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National democracy, the OUN, and Dontsovism: Three ideological currents in Ukrainian Nationalism of the 1930s–40s and their shared myth-system[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The ideology of Ukrainian nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s was a contested arena in which three dominant currents fought for hegemony: the national democrats grouped around the UNDO party, the authoritarian nationalists who supported the OUN movement, and the more extreme brand of authoritarianism espoused by the publicist Dmytro Dontsov. The three currents can be distinguished by analyzing both ideological writings and the myth-system that underpinned creative literature of this period. Distinguishing between the three currents allows for a better understanding of ideological shifts among those calling themselves nationalists, particularly shifts which occurred during the Second World War and its aftermath. It also helps to explain some of the confusions that surround the term “Ukrainian nationalism” in the present day.

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The term “nationalism” as applied to Ukrainian politics in the 1930s and 1940s has long been in need of greater terminological precision. During these years the “nationalists” in what is today Western Ukraine (Galicia, Bukovyna and Transcarpathia) and in émigré Ukrainian communities throughout Europe can be seen as three related but separate political currents: national democrats, members of the OUN, and ideological supporters of Dmytro Dontsov. Distinguishing these currents throws light on many nuances in the politics and ideology of the day. In particular, it helps to explain how individual figures could shift, sometimes imperceptibly, between different forms of nationalism while articulating what appear to be the same basic principles. This article offers a new framework for understanding interwar nationalism, examines relations between the three currents, and outlines the myth-system that is shared by all three currents and is most evident in the creative literature of these decades.

1. Defining three currents in Ukrainian nationalism

National democrats supported the struggle for linguistic, cultural and political rights, but saw the ultimate goal as either an independent Ukrainian state or an autonomous Galician Ukraine within Poland. All indicators show that this current represented most intellectuals and writers, both in Galicia and in émigré communities living in European cities.

[☆] The argument developed in this article is based on my monograph *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology and Literature, 1929–1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

It included such political organizations as the UNDO (Ukrainian National–Democratic Association), many supporters of the UNR (Ukrainian People's Republic) and Catholic organizations.¹ National democracy represented a broad current with a range of political ideologies. The UNDO and UNR had roots in the decades of struggle for civil and national rights that preceded the revolution of 1917. From the mid-twenties the UNDO, a firm believer in the values of parliamentary democracy, contested elections to the Polish parliament (*Sejm*). Supporters of the UNR often belonged to the Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary parties, both of which had struggled to create an independent Ukrainian republic in the years 1917–20. In 1930–32, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in response to nationalist and communist acts of political terror formed two organizations: Bishop Hryhorii Khomyshyn created the Ukrainian Catholic People's Party (UKNP; renamed the Ukrainian People's Revival –UNO–in 1932) and Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky created the Ukrainian Catholic Union (UKS). Observers viewed both organizations as part of the national democratic mainstream.

Nonetheless, the drift to the right throughout Europe affected national democrats. After 1926, when Josef Pilsudski came to power in Poland, a number of individuals in the UNR camp began supporting his increasingly authoritarian regime, primarily because of its opposition to Soviet expansionism. Moreover, the Catholic parties and organizations were strongly conservative: some church leaders opposed what they termed social and political “liberalism.” Despite this drift, within the national democratic camp there was general agreement that various parties and currents had to coexist and work within the parliamentary system and democratic norms.

Authoritarianism expressed itself in support for the “integral” nationalism of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists), which developed a mass base in the early thirties, especially among veterans who had fought for independence in 1917–20 and Galician youth. The OUN's nationalism was articulated by a group of writers, who contributed to a network of publications produced outside Galicia, in which the organization had been outlawed by the Polish government. The OUN's main organs, *Surma* (Trumpet) and *Rozbudova natsii* (Nation-Building), were published in Berlin and Prague, and smuggled into Galicia.² Although the organization's membership in Western Ukraine on the eve of the Second World War was an estimated 8000–9,000, it had dedicated activists, a strong conspiratorial network and gained extensive publicity from its assassinations, arsons and “expropriations,” that is, robberies of banks and post offices (Wysocki, 2003, 337).

Dmytro Dontsov, who published the journal *Vistnyk* (Herald, 1933–39) in Lviv as his own private operation, represented a third, more extreme current of integral nationalism. Earlier he had been editor of *Literaturno-naukovy vistnyk* (Literary-Scientific Herald, 1922–32), which had a wide range of contributors from various political camps. *Vistnyk* drew on a narrower group. In fact, Dontsov wrote many articles himself, often under pseudonyms, and selected for publication only materials that fitted his own ideology. His doctrine was distinguished by a focus not on specific political goals but on a psychological—spiritual revolution, and by a particularly vehement, intolerant tone.

In the interwar period, therefore, the competition for Ukrainian hearts and minds was increasingly fought out between national democracy and two versions of integral (extreme authoritarian) nationalism – the OUNite and the Dontsovian brands. The OUN used the term “organized nationalism” (orhanizovanyi natsionalizm) to characterize its doctrine. Dontsov called his ideology “active nationalism” (chynnyi natsionalizm). Leading members of the UNDO and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church tended to avoid the term altogether, although a current existed within the Church that called itself “Christian nationalist.” Of course, opponents of the Ukrainian autonomy or independence often made no distinction between moderate and radical currents, legal and illegal forms of struggle, parliamentary and underground organizations. This was true of Polish officials and journalists, who sometimes branded any politically assertive Ukrainian as a nationalist, and it was also true east of the Polish border, in the Soviet Union, where tens of thousands were accused of nationalism, arrested, imprisoned and executed. Among them were an estimated 50,000 Galician Ukrainians or returning émigrés who participated in the movement to implement Ukrainianization. This policy was proclaimed in 1923 by the Soviet Ukrainian republic. During the years that Kharkiv was the republic's capital, from 1923 to 34, an energetic attempt was made to introduce and spread the use of Ukrainian in schools, the press, government and administration. The 1930 show trial of the SVU (Spilka Vyzvolennia Ukrainy – Union for the Liberation of Ukraine), an organization entirely fabricated by the secret police, was the first signal to the population that the policy had come under attack. The trial served as the pretext to arrest 30,000 school teachers and educators. In 1933 all the policy's architects were arrested, and Mykola Skrypnyk, the Commissar for Education, committed suicide.

¹ Among the more visible Christian parties and civic-religious organizations were the Ukrainian Christian Organization (Ukrainska Khrystyianska Orhanizatsiia, UKhO), which in 1930 became the Ukrainian Catholic Organization (Ukrainska Katolytska Orhanizatsiia, UKO); the Ukrainian Catholic People's Party (Ukrainska Katolytska Narodna Partii, UKNP), which was formed in 1930 and renamed the Ukrainian People's Revival (Ukrainska Narodna Obnova, UNO) in 1932; the Ukrainian Catholic Union (Ukrainsky Katolytsky Soiuz, UKS) formed in 1930–31; the Catholic Action (Katolytska Aktsiia, KA), which later became the Association of Ukrainian Youth (KAUM).

² The organization also published a number of newspapers, such as *Ukrainske slovo* (Ukrainian Word, 1933–40), which appeared in Paris, and the popular journals like *Proboiem* (Breakthrough, 1933–44), which was published in Prague, and *Samostiina dumka* (Independent Thought, 1931–37), which was published in Chernivtsi. In Galicia the Lviv newspaper *Holos* (Voice, 1938–39) which replaced *Holos natsii*, (Nation's Voice, 1936–37) edited by Bohdan Kravtsiv, was influential.

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