

# History Education and Reconciliation: The Ukrainian Nationalist Underground Movement in Secondary School Curricula, Textbooks, and Classroom Practices (1991–2012)\*

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***Abstract:** Using the history education and conflict transformation lens, this article studies the representation of the Ukrainian nationalist underground in secondary school curricula and textbooks during the period between 1991 and 2012. In particular, the article reviews the representation of the conflict between the nationalist organizations and the Soviet regime, a topic that has not been studied in detail to date. In addition, the article discusses the role of history teachers as mediators of official curricula and textbook narratives about the nationalist movement in different regions of Ukraine on the basis of focus group discussions conducted with schoolteachers in thirteen regions in 2011 and 2012. The article finds that textbooks generally offer mono-perspectival, simplified, and mono-causal narratives when it comes to the history of controversial issues and conflicts. These narratives are presented in a positivist manner, with an emphasis on recounting “historical facts.” The parties in the conflict are presented in an asymmetrical manner, with the nationalist movement increasingly “indigenized” and the Soviet side delegitimized. Overall, such representations serve to limit the possibilities for conflict*

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*transformation and reconciliation. Focus group discussions with teachers show that, in some cases, teachers play a conflict mitigating role by presenting multiple perspectives on conflictual issues in the classroom and inviting discussion of wrongdoing by all parties in the conflict. In other cases, teachers see their role as reproducing the official narratives and teaching their students “historical facts.”*

**Keywords:** OUN, UPA, World War II, school curricula, textbooks, teaching of history, conflict transformation, reconciliation

## **Introduction**

Historically, the emergence of nation-states was compounded with the establishment of national history-writing and school history education as means of nation and state-legitimization (Berger *et al.* 1999). Representations of the past play an important role in shaping social identities and intergroup relations. As distilled messages about the nation’s past, school textbooks and history teaching are fundamental in shaping such representations. School history education continues to play the state-legitimizing, national identity and citizenship education roles, especially in newly independent states in the situation of fragile or contested legitimacy (Carretero 2011; Carretero *et al.* 2012; Williams 2014).

There has been a growing body of research in several academic fields such as social psychology, education, conflict transformation, and memory studies that explores the connection between the social representations of the past in school curricula, textbooks, and history teaching, and conflict transformation and reconciliation in societies divided by a past or ongoing conflict (Carretero *et al.* 2012; Cole 2007; McCully 2010; McCully 2012; Zembylas *et al.* 2016; Bentrovato *et al.* 2016; Psaltis *et al.* 2017). It has been noted that the national framework of history-telling can reproduce intergroup prejudice and impede conflict transformation and reconciliation. National master narratives that propose a one-sided vision of the past politically defined by the dominant groups and homogenizing textbook narratives that promote an ethnic definition of a community, and ignore or obfuscate past conflicts, ingroup past