive program, his arguments are rather blurred, and ultimately he leaves unclear how Ukrainian historians, while retaining their professional integrity, could help society respond to current challenges, or whether it is even theoretically possible.

At this point, I suppose, it is clear that it is hardly possible to answer this question solely within the context of Ukrainian history writing. Happily, the Ukrainian situation, whatever its specific features, is not unique, and we can better understand it by putting it in the context of discussions in postwar Western historiography and theory of history. The problem of the practical use of history in contemporary society has been examined by the first ancient Greek historians and has remained relevant in different forms at every stage

¹⁸ Y. Hrytsak, *Ihry z koczerhoiu: vserioz i po-ukrainsky*, [in:] Y. Hrytsak, *Strasti za natsionalizmom. Stara istoria na novyj lad*, Kyiv, 2011, p. 142.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

of the development of historical studies. Indeed, in the second half of the 20th century and early in the 21st, several interesting propositions on the public role of historians appeared, and some of them are applicable to the Ukrainian situation.

As mentioned above, I don't plan to analyze the course of these discussions in this paper; I would merely like to show several of the most interesting suggestions that resulted from them. And the first step in making this context accessible is to define the terminology. If we look closer at the propositions noted above on the classification of history writing from the point of view of the social role of history, we see that more or less all of them have a reductive character in the sense that they reduce its role either to supporting certain identity projects or pursuing some immediate political ends.

Creating a clear dichotomy between academic and didactic (secondary school) history, prioritizing *history for its own sake*, and assigning all practical tasks to didactic history, seems to simplify the situation. While in the article "One Cleo, Two Histories" Yakovenko highlights the role of didactic history in the formation of national identity, with caveats for the importance of tolerance and multiculturalism, as head of the working group for the monitoring of textbooks on the history of Ukraine, she primarily focused on the role of history in civic education.²¹ In this case, history, along with the humanities in general, is praised primarily as a cultural resource that teaches critical thinking, empathy with the Other, and the ability to go beyond local loyalties, which are crucial for the education of citizens in a democratic state.²² It seems Yakovenko, in declaring a dichotomy between academic and didactic history, overstates the differences between them. Isn't academic writing a cultural resource for people outside the academic community? Obviously, in the case of secondary school history, these functions are more instrumental, but to deny the role of academic history as a cultural resource is inappropriate.

Megill's classification at first glance seems to be more adequate, but it also presents certain problems. The type of history writing he describes as "affirmative history," is also known as "identity history" in the English

²¹ See in particular the speech by Yakovenko delivered at the Working meeting on monitoring of the secondary school textbooks on the 19–21 of October, 2007: N. Yakovenko, ed., *Shkil'na istoria oczyrna istoriykiv-naukovtsiv. Materialy roboczoi narady z monitorynhushkil'nykh pidruchnykiv z istorii Ukrainy*, Kyiv, 2008 (<http://khpg.org.ua/index.php?id=1223646074>).

²² Penetrating analysis of the role of history and humanities in general as cultural resource of this kind is proposed by Marta Nussbaum in her important monograph that mostly went unnoticed in Ukraine: M. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton and Oxford, 2010.

language literature . Ukrainian authors often associate this type of writing with national history, but in principle it can be written about any social group, and in Western historiography of the second half of the 20th century it was used to write the history of women, sexual minorities, African-Americans in the United States, and other previously marginalized social groups, enabling them to find their place in national master-narratives. It is hard not to agree with Megill and Kasianov, who argue that historians working in this genre fulfill an affirmative function for the groups they study because they strengthen their identities and provide them with a certain historical genealogy. But the following statement by Megill seems too radical: “Affirmative historiography subordinates the past to the projects that human beings are engaged in now. It lacks a critical stance on the memories it collects and on the tradition it supports.”²³ In my opinion, this type of history can also have an important critical dimension, since it helps members of a certain group answer the question “who are we,” which does not necessarily confirm an existing identity or tradition, but could also provide a reformulation of it. This critical-affirmative understanding of the role of national history was at the center of Hrytsak’s call to his colleagues in an article from 2000, in which he stated that their most important task in the Ukrainian case should be the redefinition of the old national identity and the creation of a new, more inclusive one.²⁴

However, should the practical role of history in relation to contemporary society be limited to the function of a cultural resource or the support/reformulation of collective identity? And is didactic history, as described by Megill, able to propose any alternative? The American theoretician of historiography defines didactic history as seeking to “offer lessons from the past for the edification of the present,” and he suggests:

...the difficulty with the notion of the didactic function for history is that historians *qua* historians do not appear to have the authority to prescribe for the present and the future. Their expertise has to do with the construction and reconstruction of the past. Insofar as they do this work well, they are remarkably well equipped to criticize politicians, and citizens generally, who misrepresent the past in an attempt to support such and such a line of legislation or policy.²⁵ [*Italics in original*].

The main tasks of critical history, which in Megill’s view is the most adequate form of academic history, include the construction and

²³ Megill, *Historical Knowledge*, p. 22.

²⁴ Y. Hrytsak, *Iak vykladaty istoriu Ukrainy pislia 1991 roku?*, [in:] Y. Hrytsak, *Strasti za natsionalizmom*, p. 28.

²⁵ A. Megill, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

reconstruction of the past, as well as the deconstruction of contemporary historical myths and invented traditions. He defines the practical role of critical history as follows: “critical historiography does not prescribe for the present. It only shows what is different and surprising—astounding, even—in the past.... it causes people to see how the horizon of the present is not the horizon of all that is.”²⁶

On the one hand, it is hard not to agree with these ideas. They have their own logic and are suitable for many areas of historical studies, especially for ancient, medieval, and early modern history. On the other hand, if one takes history writing in general and pays attention to the practical importance of history, Megill’s approach is obviously reductive.

In its place, we can find examples of non-reductive approaches to this problem in recent Anglo-American theory of history. The most interesting and productive examples in this case are the concepts of “the practical past” by Hayden White,²⁷ “thinking with history” by American cultural historian Carl E. Schorske²⁸ and “critical applied history” by British theoretician of history John Tosh.²⁹ The latter, more deliberate approach will be considered in more detail.

John Tosh contends that history has and can perform an important positive function in contemporary society, and historians *as such* can help the citizens of their countries meet the challenges they face. In Tosh’s view, identity history and history-as-cultural-resource, as well as history-as-heritage (particularly prominent in contemporary Britain), are in this case helpful, but not sufficient. At the same time, the idea of “critical applied history” does not foresee a practical program for all subfields of historical studies nor does it reject the fundamental principles of the historian’s craft. The historian working with this methodology does not transform him/herself into a political commentator or a journalist, but indeed remains a historian.

The important thing here is a rethinking of the very idea of ‘practical’ or ‘applied’ history and the tasks it sets for itself. Traditionally, ‘applied’ history has been understood as seeking to give concrete advice to contemporary society or pursuing current political projects or initiatives. Recently, scholars have introduced a new term that describes this utilization of the past—the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁷ H. White, *The Practical Past*, “Historein. A Review of the Past and Other Stories,” 2010, vol.10, pp. 10-19.

²⁸ C.E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explanations in the Passage to Modernism*, Princeton 1998.

²⁹ J. Tosh, *Why History Matters*, Palgrave 2008.

politics of history’ or ‘historical policy.’ Naturally, professional historians evaluate these practices rather negatively, as they can lead towards what is called “abuse of history.” However, does the fact that history has been abused in the past and will doubtless continue being abused in the future mean that we have to reject the idea of ‘applied history’ entirely?

Tosh answers negatively and states that first of all it is necessary to reconsider our understanding of the practical importance of history for contemporary society. The concept of ‘critical applied history’ allows for the historian to choose acute problems of contemporary society for study,³⁰ but this study should make use of the basic principles and methods of the historian’s craft.³¹ Many of the problems and challenges faced by states and societies have important historical and comparative dimensions, many of which are often unknown to politicians and ordinary citizens. They in turn see the problems from a very narrow perspective and often do not make appropriate decisions. From this point of view, the historian’s task is primarily to understand the significance of the results of their research, and the results of research in related humanities and social sciences, for an understanding of urgent social and political questions.³² But the historian does not propose ready-made answers or prescriptions about how to solve certain problems. The historian’s task is first and foremost to expand the horizon and to show another (and possibly more productive) way of discussing the problem. As formulated by Tosh himself:

Most significant in critical public history [used interchangeably by Tosh with critical applied history—V.S.] is the sense of intellectual tension that is transmitted. The more that this history appeals to non-professional audiences, the more obvious it becomes that the significance of this history lies in posing new questions rather than solving them, in the demonstration of new options rather than insisting on answers.³³

It is extremely important to note that Tosh’s concept of ‘critical applied history’ is not merely an abstract idea. It is, in fact, an attempt to describe and conceptualize existing historical works. John Tosh cites several interesting case studies primarily from modern British historiography as examples of

³⁰ It is important to admit here that it is not necessarily going about the problems of history and memory, but first of all about the politics in wider sense. About the wider understanding of politics see: V. Sklokin, *Svoboda vid slova: mirkuvannia pro suchasnyj stan ukrainskoi publicznoi dumky* (<http://historians.in.ua/index.php/avtorska-kolonka/87-volodymyr-sklokin-svoboda-vid-slova-mirkuvannia-pro-suchasnyi-stan-ukrainskoi-publichnoi-dumky>)

³¹ J. Tosh, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

works written in this vein. In this article, which deals with the Ukrainian case, I will illustrate my thesis with examples from Ukrainian historical studies. Several recent case studies have appeared in Ukraine that could be classified as ‘public history.’ Here one can mention Andriy Portnov and Vasyl Rasevych as researchers working in this direction. However, in the space remaining, I’d like to look closer at several texts by Yaroslav Hrytsak, which I regard as the most notable and convincing example of ‘critical applied history’ in Ukrainian historiography.

In discussing Hrytsak, it should be noted that his views on the history of Ukraine and the problem of the social relevance of history writing have changed considerably over the last twenty years.³⁴ In the 1990s, Hrytsak was a ‘modernist,’ convinced that the formation of the Ukrainian political nation is *the* central theme of modern Ukrainian history, and one of the most important tasks for the historian is to reformulate the archaic national identity and create a new, more inclusive one. These views were best expressed in his *History of Ukraine* (1996) and the aforementioned article “How Should the History of Ukraine be Taught After 1991?” (2000). In these works, the Lviv-based historian was a proponent of history-as-identity in its critical-affirmative version. After he participated in a collaborative sociological study of identities in Lviv and Donetsk, his views began to change. This became apparent at the beginning of the 2000s, as manifested in several articles published after the Orange Revolution in the essay collections *Life, Death, and other Troubles* (2008) and *Passions around Nationalism: An Old Story for a New Situation* (2011).

In attempting to understand the reasons for the failures of political, social, and economic transformations in independent Ukraine, Hrytsak concludes that the traditional approach of explaining Ukrainian problems by means of the varying national identities in different regions doesn’t work, because the majority of the population in southern and eastern Ukraine doesn’t think in national categories. In his view, the critical concept for understanding the specificities of the Ukrainian situation is not identities but rather values.³⁵ On the basis of existing sociological surveys on values in Ukraine and other countries, Hrytsak shows that both western and eastern Ukraine are dominated by the values of a closed society. This fact constitutes one of the obstacles to a successful transformation. The author then uses the classic historian’s toolkit to explain how the specific historical

³⁴ See interesting self-reflection by Hrytsak on this evolution: *Ukraina. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej. Z Jarosławem Hrycakiem rozmawia Iza Chruślińska*. Gdańsk — Warszawa, 2009, pp. 64-69.

³⁵ Y. Hrytsak, *Khto taki ukraintsi i czoho vony хочut’?*, [in:] Y. Hrytsak, *Strasti za natsionalizmom*, pp. 321-340.

development of Ukraine led to this situation, and at the same time, assesses the opportunities for change in Ukraine that his analysis reveals.³⁶

One more example of this kind of historical study is Hrytsak's article "What Remains After the Orange Revolution?"³⁷ (2010) in which he attempts to tally up the achievements and failures of the Orange Revolution after Viktor Yanukovych's return to power in 2010. The Lviv historian believes that the most adequate way of answering this question is to go beyond the boundaries of current political quarrels and to view this problem in the historical perspective of the European revolutions of 1968 and 1989. From this point of view, the Orange Revolution is "one of the color revolutions, which have taken place in countries that experienced neither 1968 nor 1989, and thus it can be seen as a belated attempt to repeat and continue them,"³⁸ and thus the Orange Revolution ought to be understood in the context of the struggle for the values of liberal democracy and the free market, and the legacy of 2004 should be seen from this perspective.

As in the first case, Hrytsak in this paper does not give any concrete prescriptions, but broadens and contextualizes the discussion of the problem by adding historical perspective, which allows us to see new and previously neglected options and thus to make a better choice. Another aspect of these texts is that they are intentionally addressed not only to professional historians, but also to non-professionals: most of these works first appeared as blog posts, newspaper articles, and public lectures. Along with an analysis of acute social problems, an orientation to a broader audience is another crucial trait of 'critical applied history.'

As we have seen, Yaroslav Hrytsak himself doesn't describe his works in these categories, but in fact most of his recent writings fit perfectly into the concept of 'critical applied history,' as formulated by Tosh.

Finally, I'd like to emphasize once more that I do not think that all history writing has to acquire a practical dimension, and at the moment I am not sure whether the practical function of history writing described above is the most important one. The individual choice of each historian for or against 'critical applied history' is governed not by scholarly, but rather by moral criteria and is related to the problem of social responsibility. How a historian answers the ethical question "what are the tasks and responsibilities of historians as

³⁶ Y. Hrytsak, *Tsinnosti*, [in:] Y. Hrytsak, *Zyttia, smert' ta inshi nepryemnosti*, Kyiv, 2008, pp. 24-35.

³⁷ Y. Hrytsak, *Scho zalyshylosia pislia pomaranczevoi revolutsii?*, [in:] Y. Hrytsak, *Strasti za natsionalizmom*, pp. 299-320.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 304.

scholars to society?” determines the choice of one or another type of history writing. But this question is a theme for another important discussion.

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by Volodymyr Sklokin

Abstract

The article deals with the problem of the social relevance of history in contemporary Ukraine. This problem is considered through the lens of the debate on national history and its limitations, which has been the central for the Ukrainian history writing since 1991. It is shown, that both proponents and opponents of the national paradigm support reductionist views on the practical role of history in contemporary society, reducing it either to an affirmation of national identity and serving immediate political needs or to a deconstruction of myths and stereotypes. Thereby, article also focuses on the propositions in Ukrainian and Anglo-American historiographies, which try to avoid this reductionism and combine the attention to positive practical functions of history writing with upholding the core principles of historical inquiry.

Keywords: social relevance, national history, use and abuse of history, critical applied history.