

The Politics of Memory and the Dynamics of State-Building in Ukraine Since 2014: The Historical Markers of Identity

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Abstract. Based on research data and sociological surveys, the article examines the markers of Ukrainian history since 2014 through the prism of inclusion/exclusion of historical events, periods, and personalities as the components of state- and nation-building, memory, and the politics of history. The study employs several methodological approaches: a constructivist approach to identity, the concept of the links between historical markers and nation-building and the concept of memory security. The bulk of empirical data for the study is taken from a representative sociological survey conducted in Ukraine in 2022. It focuses on three pillars of Ukrainian national identity of the twentieth century: the Ukrainian Revolution, the Holodomor and World War II, as well as the Russo-Ukrainian War. The results of the study show that since 2014, the politics of Ukrainian history have been dominated by events and personalities of the twentieth century. The dominance of the Holodomor in collective memory of Ukrainians indicates its greater importance compared to WWII. The study also argues that the claim about “fragmented” and “contested” Ukrainian memory is largely outdated; however, further research is needed to understand the systematic transformations of Ukrainian identity, especially after the Russian “hybrid war,” which in February 2022 turned into open military aggression against Ukraine.

Keywords: memory politics, historical markers of identity, Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921, Holodomor, WWII, Russo-Ukrainian war, nation-building in Ukraine.

Atminties politika ir valstybės kūrimo dinamika Ukrainoje nuo 2014 metų: istoriniai tapatybės ženklai

Santrauka. Straipsnio tikslas – remiantis tyrimų duomenimis ir sociologinių apklausų rezultatais, kaip sudeamąsias valstybės ir tautos kūrimo, atminties ir istorijos politikos dalis atskleisti Ukrainos istorijos tapatybės ženklus po 2014 m. per istorinių įvykių, laikotarpių ir asmenybių įtraukimo ir (ar) neįtraukimo prizmę. Tyrimas grindžiamas keliais metodologiniais aspektais: konstruktyvistiniu požiūriu į tapatybę, sąsajų tarp istorinių ženklų ir tautos kūrimo bei atminties saugumo koncepcijomis. Dauguma empirinių duomenų paimta iš 2022 m. Ukrainoje atliktos reprezentatyvios sociologinės apklausos, kurioje daugiausia dėmesio buvo skirta trims XX a. ukrainiečių tautinės tapatybės ramsčiams: Ukrainos revoliucijai, Holodomorui ir Antrajam pasauliniam karui; taip pat Rusijos ir Ukrainos karui. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad nuo 2014 m. Ukrainos istorijos politikoje dominuoja XX a. įvykiai ir asmenybės, ryškėja mažėjantys regioniniai skirtumai vertinant anksčiau prieštarinčiai vertintas istorines asmenybes ir įvykius. Holodomoro dominavimas ukrainiečių kolektyvinėje atmintyje rodo šio įvykio svarbą – ji didesnė už Antrojo pasaulinio karo. Atliktas tyrimas rodo, kad teiginys apie „fragmentuotą“ ir „ginčytiną“ Ukrainos atmintį iš esmės laikytinas pasenusiu. Vis dėlto, siekiant sistemingai suvokti ukrainiečių

Received: 10/03/2025. **Accepted:** 30/09/2025.

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tapatybės transformacijos, ypač po Rusijos hibridinio karo virsmo į atvirą Rusijos agresiją 2022 m. vasarį, reikalingi tolesni tyrimai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: atminties politika, istoriniai tapatybės ženklai, 1917–1921 m. Ukrainos revoliucija, Holodomoras, Antrasis pasaulinis karas, Rusijos–Ukrainos karas, Ukrainos valstybės kūrimas.

Introduction

The last two decades have seen a growing interest in memory studies. Historical memory and the politics of history have become important components of various theories and practices. This new direction lies at the intersection of several disciplines: history, politics, international relations, museum studies, information technology, sociology, and social psychology. Such interest stems from several reasons: globalization and the vanishing of national borders, the collapse of Soviet communism, the reinterpretation of the past of European post-communist states, and the challenges in shaping one's national identity, etc.

Ukraine does not stay on the sidelines in reflecting both its collective memory and the politics of history. Its traumatic Soviet past has transformed into the traumatic present during the Russo-Ukrainian war. Before 2014, the Ukrainian state and society often espoused polar visions of history and politics, seeking to shape its identity as either more pro-European or more pro-Russian; meanwhile, historians, writers, and artists were doing their work by producing books and artworks that had contributed to nation's identity. However, the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014, raised new questions: What does it mean to be a Ukrainian? What are the reasons for the war? Can Ukrainian history promote comprehension of the enemy?¹ How can the Ukrainian state defend its Ukrainian identity?

The aim of this article is based on research and sociological surveys on inclusion/exclusion of certain historical events, periods, and personalities, to reveal the historical markers of Ukrainian identity as the components of state- and nation-building, memory, and the politics of history. The article rests on the idea that identity is a construct comprised of "historical components" that are fueled by "historical and legendary myths and heroes serving as a foundation of that identity."² The author of the article introduces the term a historical marker to identify heroes, anti-heroes, events, periods, and calamities that contributed to the formation and consolidation of Ukrainian identity.

The author's approach to the notion of identity is shaped by the constructivist vision of Benedict Anderson³ and Anthony D. Smith.⁴ As René Grotenhuis concludes, "the nation is about identity ... and collective subjectivity."⁵ Ukrainian researcher Alla Kyrydon also offers the definition, concerning the ties between identity and historical markers: "Identity of social groups is concentrated around their attitude towards symbols/figures of memory, in particular, in the structuring of language space."⁶ The need to master the space helps to explain the importance of the decommunization policy in Ukraine. She also analyses existing approaches to the concept of historical memory.⁷ Based on Kyrydon's analysis, the author of the article uses this term to refer to the actions of the state and its actors when shaping the understanding of the past in order to strengthen one's national identity as a feeling of belonging to the community and the response to it.

¹ In 2017–2022, the author was a host of the program "History with Meat," which was launched in response to the demand of the Ukrainians, who began to show interest in their country's history after the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

² Grotenhuis, R. *Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016, p. 26, <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462982192>.

³ Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1994.

⁴ See Smith, A. D. *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 1998; Smith, A. D. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁵ Grotenhuis, R. *Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States*, p. 28.

⁶ Киридон, А. *Гетеротопії пам'яті: Теоретико-методологічні проблеми студій пам'яті [Heterotopias of Memory: Theoretical-Methodological Problems of Memory Studies]*. Київ: Ніка-Центр, 2016, p. 193.

⁷ See *ibidem*, p. 71–85.

Grotenhuis argues that there is a special need for nation-building in fragile states. He points to the importance of the historical past in the present and future stable development of such states and concludes that “the efforts to trace back the nation into history, to link the existing nation to its historical roots, are deliberate actions to underpin a national identity of an actual living community with historical events, persons and narratives.”⁸

In a way, Ukraine can also be treated as a fragile state due to its state-building problems that come as a legacy of its Soviet totalitarian past and ongoing war. According to Grotenhuis, such fragile states should especially have “a common sense of nationhood” as an essential component of their nation-building.⁹

The term historical memories/memory has been used for more than 30 years. Smith was one of the pioneers in identifying it as a component of the nation.¹⁰ Contemporary historians have further elaborated on the interdependence of identity, collective memory, history, politics, and international relations. Antony Giddens made the first step in this direction, suggesting the concept of ontological security.¹¹ In 2015, Maria Mälksoo has developed this notion by offering the theory of mnemonic security. According to her, the state and society react accordingly, trying to safeguard their historical memory against the defined threats to secure their stability, and, thus, the societies themselves.¹²

The case of Ukraine, especially after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014, fits the framework of mnemonic security. However, it was not alone on this pathway. Eastern European countries, burdened by their totalitarian communist past, experienced a similar search for their identity pillars. In their case, World War II (hereinafter, WWII) became one such trigger. For them, the year 1945 did not mark the end of the war. Like in Ukraine,¹³ this historical event has taken on another form, instead of becoming the struggle against the Soviets.¹⁴ For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, museums in Lithuania began changing their exhibitions devoted to WWII.¹⁵ The Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees actively participated in this process, arguing that the legacy of the Lithuanian resistance to the Soviet occupation was the most important. Such position led to the creation of 40 public museums on deportations and resistance in the country.¹⁶ Moreover, the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014 reactivated collective memory about the traumatic Soviet past and the corresponding public debates in Lithuania.¹⁷

The question of Ukrainian identity and nation-building has attracted many scholars from various

⁸ Grotenhuis, R. *Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States*, p. 28.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

¹⁰ Cf. Smith, A. D. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*.

¹¹ Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 35–69. See also, Касьянов, Г. Історична політика та онтологічна безпека: концептуальні рамки та аналітичні спостереження [Historical Policy and Ontological Security: Conceptual Frames and Analytical Observations]. *Інтермарум: історія, політика, культура*, 2025, No. 17, p. 10, <https://doi.org/10.35433/history.112098>.

¹² See more, Mälksoo, M. ‘Memory Must be Defended’: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security. *Security Dialogue*, 2015, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 221–237, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614552549>. See also, Касьянов, Г. *Історична політика та онтологічна безпека*, p. 12–13.

¹³ Lysenko, O. The (Un)finished Ukrainian World War II. *Genocidas ir resistencija*, 2023, Vol. 1, No. 53, p. 226, <https://doi.org/10.61903/GR.2023.110>.

¹⁴ Cf. Norkūnaitė, G. Representations of World War II in Lithuanian Cinema in the 2000s: Between National and European Narratives. *Eastern European Screen Studies*, 2025, Vol. 16, No. 2: Special Issue on Images of War in Contemporary Eastern Europe, p. 271–272, 274, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2040350X.2022.2030558>.

¹⁵ Cf. Šermukšnytė, R. Rescuing the Jews in Lithuania during World War II: Practices of Creating a Lithuanian Museum Narrative. *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 2023, Vol. 52, p. 108–129, <https://doi.org/10.15388/LIS.2023.52.6>.

¹⁶ See Rindzevičiūtė, E. Boundary Objects of Communism: Assembling the Soviet Past in Museums and Public Spaces. In: *Occupation and Communism in Eastern European Museums: Re-Visualizing the Recent Past* / Eds. C. Iordachi, P. Apor. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021, p. 206–207, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350103733.ch-010>. See also, Шермукшніте, Р.; Банах, В.; Вербицька, П.; Гнідик, І.; Конюхов, С.; Кулявічюс, С.; Курдина, Ю.; Кузьмін, Р.; Лаужікас, Р.; Лисейко, Я.; Хома, І.; Жукаускаене, О. *У лабіринтах наративів: досвід музеїв Литви і України* [In the Labyrinth of Narratives: Lithuanian and Ukrainian Museum Experiences]. Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2019, p. 26–33.

¹⁷ See Matonytė, I.; Šumskas, G. Attitudes of Parliamentary Candidates Towards the Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Lithuania. *Politologija*, 2023, Vol. 111, No. 3, p. 35–36, <https://doi.org/10.15388/Polit.2023.111.1>.

fields. In 2021, the year before the Russian open-scale invasion, several Ukrainian researchers (Oleh Rafalsky, Yaroslav Kalakura, Oleh Kalakura, and Mykola Yurii) prepared a collective monograph on the history and contemporary condition of Ukrainian identity, in particular, the dismantlement of totalitarian identity.¹⁸ Georgiy Kasyanov analyzed Russo-Ukrainian relations in the framework of the mnemonic security concept.¹⁹ Historian Olesya Khromeychuk examined the relationship among gender, nationalism, and memory politics.²⁰ Laura L. Adams argued pro and contra for the application of postcolonial theory to Central Eurasia.²¹ Some conclusions are relevant for the Ukrainian twentieth-century history.

Mykola Borovyk proposed to analyze WWII memories based on eyewitness interviews.²² It is telling that out of approximately 350 interviews about WWII taken by him and his colleagues at the Center of Oral History of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in 2010–2014, approximately 70 (20%) concern memories of collectivization and the Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933, also known as the Holodomor.²³ It shows that the Holodomor trauma and memory about it have been such an inherent part of the respondents' life-changing experience that they believed it to be important in the context of the interview concerning WWII (see chapter 4). In her work, Anna Chebotareva illustrated the peculiarities of collective memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine after 1991.²⁴ Ukrainian historian Oleksandr Lysenko analyzed various actors, their policies, and responses during WWII.²⁵

Lithuanian researchers have also raised similar questions about the relationship between identity, art, history, and the history of politics. Gabrielė Norkūnaitė described the image of WWII in Lithuanian cinema.²⁶ Eglė Rindzevičiūtė analyzed the representation of the Soviet past in Lithuanian museums and communities.²⁷ Irmina Matonytė and Gintaras Šumskas proved the value of application of memory politics in Lithuanian politics.²⁸

Lysenko's conclusions about the foundations of Ukrainian identity laid the structure of this article. In 2020, he suggested that there might be three pillars of what he called the “modern collective memory model in Ukraine”: the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921, the Holodomor of 1932–1933, and WWII and its impact in terms of the partisan movement (1939–end of the 1950s).²⁹ Obviously, there were other stakeholders that had influenced the respondents during their lifetime: the 1986 Chornobyl Catastrophe,

¹⁸ See Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства: історія і сучасність* [Civilizational Identity of Ukrainians: History and Current Situation]. Kyiv: ІПіЕНД ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України, 2022, p. 323–334. Retrieved from <https://ipend.gov.ua/publication/tsyvilizatsijna-identychnist-ukrainstva-istoriia-i-suchasnist/> [accessed 02/03/2025].

¹⁹ Касьянов, Г. *Історична політика та онтологічна безпека*, p. 9–32.

²⁰ Khromeychuk, O. Glory to the Heroes? Gender, Nationalism, and Memory. In: *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine* / Eds A. Wylegala, M. Głowacka-Grajper. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020, p. 140–163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx8b7rg.11>.

²¹ Adams, L. L. Can We Apply Postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia? *Central Eurasia Studies Review*, 2008, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 2–7.

²² Borovyk, M. (In)different Memory: World War II in the Memory of the Last War's Generation in Ukraine. In: *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine* / Eds. A. Wylegala, M. Głowacka-Grajper. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020, pp. 91–114.

²³ See Боряк, Т. *Усна історія у джерельній базі студій Голодомору: історія формування та інформаційний потенціал корпусу свідчень* [Oral History as a Source for Holodomor Studies: Formation of Eyewitness Testimony Collections and Their Informative Value]. Kyiv: ТОВ “Юрка Любченка,” 2024, p. 403. Retrieved from <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0017991> [accessed 02/03/2025].

²⁴ Chebotarova, A. Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet Ukraine. In: *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine* / Eds. A. Wylegala, M. Głowacka-Grajper. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020, p. 183–205, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx8b7rg.13>.

²⁵ Lysenko, O. *The (Un)finished Ukrainian World War II*, p. 205–230.

²⁶ Norkūnaitė, G. *Representations of World War II in Lithuanian Cinema in the 2000s*, p. 269–288.

²⁷ Rindzevičiūtė, E. *Boundary Objects of Communism*, p. 203–220.

²⁸ Matonytė, I.; Šumskas, G. *Attitudes of Parliamentary Candidates Towards the Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Lithuania*, p. 8–40.

²⁹ Лисенко, О. Конкуруючі наративи: пам'ять про Другу світову в Україні: між політикою і рефлексією [Competing Narratives: Memory of the Second World War in Ukraine: Between Politics and Reflection]. *Проблеми історії Голокосту: український вимір* / *Holocaust Studies: A Ukrainian Focus*, 2020, Vol. 11 (Special Issue), p. 21–22. Retrieved from https://www.duhk.org/fileadmin/data_duhk/documents/2019_HOLOCAUST_STUDIES_11_Ukr_Germ.pdf [accessed 02/03/2025].

the 1991 Declaration of Independence, etc.³⁰ Sociological data confirms the role of the three calamities mentioned earlier in the history of Ukrainian nation- and state-building, as well as the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.³¹

The article is structured as follows. The first chapter outlines certain features of nation-building through the prism of identity construction. The second chapter examines the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921 as the first pillar of Ukrainian Identity. The third chapter delves into the nature of WWII memory as the second pillar of Ukrainian identity. The fourth chapter considers the transformation of individual memory about the Holodomor, the third pillar of Ukrainian Identity, into a collective one. The fifth chapter talks about identity orientations, decolonization of narratives, and civic space since 2014. The final section presents conclusions.

1. Constructing the Ukrainian Identity after 1991

Before turning to the first pillar of Ukrainian identity, it is beneficial to look into the situation of self-identification and civic political identity in Ukraine. Lynn Abrams perceptively observed that people's identity is based on and departs from "our memory about the past;"³² thus, we are not able to construct feelings of ourselves without personal memory. At this point, we might consider the concept of memory politics and collective memory in the context of Ukraine. It should be noted that by the beginning of the Russian open-scale invasion, there was a consensus among researchers on the concept of divided memory in Ukraine.³³

Such condition is not perhaps entirely unexpected, given the cultural, social, and demographic catastrophes brought by the two totalitarian regimes, the Communist and the Nazi one, which resulted into what Timothy Snyder called the bloodlands.³⁴ Demographers estimate that if the catastrophes of the twentieth century had not occurred in Ukraine, its population would have reached 84 million by the end of the century.³⁵ Prior to the full-scale invasion in 2022, the estimated Ukrainian population was approximately 42 million, which is twice the given estimate.

Despite the concept of "the affirmative action empire,"³⁶ used in Soviet/Ukrainian/Russian studies, Adams points to the perspective that differs from the more commonly held view. She suggests that Soviet colonialism was more aggressive than other types of colonialism. It differed from the European one by deeper penetration not only into economic sphere, but also into cultural space of colonized peoples, "leveling" their spiritual world.³⁷ Catherine Wanner confirms this conclusion by making an important observation regarding the dynamics of Ukrainian memory politics. In Ukraine, "personal memories of

³⁰ See Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*. Київ: ІПіЕНД ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України, 2022, р. 332. Retrieved from <https://ipien.gov.ua/publication/tsyvilizatsijna-identychnist-ukraintstva-istoriia-i-suchasnist/> [accessed 02/03/2025].

³¹ See Survey Infographics. Historical Memory: Importance of Pre-Listed Events in the History of Ukraine (Mean). *University of St. Gallen*. Retrieved from: <https://www.uaregio.org/en/surveys/data-visualisations/survey-infographics/historical-memory/> [accessed 02/03/2025].

³² Abrams, L. *Oral History Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 82, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203849033>.

³³ See, e.g., Borovyk, M. *(In)different Memory*, p. 92.

³⁴ See more, Snyder, T. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

³⁵ See "Якби не катастрофи ХХ століття, то на початку 1990-х в Україні жило б 84 мільйони"—демограф Олександр Гладун ["Had the Catastrophes of the Twentieth Century Not Happened, in the Beginning of 1990s 84 Million Would Have Lived in Ukraine"—Demographer Oleksandr Hladun] / беседовала О. Скороход. *Локальна історія*, 22 October 2022. Retrieved from <https://localhistory.org.ua/texts/interviu/cherez-kilka-rokiv-pislia-katastrofi-vidbuvaetsia-kompensatsiine-zrostannia-narodzhuvanosti-demograf-oleksandr-gladun/> [accessed 02/03/2025].

³⁶ The concept comes from the title of the book by Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the USSR, 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001). The book has been criticized by Ukrainian historians.

³⁷ See Adams, L. L. *Can We Apply Postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia?* p. 4. See also, Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, р. 330.

participants and witnesses, which did not fit the official framework,”³⁸ still existed in a certain space of memory, and such coexistence, in turn, compromised official historiography. The coexistence of different forms of remembrance has been particularly evident in the case of the Holodomor.

Ukrainian researchers have reached a consensus on this observation and have contributed further insights on the topic. Maxim Kyrchaniv proposes considering three dimensions of the Soviet past: Sovietization as deprivation of political independence; getting closer to Russia under the flag of “Russian-ness” (in Ukrainian: *rosijshchennia*); and Russification as dismantling of Ukrainian discourse³⁹ and identity. Such an approach may help to gain insight into the contemporary challenges that Ukrainians face in the process of self-identification. It is also important to keep in mind the concept of post-genocidal nation in relation to Ukrainians, which was introduced by James Mace, American researcher of the Holodomor.⁴⁰

Such post-totalitarian and post-genocidal identity has many features, in particular, fear and threat; feeling of being controlled; identity that is easily relinquished in favor of another (in the case of Ukraine, this could be Russian identity); and numerous traumas of the twentieth century (many of which have still not been adequately reflected upon).⁴¹

In addition to the traumas of the twentieth century, economic difficulties and political turbulences, the information aggression of Russia against Ukraine also contributed to the slowdown in the formation of Ukrainian political identity and nation. To illustrate this point, in the end of the 1980s, in Ukrainian cities, Donetsk, Luhansk, Chernihiv, Simferopol, and Mykolajiv, no Ukrainian-language school operated; and in Kyiv in 1987, out of 300,000 school students, only 70,000 attended schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction.⁴² Such a scale of Russification was manifested not only externally (in the language of communication) but also in more profound ways, such as a lack of orientation towards the idea of an independent Ukrainian state, Ukrainian culture, art, literature, and identity in general.

Similarly, Ukrainian researchers highlight the role of history in identity formation, alongside such factors as “language, mentality, picture of the world, mythology, cultural memory, religious and civic position.”⁴³ In the aftermath of the Soviet Russification, the language issue proved to be particularly sensitive and challenging one. According to the 2001 census, Ukrainians constituted 77.8% of the total population, while Russians accounted for 17.3%. The Ukrainian language was identified as a native⁴⁴ language by 67.5% of Ukrainians, and the Russian language by 29.6% of respondents.⁴⁵ This suggests that for 10% of Ukrainians, the Ukrainian language was not a native one.

It is worth noting that in 2022, the number of people identifying themselves as Ukrainians reached 92%, while those identifying themselves as Russian accounted for 5%.⁴⁶ By the beginning of the Russian open-scale invasion in 2022, 95% respondents agreed with the statement, “I believe that I am a citizen

³⁸ Wanner, C. *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*. Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, p. 37.

³⁹ See Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, p. 330.

⁴⁰ See more, Mace, J. E. The Man-Made Famine of 1933 in the Soviet Ukraine: What Happened and Why? In: *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide* / Ed. I. W. Charny. Boulder: Westview Press, 1984, p. 67–83.

⁴¹ Cf. Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, p. 330–331.

⁴² See Ярмоленко, М. Мовна політика в УРСР у 40–80-х роках XX століття [Language Policy in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in the Fourth–Eighth Decades of the Twentieth Century]. *Наукові записки Інституту політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І.Ф. Кураса*, 2013, No. 3(65), p. 375. Retrieved from <http://jnas.nbuv.gov.ua/article/UJRN-0001119390> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁴³ Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, p. 330. See *ibidem*, p. 332.

⁴⁴ According to sociologists, in reality, the number of those who spoke only Ukrainian was lower. See Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування: Ідеологічні маркери війни [The Tenth All-National Survey: Ideological Markers of the War]. *Соціологічна група “Рейтинг”*, 27 April 2022, p. 36. Retrieved from https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/685c279caf66f4023ad2cab4/68da46fdb1e96d-5c4b99b62e_rg_ua_1000_ideological_markers_ua_042022_press_compressed.pdf [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁴⁵ See Перепис населення України (2001) [General Census of Ukrainian Population (2001)]. *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Перепис_населення_України_\(2001\)](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Перепис_населення_України_(2001)) [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁴⁶ See Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування, p. 37.

of Ukraine.”⁴⁷ Although such statistics confirm the formation of an all-national civic identity in Ukraine, there are still some issues to be resolved in relation to the content of such identity, which I examine in more detail further on.

It would seem that there is a general consensus among researchers that religious tolerance exists in Ukraine. 67% of Ukrainians believe that any religion that declares ideals of “kindness, love, and charity, and does not threaten the existence of other human being,” as well as all religions have the right to exist as various ways leading to God.”⁴⁸

Additionally, in 2020, 65% of respondents indicated that they believe that the Church should not intervene in the relations between a human being and the authorities. Conversely, 28% of respondents expressed disagreement with the view that the separation of the Church from the state and school is a prerequisite for a democratic state and freedom of conscience. This figure represents a slight decline from 37% of respondents who held this view in 2000. In 2020, 71% of respondents indicated that they believe that there is full freedom of conscience in Ukraine (compared to 66% of respondents who expressed the same view in 2000).⁴⁹

Other components of identity were constructed by historians (national history writing, grand historical narrative) and authorities (memory and the history of politics). It is regrettable that such activity took place in the “information” space, where Russia expressed reservations about Ukraine’s desire to chart its own course. Russia attempted to keep Ukrainian identity framed as a Russian identity; moreover, such identity was constructed as a Soviet one.⁵⁰ It is therefore understandable that Russia’s involvement in the Ukrainian humanitarian sphere, especially up until 2014, had been so intrusive.

By 2022, before the Russian open-scale invasion, historians had identified a number of factors that could potentially impact the stability of Ukrainian civic identity. These included a historical and geographic proximity to Russia in the eastern and southern regions (often manifested in the form of nostalgia for the Soviet era and reliance on Russian cultural production—T. B.), historical, geographic, and territorial factors, incomplete process of decommunization, weak communication between the authorities and the citizens, the disparities in regional development, state- and nation-building, and the absence of experience in social compromises, “mental inertia of the population,” globalization processes, post-modern world and legal nihilism.⁵¹

Besides, there has also been direct Russian interference (see the chapter on information war against the Holodomor deniers), which had an impact on another aspect of Ukrainian nation-building, “a conflict of languages and cultures, artificially created with the participation of the northern neighbor.”⁵² Ukrainian philologist Larysa Masenko argues that the initial stage of the Russian war against Ukraine (this thought was voiced before the open-scale invasion) may have been caused by the “failed national politics” of Ukraine, that is, the inability of Ukrainian citizens to bring to power a real “national elite with state-oriented thinking” that would set barriers to the neglect of Ukrainian language, culture, identity, and state by the Russian media, book, and pop culture.⁵³ It is therefore understandable that when political opponents came to power in Ukraine, they replaced the set of “heroes” suggested by a predecessor

⁴⁷ See Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, p. 383.

⁴⁸ *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000–2020 рр. (Інформаційні матеріали)* [The Peculiarities of Religious and Church-Religious Identification of the Citizens of Ukraine: Tendencies of 2000–2020 (Information Materials)]. Kyiv: Razumkov Centre, 2020, p. 27. Retrieved from: https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2020_religiya.pdf [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁴⁹ See *ibidem*, p. 45, 41, 36.

⁵⁰ See Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, p. 356.

⁵¹ See more, *ibidem*, p. 425–426, 428.

⁵² Масенко, Л. *Конфлікт мов та ідентичностей у пострадянській Україні* [The Conflict of Languages and Identities in Post-Soviet Ukraine]. Kyiv: Klio, 2020, cited in Рафальський, О.; Калакура, Я.; Калакура, О.; Юрій, М. *Цивілізаційна ідентичність українства*, p. 426.

⁵³ See *ibidem*, p. 434, 435.

with their own, in accordance with the electorate's wishes rather than the interests of the state.⁵⁴ Such an approach contributed to "the fragmented, eclectic, and often contested historical policy."⁵⁵

2. The First Pillar of Ukrainian Identity: The Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921

When examining the pillars of Ukrainian collective memory as the stories of success and failures, I will also try to demonstrate (using sociological data⁵⁶) the adaptation of narratives imposed on Ukrainian society through the state politics of history and memory politics.

With regard to the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921, it is evident that the memory about this event could not be preserved by the living eyewitnesses; however, the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine in 2014, and especially the open-scale invasion that began in 2022, have prompted a growing interest in the topic.

Ukrainian writer Vasyl Shkriar has written a series of historical novels about the Ukrainian Revolution. His first novel, entitled *Black Raven* (orig. *Чорний Ворон*⁵⁷), was published as early as 2009, after thirteen years of research and work. His subsequent novels, as well as the books about the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (in Ukrainian: *Ukrajinska povstanska armiia*; hereinafter, UPA), Zaporizka Sich, Chornobyl, and the war between Russia and Ukraine, were published in 2014 and later. The writer demonstrated his moral stance, identity, and principles in 2011, when he declined to accept an award from the fourth president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, who was accused of high treason in 2019 (the final court decision was delivered in 2021).

The year 2017 was declared a year of Ukrainian Revolution to celebrate a centenary of its beginning. In that same year, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (hereinafter, UINM) published recommendations for Ukrainian general educational institutions on how to commemorate significant dates. The compilers included a variety of important dates, quotations of the Ukrainian leaders of that time, explanations of the events, debunking myths about certain movements and events, such as WWII, the UPA, and the dissident movement, supplementing them with biographies of prominent and ordinary Ukrainians, who witnessed the aforementioned events.⁵⁸

In 2004, with the beginning of the presidency of the third president, Yushchenko, the state had also demonstrated interest in Symon Petliura, one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Revolution. As a result, there has been a notable shift in public opinion regarding Petliura. In 2012, only 26% of respondents expressed a positive view towards him, but by 2022, the figure had risen to 49%.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, his appreciation was still almost twice as low compared to the attitude towards one of the intellectual fathers of the Ukrainian Revolution, Mykhailo Hrushevsky.⁶⁰ In 2022, he was positively evaluated by 83% of respondents.⁶¹ Also, in 2018 and 2019, two movies about this Ukrainian Revolution leader were released.⁶²

⁵⁴ See more, Khromeychuk, O. *Glory to the Heroes?* p. 145.

⁵⁵ Chebotarova, A. *Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, p. 183.

⁵⁶ *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*.

⁵⁷ Шкляр, В. *Чорний Ворон*. Київ: Ярославів Вал, 2009.

⁵⁸ See more, *Збірка методичних рекомендацій до відзначення пам'ятних дат у загальноосвітніх навчальних закладах [Collection of Methodic Recommendations for Celebration of Memorial Dates in General Educational Institutions]* / Eds. Г. Байкеніч, О. Охрімчук. Дніпро: ЛІРА, 2017. Retrieved from <https://uinp.gov.ua/elektronni-vydannya/zbirka-metodychnyh-rekomendacij-do-vidznachennya-pamyatnyh-dat-u-zagalnoosvitnih-navchalnyh-zakladah2> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁵⁹ See *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ The first scholarly biography of Hrushevsky, see Prymak, T. M. *Mykhailo Hrushevsky: The Politics of National Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442677487>.

⁶¹ See *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, p. 11, 22.

⁶² For more details, see Pauly, M. D. Symon Petliura, The Ukrainian People's Republic, and National Commemoration in Contemporary Ukraine. In: *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine* / Eds. A. Wylegala, M. Głowacka-Grajper. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020, p. 117–139, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx8b7rg.10>.

More information about the resistance of Ukrainians to the Soviet regime, in particular, Cold Ravine Republic (1919–1922), appeared in public space. For example, the Historical Club Cold Ravine was established as early as 1997. In 2018, its head, writer Roman Koval, initiated the renaming of the 93rd Separate Mechanical Brigade by adding the words Cold Ravine. In 2013, the article on Cold Ravine Republic was published in the Encyclopedia of Ukraine, the most comprehensive publication about the history of Ukraine, compiled by the Institute of History of Ukraine. Therefore, only in the 2010s, the information about the Ukrainian resistance was included in the encyclopedia. Since 2022, many more articles have appeared in various internet resources on the Republic and its struggle against the Bolshevik occupation.

3. The Second Pillar of Ukrainian Identity: Memory about WWII

When considering the second pillar, the most essential factor is the division of society regarding the evaluation of the Red Army and UPA soldiers, as well as the general approach towards war and its legacy.⁶³

It is important to bear in mind that in Ukraine, WWII was fought by everyone against everyone, unlike in Western Europe, where there was one obvious enemy, Nazi Germany. Moreover, in the West, there were more secure spaces which helped people to survive. The German troops and the troops of its allies (Hungarians and Romanians), the Red Army, the UPA and the two Polish armies (of national and pro-Communist orientation) fought on Ukrainian territory. All of them engaged in conflict with one another, sometimes uniting in an effort to achieve their respective objectives. The result was the complete occupation of Ukrainian territory by the Nazis, which led to approximately 10 million of victims, which comprises one-third of the total prewar Ukrainian population.

It seems that memory about WWII in Ukraine has been shaped by a combination of factors, including the horrors of Nazi occupation, the Soviet and the UPA partisan war, and the second Soviet occupation of 1944–1945. Memory about all those events had remained within the family and did not play the role of “a governing myth”; although, as research shows, they have been exploited by the representatives of post-communist elite. While in Russia, the myth of WWII, as a core of state-building strategy, has taken on a form of castrated cult of *pobedobesie* (raving about the victory), followed by the slogans such as the “Great Victory,” “We can repeat it,” “Russians as the only winners over Nazism,” and “Immortal regiment.”⁶⁴ Both the cult of the “Great Victory” and the glorification of militarization also played a role in mobilizing Russians in their war against Ukraine in 2022.

The beginning of a large-scale invasion has prompted the Ukrainians to engage in deeper reflections on the traumatic legacy of Soviet colonialism (although this process has already begun in 2014). Thanks to the initiative of the UINM and a corresponding orientation of the fifth president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainians have aligned with the Western Day of Memory and Reconciliation of May 8 as a day of remembrance and mourning, which differs from the Russian and pre-2015 Ukrainian celebration of victory over Nazism celebrated on May 9. A symbol of commemoration has also been modified. Since 2005, Russia has begun to disseminate within and outside the country the Georgian ribbon as a symbol of the “Great Victory,” which gradually became to manifest anti-Ukrainian identity and pro-Russian orientation. In 2014, the Ukrainians switched to the poppy flower as a symbol of WWII remembrance. In 2023, the two holidays in Ukraine were unified as a single commemoration, designated as Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism of May 8. The slogan was replaced with the phrase, “We remember. We are winning.”

According to sociologists, there has been a notable decline in the number of Ukrainians who viewed Victory Day of May 9 as an important holiday. In 2010, 58% of Ukrainians expressed their support for this day, while in 2023, this figure dropped to 13%. Additionally, in 2023, 62% of Ukrainians expressed their

⁶³ Cf. Borovyk, M. (*In*)different Memory, p. 91.

⁶⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 94.

support for commemorating the victims of WWII on May 8.⁶⁵ In 2012, 74% of Ukrainians supported the celebration of May 9 as a victory day; in 2018, the number was 58%, and in 2022, 15%. In 2022, 80% of respondents told that this must be a memory day and not a victory day (75% were Ukrainians from the southern Ukraine, 76% from Eastern Ukraine, 77% were aged 51+, and 66%—Russian-speaking Ukrainians).⁶⁶ In general, in 2022, 36% of respondents treated May 9 as a remnant of the past, and 23%—as a commonness.⁶⁷

This shift occurred with the passing of the war generation. It has been observed that an increasing number of Ukrainians has been attending the cemeteries rather than going to the squares to commemorate the fallen veterans of WWII. Also, the ongoing war has had an impact on the perception of the celebration of the end of WWII. As a potential outcome of the two concurrent trends, sociologists observed that in 2022, 34% of respondents indicated that the May 9 had become a holiday with “symbolism, meaningful for me [a respondent] personally” (in 2017, the number was 82%).⁶⁸

It is also notable that for the first time at the state level, the president of Ukraine, Poroshenko, invited the soldiers of the Red Army, the UPA, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine to commemorate memory of WWII victims together, in a gesture of unity and respect. Ivan Zaluzhny was one of the Red Army veterans present at the event. He lost his only grandson in the war against Russia in 2014. Such Poroshenko’s (and thus, the state’s) attitude was undoubtedly a success story in the realm of memory politics.

More than two decades after Ukraine gained its independence, the law recognizing the role of the UPA in the fight for Ukrainian independence was passed in 2015. 81% of Ukrainians supported the idea in 2022 (an increase of four times since 2010, when only 20% were in favor, and 61% opposed it).⁶⁹

One Ukrainian oral history project dedicated to WWII collected 304 testimonies between 2010 and 2015. The testimonies illustrate a variety of strategies, including references to the “Soviet people,” the “Banderites,” and the local community (a “they, ours, and we” identity), as well as a notable absence of collective memory about the war. Of those 304 testimonies, only around 5% were told “on the basis of an ideologically motivated narrative strategy”; instead, people were mostly telling their life stories in the times of calamities.⁷⁰

Historian Khromeychuk suggests that Ukraine has selected “the wartime nationalists as role models” in contemporary (as of 2020) popular memory, using “uncritical attitude toward nationalism, coupled with the militarization of society, in which traditional [sic!] masculinity is almost worshipped...”⁷¹ I disagree with this straightforward statement. Sociological data shows that approximately 43% of Ukrainians have certain restrictions and reservations regarding the role of the Red Army and 31% regarding the UPA soldiers in WWII.⁷² This suggests that respondents have demonstrated some reflection and knowledge about various aspects of veterans’ activity during the war, as well as the absence of emasculated approach towards it. The appeal to the military events and army-related figures from the Ukrainian past fits mnemonic security framework, which works in favor of the need to defend. This pattern differs from the approach seen in Russia with its slogans of the “Great Victory,” “Our (great)grandfathers were fighting,” “We can repeat it,” etc., serving to mobilize the Russian society in the war against Ukraine.

Furthermore, the use of wartime figures by Khromeychuk is only partially accurate, as Ukrainian

⁶⁵ See more, Торба, Б. Чому День пам’яті та перемоги над нацизмом в Україні тепер святкують 8 травня? [Why Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism Is Celebrated on May 8?]. *Українська правда. Життя*, 7 May 2024. Retrieved from <https://life.pravda.com.ua/projects/zapitay-jittya/den-pam-yati-ta-peremogi-nad-nacizmom-chomu-teper-vidznachayut-8-travnya-zamist-9-travnya-301426/> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁶⁶ *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, р. 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, р. 4.

⁶⁸ See *ibidem*, р. 7–8.

⁶⁹ See *ibidem*, р. 11, 19.

⁷⁰ For more detailed account, see Borovyk, M. *(In)different Memory*, р. 92–93, 94–105.

⁷¹ Khromeychuk, O. *Glory to the Heroes?* р. 150.

⁷² *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, р. 17.

historians have initiated a reflection within the society on numerous other periods and actors in Ukrainian history. As evidenced by the examples pertaining to the Ukrainian Revolution and Holodomor, as well as the aforementioned recommendations of the UINM, it is clearly the case. In addition to the 93rd Separate Mechanical Brigade, numerous other brigades have been named in honour of various figures and events of Ukrainian history: V. Monomakh, King Danylo, Great Prince Vitovt (lived during the Rus and the Great Duchy of Lithuania period); hetmans Petro Doroshenko, Ivan Vyhovsky, and Danylo Apostol, Kosh⁷³ otaman Kost Hordienko, Black Zaporozhtsi, Prince K. Ostrozky, Zaporizka Sich (a Cossack state from the Hetmanshchyna period), and Cold Ravine. A number of actors of the twentieth-century Ukrainian history has also attracted the attention of the Ukrainian Army: Marko Bezruchko, Romam Dashkevych, the Knights of the Winter Campaign, Petro Franko (son of famous Ukrainian writer, Ivan Franko, second after Taras Shevchenko, “father of the nation”), Yakiv Hanzhiuk (the Ukrainian Revolution period), and so on.

Additionally, sociological findings indicate a mental reconciliation of the majority of society with the Red Army and the UPA. In 2022, 85% of Ukrainians (42% of them definitely positively, and 43%—rather positively) expressed positive attitude towards the soldiers of the Red Army, and 71% (40%—definitely positively, and 31%—rather positively)—towards the UPA soldiers, and 96% of respondents—towards contemporary Ukrainian soldiers engaged in combat with the Russian aggressor.⁷⁴

A shift in discourse regarding the terminology used to refer to WWII is yet another indicator of a more profound reflection about the period of 1939–1945. In 2013, 60% of Ukrainians supported the “Great Patriotic War,” while in 2017, this number decreased to 43%. Correspondingly, in 2013 only 30% were in favor of WWII, while in 2017, the number was 41%.⁷⁵

It is important to stress that WWII occupied only the second place in the hierarchy of the most negative events in Ukraine’s history, with 20.7% of respondents citing it. The majority (24.4%) of respondents cited Holodomor as a particularly tragic event in Ukrainian history. The Chornobyl disaster managed to secure fifth place with 7.7%. The survey took place in 2013, before the Russo-Ukrainian war.⁷⁶

Memory about the Holocaust as part of WWII had taken a difficult path in Ukraine.⁷⁷ Ignored during the Soviet period, neglected by the Ukrainian authorities till the late 2010s,⁷⁸ the representation of memory about the Holocaust has become a battlefield. The discussions around the museum space concept to be built in Babyn Yar (Kyiv) led to a Dutch historian Karel Berkhoff’s stepping down from his role as the main historian of the project in 2020. He disagreed with the artistic concept suggested by a Russian (sic!) filmmaker (sic!) Illia Khrazhovsky, who proposed the use of “personalized questionnaires” and “zones of virtual reality where the visitors will find themselves in the role of victims, collaborators, the Nazis, and prisoners of war.” Berkhoff argued that Khrazhovsky’s suggestion is unethical and it would turn the museum into a “blockbuster.”⁷⁹

At the same time, a few Ukrainian intellectuals have expressed concern that the project (which was nicknamed Disneyland) may have been sponsored by the Russians with the intention of controlling and influencing Ukrainian narratives and memories of the Holocaust, particularly by excluding non-Jewish

⁷³ Here, the term Kosh (Kish) is used to define Zaporizka Sich, its leadership, and the Cossack system of administration.

⁷⁴ Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування, p. 11.

⁷⁵ See more, Survey Infographics: Historical Memory: Estimated Suffering of Different Groups in WWII... (2013). University of St. Gallen. Retrieved from: <https://www.uaregio.org/en/surveys/data-visualisations/survey-infographics/historical-memory/> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁷⁶ See Chebotarova, A. Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet Ukraine. In: *The Burden of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine*, p. 190.

⁷⁷ For more details, see *ibidem*, p. 183–205.

⁷⁸ See Borovyk, M. (*In*)different Memory, p. 102, 107.

⁷⁹ For more details, see Барановская, М.; Власенко, В. “Бабий Яр”: за что историк критикует проект Хржановского [“Babii Yar”: Why a Historian Criticizes Khrzhanovsky’s Project]. DW. *Общество*, 4 June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/ru/мемориал-бабий-яр-за-что-историк-критикует-проект-хржановского/a-53650552> [accessed 02/03/2025].

victims from the memorial.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the Ukrainian historians have put forth a memorial concept that takes an inclusive approach towards the victims of the Holocaust (published in 2021⁸¹). The open-scale Russian invasion has interrupted the debates, leaving this page of memory politics unfinished.

4. The Third Pillar of Ukrainian Identity: The Transformation of Individual Memory about the Holodomor into Collective One

The third pillar of Ukrainian identity is probably the most complex from the point of view of evolution in society's memory about the famine. The process is multilayered.

The first component of the problem is the information war waged by the Soviet regime against Holodomor from 1932 up to December 1987. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this warfare ended in 1987. The Russian state has been continuing to exert pressure over the issue of the famine, its perception in Ukraine and abroad. The selection of archival records in a manner that would not reveal the specific nature of the Ukrainian famine, suggested to Russian historians by the head of the Russian Archival Agency, Vladimir Petrovich Kozlov, serves as a telling example of such instruction.⁸²

Moreover, there had been forces in Ukraine that essentially espoused a similar stance to that of the Russian state on the issue in question. The Ukrainian Communist Party, which resumed its activities in 1993, not only denied the Holodomor using the rationale of natural causes or the assertion that the Soviet historiography on the subject was sufficient and, thus, no new research was needed, but also applied the term genocide to the current political situation in Ukraine, which faced significant economic challenges in the 1990s. Moreover, according to Tetiana Zhurzhenko, Holodomor denial had become an instrument of the party's legitimization.⁸³

The year 2003 marked the 70th anniversary of the Holodomor, which led to a renewed discussion in society and among historians. Holodomor deniers did not stand aside. The communists used an argument that the victims of the famine were a by-product of industrialization that helped to combat Nazism. Several pro-Soviet historians in Ukraine argued that the contemporary authorities used the Holodomor as a cover-up of current problems, invented the term Kholodomor (the term, which sounds similar to Holodomor, means extermination with frost), and introduced a concept of collective responsibility, when all power vertical from Stalin to the head of collective farms simply took wrong decisions with no bad intentions.⁸⁴

The adoption of the Law on Holodomor by the Ukrainian Parliament in 2006 paved the way for the establishment of the UINM. Initially, the UINM acted only by incorporating the famine as one of the painful and turning points in Ukrainian history. The efforts of historians to encourage reflection on the Holodomor by challenging the silence surrounding it led to the emergence of groups who publicly

⁸⁰ For more details, see Дорош, С. Бабин Яр і російський слід. Що стоїть за конфліктом навколо меморіалу [Babyn Yar and the Russian Trace: What Is Behind a Conflict around the Memorial]. *BBC News Україна*, 3 March 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-56156925> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁸¹ For more details, see Boriak, H.; Hrynevych, V.; Mykhailo, H.; Kashevarova, N.; Kot, S.; Krupyna, V.; Levitas, F.; Lysenko, O.; Nakhmanovych, V.; Pastushenko, T.; Patryliak, I.; Podolskyi, A.; Poshyvailo, I.; Sabetska, O.; Simperovych, V.; Tiahlyi, M.; Shuliar, A.; Yaremenko, V. *Concept for the Memorialization of the Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve / Second Revised and Expanded Edition*. Kyiv: Ministry of Culture of Ukraine; Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; Babyn Yar National Historical Memorial Preserve, 2021. Retrieved from <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0015851> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁸² See Боряк, Т. *Усна історія у джерельній базі студій Голодомору*, p. 213.

⁸³ See more, Zhurzhenko, T. "Capital of Despair": Holodomor Memory and Political Conflicts in Kharkiv after the Orange Revolution. *East European Politics and Societies*, 2011, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 597–639, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325410387646>.

⁸⁴ See Козицький, А. Заперечення Голодомору у незалежній Україні [Holodomor Denial in Independent Ukraine]. *Етнічна історія народів Європи / Ethnic History of European People*, 2024, No. 72, p. 127, <https://doi.org/10.17721/2518-1270.2024.72.14>.

denied the Holodomor.⁸⁵ Georgy Tkachenko published two books in 2006⁸⁶ and 2008⁸⁷ that echoed Soviet narratives on the natural causes of the famine. In the second book, he denied the famine as such and instead wrote about the famine in the U.S.A.⁸⁸

Among all Ukrainian presidents, Yanukovich contributed the most to the shift of memory politics about the famine. In 2010, at a Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe meeting, he stated that the Holodomor was not a genocide but a common tragedy that befell those living in the U.S.S.R. This echoed the Russian narrative that the starvation in Ukraine was caused by economic disorganization. In general, in 2005–2013, there were 105 criminal cases regarding the Holodomor, ranging from attempts to demolish monuments dedicated to the famine to putting a ban of commemorative activities honoring Holodomor victims, etc. Also, the ruling presidential political party made an attempt to shift commemorative practices devoted to Holodomor victims from the visible public sphere to the invisible private one.⁸⁹

During Yanukovich tenure, Valerii Soldatchenko, known for the development of the concept collective responsibility, was appointed the head of the UINM (2010–2014). He attempted to introduce the neutral term famine in place of Holodomor, suggesting that the natural causes were the reason for starvation. His deputy head, Dmytro Vedeneev, published a book in 2013, in which he put forth the theory that the Holodomor was invented by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency with the goal of combating the U.S.S.R. The State Archive Branch of the Security Services of Ukraine began to restrict access to the KGB archives, which contain archival records on the famine.⁹⁰

There were other Ukrainian top figures, who lent their support to the Russian Holodomor denial campaign. In 2006, a political decision was made to replace Hennadii Boriak, a professional historian, doctor of historical science, specialist of archival records and sources, who was serving as the head of the State Committee of Archives of Ukraine, with a member of the Communist Party, Olha Hinzburg, previously employed at a reinforcement steel plant. It was only after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 that she was dismissed from her post. Hinzburg not only denied the famine but also expressed an intention to restrict access to the archival records for researchers and to reclassify the already declassified records.⁹¹

Minister of Education, Dmytro Tabachnyk (2010–2014), made the decision to exclude literary works on Holodomor from the school curriculum; however, he did not dare to exclude the mentions about the famine of 1932–1933 completely from the program of Ukrainian history taught in 10–11th grades. At the same time, he removed any mentions about the other two famines of 1921–1923 and 1946–1947. As a result, the scope of the Holodomor topic was reduced, including the notion of genocide and the 2006 law “On the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine.”⁹²

The second component of the problem concerns fragmented sources as the Soviet regime intentionally destroyed official archival records on the famine, resulting, according to my estimation, to the loss of up

⁸⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 128–129.

⁸⁶ Ткаченко, Г. *Миф о голодоморе—изобретение манипуляторов сознанием* [The Myth of the Holodomor—the Invention of Mind Manipulators]. Киев: МУСУВ, 2006.

⁸⁷ Ткаченко, Г. *Информационно-психологическая интервенция* [Informational and Psychological Intervention]. Киев: Юнивест Принт, 2008.

⁸⁸ See also, Козицький, А. *Заперечення Голодомору у незалежній Україні*, p. 128–129.

⁸⁹ See also, *ibidem*, p. 129.

⁹⁰ See more, В Институте национальной памяти возрождают концепцию Голодомора по версии КГБ,—историк [In the Institute of National Memory, the Holodomor Concept Created by KGB Has Been Revived—A Historian]. *Цензор.Нет*, 24 October 2013. Retrieved from https://censor.net/ru/news/257443/v_institute_natsionalnoyi_pamyati_vozrojdayut_kontseptsiyu_golodomora_po_versii_kgb_istorik [accessed 02/03/2025]; Бывшего кэгебиста Веденеева уволили с должности заместителя директора Института украиноведения под давлением общественности [Former KGB Employee Vedeneev Has Been Released As a Deputy Head of Ukrainian Study Institute Under the Pressure of Public Opinion]. *Антикор*, 29 September 2023. Retrieved from https://antikor.com.ua/ru/articles/656468-byvshego_kagebista_vedeneeva_uvolili_s_dolhnosti_zamestitelja_direktora_institutu_ukrainovedenija_pod_davleniem_obshcheshe [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁹¹ The information was obtained in private discussions with several archivists.

⁹² See Козицький, А. *Заперечення Голодомору у незалежній Україні*, p. 129.

to 500,000–1 million archival records. However, muted memory has been gradually passed down through generations, and this has led to the initiation of numerous oral history projects. It is important to stress that these projects did not emerge in vacuum. As early as 1933, there were suggestions in Western Ukraine (part of Poland at that time) to inquire of refugees from Ukraine who had sought refuge in the Polish state. Subsequently, new initiatives emerged in the displaced persons camps in the aftermath of WWII.

In light of the prohibition of discussing famine and the lack of relevant archival records, a third component emerges. Ukrainian approaches to the famine have been based on individual memories, grassroots commemorative initiatives, recommendations by the Association of Holodomor Researchers of Ukraine in the 1990s, and the extensive recording of oral history.

It is essential to point to one important factor that may explain why many foreigners have been sceptical about the famine and the discussions and publications on the topic by Ukrainian researchers. Firstly, there has been a lack of awareness of the Holodomor in the information space before 1991. Secondly, the source base (official archival records) for Holodomor research was fragmented. This made it challenging to answer key questions about the causes, mechanisms, scale, and impact of famine.

Ukrainian historians have been accumulating oral history and memoirs, reflecting on the past, and expressing their deep concern about the legacy of Soviet totalitarianism. They initiated awareness-raising campaigns and appealed to Western audiences, urging them to recognize the crimes committed by the Soviet state. However, not seeing the work done at the low level, lacking familiarity with the nuances of the sources, as well as being subject to the ongoing information battle between Russia and the West regarding the famine and its memory, many foreigners only saw Yushchenko's actions in relation to the Holodomor. It appeared to them that the policy was sudden, caused by political reasons only.

The last, fourth, layer of the Holodomor and identity construction is linked to the recording and collection of sources of personal origin on the Holodomor. These sources have been called to both compensate for the existing gap in the source base and symbolically rehabilitate Holodomor victims by making their experience public.

Lysenko's argument about the two (WWII and the Holodomor) of the three pillars of Ukrainian identity can be confirmed. One of the initiators of oral history projects, Borovyk, made an interesting observation. Even during the oral history project conducted in 2010–2015, many respondents, despite being aware of the project's focus on WWII, "nonetheless often start his or her story with collectivization and the famine of 1932–1933..."⁹³ This is yet another indication that the Holodomor played a significant role in the lives and memories of many Ukrainians, although it was often kept aside from official Soviet narratives of remembrance, along with personal recollections of WWII.

President Yushchenko also initiated a second wave of decommunization through the 2007 law "On Measures Connected with the 75th Anniversary of 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine." It also led to the removal of monuments to political figures who were involved in the implementation of the Holodomor.⁹⁴ At the same time, monuments to Holodomor victims were erected in villages, towns, and cities, continuing a commemorative practice that began in the late 1980s. Moreover, in 2007–2008, he initiated the largest National Holodomor Oral History Project in Ukraine (2007–2008), as a result of which, more than 70,000 oral history sources and memoirs about the Holodomor were recorded (in total, the project accumulated over 110,000 testimonies).⁹⁵

Having heard from his mother about the famine, Yushchenko attempted to reshape historical memory of Ukraine by turning to the Ukrainian past. Varvara Yushchenko was a Holodomor survivor, and her

⁹³ Borovyk, M. (*In)different Memory*, p. 104.

⁹⁴ See 9 квітня виповнилося 5 років, як в Україні розпочалася декомунізація на законодавчому рівні [April 9 Marked Five Years Since De-Communization at the Legislative Level in Ukraine]. Український інститут національної пам'яті, 9 April 2020. Retrieved from <https://uin.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/9-kvitnya-vypovnylosya-5-rokiv-yak-v-ukrayini-rozpochalasya-dekomunizaciya-na-zakonodavchomu-rivni> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁹⁵ For more details, see Боряк, Т. *Усна історія у джерельній базі студій Голодомору*, p. 447–451, 524.

testimony was published in 2007. The preparation of a nineteen-volume series that included archival sources, oral history/memoirs, and martyrology was yet another consequence of the project.

5. Identity Orientations, Decolonization of Narratives, and Space during the Russo-Ukrainian War

As the fourth pillar of Ukrainian identity is currently being formed, it makes it challenging to assess its scope and level of integration into collective identity. It is evident that the ongoing war bears direct parallels to the previously mentioned pillars (the Ukrainian Revolution, the Holodomor, and WWII). For instance, a number of soldiers, journalists, and world leaders have already pointed to similarities between the Russian genocidal practices during the Holodomor and the current Russia's war against Ukraine.⁹⁶ While it is difficult to fully grasp the nuances of this complex issue, a few valuable insights from sociological surveys conducted prior to 2017 and throughout the course of the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022 are notable here. The data illustrates the evolution of Ukrainian society.

The initial survey from 2017 conducted with 6,000 respondents offers a ranking of the listed events (a total of 19) in terms of importance. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating “the most important,” the results are as follows: 4,56 respondents voted for WWII; 4,56 for Independence of Ukraine; 4,54 for Kyiv Rus; 4,53 for Ukrainian Cossacks; 4,24 for the Holodomor⁹⁷; 4,22 for the Ukrainian People's Republic; 4,21 for Ukrainian Renaissance of the twentieth century; 4,19 for Euromaidan; 4,17 for the USSR, and 4,03 for the Pereiaslav Agreement. The other events received less than 4. The Crimea and Donbas conflict was also highly evaluated (4,39), which could decrease the evaluation of other events.⁹⁸

In 2020, Khromeychuk argued that the “views of the Ukrainian population are polarized” on the issue of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (hereinafter, OUN) and the UPA, with regional variations.⁹⁹ However, it seems that the situation is less straightforward. The survey from 2022 provides the statistics on the four conditional parts of Ukraine. The Center had a “definitely” positive attitude towards the Red Army—43% and 47%—rather positive (a total of 90%); the South of Ukraine—50% and 36% respectively (a total of 86%); the East—40% and 42% respectively (a total of 82%); and the West—34% and 45% respectively (a total of 79%). The numbers concerning the UPA soldiers were as follows: the West—60% and 26% respectively (a total of 86%); the Center—41% and 34% respectively (a total of 75%); the South—27% and 28% respectively (a total of 55%); and the East 18 and 38% respectively (a total of 56%).¹⁰⁰ Despite such regional differences, 81% of Ukrainians thought that the members of the OUN-UPA were the “participants of the struggle for state's Independence.”¹⁰¹ This figure is in line with the positive sentiment towards the soldiers of both the Red Army (85%) and the UPA (71%). Overall, 96% had a favorable view of contemporary Ukrainian soldiers, who are engaged in combat with the Russian aggressor.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ For more details, see Боряк, Т. Не(осмислений) Голодомор: Пам'ять про геноцид під час Російсько-української війни [(Un)comprehended Holodomor: Memory about the Genocide during Russia–Ukraine War]. In: *VIII Міжнародна наукова конференція “Україна—Європейський Союз: формат розвитку відносин у контексті Російсько-української війни, гарантій безпеки та реінтеграції тимчасово окупованих територій”* [VIII International Research Conference “Ukraine—European Union: Format of Relations Development in the Context of Russo-Ukrainian War, Security Assurances and Reintegration of Temporary Occupied Territories”]. Ужгород: ТОВ “ПІК-У”, 2023, p. 63–69. Retrieved from <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0017764> [accessed 02/03/2025].

⁹⁷ Such small decrease in comprehension of Holodomor as the most negative event, compared to the 2013 survey, can be explained by the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. However, since the questions asked were not the same, it is impossible to accurately compare the data. Still, it is obvious that the Holodomor occupies a top position in Ukrainian history.

⁹⁸ See *Survey Infographics: Historical Memory: Importance of Pre-Listed Events in the History of Ukraine (Mean)*.

⁹⁹ Khromeychuk, O. *Glory to the Heroes?* p. 145.

¹⁰⁰ Based on, *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Such an understanding is closely related to the perception of the UPA army (40% of respondents had a definitely positive attitude, 31% a rather positive attitude, with some restrictions, and 18% did not have a clearly defined position¹⁰³) as the defender of Ukrainians, who found themselves caught between the two totalitarian systems during WWII (the aforementioned war of everyone against everyone), when compared with the Red Army soldiers in Soviet times and the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the present day.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the image of UPA supporters is defined by extreme nationalism and rhetoric. Rather, it is shaped by the perception of UPA soldiers as defenders of Ukrainians, who had to fight against the same enemy (the Kremlin who sent the Red Army against the UPA back in the 1940s–1950s and the Russian army fighting against the Armed Forces of Ukraine in 2014). 74% (34% had some reservations) of Ukrainians had a positive image of Stepan Bandera, compared to 22% in 2012 (the last pre-war year in peaceful Ukraine, when 58% hold a negative attitude towards him), with overwhelming majority in southern and eastern regions and among those who spoke only Russian in everyday life.¹⁰⁴ Such support for Bandera correlates more closely with the support for Ukrainian Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa (76%) against 92% for hetman Bogdan Khmelnytsky and 83% for Mykhailo Hrushevsky, as it was previously mentioned.

Support for Mazepa is more than just the endorsement of one of many Ukrainian hetmans. The Russian Orthodox Church placed Mazepa under anathema more than three centuries ago, in 1708. For many Ukrainians, he has been the hetman, who put a great deal of emphasis on the development of Ukrainian culture, education, and the church. Mazepa made an attempt to distance himself from the Moscow/Russian tsardom by uniting with the Swedish king. The joint army lost the Battle of Poltava in 1709, which led to further integration initiated in 1654 by the Pereyaslav Agreement.

The Pereyaslav Agreement is associated with Khmelnytsky, who is regarded as a positive leader by Ukrainians. The agreement was a military-political treaty signed with the Moscow tsardom, marking the beginning of incorporation of the Ukrainian lands into the Moscow/Russian state.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the Ukrainians voted in favor of this figure having this particular connotation in mind during the open-scale invasion. It seems that many Ukrainians view Khmelnytsky as a figure who played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Cossack Hetman state (mid-seventeenth century–1764) that had laid the foundation of the Ukrainian nation, with the Cossacks being referenced in the national anthem.

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, a set of decommunization laws “On the Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of their Symbols” was adopted in 2015. Criticized by numerous researchers,¹⁰⁶ the laws seem to correlate with the search for identity and its construction. Otherwise, why does the Russian occupation army restore monuments to Lenin and return old Communist street names on occupied Ukraine’s territories? As with the Holodomor initiatives, the laws did not originate from bare ground. There was a certain societal consensus based on traumatic memories about the past.

The data shows that in Russia, nostalgia for the USSR has increased from 55% in 2010 to 63% in 2022, whereas in Ukraine, it has dropped from 46% in 2010 to 11% in 2022; moreover, 87% of Ukrainians do not regret the dissolution of the USSR.¹⁰⁷ Also, in 2022, only 13% of Ukrainians (9% of them with some restrictions) positively looked on Lenin and 7% (5% with some restrictions) on Stalin.¹⁰⁸ Such low

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 11, 22, 23.

¹⁰⁵ See Norkus, Z. *An Unproclaimed Empire: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania: From the Viewpoint of Comparative Historical Sociology of Empires* / Translation from Lithuanian by A. Strunga. London: Routledge, 2018, p. 278, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315162720>.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see Khromeychuk, O. *Glory to the Heroes?* p. 146; Chebotarova, A. *Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁷ *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 11, 25.

numbers for support for Stalin correlate with the reflections on Holodomor: in November of 2022, after Russia began its open-scale invasion, 93% of Ukrainians agreed that the Holodomor was a genocide.¹⁰⁹

In 2022, 76% of Ukrainians expressed their support for a ban on the usage of symbols of Z and V used by the Russian army and the state in the war against Ukraine, and 74% for a ban on the Georgian ribbon (in 2018, the number was only 45%); more than 65% supported the idea of decommunization of streets, 71%—of monuments, and 62%—the possibility to ban Russian musical, cultural, artistic, and film production. Additionally, 41% of respondents viewed the political regime in Russia as dictatorship, 37% as fascism, and 10% as Nazism (a total of 88% thought that there is no democracy in Russia at all).¹¹⁰

The Russo-Ukrainian war has also had an impact on identity perception and identity construction. In 2022, a significant majority, i.e., 92% of respondents, identified themselves as Ukrainians, indicating that the self-identification with a nation was a key marker of their identity. In 2008–2014, this number was approximately 83% (in addition, 15% called themselves Russians), after 2014, the number reached 87–88% (and 11% of Russians). With regard to various ethnic groups and minorities, the prevailing attitude among Ukrainians was mostly positive or positive-neutral: with regard to Ukrainian-speaking people (95%), Russian-speaking people (57%), Jews (60%), and Hungarians (49%).¹¹¹

In 2022, sociologists also observed a decline in the Russian-speaking segment of Ukrainians. At the outset of the war in 2022, this group constituted 18% of the population, whereas by the end of April 2022, it had decreased to 15%. In 2012, the number was 40% and by the end of 2021, it was 26%. Also, 33% of respondents used both the Ukrainian and Russian languages, whereas 51% used the Ukrainian language. A significant majority, namely 80%, believed that the Ukrainian language is their native one¹¹² (compared with 67.5% in 2001 census).

One third of respondents, namely 35%, indicated their support for the exclusion of works by Russian writers from the school curriculum, whereas 30% were opposed to this idea and 30% were undecided. Similarly, 40% of respondents expressed opposition to the dismantling of monuments associated with WWII.¹¹³ The discussions continued during the open-scale invasion. In August of 2022, the National Writers's Union of Ukraine made a suggestion to consider closing Mikhail Bulgakov's museum. In the spring of 2024, the UINM recognized this writer as a symbol of Russian imperial politics.¹¹⁴

The specialists who signed the resolution called Bulgakov “imperial by outlook, obstinate Ukrainophobia,” who, despite living in Kyiv, “despised Ukrainians and their culture, hated Ukrainian strive for independence, negatively wrote about the formation of Ukrainian state and its leaders.” They also concluded that the writer serves as a contemporary ideologue of “putinism and Kremlin's accusations of ethnocide,” who during his time, spread the ideological potions of “Russian imperialism, White guardiness, encouraged expansion of the Russian communism.”¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Динаміка ставлення до Голодомору 1932–33 рр. (листопад 2022) [The Dynamics of Attitude to the Holodomor of 1932–33 (November 2022)]. Соціологічна група “Рейтинг,” 25 November 2022. Retrieved from https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/dinam_ka_stavlennya_do_golodomoru_1932-33_rr_listopad_2022.html [accessed 02/03/2025].

¹¹⁰ See *Десяте загальнонаціональне опитування*, p. 28, 34.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹¹⁴ For more details, see Гаращенко, Р. УІНП визнав Михайла Булгакова символом російської імперської політики [The UINP Recognized Mykhailo Bulgakov as a Symbol of Russian Imperial Politics]. *Ukraine World News*, 4 March 2024. Retrieved from <https://uworld.news/news/uinp-vyznav-mykhaila-bulhakova-symvolom-1009547.html> [accessed 02/03/2025].

¹¹⁵ For more details, see Фаховий висновок щодо належності об'єктів (географічних об'єктів, назв юридичних осіб, пам'ятників та пам'ятних знаків), присвячених російському письменнику М. А. Булгакову (1891–1940) до символіки російської імперської політики [Professional Expertise on the Ownership of Objects (Geographical Objects, Names of Judicial Persons, Monuments and Memorial Signs), Dedicated to the Russian Writer M. A. Bulgakov (1891–1940) as Symbols of Russian Imperial Politics] / Chairman of the Commission В. Брехуненко. *Український інститут національної пам'яті*, 3 March 2024. Retrieved from https://uinp.gov.ua/dekomunizaciya-ta-reabilitaciya/podolannya-naslidkiv-rusyfikaciyi-ta-totalitaryzmu-v-ukrayini/fahovi-vysnovky/myhaylo-bulgakov?fbclid=IwAR3CY3Bg3kdLj_F4ZYPwbi7TuMG82vI_CdOB1_ALq71EeiYAuHyR1PpgFNo_aem_Adu7uZQV-S2Ac0mU8I8J--HkNb7oCJwIkW9a2lhHjCAqQMa-QRkA-IfqofAvGSjH6rfkn8ZV7GNpkz1fW6pOO7Ufl [accessed 02/03/2025]. The monument to Bulgakov was dismantled on June 4, 2026.

During the tenure of Yanukovich, the UINM's scope of activities has been limited. However, following the onset of the Russian military conflict against Ukraine in 2014, the UINM was re-established with renewed vigor. Since then, the UINM has played a significant role in the preparation of the law on the prohibition of the Communist and Nazi regimes (2015) and the decommunization process.

By the end of 2016, approximately 51,500 streets and squares (toponymic objects) had been renamed, reflecting the progress made in implementing the decommunization law over the past year and a half. A total of 32 cities and large towns, 955 villages and smaller towns, and 25 districts were given new names. Almost 2,400 monuments to totalitarian leaders were dismantled, of which 1,320 were to Lenin.¹¹⁶

Over the course of five years, by April of 2020, the process of decommunization saw an increase of one district, four settlements, 75 educational institutions, 33 railroad objects, two seaports, and 20 monuments (of which four were dedicated to Lenin). Ivano-Frankivsk region had no objects to be renamed.¹¹⁷ In September of 2024, the Verkhovna Rada approved decommunization of 4 districts, 10 big towns, 56 small towns, and 262 villages (in total, 328).¹¹⁸

Conclusions

The paper examines the historical markers of Ukrainian identity since 2014 as integral parts of state- and nation-building, memory, and the history of politics through the prism of inclusion/exclusion of historical events, periods, and individuals. The study corroborates the connection between identity and historical markers. It shows why the Ukrainian state- and nation-building actors must continue to persistently promote the use of historical markers in education, culture, art, and especially in international relations. The search for the pillars of Ukrainian identity and its strengthening brings us back to the concept of mnemonic security. Sociological surveys confirm the concept of fragility and, thus, the need for Ukraine to look to its history for support points, especially after the Russo-Ukrainian “hybrid war” has transformed into open Russian aggression in February 2022. The historical markers are being used as an umbrella and shield to defend Ukrainian identity against the Russian enemy by using history to draw a line between we vs they.

The fact that mostly twentieth-century events form the foundation of Ukrainian identity points to several aspects. The first point highlights the importance of family history, because a family member could represent a historical actor and preserve the experience of the Soviet period. The second point concerns the departure from and the struggle with Soviet historiography, narratives, and trauma. The third points to the identification of a common enemy, who is responsible for the twentieth-century calamities in Ukraine and the Russo-Ukrainian war. The fourth point emphasizes the incomplete process of national identification, forcing Ukrainians to turn to recent twentieth-century events for resilience.

The specificity of Ukrainian history has been marked by deep penetration of the metropole (Russian) into colonized spaces. Thus, when reverted, the colonized spaces require close attention to the issues of culture and history as tools for departing from the former empire, be it Russian or Soviet.

The new leadership of the UINM has promoted the dissemination of knowledge about the Ukrainian Revolution alongside film producers, local historians, and writers. For the older generation, which graduated from the Soviet schools, the actors of that period still remained as people that were active in “bourgeois nationalist governments.” However, the awareness towards the leaders Hrushevsky and Petliura has gradually grown, gaining 49% of positive evaluation in 2022 compared to 26% in 2012.

¹¹⁶ Понад 50 тисяч вулиць змінили назви впродовж 2016 року [More Than 50,000 Streets Have Changed Their Names during 2016]. Український інститут національної пам'яті, 2016. Retrieved from <http://old.uinp.gov.ua/news/ponad-50-tisyach-vulits-zminili-nazvi-vprodovzh-2016-roku> [accessed 02/03/2025].

¹¹⁷ 9 квітня виповнилося 5 років, як в Україні розпочалася декомунізація на законодавчому рівні.

¹¹⁸ Рада проголосувала за перейменування 328 населених пунктів [Rada Voted in Favor of Renaming 328 Settlements]. *Слово і Діло*, 19 September 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2024/09/19/novyna/suspilstvo/rada-proholosuvала-perejmenuvannya-328-naselenykh-punktiv> [accessed 02/03/2025].

The complexity of WWII, both as the event and the comprehension of it, is still in progress. However, the process of reconciliation between the veterans of the Red Army and Insurgent Army, which previously have been treated as hostile camps, seems to be ending. According to sociological data, the majority of Ukrainians have confessed that the UPA fought the same enemy as the Ukrainian Armed Forces do now.

Borovyk's observation about family- and not community-shared (and thus, open to Soviet and Russian propaganda) memory about WWII is notable. It was this family memory that contributed to the reconciliation of memories and evaluations of historical figures during the calamities, followed by their presence in the information space and available in various forms: school programs, books, movies, etc.

Rethinking of May 9, one the once-most-favorite holidays in Ukraine, has also taken place. However, the Ukrainian society is not falling into *pobedobesie* (the dance of demons), phenomenon observed in Russia, where the idea of the "Great Victory" has been transformed into almost religious cult. Such a departure from the Russian pattern also indicates the rethinking of the event as a core of nation- and state-building, as the Russian state suggests, in favor of orientation towards memory model as a form of resistance, reconciliation, and digression from Soviet identity. In this particular case, the personality of Zaluzhny, a Red Army soldier who shook hands with the UPA vis-à-vis and lost his grandson in the Russia-Ukraine war, has become a symbol of this process.

The Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933 (the Holodomor) occupies a special place in collective memory. Even in 2013, 80 years after the tragedy, the majority of respondents identified Holodomor as the most negative event, with WWII occupying second place. The process has accelerated after 2014, with the escape of Yanukovych and the Minister of Education Tabachnik, the factual dissolution of the Party of Regions, the ban on the Communist Party of Ukraine, and the UINP's work starting in 2014. Fragmented historical sources on famine led to oral history projects since the late 1980s, partially compensating for the lack of official sources on the topic. In this way, comprehension of famine's history has advanced, contributing to the transformation of individual memory about famine into a collective one.

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war has clearly underscored the need to look back at both similar periods in history when the Russian state was an enemy and the corresponding forms of Ukrainian resistance during those periods. That is why military patterns from various periods are being integrated into everyday life: military, education, literature, art, and theater. However, the prominent figures, associated with the building of the Ukrainian state, even if they failed (Hryshevsky or Bandera), have also attracted a special interest and support from memory policy agents and intellectuals, as well as a positive response from society.

After 2014, the brightest examples of overcoming Soviet stereotypes include the Ukrainian Cossack hetmans, Khmelnytsky and Mazepa, who are now recognized as positive figures rather than the initiators of the union with Moscow and betrayal of Ukraine. Even the low percentage of positive evaluations of Lenin and Stalin (13% and 7% respectively, of whom more than half had reservations) indicates the reflection and reevaluation by Ukrainian society of the two most famous Soviet leaders. Decommunization laws have also sparked professional and public discussions about removing historical signs related to the above-mentioned personalities and events from public spaces, raising awareness of Ukrainian history.

Regional differences in attitudes towards historical markers are still present, but to a lesser degree than in the 1990s–2000s. Even the perception of the UPA as "definitely positive" and "rather positive" has risen over 50% in the Southern and Eastern regions, which used to be pro-Russian and pro-Soviet.

Finally, as researchers note, by 2020, practices of memory and the politics of history in Ukraine were partially fragmented and contested. However, the data collected by sociologists after February 24, 2022, indicate the emergence of a certain umbrella of historical images that encompasses Ukrainian residents across various regions of Ukraine. The process of identity transformation in Ukraine caused by the Russo-Ukrainian war is ongoing. It might shift and be challenged by various outcomes and scenarios when the war ends.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor(s)

Tetiana Boriak is a research fellow at the Faculty of History of Vilnius University, and a MSCA4Ukraine fellow (2025–2027). She received her second habilitated doctoral degree in History in 2024 and her first Ph.D. in History in 2008. She graduated from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in 2003. In 2004, Boriak received her M.A. in History from this university, and in 2006, her M.A. in History from Kansas University (U.S.A.). In 2008, she defended her dissertation thesis on the topic of documental heritage of the Ukrainian emigration in interwar Czechoslovak Republic (the reconstruction of the so-called Prague Archives). In 2015, she became Associate Professor. From 2008 until 2016, Boriak worked in the National Academy of Managerial Staff of Culture and Arts. From 2020–2022, she participated in a postdoctoral program at the Faculty of History of Vilnius University. Her research interests include the Holodomor, 20th-century history of Ukraine, Soviet totalitarianism, memory, and genocide studies. Boriak's most recent monograph, *Усна історія у джерельній базі студій Голодомору: історія формування та інформаційний потенціал корпусу свідчень [Oral History as a Source for Holodomor Studies: The Formation of Eyewitness Testimony Collections and Their Informative Value]*, came out in 2024 (<http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0017991>).

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