

National Femininity Used and Contested: Women's Participation in the Nationalist Underground in Western Ukraine during the 1940s-50s

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Abstract: In the 1940s and 1950s, thousands of Ukrainian women joined the underground nationalist movement on west Ukrainian lands as members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). However, their experiences and contributions to this movement remain understudied, marginalized and trivialized in historical research. A study of personal testimonies of former female insurgents allows one to question the established perception that women served only in auxiliary and secondary roles in the nationalist organizations. This paper examines whether the concept of normative femininity—as constructed by the nationalist ideology—actually corresponded to the women's real life experiences in the underground. It explores the variety of ways in which a traditional notion of femininity was maintained, broadened, negotiated, contested and transgressed through women's active involvement in guerrilla war.

Keywords: Ukrainian Women, Militarism, Nationalist Underground, Femininity, OUN, UPA

In many national projects, a woman's role is defined in two ways: on the one hand, her membership in the national collective is determined by the maternal functions that ensure the nation's physical and cultural survival; on the other hand, a woman serves as a symbol of the Nation itself. Women are rarely perceived as subjects/participants of national processes. Nations tend to be allegorically represented as female figures (evinced in nationalist propaganda, monuments and paintings), while women themselves are used as markers of collective boundaries and differences (Anthias, Yuval-Davis 314–315). Such ideas are clearly presented in, and promoted by, many nationalist ideologies, of which the Ukrainian is no exception. The question is: To what extent are these views implemented in practice in different political contexts, especially under conditions of an armed nationalist insurgency? The experience of formerly colonial nations across the globe shows that nationalist movements fighting against colonizing powers often

mobilize women into its ranks. The history of the Ukrainian national guerrilla movement in the mid-twentieth century—with its remarkably massive participation of women in underground organizations—can serve as a case study for (1) exploring whether or not the nationalist conception of women was implemented systematically and consistently in practice, and for (2) examining the impact that women’s direct participation in the nationalist movement had on their own understanding and practices of womanhood.

WOMEN AND THE UKRAINIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT: IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES
AND THE HISTORICAL RECORD

The Ukrainian nationalist movement flourished on west Ukrainian territories from the early 1930s. It was spearheaded by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which strove for an independent Ukrainian nation-state.¹ Later, the ramified and efficient network of the OUN’s primary units, as well its enormous human resources, came to lay the foundation for the Ukrainian Insurgents Army (*Ukrains'ka Povstans'ka Armiia* or UPA), which fought against Nazi occupiers and the Soviet regime.² The discrepancy between the large female membership in the OUN, as well as their active participation in the UPA, and the striking deficiency of comprehensive historical research about them is symptomatic of the gender bias inherent in both the armed national guerrilla struggle and in the national historiography.

As a matter of fact, the Ukrainian nationalist propaganda materials from that period did not pay much attention to the “woman’s question”; only a few texts reveal the OUN’s vision of women’s role in the nationalist

¹ OUN was conceived in 1929 as an underground political organization aimed at the ultimate liberation of the Ukrainian nation from all colonizers (first and foremost Russia and Poland) in order to establish an independent Ukrainian nation-state. In the 1930s OUN was very influential among Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia. Thanks to aggressive propaganda and active recruiting policies, thousands of young Ukrainians became active members before World War II. In the 1930s, the Polish government persecuted many members of OUN for their subversive and terrorist activities.

² The UPA was a military and political formation that operated on west Ukrainian territories from 1942 to 1953 and fought against Polish, Nazi and Soviet powers for an independent Ukrainian nation-state. The UPA structure and activities testify to a full-fledged Ukrainian national guerrilla movement. It was ultimately defeated by Soviet authorities in the mid 1950s, and its members and supporters were severely repressed.

struggle. The available policy texts provide descriptions of the perfect Ukrainian woman, elaborate on her desirable personality traits, delineate her major social functions as well as appropriate spheres of activity. Remarkably, despite acknowledging women's rights as citizens and political actors, these texts firmly stress that motherhood is the key mission for Ukrainian women (Ukrains'ka zhinka; Rebet 1943). While calling upon women to take an active part in the nationalist struggle, authors keep reminding them of their primary duty and unique role in the physical and cultural reproduction of the Ukrainian nation:

This does not mean that militarization is a women's main mission. A woman has no right to forget that her duty is to become a mother and a foundation for a healthy Ukrainian family. This is especially because we need to have a healthy, physically and spiritually strong reinforcement, our heirs ought to be able to follow proudly in the footsteps of their great forefathers... We come to the core aspects of the Ukrainian women's mission, which are: a) to produce a new generation, as abundant as possible and as healthy as possible; (b) to prepare for uprising and state building. (Rak 10-11)

It is important to determine if this normative nationalist notion of femininity was implemented in practices by the OUN and the UPA, and how its imperatives correlated with the lived experiences of the female insurgents, especially taking into account their mass participation in guerrilla war. The first attempts to comprehend women's experiences in the nationalist guerrilla struggle in Western Ukraine appeared soon after the armed resistance was suppressed by the Soviets (Marta). Since that time, however, historians cannot boast of any serious achievements in this area. Indeed, for a long time scholarly publications on the OUN and UPA passed over in silence or trivialized women's membership in the movement. Over the past two decades academic interest in the Ukrainian national resistance to the Nazi occupation and the Soviet regime has grown considerably. This very promising trend, nevertheless, did not do much to advance our knowledge and understanding of women's experiences or their clandestine activities.

The gender bias is evident in the large volume of biographical literature on the leaders and heroes of the OUN and UPA (not to mention the Ukrainian nationalist movement as such), among which the share of publications about female members is rather small (Mandryk). Scholars of the nationalist underground simply pay lip service to women's contributions to the guerrilla war with brief general statements. They do

not explore in detail women's activities.³ At present, one cannot imagine either the scale or the uniqueness of women's participation in armed guerrilla warfare from the scanty information provided in the literature. Neither are we able to judge the impact of the female partisan experiences on their lives in the long term.

The official commemorative practices of the UPA are not gender balanced. Among the monuments, street names and other memorial sites established in Western Ukraine since 1991 to honour OUN and UPA history there is not a single *lieu de mémoire* celebrating women fighters. This situation fits the cross-cultural pattern, as feminist historians have pointed out in writing about the widespread marginalization of women combatants in the post-war contexts: "Whilst women have historically always occupied a variety of different roles in wartime, the figure of the female soldier has been marginal to both the militaries that fight wars and to our memory of these wars" (Noakes 12).

In recent years, however, one can observe increasing public interest in gender aspects of the nationalist political movement and the armed struggle in the mid-twentieth century. The Ukrainian media occasionally address this issue (Viatrovykh; Burnashov; Voloshka; Hinda). In addition, a number of books (biographical reference books, collections of biographical sketches, biographical novels) have revealed women's experiences in the OUN and the UPA (Mudra; Savka). Professionally written biographies of some prominent female partisans (Kateryna Zaryts'ka, Liudmyla Foia, Halyna Holoiad, among others) are now available to the Ukrainian readership (Onyshko; Ivanchenko; Panchenko; Posivnych and Brelus). The life story of Dariia Rebet, who was the only female member among the highest leadership of the OUN and who later played a significant role in OUN activities in exile, is yet to be studied in depth. Today there are only a few scholars researching the particularities of women's participation in the Ukrainian armed guerrilla struggle (Burds; Petrenko; Onyshko; Antonova). Their studies are based mainly on archival documents that can shed light on ideologies, policies, structures and activities of organizations and institutions. But they tell us next to nothing about the practices and experiences of clandestine life, the female insurgents' daily activities, their human interactions in the underground, their personal motivations for joining. These limitations can be successfully surmounted only when personal testimonies of the past are scrutinized. Recently published

³ Even the newest and most substantial historical publications on the Ukrainian nationalist underground in the mid 20th century contain nothing but occasional remarks on some women who happened to be involved in the 'significant' events (Kyrychuk; Zhyliuk; Patryliak).

autobiographies, memoirs, as well as oral histories represent rich a source for analysis (See Savchyn; Kokhans'ka; Karwans'ka-Bajlak; Plechii; Protsak; Datsiuk; Pan'kiv; Lunio).

Women's personal recollections of events allow us to partially reconstruct the forms and the scale of women's participation in the nationalist underground on west Ukrainian territories from the late 1930s to the mid 1950s and to examine their gender aspects. The study of personal narratives of former female insurgents is important for several reasons: it helps us understand why women joined the underground; it allows us to explore how women themselves perceived and performed their roles; and, finally, it helps us see how war affected their lives and world views, especially in relation to gender norms. Even though women were clearly influenced by the prevailing heroic narrative of the nationalist underground, which led them to frame their own written and oral stories accordingly (avoiding controversial and shameful experiences), women's personal testimonies, nonetheless, provide important insights about gender ideology and the gender regime in the nationalist underground.

The present paper is based on an analysis of a variety of women's personal recollections about their participation in the OUN and the UPA during the 1940s-50s. The goal is to initiate discussion on Ukrainian women's active participation in the Ukrainian national project within the framework of a national guerrilla war. The goal is threefold:

- 1) To undermine the widespread view that women played only supportive and secondary roles in the Ukrainian nationalist underground by showing their contributions in vital spheres of the two respective organizations;
- 2) To identify "blind spots" in our knowledge about women's gendered experiences during the nationalist insurgency and to suggest possible ways for further study of these particularities from a feminist perspective;
- 3) To examine how the nationalist concept of normative femininity was maintained, performed, broadened, negotiated, contested and transformed by women actively involved in guerrilla war.

WOMEN'S MEMBERSHIP IN OUN AND UPA

From its very beginnings in the 1930s, OUN encouraged women and girls to join the organization, providing special opportunities for theoretical instruction and practical training. Joining the *lunatstvo*—the youth section

of the OUN—was the first step toward becoming a member of the party.⁴ In the 1930s, *iunky* (female members of *Iunatstvo*) were recruited primarily in cities and towns from among high school and college students. OUN targeted nationally aware girls of strong personality and managerial potential (Onyshko 2002, 24; Petrenko 2009, 3).⁵ During regular secret meetings, girls not only studied the history and geography of Ukraine, they were also taught the basics of nationalist ideology and debated political issues (Datsiuk 2007, 14-16; Kokhanska 28). Moreover, women acquired practical skills in keeping secrets and medical aid; they also disseminated propaganda flyers and collected information. Thus, *iunky* were systematically trained both theoretically and practically to be prepared for future full-scale and multipurpose participation in the OUN's subversive activities. Girls become members of the OUN even before they attained lawful adult age, some being between 15 and 17 years old (Mudra 2004 and 2006). By age 19 or 20 many were already in charge of specific activities on various organizational levels, bearing responsibility for a district, an area, or a village sub-division. In fact, before World War II young girls constituted the most educated, well-trained and active part of OUN's female membership (Kokhanska 26-27). Women's participation in OUN's activities and UPA operations reached a peak and became especially important when the Red Army invaded Western Ukraine after the expulsion of the Nazi occupiers in the summer of 1944. According to documents found by Jeffrey Burds, the leadership of the OUN and UPA made a series of special decisions at that time designed at broadening and stimulating women's participation in various activities. There were special directives issued by the UPA leadership to this effect (Burds 310). Burds pointed to a remarkable fact: no

⁴ *Iunatstvo*—an underground youth organization for teenagers from 15 to 17 years olds that operated under the command of the OUN. In 1929-1941 *Iunatstvo* became a forge for training the most nationally aware and loyal young freshmen. The members of *Iunatstvo* had to follow the three codes of virtues: namely, the Decalogue (10 commandments of a Ukrainian nationalist), 12 features of personality and 44 rules of life of a Ukrainian nationalist, which required total dedication to the national cause, strict self-discipline and unconditional obedience to the commanders' orders. This organization consisted of basic units of 4-5 persons, each having his/her exact sphere of responsibility: study of ideology, training in secrecy and espionage, propaganda, financial and economic issues, medical treatment, etc. The organization had a territorial structure, with local commanders assigned to their posts by the higher leadership.

⁵ Olena Petrenko rightly points that after the creation of the UPA, recruitment practices changed: because the military units operated in the woods and in the countryside, the insurgents sought new female followers mainly among local peasant girls (Petrenko 2009, 5).

woman's name appears among the Ukrainian insurgents reported to be killed, executed or arrested by the Soviets before February 1945; but in later reports their number increased regularly (314). Burds claims that the process of "feminization of the Ukrainian underground" was in fact an involuntary measure caused by the need to keep the underground network running in a situation when activities of male members were extremely restricted due to severe persecution.⁶ This period was marked by mass mobilization of village girls into the underground movement. All recent publications on women's participation in the Ukrainian national guerrilla activities tend to stress their national sense of awareness as the main reason for their membership in the OUN and UPA. The same motivation is normally voiced in personal recollections of former female insurgents as well. Some stories by women however reveal other factors driving them into the underground. Personal relationships with male fighters appear as one of strongest reasons: quite often a wife followed her husband when he joined the insurgents; a peasant girl became a nurse, healing and hiding partisans because her boyfriend was among them; a sister cooked and laundered for an UPA unit where her brother served and so forth. Most girls who joined the national struggle were very young—anywhere from 16 to 22 years old. At this age, romantic attitudes toward the opposite sex may dominate a youngsters' behaviour. Since the majority of young men went underground, many girls followed their boyfriends. In addition, the masculinity of these military men was magnified through an extremely idealized image of the Ukrainian insurgent constructed and promoted by nationalist propaganda. He appeared as a strong, fearless and virtuous super-hero.⁷ One cannot discard the latter as a factor that mobilized young girls into the struggle. At the same time, radicalism of thoughts and rebellious behaviours are very typical for teenagers, therefore some perceived membership in the UPA as a risky adventure, an opportunity to test one's maturity, to prove one's independence, or challenge all kinds of authorities. This view finds support among former insurgents as well as scholars (Savchyn-Pyskir; Petrenko 2009, 5).

The format of women's participation and their functions in the OUN were determined to a great extent by gender. In the 1930s, a special

⁶ All male citizens aged 17 to 50 were subject to compulsory recruitment into military service in the Red Army. As a result, Ukrainian men massively went underground in order to avoid the draft and/or prosecution for anti-Soviet activities.

⁷ For a highly illustrated collection of UPA visual propaganda materials, featuring male insurgents, see *Ahitatsiia i propahanda; Rizdviani lystivky*.

Women's Network (*Zhinocha Sitka*) was launched as a relatively autonomous sub-structure of the OUN. This non-military network was assigned a range of specific functions and tasks suitable for women: medical and sanitary services, provisioning and daily sustenance, including food supply, cooking, laundry, mending of clothes, military intelligence, education, and propaganda (Pisnia). Members of the Women's Network did not participate in military operations or violent subversive activities. Their network structure replicated that of the OUN: female members were to maintain strong discipline, keep membership confidential and activities secret.⁸

The forms of women's collaboration with the insurgents (and their functions in the OUN and the UPA) depended on the level of their personal engagement in these organizations. In most cases, involvement in underground activities varied over time and was often vague, but for purposes of this study, we can single out three major levels of women's involvement:

1. *Full and comprehensive participation through formal membership in the OUN.* This implied that a woman performed a range of functions and assumed responsibilities in the organization consistent with her experience, trust and earned respect.⁹ A full OUN member was completely at the disposal of the organization, being obliged to obey the leaders' orders unreservedly; she could be mobilized for special operations or sent underground, moved to another locality or even abroad with a special mission. If she was under threat of arrest, the organization usually helped her to flee; if trapped, she was expected to commit suicide.

⁸ Members always used nicknames and normally did not know the real names of others. According to established rules, members of a basic unit (consisting normally of three individuals, plus a leader) only knew each other, but the identity of other members of the organization remained secret to ordinary members. These precautions minimized the risks of mass arrests in case of betrayal. Maintaining highest secrecy was of paramount importance for any person collaborating with the UPA: it was a matter of the insurgents' security, so partisans observed it rigorously (Datsiuk 2003, 259). That secrecy rule, however, turned out to be the main—often insurmountable—obstacle for writing about women in the nationalist underground today (Mudra 2005, 10). Indeed, survivors, who are few in number, cannot compare or generalize their personal experiences, because they really were not informed about activities—and often did not know the real names of their fellow female insurgents.

⁹ These might include: establishing local units of the Women's Network, managing and coordinating their activities, recruiting new members, carrying out task of the higher leadership, etc.

2. *Partial active participation in certain activities of the OUN and UPA.* This implied no formal obligations. These were usually local women dedicated to securing the vitality of the underground's "circulatory system." They served as messengers, guides, scouts, disseminators of propaganda materials. These women operated legally on the local level, observing basic principles of secrecy. If exposed or arrested, they were on their own.

3. *Logistics and occasional support.* These were contributions by women that included all the functions of the "home front" on behalf of the military units of the UPA. Local women provided basic supplies and services (cooking, laundering, sewing, sanitation). They collected clothing and other essentials for fighters; they often also opened their homes to insurgents for treatment, recreation, and personal hygiene; they stored propaganda materials, weapons, and other supplies in their homes.

In what follows, I will examine women's personal narratives with a view to analyzing how specific functions and activities women typically performed within the nationalist underground movement correlated with the traditional concept of femininity—i.e., to what extent femininity was used, exploited and promoted, and when it was broadened, negotiated, contested or undermined. This analysis can enhance our understanding of the general transformation of the normative notion of femininity (as formulated by Ukrainian nationalist ideology), when it came face to face with women's activities and participation in the underground.

HEALTH CARE AND PROVISIONS: NORMATIVE FEMININITY BROADENED

Women, traditionally seen as primary caregivers, bore the greatest responsibility for first aid, nursing and providing routine treatment for sick and wounded insurgents.¹⁰ The functioning of the UPA medical services was heavily dependent on the human resources of the former Women's Network, created by the OUN in the 1930s. Due to an acute shortage of professional physicians, virtually all the female members of OUN were mobilized to serve as nurses. They usually attended special medical, practice-oriented courses for two to three weeks, where, under the

¹⁰ The UPA medical/sanitary services were a well-ordered, ramified network. Initially, the structure of the Ukrainian Red Cross (URC), which resumed its activities in Lviv in 1941, was used for this purpose, but after its official dismantling in 1942 it went underground and was coordinated by the medical-charity department of UPA based in exile. The URC consisted of four main divisions covering different types of activities: medical, pharmaceutical, fundraising, procurement, and charity (Onyshko 2002, 60-66). For a detailed description of the URC structure and activities, see Ripets'kyi.

guidance of professional physicians, they were trained as nurses and paramedics (Hordasevych 72, 105; Savka 47, 93; Lunio 88, 151, 483).¹¹ Oftentimes after such training women were sent underground to serve in secret hospitals and this work required their total dedication to the cause. The living conditions in these underground hospitals, located in remote areas or in dugout bunkers, were extremely difficult: both patients and personnel suffered not only from a scarcity of medical supplies, but even the most essential things (food, water, clean clothing). In some cases (during frequent KGB manhunts), they could not even breathe properly, being locked and sequestered in their shelters for days or weeks. One must not overlook the emotional tensions caused by confinement in a narrow space with other (male) comrades. Nevertheless, the recollections of former nurses barely focus on those shared hardships; on the contrary, they often recall their experiences with remarkable pride: “They asked me to take care of ‘Karpats’kyi,’ an officer of the SB [Security Service]—he was stricken with typhus... I was so proud to be entrusted to nurse such a legendary leader! I was so happy to be among the insurgents! [...] I was enormously proud of that (Plechiy 16-17).

In many cases it was impossible to bring a wounded insurgent to a secret hospital, which meant that he had to be treated in a private household, usually in a specially made hiding place. Not infrequently a nurse had several such patients in different locations, each to be visited more than once daily, despite the risk of being noticed by NKVD agents (Lunio 152-153). If a wounded insurgent had to be transferred from one location to another, women—not men—were usually in charge of such operations (Lunio 155-6; Savka 113). Obviously, attendants of such trips were exposed to a risk of being caught and punished for complicity in subversive activities, meaning that this job required a great deal of courage, discretion and self-control.

The majority of peasant girls were, to some extent, involved in the provisioning of food for insurgents squads based in the woods. Besides the daily procurement of foodstuff for the UPA from local peasants, they were in charge of cooking hot meals that were delivered directly to the camps or secret meeting points (Lunio 93). No matter how trivial this work appeared, the practical execution of the job required far more than cooking skills.

¹¹ Future nurses had to know how to provide first aid; how to disinfect and bandage wounds; how to stop bleeding. They were also instructed on principles of natural healing (especially herbal therapy); they learned sanitary principles (methods for preventing pandemics, how to immunize insurgents and the population, hygiene) and primary methods of coping with widespread illnesses, typical during wartime (enteric fever, catarrhal inflammations, skin diseases).

Indeed, experience and habits of secrecy were essential for these activities. Preparing enormous amounts of food (for several dozen insurgents at a time), girls had to determine the proper place and time for cooking and baking, in order to avoid drawing any attention of strangers or otherwise arousing suspicion. In her recollections Kateryna Hula, for instance, emphasized: "In those days we were cooking for insurgents... Everything was done secretly: one day we cooked in our house, next day in another house, and then we were secretly delivering [meals] to partisans who were in the woods or in hideouts" (Lunio 400, 94).

The same applied to storing food reserves and delivery of foodstuff to forest camps. The women's stories provide numerous examples of their infinite resourcefulness in disguising these activities, notwithstanding the real risk they faced.

Because of their particular life style and living conditions, partisans wore out and soiled their clothes very quickly, and the Women's Network was charged with their repair and laundry. Women's recollections reveal how physically challenging, time consuming and risky were these otherwise routine female labours under the circumstances. The story of Kateryna Vitko-Stakh is especially eloquent:

Even laundry—this simple work—was then very dangerous and required a lot of courage. When several bags of linen arrived, one had to distribute them among the women. It was not mere laundry—one had to boil it, and there was no detergent, no soap, and no proper conditions. How to dry so much linen without being noticed? Women used washboards. That was difficult and risky work. The [Soviet] military men could arrive at any moment—and where should one go with so much linen? But women never refused; they understood that there was nobody else to do it. (Pan'kiv 2005, 22)

In the countryside, people's lives were quite transparent, so women and their family members who engaged with the UPA lived constantly under the threat of exposure and severe persecution for collaboration with the "people's enemies." As a result, they had to remain alert and circumspect, keep to their work in complete secrecy. In short, they had to adjust their daily lives to numerous precautions and restrictions. It is no surprise that such sustained insecurity was bound to cause enormous emotional strain, permanent anxiety and psychological stress, and this aspect of women's experience of underground work also deserves study.

In women's recollections of these days hardship, one can find numerous testimonies of their incredible solidarity and mutual help in the most desperate situations. In fact, the Women's Network formed in them a strong sense of sisterhood, as frequently a fellow female partisan became

closer than a family member. Girls always helped one another to perform their duties, warned one another of any danger, supported those in need financially, concealed persecuted comrades, and helped them to flee, if necessary (Pan'kiv 2001, 240-241, 268).

In performing their traditional roles as caregivers, women substantially redefined their meaning: cooking, laundry and nursing, done for the UPA, were no longer considered household chores. While working for the underground, women stepped out of the private sphere and their traditional jobs changed: they became politically significant actions. As Linda K. Kerber correctly pointed out:

It is true that cooking, laundering, and nursing were considered 'female' skills and that women were doing in a military environment what they would normally do in a domestic one. But we ought not to discount these services... Women performed tasks of the utmost necessity, if the army was to continue functioning. (Kerber 96-97)

Such work did give women the feeling of belonging to the great cause of national liberation, raising their self-esteem and self-confidence. Besides performing their traditional tasks efficiently, women had to acquire new knowledge and develop new skills (secrecy, medicine, hygiene, team work); they also had a chance to discover, to manifest, to practice and to advance new personality traits for which there was little (if any) demand in a woman's ordinary, daily life (e.g., courage, discretion, self-control, affective tolerance, leadership).

COMMUNICATION, DELIVERY, AND PROPAGANDA: TRADITIONAL FEMININITY CONTESTED AND NEGOTIATED

The main task assigned to girls was to ensure regular communication among units, sub-divisions and the OUN and UPA leadership that operated underground or abroad. A human mail service was established and worked almost perfectly. Couriers were assigned to deliver messages and reports (known as *shtafety*—from the word *estafeta*, meaning relay race—and *hrypsy*, i.e., cryptograms) along a human chain from one location to another.¹² They never knew their content: a cryptogram on a tiny piece of

¹² Observing strict secrecy, messengers used a system of secret addresses and passwords. The network of messengers was based on the relay principle, with each courier covering only part of the distance: picking up a message, bringing it to a specified destination, and there passing the 'baton' to the next courier in the chain. Sometimes, the recipient was a stranger, but if permanent chains of information

paper was usually hidden in a girl's clothing or hair. If threatened with arrest, girls were required to destroy (even swallow) the message. Olena Labay's story gives us an idea on how the message system worked:

There was a contact house in every village. Couriers had various tasks... If there was a big manhunt, we could deliver the *shtafeta* next day or even on the third day. But sometimes there were *shtafetas* signed "alarm," meaning "urgent", for immediate delivery to the destination... I carried many such *shtafetas*. Frequently I had to deliver as many as three *shtafetas* a day... Very often we had to stay [at the destination] and wait for a response. Sometimes *shtafetas* were destined for another village, and I had to wait for a response. (Lunio 93-94)

Former messengers unanimously stress that their job was very demanding in terms of physical and emotional endurance, because they had to travel long distances regardless of season or weather, day or night, through rugged terrain, often across woods, rivers or swamps (Datsiuk Datsiuk 2003, 218; 295). Many of the stories reveal the exceptional wit and intelligence of female messengers who camouflaged themselves adroitly in order to escape perilous situations. They fabricated false identities and plausible 'legends' explaining the purpose of their trips; often they pretended to be dumb peasant girls or flirted with male enemies to lull them into a false sense of security. Using a variety of tricks, they were able to sneak through the densest guarded borders (Pan'kiv 2005, 255; Datsiuk 2007a, 20-21). The experiences of Ol'ha Shymkiv and Nastia Petrenii seem to have been very common:

I did not go home. My female neighbour changed me into an old woman; she powdered my face with ash, and covered my head with a kerchief. I pretended to be a lame old woman going with a bucket for water. I crossed the courtyard to a side street. There I met Ksenia, she suggested I come into her house... When the NKVD agents broke in they found only small children and an "old woman". Thus I avoided arrest. (Pan'kiv 2005, 268-269)

Female members of the underground took advantage of the existing gender stereotypes, which expected women to stay away from fighting. Indeed, for certain period of time state authorities and punitive organs (Polish, Nazi and Soviet) were less suspicious of girls so they were able to steal up virtually everywhere with relative ease. Although gender stereotypes facilitated the relative mobility of girls, they did not guarantee immunity in case of arrest. Although acutely aware of the threat of arrest

transmission existed, the messengers knew each other. Nevertheless, they never knew other sections of the chain; they never knew the immediate addressee either.

and its appalling consequences, young girls served as couriers nonetheless, delivering all kinds of goods and supplies for underground activities.¹³ Nastia Petrenii narrated a story about an incident that took place in 1943:

I was given money for a train ride from Iamnytia to Stanislav, then from Stanislav to Kolomyia, and further to the village of Matiivtsi. So I had an order to go. I was given a big bag; I don't know what was inside. I was instructed where to get off and which way to go, across the meadow to a certain house painted blue. A man awaited me there; I gave the password, heard the answer, and understood that he was our liaison. He gave me another bag; it was full of printed materials, I guessed. I entered the station to buy a ticket, but then I saw that the station was full of Gestapo with dogs. They were searching for somebody. And I was carrying a bag! I had to find an exit; I had to pull myself together! Even today I feel scared when I recall that. But then I managed to get a grip on myself, so I passed by those dogs and Gestapo [men], went to the counter and bought a ticket. I was only 16 years old at that time, but I was thinking of nothing except how to fulfill the order. (Datsiuk 2007a, 16)

Local girls often served as guides helping insurgents to make their way safely through an unknown locality during their marches or raids. Usually a girl walked ahead of a group at a safe distance to make sure the way was clear, while the rest followed her after a special signal. The need to guide insurgents might occur any time, day or night, any season or weather. One gets a sense of the risk these guides were exposed to from reading the memoirs of Paraska Protsak:

I guided squads through safe terrains when needed. It was very hard; danger was everywhere. During one of those marches I was about to die. The river was over flooded because of rain, it was night – I could not see anything around me. As usual, I walked ahead, four men followed me, and a hundred soldiers brought up the rear. I stepped forward – and was submerged in water. I was about to sink... (Protsak 16).

Women were also actively engaged in propaganda activities. After completing special *lunatstvo* training, each girl was required to educate the local population about the goals of the national cause, and disseminate the printed nationalist propaganda materials (Hordasevych 32-33, 105; Savka 53, 55-56, 140, 168). Anna Karwanska-Bajlak recalled her personal experience of recruiting local people to the nationalist movement:

¹³ Girls were often sent to cities to bring fake documents (e.g., IDs, passports, references) to the insurgents located in the countryside; they also transported medicine, propaganda materials, stationary for secret printing houses, radio receivers and transmitters, batteries, weapons, clothing (Hordasevych 70, 86).

I decided to look for proper people among peasants working on their fields. I tried to cover dozens of kilometres as fast as I could in order to reach people while they were still on the fields before sunset... Day after day I was walking and running on roads, paths, furrows, borders, from one village to another, to find my new fellows, my recruits. I did not recognize myself. I was physically exhausted, but at the same time I felt myself becoming stronger on the inside; in me firmness and determination were strengthening (60).

After completing a typist courses, some educated girls worked for underground printing offices (Savka 162; Datsiuk 2003, 296). Remarkably, there was a gender division of labour in the propagandistic work: production of the most important texts on nationalist ideology and analysis of current political situation was normally done by the male leaders, whereas women were assigned the more technical functions of copy-editing, retyping and dissemination of these materials. Only a few women (Liudmyla Foia, Bohdana Svitlyk, Halyna Holoiad, Kateryna Zarytska, among others) contributed as authors and served as editors for underground periodical and bulletins: nine female names appear on the list of 69 writers whose works appeared in underground publications (Stasiuk 375-76; see also Nikolaieva 27-30).¹⁴

This situation shows that the leadership of the OUN and the UPA did not use the intellectual potential of women to the full extent. Remarkably, the very idea that women are less suitable for highest political leadership and military command has been actively cultivated among insurgents, to the extent that even women also adopted it. Daria Rebet, one of the most prominent female leaders of the OUN, in a text dedicated to a woman's nature and her societal mission, argued:

[Women] shall not attempt to do all that men do at any cost... Because when a decision on some significant and important issues is to be made, when circumstances get more complicated, when one has to be merciless toward others and oneself, and when for the sake of impartial decision it is necessary to get rid of emotions—women often fail, and women's nervous system and physical built plays a certain role here as well. (Rebet 1943, 8)

As a matter of fact, none of the nationalists policy texts on women's issue ever encouraged women's political leadership: a list of spheres appropriate

¹⁴ Kateryna Zaryts'ka was perhaps the only exception: she published several works on theoretical and practical issues of the Ukrainian national liberation struggle, signed with her nick-name *Kuzhil'*. Her article, "Ways of Russian Imperialism," was on the required reading list of underground political training courses (Onyshko 2004, 35).

for women's public activities usually included educational and cultural institutions, charity and social care, and improvement of domestic efficiency (Rebet 1943, 21a; *Ukrains'ka zhinka* 7a). And this despite the fact that many of the female partisans (especially those recruited among college and university students in the pre-war period) were better educated. Sometimes that educational difference provoked jealousy and tension among partisans:

In general, relationships between insurgents of different sexes did not create serious problems, but some difficulties did exist. There were significantly fewer women than men in the movement, and their recruitment to the underground was more selective. Girls doing clerical work usually had more substantial education than many insurgents. But the battle-hardened soldiers hated when a woman let them feel her superiority, even if it was her formal education... At times even a woman's innocent reminiscences of the times spent in high school were perceived as bragging. (Savchyn 174)

The absence of women in UPA's highest leadership positions demonstrated their unequal status in the common struggle, especially when it came to decision-making and the general command. Women made up a significant share of the regular messengers, couriers, guides and propaganda workers. The female insurgents exploited their traditional femininity to take advantage of the prevailing gender stereotypes. At the same time, they transgressed the established gender scripts in the sense that their missions involved dangerous and physically demanding tasks, long-distance trips, and political knowledge. The tasks assigned them required that young women either possess or develop certain personality traits and skills, including quick-wittedness, courage, physical strength and endurance, a good sense of direction, verbal abilities, sociability, discretion, self-discipline, and emotional self-control. All these traits were systematically cultivated in female members of the UPA, even though they were hardly considered to be typical of women.

WOMEN IN CAMPS AND MILITARY UNITS: FEMININITY CURTAILED AND UNDERMINED

Testimonies about women participating in UPA military units, operations and armed conflicts are very limited. This is quite natural taking into account that the proportion of female soldiers was relatively low. Moreover, the majority of female fighters fell in battle, committed suicide or was executed upon arrest. From the incomplete testimonies available we learn that not infrequently girls served as bodyguards of OUN and the UPA leaders; some became parachute jumpers; some participated in UPA

military operation on par with men (Savka 54, 79, 94-95, 142-143, 156, 162; Hordasevych 33). Perhaps, the half-legendary story of Liudmyla Foia's heroic death on the battlefield is an exemplary case proving that some women did participate in actual military operations (Petrenko 2009). Recollections of former male insurgents testify that there were quite a few women among them (Antonova).¹⁵

The idea of women taking up arms faced strong resistance from public opinion in major belligerent states during World War II (except in the USSR), resulting in women not being allowed to use weapons (Campbell 1993). Apparently, this was not the case among the Ukrainian insurgents. According to women's personal testimonies, the majority of female insurgents (messengers, scouts, couriers, nurses) rarely had guns at their disposal. This contradicts the visual documents: contemporaneous photographs feature female fighters holding firearms.¹⁶ Such discrepancy may be explained by the fact that the narrators were not personally engaged with the military units, while female soldiers did not survive to share their stories. In any case, the girls who served as messengers or couriers and exposed their lives to mortal danger carried no guns for self-defence. The reason was simple: if a girl was captured unarmed her chances to extricate herself from trouble were higher.¹⁷ Even those having guns rarely used them. It looks like girls preferred to rely on their own resourcefulness to avoid the enemy (Protsak 17). Some former female members of the national underground admitted that they did not really like to use weapons to shoot people (Lunio 157; Hordasevych 109). All UPA members were instructed to commit suicide in case of arrest in order to prevent the transmission of vital information under torture. Messengers delivering especially important messages never carried weapons but were

¹⁵ Although the exact number of insurgents remains unknown, the leading historian of the UPA, Dr. Volodymyr Viatrovych, estimates that the Ukrainian nationalist underground may have number up to 500,000—including about 100,000 military. He also estimates that women constituted about 1/3 of those who participated in non-military activities (Viatrovych 2014).

¹⁶ Numerous examples of such photos were presented (from May 2008 to September 2009) in a travelling exhibit titled "Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA): A History of the Undefeated" (U Sluzhbi Bezpeky...).

¹⁷ Another explanation could be the difference in arming women at different stages of the struggle: at the later stage the number of insurgents decreased considerably and almost all of them went deep underground hiding in secret bunkers, so that each of them, including women, was considered to be a soldier with a right to carry a gun.

given lethal poison to be taken in case of arrest.¹⁸ There are several testimonies revealing instances when female couriers did away with themselves in hopeless situations.¹⁹ Numerous stories also relate how women, serving as secretaries to UPA commanders, together with other insurgents, when surrounded by the NKVD, were herded into a bunker and shot by those they served (Petrenko 2009, 12).

These practices unambiguously prove that female fighters were not perceived as women in a traditional sense: instead of protecting women as procreators of the nation and saving their lives at any cost, nationalists found it possible to sacrifice them for the sake of the underground movement's security. Effectively, by joining the armed struggle women-partisans were expected to give up a great deal of their traditional femininity. Thus, their experience of armed fighting and 'heroic death for the Nation' undermined the proclaimed nationalist ideal concerning woman.

Both women and men endured all kinds of hardships caused by living and working in dugout bunkers without basic sanitary facilities, with no natural light and poor ventilation.²⁰ In their recollections, women pointed out the particular, gender-related, inconveniences and difficulties they faced: everyday hygiene in general, and especially during their periods, was very problematic because in most case bunkers had no separate rooms or quarters for women.²¹

During military raids women normally wore men's uniforms, as they were considered more suitable for secret marches. Nevertheless, some women tried to secure their femininity by wearing proper woman's clothing while in the bunker. In rare cases, women even procured cosmetics and perfume—real treasures for them. Even in forest camps some women tried to maintain their feminine appearance, using any opportunity to spruce up:

¹⁸ Olena Petrenko pointed out a special instruction that circulated among UPA fighters, advising them to commit suicide in a hopeless situation (Petrenko 2009, 11).

¹⁹ Historians of the UPA pointed out the common practice of committing suicide when under threat of arrest (Kyrychuk 275, 276, 303; Savka 206).

²⁰ Maria Savchyn-Pyskir stressed that after several months in a wet, dark, cramped room (especially in winter), with poor and irregular nutrition, some insurgents developed chronic illnesses, the most typical of which were tuberculosis, muscular asthenia, poor sight, and duodenal ulcers.

²¹ This aspect of women's experience in the underground is very poorly covered in their narratives.

Immediately upon her return to the bunker Kateryna changed. She took a bath and changed her pants for a skirt, boots for high-heeled shoes, and socks for nylon stockings; she powdered her face, and sprayed eau de cologne on herself. Now she no longer resembled a fighter. Once she said: "If death is going to meet me, I shall change into fresh clothing." (Savchyn 291-2)

Maria Savchyn, whose reflections on the gender aspects of underground life are quite unique, related the personal dilemma she faced after her girl friends gave her some women's items—facial cream, stockings and perfume. She had to hide that valuable gift lest her husband and male comrades ridiculed her (Savchyn 319). Women repeatedly stress that while in the underground they missed quality items and fresh clothing (Pan'kiv 2005, 207-210).

Romantic relationships and love affairs were common in the underground (Havryshko). All the wartime distresses were unable to stop the natural course of life. Even in hideouts and in forest camps, under permanent threat of arrest and death, young men and women continued to fall in love, and many even married in the underground.²² This became a fairly common practice, but a fighter's marriage required the commander's approval (Karwanska-Bajlak 120).²³

If both lovers were in the underground there was no problem, but if an insurgent wanted to marry a "civilian" girl, such a 'mixed' marriage was unwelcome. The leaders considered such cases very carefully: will the bride weaken the insurgent's morale or persuade him to leave the struggle, or, perhaps, through her, the NKVD may try to turn him into an agent. (Savchyn-Pyskir 2010)²⁴

Almost every woman's recollection of her membership in the UPA contains several stories of her comrades who married an insurgent and became widowed soon after (Karwanska-Bajlak 2000). Maria Kurochka's story is

²² Women's memoirs are replete with stories of how their girlfriends married male colleagues in the underground (Pan'kiv; Savchyn; Karwanska-Bajlak).

²³ Only a few hand-made marriages certificates of the insurgents survived (Kis 593-594).

²⁴ In general, the UPA commanders did not encourage the presence of women in military units (Petrenko 2009, 6). Since the number of women among male insurgents was considerably smaller, only a lucky few, the married ones, had the possibility of satisfying their sexual needs. Therefore, a woman always had to watch her behaviour, stay on proper friendly terms with all her male counterparts. Indeed, competition for a woman could lead to jealousy and hostility among the insurgents and thus weaken the military unit's morale and fighting ability.

typical in this respect: she joined the OUN when she was 17 years old; at the age of 20 she married a fellow member of OUN. One month after their wedding both joined the UPA, and soon thereafter her husband was killed (Savka 101). The fate of another couple was similar: Twenty-eight-year-old Vasyl' Sarchuk was killed in a battle a few months after the wedding. His wife Lida gave birth to their son, but in December 1951 he was caught by the NKVD and sentenced to 10 years in the Gulag (Koval'chuk).

On the other hand, a woman's presence in a bunker had some positive effects on insurgents: it created an illusion of a "normal life" as women performed the traditional roles of caregiver and agent of emotional release in extremely distressing circumstances (Savchyn-Pyskir 2010). This ambivalence set up a number of special restrictions with regard to a woman's behaviour, making her life more difficult in a psychological sense.

Pregnancy was not a rare occurrence among married women in the underground. The issue of motherhood surfaces repeatedly in women's memoirs. Remarkably, they preferred to keep silent about the circumstances of their conception and attitudes toward pregnancy; instead, they focused on the extreme hardships of being pregnant, giving birth and mothering itself.²⁵ Obviously, such a situation was especially difficult for those living in forest camps and bunkers. Pregnancy and/or a baby reduced considerably a woman's ability to participate in the struggle and required additional resources. A pregnant woman was a real burden for a military unit, reducing its mobility and increasing the risk of discovery. That is why she was usually "legalized," i.e. discharged from the UPA and sent to live as a civilian with fake documents. But even then she was an easy target for the NKVD and a weak link in the network. Punitive organs usually watched a mother closely; her house could become a trap for her husband or other insurgents. Being aware of the potential risk, insurgents often terminated all contacts. Left to survive on her own, a woman would perceive motherhood not as a blessing but as a curse due to which she lost her role in the national struggle, became a source of danger for her comrades, was deprived of all financial and emotional support, doomed to a life of a single mother filled with hardships, in isolation and suffering and permanent anxiety.

Iryna Bulat's story is very typical in this respect. She became pregnant while in the underground with her husband. In June 1946, six months pregnant, she came out of the forests and stayed secretly with several peasant families loyal to the UPA. In September she gave birth to a little girl.

²⁵ For a more detailed discussion on motherhood in the Ukrainian nationalist underground, see Kis 2014.

Several months after delivery, a baby in hand, she began running from the punitive organs, moving from one village to another. Once, in January 1947, during a snowstorm, she covered on foot ten kilometres of rough terrain. She finally emigrated, leaving her baby in the custody of strangers (Pan'kiv 2005, 133-138).²⁶

Attitudes toward motherhood were controversial among women who dedicated their lives to the national cause. The situation of women whose pregnancy and delivery took place in the military camps was even more complicated. Maria Kurochka is one example. Her husband was killed in battle soon after their wedding, leaving Maria a pregnant widow, but she never ceased participating in subversive activities. She gave birth in a bunker located in the middle of a field, which Maria shared with five other partisans, some of them wounded. They assisted in the delivery and made nappies out of their clothes. During one two-week siege they were totally isolated, suffering from severe hunger and thirst. Ultimately, Maria was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag. Maria's parents brought up her son; she became insane when her son repudiated her as a mother upon her release (Savka 101-102).

Mothering in the traditional sense was absolutely incompatible with a woman's active participation in the struggle. Pregnant female insurgents faced a dilemma, and many made an extremely difficult and impossible decision (from the point of view of traditional femininity) in favour of warfare—at the cost of motherhood.

The personal story of Daria Rebet, one of the OUN leaders, mirrors the stories of thousands of young mothers: she left behind her two-years-old boy to be brought up by other people in order to dedicate her life to the struggle (Rebet 467-468). The story of Hanna Svystun, a thirty-seven-year-old mother of five is even more impressive. Living legally in her native village, she secretly served as a courier and messenger for the UPA. Eventually, she was caught and tortured by the Soviets, but managed to escape and go underground. Her five children were left in the care of Hanna's elderly mother. Hanna participated in UPA military operations, was wounded, arrested and sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag (Savka 86-87).²⁸

One must appreciate the unfailing solidarity that women demonstrated by taking care of children left behind by an insurgent mother: the practice of long-time custody or adoption was widespread during the nationalist guerrilla war (Pan'kiv 2005, 151, 140-143). This social phenomenon could

²⁶ There are an endless number of women's stories with a similar scenario. Maria Savchyn lost her two sons who were born in the underground (Savchyn 2003). Kateryna Podol'ska followed her husband and went underground, and her old parent had to take care of the two children left behind (Pan'kiv 2001, 51).

be seen as a kind of communal motherhood: under the threat of common danger, Ukrainian women appeared to feel greater empathy toward one another, and/or a certain collective responsibility for the survival of all children, treating them as “ours.” Thus while mothering as an individual role was undermined, motherhood as a cultural value was collectively maintained among Ukrainian women who participated in the struggle.

In order to avoid such tough choice, i.e., between motherhood and the national struggle, some girls deliberately denied themselves any romantic relationship (and sexual contact) during wartime—and postponed their matrimonial plans for a more appropriate time. For instance, Bohdana Pylypchuk explained her unmarried status: “One man asked why I am not married, so I replied: ‘I will get married when Ukraine is independent’” (Pylypchuk). Unfortunately, she was in her seventies when that finally happened. Another former insurgent was even more straightforward in her views: she strictly instructed the girls under her command that the national liberation struggle is their top priority, and all love affairs must be postponed. She proudly claimed that not a single case of marriage or pregnancy occurred on her watch.

A female member of the UPA had to maintain such a strong position... If she decided to join the struggle, there had to be discipline, military discipline, and those who could not comply could not work for the underground. It was no place for marriage or any love affairs...” (Salamakha)

The women whose teenage sons and daughters went underground also had to subordinate their maternal sentiments to the national cause. In the women’s memoirs there is no mention of a mother impeding a child’s admission to the UPA. Numerous stories tell of a broken-hearted mother whose offspring was shot down in battle or in a manhunt, and she could not openly mourn or properly bury the dead body (Savka 114; Plechiy 32-35).

Many women in the underground lived under false names, far from their hometowns. They usually resided with people loyal to the UPA, pretending to be a relative—while their kinfolk had no idea about their lives (Pylypchuk). In fact, all insurgents had to give up their family relationships for the sake of the national cause. For UPA members this imperative applied to men and women equally, contradicting thereby the traditional perception of the woman as a custodian of cherished family ties. In fact, many women prioritized political activism at the cost of family relationships while in the insurgency.

Women’s strong maternal and family sentiments made them especially vulnerable in case of arrest. According to Soviet and Nazi officers who interrogated captured insurgents, threatening a woman’s family with

repressions (or promising the family amnesty) proved to be the most effective method of turning women into agents (Burds 307).

Direct and immediate participation of women in the national guerrilla war required women to reconsider their notion and practices of femininity: women had to adopt and master male patterns of behaviour, go without basic comforts, give up many conventional women's attributes and habits, establish partner relationships with male comrades, etc. At the same time women were expected to perform traditionally women's functions, and their sexual behaviour was closely monitored. In sum, one of the most fundamental elements of traditional womanhood—motherhood—was routinely questioned and undermined. The general rise in national consciousness among Ukrainians, together with women's active participation in the armed struggle, had a considerable impact on women's value system, as many did subordinate their family roles and personal relationships to the national cause.

CONCLUSIONS

Women's multifaceted and mass participation in the Ukrainian national guerrilla movement during the mid Twentieth century is inadequately reflected in the historical record. A close reading of the personal recollections of former female insurgents allows us to explore the deeply gendered and inherently controversial nature of the nationalist movement and armed insurgency. The factor of gender proved to play a key role in determining the nature of women's participation in the guerrilla war: their functions in the OUN and the UPA were clearly gender-based. The UPA commanders exploited gender-specific skills, together with the knowledge and resources of local Ukrainian women. They did not, however, use the women's intellectual and managerial abilities to the fullest extent. Neither was their leadership potential properly appreciated. Women in the underground movement were both beneficiaries and victims of the prevailing gender stereotypes: as females they aroused little suspicion of the punitive organs (at least for a while), but for the same reason they were kept aloof from decision making in the underground.

The mass engagement of girls and women in the nationalist underground allowed Ukrainian women to broaden and negotiate a centuries-old notion of normative femininity, and to transgress traditional gender scripts, contesting and undermining some of its most fundamental principles. For thousands of Ukrainian women the nationalist credo 'Nation comes first' became a reality and changed their lives forever, to the extent that even the most sacred elements of traditional femininity (family and

motherhood among others) became secondary compared to a woman's service to the Nation.

In addition, a great number of peasant women acquired a previously inaccessible education. They studied history, geography, nationalist ideology, espionage, journalism, publishing, and medicine in the underground. Thousands of young peasant girls—otherwise doomed to stay in their home villages for most of their lives—were able to travel around the region and beyond, thus crossing the gendered imperative of immobility and breaking family bonds.²⁷

This is in line with the conclusions of feminist historians about the emancipative effects of women's wartime experiences in the Twentieth century, as it in fact facilitated women's entrance into the public sphere and broadened substantially the spectrum of social roles available to them (Summerfield 256-264). I agree with Lucy Noakes' claim:

War work in both [world] wars provided women with increased access to the public, previously male, spaces as women moved out of the 'traditional' areas of female employment into a variety of occupations which were previously the domain of men... The diaries and autobiographies of women who lived through both wars [show] the increased confidence felt by many of them. (Noakes 15)

Women also obtained practical experience in direct political participation and proved their preparedness and ability to be the full-fledged members of the nation. Their contribution to the national cause (even when marked as purely feminine) transgressed the framework of the "private sphere" and exceeded traditional gender roles.

Indeed, Ukrainian women proved to be agents of historical change. At the same time, women's agency acquired in the guerrilla movement differed substantially from that of men, as it was not associated with either strategic military or political decision making, nor legendary victories or even more glorified defeats on the battlefield. Women's agency manifested itself at the grass roots level and therefore was less visible and less celebrated—but one has to admit that the day-to-day vitality of the entire organization depended on the persistent selfless efforts of thousands of such ordinary women.

²⁷ D'Ann Campbell has also stressed that American military women found "their years of service broadened their horizons, improved their skills, and above all, increased their self-confidence" (108). American women recruits had obtained a unique opportunity for long-distance travel after being enlisted in the US military forces during the WWII.

It is clear that the UPA leadership's decision to recruit women on a mass scale into the underground was instrumental, necessary to keep the organization running when the male members were immobilized by the harsh activities of the punitive organs. Although the emancipation of women was by no means an aim, at the end of the day their participation in the struggle undermined the millennia-old tradition of excluding women from taking active part in military conflicts—and thus challenged the established gender order.²⁸

The underground experience allowed female insurgents to go beyond the traditional gender scripts, to acquire valuable political knowledge and skills, and to exercise their new-found political agency. As Ann Dombrowski correctly remarked: "Women who choose to fight, claim a place for themselves among those men who have achieved the respect of their fellow citizens for their willingness to risk their lives for the sake of their country or their ideals" (2). Despite women's active and mass participation in the underground it did not ultimately help to equalize gender relations in Ukrainian society afterwards, neither did it affect Ukrainian historiography on the subject of the nationalist guerrilla war. The concept of "double helix" coined by Margaret and Patrice Higonnet may help to explain gender dynamics during wartime. Two intertwined strands represent the gender order of a patriarchal society, with the female strand opposed and subordinated to the male: whenever women's social status raises, the men's status raises even higher and the general hierarchal relationship is maintained (34). Thus, after they performed a number of essential roles in the nationalist underground, Ukrainian female insurgents did advance their social status, but the male fighters who sacrificed their lives for the homeland achieved the more prestigious status of national heroes.

Nevertheless, having had such training in active citizenship, one could hardly expect Ukrainian women to remain passive objects or indifferent bystanders of the dramatic historical developments that followed. Unfortunately, by the time that the UPA resistance was suppressed by the Soviets, the majority of female insurgents were dead, imprisoned or in the immigration. They had virtually no possibility to convert their newly acquired knowledge and experiences into a civilian life of active citizenship. The remaining local population was forced to keep silent anything related to the nationalist underground. For decades Ukrainian Soviet society knew next to nothing about Ukrainian women's roles in the underground movement. This does not mean however that such knowledge has no

²⁸ Melissa K. Stockdale made similar observation in her research on Russian women's participation in the Great War (112).

relevance in today's Ukraine. A study of the survivors' memoirs can help modern Ukrainian women to legitimize their claims for active political participation in order to ensure their right to be full-fledged citizens and equal members of the emerging Ukrainian political nation. The recent events on the Maidan in Kyiv and the war with Russia in Eastern Ukraine are providing yet another remarkable opportunity for Ukrainian women to step forward and show their agency in the struggle for their nation's sovereignty and democracy as members of civic society organizations, volunteer initiatives, and military units.²⁹ By learning the history of women during the nationalist guerrilla struggle and comparing it to the present enormous contribution by a new generation, women can confidently claim their well-deserved and equal place in national politics, government and policy decisions.

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²⁹ For a detailed analysis of Ukrainian women's participation in the Maidan, see Phillips.

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