



Fascism or ustashism? Ukrainian integral nationalism of the 1920s–1930s in comparative perspective[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Although considering Ukrainian integral nationalism as a variety of fascism is not without foundation (especially within the framework of the history of ideas), the fascist model has a limited heuristic value for the Ukrainian case. The proper designation for the ideology and practice of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and similar movements in stateless nations is not fascism, but rather *ustashism* (from the Croatian Ustaša), which can be defined as revolutionary integral nationalism developing under conditions of perceived foreign oppression and using violence for the purpose of national liberation and the creation of an independent authoritarian state.

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1. Introduction – the main argument

The period between the two world wars in Europe has rightfully been called the epoch of fascism (Nolte, 1966; Griffin with Feldman, 2004) – no other ideology, including Communism, competed with it in scope and dynamic of influence. Not only some nation-states, but also the nationalist movements of stateless peoples became voluntary prisoners of the fascist myth. The case of the organizations of stateless peoples like the Ustaša – Croatian Revolutionary Movement (before 1941) or the Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) presents a typological and terminological problem. Some authors regard them as fascist or fascistic, but is it by definition possible for a stateless nation to generate its own fascism?

As early as the late 1960s, John A. Armstrong drew parallels between the three nationalist movements – the OUN, Ustaša, and the Slovak People's Party (Armstrong, 1968). He showed the differences between Eastern European integral nationalist movements and fascism, arguing that the basic motivation of the former's collaborationism during World War II was ethnic rather than ideological. Unfortunately, the idea, which was implicitly present in Armstrong's article, that movements such as the OUN, Ustaša, and the Slovak Populists should be considered within a separate type of integral nationalism¹ in stateless nations has not received a thorough development in historiography.

Although there is a plethora of studies of interwar and wartime Ukrainian nationalism, and some of the works are of high quality, one can find in the field a lot of myths and misinterpretations curiously mixed with considerable factual material and

[☆] In this text, some excerpts are used from a related article by the author, translated into English by Stephen D. Shenfield (Zaitsev, 2013b).

¹ Here I understand integral nationalism as a form of authoritarian nationalism that regards the nation as an organic whole and demands the unreserved subordination of an individual to the interests of his or her nation, which are placed above the interests of any social group, other nations, and humanity as a whole. The term was first used by the French royalist and leader of *Action Française*, Charles Maurras in 1900 (Bushman, 1939: 111). Carlton J. H. Hayes introduced it into academic usage as a generic concept in the late 1920s (Hayes, 1968: 164–224). The first, who in the 1950s applied the term to Ukrainian nationalism, was John A. Armstrong (1955, 1990). On authoritarian nationalism and its different “faces” see Payne (1995: 14–19).

well-grounded interpretations. Two contradictory and almost mutually exclusive trends still compete in historiography: one emphasizes the liberation character of the nationalists' struggle for an independent state, rejecting or ignoring extremist, xenophobic, and totalitarian elements in their ideology and practice (Vyatrovych, 2006; Mirchuk, 2007; Kvit, 2013); the other exposes the extremist, totalitarian, and “fascist” nature of the nationalist movement, denying any liberation and democratic elements in them (Poliszczuk, 2003; Grott, 2010; Rossolinski-Liebe, 2014). Some in-depth and impartial studies usually lack a comparative perspective (Wysocki, 2003; Kentii, 2005). After Armstrong's article, there were no comparative studies that would cover the Ukrainian case and other major cases of integral nationalist movements in stateless nations of Eastern Europe.

The main argument of this article is the following: integral nationalist organizations of stateless peoples like the OUN, Ustaša, and others constitute a separate genus of political movements and respective ideologies, different both from fascism and from the democratic trend in national liberation movements. Just in the frame of this genus the comparative historical approach can be the most fruitful. Unfortunately, there is no special term in historiography and political science for the designation of this type of movement. In some of my works I have chosen for this purpose the term *ustashism* (Zaitsev, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), which is sometimes used to denote the ideology and practice of the Ustaša of Croatia. Here I use the term in a generic sense, taking the Ustaša as a paradigmatic case. In this understanding, *ustashism* can be defined as revolutionary integral nationalism developing under conditions of perceived foreign oppression and using violence for the purpose of national liberation and the creation of an independent authoritarian state.

The OUN can be considered a second major example of “generic *ustashism*,” along the lines of the paradigmatic case of the Croatian movement. Like the Ustaša, it is often labeled fascist. That is why below the juxtaposition of Ukrainian integral nationalism to generic fascism will be discussed at some length. In Section 2, I survey different approaches to the problem of “Ukrainian fascism.” Next, I consider some definitions of fascism and the distinction between fascism and *nationalism in stateless nations*. In Section 4, I briefly describe the ideology of Dmytro Dontsov, who became the first popularizer of fascism among Ukrainians. He was often called a fascist, but, I shall argue, his ideas were much closer to another “third way” ideology – the “Conservative Revolution.” In the fifth and largest section, I examine the influence of Italian Fascism on the ideology of the OUN and latter's ambivalent attitude to German National Socialism. In the sixth and crucial section, I point out to the fundamental difference between fascism and Ukrainian nationalism: the former was a means of reordering an already existing state, while the latter was primarily a means of creating a state. Also I compare the OUN to its closest “ideological relative” in Europe – the Croatian Ustaša. Finally, I briefly outline the typological implications of my argument. Although considering Ukrainian integral nationalism as a variety of fascism is not without foundation, the proper designation for the ideology and practice of the OUN and similar movements is not fascism, but rather *ustashism* in generic sense of the word.

2. Ukrainian fascism?

The arguments of the fascist interpretation of the OUN can be briefly summarized by the words of John-Paul Himka

OUN was indeed a typical fascist organization as shown by many of its features: its leader principle (*Führerprinzip*), its aspiration to ban all other political parties and movements, its fascist-style slogan (Slava Ukraini! Heroiam slava!²), its red and black flag, its raised-arm salute, its xenophobia and anti-Semitism, its cult of violence, and its admiration of Hitler, Mussolini, and other leaders of fascist Europe. What's not fascist here? (Himka, 2010: 87).

As if answering to Himka's rhetorical question, though a few years earlier, Heorhii Kasyanov wrote

If we take into account a certain set of external and functional features in a certain period of the organization's existence [...], we can identify, with equal success, the OUN, for example, with the ideology and practice of Soviet totalitarianism of the 1930s or with fundamentalist religious movements. Recognizing the obvious fact that the OUN had much in common with Italian Fascism and German National Socialism in terms of world view, ideology and some political practices, we cannot include the OUN neither into Fascism, nor into National Socialism (which, after all, were independent historical phenomena)... (Kasyanov, 2005: 459–460).

Thus, the opponents of the identification of the OUN with fascism, although mostly do not deny their common characteristics, still consider these features as not specifically fascist, but attributable to any movements of the totalitarian or fundamentalist type. The main difference is often seen in the national liberation goals of the OUN's struggle (Motyl, 1980, 2010; Hrytsak, 1996: 207–208).

The view of Ivan Lysiak-Rudnytsky, as set out in his encyclopedia article “Nationalism,” is still authoritative in academic circles. According to him,

the closest relatives of Ukrainian nationalism were not German Nazism and Italian fascism, which were the product of industrialized and urbanized societies, but similar ideologies of parties among agrarian peoples in less-developed countries of Eastern Europe, including the Ustaše (Ustashi) of Croatia, the Rumanian Iron Guards, the Slovak L'udaks (supporters of A. Hlinka's Slovak People's party), and the Polish National-Radical Camp. Ukrainian nationalism was a

² “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!” It worth to mention that the greeting became very popular in Ukraine during the Euromaidan Revolution but without any fascist connotations.

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