

SHARED MEMORY CULTURE?

Nationalizing the 'Great Patriotic War' in the Ukrainian-Russian Borderlands



Tatiana Zhurzhenko

Borders and borderlands, particularly in Eastern Europe, are ideal sites for studying memory cultures and commemorative politics. Historically, borderland territories have often been exposed to changing powers, to military and political expansion by the neighbours and to ethnic and religious conflicts. In most cases European borderlands are 'victim intensive' places, with their historical memories shaped by collective traumas, former hostilities and shared guilt. At the same time, they are places where different cultures coexist and enrich each other, creating 'hybrid' or 'creole' identities, sometimes seen as a challenge to the nation-building efforts of the political elites. Thus, borders and borderlands are not marginal places but central sites of power where the meaning of national identity is created and contested. The implementation of a new international border encourages the nationalization of collective memories and generates differences in a formerly shared memory culture, as has been exemplified by the events since 1991 in the post-Soviet borderlands.

This chapter addresses some aspects of memory politics in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands using the example of the 'Great Patriotic War', the official Soviet narrative of the Second World War which has been transformed and adopted by the post-Soviet political elites in both Ukraine and Russia. Focusing on two neighbouring regions – Kharkiv (Ukraine) and Belgorod (RF) – it compares the new national (and regional) memory cultures while concurrently tracing the transformation of the common Soviet narrative of the 'Great Patriotic War' and its integration into a new transnational discourse of East Slavic unity. The fates of Kharkiv and Belgorod during the Second World War were closely connected: both cities were liberated by the Soviet Army in August 1943, in

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the aftermath of the Kursk Battle. During the postwar decades they shared the official Soviet commemorative culture, including the state-sanctioned historical narrative, the pantheon of heroes and the memorial calendar. Today Kharkiv and Belgorod can serve as examples for studying the processes of pluralization and nationalization of memory cultures on both sides of the border.

The pluralization of memory cultures in the post-Soviet societies is a result of democratization, which opened the way for public representations of the past by different social groups and 'communities of memory': traditional (such as Soviet veterans, former Nazi KZ prisoners) as well as new ones (e.g., victims of Stalinist repressions, Holocaust survivors, former deportees). The nationalization of memory refers to the renarration of the 'Great Patriotic War' and the reinterpretation of its key events, symbols and 'historical lessons' in the process of the construction of new post-Soviet national identities. Unlike in Western Ukraine and in the Baltic states, in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands this creeping nationalization of memory does not imply its radical de-Sovietization. Rather, we can speak about pragmatic policies of the regional authorities, which step by step replace 'archaic' Soviet symbols with national and religious ones, or rather integrate the former national narratives into new ones. At the same time, the myth of the 'Common Victory in the Great Patriotic War' remains an important symbolic resource used by various political actors on the national as well as regional level. In Ukrainian-Russian relations it serves for legitimizing post-Soviet integration projects and the 'strategic partnership' of both countries.

This chapter starts with introductory remarks on the memory of the Second World War in Ukraine and Russia, and continues with some brief comments on the specific political and cultural situation of the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands and on the political uses of memory in cross-border cooperation projects. As the next step, the new memory cultures in Kharkiv and Belgorod will be analysed and compared. This analysis is illustrated by two examples of new war memorials – the Prokhorovka Field in the Belgorod region and the Marshal Konev Height near Kharkiv. Both memorials were initiated by the local political elites after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. While representing new projects of national and regional identities supposedly free from Soviet ideology, they reflect the fragmented and ambivalent character of the new national narratives and demonstrate the tendency to political instrumentalization and reideologization of Second World War history.

The Memory of the Second World War in Ukraine and in Russia

The official Soviet narrative of the 'Great Patriotic War' was elaborated in the Brezhnev era (Dubin 2005). Not only did it provide the Soviet system with legitimacy but it also helped consolidate the collective identity of the 'Soviet people'. The myth of the 'Common Victory' played a special role in the relations between Moscow and Kyiv; it corresponded to the basic historical paradigm of East Slavic unity and helped to silence the counter-memory of the anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist resistance and its collaboration with the Nazis (cf. Grinevich 2005). As will be shown later, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, 'Brezhnev's empire of memory'¹ did not collapse at once. Due to various geopolitical, cultural and historical reasons the political uses of the Second World War in post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia differ significantly.

Unlike in Russia, in Ukraine conflicting views on the Soviet past and alternative interpretations of the Second World War contribute to a profound political conflict which divides society. In this respect Ukraine is reminiscent of a country that has experienced civil war (Shevel 2011). On the national and regional level, the right to interpret the historical and geopolitical outcome of the Second World War has been openly claimed by the competing political forces. The reinterpretation of the Second World War and its role in Ukrainian history is directly linked to the 'postcolonial' search for national identity and the problem of geopolitical choice between Russia and the West. While during Leonid Kuchma's decade the official rhetoric referred to the Second World War as the 'Great Patriotic War of the Ukrainian people', the narrative preferred by former president Yushchenko presented the Ukrainian nation as a victim of two totalitarian regimes. According to Sofia Grachova (2008: 4), 'the new official historical narrative represented the war not so much as a glorious event, but rather as a terrible tragedy that struck the Ukrainian people in the absence of a national state'. At the same time, Yushchenko's symbolic politics, which aimed at the glorification of Ukrainian nationalism and at denouncing the Soviet regime as anti-Ukrainian, polarized the country. The Eastern Ukrainian regions (including Kharkiv), being the stronghold of the Party of Regions, became the main arena of memory wars during Yushchenko's presidency.

In Russia, some aspects of the Second World War also remain the subject of hot public debates (primary amongst them the role of Stalin). At the same time, a basic consensus exists among the political elites (shared by the Russian society at large) on the role of Russia in the Second World War and on the meaning of this event for national history. State managers,

technocrats, nationalists and even liberals share the interpretation of the victory over the Nazis as the only achievement of Soviet history to survive the collapse of communism. There is, of course, a geopolitical dimension to this triumphalist narrative: the 'Great Victory over Fascism' became the Soviet Union's entry ticket to the club of world powers and legitimized its new global status and sphere of influence on the European continent. Like the USSR, post-Soviet Russia draws its geopolitical status from the historical outcomes of the Second World War. In its relations with the former Soviet republics (such as the Baltic states and Georgia), where war memory has become a subject of de-Sovietization and 'decolonization', Russia uses the symbolic capital of the 'Great Victory' for denouncing the pro-Western political elites as 'Nazi sympathizers'. The Soviet myth of the 'Great Patriotic War' remains basically unchallenged but at the same time has been integrated into the new narrative of Russian history; it serves as an instrument of national consolidation and patriotic education. The same policy can be observed in the Russian regions, as the example of Belgorod will demonstrate.

Politics of Memory in the Regions

Regional elites in Russia and in (Eastern) Ukraine use the myth of the 'Great Patriotic War' as a symbolic resource for a number of purposes. Firstly, for strengthening their dominant position and for legitimizing the political status quo in the region. As the war myth is deeply rooted in mass consciousness, no wonder that local authorities try to present themselves as heirs and guardians of the 'Great Victory', caring about Soviet veterans and protecting historical memory. Secondly, the history and memory of the war are used to induce local patriotism, seen by the regional authorities as an important pillar of social and political stability. Remnants of the Soviet ideological and educational institutions and new social initiatives (military-patriotic clubs, *poisk* movements, historical re-enactment groups) are usually directly controlled and even encouraged by the local authorities. Thirdly, memory politics is an instrument of regional branding; it is believed to improve the investment climate of a region and the chances of receiving funding for prestigious local projects from the central budget. True, the painful memory of the Second World War seems not to be the best choice for regional branding; however, the more the war becomes history the more the tragic past turns into cultural heritage. The Belgorod elites, for example, promote the brand of Prokhorovka as the 'Third Battlefield of Russia', along with the Kulikovo Field and Borodino.² In the case of Belgorod, such politics of memory

are supposed to compensate for the lack of other symbolic resources and the relatively young age of the Belgorod oblast as an administrative unit (Reutov 2004). Unlike in Belgorod where the local context of the war memory was reshaped by the triumphant narrative of the Kursk Battle, in Kharkiv the war has been associated in collective memory with catastrophic defeats of the Red Army and strategic failures of Soviet military leadership. While such memory is not quite usable for regional branding, other local myths such as Kharkiv as 'First Capital'³ proved more productive (cf. Kravchenko 2009, Zhurzhenko 2010). Therefore, history is not a 'limitless and plastic symbolic resource' (Appadurai cited in Yekelchik 2004) that the regional elites can use on their own; this is even more true for the recent past.

Politics of memory in the regions cannot be reduced to the 'symbolic management' of the authorities. In a democratic society there are also political parties, NGOs, professional and cultural associations, academic institutions, local media and civic activists that pursue their own interests and shape regional memory cultures. Pluralism of memory depends on the level of political pluralism in the region, the strength of civil society, the independence of local media, the level of political competitiveness, the interest of the local authorities in history and their openness to public dialogue. The example of the Belgorod region demonstrates that the semi-authoritarian regime created by the local governor tends to monopolize and control public memory. The opposite example of Kharkiv proves that memory wars caused by the deep ideological split in Ukrainian society and by the fight between local interest groups, provide more space for pluralism of public memory but also lead to reideologization and political manipulation.

'Shared Memory' and the New Border

The new border between Ukraine and Russia contributes to the transformation and disintegration of the shared memory culture inherited from the Soviet era. National holidays and remembrance days differ on both sides of the border, Ukrainian and Russian school textbooks are based on different historical narratives, and national media in both countries often give opposite interpretations of the same historical events. The nationalization of the formerly shared memory culture brings, however, rather different outcomes in Kharkiv and Belgorod. Kharkiv, similarly to other regions of Eastern Ukraine, has undergone an ambivalent process of integration into the new Ukrainian nation, while the latter itself still remains in the political gravitational field of Russia (Zhurzhenko 2010).

In largely Russian-speaking Kharkiv, mixed and overlapping identities pose a challenge to the politics of Ukrainization and nationalization of the past, while from the perspective of the Ukrainian nationalists the city represents a stronghold of the pro-Russian forces. After 1991 local political and business elites used positive symbols of Russian imperial and Soviet modernization for constructing the new image of Kharkiv as a multi-cultural borderland city with a tolerant and liberal capitalist spirit (cf. Kravchenko 2009). At the same time, Kharkiv elites actively promoted the new regional brand of *Slobozhanshchyna* (Sloboda Ukraine), which goes back to the history of seventeenth-century Ukrainian-Cossack colonization of this territory. The invention of *Slobozhanshchyna* reflected the search for Ukrainian roots of their regional identity, but at the same time it is often used as a symbol of a centuries-long peaceful Ukrainian-Russian coexistence (Zhurzhenko 2010). Characteristically, the first Ukrainian-Russian Euroregion initiated by Kharkiv and Belgorod in 2003 was given the name *Slobozhanshchyna*, while Kharkiv was declared the ‘capital of the Ukrainian-Russian cooperation’.

Both Kharkiv and Belgorod were founded three-and-a-half centuries ago as military fortresses for protecting the Muscovite state against the Tatars, but were soon integrated into the Russian imperial, later Soviet heartland; today they are rediscovering their borderland identity. For Kharkiv the border is rather a contact zone, while Belgorod sees itself first of all as a stronghold of the Russian state, Russian identity and the Orthodox Church. In the last two decades Belgorod authorities succeeded in attracting state funding for various local projects (border and transport infrastructure, a new university) appealing to the new geopolitical status of the region. At the same time, the Soviet toponyms referring to the Ukrainian-Russian brotherhood survived in the Belgorod symbolic landscape. In 1954, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Treaty (a symbol of the Russian-Ukrainian ‘reunification’ in the Soviet historiography), a monument to the Ukrainian-Cossack Hetman Bogdan Khmelnytskyi was erected in the city.⁴ While the monument was later removed for technical reasons, the main city avenue still bears the name of the Hetman. On the outskirts of Belgorod one can find an old oak that according to local legend was a witness to the meeting between Bogdan Khmelnytskyi and the ambassadors of the Russian Tsar. In the 1990s, Belgorod authorities inscribed these elements of the symbolic landscape into the new narrative of ‘East Slavic unity’. The Assembly of the Slavic Peoples, cross-border business forums, and festivals of ‘Slavic culture’ were supposed to demonstrate the economic and cultural reintegration of the post-Soviet states, or at least of the Slavic core. Belgorod presented itself as a stronghold of East Slavic unity and a motor of Russia’s cooperation with Ukraine and Belarus.



FIGURE 9.1 Orthodox chapel with the Bell of Unity in front of Peter and Paul Cathedral.
Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

The Prokhorovka war memorial (1995) near Belgorod was integrated into the new narrative of Slavic unity and became a mandatory site to be jointly visited by Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian leaders. An Orthodox chapel with the 'Bell of Unity' was erected for the meeting of Putin,

Lukashenka and Kuchma in Prokhorovka in May 2000; it is decorated with the icons of three saints – the patrons of the three Slavic countries (Figure 9.1). Patriarch Alexy, who had initiated the meeting of the three presidents in Prokhorovka on the occasion of the fifty-fifth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany, stressed the issue of Slavic unity in his speech:

Sons of the Russian, the Ukrainian and the Belorussian nations fought here heroically against the common enemy, protecting their common Motherland. Many of them gave their lives for our peaceful and free future. Nobody can separate their graves. In fight, in sacrifice, in victory they were together. They share military glory and we share the memory of their deeds ... Our best gift to their memory will be a strong union of the Ukrainians, the Russians and the Belorussians.⁵

In the mid-2000s Prokhorovka became a symbol of the ‘East Slavic reunification’, understood as the political, economic and cultural reintegration of the three former Soviet republics. Political elites interested in this project sought to inscribe the ‘Great Victory’ in the new discourse of pan-Slavism and Orthodox unity, adapting Soviet symbols, narratives and rituals. As a part of cross-border cooperation, mutual visits by Kharkiv and Belgorod Soviet veterans and their meetings in Prokhorovka were supported by the regional authorities. The memorial was also visited by student delegations from both cities, participants of business forums and academic conferences. These activities were significantly reduced after the Orange Revolution, but resumed from 2010. A special train organized on the occasion of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the ‘Great Victory’ brought Kharkiv Soviet veterans via Belgorod, Orel and Kursk to Moscow, and a new cross-border tourist route ‘Battlefields of Slobozhanshchyna’ was developed under the auspices of the Euroregion. Visiting Kharkiv in May 2011, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Cyril paid tribute to the Memorial of Glory and warned against historical revisionism with regard to the Second World War.

Belgorod – City of Military Glory

In Belgorod, the politics of memory reflect the specific features of the local semi-authoritarian political regime, created by governor Evgeniy Savchenko during the two decades of his rule. A former communist and a representative of the agrarian lobby, he was one of the first governors to join the pro-Putin ‘United Russia’. Savchenko managed to consolidate his power thanks to his ability to reach a compromise with all

influential groups and to provide the Kremlin with satisfying electoral results. Political monopoly allows the governor to implement prestigious and expensive projects – such as the Prokhorovka tank battle memorial. The Belgorod authorities present themselves as ‘caring’ for the local population and have implemented various social programmes, from encouraging small farming to affordable housing and state support for young families. The Russian Orthodox Church is very influential in the region and cooperates closely with the regional authorities, particularly in such areas as education, ideology and historical memory. Conflicts among the regional elites are usually non-ideological and rarely have a public dimension. The only ideological opponent of the authorities represented in the regional and local councils is the Communist Party. One of the rare conflicts around historical memory occurred in 2004 and concerned the issue of urban toponyms: on the initiative of the new city mayor and with support of the Russian Orthodox Church, most central streets of Belgorod, which until then had had Soviet names, were renamed without any prior public discussion. The local communists publicly protested against the renaming, but without success. A similar conflict happened in 2009, when the local authorities decided to remove the Lenin monument from the central square in order to make space for the planned obelisk ‘Belgorod – City of Military Glory’. In 2007, Belgorod was one of the first cities to receive the newly introduced honorary title ‘City of Military Glory’ from President Putin; it has become the ‘light’ version of the Soviet title ‘Hero City’ (Figure 9.2). However, the conflict about the Lenin statue did not endanger the local consensus on the Great Patriotic War; the communists only proposed to erect the new memorial on a different, but still central place.

In Soviet times, Belgorod, known as the ‘City of the First Salute’,⁶ possessed several war memorials: the ‘Mourning Mother’ (1953) on the central square, the ‘Monument to the Liberators of Belgorod’ as well as various monuments and busts in the central Victory Park dedicated to famous Soviet army generals and heroes of the Soviet Union. One of the most important local sites of memory is the ‘Memorial to the Heroes of the Kursk Battle’ (including a war museum) situated 624 km up the Moscow-Simferopol highway. As late as 1987 a new museum: The Kursk Battle – Advance to Belgorod was opened in the centre of Belgorod. The museum is organized around an impressive monumental diorama (67 x 15 m), one of the biggest in the former Soviet Union, which represents the culmination of the Prokhorovka tank battle.

In a kind of path dependency, the post-Soviet Belgorod authorities chose the myth of the Great Patriotic War as their main symbolic resource. They have been successfully promoting such regional brands



FIGURE 9.2 'Belgorod – City of Military Glory', patriotic visual propaganda in the urban landscape. Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

as 'Prokhorovka – The Third Battlefield of Russia' and 'Belgorod – City of Military Glory'. This heroic war narrative provided the ideological foundation for the regional programme 'Patriotic education of Belgorod citizens'. The local authorities managed to preserve various Soviet institutions of education and youth policy, replacing communist ideology with Orthodox religion, Russian nationalism and pan-Slavism. For example, the DOSAAF (Voluntary Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation and Fleet), a Soviet paramilitary association formerly used to prepare young people for military service, was transformed into a dense network of patriotic military clubs active in all districts of the Belgorod region. 'Cadet classes' were created in Belgorod schools with the purpose of teaching children sport, military skills and patriotic values, encouraging them to pursue a military or police career, with the local border police actively cooperating with Belgorod schools. In 2002, the General Vatutin Award⁷ for the best achievements in patriotic education was endowed by the Belgorod authorities. In the last two decades the urban landscape was supplied with new war monuments and the 'Alley of Heroes of the Soviet Union' in Victory Park was supplemented by busts of the new Heroes of Russia.

Belgorod's second ideological pillar is the Orthodox Church. In 1995, a separate Belgorod and Sary Oskol Eparchy was established with the bishop Yoasaf (Yakim Gorlenko, 1705–1754), canonized in 1911, becoming the city's official patron. A huge statue of prince Vladimir (Ukr. Volodymyr), who had baptised the Kievan Rus, was erected in 1998 on the occasion of the so-called 'Millennium of Belgorod'. The fact that the 'millennium' was criticized by historians as a fake did not keep the regional authorities from officially celebrating it. In the context of the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands the monument to Prince Vladimir has an ambivalent meaning as it symbolizes East Slavic unity and at the same time presents the Russian response to the Ukrainian claims for the heritage of the Kievan Rus (Vendina 2010). In the 1990s, a theological college with a special focus on missionary activity was re-established in Belgorod after seven decades of Soviet rule. It presents itself as a stronghold of Orthodox belief and Russian identity at the western border. Ukraine is often seen in this context as a source of various 'spiritual threats' such as schism, expansion of Protestant sects and of Catholic influences. Belgorod was one of the first regions to introduce 'Orthodox culture' into school curricula; the local eparchy is a co-founder of several local newspapers and magazines. The dominant status of the Orthodox Church corresponds with the pan-Slavism and Russian nationalism popular among the local elites. This link can be found in the works of the local sculptor Viacheslav Klykov (1939–2006), former head of the nationalist Union of the Russian People (*Soiuz Russkogo Naroda*) and creator of several monuments in Belgorod (including the one to the Prince Vladimir). Klykov, who received full support from the local authorities, was one of the designers of the Prokhorovka memorial that inscribes the epic tank battle in the centuries-long history of Russian military glory.

The Prokhorovka Memorial – 'The Third Battlefield of Russia'

The impressive war memorial in Prokhorovka, where in summer 1943 the biggest tank battle of the Second World War took place, is not only one of the most prominent sites of memory in the region but it also has national status. The project was initiated by the local authorities and supported by President Yeltsyn; Nikolai Ryzhkov, the last Soviet prime minister and now a senator from Belgorod, became the official patron of the memorial. It was inaugurated in 1995 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the victory. The most important element of the memorial site is the Bell Tower, which stands fifty-two metres high and is made of white marble and crowned with a golden statue of Mary, mother of God (Figure 9.3).



FIGURE 9.3 The Bell Tower on the Prokhorovka battlefield. Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

The four walls of the Bell Tower, which symbolize the four years of war, are covered with numerous illustrations of heroic fighting, suffering and triumph. Images well known from Soviet iconography such as the invasion of the fascist aggressors, the self-sacrificing work of women and children and the Victory parade on Red Square are presented here in a new aesthetic paradigm. Communist and Soviet images are virtually absent; instead, Orthodox symbols are widely used. Soviet soldiers and generals are depicted as heroes of Russian, rather than Soviet history. A row of Orthodox icons presents Russia's most important national saints and warriors, and a 'Holy Trinity' icon referring to Andrey Rublev symbolizes the unity of the army, the people and the Russian Orthodox Church. The figure of Marshal Georgiy Zhukov corresponds with the icon of Saint George killing the dragon (on St George's day, 6 May, the war 'actually ended', as a local tourist brochure informs). In recent years, public festivities for the occasion of Victory Day have started in Belgorod on Saint George's day with religious services.

This new symbolism corresponds with one of the most important tendencies in Russian politics of memory: the nationalization and confession-alization of war memory (Forest and Johnson 2002). The Great Patriotic War is the most recent episode in Russian history interpreted as a cyclic process, a sequence of foreign invasions and Russian military triumphs. This interpretation is reflected in the new brand 'Prokhorovka – the Third Battlefield of Russia'. In this way, the Prokhorovka battle appears as one of three crucial events in Russian history. To stress the continuity of Russian military glory, military units, dressed in costumes of the fourteenth and early nineteenth centuries, take part in the official ceremonies. On the occasion of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Kursk Battle, monuments to three military leaders in Russian history – Dmitriy Donskoy, Mikhail Kutuzov and Georgiy Zhukov – were erected on the Prokhorovka field. The confession-alization of war memory reflects the claims of the Russian Orthodox Church for its share in the symbolic capital of the 'Great Victory'. Today the Church argues that it was 'only after Josef Stalin opened the churches and released the priests from prison, [that] the decisive turning point of the war became possible' (Mitrokhin 2004). In their turn, the army and the Russian authorities rely on the Church as far as patriotic education, restoration of traditional moral values and loyalty to the Russian state are concerned.

In addition to the Bell Tower, a new cathedral was constructed in Prokhorovka village. Named after Peter and Paul (the saint's day of the tank battle according to the Orthodox calendar), the church was built in so-called 'old Russian' style associated with the nationalism and patriotism of the late nineteenth century. The names of the Soviet soldiers, fallen



FIGURE 9.4 The 'Third Battlefield of Russia' Museum with tank monument.
Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

in the Prokhorovka battle, are engraved on the inner walls of the church. In this way, they all are retroactively included in the imagined community of Orthodox Russians, regardless of their ethnicity or creed. The public library named after Nikolay Ryzhkov, the orphan house and the rest home for Soviet veterans were constructed at the same site and symbolize the link between the generations and the 'care' by the local authorities for children and the elderly. It seems that the Prokhorovka Memorial is an open project: every anniversary serves the authorities as a pretext to demonstrate their faithfulness to the memory of the 'Great Patriotic War'. In May 2010, a new museum 'The Third Battlefield of Russia' was opened in Prokhorovka and consecrated by Patriarch Cyril (Figure 9.4). The exposition of the museum adds nothing new to the traditional canon of the Great Patriotic War memory; it is largely devoted to the details of the Prokhorovka battle, figures of Soviet generals and the everyday life of Soviet soldiers.

Kharkiv – a Plurality of Memories

Kharkiv was one of the important economic, cultural and academic centres of the Russian empire and later of the USSR, and therefore possesses

diverse symbolic resources for constructing a local identity and regional branding. At the same time, the Russian imperial and Soviet past of Kharkiv makes it difficult to reinvent it as a Ukrainian city. According to Volodymyr Kravchenko (2009: 220), 'Kharkiv situated within Ukrainian-Russian contact zone, is a place of contested national narratives, historical mythologies, and political projects'. Along with the traditional political pluralism in Ukraine, this particular borderland situation of Kharkiv makes local memory culture more fragmented and diverse than in Belgorod. The same is true for memories of the Second World War.

The inhabitants of Kharkiv and Belgorod, separated only by seventy kilometres, had rather similar experiences during the war of severe military destruction, population losses and repression by the Nazi occupation regime. Both cities were captured by the Nazis in October 1941, briefly regained by the Soviets in February-March 1943 and reoccupied by the Nazis to be finally liberated in August 1943. But if Belgorod came to be associated with the success of the Kursk Battle and, in this way, with the heroic narrative of the Great Patriotic War, the memory of the war in Kharkiv has been more traumatic and much less triumphalist. In the history of the Second World War, Kharkiv is linked rather with Soviet military defeats, such as the failed Soviet counter-offensive in summer 1942. A big industrial centre and an important transport junction, Kharkiv was of high strategic importance for both sides, and as the biggest Soviet city ever captured by the German army, it has become a symbol of Hitler's military success. Probably due to these reasons, Kharkiv, unlike Belgorod, never received official honorary titles or military rewards during Soviet times. Another possible explanation was the collaboration with the Nazis by a part of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and local population.

Although an obligatory element of official Soviet memory culture, in Kharkiv the myth of the Great Patriotic War did not take a central place in the urban landscape. Neither of the two main Soviet war memorials are located in the city centre. One is the statue of the 'Soldier-Liberator', a gigantic figure of a Soviet soldier with a Kalashnikov in his raised hand, erected in 1981 in a new residential area (Figure 9.5). The second is 'The Memorial of Glory', constructed in 1977 in Sokolniki, a green zone on the northern margins of Kharkiv, which during the war became a site of mass graves of Nazi victims (mostly civilians and Soviet war prisoners). The symbolic centre of the memorial ensemble is a 'Mourning Mother' statue at the end of an alley with an eternal flame in front of the statue and a heartbeat coming from inside it. A bas-relief panorama behind the statue presents the canonical images of the 'Great Patriotic War', from mass mobilization in June 1941 to Victory Day. A wooden cross – an Orthodox symbol – was added to the memorial in the early 1990s. In Soviet times



FIGURE 9.5 The 'Soldier-Liberator' statue in Kharkiv. Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

the 'Memorial of Glory' was the main site for official commemorative ceremonies, and also a place visited by tourists, official delegations and young couples after a marriage ceremony. The public functions of this memorial site have not changed much since then. While the statue of the 'Soldier-Liberator', placed in the middle of a residential area, serves as a

site for public performances, concerts and open air festivities for veterans, children and local residents, the memorial in Sokolniki is a place for mourning and silent reflection.

Unlike in Belgorod, where the 'Great Patriotic War' was renarrated and integrated into the new paradigm of national history, in Kharkiv in the first post-Soviet decade the absence of a national consensus on the role of the Second World War in Ukrainian history prevented the ruling elites from new ambitious commemorative projects. Rather, some fragments of the Soviet narrative were appropriated for local purposes. Thus, 23 August, the 'Day of Liberation of Kharkiv from Nazi occupation', became the Day of Kharkiv, officially celebrated as a popular local holiday. In general, the main tendency in the region was the pluralization of collective memory. In the early 1990s a private Holocaust museum was created, the first in Ukraine, and some years later the new Holocaust memorial 'Drobitskyi Yar' was opened at the site of mass executions of the Kharkiv Jews (Figure 9.6). The memorial cemetery at the place of the mass murder of about 3,800 Polish prisoners of the Starobelsk camp committed by the NKVD during April and May 1940 was opened in 2000 by the prime ministers of Ukraine and Poland. Finally, the new narrative of the Holodomor (the Great Famine in 1932–1933) as a crime committed by



FIGURE 9.6 The Holocaust memorial 'Drobitskyi Yar'. Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

the Soviet regime against the Ukrainian nation, while causing political conflicts and ideological polarization, took a prominent place in the public space of Kharkiv. Against this background the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War became just one of several coexisting memory cultures.

The pluralism of the local public memory corresponds with the political pluralism characteristic of Kharkiv, which has always been an arena of competition between different interest groups. While the 'party of power' was in control of local politics during the Kuchma decade, the Socialist Party, the Communists, Narodny Ruch and pro-Russian and Ukrainian nationalist groups also played a role in local politics. To the end of the 1990s Evhen Kushnarev, the former mayor and later head of Kuchma's presidential administration, managed to consolidate the regional elites. As a governor of Kharkiv from 2000 to 2004, he mobilized the administrative resources in support of Victor Yanukovych in the 2004 presidential elections; but the Orange Revolution split the local elites. The newly appointed governor Arsen Avakov, close to Yushchenko's family and a member of his 'Our Ukraine' party, implemented the new president's commemorative policy in the region. The most important project of the local 'Orange' camp was the construction of a Holodomor memorial and the official commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of this event. However, the Party of Regions, which had won the 2006 local elections and achieved the majority in the city and oblast councils, opposed the commemorative initiatives of the governor. As a result, after the Orange Revolution Kharkiv became a site of severe conflict over the memory of the Soviet past. Unlike in Belgorod, in Kharkiv the memory of the Second World War was instrumentalized in partisan conflicts.

One strikingly characteristic example of such instrumentalization and reideologization of Second World War memory is the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) monument that was erected in the early 1990s on the initiative of Narodny Ruch. A granite stone of relatively small size in a corner of the Youth park (which is a former city cemetery), it remained practically unnoticed by the majority of local inhabitants, all the more as the UPA is marginal in the local collective memory. When this issue was politicized, however, after the Orange Revolution, the monument became the site of violent clashes between Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Russian organizations supported by the communists and Soviet veterans. The city council controlled by the Party of Regions decided to remove the monument, referring to the alleged lack of formal permission. This decision was opposed by Ukrainian nationalists and other political opponents of the Party of Regions; voluntary guards protected the memorial overnight to prevent its dismantling. To make the story even more absurd, in December 2007 the monument was kidnapped by members of the extremist pro-Russian

Eurasian Youth Organization. The stone was found and restored to its place, but remained in the centre of media attention in both Ukraine and Russia and continued to generate political conflicts. Kharkiv mayor Mikail Dobkin proposed to 'deport' it to Western Ukraine, promised to build instead a memorial to the victims of UPA violence and even offered asylum to the Tallinn Bronze Soldier. With such provocative manipulation of Second World War memory the mayor hoped to direct public attention from the real problems of local self-government and to stay in office despite the growing pressure of his political opponents. However, in 2009, in the wake of the European championship, some kind of 'non-aggression pact' was made between the Kharkiv elites, including a ceasefire in the local memory wars. One year later, with the victory of Viktor Yanukovych the Party of Regions consolidated its power in Kharkiv and marginalized the opposition, which since then has been unable to pursue alternative commemorative projects.

The Marshall Konev Height

It is worth comparing the Prokhorovka memorial with the new Marshal Konev Height war memorial, devoted to the liberation of Kharkiv in August 1943. Both are ambitious projects by the local elites, reflecting their search for a new national identity and their attempts at regional branding. The example of the Prokhorovka memorial, regularly visited by Kharkiv politicians on various occasions, provided a major source of inspiration for them. The idea of a memorial was lobbied by the Kharkiv Soviet veterans' organizations which were well informed about the more active commemorative politics of the Belgorod authorities. Kharkiv historians, stressing the key role of the city in the history of the Second World War argued that a new war museum was needed to fill blank spots in public memory.

Therefore, in the early 2000s Kharkiv authorities, not without the influence of their Russian neighbours, tried to restore and instrumentalize the Soviet triumphalist narrative of the 'liberation from fascist occupation'. The Marshal Konev Height memorial was constructed in Solonitsevka on the outskirts of Kharkiv, at the site where the headquarters of Marshal Konev, a Soviet army commander who directed the military operation, were located in August 1943. The project initiated by governor Kushnarev, one of the architects of the post-Soviet identity of Kharkiv, was officially opened in May 2005, Kushnarev himself having been dismissed as a result of the Orange Revolution. The new regional administration adopted the memorial, which was given national status by a decree of president Viktor



FIGURE 9.7 Victory Day 2010 on the Marshall Konev Height. Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

Yushchenko in 2008. Apart from the renovated Soviet-era obelisk with a relief portrait of Marshal Konev (Figure 9.7), the memorial includes a new Orthodox Chapel dedicated to Ivan the Warrior, an open-air exhibition of Soviet military weapons and a small museum. Despite its official national

status, the memorial remains in fact a regional site of memory and cannot equal the more ambitious Prokhorovka memorial (Figure 9.8). However, both memorials show some stylistic parallels, such as a combination of Orthodox symbols with Soviet monumental architecture, references to the Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War and the cult of Soviet military leaders.

The new Kharkiv memorial can be seen as an attempt by the local authorities to appropriate fragments of the Soviet myth and to use them as building blocks for a new regional identity. While the Prokhorovka memorial demonstrates a new interpretation of the 'Great Patriotic War' as a national struggle of the Russian Orthodox people against the foreign invasion, the Konev memorial can be hardly inscribed in the fragmented and controversial narrative of Ukrainian history and remains an enclave of Soviet war memory. The exhibition at the memorial's museum focuses on the military history of the Second World War in the region and presents the liberation of Kharkiv in summer 1943 as its highlight. Many museum objects on display, such as a reconstruction of the Soviet military headquarters and personal belongings of Soviet soldiers and commanders, are very similar to those in Belgorod museums.

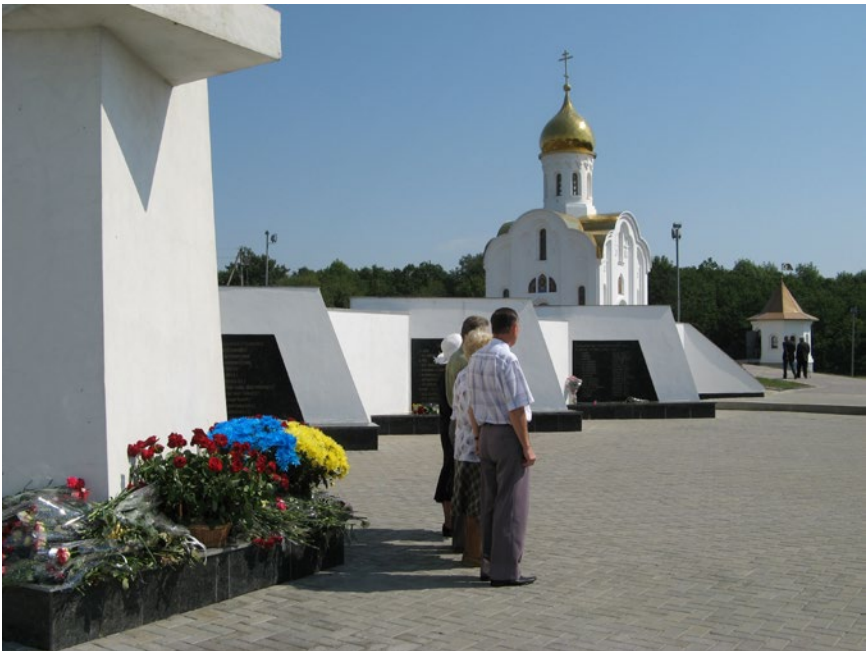


FIGURE 9.8 Orthodox chapel on the Marshall Konev Height. Photo: T. Zhurzhenko.

At the same time, a closer look reveals some details pointing to the pluralism and ambivalence of the Kharkiv war memory. Despite the conceptual framework set by the museum's name – 'The Kharkiv region in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945' – it actually narrates the Second World War. The exhibition includes information on the Soviet occupation of Poland in September 1939 and on the tragic events of the Katyn massacre. Obviously, this aspect of Second World War history is difficult to ignore in a city that, together with Smolensk, has become a site of pilgrimage for Polish families and of official visits by Polish politicians. A monumental painting entitled *Katyn* presents the scene of the mass killing of the Polish officers. Small wonder that the Soviet veterans found this part of the exhibition disturbing and demanded it be removed. While continuing educational work aimed at children and Soviet veterans, the museum provides space for various commemorative projects, some of them having little in common with the traditional narrative of the 'Great Patriotic War'. For example, in 2008 the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising organized the exhibition 'The Poles in the Second World War' here, which impressed the local public and experts with its high technical level, and presented the history of the Second World War from a different, little-known perspective. Unlike the Prokhorovka museum, this is not a museum of one battle; the social history of war, everyday life under occupation, the Nazis repression of civilians and of course the Holocaust – all of these themes are addressed in the exposition. The story of the mass murder of the Kharkiv Jews in Drobitsky Yar, near the Kharkiv Tractor Plant, is presented in a special section of the museum.

Conclusion

The new post-Soviet commemorative cultures in Ukraine and Russia reflect the nationalization and pluralization of the 'Great Patriotic War' memory. However, while in Russia there is a basic consensus on the role of the war in national history, in Ukraine the divided collective memory contributes to regional pluralism and fuels ongoing political conflict. These differences are especially visible in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands, which were an arena for severe fighting during the last war, and are exposed today to competing geopolitical influences. In this situation the memory of the Second World War has been instrumentalized by national as well as regional political actors for legitimizing competing geopolitical projects such as the European integration of Ukraine and the East Slavic reunification.

At the same time, the local elites concerned with electoral support, political stability and the image of the region have their own reasons for instrumentalizing the memory of the Second World War. As the comparison of Kharkiv and Belgorod demonstrates, it is not only the priorities of national commemorative politics, but also the character of the local political regime, the level of political pluralism and competition, the strength of civil society and the freedom of local media that influence local memory cultures. In Belgorod, under the conditions of the governor's semi-authoritarian regime, the de facto monopoly of the pro-Putin 'United Russia' party and the alliance of the local authorities with the Russian Orthodox Church, we can observe the reideologization of memory based on the nationalization and confessionalization of the Soviet narrative. In Kharkiv, which is an arena for competing interest groups, the memory of the Second World War has become the subject of open ideological conflicts and often of populist manipulations. While the Prokhorovka memorial in Belgorod presents the 'Great Patriotic War' as a fight for national liberation from foreign invasion, the Konev memorial in Kharkiv, at first glance an enclave of Soviet war memory, is in fact open to alternative interpretations of the Second World War.

Notes

1. A paraphrase of Serhy Yekelchuk's *Stalin's Empire of Memory* (2004).
2. The victory of Muscovy prince Dmitri over the Tatar forces in the Battle of Kulikovo (1380) has been presented by Russian historiography as the beginning of the liberation from the Golden Horde yoke. The Battle of Borodino (1812) was a pivotal point in Napoleon's invasion of Russia.
3. Kharkiv was the capital of Soviet Ukraine from 1920 until 1934.
4. Bohdan Khmelnytsky was the hetman of the Zaporozhian Cossack Hetmanate. In 1654, he concluded the Treaty of Pereiaslav with the Muscovite state which led to the eventual incorporation of Ukraine into the Russian Empire.
5. 'The Patriarch of Moscow and all the Rus' Alexi Two and the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus visited Belgorod and Prokhorovka', on *The Russian Orthodox Church. The Official Site of the Department for the External Church Relations*, www.mospat.ru/archive/nr005172.htm (accessed 17 May 2000).
6. In 1943, with the liberation of Belgorod, Kursk and Orel, the tradition of gun salutes in Moscow in honour of the Soviet army victories was established.
7. General Nikolai Vatutin, born on the territory of today's Belgorod *oblast'*, was a Soviet military commander during the Second World War. His army liberated Belgorod in August 1943. In February 1944, general Vatutin was ambushed and wounded by the UPA insurgents and died some weeks later.

Tatiana Zhurzhenko is research director of the 'Russia in Global Dialogue' programme at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna, Austria, and lecturer at the Institute of Political Science, University of Vienna. She studied political economy and philosophy at V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Ukraine) where she started her academic career before moving to Austria. Tatiana Zhurzhenko published widely on gender politics and feminism in Ukraine, on borders, borderland identities and memory politics in Eastern Europe. Her latest book is *Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2010).