Ukrainian collective memory regarding the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the potential for reconciliation

La mémoire collective ukrainienne à l'égard de l'invasion à grande échelle de l'Ukraine et le potentiel de réconciliation

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Abstract
This study examines the differences in collective memory in Ukraine regarding the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 and the potential for reconciliation. Combining theories of social representations, conflict transformation and narrative theory, 37 semi-structured interviews were conducted with groups based on the origin of people (TOT or the rest of Ukraine). The collected data was analysed thematically, and the results suggest a long historical span of perceived causes for the full-scale invasion as well as plurality of memory. Reconciliation as a measure in its turn implies nation-building processes and identity alignment. However, there were severe doubts over the feasibility of searching for and establishing one single narrative for Ukraine and TOT at the current phase of the war.

Keywords: *collective memory, reconciliation, identity, plurality, storytelling*

Résumé
Cette étude examine les différences dans la mémoire collective ukrainienne à l'égard de l'invasion à grande échelle de l'Ukraine par la Russie en février 2022 et le potentiel de réconciliation. En combinant les théories des représentations sociales, de la transformation des conflits et de la théorie narrative, 37 entretiens semi-structurés ont été menés avec des groupes basés sur l'origine des personnes (territoires temporairement occupés (TOT) ou le reste de l'Ukraine). Les données recueillies ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique et les résultats suggèrent une

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longue période historique de perception des causes de l'invasion à grande échelle, ainsi qu'une pluralité de mémoires. La réconciliation implique à son tour des processus de construction nationale et d'alignement identitaire. Toutefois, de sérieux doutes ont été émis quant à la faisabilité de la recherche et de l'établissement d'un récit unique pour l'Ukraine et la TOT dans la phase actuelle de la guerre.

Mots-clés : *mémoire collective, réconciliation, identité, pluralité, storytelling*

Introduction

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 demonstrated not only the exacerbation of the conflict which started in 2013-2014 with the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine but unveiled the deep polarisation inside of the Ukrainian state which Russia used at its own advantage engaging in the conflict militarily. It demonstrated that the current conflict has lasted for decades or even centuries characterising it as an intractable conflict. Thus, the open confrontation which began in 2014 is "by no means the cause, but just a symptom of the current confrontation" (Dembinski & Spanger, 2017).

Nonetheless, longevity as a feature of intractable conflicts contributes to the formationof socio-psychological infrastructure to which collective memory belongs. Over the years, groups involved in conflict selectively form their narratives about it (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 52) as they "are folded into the history and mythology of the parties" (Zartman, 2005, p. 49). In the ongoing war, the military of Ukraine fights Russian expansionism for the Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity[1] with the goal to free all temporarily occupied territories by Russia (TOT) "till the last piece"[2] including those occupied since 2014. However, changing the nature of conflicts (here possible reoccupation of

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[1] "Statement on a year since the start of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine", February 24th 2023: https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/zayava-mzs-ukrayini-do-roku-z-pochatku-povnomasshtabnogo-vijskovogo-torgnennya-rosiyi-v-ukrayinu (accessed December 29th 2023).

[2] President Poroshenko stated that the war will end when the last piece of Ukrainian territory was freed. ("Poroshenko said when the war will end", October 2 2015: https://politics.segodnya.ua/ua/politics/poroshenko-rasskazal-kogda-zakonchitsya-voyna-0-02-10-2015-654800.html) (accessed December 24th 2023).

Ukrainian territories) also requires psychological change (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 59).

Analysing the very region of Eastern Europe, tragic and dramatic events that took place here caused historical trauma of its population (Polishuk, 2020, p. 97). And Ukraine as a part of the region is characterised by "ambivalent concept of a victim" (Kasianov, 2010, p. 268) which is exactly the consequence of the dichotomous perception of the past (Kis, 1998, p. 130). Throughout centuries, Ukraine as a state has been "long contested" with "regular fragmentation and unsettled borders" (Freedman, 2019, p. 61), and, what is more important, divided between different civilizational entities (Golovaha & Pukhliak, 1994), leading to "divided culture of memory" (Fedor et. al., 2017, p. 9).

Research questions

The current research aims at shedding light on existing differences in collective memory regarding the causes of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia as well as at exploring the potential for reconciliation. The main research questions of this article are therefore: *"How does collective memory of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia differ in temporarily occupied territories (TOT) and Ukraine?"* and *"What is seen as a potential for reconciliation?"*.

Drawing primarily on the theory of social representations, conflict transformation theory as well as narrative theory, this article also aims at identifying the potential of using collective memory through storytelling practices for reconciliation in Ukraine. This paper will therefore explore the following sub-questions: "*How is storytelling seen as a tool for conflict transformation and therefore reconciliation in the current conflict?" and "What is the role of truth telling for reconciliation in the current conflict?"*

Consequently, the intended research will deal with a complicated setting as the target researched group is one country (Ukraine) divided on economical, socio-cultural, and informational

level through occupation by the third country (Russia) which in its turn started a full-scale invasion against Ukraine. The uniqueness of this work is to identify the insights inside of one country, where one part lived ten years under the occupation and the second part was affected by the full-fledged war for almost three years. The identified patterns of collective memory might enable effective trust- and relationship-building strategies and counter-narratives to target reconciliation between conflicting groups. Furthermore, the communication patterns and needs for transmission of oral collective memory will provide valuable information in understanding a possible reconciliation processes.

Literature Review

Collective memory

Events from transitional periods like the ongoing war in Ukraine make an especially strong impression on individuals (Schuman & Scott, 1989, p. 35) affected, the rupture of former lifestyle or social structure may also be considered radical. According to this, negative experience transforms into memories that are often prompted by a collectively shared trauma, which becomes the basis for producing a new history and which connects an individual and a collective. This means that though everyone makes an individual experience, memory does not develop in itself, independently from others but is "socially generated in societal frameworks" (Bachleitner, 2022, p. 167). Thus, it becomes "the vehicle for collective self-understanding" (Nikulin, 2015, p. 5), has a motivational function for collective behaviour, as it stimulates groups to act collectively, and justify actions of the in-group toward the out-group as well as serve as political mobilisation to legitimise political agenda for the present and future (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Additionally, deliberating on the past, groups sharing collective identity make a "binding decision" of what should be respected and remembered by future generations (Honneth, 2015, p. 316) also called as "projection into the future (Tulving, 1985; Conway, 2005; Eustache et al., 2016).

As collective memory plays a functional role in fulfilling the needs and goals of society (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 153), a society may hold competing collective narratives regarding major events in the past which is a sign of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 140). Thus, it does not have to correspond to the "universal truth" or provide an objective history of the past (Winter & Sivan 2000, p. 8), collective memory should be viewed as a multilayer narrative (Bar-Tal 2011, p. 142) or "usable past" (Wertsch, 2002; Licata & Mercy, 2015) as the major event (the beginning of confrontation) reinterprets the past events and makes them look coherent and consistent (Devine-Wright, 2003; Papadakis et al, 2006). During this process, individuals can also incorporate historical memory as their own collective memory through experience of learning the past (Crane, 1997) which is also very common during the conflict.

Thus, major events during the confrontation can be classified as "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" (Volkan, 1997) with "chosen traumas" or sufferings (Nadler & Saguy, 2004; Noor et al., 2008) being shared as societal mental representations of a historical event in which the group suffered (defeat, loss, humiliation). This influences the shared perception of the group of being a victim and this experience does not heal: "those groups feel threatened or are still burdened by the memories of past sufferings" (Bartov, 2003, p. 42). That is why it has such an effect of the psyche of the group (Alexander, 2004) and can be reactivated in times of threats and stress (Volkan, 2001; Svasek, 2005) but also the opposite: heal a group from past trauma by making sense of confusing events (Qi, 2008). The opposite effect, a feeling of triumph and success, has a "chosen glory".

In conflicts over material issues (territory, resources) or identity conflicts (recognition), collective identity is founded upon and nourished by national narratives which in their turn pose barriers to a reconciliation process (Ross, 2007). The "ideal" national narrative is a solid, self-sustained edifice that plays an important role in conflict development and often contributes to its exacerbation (ibid).

Similar research studies on collective memory on certain events in the past were conducted by Schuman and Scott (1989), Schuman and Corning (2012). The research dedicated to collective memory in war contexts was conducted by Aboultaif and Tabar (2019), Rydgren et al. (2017), Abou Jaoude and Rugo (2021), Velte (2022), Halstead (2018). However, the most of research attention was given to the analysis of rituals and practices of commemoration used for construction of the national past in the present (Spillman, 1997; Schwartz, 1987, 2000; Lowenthal, 1985; Joon Lee, 2013; Kennell et al., 2018) as well as the construction of nationhood like in Macedonia by different groups (Roudometof, 2002) or national identity (Sumartojo, 2016; Lee, 2013). These studies do not include the direct questioning of people in the respective target countries on prevailing narratives.

Reconciliation

"Reconciliation" is a broad term used to interpret a range of elements. One can start from legal measures most often framed as transitional justice like truth-telling through establishing truth commissions and thus investigating and punishing the responsible ones for committing crimes. However, criminal or retributive justice may cause more harm and does not respond to the political realities' (Goldsmith & Krasner, 2003; Richmond et al., 2016, p. 14-15; Mani, 2005; Snyder & Vinjamuri, 2004) as well as reparations provided to victims for damage as well as introducing more economic (Fearon et al., 2009; Zorbas, 2004) and political solutions (Rodrik, 1999; Vargas, 2012) like addressing power imbalances and exclusion.

The above-mentioned mechanisms for fostering peace and reconciliation between war-torn or post-conflict societies show that solely these measures cannot solve the problem (Fontaine et al., 2015; Rettberg et al., 2016, p. 518). The context of reconciliation implies and requires direct engagement with politics, war, and violence, e.g. establishing a "shared truth" about past collective violence and human rights abuses (Chapman, 2002, p. 260–261) and therefore does not support an

absolutist, nonhistorical, nonpolitical understanding of reconciliation itself (Weber, 2015).

Alternative measures might enable the parties of the conflict to move on after they review the past events, looking backwards: historical perspectives (Encarnación, 2008; Kwak & Nobles, 2013; Suh, 2010; Shih & Chen, 2010; Dwyer 2003, p. 100) or "acknowledging and memorialising the past" (Gay, 2011; du Toit, 2009, p. 256) and aiming at reconciliation (looking forward/future perspective (Lederach, 1997; Rigney, 2012; Rushton, 2006; Staub, 2006, Dwyer 2003, p. 93-94) or "shared vision" (Chen, 2010; Kohen et al., 2011; Dembinska & Montambeault, 2015; Gibson, 2007; Murphy, 2010; Raftopolous & Savage, 2004; Schaap, 2004, 2005; Schiller, 2011; Verdeja, 2012; Whittaker, 1999; Xyangyu et al., 2012; Hamber & Kelly, 2005, p. 7; Mack, 2011, p. 450–451). The perceptions of conflict (interpretation of them) are primarily subjective, that is why there can be more than one truth in a conflict (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Instead of finding the factual truth, reconciliation requires that past is explained and turns to awareness how to prevent such events in future, so-called transformation of narratives, beliefs, ideologies, or identities must take place (Kelman, 1997; Moon, 2006; Rigby, 2001; Theidon, 2009; Verdeja, 2009; Kriesberg, 2004; Staub, 2011) action to change behaviour (Fontaine, 2015, p. 142).

The research on conflicts with similar setting like in Ukraine, e.g. South and North Korea, Moldova and Transnistria has focused more on security issues (arms control, disarmament) (Rosa, 2021) and regional cooperation (mostly economic) (Hamm, 2001; Mikheev, 2001; Lee, 2019) or on the analysis of policies towards each other (Park, 2014). Some studies were conducted on the reconciliation needs or conflict transformation (Hundt & Bleiker, 2007; Rojansky, 2011; Marandici, 2022; Rettberg et. al., 2016, p. 527-530; Little, 2012, p. 85).

As for Ukraine, there has been a few attempts to analytically work on the conflict resolution or conflict transformation options, which mostly involved interviews with experts for possible scenarios for the armed conflict in Ukraine and peacekeeping. However, the question of reconciliation in

Ukraine has not been widely empirically researched. Baylis (2023) contemplates on possible reconciliation mechanisms that could help in a post-conflict Ukraine, taking into consideration three broad categories (instrumental, historical, and structural).

According to the variety in definitions and meanings of what reconciliation could mean and what a particular society might understand when talking about/implementing reconciliation, the gap in the existing literature is to identify what is understood in Ukraine and which measures could be feasible and viable in the current political situation.

Methodology

As collective memory can be viewed as socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), meaning constructed by individuals and interpreted according to the subjective understanding about their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Cohen et al., 2000), social constructivism is chosen as the most fitting research paradigm. This leads to the idea of multiple socially constructed realities rather than one single objective reality (Patton, 2015). Postmodernism holds that all interpretations are constructed for specific purposes and thus may both compete and contract with each other (Seixas, 2000, p. 29-30). Our concepts, actions, and practices are products of particular traditions or discourses; they are artificial inventions of particular languages and societies (Bevir et al., 2007, p. 63).

The data collection consisted of 37 semi-structured interviews (narrative interviews) conducted between October and November 2023. Due to the sensitive topic of collective memory amid the ongoing war, difficulties to find respondents were to be assumed according to Faugier and Sargeant (1997, p. 791). Probability and nonprobability sampling strategies were combined: the potential candidates with needed background (purposive (Chein, 1981) or purposeful (Patton, 2002) sampling strategy) were contacted or such possibility to express their opinion on the researched topics was offered in some groups or chats in social media. Sometimes, the respondents recruited for

the interview people who they are more connected with (snowball sampling). Even though, "generalization [...] is not a goal of qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 77), the generalization of the findings was aimed for to identify patterns if there are any. At the same time, I am aware of possible limited generalizability due to the non-random sampling method (Browne, 2005).

The sample size was determined by the research question and the desired level of depth and details (Patton, 2002). The goal was to conduct approximately 30 interviews, the approximation suggested by Creswell (2013) and Mason (2010). The number increased to 37 due to the snowball technique and willingness of people (particularly from the Ukraine category). However, not all willing people could provide the comprehensive answers to the questions defined by the research. Consequently, the outcome of 37 interviews reached a saturation point where no new information or themes emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Out of 37 participants of the study, 15 are originally and/or living in TOT and 22 people from other regions in Ukraine, thus making two groups Ukraine and TOT[3], conducted prevalently online. They originate from different regions and socio-religious groups in Ukraine, which provides a diverse sample of people with different personal backgrounds, views, and motivations, thus show plurality of opinions. In both groups there were people who considered themselves directly involved in the conflict (direct participation) since 2014 or who were indirectly involved (watching, reading, hearing about it) (Bar-Tal, 2011, p. 34). Furthermore, the majority of participants are on average 30 years old, so they experienced the beginning of the conflict in their 20s as exactly adolescence and early adulthood are the primary periods for generational imprinting in the sense of political memories (Schuman & Scott, 1989).

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[3] For the purposes of research, the part occupied by Russia since 2014 is called "TOT" to distinguish from the rest of Ukraine (category "Ukraine" that was mostly heavily affected only in 2022).

Table 1. Sub-groups in the research.

A1. Ukrainians[4] originally from TOT but moved out after 2014	B1. Ukrainians who moved abroad after 2022 or/and came back to Ukraine
A2. Ukrainians originally from TOT who stayed after 2014	B2. Ukrainians who stayed in Ukraine after 2022
A3. Ukrainians originally from TOT who moved out before 2014	B3. Ukrainians who moved abroad before 2022

To conduct data analysis, the coding manual of Johnny Saldaña (2009) was used which consists of five main steps for qualitative inquiry. Additionally, descriptive statistics was used for the presentation of the data due to a different number of respondents in each group (15 and 22) in order to offer the same base for the comparison.

Findings on collective memory

In the beginning, it is worth mentioning that the division based on the migration experience and/or origin has not shown the difference in the views, as respondents from the group A (TOT) who left for Ukraine before or after 2014 represent the opinions shared by group B. Thus, the current or main/chosen place of living was an important factor for expressed opinions.

Firstly, different temporal perceptions were identified: two mostly mentioned events by the two groups, Euromaidan in 2013 and annexation of Crimea in 2014, became the starting point for the current conflict for the group TOT and the finishing point for the group Ukraine. Different temporal perceptions demonstrate contradicting narratives about their past and their future (Liu & Hilton 2005, p. 537). At the same time, the collective memory of the category "Ukraine" starts to be collective in the period of 1917-1919 with almost 20% mentioning it.

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[4] By Ukrainians in this research is meant citizenship as of 2014.

Table 2. Events of collective memory[5]

Events	TOT	Ukraine	total
Russian Revolution 1917 and the Soviet occupation of Ukrainian People's Republic	0 0%	4 18%	4 10.8%
The dissolution of the USSR	1 6.6%	7 27.3%	8 21.6%
Georgia 2008	1 6.6%	4 18%	5 13.5%
Euromaidan/ Revolution of Dignity in 2013/ 2014	6 40%	12 54.5%	18 48.6%
Annexation of Crimea	5 33.3%	8 36.4%	13 35.1%

As it turned out not to be easy to get a chain of events where at least one forth mentioned them, all mentioned events also by one or two people were codified, and further themes appeared (presented in Table 3).

Table 3. Interpreted themes of events

Interpreted theme[6]	TOT	Ukraine	total
Change of geopolitical direction	6 40%	14 63.6%	20 54.1%
Blame for West	7 47%	11 50%	18 48.6%
Russia/ Putin	5 33.3%	11 50%	16 43.2%
Oppression of Ukrainian state/ culture	2 13.3%	9 40.9%	11 29.7%
Presidents	5 33.3%	3 13.6%	8 21.6%

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[5] In this paper, the events mentioned by a minimum of four respondents are presented in the table.
[6] The themes were interpreted by the author.

"Change of geopolitical direction" meaning more ties with Russia or with the West seems to be the main chain of events that caused the full-scale invasion. Another theme "West" referring to the role of other states (EU and the USA) in the domestic politics of Ukraine. However, even here the further interpretation of these events differs significantly as for TOT the West is to "blame" for supporting the "polarization which led to the current military confrontation". For Ukraine, on the other side, this "blame" goes for not providing enough support before and during the confrontation with Russia as containment for further aggravation.

Additionally, as in most cases, people from both categories had difficulties naming particular events which caused the full-scale invasion in 2022, they also mentioned reasons. The calculation in the sub-category "reasons" is done differently, as some people mentioned several reasons that were eventually classified into one particular category. Because of this, the percentage was calculated based on the total number of reasons which appeared during interviews (see Table 4). The most frequently mentioned theme for reasons goes as "Ukraine to blame" which is justified in TOT by inner instability or not fulfilling Minsk agreements and in Ukraine by the inability to defend itself due to the absence of military power and giving up weapons including nuclear weapons to Russia.

The second frequently mentioned theme is Russia/ Putin, where all the reasons are connected to the action of a state (Russia) or a particular person (Putin). Thus, imperialist/ expansionist ambitions of Russia or of Putin were mentioned (37.1% and 32.8%[7]), Russia's needs for territories.

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[7] Also in the group A few who stayed in TOT mentioned it additionally to those who left after 2014 for Ukraine.

Table 4. Themes for reasons of the full-scale invasion[8]

Theme	TOT	Ukraine	Total
Ukraine to blame	14 51.8%	36 62.1%	50 58.9%
Russia/ Putin	10 37.1%	19 32.8%	29 34.1%
Hostility	3 11.1%	3 5.2%	6 7.1%
	27	**58**	**85**

Communication

Communication is the second crucial part in the interview with the connection between collective memory and social representations. Memory becomes collective due to social frameworks in which people exist. Among various kinds of such social interaction, interpersonal communication and exchange, and thus, the presence or absence of mutual influence (Abric, 1994) is directly researched in the current work. All in all, people from TOT continue communicating with people from Ukraine (friends or relatives) or with who moved out after 2014 even while having different opinions on the current conflict avoiding discussion of political topics. Lack of wish or impossibility to talk about their own experience (group TOT) has shown in the interviews a two-fold impact on communication patterns of both researched groups. On the one hand, there are trust issues that do not make sharing possible. On the other hand, the absence of narrative from the occupied territories in the rest of Ukraine shifts the attention and creates obstacles to understanding grievances.

Consequently, people from Ukraine either have not had any contact with people from TOT (sometimes due to the obvious reasons of the distance and/ or absence of connections)

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[8] The calculation here is done differently, as some people mentioned several reasons that were eventually classified into one particular category. Because of this, the percentage was calculated based on the total number of reasons which appeared during interviews.

or do not know that these people are from TOT or they consciously choose not to interact/ not to ask if they suspect there could be differences in opinions.

Reconciliation

As the war is still ongoing, the question about reconciliation caused different reactions. On the one hand, the question about reconciliation was considered difficult (6 people said so), painful (1 person) and impossible (4), but on the other hand, for many respondents it was not clear in the beginning with whom the reconciliation should take place as some are of opinion, they "haven't had any quarrels or conflicts with anyone". However, a number of possible measures reached 113 which were further assigned to themes according to the respondents' interpretations (see Table 5).

Table 5. The themes for measures for reconciliation[9]

	The theme	TOT	Ukraine	Total
1	Integration practices / identity building	11 30.5%	38 49.4%	49 43.4%
2	Territorial + population	8 22.2%	15 19.5%	23 20.3%
3	Economic measures	6 16.6%	10 13%	16 14.2%
4	Political measures	5 13.8%	9 11.6%	14 12.3%
5	Psychological	4 11.1%	4 5.2%	8 7.1%
6	Truth seeking	2 5.5%	1 1.3%	3 2.6%
		36	**77**	**113**

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[9] The numbers presented in the table represent how many times certain measures were mentioned and not the number of respondents mentioning them and the percentage is calculated according to the total number of measures.

Generally, the most critical point in the answers is the concern about integration which included speaking one language or having only one official language which is Ukrainian which is interpreted here as a part of a nation-building process (Diamond, 1994) as well as measures connected to education and culture (cultural changes (Schirch, 1999, p. 38): having a clear strategy, checking the quality of education processes on all levels (kindergartens, schools, universities) and the competencies of teachers based on their pro-Ukrainian position and language used. Integration courses like in Germany were also mentioned twice in this category which means that people "must know their language, culture, pass exams".

The questions of territory (under whose control) and population, like whether they support Ukraine, what are the measures taken against collaborators and whether Russians who resettled there would leave or not also play an important role for reconciliation. Less important but mentioned several times were political and economic measures.

Truth seeking as a measure which is crucial for reconciliation was mentioned only three times out of 113 without being asked explicitly. This question about reconciliation precedes the direct question about the necessity of truth telling or storytelling which also shows that reconciliation is not connected to truth seeking practices. Therefore, when asked explicitly, slightly more than a half of respondents do not believe that the restoration of narrative through storytelling or truth commissions can help the reconciliation, only 17 out 37 truly believe in the power of narratives. Group B (Ukraine) continues in its majority to support storytelling practices for the argument "Ukrainization": the stories themselves should be either about occupation or about the local resistance in TOT refusing shooting or fighting against Ukraine or authors of such stories should be the direct participants of these events who do it sincerely and not for their own publicity. When asked explicitly, the respondents are aware of the conflict-laden topic of truth and investigation of facts through truth commissions. That is why, its potential for reconciliation process is not seen and some preferred to

concentrate on building a future after the conflict comes to an end.

Discussion

The findings for collective memory regarding the full-scale invasion as well as the potential for reconciliation in comparison for two groups will be in detail discussed below:

1. Collective memory in the current conflict shows plurality of memory in Ukraine but, thus, mutually exclusive narratives.
2. The necessity to readjust the identity is the mostly mentioned reconciliation measure.
3. Communication patterns as well as the need for storytelling of the two groups vary and reflect the social representations people are in.
4. The implementation of storytelling and truth telling practices is seen differently by two researched groups.

1. The findings on the collective memory regarding the causes of the full-scale invasion in the form of events and reasons show certain patterns according to which two researched groups remember certain events. The main finding is that it was not possible for two researched groups to identify one single chain of events leading to the invasion in 2022. Thus, there are just two events (Revolution of Dignity and annexation of Crimea) that mostly "unite" two researched groups having been mentioned much more often than other events. However, with these events there is a different interpretation: Revolution of Dignity/ Euromaidan 2013-2014 is for TOT a "chosen trauma" (from where the military actions began and the grievances of the region further exacerbated) and for the category Ukraine a "chosen glory" (Volkan, 1997) as it is considered to be one of the milestones of Ukraine demonstrating its sovereignty and independence from the course Russia wants Ukraine to follow.

Furthermore, these events are indicated in a different temporal connection. Thus, for TOT just the beginning of the chain of events leading to the full-scale invasion in 2022

meaning that historical grievances of Ukraine as a sovereign state before 2014 are not visible for this group. On the other hand, for the group "Ukraine" these two events finalise the list of important milestones in the form of events that caused the full-scale invasion. The collective memory of this category starts in historical memory (events learned not lived through) which reflects the current need for the justification of the right of Ukraine to exist as well as demonstrating expansionist practices of Russia towards Ukraine over decades or even centuries. At this point of the research it became clear that both groups are "stuck" on different time periods, though overlapping with each other but filled with exclusive interpretations. This leads to the answer to the first research question of this work: there are mutually exclusive narratives which can potentially hinder the reconciliation process but at the same time plurality of memory in Ukraine which can ensure all voices are heard.

First, according to the theorists researching collective memory, such competing memory discourses may intensify divisions as they promote mutually exclusive narratives of victimhood (Olick, 1999). As the study by Halstead (2018) pointed out that despite globalisation and digitization, the antagonistic national histories or in this work narratives may be solidified. According to Assmann (2006, p.495), it is also about the "human basic needs of orientation" that is "closely connected to collective and cultural identity and belonging". Thus, competing narratives may lead to further divisions. Therefore, there is no singular meta-narrative (Olick, 1999; Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003) which might continue the discourse of "two Ukraines" which was previously used by Ryabchuk (2003) and thus polarization in Ukrainian society.

But on the other hand, recognizing plural or conflicting memories is important to ensure all groups feel their voices are represented in reshaping collective identities after war (Leebaw, 2008; Abou Jaoude & Rugo, 2021, p.18) and the suppression of dissenting histories will not add to the legitimacy of these processes (Hayner, 2010). That is why the "reexamination of

historical narratives and the reevaluation of national myths" would advance reconciliation efforts (Kelman, 2004b, p. 123).

Secondly, awareness of the milestones in the history of Ukraine in the respective category shows the level of historic consciousness. At the same time, it demonstrates that the narratives are fluid mostly due to the ongoing war and change according to the appearing demand for justification of the right of Ukraine to fight. It contributes to the formation of historical culture, a certain way of how events are interpreted and made sense of (Thorp, 2014, p. 23). On the other hand, when a person incorporates too much of a historic memory into their collective memory, it can potentially hinder the reconciliation process. This prevents trust building or cooperation with former adversaries (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008).

2. As mentioned previously that plurality of memory and diversity in discourse in a society can have a positive nature for the reconciliation process, it includes in its prevalence mutually excluding issues, e.g. freedom to use a language of minorities (Russian) demanded by the category TOT or "Ukrainization" (obligatory use of Ukrainian in all spheres of life) suggested as a measure by the category Ukraine. Thus, the second research question regarding the potential for reconciliation does not look promising at the moment as it gives more insights into identity and identity conflicts: Ukraine is ready to reconcile when the population of TOT will endorse Ukrainian identity and comply to it not only in public sphere (state institutions, kindergartens, schools, and universities) but also in everyday language. This implies a solidified (within group "Ukraine") interpretations of historical events with language being a reaction or a sign of the "correct identity". This might shift possibly towards discrimination which looks like compliance in order to gain reward or approval (Kelman (2004b) and does not constitute "minimal agreement to coexist" according to Minow (2000).

It is without doubt, for Ukrainians, a time for mobilisation of culture, historical consciousness and language which was devalued and at some point, forbidden there as Ukraine had been stripped of its attempts to be independent.

Contrastingly, the group "TOT" sees the problem in Ukraine and its "unfair" policies which consist of forcing people to speak Ukrainian and forcing a big part of the population into a national direction towards the EU and the Western institutions, a direction which was seen undesirable for the majority in 2013-2014. Thus, these two statements again imply collective victimhood (Shnabel et al., 2013) from both sides as they both see themselves as a victim of the policies of their 'enemy' which eventually caused conflict. Furthermore, overlooking by Ukrainians the grievances which exacerbated in 2014 for people from TOT and at the same time overlooking the grievances that now Ukrainians are going through in the ongoing war may give signs of 'competing victimhood', when the groups attempt to establish a narrative that they have suffered more than the opposing group (Noor et al., 2012).

The mentioned hostility is another contradiction, which in case of TOT is expressed through "hostility to Eastern Ukraine and Russia" by Ukraine or the Western world. That is the only time when Russia is mentioned by the category "TOT". At the same time, the reasons or the events mentioned by the group Ukraine do not include TOT as an actor or agent actively participating or being in the conflict (rather an object of occupation), which again implies overlooking the grievances, possibly not much significant before the escalation of the conflict in 2014 but which exacerbated with the beginning of the armed conflict and the launch of the Anti-terroristic operation (ATO) by the Ukrainian government. Now these grievances play a much more serious role as the respondents from the category "TOT" decisively do not see a potential for reconciliation but admit the possibility of territories to be regained by Ukraine, which in its turn will not resolve the conflict.

Thus, the findings of the current work counter the obstacle which is the connection of identity and reconciliation as a part of transitional justice (Aiken, 2013, p. 211), show that grievances on collective identities and need for recognition are placed above political or economic measures (Beylis, 2023). Moreover, contrary to the findings of the study on Colombia by Rettberg (2016), the need for psychological or political

reconciliation is unpopular in Ukraine at the moment of conducting this research.

Consequently, a necessity for nation-building process (Diamond, 1994) is obvious which would require both sides to abandon part of their already solidified identity in order to start 'identity negotiation' which is essential to reconciliation (Kelman, 2004b, p. 119; Volf, 1996, p. 110). However, current developments in Ukraine as a state such as 'decommunization' (getting rid of cultural heritage of the Soviet Union in the form of monuments, symbols, names of streets etc), switching to another calendar of religious holidays (joining the calendar the most European countries follow for religious holidays) might undermine the nation-building activities as more issues would hinder the reconciliation and would clearly define the sense of "us" vs "them" separating the in-group from others. Researching "inclusive victimhood" option, which "entails recognising others' victimhood and the in-group responsibility in harming them" can shed light into the subject of competitiveness (for example, using "the competitive victimhood typology" (Demirel, 2023, p.1773) and can lead to the points which bring two sides into a dialogue, e.g. "suffering is likely to be something shared by all parties" (Govier, 2005, p.169). Identifying inclusive victimhood rather than adopting a single narrative (Shnabel et al., 2013; Adelman et al., 2016) can foster reconciliation as it would validate at least some parts of the other's experiences (Kelman, 2004a; Rosoux, 2004; Auerbach, 2009).

3. The communication patterns chosen by the category Ukraine which is to avoid people with "destructive opinions" might help solidify the identity and feel belonging to a certain group with the same mindset. But, at the same time, avoiding direct engagement with the dissenting voices especially since 2014 has led to the exclusive collective memory and clear distinction made by the category TOT "we-they", thus not having a certain verification from the other side (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2008, 2012).

The last argument can be even more reinforced by one group not willing to directly interact with another group to

challenge different narratives (Tam et al., 2007, Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004) which just follows the same trajectory of two opposing views (both of them victimised) not being moderated through discussion (Noor et al., 2008). Therefore, opportunities for building understanding, empathy and trust across divides are lost through isolation into echo chambers (Philpot & Hornsey, 2011). Moreover, the communication through storytelling or truth telling is expected to reinforce the narratives of the occupation by Russia, waiting for reoccupation from Ukraine and resistance against Russia, which will solidify only one view. Insisting on acknowledgment and empathy only for one group and not seeing the grievances and groups' narratives that came about with the conflict impedes the bridging of narratives needed for reconciliation (Maoz, 2011). Even though the majority in both groups criticise Ukraine as the main responsible for the ongoing war, the interpretations are again mutually exclusive: refusing negotiations with Russia and thus continuing the war (by the group "TOT") or the weakness by Ukraine (unpreparedness for its own defence with the invasion).

        The truth commissions using the mechanism of storytelling and possibly judicial investigation can have a potential for societal transformation as "reclaiming a full spectrum of voices [...] is an important step enabling the telling of more nuanced and inclusive stories" (LeBaron &Regan, 2018). Thus, the importance of storytelling and truth commissions cannot be undervalued. As "narrative surfaces in all human communication" (Papke & McManus, 1999), "telling our stories" can be a "sustainable" approach to reconstruction (Graham, 2003, p.11) as the "others' stories" were not available or misunderstood (ibid). It can be mentioned one among several truth commissions that existed South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), on the one hand, was successful in exposing "as much truth as possible" through storytelling (Verwoerd, 1999) as the narrative was restored and people reinvented themselves through narrative (Ndebele, 1998, p.27). However, with the disclosure, the perpetrators qualified automatically for amnesty and their versions of events was not crosschecked with evidence of the victims (Graham, 2003, p.12),

which makes the success of storytelling practices in this particular case questionable.

4. Attempts to get military victory and thus regaining territories or keeping the status quo to prove one's identity as well as the absence of the demand for common truth seeking or storytelling practices to advance reconciliation shows unreadiness and/ or unwillingness to deal with the opposing views directly and get confronted with the plurality of truths that can exist. The absence of clear communication reinforced victimhood of the TOT suffering from Ukraine. Regaining or liberating the territory will not change the resentments and tensions as they will linger after conflicts end as issues were not fully or at all addressed through open interchange when they were active (Maoz, 2000; Snyder & Vinjamuri 2003; Stover & Weinstein, 2004, p. 323). Thus, one of the measures suggested by Beylis (2023) which is a dialogue and exchange of experiences is also important but not mentioned primarily as a reconciliation mechanism.

As a result, Ukraine's engagement with real stories of "republics" might bring obstacles in reconciliation or peace process due to identity differences which would come out but must be provided to both sides (Tam et. al., 2007, p. 133) as "addressing the prior hurts, pain, and violence that the groups have inflicted upon each other" (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2008). This could go only through respectful communication (Schnabel et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Having based my research on the theory of social representations and conflict transformation, it was aimed at exploring the differences in collective memory currently dominating in two researched groups "Ukraine" and "TOT" and the potential for reconciliation for these two groups in case of Ukraine's liberating parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Using narrative theory, the possibility of using storytelling or truth telling practices as a tool for reconciliation was explored.

Answering the first research question mapping differences in collective memory, important milestones regarding the causes of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia were identified. The author argues that there is a plurality of memory between two researched groups. High level of historical consciousness of the group "Ukraine" "contradicts" the comparatively short span of the collective memory in the group "TOT". However, the "uniting" events also became visible which could potentially be used for countering different temporal perceptions of the two groups to achieve reconciliation.

Regarding the second main question about the potential of reconciliation, the most frequent measure was actor transformation (integration) through the lens of conflict transformation theory. Any kind of "Ukrainization" in group "Ukraine" which basically shows the necessity of identity alignment and solidification is not seen as significant for reconciliation by the other researched group which shows a firm identity conflict and differences on which conditions the reconciliation could be possible.

Regarding the first sub-question exploring the role of storytelling in the reconciliation process, the group "TOT" can hardly see any benefits of that. On the other hand, group "Ukraine" finds its therapeutic characteristics important for healing amid the ongoing war. However, according to narrative theory, the need for reinforcement of the identity of Ukraine as a victim but not as a counterpart in the conflict. Furthermore, the need to focus on the future without concentrating on the past was expressed.

Dealing with the collective memory topic, it is hard not to mention some limitations of the research, e.g. recall bias as the recollection of the respondents could be incomplete or inaccurate, but, as the aim of the work was exactly capturing the memories according to the interpretations of the causes of the full-scale invasion in Ukraine, that is why omitting or not to mention some events could be the result of the existing public discourse or depending on current perspectives and especially on the ongoing war. Additionally, this work does not contain the

analysis of the current public discourse regarding the opinions of the experts (historians, political analysts, politicians) which leads to the absence of the analysis of how much it is socially constructed and whether it correlates to the popular opinions or public discourse. However, some people were mentioning their interest in history and some influencers or experts in the field who they are following.

The above-mentioned point leads to another limitation which is social desirability bias which means that some participants consider themselves to be outside the field of interest in politics or current course of events, concentrated on what they heard or read somewhere but their descriptions do not reflect their own recollections and interpretations.

The current research was the attempt to map the current state of collective memory in Ukraine including the temporarily occupied territories regarding the ongoing conflict. Further research could concentrate on the manifestation of collective memory and memory cultures through official memory politics, commemoration practices, the usage of public space for monuments and what narratives those monuments convey. Long time of cultural isolation and the absence of thorough research of collective memory hinders the search for common visions for the future and the transformation of the ongoing military conflict.

Moreover, as one of the findings of the research was the absence and seemingly the impossibility of the direct engagement with opposing views, future research in the field could be the organisation of experimental groups engaging with each other through personal narrative and storytelling of how the conflict and ongoing war influence the perception of each other. Especially valuable would be to involve affected people from TOT to engage and tell their stories while creating safe spaces for them. Such experiments would engage both sides deeper into their narratives to see how the idea of reconciliation would look like, or the alignment of the collective memory happens.

As the current work concentrated on Ukraine, particularly the part considered occupied since 2014, one of the most significant causes is Russia and its expansionist nature, the research on

collective memory and identifying the causes for the current confrontation Russia-Ukraine could also be crucial for understanding it and see the potential of finding one narrative through storytelling and truth telling for reconciliation as a part of a peace process.

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