

**Nationalism and Collective Memory Politics:
Case Studies of Poland and Ukraine**

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of International Relations

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of Master of International Relations

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Vienna, Austria
2021

Word Count: 9925

Abstract

Memory politics today play an important role in international relations. Interpretation and manipulation of controversial events of the past is seen as a simple way of gaining support and projecting power on international stage by national leaders all over the world. In Europe, especially Eastern Europe, the historical period of Second World War and surrounding developments, as well as the image of its participants, remains a cornerstone of national memory. In my thesis I assess the case studies of national memory politics in Poland and Ukraine, centered around most major Polish-Ukrainian clash on the lands of Volyn region in current day north-western Ukraine. I examine the ethnic-symbolical role of this tragic chapter in the history of both nations for Poles and Ukrainians and how memory of Volyn Tragedy was manipulated by contemporary political leadership in Warsaw and Kiev. My argument is structured in the following way. First, I introduce my research question, the theoretical basis of my argument and the case studies that I will assess. My first chapter than is a discussion of main theoretical concepts of nationalism, i.e. the basis of my argument, namely the overview of the concepts of nation and nationalism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of nationhood, Oliver Zimmer's ideas on minorities and nationalism, and Johan Herder's theory of language as a basis of nation. In my second chapter I assess the place of Volyn Tragedy in Polish national memory and Warsaw's contemporary memory politics, also through comparison of historical cases of Volyn in 1942-1943 and Bosnia of 1990s. My third chapter is a discussion of collective memory of Poles and Ukrainians from the historical perspective (both in a wider scope and in relation to Volyn events) and significance of Volyn tragedy for contemporary relations between Kiev and Warsaw. Here I assess the positions and actions of Polish and Ukrainian political leadership from 2014 up to present day.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Andrew X. Li for his valuable guidance and feedback throughout the writing process, who was always there for any necessary help to me, despite the hard conditions.

I would also like to thank Professor Erin K. Jenne, who, despite not being my supervisor, has given some very important and detailed suggestions on the literature that guided me through my work and the general structure of how to proceed with my argument.

Apart from that, I would like to thank all other professors and staff with whom I had pleasure working with throughout this whole extraordinary academic year 2020-2021, who had done everything to make my MA studies a truly valuable experience despite the unprecedented global crisis conditions.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and coach who were always there to support me throughout this highly challenging academic year.

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Introduction

The research question of my thesis is to what extent the collective memory of Poles and Ukrainians in relation to tragic events in Volyn of 1942-1943 has been abused by contemporary political elites of two states? Through answering this question I aim to examine the specific ways how collective memory of nations is manipulated in contemporary geopolitics, how it influences the international relations in general (through the example of Polish-Ukrainian relations) and what would be the possible ways to overcome negative effects of such practices. In order to answer my research question, I should first introduce the theoretical background that will lead me through my argument regarding case study examples. I will base my argument upon the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, starting from introducing the main theoretical concepts of nation and nationalism and applying them upon interwar Poland and its handling of national minorities, among whom Ukrainians were the largest group alongside Belorussians. First, however, I would like to give an overview on the cases of two states that I have chosen and the main point of conflict.

Political relations between two neighboring Eastern European states, Poland and Ukraine, in 2010s, has went at the background of nationalistic tendencies in both countries. While the context in Ukraine involved mainly the traditionally more conservative and nation-centered Western Ukraine, with difficult history of long-standing militant movement of Ukrainian Insurgency Army in current-day Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, commonly known as Galychyna, and Volyn regions, in Polish case the nationalistic uprising and popularity of contemporary political nationalism in general involves the whole-state level. My hypothesis is that the political leadership in both countries have continuously used the nationalist sentiment in increasing their electoral support.

The main point of clash between Poland and Ukraine in this question remains the collective memory and different interpretation of events that happened some 80 years ago in current-day Ukrainian region (oblast') of Volyn or Volynnia as its known in Poland. Volyn is a place where the most violent confrontation between two main nationalistic forces of two sides, Ukrainian Insurgency Army (UPA) and Krajowa Army (KA), took place in the Second World War context of early 1940s. Events that became known as Volyn Tragedy or Volyn Massacre in Polish interpretation, refer to alleged mass purposeful killings of Polish civilian population, that was part of large Polish minority back then, by UPA, and the retaliation that followed from the Krajowa Army. Official positions of Kiev and Warsaw on one of the key events of Second World War for both states, formulated by the national memory institutes, is directly opposite. Polish Institute of National Remembrance states that the events in Volyn were direct and purposeful mass killing of unarmed civilians by Ukrainian nationalists and local SS units with the aim of "cleansing" the lands of Volynnia from ethnic Polish population, thus accounting to a war crime and act of genocide. Alternatively, the position of Ukrainian Institute of National Memory is that no such purposed ethnic cleansing took place despite both sides committing crimes against Ukrainian and Polish civilian population in Volyn.

While the process of coming in terms with historical truth is itself long and complex, what interests me is how the memory of Volyn events is abused and strategically deployed by the political leadership in both countries, specifically referring to the 2014-2019 period of Petro Poroshenko's presidential term in Ukraine and Andrzej Duda's first presidential term in Poland. Moreover, memory of Volyn events has also been played upon by Moscow after 2014, with the aim of intensifying

dispute between Kiev and Warsaw, both rogue states to Russian Federation. To understand better how and why two forms of nationalism in Eastern Europe, Polish and Ukrainian, have come to the clash, as well as the historical origins of dispute between two nations, it is important to get familiar with the theoretical concepts of nation and nationalism in Europe, as theorized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oliver Zimmer and Johan Herder.

Chapter I. Theory of Nationalism

1.1. Theoretical concepts of nation and nationalism. Overview

Terms “nation” and “nationalism” as the derivative from the first have ancient and early modern roots in political philosophy studies. “Nation” derives from Latin *natio*, meaning the place of origin. During Early Modern times, the meaning of the term was taken further and explained sovereignty through identification of people entitled to hold highest authority within a specific polity¹. However, the word “nation” still revoked the meaning of belonging to the ancestral territory in public perception. The term became highly associated with patriotism and thus acquired religious and emotion-based meanings to it, explaining the bond between people and their homeland through the religious allegory of body and “holy spirit” in early European society, also serving as a barrier or “frontier” against the outsiders. Later on, the term “nation” was theorized and expanded by European scholars in such ways that “people” should not be necessarily attributed to the physical territory, directly hinting at the Jews, who for thousands of years lacked, or were deprived of their territory of nation-state, yet retained the collective bounds of common religious practices, cultural values and most importantly collective memory. The example of Jewish nation is also highly applicable to Ukrainians living centuries under the foreign occupational rule of Polish-Lithuanian kingdom and Russian Empire, as well as the interwar Poland of 1918-1939 that I will discuss further. It was the merge of classic Greek and Roman philosophy on resisting imperial authority that has led to the assumption that nations that lacked state nevertheless have a right to constitute their own polities². The early modern definition of nationhood thus implied that the

¹John Breuilly, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38

² Ibid

legitimate authority is made out of popular mandate, or “people’s will” in other words, rather than a ruler or the elite. Furthermore, the authority should come only from within the nation itself, and not imposed from outside forces. This assumption gradually leads to the theoretical concept of nationhood, that French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau has came up with in latter 18th century.

1.2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Social Contract and Poland*

As touched upon previously, the concept of nationhood was only given concrete theoretical meaning in the field of political philosophy by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century. Under Rousseau’s theory of political legitimacy, outlined in the *Social Contract* of 1762, the concept of nation was given a clear definition of “people constituted by individuals who, deliberating without distinction of birth, religion, or wealth, voluntarily establish their own governing authority”³. The only bond among members of such community than is the common agreement on the authority that they have themselves created. Common history, culture or religion under such assumptions than is only supplementary to the legitimacy, but are not the source of it as such. Members of nation, under Rousseau’s approach, than naturally have to follow the fair procedures of the authority that they have created, which is close to the modern concept of the authority of law in democratic states. Rousseau than argues that the main functional principle of the nation becomes mutual respect to the power of choice of individuals constituting nation. In other words, no obligatory application of single religion, social identification or physical attachment to specific territory is necessary. Moreover, according to Rousseau any group of people who express capability and desire of constituting a nation have a moral right to do so

³ Ibid, 39.

regardless of their size, strength, religion, culture and other attributive characteristics and concrete factors. Thus, Rousseau's approach in defining the concept of nationhood is revolutionary in a sense that the geographical factors and power capabilities are not given the central role in defining nation.

It must be said that Rousseau's theory has given new meanings of legitimacy to the people living under hegemonic oppression in Europe, such as Ukrainians and Belorussians in *Recz Pospolita* and than Poland. Rousseau's claims have critically challenged previously dominating concepts of nation, particularly one of John Locke of late 17th century. Locke has strongly tied the concept of nation to the specific territory and argued that the people who use land in "rational and industrious" manner have supreme right upon it⁴. In other words, Locke placed a strong emphasis on importance of civilizational progress above equal rights of people on nationhood. Locke's argument was effectively used by hegemony advocates in support of further oppression of minorities under the rhetoric of civilizational/technological supremacy. These strictly realist claims were rejected by Rousseau who believed that any group of people who could decide between themselves to constitute a nation have equal rights for nationhood, independence and territory, regardless of their military strength, technological supremacy, economic superiority or any other factors of material or cultural power. Moreover, he believed that if states and rulers continued to follow the "principle of the strongest", the oppressed will continue to struggle and challenge the dominating, as well as the dominating won't feel safe with their dominance. Understanding, however, that his principles may be hard to apply to realities of oppressed nations under the rule of Great Powers in 18th century context, Rousseau acknowledged that in such cases

⁴ Ibid, 39-40

embracing defensive, exclusionary forms of nationhood and nation-building is justified. That said, I would like to focus reader's attention here specifically on Rousseau's *Poland* work of 1772.

Rousseau has continuously supported the efforts of Poles to carve out national characteristics of Polish nation in opposition to the imperial authority. Rousseau believed that the way for Poles back in late 18th century was in embracing education and rituals in cultivating strong national identity under the context of imperial oppression. Rousseau indeed acknowledged that this process may lead to some bad decisions being made under forcefully drawing barriers between Poles and other nations, however seeing them as secondary on the path to the target, thus unintentionally providing justification for the rise of ethnic nationalism, that Rousseau, nonetheless, has never intended to promote.

Rousseau saw some good-intended reasons in constructing Polish national characteristics, that would than be approached with belief in their "naturalness", being one of the basic principles of ethnic nationalism. In my opinion, Rousseau's shortcoming with conceptualizing Polish nationhood here was the fact that he saw these processes as a good defensive strategy for the emergence of than-oppressed Polish nation, perhaps never imagining that it would backfire later in 20th century when an oppressed turns into a hegemon. Moreover, Poles at the time lacked the capacities, and most probably the desire for reforming in accordance with Rousseau's principles, instead embracing the institution of centralized monarchy and cultural, linguistic and religious hegemony over the future national minorities. In other words, Poles went on path of ethnocentrism and dictatorial practices, rather than political and administrative reformation as suggested by Rousseau.

1.3. Oliver Zimmer. *Nationalism in Europe 1918-1945*

Oliver Zimmer in *Nationalism in Europe 1918-1945* argues that the large national minorities in hegemonic states of interwar Europe have had to subscribe to a specific type of nationalism that largely disregarded minorities, and in some cases, as was in Poland, saw them as a threat to the cultural homogeneity of a nation state⁵. After World War I, the successor state of Poland was envisioned by the dominant nation, the Poles, as an exclusively-defined state of Polish nation, in other words as a mono-ethnic and mono-cultural state. The problem that has inevitably and rapidly arisen was the fact that Poland by 1920s was as state comprising of large number of various minorities, such as the already mentioned Ukrainians and Belorussians as well as Jews, Germans and Lithuanians. Nonetheless, the first Constitution of post-WWI Poland was highly centrist and hegemonic in a sense that it essentially implied the forced assimilation of national minorities, concerning first of all Germans who were seen as hostile elements for Polish state after First World War, but Ukrainians and Belorussians as well, given the collective memory of these nations stemming from centuries of occupational rule under Polish-Lithuanian kingdom of *Recz Pospolita*. These two minority groups, constituting majority in some places in the east of interwar Poland, had fallen under severe restrictions according to their ethnicity, religion and language.

Interwar Poland, as an essential successor of once the most powerful monarchy of eastern Europe, and a strongly defined Catholic state, resorted back to the practices of severe restrictions in religious affairs and practices of Eastern Orthodox Church followers, especially in regards to Ukrainians, revoking painful memories of forced Catholicization in Western Ukraine for several hundred years under *Recz*

⁵ Ibid, 414

Pospolita's rule. Striving to preserve a mono-cultural and mono-linguistic look of the re-instituted Polish state, severe restrictions were applied upon the use of Ukrainian language in interwar Poland, essentially pushing it out from as many fields of public life as possible. Ukrainian language, in official referrals, was even turned to "Ruthenian". Furthermore, free movement ban was applied upon the autochthonous inhabitants of Eastern Borderlands, mainly Ukrainians and Belorussians, that has led to further marginalization of these minority groups in Second Polish Republic of 1918-1939. Unsurprisingly, such policies of interwar Poland have eventually led to the open armed resistance by Ukrainian nationalists in Volyn and Galychyna, reaching the climax during Second World War, that I will assess later.

1.4. Johann Gottfried Herder. Language and nationalism

Remembering that the whole national idea of Second Polish Republic centered around the notion of establishing mono-ethnic and even more noteworthy monolingual Polish state, it is worthwhile to assess renewed Polish statehood in 1918-1939 through the prism of another classic theory of nationalism that was brought up by German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder in late 18th century. Herder's theory was heavily influenced by the previously discussed Rousseau's ideas on nationalism, especially in relation to the defensive nation-building in reaction to the imperial oppression during 18th century. For instance, Herder, very much like Rousseau, agreed that the imperial powers in Europe of that time, as well as rivalry between them, have to a large extent threatened the entire existence of smaller nations, especially stateless ones, as were the case with Poles, Ukrainians and Belorussians. Herder also shared Rousseau's vision regarding the fallacy of claims that European imperial powers constituted some kind of superior authority

and civilization and thus had more rights for statehood and an excuse to rule over stateless nations. However, with that stated, Herder's theory had some fundamental differences from Rousseau and also Kant. Herder believed that language was the most important constituency and statehood-deriving basis for nations, from which they draw legitimacy, contrary to Rousseau's focus on commonly agreed acts, or simply social consensus. In other words, according to Herder, nation bonded by a common language draws its legitimating authority from nature and historical proceedings.

Essentially, Rousseau and Herder challenge the same assumption of Great Powers imperial authority from different perspectives. Herder strongly believed that the communal diversity of languages in Europe and elsewhere was a main factor that facilitated social evolution of humanity, as the most easily grasped, distinctive, morally, spiritually and humanly enhancing characteristic of nation.⁶ According to this assumption, each different nation that is bonded together with a common language, progresses in its own way, and all of these ways have a right to exist. Thus, no one is superior just because they inherit the language that is spoken in a more powerful state. However, while having this "all-welcoming" and "all-powerful and equal" attitudes towards nations tied by different languages, Herder nevertheless assigned some kind of moral advantage to vernacular languages as ones that are "closer to nature and God" in opposition to "dead" or poorly understood languages, such as Latin for instance that by that time already was mostly spoken by Catholic priests and professionally used by doctors and pharmacists regardless of their national belonging.

6 Ibid, 42

It is easily grasped that Johann Herder's theory is heavily culture-centered, with few mentions of national politics, which nevertheless does not diminish its novelty for academic discussion of the notions of nation, nationhood and nationalism. Herder was the first to introduce the concept that the identity of nation is founded primarily upon linguistic characteristics or simply the spoken language, which can either become the core derivative for political authority or basis of nation's resistance against oppressive imperial authority. Indeed, Herder has come up with highly ambiguous concept of relations between language communities and political governance as such. From another side, although not as sort of any demeaning of the theory itself, Herder's ideas, especially in the modern context, could be used as a convenient basis for populist and nationalist manipulation, both in expansive multiculturalist debate and exclusionary ethnic nationalism. That said, Herder himself has never envisioned advocacy for the form of statehood that is solely defined by sharp mono-linguistic boundaries as a primary condition for the progress of state, but simply highlighting the importance of multicultural tolerance. In fact, Herder very well foresaw the capacity for abuse of his theory by contemporary and upcoming political elites in Europe in the background of growing literacy rates and ever increasing capacity of social interactions among communities.

Vital to note also that Herder, similarly to Rousseau, placed more emphasis on common identity potential, that in his understanding is based upon language primarily, for weaker nations resistance against more powerful oppressors and cultural assimilation, than for hegemonic nations. Herder foresaw that the practice of forced cultural/linguistic assimilation of smaller nations, very much apparent in the context of imperial rule of 18th-19th centuries in Europe, would eventually backfire and

provoke staunch resistance from the oppressed communities. Solidifying national culture for instance helped Poles to achieve successful anti-imperial resistance in 19th century, although backfiring later during 1930s and 1940s. In such way, language is essentially seen by Herder as a weapon on one level with physical firearms. This idea is enshrined in Herder's later work, "Idea for the First Patriotic Institute for the Common Spirit of Germany", of 1787, where Herder characterizes language as a soft power tool of projecting influence and assimilation, as well as a resistance weapon of the oppressed.

In the context of late 18th century, the case of France and French language inevitably comes to mind, exerting what Herder called a "secret preponderance over other languages and cultures"⁷. Back then, knowing and speaking French, as well as adapting French culture, was a matter of prestige for the high society spanning from Germany to Russian Empire. The influence of French language became an ultimate example of very first major cultural expansion in Europe without a single shot fired. Rapid soft expansion of French language and culture, however, tempted Paris to undertake the same in geopolitical and military dimensions, resulting in the most deadly international conflict up to date and eventual destruction of empire and monarchy, weakening the French state for the next hundred years to come. In the same work, Herder embraces the role of German language and culture in resisting French occupational authority and other imperial aspirations to the German land, itself heavily feudalized at the time. Herder suggested that different German states should unify under a single culture and language policy, to be done through the formation of so-called Patriotic Institute, in the time of wider European "contest of

7 Ibid

people for mental and artistic forces with each other”⁸. In the debate on German cultural unification, Herder insisted that “each ‘must advance with those others; in our time one can no longer be a barbarian; as a barbarian one gets cheated, trodden upon, despised, abused.’ No contemporary people could opt out of this global competition ‘even if it wanted to’”⁹. In other words the feudalism and cultural fracturing were a highly destructive path for Germans to follow in the context of growing power of imperial formations around German lands and territorial appetites of neighbors deriving from them. Thus, according to Herder unifying under one common cultural heritage was an only way for building an effective defense. Indeed, the power of statehood by the start of 19th century was defined by the merge of cultural might, strong economy and solid military capabilities.

For Herder, solid military defensive capabilities were seen as a condition for the survival of culture, although he never placed an emphasis on strong army being the core of national statehood or authority above others. Yet, in the lack of military defense he saw the reason of many nations and ethnic groups failing to achieve statehood or effectively resist imperial expansionism. Indeed, for many Eastern Slavs, among them Poles, Ukrainians and Belorussians, for a long time this was the case. “The historically ‘submissive and obedient’ conduct of non-Russian Slavs had long facilitated their oppression by the neighboring empires. The time had now come, he told them, to ‘awaken from your long and heavy slumber’ and ‘be freed from your enslaving chains’. Shedding their aversion to ‘permanent military establishments’, the Slavs should seek to realize their historical destiny: to ‘use as their own’ the vast territories now dominated by Habsburg Germans and Ottoman Turks.”¹⁰ This

8 Ibid, 43

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

argument by Herder was and is still used by the nationalist thinkers in justification of aggressive achievement strategy for certain national aims in spite of embracing peaceful coexistence with neighbors. This assumption leads me to Herder's differentiation between primitive and modern motives for language divisions among communities. Even among those ones that could peacefully co-exist under other conditions.

The primitive motive argumentation is such that fighting enemies as a "sacrifice to the shades of their fathers" is a main aim, guided by "family feeling" emotions¹¹. According to Herder, this primitive emotional differentiation of communities is based upon three main simple assumptions. First one depicts "others" in a negative manner, thus creating an image of enemy. It is centered around the slogans *Those not with us are beneath us* and *Foreigners are worse than us*. Second naturalizes enemies outlined in the first assumption: *Whoever is not with me is against me*, where me is easily modified into us under communal conditions. Third assumption erects enemy groups division and alienation, conveniently explained by Herder in relation to his notion of language being the most important factor for national emergence as "no familial customs, no remembrance of a single origin, and least of all language [should be held in common]. ... Language could not possibly, therefore, remain of one kind. And so the same familial feeling that had formed a single language, when it became national hatred, often created ... complete difference in language"¹². Herder sees these primitive assumptions as deriving from people's weakness, to be overcome throughout social progress. Paradox here is that while Herder condemned war, expansionism and oppression, commonly exercised by the

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid, 44

Great Powers, driven by those same primitive barbaric impulses, he did not provide weaker nations with the different means of defense.

Apart from Rousseau, another area where Herder essentially failed to assign meanings, are outlining moral and legal boundaries for exercising nationalism and achieving national statehood. In my opinion while Rousseau rightfully embraced the importance of international law and institutions in providing adequate constraints in exercising national statehood, Herder in the same time has never mentioned the importance of appropriate “rules of the game” for international relations or any constraints for nations and states whatsoever. Herder’s assumption that history would essentially “whiten up” present injustices is rather short-handed, and potentially dangerous. It seems that here Herder unintentionally goes beyond his original notion of the importance of language for nationhood, and becomes an unsophisticated advocate for anarchy, adding a good share of speculation to his theory. Than also, the whole idea of the single national language is highly controversial, especially under modern conditions that Herder simply couldn’t envision, opening up a separate field for speculation and manipulation. Even Germany that Herder refers to in the context of late 18th-19th centuries was a highly multilingual state, varying from Dutch speaking area to Scandinavian and the derivative of modern German. In fact, as touched upon previously, one of the main errors of Poland in 1918-1939 was the strive to achieve and preserve exclusively Polish-speaking state, disregarding large German, Ukrainian and Belorussian-speaking areas, not mentioning large and heavily dispersed Hebrew-speaking Jewish community. From another side, the same heavily language-centered form of Ukrainian nationalism in Western Ukraine during 1930s-1950s has alienated many

non-native Ukrainian speakers in the region and elsewhere in Ukraine who would potentially join the resistance otherwise, eventually leading to its destruction by the Soviet state in late 1950s and continuously sparking new internal conflicts after the re-institution of Ukrainian independence in 1991. To sum up discussion on Herder's theory shortcomings, placing the source of political legitimacy upon inherent identities such as language and native culture instead of the decisions of community is problematic to say at least when applied to the real life context.

Chapter II. Memory Politics. Poland

2.1. Volyn Tragedy (Volhynia Massacre) as a cornerstone of Polish national memory

Events that took place in Volyn in 1943 are known as the Volhynia Massacre in Poland and are the cornerstone of Polish national memory as perhaps the most tragic chapter of the history of Poland and Polish people in 20th century, alongside the German occupation and crimes against civilians committed by Third Reich. The governmental Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw is the primary state institution responsible for collecting historical materials, witness accounts and investigating the past of Polish state. Volhynia Massacre thus is one of the main points of interest for National Remembrance Institute, with a specialized site dedicated to this specific event in Polish history set up. The volhyniamassacre.eu is an open source that, apart from Polish, also has English and, crucially, Ukrainian language version. Therefore, in such manner the official Warsaw's stance on events that happened in neighboring state is usefully projected and popularized towards a wide international auditorium, including the Ukrainian-speaking one. The Volhynia Massacre source of the Institute provides the Polish historical account on the course of events and details of what happened in Volyn, accounts of eye-witnesses of alleged war crimes, introduce the criminal investigations that were undertaken and are currently conducted by the international and Polish investigators into the matter and even contain the photo gallery of pre-war life of Poles in Volyn and the tragic results of alleged massacre that took place against Polish civilians. What is crucial to pay attention towards Polish official source on the historical events that took place in Volyn during Second World War is the straightforward, one-sided portrayal of them, which is easily glimpsed from the historical section introduction on what were the

Volhynian Massacre events according to Warsaw's position. "The Volhynian massacres were anti-Polish genocidal ethnic cleansings conducted by Ukrainian nationalists. The massacres took place within Poland's borders as of the outbreak of WWII, and not only in Volhynia, but also in other areas with a mixed Polish-Ukrainian population, especially the Lvov, Tarnopol, and Stanisławów voivodeships (that is, in Eastern Galicia), as well as in some voivodeships bordering on Volhynia. Their documents show that the planned extermination of the Polish population was called an "anti-Polish operation"¹³.

Even a reader, unsophisticated with issues of Ukrainian-Polish relations history, can easily grasp the one-sided, condemning narrative of the historical accounts provided here by the Institute of National Remembrance on such sensitive matter in the history of Second World War and Ukraine and Poland in general, which I would later compare with the official Ukrainian position on the matter. In the part on chronology of the events, the source explains in detail the alleged mass killings of Polish civilians by the UPA fighters, as part of what is said to be an ethnic cleansing under carefully-planned national extermination and expel campaign against Poles in Western Ukraine (Galychyna and Volyn lands). While the source provides in detail the Polish version on chronology of events that took place in 1942-1943, concerning war crimes against Polish civilian population, in the same time it fails to not only provide a detailed account, but even mention the numerous war crimes that were in the same time conducted against the Ukrainian civilian population by the Krajowa Armia in Polish-occupied Ukrainian lands of Volyn during this most major clash between Polish and Ukrainian nationalists in history of two nations, thus applying the

13 N.d., "What Were the Volhynian Massacres? - History -.", Volhyniamassacre.Eu, <https://volhyniamassacre.eu/zw2/history/173,What-were-the-Volhynian-Massacres.html>

blame for atrocities exclusively upon Ukrainian side. Moreover, in the latter section on the German Occupation period, source authors state that Ukrainian nationalists have actively collaborated with Germans in Volyn in order to further exterminate the local Polish and Jewish populations, a narrative that is also shared and actively projected by the Russian state propaganda, and is widely contested by official Kiev, Ukrainian and independent historians.

Here is just some of the most striking claims made on the relationship not only between the UPA nationalists and Third Reich commanders, but also between Ukrainian civilian population and German occupiers, by the source authors: “Many Ukrainians hoped that the Third Reich would help create a Ukrainian state. In the summer of 1941 Ukrainian inhabitants of many localities enthusiastically welcomed the arriving German detachments. Ukrainians erected arches to welcome the Germans and they put up Ukrainian flags. The occupier waged terror throughout Volhynia, which some Ukrainians greeted with dismay. The Ukrainian nationalists from the OUN, however, chose to support the occupier. The Germans conscripted approx. 5,000 volunteers into the newly-created Ukrainian auxiliary police. At the very beginning of the occupation the Germans executed several hundred representatives of the Polish and Jewish intelligentsia on the basis of lists drafted by the OUN.”¹⁴ Apart from the claims that Ukrainian nationalists have most actively collaborated with German forces and that many Ukrainian civilians have cheerfully greeted the occupation, source authors, seemingly striving to reveal historical truths, make outward claims that the Ukrainian nationalists naturally striven to “murder as many Poles as possible”, systematically insisting on innocence and victim-hood of Polish side, without a single mention of crimes committed by the Krajowa Army. Such

¹⁴ Ibid

deliberately one-sided narrative provided by the governmental institution, claiming of studying and coming in terms with national past, leads to a conclusion that the real aim of it is not revealing truth on dark pages of national history, but rather solidifying the ethno-symbolic forces of collective memory of Polish nation, with clear political goals of Warsaw's leadership. The interpretation of Volyn events in the form of staunch condemnation of opposing side and creation of victim's image that is not based upon pure, unsophisticated historical factual foundation, reminds me of the work by Stuart J. Kaufman on the symbolic politics of ethnic war, and specifically the example of Serbian-Croatian and Serbian-Bosnian conflicts during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, with many important similarities with Ukrainian-Polish conflict in Volyn and wider Western Ukraine.

2.2. Volyn and Bosnia. Similarities and implications

Western Ukraine, and Volyn in particular, of the pre- and Second World War era, is easily comparable to Bosnia of 1990s, in regards to highly multi-ethnic character of both at the mentioned timelines. Volyn region prior and during the 1942-1943 Polish-Ukrainian clash, though Ukrainian-dominated, was a region widely populated by different ethnicities, main of whom were Ukrainians, Poles and Jews, accordingly presenting a diverse religious portrait of Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Judaists. Similarly, Bosnia at the time of disintegration of Yugoslavia was mainly populated by Muslim Bosniaks, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. "Bosnia is rural, isolated, and full of suspicions and hatreds to a degree that the sophisticated Croats of Zagreb could barely imagine.... Bosnia did have one sophisticated urban center, however; Sarajevo, where Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Jews had traditionally lived together in reasonable harmony. But the villages all around were full of savage

hatreds, leavened by poverty and alcoholism. The fact that the most horrifying violence—during both World War II and the 1990s—occurred in Bosnia was no accident.”¹⁵

Volyn at the time was similar. Predominantly rural, with very few major cities, located on the outskirts of Polish controlled territory. However, in the same time, Volyn was a crucial region for Ukrainian national strive of securing the future independent Ukrainian state, free of Soviet (Russian), Polish and German influence. For Poles on the contrary, Volhynia is seen as part of wider ethnic Polish territory that should be preserved and secured from losing its “original character”. Moreover, given that a large swath of Polish territory, including Warsaw, by 1942 had already fallen under the German occupation, the stakes of losing Volyn to Ukrainian nationalists were too high. Similarly, safe-guarding ethnic Serbian territory in Bosnia after the fall of Yugoslavia was the main strategic interest of Belgrade at the time. However, another component that is important to assess here is the ethno-symbolic meaning of territories for former hegemon in the face of Serbia in Balkans and for the formerly oppressed nation in the face of Ukrainians in Volyn.

For Serbs, the memories of resistance towards an Ottoman Empire in Middle Ages, as well as horrors of crimes committed by Croatian Ustasha Nazis during Second World War came back to life during disintegration of Yugoslavia. Therefore, the Bosnian Muslims represented the neo-Ottomans while Croats represented the neo-Ustasha in the public perception of Serbs through the manipulation of then-president Slobodan Milosevic. In the case of Volyn, Ukrainian UPA nationalists were represented as German Nazi collaborators, that resonated effectively with Polish

¹⁵ Kaufman, Stuart J. 2017. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 3, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501702006>.

society following the German attack and occupation of Poland in 1939. However, it may be argued that there was more ethnic symbolic meaning of Volyn for Ukrainians than Poles. Western and Central Ukraine was living under foreign occupation of Polish-Lithuanian kingdom of *Recz Pospolita* for many centuries, while the eastern and parts of southern part were occupied by the Russian Empire for hundreds of years. Thus, it was no surprise that the UPA has outlined Poles and Soviet Russians, representing the old *Recz Pospolita* and Russian Empire occupiers, as the main enemies of Ukrainian nation by the start of Second World War, later joined by Nazi Germans as well. Just like Milosevic denounced Croats as descendants of Second World War-era pro-fascist Ustashas, so did the OUN-UPA commandment of Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevich in relation to Poles.

One similarity between Serbian and Ukrainian nationalist cause is also the question of religion. Western Ukraine specifically has suffered centuries of forced catholicization under Polish rule, while Serbs have also payed a big price for preserving Orthodox faith under Ottoman rule and during Second World War repressions widely conducted by the Catholic Croats. Moreover, while Ukrainians in Volyn have faced a staunch enemy in the face of ruthless Polish-chauvinist *Krajowa Army* that striven to carve out and preserve the independent Polish state that would have Western Ukrainian territories incorporated in it, so did the Serbs in Bosnia in the face of aggressive Croatian chauvinism under the leadership of Franjo Tudjman and violently Islamist Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic. Thus, contrary to the official position of Warsaw, both sides were looking for a conflict that was inevitable, just as was the case in Bosnia, which is evident also through the archives of National Memory Institute of Ukraine that I will reveal further. Going back

to comparing examples of Bosnia and Volyn, it is thus important to take into account not only the role of aggressive leadership of warring sides, be it Milosevic in Serbia, Tudjman, Stepan Bandera or the commandment of Krajowa Army, but the historical foundation and symbolism of ethnic violence. In other words, much of attention should be directed towards the bottom-up causes of ethnic conflict, without disregarding of course the role of leaders' manipulation with group identity and collective memory in the times of troubles. Here, close attention should be paid to the notion of ethnic stereotyping and its implications upon national memory in the context of ethnic conflict.

Chapter III. Collective memory of Poles and Ukrainians from the historical perspective and contemporary standing

3.1. National traumas and ethnic stereotyping

The consequences of tragic events in Volyn and their influence upon collective memory of Poles and Ukrainians, as well as the general influence over the contemporary relations between two states are mostly derived from the collective emotional sphere rather than rationality, just like the causes of many ethnic conflicts, including Polish-Ukrainian. That is why understanding of Volyn conflict causes and consequences is impossible without assessment of ethnic stereotyping of both nations, where ethnic stereotype refers to irrational, generalized and emotion-based set of mental schemes representing specific ethnic group. Given the irrational nature of ethnic stereotyping, it nonetheless serves important role of preserving an ethnic culture identity of nation, therefore being a factor of consolidation that bounds specific ethnic group members together and draws its boundaries in relation to others, especially towards rival ethnic groups. These boundaries, despite the emotional origin, may very well be resembled physically, as seen from my case study of ethnic conflict in Volyn. Simply put, Polish and Ukrainian nationalists in Volyn have drawn clear land lines that separated ethnic Ukrainians and Poles from one another, with both Krajowa Army and the UPA naturally striving to expand and preserve these boundaries further. As explained previously, this process has come under justification of the “national Polish” or “national Ukrainian” territory preservation, as well as legitimate resistance against alleged planned, mass ethnic cleansing as claimed by Warsaw.

After the breakdown of Soviet Union, Warsaw's departure from the socialist block and re-institution of independent Ukrainian state that included Volyn region as its

integral part in accordance with the results of Second World War, the old wound in Ukrainian-Polish relations was re-ignited by the political elites of newly independent states that from now on have increasingly manipulated with collective memory traumas of two ethnic groups. First and foremost, this manipulation has increasingly included open falsification of historical events, like the already mentioned claims that the UPA has unilaterally conducted mass genocidal acts against the civilian Poles in Volyn. In analyzing the official claims of Warsaw concerning Volyn Tragedy, it is important to understand the functional structure of given projected ethnic stereotype. Three main components here may be derived: purely emotional component; cognitive component that is referring to the statement of characteristics of particular ethnic group, in our case Ukrainians; and finally the component of forming collective behavior patterns in relation to the given ethnic group. Thus, stating that Ukrainians have conducted an unprovoked, purposeful genocidal crime against peaceful Polish civilian population in Volyn, also in direct collaboration with Third Reich on latter stages, politicians in Warsaw first create a starkly negative emotional relation to the “descendants” of alleged war criminals, and Ukrainian nationalists in general. Secondly, through attributing such characteristics to the events and perpetrators as anti-Polish, genocidal and pro-fascist, the according cognitive component is set up. Combination of two components than forms the collective behavior pattern, especially among Poles who have personal family history of predecessors living or killed in Volyn. Such ethnic stereotypes that are centered around collective memory traumas of nation and are formed and projected on the state level, are increasingly difficult to transform. Main reason for that is a question of simplicity. Psychologically, it is much easier and convenient to maintain simplified and generalized stereotyping

of specific ethnic group than nuance and expansion of knowledge on the events and those accused as perpetrators, which is especially the case for collective level. Once more, as long as such stereotyping serves the interest of ruling elites, it is highly unlikely to change.

Polish stereotyping on the Volyn events is seen as imperial, deriving from the pain of “lost territories” that are still claimed by Polish nationalists as belonging to the Polish state. One should not forget that Poland, unlike Ukraine, is a mono-ethnic state with much smaller number of national minorities compared to its neighbor. Therefore, making it easier to unite large number of people under certain stereotype. In Ukraine, on the contrary, it is more in natural interest of political elites to avoid touching upon and openly manipulating with sensitive questions of the past that is seen differently by people in different ethnic-cultural regions of Ukraine, especially in referral to the events and participants of Second World War. For instance, when we look at the example of Ukrainian Insurgency Army-Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and their leaders Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevich, the relation to these historical figures will be highly different depending on the region. Whereas for inhabitants of Galychyna and Volyn historical regions, OUN-UPA and their leaders are predominantly seen as heroes, for majority of people in southern and especially eastern Ukraine, they aren’t or even openly seen as criminals. However, in Poland, the majority of society, regardless of specific area of origin, would have predominantly positive attitudes towards the Krajowa Army and their commanders, as well as single interpretation of events that happened in Volyn. Another explanation of rather negative Polish stereotyping towards Ukrainians is rooted in the history of

Polish nation and national idea emergence, centered around the traditional notion of “shlyachta”, or community.

Historically, Polish aristocracy were seen as bearers of people’s freedom, with one side of the coin here being that a local ruler, or “schlyachtich” presiding over the “shlyachta”, is not worth much on his own, but simply being the one who realizes the collective will. Thus, the notion of collective will became dominant in Polish national idea¹⁶. It is vital to state that “shlyachtich”, who ruled on Ukrainian territories during the reign of Rzecz Pospolita, naturally had a negative representation among local Ukrainian population, not without ground seen as oppressive and exploiting. It may be also argued that the demonizing and marginalization of “shlyachta” rulers on the occupied Ukrainian lands had also had much contribution to the formation of Ukrainian self-identification and indeed positive self-stereotyping, adding up to the symbolism of fight against Poles during UPA’s Volyn campaign. Thus, both Polish and Ukrainian ethnic stereotyping by the start of Second World War were largely rooted in the centuries of Polish occupational rule over Ukraine during Rzecz Pospolita’s era. While the ethnic hatred and scheming from both sides had essentially the same historical basis, the relational angle was different. For Polish case, as mentioned previously, the approach is imperial, crystallized in the pain of loosing hegemony over the formerly controlled territories that included nearly half of modern-day Ukraine, western Belarus and Lithuania (on the rights of Polish-Lithuanian kingdom where Poland enjoyed the leading role). For Ukrainians, the collective memory and ethnic stereotyping is largely colonial-based and is derived from centuries of oppression and marginalization under Polish rule. Thus, by the time the Volyn events unraveled, two nations have acquired a large set of claims against

16 N.d. Gov.Ua:8080. <http://www.memory.gov.ua:8080/ua/publication/content/1664.htm>

one another. Open violence and war between Poles and Ukrainians was just a matter of time now.

The Volyn Tragedy has left the strongest mark on the collective memory of participant nations and their alienation due to the fact that it was the first full-scale, massive warfare course of events between two sides, despite the long and steadily rise in tensions previously explained, turning into the most tragic page in the history of Polish-Ukrainian relations. The events in Volyn coincided and became part of Ukrainian struggle for independence in 20th century, just as they were part of Polish struggle for future independent state. Relation towards the Krajowa Army and UPA as specific sides of the conflict became the main pillar that shaped the collective memory towards the events. As evident from the materials provided by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance on Volyn events, the atrocities that were committed by Krajowa Army against Ukrainian civilians, allegedly in retaliation against the UPA “genocide”, are turned a blind eye by Warsaw. After Poland’s departure from the socialist block of Soviet Union, actions of Krajowa Army during Volyn and other conflicts from now on were officially represented as such that perfectly fit Polish national interests. As with the Ukrainian case, atrocities and crimes against unarmed civilians committed by the KA fighters before and during the Second World War, were put aside the state-led heroicizing campaign and re-creation of national symbolism after the fall of socialism. Krajowa Army was portrayed as the ultimate liberating force that struggled against two oppressive totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Russia, as well as defenders against Ukrainian nationalists on south-eastern front. Whole-state social consensus, that is still very well apparent in Poland, was such that no discussion should take

place in relation to the dark side of KA's operation, that included tortures of captives, discriminatory killings of civilians, child soldiers use and others. As mentioned previously, contrary to Poland, large part of Ukrainian society outside Western Ukraine still saw UPA as criminal even long time after the breakdown of Soviet Union, with attitudes only starting to improve after 2014. Nonetheless, the 2014-2019 presidential administration of Petro Poroshenko in Ukraine has also turned out to become strongly engaged in manipulating the national memory of Ukrainians, with the heavy emphasis on Second World War period, accordingly the image of Ukrainian Insurgency in Western Ukraine and Volyn events.

3.2. Contemporary memory politics in Poland and Ukraine during 2014-2019. Andrzej Duda (Term I) and Petro Poroshenko

Since 2017, each 11 July is marked as a Day of Genocide Victims Remembrance in Poland, commemorating ethnic Polish civilians allegedly killed by Ukrainian nationalists in Volyn. Vital to note that prior to 2017, the alleged genocide of Poles in Ukraine was never marked on the highest state level. This is partly explained by the fact that the Ukrainian President of that time, Petro Poroshenko, 3 years into office, by that time has started to openly sideline with nationalist-leaning citizens and has actively taken up the radical Ukrainian nationalist rhetoric in public speeches. Moreover, several, though unsuccessful attempts were made in the Ukrainian parliament to grant the Heroes of Ukraine status to Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevich and acknowledge on official level the Ukrainian Insurgency Army as the "independence fighters" and a separate conflict side of Second World War. Needless to say that such moves and open "flirting" with nationalists taken up by President Poroshenko was seen as crossing the red line by Warsaw. Thus, the first presidential administration of Andrzej Duda has responded with the flare up of Polish nationalist

rhetoric through a common practice of manipulating with the people's memory of Volyn Tragedy.

Polish historians and researchers insisted that 11 July specifically was chosen as an annual commemoration date due to the fact that on that specific day in 1943 majority of civil population in 100 ethnic Polish villages in Volyn was allegedly massacred by the UPA fighters, a claim that is widely contested by Ukrainian colleagues who insist that this specific date was by no means a culmination of Volyn conflict, and that it was chosen by Poland out of purely propagandist aims, in support of the idea that the violence that gripped Volyn in 1940s was centered around this one-day act of genocide against Polish civilians. President Duda himself, while visiting Volyn in 2018 together with Petro Poroshenko, made a public statement that 100 thousand Polish civilians were killed in the specific area in Volyn, with only 5 thousand killed Ukrainians, and that "there was no war between Poland and Ukraine, but an ordinary ethnic cleansing..., and only than the Poles responded"¹⁷. Again, these claims and numbers are widely disputed by Ukrainian historians.

Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) of Lviv earlier same year has set up a special investigation research into the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Volyn for 1939-1947 period, headed by the Polish historian of Ukrainian roots, Ihor Halahida¹⁸. UCU researchers state that the atrocities claims made by politicians like Andrzej Duda have no reflection in historical reality of events. The counter-hypothesis is that only the deaths of 8 thousand Ukrainians and up to 25 thousand Volyn Poles may be documented with sufficient evidence, allowing that the atrocities may have been

17 Терещук, Галина. 2018. "Тема Волинської трагедії – легка здобич для політиків." Тема Волинської трагедії – легка здобич для політиків. July 11, 2018. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29357134.html>.

18 Ibid

higher in reality, however, with no sufficient evidence yet provided. Alternatively, the atrocities claims made by Polish side are based solely on verbal accounts of Polish family dynasty that stems from Volyn. Once more, the atrocities committed by the Krajowa Army and other Polish paramilitary forces of that time, are disregarded by the Polish side. The position of Ukrainian researchers into Volyn, as well as the official position of National Memory Institute of Ukraine is such that the events that happened in Volyn should be studied as an episode of wider Polish-Ukrainian war of 1942-1947, specifically in relation to Polish expansionist, neo-imperial aspirations of expropriating and integrating the western Ukrainian territories once again into the Polish state.

The main point how Polish approach on this historical matter differs from Ukrainian than is that the emphasis is strongly made upon one specific event in the course of Polish-Ukrainian conflict, that allegedly took place on 11 July 1943. The focus of Ukrainian historical research into the matter on the contrary is centered around the study of modern nationalism and its applicability upon the wider Polish-Ukrainian conflict. In other words, the debate here is that by the time the second Polish-Ukrainian war of 1939-1947 unraveled, two distinct forms of nationalism, Polish and Ukrainian, were in place, centered around the strive of two nations to form their own independent state. Thus, given the strategic location and symbolic meaning of Volyn for two nations, the conflict was inevitable. In other words, the core of the conflict for two sides, according to Ukrainian version, was lying in the territorial question and therefore the national sovereignty question stemming from it, and not the ethnic hatred against Poles per se, as claimed by Warsaw. Thus, no heroicizing or moralization of armed factions that took active part in the conflict should take place,

as well as no collective blame should be put upon either Ukrainian or Polish nation for what happened.

Without downplaying the fact that indeed many Polish civilians have fallen victims during Polish-Ukrainian war, although not in result of a planned massacre, Ukrainian historians focus attention on the events that preceded the Volyn Tragedy, that are not brought up by the counter-side in Warsaw these days. Some of these acts in Western Ukraine that were committed against local population included mass destruction of orthodox churches by catholic occupational authorities, forced “Polonization” and catholicization of locals, earlier repressions in 1930s and others all adding up to the hatred against Polish authorities in Western Ukraine of that time. Therefore, Ukrainian nationalists saw the proclamation of independent Ukrainian state as the only solution to break free of foreign oppression, while the Polish state-in-exile did not imagine the renewed Polish statehood without Western Ukrainian lands.

Going back to the discussion on contemporary politicians manipulating with memory of tragic events of the past, it is worthwhile remembering the famous “anti-UPA” law passed by the Polish Senate on 1st February 2018, half a year before Duda-Poroshenko’s meeting in Volyn. The Polish Senate, by absolute majority, has passed the law that made major changes to the Institute of National Remembrance and its authority, that has instituted criminal punishment for “refuting crimes committed by Ukrainian nationalists” and for ascribing “Nazi acts to Polish nation”. Effectively, from now on anyone under Polish jurisdiction who would open up debate on crimes against civilians conducted by the Krajowa Army or other Polish paramilitary forces during Second World War and beyond, would face criminal

prosecution. Moreover, the same law has officially characterized “Banderit nationalists” as guilty of genocide of both Polish and Jewish inhabitants in Western Ukraine. Expectedly, both Ukrainian President Poroshenko and the Foreign Ministry have condemned the passing of the law, that was named as “another try of unilateral portray of historical events”¹⁹ that has simply opened up a new chapter in Ukrainian-Polish polemic regarding the past. The “response” from Kiev was rather moderate although still irritating for Warsaw. Later same year, the status of “armed conflict participant” was granted to Ukrainian Insurgency Army and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists through a law signed by Poroshenko, that has put veterans of OUN-UPA on the same level as Red Army and other Second World War participants.

President Petro Poroshenko, from one side claiming that the OUN-UPA leader Stepan Bandera was “a great Ukrainian political leader, that has made a huge deed for national liberation movement”, and refuting Warsaw’s claims concerning Volyn Tragedy, as well as publicly insisting that Polish side has committed crimes against Ukrainian civilians during Second World War period, from another side continuously expressed the need of maintaining good relations with Poland, without looking back at the tragic events of the past. Moreover, Poroshenko has scapegoated Moscow in the question of Polish-Ukrainian relations as the one that allegedly deliberately alienates Kiev and Warsaw against one another, solely based on the fact that Russia was the only state that greeted new “anti-UPA” law, which in all is a rather untruthful claim, given that by all means Warsaw on its own has continuously manipulated with the collective memory of its citizens concerning Volyn Tragedy, supported by Duda’s

19 Свобода, Радіо. 2018. “Порошенко назвав неприйнятним рішення польського парламенту про «бандерівських націоналістів».” Порошенко назвав неприйнятним рішення польського парламенту про «бандерівських націоналістів». February 1, 2018. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/29011234.html>

claims necessarily concerning Volyn, as well as the notion projected by Polish presidential administration that the good relations between Warsaw and Kiev can only be built on the basis of “historical truth” (of course in Polish interpretation). From another side, it is indeed justifiable to say that Moscow, in staunch conflict with Ukraine following annexation of Crimea and unraveling of war in Donbas in 2014, was getting its own advantages from Ukrainian-Polish major historical dispute during Petro Poroshenko’s presidential term, while in the same time Moscow’s relations with Warsaw could not be named friendly either. However, stating that the entire dispute between Kiev and Warsaw was inspired by Russia is too of overstatement in my opinion, given the fact that dispute over Volyn events started much earlier than continuing Ukrainian-Russian conflict, also not forgetting that Poland itself is highly interested in stable and strong Ukraine as somewhat a line of defense against its arch-rival, despite the lack of consensus on the question of Volyn

3.3. In the search of reconciliation

New turn to Ukrainian-Polish relations was given by a presidential administration of 6th Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, sworn in on 20th May 2019. Zelenskiy, in the run up to presidential post and following inauguration, has set up a goal of improving Ukraine’s relations with neighboring states, with Poland being at the forefront, becoming one of the main foreign policy aims of his presidency. After years of rather cold if not hostile relations between President’s Duda and President Poroshenko’s administrations, Warsaw was also keen on improving relations with its strategic eastern neighbor, sensing a window of opportunity that has opened up during so-called “honeymoon” first year of President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Duda’s personal interest in making some gains on Ukrainian direction was related to the

upcoming presidential elections in Poland, originally scheduled for Spring 2020, in the shadow of falling approval ratings at the end of first term.

Andrzej Duda has made an official request to Volodymyr Zelenskiy regarding one of the most sensitive questions surrounding Ukrainian-Polish dispute about Volyn. The request concerned gaining permission for exhumation of Volyn Tragedy Polish victims on Ukrainian soil. Duda's argument on exhumation importance was such that before any major improvements to Polish-Ukrainian relations take place, first of all those who were killed during tragic events have to be properly buried. The exhumation itself is a rather technical procedure, that, however, as all other aspects of Volyn events, was highly politicized by both sides, especially during President Poroshenko's term. President Zelenskiy, during his official visit to Warsaw on 31st August 2019, has accepted Duda's request and officially unblocked the exhumation process in Ukraine. In return, Duda has promised that the Ukrainian memorial sites would be built on Polish territory. Moreover, during the same visit to Warsaw, Zelenskiy and Duda have agreed to restart the bilateral task group on Volyn Tragedy, that was frozen for the most of Petro Poroshenko's presidency. Symbolically, both Presidents have also agreed to set up a mutual memorial site on the border between two states. Needless to say that the newly-sworn Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's first official visit to Poland has essentially kicked off the restart of relations between two nations that have severely deteriorated during past presidential administration. The new start of Polish-Ukrainian diplomacy was than highlighted by the response visit of President Duda to Ukraine in October 2020.

Conclusion

Tragic events of the past leave deep scars in the collective memory of nations that have suffered from them. The period of Second World War was perhaps the most traumatizing event for national memory of people all over Europe, and especially Eastern Europe as the region that has suffered the most horrifying atrocities. Debates on the image and relation of World War II participants in Europe continue 75 years after the end of most violent war in human history. However, what is more important to take into the account is the widespread falsification of the historical events and state-led manipulation with the collective traumas of the people. Through assessing the case of Ukrainian-Polish clash in Volyn of 1942-1943, and the interpretation of events by two sides in present, I have revealed how contemporary Poles and Ukrainians relation and memory of deeply traumatizing events of mass civil atrocities that have happened in north-western Ukrainian region in the context of Second World War are openly manipulated by contemporary political elites of two states in pursuit of easy electoral gains. For the reasons described in the theory past of my work, nationalist-leaning citizens in both states are becoming the “easiest prey” for manipulation with the national memory. Therefore, answering my research question of to what extent the collective memory of Poles and Ukrainians in relation to tragic events in Volyn of 1942-1943 has been abused by contemporary political elites of two states, the answer is that the collective memory of Volyn events in regards to the participant nations was abused to a great extent. However, to end on a positive note, I would like to express hope that the efforts to find reconciliation that were undertaken by the leadership of both nations since 2019 would continue and

eventually lead to a major historical agreement on the issues of the past between Poland and Ukraine.

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