Chapter 7

Spaces of Memory

When using the term “spaces of memory,” I have two possible connotations in mind. First of all, there is Pierre Nora’s concept of *les lieux de mémoire*: these include a great number of carriers of information and cultural codes, from monuments and the names of topographical features to collections of documents and “documentary” films. I will also mention locations related to historical and political geography, the territories where a given form of representation of historical memory or mentality prevails.

In terms of spaces of memory, regional differences are important: in western Ukraine (especially Galicia), the national/nationalist narrative in its exclusivist form immediately became dominant.¹ It was supplemented by a regional variant of the imperial nostalgic narrative, though in this case, it focused on the glamor of the Habsburg Empire. Central Ukraine remained in the sphere of influence of the ambivalent model for a long time.² All the aforementioned narratives coexisted with regional narratives, usually with local variations of the general schemes. For instance, the memory of the “Sich Riflemen” was quite popular in western Ukraine, while central Ukraine preserved stereotypical forms of memory about the Cossacks. Finally, the southeastern regions (especially Donbass) and Crimea remained an almost untouched repository of the Soviet, imperial, and Soviet nostal-

¹ The notion of “Western Ukraine” in this case includes the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil regions or oblasts (Galicia), the Volhynian and Rivne regions (Volhynia), and the Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi regions (Bukovina). The preeminence of the national/nationalist memory narrative in this region did not imply full homogeneity. While Galicia was dominated by the exclusivist model of this narrative, the ambivalent model was also present in Volhynia, Zakarpattia, and Bukovina.

² Central Ukraine in this case includes the Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Sumy, Kirovohrad, and Cherkasy regions.
gic narratives. Since 2014, the Soviet nostalgic and, to some degree, imperial narratives are being expelled from central, eastern, and southern Ukraine, and, correspondingly, the influence of the exclusivist model of the national/nationalist narrative is growing.

The cult of Lenin (or sometimes even Stalin) is an extreme version of the Soviet nostalgic narrative, while the nationalist narrative has its own extreme—the cult of Bandera. However, between these two poles there is sizeable territory on which both “places of accord” and “spaces of uncertainty” can be found. As previously mentioned, this includes places and narratives of memory that transmit the archaic and antiquated variant of the national/nationalist narrative: Kievan Rus’ and the era of princes, Cossackdom and the Hetmanate (except for Mazepa), and outstanding cultural figures from Hryhorii Skovoroda to Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Lesya Ukrainka.

This also includes the communicative and cultural memory of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster and the war in Afghanistan (1979–86), which also periodically (following the calendar) come into focus for the agents of historical politics. “Places of uncertainty” may include spaces of memory that find themselves on the margins of historical politics. These “peripheral” genocides as I dub them, include both the inclusivist and exclusivist versions of the Holocaust; the deportation of the Crimean Tatars and other peoples in the region in 1944; and the murder of Roma and Sinti peoples.

**Lenin, Bandera, and Others**

The image of Vladimir Lenin was the central sacred symbol of the Soviet memory narrative. Lenin is featured in a number of Soviet-era monuments in Ukraine. According to various data, by 1990, there were between four thousand and five thousand statues of Lenin in public places across the Ukrainian SSR: they stood in squares, in front of official Soviet and party agencies, in front of schools and hospitals, and in industrial and recreational areas.

---

3 The southeast includes the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Odessa regions (in the south) and the Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions (in the east).

4 Oleksandra Haidai, *Kam’yanyy biit: Lenin u Tsentralniy Ukrajiny* (Kyiv: Laurus, 2016), 47.
Since 1990, both Lenin monuments and toponyms began to be removed from the public space of Ukraine. In Galicia, Lenin disappeared from almost everywhere during the first years of independence. In Kyiv, of the two monuments to the “leader of the world proletariat” that stood in the city center, the newer one (the monument to the October Revolution) in October Revolution Square was dismantled in September 1991, and the square was renamed Maidan Nezalezhnosti. The monument built in 1946 had the status of a national heritage site and, therefore, remained intact until June 2009, when it was vandalized by members of a Ukrainian nationalist organization.5

All Lenin monuments were removed from the national register of cultural heritage sites in 2009 in accordance with Viktor Yushchenko’s decrees. At the time, the register listed 2,082 Lenin monuments in Ukraine. According to Olexandra Haidai, this figure does not represent the real number of Lenin monuments, since many of them were not included on the register.6 For instance, virtually all industrial enterprises had statues of Lenin in their inner courtyards, some of them enormous. For a long time, an enormous head of Lenin disguised by Ukrainian symbols stood in the assembly hall of the Institute of the History of Ukraine in Kyiv. In July 2013, the website dedicated to Lenin monuments indicated their total number in Ukraine as 2,358.7 The hunt for Soviet monuments became a part of Svoboda and other right-wing organizations’ self-advertisement strategy. After 2010, this specific kind of political activity was part of the confrontation between these organizations and “Yanukovych’s neo-Soviet regime.”8 The most famous episode of the period took place in Okhtyrka, Sumy oblast, in February 2013. A dozen Svoboda members led by an MP and equipped with a truck and a tow-rope toppled a local Lenin monument. Local residents participated in the action as passive observers.9

5 The action was initiated and carried out by Mykola Kokhanivsky, a member of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (the political superstructure of the OUN (Bandera) in 2014–15. He was the head of the OUN volunteer battalion that fought in Donbass.
6 Haidai, Kam’yanyi hist, 51.
7 See the online resource “Pamiatniki Leninu,” http://leninstatues.ru/.
8 Paradoxically, this “neo-Soviet” regime of memory was sustained by the big capitalists.
From late 2013 to early 2014, Ukraine became a space of mass destruction of Lenin monuments, which was called the Leninopad (“Leninfall”). It started on December 8, 2013, when Svoboda members toppled a Lenin monument in Kyiv, subsequently destroying it with sledgehammers. The Maidan participants enthusiastically welcomed this action, perceiving it as a generalized symbol of protest. The precedent was set. In this moment of antagonism with the authorities, the destruction of one of the central symbols of communism was important and provided at least some psychological relief to protesters by giving them a sense of moral victory. Curiously, the Leninfall initially started in central Ukraine, where the attitude of the local population toward these monuments was generally indifferent. According to unverified data, 142 Lenin monuments in central Ukraine were destroyed between December 8, 2013 and February 20, 2014. In Volhynia and the southern part of the country, there were isolated cases of removal of Lenin monuments. The most massive outbreak of iconoclasm took place after Yanukovych’s escape: in three days between February 21 and 23, crowds destroyed 158 Lenin monuments.

The vigorous Leninfall combined spontaneity with systematic elements. As a rule, a well-organized group of initiators, whose actions were coordinated, led the crowd. In many cases, this group represented Svoboda or other nationalist organizations, such as Right Sector. The simultaneity of the most massive action in February 2014 proves that the Leninfall was not just a spontaneous act of “revolutionaries.” In some cases, the dismantlement of Lenin monuments happened by the decision of local authorities, lending an aura of legality to the action; this decision was often made under pressure from the nationalist lobby of local councils.

According to the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, five hundred Lenin monuments disappeared by the end of 2014. Some 1,700 stayed in place. After April 2015, Ukraine outlawed all monuments to Lenin and other communist figures: while earlier (especially since 2009), local authorities were in charge of deciding on their removal from public space,

10 The Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Poltava, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, and Khmelnytskyi regions.
12 Haidai, Kam’yang bist., 113–16.
this national-level legislation now obliged local authorities to dismantle the Soviet-era monuments. This enthusiasm for iconoclasm was mostly a sign of revolutionary fervor and chaos, not an indicator of general attitudes toward the monuments. According to a nationwide opinion poll of six thousand Ukrainians, the liquidation of Lenin movements was very controversial. The share of those who approved of the Leninfall and those who disapproved of it stood equal at 39 percent, while the rest remained disinterested.14

The “Leninfall” soon turned into “Leninocide.” By June 2016, the total number of Lenin monuments dismantled since December 2013 reached 1,221. Some nine hundred monuments remained in place, mostly in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Among the territories under the control of Kyiv, the leader was Kharkiv: seventeen Lenins remained on their pedestals for some time.15

The result of this purge was that many public places became vacant. The statues of Lenin had generally been the focal points of their surroundings, and their absence was conspicuous. The excessive number of Lenin monuments, a testament to the existence of a formal civil cult, made the problem of its replacement topical. A figure as appealing as Lenin was now required. Taras Shevchenko, the main cult figure of the national/nationalist narrative, already had a sufficient number of Soviet-era monuments, putting him in second place after Lenin. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shevchenko monuments are present in thirty-five countries across the world, and their total number amounts to 1,384. Of these, Ukraine is home to 1,256 sculptural images of the poet, a majority established during the Soviet era.16

There was no universal replacement for Lenin. In Kyiv, the pedestal of the Lenin monument was taken over by a “golden” toilet and then by a statue of the Mother of God. In the summer of 2016, the pedestal became an artistic installation: everyone who wished to could take the place of the statue for several minutes. In 2018, a huge blue hand was placed next to the pedestal. In Poltava, there were plans to create an alley dedicated to the heroes of the Heavenly Hundred and a chapel. In Trostyanets, a district center in

---

Vinnytsia oblast, the monument to Lenin was replaced with a fountain. In Kremenchug, the site once occupied by the leader of the revolution was taken over by an image of the vyshyvanka (the traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirt). In Freedom Square in Kharkiv, a public garden with a fountain filled the space. In Druzhkovka in Donetsk oblast, the local authorities suggested installing a figure of a Cossack. In Kodym, Odessa oblast, a bust of Taras Shevchenko took Lenin’s place. In some villages, existing images of Lenin were reshaped into images of Taras Shevchenko—by adding a mustache and some hair.

Heroes of the nationalist movement represent the most radical alternative to Lenin, and Lenin’s main rival is Stepan Bandera, though the latter’s cult was, for a long time, limited to western Ukraine, most notably Galicia. Between 1990 and 2014, local authorities installed forty-six monuments and sixteen memorial plates in honor of the leader of the OUN.17 A sudden increase in the birth rate of stone Banderas took place after 2007, starting with a sculptural-architectural ensemble that appeared in Lviv. Making a monument in the image of the OUN leader was part of the revival and proliferation of his cult in the region. The figure of Bandera, who was represented as a tireless and fearless freedom fighter, became a symbol of anticommunism. It served as a counterweight to the revitalization of the Soviet nostalgic memory narrative and the antithesis of Lenin. Ironically, this image was, in some ways, Lenin’s visual alter ego. Both were fanatical revolutionaries, ascetics, ready to sacrifice themselves and others for the principal cause of their lives. Both were short and had physical defects. Both were intolerant not only of enemies but also of allies who deviated from their orthodox perspective. Both represented a radical interpretation of a certain worldview. Finally, both were the objects of political cults and became sacralized figures. In other words, Bandera was the Lenin of nationalist discourse and, thus, visual representations of him were unsurprisingly the same. Having destroyed the cult of Lenin the communist, the bearers of the nationalist narrative simply installed their own in his stead.

However, Bandera did not—and probably will not—become a unifying symbol for the majority of Ukrainians. In April 2014, when Bandera’s por-

trait had already been hanging at the Kyiv Maidan for the three months and the OUN slogan “Glory to Ukraine—glory to the heroes!” had moved well beyond the limits of the nationalist movement, the attitude toward the main icon of Ukrainian radical nationalism remained controversial. According to an opinion poll by the Rating group, 48 percent of Ukrainians saw Bandera in a negative or “rather negative” light, while only 31 percent had a positive or “rather positive” view of him (it should be noted, however, that the latter group grew by 9 percent over two years). In central Ukraine, 39 percent assessed Bandera negatively as opposed to 28 percent who held a positive attitude toward him. In southern Ukraine, these figures amounted to 69 percent and 15 percent, respectively, and in eastern regions (excluding Donbass), the figures were 70 percent negative and 8 percent positive. The polarization of opinions followed not only geographic but ethnic lines as well: only ethnic Ukrainians expressed positive views of Bandera.18

Nevertheless, the promotion of Bandera’s name became trendy between 2014 and 2019. This development can be regarded as a consequence of the deliberate promotion of the nationalist narrative both by the central authority (UINP) and local agents of historical politics. For instance, due to the decommunization of street and avenue names in 2015 and 2016, those bearing the name of Stepan Bandera emerged in Bila Tserkva, Kyiv, Sumy, Brovary, Zhytomyr, Korosten, Khmelnytskyi, Shepetivka, and Uman.19 Almost everywhere, representatives of Svoboda lobbied local councils for these name changes. In 2016, memorial plates to Bandera were installed by the representatives of Svoboda in Cherkasy and Khmelnytskyi without the approval of local authorities.20

The multiplication of stone Banderas and the expansion of his name into central Ukraine led to curious aesthetic accidents: many monuments looked like twins and had obviously been produced by the same company. Others were very “unconventional.” For instance, a monument to Bandera

19 Zhytomyr became a virtual “OUN stronghold” in central Ukraine: in the winter of 2016, the names of its streets were changed to immortalize not only Bandera but also Olena Teliha, Yevhen Konovalets, Vasyl Kuk, Mykola Stsiborskyi, and Roman Shukhevych. See the official website of the Zhytomyr city council: http://zt-rada.gov.ua/news/p5840.
20 Data provided by Oksana Myshlovskaya.

In some cases (such as in Uman’) the decisions of the local councils to rename streets after Bandera were overturned by the courts. In Cherkasy, the local council decided not to rename one of the streets after Bandera following heated debates. In Poltava, discussions lasted for almost two years and, in the end, Bandera “did not come” to the city.

Right after the Maidan events, the Bandera cult became a sort of fashion logo. The neologism 
\textit{zhydobanderivtsi} (Judeo-Banderites) became popular as an ironic representation of the unity of ethnic Jews and nationalists in the struggle against Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. The most famous public figure who wore the T-shirt with this inscription was Ihor Kolomoyskyi, who also financed the voluntary military battalion “Dnepr.” This trend faded in a year.

Beyond the ideologically incompatible but similar representations of polar opposites—the Soviet-nostalgic narrative and national/nationalist memory—the standard version of the national/nationalist narrative also includes the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which is often mentioned alongside the OUN-B, and a small pantheon of nationalist figures primarily from the Banderite group: Roman Shukhevych, Yuri Shukhevych, Yaroslav Stetsko, and Yaroslava Stetsko. Other important figures in the nationalist movement such as Yevhen Konovalets, Andriy Melnyk, Lev Rebet, and Daria Rebet remain on the margins of this narrative or, at least, do not attract much public attention. In the Soviet nostalgic narrative, the central position belongs to the myth of the “Great Patriotic War,” though a revived cult of Joseph Stalin can be considered its extreme manifestation. However, Stalin was an iconic figure only for some communists and veterans of the war.

The contrasting narratives coexisted rather peacefully in parallel (but distinct) spaces; the situation changed only when, through the efforts of mnemonic warriors (primarily political parties and NGOs created with the help of these parties), these narratives clashed. Skirmishes between supporters and opponents of the UPA in Kyiv in the fall of 2005; the battle over the draft law and resolution in the Verkhovna Rada in 2004–13; and confronta-
tions over the “Victory Banner” in the regional centers of Galicia in 2011–13 all represent tangible traces of the conflict over historical politics. One more example is the “war of monuments,” which evolved into a war of memory extermination. Acts of vandalism (inflicting damage on monuments, coating them with paint or feces, leaving insulting inscriptions and symbols on them, etc.) became common. Monuments to Lenin, Bandera, the Holocaust, the Holodomor, Soviet soldiers, and UPA soldiers became favorite targets for vandals.22

The story of the monument to Joseph Stalin in Zaporizhzhia serves as an example of the most radical manifestation of the issue of symbolic memory space. In May 2010, communists and representatives of the Soviet Army veterans’ organizations installed a bust of Stalin near the façade of a residential building hosting the regional committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. The official unveiling of the monument (which took place despite a ban by local authorities) turned into a scandal: Svoboda organized a counter-protest, Stalin fans bombarded them with eggs. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg “expressed regret.” On December 27, 2010, nationalists from Tryzub made their position clear by cutting off the head of the monument with the help of a chainsaw.23 The admirers of Stalin restored the bust. On New Year’s Eve (from December 31, 2010, to January 1, 2011), Tryzub members destroyed the sculpture with the help of explosives.24 The perpetrators of the action were sentenced to two or three years in prison with suspended sentences, and Stalin’s bust was restored and moved to a special glass annex.25 The Revolution of Dignity delivered the final blow to the Stalin bust: in November 2017, local activists destroyed the sculpture and its fragments were piled onto the monument to the victims of the famine of 1932–33.

22 See a list of news stories about vandalism in the online newspaper Istorichna Pravda: http://www.istorichna-pravda.com.ua/tags/tag_вандалізм/page_1/.
23 The full name of organization is the All-Ukrainian Organization Tryzub, which is named after Stepan Bandera. A video of the event was published by Prioritetinform (YouTube channel), “Pamiatniku Stalina v Zaporozhzhie orezali golovu,” YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBS2PAk6io0&ab_channel=prioritetinform; See also “Pamiatnik Stalina v Zaporozhzhie ostal’sia bez golovy,” Focus, December 18, 2010, https://focus.ua/politics/165319.
At the same time, the national/nationalist space was expanding. Figures, events, and antiheroes that had previously been forbidden in the Soviet narrative entered the public arena: the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–20, Nestor Makhno, the heroes of Kruty, the repressions of the 1920s–30s, the famine of 1932–33 (often integrated with famines of 1921–23 and 1947), the oppression of the intelligentsia in the late 1940s to early 1950s, and, of course, the nationalist movement. In 2009, city landscapes exhibited sculptural figures of new and (very) old heroes: nine monuments to Mykhailo Hrushevsky, five to Viacheslav Chornovil, three to Roman Shukhevych, and two to Prince Danylo of Halycz, Petro Sahaidachny, Ivan Mazepa, and Nestor Makhno were erected.26 Between 2005 and 2010, Viktor Yushchenko’s decrees celebrated the jubilees of Prince Roman Mstislavovych of Halycz, Petro Kalnyshhevsky, the last Kosh Otaman of the Zaporizhian Host, Acting Hetman Pavlo Polubotok, literary historian Serhiy Yefremov, historian Vyacheslav Lypynsky, poet Vasyl Stus, dissident Petro Hryhorenko, and composer Volodymyr Ivasyuk. These characters were all commemorated with toponyms.

Two other cases of remembrance that belong to the national/nationalist memory narrative will be examined in the next section. According to their promoters, they are universal symbols and have unifying potential. The first is the historical myth about the heroes of Kruty and the second is the Holodomor.27

The “Battle of Kruty”: From Victims to Heroes

The myth about the heroes of Kruty is a part of the wider representation of the event known as the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–20.28 On January 29, 1918, two small units of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, partly composed of university and high school students, fought an uphill battle against the numerically superior Bolsheviks at the village of Kruty, some 150 kilometers northeast of Kyiv.

---

28 On January 29, 1918, two small units of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, partly composed of university and high school students, fought an uphill battle against the numerically superior Bolsheviks at the village of Kruty, some 150 kilometers northeast of Kyiv.
Spaces of Memory

of the “Great October Socialist Revolution and civil war.” The standard representation of this period in Ukraine holds that the Ukrainian Revolution was the climax of the national liberation movement, the reincarnation of Ukrainian statehood that perished in the past. The Ukrainian Revolution is a unique event that should be distinguished from the Russian Revolution and even juxtaposed to it.

The myth of victimhood and heroism about the heroes of Kruty began to take shape soon after the event itself. Contemporaries who wrote and spoke about this event interpreted it as a sad and tragic chapter of history. After the establishment of Soviet power in Ukraine, the ideologues of the nationalist movement created a heroic myth that treated it as a Ukrainian Thermopylae. This is how, according to Andriy Liubarets, two variants of the myth emerged, one of victimhood and one of heroism.29 The first mention of the “heroes of Kruty” in the public discourse of contemporary Ukraine dates back to the late 1980s. In the following decade, the story made it into school textbooks. On the official level, the state first paid attention to the event in 2003, when Leonid Kuchma ordered the celebration of the eighty-fifth anniversary of the battle, with the stated aim of “establishing a higher political culture in society, raising the youth in the spirit of patriotism, showing respect to the historical past of the Ukrainian people and honoring the memory of those who died for the Motherland.”30 During Yushchenko’s term, the myth about the heroes of Kruty began to occupy a much more important place in state historical politics. Between 2006 and 2009, the president issued four decrees dedicated to the anniversaries of the event. The first two spoke about the “heroic death of young men in the battle of Kruty,” and the other two about the “the Ukrainian young men’s feat of arms,”31 indicating a shift of emphasis from victimhood to heroism.

---

This point was pressed by nationalist organizations that carried out their own commemorative rituals, which were often counterposed to the official ceremonies (the anniversary of the event was already celebrated according to a certain standard, with a torchlit procession). Between 2006 and 2008, a memorial and museum complex was created near the village of Pam’yatne in Chernihiv oblast. A feature film was planned (it was produced much later, in 2019), and in 2008, a reenactment of the battle was organized by amateurs on the site of the event. In January 2009, speaking at the House of Officers in Kyiv, Yushchenko expressed his support for the public initiative to move the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland from February 23 (a date established in the Soviet period and legally affirmed by Leonid Kuchma in 1999) to January 29. “The day of the feat of arms at Kruty,” said the president, “is our real national Day of the Defender of the Fatherland. It will inevitably—I am deeply convinced of this—remain close to the heart of any Ukrainian warrior and citizen.”32 The proposal, which was criticized by proponents of the Soviet nostalgic narrative, did not go any further.

After 2007, official celebrations of the heroes of Kruty became common. On the anniversary of the event, top officials laid flowers on the memorial cross at Askold’s Grave in Kyiv, and the museum and the memorial complex became a place of demonstrations of mourning and prayer services. Even during the brief revival of the Soviet nostalgic narrative, the authorities did not encroach on the myth of the heroes of Kruty. Every year, Prime Minister Mykola Azarov accurately carried out the ritual honoring the heroes at Askold’s Tomb. Viktor Yanukovych also mentioned this event every year, generally emphasizing its tragic dimensions. In 2013, the Verkhovna Rada, in a rare display of consensus, voted by roll call in favor of the resolution, “In Commemoration of theFeat of Arms of the Heroes of Kruty,”33 which had been submitted by the representatives of Svoboda. The text contained direct criticism of the historical politics of the Party of Regions, but this did not stop the majority of MPs from supporting the resolution.34 All the communist MPs abstained from voting. The resolution suggested a wide range of

34 The story about the exploits of the heroes of Kruty was removed from the new fifth-grade history textbook.
fairly standard commemorative practices. The only elements that appeared somewhat novel were the suggestions to confer the title of Hero of Ukraine on those who died in the Battle of Kruty and to provide free transportation for students to the Pam’yatne memorial on the day of remembrance.

The myth of the heroes of Kruty was recognized by the majority of actors, including antagonists. Of course, their motivations when invoking the topic were different. For Leonid Kuchma and later for Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions, the use of this myth was purely pragmatic and served to legitimate their power. For the national/nationalist narrative zealots, it was an important part of the struggle over ideas and the promotion of the ethnonational myth that proved the loyalty of the Ukrainian nation and its capacity for self-sacrifice and fighting ability. In the eyes of the radical nationalists, the battle was the apogee of confrontation with Ukraine’s eternal enemy, Russia. For them, the emphasis needed to be shifted from victimhood to heroism.

The myth about the heroes of Kruty spilled onto the streets during the Revolution of Dignity in the winter of 2013–14: appeals to remember the events of the winter of 1918 were heard echoing from the Maidan. A new slogan emerged, “Our Kruty,” referring to the deaths of Maidan protesters. In January 2014, after the first deaths in Kyiv, an inscription was placed on Hrushevsky Street, near the barricade: “Our Kruty are here!” The homily at the annual prayer service near the memorial sign of Askold’s Tomb on January 29, 2014, made an explicit link between the events of 1918 and current events.

Since 2014, the heroic myth has completely eclipsed the tragic one. A poster created by the UINP (2016) declared: “Kruty is a battle for the future. Ukraine became possible thanks to the army.” The story told by the UINP was about the overwhelming power of the enemy and the boundless heroism of the patriots, a rather typical formulation for this kind of propaganda. A new plot also emerged: through their sacrifice, the heroes of Kruty detained the enemy for four days, which bought time for the representatives of the Central Rada to sign a treaty with the Triple Alliance (another allusion to the myth of Thermopylae). According to the UINP version, as a result

---

of the battle of Kruty, the Ukrainian People’s Republic was recognized as an independent state, Ukraine withdrew from World War I (for some reason, the West Ukrainian People’s Republic is forgotten), and Germany and Austria-Hungary “granted military aid” to Ukraine and liberated it from the Bolsheviks. Interestingly, German and Austrian historiography considers this “military aid” to be “an occupation.” The fact that the Germans and Austrians backed the coup d’état that ended the existence of their Ukrainian “ally” is also muted by official presentations.

The annexation of Crimea and the war in the east greatly strengthened the military propaganda potential of the event and, of course, its anti-Russian character. On January 29, 2016, President Petro Poroshenko gave a “Lesson of Courage” at the Ivan Bohun Military High School (previously Alexandr Suvorov Military School), drawing a parallel between contemporary events and 1918. In one of the most popular internet resources in Ukraine Istorychna pravda, an article about Kruty, based on UINP materials, represents the Battle of Kruty as part of the “Russo-Ukrainian War,” and the Bolsheviks, mentioned in the beginning of the article, turn into “Russians” by the end: aggressors acting on their base instincts, annihilating all rules. Commemorations dedicated to Kruty were held on the battlefield, and the director of the UINP followed the president in calling the heroes of Kruty “an example for modern soldiers.”

---

37 Modern German and Austrian historiography qualifies the post-Brest-Litovsk actions of armies which “granted military aid” as occupation.
40 “Kruty–ne porazka, a peremoha–istoryky” (infographics), Istorichna Pravda, January 29, 2016, http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2016/01/29/148894/. The “historians” mentioned in the article turned out to be just one person, Volodymyr Viatrovych, the director of the UINP.
43 “U p’yatnitsyu, 29 sichnya, Ukrayina vshanovuvatyme pam’jat Heroyiv Krut,” official website, President
The recasting of Kruty tied the battle even more closely to the current situation: the “Kruty heroes” were called the “first Cyborgs,” the latter a nickname for the Ukrainian defenders of the Donetsk airport in 2014. President Poroshenko started his electoral campaign for his second term in 2019 with a pompous public event titled “From Kruty to Brussels. We follow our own path,” signifying his commitment to the great deed of the past.

Recently, top officials signaled a shift in the public representation of Kruty. After regular commemorative actions on January 29, 2020, President Zelensky wrote on his Facebook page: “This story is not about victory or defeat, not about an assessment of commanders’ decisions, not about historical or geopolitical outcomes. It is, first of all, about unbelievable courage and the brief lives of very young, not fully trained cadets, students, and gymnasium pupils who rose up to defend the Ukrainian state and were able to stop the enemy who overwhelmed them in numbers and arms.”

The Holodomor

Representations of the Holodomor were also initially dominated by the victimhood discourse. The rhetorical forms and strategies of representation were elaborated in the North American Ukrainian diaspora. The recollection of the story of the famine of 1932–33 and its public depiction was first an initiative of public activists engaged in the defense of human rights in the Ukrainian SSR, notably those who supported Ukrainian dissidents. The famine was presented as a crime of the communist regime against Ukrainians. Later the Holodomor became a part of the crusade against the “Evil Empire”—the USSR.
Creators of the stereotyped cultural memory of the Great Famine of 1932–33 in the Ukrainian SSR utilized the experience of the representation of the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide of 1915. Basic tropes about the famine of 1932–33 created in the first half of the 1980s were transferred to the territory of continental Ukraine after 1986, where they partly matched different forms of communicative memory. During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the memory of the famine was intensely inscribed in the aforementioned stereotypical forms. As a result, by 1990, a canonical version of the Holodomor already existed, which represented the famine of 1932–33 (the Holodomor) as the genocide of Ukrainians organized by the totalitarian communist regime. On the metaphorical level, this regime was symbolized by “Moscow.”

As mentioned before, representations of the Holodomor in the public sphere in the 1990s were mainly promoted by non-governmental organizations, right-of-center political parties or the national democrats, and by some professional historians; the state only provided moral and organizational support for these groups, which was still very important for their legitimation. The first national commemorative action was organized in 1993 following a resolution issued by Leonid Kuchma’s government. On September 10, state flags flying on all state buildings throughout the entire country were lowered for four hours. In October 1998, a special government resolution dedicated to the sixty-fifth anniversary of the famine of 1932–33 was adopted, and it included a list of commemorative events to be organized by state bodies. That same year, Leonid Kuchma established the Day of Remembrance of Victims of the Holodomor; in 2000, he renamed it the Day of Remembrance of Victims of the Holodomor and Political Repression, and

---

47 It is worth mentioning that Ukrainian authorities are not positive at all about discussing the recognition of the massacre of Armenians in 1915. The major concern here is not to endanger relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Two attempts to pass a special declaration of the Parliament dedicated to the massacres of Armenians of 1915 failed. See Oleg Kapriak, “Chomu Ukraina ne vyznala virmen’s’ku trahediju he-notsydom,” BBC News, April 24, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/04/150424_arnemenia_ukraine_ ko.


Spaces of Memory

in 2004 changed its name once more to the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Holodomors and Political Repression. Beyond their symbolic and political character, Kuchma’s decrees also had a purely technical character: they established a commemoration date.

However, the decree “On the events related to the seventieth anniversary of the Holodomor in Ukraine” promulgated in 2002 already lists practically all the main commemorative and ritual practices pertaining to the famine of 1932–33 that had been established in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{51} The presidential decree conferred on them the status of activities recommended by the state. Quite significantly, the text of the decree also made it obvious that the term “Holodomor” became firmly established in the language of the state bureaucracy (it appeared in other decrees as well). In a way, the decree was also a part of the political game in terms of relations between the president and the emerging parliamentary opposition. It may have been an attempt to seize initiative because an appeal to the tragic historical past offered the president a convenient opportunity both to show his human side and to prevent the use of this past in an undesirable context. By the end of 2002, on December 6, Kuchma issued an order to construct a memorial for victims of the Holodomor and political repression in Kyiv (though this was not enacted during his term).

In 2003, an important step was made to promote the Holodomor in social and political discourse: parliamentary hearings dedicated to the famine of 1932–33 were held. The seventieth anniversary of the tragedy coincided with the aggravation of internal political conflicts caused by the approaching presidential election and by Kuchma’s attempts to carry out parliamentary reform aimed at curtailing its authority in the president’s favor. It should be noted, that 2003 was the anniversary of another complicated date, the Ukrainian-Polish conflict, or the Volhynia massacre of 1943. Lastly, 2003 was the Year of Russia in Ukraine, which contributed to the symbolism of debates about the famine of 1932–33, especially for those in the political elite who saw Russia as the eternal oppressor of Ukraine.

Of course, the anniversary of the famine of 1932–33 was bound to become a point of contention in political debates. The ill-sorted opposition, brought

together only by the struggle against Kuchma’s pretentions to build a super-presidential power structure, immediately fell into discord when center-right parties that had formed the Our Ukraine Bloc initiated special parliament hearings dedicated to the famine of 1932–33. Communists, the temporary allies of Our Ukraine in the struggle against Kuchma, were dead set against this idea. At the same time, the “oligarchic” factions that, at the time, did not give much weight to the problems of historical politics, supported the initiative with the blessing of Leonid Kuchma.

The special hearings in the Verkhovna Rada took place on February 12, 2003. National democrats and their allies from the other right-wing parties routinely denounced the “criminal totalitarian regime,” never forgetting to attack the current regime which they also considered criminal. Accusations against the ruling “anti-people party” were readily supported by the communists who, nevertheless, flatly refused to assume any responsibility for the crimes of their predecessors despite the efforts of national democrats and right-wingers. The regime in power associated contemporary problems in Ukraine with the painful traumas of the past. Dmytro Tabachnyk, vice premier of the government, said that “the starvation of 1933 is not the historical past, it is a deep social and demographic catastrophe of the twentieth century, a never-healing moral and psychological wound that torments the memory of the eyewitnesses with sharp pain. Social and physiological fear engendered by mass purges and holodomors lives in the consciousness of many generations. It sank deeply into the genotype of the nation and is a strong hindrance to the democratization of our society.”

National democrats and right-wingers echoed the authorities: in their opinion, the Holodomor exterminated the best of the nation, dealing a crushing blow to the Ukrainian nation and destroying its gene pool. Pavlo Movchan, a former writer and an MP representing Our Ukraine party, declared that “the intellectual, energetic, actively creative force of the nation was sapped for many years. Any resistance to the acts of violence in all the spheres of national and social life was broken.”

53 Ibid.
Those on the left portrayed the famine of 1932–33 in their own way. Petro Symonenko, the leader of the communists, declared that the genocide was happening in the present day and there was no need to look for it in the past. “From this tribune, I speak to the gentlemen in power, with a proposal, a demand to stop lying about the Soviet past and assume responsibility for the criminal policy they are perpetrating today—a policy of genocide,” he said.54 Not long before, in 2000, the communists organized public protests against the privatization of land, using the slogan “No to the land sale and to the Holodomor 2000!”

On May 14, 2003, in compliance with the recommendations of the parliamentary hearings, a special session of the Verkhovna Rada dedicated to the famine of 1932–33 took place (although according to data from the nongovernmental Laboratory of Legislative Initiatives, it only lasted several minutes). Parliament (without the participation of the communists) voted by a majority of 226 representatives to adopt the text of an address to the Ukrainian people in which the famine of 1932–33 was defined as a genocide against the Ukrainian people. Also in 2003, the first attempt was made in the United Nations to have the famine of 1932–33 recognized as an act of genocide.

By the middle of the 2000s, the canonical version of the Holodomor finally took root in Ukraine, contested only by the communists. They did not deny the fact that there was a famine in 1932–33, but they did not accept the idea of a deliberate, organized famine. The regime used the Holodomor as a means to legitimize itself and to demonstrate its unity with the people. For national democrats, it offered a way to criticize the authorities and explain the difficult situation of Ukrainians in the present; for nationalists, it was a convenient topic and a pretext to accuse Moscow of wrongdoing.

In the middle of the 2000s, the promotion of the Holodomor reached the state level, becoming a part of a consciously enforced government policy. The governing bodies of the “presidential vertical” (oblast, rajon [district], city administrations, some ministries and committees controlled by the president, and the Security Service of Ukraine) were all deployed to achieve its implementation. Viktor Yushchenko created a special body—a coordination committee that included representatives of ministries, NGOs, researchers,

54 Ibid.
public figures, and representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora—to prepare for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the famine.

The state began to finance research and memorial events: the budget sponsored the construction of a memorial honoring the victims of the Holodomor in Kyiv, the creation of a “Book of Memory,” and contests for student works and studies dedicated to the topic. In 2006, the government established the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory with the status of an executive body; under its auspices, the megaproject “Book of Memory” was carried out between 2007–2008. The project included the compilation of the names of some eight hundred thousand victims of the famine of 1932–33. For all its bureaucratic flaws, the project turned out to be a massive undertaking. It involved thousands of people in eighteen regions of Ukraine: teachers, students, employees of cultural and educational institutions, university professors, and members of NGOs. They identified eyewitnesses of the famine, conducted interviews, worked with the archives of civil registry offices, and compiled lists of those who perished.

In 2006, Viktor Yushchenko and his allies succeeded in approving a special law “On the Holodomor of 1932–1933” that formally established the official representation of the event as “an act of genocide of the Ukrainian people.” In February 2008, Yulia Tymoshenko’s government approved the funding of the National Program of Studies of the Holodomor and Perpetuation of its Memory until 2012 although this political and bureaucratic fantasy was shattered by the financial and economic crisis of 2008.

It was in connection with the promotion of the Holodomor that civil servants were held accountable for lack of zeal when executing the tasks mandated by the president. In October 2007, Viktor Yushchenko signed a special decree reprimanding the administrative heads of the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Odessa oblasts and demanding the punishment of employees of regional and municipal administrations in Dnipropetrovsk,

55 This project was carried out in the mold of other large-scale projects: “Rehabilitated by History” started in 1992 and was dedicated to the victims of repressions. See the project website: http://www.reabit.org.ua/aboutus/about_reabit/. The “Book of Memory of Ukraine” started in the Soviet times, in 1989, and then was renewed in 1992 and dedicated to Ukrainians killed in World War II. In total, 257 volumes were published.

Kyiv, Mykolaiv, and Khmelnytskyi. Six months later, the district heads of the Kherson, Luhansk, and Khmelnytskyi oblasts were personally reprimanded as well.

In 2008, which had been officially declared the year of memory for Holodomor victims, a number of national remembrance actions were carried out under the auspices of the state, such as “Light a Candle,” “ever-burning candle,” etc. In most Ukrainian regions, November 2008 was marked by a number of mourning demonstrations, concerts, artistic and literary contests, student essay contests, the laying of wreaths and bouquets, and memorial lessons in schools. New memorial spaces were created, such as exhibitions in museums, schools, and libraries. Crosses, memorial signs, and burial mounds were erected and memorial complexes emerged. By mid-2008, the number of memorials, monuments, and memorial sites to the Holodomor of 1932–33 reached around 4,500. By 2017, this number was about seven thousand according to the data from the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium.

---


59 “Light a Candle” is an annual ritual that became a national event in 2003. On Remembrance Day of the victims of the famine of 1932–1933 (the fourth Saturday in November), anybody who wishes places a lighted candle in their window. The “ever-burning candle” is a sheaf 1.5 meters high weighing 200 kilograms made of beeswax collected in all the regions of Ukraine. In 2008, it traveled from one country to another (the total number of countries, 33, was to match the date of the tragedy), with requiems and rallies held at its arrival; by the fall, this symbol had toured all the regions of Ukraine as well. The “ever-burning candle” finished its pilgrimage at the Memorial of Holodomor Victims in Ukraine, opened in November 2008 in Kiev, where it became one of the first exhibit items. Between June and November 2008 “33 minutes,” a public event, took place every Saturday and Sunday in public places such as squares or near the surviving monuments and memorials of the “totalitarian regime figures.” The names and surnames of those who died of hunger in 1932–33 were read aloud for 33 minutes.

60 Kalinovy Hai (Guelder-Rose Grove) features over 200 guelder roses planted by MPs led by Yushchenko in 2007 on the slopes of Dnipro not far from the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. At the same place, the Memorial of Holodomor Victims (now National Museum of Holodomor-Genocide) was opened in 2008, centered on a 26-meter candle-like chapel.


In general, the promotion of the genocide interpretation of the famine of 1932–33 is usually viewed as a success for Yushchenko’s historical politics. The campaign of 2007–2009 attracted unprecedented institutional and financial resources from the state, NGOs, and political parties. It would be fair to say that by the beginning of this campaign, the Holodomor was no longer a blank spot. According to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, in 2006, 94 percent of respondents had heard of or read about the Holodomor and 69 percent of them believed that the Soviet authorities were to be blamed for the famine. Of this number, 84 percent were sure that the authorities deliberately organized the famine. These results raise the point that in their calls for historical “truth,” Yushchenko and his supporters were preaching to the choir.

According to the same opinion poll, only 14 percent believed that the Holodomor exclusively targeted ethnic Ukrainians. At the same time, 60.9 percent of respondents agreed that it was an act of genocide, which suggests that they did not see the term “genocide” as related only to ethnic Ukrainians. The results of opinion polling between 2010 and 2013 are even more interesting because the share of respondents that saw the Holodomor as the “genocide of Ukrainian people” steadily grew: from 61 percent in 2010, it initially decreased within the predetermined margin of error, and then reached 66 percent in 2013. In 2015, according to the same polling center, it reached 80 percent, a result represented by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory as a triumph for Yanukovych’s opponents.

Opinion polls after 2014 did not include the population of regions under the control of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (approximately one-third of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts). Neither did it include annexed Crimea. These regions usually “blemished” the results. As for the eastern part of the country (meaning a de facto frontline zone controlled by Ukraine), 64 percent of respondents recognized the Holodomor

---

63 The Kyiv memorial alone cost almost $70 million (about UAH350 million); the budget for the second phase of the memorial construction was about UAH 1 billion, about $40 million.
as an act of genocide in 2015, although according to the presentation of results, “east” meant the whole eastern territory of Ukraine, including the zone where the opinion poll was not held.\textsuperscript{67} In 2016, the same poll signaled that 72 percent of respondents believed the genocide interpretation of the Holodomor, and in 2017, this share grew to 77 percent. A year later, the percentage of respondents who supported the Holodomor = genocide formula was 56 percent in the east and 65 percent in the south.\textsuperscript{68} In 2019, 82 percent of respondents believed that the Holodomor was a genocide.\textsuperscript{69} No opinion poll ever included questions about the meaning of genocide.\textsuperscript{70}

The promotion of the canonical and official version of the \textit{Holodomor} as one of the central symbols of the national/nationalist memory narrative went hand in hand with attempts to evict Soviet symbols and narratives from the memory space. At first, such actions were explained by the need to honor the victims of famines and purges, and then by the necessity to overcome the heritage of a totalitarian regime. Yushchenko addressed the topic of decommunization twice. In March 2007, he instructed regional state administrations, the government of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the municipal organizations of Kyiv and Sevastopol to “statutorily conduct actions in order to dismantle monuments and memorial signs dedicated to the persons involved in organizing and implementing the Holodomor of 1932–1933 and political repression, as well as to statutorily rename streets, squares, lanes, avenues, parks, and public gardens, whose names are related to these persons.”\textsuperscript{71} This formula was repeated verbatim two years later (in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} However, the Rating Group presentation does not specify the regional parameters of the poll: Rating Group Ukraine, “Sotsiolohichna hrupa Reitinh: Dynamika stavlennya do Holodomoru,” November 24, 2015, http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/dinamika_otnosheniya_k_golodomoru_noyabr_2015.html.
\item \textsuperscript{70} During a public discussion on October 2, 2019, Liubomyr Mysiv, the deputy director of Rating Group Ukraine admitted that the questions in the questionnaire were formulated to influence respondents. See the following video (59:44 to 1:00:31): “Polityka pamiati v Ukraini: prypynyty nemozhlyvo prodovzhyty?,” YouTube video, October 2, 2019, https://youtu.be/FJMpRDuXsXI.
2009) in a presidential decree dedicated to “additional measures” honoring the Holodomor victims, as well as in a governmental resolution, adopted several months later.72

The reason for such persistence was the lack of cultivation of this aspect of historical politics. Galicia remained the only region where the memory space went through a radical change from communist symbols to national and nationalist ones. In all other territories, the Soviet memory narrative remained almost untouched. Central Ukraine was dominated by an ambivalent model of historical memory that can be illustrated by the example of January Uprising Street in Kyiv. In 2007, this street was renamed Ivan Mazepa Street, erasing the Soviet name related to the memory of the Bolshevik-inspired uprising at a munitions factory in January 1918. However, Ivan Mazepa Street begins at Arsenal Square, which features a Soviet monument—a piece of artillery on a pedestal, a symbol of the January Uprising. The street ends at Glory Square (a Soviet name), where one of the most iconic and important memorial complexes of the Soviet era—the Memorial and Park of Eternal Glory—is located. Moreover, sometimes even after being renamed, the “old” symbols did not disappear from the memory space. For example, in 1997, one of the central streets in Kyiv was renamed Sich Riflemen Street on the anniversary of the Ukrainian Revolution, but the official addresses on this street retained the old name, Artema Street, until 2015.

Speaking at the Bykivnia Graves National Memorial Reserve on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repression on May 17, 2009, Yushchenko proclaimed the need to “cleanse” the symbols of the regime that exterminated millions of people from the public space.73 He said, “these [symbols] are not part of our history as some people wish to say with cynicism. These are a part of the communist system. These are symbols of mur-


73 In 2007, Viktor Yushchenko separated the Remembrance Day of Victims of Political Repression from the Remembrance Day of Victims of the Holodomors, assigning it an independent date, the third Sunday of May. The Remembrance Day of Victims of the Holodomors continued to be observed on the last Saturday of November.
der, whose preservation is a blasphemy against those who perished.” In this speech, the president listed Bykivnia, Babyn Yar, Auschwitz, and Solovki, following the standard “Eastern European” formula of equating communism with Nazism. The speed of the cleansing did not satisfy the head of state and the supporters of his historical politics. According to Yushchenko, over four hundred monuments to representatives of the “communist regime” were dismantled between 2007 and 2008, and over three thousand roads, streets, squares, lanes, alleys, and so on changed their names (the total number of entities with “communist era names” was no less than fifty thousand). However, the use of presidential decrees and official resolutions to punish high-ranking local officials proves that this direction of historical politics was met with especially stubborn resistance, mockery, and sabotage even in those institutions under the direct control of the president.

With regard to local self-governing bodies, this resistance was open, especially in the regions dominated by the Soviet nostalgic memory narrative. For instance, in September 2008, the Donetsk Oblast Council rejected a resolution on the liquidation of the symbols of totalitarianism in the region (the draft law proposed by “orange” council members had no chance of success; its submission was part of a political ploy). In January 2008, local councilors in Dnipropetrovsk delivered a public statement to “stop the falsification of history”: they were nervous because of the glorification of the OUN and UPA and the destruction of “monuments of the Soviet period.” On May 9, 2008, speaking at a Victory Day rally in Luhansk, the head of the local council condemned Yushchenko’s policy and the glorification of the OUN and UPA. The “Museum of the Victims of the Orange Revolution” was opened in Luhansk with a kitschy exhibition that drew parallels between the OUN, the UPA, Nazism, and the leaders of the Orange Revolution. Decommmunization stopped after 2010 but returned again as official policy in 2015.

75 Ibid.
Overall, the failure of decommunization as part of the efforts to promote the Holodomor as one of the central myths of the national/nationalist narrative does not eclipse the general success of this affirmative representation of the past. The “Holodomor as the genocide of Ukrainians” formula has rooted itself quite firmly in the social consciousness of the majority of the population. However, it is difficult to assess the population’s level of understanding of the concept of “genocide” in connection with the famine of 1932–33 because it has never been studied.

“Peripheral” Genocides

The Soviet nostalgic narrative was not the only rival of the national/nationalist version of history. The list of memory spaces that became alien, undesirable, challenging, or even unacceptable included fragments of historical memory of several minority ethnic groups, specifically Jews, Poles, Romani groups, and the Crimean Tatars.

The “Jewish theme” is a very sensitive subject in Ukrainian history and collective memory (in this sense, Ukraine really belongs to Europe, especially Eastern Europe). The exclusivist model of historical memory based on the ethnonational narrative inevitably represents Jews as the Other, and this Other often carries archetypal characteristics of an exploiter and oppressor. If the ethnocentric version of Ukrainian affirmative history and collective memory recognizes Jews as a part of the common past of Ukraine, in the popular discourse they are often seen as the antagonist, which can be traced back to specific cultural stereotypes that move in a straight line from Jewish innkeeper and Jewish usurer to Jewish commissar or Bolshevik. This stereotype, alive and well on the popular level, sometimes rises to the surface of more official discourse, and apparently it is no coincidence that such comebacks happen at moments when the real or perceived competition between different memory narratives is heightened. For instance, there have been attempts to specifically accuse the Jews among the Soviet leaders of the 1930s of masterminding the Holodomor. In some cases, these efforts have been explicit, as with the blatantly antisemitic remarks of the representatives of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management.79

79 Komu buv vyhidnyy Holodomor? (Kyiv: MAUP, 2004), 56, 61, 62. Of course, there were discussions about the international Zionist conspiracy and the famine of 1932–1933 as one of its results. One of the conferences of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (November 2005) bore the title “The
cases, the stereotype was invoked in a more delicate way: for instance, the SBU published a list of those responsible for the organization of the famine of 1932–33, citing not only their party pseudonyms but their real names and surnames as well. The publication of the list, which was incomplete and contained errors, triggered a protest from the Ukrainian Jewish Committee.80

The “Jewish theme” seriously hampers the shape and function of the Ukrainian national/nationalist memory narrative and even sometimes opposes it, given that this narrative is based on ideas of victimhood and heroism in different proportion depending on the historical period. Relations with the Jews and their collective memory make conflict unavoidable. In the public space, the representation of Ukrainians as the eternal victims of oppression, including by Jews (from usurers to NKVD agents) collides with representations of Jews as eternal victims, oppressed by Ukrainians (from Cossacks and haidamaks to the OUN and communists). The extreme version of the Jewish historical narrative sometimes depicts Ukrainians as naturally born antisemites (very similar to the stereotype of a “Ukrainian throat cutter” in Polish mythology).

The somewhat morally puzzling process of myth-building around the number of Holodomor victims can be seen as the climax of the “victimhood olympics.”81 It is well known that Viktor Yushchenko, who was well-informed about the numerous and diverse studies of historians and demographers of the 2000s, chose to ignore their data and insisted that the total number of Holodomor victims amounted to seven to ten million people. The source of his inspiration is no secret: it was actively defended by the “nomenklatura” of the Ukrainian diaspora, in particular the leadership of the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC).82 The June 1, 2008 report of the International Coordination Committee of the UWC headed by Stefan

Jewish-Bolshevik Coup of 1917 as the Prelude to the Red Terror and Ukrainian Holodomors.” (See the website of the event, http://maup.com.ua/ua/pro-akademiyu/novinii/usi-novinii/tekst_vystupu_georgiya_schokina_na_konferencii_evreysko-bilshovicky_perevorot_1917_roku_yak_peredumovacherchevonogo_teroru_ta_ukrainskih_gol.html)


81 This was clearly expounded by Jean-Paul Himka, whose position on Holodomor mythology and Ukrainian participation in the Holocaust provoked an outcry among part of the Ukrainian diaspora, including representatives of the academic establishment.

Romaniw, the leader of the OUN (Bandera faction), clearly contained the figure of seven to ten million victims, which was to be promoted to the presidential secretariat and the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. The victimhood competition evolved in the context of a political situation in which the formula “seven to ten is greater than six” played an important role. Stanislav Kulchytsky recalled, that the head of the World Congress of Ukrainians Askold Lozynskyj insisted on 7–10 million simply because it is bigger than 6 million, the number of Jews who perished during Holocaust. Lozynskyj in turn suggested that Kulchytsky and his followers deliberately reduce the number of Holodomor victims to avoid competition with the Holocaust.

The very term “Holocaust” was appropriated. During the period of active build-up of the cultural memory of the Holodomor, the famine of 1932–33 was quite often called the Ukrainian Holocaust. It should be mentioned that this pattern of manipulation of the figures was not appropriated even by the majority of supporters of the genocidal version of Holodomor in Ukrainian academia.

The “victimhood competition” was aggravated also because of challenges that hampered efforts to establish a heroic narrative. As in many other countries in “Eastern Europe,” Ukrainian heroes and victims often turn out to be antiheroes and murderers in the historical memory of their neighbors. For example, the standard national/nationalist narrative of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Cossack war of the mid-seventeenth century (represented as a national

---

83 Mizhnarodnyy Komitet Holodomoru. 75-ta Richnytsya Vidznachennya Ukrayinskooho Henotsydu 1932–1933. International Holodomor Committee (IHC) for the 75th Commemoration of the Ukrainian Genocide 1932–1933, 5–6. Author’s personal archive.


Spaces of Memory

revolution) is usually silent on the “Jewish topic,” at least in the public memory space. The glorification of “popular uprisings” and their leaders means at best “filtering” this topic out of public discourse, and at worst entails representing the extermination of Jews by the masses as a normal reaction against oppressors (such views, however, continue to be expressed covertly).\(^87\) Glorification of the twentieth-century Ukrainian nationalist movement, in which the movement is presented as “fighting against two totalitarianisms” goes hand in hand with the aggressive rejection of reminders of the OUN’s antisemitism and the participation of Ukrainian nationalists in the Holocaust.\(^88\)

The efforts of Yushchenko and Ukrainian diplomats to obtain recognition from international organizations that the famine of 1932–33 was a genocide of Ukrainians failed to get the support of the country where the Holocaust is an important part of the national mythology. Speaking at the Israeli Knesset on November 14, 2007, Viktor Yushchenko urged Israel to recognize the Holodomor as an act of genocide.\(^89\) Israeli parliamentarians met the words of the Ukrainian president with emphatic silence.\(^90\) The Israeli position was later clarified by its ambassador to Ukraine, Zina Kalay-Kleitman.\(^91\) The ambassador explained that “Israel recognizes as an act of


\(^{88}\) When debating Jean-Paul Himka on the participation of Ukrainian nationalists in the Lviv pogrom of the summer of 1941, Askold Lozynskyj, president of the World Congress of Ukrainians in 1998–2008, remarked that when “agents who had been persecuted and stateless for years” accuse Ukrainian nationalists of anti-Jewish actions, they try to conceal their own sins, like the fact that many Jews served in the NKVD. The argument was repeated by Marco Levytsky, the editor of Ukrainian News, who decided to substantiate his report with figures. He calculated that Jews accounted for 3.92 percent of the senior staff of the NKVD, while their share in the total Soviet population amounted only to 1.78 percent. See Himka, “Interventions: Challenging the Myths of Twentieth-Century Ukrainian History,” in The Convolutions of Historical Politics, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2009), 232.


\(^{90}\) The visit was postponed several times. Yushchenko’s historical politics rang alarm bells for the Israeli political elite. They were especially annoyed by the actions taken by the head of state to glorify the OUN–UPA and the leaders of the Ukrainian Nationalist movement, who were considered antisemites and accomplices in the extermination of Jews during World War II. The visit took place during the year when Roman Shukhevych, chief commander of the UPA, was posthumously awarded with the title of “Hero of Ukraine.”

\(^{91}\) Vladimir Kravchenko (interviewer), “Zina Kalay Kleitman: Izrail ne mozhut priznat Golodomor aktom etnicheskogo genotsida,” Zerkalo nedeli, September 27–1 October 3, 2008. A telling detail: the interview with the Israeli ambassador was dedicated to the issues of Israel’s foreign policy. Only one question was related to the famine of 1932–1933; however, the editors chose to put the answer to this question in the headline of the article.
genocide something that has been recognized by international law. Namely, the extermination of people on ethnic grounds is genocide. The Holocaust was one such instance. Israel cannot recognize the Holodomor as an act of ethnic genocide. At the same time, it considers the Holodomor the greatest tragedy of the Ukrainian people.”

In September 2016, speaking in the Ukrainian parliament on the anniversary of the tragedy in Babyn Yar, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin declared that many Ukrainians had been Nazi accomplices in the murder of Jews and pointed specifically at the OUN’s role in these killings, provoking the anger of defenders of the national/nationalist narrative. It was probably to redress this situation that the Presidium of the Knesset put the examination of a resolution that would recognize the Holodomor as genocide on its agenda in November 2016, leading to jubilant reports and commentaries from some journalists and members of the political elite: the information agency headlines already spoke of future recognition. However, the topic suddenly disappeared from the media landscape. It turned out that the issue was transferred to committee, effectively nullifying the prospect of this much desired (by Ukraine) resolution’s adoption by the Knesset.

Knowledge of this context can probably help explain the marginal role of the Holocaust in the historical politics of the Ukrainian state. According to different assessments, between 900,000 and 1.5 million Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, their allies, and local collaborators in Ukrainian territory. As many as 2,634 Ukrainians were listed by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations by January 2019. Nevertheless, a considerable part of Ukrainian society is still not in a hurry to adopt the Holocaust as a part of “its own” history. The internalization of this tragedy as an integral part of Ukrainian history is still very far away. While in the Soviet official narrative, the annihilation of Jews was only present as part of the general dis-

92 Kravchenko, “Zina Kalay Kleitman.”
95 The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center claims the figure of 1,500,00 on its interactive map. See Babyn Yar website, accessed December 12, 2020, http://babynyar.org/byhmc/historical/exploremap.
cussion on the extermination of “Soviet citizens,” in the official Ukrainian version of collective memory, the Holocaust was alienated by the exclusivist ethnonational narrative, becoming an event peripheral to the Ukrainian national narrative. Moreover, as mentioned above, the Holocaust was often part of the broader competition of victims in Ukrainian historical politics. Between 2006 and 2019, various sociological institutes conducted approximately a dozen sociological surveys on attitudes toward the Holodomor. None were dedicated to the Holocaust. In 2020, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, a non-governmental organization, announced that it had commissioned a survey.

Babyn Yar in Kyiv became the primary place of official Holocaust memory in Ukraine. In September 1991, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a resolution dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the executions at Babyn Yar. The document spoke of the “mass extermination of Soviet citizens, in particular Jews, by German Fascist invaders.” Leonid Kravchuk, the then-speaker of parliament, took part in the commemoration ceremony in Babyn Yar, apologizing on behalf of Ukrainians who took part in the extermination of Jews. In 2001, Leonid Kuchma honored the memory of victims of Babyn Yar and laid a wreath at the new monument to executed children. In 2007, Yushchenko did the same, also laying a wreath at a cross, erected in memory of members of the OUN executed at Babyn Yar. Two years later, in his speech dedicated to another anniversary of the tragedy, Yushchenko said that Babyn Yar is a common grave where over one hundred thousand of “our compatriots” are buried: Jews, Roma, Ukrainians, Russians, prisoners of war, members of the Soviet underground, and mem-

97 See news posts on Babyn Yar’s official website: https://babynyar.org/en/news
98 Babyn Yar was the place of mass executions in Kyiv in 1941–43. In two days in late September 1941, almost 34,000 Kyiv Jews were shot there. In the early 1960s, the grounds were covered with earth and became a park. In 1976, a monument to “Soviet citizen” victims of the Nazi occupation was installed in the vicinity of Babyn Yar. Since 1991, a great number of memorial objects have been erected around the monument, dedicated to Jews, Romani, Ostarbeiter, prisoners of war, priests, Soviet resistance fighters, and nationalists. The 1976 Soviet monument became the most universal sign for all the victims.
bers of the OUN. In 2010, Yushchenko conferred the status of National Reserve on Babyn Yar, which did not affect the position of this place of memory in any meaningful way. Yushchenko was the first top official to use the word “Holocaust” in his official speeches. His predecessor did his best to avoid this term.

Yushchenko addressed the topic in an utilitarian manner. First, he used the Holocaust to promote the Holodomor internationally and nationally. Second, in 2007–2009 he promoted the idea of legal prosecution for “Holodomor denial.” The existence of civil and criminal penalties for the trivialization and banalization of Nazi crimes in some European countries, often interpreted as prosecution for public Holocaust denial, was used as a precedent for the promotion of similar practices in Ukraine concerning Holodomor denial. This handling of the Holocaust was extremely pragmatic: its memory was used for the political instrumentalization of the memory of the Holodomor.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day, established by the international community in 2005, became the national commemorative date in Ukraine in 2011, following a resolution of the Verkhovna Rada drafted by a communist MP. As noticed by a Ukrainian expert, the text of the resolution was reminiscent of the Soviet practice of commemorating Babyn Yar victims as “victims of Fascism” (the word “genocide” was not present in the resolution). At any rate, while top state officials began to mention the Holocaust annually on January 27, this did not change the status of this event’s memory. Communists appealed to Holocaust memory because it was a good pretext to memorialize the role of Ukrainian nationalists in the tragedy.

The construction of the historical memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine was mostly done by non-governmental organizations, both Ukrainian and foreign (the most prominent place among the former belongs to German foundations). The Thukma Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, the Center for Studies of Memory Policy and Public History

103 For more details, see the section on memorial laws in this chapter.
“Mnemonics” in Rivne are the principal Holocaust research and public history institutions in Ukraine, along with the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (VAAD). In 2002 on the initiative of the Catholic priest Patrick Desbois, a project to identify and document locations where Jews were executed was launched in Ukraine. In 2010, with the support of the American Jewish Committee and the German Foreign Ministry, the project was rebranded as “Let us protect the memory!” The new name suggests not only the identification of and care for the burial places of Holocaust victims, but also educational events involving the local population.

A similar situation is observable in the sphere of research and education. In 2000, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science recommended that universities start teaching a course on the history of the Holocaust. According to John-Paul Himka, ten universities’ centers of Ukrainian history introduced such courses by the end of the 2000s. Before the middle of the 2000s, only fleeting mentions of the extermination of Jews were to be found in school textbooks on Ukrainian history. The Holocaust was included in world history textbooks, but only as a European event. An academic volume dedicated to the political history of Ukraine in the twentieth century (produced by the parliamentary publishing house) did not mention the Holocaust at all on the pages dedicated to World War II. In 2013, Himka also notes that the events dedicated to World War II that were planned by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory in the second half of the 2000s never mentioned the Holocaust.

In 2006, the word “Holocaust” made its appearance on the university history examination. In 2009, a report from the Ministry of Education and Science on the “Study of the History of the Holocaust in General Educational

---

Institutions” stated that the ministry called for the “study of particular topics as part of the curricula of courses on the history of Ukraine and world history in general educational institutions,” and called attention to a student contest on the “History and lessons of the Holocaust” that was held “with the support” of the ministry. An optional course on Holocaust history was offered in a number of schools, and the exhibition “Anne Frank House” traveled across the country. The report also mentioned a traveling exhibition “The Development of Tolerance through the Example of Holocaust History,” which existed from 2002–2009. The document recommended publishing textbooks on the subject and organizing workshops for teachers.111 The same recommendations were on the table thirteen years later.112 Textbooks for the history of Ukraine and world history (two courses taught separately) contained brief information about the Holocaust in Ukraine. In some cases, the topic is dealt with in a special section,113 and in others, it is limited to several lines about the mass killings of Jews.114 Some textbooks mention the Righteous Among the Nations.

“The Holocaust in Ukraine and Europe” as a separate topic in the program of a new, integrated course called “History: Ukraine and the World” for grades 10 and 11 in secondary schools was presented as a joint program of the Ministry of Education and Sciences and the UINP.115 This subject was to replace the two separate history courses. Between 2016 and 2017, it was common practice in Ukrainian schools to have an annual “class hour” or special lesson on January 27 dedicated to International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This activity is not centrally coordinated or directed, so there is no data about the number of these events available.

111 "Vyvchennya istoriyi Holokostu v ZNZ Ukrayiny," Internal report by the Ministry of Education and Science, author’s personal archive.
115 "Ukrainskiy institut national’noi pamiati, Volodymyr Viatrovych predstavyy konseptsiyu vykladaniia istorii dlya 10–11 klasiv,” accessed December 19, 2020, http://memory.gov.ua/news/volodimir-vyat-rovich-predstaviv-konseptsiyu-vikladannya-istorii-dlya-10-11-klasiv. The role of the UINP in the development of a new program is unclear: the institute did not have personnel capable of doing this, and it was not an area of its competence.
The author of the 2009 report referred to “non-governmental organizations,” but forgot to mention that, in fact, these organizations alone carried out all the events listed in the report and did so with the financial support of foreign donors. Support from the Ministry of Education and Science simply meant that the ministry did not interfere in these efforts. In 2009, the ministry planned a contest called “Lessons of the Holocaust—Lessons of Tolerance.” The contest description, which was initiated by Tkuma, was edited several times. First it spoke about the “lessons of the Holocaust,” then about the “study of the history of the Holocaust and holodomors,” and finally about the “support for the study of Ukrainian history: the holodomors in Ukraine, the events of World War II, and the Holocaust.”

In 2008, Anatoly Podolsky, one of the pioneers of Holocaust studies in Ukraine, wrote: “the state (as represented by the Ministry of Education and Science) created neither any formal obstacles to teaching the history of the Holocaust nor any possibilities for such teaching (number of class hours, textbooks, teacher training).” This conclusion applies today: the dissemination of information about the Holocaust and everything that falls under the category of Holocaust education is still the prerogative of Ukrainian and international non-governmental organizations. In 2016, another enthusiast of Holocaust education in Ukraine, Ihor Shchupak, credited the same ministry with the permanent support of Holocaust education. Nevertheless, this praise again concerns only “in-kind” support, not any serious financial or managerial commitment.

Holocaust museums in Odessa (2009) and Kharkiv (1996) were established on the initiative of private citizens and ongoing donations. The construction of the Museum of the History of Jews and the Holocaust in Dnipropetrovsk (2012) was funded by private members of the local Jewish community (including the well-known billionaires Ihor Kolomoyskyi and Gennadiy Bogolyubov). As a Holocaust researcher in Ukraine commented in an unofficial conversation, “the memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine remains the concern of Jews.”

116 “Polozhennia pro Mizhnarodnyy konkurs ‘Uroky Holokostu—uroky tolerantnosti,’” internal provision by the Ministry of Education and Science, author’s personal archive.
More recently, certain changes related to Holocaust memory began to emerge. Since November 2015, President Petro Poroshenko published three decrees dedicated to the organization of memorial events for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy (2016). The first decree mentions “one of the most tragic pages of the Holocaust, the mass murder of Kyiv Jews” and proposes the creation of a permanent exhibition dedicated to the Holocaust in the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II.119 The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, when preparing a moving exhibition on the history of World War II, dedicated separate panels to the Holocaust and to the Ukrainians who were honored as Righteous Among the Nations.120 In 2017, the UINP financially co-sponsored one thousand copies of a guidebook on Babyn Yar for teachers, prepared by the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies. The official website of the institute presents some brief information about the Holocaust in Ukraine on the page dedicated to International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In December 2015, President Poroshenko delivered a speech in the Knesset and apologized on behalf of Ukraine for the deeds of those Ukrainians who collaborated with the Nazi regime in the extermination of Jews.121

At first glance, the official line since 2015 seems to promote an inclusive concept of the Holocaust, including the listing of victims of different ethnic, religious, social, and political groups—among them Ukrainian nationalists—with a special emphasis on Jews as the primary target of murder. At parliamentary hearings on September 27, 2016, the term “Holocaust” was again assigned to the Babyn Yar massacres. The recommendations of the hearings pointed out that two-thirds of the victims at Babyn Yar were Jews, and mentioned other victims: Ukrainians, Roma, POWs, Ukrainian nationalists, and “representatives of different political views, beliefs, and nationalities.” However, this inclusiveness provoked new tensions. Mentioning Ukrainian nationalists—who took active part in the killing of Jews and included antisemitism in their political programs—as equal victims of the Nazi regime has sparked public debates about the moral and political legitimacy of this approach.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Sciences issued a special plan for the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Babyn Yar. The plan listed seven types of activities including special lessons, commemorative events in schools, excursions, seminars, and so on.

In January 2018, representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture, the director of the National Historical-Memorial Reserve “Babyn Yar,” the director of the charitable foundation Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, and the mayor of Kyiv, Vitalii Klitchko, signed a memorandum on the creation of a Memorial of the Holocaust “Babyn Yar” in Kyiv. The aim of the parties was to build a memorial and museum on the scale of Yad Vashem by 2021. Three years later, the future of the project remained uncertain for a number of reasons. The discussions about the concept soon turned into a competition between two projects: one elaborated by Ukrainian scholars and the public and the other designed by an international team of historians and mnemonic activists, supported by individual donors (more substantial in financial terms—the budget announced by the sponsors was $100 million) and politically sheltered by the state.

Discussions on the competing concepts of the new memorial at Babyn Yar at one point resulted in the publication of an open letter by the Ukrainian historians and prominent figures. The signatories objected to the “one-sided” approach of the concept (called “historical narrative”) proposed by the international team, which, in the opinion of the signatories, tended to represent Babyn Yar as an exclusively Jewish tragedy.122 They also resented the idea of representing the Babyn Yar story in isolation from the European Holocaust. The authors and signatories proposed the construction of two museums: one devoted to the Holocaust (where only Jewish victims would be represented) and the second—the museum of Babyn Yar—where the memory of all other victims would be included.123 In the meantime, the private project also underwent serious modifications. Its sponsors (Russian billionaires of Jewish origin) decided to invite the contribution of Russian producer Ilya Khrzhanovsky of the controversial Dau project. His vision for

---

the Babyn Yar memorial site was unacceptable to many (some called it “the Holocaust Disneyland”)\(^{124}\) including members of the international team (some respected scholars left the project in the protest).\(^{125}\)

In recent years, the Holocaust and the fate of Ukrainian Jews in World War II have received more attention from the state and the broader public. It is unclear, however, if this interest was triggered by the anniversary or is part of the broader shift to a more inclusive model of historical memory. Ukraine is still not a member of the International Holocaust Research Alliance; although negotiations started in 2005, the prospects for Ukraine’s inclusion are unclear. The rise of right-wing populism in Ukraine after 2014 combined with spontaneous manifestations of grassroots antisemitism, vandalism of Jewish sites of memory, and the open glorification of the OUN, UPA, and Ukrainians who served in Nazi military units, further complicates the issue.

The exclusion of another ethnic group from the historical memory of World War II in Ukraine is even more controversial. In the course of preparations for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Babyn Yar massacres, the government also planned a conference called “The Forgotten Genocide of the Romani.”\(^{126}\) The title of the conference serves as a perfect description of the current level of commemoration of the extermination of the Romani during World War II. Just recently, this dimension of the Holocaust was a huge blank spot on the map of historical memory in Ukraine. The genocide of Romani and Sinti people found itself “on the far margins” of historical politics not only because of the rivalry among “big” memory narratives but also because of the absence of institutions and agents capable of constructing, preserving, and promoting its cultural memory. According to Mykhaylo Tyaglyy, a pioneer of Romani genocide research, the peculiarities of their nomadic culture resulted in the scarcity of material traces, some of which were erased together with their guardians.\(^{127}\) Roma people do not have their


\(^{125}\) See the thematic page “Holocaust” in the online newspaper _Istorichna Pravda_, https://www.istpravda.com.ua/themes/holocaust-history/.


own agents of historical memory; this function was assumed by politicians and non-governmental organizations outside of the Roma community.

It should also be mentioned that the Ukrainian population displays the highest level of social distance (xenophobia index or Bogardus scale) toward the Roma: it reached 5.5 points in 2007 and remained almost unchanged in 2018—5.66 (the highest level of negative attitudes toward foreigners equals 7 on this scale). According to a spring 2017 sociological survey, 47 percent of respondents believe that the rights of the Roma should be restricted. Roma are still a primary target of ethnic violence and xenophobia. In spring 2018 alone, four attacks on Roma camps occurred in Kyiv (April 20), Lviv oblast (Rudno, May 9), and Ternopil oblast (May 22), and on the outskirts of Lviv in June 2018 (one inhabitant of the Roma camp there was killed and four were seriously injured). In all these cases, the police began a criminal investigation, but there were limited prospects that the perpetrators of the attacks would be brought to justice.

In October 2004, the state, represented by the Verkhovna Rada, commemorated the “Holocaust of the Roma”: upon the suggestion of a communist deputy, a resolution was approved establishing the “International Day of the Roma Holocaust.” The resolution suggested August 2 as the day of observance and even proposed including the Roma in the list of persons who suffered during the occupation, which would formally make them eligible for compensation. In August 2009, Yushchenko gave an address on the International Day of the Holocaust of the Roma, promising that the “truth about the ethnocide of the Roma people will become an integral part of all-Ukrainian national memory.” No action was taken to ful-

---


132 The date of the so-called Gypsy Night in Auschwitz in 1944, when those who lived in the Roma sector of the camp were exterminated.

fill this promise. Currently, the efforts of non-governmental organizations have helped identify 130 places of extermination of the Romani and Sinti in Ukraine, and fifteen of them have been marked with memorial plaques. The memorialization of the genocide of the Roma and Sinti has been carried out by a small number of supporters and is mainly sponsored by foreigners. At times, this leads to conflicts with those in power. Two attempts at establishing a monument to the Roma, a kibitka (nomad tent wagon) in Babyn Yar, were aborted by Kyiv city authorities because of the failure of the organizers to comply with formal requirements (unsurprisingly, several other memorial signs in Babyn Yar that failed to comply with formal regulations remained untouched). In the end, Kamyanets-Podilskiy became the home of the monument. Only in 2017 was a copy of the monument placed at Babyn Yar.

The history of the Crimean Tatars occupies a special place in Ukrainian historical memory. In the canonical version of the Ukrainian ethnorangeal narrative, this ethnic group was traditionally represented as a historical Other: either a perfidious and unreliable temporary ally or an outright enemy. This stereotype was particularly strong in school textbooks. According to the research project "Tolerant Textbooks—a Tolerant Society," which carried out an analysis of fifty-two social science textbooks in 2010–11, twenty-eight of them were found to contain 170 intolerant statements. Most of these concerned the Crimean Tatars.

The Crimean Tatars entered the space of historical politics in 1994. In April of that year, Leonid Kravchuk published a decree, “On the Events Honoring the Memory of Victims of Deportation from Crimea,” which referred to Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Armenians, Greeks, and “persons of other nationalities.” A commemoration date was fixed on May 18. In 2003, President Leonid Kuchma ordered the observation of the sixtieth anniversary of the deportation. The name of this document listed the victims of


the deportation as “Crimean Tatars and persons of other nationalities.” In addition to more formal and ritualistic events, the president asked for funds to restore the Palace of the Khans in Bakhchisaray. In 2009, Yushchenko published a decree commemorating the sixty-fifth anniversary of the deportation of “Crimean Tatars and other persons on ethnic grounds.” This decree included a broad program of commemorative events textually similar to the other commemorative decrees issued by Yushchenko; the implementation of this program depended on the enthusiasm and consciences of civil servants. The decree also requested verification for resettlement assistance programs for returnees; this action was extremely controversial. Public conflicts and protests and even illegal land seizures by Crimean Tatars became routine due to the reluctance of the Crimean authorities to peacefully resolve conflicts related to repatriation.

The standard calendar was used to commemorate the event referred to as genocide among Crimean Tatars; they used this terminology in their observations of the May 18 memorial day, and they expected the state to do the same. The Qurultay (the supreme representative body of Crimean Tatars) established a special commission to investigate the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people. In May 2009, Viktor Yushchenko ordered the Security Service of Ukraine to investigate whether the deportation was an act of genocide (the investigation of the Holodomor was initiated around the same time). According to Gulnara Bekirova, the SBU stopped their investigation in 2011. In May 2015, SBU relaunched this symbolic investigation.

On the formal level, the state half-heartedly recognized the tragedy of the Crimean Tatars but relegated it to the margins of the Ukrainian memory space. The most important contribution of the state was the inclusion of information about the 1944 deportation in history textbooks.

The situation evolved with the loss of Crimea in the spring of 2014: the political leadership of the Crimean Tatars opposed the annexation, and the Russian authorities reacted by banning the activities of the Mejlis, which was branded as an extremist organization. A crackdown on Crimean Tatar activist organizations in the annexed region followed. The tragedy of 1944 became highly politicized. Remembrance of this tragedy began to interest the Ukrainian state. On November 12, 2015, the Verkhovna Rada recognized the 1944 deportation as a “genocide of the Crimean Tatar people” and established an official commemoration date on May 18, now called the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Crimean Tatar Genocide. For the first time, this day was observed at the national level. In May 2016, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a statement to international organizations about the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people and the violation of their rights and liberties by the Russian Federation. The 1944 tragedy was seen through the lens of current events. The Verkhovna Rada proposed that May 18 be observed as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Crimean Tatar Genocide and that the current occupation of Crimea by Russia be condemned. Never before had the deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944 attracted so much attention from the state and society: the scale of the commemoration of May 18 was huge. Crimean Tatar singer Jamala won the Eurovision Song Contest that month with her song “1944,” and this pop culture event became a part of Ukrainian political life.

The existence of “peripheral” genocides might be a consequence of the archaism of the Ukrainian national project, which continues to rely on an exclusivist model of historical memory that presents the past through the prism of the history of distinct ethnic groups. Certain departures from the latter in favor of an inclusivist model tend to be related to oscillations in the political climate and do not indicate a long-term strategy. State events dedi-
cated to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy in Kyiv demonstrated the readiness of part of the ruling class to accept the European model of Holocaust remembrance (or at least its rhetoric), but whether it resulted from political expediency or from the genuine internalization of this discourse remains unclear.\footnote{For more detailed insights into the nature of the Holocaust negligence in Ukraine, see Anna Wylegala, “Managing the Difficult Past: Ukrainian Collective Memory and Public Debates on History,” Nationalities Papers 45, no. 4 (2017): 780–97.} The recognition of the 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars as genocide was undeniably the result of a contemporary political agenda. However, the story of extermination of the Roma and Sinti remains marginal to the core national narrative of Ukraine. Moreover, Ukraine belongs to the group of countries that has not recognized the Armenian genocide of 1915.

Even as there are shifts in the historical politics, the examples outlined above demonstrate that these national tragedies continue to be considered an issue only for ‘Others’ in Ukraine. They are excluded from the national memory narrative, which cultivates its own tragedies and, in certain cases, turns the heroes in someone else’s tragedies into villains (the case of the OUN and UPA is the most significant in this regard). Situational inclusion stimulated by external factors and actors and often simulated by internal memory warriors does not help elaborate genuine social or political inclusion, that is, the internalization of the ethnic Other that has lived on the same territory for centuries as an integral part of the collective Self.

**Memory Laws**

“Memory laws” regulate methods and forms of commemorative practices in the public space. The experience of the 1990s and 2000s singles out two main types of legislative practices in the sphere of collective/historical memory regulation. The first simply establishes certain commemorative practices and rituals, and the second introduces limitations and establishes punishments for their violation.\footnote{For a more extensive and detailed reading, see Nikolay Koposov, Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Koposov provides detailed arguments about the term in different discursive and political contexts.} The first type usually presupposes the existence of a public consensus, and the second bears witness to identity and civil loyalty issues and the absence of consensus. International Holocaust Remembrance
Day (January 27) belongs to the first type; the laws on Holocaust denial, in force in more than a dozen European countries, exemplify the second. The second type of laws usually causes public conflict which sometimes have to be resolved through additional legislation (for example, the Spanish Constitutional Court nullified the law on criminal penalties for Holocaust denial). Sometimes they give rise to new protest movements, as in France, where the desire of the state to regulate interpretations of the past produced the Freedom for History movement, which became popular among professional historians in different countries.

The string of memory laws adopted in Ukraine since independence starts with the law of 2000 “On the Perpetuation of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945.” The idea behind the law was actually to integrate the Soviet memory narrative about the “Great Patriotic War” into the Ukrainian national narrative in accordance with the general trend of historical politics during Kuchma’s presidency. The former communist nomenklatura, having taken over the reins of power, used the standard national memory narrative to legitimize its position as the national elite while at the same time paying homage to the Soviet nostalgic variant of collective/historical memory. Commemorative practices, rituals, and symbols established by this law copied and repeated Soviet modes of action (e.g., the creation of “corners of military and labor glory” in educational institutions, agencies, and enterprises). May 9 was established as the official day of commemoration, and the day would be marked annually with government decrees.

The law from 2000 returned to the limelight under Viktor Yanukovych when the ruling parties began to resuscitate the Soviet nostalgic memory narrative and discredit the national/nationalist narrative (by stigmatizing its nationalist dimension). In 2011, the communists initiated changes in the law related to the use of the so-called Victory Banner during events dedicated to Victory Day (May 9) and other episodes from the Great Patriotic War (June 22, the day marking the beginning of the war and October 28, the “Day of Ukraine’s Liberation from the German Fascist Invaders”). Subsequent

---

147 The “Victory Banner” is a copy of the banner of a Red Army unit that was hoisted above the Berlin Reichstag on May 1, 1945. The banner and the staged photograph of its hoisting became the main visual symbols of the Soviet historical myth about the victory in the “Great Patriotic War.”
developments testify to the fact that the initiative of the communists was a part of a larger strategy to provoke public incidents and discredit the opposition by identifying it with fascism (a strategy used by the authorities during the 2004 presidential campaign). According to the law approved by the parliament and signed by Viktor Yanukovych, the “Victory Banner” was to be raised alongside the state flag of Ukraine during commemorative events dedicated to the “Great Patriotic war.”

As expected, the law provoked nervous reactions among nationalists (the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda”) and their allies in the opposition, who tried to cancel the decision by submitting another draft law.148 The parliament, controlled by a pro-Yanukovych majority since his accession to power, quickly rejected it. The very fact that this draft law was discussed at all (it came into force at the end of May 2011) immediately created conflict. On May 9, 2011, skirmishes took place in Lviv in the vicinity of the Soviet-built Hill of Glory Memorial; radical nationalists clashed with partisans of the “Victory Banner” from Odessa (Russian Unity organization, Rodina Party), who were less numerous but well organized.

In June 2011, responding to an appeal by the opposition MP Yuri Kostenko, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine recognized a number of points in the law as unconstitutional.149 This decision did not stop conflicts involving the “Victory Banner” and the red flag in general. In 2012 and 2013, representatives of the Communist Party of Ukraine persistently organized public actions with red flags to celebrate May 9 in western Ukraine (Lviv, Ternopil), and members of Svoboda were eager to physically oppose them.

In April 2015, the first memory law in the modern history of Ukraine ceased to exist. A new law that completely transformed the memory narrative about World War II replaced it. It removed Soviet formulas from commemorations of the war; the “Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945” mutated


into the “Victory over Nazism in World War II.” The label of “Victory Day,” which had been traditionally celebrated on May 9, also changed; the new official name of the holiday was the “Day of Victory over Nazism in World War II.” Another innovation was the introduction of May 8 as the Day of Memory and Reconciliation, which was intended to demonstrate the convergence of Ukrainian historical politics and European memorial practices.  

The most famous Ukrainian memorial law from the first decade of the twenty-first century was arguably the 2006 law “On the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine.” The preparation and enactment of the law became a political tragicomedy that developed against the background of a general political crisis caused by the breakup of the “democratic coalition” and the emergence of the “anti-crisis coalition,” which brought together the Party of Regions, representatives of big business, and communists and socialists—parties that in reality should have been ideological adversaries. President Viktor Yushchenko submitted the law to the parliament, marking it as “urgent.” Three of six articles of the draft law virtually opened a new page of historical politics in Ukraine. The first article qualified the “Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine as a genocide of the Ukrainian nation,” the second prohibited the “denial of the fact of the Holodomor,” and the sixth addressed “administrative responsibility for the public denial of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine.”  

Representatives of the Party of Regions proposed an alternative draft law that did not include the word “genocide” and stated that the famine did not only affect Ukrainians. They presented the event as the “national tragedy of the Ukrainian people.” Because the genocide version of the Holodomor

151 The name for supporters of Yushchenko in the Orange revolution: National democrats, right-center and right-conservative, and nationalist parties allied with Socialists.  
152 For more details, see Georgiy Kasianov, Ukraina 1991–2007: Ocherki noyuyshy istorii (Kyiv: Nash chas, 2008), 415–31. While nobody was surprised by the political promiscuity of the leadership of the CPU, the decision of the Socialist Party to enter the coalition with the “capitalists and oligarchs” was shocking and caused the political meltdown of the party.  
154 “Stenohrama plenarnoho zasidannya,” November 28, 2006, http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenog/show/1356.html. The texts of these draft laws are currently absent from the website of the Verkhovna Rada but, at least theoretically, can be obtained upon request.
was also opposed by top Russian leaders, it gave opponents an additional pretext to accuse the Party of Regions of defending alien interests.

The dramatic discussion of the presidential draft law in the Verkhovna Rada on November 28, 2006, collapsed into political buffoonery. Almost every participant interpreted the events of 1932–33 through the lens of the current political situation. The presidential faction (“Our Ukraine”) and its allies (the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc) wept over the current dismal state of the Ukrainian nation as the result of holodomors and political repressions and accused opponents of the draft law of being amoral. Their adversaries, in turn, vociferously accused the president and his allies of cynically using the events of 1932–33 to advance their selfish political goals. The leader of the socialists, Oleksandr Moroz, even suspected the presidential draft law of being an attempt to establish a dictatorship in Ukraine, and the communists declared that Yushchenko’s initiative would provoke a “chain reaction of confrontation in Ukraine,” violate the constitution, and lead to strained relations with Russia. They used this occasion to call for Yushchenko’s impeachment.\(^{155}\)

In response, the MPs of the majority factions (the Party of Regions and the communists) at first flatly refused to consider the presidential draft law and then voted it down. The opposition managed to vote down the alternative draft law, and Ukraine would probably have never passed one of its most famous memorial laws. Moroz, who in addition to leading the socialists, was also the speaker of the parliament, saved the situation. In the recess between the morning and evening plenary sessions, he edited the presidential version. Most notably, he replaced the word “nation” with “Ukrainian people,” toned down the wording of the section banning Holodomor denial, and added a mention of other peoples in the USSR who suffered from the famine of 1932–33. As a result of a roll-call vote, this version of the law was adopted, thanks to the socialists who voted in favor of it.\(^{156}\)

The law stated that “public denial of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine is an insult to the memory of the millions of victims of the Holodomor, a humiliation of the dignity of the Ukrainian people, and is unlawful.”\(^{157}\)


\(^{156}\) Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, Stenohrama plenarnoho zasidannia 28 lystopada 2006 roku.

On December 21, 2006, Yaroslav Kendzor and Refat Chubarov, MPs from Our Ukraine and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, respectively, registered a draft law introducing modifications of the Ukrainian Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, “On Responsibility for the Public Denial of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as the Genocide of the Ukrainian People.”158 Communist and Party of Regions MPs demanded that the draft be remitted, which was done. At this stage, President Yushchenko decided to join the fray. On March 28, 2007, he submitted a draft law “On Introducing Modifications into the Ukrainian Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure (On Responsibility for Denial of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as a Genocide of the Ukrainian People and Denial of the Holocaust as a Fact of Genocide).” He repealed his allies’ previous draft, introducing something new: the mention of the Holocaust. He proposed the introduction of criminal responsibility for “the denial of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 as the genocide of the Ukrainian people and the Holocaust as the genocide of the Jewish people.”159 He proposed that public actions as well as the “fabrication and propagation” of relevant materials associated with denialism be punished with a fine of between 100 and 300 percent of tax-exempt minimum wages or imprisonment for up to two years.160 For repeat offenders or civil servants, the same acts carried a prison term of up to four years.161 From this point on, all variants of the “criminalization of denial” used this standard set of measures: administrative responsibility, fine, and imprisonment.

Technically, the goal of the law was to concretize the provisions of the previous law from 2006. Informally, the draft law of 2007, which introduced a maximum penalty for civil servants, was apparently meant to intimidate local authorities in the eastern and southern regions. It was here that there

160 Meaning 1,700–5,100 hryvnias or approximately $340–$1,020, according to the official exchange rate of the Ukranian National Bank.
161 “Poyasnyvalna zapyska do Proektu Zakonu Ukrayyny, ‘Pro vnesennya zmin do Kryminalnoho ta Kryminalno-procesualnoho kodeksiv Ukrayiny,’” C. 2, accessed June 20, 2009, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_t?pf3511=29881. These documents (the law draft and explanatory notes) are not available at this link anymore. However, since the law draft was resubmitted in December 2007, they are fully reproduced here: http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_t?pf3511=30993.
was no enthusiasm for the presidential decrees on preparations for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the tragedy. The draft law also might have been a tactical move in the complex political confrontation between the president and the hostile parliamentary majority, through which the government—also controlled by enemies of Yushchenko—gained momentum. It would be safe to say that the criminalization of Holodomor denial had already become an idée fixe of Yushchenko. The appearance of the mention of the Holocaust was evidently meant to strengthen the presidential initiative by evoking a broader European practice; the draft contained direct references to relevant laws in other European countries.

The explanatory note attached to the draft contained some very interesting turns of phrase. For instance, it affirmed that the “adoption of the law will be conducive to the consolidation of the Ukrainian people, citizens of all ethnic origins, around the ideas of promoting intolerance for any manifestations of violence in society, increasing respect for the lives, rights and liberties of the citizen, and establishing harmony and civil peace in Ukraine.”\textsuperscript{162} The document never explained how the criminal prosecution for the “incorrect” interpretation of the Holodomor and the Holocaust would help achieve the aforementioned noble goals.

The criminalization effort was a purely demonstrative action, an act of moral and political pressure against opponents. Using his position as speaker, Moroz chose the end of May 2007 to debate the legislation (even though the draft law was submitted as “urgent”). However, on April 1, 2007, the president had already dissolved the Verkhovna Rada (he had to do it three more times over the following six months because the MPs became unruly and resisted dissolution). At the same time, Yushchenko accused the “anti-crisis coalition” of attempting to usurp power. In the spring of 2007, the draft law on the “criminalization of denial” became a part of political negotiations with the “anti-crisis coalition.” It was included in a package of political compromises that included a number of far more important laws about changes to the constitution and the opposition.\textsuperscript{163}


After snap parliamentary elections in October 2007, Yushchenko stated his intent to pass this draft law through the new parliament now that he faced the prospect of having a loyal majority in the parliament. He carried out his promise in December of that year, when the presidential draft on the criminalization of Holodomor and Holocaust denial was mentioned in the list of thirteen other “urgent” draft laws. This time, the need to introduce criminal responsibility for the denial of the genocidal character of the Holodomor and Holocaust was augmented by the “need to deter the relevant conduct and, therefore, to prevent harm to society, to make it impossible to abuse a physical or a legal person, society or the state.” A month later, in January 2008, the presidential draft was duplicated by the legislative initiative of two MPs representing the presidential faction “Our Ukraine–People’s Self-Defense.” They intended to punish Holodomor denial (without mentioning the Holocaust this time) with up to six months of probation or three years in prison.

The Party of Regions successfully blocked the draft, and it was rejected. In 2010, after a break caused by yet another political crisis, conflict among Yushchenko’s allies, and the presidential election, the issue of the “criminalization of Holodomor denial” returned to the agenda in the habitual context of undermining political opponents. Vasyl Kiseliov of the Party of Regions showed concern for the wrongful use of the word “genocide” in referring to the Holodomor and proposed amending the law “On the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine” by replacing the word “genocide” with the word “tragedy” in the first section. The opposition quickly struck back: parliamentarian Yuri Karmazin submitted a draft law that had an incredibly long but eloquent name. An indefatigable member of the Party of Regions

164 A coalition of “frenemies” emerged when the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc allied with Yushchenko’s supporters in Our Ukraine–People’s Self-Defense bloc.
168 “Proekt Zakonu pro vnesennia zmin do statti 1 Zakonu Ukrayiny, ‘Pro Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini,’ (shchodo vyznannya Holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini henotsydom Ukrajinskoho narodu—zlochnym Vsesoyuznoyi komunistichnoyi partiiyi (b) ta yii filialu-Komunistichnoyi
responded with an updated version of a proposal that suggested the removal of the words “criminal totalitarian regime” from the text of the law. Both actors and spectators were evidently exhausted: all three draft laws were withdrawn.

However, the propaganda potential of the topic was apparently not yet exhausted. At the end of 2010, Stepan Kurpil, a member of the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, proposed supplementing the 2006 law with a reference to penalties for the “denial of the Holodomor as genocide” and amending the Code of Administrative Offenses with an article on administrative responsibility (a fine) for denial.169 The draft targeted Yanukovych who, as already mentioned, publicly spoke out against the use of the word “genocide” when referring to the Holodomor.

In November 2014, the topic resurfaced in parliament. The All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” did not make it into the parliament in the snap elections of October 2014, and in the final days of the “old Verkhovna Rada,” MPs decided to again propose the introduction of criminal sanctions “for the denial of the Holodomor as a fact of genocide of the Ukrainian people and the Holocaust as a fact of genocide of the Jewish people.” The text of the explanatory note implied that Holocaust rhetoric was already routinely used as a stand-in for the idea of criminalizing the “denial of the Holodomor” (this use of the Holocaust by the members of a party with notoriously antisemitic leadership was like a bad joke).170 Nationalist MPs decided to think big and proposed punishment for those who “deny the fact” with imprisonment for a period of between six months and three years or up to five years for repeat offenders. The draft law was submitted on the


eve of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Holodomors (commemorated on November 22 in 2014) but was later withdrawn because of the end of the parliamentary term.

The next incarnation of the criminalization of denial (in 2015) was arguably the draft submitted by Oleksandr Feldman, an “independent” MP from Kharkiv, a millionaire, and a well-known Jewish figure. In his explanatory note, which was mostly dedicated to the Holocaust and used the Holodomor as an additional argument in favor of the law, Feldman remarked that the establishment of a substantial fine or prison sentence for the “denial of the Holocaust or Holodomor” would “help protect the reputation and rights of persons who suffered from the Holocaust and raise Ukraine’s credibility at the international level.”

In 2016, the draft disappeared from the website of the Verkhovna Rada because the relevant parliamentary committee assessed it as “having no prospects”: it was in conflict with a law adopted two weeks earlier that glorified the OUN and UPA.

In February 2016, a new attempt to introduce criminal punishment for denial was undertaken by a group of MPs. This time the Holocaust and deportation of Crimean Tatars accompanied the Holodomor, and sanctions for denial ranged from a serious fine (equivalent to $1,400 to $6,300) to up to five years imprisonment. Once again, this draft law never reached the plenary session and attempts to pass a special resolution failed.

President Poroshenko picked up the theme in 2017. Speaking at the ceremony dedicated to the anniversary of the Holodomor, he proposed sanctions for Holodomor and Holocaust denial. MPs from the nationalist party Svoboda supported the president’s initiative and submitted the latest in the series of criminalization laws. They did not care about the Holocaust, however: the law draft contained references to only the Holodomor. Nationalists proposed the same range of sanctions proposed by “democrats”: a fine and

Spaces of Memory

up to five years imprisonment. The same project was resubmitted by a single MP from Svoboda in September 2020, but it was not included on the agenda. The total number of attempts to criminalize “Holodomor denial” reached thirteen.

The practice of using the questions of history to advance the current political agenda reached its somewhat cartoonish form during the adoption of the so-called dictatorship laws on January 16, 2014, at the height of the mass political actions that turned into a revolt in Kyiv and cities in western and central Ukraine that was later christened the Revolution of Dignity. The goal of the “dictatorship laws,” as they were called by representatives of the opposition, was to tighten the screws on participants in demonstrations. Another objective was to substantially restrict the freedom of speech in Ukraine.

The total “package” of eleven laws included two that were pertinent to historical issues. The first law proposed criminal sanctions for the “public denial or justification of the crimes of fascism” by adopting amendments to article 436 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (“Propaganda of War”). The text mentioned the “Waffen SS organization,” those who “fought against the anti-Hitler coalition and collaborated with fascist occupiers.” This law, prepared by communist MPs, served a dual function. On the one hand, it was part of the strategy of labeling their opponents as “fascists”; their opposition included the nationalist All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda,” for whom the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Galician), together with the OUN and UPA, was an integral and glorious part of historical memory and, of course, a core part of their ideological arsenal. By this point, the use of the “fascist” label to refer to the entire opposition had already become commonplace in the government. On the other hand, the intention to expand

175 Only seven laws were “dictatorship laws” (limiting constitutional rights and liberties); the whole package, for instance, included the law on the 2014 state budget.
177 Between May 14 and May 18, 2013, the ruling Party of Regions organized a series of rallies (marches) under the slogan “To Europe—without Fascists!” In a strange twist, the final event, the march on May 18 (Europe Day) in Kyiv, coincided in time and place with the final action of the opposition’s “Rise, Ukraine!” directed against the Party of Regions. The term “fascists” was used by the ideologists of the Party of Regions to refer to the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” and sometimes to the entire opposition.
the legal grounds for prosecuting political opponents was evident: from now on, any mention of the OUN or UPA as representatives of the national liberation movement could be interpreted at will. It should be remembered that, at the time, the OUN slogan “Glory to Ukraine—glory to heroes!” was adopted by Maidan protesters as a common slogan. Nationalist organizations including Svoboda and Right Sector played a prominent role in the organized violent resistance to government forces. The second law in a way supplemented the first.\(^{178}\) It also proposed changes to the criminal code, this time to article 297 on the “Desecration of graves.” The explanatory note mentioned real cases of desecration of graves of Soviet Army soldiers in western Ukraine (Lviv, Chervonohrad). It was automatically assumed that any such actions were perpetrated by the nationalists (that is, “fascists”).

The adoption of the dictatorship laws triggered the violent escalation of street protests in Kyiv; fighting on the barricades erupted in the capital, and new “Maidans” emerged in large cities in western and central Ukraine. Under pressure from protesters and the parliamentary opposition, the laws were retracted on January 28, 2014, but on the same day, the same majority adopted memorial laws similar to those that had made up part of the “dictatorship” package.\(^{179}\)

Not surprisingly, the promotion of the new portion of the memory laws after the Revolution of Dignity can be considered a continuation of the use and misuse of the past for immediate political goals, without any consideration of the social consequences. The memorial laws adopted between April to May 2015 laid the groundwork for the dramatic change of the collective/historical memory landscape in Ukraine and provoked short-lived protests and half-hearted debates among intellectuals.\(^{180}\)


\(^{180}\) One of these laws was discussed in the beginning of the chapter.
Spaces of Memory

It might be too early to assess the long-term consequences of these laws, but the main ideological substance of two of them is already obvious: the elimination of the Soviet nostalgic memory narrative from the symbolic memorial space and its replacement with the national/nationalist representation of the past. Two of the four laws in the package deserve special attention: “On the Legal Status and Celebration of the Memory of Participants of the Struggle for the Independence of Ukraine in the Twentieth Century”\(^\text{181}\) and “On Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and the Prohibition of the Propagation of their Symbols.”\(^\text{182}\) The former aimed to “recognize the participants of the struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century as the main actors in the struggle for the restoration of the independence of Ukraine—fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century” (my italics).\(^\text{183}\) The law suggested establishing a legal status for independence fighters, defining the right of such persons “to receive state and municipal benefits.” As follows from the text of the law, by “legal status,” the authors meant their official recognition as “independence fighters,” that is, those who “took part in all forms of the political, armed, or any other collective or individual struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century.” The formula is followed by a long list of such organizations, most of which had long ceased to exist; the list starts with the state bodies of the Ukrainian People’s Republic and ends with the People’s Movement of Ukraine (Rukh). The law mentions “other organizations, structures, or formations” that can be added to the list by the government.

The most impressive provision of the law is the article establishing sanctions for the “violation of legislation on the status” of the independence fighters. Irrespective of their nationality, people who took the liberty of publicly showing “contemptuous disregard” for the independence fighters or “hampering the realization of their rights” should bear responsibility “as set forth by law.” The final formula deserves to be reproduced in full: “The pub-


lic denial of the fact of the rightfulness of the struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century is recognized as an outrage against the memory of the fighters for the independence of Ukraine and the degradation of the dignity of the Ukrainian people and is illegal.” Nobody was able to explain what “the fact of the rightfulness of the struggle for independence” meant or how it is possible to deny it.

The strategy to promote the idea of punitive sanctions was the same used on the issue of the criminalization of Holodomor denial. In January 2017, MP Yuri Shukhevych, the son of Roman Shukhevych and a recognized participant in the struggle for Ukrainian independence, submitted a draft law with an intricate name that mentioned the Holodomor together with “independence fighters.” The draft addressed the denial of both the “fact of the rightfulness of the struggle for the independence of Ukraine” and the “fact of the Holodomor of 1932–1933.” Sanctions ranged from fines and six months detention (if a first-time offense) to heavy fines and imprisonment for up to five years if the crime is a repeat offense or if perpetrated by a “representative of authority” or a group.

In December 2018, the Ukrainian parliament passed a new law that finalized the equalization of the rights of Soviet and nationalist veterans. Since then, veterans of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and other nationalist military formations, members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, and all “persons who took part in the struggle for independence in the twentieth century” received equal status with those who fought in the ranks of the anti-Nazi coalition. The major aim, however, was not social benefits. The law excluded a previous formulation that withheld this status from those who were involved in crimes against humanity. The major aim of this amendment was to whitewash the image of organizations whose collaboration with the Nazis and role in the Holocaust and other ethnic cleansings had attracted a lot of attention in public discourse. In terms of social jus-

184 Ibid.
The law “On the Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and the Prohibition of the Propagation of Their Symbols” was, for all intents and purposes, an extensive reorganization of the symbolic space of collective/historical memory in Ukraine. The law condemned the regimes specified in its name, defined the legal grounds for prohibiting the propagation of their symbols, and established procedures for their elimination from the public space, including a full ban on their use as toponyms and the names of political parties.

The mention of the National Socialist (Nazi) regime in the law followed the decommunization scenario of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. In this setting, “denazification” seemed to have a purely ritual meaning because of the physical lack of anything to denazify. However, at the same time, equating Nazism with the Soviet variant of communism was used to discredit the latter morally and politically, helping local rightist and right-conservative politicians who intermittently came to power and usually struggled against the communist heritage.

By equating communism with Nazism, the authors claimed to “follow European practices” (The European Parliament in 2008 and OSCE in 2009 famously equated “Stalinism” with “Nazism”). “Nazism” was intended to play a role similar to that of the Holocaust in the criminalization of Holodomor denial, appearing regularly but as a side issue. This approach becomes especially evident in a textual analysis of the law, as all mentions of Nazism are evidently “technical,” playing a “supporting role” (for instance, the “symbols of Nazism” reduced exclusively to the symbolism of the NSDAP).

The prohibition in the law is against communism in its broad-

---


188 In these regions, Nazi symbols and “places of memory” were liquidated long ago by the communist regime.

189 The law refers to six documents adopted by the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

The law bans all uses of communist/Nazi symbols in the public sphere, itemizing the cases of such use and providing a detailed list of symbols, images, names, memorial signs, and other vestiges of the communist past to be removed and banned. The authors also created a list of exceptions and cases where the ban is not applicable such as in research, art, and educational material, as long as such uses "do not entail propaganda of the criminal character of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917–1991, [or] of the criminal character of the National Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regime." 191

According to expert opinion, some articles of the law challenged the constitution, and some contradicted other existing laws. 192 Nevertheless, the law was hastily adopted and, together with the law on the glorification of independence fighters, immediately became the object of heavy criticism not only from expected opponents like the communists or the fragments of the former Party of Regions, but also from those who were seen as allies. The procedure used to adopt the laws was the first issue to trigger an outcry: they were “unanimously approved” on the same day in a package with two other less provocative memorial laws during a parliamentary session which looked rather like a rally; there was no discussion of the laws—a breach of regulations—and a total disregard for the opinion of external reviewers. Critics from the scholarly community were particularly alarmed by the desire of the state to regulate the interpretation and the representation of the past, and to limit what could be said about it. Fundamentally, the laws limited freedom of speech and enhanced the capacity for bureaucratic despotism. Soon after the adoption of these laws by the parliament, a collective letter signed by sixty-three “foreign experts on Ukraine” (the signatories included a number of Ukrainian citizens as well) was addressed to the chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, Volodymyr Groysman, and President Petro Poroshenko; it urged them to reject two of the four memorial laws. 193

191 “Zakon Ukrayiny ‘Pro zasudzhennya komunistychnoho.’” This is one of the most obscure passages in the text of the law, probably a result of haste and a lack of legal competence on the part of the authors.


The letter expressed apprehension about the ban on potential criticism of the OUN and the UPA (with administrative and even criminal penalties). The authors wrote, “Not only would it be a crime to question the legitimacy of an organization (UPA) that slaughtered tens of thousands of Poles in one of the most heinous acts of ethnic cleansing in the history of Ukraine, but it would also exempt from criticism the OUN, one of the most extreme political groups in Western Ukraine between the wars, and one which collaborated with Nazi Germany at the outset of the Soviet invasion in 1941.”194 In another passage, the letter explained that the total condemnation of the Soviet period may lead to “absurd and unjust consequences,” enabling the prosecution of those whose positive assessments of the Soviet period could be interpreted as “propaganda of Communism.” All addressees ignored this appeal. In May 2015, President Poroshenko enacted the bill. Volodymyr Viatrovych, the director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, hastened to brand the open letter as a document that could be used in Russia’s information warfare against Ukraine.195

On May 27, 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a special resolution that launched the implementation of the decommunization law concerning the ban on legal entities and political parties. In practice, the law was about depriving the Communist Party of Ukraine of its political identity—its name, symbols, and official policies. The extensive document contained detailed instructions to the Ministry of Justice and its local bodies on the actual prohibition of any political party or social organization that would use the symbols of the “Communist totalitarian regime” (including, for instance, the hammer and sickle).196 A special commission created by the Ministry of Justice discovered three parties in Ukraine with the word “communist” in their name, two of them being the long-ailing Communist Party of Ukraine (renewed) and the Communist Party of

194 Ibid.
195 Quite soon this formula became a commonplace in combating any criticism of the nationalist narrative of the past.
Workers and Peasants. The Communist Party of Ukraine chaired by Petro Symonenko that had recently been defeated in the Verkhovna Rada elections was also listed. The names, symbols, and charters of all three parties were found to be illegal, and they were now facing a dilemma: change their identity or to stop their activities. Minister of Justice Pavlo Petrenko signed orders excluding the aforementioned parties from the electoral process. Not much is known about the reaction of the two communist parties that existed solely in the registers of the Ministry of Justice; however, for the CPU, gloomy after its failure in the parliamentary elections, decommunization was a godsend.

In July 2015, the CPU filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Justice; the case moved through the administrative courts, leading to the CPU being “banned” one day and “unbanned” the next. In October 2015, the communists were unable to participate in local elections under their name. In December 2015, the CPU leader announced that the party would apply to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In May 2017, a group of forty-six MPs from the opposition (the remnants of the Party of Regions) submitted an inquiry to the Constitutional Court about the legality of the decommunization law. The case was closed in July 2019; the Constitutional Court recognized the constitutionality of the law “On the Condemnation of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and the Prohibition of the Propagation of their Symbols.” This verdict was not unanimous; four judges abstained.

Despite the ban, the CPU was still active in public life, claiming 50,000 members (2018) and local branches in all the regions of Ukraine. In February 2019, the CPU announced that the ECHR would consider the

200 Kravets, “Prizrak kommunizma ili pochemu zapreshchennaja KPU.”
case, but Petro Symonenko, the leader of the CPU, was not permitted to take part in the presidential elections in Ukraine later that year.²⁰¹

In the meantime, the decommunization of symbolic space was enacted across the entire country: commissions of “public representatives” were created by local authorities and independent bodies to prepare proposals for the total overhaul of toponyms and the “cleansing” of monuments and memorial spaces of the communist regime (the “Nazi totalitarian regime” evidently did not cause such problems). The decommunization of the public space met with mixed reactions. Opinion polls showed a lack of interest in the problem; many Ukrainian citizens believed that the country had more pressing issues than the toppling of statues or the changing of street signs.²⁰²

At the end of 2015, Ukraine received the “preliminary conclusion” of the Venetian Commission on its main decommunization law. It suggested a “more extensive” list of banned symbols; a clear definition of the term “propaganda,” especially in cases when a criminal penalty is proposed; and a clear definition of and limits for the notion of “crimes of the regime” that are not to be publicly denied (that is, clarifying the crimes mentioned in the law). The commission suggested restricting criminal penalties only to such breaches of the law that constitute a real threat to society. A separate paragraph suggested banning political parties and non-governmental organizations only in exceptional cases and as a last resort.²⁰³ The commission scolded the authors of the law for its hurried passage, for the absence of public discussion, and for the vagueness of its language, including the aim of the law.²⁰⁴

In May 2016, a group of MPs proposed a draft law that implemented the recommendations of the Venetian Commission. Sanctions were mitigated, but criminal penalties (from large fines to imprisonment for two to five

---


²⁰⁴ Joint Interim Opinion on the Law of Ukraine, 18–21.
years) remained in place for the public denial of the Holodomor, Holocaust, or deportation of Crimean Tatars, and for the trivialization of crimes against humanity, military crimes, crimes of aggression, “and other crimes.” The text of the law contains a passage denouncing propaganda on behalf of the communist or Nazi regimes, for instance, the “public apology for the establishment of Soviet rule in the territory of Ukraine or in separate administrative-territorial units; [and] public apology for the persecution of fighters for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century” by Soviet and Nazi government authorities. For various reasons, the draft law got stuck in committee. In November 2016, MPs representing the Petro Poroshenko Bloc suggested adopting the draft law in its first reading, but it went no further. In summer 2019, this draft law was excluded from consideration due to the expiration of the term of the Verkhovna Rada elected in 2014.

Meanwhile, the process of decommunization in Ukraine focused predominantly on the public space: localities, districts, streets, squares, side streets, and other “topographic objects” were renamed, and monuments and memorial signs were removed. Even with this decommunization underway, at least one-third of the population regretted the breakdown of the USSR according to an opinion poll from May 2014. The nostalgia increased the further east one went: while only 33 percent of respondents in Central Ukraine expressed regret, this figure increased to almost 50 percent in eastern and southern Ukraine and 60 percent in Donbass. In August 2015, according to opinion polls conducted by the FAMA sociological agency, almost 90 percent of respondents expressed a negative view of decommunization; most of them were unhappy with its top-down character, its “bad timing” (there were

---


206 “Pro rozpad SRSR dosi zhalkuye tretyna ukrayintsiv,” Radio, May 5, 2014, https://racurs.ua.ua/n26750-pro-rozpad-ssr-dosi-jalkue-tretyona-ukrayiniv.html. Regret for the USSR was hardly related to any ideological motives. People regretted a certain ideal model, associated with stability, social justice, and confidence in the future. Regret that the USSR broke down did not automatically imply a desire to recreate it, as testified by the perpetual decrease of support for the CIS through the 2000s. According to an opinion poll held by Razumkov Center in September 2016, the idea of creating a union state of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine as equal subjects was supported by 18 percent of respondents and opposed by 69 percent. See “Ukrayintsiv vyznachivsya shchodo chlenstva v NATO, YeS, SND ta maybutnikh vidnosyn z RF—opytuvannya,” Ukrainskyi Tyzhden, September 27, 2016, http://tyzhden.ua/News/174867.
more urgent problems), and the absence of public discussion on the issue. These figures indicate the extent of open or hidden resistance to top-down decommunization, which was especially strong in the regions it specifically targeted: Donbass (territories under Ukrainian control), Sloboda Ukraine, and the southeast. By February 2016, only 47 percent of the decommunization plan had been implemented.

The greatest “schedule delay” was in central and southern Ukraine, namely in Poltava, Odessa, Sumy, Mykolaiv, and Kherson. Oleksandr Mamay, the mayor of Poltava, defiantly refused to take any action on renaming the streets; this did not stop him from being reelected in October 2015. An informal referendum held in Kirovohrad during local elections showed that a majority of its inhabitants supported the return to the historical name of the city, Yelisavetgrad. As the law said nothing about imperial heritage (which is, of course, unacceptable to the authors of the law), these results were an unpleasant surprise, especially when it was publicly insinuated that the city had been named after St. Elizabeth rather than the Russian Empress Elizabeth Petrovna. Finally, in July 2016, Kirovohrad was renamed Kropyvnytskyi in honor of a famous classical Ukrainian playwright. The transformation of Dnipropetrovsk into Dnipro failed to excite local inhabitants (they suggested keeping the old name), but the name change was accepted without much of a fight. The renaming of Komsomolsk in Poltava oblast, a city built in the early 1960s, followed the Kirovohrad model: despite the protests of locals, the Verkhovna Rada rechristened the city Horishni Plavni. In Odessa, the monument to Lenin was transformed into a statue of Darth Vader. The Odessite sense of humor could not compete with the seriousness of the commitment of city council members in Volnovakha, Donetsk Region: unwilling to topple a monument to Vasily Chapayev, an icon of Soviet mythology, they decided to

210 The appeal of the 48 MPs of the Verkhovna Rada to the Constitutional Court was rejected.
rebrand it as “Cossack.” In the village of Tkhorivka, Kyiv oblast, Lenin’s moustache was lengthened and its direction was changed to transform a statue of Ilyich into Taras Shevchenko. In July 2016, Andriy Parubiy, chairman of the Verkhovna Rada and one of the main champions of decommunization, declared that the renaming of (most) cities and administrative districts was over (a total of 1,012 had changed their names).

Polling done by the Razumkov Center in the spring of 2016 confirmed the consistency of regional differences in responses to decommunization. For instance, the change of the name of the May 9 holiday was supported by 57 percent of respondents in western Ukraine and 42 percent in central Ukraine. In other regions, 47–50 percent of those surveyed did not support it. The condemnation of the “communist totalitarian regime” and the ban on its symbols was endorsed by 82 percent of respondents in western Ukraine and 58 percent in central Ukraine. In the east and in the south it was supported by 34 percent and 30 percent, respectively, and rejected by 36 percent and 38 percent. The recognition of organizations listed in the text of one of the memorial laws (including the OUN and the UPA) as fighters for independence was supported by 76 percent of respondents in the western part of the country and 46 percent in the center. The same idea generated support among 26.8 percent of respondents in the east, 20.1 percent in the south, and 21.1 percent in Donbass. Those who did not support the idea in the three latter regions amounted to 39.6 percent, 24.4 percent, and 37.5 percent, respectively.

Another opinion poll from November 2016 also verified the existence of substantial regional differences in regard to the politics of decommunization. According to the Rating Group’s survey, 35 percent of Ukrainian respondents supported the renaming of inhabited localities and streets while 57 percent opposed it. Whereas in western Ukraine 63 percent were in favor of the renaming campaign, only 32 percent supported it in central Ukraine (45 percent opposed it), 19 percent in the south (with 54 percent against),

---

and 18 percent in the east (with 65 percent against).\textsuperscript{214} By the end of 2016, there were attempts in the central and southeastern parts of Ukraine to challenge the renamings in court.\textsuperscript{215}

Yet another poll conducted in Ukraine by the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the National Center of Polish Culture at the same time revealed that 58 percent of the population viewed decommunization negatively versus 34 percent who viewed it positively.\textsuperscript{216} This data partly correlates with the results of a sociological poll (conducted by phone) organized by the Sociopolis team in May 2017: 32 percent of respondents supported decommunization, 41 percent expressed negative attitudes toward it, and 25 percent were indifferent.\textsuperscript{217}

The fourth memorial law, the so-called archival law, seemed to be the least controversial, at least initially.\textsuperscript{218} The idea of ensuring access to the archives of repressive organs was a major part of the decommunization process in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Balkans after the collapse of the communist system. Together with lustration, it was one of the core elements of transitional justice policy.\textsuperscript{219} The authors justified the necessity of such a law on both humanitarian and urgent political grounds. For instance, they declared that “the closure of the archives became one of the preconditions for the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the military conflict in the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.”\textsuperscript{220} “The law contains a list of “repressive organs,” including all the law enforcement bodies of the “totalitarian communist regime” including the militsiya (police), courts, prosecu-
tors’ offices, and the penal system. The chronological limits of the totalitarian communist regime were defined as 1917–91, similar to the decommunization laws. The law mentioned “unofficial collaborators of repressive organs,” for example, “informants of all categories.”221 According to the law, access to all information about these people was to be unrestricted. At the same time, the law stipulated the right of “victims of repressive organs” to be protected by limitations on access to their personal files.

The law provided for the creation of a specialized state archive under the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINP) and established a two-year term during which all the documents from the years 1917–91 were to be transferred to this archive from the following agencies: the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Justice, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Foreign Intelligence Service, the Prosecutor General’s Office, the State Judicial Administration, the State Penitentiary Service, and the State Border Service Administration.222

The law sent tremors throughout the archival world: the idea of transferring the archives of state institutions to the specialized archive created under the aegis of the UINP was not only unprecedented but inconceivable from a technical point of view. At present, no one is capable of evaluating the total volume of documents to be transferred to the specialized archive of the UINP, an organization that only employed about seventy people, including archival technicians. To put in layman’s terms, the law indulges in wishful thinking.

By 2020, the SBU archive was the only institution from the list that had provided near-unrestricted access to its files. Direct contact and cooperation between the UINP and the SBU Archive was ensured through a management reshuffle: in early 2016, the newly appointed director of the SBU Archive moved to the UINP with the goal of preparing for the creation of the specialized archive. His position in the SBU was taken over by a member of the Center for Research of the Liberation Movement (TsDVR). To give an idea of the scale of work in the case of the SBU Archive alone, the collections to be moved included 910,000 volumes of files preserved in the Central Archive of the SBU and its regional departments (37,000 linear meters).223

221 Ibid.
222 As of 2019, only the Security Service Archive was accessible in full compliance with the law.
223 “U SBU anonuvaly peredachu arkiviv 1917–1991 rokov do Instytutu natsionalnoyi pam’яти,” Ukrai
The UINP obtained the premises to house the archive only in 2019. However, no funding for the renovation of an abandoned building in the outskirts of Kyiv was provided. The lack of qualified archival specialists available to ensure relevant services or access continues to be another problem. Besides the practical issues concerning the implementation of the archive law, it is probably safe to assume that the institutions listed in the law probably do not feel much enthusiasm for the additional burden of transferring their records and likely lack the technical capacity to accomplish the transfer: moving the documents not only involves moving tons of papers from one building to another but also requires a colossal amount of work and technical tasks related to the cataloguing and tracking of documents.

In May 2017, the Ukrainian parliament passed one more memorial law. This time, MPs took issue with the St. George Ribbon. This artless symbol replicating the colors of the Imperial Order of St. George was “invented” in 2005 by the RIA news agency, and it became incredibly popular among Russians and some Ukrainians. Starting in 2014, especially during the Donbass War, the St. George Ribbon became an ideologically important symbol of separatism, and in Ukraine, it began to be considered a sign of support for the “kolorady” (the comparison of people with the Colorado potato beetle, which had the same colorings as the ribbon, helped dehumanize the enemy). Attempts to wear the stripe on May 9, Victory Day, provoked public scandals usually provoked by right-wingers. Commenting on a resolution by parliament, Petro Poroshenko declared that in Ukraine, the St. George Ribbon is not a symbol of World War II; instead, “it is the symbol of aggression of 2014–2017 against Ukraine. Gunmen bedecking themselves with these ribbons are killing our fighters every day, right now.” The law that banned the St. George Ribbon introduced modifications into the administrative offense legislation. Wearing the ribbon (except for special cases listed in the text of the law) was punished with a fine; in the case of repeat offenses, the fine was doubled and there was the possibility of a fifteen-day jail sentence.

Memory warriors presented the Ukrainian memorial laws as the embodiment of their desire to emulate “European,” or, to be specific, “Eastern European” practices. However, such an imitation is problematic because Ukraine, unlike its models, has weak traditions of pluralism, democracy, and civil society. The story of their adoption is telling in itself. The memorial laws that formed part of the package of dictatorship laws in the winter of 2014 were adopted by Yanukovych supporters in the same fashion as those enacted in April 2015 by Yanukovych’s opponents.

The political culture in Ukraine presupposes that any law that regulates the understanding and representation of the past inevitably leads to the bureaucracy’s dominance and to a victory (usually temporary) of one historical narrative over those held by other social groups; the recent experience of decommunization corroborates this somewhat anecdotally.

In May 2017, for instance, the Halyts’ky district court in the city of Lviv accused a student from the local university of the crime of communist propagandizing. The court based its prosecution on the fact that the defendant published quotations from Lenin’s works on Facebook. The local prosecutor’s office requested a two and half years prison sentence, but since the defendant wholeheartedly admitted guilt, the sentence was “mild”—one year of probation. Curiously, the court ruled that the material evidence in the case (for example, a copy of Marx’s _Das Kapital_), which was recognized as the corpus delicti, be destroyed. In October 2019, the district court in Kryvyi Rih sentenced a local jobless person to one year in prison for wearing a t-shirt with the emblem of the USSR in public. The garment was considered to be propagating a symbol of the communist regime (the defendant put on an old t-shirt to perform his temporary job washing windows at the local shopping mall). The man pleaded guilty, and the court decided to change the sentence to one year of probation. The case was registered by the court under the following titles: “Criminal cases; Crimes against peace, security of humankind and the international legal order; and Propaganda of war.”

The fact that the official name of the court is Dzerzhinsky District Court adds

---


227 The district and the court bear the name of Felix Dzerzhinski, the founder of the Soviet secret police and definitely the person whose name is forbidden in public space. Using this name in the title of the court itself can be considered as a propagation of communist symbols.
special charm to this story. In November 2020, a pensioner from Kherson oblast was about to be sentenced to five years imprisonment for posting pictures and postcards with Soviet symbols as well as portraits of Soviet officials on her personal page on the social network Odnoklassniki (Classmates). Needless to say, she pleaded guilty, confessed, and, was sentenced to one year of probation. According to the General Prosecutor’s Office, in 2015–2019 the police opened 119 cases under art. 436-1; thirteen people were summoned to the courts.

The internal incoherence of most of the laws we examined is obvious: at their core, they are destined to overcome the burdensome legacy of the communist regime, or, to put it in a broader context, the Soviet heritage. The texts of these laws always contain a statement about the authors’ aim to achieve consensus and harmony in society. However, the methods used to elaborate, promote, and adopt these laws, their wording, and the manner of their implementation are reminiscent of the very cultural patterns they are intended to overcome. The anticommunist iconoclasm is reminiscent of the ecstatic destruction of imperial monuments by the Bolsheviks, and the decommunization of topography is nothing but the flip side of its communization. Moreover, decommunization politics did not accomplish its major objective: the ideological homogenization of society. According to the most recent opinion poll conducted by the Demokratychni Initiatyvy foundation, the dividing lines between those who supported decommunization and the opponents of this politics remained in place, and regional divisions did not change. Some 32 percent of Ukrainians expressed a positive attitude toward the ban on communist symbols and 30 percent affirmed the renaming of cities and streets, while 34 percent held negative attitudes toward the ban, and 44 percent were negative about renaming. The West provided the highest share of those who supported the ban: 45.3 percent (24.3 were against),

228 Vyrok imenem Ukrainy, October 11, 2018, http://reyestr.court.gov.ua/Review/85088106. After seven years of decommunization the court still bears the name of Felix Dzerzhynsky—the chief of the Bolsheviks’ secret police and one of the main symbolic figures of the communist regime.
231 As we have already seen, the package of memorial laws was submitted to the respective committees of the parliament without any preliminary discussion; it was registered and scheduled for the plenary meeting in just one week and was “discussed” and adopted by the MPs in only 40 minutes.
and those in support of renaming: 43.6 percent (with 30.3 percent against). Central Ukraine retained its status as the region of ambivalence. Here, 32.7 percent of respondents supported the ban, while 31.6 percent did not approve it, and 35.8 percent were either indifferent or did not have any attitude toward the issue. Interestingly enough, the share of the opponents of renaming here was quite high—42.2 percent, while the proportion of the proponents amounted to 28.5 percent. Not surprisingly, the highest group of opponents of the ban and renaming was observed in the south: 41.5 and 56.8 percent, respectively, and in the east: 44.2 and 51.9 percent.232