DISMANTLING THE PAST, REBUILDING THE FUTURE: POLITICS OF MEMORY AND URBAN SPACE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERES OF POLAND AND UKRAINE

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Abstract

This thesis comparatively explores the approaches to working with representations of memory of the state-socialist regimes in the urban spaces of the capitals of Poland and Ukraine within the framework of the transformations unfolding in the respective public spheres during and after the post-1989/1991 transitions. It does so by employing a longer temporal perspective and analyzing the articulations of politics, memory, and national identities during the state-socialist regimes, focusing on the memory of World War II as a turning point. Detailing the contexts of post-1989/1991 transitions, nation- and state-building projects, and their articulations with the past, this thesis contextualizes the development of decommunization as a discourse and policy. Finally, it analyzes these transformations using case studies of the 'afterlives' of the monuments, embodying memory narratives that were crucial during the state-socialist periods. The thesis demonstrates the transformations of memory as both triggering and reflecting changes in the construction of collective identities.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Symbolic shifts are intertwined with the political transformations, both causing and reflecting them. Emerging political movements or regime changes introduce new systems of meaning, encompassing chronologies of canonical events, pantheons of heroic figures, and iconic symbols, with all these aspects being instrumental in establishing new identification frameworks and orienting a community within them. Collective memory becomes a key arena for such transformations, subject to varying strategies of instrumentalization. Urban milieu, reflecting spatiality and temporality of remembrance, constitutes its most illustrative component. It demonstrates the rhetoric of power and strategies of space marking, signaling belonging, and legitimizing or resisting authority. In this dynamic, the role of monuments is especially significant: representing belonging to an "imagined community," they orient and navigate citizens by structuring their lives in space, as the most focal points of urban spaces, and time, as the sites of memorial ceremonies and public holidays. They also serve as symbols that refer to broader systems of meaning, rarely encapsulating a singular narrative, but, despite being conceived to set identity projects in stone, appear porous and plastic, accepting of being reread. The signs of memory in urban spaces react to political transformations differently, either being rethought, altered, or demolished, with none of these actions constituting a complete erasure of memory. The focality of the presumed forgetting obscures the presence of the past, which continues to shape public opinion, patterns of interacting with the space, meaning- and decision-making. Hence, the necessity of developing more complex and inclusive strategies for dealing with the material witnesses of the dissonant past. The acts of iconoclasm or de-commemoration become incorporated into the historical continuities supported by the targeted signs. Presenting the destruction as a recognition of the object's meaning, yet its incommensurability with the community's self-identification, the defaced, altered, or destroyed monuments become symbols of the community's "others," illustrating examples of non-belonging. Another strategy in dealing with the signs of the dissonant past involves resignifying its symbols, which raises the question of the limitations of tolerance to its elements in a new political articulation and the actors involved in the respective decision-making. Thus, tracing the dynamics of

resignification and de-commemoration of the signs of collective remembrance allows for exploring the complex issues related to group identification, changes in political culture, and the distribution of power.

The collapse of state-socialist regimes in 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 entailed significant transformations in the political landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe. These changes encompassed not only political and economic structures but also necessitated rearticulating the connections to the recent past. Therefore, the post-1989 transitions entailed the renegotiation of memory narratives by different actors, including international non-governmental organizations, governments, intellectuals, national minorities, and the broader public, in the effort to reestablish collective identities, a sense of belonging and legitimacy, and construct a narrative about the previous regime. The changes in collective memory reflected these processes both preserving the perceptions of the historical and political continuities and introducing the processes of disengagement from them on various levels from communicative, lived remembrance, to the state-level policies. Such policies, introducing separation from previous regimes, generally aligned with the ideas of transitional justice and lustration, thus carrying moral connotations. Despite being framed by similar discourses, these changes unfolded in response to different political events and had diverging legacies contingent upon various factors, including formats of transition and subsequent political developments.

This thesis analyzes and compares the approaches to working with representations of memory in Kyiv and Warsaw, contextualizing decommunization as a discourse and policy within the broader transformations of public spheres during and after the post-1989/1991 transitions. It focuses on how disengagement from the past intersected with and was a component of articulating collective identities in post-transition state-building projects. The thesis demonstrates how shifts in collective memory both trigger and reflect the changes in the construction of collective identities.

Focusing on the capitals of Ukraine and Poland, this research highlights the entanglements between the urban space, memory, and identity politics. The choice of the cities for the analysis is reasoned by their role as capitals, thus, by them being the symbolic loci for representing, contesting, and negotiating national identities, focal points of dialogue/conflict between the national authorities

and municipal administrations, and examples of having drastically different dynamics within the researched processes.

This thesis poses the question of how the processes of dealing with the signs of memory of the state-socialist regimes, implemented in post-1989/1991 Poland and Ukraine within the framework of decommunization, reflected the discussions on the construction of national identities following regime changes. I seek to answer who the actors shaping decommunization as a discourse and policy were, trace these negotiations between the different actors, and identify the patterns of post-transition power distribution that these interactions reveal.

It combines cross-national and comparative perspectives to trace the transformations of memory of the state-socialist regimes as a component of a transnational ideology in the contexts that diverged in relating to it, yet were contingent upon similar practices of the post-war and post-transition memory construction and the institutional and legislative modalities of disengagement from them, as well as similarities in the discourses framing these changes. The comparative perspective is utilized to critically engage with the causalities inherent to a nation-centered perspective employed in interpreting the post-1989/1991 memory politics to analyze the position of the decommunization discourse in the nation- and state-building processes that followed the transition, and situate these processes within the context of the post-communist de-commemoration of the dissonant past and rethinking the national memory.

Chapter I. Theoretical Background and Historical Contextualization

I.I Constructing Collective Pasts: Articulating Memory, Power, and Politics

Political crises restructure communities, bringing the connections that shape them to the light of public discourse and academic research. These events entail reevaluating the past, with these inquiries serving as a foundation for bridging the past, the present, and the future in negotiating identities and claiming legitimacy. As an interdisciplinary field that inquires into constructing temporal continuities that inform collective identities, memory studies have been developing in reaction to political events that necessitated the re-examination of the approaches to dealing with recent historical experiences. Developing in the context of the restructuring of the nation-states in the Western Europe and their re-emergence in CEE, the legacies of revolutions, wars, and genocides, the study of memory has focused on the past as situated in the present, on its "specters" and "ghosts," places and practices, actors and regimes. In such articulations, scholars view memory as a phenomenon that simultaneously reflects the processes unfolding in the already existing communities and informs the structuring of these communities.

The interest in collective memory transformed into a field of academic research in the 1980s. This "memory boom"—an increase in scholarly and popular attention to collective remembrance, marking a paradigm shift in the humanities and social sciences—constituted a reaction to the political changes of the twentieth century. The legacies of the two World Wars, the Holocaust, the wars of decolonization, transitions from the dictatorships and authoritarian regimes to democracies, and epistemic transformations related to the subjects and means of historical knowledge production[2] in the context of the "second modernity of globalization"[3] granted the past an explicitly central presence in the challenges and anxieties of the present.[4]

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[2] Here, I am referring to the increasing attention to the witnesses' accounts in historical research unfolding against the background of the so-called "end of communicative memory" (Jan-Werner Müller's term) and the Historians' dispute on the incorporation of the Holocaust memory into the German historiography in the 1980s, and the effect two processes had on the studies of history and memory.

[3] Jan-Werner Müller, "Introduction: the power of memory, the memory of power and the power over memory", in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16.

[4] Ibid., 15.

Memory studies have drawn inspiration from various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, and political science, all of which have contributed to understanding the processes of collective recollection of the past. In historical and political studies, memory is viewed as a site of power, taking the shape of control, struggle, or resistance. It is often framed by Michel Foucault's quote on the dynamics of popular remembrance: "*If one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism.*"[5] Although scholars actively use this quote, especially when applying it to non-democratic regimes, it raises questions about the agency. Can memory be controlled? Who can be granted the position of a sovereign not only of the present but also of the past? And what kind of dynamism is affected by controlling remembrance? The agency in memory work is multilayered and complex; as reflected by various approaches undertaken to analyze it, memory is seen as a discourse, which can be both hegemonic and heterogeneous.[6] The articulations of memory, power, and politics can be outlined in two ways. First, one can approach memory as a political matter that reflects the dynamics pertaining to the past, collective identities, representation, and legitimacy. Second, it can be perceived in terms of its political weight and the influence over politics. The first part of this section will answer how memory, as a collective construction that reflects different dynamics of representation, acquires political significance. The second part, establishing a foundation for this research, will demonstrate how memory operates as a resource that informs politics.

Memory as a political matter

In this part, I follow the development of memory studies, focusing precisely on the articulations of remembrance with power, identities, and representation, to demonstrate memory as a political matter.

Viewing memory as a political matter comes down to inquiring into its collective character. In the late 19th and early 20th century, collective memory became a subject of theorizing from the standpoints of various disciplines. Two 'generations' of authors[7] articulated memory with the notions

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[5] In this interview, Foucault details the influence of media on memory on the example of films. Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: (interviews, 1966-84)* (Semiotext(e), 1989), 124.

[6] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 19.

[7] I frame this distinction to emphasize the differences in the approaches of these authors that correlate to their lived experiences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

of morality (Nietzsche, 1887), embodied experience and knowledge (H. Bergson, 1896), religious rituals as a means in establishing a continuity with the past (E. Durkheim, 1912), and historical knowledge (W. Benjamin, 1936, 1942). However, the concept of "collective memory" was introduced by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925. A student of Durkheim and Bergson, in the "*Les cadres sociaux de la memoire,*" Halbwachs suggested seeing individual memory as informed by frameworks of collective organizations. Introducing an idea of a collective level of organizing, transmitting, and sustaining memory, he suggested seeing it from two perspectives: as an individual memory, articulated in collective frameworks (language, culture, and meaning-making) and a shared version of the past, constructed and sustained by supra-individual organization.[8] Thus, Halbwachs's approach to collective memory represents it as both multivocal and essential for social stability.[9] Despite being criticized for challenging a then-dominant psychological approach and being largely forgotten in the interwar years, his ideas were rediscovered and constituted the foundation for the emergence of memory studies as a distinct field of study in the postwar period.[10]

Emerging as a research paradigm, memory studies focused on the questions pertaining to the perception of the past at the national level. These works relied on the ideas introduced by Halbwachs, even though his research, according to Jay Winter, was more concerned with the dynamics of a civil society than a nation-state due to its emphasis on multivocality.[11] The second half of the twentieth century marked the rise of the new cultural memory studies. The most significant works of this period included Pierre Nora's monumental "*Les Lieux de Mémoire*" (1984-1992) that investigated the role of the sites of memory in the context of the memory environments' disappearance due to the political transformations in France, and Yosef Yerushalmi's "*Zakhor*" (1982) that explored oral transmission of memory in the Jewish tradition. Another important contribution of this period was Aleida and Jan Assmann's differentiation between the cultural and communicative memory that reflected different levels of organizing remembrance.

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[8] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (Harper and Row, 1980).

[9] Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering (Theorizing Society)* (Open University Press, 2003).

[10] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sarah B. Young (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011).

[11] Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt, *Memory and Political Change* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), ix.

According to Nora, *sites of memory*—cultural objectivations and symbolic loci that trigger collective remembrance—emerged due to the loss of the living connection to the past; hence, the *lieux* of memory substituted the memorial *milieux*. Focusing on the French context, Nora approached the twentieth century as a period of transition from the national form of organization to the post-national condition.[12] He suggested viewing memory as a natural given that was lost and replaced by symbolic objects or phenomena to sustain a collective identity when political transformations endangered it. Nora's approach views remembrance as a tool in supporting a collective identity; it demonstrates memory as constructed by various actors, yet relatively homogeneous and confined to the national level.

During this period, the study of memory became more closely intertwined with historical research, establishing stronger methodological and conceptual connections. The works significant in theorizing a nation as a historical form of collective organization and demonstrating the role of the past in sustaining it include E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger's *"Invention of Tradition"* (1983) and B. Anderson's *"Imagined Communities"* (1991). Crucial for a presentist approach to the study of memory, these works addressed nations and nationalism as historical phenomena that emerged in the late XVIII century and, becoming intertwined with other ideologies and transplanted to different cultural contexts, became the ultimate characteristics of the political life of the twentieth century. *"Imagined communities"* posed a question regarding the historicity of the nation in the time of its growing role; the publication reacted to the armed conflicts in Indochina and growing tensions between the socialist states. Anderson defined a nation as an imagined, limited, and sovereign community—a virtual non-hierarchical comradeship.[13] To establish governance and a sense of relatedness, the understanding of political legitimacy changed from the divine dynastic continuities to imaginaries of the pre-modern symbols, languages, and the emplotments of history in the rituals of remembrance. The mechanisms employed concerned both the dynamics of popular sentiment and the

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[12] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Memoire", *Representations* 26, № 1 (1989).
[13] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Verso, 2006), 7.

programs imposed by those in power. This approach views memory as an element of the present-day sense of belonging and identification, which is simultaneously constructed and lived through.

The dynamics of official memory, unfolding between the celebration and censorship, are the focus of the "*Invention of Tradition.*" Hobsbawm and Ranger define tradition as a practice that has a symbolic character, adheres to defined rules, and creates the continuity between the past and the present through repetition. The necessity to develop new political traditions during the late XIX and early XX centuries reflects significant changes in the political landscape, including the rise of electoral policies that required new methods for establishing and maintaining a sense of representation and loyalty among the public.[14] During political transformation, such traditions were introduced to strengthen cohesion, legitimize the emerging institutions, establish new statuses and relations of authority, and promote new values. This demonstrates the significance of tradition as a constructed continuity in supporting a society during a period of change.

These approaches emphasized the embeddedness of the past in the needs of the present. A separate debate unfolding in parallel questioned the notions of agency in remembrance and opposed the ideas of national memory being homogeneous, static, and imposed from above. The main critical strands of the study of memory in articulation with popular agency stem from the Popular Memory Group and Foucault's notion of counter-memory.[15]

Foucault's idea of counter-memory relied on the notion of power as a dominant factor in the construction of memory and the idea that resistance exists wherever power is present. Theorizing an alternative to the dominant discourse, Foucault presented the concept of counter-memory, although referring to it as a singular and monolithic entity. This way, he reached a pessimistic conclusion, denying the possibility of liberation from the dominant memory. On the other hand, the Popular Memory Group emphasized the significance of the plurality of non-hegemonic memories, seeing a hegemonic remembrance itself as a dynamic entity and a space of negotiations. Utilizing this perspective, the authors approached collective memory as a site of struggle where reference to the

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[14] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)
[15] Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering (Theorizing Society)*.

past serves as a means of competition over political power.[16] The heterogeneity of memories, as well as the variety of the forms of their interactions, became a focus of the Dynamics of Memory approach. These scholars focused on non-commemorative narratives to emphasize the flexibility of memory and historicize the identities of the actors of the remembrance processes. Demonstrating memory as a dynamic result of the interaction of different discourses and not confining culture to the frames of defined groups (e.g., nations), this approach perceives memory as reflecting the complex dynamics in the political culture.

Developing as a research paradigm, the study of memory has been concerned with processes and phenomena that hold political significance. It responded to the transformations in political landscapes by posing questions pertaining to social conditioning of remembrance, the role of the narratives and practices addressing the past in shaping collective identities, as well as its impact on claiming legitimacy, imposing or resisting governance. As this research centers on the politicization of memory, it is important to trace its transformation into a political discourse and see its influence on decision-making.

How does memory matter politically?

While a growing body of scholarship focuses on memory as concerned with the questions pertaining to identities, representation, and the construction of communities as political matters, the explicit connection between remembrance and policymaking remains less discussed. In the introduction to the "*Memory and Power in Post-War Europe. Studies in the Presence of the Past,*" Jan-Werner Müller emphasized that focusing on the constructedness of the national communities, identities, and the role of memory in the studies of nationalism, ethnic politics, and politics of recognition is insufficient for articulating it with politics. Inquiring into precisely *how memory matters politically*, he suggests approaching it as a factor that influences policymaking as a constraint and an enabler.[17] The scholarship converging memory and politics can be separated into two strands, each facilitating

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Müller, "Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power Over Memory".

distinct inquiries: one focusing on memory's impact on policymaking and the other on the political influence on remembrance.

The scholarship focused on the impact of remembrance on policymaking perceives memory as a component of culture that informs the perception of the past and the future, and concerns collective identity. This perspective can be exemplified by Astrid Erll's notion of memory as a "soft power" behind the "hard facts of power politics."[18] Erll approaches memory as a habitual paradigm that shapes the perceptions of temporality and provides an ideological foundation for political events. From a similar perspective, Jan-Werner Müller explored how memory affects decision-makers.[19] This notion is especially important in the context of this research, as it allows for an attentive consideration of the formation of various actors' approaches to memory politics.

The approach that inquires into the development and operation of memory as a political discourse focuses on the transformations after WWII, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the fall of communist regimes. "*The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath,*" published in 2000 by István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, explored the postwar transformations in memory politics and their long-lasting legacies in Eastern and Western Europe. The authors address the postwar historiographies that begin in 1945 as the "Year Zero" and obscure the wartime years, instead emphasizing the transformations of the anti-Nazi alliances into the Cold War divides. Deák, Gross, and Judt view these approaches as outdated due to the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent fading of the idea of postwar divisions as an organizing structure, the revival of memory, and the developing discourse on justice. Instead of threading the Western and Eastern European experiences as distinct opposites, they highlight the similarities in constructing the postwar narratives of memory. These aspects included the distribution of guilt solely to the German people and the myth of the mass resistance. The authors highlighted the similarities in the post-1989 dynamics in the two contexts, particularly regarding the reemergence of national identities. Deák, Gross, and Judt highlighted the significance of considering the pre-1939 events and how their memories were incorporated into or

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[18] Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory", *Parallax* 17, № 4 (2011).
[19] Müller, "Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power Over Memory".

obscured from the postwar narratives in recovering larger historical continuities in the place of what was earlier approached as a rupture.[20]

Detailing the post-war transformations in memory cultures, Müller emphasized that the memory discourse significantly changed after WWII, leading to policy changes. The rhetoric of mourning shifted considerably after the Holocaust, atomic warfare, and mass civilian deaths in WWII. The widespread imagery of destruction contributed to complicating efforts to derive meaning from the recent past, aligning memory work with myth-making.[21] The collapse of the myth of the War Experience, implying a heroic and brotherly attitude at the frontline, as well as the weakening of the national mythologies, entailed the processes of re-mythologization, which utilized memory to forge new narratives on "origin stories" and practices of remembrance, ensuring cohesion and loyalty.

The theorists whose works belong to this strand also focus on memory as a means of establishing justice and shaping local, regional, and global politics. According to Assmann and Shortt, memory has played a significant role in the transitions due to its plasticity, representativeness, and heterogeneity on all levels of organization.[22] Assmann also emphasized the convergence of the discourses on memory and human rights.[23] In the postwar years, various actors have articulated this connection. Yet, these debates found a direct implementation, including involvement of the non-state actors, such as Amnesty International and The Human Rights Watch, only in the 1980s. The human rights framework's claims on the universal moral standard led to the elaboration of new memory politics and accelerated the process of the collective memory transnationalization.

Collective remembrance not only reflects the processes that have political significance but also bears upon the collective organization, both implicitly, as part of a cultural paradigm that informs decision-making, and explicitly, unfolding in the realm of politics. Constructing the temporal connectivities that anchor communities and facilitate identification, memory holds special

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[20] Tony Judt et al., *Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton University Press, 2009).
[21] Ibid.
[22] Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt, *Memory and Political Change* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[23] Aleida Assmann, "Global Publics: Remembering and Forgetting", in *Global Publics: Their Power and Their Limits, 1870–1990* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

significance during periods of political change. In this research, an inquiry into the transformations of the collective remembrance during and after the post-1989/1991 transitions highlights complex articulations of agency and power within the given societies.

I. II Space as a Frame of Collective Remembrance

Theorizing space and power

This research explores the practices of disengagement with the memories of state-socialist regimes in the contexts of the post-1989/1991 political climates. The most focal and contentious aspect of these changes encompassed the transformations unfolding in the urban space. This section, therefore, establishes a theoretical foundation for analyzing urban remembrance.

Historians inherently deal with the spatial dimension of the past, yet it was in the second half of the twentieth century when space was rediscovered as a separate analytical category. The "spatial turn," introduced by the political geographer Edward Soja, focused on the spatial embeddedness of cultural, political, and historical phenomena. It reacted to the changes in geography studies and critical reactions to geopolitics as a component of modernity. It relied on developments in analyzing the interactions between the environments, politics, and economy, including the contributions of the historians of the second generation of the Annales school.[24]

One of the pioneering texts of the aforementioned spatial turn was written by French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who introduced the idea of social production of space in 1974. Lefebvre approached space as utilized in the relations of property and production, reflecting social relations and power distribution. He situated a category of space in the production scheme as both a force and a result of production.[25] Seeking a "space-science" that would center on the political use of space, often concealed by ideology, and demonstrate its connections with production, he suggested a triadic analytical scheme encompassing spatial practices, representations of space, and representational

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[24] Here, I refer to the F. Braudel's "The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II" published in 1949.

[25] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991).

space (symbolic practices).[26] This approach views space as a dynamic result of social relations, reflecting the power distribution inherent to a society at a specific time.

The concept of a "spatial turn" was introduced eleven years later by Edward Soja, tracing the development of a spatial perspective in critical social theory. In "*Postmodern Geographies*" (1989), Soja analyzed the spatial projects of Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and John Berger, situating the origin of the resurfacing interest in spatiality at the intersection of Marxist theories and the development of modern geography.[27] He approached the spatial turn as a phenomenon reflecting changing conditions of political economy and the emergence of a new way of relating to space in a time reflecting an ontological shift in the balance of relations between history, geography, and society.[28] Drawing insights from human geography, Marxist, and poststructuralist theories, the theoreticians of the spatial turn approached space as a dynamic result of production reflecting political and cultural processes, opposing a previous tendency of addressing space as an ahistorical given.

Lefebvre's ideas resonated with later works on constructing and representing political spaces, "symbolic geographies" including E. Said's *Orientalism* (1978), L. Wolf's *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), G. Delanty's *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (1995), and M. Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). The ideas about the production of space began to be actively employed in historical research. According to Anton Kotenko, writing about the applicability of the spatial turn theories in Ukrainian academia, space became a crucial category for history scholars as it allowed for a deeper analysis of the conditions and causes of historical events.[29]

Another significant contribution to spatial analysis concerned challenging the dominant structures of power and focusing on the horizontal agency in performing space. While Lefebvre focused on space as reflecting the dominant dynamics of power, Michel de Certeau, in "*Practices of Everyday Life*" (1980), focused on the modalities of performing space by actors occupying different positions of power: the grassroots *tactics* opposing authoritative *strategies*.[30] Differentiating places

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[26] Ibid., 33.
[27] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, 1989), 43.
[28] Ibid., 61-62.
[29] Anton Kotenko, "Povernennia Prostoru" [The Return of the Space], *Ukrainskyi humanitarnyi ohliad* 15 (2010): 47.
[30] Michel de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1988), 35-39.

from spaces, de Certeau approached the former as reflecting the established order and suggested seeing the latter as a process of dynamic interaction. For de Certeau, space emerges only when it begins to operate as a multivalent entity, a practiced place.[31] Echoing Lefebvre's triad, Michel de Certeau suggested that urban space exists in multiplicities, being performed in the acts of walking—the 'invisible cities' of non-hegemonic practices of interaction and representation exist parallelly with the conceived and constructed material cities. In the context of my research, this brings attention to the alternative ways of interpreting and interacting with the memorial spaces.

It is heuristic to address space (in this research—the memoryscape) as a dynamic entity. It can be seen as a force and a result of production that reflects various dynamics of power in a given society, and its analysis should encompass its objects and subjects, as well as political and cultural conditions of interacting with it and various modalities of doing so employed by actors in different positions of power.

Urban Memory: Spatializing Remembrance and Forgetting

The spatialization of collective remembrance—projecting spaces in mnemonic techniques or weaving memory into the fabric of urban space—has been an object of inquiry for history, geography, and sociology scholars for decades. Yet, the interaction of the two as dynamic entities remains a question to be analyzed.[32]

Detailing the connections between the spatial embeddedness of a collective and the identity its members see as shared, already Halbwachs accentuated the role of space that, due to its stability, anchors a group through superimposing the past onto the present.[33] The space as an external milieu of a group shapes its perception of itself, strengthening it if it remains unchanged. Therefore, space and memory inform each other: the perceptions of space are constructed in the collective meaning-making processes involving memory, and the space shapes a collective identity, informing the community's memory. The simultaneous roles of space as a productive force and a product are

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, "Memorial Landscapes: Analytic Questions and Metaphors", *GeoJournal* 73, № 3 (2008).

[33] Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*.

especially focal when discussing urban spaces. It is in the physical spaces of the cities where public discourses find their material and practical emanations in objects, subjects, and interactions that connect them.

Svitlana Shlipchenko approaches the organization of urban space as first and foremost connected with representation.[34] She refers to Frances Yates's idea of memory theaters, tracing the links between the organization of the urban spaces and images of the past, embedded in two temporalities that appear simultaneous: the imagined past continues in the material present. Shlipchenko views urban space as a space of remembrance, emphasizing its ability to evoke visions of an ideal society in the collective imagination. Thus, interacting with the images of the past in the urban spaces, citizens forge their collective identity and sense of belonging. This transmission of memory in the urban space is ensured by its interaction with the individual memory, facilitated by the means of remembrance that encompass institutions, memorial objects, and memory practices. Among these, Shlipchenko emphasizes the role of monuments, which simultaneously "operate" through visual perception and everyday interaction with the space. Given the focal status of monuments, they, along with toponymy, are the first signs to be "mobilized" and transformed during a political change.[35] Analyzing these dynamics allows for a deeper examination of the transformations in the discourses of collective memory.

Mark Crinson situates the increasing inquiry into urban remembrance in the postmodern urban developments. After the modernity's focus on the destruction and staring anew—on the city that can easily forget—the urban spaces returned to reflect the intermixture of the past and the present. He traced this change in the convergence of the discourses on conservation and development and the growing number of monuments and institutions dealing with exhibiting and educating on the matters of the past in the urban spaces.[36] The increase in research on the urban matters of memory is marked by the growing number of monograph publications, edited volumes, and special issues of journals

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[34] Svitlana Shlipchenko, "DeCom Job: Kilka zahalnykh mirkuvan shchodo spetsyfiky protsesiv dekomunizatsii u prostorakh mista" [DecomJob: Notes on the Decommunization of City Spaces], Misto: Istoriia, kultura, suspilstvo 1 (2017).

[35] Ibid.

[36] Mark Crinson, *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City* (Routledge, 2005).

dedicated to these issues. The significance of urban memory research was emphasized in a 2008 issue of *GeoJournal*.

The contribution by Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman reviewed the key ways of approaching urban space in recent research. They outline three most common approaches to theorizing urban memory: viewing it as a text, an arena of political struggle, and a performance, each having a distinct inquiry.[37] The use of a metaphor of a text, inspired by poststructuralist theories, constitutes a dominant approach that demonstrates the signification processes through which urban landscapes are constantly being intertextually and discursively reproduced. It focuses on the toponymy and material signs of memory, emphasizing the hermeneutic character of a city-text. Urban memory is interpreted as a multilayered record. Elzbieta Rybicka referred to the processes of memory sedimentation and textualization analyzed through the metaphor of a palimpsest, mentioning that each trace in such a record is seen as evidence of a political event, "individual, specific, and situated."[38] Maksym Hon addresses the practices of "reading" urban texts, emphasizing various agencies reflected in the processes of encoding cultural meanings.[39] This notion resonates with de Certeau's emphasis on the productive character of reading that does not solely imply literal perception but refers to situated meaning-making processes.[40] Dwyer and Alderman also suggest an approach to memory as a performance, which allows for a nuanced analysis of the acts of commemoration, practices of remembrance and re-enactment, and uses of the past for the political objectives of the present.[41] In this research. these ideas emphasize the superimposition of various modalities of reading and interpreting the same signs in the shared space, which is both physical and symbolic, as a factor in shaping the contested character of collective remembrance.

Urban memory can also be analyzed as an "arena of political struggle." Then, it concerns the coexistence of different mnemonic narratives in the city space, which may entail different dynamics,

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[37] Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, "Memorial Landscapes: Analytic Questions and Metaphors", *GeoJournal* 73, № 3 (2008).
[38] Elżbieta Rybicka, "Pamięć i miasto. Palimpsest vs. pole walki" [Memory and City: Palimpsest vs Battlefield], *Teksty drugie* 5 (2011).
[39] Maksym Hon et al., Misto pamiati – misto zabuttia: Palimpsesty memorialnoho landshaftu Rivnoho [A city of memory is a city of oblivion: Palimpsests of the memorial landscape of Rivne] (Volyn. oberehy, 2017).
[40] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*.
[41] Dwyer and Alderman, "Memorial Landscapes: Analytic Questions and Metaphors".

from conflict and competition to influence and dialogue. Rybicka also introduces an idea of urban memory as a battlefield,[42] accentuating the heterogeneity and fluidity of a memoryscape and emphasizing its role as a "territory of identity-creation" and struggle among different actors. This approach views memory as a symbolic resource and a product of social power. It can be illustrated by a body of scholarship on the contested cities and the layering of their memories, including Mark Mazower's "*Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950*" and Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth's "*Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia,*"

The analysis of the urban space, in its interaction with collective memory, appears especially significant as it demonstrates the materialization of the respective discourse. In the urban spaces, the memory discourses transcend the realm of rhetoric, with the acts of remembrance and de-commemoration transforming into the visible, embodied, and material practices. The analysis of urban memory during political transformation would, therefore, allow for the accounting of various agencies and the respective power relations they reflect.

I.III Memory Politics and De-commemoration after the Transition in CEE

Politics of memory and political forgetting in CEE after the regime change

The collapse of state-socialist regimes in 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 entailed significant changes in the political landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe. These transformations encompassed political, economic, and cultural restructuring on the levels of state, public institutions, and civil society, necessitating a reapproach to the recent past. Historicizing and contextualizing the patterns of post-1989/1991 memory politics and detailing the role of forgetting during the transitions across CEE, this section sets the ground for the further comparative analysis of the decommunization processes in Poland and Ukraine.

While the dynamics of transitions differed according to the structure of the pre-1989 regimes, organization of the opposition, form of regime change, and the actors shaping the political landscapes

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[42] Rybicka, "Pamięć i miasto. Palimpsest vs. pole walki."

afterward, all CEE countries referred to memory work to reconfigure the continuities that shape both domestic and international politics. According to Tony Judt, in the countries of CEE, 1989 became the year when the pasts, in plural, became revealed, reapproached, and mobilized as a political resource. Such references include 1918–21, 1938, 1939, 1941, 1944, 1945–48, 1956, 1968, and 1989.[43] All these events have been highly contested; thus, it is impossible to create a uniform narrative about them. Judt mentions that, in contrast to the Western European approach to the past as "another country," in Eastern Europe, the past constituted "an archipelago of vulnerable historical territories"[44] that presupposed conflictual relations in which the enemy could be found both inside and outside a community. The memories, revealed and accessed during the transition, bore an emotional charge and social significance, becoming important reference in politics.

Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper outlined three crucial challenges pertaining to memory that the post-1989 European countries had to deal with, including reestablishing a foundation for a collective identity appropriate for a new political context, restoring the memories marginalized during communist rule, and interpreting the experiences of living through communist rule.[45] Such transformations reflected and fueled the processes of reestablishing national identities and relations between the countries.

The majority of the post-1989 state and nation-building projects articulated themselves in opposition to the previous regimes to legitimize themselves. The post-transition authorities had relied on the pre-communist past to establish historical and political continuities that would lead to them. As the state-socialist regimes reinterpreted national myths and memories rather than banning these narratives altogether, such policies resulted in the emergence of the so-called "hybrid cultural forms," which, after the transition, were rethought again to support and sustain the reinterpreted national identities. Similarly, analyzing the post-1989 changes in memory work, Susan Pierce accentuates the significance of the reconstruction of the national identities that acquired a modality of a "return to

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[43] Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe", in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
[44] Ibid.
[45] Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper, "Memory in Post-Communist Europe: Controversies Over Identity, Conflicts, and Nostalgia", *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 32, № 4 (2018).

oneself."[46] This transformation often converged with the narrative about the "return to Europe," articulating belonging both to national and supranational communities. In public sphere, these changes encompassed the reemergence of national mythologies, ethno-nationalist sentiments, and the "landscapes of silence" formed by the erasure of the signs of memory of the previous regimes, as well as by the emergence of the new signs and institutions of remembrance.[47]

The reestablishment of the national identity presupposed the construction of the "other," manifested in legacies of the previous regime and the revealed pre-communist international conflicts. Attila Pók traced several strategies for articulating national and communist pasts in CEE, namely, viewing communism as a foreign system forcefully imposed by the Soviet Union, and a deviation from a natural development; exploring the extent of the systems' convergence and seeing the interaction of the internal and external factors as bearing upon the fall of the regime; and attempting to delineate the positions of the regimes' victims and the perpetrators.[48] Pók mentions that the official rhetoric of disengagement from communist rule in many states repeated the communist rhetoric of "sweeping away" the dissonant past, thus transforming the rejection of the previous regime into a "constitutive other" in the state-building process.[49] This strategy concerned the idea of seeking justice, especially by the groups and communities that perceived themselves as persecuted under the previous regimes. Lavinia Stan emphasized that the processes of decommunization and the efforts to establish transitional justice were driven by the same underlying logic.[50] The changes in the memory narratives, pantheons of national heroes, and commemoration practices unfolded within a larger framework of seeking historical truth and bore moral connotations.

The post-1989 period witnessed a reevaluation of the memory narratives exercised by different actors, including international organizations, governments, intellectuals, national minorities, and the broader public, to renegotiate collective (national) identities, reestablish a sense of belonging

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[46] Susan C. Pearce, "Delete, Restart, or Rewind? Post-1989 Public Memory Work in East-Central Europe", *Sociology Compass* 5, № 4 (2011).
[47] Ibid.
[48] Attila Pók, "On the Memory of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe", in *Writing the History of Memory* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).
[49] Ibid.
[50] Lavinia Stan, "The Vanishing Truth? Politics and Memory in Post-Communist Europe", *East European Quarterly* 40, № 4.

and legitimacy, and construct a narrative about the previous regime. These processes were not uniform across CEE, yet, according to Pierce, all encompassed a sense of urgency of the symbolic change, recovery of the histories that were marginalized or lost in the state-socialist regimes, and the significant shift from the centers of decision-making to the municipalities, hence, reemergence of the local histories.[51]

Spatializing forgetting: the politics of de-commemoration

As any mnemonic narrative is informed by its subjects and their situatedness in the political contexts and is, therefore, selective in character, its creation and transformation depend on the processes of remembering and forgetting. The interplay of these phenomena has been an object of inquiry that encompasses outlining the typologies of forgetting, its politicization by different actors, and the implications of its usage.

In "*What is a Nation?*" (1882) lecture, Ernest Renan questioned a then-predominant approach to forgetting as a loss, emphasizing its significance in constructing a nation.[52] In 2007, Paul Connerton suggested rethinking the importance of this phenomenon. Opposing a tendency to homogenize memory and forgetting and approach them respectively as a virtue and a failure, he outlined types of forgetting, differentiated by the agency of its subjects. This typology included repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; structural amnesia, forgetting constitutive in forming a new identity; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; and forgetting as humiliated silence.[53] His later work, "*How Modernity Forgets*," situated the phenomenon of cultural amnesia in the context of the modern acceleration of life and the subsequently transforming relations with spatiality. Connerton suggested that the shifts in the temporality of modernity are caused by the disconnection of social life from a locality, resulting from increasing capitalist and technological development.[54] The loss of the place-memory affected the collectives' sense of belonging and the practices of delineating the past and the present—*the lieux de memoire* turned into *the lieux d'oubli*, marking a

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[51] Susan C. Pearce, "Delete, Restart, or Rewind? Post-1989 Public Memory Work in East-Central Europe."
[52] Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation? (1882)*.
[53] Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting", *Memory Studies* 1, № 1 (2008).
[54] Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

shift in the perception of temporality. While forgetting is theorized as an inherent component of collective meaning-making that reflects diverging power dynamics in a given collective, the issue of the materiality of oblivion can be seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, it demonstrates a competition over preserving memory in a limited representational space; on the other, it deals with the materiality of a medium in preserving cultural meanings.

The works dealing with the materiality of forgetting in the context of a struggle over political representation have been framed under an umbrella category of *de-commemoration*. In 2024 volume, Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Wüstenberg suggested using the term (coined by Gensburger in 2020) to address a shift in the global history of memory marked by increasing attention to disengagement with the material signs of the past. They approach this acceleration as reflecting the change in our self-perception, encompassing critique of ideologies, a desire to belong, and a need for stable, clear-cut ideals and values in a time that appears to be in flux. Gensburger and Wüstenberg defined de-commemoration as altering or destroying the physical representation of the past. The use of the prefix "de" here denotes that every form of de-commemoration is a form of creating memory, a practice of commemoration.[55] The practices of disengagement from the material signs of memory narratives, seen as unwanted or troubling, anchor the communities in the "present past," mobilizing them for constructing memory narratives. They outline types of de-commemoration, including this process unfolding after a regime change, reflecting a collective's changed perception of itself (happening either after a formative event or a gradual transformation), propelling change, or serving as a smoke screen underpinning a dominant memory narrative and concealing larger political challenges. Both the introduction and the destruction of the signs of memory bear upon establishing a group identity and ensuring cohesion. In defining the cultural and political implications of forgetting, Gensburger and Wüstenberg resonate with Michael Taussig's idea that the material signs of memory return to life when destroyed. This framing highlights the multitemporal character of forgetting, often mistakenly seen as rupture or loss, not bearing long-term consequences. On the contrary, Gensburger and

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[55] Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Wüstenberg, *De-Commemoration: Removing Statues and Renaming Places* (Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2023).

Wüstenberg approach de-commemoration as a continuous process that combines different temporalities unfolding in a singular space or an object.

The role of material memory media in the forgetting processes is explained by the influence of their *focal, invisible,* and *plastic* characters on their ability to preserve cultural meanings. Memory signs' visibility refers to their positions in the urban space (structuring the spaces and suggesting hierarchical interactions with citizens taking on a dominant position regarding them) and a role in the practices of navigating the routines of everyday life.[56] The notion of these signs being *invisible* and, therefore, failing their mission of preserving and evoking the images of the shared past is explained by their naturalization and embeddedness in everyday life practices. This approach to viewing monuments can be summarized by Robert Musil's commentary, saying, "*There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument.*"[57] The reason he uncovers is the discrepancy between the singular temporality implied by the monumental form, conceived and produced to endure, and the actors interacting with it at a particular moment in the changing present in the context of the developing media technologies. Anything that can endure, he emphasizes, will eventually fail to impress. Michael Taussig refers to Musil's hypothesis to explore the reasoning behind the toppling of monuments after the regime change, given their invisible character. In "*Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative,*" Taussig approached forgetting as a component of memory work that reveals the hidden part of a narrative that a community has a symbolic contract of non-remembering.[58] Thus, destruction serves as a revelation, evoking a counter-narrative of the commemorative event or figure. Therefore, defacement brings unnoticeable statues back to the focal point of the public discourse. In this research, this dynamic can be illustrated by the immediate changes in the memory landscapes, bringing both the memorialized figures and the methods used to the light of the public discussion.

Finally, material signs of memory can be seen as *plastic*. In 2021, Serhii Yekelchyk introduced the concept of *symbolic plasticity* to explain the long-term preservation of the Soviet memorials and

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[56] Shlipchenko, "DeCom Job: Kilka zahalnykh mirkuvan shchodo spetsyfiky protsesiv dekomunizatsii u prostorakh mista" [DecomJob: Notes on the Decommunization of City Spaces].

[57] Robert Musil, "Monuments", in *Posthumous papers of a living author* (Eridanos Press, 1987).

[58] Michael T. Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford University Press, 1999).

monuments as signs of a dissonant past by inquiring into the changing referents of these signs. In his article, he engages in dialogue with Aleida, Jan Assmann's, and Michael Taussig's ideas and elaborates on them. While Assmanns introduced the concept of mnemonic energy, implying that memory objects bear not only the narratives about the historical events but also the emotional reactions and the receptions of these events, they approached this *energy* as unchanging and independent of the practices and environments surrounding them. Yekelchyk puts this concept in dialogue with Taussig's idea of the coexistence of the opposite versions of the past within one object, with the hidden narrative awaiting to be revealed after a monumental form is altered. He argues that the different chances for Soviet monuments' preservation are determined by their level of symbolic plasticity—a potency to be rethought in articulation with commemoration practices and changes in the surrounding landscapes.[59] While for Taussig, the monument, as an object that endures and thus loses its visibility, needs to be destroyed for an alternative meaning to be recovered, Yekelchyk emphasizes the plasticity of a monumental form and its ability to transform over time, challenging Taussig's approach.

Forgetting is inherent in shaping and negotiating collective identities and claiming political legitimacy. Like memory, it is contingent upon different factors, including political transformations, shifts in identity, belonging, representation, and overall group cohesion. Similar to commemoration practices, de-commemoration can be employed to achieve a larger goal pertaining to a collective organization and seen as a means in the politics of memory. Addressing issues of political importance and being part of policy, de-commemoration practices can be viewed in relation to changes in political organization. Therefore, tracing the dynamics of de-commemoration allows for exploring the complex issues related to group identification and representation and changes in the political culture, agency, and distribution of power.

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[59] Serhy Yekelchyk, "Symbolic Plasticity and Memorial Environment: The Afterlife of Soviet Monuments in Post-Soviet Kyiv", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 63, № 1-2 (2021).

I.IV Post-1989/1991 Memory Politics in Poland and Ukraine from a Comparative Perspective

The post-1989/1991 politics of memory in CEE have unfolded on both the state and international levels, becoming an object of inquiry for national and cross-national comparative studies across various disciplines.

A comparative method is an indispensable component of historical research. It is employed in both diachronic and synchronic analysis, and it can accompany inquiries even into the processes unfolding within a single state or region, where it is applied to delineate the spatial and temporal categories and the idea of a unique historical event.[60] While the conception of the method is traced back to Henri Pirenne's and Marc Bloch's projects, Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (2004) highlight the longer pre-histories of the method in the studies outlining and crossing national boundaries.[61] The comparative approach does not have a singular linear genealogy as it has been developing in several centers, including Central and Eastern Europe, shaping the modalities of inquiries according to the respective contexts. It has been employed as a means to larger objectives, including making the research practice more scientific (François Simiand), tracing where do the historical phenomena stem from (Marc Bloch), moving beyond nationalism in historical studies (Henri Pirenne, Geoffrey Barraclough), and separating the crucial factors from the contingent ones in re-examining historical casualties (Peter Baldwin).[62] One of the most common motivations for employing the comparative perspective is challenging the causalities inherent to the nation-centered perspectives. However, it can also be applied in historical research to serve other objectives, as Marta Petrusewicz's, Nancy Green's, Deborah Cohen's, and Susan Pedersen's approaches illustrate.[63] Petrusewicz suggests transferring the research vocabularies between the contexts of analysis and "comparing the incomparable," moving from the aspects that are synchronous and similar to different processes that diverge, to challenge the predictability of interpretation. Green uses a comparative

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[60] Peter Baldwin, "Comparing and Generalizing: Why All History Is Comparative, Yet No History Is Sociology", in *Comparison and History* (Routledge, 2004).
[61] Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2004).
[62] Nancy L. Green, "Forms of Comparison", in *Comparison and History* (Routledge, 2004).
[63] Cohen and O'Connor, *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*.

method to question the perspective on the processes unfolding on the national level and shows them as complex and non-monolithic, while emphasizing the constructedness of the national organization. Cohen and Pedersen, similarly, apply this approach in juxtaposing two phenomena to render visible the aspects historians usually take for granted, "de-normalise" and "unsettle" the notions of identities, and re-evaluate the factors informing the historical processes. The comparative method is inseparable from a cross-national approach that examines the phenomena that connect and cross the borders of the nation-states, as each method is embedded in the formation of the other.

In historical studies, research on the post-1989/1991 memory is predominantly done at the state level and unfolds on the axis of the communist and national narratives, treated as mutually exclusive. A comparative transnational approach to the post-1989/1991 memory in CEE is mainly undertaken in edited volumes with different contributors authoring chapters dedicated to analyzing the state-level case studies. "*Historical Memory of Central and East European Communism*" (2018) exemplifies this approach, detailing the construction of the memory of state socialism and the official identity after 1989, examining the memorial landscapes of the post-socialist cities, and demonstrating the respective regimes' narratives on their pasts.[64]

Less academic attention, however, is generally dedicated to the synchronous analysis of the post-communist memory politics unfolding in parallel and reciprocally influencing each other. In this context, the Polish and Ukrainian cases present an interesting convergence. While the countries had completely different pre-1989/1991 experiences, they were subject to the introduction of similar narratives of memory and practices of instrumentalization of national remembrance cultures under state socialism. As the dynamics of transition differed, the two contexts have been involved in long-lasting dialogues, processes of transfers, mutual influences, and shared reactions to the external political triggers. Having, on the first sight, incomparable experiences, the two cases demonstrate convergent dynamics of disengagement with the dissonant past for various objectives unfolding on the axis of rethinking a national identity in the post-transition context.

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[64] Agnieszka Mrozik and Stanislav Holubec, *Historical Memory of Central and East European Communism* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

Although not in the context of the postcommunist remembrance, the aspect of dialogue between these contexts is well-researched in the 2021 "*Historical Cultures in Transition: Negotiating Memory, History and Identity in the Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*" project. It follows this logic in four books: "The Politics of Memory in Poland and Ukraine from Reconciliation to De-Conciliation,"[65] "Cultures of Historical Poland and Ukraine. About the sources of misunderstanding among neighbors,"[66] "Historical discourse in the mass media. Representations of the past in the Polish and Ukrainian spheres of media,"[67] and "Walka o pamięć czy instrumentalizacja historii: intelektualiści wobec polityki pamięci w III Rzeczypospolitej i na Ukrainie"[68] (The struggle for memory or the instrumentalization of history: intellectuals in the face of politics of memory in the Third Polish Republic and Ukraine). Employing a comparative perspective, the project details actors, institutions, mechanisms, and political implications of the historical production processes in Ukraine and Poland. It demonstrates the transformations of the respective historical cultures in seeking mutual reconciliation. In treating these contexts as entangled and synchronous, instead of approaching them as separate, the project situates them within the larger frames of mutual influences and the Central and Eastern European memory cultures' development.

Converging the two approaches outlined above—the detailed analysis of the processes of negotiating collective remembrance of the pre-1989/1991 regimes after the political change and a careful comparative research of a limited number of cases illustrating the processes not only parallel in their development but interacting and influencing each other appears to have a heuristic potential in highlighting the aspects these approaches tend to omit when applied separately. A combination of the cross-national and comparative perspectives in researching the Polish and Ukrainian processes of de-communization of collective memory allows for tracing the transformations of an inherently transnational ideology in the contexts that differed in relating to it, yet were contingent upon similar

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[65] Tomasz Stryjek and Joanna Konieczna-Sałamatin, *Politics of Memory in Poland and Ukraine: From Reconciliation to De-Conciliation* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).

[66] Tomasz Stryjek and Volodymyr Sklokin , ed., *Cultures of Historical Poland and Ukraine. About the sources of misunderstanding among neighbors* (Scholar; Collegium Civitas, 2021).

[67] Barbara Markowska, ed., *Historical Discourse in the Media. Representations of the Past in the Polish and Ukrainian Media Sphere* (Scholar; Collegium Civitas, 2021).

[68] Marek Wojnar, *Walka o pamięć czy instrumentalizacja historii: intelektualiści wobec polityki pamięci w III Rzeczypospolitej i na Ukrainie* (ISP PAN, 2021).

policies of the post-war and post-1989/1991 memory construction and the institutional, legislative, and structural modalities of disengagement with the pre 1989/1991 memory regimes as well as similarities in the discourses framing these changes and the political factors informing them, although to different degrees. The comparative approach will help critically engage with the causalities inherent to a nation-centered perspective employed in interpreting the post-1989/1991 memory work to analyze the position of the decommunization discourse in the nation- and state-building processes that followed the transition, and situate these processes within the context of the post-communist de-commemoration of the dissonant past and rethinking the national memory. The comparative perspective will also allow for tracing the asynchronous and at first sight incomparable aspects of memory politics, shedding light on the construction of the positions of actors of memory work and the prerequisites of the public reactions' similarities and their political and historical implications. Finally, examining the divergences in the unfolding of the process after the structurally similar transformations (i.e., introduction of the de-communization legislation) will help critically analyze the prerequisites of the respective reactions.

Chapter II. Constructing Identities, Projecting Belonging: Politics and Landscapes of Collective Memory in Warsaw and Kyiv before 1989/1991

II.1 Identity in the State-Socialist Memory Politics

Employing a future-oriented ideology postulating the necessity to transcend the confines of national identification in the struggle for global transformation, state-socialist regimes had still relied on the reinterpretations and mobilization of the past and never parted their ways with the national framework in articulating their objectives and claiming political legitimacy. In the Soviet Union, asserting and sustaining ideology relied on the convergence of the national and the Soviet identities, among which the latter, for most of the regime, was seen as a civic and future-oriented one. The interactions of ethnic, national, and Soviet/civic identities were complex and contingent upon the challenges in the internal and international politics. Being reflected in memory work and history writing, they had lasting effects that influenced the rearticulations of the national identities after 1991. Covering the larger processes of instrumentalizing the past under the state-socialist regimes, this chapter explores the narratives of memory that came to the forefront of the postwar politics in the Polish People's Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic to support and sustain the transforming political systems and details their roles in the respective public spheres. Reflecting on the changes in the memoryscapes of Warsaw and Kyiv, it aims to demonstrate how the urban space was used to buttress these narratives.

The instrumentalization of memory constituted a significant part of the Soviet state building, starting from the revolutionary iconoclasm targeting tsarist-era monuments in 1917 and proceeding with the decrees issued by the Council of the People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) afterward. Instrumentalizing forgetting applied to the symbols to forget the monarchy, the legislated revolutionary iconoclasm of 1917 echoed the iconoclasm of 1792. The "On Monuments of the Republic" decree issued on April 12, 1918, detailed the plan for removing the monuments honoring the figures of the tsarist period and not bearing historical or artistic significance from the public space and redecorating the cities across the RSFSR with the monuments that would celebrate the revolution, instead. The Council assigned this task, along with defining the criteria of

the "historical and artistic interest," to the newly established commission of People's Commissars for Education and the Property of the Republic.[69] The commission was tasked with organizing the city decorations and developing the projects to memorialize the Revolution of 1917 by May 1 of the same year. This decree was not implemented fully due to the time constraints and the lack of developed organizational mechanisms. However, the acts of de-commemoration that had happened at that time not only demonstrated the symbolic rupture between the political regimes but also established a specific dialogue between them. This process subordinated the past to—quite literally—the authority and rule of the present, as illustrated by the monuments undergoing the so-called "people's trials," which involved the participation of the lawyers and prosecutors, and the monuments being sentenced to public hanging, as was the case with the statue of Pyotr Stolypin.

The "On Monuments of the Republic" decree constituted the first step in Lenin's plan of the Monumental Propaganda, which was conceived to mobilize the symbolic to forge and assert the political. While the initial politics of memory focused on the state-sanctioned forgetting, the relations between the past-oriented narratives and the future-oriented ideology were more nuanced and mutually dependent on the articulations of ethnic/national and Soviet identities. Subsequent decrees and resolutions demonstrated that even the initial pantheon of the regime's heroes included people of various national backgrounds. For example, the Council of People's Commissars resolution adopted on July 30, 1918, and published on August 2, 1918, encompassed a list of people to be honored with monuments in cities across the RSFS; it included political figures, writers, poets, philosophers, artists, and composers of different origins, although granting the dominant presence to those of the Russian background.[70] The later canons of remembrance in the different republics of the USSR and, then, the countries of the Warsaw Pact merged a Russian-centered Soviet political pantheon with the local memory narratives, reinterpreted to align with the values and objectives of the new regime, while rendering narratives that diverged unworthy of being remembered. The politics of memory and

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[69] Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Soviet of People's Commissars, *On Monuments of the Republic*, Decree, adopted April 12, 1918.

[70] "The list of personalities in honor of whom the monuments were to be erected in Moscow and other cities of the RSFSR, submitted to the Council of People's Commissars by the Fine Arts Department of the People's Commissariat for Education'," *Izvestia* 163, no. 427 (1918).

history-writing were evolving in response to political transformations. While the immediacy of the regime change required forgetting the recent past, the Soviet system later rehabilitated some figures from the imperial pantheon back to the cultural canon. In the Stalinist period, this practice concerned the military figures: the respective axiology was used in framing the new war. It was also connected with the establishment of the so-called Russian-centered etatism. Similarly, the political and cultural figures from various national contexts were reinterpreted and included in the canon to forge the peoples' loyalty. The modality of collective remembrance developed at the beginning of the Soviet state-building constituted an intermixture of the revolutionary change, encompassing the destruction and (re)legitimization of memory that can be traced back to the events of the French revolution, and the sacralization and canonization of memory, reflecting the Orthodox tradition in a context of the secular belief system.

In 1935, Nikolai Bukharin defined the notion of the "Soviet people" for the first time in the *Izvestia* newspaper after almost a decade of this concept being in circulation.[71] In Stalin's 1931 speech at the First All-Union Conference of workers of socialist industry, "On the Tasks of Workers in the National Economy," the USSR had been referred to as the "socialist fatherland" of workers obliged to end its backwardness by "outstripping the capitalist countries." Belonging to the "fatherland" was, thus, seen in civic terms, and this notion of citizenship was entwined with labor and production issues. Four years later, Bukharin referred to the "Soviet people" using a celebratory tone and emphasizing their unity, heroism, and solidarity against the backdrop of the nearing "fascist threat."[72] The publication celebrated ethnic diversity, and the issue included contributions from authors of different origins. Therefore, from the beginning, articulations of the Soviet identity referred to a multinational, united, and consolidated polity. At the same time, the ideology was changing, shifting its objectives from the "world proletarian revolution" and proletarian internationalism to the "construction of socialism in one country" and National Bolshevism. After implementing the indigenization policies

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[71]Anna M. Whittington, "Forging Soviet Citizens: Ideology, Identity, and Stability in the Soviet Union, 1930-1991" (Doctoral diss., University of Michigan, 2018).

[72] Whittington, "Forging Soviet Citizens: Ideology, Identity, and Stability in the Soviet Union, 1930-1991."

of the 1920s and the respective support for the republics of the USSR being governed by their representatives, the policies became more centralized. During this time, the narrative of the "friendship of the peoples" that presupposed the idea of an equal interaction between the developed nations substituted the metaphor of the "brotherhood of the peoples" that implied a revolutionary mobilization and employed militant language of the hierarchical familial ties—in this articulation, the Russians were granted the role of the eldest brother, "the first among the equals."[73]

The idea of the "friendship of the peoples" became a key component of the official ideology, emphasizing the harmonious state-managed coexistence of different nationalities within the same political community. The Soviet Constitution of 1936, although not referring to the "Soviet people" explicitly, emphasized the unity of all the peoples composing the USSR. However, granting the dominant role to the Russian people and addressing them as a model for other peoples to follow contributed to establishing the foundation for Russian-centered etatism, which was later evident in education and labor relations. Another notable tendency in this period was an increase in references to the military, approached as the army of the "Soviet people"—a united, multiethnic entity. The propaganda of this period underscored the diversity of the Soviet people by contrasting the respective values of equality and inclusion against the racial hierarchies of the Nazi regime.

The war experience transformed the articulations of national and soviet identities, strengthening the existing hierarchies with the new axiology. While the immediate postwar objectives focused on the physical reconstruction, they were accompanied by campaigns to assert and entrench the Soviet institutions, especially in the newly incorporated territories. While the influences of pre-war politics and power dispositions remained, new methods were implemented to consolidate the community divided by different experiences from 1939 to 1945. Besides transfers and resettlements, these means included the creation of the narrative about the war that would explain and frame the recent experience. The immediate official accounts of the WWII experience, or the "Great Patriotic War," referred to the unified pan-national victory of the Soviet people, with the Russian people's

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[73] Ibid.

contribution to the warfare seen as dominant. This period witnessed an increase in homogenization along national lines, which entailed that the experiences of the non-titular nations were largely unrepresented. The "Great Patriotic War" narrative was soon adapted to the political realities of the Cold War, gaining critical importance in the 1960s and becoming a core narrative in memory politics and a key reference in claiming state legitimacy.

Analyzing the postwar transformations of the Soviet system, Franziska Exeler highlighted the ambivalence of the employed political strategies.[74] The authorities viewed the war as demonstrating the real ideological preferences and loyalties of the peoples; therefore, they approached their various and often diverging experiences in black and while. This perspective allowed them to "uncover" the mass enemies of the regime as well as its mass support in the newly incorporated territories. At the same time, the treatment of the accused was not equal, but ambivalent and contingent upon various factors, which demonstrated the ambivalent character of the Soviet postwar retribution policies.

The articulations of the ethnic/national and Soviet/civic identities were multilayered and complex. The concept of the "Soviet people" referred to the identity constructed on the rhetoric of consolidatedness and unity, relying on the loyalty of the diverse national communities and therefore involving ethnocultural elements. The inequalities between the titular identities complicated these articulations, simultaneously echoing and diverging from the previous, imperial patterns of rule. The postwar construction of memory accentuated the national belonging, homogenizing it along the national lines, yet also imposing the hierarchy of heroism that was later transferred to different political contexts to assert the political systems and forge loyalties of the respective communities. The postwar memory politics in the Polish People's Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic demonstrate different scenarios of historical narratives being used in strengthening respective political systems. Establishing the foundation for the official memory politics in PPR and UkrSSR, these narratives had lasting influences on the following memory regimes.

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[74] Franziska Exeler, "The Ambivalent State: Determining Guilt in the Post-World War II Soviet Union", *Slavic Review* 75, № 3 (2016).

II.2 Memory in the Postwar Politics: the Polish People's Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

The Postwar Memory Narratives in the Polish People's Republic

The formation of the Polish People's Republic started in 1944 with the establishment of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. It relied on the backing of the Soviet Union and the Red Army. The process lasted four years, resulting in the formation of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), which ascended to power in 1948. As the state was governed by the political minority that did not have considerable popular support, nor could directly use force to forge public acceptance and loyalty, the authorities needed a different means to coerce the political community and claim it legitimate. One of such methods of persuasion and cooptation, especially in the regime's earlier years, lay in establishing historical continuities, reinterpreting and appropriating Polish history for it to be seen as a series of events that had led to the state-socialist rule.

The memory of the Second World War—referred to as the "War of Liberation" in the official propaganda—was crucial in establishing the Polish People's Republic. Seen as a political resource, it was mobilized from the first year of the regime to legitimize the assertion of power and gain public support by providing the nation with a narrative framing the experience of the war it had undergone. While the emphases of memory politics were shifting, reacting to the issues in internal and international relations, their objectives remained unchanged, and they focused on informing society's historical consciousness[75] and sustaining the established political system.

Fostering loyalty to the new regime necessitated establishing historical continuities and rewriting the history of the political tradition of the Polish state.[76] The key approaches employed can be outlined here. First, the authorities needed to react to the Polish government in exile as it evoked the memories of the Second Polish Republic, and render it illegitimate. The official rhetoric addressed the London-based government as having lost the chance to establish an independent nation-state. On this backdrop, the communist authorities presented themselves as providing the opportunity for

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[75] Bartosz Korzeniewski, "World War II in the Politics of Memory of the Polish People's Republic 1944–1970," in *World War II and Two Occupations* (Peter Lang, n.d.).
[76] Ibid.

national unity.[77] Second, the regime divided the pre-war historical tradition into the "noble" and "correct," among which the events and figures that represented the "noble" tradition were excluded from the memory canons. The events that were seen as ideologically "correct," on the contrary, were presented as precursors to the establishment of communist rule.[78] Thus, after the Second World War, history was reinterpreted in a teleological and dichotomic key, resulting in the perceptions of the communists' victory as unavoidable. The key transformations in the PPR's politics of memory can be framed in several periods: the period of 1944-1948 that encompassed the immediate postwar years and was characterized by the instrumentalization of the narrative about the Second World War in asserting the political regime; 1948-1956—the period of memory culture's transformations and the shift in focus from establishing the WWII remembrance to importing the memory of the Revolution of 1917; and 1956-1989 that covered the expansion of the official memory canon and an emergence of Solidarity's strong alternative memory canon.[79]

In the postwar years, the main objectives of the authorities encompassed the consolidation of power, the elimination of the political opposition, the discreditation of the underground formations, and gaining the nation's support. The politics of memory of this period focused on framing the war experience and reinterpreting the Polish tradition of a struggle for national independence. These practices resulted in the hybrid cultural forms, including the narratives of memory, that became characteristic of the system Elżbieta Halas addressed as "symbolically plastic."[80]

The authorities employed different strategies regarding the narratives that either did not align with the new memory regime or were potentially detrimental to it. Therefore, the memories of the Soviet repressions of the Poles after 1939 and the Katyn massacre were excluded entirely from the public sphere, and the histories of the Polish underground political formations and the Warsaw Uprising were rewritten and falsified.[81] The holidays, significant for a national identification and the

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Elżbieta Hałas, "Symbole publiczne a polska tożsamość. Zmiana i niejednoznaczność w kalendarzu świąt państwowych III Rzeczypospolitej," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 45, no. 3-4 (n.d.).
[81] Ibid.

statehood tradition before the war, including 3 May (the declaration of the 1791 Constitution) and 11 November (the day of regaining independence), were also subjected to the "repressive erasure."[82]

The formation of the official memory of the Second World War relied on the two political myths: the myth on the Polish-Soviet victory over Germans that encompassed the perception of the 9 May as the day of Liberation (hence, the war was officially referred to as the war of liberation—"wojna wyzwoleńcza") and the myth on the Soviet-Polish brotherhood in arms. The narrative about the victory comprised a superimposition of the victory of the Soviet-Polish brotherhood in arms over the "fascist occupiers" and the victory of the new political system, signifying the general triumph of Polish history.[83] These two narratives were intertwined within a political myth of the return of the inherently Polish territories to the "fatherland" during the war. This narrative was later supported by the implementation of commemorative practices and public holidays and reflected in memoryscapes.

The communist government introduced a new calendar of official celebrations and public holidays to support the new memory regimes. The holidays that corresponded to the key political myths and were granted the greatest significance were 9 May, 12 October, and 22 July. The 9 May referred to the National Day of Victory and Liberty, which was introduced to establish identification with the state. 12 October celebrated the first joint Soviet-Polish battle, supporting the narrative about the brotherhood in arms.[84] The official war memory narrative reduced the Polish war experience to the identification with the Red Army and the People's Army, omitting the Underground state. Finally, 22 July was a newly established celebration that laid the foundational myth for the state through referring to the fabricated publication day of the Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation.[85]

Halas refers to the processes of rethinking and appropriating prior traditions, including important celebrations, as a way of modeling hybrid cultural forms characteristic of the "symbolically plastic" political system. Embodying this plasticity, PPR relied on a triad of a nation, people, and a

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[82] Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting", *Memory Studies* 1, № 1 (2008).
[83] Korzeniewski, "World War II in the Politics of Memory of the Polish People's Republic 1944–1970."
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

state, where the latter had not only territorial but also temporal borders. This explains both the acts of prohibiting and the processes of rethinking the symbols, holidays, and canons of the Second Polish Republic.[86]

The Stalinist period (1948-1956) in the Polish People's Republic was characterized by a significant shift in memory politics: the narratives about the Second World War, crucial in the immediate postwar years, were substituted by the attempts to import the Soviet memory of the 1917 Revolution. Besides the introduction of the signs, places, and practices of memory, this change was reflected in the official calendar with the introduction of May 1 and October 7—the first memory narratives of the events that did not happen in Poland and were generally foreign to the national tradition. However, these attempts were largely unsuccessful due to a discrepancy between the official remembrance and the lived experience and communicative memory. Robert Traba's contribution resonates with this notion, emphasizing the rupture between the bureaucratic and living memories that constrained the policies of assimilation.[87] Another rupture, as mentioned by Halas, concerned the objective of introducing official memories related to the nation, state, and people and the means employed in this period. Despite being claimed to be international, these narratives originated from and bore a deeper connection to the Russian political context, which resulted in people perceiving them as foreign.[88] The dates introduced during this period were close to those of the pre-war national and religious holidays, substituting them with commemorating or celebrating the official and "correct" versions of the past.

In 1956-1989, the official canons of memory expanded with the changes in the political system. The main foci of this period comprised the narratives of the Polish martyrology and the histories of the battles against the Germans. With Władysław Gomułka becoming the First Secretary of the PZPR, the interpretations of many historical events transformed—the politics of memory

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[86] Hałas, "Symbole publiczne a polska tożsamość. Zmiana i niejednoznaczność w kalendarzu świąt państwowych III Rzeczypospolitej."

[87] Barbara Szacka and Marjorie Castle, "Polish Remembrance of World War II," *International Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 4 Collective Memory and Social Transition in Poland (2006).

[88] Hałas, "Symbole publiczne a polska tożsamość. Zmiana i niejednoznaczność w kalendarzu świąt państwowych III Rzeczypospolitej."

became less strict and focused more on emphasizing the Polish tradition of struggle for independence and constructing such a version of the past that could bridge the existing ruptures. The change in the narrative of the Warsaw Uprising was a key illustration of these transformations.

The communicative memory of the Second World War was fading due to the growing temporal distance, granting a bigger presence and role in shaping collective remembrance to the official state institutions and self-organized communities, such as the veteran organization Polish Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBoWiD), that in this period became actively involved in the memory politics. This engagement had complex manifestations, including the instrumentalization of the Home Army's memories in supporting the official communist narratives.

The 1960-1966 celebrations of the Millennium of the Polish State presented an example of the competition between the visions of the Polish statehood by the Party and the Church. The two projects for the celebration focused on completely different visions of the state, presupposing diverging political and historical continuities.[89] The Party authorities emphasized the history of the struggle leading to socialism and focused on the memory of the Grunewald battle, encompassing the opening of the school monuments, road building projects, organization of parades, and introduction of monuments. The Church's celebration emphasized the religious aspect of Polish identity, marking the anniversary of baptism and strengthening an identity that was alternative to the state's, which soon became especially important in the organization of the opposition.

Finally, the period of the 1980s is referred to as the time of the "reanimation of memory"[90] as it witnessed an increase in publications on the topics silenced or censored earlier, including the memories of the Katyn Massacre.

The development of the memory politics in the Polish People's Republic had two main sides. On the one hand, the respective policies aimed to legitimize the regime change through establishing historical continuities with the existing forms and narratives of collective memory. This encompassed

[89] Jan Kubik, *The power of symbols against the symbols of power: the rise of Solidarity and the fall of state socialism in Poland* (The Pennsylvania State University, 1994).
[90] Barbara Szacka and Marjorie Castle, "Polish Remembrance of World War II," *International Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 4 Collective Memory and Social Transition in Poland (2006).

reinterpreting and appropriating the national historical traditions, practices, and canons of memory to align with the new ideology. On the other hand, the past was filtered and categorized into the "correct" histories fitting the teleological narratives of the state ideology and the "noble" historical traditions that were excluded from the memory canon, similar to the narratives that could question the ideas, values, or objectives of the Party. The dynamic of the PPR's memory politics can also be characterized by the following transformations. The initial focus of the official memory was centered on framing the war experience to interpret the event that brought the regime change. In the subsequent decades, the focus shifted to incorporate PPR into a larger community of memory, importing the narratives and practices of remembrance of the 1917 Revolution. However, the gap between official memory canons and the lived experiences and communicative memories made the project largely unsuccessful. These dialogues and mixtures of memory cultures resulted in the emergence of the hybrid cultural forms, which later influenced the landscapes of collective remembrance in post-1989 Poland and the changes they underwent.

The Postwar Memory Narratives in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

Writing about Russian-Ukrainian relations in Stalinist politics of memory, Serhy Yekelchyk approached national identification as a construct resulting from social and cultural practices.[91] Yekelchyk drew on Arjun Appadurai's idea that such a construction process is not limitless and entirely plastic, but dependent on the existing narratives.[92] The politics of memory in the USSR similarly relied on the narratives, pantheons, and frameworks that had already been in circulation before the formation of the regime. In the context of the UkrSSR memory politics, these ideas were often shaped by nineteenth and twentieth-century intellectuals and, embodying longer traditions of signification, already bore social, cultural, and emotional importance. Therefore, they became a political resource later used to forge public loyalty. Converging Soviet and national identifications, the politics of memory in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic were changing, responding to

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[91] Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (University of Toronto Press, 2014).
[92] Ibid.

challenges in internal and international politics. While the notion of "postwar" period as applied to the Ukrainian SSR appears as having unclear borders due to the continuation of the partisan fighting and divergent war experiences the citizens of different UkrSSr's region had underwent, this section will refer to it addressing the official efforts in (re)constructing collective remembrance as a means of asserting ideology. The memory of World War II (referred to as "Great Patriotic War" in the official historiographies, memory politics, and media communication) became a foundation for rearticulating the Soviet identity and shaping a narrative that would unite the Ukrainian people separated by drastically different pre-war and wartime experiences.

The transformations in the collective memory were unfolding against the backdrop of the ideological change that Nicholas Timasheff referred to as the "Great Retreat." According to Timasheff, the "retreat" marked a conscious shift from internationalism to traditional values in governing in the light of the nearing Nazi threat and the unpopularity of the global revolutionary ideas by 1934. While Timasheff's work is criticized for his idea of the conscious abandonment of ideology, the term he coined is actively used to refer to the transformations of the scale of the political objectives of the Party in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In this period, the multinational and multiethnic polities of the USSR's republics were homogenized along national lines. The national pantheons became important political references; hence, they were reinterpreted to align with the ideological ideas, values, and objectives. They were supported by the new "great traditions," commemorative practices, and public holidays. These changes bore upon the construction of memory of the Second World War, and, at the same time, the memories of WWII reflected the politics implemented regarding different nationalities of the USSR.

In a radio announcement on 22 June 1941, the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs, Viacheslav Molotov, referred to the war with the adjective "patriotic" for the first time. He employed tsarist-era lexis, which was earlier used regarding the war of 1812, to evoke the associations with the axiology of the prerevolutionary military traditions.[93] If the official statements issued in the 1930s emphasized

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[93] Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*.

the role of the USSR as a multiethnic homeland of the workers, the experience of the war shifted this articulation, connecting them with the virtues of heroism and consolidatedness. The postwar history-writing, aiming to unite the peoples who had different experiences of the war, focused on the moral unity of the Soviet people, the values of patriotism and heroism, the role of the Party in leading the people, and the narrative about the peoples' friendship.

The key political myths informing the construction of the official memory encompassed the perception of the "greatness" of the Russian people, the narrative about the Russian "liberation" of the Ukrainian territories, and the narrative about the "gathering" and "reunifying" Ukrainian lands. The myth of "greatness" was translated into various official practices even during the war. One of the examples deals with the official commemoration of the Revolution of 1917 in 1941, when Stalin addressed the threat the "German occupiers" pose to the "Great Russian People" and referred to the glory of the figures of the Russian military canon, such as A. Nevsky, D. Donskoy, K. Minin, D. Pozharsky, A. Suvorov, and M. Kutuzov, to establish a continuity to a then-present-day fight based on the existing military virtues.[94]

The rhetoric of greatness was used to refer to the Russian people and other titular nations to forge their loyalty, symbolically bringing them closer to the "elder brothers." Stalin's toast from the reception of the commanders of the Red Army on 24 May 1945 constituted a culmination of this rhetoric's use. He proclaimed that the Russian people constituted the leading force of the USSR and emphasized the sacrifices they made for the sake of victory and their decisive role in the Soviet "historical victory over fascism."[95] Another example of using the lexis of "greatness" was the "Letter from the Ukrainian People to the Great Russian People," written right after the Red Army took over the city. The letter does not refer to the Ukrainian nation as the "great" yet accentuates the brotherly ties that the two peoples were seen sharing in waging the war and reaching the "historic victories."[96]

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[94] Viktor Drozdov, "Obraz rosiiskoho narodu v radianskykh komemoratyvnykh praktykakh na aneksovanykh ukrainskykh terytoriiakh (1939–1953)," [The Image of the Russian People in Soviet Commemorative Practices on the Annexed Ukrainian Territories (1939–1953)] *Scientific Papers of the Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsyiubynskyi State Pedagogical University Series History*, no. 44 (June 19, 2023).
[95] Ibid.
[96] Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*.

The lexis of "greatness" was applied to the Ukrainians in official communications in 1940 in an attempt to forge the people's loyalty in a state where this rhetoric was applied only to the Russian people.[97]

However, the overarching frame shaping postwar approaches to national cultures from 1946 until 1953 was informed by the so-called Zhdanovshchina, the cultural doctrine introduced by the secretary of the Central Committee, Andrey Zhdanov. The main objectives of this policy were centralization and the establishment of total control of the Party over the culture and intellectual life. In the UkrSSR, this policy took shape in the form of an increase in accusations of bourgeoisie nationalism and the enforcement of the canon of proletarian internationalism. One of the key objectives of this policy in the Ukrainian context was promoting the convergence of the Ukrainian culture with the "great Russian culture."[98]

The official approaches to Ukrainian culture in the postwar years reflected the general politics of centralization and interpreted it as closely connected to the Russian one, sometimes addressing them with metaphors of familial ties. At the same time, the experiences and memories of the non-titular nations and the ethnic-based violence, including the Crimean Tatar deportations, the Holocaust, and the Polish-Ukrainian conflicts, including the Volhynia Massacre, were silenced.

The Stalinist canon encompassed the expressions of gratitude to the Party and its leader in various formats, ranging from solemn meetings, speeches, and rallies to posters, slogans, and congratulatory letters.[99] In the postwar years, the "gratitude canon" transformed to encompass the gratitude to the Russian people for the liberation and reunification of the Ukrainian lands. The narrative on the reunification of the Ukrainian people (which referred to the incorporation of the territories in the West of Ukraine into the UrkSSR) was articulated with Ukrainian history, addressing

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Nataliia Siruk, "Ideolohichnyi nahliad za intelihentsiieiu v Ukraini (druha polovyna 40-kh–pochatok 50-kh rokiv KhKh st." [Ideological supervision of the intelligentsia in Ukraine (second half of the 1940s and early 1950s)], *Intelihentsiia i vlada. Seriia: Istoriia*, 2010.

[99] Drozdov, "Obraz rosiiskoho narodu v radianskykh komemoratyvnykh praktykakh na aneksovanykh ukrainskykh terytoriiakh (1939–1953)," [The Image of the Russian People in Soviet Commemorative Practices on the Annexed Ukrainian Territories (1939–1953)].

it as the history of the long-lasting struggle against social and national oppression for reunification in a single Ukrainian state and the unification with the brotherly Russian people.

In October 1949, the authorities introduced the celebration marking the anniversary of the "Reunification of the Ukrainian People." Held on the newly incorporated territories, the holiday, as a component of a broader memory policy, had a consolidating and legitimizing significance. It supported the narratives about the roles of the Bolsheviks, the Party, and the Russian people in purging the "national bourgeoisie" and reunifying the Ukrainian people.[100] The myth of the reunification of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples reached its peak in 1954 on the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Pereyaslav agreement. Finally, one of the biggest celebrations in the UkrSSR in the postwar years was the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the state in 1948. The speeches emphasized the "unbreakable friendship" between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, serving as a "driving force in the struggle for communism's victory." This narrative utilized the metaphors of familial ties, referring to the Ukrainian people as "younger brothers" reaching out for help to the Russian people as the elder brother.[101] It was stretched temporally to encompass the more distant historical figures, such as Bohdan Khmelnytsky, and proceeded to the stories about the civil war and the "Great Patriotic War."

The "Great Patriotic War" became a central event in the official political mythology of the 1960s, substituting for the narrative about the October Revolution. Bartolomiej Gajos outlined the following reasons for the shift in memory politics in 1965: a generational change (for the first time, the people in power did not experience the Revolution; however, they had the first-hand experience of the war), the geopolitical change (the Sino-Soviet split), the de-Stalinization policy, and the anniversary of the proclaimed end of building stage of communism which necessitated rethinking the political objectives.[102] The twentieth anniversary of the victory in the war in 1965 marked the first state-level victory celebration since 1947, with this day becoming a public holiday. May 9th, Victory

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Bartłomiej Gajos, "The Fiftieth Anniversary of the October Revolution (1967) – a Generational Turnover and the Politics of Memory of the USSR", *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 52, № 2 (1 January 2018).

Day, became equally important with the day of the Revolution of 1917 in telling the state's origin story; over time, this narrative became a key element in ideological education frequently referred to in educational[103] and commemorative practices, especially targeted at the youth.[104]

The war historiography of the 1960s can be characterized by a self-congratulatory narration and generalized statements overlooking the experiences of different ethnic groups, focusing on the heroism of the Soviet people instead; it centered on the valor of the Red Army, the Resistance movement, and the central role of the Party.[105] In May 1964, a decree was issued to improve the functioning of museums, assigning communist education as a new mission for them. This entailed the formation of museum exhibitions focused on the history of the USSR from the Revolution of 1917 to the 1960s, constructing and reinforcing an image of historical continuity. The approach the Great Patriotic War Museum in Kyiv had undertaken echoed these changes in sustaining the image of the Soviet people in a heroic fight; it was supposed to be simultaneously scientific and commemorative, didactic and emotional.

By the 1980s, the Great Patriotic War-related memory politics had been developed fully, culminating in a well-connected set of commemorative practices, historiographical approaches, and political iconographies developed to sustain the narrative.[106] The early 1980s marked a peak of this myth's development, which was questioned and challenged by *glasnost* and the inclusion of different voices later. The state-level memory politics of the 1980s also utilized public spaces to establish commemorative places that provided information about the event and transmitted the emotions associated with it. The design projects for the memorial ensembles across the USSR at this time employed grandiose structures and anthropomorphic forms personifying the "Soviet people."[107]

The postwar politics of memory in the UkrSSR unfolded against the backdrop of centralization in politics, homogenization along national lines, and overall increasing ideological

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[103] Gajos, "The Fiftieth Anniversary of the October Revolution (1967) – a Generational Turnover and the Politics of Memory of the USSR"
[104] Nina Tumarkin, "The Great Patriotic War as myth and memory", *European Review* 11, № 4 (October 2003).
[105] Olga Baranova, "Politics of Memory of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union", in *IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings* (2015).
[106] Tumarkin, "The Great Patriotic War as myth and memory".
[107] Ibid.

control. The memory narratives of the "Great Patriotic War" reflected the necessity to re-establish and strengthen the collective identity of the "Soviet people," presenting the war as a Pan-Soviet experience and referring to the values of moral unity and heroism. At the same time, the increasing focus on the national frame affected the development of the WWII memory, strengthening the pre-war hierarchies of the USSR's titular nations in the political context that had changed. While the cultural policies of the immediate postwar years emphasized the unity of the fraternal people in warfare and employed Zhdanovshchyna as a cultural policy, the policies of the Khrushchev's period focused on the idea of the reunification of the Ukrainian and Russian people, with the narrative about the Pereyaslav Agreement serving as a main reference point. Finally, during the Thaw, the policies that concerned the UkrSSR utilized the narrative of people's friendship. In the UkrSSR's postwar context, the Soviet identity was seen as a civic one, with the notion of citizenship transforming to encompass the values and virtues of heroism and consolidation and the civic emotions of love for the fatherland and the Party's leader. The respective memory narratives reflected the constructed subordinate position of the Ukrainian people to the "elder brothers," with the patronizing emphasis on the weaker position of the Ukrainians regarding the Russians. At the same time, the Ukrainians' contribution in the war, as that of another titular nation, was emphasized, which also partially explains the long-term preservation of the "Great Patriotic War" rhetoric, along with the practices and narratives of memory in the Ukrainian public sphere after 1991. The postwar politics of memory, thus, seemed to entrench the previous hierarchies with the new narratives of remembrance and commemorative practices.

II.3 Memory Narratives in the Urban Spaces of Warsaw and Kyiv

Warsaw's Postwar Palimpsests

In the years following World War II, the communist government approached collective memory as a symbolic resource, utilizing it to forge identification with the state and claim its political legitimacy. The changes in urban memory became a part of these efforts. While in Warsaw, the key objective in

the immediate postwar period was to renew the urban fabric after its destruction; the reconstruction process symbolically rewrote the city, translating the ideology into the urban memoryscapes.

While the policies introduced immediately after the war focused on reconstructing the city, this process had two objectives that were pursued simultaneously. As the attack on the city—and especially the Old Town—was seen as an attempt to destroy not only the built environment of the city, but also to raze the Polish culture, the postwar reconstruction meant rewriting the national culture and re-inscribing it in the public space.[108] The modality of the reconstruction was subject to debate, and the stances varied from the construction of a new city *tabula rasa* (with fewer voices, most of which were from the communists, being supportive of this idea) to creating a copy of the pre-war cityscape (this project was supported by the majority; interestingly, it was supported both by the new authorities and by the architects of a more traditionalist leaning). Jan Kubik referred to this process as an illustration of the nationalizing focus of the Stalinist-era politics in the PPR.[109] According to Kubik, the reconstruction of the city was not an example of symbolic engineering but of remodelling of the existing tradition to provide a ground for the Bierut government to claim itself legitimate. In this articulation, historical continuity was seen as secondary, leaving the main role to the long-standing Polish political and cultural traditions. The resulting system, thus, presented an example of the hegemony's "moving equilibrium."[110]

The building process gave rise to the metaphor of Warsaw as the heroic city (*bohaterski miasto*), which was often used to refer to the might of the state-socialist regime.[111] The city's finished parts were solemnly presented on 22 July to demonstrate that the reconstruction of the city and the culture overall was brought about by the state-socialist regime. The transformation of Warsaw's memoryscape during the state-socialist regime can be divided into two distinct periods. Krystyna Siellawa-Kolbowska identified them as follows: 1945-1955 as the first post-war decade, the establishment of the new regime, and the Stalinist period of the PPR, and 1956-1989 as the period of

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[108] David Crowley, "Cityscape After a Battle: The Faces of Warsaw," in *Cumulus Working Papers. Warsaw* (University of Art and Design Helsinki, 2007).
[109] David Crowley, "People's Warsaw / Popular Warsaw," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997).
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

the PPR's limited sovereignty.[112] During this time, Warsaw's memoryscape underwent significant transformations by the means of erasure, augmentation, and re-inscription[113] as well as coexistence and competition of distinct memory narratives. Siellawa-Kolbowska details the emergence and development of the two traditions of memory that polarized Warsaw's memoryscape and affected the overall construction of the remembrance culture during and after PPR. Namely, these were the *vae victis* ("woe to the vanquished") narrative of the PPR authorities, and *gloria victis* ("glory to the vanquished") narrative of the Home Army.[114]

The *vae victis* remembrance was constituted by two components: the pro-Soviet rule memorialization and the silencing of the alternative remembrance strategies, especially of the Warsaw Uprising. The first part of this strategy is illustrated by the war monuments honoring the Red Army, built between 1945 and 1950, and the introduction of war-related public holidays and commemoration practices. The most significant monuments erected in Warsaw in this period included the Memorial to the Polish-Soviet Brotherhood in Arms (unveiled in 1945, it was the first monument to be installed in the city after the regime change), the Soviet Soldiers Memorial (unveiled in 1946 to honor the soldiers who fell in the fight in Washington Roundabout), and the Mausoleum of Soviet Soldiers (a necropolis built in 1950 to commemorate the soldiers of the First Belarusian Front).[115] It is also important that the official narratives of memory in the PPR and their reflection in the urban milieux rarely included key figures of the Soviet political pantheon, being focused on Polish communist figures instead.

Another important landmark of this period was the Palace of Culture and Sciences, constructed in the period from the late 1940s to 1955. An example of the Stalinist architecture in Warsaw, the construction of this grandiose project necessitated destroying several blocks of residential architecture. Built by the Polish and Soviet soldiers, the "brotherly gift" did not bear a

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[112] Krystyna Ewa Siellawa-Kolbowska, "War After War Second World War Memorials as Memory Sites – The Case of Warsaw," in *Collective Memories in War* (Routledge, 2016).

[113] Jerzy Elzanowski, "Memorials and Material Dislocation the Politics of Public Space in Warsaw," in *Public Space and the Challenges of Urban Transformation in Europe* (Routledge, 2013).
[114] Siellawa-Kolbowska, "War After War Second World War Memorials as Memory Sites – The Case of Warsaw."
[115] Ibid.

significant immediate connection to the city, neither emotional nor pragmatic, and thus was not welcomed by the citizens. Although in the interwar period, Warsaw already had its first skyscraper—the Prudential House (Hotel Warszawa)—the Palace of Culture and Science completely changed the cityscape, erasing its Jewish district, re-centering Warsaw around a sign of a new ideology, silencing the spatial narratives referring to different stories residing, since then, in its shadow, and symbolically placing PPR in the USSR's orbit.[116]

Detailing the postwar transformations in Polish public memory, Jerzy Elżanowski emphasized that since 1945, Warsaw witnessed an increase in grassroots commemoration that included the installation of crosses, stone tablets, and plaques at the execution sites.[117] These practices mostly concerned the grassroots memorialization of the Warsaw Uprising. These efforts constituted the second thread of the postwar remembrance—the *gloria victis* narrative. While one of the components of the state's efforts lay in silencing the initiatives of the Warsaw Uprising memorialization, the civic agency in documenting and commemorating these events formed the opposing strategy. Both dynamics and their interactions are illustrated by the shaping of the public memory of the Warsaw Uprising.

In the postwar period, ex-militants who participated in the Uprising and their families started documenting and researching the places of the fights. One of the most significant places of the Uprising commemoration and memorialization was Powązki Military Cemetery, as the important non-official memorial—the *Gloria Victis*—was installed there[118] by the grassroots efforts. However, the visits to the Cemetery were politically threatening as upon entering, the visitors were asked for their identification and visit purposes—this regulation resulted in several areas of the cemetery becoming neglected.[119] The situation changed after 1956, when the units of the Warsaw Garrison and the school pupils engaged in renovating the cemetery. Since 1964, it has become a central place of memory of the Uprising.

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[116] Piotr Skurowski, "Warsaw: Precarious Spaces, Precarious Memories," in *Precarious Places* (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2020).
[117] Elzanowski, "Memorials and Material Dislocation the Politics of Public Space in Warsaw."
[118] Siellawa-Kolbowska, "War After War Second World War Memorials as Memory Sites – The Case of Warsaw."
[119] Ibid.

The memory of the Warsaw Uprising also demonstrates the heterogeneity of agency and media comprising Polish memorial landscape, which largely contrasts the situation in the Ukrainian public sphere at that time. Being present in art and films, the history of the Uprising remained unrepresented in the urban memoryscape, until the 1970s.

The monument to the *Undefeated Fallen* (Polegli Niepokonani), the first to memorialize the Warsaw Uprising, was installed in the Warsaw Insurgents' Cemetery in 1973. Another sign dedicated to the memory of the Uprising—the *Monument to the Heroes of the Uprising* (Pomnik Powstańców Warszawy) and the *Monument Barricade 1939* (Pomnik Barykada Września)—were installed in 1979. Long silenced, the topic remained sensitive yet very important to the public. Thomas Gladsky mentioned the coexistence of the nationalist and communist memory narratives in the public sphere, emphasizing that even during the Gomułka's politically rigid regime, the topics of resistance and independence were represented; in the same way, during Gierek's rule, the three monuments that constituted the most significant changes in Warsaw's memoryscape of this period were not "socialist" in their messages.[120] This tendency continued in the 1980s, with the establishment of the memory canon of the opposition movement.

Since the postwar years and especially after 1956, Warsaw has witnessed a noticeable trend of civic agency in public commemoration, which only increased over time, culminating in the formation of Solidarity's remembrance canon of the 1980s, which constituted an alternative to the state's cultural memory. The complexity of this period can be summarized by the fact that even as it expanded and became more flexible, the memoryscape and the forms of interacting with it were still controlled by the authorities. Therefore, the strategies of the urban memory employed after WWII were focused on establishing and sustaining the "equilibrium" of the national tradition and the values and principles of the new political regime. These processes utilized the rhetoric of reconstruction, "brotherhood in arms," and "liberation," yet often were rather unsuccessful due to the rupture between the introduced narratives and the popular practices of commemoration, thus rendering the "imported"

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[120] Thomas Gladsky, "Polish Post-War Historical Monuments: Heroic Art And Cultural Preservation," *Polish Review* 31, no. 2/3 (1986).

memories and mediums of memory "mute." However, over time, the alternative strand of collective remembrance becomes stronger, supporting another vision of Polish identity.

Memoryscapes of the Postwar Kyiv

Since the establishment of Soviet rule, history-writing and public memory were utilized to assert and support ideology, urban memory, encompassing sites and places of memory and commemorative practices, became a significant means in these efforts, especially in forging collective identities and establishing symbolic support for the regime. The political myths about the origin and the mission of the USSR, converging the temporalities of the past, the present, and the future, were translated into the spatial texts of urban memory. While specific prewar patterns and practices of public remembrance continued shaping the city's memoryscape in the postwar years, the transformations in the political climate influenced the construction of the collective memory, with the urban space reacting to and reflecting the respective changes.

Kyiv's prewar memoryscape was shaped by the introduction and partial implementation of Lenin's plan for monumental propaganda and the changes brought by the Stalinist-era centralization. The first Bolshevik monument in Kyiv was installed in 1919 on Sofiivska Square. The respective decree on purging the public space of the tsarist-era monuments and installing the ones to memorialize the revolution in the UkrSSR was adopted a year later than in the RSFSR and, due to the constraints in timing, organization, and funding, was not implemented fully. The installed monuments were often made of concrete or plaster and were generally of poor quality.[121] The monuments dedicated to Lenin were among the most reproduced throughout Soviet rule in the UkrSSR. As of 1991, there were 5015 monuments to Lenin on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR (the only larger number was in the RSFSR). Installing such Soviet monuments presupposed symbolically "rewriting" the surrounding areas. The signs and places of memory recontextualized the areas they were located: placed in front of the factories, they emphasized the connections between the production, economic development, and the

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[121] Oleksandra Haidai, Oleksandra Haidai. *Kamianyi hist. Lenin u Tsentralnii Ukraini []Stone guest. Lenin in Central Ukraine]* (K.I.S., 2018).

regime; and, on the contrary, placed near the religious architecture, the monuments had to resignify these areas, as these buildings were often transformed into the schools or warehouses.[122] Installed on public holidays, these monuments had to embody the temporal continuity, legitimizing the regime. While some of these forms of urban remembrance remained in the postwar memoryscapes, the postwar political changes significantly transformed them, adding the signs memorializing new events and people, gradually allowing for increasing agency of more actors, and constructing new images of the cities.

The postwar politics regarding the Ukrainian SSR were shaped by several factors, including the failed interwar homogenization and the wartime post-occupation decrease in people's loyalty to the regime. Against this backdrop, the victory in the war presented an opportunity for a new political mythology based on the values of sacrifice, unity, and consolidatedness. The "Great Patriotic War" narrative shaped the canon of war heroes and constructed the images of internal and external enemies to coerce the citizens.

The efforts to commemorate the war started when the war was still ongoing and continued throughout the regime's duration, culminating in the 1960s and 1980s. While being an important reference point in the official rhetoric of the Stalinist period, and the different, mostly grassroots, efforts in memorialization, the war became the most significant state-level memory narrative and a political myth in the 1960s. The political foundation for the official commemoration of WWII in Kyiv was established by Nikita Khrushchev during the war. He introduced two republic-level public holidays: Kyiv Liberation Day (November 6) and Ukraine Liberation Day (October 14). At his request, shortly after the liberation of Kyiv, the authorities organized the burials of heroes of Kyiv's defense (Kirponos, Potapov, Tupikov, and later—Vatutin).[123] Becoming the first secretary of the CPSU Central Committee in 1961, Khrushchev introduced a Hero City title to Kyiv.

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[122] Kseniia Kuzina, "Pamiatnyky yak mistsia pamiati u symvolichnomu prostori mist radianskoi Ukrainy (1920–1930-ti rr.).," [Monuments as places of memory in the semantic urban landscape of Soviet Ukraine (1920–1930s)] *Novi storinky istorii Donbasu* 27.
[123] Ibid.

In 1943 and 1944, the Central Committee of the CPU introduced the plans for the construction of a series of war memorials: the war heroes' pantheon, the monument to the generals participating in the liberation of the UkrSSR cities, and the monuments to Glory and Victory, with the latter embodying and representing the "the struggle of the Soviet people against the invaders and the assistance of the Russian people, the peoples of the USSR, and Great Stalin to the Ukrainian people in the liberation of the territory of Soviet Ukraine."[124] Not all of these plans were implemented for a number of reasons; however, they demonstrated the general approach to the war memory during this period. In 1944, the Council of the People's Commissars issued a resolution "On the maintenance of graves and perpetuation of the memory of soldiers who died in battles for the liberation and independence of the Soviet Fatherland," obliging the government officials and party organizations to record all found military graves in the Book of Memory.[125] Over time, the forms, shapes, and visual motifs of commemorative signs began to change. The initial forms and modalities of memorialization included cenotaphs displaying the names of the fallen, and later, the Tombs of the Unknown Soldiers. Over time, the memorials and monuments acquired a more heroic tone. Since the 1960s, memorials have been installed in hero-cities, and during the 1970s and 1980s, obelisks and monumental complexes were constructed. At this time, a new form of commemoration—the Eternal Flame—became a component of the Soviet memorialization of the war.

The main monument to Lenin in the UkrSSR was installed in Kyiv at the Bessarabska Square in 1946. This monument was important for official commemoration events and state-level celebrations. It was seen as one of the most important and iconic pieces of the republic's heritage in the official discourse. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, monuments to Lenin were installed en masse across the UkrSSR to mark two celebrations: the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967 and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Lenin in 1970.[126]

[124] Vladyslav Hrynevych, "Mit viiny ta viina mitiv," [The Myth of War and the War of Myths] *Krytyka* 2 (2005).

[125] C. Kalibrovets. Memorialy Velykoi Vitchyznianoi viiny u mistakh-heroiakh Ukrainy ta polityka pamiati (1942– 1980-kh rr.). [Memorials to the Great Patriotic War in the Hero Cities of Ukraine and the Politics of Memory (1942-1980s)]. *Naukovi zapysky [Natsionalnoho pedahohichnoho universytetu im. M. P. Drahomanova]. Seriia : Pedahohichni ta istorychni nauky* 103 (2012).

[126] Haidai, *Kamianyi hist. Lenin u Tsentralnii Ukraini []Stone guest. Lenin in Central Ukraine]*

The memory of the Holocaust became the biggest lacuna in Kyiv's postwar memoryscape. After the Nazi occupation of Kyiv in September 1941, the announcements were posted around the city, stating that Jewish citizens of Kyiv had to gather at the crossing of Melnikova and Dehtiarivska streets with warm clothing, documents, and money on September 29th, ignoring the order was fraught with death. On the 29th and 30th of September, 33771 Jewish people gathered at that crossing were taken to the Babyn Yar ravine and executed. The ravine had been a site of mass executions (including of Roma people, Ukrainian nationalists, the sailors and commanders of the Dnipro detachment of the Pinsk military flotilla, and the prisoners of war) for the whole period of Kyiv's occupation. In the postwar years, the Ukrainian SSR authorities adopted Resolution №378 on the construction of a monument (which, however, did not mention the nationality of the victims) on the territory of Babyn Yar. However, due to the beginning of the USSR's anti-cosmopolitan campaign of 1948, attacking Jewish intellectuals and the Jewish Antifascist Committee to enforce postwar conformity and coercion, the plan was not implemented. In 1961, the USSR authorities, despite the intellectuals' campaigns for commemorating the tragedy of Babyn Yar, decided to implement the prewar plan to establish a park on the territory of the ravine, which led to the Kurenivka Mudslide tragedy. The direct calls for memorializing Babyn Yar were expressed more after 1953 by the intellectuals, dissidents, writers, and poets addressing the tragedy and the silence around it. Finally, in 1976, the monument dedicated to honoring the victims of Babyn Yar was erected near the ravine. The plaques beneath the monument did not mention the nationalities of the victims either, stating the commemoration of the "Kyiv citizens and prisoners of war" instead. It was only during glasnost that it became possible to talk about Babyn Yar more openly and uncover the information about the different groups of its victims.

Another way of approaching urban memory would be to analyze it as a practice, meaning to consider the role of the aforementioned monuments and memorials within the contexts of the commemorative practices they belonged to and the narratives they were supposed to support, both in the everyday and celebratory interactions. Svitlana Schlipchenko emphasized the role of a city as an environment that facilitates the reproduction of historical memory through the interaction of

collective and individual memories that unfold within specific architectural settings through engaging with various media of urban memory.[127] Victor Drozdov suggested considering memory rituals as effective practices for supporting and sustaining memory narratives.[128] In elaborating the notion of a memory ritual, he refers to Paul Connerton's approach to the transmission of memory through ritual performances and embodied practices. He argues that, due to being formalized and repetitive, such practices have a strong mnemonic effect. Paul Connerton also suggests that such practices of collective remembrance do not always refer to contemporary realities, but rather connect the images of the past seen as shared with the collective utopias.[129] The official celebrations, seen as a form of memory rituals, can also be said to possess a synthetic temporality that combines the past, an image of a utopian future, and the present, essentially dictating how the present is to be experienced based on past narratives and images of the future. Such memory rituals inform the patterns of collective behavior, perceptions of the political regime, collective axiology, and meaning-making.

The most important among the UkrSSR's official celebrations and public holidays included the Day of the October Revolution, Victory Day, and the Labor Day (the Day of Workers' Solidarity). Additionally, the Day of Liberation of Kyiv (November 6) and the Day of Liberation of Ukraine (October 14) were introduced and became important in the context of the postwar period. The celebrations of the Victory Day held in Kyiv and Moscow were the largest in scale in the USSR. The utopia of the mnemonic ritual concerned the present-day action as enabling the desired future. This is especially visible when analyzing the events organized for young people and aimed at passing on the "correct tradition of the older generation" to them. The examples of such events were the youth guards organized near the monuments; young people vowed to multiply the accomplishments of the past by working for the benefit of the state. The importance of present actions for the realization of utopia is also illustrated by the involvement of the winners of socialist competitions in the celebration,

[127] Svitlana Shlipchenko, "Decom Job: Kilka Zahalnykh Mirkuvan Shchodo Spetsyfiky Protsesiv Dekomunizatsii u Prostorakh Mista," [Decom Job: Notes on the Decommunization of City Spaces.] *Misto: Istoriia, kultura, suspilstvo* 1 (2017).

[128] Victor Drozdov, "Radianskyi ofitsiinyi sviatkovyi dyskurs i komemoratyvni praktyky na pryiednanykh ukrainskykh terytoriiakh (na prykladi sviatkuvannia desiatyrichchia «vozziednannia ukrainskoho narodu»).," [Soviet Official Celebration Discourse and Commemorative Practices in the Annexed Ukrainian Territories (the Example of Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the «Ukrainian People's Reunification»)]. *Zaporizhzhia Historical Review*. 6, no. 58 (2022).

[129] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

who had to prepare the reports by May 9 and present them with the slogan "Work for yourself and for those who did not return from the frontline."[130]

Another important component of these celebrations was a solemn meeting. In Kyiv in 1985, it began on May 7 in the hall of the Palace of Culture "Ukraine." Before? At that time, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPU, Volodymyr Shcherbytskyi, in his speech, emphasized the heroism of the Red Army and the role of the party in achieving he "Victory" and enabling the building of a better future.[131] The celebrations of the Victory Day were held near official places of memory and in the main squares. It is important that sites and signs of memory of the Second World War were involved in public celebrations that were not explicitly related to commemorating the war. For example, WWII memorial sites were used as places to join the Pioneer Organizations and distribute Komsomol membership cards, demonstrating the significance of memorial sites in establishing continuities with the past. Therefore, the celebration and the overall memory of May 9 were a source of power legitimization and a reminder of the regime's superiority, and had both commemorative and didactic character.

In the post-Stalinist period, forms of commemoration became more closely linked to leisure and consumption and included tourist activities, visits to memorial complexes (which combined recreation and educational work[132]), and children and youth-oriented events. Therefore, the war memory did not exist solely in the realm of the "mass indoctrination". Instead, it was an important component of the ideology overall, existing both in the spaces of official cultural memory, the private communicative realm of remembrance, and the spaces of everyday life and recreation in urban space, which highlights the interconnections of the different memorial narratives.

In the UkrSSR's context, the development of the postwar remembrance culture can be characterized by the entrenchment of the prewar relations and hierarchies of the Soviet peoples with

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[130] O. M. Klymenko, "Sviatkuvannia Dnia Peremohy v Kyievi 1985 roku," [Celebration of Victory Day in Kyiv in 1985] *Mahisterium*, 54 (2015).

[131] Ibid.

[132] Iryna Sklokina, "Pamiat pro Druhu svitovu viinu ta natsystsku okupatsiiu Ukrainy v povsiakdennykh praktykakh radianskoho suspilstva (1953–1985)," [Memory of World War II and Nazi Occupation in Everyday Practices of the Soviet Society (1953–1985).] *Visnyk Kharkivskoho natsionalnoho universytetu imeni V. N. Karazina* 982, no. 44 (2011).

the new narratives of remembrance and commemorative practices. It unfolded from the immediate postwar entrenchment of the Soviet identity to the narratives of the reunification of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples and the narrative of the Peoples' Friendship. The transformations in power changed the memorial landscape, as exemplified by the Holocaust commemoration. The official memories of WWII demonstrated the status of the Ukrainian people as the titular nation that "along with the brotherly Russian people" made a significant sacrifice and a decisive effort in war, and emphasized the weaker position of the Ukrainian people regarding their "elder brothers." The official communication targeted at the UkrSSR in the postwar years was informed by the Zhdanovshchina policies and centralization.

Urban memory became a significant aspect of establishing and sustaining the Soviet culture of remembrance, with both the signs and practices undergoing transformations. The development of media and practices of urban remembrance emphasizes the broader concept of the "Soviet people," resulting in the homogenized forms of commemoration aimed at reinforcing a Soviet identity after the war. Finally, the tendencies in the practices of memory demonstrate the interconnectedness of the memory narratives and highlight their significance as everyday markers of historical continuity.

Chapter III. Contextualizing Decommunization: Collective Identities and Politics of Memory in the Post-Socialist Transition

The post-1989/1991 transition process encompassed several transformations that post-socialist states had to undergo. Along with the changes in the governing and economic transformations, a crucial change, which in several cases was a decisive factor in the regime change, concerned rethinking and reasserting national identity. The transition processes restructured national communities, bringing closer attention to the connectivities that shape them and situating them at the center of many post-socialist state-building projects. The form of transition affected the political formations that followed. The respective actors, in turn, had different state-building projects, often utilizing the past to articulate them. This chapter illustrates the interconnectedness of transition processes and changes in collective memory by examining how the past is used in constructing and negotiating nation- and state-building projects. Here, I approach memory as a symbolic resource that different actors used to re-establish collective identities in periods of uncertainty and change.

This chapter comparatively explores the transitions in Poland and Ukraine, using broader temporal perspectives to cover the contexts of the regime changes. It reflects on the transformations of identities in the transition and post-transition periods. Afterward, it traces the development of decommunization as a discourse and public policy. Analyzing the debates unfolding between states and societies regarding the implementation of decommunization policies reveals the articulation of memory as a means of constructing state-building projects and the formation of political power in transition and post-transition contexts.

III.1 Collective Identity and Public Memory in the Post-Socialist Transition

The past and the future in the Polish transition

In PPR, the formation of the resistance that led to the emergence and legalization of Solidarity, along with later Roundtable talks that shaped the transition, had a larger prehistory. Due to the number of factors including the form of the regime's establishment—the Yalta Agreement, perceived as an act

of betrayal[133] of the tradition of statehood and struggle for independence—and the discrepancy between the means employed for forging a collective identity and the existing cultural and historical traditions, the Polish People's Republic was predominantly seen as an imposed and foreign regime. While the polarization between the PPR and society became especially sharp in the regime's last decade,[134] the beginning of its formation can be traced back to the Poznan Uprising of 1956.

Referring to Timothy G. Ash's formula of Solidarity's cultural memory, Magdalena Kubow traces its origins back to 1956 and follows its development through the student protests of 1968, the economic crises, and the protests reacting to them in 1970 and 1976, and the culmination of the resistance in 1980.[135] While the uprising in Poznan, the first workers' strike in the PPR, was not directly connected to the formation of Solidarity and was not oppositional, it presents an important point in the history of the Polish resistance. The uprising began with the workers demanding better wages and work conditions, and was met with state violence that resulted in 54 deaths, repression, and arrests of the participants. The understanding of the potential risks in the relations between PPR and the USSR necessitated changes in government: in the same year, Władysław Gomułka became the First Secretary of the PZPR. Despite Gomułka articulating the issues in governance in his program speech as a candidate, after he became the first secretary, his government did not implement any significant changes in this regard.

Another important point in the history of the Polish resistance is March 1968. Inspired by the Prague Spring and the performance of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady*,[136] the students and intellectuals took to the streets of Warsaw with a peaceful pro-democratization protest. The government responded by arresting the participating students and using violence in a similar protest in Kraków. The other events leading to the formation of the opposition happened in 1970 and 1976. The radical increase in prices in 1970 caused protests in Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin. The army of the PPR opened fire at

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[133] Magdalena Kubow, "The Solidarity Movement in Poland: Its History and Meaning in Collective Memory", *Polish Review* 58, № 2 (2013).

[134] Jerzy Łazor and Wojciech Morawski, "The Memory of Communist Poland in the Third Polish Republic. A Tentative Systematisation", *Studia z Polityki Publicznej* 4, № 12 (2016).

[135] Kubow, "The Solidarity Movement in Poland: Its History and Meaning in Collective Memory."

[136] Ibid.

the protesters in Gdańsk; afterward, the strike had also started in Łódź. The growing tensions between the state and society led to Gomułka's resignation. The situation stabilized after Edward Gierek became the first secretary of the PZPR, until the drastic price increases shook people again in 1976. The unstable economic situation led to another wave of protests that were met with violence by the government. This period is characterized by the emergence of committees and movements helping to approach resistance in a more systemic way. In 1976, the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) was founded by those who had helped the prosecuted participants of the previous protests, and in 1977, the Movement in Defense of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO) was established by its members.

Another important aspect in the formation of the opposition was the celebration of earlier-silenced national holidays, including November 11 and May 3. Banned to disrupt the continuity in the Polish tradition of statehood, these symbolic dates could not be ignored in 1978 due to the growing influence of the opposition and its support by the Church. The celebrations were held, although reframed to support the narrative about the revolutionary movement's role in regaining Polish independence.[137]

As tensions grew, the aims of the protestors started to encompass broader changes in the political regime than wages and working conditions. The situation culminated in the politically motivated firing of Anna Walentynowicz, a prominent figure since the 1970 strike, who had actively supported the opposition. Her coworkers reacted by organizing a strike.[138] The protestors created the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee, which developed 21 demands to the PPR's government, with the recognition of trade unions as one of the central aims. After long negotiations, the authorities accepted the demands, and in November of the same year, Solidarity was recognized and legitimized.

Beyond political recognition, Solidarity and the resistance overall had religious support. The visits of Pope John Paul II brought understanding of the possibility of self-organization[139] and the creation of a public sphere that would serve as an alternative to the state-controlled one.

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[137] Jan Kubik, *The power of symbols against the symbols of power: the rise of Solidarity and the fall of state socialism in Poland* (The Pennsylvania State University, 1994).

[138] Kubow, "The Solidarity Movement in Poland: Its History and Meaning in Collective Memory."

[139] Łazor and Morawski, "The Memory of Communist Poland in the Third Polish Republic. A Tentative Systematisation."

However, as early as November 1980, the PPR government began considering and preparing the means to stop the strikes from spreading and reduce Solidarity's influence. In the face of growing tensions between the state and Solidarity, the Bydgoszcz attack on opposition members, and the warning strikes, the PPR's government agreed on the introduction of martial law with the USSR. In December 1981, Wojciech Jaruzelski's government introduced martial law, explaining it as a need to develop solutions to the troubling economic situation. Targeting the opposition, the martial law lasted until 1983. It did not make Solidarity disappear. Instead, its members organized underground and also received papal support during his second visit. The tensions continued to grow through the 1980s, and in 1988, the government reached out to representatives of Solidarity for negotiations.

The roundtable talks began with both sides understanding the limits and losses in their efforts in 1980-1981.[140] Solidarity realized that even high public support and mobilization of culture were not directly translating into influence on decision-making; witnessing the state's reaction, they also realized the limits they could achieve through the protests. Similarly, the government understood that the use of force was not an effective means in crisis management. The perceptions of the two sides of each other changed as well, enabling the dialogue.

The participants of meetings of the Roundtable Talks in February and April were divided into three working groups respectively working on establishing dialogue in the following questions: the "union pluralism" and the legalization of Solidarity and the other trade unions, the political reforms (concerned the elections processes), and the systemic anti-crisis reforms.[141] The first agreement reached concerned the procedure of the parliamentary elections. Afterward, Solidarity acquired recognition and legitimization, and finally, the last and most difficult agreements concerned the reforms.[142] The Roundtable Talks resulted in the relegalization of Solidarity, establishing plans for the parliamentary elections, and the institution of the presidency. The results of these negotiations were informed by the variety of factors, including that the participants in the Roundtable talks were

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[140] Wiktor Osiatynski, "The Roundtable Talks in Poland", in *The roundtable talks and the breakdown of communism*, ed. Jon Elster (The University of Chicago Press,, 1996).
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

the same people who were in the confrontation eight years ago, the internal conflict among the representatives of the authorities (a split between the Party, being more ready to adapt, and the nomenclatura that had a more conservative stance), and finally by the authorities' misunderstanding of how low their support was.[143]

The process of the formation of the Polish opposition encompassed several decades of struggle and various factors, including economic crisis, corporatism, the weakness of the Party, the strong intelligentsia, and the Church.[144] The formation of Solidarity, therefore, was rather a culmination of a longer political, economic, and cultural struggle. Solidarity combined the motivations of workers, students, and intellectuals. One of the key aspects uniting them was the perception of the discrepancy between the regime and the national identity. As illustrated by the singing of the "So the Poland shall be Poland" song after the recognition of Solidarity, the formation of the opposition was articulated with the notion of Polishness, highlighting the importance of national identity in the further state-building project.[145]

The years that followed the regime change can be characterized by the unfolding of the public and academic debates regarding the communist past. The immediate changes in the Polish public sphere encompassed the increasing attention to the "blank spots" in memory work and history-writing, the changes in urban memoryscapes, and the attempts to re-establish the relations with the neighboring states.[146]

According to Ewa Ochman, the debate of the first years of the Third Republic revolved around the efficiency and success of the established means and the actors of memory work.[147] The participants of the broader discussion can be divided into two groups according to their stance regarding the means of memory work employed by the state. Those approving of the state efforts were satisfied with the processes that have been presented as completed, including the recovery of

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Kubik, *The power of symbols against the symbols of power: the rise of Solidarity and the fall of state socialism in Poland*.
[145] Kubow, "The Solidarity Movement in Poland: Its History and Meaning in Collective Memory."
[146] Ewa Ochman, *Post-Communist Poland - Contested Pasts and Future Identities* (Routledge, 2013).
[147] Ibid.

the histories which were silenced in the PPR, the symbolic changes (the changes of the official state symbols, introduction of the new toponymy, and changes of the monumental landscapes), the establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance–Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in 1998, and the opening of the Katyn war cemetery in 2000.[148] Another group of intellectuals and politicians questioned the means employed, presenting them as insufficient to fully address all the crimes of the communist regime.

Along with the unfolding debate around the perceptions of the post-1989 memory work, the perception of the PPR changes as well. Due to the instability of the new regime, the level of its support decreased over time. Ochman presented a survey demonstrating that 63% of the citizens agreed with the fact that the regime change was worthy in 1999 in comparison to 75% of the citizens replying the same in 1989.[149]

The political uncertainty and instability led to distrust in the political elites and the fragmentation of Solidarity. These aspects enabled post-communists to acquire positions of power, as evidenced by the SLD's (Democratic Left Alliance) wins in the 1993 and 2001 parliamentary elections. The emergence of SLD as a coalition of the SDRP (Social Democracy of the Polish Republic) and Solidarity's failure to form a left alternative provoked a new debate about the memory and legacy of PPR. SLD attempted to position itself as a pro-Western party that supports liberal policies and the free market. The SLD's candidate, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who had a communist past, was elected president twice, in 1995, competing with Lech Wałęsa, and in 2000. Interestingly, the election campaigns and subsequent political debates can be characterized by the greater importance placed on attitudes toward the past and articulating oneself regarding it, rather than the parties' economic or social programs, which testifies to the significant emotional impact of this aspect on the public.[150] Notably, Kwaśniewski's slogan was very future-oriented ("Wybierzmy przyszłość", "Let's Choose the Future"), focusing the public's attention on the idea of consolidation in the present without the need to consider the past, which pertained to the idea of lustration processes being

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[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

unnecessary. This approach came to characterize the memory work regarding the PPR in the years that followed the regime change—the "think line" policy, announced by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the prime minister, to delineate the past from the present to avoid the reckoning with the past on the level of personnel in the position of power. These approaches to post-communist temporalities and memory work were later echoed by the concept of the "Fourth Republic," introduced by the right-wing "Law and Justice" in the context of the electoral campaign. Therefore, the political context of the format of the transition, the respective changes in the government, and its composition led to a future-oriented and nation-centered approach to nation- and state-building in the first years after the regime change.

Re-assembling the national identity: Soviet legacies and state-building in the Ukrainian transition

The year of the USSR's dissolution did not become the annus mirabilis in the context of the Ukrainian transition: it did not leave the country with the institutional infrastructure enabling a smooth democratization, nor did it become a culmination of a long-lasting struggle for independence, revealing a well-defined and articulated national identity. On the contrary, due to the legacies of the USSR's nationality policies, the Ukrainian transition had to encompass the processes of forging and reasserting a national identity along with the transformations in statehood, politics, and economy. Therefore, the transition in Ukraine comprised four elements: economic (marketization), political (democratization), state-building (transition to sovereignty), and nation-building changes.[151]

In Ukraine, the legacies of Soviet nationalities policies and modernization took the form of regionalism and conflicting projects for Ukrainian state-building. In the USSR, national and Soviet identities were being developed simultaneously, contingent upon challenges in changing internal and international political climates. Kuzio details the aspects of the Soviet nationality policies regarding non-Russian peoples, affecting their transition projects, namely: the development of the nation-building both on the levels of republics and the USSR, the resulting people's perceptions of their republics as homelands with clearly defined borders, and the connectedness and simultaneity of the

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[151] Taras Kuzio, "Ukraine: A Four-Pronged Transition", in *Contemporary Ukraine Dynamics of Post-Soviet Transformation* (Routledge, 2015).

Russian nation- and state-building projects as an empire and a nation.[152] While these aspects have shaped the transition perceptions of statehood, the questions of national identity remained more nuanced, entwined with the legacies of Soviet industrialization and modernization.

Taras Kuzio highlights the regional differences in the convergence of modernization and nationalization processes. In the regions that constituted the UkrSSR before WWII, the processes of indigenization and Soviet modernization occurred earlier, resulting in the Ukrainians' demographic but not cultural domination in urban centers. These urban centers did not help forge either a Ukrainian or Russian identity, but rather a Soviet one. In the regions of Ukraine, incorporated during WWII, these processes unfolded in parallel, resulting in both demographic and cultural dominations of the Ukrainians in the Ukrainian urban centers. This dynamic reveals that regions characterized by a more active civic society tend to be less industrialized.[153]

During the transition, the Ukrainian society was heterogeneous in terms of national identification. The surveys of 2002 demonstrate that 55% of citizens identify themselves as Ukrainian only, 27% as both Ukrainian and Russian, and 11% as Russian only.[154] Highlighting the linguistic and regional divides, Mykola Riabchuk emphasized that the condition of the Ukrainian transition did not reflect the fault lines that might have posed serious risks of political splits.[155] This can be explained by a relatively strong idea of statehood and by the constant interactions and mixing of the groups of different identification, hence, their hybridity and the absence of radical polarization.

These legacies led to different visions of the nation's history and imaginings of the state's future, as well as to centrist political positions adopted by the first two presidents of Ukraine. Detailing the divides in the Ukrainian society, Mykola Riabchuk mentioned that they pertain more to the ideological projects for the state's future.[156] He delineates them into the "Ukrainian national" and "Little Russian" projects. The first project relies on the idea of Ukraine as a European nation,

[152] Taras Kuzio, "The national factor in Ukraine's quadruple transition", *Contemporary Politics* 6, № 2 (2000).
[153] Ibid.
[154] Mykola Riabchuk, "Ukraine's 'Muddling Through': National Identity and Postcommunist Transition", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45, № 3-4 (2012).
[155] Mykola Riabchouk, "Civil Society and Nation Building in Ukraine", in *Contemporary Ukraine Dynamics of Post-Soviet Transformation* (Routledge, 2015).
[156] Ibid.

influenced by the periods of the Russian Imperial and Soviet rule, and sees the transition as its "return to Europe." The second project is less defined and relies on the Soviet legacies in perceiving the Russian language and culture as superior and viewing Ukraine as backward. Riabchuk approaches this project as an illustration of the postcolonial transition, mentioning that it was massively supported in the presidential elections of 1991, when, between Vyacheslav Chornovil and Leonid Kravchuk, the latter was elected, having a program that did not imply a radical break with the system, instead suggesting its continuity.[157]

The aforementioned national and linguistic divides and regional differences formed the centrist leaning of the Ukrainian state-building. Ukrainian transition presents a paradox: its centrism, resulting from the politics employed in the USSR, negatively affects the speed of the transition, but helps the process unfold in a stable way without the risks of ethnic conflicts. This project relied on the civic perception of a nationality and was moderate in the means it employed, avoiding aligning with any of the radical sided: the more radical moves in the direction of the "return to Europe" necessitates the efforts in overcoming corruption and consistency in implementing reforms; a more in the direction of the stronger cooperation with Russia, on the other hand, would presuppose the risk of falling into its dominion.

This political dynamic can be illustrated by the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005). Neither of them advocated for a radical break with the past, using it pragmatically in the electoral process. Both supported the idea of civic-based nationhood and did not implement any harsh policies regarding language issues, accepting the use of both Ukrainian and Russian.[158] While being presented as complete opposites over time, their policies converged on aspects that include the approaches to nation-building: both Kravchuk and Kuchma defined Russia as the "other" in the state-building project and promoted a civic nation.[159]

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[157] Riabchuk, "Ukraine's 'Muddling Through': National Identity and Postcommunist Transition."
[158] Alexander Motyl, "State, Nation, and Elites in Independent Ukraine", in *Contemporary Ukraine Dynamics of Post-Soviet Transformation* (Routledge, 2015).
[159] Ibid.

The main component of state-building that relies on the idea of a civic-based national identity is civic society. According to Riabchuk, in the first years after the transition, Ukrainian society was weak and primarily demonstrated self-organization in response to issues in state policies (a form of self-organization *against* the shared issue rather than in an effort to establish dialogue).[160] The overall dynamic unfolded in the following way: the most active section of the Ukrainian civic society was composed of, as Riabchuk puts it, "Ukrainophone Ukrainians," which reflects the composition of the Soviet dissidents;[161] on the other hand, state officials often came from the circles of former communist officials.

The dynamic of the Ukrainian transition and state-building is, therefore, affected by the Soviet legacies of nationality policy, resulting in regionalism and divergences in the projects for the state's development, a stronger sense of statehood than of national belonging, and a heterogeneity in the linguistic and national identifications. One of the biggest challenges brought about by the regime change was precisely the necessity of forging state and nation-building projects, given the limited administrative and institutional infrastructure for these efforts. Therefore, the means employed and the positions taken reflected a moderate centrist stance of the authorities regarding the legacies of the USSR in the first years after the transition; during this period, the references to the Soviet legacies were predominantly made in the electoral campaign and rarely implemented. All these factors explain the belatedness of the later efforts in decommunization and lustration.

III.2 Decommunization of the Public Sphere in the Nation- and State-Building Projects

"Cutting the cord" with the past: legislating post-transition identity

Decommunization, as a practice of addressing the legacies of communist regimes, became an integral part of the post-1989/1991 transitions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As a practice of dealing with the recent conflictual past, it has been articulated with the concepts of democratization and transitional justice. Apart from the political and economic transformations affecting the state

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[160] Riabchouk, "Civil Society and Nation Building in Ukraine."
[161] Ibid.

officials, public institutions, and civil society, decommunization processes have also encompassed collective remembrance, instrumentalizing it as a symbolic resource to draw a line between the past and the present in post-transition state-building projects. In these efforts, the decommunization of memory unfolded, delineating national and communist identities. The attempts to draw a line between "us" and "them" here reveal different identity-building projects and conflicts over renegotiating them. In the Polish context, they can be traced back to the political dynamics of the years that followed the regime change.

The processes of disengagement from the state-socialist past in Poland began in 1989 and continued through the 1990s, acquiring the status of a state policy in 2016 and 2018. The "first wave" of de-commemoration followed the regime change. It affected the most iconic examples of the PPR's heritage in the public spaces, including the monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky and the Lenin statue in Nowa Huta, Kraków.[162] Exercised following the decisions of the local authorities, these acts had large popular support. This process was accompanied by toponymical changes: the street renaming unfolded through the 1990s and gradually slowed by 1993.[163] The "second wave" of the process is associated with it acquiring a legislative status in 2016 and 2018, more than twenty years after the regime change. Decommunization became a policy employed at the state level during the second rule of the right-wing Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party. However, the development of the decommunization policies dates back to and follows a clear continuity with the attempts to establish the legislative grounds for the transition-period debates on the PPR's legacies in 1998.

According to Ewa Ochman, Polish decommunization was shaped by the two aspects of the transition: the formation of the SLD and the fragmentation of Solidarity.[164] These divergences can be traced in the debates on the punishment of former state functionaries: while the right suggested strict measures, liberal politicians advocated reconciliation and forgiveness (as illustrated by Mazowiecki's "thick line" policy). This shift was also noticeable in the debates on street renaming: while there was

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[162] Ewa Ochman, "The Legacies of Transition, Street Renaming and the Material Heritage of Communist Dictatorship in Poland", *Journal of Contemporary History* 59, № 1 (2023).
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.

an agreement regarding the necessity of these changes, the approaches to methods of implementing them diverged: while the liberal camp argued for the decentralized decision-making, the right, here presented by the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), argued for the mandatory status of this policy and its centralized implementation.

During this period, the development and implementation of decommunization policies were contingent upon the outcomes of elections. In 1997, AWS won parliamentary elections, and in 2005, PiS came to power, introducing the politics of history as a part of their program. PiS was organized by Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, and most of its participants were members of the AWS before. The party's manifesto traced the issues Poland faced in the post-transition state-building as resulting from its crisis of patriotic values and pro-EU leaning.[165] Therefore, the means to establish the "Fourth Republic" was found, in particular, in implementing decommunization and lustration. The respective policy of promoting national culture and forging national memory was titled "polityka historyczna" (historical politics). The project of the politics of history provoked a major public debate regarding the issues it touched upon, including "reopening of old wounds," justifiability of erasure as a means in memory work, and the use of memory as a resource in the internal struggles for power.[166]

Coming to power, PiS became the main actor behind the decommunization policies. These rhetorics were supported by the educational and, after 2016, legislative means.[167] In the context of educational means, decommunization became a task of the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN), established in 2000. The institute supported the state policies with the development of recommendations and resources on changes in urban toponymy, efforts in public education, and interaction with authorities involved in decision-making. The establishment of IPN and its role in Polish politics and public sphere were met with criticism of it being a "ministry of history" supporting the "monopoly" of the state on history.

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[165] Ewa Ochman, *Post-Communist Poland - Contested Pasts and Future Identities* (Routledge, 2013).
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ochman, "The Legacies of Transition, Street Renaming and the Material Heritage of Communist Dictatorship in Poland.

The legislative efforts mainly concern the 2016 and 2018 decommunization laws. However, attempts to legislate anti-communist rhetoric can be traced back to 2009 and 1998. In 2009, the authorities tried to make amendments to the Penal Code Article 256, banning the display of the symbols of totalitarian regimes, including the fascist and communist regimes. The Constitutional Tribunal found this amendment to be violating freedom of speech and cancelled it. The laws of 2016 and 2018—the Law Prohibiting Propagation of Communism or Other Totalitarian Regime Through Names of Buildings, Objects, and Public Service Devices (amended to include monuments in 2017) and the Amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance—shaped the legislative foundation of the focus of politics of history and decommunization process.

The decommunization law of 2016 made local authorities responsible for renaming the streets bearing the names of officials associated with the communist regime (2016) and removing the monuments honoring them (after the amendment made in 2017), and in the situation of the required changes not being exercised, the law obliged the reaction of the province governors. The introduction of the law was met with resistance from local authorities (with Warsaw as the most striking case, authorities rejecting 50 renaming suggestions) and caused major internal and international public and academic debates. These debates linked the decommunization policy with democratic backsliding and presented it as detrimental to local decision-making.[168] The 2016 law did not just shape the foundation for the state policy of erasing the dissonant past but also rendered the plurality of opinions on the case nearly impossible, affecting the structuring of the public sphere overall.

The Amendment of 2018 concerned the securitization of the official version of the memory of WWII. It was aimed to criminalize the public statements of the Polish complicity in the Holocaust; however, due to the large international protests that followed the introduction of the amendment, the criminalization was repealed. The other section of the amendment presented the narrative of the Ukrainian nationalists' crimes against the Polish nation. Attempting to construct and legislate the

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[168] Ochman, "The Legacies of Transition, Street Renaming and the Material Heritage of Communist Dictatorship in Poland."

state's version of history, the memory laws of PiS have framed Polish history into the narrative of victimhood nationalism.

However, such a radical gesture of addressing the past and removing its signs from the public sphere was not the first case in the Polish context. A similar bill was already introduced, although not implemented, causing a public debate around the same issues, in 1998. The "On de-communization of public life in Poland," introduced by AWS, approached working through the legacies of the state-socialist regime as a means of establishing transitional justice. The bill consisted of several parts, with the first part addressing the public office bans of the former PPR officials and the second part advocating for the erasure of the regime's symbolic heritage, including a detailed list of the objects and media subject to renaming.[169] The introduction of the bill was followed by Mariusz Kaminski's statement presenting decommunization as a means of "cutting the umbilical cord"[170] connecting the Third Republic to the PPR. Therefore, the 2016 Law demonstrates continuity in terms of the groups composing it (the AWS-PiS connectivities), the phrasing of the anti-communist rhetoric, the means suggested, and the institutional support they had (the special commission in 1998 and the IPN in 2016, responsible for similar tasks).

The memory legislation process in Poland, framed as "wars over memory," not only unfolds in the context of several simultaneous political transformations, including the weakening of the rule of law and the growing populist movements,[171] but also presents continuities of the longer struggles of the transition period. Therefore, the 2016 Law cannot be seen as evidence of the peak of the radicalization in the discourse, but as a continuation of the rhetoric that has been shaping the Polish public sphere since the beginning of the transition process. Finally, it was the 1998 bill that articulated the ideas of decommunization with the concepts of justice and the processes of lustration, placing the transformations in memory together with the political changes. The rhetoric of the "uncovering of the truth" and "decommunization as a means in establishing justice," thus, also reflects a larger continuity

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[169] Ochman, "The Legacies of Transition, Street Renaming and the Material Heritage of Communist Dictatorship in Poland."

[170] Ibid.

[171] Aleksandra Gliszczynska-Grabias et al., "Memory Laws and Memory Wars in Poland, Russia and Ukraine", *Jahrbuch des öffentlichen Rechts* 69 (2021).

shaped in the context of transition and reacting to the respective challenges. Being a component of the PiS state-building project, the decommunization laws reflect the larger continuity of the post-transition conflicts.

Securitizing forgetting: legislating memory as securitizing difference in wartime Ukraine

The process of removing Soviet symbols from the public spaces in Ukraine began in 1990, a year before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first case of a Soviet monument demolition occurred at a workers' strike in Chervonohrad, a former "exemplary town" in the Ukrainian West, constituting the only symbolic request among the otherwise economic demands[172] and reflecting the weakness of the ties between the state's center and peripheries, in particular, in the economic and administrative contexts. However, due to the decommunization discourse's development, its role in the political processes during the Revolution of Dignity and the Russian-Ukrainian war, and its legislative status, its framing transformed. Currently, in the Ukrainian public sphere, decommunization is viewed from a nation-centered perspective as a component of the processes of wartime securitization, establishment of transitional justice, and forging of a national identity; it is also seen as a component of the broader derussification efforts, convergent with the discourse on decolonization.

The discourse of decommunization and the respective memory laws have a longer prehistory, covering the reactions to the internal issues of the post-socialist transition, changes brought about by the Revolution of Dignity, and challenges posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014. The development of decommunization legislation can be traced back to the Law "On the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repressions in Ukraine," adopted before the declaration of independence. Along with laws addressing the changing position of the Communist Party, the status of war veterans, and operations of national archives, the law on rehabilitation of the victims of political repressions created a foundation for the development of the memory legislation in independent Ukraine.[173]

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[172] Kateryna Malaia, "Monumental Landscapes and the Politics of Place: The First Lenin to Fall", *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 5, № 1 (2018).

[173] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Legislating Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Ukraine", in *Memory Laws and Historical Justice the Politics of Criminalizing the Past* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

During the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, memory politics did not constitute a prioritized objective. Moreover, opting for a centrist approach, neither of the first two presidents employed radical means regarding the public memory or the legacies of the USSR overall. The narratives of public remembrance were predominantly used in the electoral campaigns, but were rarely implemented afterward. In 2000, the authorities adopted a law on "On Commemorating the Victory in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945," which became the first example of memory legislation in independent Ukraine. However, the aforementioned laws had rather constructed a continuity with the previous Soviet modality of remembrance than established and legislated a difference. The law of the Victory commemoration reestablished 9 May as a state holiday and introduced regulations on the symbols used at the ceremonies. In 2011, during Victor Yanukovych's presidency, the Communist Party initiated an amendment to this law, suggesting the display of the victory banner on public institutions at war memory-related public holidays, symbolically making it equal to the national flag. The amendment provoked a fierce public debate and was repealed.[174]

The politics of memory transformed more significantly, diverging from Soviet memory culture, during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010). Yushchenko's efforts in memory policies were focused on the rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA, memorialization of Holodomor as genocide, and the reconstruction of the Cossack memory. The means undertaken regarding the Holodomor commemoration encompassed the installation of a national memorial in 2008, introducing the decree ordering the removal of the monuments to the Soviet officials complicit in the organization of Holodomor (the first example of state-sanctioned de-commemoration), and criminalization of denying Holodomor and Holocaust as genocides (avoiding the victimhood competition, this strategy aimed at the international recognition of Holodomor as genocide; being repealed, the punitive aspect of memory legislation laid the foundation for the later laws of decommunization). The beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian memory wars become traceable in this period—as the Russian authorities perceived the Orange Revolution, the political protests against the

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[174] Ibid.

fabricated results of the 2004 presidential elections, as a treat of Ukraine drifting away from the Russian influence, the pro-Russian leaning Party of Regions suggested memory legislation aimed to cancel the laws of Yushchenko's presidency. Attempting to combat the "falsification of history," these laws echoed Russian anxieties regarding the "historical revisionism gaining momentum in the neighboring states."[175] Subsequently, the efforts in developing the national memory culture were harshly affected in the context of the growing threat of democratic backsliding during the presidency of Victor Yanukovych, who publicly rejected the established form of commemorating Holodomor and reinstated the Soviet form of commemorating WWII.

Decommunization legislation constituted a reaction to the Revolution of Dignity and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014. On November 1, 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine suspended the preparation for the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. Hundreds of people dissatisfied with this decision took to the streets, reaching Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Kyiv's central square. In three days, the protestors organized one of the largest rallies, and in five days, the student strike began. On November 30th, the Berkut special police force unit executed violence against the protestors, killing 94 people. More people took to the streets in the next days, and the Euromaidan peaceful protest transformed into the Revolution of Dignity. In February 2014, the protesters succeeded in achieving their demand to initiate early presidential elections, and the collapse of Yanukovych's regime and the Revolution's victory were supported by legislative acts.

During the Revolution, on December 8, 2013, the central monument to Lenin was toppled, triggering a chain reaction later referred to as "Leninfall" in cities across the country. The Revolution of Dignity, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2014, and the annexation of Crimea in March of the same year led to significant transformations in the Ukrainian government. In February 2014, the Ukrainian parliament appointed Oleksandr Turchynov as the Chairman, and the next day, he was entrusted with the duties of the President of Ukraine. The first presidential elections resulted in

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[175] Zhurzhenko, "Legislating Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Ukraine."

choosing Petro Poroshenko, an active participant of the Revolution of Dignity and the Orange Revolution and a People's Deputy in 1998-2014, a former Minister of Economy and Trade (during Yanukovych's presidency) and the Minister of Foreign Affairs (during Yushchenko's presidency). The parliamentary elections of 2014 led to the establishment of a pro-European coalition, and parties with a pro-Russian leaning, such as the Party of Regions, lost a significant portion of their electorate and, along with the Communist Party, became predominantly marginal.

In 2015, the parliament adopted four decommunization laws, developed by UINM. The laws were signed into effect by Poroshenko shortly afterward. The "decommunization law package" consisted of four laws, among which two were commemorating the OUN and UPA fighters for the Ukrainian independence and the Victory over National Socialism in WII, one regulated the access to the archives of the repressive bodies of the Soviet regime, and the one condemned Communist and National Socialist regimes as totalitarian and criminalized the manufacturing and dissemination of their symbols. The law "On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting the Propagation of their Symbols" is the only punitive law from four that presupposes the penalty of restraining the liberty for up to ten years depending on the conditions of violation. This law, complemented by the additional explanations provided by UINM, constituted the foundation for the decommunization policies in Ukraine, detailing the procedures and their temporal frames.

This law was met with criticism both internally and internationally (The Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR)[176], particularly for the limitations it was seen to impose on the freedom of speech and for the potential risks it was perceived to impose on the country with the evident ideological and mnemonic divides. However, while such a rhetoric was shared by the opposition parties, the activists and the local authorities had generally supported the law as a means of forging a more defined policy of disengagement from the Soviet regime and a means of coordinating and regulating the popular decommunization. Interestingly, the text of the law referred to Article 11 of Ukraine's Constitution,

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[176] Maria Mälksoo, "Decommunization in Times of War: Ukraine's Militant Democracy Problem", *Verfassungsblog*, 2018.

obliging the state to promote the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation and its historical consciousness, thereby fostering cohesion. It also referred to the aforementioned laws "On the rehabilitation of victims of repressions of the communist totalitarian regime of 1917-1991," and the law "On the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine" to connect the legislative initiatives.

Volodymyr Viatrovych, the then-director of UINM, referred to decommunization as a matter of national security. This approach to memory legislation prompts viewing it from the perspective of mnemonic security. Maria Mälksoo, who adapted the ontological security theory to the realm of public memory, interpreted it as a means of re-establishing the temporal core of a state's biographical narrative and emphasized its role in conditions of uncertainty and threat.[177] This approach allows for analysing how the collectives deal with the visions of the past rendered threatening to the their existence. In the Ukrainian case, this allows to see the embeddedness of the decommunization process in the context of the ongoing political crisis.

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[177] Maria Mälksoo, "'Memory Must be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security", *Security Dialogue* 46, № 3 (2015).

Chapter IV. The Narratives and Forms of Decommunization

In her ethnographic study of the first stage of disengagement from the Soviet past in Ukraine (unfolding from 2014 to 2018), Anna Kutkina posed the question of *what* precisely should be decommunized. Highlighting the complexity of this process, Kutkina referred to the distinction between the decommunization of a body politic, which involves changes in decision-making, institutions, and civil society, and the decommunization of the citizenry, implying individual transformations.[178] While these aspects are especially efficient when combined, the respective changes do not reach them immediately and simultaneously. Similarly, Svitlana Shlipchenko emphasized that decommunization has to encompass both the disengagement from the legacies of the dissonant past and the process of reimagining the modality of remembrance that the state follows[179]— a process that concerns both the materiality of memory and its intangibility. However, what is being targeted first in decommunization are predominantly material symbols of the previous regime. These changes had different dynamics over time. While the changes in the immediate post-transition period, reflected in the removals or alterations of the material carriers of memory, prompted the renegotiation of its frameworks and narratives, changes that unfolded later in response to political triggers prompted rethinking of the past, with these processes being then reflected in the memoryscapes. Thus, changes in memoryscapes serve both as triggers that affect the discourses of public remembrance and as milieus that reflect them. These changes reflect not only the people's perceptions of the respective regimes but also their perceptions of themselves as an 'imagined community'. The identity reactualized in the decommunization process is built on delineating the "self" and the "other" as applied to the past, seen as dissonant. Thus, analyzing the dynamics of disengagement would allow for seeing the rethinking and reassertion of the collective identities of the transition and post-transition periods. Such an analysis would also help put the changes in narratives and the modalities of decision-

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[178] Anna Kutkina, *Between Lenin and Bandera* (ibidem-Verlag, 2021).
[179] Shlipchenko, "DeCom Job: Kilka zahalnykh mirkuvan shchodo spetsyfiky protsesiv dekomunizatsii u prostorakh mista" [DecomJob: Notes on the Decommunization of City Spaces].

making in dialogue, revealing the power dynamics behind the transformations in remembering non-democratic regimes.

This chapter details the processes of decommunization unfolding in the urban spaces of Warsaw and Kyiv, exploring the forms of disengagement with the past employed and the broader transformations these processes entailed. The cases selected for this research reflect three distinct narratives of memory: the memory narrative of the regime itself (exemplified by the monuments to Felix Dzerzhinsky and Vladimir Lenin), the "People's Friendship" narrative (illustrated by Warsaw's monument to the Polish-Soviet Friendship and Kyiv's People's Friendship Arch), and the memory of WWII (the monument to the Brotherhood in Arms and the Mother Motherland monuments). This comparative analysis unfolds in stages. I begin by demonstrating the histories of the respective monuments, including the contexts of their installation, their roles in remembrance practices, and their perceptions among citizens. I proceed with analyzing the demolition or resignification processes, contextualizing them within their respective political environments, paying special attention to the decision-making process.

IV.1 De-commemoration as a Means of Decommunization: Memory of the Regime and Collective Forgetting as an Event and a Process

The destruction of a monument is as political an action as its installation. Seen as components of urban memory texts, the signs of collective remembrance rewrite the spatial narratives, not only introducing messages into the shared spaces but also altering their contexts. Similarly, the acts of demolition transform memoryscapes, constructing images of the collective's "other" by creating spaces of absence, memorial lacunas. The destruction of a monument, seen as the most radical response to an object,[180] implies the recognition of its symbolic charge and, at the same time, of its incommensurability with the collective perception of itself and its shared identity. Coined and initially

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[180] Krzysztof Górny and Ada Górna, "Chapter 4. Selected Political Issues for Public Space—Iconoclasm in Respect of Warsaw Monuments from the 1945 to 1989 Period and Post-soviet Monuments in Ukrainian Cities", in *Global Challenges Social, Economic, Environmental, Political and Ethical* (Springer, 2024).

used to refer to the destruction of religious images, the concept of "iconoclasm" resonates with present-day changes in political landscapes, when applied to the analysis of the destruction of symbols and signs of collective remembrance that follows regime changes. These acts, similar to *damnatio memoriae*, do not solely imply forgetting, but preserve the past as a negative reference, contrasting the old regime with the new one. This section compares the cases of de-commemoration in Warsaw and Kyiv, analyzing how they reflected changes in the public perception of the respective narratives and modalities of memory, and how these changes affected further dealing with the dissonant past.

"Bloody Felix": an iconic monument and the iconoclasm unplanned

The monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, a revolutionary of Polish origin and the creator of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Cheka), was installed on Warsaw's central square, later renamed Dzerzhinsky Square, on July 20, 1951, the 25th anniversary of his death. Paradoxically, this was the most central yet the most ambiguous sign of the PPR's memory, reflecting the tensions in its construction.

The monument was unveiled by the first President of the Polish People's Republic, Bolesław Bierut, and Soviet officials, including Vyacheslav Molotov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, and Ivan Konev, the Marshal of the Soviet Union. Installed at the peak of the Stalinist era in PPR, it was the first monument in the republic that was dedicated to an activist of the workers' movement and a revolutionary figure. The monument's unveiling was filmed and shared by the Polish Film Chronicle, the official newsreel. The films covered the ceremony of unveiling the monument and the preparations leading up to it. In the chronicle, Felix Dzerzhinsky was referred to as a "Great Pole,"[181] and the preparation of the monument was presented as a part of Warsaw's general postwar reconstruction.

The context of the reconstruction is symbolically complex, as, besides the literal rebuilding after the war-brought destruction, efforts were directed at reinscribing a new collective identity in the

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[181] *Na placu Bankowym stanie pomnik Feliksa Dzierżyńskiego. Przebudowa placu Bankowego*. (1951. Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych Warszawa Wymiana zagraniczna: Nowosti Dnia (Now. D.)).

public space through the (re)installation of its symbols. Therefore, national motifs held great significance in Polish postwar social realism.[182] The monument also illustrates state efforts to construct a pantheon of national communist heroes, interpreting the Polish and Soviet political developments to better assert the ideology and demonstrate its connections with the local context. The key Stalinist monument in Warsaw represents a Polish-born nobleman, constituting a symbolic gesture aimed at forging the ideological connection between the USSR and the PPR, seen as nationalist. This tendency is particularly evident in the establishments of the monuments that followed, including the ones dedicated to Polish communist figures M. Kasprzak, J. Marchlewski, K. Swierczewski, and M. Nowotko.[183]

Constituting the most focal part of the reconstructed memoryscape, the monument centered itself as a symbol of the new regime. The chronicles depicted the site of the monument as a central location for official celebrations and public holidays.[184] The film from July 22, 1951, demonstrates the participants of the parade, including Bolesław Bierut, Georgy Zhukov (Marshal of the USSR), Konstanty Rokossovsky (Marshal of the Polish Army), Józef Cyrankiewicz (Prime Minister of the PPR), and Vyacheslav Molotov. Besides the officials, the ceremony's guests included Dzerzhinsky's family members and youth.[185]

The most telling aspect of this footage is the speeches given by Aleksander Zawadzki, the Deputy Prime Minister of the PPR, and Pyotr Pospelov, the Representative of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party. Zawadzki referred to Dzerzhinsky as the "Great son of the Polish nation, the great leader of the working masses, the greatest Polish revolutionary." Pospelov addressed him as "an outstanding model of party spirit," proceeding with the following wishes: "Long live the great party of Lenin and Stalin! Eternal glory to Felix Dzerzhinsky and his memory, his name is the symbol of the friendship of the Polish and the Soviet peoples." Afterward, Bolesław Bierut unveiled

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[182] Górny and Górna, "Chapter 4. Selected Political Issues for Public Space—Iconoclasm in Respect of Warsaw Monuments from the 1945 to 1989 Period and Post-soviet Monuments in Ukrainian Cities."
[183] Ibid.
[184] *Defilada na placu Dzierżyńskiego. Zabawa na ulicach. Przebudowa placu Bankowego.* (1951. Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych Warszawa).
[185] *Cały naród czci pamięć Feliksa Dzierżyńskiego. Odsłonięcie pomnika Dzierżyńskiego.* (1951. Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych Warszawa).

the monument. Andrzej Łapicki (who late became an important actor in Andrzej Wajda's and Krzysztof Zanussi's films), the narrator of the chronicle, summarized the ceremony of honoring Dzerzhinsky's memory in a following way: "Here, on the square, where he spoke in the memorable year of 1905 to the Warsaw workers, Dzerzhinsky stood looking at Warsaw for which he had fought all his life: the capital of the People's Republic of Poland."[186]

However, the accuracy of these claims remains questionable, as Felix Dzerzhinsky's mobilization of Warsaw's workers was not that successful, and dispersing in the face of an armed military resulted in more than twenty people being wounded.[187] The "Iron Felix," despite the authorities' efforts, was not welcomed by Warsaw's citizens, as even during the period of the monument's installation, Varsovians were aware of Dzerzhinsky's crimes. Since 1951, several attempts have been made to alter or destroy the monument to the "Bloody Felix." The first acts of vandalism constituted a response to the closure of the "Po prostu" weekly. In 1957, the students painted the monument's hands red. In 1971, Andrzej Fedorowicz (later an important activist of the Polish underground) attempted to change the inscription on the monument's pedestal from "pride" to "executioner." Fedorowicz was caught; however, due to his young age, the proceedings were discontinued. The last attempt to destroy the monument was connected with the names of Emil Barchański, Stefan Antosiewicz, and Artur Nieszczerzewicz, high school students and members of the underground. The students threw red ink and gasoline at the statue, setting it on fire afterward. Emil Barchański, one of the three students initiating this action, was arrested and beaten. In four months, after sharing about this experience on a trial, Emil was found dead, and no perpetrators have been found.[188]

The overall negative perception of the monument helps to understand the process of its demolition. Planned as a discreet and non-public procedure by the municipal authorities, the act of toppling the monument caused a major public reaction. The decision to remove the monument, made by the municipal authorities, was explained by the construction works and the building of a new metro

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[186] Ibid.
[187] Paweł Tomczyk, "35 lat temu pomnik Feliksa Dzierżyńskiego upadł na bruk Warszawy", *Dzieje.pl Portal Historyczny*.
[188] Ibid.

line. The removal was undertaken by the Voivodeship Directorate of Municipal Roads workers. The process began on November 16, 1989, and lasted for two days. On the first day, the citizens who were not informed about these works joined the workers. On the first day, the citizens targeted the plinth, writing graffiti over it (such as "Go Away!", "Cheka Tyrant," and "Tirana is waiting"), and trying to destroy it. On the next day, more people joined, and some brought hammers along. When the monument was lifted by the crane and overthrown, breaking into pieces, people joined in, using hammers to destroy the sculpture and take its pieces as souvenirs. The demolition, followed by a large crowd singing the national anthem,[189] made it to the news, becoming an iconic event and a symbol of post-socialist de-commemoration.

The popular support for the monument's removal, which later came to signify the rupture with the communist regime, reflected the general mood regarding the first phase of decommunization. Hundreds of the PPR monuments had been removed, and the streets had been renamed by 1993. Demolition was also filmed and broadcast, which also contributed to this event becoming iconic. However, even being generally positive, the opinions on this act were not uniform. This demolition had multiple direct consequences, including a more discreet form of the authorities' removal of the monuments further. The fall of Dzerzhinsky was interpreted as a symbol of the fall of the Communist regime and an act of the symbolic regaining of sovereignty and emancipation from the state of occupation. More than a decade afterward, this focal place at the heart of the city became a site of memory again. In 2001, the same place where Dzerzhinsky stood became the site of a monument to Juliusz Słowacki, a Romantic-era poet.

Kyiv's Lenin: revolutionary iconoclasm, multivocality, and remaking the past

Standing in the center of Kyiv and being now topped with the Ukrainian trident, the plinth of the monument to Vladimir Lenin on Bessarabska Square serves as a testament to the popular mobilization

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[189] Ewa Ochman, "Chapter 35. Who Cares About Old Statues and Street Names? Resisting Change and the Protracted Decommunization of Public Space in Poland", in *De-Commemoration. Removing Statues and Renaming Places* (Berghahn Books, 2023).

during the Revolution of Dignity, disengagement from the dissonant past in the context of a political crisis, and attempts to forge a new self-articulation.

The monument was installed in Kyiv in 1946 as part of the postwar reconstruction of Khreshchatyk, the city's central street. The ceremony of unveiling the monument was coordinated to align with the tenth anniversary of the Stalinist constitution on December 5, 1946. The monument was originally conceived to be presented at the USSR's pavilion for the World Exhibition in the US in 1938. After the Second World War, a monument constructed according to the same project was installed in Kyiv. The statue at Bessarabska Square was made by Sergei Merkurov from Karelian quartzite—the same material used for the Mauzoleum in Moscow.[190] In 1965, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union issued a decree to include the monument in the list of art, history, and archaeology monuments of republican significance. In the official discourse, it was seen as one of the most important and iconic pieces of the republic's heritage.

In the 1970s, the main Party solemn events were held on the Square of the October Revolution (Maidan Nezalezhnosti), near the monument to the October Revolution, featuring another figure of Lenin in its ensemble. These two monuments were connected by the central street of Kyiv, forming an ideological axis in the urban space. In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the monument to the October Revolution was removed by the municipal authorities, and the monument to Lenin at Bessarabska Street became the place where the Communist Party of Ukraine held its events.

The installation of this monument and its subsequent transformations unfold in the context of changing perceptions of Lenin, his place in the state ideology, and meaning during the transition, as well as within the evolving mnemonic milieu in which it is located. Its establishment constitutes a component of the broader postwar "Leniniada," the efforts to reassert state ideology in the public sphere. Hence, most of the monuments to Lenin established on the territory of the UkrSSR were constructed in the late 1950s and the second half of the 1960s.[191] The Leniniada of the late 1960s

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[190] Haidai, *Kamianyi hist. Lenin u Tsentralnii Ukraini [Stone guest. Lenin in Central Ukraine]*.
[191] Ibid.

refs to the mass establishment of these statues in the context of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution. In the 1980s, the symbolism of Lenin transformed, becoming part of the culture of laughter and reflecting kitsch rather than symbolizing a great revolutionary past, thus becoming an object of grotesque symbolism.[192]

After 1991, the discussion of dealing with the USSR's heritage began to unfold. The commission for the liquidation of the landmarks of the totalitarian regime, which worked through 1993 and included representatives of the state institutions and research organizations, suggested dismantling the monuments to Lenin, including the one on Bessarabska Street. However, the city council did not implement this decision, explaining it by financial constraints.

On the night of June 30, 2009, the monument to Lenin was damaged by a group of nationalists, including Mykola Kokhanivsky and Oleksandr Zadorozhnyi, who put a ladder to the monument and broke its nose and arm off. The action was coordinated to correspond to the birthday of Roman Shukhevych, the commander-in-chief of UPA, and was argued to be in accordance with Victor Yushchenko's decree on commemorating the victims of Holodomor, as one of its aspects presupposed the "dismantling of monuments and memorials to those involved in the organization of the Holodomor of 1932-1933."[193] Afterward, the monument was excluded from the State Registry, losing its protected status. The representatives of the Communist Party reconstructed it at their own expense.

The most significant change that made this monument well-known and affected the development of Ukrainian memory culture happened in the context of the Revolution of Dignity. During the protests in the city center, police were concerned that participants in the rallies would vandalize the Lenin monument. Therefore, they surrounded it in a ring. The Communist Party, which supported then-president Victor Yanukovych, set their text nearby to protect the monument. The first attempt to topple Lenin happened on December 1. The protesters threw red paint over it. The next attempt to destroy the monument took place a week later, on the evening of December 8, 2013; the police did not intervene. The National Resistance Headquarters stated that the removal of the

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[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.

monument was not an initiative of Euromaidan. The responsibility for toppling the monument was later claimed by the Svoboda party.

The protestors joined enthusiastically, destroying the remains of the monument, taking some of its pieces as souvenirs, and singing the national anthem. This act of "iconoclasm" provoked a chain reaction of similar acts of demolition, which transformed into the "Leninfall" unfolding across the country. The December 8 event became iconic because of its role in the protest, as it happened on the same day as the "March of the Millions", its role in the overall disengagement with the Soviet system, and its rapid mediatization.

However, the meaning attributed to the fall was not uniform due to the heterogeneity of the group of protest participants. While evoking a large popular reaction, the meaning behind it was being constructed in the moment of demolition, and the protestors who joined the protest for different reasons expressed opposing views regarding the demolition of Lenin.[194] This can be explained by the dynamic of the protest which began with addressing the issues of governance (hence, was more concerned with the statehood than national/ethnic belonging in the first days), and later, facing and having to resist to the state violence, transformed into the event of rearticulating Ukrainian identity.

After December 8th, the monument's plinth became a place of rethinking the heritage of the Soviet regime and the monument as a form of commemoration and memorialization. Immediately afterward, different initiatives suggested visions of what should be on the plinth instead. The absence that became especially focal quickly became a space for negotiating public space. All these attempts made the KCSA's Department of Urban Planning and Architecture hold a series of "Monument VS Public Space" discussions. Another attempt to address the same topic was introduced by the Social Contract project by the Izolyatsia Foundation, inviting artists and curators to facilitate a public discussion between citizens and the government, centering around the topics of memorialization.

As time passed, the plinth became a memorial site of the revolution. It is still present and is now topped with the Ukrainian trident. Becoming an iconic sign of disengagement from the past, the

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[194] Kutkina, *Between Lenin and Bandera: Decommunization and Multivocality in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine*.

fall of Lenin became used in articulating solidarity and resistance to undemocratic regimes both locally and internationally, contextualizing the event. In 2018, the imagery of Leninfall was exhibited with the slogan "for your and our freedom 1968-2018."[195] Therefore, the significance of the demolition of the monument, exercised in the public mobilization of the revolution, grew, transforming the meaning from erasure of the dissonant past to the rethinking and rearticulation of the present.

These examples of monumental iconoclasm, not resulting from a state policy, but illustrating a public reaction to the removal of a central yet unwanted sign of remembrance in the first case and constituting an act of symbolic mobilization in the second, demonstrated the assertion of sovereignty through the act of de-commemoration. Both acts targeted central monuments of the previous regimes and became iconic in illustrating disengagement from them due to their roles in the respective periods of "popular decommunization," the influence on the following changes in memoryscapes, and their medialization. These changes reflected the processes of disengagement from the past, not only seen as dissonant, but also viewed as a 'constitutive other' in articulating and asserting a new collective identity. These changes differed contextually and temporally: while in the Polish case, the issue of national identity was seen as one of the core reasons in the transition, in Ukraine, it was in flux at its beginning: the 'rupture' with the dissonant past was articulated later, in the context of the Revolution of Dignity, being more of a point of the acceleration of a public discussion than its culmination.

IV.2 Is There Space for the Friendship of the Peoples in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe?

Monumental bodies and the discourse of friendship: spatialization, forgetting, alteration

> *A fairy-tale Palace is rising*
> *in Warsaw*
> *Forever it shall last—like love*
> *for a child*
> *Forever it shall last—like friendship*
> *of the Soviet kind.*
> Jan Brzechwa, "Stone Flower"[196]

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[195] Ibid.
[196] Magdalena J. Zaborowska, "The Height of (Architectural) Seduction: Reading the "Changes" Through Stalin's Palace in Warsaw, Poland", *Journal of Architectural Education* 54, № 4 (2001).

Described in this socialist realist children's poem, the "fairy-tale Palace," the construction of which presupposed the destruction on an entire district, had outlived the "friendship of the Soviet kind," acquiring new meanings over time and testifying to the changes in the urban organization and the discourse of people's friendship in Poland during and after the transition.

The Palace of Culture and Sciences, a monumental example of socialist realism in Polish architecture, constituted a Soviet "gift" to the Polish people, illustrating "Polish-Soviet friendship." The Palace was named after Stalin, and until 1956, this was mentioned on its facade, stating "Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science." The Palace is located on the territory of the former Jewish district and later the Warsaw Ghetto, which was completely destroyed in the war and during the city's reconstruction. Before the Second World War, Warsaw had the second-largest Jewish community, constituting one-fourth of the city's population.[197] However, the postwar rebuilding of this area as well as the construction of the Palace and the Plac Defilad, a colossal communist agora neighboring it, shows no trace of it, demonstrating the inevitable transformation of the cityscape with no chance of return, obliterating not only the city's past, but the then-present urban pattern.[198] The construction of the Palace transformed the cityscape, introducing a stark contrast between the new architecture and the old town, and completely recentering the city around a new symbol of socialist might, placing PPR in the USSR's orbit. The (re)constructed body of the city, along with its new ideological core, can be seen, therefore, as based on its destruction.

The construction of the Palace of Culture and Science was funded and supervised by Soviet architects coordinated by Lev Rudnev, with the participation of Soviet workers supervised by the PPR authorities. The decision regarding the decoration of the Palace was to be made in dialogue with Bierut and Cyrankiewicz, and the central element of the Palace was decided upon in competition for sculptural projects. While Magdalena Więcek's design won, it was never implemented. Instead, the project of Alina Szapocznikow was implemented, and the monument to Polish-Soviet Friendship was installed at the main entrance of the Palace of Culture and Sciences in 1954, remaining its central

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[197] Piotr Skurowski, "Warsaw: Precarious Spaces, Precarious Memories", in *Precarious Places* (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2020).
[198] Ibid.

sculpture for more than thirty years.[199] The monument depicts two men, one Polish and one Soviet, standing in an embrace and holding a banner.

The artist's personal trajectory is crucial in this context. Surviving the Nazi camps, she, as she mentioned herself, went thought the "baptism of despair," later becoming committed to the PPR's regime, drawn by the socialist idea of justice.[200] Thus, the bodies of this sculpture are the reconstructed and reconstituted social bodies. Szapocznikow's works, before and after the completion of the Friendship Monument and the monument to Stalin, were avant-garde in style and predominantly focused on corporeality and the experience of illness. This monument, however, is one of the most well-known examples of Polish socialist realist sculpture.

The monument was designed to support the idea of Soviet-Polish friendship, situating it at the very center of the new ideological core of the city. Among the two men represented by the sculpture, the one holding the banner represents the Soviet side (as can be recognized by the star symbol on the monument's design plan); he is standing in a leading position with a more determined expression; he has his hand on the Polish worker's shoulder, almost like showing him way—the Friendship narrative represented by the sculpture still presupposed a certain hierarchy.

The monument to Polish-Soviet Friendship stood in the Palace of Culture and Science until 1992, when, during the first wave of decommunization, it was considered unworthy of display.[201] Then the monument was dismantled, and the figures' hands and banner had to be removed so that the monument could be taken out of the building, as the sculpture had been installed before the doors were finished. The decision to remove the sculpture in this manner, according to Michael Murawski, demonstrated a sense of hurry or a perception of the monument as insignificant and not worthy of preservation in its original form.[202] Therefore, being partially destroyed, this monument bears the materiality of both the narrative it was designed and constructed to support and the changing public

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[199] Agata Jakubowska et al., "O rzeźbie Aliny Szapocznikow „Pomnik przyjaźni polsko-radzieckiej"", *Mint Magazine*, 2025.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Tomasz Urzykowski, "Słynna rzeźba z Pałacu Kultury odnaleziona po latach. Trafiła na aukcję za ogromne pieniądze", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2019.
[202] Ibid.

perception of it. While the monument ended up in a private collection, its hands and the banner were considered lost for 16 years.

In 1998, Katarzyna Bielas and Dorota Jarecka discovered the monument, sparking a new debate around it by publishing an article in Gazeta Wyborcza. According to Bielas and Jarecka, the missing elements were with the monument's owner. In 2019, the owner of the sculpture decided to sell it at an auction. The board of the Palace demanded that the monument be returned; however, the auction still proceeded, as the Desa auction house considered these demands unjustified. After the auction, the sculpture was placed in the warehouse until its legal status was clarified. The auction changed the "afterlife" of the monument, as afterward, it became a part of the museum exhibition, and returned to the public sphere, provoking a discussion on the possibilities of such "friendship of the peoples" in the post-socialist era. The aspect of the market has also transformed the Palace itself, which continues to center the city on itself.

In 2024, it became a permanent part of the exhibition in the Warsaw Museum of Modern Art. In the museum, its title was changed to "Friendship", and its location was changed—the monument was placed near one of the staircases, in contrast to its previously central position in the Palace. This "amputated Friendship" provokes the discussion on the idea of "friendship of the peoples" and its historical and political transformations, as well as on its spatiality, both regarding the central/peripheral status and the proximity of this place to the former Ghetto and the destruction the construction of the Palace caused. In Agata Jakubowska's words, the "amputated friendship" makes one think about the "amputated district."[203]

According to Agata Jakubowska, Sarah Wilson, and Michał Murawski, the monument reflects the history of and the reaction to the traumatic experience that later left a material imprint on its symbol, being unreflected and lacking a narrative to frame it.[204] The authors emphasize the general sense of belatedness in the perception of the decommunization process, particularly in the context of overcoming and working through the traumatic experience.

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[203] Jakubowska et al., "O rzeźbie Aliny Szapocznikow „Pomnik przyjaźni polsko-radzieckiej"".
[204] Ibid.

Both the Palace and the monument, material symbols of the "friendship of the peoples," once seen as eternal, became the bearers of the passage of time, which altered them. Following the discussion about the Palace's resignification projects, the option implemented was the installation of the Millennium Clock on its façade, challenging the temporality inherent in it.[205] Szapocznikow's monument to the Polish-Soviet Friendship reflects these changes in the materiality of the depicted bodies. Being constructed as embodying the promise of postwar justice, for Alina Szapocznikow, they illustrated the socialist project. Built on the preceding destruction, the bearers of an "eternal idea" became affected by the passage of time and the changing mnemonic milieu that transformed them and their roles accordingly.

Between friendship and reunification—People's Friendship Arch in Kyiv

The monumental testament to the idea of the Friendship of the Peoples in Kyiv constitutes a place where two distinct memory narratives converge, demonstrating the construction of the 'multilayered' memory node as a means of forging public loyalty in the USSR as well as the processes of disentanglement of them and disengagement from them after 1991.

The People's Friendship Arch in Kyiv is a part of a monumental ensemble installed in 1982. Besides the arch, it encompasses a stele depicting historical figures associated with the signing of the Pereyaslav Agreement of 1654, including Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the leader of the Zaporizhia Cossacks, and Vasyl Buturlin, who represented the tsar of Moscow; and a monument featuring two workers holding the "People's Friendship" order. The ensemble illustrates the convergence of memory narratives that in became especially significant during the postwar period the UkrSSR, namely the "reunification of the Ukrainian and the Russian people," illustrated by the reinterpretation of the Pereyaslav events, and the "friendship of the peoples," shown by the arch and the sculpture of the workers.

In the postwar years, the official reinterpretation of the Pereyaslav events, along with the narrative about Kyivan Rus as a "cradle of Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians as the three

[205] Michał Murawski, *Palace Complex: A Stalinist Skyscraper, Capitalist Warsaw, and a City Transfixed* (Indiana University Press, 2019).

brotherly people," was crucial in framing Ukrainian-Russian relations.[206] These narratives were supported by the installation of memorial signs and the introduction of official celebrations and public holidays. In 1954, the Soviet authorities introduced the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the reunification of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples. Another, the 325th, jubilee dedicated to this narrative was celebrated in 1979.[207] The People's Friendship Arch was conceived to be installed by this date; however, as the construction works took more time, it was not until 1982 that the Arch was unveiled.

The installation of the monumental ensemble was therefore dedicated to marking the 60th anniversary of the USSR (which was also mentioned in the text on the panel) and the 65th anniversary of the Revolution of 1917. Its installation was also connected to the 1500th anniversary of Kyiv, the date introduced by the Soviet authorities. In 1982, Kyiv was also awarded the "People's Friendship" order. Combining the narrative about the historical closeness and relatedness of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples and the reinterpretation of Kyiv's history, the monument provided the narrative about People's Friendship with spatial anchoring and temporal continuity.

The monument to the People's Friendship is similar to the monuments embodying this narrative across the USSR's republics. However, as everywhere else, it was adapted to the local canons of depiction: the Ukrainian worker in Kyiv's monument is represented wearing a traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirt. Besides the difference in clothing, the represented figures look similar, which reflects the idea of overcoming national differences in the state's development.

The People's Friendship Arch had a longer prehistory. Several precursor projects were introduced as early as the 1950s. From the beginning, it was intended to commemorate the narrative of the Russian-Ukrainian reunification through the history of the Pereyaslav Council of 1654. The arch was meant to be located on the right bank of the Dnipro River, and the authorities organized an All-Union competition for the monument's design. The first projects introduced were stylistically closer to the Triumphal Arches. However, bridging these ideas was a challenging task, as the

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[206] Serhii Tolochko, "Celebration of 1500 Anniversary of Kyiv in 1982: Ideological Aspect", *Kyiv Historical Studies* 1, № 8 (2019).
[207] Ibid.

Triumphal Arches were associated with military victory, which contradicted the idea of friendship and reunification convergence.[208] Along with the temporal and financial constraints and the political changes that included the adoption of the "On elimination of excesses in design and construction" decree, these projects were never realized. Instead, the People's Friendship Arch was made of titanium and installed later. As the monument significantly changed the urban landscape of Kyiv, the public reactions to it varied, including the monument acquiring several different titles, such as "Shackle" and the "Monument to a cyclist."

After the introduction of the decommunization laws, several attempts were made to reinterpret and resignify the monument, as well as acts of destruction on parts of its inscription and calls to demolish it in order to install a new memorial in its place. Among the ideas was the suggestion to rethink the Arch as a symbol of the Unification Act between the Ukrainian People's Republic and the West Ukrainian People's Republic, and a suggestion by Volodymyr Viatrovych, a then-director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, to install the national pantheon on the location of the Arch. In 2017, when Kyiv hosted Eurovision, the Arch was painted in pride colors and renamed the "Arch of Diversity." In 2018, to raise attention to the Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and the Russian-occupied Crimea, the crack was stuck onto the Arch, introducing an installation of a "cracked friendship".

After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the decommunization discourse converged with a discourse on derussification, and in 2023, the so-called decolonization law ("On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonization of Toponymy") was introduced to establish a legal framework for this discourse.

In April 2022, the municipal authorities began dismantling the monument to the "People's Friendship" beneath the arch. This act sparked a debate on the matters of decision-making, agency, and legitimacy in constructing the collective memory, as no prior communication had been made, and the solution regarding this monument was made without consulting either citizens or relevant

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[208] Andrii Markovskyi, "Arka yak symvol triumfu panuiuchoi ideolohii v arkhitekturi kyieva 1930-kh-1950-kh rr.", [Arch as a symbol of the triumph of the dominant ideology in the architecture of Kyiv in the 1930s-1950s.]]*Suchasni problemy arkhitektury ta mistobuduvannia*. 57 (2020).

expert communities. During the demolition, the "Russian" figure among the two was accidentally beheaded, which later in the media was seen as "a good omen." In May of the same year, the City Council renamed the Arch "Arch of Freedom of the Ukrainian People."

In March 2024, the expert commission of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory to determine whether objects belong to the symbols of Russian imperial policy, working within the framework of the legislation on decolonization, published a conclusion that the People's Friendship Arch belonged to the symbols of Russian imperial policy and was subject to dismantling.[209] The Ministry of Culture supported this conclusion, mentioning that even after the renaming, the monument was representing solely the Soviet ideologemes that constituted a threat to Ukraine's national security. The ministry then referred to the older unofficial names the Arch had to justify the idea of its removal by public sentiment. They have also referred to uses of the "People's Friendship" narrative in present-day Russia, especially in justifying its territorial claims.

However, the city council disagreed, highlighting the financial constraints and untimeliness of this decision and the importance of the Arch as a structure that prevents landslides. This debate also involved activists, who expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of a broader dialogue about the decisions regarding the monuments of the Soviet period; the activists highlighted the potential of these monuments to serve as history lessons in the public spaces which is lost to their removal and affects the dynamics in the society overall. Therefore, one of the issues this case reveals lies in the decision-making procedures and the relatively weak dialogue between the state and society regarding these matters.

The contexts of introducing the narratives of people's friendship as a means of forging public loyalty differed, as well as the temporalities implied. While in the case of PPR, it demonstrated an attempt to establish such a connection, claiming it to be eternal and future-oriented, in the case of the Ukrainian SSR, the narrative was more past-oriented, converging with the reinterpretation of the

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[209] Ukraina, Ukrainskyi instytut natsionalnoi pamiati, *Fakhovyi vysnovok shchodo nalezhnosti vstanovlenoi na terytorii Khreshchatoho parku mista Kyieva Arky druzhby narodiv (pereimenovano na Arku Svobody ukrainskoho narodu) do symvoliky rosiiskoi imperskoi polityky, [An expert opinion on the affiliation of the Arch of Friendship of Peoples (renamed the Arch of Freedom of the Ukrainian People), installed in Khreshchatyi Park in Kyiv, to the symbols of Russian imperial policy]* Fakhovyi vysnovok, ukhvaleno 27.03.2024.

historical continuities of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Interestingly, the processes of disengaging from the narratives of "people's friendship" and their material bearers illustrated different renderings of the past: while in the Polish case, the transformations in the signs of the "eternal friendship" unfolded, partially, in the museum settings, prompting rethinking this narrative as a component of the past, the Ukrainian case, unfolding during the Russian-Ukrainian war, rendered the past as a threat to the present.

IV.3 Remembering to Forget: Decommunisation Discourse and War Memory

From the "four sleepers" to the "three cursed soldiers": resignification of the "Brotherhood in Arms" monument in Warsaw

Unveiled on November 18th, 1945, the Monument to the Brotherhood in Arms was the first one to be installed in Warsaw after World War II. At that time, it had a very central location, neighboring the building of the Provisional Government of the PPR. It was unveiled by B. Bierut, and among the participants at the ceremony were the Prime Minister, the Chief Commander of the Polish Army (previously, the commander of the People's Army), and the USSR's military attaché; therefore, this event entrenched the official narrative of the war experience connecting closer the People's Army (AL) and the Red Army.

The monument was the result of the collaborative work of Polish and Soviet sculptors; the idea was developed by an artist who was also a Red Army Major. The monument combined two sculptural groups: the first, placed on the top, represented the Soviet soldiers in a fight, and the second demonstrated four soldiers, two of them Polish, and two Soviet, on guard. In 1947, the monument was renovated and some details of the sculptures were changed: the grenade was changed for the firearm, and some of the sculptures were swapped places. The inscription changed, too. The first version referred to the liberation narrative, saying "Glory to the heroes of the Red Army who died in the struggle to liberate Poland". The 1947 version focused on the Soviet army's contribution to

establishing the Polish nation's independence: "Glory to the heroes of the Soviet Army, brothers in arms, who gave their lives for the freedom and independence of the Polish nation."[210]

The monument was used as a place for wreath-laying ceremonies and solemn speeches on the dates relating to military history. For example, the monument was a central location on the day of the Soviet army and the Liberation anniversaries. The official film chronicle demonstrates the official holidays held near the monument. In these speeches, the Soviet army was referred to as the army bringing freedom to the Polish people and the army that not only liberated Poland from the Nazis, but saved the very existence of the Polish nation.[211] In the ceremonies held near the monument, the brotherhood in arms is seen as a component of the friendship between the peoples.

In the unofficial communication, the monument was referred to as "the monument to the four sleepers" or the "four sad ones," as the figures were shown with their heads down. The full saying, articulating the monument with the unrepresented memory of the Uprising, went as follows: "The three fought with the Polish underground, and the four were sleeping while the Germans destroyed the Uprising."[212]

After 1989, the celebrations of the Red Army's liberation of Warsaw were substituted with the marking of the anniversary of the "end of the fight" in the city. This change in the emphasis was supported by the changed inscription. With time and changes in the historical politics, it stopped being a place of official celebrations. For a long time, the monument to Brotherhood in arms remained "muted," neither being a place of commemorative events, nor sparking any political controversies. The changes that the monument underwent both during the PPR and after 1989 were connected to the construction works of the public transport system.

The first suggestion to remove the monument as a symbol of the previous regime was introduced as early as 1992. In 1994, the authorities included the monument in the list annexed to the

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[210] Contested Histories, "*Brotherhood in Arms Monument in Warsaw, Poland*", Contested Histories Case Study #127 (April 2024), Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) at the European Association of HistoryEducators (EuroClio).

[211] *Święto Armii Radzieckiej. Składanie wieńców przy Pomniku Braterstwa Broni. Akademia ku czci 30-lecia Armii Czerwonej. (*1950. Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych Warszawa Wymiana zagraniczna: Nowosti Dnia (Now. D.)).

[212] Zuzanna Derlacz, "Ciężar historii pomnika Braterstwa Broni, czyli co robiło czterech, gdy trzech walczyło", *Historie pomników*.

Polish-Russian agreement, necessitating dialogue regarding any changes to the monument in the future.

In 2007, the authorities suggested relocating the monument to build a tramway hub. In 2020, the debate on the monument accelerated. PiS councilor Maciejowski suggested blowing it up; other suggestions included transporting it to the communism museum or the Cemetery-Mausoleum. In 2011, the municipal authorities suggested taking the monument down to finish the metro line works and returning it afterward. These ideas started an intense discussion that touched upon war memorialization and the memory of the PPR and encompassed the media debate, several signed petitions, and acts of vandalism. This debate reflected the general post-1989 climate of rethinking the national identity through rediscovering and re-evaluating the past.[213]

After the monument was removed, a "red plague" inscription appeared on the plinth, referring to Józef Szczepański's poem with a verse: "We are waiting for you, red plague, to save us from black death." A court decision regarding this case did not recognize it as an act of vandalism and concluded that the monument was "harmed insignificantly." The monument was not officially protected by law, so no measures could have been implemented.

According to the municipal authorities' decision, the monument was to be returned to the same square but several hundred meters further. The local residents began protesting against the monument's return. Most of the statements concerned an economic dimension of the problem and were directed at the Civic Platform, which suggested renovating the monument at the city's cost. They also referred to the monument as hypocritical and honoring the occupiers. At that time, PiS disagreed with this resolution, mentioning that the return of the monument would mean propagating communism and being in a servile position regarding Russia. As the debate intensified, the City Hall issued a public survey regarding the perceptions of the monument. According to the survey, 72% of the citizens did not want to remove the monument, 12% chose that the monument had to be returned, but to a different place, and 8% supported the idea of removing it without return.[214] As a response,

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[213] Ibid.
[214] Tomasz Urzykowski, "IPN wypowiada wojnę "śpiącym". Będą rozdawać ulotki", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2014.

IPN, executing its objectives in public education, prepared leaflets to explain the "true intentions behind installing the monument."[215] The resignification of this monument also reflected the approach, framed by Magda Szcześniak and Łukasz Zaremba as "paranoid." In their article, they are drawing on Kosofsky Sedgwick's idea of paranoid reading to demonstrate how the Polish 'de-communization' implied a particular modality of looking that approached the public sphere as a dangerous environment that needs to be examined and purged of all the symbolically threatening objects.[216]

Afterward, the Freedom and Democracy Foundation, a non-governmental organization of right-leaning individuals, initiated the petition and managed to collect 9000 signatures to prevent the return of the monument. Among the factors highlighted was the location of the monument: it was close to at least five sites where the soldiers of the Home Army were killed. PiS party, as well as the city Councils from PiS, after acquiring the support of the victims of communist repressions associations, demanded complete demolition of the monument.[217] The decision was in the hands of the Warsaw City Council, which at that time was dominated by the center-right PO; along with the councils from the SLD, they voted against the PiS suggestions. Among the explanations PO and SLD provided was that the monument did not glorify the previous regime but honored the Soviet soldiers (not the high-ranks, but the ordinary people) who but died fighting "nor for the specific ideology, but against the Nazis. PO's and SLD's explanations were supported by the organizations of the ex-combatants. The other explanation in defending the monument was that it was also honoring the memory of the Polish soldiers organized under Soviet control.

The sculptural compositions of the monument allowed for rereading it as a symbol of Soviet domination. However, the ex-militants questioned this, referring to the second sculptural group and mentioning that the two armies fought hand in hand. The other "readings" of the monument emphasized the effort and sacrifice made by the Polish army—the ex-combatants were sharing their understanding of the monument as the site of mourning and a duty to honor the fallen. From a broader

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[215] Ibid.

[216] Magda Szcześniak and Łukasz Zaremba, "Paranoid looking: on de-communization", *Journal of Visual Culture* 18, № 2 (2019).

[217] Ochman

perspective, it reflected an earlier debate regarding the memory of the war and the attempts to clarify one's position regarding it—a construction of the memories of "us" and "them." Yet, because the number of veterans declined, and the SLD was losing its support, the final decision was to be made by the Warsaw citizens[218] for whom the monument was the site of everyday meetings and a spatial marker, but not the site of practiced memory.

A discussion was sparked again with a publication in Gazeta Stołeczna, suggesting returning the monument with a plaque explaining it. The author suggested that IPN write a text, and the City Council approved it. However, the Civil platform remained silent due to the upcoming elections and the respective unwillingness to cause major public debate. PO also referred to the residents' protests and suggested finding a new place for the monument and to the "current historical situation" (as of 2015) being inappropriate for this monument's return.[219] In 2015, they officially repealed the 2011 decision, putting an end to the debate that had lasted for 4 years. The monument was taken to the Museum of Polish History, where it was deconstructed and exhibited as a symbol of lost sovereignty.[220] After the repeal, the Russian Embassy reached out for clarification and expressed that the monument has to be returned.

Whose Motherland? The interactions of war memories and the limits of monumental plasticity

The Mother Motherland monument is a part of the *National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War,* opened in 1981 in Kyiv. The Motherland is portrayed as a woman holding a sword and a shield raised above her head. One hundred two meters tall, she is overlooking the city, being one of its highest structures. Since its opening and until 2015, the museum was named differently. The *Museum of the Great Patriotic War* reflected a narrative dedicated to the communist victory over fascism, a key memory narrative of the Soviet Union after 1965. The museum's establishment was initiated by the USSR Ministry of Culture order in 1973. It was opened in 1974 to

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[218] Ochman, "Spaces of Nationhood and Contested Soviet War Monuments in Poland: The Warsaw Monument to the Brotherhood in Arms."

[219] Michał Wojtczuk, "Rada Warszawy: "Czterej Śpiący" już nie wrócą", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2015.

[220] Michał Wojtczuk, "Kiedy spadał z cokołu, warszawiacy wiwatowali. Pomnik Dzierżyńskiego wraca właśnie w wielkim stylu", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2020.

mark the anniversary of "liberating Ukraine from fascists," providing the myth of the Great Patriotic War with institutional support. The development of a museum complex with a monument, sculpture galleries, and space for exhibiting military vehicles started later, culminating in the museum's inauguration on May 9, 1981. The solemn ceremony, attended by the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Leonid Brezhnev, reflected broader shifts in the USSR's memory politics and political mythology. The narrative of the Great Patriotic War became a central event in the official political mythology in the 1960s, substituting a previously central narrative about the Great October Revolution.

In May 1964, a decree was issued to improve the functioning of museums, assigning them a new mission: communist education. This entailed the formation of dedicated museum sections focused on the USSR's history from the Revolution to the 1960s, constructing and reinforcing an image of historical continuity. The approach the Great Patriotic War Museum had undertaken echoed these changes in sustaining the image of the Soviet people in a heroic fight; it was simultaneously emotional and didactic, scientific and commemorative.

The Victory Day-dedicated installation of the Motherland monument reflected a broader tendency in constructing the national representation with the image of a woman in the USSR. Similar statues were erected in Georgia, Armenia, and Russia to commemorate the capitals' anniversaries (Tbilisi) or celebrate the Soviet victory, visually supporting the respective myth (Kyiv, Yerevan, and Volgograd). The project of Kyiv's Motherland was suggested in the 1970s by Yevhenii Vuchetich, who designed the Motherland Calls sculpture in Russia. After he died in 1974, the project was developed and finished by Vasyl Borodai, the head of the USSR artists' union. According to the oral testimony of the author's grandson, the earlier projects for the monument implied the figure holding a palm branch as a symbol of peace, but the Party had rejected them, demanding a sword instead. The images of the Motherland with the sword across the USSR reflected the emphasis on collective valor in the official narrative about the Great Patriotic War. Channeling the key political myth of its period, the monument drastically transformed the symbolic landscape of Kyiv. It was not well-received by the citizens who already had a symbolically stronger place for the war commemoration events

nearby.[221] Weak in function, the monumental sculpture did not justify its grandeur with meaning as demonstrated by the alternative names the citizens gave it, from "Iron Woman" to "Rivet Mother." Observed from a broader context, the installation of the monument also illustrates the localization and adaptation of the ideas and practices coming from the USSR's center to the peripheries. Not allowing for independent memory politics, yet not constituting a one-sided communication situation either, the cultural space of the UkrSSR was hybrid, with all republic-level projects being exercised in a specific mixture of ideas and agencies.

Even though the museum complex combined the functions of a research institution and a place of memory, it never became a site for the official commemorative events during Soviet rule. Neither was the museum complex well-accepted by the citizens, as the mnemonic landscape of the city already had another place of war memory—the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Park of Eternal Glory; symbolically stronger, it served as a place where the official commemorative ceremonies took place.[222] In the last years before the USSR's dissolution, the authorities tried to divide commemorative events between these places, but never succeeded; the museum remained a place of production and dissemination of the myth of the Great Patriotic War.

Since Ukraine regained independence in 1991, the interpretations of the museum and the monument by the citizens and state authorities have transformed profoundly. The regime change entailed changes in the symbolic landscape: the de-commemoration practices encompassed re-reading and/or demolishing the Soviet monuments, changes in toponymy, and updating the institutional practices and memory work decision-making. The Museum of the Great Patriotic War did not constitute an exception—the recent discussion over the monument's fate in the context of decommunization demonstrates that its meanings are still contested. In 1994, the museum changed its approaches to research and exhibitions. The museum started to seek an alternative to the Soviet myth about the Great Victory, changing the narrative and focus. The remodeled exhibition focused more on the individuals (and not the collective or the Party) and utilized a less heroic tone in

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[221] Yekelchyk, "Symbolic plasticity and memorial environment: the afterlife of Soviet monuments in post-Soviet Kyiv".
[222] Ibid.

narrating.[223] The exhibition design was changed to include the events on the whole frontline. More topics, including more Ukraine-focused ones, including the Holodomor, were added to the exhibition.[224] The other important change was shifting from an ethnic-based to a civic-based approach to identity. Generally, this museum presented itself as an objective, rational, and scientific institution. The changes in the political landscape allowed it to rethink and transform some of its approaches and start the process of disengaging from the memory of the State that no longer existed. However, the most profound transformations in representing the Soviet memory were triggered not as much by the dissolution of the USSR as by the Russian invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. The Revolution of Dignity of 2013-2014 and the subsequent Russian invasion accelerated the processes of disengagement with the Soviet past, converging them with memory securitization policies. Unfolding in the context of the adoption of the decommunization legislation, the transformation of WWII commemoration became not solely the most symbolically strong and focal shift but an internationally targeted gesture signaling that the state was joining a European tradition of remembrance, in the memory-related legislation and communication. The Great Patriotic War was changed to the Second World War, the dates were shifted respectively (from 1941-1945 to 1939-1945), and the state-level commemoration changed its date, mood, and meaning, shifting from the Victory Day celebrated on the May 9th to the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in World War II in 1939-1945 on the May 8th.

The urban memoryscape was changing, too. The Mother Motherland monument was, in this regard, a difficult case, as removing the Soviet coat of arms from its shield would have been both technically and financially challenging. Instead, the capital's authorities tried to balance the monument with another sign by installing the country's highest flagpole with the Ukrainian flag nearby.[225] In the spring of 2015, a month after the legislation was passed, the local activists put a gigantic wreath of poppies with flag-colored stripes on the monument's head to signify the transition to the new type of commemorating the war under the "Never Again" slogan. This marked the shift to

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[223] Serhii Rudenko, "Dekomunizatsiia» muzeiu Velykoi Vitchyznianoi Viiny u Kyievi: 1994 chy 2015", Hileia 116.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Yekelchyk, "Symbolic plasticity and memorial environment: the afterlife of Soviet monuments in post-Soviet Kyiv".

commemorating the fallen rather than celebrating the victory; a tendency that later continued in the convergence of the WWII remembrance with the commemoration of the fallen in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The attempts to reclaim and resignify the Mother Motherland monument were not confined to the decommunization discourse, respective legislation, and state-level decision-making. In 2020, queer activists from Kyiv tried to rethink the monument by transforming a "communist symbol into a symbol of gender equality" by flying a drone with a pride flag attached to it over the monument's sword. The video they published depicted the sculpture holding a flag in her hand with the "motherland is for everyone" slogan captioning the action. The activist received criticism from the museum: the official statement mentioned that the action was provocative and unacceptable in the museum hosting the tragic memories of WWII and the ongoing war. This response marked the museum's specific reading of the monument, where the Motherland was not accepting anyone identifying their belonging to the nation, with this tension being reflected as one of the limits of the monument's symbolic plasticity.

In 2023, the Mother Motherland became Mother Ukraine. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 accelerated symbolic politics, merging the discourses of decommunization and derussification. The memory of the Soviet period transformed from 'cold' to 'hot' again, with its signifiers acquiring a new reading. The process of resignification of the Soviet past in the context of Russian imperial policies caused a new wave of de-commemorative acts, varying from changing the names and altering the memorial objects to the practices of removing and destroying them. The iconic signs of Soviet times, including the Motherland monument, were the first to be affected. Yet, the perception of these changes was not homogeneous, as the monuments in many cases lost their initial connections with the events and contexts they were conceived to sustain and, as emptied signifiers, became objects of materializing and negotiating the public discourses.

The Motherland monument underwent several changes, both on the level of the monument and the practices of encoding and decoding it. In 2023, resulting from the in-museum closed discussion, the monument's name was changed to Mother Ukraine to symbolically mark the new

reading of this sign as made in Ukraine by the artist of Ukrainian origin, and signifying Ukrainian memory. This act, as the museum director emphasized, followed the popular return to the symbol in the context of the Russian attacks. Facing the North-East, the monument was reinterpreted as defending her country with the sword and shield from its eastern neighbor. It was often used on posters and memes in social media, and the users tended to mark the similarities between the monument and the Orans—the symbol in the apse of the Saint Sophia Cathedral signifying divine protection.

Another symbolic shift altered the sculpture's monumentality. In 2023, Kyiv's authorities launched a public poll asking what to do with a Soviet coat of arms on the Mother's shield. The options presented were as follows: to remove it, to change it for the Ukrainian coat of arms, or to leave it as it was. In July 2023, exchanging the hammer and sickle for a trident acquired the biggest percentage of votes, despite the technical and financial difficulties. This grandiose symbol was replaced with a new one on the day of Ukrainian independence. The inclusion of a broader group decision-making was a shift long overdue in the course of the decommunization policy; yet, the reactions to these changes were by no means univocal.

The public poll as a method of dealing with a dissonant heritage and the undertaken format of symbolic resignification evoked a discussion that reflects that, up to this day, the opinions on the possibility of reclaiming the symbols of a dissonant past are heterogeneous and conflicting. It is possible to delineate two discursive positions in this debate. The first group of public intellectuals emphasized that no matter the name and the symbol on the sculpture's shield, it remains Soviet in its grandeur, iconicity, and the way it communicates the past. In this line, Myroslava Barchuk emphasized that the monument, even transformed, never stopped bearing the communist ideology, and the very fact of it remaining in the urban space and being 'normalized' within the framework of a new national myth is detrimental to society.[226] In a similar debate in the context of the Polish decommunization, Magda Szcześniak and Łukasz Zaremba refer to a similar approach to questioning

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[226] Myroslava Barchuk, "Klepana Mat", Espreso, 2023.

and purging the remains of the Communist past as "paranoid looking." This way of seeing, Szcześniak and Zaremba emphasize, scrutinizes previously unquestioned signs in the public sphere. This form of 'reading' the memoryscape lies in extracting the objects from their environments, a decontextualized analysis, and a projection of the 'other' onto the text.[227] These arguments have no space for the symbols' plasticity, as this notion implies the careful examination of the contextual symbioses of the signs in the ever-changing mnemonic texts they are constitutive of. The second stance in the debate places the locus of power and agency on the people, not the signs. As mentioned by Ivan Kozlenko, the monuments' meanings are subject to changes brought about by the people and environments altering them and interacting with them. Reclaiming the sign, in this paradigm, would mean reclaiming one's right to meaning-making.[228] These stances demonstrate the differences in the perception of the very possibility of reinterpretation of the dissonant past, at the same time, reflecting the approaches to agency and power they imply.

Suggesting the idea that any monument, besides a narrative on the event it was conceived and produced to commemorate, also bears its alternative, which can be revealed in the act of its defacement, M. Taussig approached this change as a transition from the excess of invisibility to the excess of visibility. Contrary to Musil's remark on the monuments' invisibility as their key feature borne of their capacity to endure, monuments become the most focal both in urban spaces and public debates, specifically because of this capacity. The acts of alteration and resignification challenge the lasting forms, bridging their temporality with the event that seems to rupture their long-term preservation, continuing it even further.

Due to its paradoxical combination of monumentality and plasticity, Mother Ukraine is reread differently with the conflicting approaches reflecting different foci: on the form and on the practice of interacting with it—its multidirectionality lies in its capacity to host opposite meanings that operate the same vocabulary and co-exist constantly and reciprocally influencing one another. The narratives that it hosts—the ones on the Great Patriotic War, World War II, and the Russian-Ukrainian war co-

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[227] Szcześniak and Zaremba, "Paranoid looking: on de-communization".
[228] Ivan Kozlenko, "«Batkivshchyna-maty»: niiakykh «dukhovnykh symvoliv» i zhodnoi mistyky", Hlavkom, 2023.

exist because of the initial negative reception of the sign and its rather weak charge. Its iconography—an image of the warrior-woman holding a weapon and a shield—grandeur, and materiality, indexical of its production,[229] allowed this sign of memory to combine monumentality and porosity. This combination lets the monument absorb new meanings yet take none of them as final, illustrating both the possibilities for the symbolic plasticity of a form conceived to bear the narrative of a communist memory, and the limits established to it by actors relating to the respective narratives from their situated positions.

Its readings are still contested, yet the very fact of so many new voices constituting a dialogue reflects a broader shift that may be of bigger importance than a sole change of a sign—the multiplication of the agency of various memory actors, reflecting that the memory signs are by no means invisible and unimportant but still constitutive of collective identities. Finally, this shift marks the importance of focusing not only on the sign but on practices of rewriting and rereading it and the agency of different actors within it.

The monuments, bearing the narratives of war memory, were significant in both contexts of state-socialist rule and had lasting afterlives. Both "Brotherhood in Arms" and "Mother Motherland" monuments, besides their original meanings, which they were conceived to convey through visual means and in commemorative practices, acquired popular readings from the very beginning, being open to additional meanings. After not being at the center of the public discussion or memory rituals for a long time, they reappeared in the public debate due to different events, yet having convergent implications. While the discussion in the Polish case revolved around the possible return of the sign already dismantled, in Ukraine, the debate unfolded around the sense of urgency to resignify the monument. The rhetoric employed in both cases presupposed a specific modality of looking, rendering the monument itself as a potential threat, substituting the collective's "other," which in the Polish case was connected to the memory of communism, and concerned the uses of the sane remembrance narrative in Russia, in the Ukrainian case. Aligning with the attempts to democratize

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[229] The monument was created by the Ukrainian artist.

the decision-making process in the context of dealing with monuments approached as threats by certain groups of political actors, this modality of looking also reveals the perception of the public opinion—to what extent were the citizens heard or seen as needing to be educated on the "correct versions of the past." This aspect prompts the question of who gets to make a decision about the pasts rendered dangerous. Finally, these cases illustrate the notion of symbolic plasticity in the rereading of monuments and their iconographies, prompting the question of whose vision becomes normative and decisive. Thus, the plasticity of the dissonant sign reflected the inclusivity of the public sphere.

Conclusions

Analyzing the approaches to working with the signs of memory of the state-socialist regimes in Kyiv and Warsaw, this thesis contextualized decommunization as a discourse and policy within the state- and nation-building projects unfolding after the post-1989/1991 transitions. This research detailed the development of decommunization in conjunction with renegotiations of collective identities, focusing on the actors, debates, and decision-making processes involved. Employing a comparative cross-national perspective, I attempted to examine the long-term processes of constructing post-transition memories as well as the dynamics that preceded and shaped them. The use of the comparative approach helped outline and analyze the key differences in the unfolding of the decommunization processes, their objectives, and roles in the post-transition public spheres. The combination of examining the memory politics of state-socialist identity projects, the dynamics of the transition, and the subsequent state-building projects allowed for correlating and nuancing the findings.

In the Polish context, the decommunization discourse bears the legacy of debates on national identity during the transition era. The 2016 memory legislation, introduced by the PiS party, is shaped by the bills introduced in 1998 by AWS as the predecessors of the party. The 1998 bill articulated the practices of disengagement from the signs of state-socialist memory in conjunction with the ideas of transitional justice, placing the transformations in memory alongside the political changes, thereby shaping the overall decommunization rhetoric. Being a component of the PiS party's ideological project, the policy of decommunization reflects the larger continuity of post-transition conflicts over establishing national identity and negotiating its relation to the past. These debates emerged between the right-leaning and liberal factions of Solidarity after its fragmentation, encompassing the ideas of complete separation and distancing from the dissonant past, as well as the politics of lustration for officials and the erasure of memorial signs, framed by the rhetoric of transitional justice. The practices of interacting with the monuments embodying the narratives of the PPR memory, predominantly seen as imposed, reflected different dynamics of public reaction, dependent on the political context and the significance of a monument in the symbolic realm, as a sign of ideology, and in everyday life practices. While the demolition of key ideological figures symbolizing the regime was met with

enthusiasm, the further state-sanctioned removals of the monuments prompted major public debates, revealing the dynamic of the decision-making process and demonstrating the municipal authority's crucial role in implementing memory politics on the ground.

In the Ukrainian case, on the contrary, decommunization discourse was less connected with the dynamics of the transition, emerging later and constituting a case of memory securitization. Due to the difference in the Soviet rule and the modality of transition, national identity was not a decisive factor in the disengagement from the Soviet regime. However, it became the center of the public debate during the Revolution of Dignity and the subsequent Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, with the onset of the new stage of war, the decommunization discourse converged with the discourse on derussification. This connection prompts an inquiry into the perception of memory politics as a means in warfare and its politicization in an effort to ensure collective cohesion and a sense of identity. The decommunization in the Ukrainian context dealt less directly with the narratives of Soviet memory and was articulated in relation to the ongoing threat, being officially addressed as a "matter of national security."

In both cases, the changes in the memorial landscapes, brought about in conjunction with the decommunization rhetoric, presupposed different modalities of instrumentalizing forgetting as a means of constructing collective identities and forging social cohesion. The uses of forgetting took different forms, ranging from acts of decommemorative iconoclasm to state-sanctioned removals, demolitions, or resignifications of the signs of the previous regimes' memory. Conceived in an effort to erase the past, all these means contributed to constructing its memory, as well as shaping the present identities and articulating the projects for the future. Moreover, these attempts at forgetting reveal the persistence of the legacies of the past, particularly in decision-making processes. These politics of disengagement from the past, seen as conflictual or threatening, were met with criticism, necessitating the establishment of a broader and more inclusive dialogue.

These transformations referred to the past not only as dissonant but also viewed it as a 'constitutive other' in articulating and asserting new collective identities that had different memorial references. These references had a temporal difference: while in the Polish case, the issue of national

identity was seen as one of the core reasons in the transition and constitutes a part of the "*war over memory*," in Ukraine, the 'rupture' with the dissonant past was articulated in the context of the present threat, constituting a reflection of the broader "*memory wars*." Thus, both processes also reflected the states of the post-transition public spheres affected by different political crises and served as attempts to respond to them. While the decommunization discourse and the respective transformations in the public sphere and urban memoryscapes in Poland reflected the negotiations of the already articulated ideological project, in Ukraine, it became a turning point in the development of a nation-building project. Therefore, having different temporalities, objectives, and formats, the processes converged in their role as projects of establishing "imagined communities" through the politicization of public remembrance and forgetting.

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