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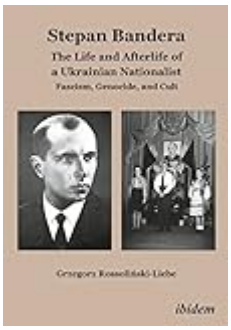

Grzegorz Rossoliski-Liebe. *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist. Fascism, Genocide, and Cult.* Stuttgart: ibidemPublishing House (ibidem Verlag), 2014. pgs. (paperback), ISBN 978-3-8382-0684-4.

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G. Rossolinski-Liebe: Stepan Bandera

During the Maidan events in Kyiv, protesters took over the City Hall and hang huge portraits of Stepan Bandera over the entrance and inside the building. One could see the red-and-black banners and Bandera portraits used by various far-right political groups and mainstream parties, claiming the heritage of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and its charismatic leader Bandera, although most non-Ukrainians knew nothing about this historical figure and the movement he became the icon of from the 1930s until today.

The book by Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe comes to fill a huge gap in scholarship, as it is the first political biography of Stepan Bandera written in English. At the same time, it provides a detailed and fascinating history of the OUN and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), its relations to Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, its conception of a Ukrainian State and of Ukrainian identity, and finally the myth that surrounded its leader and the OUN in exile after WWII and in post-Soviet western Ukraine.

The monograph, based on the extensive archival research in Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Germany, United Kingdom, Canada and the USA, offers a number of carefully documented revelations that strongly contradict the hagiographic literature produced during the Cold War by historians of Ukrainian diaspora, and later in independent Ukraine particularly during the Presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005â2010).

Writing this book required quite a bit of courage, as the author was several times threatened, not the least in 2012 during a series of lectures in Ukraine which were met with violent demonstrations of dozens of Svoboda far-right extremists, who protested against his labeling of Bandera as âFascistâ. If the bone of contention is firstly that of the political categorization of Bandera and the OUN took under his direction, the archival research leaves no doubt: from the 1930s, the OUN imitated the Italian Fascists and the German National Socialists and cooperated with them. It prepared a ânational revolutionâ of a fascist type like in Tisoâs Slovakia or PaveliÄâs Croatia. It propagated an exclusive nationalism which aimed at suppressing other ethnic groups, such as Poles, Jews, and Russians. The movement was totalitarian, anti-Communist, anti-liberal, anti-democratic and envisioned a dictatorial regime based on a one-party system lead by

a FÃ¼hrer-type charismatic leader, Bandera himself.

The book makes clear that it was Bandera who radicalized the OUN and introduced the use of political terror in the 1930s. Under his guidance, the OUN specialized in criminal activities such as arson, destruction of property, bank attacks and political assassinations, aimed at representatives of the Polish state such as the Interior Minister Pieracki, and murdered also Ukrainians seen as traitors to the cause, including a number of OUN members. The analysis of the trials against the OUN in 1935â1936 shows convincingly how Bandera and his accomplices used the trials as a political tribune, performing the fascist salute âGlory to Ukraineâ with the arm raised in imitation of the âHeil Hitlerâ gesture. The author emphasized that the aggressive politics of Polonization in Galicia and Volhynia incensed Ukrainians, but it was in part a response to the criminal acts and the radicalization of the OUN in the 1930s. Interestingly, during the trials, disagreement among the captives, of whom a number regretted the assassinations, showed the dissent existing among Ukrainians and lead to the identification and the conviction of the main conspirators.

The book sheds light on a number of controversial aspects of Banderaâs and the OUN activities. One point that will surely draw attention is the question of the âgenocidalâ intention of the OUN, which the author sets very early, right in 1941, when Ukrainian nationalists, trained by the Wehrmacht, participated in the invasion of the USSR in the battalions Nachtigall and Roland. They set up a militia that helped the Germans identify Jews and Poles, leading to the ferocious pogroms of July 1941, in which not so much Poles, as in Jedwabne in Northeastern Poland, but mostly local Ukrainians massacred their Jewish neighbors.

Yaroslav Stetsâko, who proclaimed the Ukrainian state with Bandera as its head, asked in letters Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco to accept it as a part of the âNew Europe.â Shortly thereafter he argued in favor of importing âGerman methods of exterminating Jewry to Ukraineâ (p. 247). While the OUN leaders planned the ânational revolutionâ carefully including the extermination of âMuscovites, Jews, Aliens and Polesâ (p. 181â185), it may be precocious to date the project of annihilating all non-Ukrainians back to 1941. But the author convincingly documents the genocidal project of the OUN and its military branch UPA, whose members first serving in the Ukrainian police helped the Germans to annihilate the Jews, and then, after deserting the police in spring 1943 and joining the UPA, applied the extermination techniques to the ethnic cleansing of Polish villages in Volhynia and Galicia, as well as to the hunt for last Jews hiding in the forests. The Ukrainian who hid the Jews did so in spite of the OUN, not with its help.

The book also explains that Bandera can hardly be considered as a victim of the Nazis. He was detained, not because he opposed Nazi Germany, but because the Nazis had other plans for Ukraine, first under house arrest, then in a privileged section of Sachsenhausen camp with other special political prisoners such as the former Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg and Horia Sima, the leader of the Iron Guard (p. 285).

Another point of the book is to illuminate the enterprise of whitewashing the fascist ideology of the OUN and its criminal deeds, which started as early as 1943, as the OUN began to bet on a victory by the Allies, and continued in the Ã©migrÃ© circles in America and Western Europe. However, the end of his life was not characterized by a change in attitude, as for his opponent Mykola Lebed, who successfully collaborated with the CIA by simulating a âdemocraticâ turn. Bandera remained an unconditional fascist and true to his dictatorial manners, and did not hesitate to have his opponents murdered. After 1945, the OUN and UPA continued the fight against the Soviet regime and killed Ukrainians accused of supporting the Soviet authorities, which in turn targeted civilian Ukrainians. Parts of western Ukrainian population turned Bandera into a national hero and, after his assassination in Munich, also into a martyr. Ukrainian collaborators, who escaped from Ukraine in 1944 and remained in the West, established a similar cult of Bandera and his âliberation movement.â

Today, these âheroesâ of OUN and UPA are glorified in Western Ukraine, marches to the SS-Galizien are regularly held and monuments to Bandera and leaders of the UPA including a number of war criminals such as Roman Shukhevych have been erected. The Bandera cult culminated in 2010, when Yushchenko elevated the OUN leader to the rank of âhero of the nationâ.

This book is an indispensable companion to whoever wants to understand contemporary Ukraine and its division between East and West. The author shows how the figure of Bandera has been appropriated and distorted both by the right wing nationalist supporters and by Putinâs Russia, who agitates it as a scarecrow to justify his politics of military intervention and annexation. Bandera is today more an empty icon that can be alternatively seen in negative or positive lights, than a name associated with a real person and real deeds. This book will

help returning to some historical facts, including Banderaâs undoubtedly fascist, racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic credo, his nationalist fanaticism, his extremism and ultimately, his responsibility for crimes that urgently call for recognition, if Ukraine wants to integrate the European community of memory and values.

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