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STRUGGLING OVER ETHNO-NATIONAL BOUNDARIES
THROUGH CONTESTED HISTORY: THE CASE OF UKRAINE
FROM A PATRONAL PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

In any given polity, elite networks' struggle for legitimacy and for legislation modifies political institutions, thereby contributing to the definition of that polity as a modern nation-state with peculiar characteristics (Brass 1991; Gellner 1983). The consolidation of elite networks' interests at the level of central organisations contributes to the enforcement of state structures that represent the interests of a discrete ethno-national group defined in terms of relative socio-political exclusion.

Since independence, Ukraine has faced latent challenges in consolidating consensus on a conceptual norm of national identity that could reconcile its western and eastern poles' divergent preferences (Hrytsak 1998; Birch and Zinko 1996; Bremmer 1994; Petro 2015; Korostelina 2013b; Solchanyk 1994; Pirie 1996; Kubicek 2000; Katchanovski 2006a; 2006b).

The tension has hindered basic processes of state-building and has impacted negatively on the opportunity to agree upon a programme for advancing democratic self-governance, socio-economic reforms and a coherent foreign policy agenda (Yakovenko 2000; Rywkin 2014; Korostelina 2013a; Birch and Zinko 1996; Petro 2015; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2002; Kuzio 2002b; Solchanyk 1994; Minakov 2018; Wilson 2009; Bugajski 2000). In turn, public politics has been largely dominated by political actors' competitive mobilisation of identity cleavages for electoral purposes (Hale and Orttung 2016; Sasse 2000).

The antagonism intrinsic to Ukraine's identity divide peaked during and immediately after the Maidan Revolution (Petro 2017; Sakwa 2014; Wilson 2014). Between January and February 2014, violent protest events gained a participatory character and competitive claims to nationhood framed around contested history were a dominant part of the confrontation (Siddi 2017; Portnov 2016; Risch 2015; Umland 2013b; Kulyk 2014).

Moscow's annexation of Crimea, the armed conflict in Donbass and the securitisation of relations with Russia have furtherly stimulated the crafting of

contested legislation in historical policy (Marples 2017; Portnov 2017; Shevel 2016b; 2016a; Kasianov 2019; Kulyk 2019).

In turn, Ukrainians' spectacular mobilisation against corruption and authoritarianism has not scraped the persistence of dysfunctional state-society relations (Way 2014; 2016).

Indeed, both the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Euromaidan were followed by a sharp increase in corruption, or even by authoritarian tendencies perpetrated by the same supporters of democratic uprisings (Fisun 2007; 2012b; 2017; Jarabik and Minakov 2016; Jarábik 2015; Minakov 2018; Umland 2017).

The resultant instability of the political order has been partly located in the pervasiveness of personalised relationships established between ruling networks and the oligarchs, i.e. powerful actors that advance and inscribe their self-interest at the level of state structures through rent-seeking relations (Van Zon 2001; Puglisi 2003a; 2003b; Jarábik 2015; Hale and Orttung 2016; Kuzio 2016a).

The dissertation's conceptual framework problematises these political processes together: a primary concern is with the interaction between contestation over the national past and the perpetration of dysfunctional regime dynamics, and the impact the latter have on the opportunity for consolidating the state on a countrywide-appreciated national norm.

Discussion and object of the research

Foreword. On the processual making of the nation: power and ideology

Nationalism emerges as an ideology of classification (Jenkins 2008b): processes of identification and categorization are political claims that (re)define the nation along a perfect matching between the political and the ethno-national cleavages of the state.

Elites' degree of control over state power augments the opportunity for shaping national group-making processes (Brass 1985; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1986). On these premises, nations shall be conceptualised as a product of layered processes of cultural, discursive and political

institutionalisation (Brubaker 1996, 37): the underlying struggle establishes a position of domination for the national group represented at the level of central organisations, and provides prescriptions on social interactions along national principles of solidarity (Jenkins 2008b; Malešević 2013; 2019; Wimmer 2002a; 2013).

Nationalism thus rests on a process of social closure and cannot be reduced to a metaphor of imagination (Anderson 2006): membership in the national group produces patterns of exclusion that are inscribed into organisations' structures and reinforce hierarchies of power that are operational in the field. Confrontation over identity ultimately translates contested political projects that build on a potentially ever-changing representation of the national community at the level of central organisations.

The state's symbolic power consists in central organisations' ability to craft, reconstruct, institutionalise and impose meaningful categorisation modes (Bourdieu 1991); its pervasiveness varies because nation-building is a relational process. Notwithstanding central organisations' authoritative position, the result of categorisation processes is always affected by the opportunity for penetrating ideologically and uniformly micro-level interactions that reproduce the ideal of the nation across the field (Malešević 2019). Ultimately, the outcome of nation-building projects is contingent to degrees of legitimacy that elites' representation of the nation catches across large enough fractions of the public (Wimmer 2013).

In those contexts in which the public is fractured in more-or-less distinct groups preferring diverse versions of the representation of the nation-state, nation-building forms an embedded mechanism of political competition between a variety of competing networks who exploit contested narratives to fulfil their interests while gaining and stabilising their access to material and symbolic power, and state resources (Brass 1991; Brubaker 2004; A. Cohen 1969).

The lack of agreement over the definition of the national domain determines the political salience of attempts to renegotiate categorisation pattern inherited from previous macro-structural settings and political orders (Brubaker 1996; Linz and Stepan 1996). When divisive initiatives are not supported by large-enough

portions of the population, they may exacerbate conflict and prompt state fragmentation (Conversi 1999; Petersen 2011).

Soviet successor republics surely display intense degrees of exploitation of contested national claims (Z. D. Barany and Moser 2005; G. Smith et al. 1998; R. Isaacs and Polese 2016; Brubaker 1996; Suny 1993; Todorova 1992).

The Bolsheviks' institutionalisation of ethno-territorial units had strengthened or even created nations that had not existed before: therein, the legitimacy and mobilisation capacity of ethnically-defined nations across post-soviet states is entrenched in structures and practices inherited from the socialist experience.

In the context of perestroika, this feature provided incentives for republican leaders to exploit ethnic politics and to mobilise people along national lines (Beissinger 2002; 2009; Hale 2008). Later, it stimulated the transition to sovereignty be framed in exclusive national terms (Brubaker 1996; G. Smith et al. 1996).

As the territorial and national boundaries of new states would hardly coincide, the reconstruction of nationhood enacted conflictual political struggles whose intensity could be exacerbated by self-interested powerful actors or smoothed by the same actors displaying a willingness to compromise on the common interest of ensuring the survival of newly-established political orders (Sasse 2001; Laitin 2005; 1998).

On these premises, nation-building can hardly be considered exclusively an elite-centred activity: identity markers can be accepted, rejected, renegotiated by the public and by relatively powerful actors placed at different levels of the administrative apparatus (R. Isaacs and Polese 2016). The understanding of state-led nation-building practices shall thus always consider the constellation of different actors and the ideological underpinnings of established power relations that provide legitimacy and justification over particular patterns of (collective) action across elites and masses.

Ukraine's identity divide: contestation about history in the context of dysfunctional state-society relationships

After independence, Ukraine was defined a nation of two parts (Riabchuk 2003) divided along an east-west cleavage that geographically matches the flow of the River Dnepr but that can hardly be understood in terms of the dichotomous “Ukrainian *versus* Russian” ethnic affiliation alone (Birch and Zinko 1996; Bremmer 1994; Hrytsak 1998; Korostelina 2013b; Kuzio and D’Anieri 2002; Pirie 1996; Petro 2015; Solchanyk 1994).

Regionally-distributed patterns of national identification have been widely assessed by looking at distinct cultural markers, included fragmented language practices (Arel 1995a; 1995b; 2006; Wilson 2009; Kulyk 2018; Onuch, Hale, and Sasse 2018) and splits in the preferred representation of national history and collective memory (Motyl 2010; Shevel 2016b; Kasianov 2012).

The absence of a shared national idea and the prevalence of dual and hybrid modes of self-identification across the south-east has been related to an ambivalent process of identity formation that has denied the state and its constituent groups a clear definition of internal and external attributes of nationhood (Arel 1995b; Kuzio and D’Anieri 2002; Wilson 1993; Petro 2015; Korostelina 2013b).

The reproduction of regional cleavages into voting practices signals polarised orientations over national state-building and foreign policy priorities, both being at times assessed in the literature in terms of divergent and conflictual political cultures (Arel and Khmelko 1996; Arel and Wilson 1994; Barrington and Herron 2004; Birch 1998; 2000; Katchanovski 2006b; Kubicek 2000; Marples 2015b; Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018).

The consolidation of practices of intense competition over national state-building efforts has led to the reproduction of a zero-sum game between the country’s two poles (Korostelina 2013a). The concomitant non-programmatic politics of formal parties furtherly contribute in producing the peculiar situation in which parties’ socio-economic agendas hold little salience over electoral practices, while differences concerning a party’s geopolitical orientation and

stance on identity issues impact greatly on electoral behaviour (Fedorenko, Rybiy, and Umland 2016; Shevel 2015).

In such a context, contestation over the interpretation of the national past has grown considerably (L. A. Osipian and Osipian 2012; Shevel 2011; Yurchuk 2011; Kasianov 2012; 2019; Marples 2006; 2007).

Likewise other states in transition from socialism, independent Ukraine embarked on a formal state-led project of nationalisation of history (Wilson 1998; Kasianov 2012). The "nationalised" version of the past consists in a:

"way of perceiving, understanding and treating the past that requires a separation of "one's own" history from an earlier "common" history and its construction as the history of a nation" (Kasianov 2009, 7).

The process kicks off from the sovereinisation movement initiated by *Rukh*, the Ukrainian movement for perestroika (Wilson 1994): likewise in other former soviet Republics, past experiences of the new-born state were conceptualized as the national history of the titular ethnic group (Kasianov and Ther 2009; Kasianov 2012). The national narrative points to the experience of subjugation of the Ukrainian nation to competing imperial rules, the most important of which was the Russian, and later Soviet empire (Wilson 1998).

The continuous process of nationalisation has been equated to a project of "unfinished modernization" grounded in ideological and political struggles over degrees of opposition to the soviet historiography (Kasianov 2009, 7-8). The latter's interpretation of Ukrainian history continues the Soviet view over a common past uniting the East Slavic peoples on a voluntary basis under the Russian Empire first and the USSR later (Kuzio 2006; Wilson 1998) and would enjoy relative degrees of legitimacy across Ukraine's Russophone south-eastern communities.

Throughout Ukraine's first decade of independence, relevant actors' symbolic strategy of reconstructing a national tradition was openly contested by the Communist Party alone, but was relatively constrained in scope by perceived preferences distributed across Ukraine's diverse regions and by former-nomenklatura ruling elites' priority of ensuring good economic, political, and

cultural relations with the Russian Federation (Portnov 2013; Kasianov 2012, 142–48; Yurchuk 2011).

After the Orange Revolution, standard politics of history was overridden by the one dictated by political conjunctures. President Yushchenko's revival of exclusivist national myths reflecting western regions' preferences prompted the reorganisation of political forces claiming to represent the interests of Ukraine's south-east. In turn, the partial reversal of Yushchenko's policy under Yanukovich's presidency heightened discontent in Ukraine's western constituencies and contributed in consolidating history as a favourite tool of contestation in a context of radicalising ethno-political struggle (L. a. Osipian and Osipian 2012; Osipian 2015; Katchanovski 2015; Kulyk 2019).

By the beginning of the Maidan, markers of contested history were furtherly associated to regionally-distributed geo-political orientations and to the advancement of Ukraine's projects of integration into competitive supra-national political projects. This feature emerged explicitly in the confrontational claim-making process of the Revolution of Dignity (Risch 2015; Kulyk 2014; Fedorenko 2015; Portnov 2016; 2017; Siddi 2017).

The potential for violent state disintegration had been relatively high already in 2004 (Arel 2006), but likewise the 1990 Revolution of Granite, the Orange Revolution had ended in an elites' compromise on a power sharing agreement. The introduction of a semi-presidentialist constitution in 2005 mitigated problems of commitment across Ukraine's south-eastern communities (Popova 2014; Strasheim 2016) and allowed Yanukovich's Party of Regions to negotiate an optimal bargaining position in the Parliament, thereby granting pluralism at the level of central structures (Strasheim 2016).

By contrast after the Maidan, the violent reversal of the power sharing agreement of February 2014 precipitated the country into an unprecedented crisis.

The diversity of actors supporting the Revolution has been object of research: a particularly rich debate emerged as to the evaluation of the activity of well-organised ideologically-committed groups which contributed greatly to the diffusion of nationalist symbols, slogans and rhetoric across moderate

protesters and opposition elites (Umland 2013a; Risch 2015; Kulyk 2014; Portnov 2016).

Some observers point to nationalist parties' poor number and weak performance at the 2014 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections as an evidence that they could not impinge on the democratic base of the protest (Likhachev 2015; Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014). Relatedly, radicalising trends were assessed as contingent to nationalist groups' effective defence of protesters from regime repression during the most violent phase of the confrontation (Likhachev 2015; Onuch and Sasse 2016).

Others have emphasised the divisiveness of claim-making repertoires popularised by these groups (Darden and Way 2014; Umland 2014; Way 2014), and the impact of their violent strategy on the outcome of the protest and on Ukraine's crisis (Ishchenko 2016; Katchanovski 2020; Kudelia 2018).

Relatedly, their growing leverage has been linked to the little transparency of the power transfer process in 2014 and to growing permissiveness across Ukraine's society towards right-wing ideologies (Ishchenko 2018; Umland 2019).

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the armed secessionist conflict in Donbass prompted an unprecedented state-promoted rejection of Soviet remnants and run parallel to the most intense activity of legitimisation, institutionalisation and imposition of discourses anchored to controversial aspects of Ukraine's nationalist interpretation of history (Olszański 2017; Shevel 2016b; Marples 2017; Kasianov 2019). With the approval of the controversial Laws on Decommunization (April 2015), contested historical material first popularised by the Maidan's radical groups was placed at the core of Ukraine's securitisation strategy *vis à vis* Russia and anchored explicitly to prospects of state survival (Marples 2017). The antagonism of the initiatives has been discursively legitimised by referring to Moscow's own active mobilisation of Soviet "anti-fascist" myths on WWII during the last stage of the Maidan (Siddi 2017; Kulyk 2014; Osipian 2015).

In this context, post-Maidan Ukraine's pro-Western political consensus has coexisted with a latent systemic form of corruption that permeates institutions and perpetrates personalised relationships of power accumulation, the latter being established mostly between the ruling class and the powerful oligarchs of the country (Umland 2017; Minakov 2018; Jarabik 2015; Fisun 2010; 2012). The scholarship has found that the opportunity for constructing genuine competitive democracies in Eurasia was hindered by informal arrangements of monopolistic appropriation and predation of public, political, and economic power (Åslund 1994; Fisun 2012; Fisun and Hale 2019; Grzymala-Busse 2008; Hale 2014; Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann 2000; Kudelia 2012; Kuzio 2016a; Puglisi 2003a; 2003b; Van Zon 2000; 2001). A common output of these modes of political competition is the emergence of informal institutions that compete with and substitute democratic ones, thereby widening the set of challenges for consolidating state capacities and the rule of law (Minakov 2018, 123-25). Resultant hybrid regimes experience major episodes of power redistribution and political contestation in concomitance of crucial splits within the ruling network (Way 2005a; 2005b; 2016; Fisun 2007, 2010, 2012; Hale 2014; 2019): indeed, revolutions and democratic breakthroughs across the post-soviet space do not emerge where prerequisites for democracy exist but where wannabe authoritarians are not strong enough to prevent elites' defection from their extended networks of clientelistic relations.

In such dysfunctional systems, competition and contestation over legitimate identity divides can be instrumental to mobilize voters in spite of their dissatisfaction with the results of non-programmatic and highly corrupted political projects: in the Ukrainian case, the reification of national divides might be key to perpetrate the rule of networks that are permeated by self-interested mechanisms of power accumulation and unable or unwilling to advance effective socio-economic reforms (Ishchenko 2018). One side-effect of this strategy is the relative risk of state fragmentation that stems from the lack of incentives in reconciling the state on an agreed national idea and that in Ukraine materialised dramatically in 2014.

Research objectives

The dissertation hypothesises that political contestation in multi-national contexts reflects high levels of social closure across nationally-defined communities whose preferences are competitively upheld by self-interested networks seeking access to power and state resources.

The study maintains that in the former soviet States, contestation over the national political order partly originates in embedded structures inherited from the soviet experience as well as in informal modes of political competition and power accumulation: in this perspective, ideological underpinnings and power relations concur interactionally to the institutionalisation of contingently salient versions of national identity.

The purposeful mobilisation of resonant and/or contested national divides may be key to perpetrate dysfunctional state-society relations and to marginalise both political opponents and societal discontent for corrupted practices that permeate the functioning of state organisations.

The empirical sections zoom on the case of Ukraine and problematise competitive claims over national interpretations of history: rather than focusing on the stock of historical repertoires and myths, the dissertation reflects on the idea that informal mechanisms of political competition may impact negatively on the opportunity for reconciling Ukraine's macro-regions' divergencies on a unifying ideal of nationhood.

The case study preliminarily targets historically-embedded and discursively institutionalised ideological underpinnings that allow to draw on collective understandings of history for crafting meaningful national divides. By thus doing, the study unfolds power relations and political brokerage activities that account for contingent shifts in levels of manipulation of confrontational narratives. A primary concern is with the growing political salience of contested history for patterns of collective action across the public and elites.

Zooming on the episode of the Maidan, the research will problematise the diffusion of nationalist symbols, slogans and rhetoric first mobilised by minority

but ideologically-committed nationalist groups and will address the following questions:

Which relational mechanisms account for the diffusion of nationalist groups' rhetoric across moderate opposition parties during the revolutionary phase? How do claim-making processes interact with contestation across the south-east and with the outbreak of the war in Donbass?

In exploring these issues, the study maintains that shifts pertaining to the balance of power between informal networks, traditional political parties and newly-empowered and ideologically-committed actors contribute in altering mechanisms of social closure attached to national divides.

The last empirical section addresses the institutionalisation and imposition of national boundaries as defined by the contested Decommunization Package. Opposition to the mandatory specifications of some of the provisions included in the Laws signals that ruling coalitions may lack incentives in upholding a nationwide accepted definition of the national ideal. The research thus addresses the following questions:

Why do ruling networks agree upon inscribing nationalist interpretations of history into state structures and promoting a policy that might exacerbate regional divisions? Which informal mechanisms of power redistribution account for the reproduction of intense levels of political struggle over the implementation of the Laws on Decommunization?

Zooming on within-case analysis, the study evaluates the implementation and renegotiation of the legislation in the largely pro-Russian city of Kharkov, thereby addressing the following question:

What does sub-national contestation signal within a renovated system of political competition that marginalises the representation of south-eastern Ukrainians' preferences in central structures?

The underlying assumption of the thesis is that ruling elites' promotion of personalised mechanisms of benefit maximisation rests on the reproduction of the exclusivity of the national domain.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Processes of national state-building as projects of ethnic boundary-making

The study builds on a multi-layered approach to state-led nation-building initiatives and explicitly conceptualises processes under analysis in terms of state consolidation.

The theoretical framework rests on Barth's concept of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969) and draws on Wimmer's relational theory on the emergence and transformation of modern nation-states as a strategic struggle through which a given population agrees upon patterns of classification and identification within the social system it inhabits (Wimmer 2013).

Three macro-structural interdependent features impact on the outcome of the process: institutional structures, the configuration of political alliances and the distribution of power across the field leverage on strategies and means of ethnic boundary-making individuals can opt for. Taken together, the institutional framework and the width of political alliances determine whether ethnic boundaries matter at all and, if they do, whom they include and exclude. In turn, unequal access to power interacts with the range of interests according to which an actor pursues a level of differentiation which she perceives to further her interests (Wimmer 2013, 90-98). As a rule, degrees of centralisation go hand in hand with the opportunity to have larger fractions of the community to enter the social contract (Tilly 1975).

In divided societies, political networks act strategically to uphold a given representation of salient societal divisions they claim is legitimate and representative of the wider public's interests. Public support bolsters a network's consolidation at the expense of competing groupings supported by other portions of the public. The process ultimately determines the exclusion of fractions of the population from the national model of statehood that is being consolidated by ruling networks (Conversi 1995, Wimmer 2002b).

The relational logic builds on notions of socio-political closure, thereby addressing the multi-layered negotiation of the markers that differentiate the national group from domestic minorities in more or less exclusivist polities.

The project of nation-building ultimately rests on levels of public legitimacy over the national project which is being discursively constructed and institutionalised at the level of central structures, and patterns of exclusion from dominant groups depend on levels of inequalities among groups (Wimmer 2013, 89–95). Consensus on national divides is the outcome of a classificatory struggle and is granted in exchange of material and symbolic resources. The continuous alliance-building activity for reproducing the nation is underpinned by contestation over the legitimacy, exclusiveness, and political meaning of the claim advanced by powerful actors and impact on the pervasiveness and reproduction of the ideological norm at the level of everyday interactions.

Major shifts in the location of any given boundary are however contingent to the configuration of ruling networks, to dynamics of elites' split and compromise; as well as to major shocks produced endogenously and exogenously to the field and impacting on the macro-structural features of the state.

Ethno-symbolic accounts expand on myth-making aspects of nation-building and treat the power of symbols and memories of shared pasts as endogenous to culturally-defined ethnic communities (Armstrong 2017; Hutchinson 1987; 2004; A. D. Smith 1986). A boundary understanding reflects instead on the intersection between content and context that produces conflictual modes of national identification: such a perspective does not overlook issues of legitimacy but avoids the pitfall of conflating ideology with culture.

On these grounds, competitive understandings over Ukraine's past are mobilizational resources whose hold on emotions stems from cognitive and ideological frames embedded in the institutional framework and reproduced across the public (Brubaker 2004): the political meaning and modes of power distribution attached to ethno-national markers of identification overcome the impact of cultural material *per se*, and depend on the configuration of political networks at a given moment in time.

The approach stresses the transactional character of the whole process of negotiation (Wimmer 2013, 27-29) and treats the distinction between majority and minority groups as an historically specific process of nation-building: constituent groups' identity is a product of the definition of the boundary differentiating them (not of separate identity) which holds different properties across different political contexts because there exist different definitions of the nation.

A patronal perspective on the functioning of political competition

Research on democratisation maintains that soviet successor states' paths towards democracy was undermined by ethno-authoritarianism, ethnic conflict and mechanisms of state erosion (Linz and Stepan 1996, Chap 19): structural features are major explanations for problems of transition that exacerbate risks of conflict.

Yet, institutional dynamics cannot be fully understood in constitutional terms: informal practices have powerful effects on institutional outcomes and shape the functioning of democracies and other regimes (Fisun 2012; Grzymala-Busse 2008; Hale 2011; Helmke and Levitsky 2006; A. V. Ledeneva 2006; 2013; Sakwa 2010). Political actors respond to a mix of formal and informal rules and the latter might have a bigger say for the actual functioning of the political game (Gel'man 2004; Hale 2011; 2014; Helmke and Levitsky 2006; North 1990).

The extent to which formal rules constrain political actors' strategies vary widely across cases (North 1990; O'Donnell 1996): in countries in transition from authoritarian rule, official rules are often applied in accordance to more fundamental informal norms that may prevail over formal ones (Carothers 2002; Gel'man 2004; Hale 2011; 2014; Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 1–2; Levitsky and Way 2010; Merkel and Croissant 2000; O'Donnell 1996; Sakwa 2010; Way 2016; 2005a). Particularly in conditions of fluctuating institutions, the outcome of political processes is altered by the “unofficial” part of politics, which includes multiple layers of communication, interaction and enforcement of policies (Levitsky and Way 2002, Gel'man 2004, Way 2002).

Approaches informed by transition and democratisation paradigms might be insufficient to grasp fundamental dynamics of alliance-building activities and power configurations that impact on the politics of the nation (Carothers 2002; Way 2002). Further, the outcome of nation-building projects is shaped by negotiation mechanisms established among situated formal and informal actors who hold diverse stocks of power and resources to advance and impose their preferred mode of national identification (Sasse 2010; R. Isaacs and Polese 2016).

On these grounds, it is key to explicitly shift the focus from explaining formal outcomes of national state-building to illuminating the configurations of political alliances that lead to more or less successful processes of state consolidation (Grzymala-Busse and Luong 2002).

The research reflects on these observations and expands on the idea of patronalism as a dominant social equilibrium across non-Baltic Soviet successor States: in such an understanding, rules of personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments govern individuals' organisation of their political and economic pursuits (Hale 2014, 9–10), and public politics revolves mainly around the competitive struggle for access to state resources among competing patronal networks.

The latter emerge as hierarchical self-interested collective actors made up of clients vertically organised around patron-presidents that control the particularistic distribution of resources and power (Fisun 2007; 2010; 2012; Way 2005a, 2005b; 2016). At the core of the political game lies a problem of coordination concerning a client's choice of joining one patronal network over another. Collective action responds to dominant expectations over current and future balances of power rather than to principles of abstract imagined communities.

Phases of cyclic dynamism determine moves away from single-pyramid politics and towards competing-pyramid configurations: in these contexts, centrifugal pressure prompts networks splits and the opening of the system, thus heightening levels of competition. Regime dynamics thus originate less in patterns of regime

change and more in relative fluctuation: in this perspective, peculiar regime cycles produce predictable equilibria.

Particularly during and after episodes of power redistribution, networks' expectations are shaped by trends within (mobilised) masses other than by the current balance of power. In these contexts, the mobilisation of a given divide, e.g. collective representations of the nation's past, is used strategically to polarise multi-national societies and move dissatisfaction away from lack of advancement in programmatic politics.

The integration of theoretical insights as briefly sketched above allows to bridge the analysis of embedded sources of ethno-political mobilisation to contextual processes of legitimisation and competition for power that impact on the strategies political networks set forward to modify the legitimacy, the location and the political meaning of self-interested national divides.

Methodology and methods

The case study has descriptive and exploratory purposes related to the evaluation of context-specific evidence against the background of broader theoretical reflections on contested nationalism and dysfunctional state-society relations. A limited explanatory purpose emerges from the evaluation of the set of outcomes related to the impact patronal modes of political competition have over the perpetration of the struggle over the national domain in Ukraine.

The study treats the reconstruction of ethno-national boundaries as a processual discursive practice underpinned by contestation (Brubaker 2004; Bourdieu 1991; Wimmer 2013): the underlying continuous struggle produces precise patterns of legitimacy, meaning and location of the contested divide separating the Ukrainian national group from an hard-to-define *Russian* minority. The investigation researches relational underpinnings of the state's symbolic power and the interactions between power inequalities and patterns of legitimacy over the reproduction of the selected national norm across the field. The relation between groups and categories evoked by elites is analysed by pointing to processual implications of the top-down politics of categories

(Bourdieu 1991; Brubaker 1996; 2004; Loveman 1999; Wacquant 1997; Wimmer 2002b); i.e. to processes by which categories derived by contested interpretations of history become entrenched in what ethno-symbolists identify as culturally powerful and symbolically resonant myths, memories and narratives (Armstrong 1982, A. D. Smith 1986). Such processes mainly pertain to the realm of nation-building and policy-making in historical policy.

Methods include interpretivist process tracing (Vennesson 2008), a tool designed to identify processes linking a set of initial conditions to a particular outcome (Falleti 2006) and that proves effective in uncovering sequences in policy-making as well as anomalies in historical developments (Vennesson 2010).

The empirical analysis will trace alterations in more-or-less consolidated power relations and the impact of the soviet institutional legacy on the functioning of alliance-building activities. A primary concern is with the processes that contribute to the reproduction of a patronal system of politics through the inscription of dysfunctional modes of political competition and power configuration into state structures, thereby altering the continuous project of ethnic boundary-reconstruction.

Discourse analysis is set to assess the political implications of the activity for making of relevant narratives over Ukraine's past a salient marker of national identity which is operational across the field and consequential for power relations.

Central organisations propel and resort to discourses that are political and that construct the meaning, location and significance of the boundary, thereby producing concrete effects in the field. The empirical investigation treats political discourses both as structures, i.e. as embedded socio-cultural resources; and as practices, i.e. as structures of meaning contingently exploited to express, enforce and institutionalise national boundaries and their reproduction into stable patterns of social relationships that impose precise configurations of power relations (Weldes and Laffey 2004). Embedded modes of ethno-national identification framed along contested markers of history represent the structures,

i.e. the cultural content on which elites draw to advance self-interested strategies of ethnic politics (Hale 2008).

A basic understanding is that categories of national identification inform elites' strategy at the threshold of action (Hale 2008); they are pre-cognitive devices that make the world intelligible and then prompt the strategic use of ethnic politics for self-interested purposes. The actual strategies for promoting and imposing categories anchored to contested interpretations of history represent the practices that construct and modify the meaning, location and significance of the boundary. These practices are political sites of contention (Weldes and Laffey 2004, 28-29) and produce subjects and relations of domination, thus enforcing power relations that are meant to uphold both embedded and contingently salient frames of national identity.

Discourse analysis is applied to open-ended interviews carried out during a fieldwork in Kiev and Kharkov in November and December 2019¹.

The structured questionnaire tackles the evaluation of independent Ukraine's state-led strategies in historical policies and was designed to discern embedded structures elites resort to in order to justify, promote, institutionalise and oppose contingently-constructed practices that constitute the political struggle over meaningful group relationships in any given polity.

The recruitment procedure in Ukraine included snowball sample; interviews were recorded on a voluntary basis and the name of respondents reported when not agreed otherwise. Respondents in Kiev include political elites, such as MPs, policy-makers; and experts and representatives of executive institutions. Among national oriented interviewees, most were members of the civil society and political activists that participated to the Maidan protests and were later involved in the crafting, approval and implementation of nation-building initiatives. Actors from the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance are treated as

¹ During the fieldwork in Ukraine, the author was hosted in Kiev at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine at the Institute of History of Ukraine - Department of Contemporary History and Politics directed by Professor Georgiy Kasianov

mnemonic warriors, i.e. as actors engaged in establishing one and only one historical truth, which is opposed to other wrong versions of history propelled by Russia's propaganda and its "fifth columns" (Bernhard and Kubik 2016, chap. 1; also see Kasianov 2019, Section Two).

Kharkov is selected as a case to study patterns of strategic action for implementing, renegotiating and contesting the Law on Decommunization at the sub-national level of administration. Ukraine's second-largest city presents the following characteristics:

- i) It is traditionally associated to pro-Russian sentiments and experienced a concrete threat of falling under the control of separatists in 2014 (Blavatnik 2020; Piechal 2015; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018; Zhurzhenko 2016)
- ii) It is home to a regional political machine which has been historically prone to compromise with ruling political alliances (Blavatnik 2020; Mazepus et al. 2018; 2021; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018)
- iii) It is home to ideologically-committed fringes associated to both sides of the national-political contention

Open ended interviews were carried out with supporters of the Law, included local representatives of executive bodies (i.e. personnel from the president-appointed Region State Administration, RSA), members of the of Kharkov's City Council, NGOs and activists from empowered civil society.

Interviews with representatives of locally elected bodies (e.g. representatives from the majority of the Regional and City Councils), political activists, historians and technical personnel aim at detecting discourses, strategies and motivation for local-level actors' activity of renegotiating and adjusting the contested legislation to local preferences.

Open-ended interviews provide insight on top-down processes of national group reconstruction that are still ongoing (Mosley 2019). Survey data collected by Ukrainian and international agencies allow to critically reflect on changing degrees of consensus over the legitimacy, location and meaning of national divides in the field.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter One. State consolidation in diverse societies as a process of boundary-making

The chapter reflects on structural and interactional components that account for the consolidation of modern state structures according to principles of national identity.

The section expands on Wimmer's theory of ethnic boundary-making (Wimmer 2013): the framework treats the emergence of modern nation-states as a strategic struggle through which a given population and its empowered representatives agree upon patterns of classification and identification within the social system they inhabit. Nation-building projects rest on sufficiently shared understandings over a form of nation-state, and patterns of exclusion from dominant groups depend on levels of inequalities among groups (Wimmer 2013, 89–95). The approach allows to look at contested interpretations of national history and collective memory as privileged markers of ethnonational and political projects of categorisation: the underlying logic is that divides and conflict emerge not there, where degrees of differentiation between nationally-defined groups are high, but rather where ethno-national boundaries clash with political pursuits.

The state's symbolic power entails the ability to impose contested categories and to make them consequential even in contexts in which identification modes are fluid. The processual implications of the framework imply that shifts in acceptable political alliances and in the bargaining position of constituent groups and their empowered representatives impact greatly on the reconstruction of more antagonistic national divides. Still, the pervasiveness of selected modes of identification is contingent to the effective reproduction of elites' self-serving ideological norm across the field, as well as to the exact location of powerful actors who struggle with each other over which principle of legitimacy should prevail.

Chapter Two. Ethnic Politics after socialism: a patronal perspective on Ukraine's case

The chapter addresses the making of ethno-national boundaries in countries in transition from socialism. A preliminary understanding is that the exclusivity of the national domain in soviet successor states is contingent to the location of political alliances and to the bargaining power of formal and informal actors.

The section thus zooms on informal modes of political competition that craft dysfunctional state-society relations in non-Baltic successor states and expands on Hale's theory of patronalism (Hale 2014): the framework treats political competition as a struggle between self-interested networks made up of clients hierarchically organised around patron-presidents and responding mainly to collectively-generated expectations on particularistic distributions of power.

In such a blueprint, revolutionary events are predictable components of patronal regimes' cyclic dynamism and their intensity and outcomes depend more on networks' splits and patrons' inability to shape clients' expectations than on commitment to democracy and the relative strength of grassroots mass movements.

Particularly during and immediately after episodes of power redistribution, obvious trends across (mobilised) masses and current power balances inform key processes of coordination in pursuing access to resources. Moves away from verticalized, single pyramid systems produce contexts of political openings that augment competition between rival patronal networks.

On these grounds, networks' mobilisation of ethnic divides in multi-national states exploits the cognitive and emotional resonance of embedded modes of ethno-national identification to polarise societal divisions while moving attention away from major flaws in programmatic politics.

The integration of a patronal logic to the conceptual framework on ethnic boundary-making addresses structural and interactional components of the competitive mobilisation of identity divides.

The resultant blueprint implies that in Ukraine, the institutional framework, the functioning of political alliances and the principles of power distribution

function defectively, thereby impacting negatively on the opportunity for consolidating the state around a nationwide accepted ideological norm that may reconcile divergencies between the country's two poles.

Chapter Three. The leverage of contestation about history on the politics of the nation: a longitudinal overview

This section assesses Ukraine's process of national state-consolidation and reflects on patronal underpinnings of national group-making projects that have contributed in exacerbating the salience of state-led nation-building initiatives framed around contested markers of history.

The chapter hypothesises that the incorporation of a soviet conception of power in new state structures and informal modes of political competition concur to the institutionalisation of an ambiguous process of nationalisation of the past.

Rather than focusing on the stock of repertoires and myths, the research problematises regime dynamics and power relations that impact on the crafting of a national ideological norm, thereby contributing to the continuous promotion and institutionalisation, contestation and renegotiation of ethno-national boundaries.

The section locates the embeddedness of contested interpretations of the national past and the patronal underpinnings that contribute in making of markers of national history a privileged instrument of patronal networks' competition and a marker associated to high degrees of social closure.

Chapter Four. The diffusion of nationalist historical narratives during the Maidan Revolution

The chapter zooms on the Maidan Revolution and the period of power redistribution soon afterwards (November 2013 – May 2014); a primary concern is with structural and interactional components of the struggle that account for the processual popularisation and institutionalisation of nationalist symbols and rhetoric over Ukraine's history that were firstly owned by ideologically-committed radical groups.

The section argues that the strategic use of violence and the concrete risk of state fragmentation alter relations within the composite pro-Maidan movement and empower radical actors claiming to represent the Ukrainian nation, thus impacting on patronal networks' coordination amidst an unprecedented crisis of statehood.

The relational struggle for making of nationalist groups' contested symbols on Ukraine's history a dominant marker of national identity entails interactional and embedded components but is ultimately contingent to changes in acceptable political alliances (Wimmer 2013): the latter relate to (perceptions of) growing social closure of the emerging political order.

The discursive reconstruction of more confrontational boundaries furtherly contributes in shaping conflictual patterns of collective action that lead to the armed confrontation in the Donbass region.

*Chapter Five. The implementation and contestation of the Laws on
Decommunization: the case of their renegotiation in Kharkov*

The chapter aims at explaining ideological underpinnings and power relations that account for elites' support for the contested provisions included in the Decommunization package.

The major claim is that elites respond to the pressure of minority but mobilised fractions of the protesting group and that this process in turn informs and interacts with patronal networks' coordination and competition for access to state power and resources.

The chapter preliminary traces major changes in institutions, power differentials and political alliances. The analysis of central policy makers' strategy for upholding the laws aims at detecting patterns of competition across supporters over the meaning and location of ethno-national boundaries, and patterns of confrontation over their legitimacy between supporters and opponents.

Central organisations' reconstruction of national boundaries can be effectively reviewed at the sub-national level, formally or informally (Wolczuk 2002; Sasse 2000; 2010). The empirical investigation over the implementation

of the Decommunization Law in Kharkov discerns the extent to which blurred patterns of communal identification leverage on local patronal networks' opportunity for renegotiating the balance of power in the new political order.

Conclusions

The section reflects on the findings of the empirical investigation, their limits and implications over the theoretical framework and further research in the field.

CHAPTER 1

STATE CONSOLIDATION IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES AS A PROCESS OF BOUNDARY-MAKING

The chapter reflects upon a boundary-based understanding over group-making projects in diverse societies.

The national domain is both about ideology and power. As an ideal of legitimate political organisation, nationalism prescribes patterns of social interaction that are consequential for exchange relationships and invoke shared collective interests among large sets of individuals (Gellner 1983; Jenkins 2008b; Malešević 2013; 2019; Tilly 1975).

Nations hold a mobilising capacity and the process of national group formation is an ongoing political project that consolidates the state around a preferred version of the nation (Brubaker 1996, 2004; Wimmer 2002b, 2013).

The pervasiveness of the state's symbolic power rests on the top-down politics of categories (Bourdieu 1991): central organisations mobilise divides that are interactionally imposed across the field (Brubaker 2004; Jenkins 1994; Loveman 1999; Tilly 2015; Wacquant 1997; Wimmer 2013). In this perspective, nationalism is a political claim underpinned by contestation over the meaning, location and legitimacy of categorisation modes advanced by central organisations (Brubaker 2004, 13; Wimmer 2013, 52).

A boundary understanding over group-making processes reflects on the intersection between the cultural content and the political context that produces conflictual modes of ethno-national identification: such a perspective does not overlook issues of legitimacy, but avoids the pitfall of ethno-symbolic accounts that conflate ideology with symbolic and cultural material.

Relational underpinnings supplement the modernist tradition by addressing the impact current structures of power hold over the consolidation of a legitimate form of nation-state. At the same time, they deflect the drawbacks of over-

instrumentalist approaches to nationalism that overemphasise notions of state capacity and principles of political economy; thereby overlooking important issues of legitimacy, political grievances and inequality among situated actors when studying collective shifts towards conflictual modes of identification (Chandra 2001; Fearon and Laitin 1996; 2000; Kuran 1998; Laitin 1998). The approach treats contested interpretations of national history and collective memory as privileged markers of ethnonational and political projects of categorisation. The pervasiveness of the resultant modes of identification is contingent to the exact location of powerful actors who struggle with each other over which principle of legitimacy should prevail.

1.1. Nationalism and the consolidation of state capacities

1.1.1. Objective attributes of the state and processes of national integration

In Weber's classical definition the state is a human community that successfully claims the monopoly over the legitimate use of force across a given territory (Weber 2004).

Authority is backed by legitimacy only when it is carried out by the state, which is the only political institution authorised to use force. Today legal authority rests on constitutional means that demand the commitment of people (Weber 1978). Further, the political unity of the state rests on its territorial boundedness: unlike other administrative organisations, modern states aspire to establishing fixed borders and are identified with stable and delimited portions of land (Gellner 1983; Malešević 2019, 74; 2013; Weber 1978).

Territoriality and legitimacy make of state structures a powerful symbol of collective action and prompt the establishment of the nation-state (Weber 1978; Gellner 1983).

Drawing on this view, the scholarship has explored processes by which the subjects of monarchies were gradually turned into loyal citizens of the nation-state. Nation-building theory was used to analyse historical processes of national integration that lead to the establishment of the modern nation-state as distinct

from various forms of traditional states, such as feudal states and empires (Tilly 1975; Mann 1986; Collins 1999).

Political structures rich in historical attainment of power positions enact a process that gradually grants elites with prestige and material resources and that enlarges from dominant positions to the nation (Weber 2009, 172). The shift from pre-modern administrative structures to the nation-state rests on top-down dynamics undertaken by powerful actors (Brass 1991; Mann 1986; Tilly 1975).

The neo-Weberian perspective focuses on nation-state formation as a process involving mainly changing power networks' dynamics: in the late 19th century, the cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion and violence prompts the creation of uniform institutions and helps to mould citizens of European states into integrated populations (Tilly 1975; Mann 1986; Collins 1999). Western governments' measures of homogenisation lead to the creation of national languages, mass instruction programmes and to the assimilation or expulsion of minorities. Political and administrative conditions, included the availability of resources and strong coalitions between central and landed elites, reinforce the cultural homogeneity of nation-states and impact on their chances of survival (Tilly 1975, 40-44).

According to this state-centred view, nation-building is a gradual process of unification that proceeds from the economic and cultural integration at the level of central organisations and augments towards other sectors of the community. Burgeoning mass media create channels for direct contact between central elites and periphery populations, thereby generating widespread feelings of alignment with the political system (Rokkan et al. 1999).

Until the 1970s, the scholarship scantily considered intra-state national cleavages when exploring processes of national state-building. The primary concern was with socio-economic cleavages rather than with ethnic principles of unequal distribution of power and resources (Deutsch and Foltz 2010; Tilly 1975). Assumptions on homogeneity fostered research over the role of the military, the bureaucracy and classes in bolstering states' integration into a coherent whole. In this perspective, state consolidation is conducive to national

integration and enables the forging of national loyalties at the expense of particularistic forms of identification.

Connor (1972) brings to the forefront the salience of politicised ethnicity: a core idea is that nation building, i.e. the process of assimilating different groups into cohesive nations, destroys identities that coexist on a given territory and is key in violently terminating national differences (Connor 1972). Connor emphasises the analytical distinction between the state and the nation, and confutes their overlapping even in apparently homogeneous societies. The approach brings up a focus on forced assimilation of minorities into nation-state institutions in multi-ethnic societies, and on elites' instrumental exploitation of the volatile idea of the nation (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1986). It furtherly stimulates a critical approach to the relation between nation-building and the making of ethnic minorities (Mann 2004; Verdery 1994; Wimmer 2002b).

1.1.2. The contingency of the nation

In a modernist perspective, nation-states are:

“secularised social organisations with fixed and stable territory and a centralised political authority underpinned by intensive ideological particularism and the promotion of moral egalitarianism, social solidarity and cultural homogeneity among its populace” (Malešević 2019, 74).

Territoriality and legitimacy prompt the consolidation of homogenous populations displaying high degrees of social solidarity (Weber 2009, 172); the latter implying that a set of individuals shares something and display loyalty to the group they constitute at the face of other groupings.

The strong attributes of the state contrast with the subjectivity of the national realm. The contextual meaning of the nation is in turn key to Anderson's understanding of modern nations as imagined communities constructed through common language, mass media, literacy and socialization (Anderson 2006).

Both Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1986) expand on the political implications of the imagination metaphor. Hence, the nation-state emerges out of historical contingencies proper of modernity; its reinforcement depends upon

actions carried out by agents holding power and prestige at the level of central organisations (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1986).

The nationalist ideology assumes that the world is naturally divided into discrete nations, thereby enacting a process of border formation and maintenance (Conversi 1995; Gellner 1983). Unlike empires and other hierarchical social organisations characterised by “a vertical sense of attachment where each stratum maintains its socio-economic and cultural difference” (Malešević 2019, 75), nations are underpinned by an horizontal organisation of communities.

The project of homogenisation thus rests on value-oriented definitions that reinforce top-down processes of nation-state formation and widen elites’ room for manipulation (Weber 2009, 171–79). Nations are therefore a necessary fabrication (Gellner 1983) endogenous to modernisation, and need be reproduced by elites to respond to modern dynamics of social competition. The replacement of hierarchical structures by cultural cohesion, and of vertical stratification by spatial fragmentation implies that subjective boundaries shift from an internal to an external – but not solely territorial - level; and that nationalism is a struggle over the legitimate definition of (spatial) cleavages. Therein, the nation-state’s legitimacy rests on the definition of its territorial boundaries in ethno-national terms (Conversi 1995, 77; Wimmer 2013, 91): borders are norms and regulate the limit that need be not passed.

Hobsbawm (1986) pushes the instrumentalist logic further, whereby he maintains that traditions are invented social products serving solely elites’ interests: nations can only be legitimised by a collective recognition of an artificial bond and a mismatch of interests associated to the national domain is the norm across social classes.

The modernist understanding emphasises that solidarity within bounded national groups originates in contingent discursive processes that are instrumental and political in nature (Barth 1969; Brass 1991; Jenkins 1994; Malešević 2019; Tilly 1975; Wimmer 2002b, 2013) rather than being endogenous to self-evident ethno-national groups (Geertz 1963; Herder 1803; Lévi-Strauss 1969).

1.1.3. The nationalist ideology as a prescription on social interactions

Political nationalism justifies the existence of the nation-state in terms of popular, i.e. national, sovereignty (Gellner 1983) and is the dominant strategic mode for capturing legitimacy in the modern era (Billig 1995; Malešević 2011; 2013; 2019; Tilly 1975; Wimmer 2012; 2013).

Such an observation relates to two conditions.

First, nationalism is a resilient ideology and nationally-defined states remain the most legitimate form of territorial rule (Malešević 2013, 2019). Second, nationalism is a process of group formation aimed at fulfilling the political project of the nation (Brubaker 2004).

Nation-states require a process of centrifugal ideologization; i.e. a mass-scale structural phenomenon through which projects of social organisation forge a degree of ideological unity out of the complex diversity that characterises large territorial entities (Malešević 2013). In this perspective, nationalist principles form the main ideology of identification (Jenkins 2008a, 86–87), they are instrumental to elites to react to the distinction between the state and the society (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1986) and to mitigate differences between the political and cultural life.

Nationalism thus results from a long-term historical shift that rests on a highly contingent confluence. Malešević (2013, 2019) emphasises the cultural interdependence of macro-structural mechanisms and micro-interactional dynamics: the tap of the nationalist ideology into everyday interactions is consequential for group-making processes that produce national solidarity and permeate masses of the idea of the nation as pinnacle of human progress.

The homogenising pressure of nationalism is matched by a massifying process of universalisation of national consciousness (Gellner 1983; Conversi 1995; Billig 1995). In contexts in which national identities are multiple but unevenly represented in organisations' structures, the process produces contestation that may result in separatist nationalism.

Therein, the nationalist ideology is more than a political doctrine, it is an embedded social practice that invokes shared collective interests, holds a

legitimising capacity and provides justification for patterns of collective action (Jenkins 2008b; Malešević 2019).

Against this background, nationalism shall be analysed as a political claim (Brubaker 2004) that advances the idea of the nation-state; that is, that the political and ethno-national cleavages of the community overlap perfectly.

Nationalism prescribes that the nation and political power should be congruent, thereby specifying how to interact with in-groups and significant others (Brubaker 2004; Conversi 1999; Jenkins 1994; 2008a; Wimmer 2002a).

The national domain is therefore not solely about membership, but also about access to resources and power appropriation (Brubaker 1996, 2009; Hobsbawm 1986; Malešević 2013, 2019; Wimmer 2002b, 2012, 2013): the imagination activity for creating a nation is thus surpassed by the activity of classification and categorization promoted by powerful leaders (Jenkins 1994, 2008b; Wimmer 2013); oppositional dynamics are key to preserve borders (Conversi 1995) and consequential for the allocation of material and symbolic power (Jenkins 1994; Wimmer 2002b; 2013).

On the one hand, the element of otherness is key, for it is the 'other' that defines the group rather than its allegedly objective traits (Barth 1969). On the other hand, nationalism draws legitimacy from its capacity to delve into the local culture (Conversi 1995; 81-82).

Hence, the state is a powerful identifier not because it creates identities in a strong sense but because it holds material and symbolic resources to prescribe modes of interaction and impose categories that are cognitively and culturally mediated (Bourdieu 1991; Brubaker 2004; Jenkins 1994; Wimmer 2009).

The understanding of nationalism as a super-thick ideology does not contradict the heterogeneity of the nation (Malešević 2019): notwithstanding its degrees of penetration, the nationalist ideology promoted by elites can differ sharply from the one reproduced in the field.

Macro-structural processes incentivise elites to pursue strategies of nation-building that are oppositional towards fractions of the public, but interactional dynamics alter the definition of the nation-state. Degrees of pervasiveness of the

national norm depend on the latter dynamics (Conversi 1999; Malešević 2019; Wimmer 2013), for they provide legitimacy - or lack thereof - to the nation that is being consolidated at the level of central structures.

1.1.4. The embeddedness of the national ideal in state structures

Modern state structures are conducive to the nation-state model and nationalism forges social solidarity towards in-groups (Gellner 1983; Malešević 2013).

In multi-national contexts there is little agreement on principles of membership in the national group; further, patterns of action prescribed by nationalism are unclear and contested (Brubaker 1996; Wimmer 2002b).

The dilemma of representativeness of contemporary nation-states informs various strands of academic scholarship, included the one on democratisation and transition from socialism (Batt and Wolczuk 2013; Caraway 2004; Chandra 2005; Linz and Stepan 1996).

Linz and Stepan (1996, 16–17) identify a problem of ‘stateness’, whereby:

“in many countries, the crisis of the non-democratic regime is also intermixed with profound differences about what should actually constitute the polity (or political community) and which *demos* or *demoi* (population or populations) should be members of that political community”

The underlying dilemma is that while sovereignty is preconditional to democracy, the fact that a sovereign state is designed to exclude consistent fractions of the population may conduct to various forms of conflict (Linz and Stepan 1996, 18).

Zooming on states in transition from socialism, the scholarship has abundantly dealt with Brubaker’s concept of nationalising state, i.e. ethnically heterogeneous polities:

“conceived as nation-states, whose dominant elites promote (to varying degrees) the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation”
(Brubaker 1996, 57)

In a relational process linking the state to minorities and the latter to kin states - i.e. to external national homelands to which minorities relate for advocacy -

elites pursue policies of nationalisation, for they perceive structural challenges attached to the relevant minority and determining the underrepresentation of the interests of the “titular” nation in current structures (Agarin and Karolewski 2015; Chinn and Kaiser 1996; Laitin 1998; G. Smith et al. 1998). The nation stems from elites’ continuous activity of nationalisation, rather than being a substantial collectivity. Key to this logic is the understanding of ethnic solidarity as a response to structural discriminations inscribed into states’ apparatus (Hechter 1974).

Nationhood is the product of layered processes of cultural and political institutionalisation (Brubaker 1996, 37), but chances to monopolise over competing identities are low also within groups. Notwithstanding governments’ formal commitment to implement democratic regimes, state institutions might be designed to enforce exclusive regimes that uphold the interests of name-bearing national groups at the expense of marginalised minorities (Agarin 2010). On this view, state structures facilitate minorities’ mobilisation and the intervention of a self-interested kin state.

The literature which conceptualises modern states as a culturalist extension of Weber’s has furtherly explored relational implications related to the fact that the state does not only seek to monopolise legitimate physical force and control of the territory, but also the legitimate symbolic power, i.e. the power to identify who is who in the field (Bourdieu 1991; Brubaker 1996; 2004; Loveman 1999; Wacquant 1997; Weber 2009, 171–79; Wimmer 2002b).

Wimmer (2013) develops an agent-centred approach to study the processual making of ethno-national boundaries: in such a blueprint, powerful actors draw upon a set of strategies and means to consolidate the state around a preferred version of the nation; yet, three macro-structural features of the field enable and constrain room for action pervasively. In a condition of interdependence and path dependence, the institutional framework, the configuration of power relations and the reach of political alliances determine which strategy and means of boundary-making and enforcement can be actually (re)negotiated in the field (Wimmer 2013, 89–95).

Embedded state structures incentivise strategies of ethnic boundary-making over wealth- or gender-based categorisation modes; and thus legitimise the making of large-scale projects of state-building along national divides (Brubaker 1996; Conversi 1995; Tilly 1975).

1.1.5. Reproduction and legitimacy of the nation

Nations' creation and maintenance pertain to organisational and ideological components and to institutional arrangements: modern state structures incentivise political actors' implementation of national modes of categorisation in opposition to a significant other (Tilly 1975; Malešević 2019; Brubaker 1996; Jenkins 1994; Wimmer 2012, 2013).

The coercive capacity of the state and the institutional framework are themselves affected by the opportunity for penetrating dynamics of everyday interaction (Malešević 2019) and for reproducing stable patterns of legitimacy over the version of the nation-state that is being consolidated by state actors (Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2013). Hence, nationalism becomes the dominant operative ideology only when micro-interactional attachments are recreated into wider organisational and ideological processes. Purpose-driven strategies grant nationalism with continuous existence and uphold identity cleavages that are consequential for interactional dynamics.

Ethno-symbolists too emphasise the multi-level struggle for making the nation (Hutchinson 2004); yet, conflictual reinterpretations of the nation are maintained to stand above elites' self-interested socialisation of contested memory and classificatory modes (Kaufman 2001). Successful nation-state consolidation thus depends on the availability of cultural material that is endogenous to groups (A. D. Smith 1986, 2009; Hutchinson 2004). In this perspective, long-term socio-cultural processes affect the public unevenly and nationalists' competitive goal of unifying a nation can hardly be fulfilled.

Modernist accounts prioritise instead the relational implications of top-down political projects: the meaning of the nation is open to interpretation and renegotiation (Wimmer 2013). In any given polity, institutions are created

through popular support and are shaped by the legitimacy elites' initiatives manage to catch across the public (Conversi 1995, Wimmer 2002b). The oppositional underpinnings of the nationalist ideology signal that the power of nationalism also pertains to the sense of loyalty and emotional attachment individuals develop with in-groups and at the face of out-groups (Jenkins 1994, 2008b; Malešević 2019; Wimmer 2013). Yet, the selection of internal factors, i.e. ethno-cultural markers, is part of the political struggle that mobilises culture and symbolic values in order to demarcate borders (Conversi 1995, 77-81). Thus, underlying dynamics of negotiation translate first and foremost elites' competition for power and resources (Wimmer 2012; 2013).

As a rule of thumb, situated agents and the public can accept or reject the national project, and can act to re-negotiate the effects and meaning of the political claim advanced by central organisations (R. Isaacs and Polese 2016). The whole everchanging process is one of political brokerage that leverages on the stability, meaningfulness, acceptability and consequentialism of divides.

1.1.6. Nation-building as a contested process of state consolidation

Nation-states originate in multi-level, interconnected processes:

- i) At the macro-structural level, state institutions sustain the legitimacy of the national model of statehood and allow to organise the nation around exclusive modes of national integration.

The concept of nation is formed out of shared culture; i.e. out of a certain degree of homogeneity embedded in institutions (Wimmer 2013). The organisational and ideological embeddedness of the nation into state structures vary, thereby producing diverse degrees of pervasiveness of the nationalist ideology (Malešević 2019, Brubaker 2004).

- ii) At the level of political networks, elite groups' competition for the control of state structures and resources and degrees of centralisation of the polity impact on the definition of the nation.

Political elites consolidate the state according to exclusivist visions of the nation (Brubaker 1996; Conversi 1995). The exact location of power, prestige and

politics - i.e. the configuration of political alliances - and underlying dynamics of power negotiation, affect the output of the continuous process of homogenization (Wimmer 2012). Hence, nation-building is an ongoing political struggle: circumstantial factors alter the interests of the national group being represented (Wimmer 2002b), as well as elites' selection of contested markers aimed at differentiating in-groups from out-groups (Pytlas 2015; Conversi 1999; Jenkins 2008b).

- iii) At the level of the public, individuals sustain the nation-centric understanding of state structures through implicit or explicit patterns of agreement over significant modes of social categorisation.

The nation provides individuals with the most important social identity and simplifies citizens' views on non-members of the nation (Jenkins 2008a; 2014). On this view, the modern subject is mainly a nationalist subject (Wimmer 2002; Billig 1995) and the process of individualisation proper of globalisation does not contradict the national norm (Malešević 2019, Chap 10).

Hence the nation is a multi-layered political project that accounts for successful state consolidation, whereby the state is framed to varying extents in exclusive ethno-national terms (Brubaker 1996; Linz and Stepan 1996). Ruling political alliances (re)define the nation at the level of state structures and through patterns of public agreement over the meaning of national divides.

In a nutshell, the emergence of the nation-state is exogenous to interactional dynamics in the field and national divides stand above other patterns of social categorisation. The exact definition of the national domain originates in a strategic struggle: political actors hold resources for making categorisation modes relevant, acceptable and operational in the field (Bourdieu 1991); still, the outcome is affected by contestation over power relations and can be successfully renegotiated.

It is therefore key to take into account the constellation of actors positioned at different levels of the administrative apparatus and the range of resources they dispose of to make their preferred classification consequential for others (R. Isaacs and Polese 2016a, 9–10).

1.2. Processes of national group formation as projects of boundary-making

1.2.1. Making the nation in divided societies: the boundary approach

Oppositional visions of societal divides are particularly salient when national identities are multiple but unevenly represented in state structures, such as in countries in transition from socialism. After the Cold War, a key challenge would be the one of having nationalism less visible as an effect of assimilation but exploited symbolically to create new and thicker boundaries through the institutionalisation of confrontational modes of identification (Conversi 1995; Brubaker 1996; Wiimmer 2002b).

The boundary metaphor was introduced in social sciences by the anthropologist Friedrik Barth (1969), who observed that ethnic distinctions result from the (un)making of boundaries that exist regardless of the factual differences that can be observed from the outside. In this perspective, it is "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth 1969, 15). Barth contended that boundaries characterising groups' identity can be maintained independently from changes in the cultural material they enclose. Scientific investigation on group-making processes shall thus not focus on distinct ethnic groups, but rather on how boundaries differentiating groups are inscribed into a social landscape characterized by continuous cultural transitions (Wimmer 2013, chap 1).

Similarities characterised by robust historical continuity are consequences rather than causes for the making of ethnic cleavages: subjective claims to ethno-national identity do not originate in powerful primordial attachments (Geertz 1963; H. Isaacs 1975), but in the need to regulate the stratified organization of complex societies.

In anthropology, research on mechanisms reproducing relevant cleavages gradually overrode the study of the culture of the social organization of supposedly "self-evident" ethnic groups (Geertz 1963; Lévi-Strauss 1969). In research on race relations, the boundary approach contributes to shifting the

focus from taken-for-granted groups to state-led strategies of racialisation that are political in nature (Brass 1991; Loveman 1999; Wacquant 1997).

The boundary metaphor prompts an analytical focus on constructed cleavages and a relative disregard for the ethnic content (Royce 1982) which is removed from the set of casual explanations for group achievements (Steinberg 2001).

The approach points to competitive political relations and understands ethnicity as a means for allocating scarce resources (A. Cohen 1969; Parkin 1974).

Nationalism and nation-state formation are political struggles that aim at defining territorial as well as subjective boundaries. Hence, nationalism can be placed in the realm of subjectivity precisely because the importance of borders overrides the one of culture (Conversi 1995, 1999). Identity cleavages between groups can be maintained regardless of the fact that their culture might be hard to distinguish or that the categorical components defining them might switch from one to the other side of the boundary (Barth 1969; Wimmer 2013).

Intuitively, the analytical focus on boundaries matches constructivists' basic questioning of "group stability by pointing out that the ethnic categories that individuals identify with are constructed and change across time" (Chandra 2001, 345): in such a perspective, state-led nationalism, national identity and ethnic conflict are contingent, made and re-made products of social processes.

The shift from anthropology to sociology implies a renewed focus on the oppositional character of boundaries (Tilly 2015). Hence, in order to identify why and how ethnicity emerges as key among other forms of classification, it is compelling to prioritise major patterns of interaction that link together diverse groups' components and contribute to the relative distinctiveness and boundedness of the divide.

Drawing on this logic, ethnic processes are transactional, for they are based on negotiation and exchange (Conversi 1995, 77; Jenkins 1994; Tilly 2004). This implies that collective modes of identification are generated in interaction; they are relational and - at least potentially - flexible, situational and negotiable.

1.2.2. Transactional implications of the boundary metaphor: categorisation and social closure

The emphasis on transactions as constituent of classification processes signals that dynamics of boundary-formation are inherently political (A. Cohen 1969; Hechter 1974; Jenkins 2014, 131; Wimmer 2002b; 2013).

Jenkins (1994) and Brubaker (2004) acknowledge the predominant role of categorization over identification, thereby stressing the impact of authority relations in the construction of ethnic identities. At the aggregate level, group members identify themselves and are categorised by members of other groups: accordingly, national group formation is inspected by addressing external and internal dimensions of classification processes.

Jenkins (1994) emphasises the interdependence of the two dimensions and brings to the forefront the importance of externally located processes for the reproduction of national divides. On these grounds, a primary concern is with contexts of social categorization (Jenkins 1994; 2008b), with embedded cultural schemas that sustain and constrain organisations' strategies (Brubaker 2004), and with alliance-building activities and power dynamics that shape the output of group-making projects (Wimmer 2013).

Such perspectives challenge the given-for-granted relationship between categories and bounded groups (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). National group-making processes aim at transforming categories into groups: degrees of groupness are thus a variable rather than a constant and a category is at best a basis for group-formation projects. The inscription of preferred categories into state institutions is meant to consolidate a socio-cultural and political project that formalises patterns of domination and makes them consequential for others (Bourdieu 1991; Brubaker 2004, chap 3).

External categorisation is thus a political act that happens within an objectified system of classification developed by authoritative institutions.

On these grounds, cognitive research has studied the processual underpinnings that prompt elites to resort to ethnic politics in order to overcome problems of collective action (Hale 2008). The political project of categorisation

rests on mental processes that structure the world by making it intelligible and transformable. Schemas, i.e. hierarchically-organised and culturally-shared mental structures, process the social world and enable categorisation: they are contingently constructed cultural frames that impact on organisations' plan over the consolidation of group-making projects (Brubaker 2004; Hale 2008). High-level schemas are fixed, large-scale structural or cultural contexts; while low-level ones need be filled in by contextual clues (Brubaker 2004, 72-76). In this perspective, nations are the combined result of practical categories and situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, organisational routines, discursive frames (Brubaker 2004, 11).

Wimmer (2008; 2013) considers these premises and points explicitly to the boundary metaphor to theorise on the politics of the nation. Practices of identification are based on two dimensions that work as cognitive scheme at the individual level: a social boundary only exists when a categorical dimension - entailing a classification and collective representation of the world along an 'us vs. them' cognitive schema - is matched by a behavioural dimension, i.e. a condition that offers scripts of action on how to relate to members of "us" and "them" (Wimmer 2013, 9).

A Weberian understanding of group formation as a process of social closure contributes to the definition of ethnicity, nations and race as more than imagined communities; thus implying that representations of collective identity are driven by hierarchies of power and prestige they contribute to institutionalise (Brubaker 2009; Loveman 1999; Tilly 1998; Wacquant 1997; Wimmer 2002a).

Therein, practices of categorization are part of the struggle over power and prestige that lies at the heart of the process of social closure. The latter concept overcomes the dichotomy differentiating ethno-national groups as a product of self-identification from ethno-national categories as imposition from powerful and discriminatory outsiders (Jenkins 1994): the solution rests in distinguishing different degrees of closure and of groupness depending on which boundary may – or may not - separate groups properly (Wimmer 2013, 83–86).

To sum up, the top-down politics of categories enables group-making projects: states' organisations claim to represent a group and hold resources to frame relevant patterns of domination and exclusion along ethno-national lines. Nevertheless, the hold of nationalism shall be verified empirically (Malešević 2019; Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2002, 2013, 2019).

Groupness is in fact a contingent event that may not happen, this notwithstanding the pervasiveness of initiatives put forward by political entrepreneurs. Still, ethnicity is real even if there is a gap between organisations and the putative group they claim to represent (Brubaker 2004, 20-27): boundaries might not separate groups with objectively different cultures but still be marked with cultural diacritics that actors perceive as meaningful for advancing their interests. Furthermore, a boundary defining a group can be stable even if individuals shift from one to the other side of the divide; for such boundaries might still pattern the overall web of socio-political relationships (Wimmer 2008; 2013). A related conclusion is that conflict is primarily between organisations and empowered collective actors competing for power and claiming to represent groups, not necessarily between groups (Brubaker 2004, 12–15; Gagnon 2004).

1.2.3. Content matters: the ethno-symbolic approach to group-making projects

After the Cold War, popular contributions would argue for treating culture as an historically integrated whole impacting greatly on international and domestic politics (Fukuyama 1995; Huntington 1993).

In the theoretical debate and contra the assertion that it is mainly the boundary that matters in ethnic relations, ethno-symbolists emphasise that the cultural “stuff” may have the leading role in group-making processes. The analytical focus is thus on cultural material endogenous to communities and on the symbolic and myth-making aspect of nation-building that frame identities in conflict (A. D. Smith 1986; Hutchinson 2004; Kaufman 2001).

Ethno-symbolism relates to the theory of cultural nationalism as a key ideological norm that promotes and reinforces a distinctive vision of the nation

(Hutchinson 1987). Culture, and specifically symbols of collective historical experiences, are conceptualised as identifiers of ethnic groups. On this view, memories of shared pasts hold a constitutive role on national identity: any account discarding the cultural content cannot catch mechanisms endogenous to groups that allow to maintain boundaries (Hutchinson 2004; A. D. Smith 2009).

Hutchinson (2004, chaps 3–4) builds on the heterogeneity of the national ideal and conceptualises nations as ‘zones of conflict’: plural understandings of their definitions make them prone to cultural wars. Such an approach contradicts modernists’ emphasis on the integrative functions of nation-building (Gellner 1983): the nation is never hegemonic, it is always an outcome of reversible and conflictual processes that poses unpredictable challenges to political actors.

On the one hand, nations are culturally heterogeneous entities shaped by layered pre-modern experiences (A. D. Smith 2009). On the other hand, they are modern political products exploited by political groupings (Hutchinson 2004). These conditions enable the creation of cultural reference points for competing nationalist projects: the latter are proper of modernity; some conduct to modernisation, others to conflict.

In both cases, elites’ opportunity for framing competition along national discourses is contingent to the availability of appealing historical repertoires pertaining to past patterns of identity. In such a framework, myths dominate over social relationships (Kaufman 2001) and shape agents’ strategy when they hold affective leverage over the resolution of inter-state conflicts. Memories of shared pasts reproduce contemporary crises as manifestations of ancestral rivalries: they thus incarnate challenges to national security; they reify ancient friend-enemy stereotypes and present contemporary geo-political controversies as part of archetypal struggles (Hutchinson 2004, 109-112). These factors explain the recurrence of competing national repertoires as well as the political salience of traumatic memories of the past. On this view, individual action is primarily driven by emotions attached to myths and symbols, not by self-interested goals (Kaufman 2001).

There exists continuity between forms of social cohesion of pre-modern *ethnies* and those of modern nations (Armstrong 2017; A. D. Smith 1986, 2009; Hutchinson 2004): only a long-term perspective can tackle causes of national revivals, the role of persisting cultural differences within nations, and the emotional resonance of nationalist discourses.

Ethno-symbolists focus on historical collective interpretations of intergroup conflict because they ultimately establish the boundaries between culturally defined national groups. The conflictual politics of the nation is thus grounded in multiple myths, memories and cultural symbols, rather than in political competition (Hutchinson 2004; 1987, Chap 8). Networks' interests inform competing national models but cannot explain *per se* the recurrence of these models. Hence, modernists' implicit or explicit focus on boundaries and external categorisation is unfitted, for it ignores mechanisms endogenous to groups and that are preconditional to the maintenance of boundaries (A. D. Smith 2009).

1.2.4. Limits of ethno-symbolism

Ethno-symbolic approaches aim at discerning the cognitive leverage shared memories and myths exert on the politics of the nation.

On these grounds, ethno-symbolism recognises that modernity enables elites' instrumental mobilisation of ethno-national solidarity for self-interested purposes, but is sceptical towards state-centred views on dynamics of mass behaviour. Nationalism is about politics, but there are objective limits to elites' opportunity for manipulating the preferences of the public: the resonance of national narratives is affected by endogenous cultural material that ultimately accounts for degrees of national solidarity (Hutchinson 2004; Kaufman 2001). Such an understanding rests on several interrelated problems.

Malešević (2019, 44-45) notes that ethno-symbolic accounts build on an unfitted overlapping between ideology and culture which fails to address how cultural material actually intertwines to powerful ideological narratives and practices. It is therefore hard to account for political shifts that intervene on traditional myths and memories previously confined to the microcosm of local

realities and that are only with modernity turned into society-wide nationalist commemorations (see Brubaker 2004, chap 8). This change happens with the development of powerful organisational and ideological structures (Malešević 2019). Hutchinson (2004) recognises that the struggle over the nation is political; but sources for manipulation are structural to groups: the public is exposed to political activists' manipulation, but nationalism's mobilisation capacity rests on cultural material which is contested as such (Hutchinson 2004).

Relatedly, struggles for the definition of the nation are not driven by divergent interests, by political struggles over who does (not) belong to the core of the national project; but by memories and myths. Thus, agent-based approaches are complete only when they include cultural assumptions and symbolic resources (Hutchinson 2004). Indeed, historical myths and a sense of cultural distinctiveness lie at the core of national identity; they determine – rather than inform - strategies of coalition-building and political mobilisation. In this perspective, myths are pervasive and operate as causal agents (Kaufman 2001): the conflictual making of national groups is more about the meaning of the nation than about the quest for power and recognition by various actors.

Ethno-symbolists tend to adopt a “groupist” approach to dynamics of ethnic group (trans)formation (Cornell 1996). Such a perspective reproduces a substantialist vision of the social world and “treat[s] ethnic groups, nations [...] as things-in-the-world, as real, substantial entities with their own cultures, identities and interests” (Brubaker 2004, 78) rather than as political representations.

Lastly, ethno-symbolists treat patterns of national solidarity as endogenous to groups instead of tracing their emergence (Kaufman 2001), and fail to address the historical trajectories of nationalist sentiments (Malešević 2019). A focus on the stock in repertoires of historical memory overlooks the political underpinnings of group-making projects and does not question within- and between-case variation in the salience of specific cultural markers.

Ultimately, the approach fails to grasp dynamics by which contested historical memory can be successfully exploited only in selected contexts; and why confrontational narratives mobilise masses in some episodes and not in others.

1.2.5. The interaction between content and context from a constructivist perspective

Scholars have dealt with the shortcomings of state-centred explanations over nationalism while contributing to the constructivist tradition, thereby addressing the hold of historical myths without attributing them action.

The scholarship has pointed to the weak analytical potential of “cliched constructivism” (Brubaker 2004), i.e. the academic use of standard qualifiers that emphasise the malleability of identities. The position of radical constructivists denying *a priori* the relevance of cultural *differentia* has been found to be problematic (Wimmer 2013, chap 7); particularly with regards to the claim that ethnicity is always imagined, fluid and situationally dependent (see Chandra 2001, 2012; Kuran 1998).

Researchers have explored conditions under which culture makes a difference when interacting with mechanisms of boundary transformation, and have addressed the cultural underpinnings of identification processes (Conversi 1995; Cornell 1996; Jenkins 2008b; O. Zimmer 2003; in anthropology see A. P. Cohen 1985).

The relative strength of ethnic boundaries promoted by elites has been found to correlate to the relative strength of cultural content, particularly in contexts of conflict and confrontation (Conversi 1995, 81–82). In contexts of securitisation of ethnic relations, the basic oppositional process of boundary-making is surpassed by adversarial strategies that translate majorities’ attempt to prevail over minorities.

Conversi (1995, 77-81) distinguishes confrontational and antagonistic strategies, both aimed at emphasising cleavages and contextual differences rather than specific cultural content. Antagonism implies that identities being constructed are stressed for excluding non-members, and the definition of the boundary rests

on a radical re-evaluation of the positive traits of the in-group and a parallel devaluation of those of the out-groups. Similarly, confrontation emerges when the process of opposition takes particularly open and direct forms. In this perspective, if content is weak because the group to be mobilized is fragmented and/or assimilated, boundaries can be reinforced by enhancing borders rather than content.

Confrontation and antagonism between constituent groups augment chances of conflict: the latter tends to enhance unity among in-groups and to produce clear-cut boundaries (Gagnon 2004). Contextual factors inform elites' selection of core values that are exploited to define the location and meaning of the boundary: circumstances pertaining to the relation and balance of power between ethno-nationalist and moderate elites contribute in filling up dominant frames (Pytlas 2015). In this perspective, the selection of particular elements of a culture to modify principles of membership impact on the form of nationalist mobilisation and on the potential for conflict with the out-group.

Jenkins (2008c) shows that the cultural stuff interacts with circumstances within which collective group identities form. In contexts of ethno-political contestation, the cultural content turns into a boundary marker that defines not only the ethnic identity of competing groups but also patterns of conflict in which they engage (Jenkins 2008c, 114), thereby dramatizing the ethno-political differences between them. In the case of Northern Ireland, religious affiliation alters relations at and across the boundary defining ethnic groups. Religious institutions and the 'cultural stuff' come together in a consequential manner: the conflict is about (ethno-)political power, but the specificity of the cultural stuff determines that differences ascribable to religion impact significantly on degrees and types of confrontation (Jenkins 2008c, 125–27).

Variation in the content of collective identities interacts with circumstance, i.e. with situations, and leverages on patterns of group persistence.

Cornell (1996) demonstrates that group attachments based on shared interests are more prone to be a function of situation, and hence more vulnerable

to the impact of circumstantial change; when compared to those held together by shared institutions and even more by shared culture.

Circumstances constrain and shape ethnic identities but the content of those identities also mediates the effects of circumstances on ethnic identity change (Jenkins 2008c): it is key not only to consider how circumstance and action constrain identity but also how different types of identity shape circumstances and action that construct them on conflictual modes (Cornell 1996).

A focus on the interplay between the external and internal dimensions of practices of identification acknowledges the leverage of resonant cultural markers over categorisation practices but retains a focus on political processes – the latter are the primary explanation for augmented contestation and for the framing of group identities in conflict.

1.2.6. Strategic action and the mobilisation of cultural markers: the embeddedness of contested frames

Bourdieu's (1991) approach to states' symbolic power has helped in overcoming the tension between over-instrumentalist and culturalist understandings of national group-making processes.

The framework maintains that state organisations regulate legitimate principles of vision and division of the social world and emphasises the strategic struggle lying at the base of identification practices; thus allowing to overcome the problematic dichotomy opposing interests to identity in agent-based perspectives (Wimmer 2013, 4). On similar premises, cognitive approaches have addressed the shortcomings of over-instrumentalist understandings by bringing to the forefront mental components' impact on the politics of the nation (Brubaker 2004; Hale 2008; Varshney 2003).

Ideal and material resources mix up in an intertwined struggle in which the individual behaves strategically, not strictly rationally. Strategic action is not merely about economic and political gains; it includes honour and prestige, as well as personal security and psychological stability granted by the sense of belonging to a cohesive community (Wimmer 2013, 5).

Short and long term identity change is affected by socio-cultural, structural and situational factors, but is ultimately cognitively mediated by micro-level determinants that pertain to the domain of the mental, rather than of the individual (Brubaker 2004, 79-84). Ethnic understandings of social relationships are thus reproduced into cultural frames anchored to specific markers of history, memory, language; and inform elites' strategy of ethnic politics. On these grounds, ethnicity and the cultural material shall be analysed as pre-rational cognitive devices that reduce elites' uncertainty at the threshold of collective action, transform uncertainty into risk and *then* prompt the use of ethnic politics as self-interested strategy (Hale 2008, 78).

Ethnicity thus precedes utility-thinking, it enables interest-oriented action by helping to frame probabilities on how other groups' action will affect one's interests. This understanding avoids to link ethno-national identity to motives, i.e. to dispositions (Fearon and Laitin 2000; Kuran 1998), and relates it directly to political strategy; i.e. to the relational choice on patterns of action (Tilly 2015). Contrary to constructivist theories that overemphasize the fluidity of ethno-national identity, the relational stance maintains that national categories matter: ethnicity is not merely an instrument but a conceptual mechanism that functions as a rule of thumb for interpreting complex aspects of human relations and for opting for a particular strategy. It is however always constructed: there is no such thing as an inherently ethnic interest; rather, ethnic behaviour is driven by the desire for material goods, economic welfare, security and power which underlies ethnic politics.

In this perspective, both nationalism and ethnic conflict are about material resources as well as symbolic values (Bourdieu 1991; Petersen 2002; Varshney 2003): ethnic categories are privileged points of personal reference for navigating the social world (Brubaker 2004, chap 3); they can easily "thicken" - i.e. be associated to meanings of greater importance and thus be less amenable to cost-benefit calculations across masses, particularly in contexts of conflict (Varshney 2003).

Elites' strategy of political mobilisation rests on oppositional and/or confrontational frames; with this being particularly the case during episodes of mass mobilisation and power redistribution (McAdam 2000; Noakes and Johnston 2005; Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 1992; Zellman 2015). Elites' collective action problem is ethnically charged, but variation in strategies of ethnic politics depends on leaders' assessment of potential benefits and losses that could result from pursuing a particular strategy (Hale 2008).

The literature concerned with processes of mass mobilisation has bridged social psychological perspectives and resource mobilisation studies to systematise the leverage of historically constructed cultural frames that take the forms of - and at times crystalize - scheme of ethno-national identity. Such accounts address explicitly the political source of potent symbols of national identity (Snow et al 1986); and their exploitation through strategies of framing aimed at enforcing consensus across the public (Zellman 2015).

The focus on mobilisation strategies addresses why ethnic identities can be sticky, politically salient and highly mobilising without implying that high degrees of solidarity, shared identity and specific culture are endogenous to groups (Wimmer 2009). Key to the logic is the relationship between principles of political legitimacy and the configuration of power, i.e. the established patterns of exchange relationship over public goods and ideal resources that produce large-scale political identities centred on more or less exclusive national ideals (Wimmer 2012, 2013).

Cultural and socio-political processes come together through the institutionalisation of identification and categorisation practices and their reproduction into competitive modes of social interaction (Brubaker 1996; Jenkins 2008b; Wimmer 2012).

1.3 The strategic making of ethno-national boundaries: stability and change

1.3.1. Structural constraints and strategies of ethnic boundary-making

In Wimmer's theory on ethnic boundary-making (Wimmer 2013, 89-97), national divides are drawn according to conditions observable in three macro-level characteristics of the field:

- i) The institutional framework determines which type of boundary can be drawn in a given social setting in a meaningful and acceptable way
- ii) Unequal access to power of the constituent groups affects the range of interests according to which actors will opt for a particular level of differentiation
- iii) The configuration of political alliances allows to know where exactly the boundary separating "us" from "them" will be drawn

In this perspective, alliances are consequentialist for the location of the boundary separating one or more minority from the core national group.

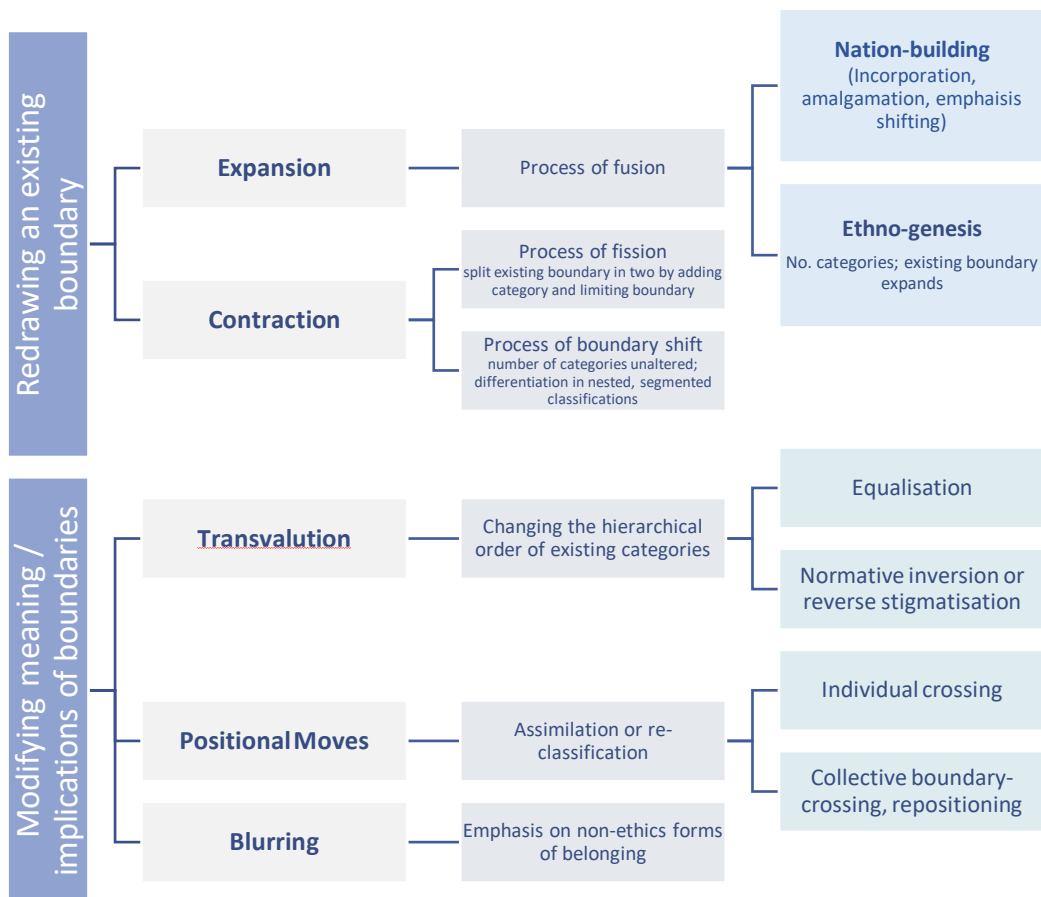
The opportunity for enforcing boundaries, changing their location and making them meaningful is informed primarily by the pervasiveness of the state's symbolic power and by political dynamics underlying the process of social closure. Such a perspective tackles the strategic nature of the struggle resting at the base of categorisation practices (Bourdieu 1991) and shifts the focus from Barth's on boundaries' reproduction to the one on boundaries' emergence and transformation (Wimmer 2013).

Wimmer distinguishes a taxonomy of strategies and means (i.e. actions to make a given strategy consequential) that can be deployed to (re)define the interests of the national group and the subordinate position of minorities (Tilly 2004; Wimmer 2013, 44-78).

The taxonomy assumes the existence of a previous historical process of group formation to which actors relate by trying to alter, change or (de)emphasize existing boundaries with the aim of institutionalising different forms of categorisation (Wimmer 2013, 49). State level actors hold a privileged

position for making their preferred modes of identification operational, but individuals' counter-strategies can effectively impinge upon the project of ruling elites (Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2013, 49-63).

Strategies aimed at redrawing an existing boundary are distinguished from those aimed at modifying the meaning and implications of a boundary.



Strategies of ethnic boundary-making, adapted from Wimmer (2013, 49-61)

Nation-building initiatives are privileged tools for state-level actors; they aim at redrawing an existing boundary and are classified as strategies of expansion proper of modernity (Wimmer 2013, 50-52). A process of fusion allows to consolidate the state around the contextual version of the nation-state dominant elites opt for. Nation-building usually promotes incorporation and translates

elites' efforts to redefine an existing ethnic group as the nation in which everybody should fuse.

Such a strategy may experience systemic lack of support when it fails to include important fractions of the population; such as in the case of many post-soviet states (Linz and Stepan 1996; Brubaker 1996). When accompanied with transvaluation strategies promoting reverse stigmatisation, nation-building triggers contestation over the meaning, location and legitimacy of national boundaries (Wimmer 2013, 52). In such cases, nation-building can be deployed from below to counter elites' vision of rightful divisions in society (Brubaker 2004, chap 4). Further, exclusive strategies of boundary shift can be used by local actors who do not have access to central resources and might find benefits in resorting to nested modes of identification (Wimmer 2013, 55).

When an individual accepts the definition of the boundary but refuses her position within it, she can undertake positional moves of re-classification and assimilation (Laitin 2005), individual crossing and collective boundary-crossing and repositioning (Wimmer 2013, 56-61).

The actual formation of national boundaries takes place at the interactional level and through the establishment of acceptable links between micro-level dynamics and macro-level organisational processes (Malešević 2013, 2019; Laitin 2005). In this perspective, the institutional framework and elites' opportunity for compromising enable and constrain the making of conflictual identities as envisaged by non-popular nation-building strategies.

1.3.2. Means: the importance of power allocation for making strategies consequential

The top-down politics of categories refer to means by which categories advanced to strengthen the nation are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalised, discursively articulated, organisationally embedded and entrenched in the social field (Brubaker 2004, 13).

Means deployed by the state level shed lights on the actual patterns of strategic action through which central organisations' preferred mode of

classification is inscribed into the social order. Wimmer (2013, 61-72) distinguishes means according to four types of resources deployed to make a boundary meaningful.

<i>Means</i>	<i>Type of resources</i>
Categorisation and Identification	Discursive and symbolic resources
Discrimination	Restricted access to goods, resources and relationships
Political mobilisation	Collective organisation
Coercion and violence	(Threat of) using physical violence

Means of ethnic boundary-making (Wimmer 2013, 61-72)

Categorisation and identification are used to define respectively relevant groups and who belongs to each group (Wimmer 2013, 64); they are key to implement nation-building strategies. Both point to the relational exploitation of identity claims in the political realm (Tilly 2004) and specify the agents doing the identifying without presupposing the existence of the identified; that is, without assuming that the mobilisation of discursive and symbolic resources will result in internal sameness. In fact, self-identification and identification by others are contextual processes (Barth 1969; Jenkins 2008), both can be pervasive without being accomplished (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The state holds a privileged position in mobilising and inscribing discursive and symbolic material into public narratives; still, individuals trying to cross or police a boundary can successfully resort to these means (Wimmer 2013, 65).

With these premises, means of discrimination can be a more effective tool to enforce specific distinctions. Degrees of formalisation of these means vary: legalised discrimination inscribed in states' legislation diverges sharply from internal, everyday discrimination that can be carried out by individuals outside the domain of state control. In between are means of institutionalised

discrimination that include formal and informal systems of preferential treatment in state administration and are performed even when they lack legal bases (Wimmer 2013, 66-69).

Means of political mobilisation emerge in patterns of claim-making and are deployed by both dominant and subordinate actors to make divisions politically relevant and salient; however contested they may be. They are particularly appealing by the time of critical junctures. Tools of frame theory (Snow et al. 1986) allow to explore how strategies of mobilisation are emphasised by various political actors so to have divisions endorsed by the public at large (Wimmer 2013, 69-70).

Means of coercion range from state-led forced assimilation to majorities' and minority activists' violent actions to reinforce a divide (Wimmer 2013, 72).

Degrees of differentiation will be pursued according to the actor's preference as to which level is perceived to further her interests. Thus, the allocation of resources among members of constituent groups impact on the capacity of the actor 'to shape the outcome', i.e. to have her preferred mode of identification and categorisation respected: power dynamics are key in granting recognition to actors' strategies of social closure (Wimmer 2013, 32).

Actors' disposal of power and resources determines which particular strategies and means of ethnic boundary-making and enforcement can be opted for.

In turn, interactional dynamics of negotiation enable a dynamic making and unmaking of national divides (Bourdieu 1991).

1.3.3. The negotiation of cultural compromises – manipulation and contestation

Contra ethno-symbolists' claim that endogenous symbolic values are key for the successful mobilisation of national identity, constructivists point to an interactional classificatory struggle that includes symbolic resources but remains political in nature. In this perspective, dynamics of negotiation between individuals and collective actors advocating for different categories are governed

by relevant actors' position in the hierarchy of power and by contingent interactions impacting on the location of political alliances.

A theory of cultural negotiation (Wimmer 2002a; 2013, chap 4) tackles explicit and implicit negotiation processes between actors who pursue different boundary-making strategies, and helps to explain how an acceptable compromise over a boundary happens to be shared in a given society.

The emphasis is on the informed, partial and strategic nature of consent granted to political leaders by subordinates. In this perspective, hegemony is a particular form of power and alliance configurations (Bourdieu 1991) rather than one of pure top-down domination. It follows that elites are bounded to the hegemonic accord as well, and they may uphold a representation of social divides even when it goes against their immediate self-interest. An agreement between groups and individuals endowed with different resources is more likely to emerge if their interests overlap at least partially, and this is often the case.

On these premises, strategies of classification concur to a sufficiently shared understanding of social interactions when there exists a sufficient base of complementary interests between actors (Bourdieu 1977; 1991). Empirical evidence sustains the claim that:

“the overlap of interests reflects a particular structure of resource distributions and political alliances – of actors who are mutually interested in an exchange of resources – that characterise a social field” (Wimmer 2013, 98-99).

Interests may be material or symbolic, they may be about power or prestige (Wimmer 2013, 5): individuals behave strategically regardless of the nature of their gains. The resultant consensus interacts with the distribution of power because it is linked to the exchange of resources; be they economic, political or symbolic ones.

Once the preferred version of the state is established, shifts within elite networks may reinforce some boundaries and de-emphasize others. Therein, political networks act strategically to uphold a given representation of salient divisions that they claim is legitimate and representative of the wider public's interests.

The most powerful state cannot monopolise the production and diffusion of identification modes (Hobsbawm 1986; Brubaker 2004): contestation is therefore a norm, even when it is not evident and explicit.

In multi-national societies, segmented preferences across the public might severely impinge on the stability of the social contract. This is particularly the case when levels of consensus are asymmetrical and/or partial; that is, characterised respectively by fundamental disagreement over the legitimacy and/or political meaning of the national divide (Wimmer 2013, 100-101). Sharp disagreement gains salience when competitive national norms are mobilised by political networks; such as in the case of Ukraine (Ryabchuk 2012; Way 2005b; Osipian 2015).

Intuitively, a partial and/or asymmetrical consensus over patterns of ethnic classification determines a potentially volatile but highly instrumental definition of the components the nation-state represents and of those it excludes.

Drawing on these premises, political entrepreneurs and activists of identity politics deploy the language of bounded groups not because it reflects social reality, but precisely because it is ambiguous and contested. Evidence from Ukraine and other former socialist countries suggests that such a strategy is even more appealing when cleavages are distributed along territorial lines (Petersen 2011; Charnysh 2013). The struggle is not between conflicting cultures or ethnic groups, but rather about culture and about the distribution of power among different organisations and their empowered incumbents who claim to represent ethnic groups (Brubaker 2004, 14-16). Even so, organisations' rhetoric has a performative, constitutive dimension (Bourdieu 1991): it can contribute to the actual making of the groups they evoke, this notwithstanding low degrees of cultural differentiation among members placed on the opposite line of the divide (Wimmer 2013; Conversi 1995, 1999; Jenkins 2008b).

1.3.4. Shifts in the location and meaning of ethno-national boundaries

Transactional approaches to boundaries shall not be reduced to pure instrumentalism, for political elites cannot manipulate constituencies at their

own discretion (Conversi 1999, 81). The scholarship has identified a number of mechanisms that lead to a hardening of ethnic boundaries, less strategic malleability, and thus more stability over time (Bentley 1987; Hale 2004; Wimmer 2002a).

The focus on the interplay between content and context allows to examine how the cultural material affects patterns of boundary change and persistence; while also maintaining that key to dynamics of political mobilisation is contestation about culture - and not a war between cultures.

Cornell (1996) builds on a three-dimensional typology of 'internal bases of ethnic attachment'; i.e. i) shared interests, ii) shared institutions and iii) shared culture. The content of collective ethnic identities varies from low to high in the degree to which each of these dimensions constitutes a basis for group attachment and collective action. When an ethnic group's identity is primarily built around shared culture as opposed to shared interests, this culture may act as a "filter" for the perception of interests, and thus influence the strategies of boundary maintenance: the resultant boundaries will be less amenable to strategic manipulation. Thick identities reduce the range of strategic options that actors dispose of and assume primacy over interest. Members of the group will thus be more likely to choose scripts of action that correspond to their ethnic category, to define their interests in terms of those of the entire ethnic community, and to respond to group pressure.

Cognitive perspectives find that long- and short-term changes in degrees of groupness do not solely depend on the content of representations but also on changes in the distribution of groupist representations within a population, on their accessibility and ease of activation, on their salience once activated and on the way they interact with key cultural representations (Brubaker 2004, 80).

Wimmer (2013, 79-89) identifies four dimensions of gradual variation of boundaries; i.e. degrees of social closure, political salience, cultural differentiation and stability over time. Gradual variation in the four dimensions depends on the interaction between structural and interactional variables: institutions and political networks determine whether ethnic boundaries matter

at all and, if they do, whom they encompass and whom they exclude; while the extent of power inequalities among groups and the reach of consensus are primary explanations for changes in the properties of ethnic boundaries.

In particular, the wider the consensus over a boundary, the more politically salient the boundary will be for alliance-building practices and the easier it will be to add dividing cultural markers. Conversely, a lack of consensus will make it hard to pursue effective strategies of symbolic boundary-marking. High degrees of power inequality between individuals of different ethnic groups lead to high levels of social closure, whereby the maintenance of a privileged position depends on membership in a dominant group. Therein, social closure easily leads to high degrees of cultural differentiation when strategies of symbolic boundary-making are put forward. Historical stability of the boundary derives from the three other dimensions: when salience and closure are low and cultural similarities not clearly demarcated, the boundary will change easily. In the opposite situation, levels of path dependency are reinforced by socio-psychological of identification that “thicken” divides (Wimmer 2013, 101-105).

On the one hand, actors' opportunity for acting strategically is constrained by macro-structural components' configuration at a given moment in time. On the other hand, changes within the three macro-structural characteristics can alter the effect of path-dependence. Specifically, when new institutions, political alliances and configurations of groups' inequalities enter the field, they produce exogenous shifts; while (un)intended consequences of strategies pursued by key actors might alter the field characteristics, thus leading to endogenous shifts. Furthermore, when new strategies from abroad diffuse in a field and are adopted by a group of actors, there are conditions for the production of exogenous drifts (Wimmer 2013, 106-10).

Drawing on the above observations, moderate political actors may have reasons to find meaning in a certain concept of the nation in dramatically changing circumstances and to mainstream resonant frames firstly owned by radical groups for the sake of preventing a dilution of power at the face of competitive networks (Pytlas 2015). All the same, changes to boundaries are the

outcome of political struggles rather than the quasi-natural result of shifts in cultural differences and social distance (Wimmer 2013, 27–29).

1.3.5. Sources of conflict and reproduction of confrontational boundaries

The concept of ethno-nationalist violence applies to qualitative forms of conflict whose origin is less in ethnicity and more in the power struggle between challengers and incumbents (Brubaker and Laitin 1998).

The eclipse of the left-right ideological axes and the decomposition of the Weberian state, i.e. the states' decaying ability to maintain a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in the post-bipolar world, reinforces the legitimising and mobilising capacity of discourses of political nationalism and incentivises elites' strategy of framing conflict in ethnic terms. Actions undertaken by key political actors may prompt the ethnicization of power struggles, which in turn exacerbates relationships among constituent groups (Bates, de Figueiredo, and Weingast 2016; Gagnon 2004; Goldstone et al. 2010).

When it comes to assess mid-term results of ethno-nationalist violence, transactional accounts imply the centrality of trajectories of negotiations between individuals and groups (Tilly 2015; Tilly and Tarrow 2015): in a constant give and take between political entrepreneurs and movement leaders, changes in interactions across established us/them boundaries impact on the shift from non-violent to violent forms of collective action. The focus is on alterations in relations among actors. Conflict facilitates nationalist elites' successful exploitation of internal factors, i.e. ethnic markers, aimed at creating core values for demarcating borders (Conversi 1995, 81). Cultural elements interact with the construction of boundaries, thus altering socio-political patterns that account for the maintenance of ethnic identities. Ethnic violence is the outcome of a process of political institutionalisation which is discursively mediated and culturally constructed (Brubaker 2004; Hale 2008). Processes of framing and narrative encoding are in turn crucial for patterns of violence, for they do not only interpret the conflict but may constitute it (Brubaker and Laitin 1998).

Hence, violence becomes ethnic through framing bias, i.e. through the meanings attributed to it, but this does not equate to subscribe to an overtly instrumentalist understanding (Brubaker 2004, 15-19). Ethnic conflict and violence are in fact rational in broad terms; i.e. not because of strict means-ends calculations, but rather because conflict makes sense in terms of its meaningful relations with other elements of the culturally defined context (Varshney 2003). The popular appeal of nationalist discourse is delimited by its resonance within existing social understandings that include cultural myths, symbols, and group histories (Petersen 2002; Saideman and Ayres 2008). The approach stresses the dominance of politics over culture but tackles the role the strategic manipulation of beliefs holds over the creation of political communities, thereby addressing the way ideological underpinnings impact on elites' and masses' action.

A relational blueprint addresses the shortcomings of dispositional accounts by locating pertinent issues of legitimacy, relative power and political grievances – the approach focuses on elites' strategic manipulation but accounts for the leverage constructed ideals hold over the functioning of ethnic politics.

1.4. Nation-state consolidation in diverse societies as a project of boundary-making

1.1.1. Relational underpinnings of national group-making projects

Transactional approaches take interactions among social sites as a starting point, and treat both events at those sites and durable characteristics of those sites as outcomes of those interactions (Tilly 2015, 14–15). Accordingly, the study of ethnic processes shall be centred on trajectories of negotiation between individuals and groups endowed with different resources and struggling with each other over legitimate principles of social divides (Gould 2003; Tilly 2015; Wimmer 2013).

The chapter has expanded on this logic by reflecting on Wimmer's theory of ethnic boundary-making to study the dynamic consolidation of national states. In this perspective, the creation of national communities rests on the construction

of meaningful divides whose location and meaning depend on the institutional framework and on the configuration of political networks at a given moment in time. In turn, individuals and groups endowed with different resources deploy categorisation modes to cross and/or alter a boundary by recurring to strategies that ultimately define the institutional framework in which the social world is reproduced.

The consolidation of the state develops from a sufficiently shared understanding over a form of nation-state, which is affected by previous state-structures and by the negotiation power of relevant actors; whereas patterns of inclusion and exclusion of different fractions of the population depend on levels of inequalities between groups and their empowered representatives. Macro-structural components combine with ongoing processes of negotiation and produce more-or-less stable classificatory scheme that become consequential for practices of closure. Multi-layered interactions are constituent part of the process because modern nation-states need non-elite members to enter a socio-political contract with their representatives (Mann 1986, 198; Tilly 1975; Wimmer 2012).

The relational stance addresses competitive interactions through which the (re)production of ethnic divides prevails over others, becomes less relevant for patterns of collective action or crystallises on relatively confrontational forms (Jenkins 2008b).

The classificatory struggle entails cultural as well as socio-political and economic processes: in this context, individuals' and groups' agency is always strategic, regardless of the type of gain (Bourdieu 1991).

Interactions between the public, political networks and institutional structures signal that the process is one of political brokerage: the width of political alliances is therefore consequential for the location and meaning of the divide separating one or more minority from the core national group.

Notwithstanding the mismatch of interests attached to the national ideal, the political struggle can lead to a large-enough consensus over the location and meaning of ethno-national boundaries (Bourdieu 1977; 1991). The latter are reproduced into state structures in the form of more or less exclusive ethno-

political identities (Wimmer 2012; 2013). An agreement between elites and masses emerges almost always on the basis of interests that are partially overlapping, but often complementary (Kroneberg and Wimmer 2012).

Modes of national identification are both a product of social (inter)action and a ground for future action (Brubaker and Cooper 2000): national boundaries stem from a contingent political process that can in theory be reversed (Wimmer 2002b; Hobsbawm 1986).

1.1.2. *Elites' manipulation of partial and asymmetrical consensus in multinational contexts*

In multinational states, initiatives of ethnic boundary-making are underpinned by contestation over modes of classification defining the core characteristics of the nation, as well as by the lack of an agreed understanding over the components of the group it represents (Linz and Stepan 1996). When competing networks mobilise opposed ideals of societal divisions, the political significance of the incongruity of national principles grows (Z. D. Barany and Moser 2005; Brubaker 1996).

A limited reach of consensus within the public may prompt higher degrees of political contests being framed in oppositional ethno-national terms. On these premises, asymmetrical levels of consensus - characterised by fundamental disagreement over the legitimacy of the boundary - and/or partial levels of consensus - characterised by disagreement over the political meaning attached to the divide –impinge on the stability of the cultural compromise sustaining the political order.

Against an established background of competition and confrontation over ethnicity and political power, the mobilisation capacity of contested markers may interact with the context and strengthen the emotional and symbolic value such markers hold across the public (Kulyk 2016; Petersen 2011). Hence, ethno-national markers of identification – included contested interpretations of history - contribute in altering political relations at and across the boundary defining competitive groups (Cornell 1996; Jenkins 2008c).

In some contexts, divergent strategies of boundary-making can be negotiated through cooperative action (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Larson 2017). In contexts of intense political confrontation, elite networks might systematically exploit the emotional resonance of ethno-national symbols at the expense of programmatic politics (Petersen 2011) and thus frame initiatives of state-building in a fashion that aims at (re)drawing identity lines along conflictual narratives (Conversi 1999). This process alters the symbolic and political meaning of national divides, impacts on patterns of exclusion and power distribution; and may debilitate patterns of legitimacy of state control over a given territory and its peoples.

Nationalism is inherently about contention, but is not purely an elite phenomenon: it shapes patterns of action and the allocation of political and economic resources.

Ethnicity and cultural markers are cognitive devices that reduce elites' uncertainty at the threshold of action and *then* enable the deployment of ethnic politics. The latter is about strategy and political struggle (Hale 2008,78). Hence, contested and symbolically resonant cultural markers are exploited to construct resonant frames aimed at defining new ethno-national identities: sources of highly-mobilising symbols of allegiances are political (Snow et al 1986); and originate in elites' struggle for stabilising consensus along a self-interested representation of the nation (Zellman 2015).

Markers of identification define not only the identity of competing groups but also patterns of political competition in which they engage (Jenkins 2008c, 114).

In the case of Ukraine, the national domain offers conflicting interpretations of the common history (Hutchinson 1987; Pytlas 2015). Drawing on the discussion so far, divergent ideals of history may be instrumental to elites to polarise the ethno-political differences between groups and to fulfil their interests while moving attention away from the pitfalls of programmatic politics (Kasianov 2012; 2019; Marples 2007; 2017; Osipian 2015; A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012; Portnov 2017; Umland and Yurchuk 2017).

In turn, the overlapping of political and ethno-national boundaries may furtherly exacerbate the significance of asymmetrical and partial degrees of consensus: cultural material and discourses impact on the political implications attached to the divide.

The strategic struggle may relate and be altered by three types of shifts. The political idea of the nation-state can be radically reviewed in light of shifts that are produced exogenously, whereby external institutions, political alliances and configurations of groups' inequalities enter the field and prompt a re-organisation of valid principles of national divides. Shifts can likewise originate endogenously to the field, whereby key actors' strategies produce (un)intended consequences that alter the field characteristics, thus stimulating the adoption of new strategies of boundary-making. Finally, exogenous drifts emerge with the diffusion of new strategies from abroad and their adoption by a group of actors (Wimmer 2013, 106–10).

National cleavages might be framed along symbolically-resonant cultural markers in changing conditions because of changes in political alliances and pursuits, or due to shifts in power disposal, included the one needed for making the selected level of differentiation operational. On these premises, moderate elites may adopt nationalist groups' exclusivist rhetoric not because they share radicals' visions of societal divides, but rather because they fear a dilution of power at the face of empowered groupings (Pytlas 2015). Therefore, when disagreement on boundaries combines with major variations in the social field, such as revolutions, it may foster the polarisation of contested ethnic boundaries along antagonistic and confrontational narratives (Conversi 1999; Wimmer 2013).

1.1.3. *Contested markers of national identity and violence*

Principles of legitimacy and power configuration jointly produce large-scale ethno-political identities that emerge from the exchange relationships people establish with each other; such identities are ideological rather than cultural and reflect power relations and contingent political pursuits.

The emphasis on the relation between boundaries and content implies that external factors, such as violence and conflict, might be key in strengthening identity cleavages separating groups when cultural differentiation is weak. Violence may superimpose boundaries on a situation characterised by fluid or even non-existing ethnic barriers (Conversi 1999, 567-71; Gagnon 2004). Insecurity over the self-preservation of a group makes of violence a boundary-reinforcing factor, thus producing impenetrability of borders and the situation in which adversarial frames are advanced by people sharing consistent cultural background. Groups in conflict may in fact experience difficulties in their self-definition: in such cases, ethno-national entrepreneurs may resort to fabricate new representations of identity that reinforce boundaries by emphasising negatively what lies 'outside' and opposing it positively to what is 'inside' (Conversi 1999, 554–55).

In this perspective, violence is a “fence-raising” separating tool independent of objective cultural differentiae (Conversi 1999, 560–73): it augments collective security dilemmas (Posen 1993; Roe 1999) and amplifies the resonance of cultural markers and hostility toward outgroups; thereby generating commitment problems across minorities (Fearon 1994, 1995; Powell 2006; for Ukraine see Kudelia 2014; Strasheim 2016). Such a perspective contrasts with the logic of “ancient hatred” and with civilisational interpretations which point to culture as a conflictual element *per se* (Kaufman 2001).

Boundaries may be imposed by human agents and by events (L. J. Cohen 1993): circumstances and shifts in political configurations may facilitate empowered actors' imposition of boundaries on a condition characterised by discrepancy over the meaning and location of national divides (Conversi 1999, 573-76).

In such contexts, cultural frames reproduce ethnic understandings for interpreting social relationships and impact on organisations' selection of preferred markers of national identification. Political actors take advantage of a collective coding bias that attributes legitimacy and resonance to national frames and emphasise such frames in order

to mask clan and class interests (Brubaker 2004, 17). In this perspective, contested interpretations of history may represent privileged markers for elites to overcome problems of collective action while fulfilling a self-interested access to central organisations (Hale 2008).

Such an understanding contradicts modernisation and globalisation theories, which downplay the problem of power inequalities between situated actors when studying shifts towards conflictual modes of national identification. It also contrasts with standard approaches in international relations that overlook changes in principles of legitimacy as a major cause for inter-ethnic wars. Contrary to over-instrumentalist approaches that focus on state capacity (Fearon and Laitin 2000), the approach prioritises principles of legitimacy, political grievances and power inequality as a cause of intra-state war.

1.1.4. *Conceptual underpinnings of the boundary metaphor*

The boundary metaphor allows to overcome several conceptual and analytical contradictions emerging from the scholarship on national group formation in diverse societies.

First, the framework avoids looking at group-formation processes while implying high degrees of in-group solidarity, shared identity and distinct culture: ethno-political boundaries do not emerge necessarily there, where cultural differences are objective, but rather where they relate to cultural diacritics that actors perceive as meaningful for gaining representation of their interests. A boundary can thus be stable even when individuals shift from one to the other side of the divide, for boundaries might still pattern the overall web of social relationships (Wimmer 2008, 2013). Such a logic contradicts those approaches that look at groups as unitary actors, and addresses the evidence that competitive claims to groupness may be put forward by persons that share an ethnic background (Brubaker 2004; Jenkins 1994, 2008b).

Second and relatedly, the framework takes on some problematic implications related to constructivists' emphasis on ethnic groups as imagined, flexible, situationally dependent entities (see, for example, Chandra 2012). The

interdependent relationship between structural and interactional variables specifies conditions under which ethnic groups are cognitively taken for granted, internally solidary and bounded, and marked by shared culture – and those under which they are not. Contingent processes that make group-making projects critical for power relations originate in the political grievances produced by power inequalities and in poor degrees of agreement on the meaning, location and legitimacy of national divides.

Lastly, a relational approach to the making of ethno-national boundaries sets aside Kohn's normative dichotomy over a good, western nationalism and a bad eastern one (Kohn 1944) which informs various studies on nationalism and conflict in eastern Europe (see Kuzio 2002 for a review). In fact, it also questions the consolidated analytical distinction between ethnic (cultural) and civic (political) forms of nationalism (Plamenatz 1976; Spencer 2014) which fails to grasp key implications of national processes and tend to be normative in nature (Wimmer 2002a, 20; Brubaker 2004, chap. 6). Some contributors have dealt with this normativity by pointing out that most polities display elements of both types of nationalism (A. D. Smith 2001). Others have criticised the notion of ethnic neutrality and have demonstrated that all western civic states are made up of ethno-cultural cores (Kuzio 2002) or have advanced alternative concepts to replace the dichotomous view (Kymlicka 2001; O. Zimmer 2003).

The notion of socio-political closure averts the dichotomy. The prioritisation and legitimation of more or less exclusivist definitions of the nation is contingent to the negotiation power of situated actors. This implies that competition, co-optation and coordination among political actors and the current configuration of power and resources are more important than institutional structures in prompting exclusivist forms of national identification. The rise of non-inclusive national norms and the opportunity for their crystallisation depend on alliance-building activities that affect the outcome of contingent strategic struggles.

1.1.5. *Changes in the location of boundaries as changes in political alliances: implications*

State-led nationalism does not originate in robust degrees of cultural homogeneity: both state-making and fragmentation result from the activity of actors rich in power position who claim to represent ethnic groups and seek to build regimes upholding a self-interested notion of the nation. Underlying social interactions ruled by principles of political negotiation determine whether the public perceives that its interests are compatible with the ones pursued by their governments: this implies that the configuration of formal institutions – included the type of regime – has little leverage over the opportunity for violent confrontation to emerge; nor it impacts directly on changes in the established location and meaning of boundaries. In this perspective, conflict and political violence exacerbate due to augmented levels of political struggle among ethnically-defined groups and the political leaders claiming to represent them (Wimmer 2012; Gagnon 2004).

This observation has a number of implications. First, ruling elites may pursue exclusivist policies and resist initiatives making governments more inclusive for they attach to such moves a dilution of their power at the face of competitors: the promotion of less antagonistic forms of identification may go against their proclaimed ideology due to situational power shifts in the field. Second, changes in the definition of the interests of the national group depend on modifications to rules of negotiation: this process has to do with alliance-building activities (Wimmer 2013). Third and relatedly, individuals may deploy categorisation modes in everyday interactions to resist modes expanding from central organisations, but changing the rules of the political game is beyond the reach of everyday agency (Chandra 2012; Wimmer 2013).

Categories shift according to changes in the configuration of power allocation, political networks, and institutional structures – and then they go down to interact with the micro-level dynamics. Embedded in the model is the mechanism of political closure: the nation emerges as states become more centralised, whereby effective degrees of centralisation go hand in hand with

better capacities to have situated actors to enter the contract that rests at the base of nations' legitimacy. In turn, practices of categorisation alter degrees of social closure, and the brokerage activity may result in changes over the control of power across dominant elites.

This perspective implies that in Ukraine and elsewhere, new modes of national identification are created, politicized, and opened to conflict *when* different nationalist aspirations enter in vivid contrast with political divides, thus springing in competing claims over power and territory. Contested cultural markers, such as antagonistic interpretations of history, are tools of the competitive struggle for power and prestige (Wimmer 2012, 2013; Gagnon 2004; Conversi 1995, 1999).

In order to explore shifts towards more confrontational modes of categorisation, it is crucial to expand on the rules of the game governing political competition and the configuration of power relations. The next chapter zooms on the conflictual making of boundaries across post-soviet states and reflects on contributions dealing explicitly with informal norms regulating state society relations.

CHAPTER 2

ETHNIC POLITICS AFTER SOCIALISM: A PATRONAL PERSPECTIVE ON UKRAINE'S CASE

The first part of the chapter reflects on ethnic politics across newly-formed states in transition from the USSR: the soviet legacy legitimises the mobilisation of oppositional, antagonistic or confrontational modes of national identification, but whether one will be excluded from the dominant group depends on the width of political alliances and on underlying patterns of power relations, rather than on relative state capacity and levels of authoritarianism (Wimmer 2013).

The second part of the chapter starts with the observation that political actors respond to a mix of formal and informal incentives (North 1990): the latter may interact and strengthen incentives to comply with formal ones (Siavelis 2006); but more often compete and undermine their effectiveness (Fisun 2007; Fisun and Hale 2019; Hale 2011; 2014; A. V. Ledeneva 2006; 2013; O'Donnell 1996; Sakwa 2010).

The research expands on the idea of patronalism as an informal equilibrium in Eurasian societies (Hale 2014): on this view, political competition is a struggle between self-interested networks of clients hierarchically organised around patron-chiefs, and regime dynamics respond to personalised mechanisms of power accumulation. Networks' collective action is shaped by expectations on current and future power balances, and may be altered by formal institutions and obvious trends across the public.

Revolutionary events may trigger networks' splits, which in turn open the system to new actors and produce a competitive situation of multiple pyramid politics.

The last part of the study reflects on the opportunity of integrating a patronal understanding of politics to the relational approach on the making of ethno-national boundaries. The regional distribution of identity cleavages in Ukraine signals that the country's "bipolarity" may hinder the consolidation of a unifying

ideological framework; however, more fundamental to the continuous process of contestation are embedded modes of alliance-building and power redistribution that function deceptively.

The patronal logic allows to bridge large-scale, institutionalised practices of identity construction to contextual processes of legitimisation, power shift and political struggle that account for growing degrees of contestation over national divides framed around contested markers of history and memory.

2.1. The processual reconstruction of boundaries in soviet successor States

2.1.1. The tightening of territoriality to ethnic groups during the soviet experience

Historical, political and institutional research on nation-building in soviet successor states emphasises Bolsheviks' recognition of national aspirations across the territory of the former tsarist empire (Z. D. Barany and Moser 2005; Bekus 2013; Brubaker 1996; Conquest 1993; Holquist, Suny, and Martin 2001). A widespread observation is that the socialist legacy provided incentives in framing legitimate patterns of self-determination along ethnically-defined territorial units.

The 1917 Revolution provoked unprecedented change, but the need to maintain a great state in the former tsarist Empire resulted in the preservation, formation and institutionalisation of ethno-national identities (Jones 1988; J. Smith 1999). In an age of sovereignty as norm, Soviet institutions could hardly advance claims of domination (T. Martin 2001; M. Beissinger 2005); further, the regime had to make an effort to win compliance among those nations that had known a period of independence prior to their inclusion in the socialist state. As a result, the USSR emerged as the world's first "affirmative empire", i.e. as a multi-ethnic state that confronted nationalism by systematically promoting minorities' national consciousness and by establishing many of the institutional forms typical of modern nation-states (T. Martin 2001). The legitimacy of the

Soviet Union rested on the denial of its imperial qualities and on an ambiguous exploitation of the nation-state model, whereby the state:

“project[ed] itself as a post-imperial form of power, a civic state that aimed to transcend national oppression in the name of class solidarity” (M. Beissinger 2005, 15)

The Leninist party-state took ethnicity seriously despite its foundational values of class revolution. The 1923 policy of indigenisation (*korenizatsiya*) aimed at integrating nationalities into a new polity while accommodating national cultural aspirations. *Korenizatsiya* anchored territorial administrative units to ethnic communities and encouraged the process of modern nation-building that had barely begun under the Russian Empire (Kappeler 2014). It stimulated the cultivation of native languages, national *intelligentsia* and elites; thereby contributing to institutionalise ethnicity within the state apparatus (Jones 1988; Brubaker 1996; Holquist, Suny, and Martin 2001). Both nationalism and communism were thus exploited to address the compelling challenge of modernising the vast territory of the new polity (Todorova 1992, 143).

The enforcement of minorities’ nationalities through a combination of political, educational and cultural measures happened against a background of dense struggle for the establishment of the soviet state (J. Smith 1999).

Throughout the 20s, the process was entrenched to competition between native elites in the borderlands and central organisations in Moscow (Conquest 1967; Mace 1982; Borys 1980). The Soviets directed developments from the centre but the policy created some support among minority populations (M. Beissinger 2005; Petersen 2005, 223).

Both *korenizatsiya* and the new economic policy (NEP) proved an effective means of political control in the periphery. On the one hand, the recruitment of native cadres to run the local administrative apparatus solved a practical problem of personnel shortage; on the other hand, it trained national leaders and gave some legitimacy to party rule in non-Russian areas (Jones 1988; J. Smith 1999, chap. 4). Although threatened by the centre, traditional practices were partially

reinforced through delegation of power to local authorities that could establish national languages and finance the production of cultural goods (Suny 1993).

The formal recognition of the right to national self-determination found a confirmation in the establishment of ethno-federal structures: union republics were motherland of mutually exclusive nationalities and would furtherly extend downward into a pyramid of territorialised ethno-cultural sub-units (T. Martin 2001). The latter were granted with a relative degree of autonomy, however structured under the ultimate authority of the centralised Communist Party of the Soviet Union - hereafter CPSU (Suny 2005, 3–4).

Throughout the 1920s, Bolsheviks' strategy of accelerating modernisation forces adds up to policies of affirmative action and to opportunities for national self-expression, thus producing a relative confidence among local elites (T. Martin 2001). The establishment of a federal colonialism institutionalises a tension between the centralised power and the (sub-)national units of the federation (D. J. Smith and Hiden 2012; G. Smith et al. 1998).

The proclaimed right to self-determination was of course instrumental to advance the cause of communism (D. J. Smith and Hiden 2012, 2) and rested on an uneven tension between principles of proletarian solidarity and ethnic diversity (Jones 1988). The slogan 'national in form, socialist in content' explicitly subordinates cultural pluralism to the goal of maintaining tight centralised control by a single party (D. J. Smith and Hiden 2012, 3). The strategic promotion of cultural and political rights of ethnic minorities was meant to undermine nationalism from within rather than attacking it frontally, and federal structures were meant to be transitional to the construction of a transcendent Soviet identity (M. Beissinger 2005; Conquest 1967).

The Great Terror and the purging of national-oriented elites brusquely reversed the formal process of national revival (Martin 2001), but ethnic politics hardly disappeared. In fact, Stalin's efforts for constructing a soviet people and the proletarianisation of the population indirectly contributed in making of ethnicity the main line of differentiation.

Notwithstanding the revision of the Leninist policy and the homogenization of the administrative apparatus, the salience of ethno-national cleavages in the field grew from the 1930s onwards (Suny 2005, 4).

2.1.2. Perestroika secessionism: structural and interactional incentives to the deployment of contested nationalism

The Soviet federal system was underpinned by dualism. On the one hand, Republics were made proto-states lacking only independence; and the system provided formal incentives to titular elites for advancing their republic's interests. On the other hand, federal units were controlled by a centralising party-state that would keep non-Russians - with the important exception of Ukrainians - out of key command posts (Linz and Stepan 1996, 369).

Sovereignty and self-determination were instruments of a non-consensual control that emerges through interaction between practices and oppositional politics rather than being structural to the polity (M. Beissinger 2005, 16–17). USSR contradictory structures were effective for managing nationalism because the party-state had total command of power. The weakening of the centre during perestroika prompts a sense of mutually exclusive and territorially-privileged national identities: unchanged structures produce new dynamics under unprecedented conditions, and incentivise the political mobilisation of ethnicity (Suny 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996, 379).

Republican units tightened territoriality to nominal state-bearing nations, thus providing ready boundaries and relative degrees of international legitimacy for advancing claims of separatism (M. Beissinger 2002, 2009; Linz and Stepan 1996; Petersen 2005, 225; Suny 1993). Both the institution of ethno-federalism as a means of cultural containment and of the Warsaw pact as a means of international control shape the collapse of communism (M. Beissinger 2009).

The system conducts to oppositional claims to nationhood (Brubaker 1996), while the implementation of perestroika and glasnost policies and the electoral sequence of the late 80s incentivise local elites' choice to play the ethnic card (Hale 2008; Linz and Stepan 1996, 370–76). Gorbachev's privileging of

liberalisation over democratisation, and central elites' decision to hold the first free elections at the republican rather than at the all-Union level hold disintegrative consequences. On the one hand, these moves eroded the party-state's ideological and coercive capacity; on the other, they contributed in making of nationalism the most dynamic force in politics (Linz and Stepan 1996, 320). Campaigns for the 1989 regional elections strengthen the legitimacy of republican elites' sovereignty claims; while the mobilisation of nationalist sentiments exacerbates relations with the centre. The parade of sovereignty leads to a quest for a new form of union, and Gorbachev's Referendum in March 1991 precipitates disintegration (Linz and Stepan 1996, 382-386).

On these grounds, regime-initiated change mobilises territorially-based nationalities against the state (Suny 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996, 372-73; Hale 2008): the potential for secessionism is endogenous to Soviet structures, but strategic action is key to the outcome.

New central-level institutions produce uncertainty, and national identity alters local elites' strategy in favour of ethnic politics. Moves for separatism are driven by an ethnically-charged collective action problem: ethnicity and national identity alone do not create the minority's commitment problem, but are key in exacerbating the risk of exploitation in continuing integration in a union dominated by Russians. Concrete interests, and in particular economic motives, are at the core of local elites' activity of manipulating the public preferences (Hale 2008).

Interactional dynamics signal that regional leaders' success ultimately depends on degrees of legitimacy they capture across masses, other than on a relative capacity they hold in relation to the centre.

Indeed, the public too is affected by the privileging of discourses of nationalities' collective rights over those of individual rights. During the last stage of perestroika, values of independence outweigh those of democratisation, and nationalism proves the most effective means of mass mobilisation (Linz and Stepan 1996, 254; Beissinger 2009). In fact, democratisation and economic concerns produce autonomous streams of contention, but the strongest pressure

for both issues comes from movements that also uphold nationalism (M. Beissinger 2002).

National claims spread transnationally through chain reactions that multiply streams of contention. State structures enable and constrain the effect of one nationalism over another (M. Beissinger 2002, 75–79; 2009, 336–39) but institutional change results from processual interactions: independence originates in the mobilisation capacity of the shared frame of “nationalism as liberation” (Bremmer 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996).

2.1.3. *The consolidation of independent states: majorities’ mobilisation*

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, ethno-political conflicts replaced the pre-1991 ideological disputes (Brubaker 1996; R. Isaacs and Polese 2016; Kolsto 2000; G. Smith et al. 1998).

Ethno-territorial structures inherited from the Soviet Union facilitate the shift to the nation-state model: the nationalist agenda of perestroika is inscribed into the institutional framework of successor states. Accordingly, ruling elites’ strategies aim at deepening, codifying and realising the collective rights of “their” nation (Agarin 2010; Bremmer 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996).

Institutions sustain a transition to sovereign republics where political, social and ethno-cultural markers match the boundaries of the new nations (Chinn and Kaiser 1996; Kolsto 2002). However, the boundaries of national communities and the official ones could hardly coincide, and nation-building emerges as a contested activity of minority construction: defining who makes up the nation is paramount for reconfiguring power balances.

New states’ actors draw upon categorisation modes inherited from the soviet system: nation-building initiatives are thus pursued to expand embedded national divides. Intuitively, these strategies coexist and are surpassed by actions aimed at redrawing existing categories and at modifying the meaning and implications of ethnic cleavages: a primary mode would consist in inverting the hierarchical position of domination which had been established under the rule of the CPSU; thus making of Russians a subordinate group. Projects aimed at

strengthening state capacities rest on contested means that are not only about the representativeness of newly formed polities (Motyl 1992; Tishkov 1997) but also about the distribution of power among constituent groups and their empowered representatives.

Means of categorisation add up to discrimination modes that foster strategies of normative inversion or reversed stigmatisation, and aim at forging a common sense of belonging by shifting power relations between majority and minority groups (Chinn and Kaiser 1996; Kolsto 2000; Laitin 1998; G. Smith et al. 1998).

The soviet legacy enables rapid nationalist mobilization and conducts to a political field dominated by contested nationalism (Martin 2001, 73; Brubaker 1996). The struggle quickly turns former communists into successful nation-builders: in Ukraine and elsewhere, former nomenklatura networks exploit the appeal of nationalism to outmanoeuvre popular movements and to root a firm hold on the levers of economic and political power (Aves 1994, 211–12; Kolsto 2000; Kulyk 2001; G. Smith et al. 1998; Suny 1993, 156; Tishkov 1997).

Nation-building is thus a symbolic component of regime-building, and contradictions left by the Soviet nationality policy impact on resolutions over language policies, citizenship, minority rights (G. Smith et al. 1998). The cultural, historical and socio-economic legacy embedded in institutions favours the enactment of top-down oppositional ethnic politics within and between newly-formed polities.

State organisations enjoy a privileged position in making a division politically relevant, publicly acknowledged and culturally legitimate; means of indigenisation of public administrations coexist with those of de-sovietisation and of (re)invention of traditions through cultural national revival.

Such strategies often aim at building homelands for nominal state-bearing nations and at weakening resident minorities' political influence: titular nationalities develop privileged relationships with the political institutions of 'their' independent state, while minorities are pressured to come to terms with a position of submission (King 2010). New relations of domination imply that

claims of national liberation are rejected when advanced by non-titular nationalities (Bremmer 1993, 16–17).

Nation-building is grounded in a security dilemma vis à vis an “other” neighbouring state, the latter usually being identified with Russia: minorities are the enemy’s potential collaborator and shall not be accommodated, because they harbour irredentist aspirations to the territory (Agarin and Karolewski 2015). Hence, ethnic relations need be securitised to reduce minorities’ impact on politics (Kymlicka and Opalski 2002).

2.1.4. Minorities’ mobilisation and renegotiation of state-led strategies

The emergence of nation-states designed for promoting the interest of titular state-bearing nations contrasts with the coexistence of peoples with divergent cultural-national and political aspirations. The embeddedness of groupist rhetoric in organisations’ structures implies that ethno-nationalist discourses may be advanced simultaneously by opposing groups; both contesting that the “interests of a putative nation are not properly realized in political institutions, practices, or policies” (Brubaker 1996, 79).

The soviet legacy leverages on minorities’ mobilisation capacity, for all groups may advance claims for building their state-bearing nation out of a soviet-inherited federal unit (Agarin and Karolewski 2015). Bremmer (1993, 11–21) refers to a ‘matryoshka-nationalism’ that produces a spiral of separatism of one group from the other (Bremmer 1993; Kolsto 2002).

Nationalising states’ policies lead to the mobilisation of minorities (Evans 1998; Laitin 1998; Motyl 1992; Petersen 2002; 2005, 224–25; Rothschild 1981; Suny 1993): the latter must contend not only with the nationalising nationalism of the state they live in; but also with the self-interested nationalism of the kin state of which they are not citizens.

Forms of national mobilisation vary, but the reshaping of ethnic hierarchies does not necessarily lead to conflict. Structural legacies and multi-layered patterns of political negotiation produce potentially-everchanging outcomes (Linz and Stepan 1996; Batt and Wolczuk 2013; Sasse 2001).

Evidence from Estonia and Latvia suggests that Russophones' positive attitude towards perestroika enacts an identity crisis in being categorised as a Russian (i.e. Soviet) irredenta. Throughout the 90s, independent Estonia deploys a discriminatory language policy aimed at reducing the number of Russophone residents. Linguistic markers limit minorities' opportunity for assimilating into an ethno-centric polity but contrast with a relative openness to subjective identification with the new state. The minority group's response is undertaken against the background of heavy costs to return in the 'homeland'; and thus impinges on ruling elites' expectations over a spontaneous out-migration of Russians. Instead, a growing number of Russophones starts sending children to Estonian-language schools: markers of ethno-political identification gradually become individuals' choice out of social givens (Linz and Stepan 1996, 410-15; Laitin 2005). The weakening of the Estonian nationalist coalition, EU's pressures to ensuring minority rights and the political fragmentation of Russophone elites furtherly renovate dynamics of party competition: by the late 90s, representatives of the Russophone minority join coalitions with Estonians and start to more effectively pressure for a policy of integration (Laitin 2005, 52-57; Linz and Stepan 1996, 220).

Both individual-level positional moves - included transvaluation strategies of assimilation - and alliance-building dynamics "force" central organisations to review the expulsion strategy and the exclusivity of the national boundary as defined by discriminatory policies (Laitin 2005; 1998). By the early 2000s, the two constituent groups and their representatives compromise on a fragile policy of integration and join together a second integration into the EU political framework (Laitin 2005, 70-71).

Ukraine's case signals instead that the renegotiation of the representativeness of the state and of the balance of power among political forces can be effectively undertaken at the sub-national level of administration. In south-eastern oblasts, Russophone residents successfully organise to establish their representatives' dominance (Kulyk 2001, 213) and political regionalism proves an efficient "balancing mechanism" for limiting central organisations'

nationalising moves (Sasse 2010). Hence, Ukrainian was declared the only state language, but the policy remained *de facto* diversified across the country (Sasse 2010, 102; Arel 1995a; Kulyk 2006).

Further, regional differences alter the process of constitutional design, whereby competition between local and central-level powerful actors and the bargaining power of former nomenklatura members in the Parliament contribute to the inscription of political rather than “thick” ethnic markers of national identification in the final document (Kuzio 2016b; Wolczuk 2001; 2002).

Renegotiation practices in the south-east originate in the successful mobilisation of regionally-distributed markers of national identification, as well as in south-eastern actors’ privileged access to formal and informal political levers and thus in their bargaining power *vis à vis* the centre (Birch 2008).

On the one hand, the regional mobilisation of ethno-political and socio-economic interests and the predominant role of informal but powerful actors impact negatively on the opportunity for building a democratic state (Birch and Zinko 1996; Nemiria 2000). On the other hand, the same factors force relevant actors to compromise and resolve most contentious issues of nation-building in a non-violent manner, this notwithstanding the ambiguity of most of its outcomes (Sasse 2001; 2010).

2.1.5. Structures of power and contested nation-building: the leverage of dysfunctional modes of political competition

However projected towards establishing class awareness, the Soviet Union was first and foremost an incubator of nationalities (Suny 1993; 2005): ideals of national solidarity remained ineradicable throughout the soviet experience and eventually clashed with those prescribed by socialism (Conquest 1967; 1993).

During perestroika, macro-structural features enable and constrain actors' room for pursuing desired strategies of ethnic boundary-making:

- i) The institutional framework favours the ethnicization of politics: the embeddedness of ethno-national modes of categorisation in federal

structures facilitates the shift to national models of statehood and the mobilisation of markers of national identity.

- ii) At the level of power disposal, republican elites' access to structures of national sovereignty bolsters the exploitation of national frames as well as the legitimising capacity of strategies aimed at affirming majorities' dominant position and at minimising Russians' impact on political outcomes.
- iii) The exact location of alliances made up of old and new political actors shape the meaning and exclusivity of national categories: where exactly the boundary separating the majority from minorities lies depends on brokerage activity and compromise propensity.

Ethno-national and political grievances erupt in 1991: new states' elites are encouraged to institutionalise political nationalism on a territorial basis and according to principles of cultural and language exclusivity, for they perceive that the titular group's interests are underrepresented in current structures (Brubaker 1996). Security dilemmas *vis à vis* Russia facilitate the shift towards confrontational modes of identification. On the one hand, states' strategies of reversed stigmatisation open doors to minorities' mobilisation of victim-based identities for self-defence purposes and thicken boundaries along antagonistic modes of categorisation (Petersen 2005, 231). On the other hand, polarisation is not inevitable: modes of identification and categorisation are chosen transactionally by both elites and masses to maximise certain preferences. Repeated interaction alters the degree of socio-political closure, thus renovating the meaning and legitimacy of cultural compromises (Laitin 2005, 71–72).

Formal institutions are the major source of legitimation, but the continuous process of ethnic boundary-making is governed by principles of negotiation as well as by acceptable degrees of consensus over the legitimacy, meaning and location of national divides (Petersen 2005, 229).

The short discussion of the cases of Estonia and Ukraine suggests that shifts in the exclusivity of national divides are indeed contingent to elites' configuration and to relevant actors' disposal of power and resources (Wimmer 2013): the

latter depends on formal and informal modes of interaction, rather than on state capacity and type of regime (Grødeland, Miller, and Koshechkina 2000; Grzymala-Busse 2008; 2010; Wolczuk 2002).

In Ukraine and other non-Baltic post-soviet states, fluctuating transitional institutions favour the establishment of a dominant position for old nomenklatura and decentralised non-state actors – e.g. local political machines and oligarchs - that tend to be organised according to dysfunctional informal rules and rent-seeking mechanisms of power accumulation (Fisun 2007; 2012; Hale 2011; 2014; Kudelia 2012; Puglisi 2003a; Van Zon 2000; 2001). Lowered institutional constraints enabled both members of the former Soviet establishment and new economic entrepreneurs to strip the state of key assets (Fritz 2007, 116–17). As privatisation plod along, agents linked via patronage to top nomenklatura leaders engage in state capture practices using their privileged advantage to pile up illicit but not illegal profits (Åslund 2009, 48–55; Havrylyshyn 2006; Birch 2008; D’anieri, Kravchuk, and Kuzio 1999; Puglisi 2003b; Solchanyk 1994; Van Zon 2001). These conditions allow to maintain formal or informal relationships with the ruling class, included ministries and the presidency (Minakov 2018, 114), and to strengthen power bases within the administrative structures (Fritz 2007, 119-20).

Drawing on these premises, the next section expands on the claim that political processes in former soviet states are governed by informal rules produced by these relations (Fisun 2012; Grzymala-Busse 2008; Hale 2011; Helmke and Levitsky 2006; A. V. Ledeneva 2006; 2013; Sakwa 2010), and that the latter may distort the outcome of nation-building projects.

2.2. Patronal politics in Eurasian societies

2.2.1. Defining the domain: informal institutions as strategic coordination

In North’s classical definition, institutions – both formal and informal - are rules and procedures that structure social interactions by constraining and enabling actors’ behaviour (North 1990, 3–4).

The differentiation between formal and informal institutions and the definition of the latter is object of debate.

Some scholars build on the state *versus* society distinction: state agencies and state-enforced rules are conceptualised as formal institutions, while norms and organisations of the civil society are maintained to be informal (Manor 2001; Tsai 2002). Another broad differentiation looks at informal norms as self-enforcing and at formal norms as enforced by a third party, usually the state (Knight 1992; Calvert 1995).

Some contributions tend to conflate informal institutions with culture, values and traditions that are proper of given communities; in this perspective, socio-cultural features provide informal constraints to relevant actors' strategy (Pejovich 1999, 166).

Patronage and clientelism are primary examples of informal practices that corrode democracy (Ades and Di Tella 1999; Knack and Keefer 1995; Persson, Tabellini, and Trebbi 2003). Dichotomous views of clientelistic *versus* civic polities emphasise the dyadic, semi-legal relationship that characterises electoral malpractices and forms of corruption (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994). Patrons and clients are thus tightened by an inherent sense of obligation other than by a profitable exchange of resources (Aizenshtadt, Eisenstadt, and Roniger 1984, 48–49). According to this view, cultural features normalise the presence of private modes of interaction in the public sphere; and developmental distortions contribute to the unwholesome confusion between the two fields.

The culturalist approach is relatively popular across contributions on countries in transition from socialism that treat informalities as processes grounded into broader socio-cultural traditions (A. C. Ledeneva 1998; Misztal 2000; Morris and Polese 2013; 2014; Round and Williams 2010). The pervasiveness of informal economic practices in Eurasia stimulates an emphasis on the embeddedness of informal institutions into cultural patterns peculiar to the region (Abdih and Medina 2013; Alexeev and Pyle 2003; Aliyev 2015; A. Smith and Stenning 2006; Wallace and Latcheva 2006). In this perspective, the severity of economic marginalisation and the rent-seeking disposition of state

officials determine that informal institutions have greater leverage in post-soviet states than in other economies, with this being true also at the level of everyday transactions (Round and Williams 2010, 189–91).

Culturalist approaches emphasise the leverage of historical experiences that produce an effect of path dependence and thus address why informal practices persist in different conditions and along extended timespans (Hendley 1999). However, the conceptualisation of informality as a structural feature reproduces a problematic determinism over the embeddedness of these practices in historically-given, static contexts. As a result, it is difficult to discern cultural practices from informal institutions (see Aliyev 2015), and to address their adaptation across varying structural features, with this being particularly problematic given the magnitude of change brought about by the dismantlement of the USSR (Gel'man 2012).

In order not to conflate informality with culture, part of the literature emphasises the strategic nature of informal practices. Helmke and Levitsky (2006, 7) conceptualise informal institutions in terms of coordination strategy and define them as shared expectations that may or may not be rooted in societal values. Formal institutions "are rules and procedures created, enforced by channels widely accepted as official" (Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 6), while informal institutions are:

“socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels” (Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 6)

Hence, informal institutions emerge out of an historically contingent process which is less the product of actors' design than the one of historical experiences that create socially shared expectations (Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 5–6). The opportunity for informal institutions' emergence, adaptation and change depends on two dimensions of interaction between informal and formal practices; i.e. degree of convergence of the outcome and effectiveness of the relevant formal institution: on these grounds, the authors distinguish complementary, competing,

accommodating, and substitutive informal institutions; none of which excludes the other (Helmke and Levitsky 2006, 13–19).

The establishment of informal institutions is thus the culmination of a bargaining process in which actors seek to maximise their benefits in contexts of uneven distribution of resources (Mejía Acosta 2006; Samuels 2006; Langston 2006; Eisenstadt 2006).

Piattoni (2001, 2) defines clientelism and patronage together as:

“strategies for the acquisition, maintenance and aggrandizement of political power, on the part of the patrons, and strategies for the protection and promotions of their interests, on the part of the clients”

Thus, clientelism and patronage are processes of exchange relations ruled by economic principles of benefit maximisation (Graziano 1976) and driven by incentives and disincentives; they are neither a cultural pathology nor a developmental disfunction (Piattoni 2001, 2–4). Institutional circumstances form a supply side that induces party leaders to adopt clientelism and patronage; societal circumstances contribute to a demand side that makes citizens and groups willing to grant votes in exchange of benefits (Piattoni 2001, 16–18). The economic approach overcomes the dyadic definition of patron-client relations, thus downgrading the idea of emotional attachment which would reveal a traditional nature of society (Piattoni 2001, 6–11): accepted political ideologies and forms of particularistic politics interact in a dialectical relationship between what is desirable and what is practically possible.

The strategic nature of particularistic politics points to actors’ ability to interact and adapt to contextual circumstances: the diffusion of informal practices is connected to but not determined by changes in institutional and historical circumstances that make these strategies socially acceptable and politically viable.

In this perspective, both clientelism and patrimonialism can be more effectively inspected as forms of state capture, i.e. as strategic action aimed at extracting assets from the state (Grzymala-Busse 2008; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Kitschelt 2000; Chandra 2007; Verdier and Robinson 2002).

Grzymala-Busse (2008) differentiates clientelism from predation, exploitation and fusion; all of which are strategies of state capture that contribute in building formal institutions that furtherly perpetuate the particular form of capture.

Framing informal institutions and particularistic politics as strategies implies that individuals' and collective actors' choice shall not be interpreted strictly in terms of institutional and structural context, even if the latter can influence whether to adopt these practices (Piattoni 2001); or provide guidance for elites' coordination around one particular leader (Hale 2014). This is particularly salient in countries in transition from authoritarian rule, where the effectiveness of formal institutions has been found to be endogenous to informal practices of political competition among actors guided by unwritten rules of the game (Grzymala-Busse 2010; Fisun 2012).

In a nutshell, structures do not immediately constrain actors' choice because they must be appraised to be constraints before they act as such (Piattoni 2001, 18).

2.2.2. Patronalism as a dominant informal equilibrium in non-Baltic soviet successor states

Research on informal practices in the former USSR emphasises less the transition from a properly authoritarian rule to a democratic condition and more the peculiar deviation between informal and formal practices (Fisun 2012; Gel'man 2004; Grzymala-Busse 2008; 2010; Hale 2011; 2014; Levitsky and Way 2010; Magyar 2019; Sakwa 2010; Way 2016; 2005a; 2005b). A basic observation is that transition and democratisation paradigms are insufficient to grasp fundamental dynamics of political competition (Carothers 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; 2010).

Evidence over feckless pluralism signals that a middle-ground condition of neither fully-fledged democracy nor outright dictatorship can stabilise into a state of normality in most transitional contexts. A form of "dominant power politics" emerges where a strong political grouping coexists with limited but real political space (Carothers 2002, 11-18).

On these grounds, Levitsky and Way (2002, 52) identify contexts of competitive authoritarian systems, i.e. hybrid regimes:

“where formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy”

Basic institutional forms of democracy exist, but dominant networks may control the system to the extent that prospects for power alternation are at minimum (Carothers 2002, 11-12).

Research on politics in post-soviet states finds that informal arrangements of monopolistic appropriation of public, political, and economic power weaken the opportunity for constructing genuine competitive democracies. In non-Baltic successor states, old political elites and new non-state actors engage in rent-seeking mechanisms with the aim of preying on state resources, thus deepening states' weaknesses (Åslund 1994; Fisun 2012; Fisun and Hale 2019; Grzymala-Busse 2008; Hale 2014; Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann 2000; Kudelia 2012; Kuzio 2016a; Puglisi 2003a; 2003b; Van Zon 2000; 2001). As a result, such states are saturated with competitive and substitutive informal institutions (Minakov 2018, 123).

These dynamics suggest that processes of state-building shall be analysed by shifting the attention from formal outcomes to the political struggle which is peculiar to post-soviet states (Fisun 2007; 2012; Fisun and Hale 2019; Hale 2014; Hale and Orttung 2016; Levitsky and Way 2010; Way 2016).

On these grounds, state formation has been reduced to elites' competition over the authority to create policy and policy-making institutions (Grzymala-Busse and Luong 2002). In this perspective, informal patterns of elite competition interact with weak state structures and influence the development of the formal institutional framework (Grzymala-Busse 2010), thus contributing to dysfunctional institutional transformation (Way 2002). The peculiarity of networks' organisation thus correlates to weak rule of law, systemic corruption and low social capital (Hale 2014, 28; Minakov 2018, 125).

Fisun (2012; 2010) draws on the Weberian concept of patrimonialism to explore the conditions that produce an apparent inseparability between private accumulation and state management. Soviet successor states display neo-patrimonial features, whereby politics rests on a modification and rationalization of the patrimonial system of domination which was proper of the Soviet Union. In this context, formal democratic institutions (e.g. electoral competition, constitutions, parliaments and multi-party systems) function deceptively because they are subjugated to a patrimonial logic of resource appropriation (Fisun 2012, 89). Informal relations between patrons and clients are *de facto* more fundamental than rational-legal ones, because they govern the access to political and economic power and resources (Fisun 2012, 92).

The persistence of meaningful democratic institutions in the arenas of electoral contests, media, the legislature and judiciary system signals that contestation from opposition forces may periodically challenge and occasionally subvert the *status quo* (Levitsky and Way 2002; 2010).

Against this background, Way (2005a; 2016) approaches soviet successor states as unconsolidated autocracies rather than as emerging democracies (Way 2005a, 232). Here, political competition originates in a form of pluralism by default: democratic features are less the result of robust civil society, effective democratic leadership or institution-building efforts, and more the outcome of networks' splits caused by incumbents' inability to maintain and concentrate the power needed to consolidate authoritarian rule (Way 2016). Hence, informal underpinnings remain in place even when democratic leaders are elected (Fisun 2012; Hale 2014; Way 2016; 2005a), because they produce a form of social relationship embedded in conventional political practices (K. Zimmer 2008).

Democratic leaders might find it necessary to build alliances with authoritarian defectors in order to stay in power, with this being the case of post-Orange and post-Maidan Ukraine (Fisun 2017; Jarabik and Minakov 2016; Minakov 2018, 117–21, 221–39; Jarábik 2015). Political dynamics thus stem less from patterns of regime change and more from a relative fluctuation: peculiar regime cycles

produce diverse but predictable equilibria (Carothers 2002; Hale 2011; 2014; Levitsky and Way 2010; Way 2016; 2005a).

Hale's theory on patronal politics (Hale 2014) explicitly aims at explaining regularities in political dynamism across Eurasia. Patronalism is defined as:

“social equilibrium in which individuals organise their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalised exchange of concrete punishments and rewards, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles such as ideological belief and categorisations that include many people one has not actually met in person” (Hale 2014, 20).

Patronal networks are key collective actors made up of clients organised around patrons that control the distribution of power and resources.

The political game is personalised and verticalized, and consists in a competition for power and resources among patron-clients' hierarchical structures: the patrons who control the variety of vertically distributed clients *de facto* control the country. Patronal networks can be reduced to three sets of collective actors: i) Local political machines, typical of the 90s; ii) giant politicised corporate conglomerates, such as oligarchs; iii) Branches of the state apparatus rich in resources and coercive capacity (Hale 2014, 10). In Ukraine, these actors are mostly former nomenklatura networks, oligarchs and regionally-distributed political machines who compete with weak governmental institutions primarily via networks of patronage with a patron-president (Fisun 2007; 2012, 93–94; Kudelia 2012; Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Kuzio 2016a; Minakov 2018; Puglisi 2003b; Van Zon 2001; 2005).

The introduction of the concept of patronalism relates to problems in either stretching or contracting other analytical terms.

First, patronalism only partially overlaps with informal institutions as defined by Helmke and Levitsky (2006): in fact, not all informalities are patronalistic in nature and patronalistic behaviours can find codification in law without becoming less patronalistic (Hale 2014, 26-7).

The stretching of the concept of clientelism is also problematic – not least because it is traditionally associated to electoral malpractices. In Piattoni's

definition, clientelism is one practical form of interests' representation: patron-client relations depend on the parties' relative power, which in turn is affected by changes in demand and supply. Such a perspective underscores the hold of clientelism in a variety of forms and contexts (Piattoni 2001, 12-18); while the reciprocity of the interaction points to a relative power shift from patron to clients (Piattoni 2001; Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Chandra 2007). Patronalism goes beyond voting practices, and is less centred on power shifts: the framework underscores instead the condition of domination by patrons over clients and the consolidation of hierarchical relations typical of Eurasian polities displaying sharp levels of social inequality (Hale 2014, 27). Further, patronalism does not differentiate from other dysfunctional practices of state capture such as predation and exploitation (Grzymala-Busse 2008) but rather includes them.

In contrast to the concept of patrimonialism, patronalism does not automatically refer to forms of traditional authority that diverge from rational-legal ones; and the relationship of material exchange it produces are not necessarily underpinned by kinship and territorial ties or shared traditions (Hale 2014, 24). Relatedly, the term refers to broad patterns of social interactions that produce dynamic relationships; and thus contrasts with the concept of neo-patrimonialism as applied to relatively static forms of rule (Hale 2014, 25).

2.2.3. Elites' strategic action: the power of expectations and reproduction of patronal systems

Patronal systems respond to a logic of collective action: at the heart of patronalism lies a problem of coordination concerning a client's choice of joining one or another patronal network.

Studies concerned with the strategic nature of informal practices zoom on resources and organisation as crucial to the perpetration of rent-seeking relations and to the consolidation of hybrid regimes: on this view, patron's ability to ensure loyalty by distributing *ad hoc* rewards and punishment is key to ensuring networks' coherence (Piattoni 2001; Fisun 2012; Way 2016).

In a patronal framework, collective action is driven instead by “the great power of expectation” (Hale 2014, 34) and regime organisation is contingent to expectations that guide coordination: organisation and resources impact on regime dynamics only after altering elites’ expectations to the extent to prompt shifts in their strategy. Hence, power is a self-fulfilling prophecy: clients obey patrons when they expect other clients to do so; consequently, when clients believe the network to be strong, it actually is strong (Hale 2014, 34–38).

Relatedly and counterintuitively, formal institutions and the public opinion impact greatly on the crafting of clients’ coordination strategy. This approach contrasts with (neo)patrimonial ones, which focus on the role of oligarchs; i.e. of the informal side of the regime and on party organisation in bolstering the consolidation of a particular regime (Fisun 2010). Drawing on a patronal logic, clients’ expectations and regime dynamics are primarily shaped by the current balance of power, but formal institutions and obvious trends within the public also impact on circumstantial outcomes of regime dynamics.

Institutions interact with four sources of dynamism that may combine and reinforce each other:

- i) changes in factors beyond patron's control but believed to underpin his power;
- ii) patron-initiated change that she expects to strengthen her position but indeed lead others to share this expectation,
- iii) miscalculated/lack of complete information by the part of the patron
- iv) Intentionally-allowed uncertainty from the part of the patron adopting change entailing risk as part of a trade-off for something he evaluates more than he fears uncertainty (Hale 2014, 62–63).

In Eurasia, patronalism reproduces itself through major historical junctures that favour the establishment of single-pyramid politics. The reproduction of the tsar’s vertical patronal system rested on a selective distribution of rewards and punishment across self-interested clients-nobles. The collapse of tsarism originated in the combination of an unpopular war, mass grievances and in the dominance of non-absolutistic ideologies: the 1917 Revolution impacted on

clients' expectations as to produce the self-fulfilling prophecy that tsarist top-down control would soon vanish (Hale 2014, 40–47).

After a period of political opening, Stalin came first in the USSR to build a vertical network: the reversal of the NEP and the accumulation of all economic assets under the state's direct control favoured the re-installment of a single pyramid system headed by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Again, conflict strategies were key to foster rivalries and prevent defection among sub-patrons organised along a complex ladder of power. This pyramid featured first the secretary of the Party at the Republican level and then other sub-patrons in charge of sub-republican administrative units (Easter 2007; Hale 2014, 48-52). Brezhnev's policy of "stability of the cadres" contributes to the consolidation of the "blat" system (Bunce 1983; A. C. Ledeneva 1998; Sakwa 2013) while also augmenting the salience of competitiveness among regional leaders (Gorlizki and Khlevniuk 2020; Moses 1985). During perestroika, changes in institutions and Gorbachev's introduction of free elections produced a dramatic opening of the system and altered sub-patrons' expectations on future power balances: new networks emerge and compete in a multiple-pyramid system of fluctuating power (Hale 2014, 54–57).

Political dynamism in patronal systems thus stems from the central role of extended networks, from the process of coordination of these networks in pursuing access to resources, and from the fundamental power of expectations – which can be influenced by organisation and distribution of resources - that drives networks' coordination.

The fact that clients positioned all the way down the hierarchical structure must collectively expect the chief to depart from power limits their scope for coordinating successfully to alter current equilibria. Patron's *ad hoc* "divide and rule" strategies prevent defective networks' concerted action against him and thus deepen the chief's relative advantage. Further, membership in patronal networks can be sticky due to kin and ethnic bounds; and shifts can be costly due to high degrees of investments (Hale 2014, 37). On the mid-run, the expected outcome of networks' competition is the establishment and strengthening of

hierarchical single-pyramid politics structured along a complex ladder of power featuring first the patron, then sub-patrons, and at the grassroots level clients who gain power, resources and prestige through support for the network (Minakov 2018, 125).

In the post-soviet context, the adoption of (semi-)presidentialist constitutions formalises this condition (Hale 2014, 125-26). Regime cycles usually originate in networks' splits that shift the social equilibrium towards dynamic phases of political openness and towards multiple-pyramid systems of power.

2.2.4. Linearity and dynamism in regime cycles

In Hale's understanding of Eurasian politics, constitutional designs signal where power is likely to be concentrated and provide robust expectations on who will be patron.

(Semi-)presidentialist constitutions dominate across soviet successor states (Hale 2014, 118-122); they produce an information effect that signals that institutions are likely to reflect the current balance of power, and a focal effect that derives from the president's symbolic position of supreme power (Hale 2014, 78-80). Even if informally the post were to be considered irrelevant, presidentialist constitutions tend to produce single-pyramid systems.

The president's opportunity for implementing self-interested decisions depends on elites' support; nevertheless, the president heading a semi-presidentialist formal system further benefits from his right to appoint and dismiss prime ministers because he can manipulate more effectively between various clans (for Kuchma's Ukraine see Matsuzato 2005). The combination of formal and informal sources of power furtherly consolidates the president's dominant position; the two effects can resolve the coordination problem for temporarily neutral networks positioned between two opposed networks. An expected outcome is the gravitation or co-optation of alternative pyramids toward the president's network. In a condition of institutional flux and political opening, leadership style and personal skills are important; while on the mid-run the adoption of semi-presidentialist constitutions stabilises dominant expectations

and power structures. The emphasis is on the institute of the presidency: a directly-elected president is the most important source of power, and his formal status impacts on his informal power.

Divided-executive constitutions lack a focal point and produce a formal balance of power between the president and the prime minister. When two different networks occupy the two executive posts, these constitutions formalise a competing-pyramid system of politics: networks' competition can be very dynamic, with Orange Ukraine representing a major example (Fisun 2012; Hale 2014, 325–31; Kudelia 2012; Way 2016)².

Elections are also a source of regularities. They shape clients' calculations as to whether join or oppose a network, they may interact with the distribution of patronage and with the delivery of international actors' legitimacy (Hale 2014, 69-73). The cost of authoritarianism may in fact be too high due to mechanisms of leverage – i.e. a government's vulnerability to external pressure – and mechanisms of linkage – i.e. the density of a state's ties to multi-lateral institutions led by western actors (Levitsky and Way 2006; 2010).

The risk of losing power is thus outweighed by long- and short-term benefits that range from the minimization of risk of revolution to the co-option of temporarily “patronless” networks (Hale 2014, 72).

Even when unfair and manipulated, elections are key to bolster a regime's legitimacy. In turn, patrons' ability to win “real” votes powerfully shapes clients' expectations on who will be likely to prevail in present and future struggles, with this being especially the case when genuine opposition is allowed (Hale 2014, 72). Fair victories signal that the patron has power to rule: public politics is about creating a real as well as an impression of popularity, but only the former

² Hale's understanding in this case differs from Fisun's (2010) who considers party organisation more fundamental: during Yushchenko's presidency, the reform of Ukraine's constitution is preconditional to higher degrees of political opening but not sufficient to produce the peculiar condition of hybridity between democracy and authoritarianism

unequivocally reinforces elites' coordination around the patron-leader. An obvious dilemma is that elections give masses a modicum of power over clients' expectations; but high support for a patron deteriorates levels of political openness and contributes in making a regime more authoritarian; as the cases of Putin's Russia and Belarus' Lukashenka demonstrate (Hale 2014, chap 8).

Irregularities in regime dynamics are the product of exogenous shocks that alter clients' expectations and activate new dynamics of competition in the form of temporary moves away from single pyramid politics.

The most important source of non-linear dynamism is the lame-duck syndrome, which alters the president's privileged condition as institutionalized focal point and produces a centrifugal pressure within the dominant network. As a result, the president's real capacity to shape clients' expectations deteriorates while the latter's room for coordination against him augments dramatically. Reasons for this syndrome range from illness and ageing to term limits and drops in popularity; the outcome being always augmented expectations among clients that the patron-president might depart from power (Hale 2014, 84-85). As the president loses control of the political machinery, elites positioned down the hierarchy start thinking collectively of a future without him. Contested elections are therefore crucial when combined with expectations of succession and term limits because they provide temporal focal points for dissatisfied networks to coordinate effectively to remove a patron from power.

The lame-duck syndrome produces uncertainty and non-linear dynamics, thus altering the functioning of the political game. In single pyramid systems, it generates rapid transitions towards competing pyramids politics (Hale 2014, 86). These shifts may be triggered by revolutionary events: in such cases, obvious trends within masses impact enormously on elites' coordination.

Regardless of the degree of public preferences' manipulation, there exists an accountability mechanism (Hale 2014, 92-93): shifts in the public's preferences may shape networks' expectations towards an agreement on an anticipated collective action against the patron.

2.2.5. Patronalism and the competitive mobilisation of national identity

A patronal understanding of revolutionary events is broadly consistent with other approaches studying the effects of mass mobilisation in semi-authoritarian soviet successor states: regime developments, included mass episodes of political contestation, shall be always understood as an elite affair where self-interested groups compete over state resources and power (Way 2005a; 2005b; 2016; Fisun 2007, 2010, 2012; Hale 2019).

In Eurasia, democratic breakthroughs happen not when prerequisites for democracy exist but rather when wannabe authoritarians are not strong enough to consolidate their rule (Way 2016). Notwithstanding the magnitude of the episode of political opening and relevant actors' genuine commitment to democratic values, the gradual restoration of defective state-society relations is the most expectable outcome (Hale 2014, chap 7).

According to Way (2005b; 2005a; 2016; for Ukraine see also Riabchuk 2012) sources of regime dynamism lie both in regime organisation and polarised identity divides. When two national conceptions are available for mobilisation by two opposite political groupings, they undermine incumbents' efforts to monopolise political control. Drawing on the case of Orange Ukraine, Way (2016, 43–44) observes that:

“pluralism has been less the result of a “struggle to develop a democratic political system” and more the product of failed efforts to create an authoritarian one. The central heroes in this story are oligarchs and ex-nomenklatura who lacked the organization to centralize political control. These actors facilitated regime competition not because they supported democracy but because their mutual distrust prevented the consolidation of authoritarian rule. Activists and protesters were also central. But, their unity and passion generally derived less from shared democratic values and more from commitment to competing and polarized conceptions of the nation”

In this perspective, polarised ethno-political aspirations are endogenous to regime dynamics because “factors facilitating pluralism have often been

identical to the ones creating dysfunction, corruption, and sometimes violent polarization” (Way 2016, 44).

The focus on patronal networks’ coordination in driving both protest and the potential for regime dynamism points to mass uprisings as a tool of power struggle among rival networks and emphasizes the role of domestically-generated succession expectations and public opinion in prompting the most meaningful elite splits (Hale 2019). All Colour Revolutions, included Ukraine’s Orange, featured a succession struggle in which the winner had previously been part of the “dictator’s” administration; while those overthrown were among the least popular leaders across the former Soviet Union. Exception made for Ukraine’s Maidan, all revolutions originate in the combination of an election-related lame-duck syndrome and low incumbent popularity (Hale 2014, chap 7).

In a patronal blueprint, identity divides remain exogenous to regime dynamism: as a rule, they do not *determine* whether a state is more susceptible to re-organise its functioning along multiple or single-pyramid politics; nor they unequivocally bind together clients in a network (Hale 2014, 31-33).

To be sure, public preferences on identity issues impact on patronal dynamics, and identity-based strategies are valid mobilisation resources for emerging networks. Further, in hybrid regimes - i.e. where regular competitive elections coexist by definition with serious violations of democratic rules - ruling networks are most likely to mobilize identity cleavages to win voters’ support through these narratives’ hold on emotions (Charnysh 2013; Levitsky and Way 2002; Petersen 2011; Riabchuk 2012).

Political opponents too have incentives in mobilising resonant ethno-national divisions because they prompt large-scale support even at the face of repression (Varshney 2003). Nevertheless, the forging of political alliances is shaped by expectations on future power balances, and elites’ coordination functions primarily according to rent-seeking mechanisms of benefit maximisation (Hale 2014, 433-34).

This logic applies to Ukraine, where alliances between oligarchs from the East and politicians from the West happened several times, and polarised identity

divides proved detrimental to presidents-patrons only when they were already unpopular (Kuzio 2016a)³.

Even after the Maidan, oligarchs' support for presidents and/or political parties is dictated by contingent personal calculations, rather than by identity issues and programmatic politics (Fisun 2017, 201; Jarábik and Bila 2015; Jarabik and Minakov 2016; Konończuk 2015; Mazepus et al. 2021; Umland 2017).

In a nutshell, identity is not structural to levels of closure of the political game and is only one factor in influencing clients' support for a patron. The thesis shall thus reflect on the claim that, in Ukraine, contested identity narratives concur with more "traditional" forms of clientelism to the collection of votes, they are exploited strategically to polarise the country and to move public attention away from programmatic politics - but are not, *per se*, a cause of networks' splits (Fisun 2017).

The next section discusses Ukraine's transition from socialism by applying the patronal logic to dynamics of political competition between former nomenklatura networks and emerging political actors. It then reflects on identity divisions and on dysfunctional effects produced by patronal mechanisms of political struggle on the polity's macro-structural features.

It thus presents reasons for integrating Hale's understanding over a patronal equilibrium to the boundary-making approach in order to study the reconstruction of national divides along contested interpretations of history.

³ Identity divides proved detrimental to President Kuchma only in 2004. By contrast, identity issues partially contradicted expected patterns of support in 1999, when the "pro-Russian" Kuchma won the majority of votes in western Ukraine

2.3. Boundary-reconstruction and the logic of patronalism: a framework to study Ukraine's case

2.3.1. Ukraine's transition from socialism: the embeddedness of the soviet conception of power

Likewise in other former Soviet Republics, nationalism in Ukraine fulfilled the ideological vacuum left by the dissolution of soviet structures and replaced the communist norm according to which the state was officially organised (Wilson 2009; Kasianov 2008b; Arel 1995b). Further, nationalism leveraged on the anomalous opening of the power vertical, whereby it concurred to keep untouched the rules of the political game in unprecedented socio-economic and political conditions (Korostelina 2013a; Kasianov 2008b; Kubicek 1998).

The 1989-1990 campaign for parliamentary elections formally opened the system to new political actors.

By the late 80s, the *Narodnyi Rukh* (the Ukrainian movement for perestroika) was the main catalyst of nationalist narratives: initially conceived as a non-party organization gathering activists, dissidents and intellectuals from the west, it quickly turned into an opposition movement displaying elements of Western human-rights movements (Kulyk 2001; Motyl 1993; Wilson 1994). In March 1990, *Rukh* merged to the Democratic Bloc for Parliamentary elections and along with other opposition parties gained one quarter of the seats in the Supreme Soviet. During the campaign, *Rukh* opposed the legitimacy of the CPSU in Ukraine, strived for its outlaw and emphasised the revival of Ukraine's indigenous culture, history and language in its calls for independence. Likewise in other republics, the movement's political agenda was anchored to the Leninist nationalities policy: claims to sovereignty were crafted upon a legitimate template that presented the national issue according to principles of institutionalised ethnicity (Kulyk 2001, 208). On these grounds, *Rukh* advanced a programme of state nationalism (Motyl 1993, 75) that would guarantee minorities the right to develop their language and culture within regional structures. Such a plan was however grounded in a preliminary Ukrainisation

and de-Russification of Russophone Ukrainians and of non-Russian minorities (Kulyk 2001, 209); and was unpopular across multi-national regions.

By the mid-1990, the CPSU in Ukraine was first among equals due to the poor institutionalization of its political opponents, and to its extensive control over economic, coercive and communicative resources (Wilson 1994, 67–69). It enjoyed a relative advantage in resources and organisation capacities but could hardly act an effective centralising mechanism for the coordination of political elites: shifts in the field impact on consolidated political structures and shape clients' expectations over further change in the ideological and organisational norms sustaining the power vertical. This process feeds elites' predictions over shifts in the relationship between a centralised but shrinking executive in Moscow and the new multi-party republican legislative; as well as between old and new political groupings acting within the boundaries of the Republic.

The erosion of vertical structures intensified levels of political struggle and prompts a collective problem over whom shall be in charge of power and which strategy might win support at the face of both political opponents in Kiev and central organisations in Moscow (Hale 2008). The political reorganisation of Ukrainian ruling class thus responded to the dispersal of a focal point in Moscow, and to the legitimacy crisis enacted by the mobilisation of national claims at home and elsewhere across the USSR.

Hence, the introduction of the presidency at the level of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in July 1991 was both an opportunity for enhancing Ukraine's bargaining power *vis à vis* Moscow (Wilson 1997a) and a foothold for relocating fuzzy structures of power at the Republican level. The appointment of a relatively strong figure such as Leonid Kravchuk – until then the chairperson of Ukraine's *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Council) – serves the double goal of empowering a negotiator to deal effectively with central and external actors while stimulating a coordination shift in clients' focal point from Moscow to Kiev.

The support for a national norm allowed former nomenklatura members to win public approval: by 1990, sovereignty became an official policy objective

of newly turned “national-communists” in Kiev and prompted elites’ adoption of strategies of political mobilisation framed along national narratives.

The failed communist coup in August 1991 is the tipping point for the consolidation of republican elites’ split from Moscow’s and from ideologically-committed supporters of the putsch (Kasianov 2008b, 30). In August, Leonid Kravchuk upheld *Rukh*-sponsored outlaw of the CPSU, and the *Rada* adopted Ukraine’s declaration of independence: the document would explicitly back Rukh’s call over the functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life (Chinn and Kaiser 1996). The pre-emptive “independence coup” put an end to the central soviet dominance in Ukraine (Pakulski, Kullberg, and Higley 1996): in a condition of flux, the reorganisation of power structures rested on elites’ concerted support for a national state.

Importantly though, ruling elites’ claims to self-determination emphasised the multinational and multilingual reality of Ukraine’s society (Kulyk 2001). In October 1989 and in contrast to other republics that were already undergoing a sharp ethnicization of politics, the 'Law of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics on languages' had awarded Russian the status of language of interethnic communications among peoples of the USSR. In October 1991, the *Verkhovna Rada* approved a Law that granted citizenship to all residents of Ukraine, regardless of their ethnicity and without language requirements. In the run up to the Referendum for independence, institutionally-mediated interests were mobilised there, where Rukh’s ethno-cultural programme could not impinge. In the Russophone and industrialised south-east, and particularly in Donbas, ruling elites championed socio-economic motives and appealed to residents’ and local elites’ expectations that the productive sectors of the area would have been better-off outside the agonising Union.

Elites’ mobilisation of an inclusive and relatively civic form of national identity was rewarded with broad support for the historic referendum of December 1, 1991. On the same day, Leonid Kravchuk, until then a symbol of the soviet nomenklatura, won the presidency against *Rukh*’s candidate and former political dissident, Viacheslav Chornovil.

Independent Ukraine adopts two declarative intents over its external attributes of statehood.

First is a return to Europe (Wolczuk 2003), a postulate later incorporated into the 1996 Constitution and that implies negotiation within and between political networks, and between the public and such networks, over levels of centralisation of the polity and on where the representative boundaries of the state lie (Linz and Stepan 1996; Wolczuk 2002).

Second is the framing of national self-determination as a corollary to a long-lasting struggle against competing imperial rules, the most relevant of which was the Russian and later Soviet Empire: accordingly, Russia is selected as the relevant other in opposition to whom the inhabitants of Ukraine shall define themselves as Ukrainians (Kulyk 2001, 211; Motyl 1993; Szporluk 1997; Wilson 1998).

Compliance with the above principles is complicated by fragmented patterns of identification, which facilitate competitive modes of national integration and widen room for contestation for local-level elites (Hrytsak 1998; Birch and Zinko 1996; Bremmer 1994; Petro 2015; Korostelina 2013b; Solchanyk 1994; Pirie 1996; Kubicek 2000; Katchanovski 2006a; 2006b). More crucially, the process was limited by the fact that official institutions were only formally transformed into new ones, but remained Soviet in style and management (Kasianov 2008b, 41-47): some were simply renamed or very outwardly re-shaped, others were left unchanged; the bureaucracy remained organised according to a soviet-like, centralised nomenklatura style.

In a nutshell, changes in formal institutions and ideological principles, and shifts in the configuration of political alliances determined that a boundary differentiating the Ukrainian majority from the Russian minority matters: likewise national-democrats, national-communists would display a “belief in an ethnic/collective competition shaping human history” (Minakov 2018, 112). New state structures were thus claimed to be different from those in the previous regime; but the condition of flux was hardly matched by consistent shifts in organisation, leadership style, ejection from power of nomenklatura personnel,

changes in patterns of behaviour and in the functioning of power structures and of political alliances (Minakov 2018, 148-50)⁴. In such a context, the nationalist ideology was key to legitimise not only Ukraine's independence, but also the continuing rule of soviet personnel.

2.3.2. Ukraine's duality: regionalism and embedded sources of contestation of the national norm

Nations' creation and maintenance pertain to organisational and ideological components and to institutional arrangements: in turn, the reproduction of legitimacy over elites' preferred national norm affects the coercive capacity of central organisations and the institutional framework in which the nation is reproduced (Malešević 2019).

As a result of a turbulent history, Ukraine displays embedded degrees of ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious differentiation, with minority groups regionally-distributed across its territory. Minorities include Romanians and Hungarians in the west (Transcarpathia and Chernivtsi oblasts), in addition to the more influential Russian minority in the south-east: by 1989, ethnic Russians would constitute an absolute majority in Crimea and a consistent minority in the remaining regions of Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson, Dnepr, Zaporozhe, Kharkov, Donetsk and Lugansk (Vsesoyuznaya Perepisi Naseleniya 1989).

After independence, the country was defined a nation of two parts (Riabchuk 2003) divided along an east-west cleavage that geographically matches the flow of the river Dnepr but that can hardly be understood in terms of Russian *versus* Ukrainian ethnic affiliation alone (Birch and Zinko 1996; Bremmer 1994; Hrytsak 1998; Korostelina 2013b; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2002;

⁴ The case of Ukraine and other post-soviet countries contrasts with developments in the Baltic states, where changes in institutions and in the configuration of political alliances paved the way to the empowerment of new political actors promoting ethno-national principles of organization of political power and resources that became operational and consequential in the field

Pirie 1996; Petro 2015; Solchanyk 1994). The country's cleft was placed at the core of a clash of cultural civilisation between western Europe and Russia (Huntington 1993, 29–30).

The dichotomy is exemplified in the contrast between the westmost, agrarian, majority-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-speaking historical region of Galicia (Lvov, Ivano-Frankovsk and Ternopol' oblasts) as the bulk of Ukrainian nationalism; and the eastmost, industrialised, highly urbanised, ethnically-mixed but majority Russian-speaking region of Donbass (Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts) as weakly committed to strengthening Ukraine's political and cultural independence from Russia (Hesli 1995; Hrytsak 1998; Wilson 1995; 1998; Petro 2015; Pirie 1996).

Divergent linguistic and cultural preferences, and polarised historical memory hardly overlap with homogenous, mutually-exclusive groups; nevertheless, they reproduce confrontation over the distribution of symbolic, cultural, political and socio-economic interests (Arel 2006; Bugajski 2000; Wilson 2009).

Having long been subject to the rule of central European states before falling under the Soviet control, the western part of the country displays solid support for a distinct form of ethno-national identity, as well as negative evaluations over Ukraine's soviet experience (Kasianov and Ther 2009). It is described as anti-communist, quick to identify Russia as Ukraine's relevant other and the West as a natural ally. By contrast in the various historical regions of the south-east, the Tsarist and Soviet experiences weaken incentives for identifying with a nationally-defined Ukrainian state: the Soviet past is perceived positively, and Russians tend to be viewed as Slavic brothers (Rodgers 2006; Wilson 1998; Wolczuk 2002, 67; Petro 2015). Privileged socio-cultural and economic relationships are underpinned by geographical and historical proximity, and most importantly by Russophonia.

On these grounds, Russophones of the south-east have been defined an accidental diaspora; i.e. a "social group that shares a cultural rather than an ethnic identity" (Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016, 72); and that favours close cooperation between independent Ukraine and Russia. The Soviet strategy of

Russification bolstered the blurring of national boundaries in favour of a class-related, supranational and ideological soviet identity based on political forms of belonging, with this strategy of blurring being particularly effective across the industrialised region of Donbass (Hrytsak 1998; Wilson 1995). Historical processes enhanced the socio-political and economic implications of multi-layered discrepancies between cultural, linguistic and ethnic divides differentiating Russians from south-eastern Ukrainians (Petro 2015).

Of course, Ukraine's bipolarity is nuanced - exceptions exist at the end of poles and divergencies do not spread along an east west continuum (Barrington and Herron 2004; Wolczuk 2002). For the purpose of the study, it is key to note that where the Ukrainian ethnic component is inscribed into a Russian-speaking socio-cultural milieu, ethnic categories blur (Barrington 2002b; Bremmer 1994; Bugajski 2000; Petro 2015; Pirie 1996; Wilson 1998), dual and hybrid modes of national identification prevail and relate to ambivalent stands towards Ukraine's independence, especially when framed in confrontation to Moscow (Arel 1995b; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2002; Wilson 1993).

Competitive modes of national identification tend to be regionally distributed rather than be strictly related to distinct ethno-national, linguistic categories (Birch and Zinko 1996; Bugajski 2000; Kubicek 2000; Pirie 1996; Rodgers 2006).

Differences have been historically reproduced into voting behaviours that signal polarised orientations over national state-building and foreign policy priorities, both being at times assessed in terms of divergent political cultures (Arel and Khmelko 1996; Arel and Wilson 1994; Barrington and Herron 2004; Birch 1998; 2000; Katchanovski 2006b; Kubicek 2000; Marples 2015b; Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018).

Regionalism in Ukraine contributed in crafting political institutions and administrative structures (Barrington and Herron 2004; Birch and Zinko 1996; Rodgers 2006; Sasse 2001; 2010; Shelest and Rabinovych 2020); and was also relevant for the emergence and organisation of patronal networks, particularly throughout Ukraine's first decade of independence.

As hinted above, informal norms of competition established during the soviet experience had enabled privileged access to formal and informal sources of power to actors from south-eastern Ukraine (Sasse 2001; Puglisi 2003a; 2003b). After 1991, business actors and networks previously belonging to the soviet administrative establishment benefitted of weak state regulations to pile up power and wealth (Van Zon 2000). Most of these groups held their interests in the industrial centres of Donetsk and Dnepropetrovsk. Throughout the 90s in these two oblasts, opaque groups and informal networks managed to incorporate their interests in regional political machines that enjoyed privileged relations with the ruling class as well as with like-minded Russian businessmen, a condition that contributes in blurring the line between domestic and foreign policy (Fritz 2007, 119; Kuzio 2016a; Puglisi 2003a; 2003b).

The Dnepropetrovsk political machine remained non-ideological, poorly organised and fractured in pursuits; it hardly managed to set a coordinated strategy, this notwithstanding the two Presidencies of one of his most prominent members, Leonid Kuchma (Minakov 2018, 130-31, 142-43). By contrast, the Donetsk group managed to consolidate its pursuits into an integrated, fully-fledged political machine, the 1997-founded Party of Regions (Kudelia 2014a; Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Kuzio 2015; 2016a; Minakov 2018, 143-45).

Drawing on the theory of ethnic boundary-making, it is possible to discern structural challenges to the establishment of a national model of statehood.

The confinement of strong feelings of national identity to the western part of the country impinges on the process of opposition-building that is key to the consolidation of the two basic attributes of statehood – territoriality and legitimacy; in fact, it also limits room for establishing a position of domination for the titular group. At the same time, the proximity of cultural markers of identification differentiating Ukrainians from Russians incentivises the deployment of confrontational and antagonistic strategies (Conversi 1999).

Endogenous to the field, there emerges at least two political sources of contestation:

- i) First, the crafting of a national state implies the unmaking of the Russian nation “at home”.

The legitimacy of this stance is contested and asymmetrical consensus emerges: elites’ strategy may be framed to target mainly the Russian state; yet, they unavoidably generate exclusion among ethnic Russians and across Russophone Ukrainians who might self-identify with a Ukrainian state as long as this does neither imply shifts in language practices and historical memory, nor impinge on privileged cultural, political and economic relations with Russia

- ii) Second, the definition of the *demos* the state shall represent is far from obvious.

Contestation over the location and meaning of the boundary produces partial consensus: disagreement emerges as to which group shall be included in the national community, as to where the boundary differentiating the majority from the Russian minority lies and on what the effects of the divide shall be on power relations.

Exogenous to the field is Russia’s strategy of postponing a legally-binding recognition of Ukraine’s territory, which adds up to EU’s “Russia first” policy in bilateral relations with former soviet republics (Wolczuk 2002, 68).

Upon Kiev’s declaration of independence, Russia threatened to backtrack the provisions of the November 1990 Treaty which had provided for the recognition of respective republican borders within the USSR only (Tolz 2001, 227), and later insisted on granting respect to Ukraine’s territorial integrity solely within the CIS, i.e. the organisation Kiev was reluctant to enforce other than for economic reasons (Solchanyk 1996). The Russian parliament's claim over the Black Sea Fleet and the territory of Crimea, and issues of military security heighten insecurity: only in 1997 the Friendship and Cooperation Agreement established a bilateral recognition of the inviolability of borders (Drohobycky 1995; Sherr 1997; Van Ham 1994). A security dilemma thus emerged as to which strategy of sovereignisation *vis à vis* Moscow might have been effective while eluding the separatist mobilisation of minorities as well as the

jeopardization of bilateral economic and political interests of ruling networks in Kiev and powerful actors in the east.

The conditions presented above signal real and perceived risks of state fragmentation that hinder the opportunity for establishing a functional and integrated state (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2002; Kuzio 2002b; Wilson 1993; Drohobychy 1995; Hesli 1995; Birch and Zinko 1996).

Room for manipulation of powerful agents also augments (Bugajski 2000; Kubicek 2000; Khmelko and Wilson 1998; Nemiria 2000): the triggering of cultural, linguistic, symbolic, historical, socio-economic markers rather than strictly-meant ethnicity is particularly appealing in the south-east; that is, where support for Ukraine's sovereignty builds at least partially on common interests and institutions and thus may be contingent to the performance of government (Cornell 1996).

2.3.3. Reproduction of the patronal system of politics and effects on Ukraine's macro-structural features

Upon independence, the vacuum left by the partial dismantlement of soviet institutions and the condition of power volatility produced irregularities in regime dynamism.

Patronal mechanisms of intense political struggle impacted on the crafting of Ukraine's three macro-structural features and thus on the opportunity for agreeing and reproducing one acceptable version of the nation-state:

- i) At the level of formal institutions, the Soviet legacy manifests itself both in the adoption of a national model of statehood and in the centralisation and personalisation of power relations at the expense of organisational capacity (D'Anieri 2007). The imperatives of institution-building are subordinated to the personal interest of accumulation and perpetuation of political power and financial wealth.

The soviet legacy, insecurity over the preservation of territorial integrity and centrifugal tendencies across south-eastern regions sustain central organisations' strategic choice of retaining the verticalized Soviet administrative structures of

oblasts (Wolczuk 2002, 69). In the public discourse, fully-fledged integration is doomed preconditional to a programme of power devolution: Ukraine's European choice was therefore equated to forging a polity on the model of 19th century western nation-states (Wilson 2009; Wolczuk 2002).

After independence, the harshest competition pertained to the constitutional design: Ukraine was the last among former Soviet Republics to adopt a Constitution and until 1996 relied on an integrated but ill-suited version of the 1978 Soviet Constitution (Birch 2008; Wolczuk 2001). According to the formal institutional setting inherited from the USSR, the president held limited capacity to shape the directions of domestic politics (Markov 1993; Wilson 1999). As a result, disparate and often low-skilled actors would advance unconstitutional and contradictory decisions to pursue policy aims (Kasianov 2008b). During Kravchuk's presidency, informal mechanisms of competition permeated state structures in such a way to limit room for agreeing upon basic reforms on socio-economic, legal and administrative issues; thereby jeopardizing basic processes of state-building (Gallina 2008). This condition directly related to former-nomenklatura's and rent-seekers' opposition to a "shock-therapy" plan (Minakov 2018, 111): the gradual introduction of economic adjustments allowed oligarchs to benefit of a "partial reform equilibrium" (Hellman 1998) whose effects on the economy are visible until today (Kuzio 2016a).

Power shifts between the Prime Minister and the President, competitive executive control over the judiciary and legislative, and self-interested political action paralyse the state's organisational capacity during situations of political openings (Fritz 2007, 110). These embedded patterns emerge even more vehemently after Ukraine's two Revolutions, thereby dramatizing levels of political struggle and regime instability.

- ii) At the level of political alliances, actors' reliance on informal networks discourages the development of programmatic politics (Protsyk 2003; Wilson 1999); brokerage activity depends on personalised ties of power accumulation but public politics is about contested nation-building.

When the CPSU dissolved, former nomenklatura members managed to enter an informal “Party of Power” (*Partiya vlada*) loosely headed by president Kravchuk and counting its most prominent members among eastern Ukrainians (Fritz 2007, 120-21).

As the state remained saturated with economic interests, central organisations continued to accumulate wealth from state-controlled sectors (Fritz 2007, chaps 6–7; Van Zon 2000; 2001). Former soviet networks were joined by new social climbers in a politically powerful but hardly coordinated faction (Wilson 2005). The absence of a real party system contributed to the relative importance of informal groups: the amorphous ‘party of power’ was permeated by conflictual interests of informal networks, the most influential being the ones from Dnepropetrovsk and Donetsk (Fritz 2007, 118-121; Minakov 2018, 129-145).

After 1995, political parties became growingly dominated by oligarchs’ self-interest (Minakov 2018, 125): support for the patron-president is not granted on the base of identity affiliation or on programmatic politics; rather, it responds to expectations on how pervasive the control of the patron will be (Kudelia 2012; Kuzio 2016a). Even after 2004, major networks are mainly absorbed in the competitive activity of controlling levers of informal power (Fisun 2017; Jarábik 2015; Jarabik and Minakov 2016; Minakov 2016; 2018, 117–21, 221–29).

The non-programmatic politics of formal parties and the competitive exploitation of identity issues produce a peculiar characteristic, whereby parties’ socio-economic agendas hold little salience over electoral preferences, while differences concerning a party’s geopolitical orientation (i.e. rapprochement either with NATO and the EU, or with Russia) and stance on identity impact greatly on electoral behaviour (Fedorenko, Rybiy, and Umland 2016; Shevel 2015).

- iii) At the level of power distribution, former nomenklatura’s access to central organisations favour the non-fixed representation of ethnic groups in power structures. The relationship between constituent groups is contested, this notwithstanding the official legislation banning the

formation of parties based on ethnic or regional criteria (Barrington 2002a) and the civic principles inscribed in the constitution.

In contrast to the Baltic States, independent Ukraine elicited the formal representation of ethnic groups in power structures: central organisations displayed a sensitive attitude towards issues of ethnic barriers, cultural minority and regional diversity (Chinn and Kaiser 1996, 147). Article three of the Law on National Minorities (June 1992) defined minorities those citizens who are not Ukrainians by ethnicity and express the feeling of national consciousness and commonality with each other (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 1992). Throughout the first years of independence, the upgrading of civic citizenship rights did not elude Russia's insistent proposals to introduce dual citizenship (Zevelev 2008), with this pressure heightening Ukraine's dilemma over the affirmation of its external attributes of statehood.

Ukraine's constitution of 1996 formalises elites' consensus over the inclusivity of the state; yet, this consensus rested on the complete avoidance of specifying the components of the national community. The major structural inconsistency lied in central organisations' decision of granting civic citizenship rights while at the same time promoting a national model of statehood in a political context dominated by former nomenklatura networks.

Sources of contestation in the field heighten the ambiguity of this choice.

Particularly throughout the first years of independence, social differences between Ukrainians and Russians remained, with the former being relatively underrepresented in the administrative apparatus and the latter more socially advanced than the titular group (Hrytsak 2009). At the same time, official discourse treated the "Russian" group as an ordinary minority and did not envisage rights based on identity other than ethnic, in practice denying multi-layered modes of identification, i.e. the existence of millions of Russophone Ukrainians (Arel 1995a; Kulyk 2006).

Against this background, the compromise-oriented minority policy and the fluidity of the boundary differentiating Ukrainians from Russians risked of leaving both Russian and Russophone groups and the Ukrainian(-speaking)

group apparently discriminated against and disadvantaged (Hrytsak 2009; Kulyk 2019). One obvious outcome is the widening of the political opportunity for cultivating regionally-distributed grievances placed at the end of Ukraine's two poles.

In a nutshell, Ukraine's macro-structural features are permeated by patronal principles of state-society relations: nation-building emerges as an activity of political competition over degrees of centralization of the new polity and over the distribution of symbolic, political and economic power, rather than as a programmatic construction of functional state institutions (Kasianov 2008b, 48). Regional diversity and patronal modes of political competition hinder prospects for agreeing upon and consolidating consensus on a nation-wide accepted model of statehood (Wolczuk 2002; Korostelina 2013b); at the same time, they conduct to a system of public politics that revolves around the mobilisation of competitive claims to national identity.

2.3.4. Ukraine's process of ethnic boundary-making from a patronal perspective: implications

In Ukraine, disagreement over the definition of the nation and on its effects on power relations fuels incentives for drawing on a variety of contested cultural resources to mobilise dissatisfaction with the state's redistribution of political, economic and symbolic power (Bugajski 2000; Kubicek 2000).

The continuous process of national state consolidation associates to high degrees of ambiguity, instability and disunity of the national domain.

Throughout the first decade of independence and particularly under the unstable presidency of Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994), former nomenklatura from the south-east exploit local dissatisfaction with socio-economic results of independence to advance their contingent self-interest, thus exacerbating the salience of regionally-distributed grievances (Kubicek 2000; Nemiria 2000; Sasse 2010; Wolczuk 2002).

The exploitation of regionally-defined interests across the public may facilitate the gradual shift of broadly-meant ethno-national categories to political ones,

this notwithstanding the fact that they are not formally institutionalised in power structures. Post-independence voting patterns signal that this overlapping is indeed salient (Arel and Khmelko 1996; Arel and Wilson 1994; Katchanovski 2006b).

Identity-based strategies of political competition alter the significance of patterns of asymmetrical and partial levels of consensus, i.e. of the contingent specifications over the legitimacy, meaning and location of the boundary differentiating the national group from an hard-to-define “Russian“ minority (Wimmer 2013).

In this context, contestation on Ukraine’s politics of history has indeed grown conflictual and has proven effective in mobilising regionally-distributed preferences of national identification (A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012; Osipian 2015; Shevel 2011 Kasianov 2019). This was particularly the case after the Orange and the Maidan Revolutions: in both cases, Ukraine’s semi-presidentialist constitution was replaced with a mixed premier-presidential one that produced divided-executive systems characterised by intense levels of struggle (Jarábik 2015; Umland 2017; Fisun 2017).

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks discussed so far maintains that competitive historical narratives are embedded cognitive devices informing patronal networks’ cost-benefit calculations at the threshold of action (Hale 2008). The mobilisation of contested historical markers is supposed to reflect a self-interested strategy that manipulates these markers’ resonance across the public in order to overcome problems of collective action, such as the ones emerging during and after Revolutions (Hale 2008; 2014).

The logic of ethnic boundary-making furtherly specifies that revolutions produce crucial changes in collective actors’ mix of strategies, and that the latter may cascade into shifts in the structure of boundaries, thereby leading to a new consensus over the legitimacy of national divides. In these cases, dynamics of negotiation between individuals and collective actors advocating for different categories are governed by actors’ position in the hierarchy of power and by circumstantial interactions altering the location of political alliances. Processes

of mass mobilisation and political brokerage may contingently empower movements who claim to represent the national group and aim at redrawing the landscape of national divisions (Wimmer 2013. 106-10). In turn, the opening of the system augments the leverage of obvious trends across the public opinion and mobilised masses, thereby affecting patronal networks' coordination strategy. Shifts in the field impact on consolidated political structures and shape clients' expectations over further change in the ideological and organisational norms sustaining the power vertical (Hale 2014). All the same, patronal networks' mobilisation of polarised interpretations of history is always driven by self-interested mechanisms of benefit-maximisation and is reflected in high levels of social closure across nationally-defined communities.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEVERAGE OF CONTESTATION ABOUT HISTORY ON THE POLITICS OF THE NATION: A LONGITUDINAL OVERVIEW

The section reflects on patronal underpinnings of group-making projects that account for the growing salience of markers of contested history in Ukraine throughout the period of 1991-2013.

In the realm of historical policy and similarly to other Soviet successor states, independent Ukraine underwent a process of nationalisation of history (Kasianov 2009; 2012; Wilson 1998; Wolczuk 2000). Throughout the 90s, state-led policies would officially mirror the national narrative in opposition to the Soviet one; the 1993-reformed Communist Party was the sole political force contesting the legitimacy of this strategy.

After the Orange Revolution, the academic struggle between the Sovietophile and the nationalised versions of history was relocated in the central stage of the public debate (Yurchuk 2011; Portnov 2013; Kasianov 2008a; 2010a; 2019 Narvselius 2012; Marples 2007; Katchanovski 2010; Shevel 2011). President Yushchenko's active promotion of nationalist narratives on Ukraine's history was contested by the Party of Regions, which would advance claims to represent south-eastern regions' preferences and interests in the Parliament (Kasianov 2012, 160-61). Resentment across western regions for the partial reversal of Yushchenko's initiatives under Yanukovich's presidency correlates to the ascent of nationalist political forces in central organisations (Polyakova 2014; Umland 2013a).

The chapter detects structural and interactional components that account for these developments and the implications they hold for the competitive struggle on contested history that emerges during and after the Maidan Revolution. Rather than focusing on the stock of repertoires and myths, the research problematises patronal dynamics that impact on the crafting of a national

ideological norm and on power relations, thereby contributing to the continuous (re)construction, institutionalisation and contestation of ethno-national boundaries framed along competitive interpretations of history.

The first section of the chapter evaluates Ukraine's process of state consolidation during Kravchuk's and Kuchma's presidencies (1991-2004): a primary concern is with the reconstruction of a vertical political system against the background of deep regional cleavages and power volatility. In this context, historical policy is functional to the symbolic construction of national boundaries and informs informal and formal actors' strategy for gaining access to state resources and power.

The second part of the chapter argues that exogenous and endogenous mechanisms alter regime dynamics in the decade preceding the Maidan, thereby contributing to the growing leverage of polarised historical narratives for strategies of ethnic boundary-making. Both embedded modes of political competition and patronal underpinnings are key for making of markers of national history a major component of public politics: the competition reinforces the ideological and cognitive leverage of the zero-sum game between Ukraine's two poles.

3.1. The reconstruction of the power vertical and the discursive nationalisation of history

3.1.1. Kravchuk's ideocratic presidency: preventing conflict in a condition of power in flux

Both presidents Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994-1999; 1999-2004) responded to the challenges of transition by seeking to promote a centralised model of statehood. In the initial condition of power volatility, the patron-president's opportunity to consolidate a focal point position is shaped by his ability to co-opt formal and informal power bases at the face of competitors (Wilson 1997a).

As a representative of the ideocratic wing of the CPSU, Leonid Kravchuk pursued a strategy of compromise against a background of political fragmentation over the definition of the internal and external dimensions of the state (Birch 2008, 230; Motyl 1995).

Two interrelated factors undermine the opportunity for establishing an effective information effect on elites' coordination:

- i) The president underestimated the importance of consolidating his leadership at the level of formal structures, thus dispersing networks' centripetal coordination around him
- ii) Kravchuk's partial promotion of Rukh's nationalist rhetoric failed to resonate across the industrialised Russophone regions, thereby providing incentives for unsatisfied networks to coordinate against him through the mobilisation of contested identity issues

In search of consensus, Kravchuk initially found the backing of a broad however loose coalition where national-communists of the unofficial *Partiya Vladiya* were flanked by moderate nationalists (Birch 2008, 229). The former group counted its most prominent members across south-eastern Ukrainians: it represented the highest levels of the soviet apparatus, the media and the economy and extended through the executive branch, security organizations, and other state institutions (Pakulski, Kullberg, and Higley 1996; Fritz 2007, 119).

National-democrats in turn entered a cooperative opposition and pressured on Kravchuk to establish Ukraine's attributes of statehood. As noted by Kasianov (2008b, 44-45), they:

“continued to fight ‘the legacy of communism’, not noticing or trying to ignore the fact that yesterday’s communists have already heeded the advice of Karl Marx and are actively engaged in the extraction of surplus value and the construction of capitalism”

Likewise “national-communists”, national democrats could not develop an effective policy of socio-economic transition; further, they lacked instruments to pressure on former nomenklatura rulers to behave in the interest of the general public. Most other parties were short of autonomy and stability (see Meleshevich

2007), and of feasible plans over Ukraine's transition to capitalism: in fact, on the left side of the political spectrum, both the Socialist Party and the 1993-refounded Communist Party opposed market reforms (Fritz 2007, 110–18).

In this context, President Leonid Kravchuk partly took over the national-democrats' programme (Kulyk 2001; Motyl 1995); yet, the prospect of stabilising consensus on a distinct ideological norm was limited by impediments pertaining to both structural and interactional components.

Regionally-distributed cleavages limit the appeal of Rukh's national programme to the country's westernmost regions (Wilson 1997b): dense mechanisms of economic leverage with Russia and the relative risk of intra-state conflict discourage the championing of strategies of reversed stigmatisation, let alone ethnic exclusion and discrimination (Andrew Wilson 1997b, 25, chap 5). The President thus symbolically absorbed Rukh's ethno-cultural priorities in nation-building (Kulyk 2001, 210), but Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia was key in preventing Kravchuk from undertaking a fully-fledged nationalist course. As a result, Ukrainian was declared the only state language but the president refrained from rapidly introducing a complete switch to Ukrainian in all public areas (Arel 1995; Kulyk 2001, 2006; Sasse 2010, 102).

The president's redistribution of particularistic benefits was organised *impromptu* to please both national democrats and interest groups of former nomenklatura in exchange on their part not to threaten the social peace of the country (Birch 2008, 228–29; Motyl 1995). Some executive posts were assigned to representatives of the national-democratic movement, but the bureaucratic structure remained in hold of *apparatchiki* (Kasianov 2008b, 43).

The discursive promotion of a national state proved insufficient to meet Rukh's ambitions and in turn widened room for the manipulation of local constituencies' dissatisfaction with the inability of the leadership to undertake beneficial socio-economic reforms: former nomenklatura networks in particular could cultivate south-eastern residents' reluctance in endorsing nationalism to use it as a bargaining chip *vis à vis* the centre while at the same time marginalising national-democrats' impact on politics (Kulyk 2006).

Constitutional imprecision and the unclear division of power allowed Kravchuk to establish *ad hoc* negotiations with formal and informal actors, but continuous shifts in the political strength of different holders resulted in shift in their roles (Wolczuk 2001, 110–19). The lack of formal reference points deprived branches of government of basic coordination mechanisms and power remained plainly open to *ad hoc* tests of strength (Kasianov 2008b, 65-66; Fritz 2007, 116). At the central level, competition between the President and Prime Ministers, and between executive and legislative branches creates a situation of permanent negotiation and discoordination, and hinders prospects for building an effective system of institutional interdependence (Birch 2008, Wilson 1997).

The dispersal of power between the two executive posts and a poorly cohesive Parliament made up mostly of independents produces a vacuum over *de jure* and *de facto* policy-making authority (Wolczuk 2001).

In turn, the opportunity for stabilising an effective information effect across elites was undermined by Kravchuk's misperception over the importance of consolidating his leadership at the level of formal structures (Motyl 1995). The crisis of governability was furtherly exacerbated by the President's active promotion of Ukraine's independence abroad rather than "at home" as well as by continuous power shifts between the President and the Prime Minister. The latter competition intensify when the right to issue economic decrees was transferred to the prime Minister, Leonid Kuchma, a prominent member of Dnepropetrovsk's regional machine (Wolczuk 2001, 114–16).

Against this chaotic background, Kravchuk always pursued a policy of consensus: throughout 1993 and 1994, this strategy would include pleasing militant miners and heavy industrialists in the east shaken by social unrest for the economic results of independence (Solchanyk 1994; Wilson 1993; Hesli 1995) while trying to meet nationalists' demands pressing from the west. This move prevented conflict but hindered basic processes of state consolidation while also jeopardising the opportunity for consolidating large power base support.

The dispersal of Kravchuk's executive powers provided incentives for local and central level actors representing south-eastern constituencies to coordinate against him in the run-up to the 1994 pre-term elections. Blocking points in the Parliament would come from the loose but powerful Parliamentary group of the "New Ukraine", which was closely linked to the Ukrainian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (UIIE), headed by former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma, and to the 1994-formed Inter-Regional Bloc of Reforms (Fritz 2007, 119; Puglisi 2003a, 2003b)⁵. These groups held their power base located in the region of Dnepropetrovsk. In turn, social unrest in Donbass throughout the Summer of 1993 contributed to the newly-formed Communist Party's come-back in the March 1994 Parliamentary elections (Pirie 1996; Solchanyk 1994; Flynn 1996).

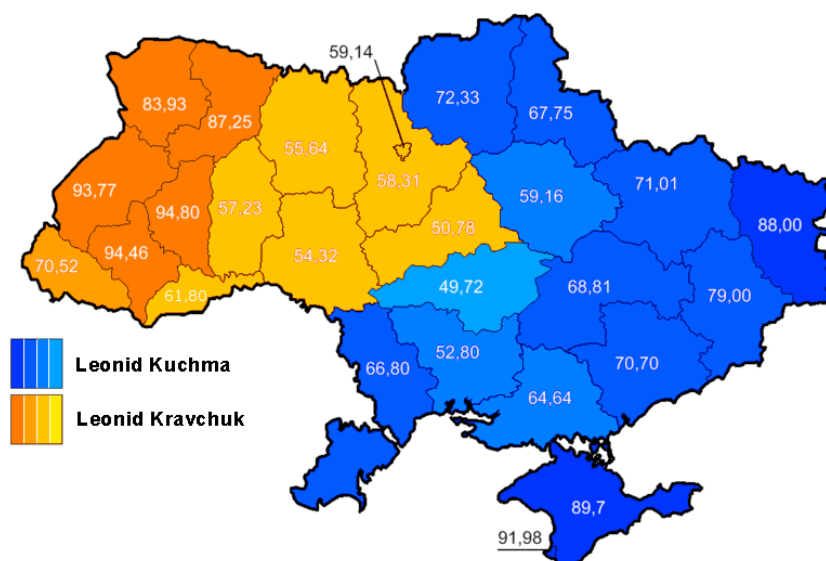
These processes precipitated the gradual dispersal of Kravchuk's executive power and forced the president to call pre-term presidential elections (Birch 2008, 234; Fritz 2007, 118): sources of disagreement over a national norm proved key to mobilize public dissatisfaction against the incumbent president and to capitalise support for Leonid Kuchma (Kulyk 2006, 295; Arel 1995b; 1995a; Arel and Khmelko 1996).

3.1.2. *Kuchma's technocratic rule: incorporation of south-eastern networks' interests into national politics*

The personalisation of power struggles furtherly stimulates the exploitation of ethno-linguistic, socio-economic and geopolitical grievances in the run up to the presidential electoral contest. In criticising president Kravchuk's allegedly nationalist moves, former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma successfully appealed to south-eastern Ukrainians' interests and emphasised the prospect of enhancing state involvement in the recovery of the economy while advancing Ukraine's ties with Russia and the rights of Russophone minorities (Kubicek 2000; Barrington

⁵ Gathering former nomenklatura members, these groups were officially pro-reform but would de facto advocate for a self-interested 'nomenklatura privatization'

2002a). This strategy won him two-thirds of the votes in every single oblast East of Poltava and 89.7 percent of preferences in Crimea (Pirie 1996; Arel 1995b). Most crucially, Kuchma could rely on the backing of both the “New Ukraine” and the related inter-Regional Bloc of Reforms, his Dnepropetrovsk power base for the presidential elections (Fritz 2007, 118–19; Puglisi 2003b).



Results of Presidential elections, second round (1994)

As a representative of the technocratic wing of the former CPSU, President Kuchma displays awareness of the importance of consolidating his position as focal point within the formal institutional framework (Wilson 1997a; 1999; Matsuzato 2005; Birch 2008). Two factors proved crucial for the successful reconstruction of the power vertical:

- i) In the face of growing disillusionment with independence, Kuchma managed to establish consensus across the public and elites over a strong leadership at the presidential office
- ii) Kuchma’s deep tools in the economy and politics of Eastern Ukraine allowed him to monopolise on south-eastern and central networks’ expectations through a systematic incorporation of informal actors’ interests into formal state structures

Kuchma too pursued a strategy of compromise across diversely-institutionalized political actors, but more effectively relied upon strategies of bargaining and co-

option of small elites and possible competitors (Birch 2008). He resorted to means of unilateralism in forcing decisions, even when they implied the explicit breakup of formal constraints (D'Anieri 2003). He proactively manipulated and bypassed institutions to stabilize his leadership; thus exploiting the weaknesses of state structures to provide constitutionally the presidential office with the widest range of executive prerogatives (Gilev 2010; Birch 2008, 230–38).

This strategy contributed to the consolidation of a vertical patronal system and to a complete merging of business and power: oligarchs' full entry into formal structures was completed by the end of Kuchma's first term (Minakov 2018, 138-42). Importantly thought, throughout Kuchma's presidency, the state was firmly in control of the rules of the game, a condition that allowed to pursue state-building through effective economic reforms (Kravchuk 2005; Kudelia 2012). In this context, contested nation-building issues were pushed into the background and were exploited situationally to fulfil the President's and his network's personalised pursuits (Kasianov 2008b).

In Kuchma's inauguration speech, identity issues had emphasised and declined in economic terms in an effort to advance a pragmatic centrist programme which could be alternative to both nationalist and leftist parties' divisive agendas. Hence, Kuchma rhetorically advocated for decentralisation and for granting the Russian language an "official" status alongside Ukrainian as "state" language (Kulyk 2006, 296) and would add that:

"Ukraine is historically part of the Eurasian economy and cultural space [...] The self-isolation of Ukraine and its voluntary refusal to promote its own interests actively in the Eurasian space were a serious mistake, causing colossal damages to our national economy" (in A Wilson 2009, 195).

Yet, electoral promises were not implemented and the new president maintained a fair degree of continuity with Kravchuk's nationalizing policy, with this being

reflected in the consolidation of the titular nation and language special place in the Constitution approved in 1996 (Bugajski 2000)⁶.

Key to the stabilisation of clients' support for such a strategy was the establishment of an unspoken agreement according to which the East would be in charge of the economy and its policy, while the West would set discursive and symbolic priorities in cultural and minority issues, the latter two being pursued unsystematically (Wilson 2009).

In turn, the overrepresentation of south-eastern networks in central organisations between 1994 and 2004 contributed in tying the East firmly to national politics: in this context, the systematic incorporation of patronal actors' interests into formal structures allowed the President to stabilise consensus on the new organisation of power. Such a process was strengthened up to the point of minimising to zero the not-too-unrealistic risk of Ukraine's territorial split into its eastern and western parts (Fritz 2007, chap 7).

As for the enforcement of external attributes of statehood, Kuchma's pragmatic re-establishment of fruitful economic ties with Russia contributed to Moscow's formal recognition of Ukraine's independence in 1997 (Kubicek 2000; Kravchuk 2005; D'Anieri 1999).

Against this background, nation-building stabilises as a tool of political competition exploited contingently to accommodate the need of the moment: hence, opportunism prevailed in the 1999 Kuchma's electoral campaign against the candidate of the Communist Party, when the president searched and found the backing of national democrats through a rhetorical resurrection of nation-building priorities (Birch 2002).

In this context, deep-seated patterns of corruption leveraged on political developments via the power of patronage (Kasianov 2008b). Kuchma's control over sub-national decision-making bodies, and his ability to influence resource allocation maximised the opportunity for co-opting political alliances, while the

⁶ The 1996 Constitution guaranteed the free use of Russian and other minority languages while upgrading the exclusive status of state language for Ukrainian.

approval of a constitution in 1996 furtherly reinforced the President's power vertical. Later, Kuchma's coercive means for keeping clients in the ranks expanded to the use of blackmail, intimidation of political opponents, control of the media and of corporate entities (Kubicek 2000; Darden 2001; Riabchuk 2012; Way 2005b).

Likewise Kravchuk, President Kuchma strived to co-opt formal and informal power bases into his networks, but his coercive and openly corrupted means and better appreciation of the importance of consolidating his informal rule at the level of formal institutions proved key to end the period of discoordination (Minakov 2018, 115; Way 2002; Matsuzato 2001). As predicted by Hale's theory, the president-patron's relative capacity to monopolize on elites' expectations is key to the finalization of formal institutional processes (Birch 2008, 221; Wilson 1999).

This is evident when one looks at the process of centralisation of the administrative structures that led Ukraine to retain the verticalized system of oblasts inherited from the Soviet Union (Wolczuk 2002).

President Kuchma pursued the same strategy of his predecessor, but was successful in finally establishing a coherent design that could serve the goal of strengthening his personal power.

Regional diversity proves functional to justify minimal change in the established verticalized structures: the reconstruction of the power vertical is in fact affected by the process of negotiation with south-eastern rent-seeking actors who hold a strong bargaining position vis à vis the centre (Minakov 2018; Way 2016, Puglisi 2003a, 2003b; Sasse 2001). Kuchma's success was facilitated by his deep tool in the economy of south-eastern Ukraine and by the dominance of soviet-time *apparatchiki* across the bureaucracy, which allowed to preserve patronage networks that could work as electoral machine and as a means of political control over lower levels of government (D'Anieri 2007; 2003; Matsuzato 2005). The centralisation of the fiscal system and the unclear division of power furtherly strengthen the centre's political leverage over regions (Kravchuk 1999).

In a nutshell, Kuchma's presidency marked a shift in the representation of regional interests in national politics, while the centralized structures inherited from Kravchuk remained formally unchanged: in such a context, constitutional reform does not govern the balance of power between branches of governance and administrative structures, it rather follows their relative strength (Way 2005a; Wilson 1999; Matsuzato 2005).

3.1.3. *From Kravchuk's symbolic statehood to Kuchma's pragmatism:
fragmentation and contestation of Ukraine's historical policy*

Likewise in other soviet successor republics, the legacy of the soviet nationality policy impacts on acceptable strategies for drawing meaningful boundaries along national markers of identification. Independent Ukraine's nation-building policies respond to principles of incorporation: the Ukrainian national group is selected by elites as the nation in which everybody should fuse.

Central organisations' strategies of ethnic boundary-making aim at institutionalising objective attributes of statehood (legitimacy and territoriality) and at strengthening national unity through means of identification, Ukrainization, and of (re)invention of traditions ascribable to the new-born nation-state (G. Smith et al. 1998). Notwithstanding the dominance of former nomenklatura members in power structures, the process of nation-building is formally framed to reverse power relations between Russians and Ukrainians in favour of the titular nation the sovereign state represents.

In this context, the symbolic nationalisation of history in Ukraine was completed as early as by the mid-1990s (Kasianov 2012): new institutional structures and the configuration of political alliances encouraged the prioritisation of the interests of the group identified with the new-born state's titular nationality, and granted a degree of quasi-unanimity on the content of historical narratives. The process kicks off from the sovereignisation movement initiated by *Rukh* and results in the creation of "mutually exclusive" histories: the making of the Ukrainian free nation entails the symbolic unmaking of the Russians' (Torbakov 2011, 212-13). The shift to a national model of statehood

and the competitive cooperation between “national-communists” and national-democrats determine the standard account be loosely defined along an ethno-centric canon of cultural exclusivity anchored to the myth of the Kievan Rus’ as the primordial model of Ukrainian sovereignty (Kasianov 2012, 141–44) and framed in relative opposition to the soviet canon of historiography (Kasianov and Ther 2009).

On these grounds, past experiences are the history of the nation associated with the titular group, i.e. the national entity in which everybody should fuse (Kasianov 2012; 2019; Torbakov 2011).

Kravchuk in particular encouraged the implanting in public consciousness of nationalist symbols, myths and traditions related to the history of Ukraine in its resistance to Russia’s imperialism and struggle for independence (Wolczuk 2000; Motyl 1995; Kulyk 2019; Wilson 1998).

The nationalisation and sovereignization of discursive and symbolic narratives of national history were key to justify the dominant position of ruling political alliances, and to sustain opposition to any integration initiative promoted by Russia within the CIS (Hesli 1995). However symbolic in scope, this strategy entailed a relative degree of cultural exclusivity: the discursive institutionalization of Ukraine’s national history rested on the denial of mutual influence and interaction with the history of the major relevant other, i.e. the tsarist-imperial earlier and later Soviet Russia (Kasianov and Ther 2009).

At the same time, the president refrained from emphasizing in the public debate *Rukh*’s and other groups’ radical re-evaluation over the blank spots of national history – i.e. those forbidden topics of Soviet historiography, such as the *Holodomor* and the OUN and UPA - which could have been used to manipulate dissatisfaction across the south-east by local and central elites up to a point of destabilisation (Wilson 2009, 144-45).

Kuchma did not reverse the project of nationalisation, but removed the indigenisation components intrinsic to Kravchuk’s symbolic strategy: as a result, the emphasis on the ethno-centric canon of history was deflated. Particularly during his first term, the discursive nationalisation of history to justify Ukraine’s

independence continued but was cleaned up of its ethnicization components: this strategy partly contributed to align major discourses to Ukraine's declarative Europeanisation (Wolczuk 2000).

Throughout his tenure, most nationalist myths and traditions were maintained but the anti-Russian and anti-Russophone rhetoric springing from the relative insecurity over the ability to maintain territorial integrity vanished, and the soviet past could be situationally declared inseparable from Ukraine's (Wolczuk 2000; Kulyk 2001).

The non-systematic organisation of the historical policy and the urgency of other social problems discouraged radical declarations from high-level policy actors as well as the mounting of dissent in the field. Public engagement and political competition would in fact prevail in the sphere of language policy (Kolsto 2000; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2002), while ambivalence would dominate over the politics of history, and open disputes were deliberately avoided (Kasianov 2012,141-48).

Such an ambiguous stance allowed authorities to focus on whatever they needed on a given moment without provoking much protest on either side of the contention. Contestation was the by-product of contingent political conjunctures: radical declarations were avoided unless they were essential for legitimising former nomenklatura members' continuing rule or for discrediting political opponents, with the latter being mostly Communists upholding the legitimacy of the Soviet narrative as part of Ukraine's history (Kasianov 2012, 147). The major aim of history policy was the one of promoting the civic education of the new country through the canonical version of nationalised history in curricula of educational institutions (Kasianov and Ther 2009).

Particularly during Kuchma's presidency, identity issues in general and historical ones in particular were consciously subordinated to the consolidation of the power vertical and to the containment of social stability (Kuzio 2016b; Wolczuk 2000). Likewise in the field of language policy, the president would systematically endorse and praise different narratives depending on which pole of the country he was visiting (Kasianov 2010a; Kulyk 2006).

The potential for heightened tensions intrinsic to the ambiguity of state-led practices was marginalised by preventing a systematic implementation of the historical policy countrywide (Yurchuk 2011; Kulyk 2019; Portnov 2013). Exception made for formal changes in educational programmes, symbolic and discursive strategies of boundary-making drawing on history would not be matched by means for making resultant modes of identification operational in the field. The lack of investment and resources to grant the nationalisation process a full top-down support furtherly deflated historical narratives' potential for leveraging over significant modes of identification (Kasianov 2012).

In the absence of a consequentialist policy, regional authorities were allowed to pursue different strategies of adjustment, thereby aligning the practices of their regions to the preferences of the respective constituencies (Kulyk 2019; Yurchuk 2011).

Locally-elected bodies in the west, particularly in Galicia, proceeded to remove and replace soviet street names and monuments with those commemorating the Ukrainian nation: the initiative entailed the public commemoration of figures and events that had been stigmatised by the socialist regime (Yurchuk 2011). As a result, the process of decommunization in western regions was de facto largely completed by the early 90s. By contrast in the south-east, the toponymical and monumental landscape remained almost unchanged (Marples 2017; Kulyk 2019). Particularly across Ukraine's western oblasts and during Kravchuk's presidency, the fragmentation of Ukraine's historical policy and the lack of an executive formal plan stimulated the proliferation of grassroots initiatives undertaken by weakly organised but ideologically motivated national-oriented CSOs that had emerged during perestroika (Yurchuk 2011, 134).

The ambiguity of the historical policy relates to former nomenklatura networks' and rent-seeking actors' shared concern for a mutually-interested independence. The latter would be pursued through extemporary nation-building initiatives that responded to the priority of balancing the country's composition while establishing a centralised state. The primary concern was the one of pursuing compromise over conflict at home (Birch and Zinko 1998) while

securing sufficiently friendly political and economic relations with Russia (Portnov 2013).

The historical policy would therefore reflect the general polysemy of Ukraine's process of state consolidation, in which the post-soviet agreement on inclusivity coexisted with the elicitation of clarifying the programmatic aims of nation-building, as well as the location and consequences of the social contract that replaced the socialist ideology with the national one.

Central organisations' action translate patronal networks' inability or lack of willingness and incentives to effectively homogenise the nation on a conceptual framework which might elude confrontation while also reconciling the two poles on a shared understanding of national unity.

The outcome is twofold. On the one hand, Ukraine's politics of history remained highly contradictory and contingent, as it was *de facto* left to the improvisation of both central and local level actors (Portnov 2013). On the other hand and likewise in the realm of language policy, the embeddedness of competitive preferences and the symbolic promotion of the ethno-centric canon allowed political actors to put contested issues on ice and at the forefront to serve individual actors' cost-benefit calculations (Yurchuk 2011, 134).

In the event of augmented competition within the patronal system of politics, the rhetorical institutionalisation of a nationalised version of history left room for mobilising dissent and turning contested issues into a self-serving political weapon.

3.2. Regime dynamics in 2004-2013 and the growing salience of contested history on political struggles

3.2.1. The Orange Revolution as an outcome of patronal networks' split

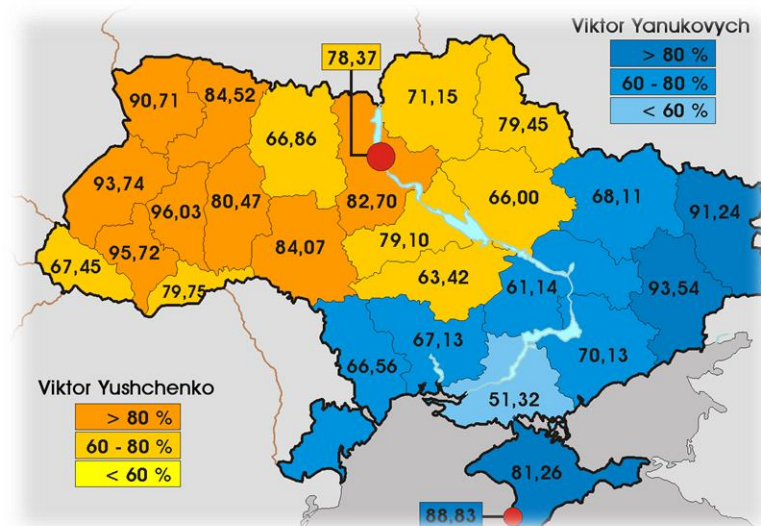
Ukraine's Orange Revolution has been evaluated as a 'national' phenomenon that empowered a political movement that claimed to represent the interests of the national group and actively aimed at institutionalising more confrontational

boundaries, thereby deepening Ukraine's east-west divide (M. Beissinger 2013; Way 2006; Lane 2008; Arel 2006).

The event was indeed marked by the intense mobilisation of nationalist and anti-corruption claims from the part of the democratic candidate, Viktor Yushchenko (Kuzio 2005b; 2010), which in turn stimulated Kuchma's heir, Viktor Yanukovich, to emphasise the anti-Russian nationalism of his opponent (Kulyk 2019, 1033-34).

Way (2006) argues that an anti-incumbent majority identity proved key in counter-balancing the weaknesses of local civil society: in this perspective, opposition to Yanukovich benefitted of national identity as a mobilization weapon against the incumbent's protegee. Relatedly, Beissinger (2013) finds that national-symbolic cleavages leveraged more than commitment to democratic values for the successful construction of a negative coalition across diverse policy groupings. On these grounds, identity cleavages are crucial to the victory of the protest movement and to the maximisation of the political effects of Ukraine's identity divides (Arel 2006).

The politicisation of competitive claims to nationhood at the level of the public debate contributes to the reproduction of polarised electoral preferences throughout all the three rounds of the electoral contest.



Presidential elections: results of the third and last round (December 2004)

Drawing on a patronal understanding of episodes of power redistribution, the fall of Kuchma's single-pyramid politics and the origins of the Revolution shall be primarily located in the combination of a lame-duck syndrome and structural flaws of the power vertical which prevented the patron's firm control on political and business elites' expectations (Van Zon 2005).

Throughout his second presidency, Kuchma's regime would respond to a principle of *divide et impera*; yet, the *Verkhovna Rada* would still present blocking points to the complete verticalization of the patron-president's superpowers (Way, 2005; Kudelia 2012).

The foundations of this system were shaken in late 2000, when Member of Parliament and leader of the Socialist Party, Oleksandr Moroz, published the recordings implicating Kuchma's involvement in the killing of the Georgian journalist Georgiy Gongadze⁷. The "Ukraine without Kuchma" popular movement prompted the organisation of political opposition and nascent civil society against Kuchma's corrupt power vertical and forced the President to enter a series of negotiation with opposition parties (Gilev 2010; Kuzio 2005b; Kudelia 2012).

In September 2004, parliamentary speaker and one of Kuchma's closest ally, Volodymyr Lytvyn, defected and brought with him 40 deputies: few weeks later, the *Rada* became the first governmental institution to back the mass demonstrations that begun soon after the electoral fraud (Way 2005b, 138-39).

Public unrest and the dispersal of Kuchma's control over the parliament prompt the opening of the system. In such a context, clients' coordination and expectations are shaped by two factors:

- i) Trends within the public opinion and the growing popularity of Yushchenko's anti-establishment, national and democratic programme inform elites' cost-benefits calculations, included the ones over future

⁷ The "tape scandal", also known as "Kuchmagate" shattered the very foundations of Kuchma's personalized state and exposed its most corrupted forms of coercion and violence

prospects of legal prosecution had Yushchenko won the elections (Matuszak 2012, 24)

- ii) Rivalries between clans prevent the consolidation of concerted support for Yushchenko's heir and former Governor of Donetsk, Viktor Yanukovich: many oligarchs who had supported Kuchma in 1999 reorganised their pursuits around Yushchenko because Yanukovich was associated to favouring the Donetsk clan's interests over others', Dnepropetrovsk's included (Hale 2014, 184–86; Kuzio 2005b; Matuszak 2012, 33; Van Zon 2005; Zubytska 2018, 149–50). By contrast, Yushchenko enjoyed good personal relationships with members of the *Rada* and their patronal sponsors, most of which had been consciously cultivated as a member of Kuchma's presidential office and as Prime Minister, in 1999-2001 (Interview with Volodymyr Lytvyn 2019)⁸.

Against this background, the mobilisation of national identity issues from the part of the democratic candidate informs elites' expectations because they relate to obvious trends across masses in the context of opening of the consolidated patronal system of politics (Hale 2014). The regional distribution of competitive claims to nationhood and past patterns of political manipulation inform clients' coordination around a strategic endorsement of Yushchenko's programme. In turn, support for the democratic leader came from actors positioned east and west of Ukraine's divide and holding their interests in different sectors of Ukraine's economy (Kuzio 2016a).

In a context of elites' split, regionalism and national identity are key to the mobilisation of political grievances across masses but not to the underlying activity of clients' repositioning and alliance-building activity.

⁸ Interview with Volodymyr Lytvyn – December 6, 2019, Kiev. Former member of the Presidential Staff (1994-1999) and Head of the Presidential Administration under Kuchma (1999-2002); he was also the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada (2002 -2006 and 2008 – 2012) and Member of Parliament until 2019

3.2.2. Patronal networks' competition against the background of endogenous and exogenous shifts

Regime dynamics in 2004-2013 are shaped by the interaction of endogenous and exogenous shifts that alter the three macro-structural characteristics of the field and interact with the growing salience of markers of contested history in state-led policies of national identification.

Exogenous to the field is the renovation of both Russia's and European organisations' policy towards Ukraine. There gradually emerges a competition between Russia and the European Union and NATO for deepening cooperation and integration with Kiev (Protsyk 2003; Torbakov 2011, 212-14; Dimitrova and Dragneva 2013; Cadier 2014; Haukkala 2015; Kuzio 2017). The ascent of Putin and dynamics of international politics hinder the sustainability of Ukraine's declarative Europeanisation and multi-vectoral foreign and security policy which had been consolidated under Kuchma's presidency (Kuzio 2005a; Gnedina 2015). Throughout the process, mechanisms of linkage and leverage with relevant actors renovate constantly.

Endogenous to the field are shifts in the constitutional design – i.e. the introduction of a divided executive system in 2005 and the return to a semi-presidentialist one under Yanukovich (2010-2014). Further, there is a major shift in the configuration of political alliances as the Party of Regions' regional patronal machine succeeds in consolidating a leading position in central politics (Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Kudelia 2014a).

The amendment of the constitution in 2005 reflects winning networks' efforts to compromise over the societal tensions that had emerged during the Revolution. The power-sharing arrangement provided for the reduction of the presidential powers in favour of the government's and the parliament's; thereby granting Yanukovich's faction with a credible guarantee of non-marginalisation in the future government (Kudelia 2007; Riabchuk 2012, 60–61). By the same token, the accord alleviates problems of commitment to Yushchenko's seemingly nationalising regime across Ukraine's south-eastern constituencies (Strasheim 2016, 32–33).

The system of competitive pyramid politics was characterised by the emergence of three main networks engaged in a continuous competitive struggle (Fisun 2010; Matuszak 2012, 25-6):

- i) The presidential team along with his party Our Ukraine
- ii) The Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, whose leader held the post of Prime Minister in 2005-2006 and from the end of 2007 to 2010,
- iii) The Party of Regions' network, which had dominated both the 2006 and 2007 early parliamentary elections⁹ and whose leader, Viktor Yanukovich, became Prime Minister in 2006-2007

As none of the networks could prevail over the other, competition coalesced on the struggle between the President and the Prime Minister: the split of the Orange coalition produces harsh confrontation between Yulia Tymoshenko's and President Yushchenko's networks (Fisun 2010).

In such a context and notwithstanding the Orange Revolution's push for order, democracy and justice, Ukrainian oligarchy flourished and renovated its engagement in the public sphere towards a more systematic activity of party formation and management (Matuszak 2012, 33; Zubytska 2018).

While patronal networks' backing for the orange camp was fluctuating and more volatile, the Party of Regions' network could rely on the stable support of Ukraine's most powerful oligarchs, included the country's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, and could benefit of its control over the majority in the Parliament (Matuszak 2012, 25–28).

In the absence of a strong party representation in the *Verkhovna Rada* and in order to counteract Tymoshenko's influence, Yushchenko was forced to co-opt representatives of the Party of Regions into governing structures, premiership included. In turn, Tymoshenko's attempts at establishing a fully-fledged network were blocked both by Yushchenko's administrative vertical and

⁹ Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc received slightly lower support and remained the strongest grouping in the 'orange' camp, while Our Ukraine 's support collapsed signalling a dramatic fall in public support for Viktor Yushchenko

by the Party of Regions' control over key regional machines (Fisun 2010). Consolidated links between Party of Regions' MPs and oligarchs from south-eastern oblasts further limited Yushchenko's programme and hindered the prospect for undertaking reforms, thus provoking a quick collapse of the president's popularity also across pro-Orange constituencies.

The impasse over much-needed socio-economic and anti-corruption plans contrasts with an active promotion of Ukrainization and of a nationalist version of history, with this strategy provoking resentment across the south-east (Kuzio 2016a; O'Brien 2010; Hrytsak 2015).

In this context, the Party of Regions' transformation from a regional political machine to a major actor in central politics was the result of an effective strategy of co-option of smaller parties from the south-east as well as of systematic politicisation of historical, cultural and language issues (Kudelia 2014a; Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Kuzio 2015; A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012).

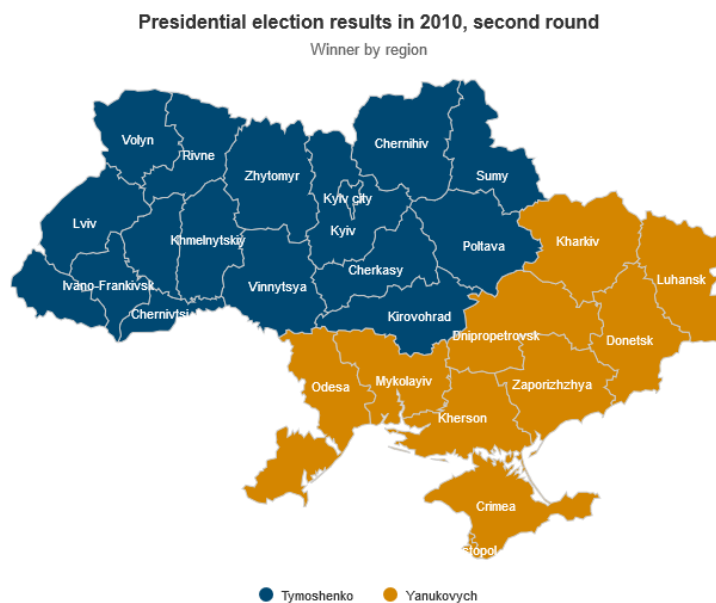
Already by the early 2000s, the Party's instrumental commitment to an ideology of soviet nostalgia allowed the network to gradually spread its influence beyond Donetsk.. After 2005, it emerged as a shelter for those government official threatened by Yushchenko's agenda (Kudelia 2014a, 21) and thus incorporated into its structures smaller south-eastern parties, most of which were based in the regions of Kharkov, Odessa and Crimea (See Kuzio 2015; Minakov 2018, 144-46). Against this background, the electoral basin of the party grew strong of stable votes based on both the ideological manipulation of modes of identification and on consolidated clientelistic practices (Kuzio 2016a, 185-86). The public attractiveness of the Party strengthened throughout Yushchenko's presidency. The network advanced Russophones' policy preferences in the public debate over issues of culture, identity, decentralisation and neutrality in international security that were competitive to the ones promoted by the pro-European and nationalist-leaning Orange leader (A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012; Kasianov 2012).

The majority position the Party enjoyed in the *Rada* enhanced the political resonance of these efforts and contributed greatly to Yanukovich's victory over

Yulia Tymoshenko in the presidential run of February 2010 (Zubytska 2018; Kudelia 2014a, 20).

Likewise in 2004, the Party of Regions' campaign relied extensively on anti-NATO rhetoric and on promises to make Russian an official language.

Nonetheless, pro-Russian discourses were mostly based on the restoration of pragmatic relationships with Moscow and were in fact smoothed in favour of balanced prospects of strengthening cooperation with both the EU and Russia (Tregub 2010). Observers point to a reiteration of Kuchma's multi-vectoral foreign policy programme based on a pragmatic rapprochement to Russia and on a geopolitical movement towards the EU (Gusev 2010; Haran and Prokopchuk 2010). Notwithstanding these differences, the outcome of the electoral contest against the outspokenly pro-European Yuliya Tymoshenko reproduced Ukraine's bipolarity in voting preferences.



Regional divides in Ukraine's Presidential elections second round

Yanukovich's family quick re-verticalization of the patronal system was undertaken at the expense of other big corporate groups whose interests had been

safeguarded under Yushchenko's multiple pyramid system¹⁰. Oligarchs who managed to negotiate a strong position were Rinat Akhmetov, the major beneficiary of the Party of Regions, and Dmytro Firtash, a magnate of the gas lobby with strong links to Russia's Gazprom (Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Kuzio 2015; McLees 2014).

Democratic advancements ascribable to the Orange Revolution were quickly reversed: by September 2010 and with the compliance of corrupt courts, Yanukovich managed to expand his power and finally reintroduce a super-presidential system (Minakov 2016; Kudelia 2014a, 20). The Party of Regions established unprecedentedly corrupted control over the Cabinet, the Parliament, and most local councils; while its extended patronal networks also controlled courts, the police, the tax administration, and major state-owned industrial companies (Minakov 2016).

These developments notwithstanding, the Party found itself in projecting in the public sphere the ideological ambiguity that had emerged during the presidential campaign and that rested on the championing of eastern Ukrainians' preferences in identity, domestic and foreign politics while effectively advancing up to a point of no-return Ukraine's integration in the European Union (Kudelia 2014a, 24, Kubicek 2017). In the context of renovated international conditions and shifting mechanisms of linkage and leverage, this policy was hardly suitable to fully consolidate a power vertical and provided a point of common coordination for unsatisfied patronal networks.

3.2.3. The mobilisation of contested history at the level of central organisations

Yushchenko's presidency was marked by the attempt of making of confrontational narratives on national history popular across western Ukraine an operational state policy consequential for national modes of self-identification

¹⁰ The president's "family" was headed by his son, Oleksandr and would include business and corporate actors

and categorisation (Narvselius 2012; Yurchuk 2011; Kasianov 2008a; Portnov 2013).

The creation in 2005 of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (*Ukrainskij Institut Natsionalnogo Pamyati*, hereafter also UINR), i.e. a governmental body tasked with the objective of forging a national policy on Ukraine's history, signals a strong political motivation in empowering an executive institution to subvert the consolidated practice of devolving to sub-national actors the opportunity for conforming to state-led initiatives (Per A. Rudling 2011; Kasianov 2019; Yurchuk 2011).

The struggle coalesces around two issues that are central to the anti-Soviet account of Ukraine's 20th century: the characterisation of Stalin-promoted Great Famine of 1932-33 (*Holodomor*) as a genocide against the Ukrainian people (Kasianov 2010a; 2010b; 2008a; 2013; Klymenko 2016; B. Martin 2012); and the awarding to World War II-era nationalist leaders Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych the status of "Hero of Ukraine" (Marples 2007; Per Anders Rudling 2006; Portnov 2016; Yurchuk 2011; 2017b; Umland and Yurchuk 2017).

The institutionalisation of the *Holodomor* as a genocide of the Ukrainian people had been anticipated by one of Kuchma's last ambiguous initiatives in the field of remembrance. In May 2003 and on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the tragedy, the Verkhovna Rada adopted an appeal upgrading the definition of genocide for the Famine and advocating for the international recognition and condemnation of the event (B. Martin 2012, 105)¹¹.

Yushchenko's efforts for stabilising consensus on the genocidal interpretation of the forced starvation started in 2005. In November 2006, the *Rada* adopted a law on the recognition of the *Holodomor* as an act of genocide, stating that its denial should be forbidden by the Law (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 2006). The President furtherly struggled to have the genocide status recognised in international fora, thus contributing to the internationalisation of the issue (see European

¹¹ Kuchma's initiative was interpreted as an attempt to remediate on his international reputation after the *Kuchmagate*

Parliament 2008)¹². The president-promoted narrative aimed at representing the Famine as a cultural trauma defining Ukrainian national identity (Klymenko 2016), and would build on the politicisation and instrumentalization of the most tragic aspects of the event (Kasianov 2008a; 2013). The policy emerges as the first systematic attempt of framing Ukraine's return to Europe as a process of alienation from Russia: the major narrative would in fact point to Bolshevik Russia's project of indigenisation as the main cause of tragedy politically motivated by the goal of eliminating the Ukrainian nation (UINR 2007).

At the central level, both the Communist Party and the Party of Regions voted against the Law of 2006; with Yanukovych's Party advocating for the omission of the definition of genocide and for the recognition of the event as a "crime against humanity perpetrated by the Stalinist totalitarian regime" (Katchanovski 2010, 982–83). In regions controlled by the Party of Regions, the confrontational struggle prompted memory wars between locally-elected bodies and the personnel of Regional State Administrations, with Yushchenko's representatives promoting the erection of monuments and the organisation of commemorative practices (Zhurzhenko 2011).

In January 2010 and on the eve of the presidential elections, Yushchenko granted the status of 'Hero of Ukraine' upon World War II-time nationalists Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, two prominent figures of the controversial OUN and UPA organisations respectively (Rudling 2006; Yurchuk 2017b; Marples 2007; 2006). Yushchenko's efforts had been anticipated by a symbolic but systematic rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA (Marples 2007, chap 7) and aimed at institutionalising the western Ukrainian narrative over the two organisations as liberation movements fighting for Ukraine's independence against Soviet and Nazi occupants (Per Anders Rudling 2006).

¹² Notably, the European Parliament issued a resolution in October 2008 defining the famine an "appalling crime against the Ukrainian people" but defecting from recognising the definition of genocide

The strategy for legitimising and institutionalising the antagonistic boundary intrinsic to such a controversial understanding rested on the discursive presentation of both the OUN and the UPA as pluralistic and inclusive organisations (Per Anders Rudling 2011). Rulers' claim downplayed these groups' involvement in the ethnic cleansing of Poles in the border region of Volhynia (Kulyk 2019, 1044-45) as well as ideological controversies related to the organisations' affinity with fascist ideologies (Marple 2006; Snyder 2010; Katchanovski 2015; Narvselius 2012). Both the OUN and UPA were placed in continuity with the Cossack myth and thus endorsed with the merit of ensuring the existence of the Ukrainian nation (Yurchuk 2011, 138). The move was aimed at incorporating both the OUN and the UPA into national history through normative practices of institutionalisation and commemoration (Motyl 2010). Yushchenko's warrior-like promotion of the nationalist view on the past provoked critical responses from Russia (Schwartz 2009) and Poland, which would consider the UPA responsible for the ethnic cleansing of compatriots (Wylegała 2017; Kasianov 2006; Marple 2007; Katchanovski 2015). The policy also contradicts the European framework on politics of remembrance (Narvselius 2012); and was promptly condemned by the European Parliament (European Parliament 2010).

Political opponents at home would depict Yushchenko's nationalist course as an attempt to "Galicianize" Ukraine (Yurchuk 2011, 140). Even more than the initiative on Holodomor, the heroization of controversial figures of WWII is confrontational towards basic postulates of the soviet historiography, and thus provoked a public reaction across those communities that were accustomed to the treatment of those leaders as Nazi collaborators (Motyl 2010; Umland 2020). In Lugansk, a monument to local victims of OUN and UPA was inaugurated soon after the officialization of Yushchenko's contested decision in 2010 at the presence of prominent political representatives from the Party of Regions and from Moscow (Yurchuk 2011, 141-42).

During the successful presidential campaign of 2010, the Party of Regions' ideological platform mobilised consensus in south-eastern oblasts over the status

of the Russian language and the resistance to Yushchenko's nationalism in the historical policy (Kasianov 2012, 161). As of February 2011, Yanukovich withdrew the initiatives on UPA and OUN leaders and dismissed the definition of the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people (The New York Times 2011).

The historian and Minister of Education, Dmytro Tabachnyk, actively promoted soviet narratives which were ideologically antagonistic to Yushchenko's: the common Ukrainian-Russian-Belorusian celebration of the victory in the WWII under the naming of 'Great Patriotic War' was reintroduced in education programmes; relatedly, the compulsory teaching of Russian at school was reinstalled (Moser 2013). The UINR's executive activity was deflated and the Institute was de facto turned into a research centre headed by Valeriy Soldatenko, an historian from Donetsk associated with the Communist Party and with a Sovietophile version of history (Yurchuk 2011, 143).

The anti-Orange predominance during Yanukovich's presidency was advanced by ideologically-committed members of the Party of Regions who would thereby advance Russia-friendly moves over identity issues (Kulyk 2019, 1035). At the same time, the foundations of the national narrative were not touched upon (Kasianov 2012; Kulyk 2019, 1036)¹³.

3.2.4. Contestation about history as an institutionalised tool of political competition: implications for patronal networks' coordination

The practice of advancing components of Ukrainian history on which consensus was lacking led to expressions of dissent from fractions of the politically active society placed on both sides of the confrontation (Korostelina 2013b) (Kasianov 2012, 160-161; Kulyk 2019).

¹³ As an example, the state-sponsored commemoration of victims of the Holodomor continued

Yushchenko's revival of contested myths over the exclusive historical path of the nation interacts with renovated domestic and international political conditions.

At home, the strategy is in open conflict with Soviet-nostalgic narratives and resulted in the tight anchoring of history to public practices of political competition (Miller 2007; L.A. Osipian and Osipian 2012; Yurchuk 2011; Narvselius 2012). The Party of Regions joined the Communist Party in the struggle to uphold the Soviet version of history as legitimate and representative of Ukraine's identity: myths and symbols of the soviet canon of history were tools of a counter-strategy to modes for dividing the social world as defined by Yushchenko's historical policy and resonated in south-eastern constituencies. Growing levels of confrontation in the Parliament have obvious effects in the field, where the initiatives of the Orange Presidency are growingly associated to moves of social closure against south-eastern residents.

Yushchenko's strategy was systematically represented by political opponents as aimed at alienating eastern Ukrainians from decision-making processes, a possibility that had been dreaded already during the Revolutionary phase (Arel 2006). Yushchenko's deliberate choice of excluding south-eastern places of memory from the national narrative and prioritising the centre and west for commemoration practices lends legitimacy to this interpretation, strengthens the appeal of regionalism and reinforces local electorate's support for their political representatives on the basis of identity allegiances (Osipian 2015, 635).

Growing political salience and public engagement thus runs parallel to shifts in asymmetrical and partial levels of consensus, both being particularly prominent for the controversial issue of the OUN and UPA rehabilitation.

In 2007, Kiev's Institute of International Sociology (KIIS) found that 63 percent of Ukrainians (rather) supported the *Rada's* recognition of the Holodomor as genocide of Ukrainian people (Katchanovsky 2015), this notwithstanding major regional differences. In turn, the idea of granting the status of Hero of Ukraine to Bandera, OUN and UPA was opposed everywhere across the country, exception made for the historical region of Galicia (Katchanovski 2015).

History became a privileged tool for discrediting ruling opponents (Kasianov 2012, 151-52), with the Party of Regions emphasizing “anti-nationalist” slogans which were formerly associated with left-wing ideologically-committed parties (Kulyk 2019). By emphasising the socio-political implications of the ethno-centric canon, competitive claims would successfully associate the Orange regime to diacritics that mandate an understanding of unequal power distribution and political representation.

All the same, competition in the public sphere did hardly interfere on the self-interested promotion of particularistic interests of patronal networks.

In conversation with the author, former speaker of the *Rada* and MP, Volodymyr Lytvyn, contends that contestation in the Parliament was part of the consolidated informal “agreement” of reproducing the opposition between the east and west on identity issues while compromising on self-interested economic deliberations (Interview with Volodymyr Lytvyn 2019).

Journalist and formerly Head of the Press service of President Yushchenko, Larisa Mudrak, claims that it was Yushchenko’s personal priority to promote dialogue with oligarchs associated with the Party of Regions, included Akhmetov, whom he would relate to as a “businessman” in order to advance positive initiatives in the programme of national state consolidation (Interview with Larisa Mudrak 2019)¹⁴. Such a strategy could be pursued also in light of little constraints from western partners, whom the president consciously related to more for technical than for substantial financial support. This latter circumstance allowed some freedom of movement to Yushchenko when compared to Poroshenko whose distribution of patronage was constrained by western donors’ and the IMF’s supervision over the fair use of unprecedentedly generous grants.

¹⁴ Interview with Larisa Mudrak – December 2, 2019, Kiev. For example, Yushchenko successfully lobbied on Akhmetov to take part to the impressive project of restructuration of Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kiev; other oligarchs were engaged in projects regarding the construction of commemoration sites

In such a context, Yushchenko's anti-Russianness as displayed during the electoral campaign was smoothed in favour of a pragmatic Russian-friendly rhetoric which was symbolically marked by the President's first official visit abroad being set in Moscow rather than in a western capital¹⁵. Notwithstanding major moments of crisis such as the gas disputes of 2006 and 2008-2009 (Stern 2006; Stern, Pirani, and Yafimava 2009; Balmaceda 2007) and the tensions during the conflict in Georgia in 2008, these signals were also meant to reassure actors with strong transnational economic interests in the CIS (Interview with Volodymyr Lytvyn 2019).

During the 2009-2010 presidential campaigns, all candidates intentionally included and emphasised a distinct historical policy in their programmes and a vague differentiation in programmatic plans (Osipain 2015, 635).

Yanukovych's partial reversal of Yushchenko's policy furtherly consolidates the role of history as a favourite tool of the political struggle. The party of Regions' policies in the field of historical memory and the approval in 2012 of Law on Minority Languages that made Russian *de facto* an official language in south-eastern regions provoked discontent in Ukraine's western regions and contributed to the local electoral success of the nationalist party *Svoboda* at the parliamentary elections of 2012 (T. Olszański 2012; Shekhovtsov 2012; 2013; Narvelius 2012; Umland 2013a).

¹⁵ Symbolically significant is also the fact that the first visit at home of the Orange President was organised in the city of Donetsk. The choice is represented as a conscious attempt to please and reassure south-eastern constituencies over the representativeness of the new government and would project the President's sincere attachment to a project that could reconcile the nation's two poles. At this regard, the contested promotion and instrumentalization of the past is referred to as a mistake driven by the President's sincere commitment to the nationalist-leaning narrative and misperception over Ukraine's society readiness to endorse such stances (Interview with Larisa Mudrak 2019)

By late 2013, competitive claims over national history were a cemented mobilisation resource of the political struggle: their instrumentalization hinders the prospect of agreeing upon a shared understanding of the national domain that could reconcile Ukraine's poles. Instead, history emerges as a favourite tool for socialising the competitive zero-sum game (A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012) evoked by elites and for moving attention away from programmatic politics while pursuing patronal networks' self-interest.

Further, the growing overlapping between mobilised ethno-national and political-ideological boundaries contributes in widening the political spectrum of the contestation. The lack of a typical *cordon sanitaire* between centrist and nationalist parties and resentment across the west for Yanukovich's friendly moves towards Russia contributes in legitimizing nationalist parties activity - particularly Svoboda's - as normal politics, thereby radicalising part of the electorate of the west (Umland 2013a).

Against this background, Ukraine's political parties' lack of ideological cleavages based on socio-economic agendas widen; while the public relevance of parties' stances towards Russophones' identity concerns and geopolitical orientation grows (Fedorenko, Rybiy, and Umland 2016): the three main parties - i.e. the Party of Regions, the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko, and Our Ukraine - would mainly differ on the way they viewed and represented the nation's past, whereby the Party of Regions too was "programmatically" supporting Ukraine's integration into the European Union.

This latter circumstance adds up to shifting international conditions and domestic dynamics of political competition, as well as to structural flaws related to both the geographical concentration and the poor mobilisation potential of the Party's electorate, thereby strengthening constraints to the consolidation of a Putin-like power vertical under Yanukovich (Kudelia 2014a).

In the context of a formal commitment to a balanced policy between Ukraine's European and Russian vector in foreign policy, Soviet nostalgic initiatives would deepen the Party of Regions' ideological inconsistency while also radicalising

portions of society that had supported Yushchenko's agenda in the historical policy.

Patronal networks who had resented of Yanukovych's family "monopolisation" on structures of power could gradually re-organise their pursuits through the support for political projects that enjoyed strong electoral bases across Ukraine's western constituencies. A major impetus to the effective reorganisation of opposition parties came after the jailing of Yulia Tymoshenko (Shumylo-Tapiola 2011): the merging of Arsen Yatsenyuk's Front for Change with Tymoshenko's Fatherland had been preparatory to the alliance with the other two major parties—the liberal Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform (UDAR) and the nationalist All-Union Party *Svoboda*— for the October 2012 parliamentary elections (Kudelia 2014a, 24–25).

The unsustainability of a Kuchma-like strategy of "declarative Europeanisation" (Wolczuk 2003; 2004) inform competing networks' effective coordinate against the ruling patronal group.

Still, major oligarchs' support for political parties popular across western regions are out of ideological attachment to the nationalist course or the pro-European course; rather, they translate an attempt at coordinating against Yanukovych's family to challenge its monopolised structures of power (Kuzio 2016a).

Trends within the public opinion and grievances for the reversal of Yushchenko's programme inform oligarchs' promotion of political projects whose electorate is located in the west, but key to cost-benefit calculations over anticipated strategic action is the enmity with the major beneficiaries of the Party of Regions' regime.

3.3. *Conclusions*

The consolidation of the Ukrainian national state is about making of informal networks established under the soviet rule an actor of the emerging political order through relations of clientele and rent-seeking: such a task was achieved under Kuchma's presidency and rested on the deliberate avoidance of specifying the components of the national community. As a result, nation-building is an

activity of political competition rather than a programmatic construction of functional state institutions.

Hence, the symbolic nationalisation of history was completed by the mid-90s but remained contingent to cost-benefit calculations of the ruling class: the opportunity for conforming to state-led strategies was discretionary to locally-elected bodies and responded to regionally-distributed preferences. The dominance of south-eastern representatives in central structures furtherly deflated national historical discourses' potential for leveraging over significant modes of identification and power distribution.

Contestation and (perceived) social closure augment after the Orange Revolution: the combination of endogenous and exogenous shifts alter Ukraine's macro-structural features, thereby making of history an overtly conflictual tool that proves effective in moving attention away from the shortcomings in socio-economic reforms. In such a context, elites' strategy responds to short-term benefit calculations against the background of growing societal divisions: history in particular proves effective in polarising the country along antagonistic sentiments and in catching and mobilising fractions of the public opinion along regionally-defined and overlapping ethno-national and political-ideological cleavages. These processes are affected by but not determined by growing geopolitical implications of Ukraine's identity divide; they translate first and foremost the cumulative effect of embedded patronalistic practices of competition for power.

CHAPTER 4

THE DIFFUSION OF NATIONALIST HISTORICAL NARRATIVES DURING THE MAIDAN REVOLUTION

The chapter problematises the popularisation of nationalist historical narratives during and immediately after the Maidan Revolution.

The study draws on the theory of ethnic boundary-making and reflects on relational underpinnings that shift the bargaining power of competing groups and situated actors mobilising antagonistic interpretations of history during the revolutionary phase.

The major argument is that the strategic use of violence and the concrete risk of state fragmentation alter relations within the composite pro-Maidan movement and contingently empower radical actors claiming to represent the Ukrainian nation, thus impacting on patronal networks' coordination amidst an unprecedented crisis of statehood.

The struggle for making of nationalist groups' contested historical narratives a dominant marker of national identity entails interactional and embedded components. On the one hand, situational regime dynamics of power redistribution and the polarization of conflictual claim-making strategies in the field facilitate moderate elites' support for more confrontational boundaries (Kulyk 2014; Risch 2015; Fedorenko 2015). On the other hand, deep-seated practices of political competition leverage on the ambiguous framing of a civic mobilization anchored to integralist interpretations of history that have historically been associated to exclusivist moves of social closure across south-eastern regions (Portnov 2016; Zhuravlev and Ishchenko 2020; A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012).

The magnitude of shifts and drifts produced endogenously and exogenously to the field contributes to relocating interactions across established us/them

boundaries and to shifting relevant social categories towards confrontational modes of national identification.

Growing political grievances and poor degrees of agreement on resultant national divides make group-making projects critical for power relations – and in fact for the prospect of state and constituent groups’ survival: against an unprecedented background of violent interactions, contestation about markers of historical memory shapes the identity of groups as well as the patterns of collective action that frame them in conflict.

4.1. Discussion and research objectives

4.1.1. From the Euromaidan to the Ukrainian crisis – problematising domestic dynamics of political competition

The event initially known as Euromaidan was triggered on 21st November 2013 by President Yanukovich’s unexpected decision not to sign the Free Trade and Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius the following week, with such a withdrawal coming after mounting pressure from Russia (European Commission 2013a; Wierzbowska-Miazga 2013). Observers interpreted the President’s U-turn as a betrayal of Ukraine’s pro-western civilisational choice and a reconsideration over a project of political integration in Russia’s Custom Union (The Guardian 2013a). *Berkut* riot police’s harsh repression of protesters in Kiev on November 30th contributed in turning the pro-European protest into an anti-governmental insurrection that quickly spread across most regions of the country (Fedorenko 2015; Onuch and Sasse 2016).

By mid-December, competitive declarations by western actors and Russia enhance the geopolitical implications of the confrontation; thereby making more evident the anti-Russian components of the protest. In turn, Russian media portrayal of the event as driven by *Banderites* and nationalists contributes in enhancing the visibility of minority but well organised radical parties – i.e. *Svoboda* and *Pravy Sektor* – and resonates widely across pro-governmental south-eastern constituencies (Interfax Ukraine 2013). The *Verkhovna Rada*’s

approval of the so-called “Dictatorship Laws” making protest formally illegal (January 16, 2014) sorts the opposite of the intended effect: on 19th January violent clashes break out on Kiev’s Hrushevsky Street, leading to the radicalisation of traditionally non-violent protesters. The withdrawal of some of the provisions on 28th January and the resignation of Prime Minister Azarov did not deescalate confrontation (Fedorenko 2015). The government’s crisis of legitimacy and governability was furtherly exacerbated by protesters’ violent seizing of administrative buildings in central and western Ukraine (Ishchenko 2020; Kudelia 2014b).

On 18th February, clashes in Kiev escalate in bloodshed and trigger western actors’ intervention. Both the EU and the US impose sanctions on Yanukovich’s closest allies and on February 21st, the President and the oppositions sign an internationally-brokered agreement mandating early presidential elections, the reintroduction of Yushchenko’s divided-executive constitution and the creation of an *ad interim* cabinet with members of the opposition (BBC News 2014b). Protesters’ violent rejection of the deal, the spectacular flight of Yanukovich and the implosion of his extended network mark the victory of the revolutionary movement as well as the beginning of Ukraine’s crisis (Larrabee et al. 2017; Petro 2017; Sakwa 2014; Wilson 2014).

Throughout and beyond the revolutionary phase, divisive slogans, symbols and interpretations of history firstly owned by nationalist groups were popularised across moderate protesters and opposition parties (Umland 2014; Risch 2015; Portnov 2016). Claim-making processes interacted with Russia’s strategy of mobilising south-eastern communities along competitive narratives anchored to soviet myths of resistance drawn from the experience of WWII (Zhurzhenko 2015a; Gaufman 2015). In February, Moscow’s discourses of resistance to a violently-installed “fascist-junta” bolstered the mobilisation capacity of spontaneous anti-Maidan protests (Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016). The strategy was preparatory to the seizure, occupation and eventual annexation of Crimea and heightened incentives for opting for separatism in Donbass (Pakhomenko, Tryma, and J’moul 2018). In the remaining south-

eastern regions of what Putin called “Novorossiia” (Basora and Fisher 2014; Laruelle 2016; O’Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2017; Petro 2015), confrontation continued well into spring 2014 and physically revolved around contested historical landmarks, such as monuments of Lenin (Unian.net 2014).

The literature has widely addressed the diversity of actors, motives, strategies of the composite protest movement (Fedorenko 2015; Onuch 2014; 2015; Onuch and Sasse 2016; Zelinska 2015); not least in light of the divisiveness it fomented across south-eastern regions. A widespread observation is that different actors with different motivations found a common ground in the rejection of Yanukovich’s corrupt regime in the context of an otherwise poorly cohesive movement (Fedorenko 2015; Onuch and Sasse 2016).

On these premises, a liberal movement, represented by the parties *Bat’kivshchyna* and UDAR, could cooperate with nationalist parties (i.e. *Svoboda* and *Pravy Sektor*) against a common Russian-backed enemy despite having distinguished leaders, ideology, methods of protest and perception of the regime (Fedorenko 2015).

The evaluation of the role of far right groups during and after the protests has generated an intense scholarly debate.

Some observers point to nationalist parties’ small number and poor performances at the 2014 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections to stress that they could not impinge on the democratic base of the protest (Likhachev 2015; Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014): in this understanding, electoral outcomes contradict the supposedly radicalising trend of the Maidan, and nationalists’ role and visibility is inflated by Russian propaganda (Shekhovtsov 2015). In a related perspective, the radicalisation of the protest has been evaluated as highly contingent to nationalist groups’ effective defence of protesters from regime repression during the most violent phase of the confrontation (Likhachev 2015). Mobilised masses’ situational endorsement of nationalism and of violent tactics in the final stage of the Revolution would therefore be symptomatic of both the outrage against the unprecedented police brutality and the inadequacy of

moderate opposition leaders and liberal CSOs to coordinate effectively against the Russia-backed regime (Onuch and Sasse 2016).

Other observers have emphasised the divisiveness of claim-making repertoires popularised by these groups (Darden and Way 2014; Umland 2014; Way 2014), their leverage over radicalisation trends across post-Maidan society (Ishchenko 2018; Umland 2019) and have addressed more systematically the impact radical right groups' organisation capacity and violent strategy had on protest outcomes and on the precipitation of Ukraine's crisis (Ishchenko 2016; Katchanovski 2020; Kudelia 2018).

Such debates are also relevant for the assessment of the nature of the war in Donbass (for a recent debate see Hauter 2021).

Kiev's official interpretation of the conflict as an hybrid inter-State war of Russia against Ukraine finds an echo in studies overemphasising external causes to conflicts (Dunn and Bobick 2014; Rywkin 2014).

Treating conflict as a multi-causal phenomenon, some studies scrutinise the interaction of domestic and external sources of separatism (Giuliano 2015; 2018; Katchanovski 2016; Kudelia 2014b; Strasheim 2016; Wilson 2016; 2015): domestic roots of secession have been located in local communities' problems of commitment towards the violently installed transitional government and thus in structural impediments to a negotiated compromise (Strasheim 2016; Popova 2014), in the escalation of fear and resentment across the previously "dominant" Donbass region (Kudelia 2014b), in political grievances exacerbated by regional identity factors and by markers of political culture peculiar to the Party of Regions' stronghold (Katchanovski 2016).

In these latter perspectives, the impact of local elites' defection on the outbreak of war is limited: rational incentives to separatism are mostly endogenous to mobilised masses (Kudelia 2014b) rather than being provoked by regional networks' purposeful strategy and by the penetration of external agents coordinated by Russia (Wilson 2016).

4.1.2. Research objectives and rationale

The chapter inspects regime dynamics during and after the Maidan Revolution and seeks to discern power relations and ideological foundations that contribute to the popularisation of nationalist rhetoric, slogans and figures of shared past previously confined to underground groups and later normalised among moderate protesters. In particular, the research focuses on political elites' discursive endorsement and institutionalisation of contested narratives on Ukraine's history: in exploring the issue, the chapter problematises changes in consolidated patronal dynamics of coordination and their relational interaction with heightened levels of confrontation in the field that intervene in the reconstruction of more confrontational national boundaries.

Likewise the Orange Revolution, the Maidan correlates to a major split within the ruling coalition and to an agreement across competing actors over the need to alter the balance of power in favour of a "pro-democratic" extended network. Throughout the phase of contention, major shifts in the field alter power balances between diverse sets of actors; included oligarchs who hold their interests in different sectors of Ukraine's economy and politics (Kononczuk 2015). As actors' relative power disposal changes, circumstantial interactions alter acceptable political alliances, thereby impacting on consolidated dynamics between individuals and collective actors endowed with diverse resources and advocating for the institutionalisation of self-interested social categories (Wimmer 2013).

In this perspective, the radicalisation of the political struggle springs from interactions between diversely organised collective agents (Tilly 2015): relational underpinnings account for the diffusion of slogans, symbols and discourses of collective history that contribute in exacerbating levels of conflict between competing groups.

The study reflects on the theory of ethnic boundary-making and identifies shifts and drifts that relate to the socialization of contested historical narratives:

- i) Endogenous to the field is the diffusion of nationalist groups' strategy of mobilizing ethno-nationalist symbols on Ukraine's collective history and memory (Kulyk 2014; Risch 2015)
- ii) Exogenous drifts stem from Russia's strategy of mobilizing and diffusing narratives of history across Ukraine's south eastern oblasts that are antagonistic towards the one mobilised by domestic actors (Kozachenko 2019; Makhortykh 2018; Nuzov 2017; Siddi 2017)
- iii) Exogenous to the field is the shift produced by the growing competition between the European Union and Russia over a key shared neighbour (Cadier 2014; Dimitrova and Dragneva 2013; Haukkala 2015; Kuzio 2017; Protsyk 2003; Samokhvalov 2015; 2015; Torbakov 2011b)

The prioritisation and legitimation of more or less exclusivist definitions of the nation is contingent to the negotiation power of situated actors: rules governing competition, co-optation and coordination among political actors and the current configuration of power and resources are more important than the polity's institutional structures in prompting exclusivist forms of national identification (Wimmer 2012; 2013).

In such a context, patronal networks' collective action is crafted in anticipation of other relevant actors' strategy and aims at incorporating clients' self-interest within the newly emerging political order (Hale 2014).

On these premises, the chapter claims that networks' coordination interacts with and is altered by two factors that contingently empower actors "from below" and limit room for negotiating a condition of compromise over conflict.

First is the escalation of violent repertoires of mass protest during the last stage of the Maidan Revolution (16th January – 22nd February).

Drawing on the work of Kudelia (2018) and Ishchenko (2020), the study treats violence as a strategic choice aimed at shifting the balance of power between ideologically-committed and highly-mobilised minority groups, and moderate opposition parties.

Second is the concrete risk of territorial disintegration (late-February 2014 onwards).

Drawing on Minakov's findings (2015), the research argues that the risk of state fragmentation contributes in establishing a contingent competitive alliance between previously separated groups; i.e. traditional political parties, the transitional government, oligarchs and armed battalions, with such a condition temporarily empowering the bargaining position of ideologically-motivated CSOs and radical activists (Umland 2019; Minakov 2015).

Patronal networks' expectations are shaped by fluctuating power relations and obvious trends within mobilised masses (Hale 2014): both variables are affected by the interaction of shifts and drifts produced endogenously and exogenously to the field; but the outcome of networks' strategy is governed by deep-seated modes of political competition that draw on contested interpretations of history.

The section thus researches interactional and embedded components of the struggle that affects contingent alliance-building activities and concurs to the discursive reconstruction of boundaries along contested ethno-cultural markers of national identity. A related concern is with domestic relational underpinnings that contribute to the outbreak of the armed conflict in Donbass.

4.1.3. Methods

The analysis concentrates upon the anti-governmental phase of the Maidan Revolution (30th November - 22nd of February) and on the transitional government's period of tenure (February – May 2014).

The empirical investigation aims at discerning ideological foundations and power relations that underpin the struggle for renovating the legitimacy, meaning and location of the national boundary opposing the Ukrainian national group to the Russian and/or Soviet relevant other.

The chapter preliminarily traces regime dynamics that impact on interactional processes during Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity and immediately afterwards: it zooms on endogenous shifts produced by mobilised collective

actors pursuing a strategic use of violence for contesting the legitimacy of Yanukovich's regime first and for safeguarding part of Ukraine's territory later. It thus problematises these strategies' relational interactions with drifts produced exogenously to the field by Russia's competitive strategy of mobilising contested narratives of soviet history and that directly relate to the popularisation of symbols of shared past whose legitimacy and meaning is contested across regionally-distributed fractions of the population.

The discursive reconstruction of antagonistic boundaries is inspected through secondary sources and partly drawing on interviews carried out in Kiev and Kharkov in November and December 2019: the latter include mostly pro-Maidan political activists, moderate and nationalist political actors¹⁶. Drawing on surveys conducted immediately after the revolutionary phase, the section reflects on changing degrees of asymmetrical and partial consensus and detects antagonistic components of the discursive reconstruction of boundaries as well as the patterns of collective action they prompt across south-eastern populations. The investigation reconstructs structures that make of contested history a major frame for navigating the social order during episodes of contention, as well as the discursive practices deployed strategically to institutionalise and legitimise divisive understandings of the common past.

4.2. Regime dynamics from the Revolution of Dignity to the crisis of statehood

4.2.1. Far-right groups' violent strategy and changes in collective actors' bargaining power

Clients' expectations over anticipated leadership change are dictated primarily by shifts in the current balance of power and by obvious trends within mobilised masses (Hale 2014). The theory of ethnic boundary-making specifies that brokerage and alliance-building activities may be altered by shifts in the

¹⁶ The majority of central-level political elites were activists or members of the Civil society before the Maidan

bargaining power of traditional political parties and new empowered actors – included minority but well organised groups (Wimmer 2013; Pytlas 2015).

The All-Union Party *Svoboda* (Freedom) and *Pravy Sektor* (Right Sector) are the main nationalist actors of the revolutionary phase. Both groups entered the field with a strategy of mobilisation of nationalist historical symbols, rhetoric and discourses aimed at subverting the political order and overcoming the established balance of power between them and moderate political parties (Ishchenko 2020). Their mobilisation and coordination capacity presents conventional elites with a collective problem of coordination: it diverges regime dynamics and alters relations within the composite pro-Maidan movement, thus impacting on patterns of legitimacy of confrontational historical narratives across mobilized masses.

Svoboda's participation to the Euromaidan along with moderate opposition parties *Batkivshchyna* (Fatherland) and UDAR (Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform) finds legitimation in previous modes of political competition: past patterns of parliamentary coordination had enabled new configurations of alliances in which *Svoboda* would join traditional opposition parties in the common struggle against Yanukovych regime (Kudelia 2014a, 25–26; Likhachev 2013; Polyakova 2014; Umland 2020, 253–54).

At the same time, an intense activity of on-the-ground recruitment in western Ukraine had enlarged the Party's base with ideologically committed activists (Polyakova 2014; Umland 2013a). The unique combination of thousands of activists, the resources of a parliamentary party, and control over local councils in pro-Maidan western constituencies produces the condition by which the leader of the party, Oleh Tyahnybok, would join moderate opposition leaders Arseniy Yatsenyuk (*Batkivshchyna*) and Vitali Klitschko (UDAR) in calling for peaceful protests, while its activists would pursue disruptive goals proper of the so-called "uncivil society" (Fedorenko 2015; Umland 2013a). As early as of December 2013, Tyahnybok could maximise the mobilisation capacity of his party by taking advantage of both Yanukovych's unpopularity and of weakened national democratic parties, the latter lacking a coordination plan for responding to

regime repression. By the end of the revolution, Svoboda emerged as the most active collective agent in conventional and confrontational episodes of mass mobilisation (Ishchenko 2016).

Svoboda was first to mobilise forms of radical nationalism in Kiev before violence erupted there and elsewhere in January 2014: both the black-and-red flag adopted by Stepan Bandera's wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) and the greeting "Glory to Ukraine! – To the Heroes glory!" (*Slava Ukrainy – Heroyam Slava!*), used by the Ukrainian insurgents during World War II appeared on the first days of the mobilisation (Fedorenko 2015; Kulyk 2014; Risch 2015). The popularity of contested symbols of the past grew soon after the first episode of *Berkut* police repression, on 30th November: at this stage, protesters were demanding not only closer relations with Europe but justice against police brutality, the resignation of Ukraine's government and the arrest of the president (Risch 2015, 138).

On December 8th, Svoboda took official responsibility for toppling Lenin's monument in central Kiev (The Guardian 2013b), an event that exceeds the anti-regime nature of the protest (Fedorenko 2015; Plokhii 2017).

In January 2014, Svoboda's torch-lit march to commemorate the anniversary of Stepan Bandera was joined by protesters not affiliated with the party and despite other opposition leaders' warnings over the risk of discrediting the protest movement (BBC News 2014a).

Svoboda's activity possibly prepared the ground to the relative legitimacy *Pravy Sektor's* violent strategy managed to catch across mobilised masses (Kudelia 2018).

The group headed by Dmytro Yarosh formed in late November 2013 as a result of the informal merging of nationalist conservative and social-nationalist organizations. The former were represented by Yarosh's *Tryzub* (Trident) and the Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian Nationalist Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO), both claiming a lineage from World War II organizations OUN-B and UPA. Social-nationalist wings included the Social-National Assembly (SNA)

and its paramilitary formation - Patriots of Ukraine (PU), both originating in the eastern city of Kharkov and headed by Andriy Bilets'kiy (Likhachev 2015).

By the end of the revolution, *Pravy Sektor* emerged as the most active collective agent in violent protests (Ishchenko 2016). Since the early stage of the protest, the group mobilised anti-regime grievances while emphasising the unreliability of conventional opposition parties to undertake effective anti-regime action.

After the approval of the “Dictatorship Laws”, opposition parties entered a crisis of confidence, and were unable to propose any move meeting protesters’ preparations (Kudelia 2018, 509). Svoboda itself lagged behind radicalizing portions of masses, and its calls for moderation were blamed for contrasting with its early radical rhetoric (Kulyk 2014, 103).

Traditional parties' decline was counterbalanced by a growing activity of *Pravy Sektor*, which took the leadership and official responsibility for the initiation of systematic anti-police large-scale violence on January 19 (Ishchenko 2016a; Katchanovski 2020; Kulyk 2014; Likhachev 2015).

The legitimacy of violent repertoires grew at the face of intensifying regime repressions and disillusionment in the capacity of moderate opposition parties to propose an efficient strategy against the government’s brutality (Kudelia 2018, 511). As large-scale regime repression erupts, violence gains a participatory character and *Pravy Sektor* comes to be represented as the Maidan's symbolic defender, with Dmytro Yarosh being perceived as the leader of the Ukrainian national revolution (Likhachev 2015, 269). By the end of January and even among liberal-minded protesters, discourses of civic loyalty would be joined by those on the necessity to prevail as “Ukrainians“ (Kulyk 2014, 98).

The mounting of violence runs parallel to the proliferation of what came to be known as *Leninopad*, or Lenin-fall (Ukrayins'ka pravda 2014). In February alone, 320 Lenin statues and monuments were violently removed; the majority on the 21st and 22nd February (Plokhii 2017, 4–5), i.e. during the most violent days of the whole confrontation. Disruptive actions were mostly coordinated by *Svoboda* and *Pravy Sektor* activists, they involved mobilised masses but did enjoy weak legitimacy across the public at large (Gaiday and Lyubarets 2016).

The radicalization of the protest interacts with the inefficiency of nonviolent methods of moderate oppositions and liberal NGOs, both having failed to build sufficient leverage and a common frame against Yanukovich's brutal but ineffective strategies of repression (Onuch and Sasse 2016; Way 2014).

Due to its embeddedness in the protest, Right Sector's violent skills, revolutionary ideology and political organization became complementary to the non-violent mobilisation of moderate elites and protesters: in fact, it also bolstered their efficiency as it minimised costs of participation to non-violent protests and increased costs of repression for Yanukovich's regime beyond acceptable levels (Kudelia 2018, 511). Already by late January, *Pravy Sektor's* violent methods had helped moderate parties to seize power in local councils in central and western Ukraine, a circumstance that heighten the perception of state fragmentation in the south-east and of regime loss of legitimacy in the largely pro-Maidan centre and west (Ishchenko 2016a; 2020; Kudelia 2014b; 2018).

On the one hand, the regime's brutal but failed efforts to criminalise the protest movement and Russia's mounting engagement in demonising the uprising leverage on the process of radicalisation (Kulyk 2014; Likhachev 2015). On the other hand, the show-off of negative attitudes towards Ukraine's soviet legacy provided an impetus to the mobilisation of anti-Maidan protests across the Russophone south east (Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016), where the highest number of far-right activity in protest events was registered (Ishchenko 2016a, 464–65)¹⁷.

The reversal of the February agreement and the ousting of Yanukovich maximised the potential of Right Sector's strategy (Likhachev 2015; Ishchenko 2016a).

¹⁷ Data collected by the Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data (UPCD) show that the highest rate of far right participation in Maidan protests took place in the South (32%), East (28%) and Donbass (26%). Such data shall be interpreted in light of the weaker appeal the Revolution enjoyed across south-eastern communities

Endogenous radicalisation trends interact with shifts and drifts produced exogenously to the field. The former mainly pertain to the geopolitical amplification of the confrontation, particularly between the EU and Russia (Larrabee et al. 2017; N. R. Smith 2015; Tolstrup 2014). Throughout and beyond the Revolutionary phase, western actors display constant support for the Maidan movement: on December 10, 2013, the EU Commission had endorsed the protest, this notwithstanding the visibility and magnitude of the first episodes of disruption (European Commission 2013b); on 27th February, the European Parliament recognised the legitimacy of the transitional government installed after the violent ousting of Yanukovych (European Parliament 2014).

Exogenous drifts are produced by Russia's strategy of demonising the mobilisation first and mobilising Russophones in Ukraine's south eastern constituencies along WWII symbols of the soviet narrative later; with such a strategy being grounded in the proliferation of markers that are confrontational towards the ones mobilised by radical groups (Siddi 2017; Makhortykh 2018). The Kremlin's strategy would also entail discourses over anti-Russian and Russophobic western actors' inference in Ukraine's domestic politics through a purposeful empowerment of fascist fringes (Osipian 2015).

In such a context, mechanisms of domestic and international competition shift quickly, but by mid/late February, networks' coordination is shaped by expectations over the emergence of a renewed commitment to Ukraine's western vector in foreign policy and by the predicted collapse of self-interested mechanisms of linkage and leverage with Russia (Jarábik and Bila 2015).

4.2.2. Patronal networks' coordination amidst the crisis of statehood: changes in acceptable political alliances

Shifts in the field reviewed above renovate regime dynamics and impact on both the transformation of patronal networks' bargaining power and on the underlying process of alliance-building activity.

The combination of large-scale violence, inefficient regime repression and western actors' sanctions on individuals connected to the regime had been key to the dismantlement of Yanukovich's network (Kudelia 2018). The full disintegration of the vertical system took place soon after the president's flight from Kiev: bribed and co-opted MPs recruited outside the Party's strongholds of Donbass and Crimea were followed *en masse* by more loyal members who either fled to Russia or switched to the winners' side (Jarábik 2015; Kuzio 2015). Throughout the spring of 2014, episodes of violence proliferated: officials linked to the old regime died in mysterious circumstances and top members of the party were victims of armed ambushes (Kudelia 2014a; Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016).

The opening of the political system provided an opportunity to emerge to those oligarchs whose interests had been threatened by Yanukovich family. The collapse of the president's network thus runs parallel to the ascent of personalities with ties to the opposition or related to the sponsoring of the Maidan – such is the case of the so-called “winner of the Revolution”, Igor Kolomoisky¹⁸; as well as the one of Serhiy Taruta¹⁹ and of the then second tier oligarchs Viktor Pinchuk and Petro Poroshenko. The latter's candidacy for presidency finds the blessing of Dmytro Firtash²⁰ and is agreed upon a platform of Euro-Atlantic integration, anti-corruption and market reforms, and defence of Ukrainian territorial integrity (Kononczuk 2015).

¹⁸ Head of the Privat Group and one of Ukraine's richest man, unlike other oligarchs Kolomoisky never actively participated in politics until the Maidan but constantly financed political parties ranging from Yushchenko's Our Ukraine to Svoboda

¹⁹ Holding most of his interests in the metallurgic sector, Serhiy Taruta was cohead of the Industrial Union of the Donbas and until the Maidan close to Tymoshenko's Party Fatherland

²⁰ The former beneficiary of the Party of Regions met with Petro Poroshenko in Vienna in March 2014. The then front-runner opposition leader Vitali Klychko also participated to the semi-secret meeting and was accorded the Mayorship of Kiev

At the same time, the reorganisation of patronal networks' access to levers of power happened against the background of an unprecedented crisis of statehood over which patronal actors had limited control (McLees 2014). In this context, power shifts dramatically: the bargaining position of Akhmetov and other powerful actors whose interests were located in the industrial sector of Donbass initially collapsed because structural constraints limited the opportunity to readjust their interest to renewed mechanisms of linkage (Jarábik and Bila 2015; Kuzio 2016a; Konończuk 2015). Emerging oligarchs too – included Petro Poroshenko – faced the threat of seeing part of their business empires disrupted due to dense business connections with Russia (Konończuk 2015). Coordination unfolds in a context of weak state legitimacy across consistent fractions of the population over the newly emerging political order.

The first formal effect of regime change was the renovation of acceptable political alliances among moderate opposition parties. The incorporation of three *Svoboda* representatives in Yatsenyuk's ad interim cabinet (February-May 2014) and the appointment of prominent members of the party as head of Regional State Administrations (RSA) confirms that *Svoboda* was recognised as a legitimate political actor²¹. Such a recognition was not formally granted to members of *Pravy Sektor*, even though some of its leaders were incorporated into central organisations and later elected in different lists through alliances and accords mostly stroke with Yatsenyuk's newly-formed Popular Front (Umland 2019).

The opening of the political space thus knocks down pro-Russian citizens' political representation (Kuzio 2015; Kudelia and Kuzio 2015; Skorkin 2018), while the failure to negotiate a power-sharing agreement between competing

²¹ *Svoboda* received the following posts in Yatsenyuk's first government: Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Sych, Agrarian Policy and Food Minister Ihor Shvaika and Environment and Natural Resources Minister Andriy Mokhnyk. Party members were appointed regional governors of Poltava, Ternopil and Rivne Oblasts

parties raises problems of commitment across Russophone regions (Strasheim 2016).

In this context, the exponential growth in amount, variety and organisation of so-called “*dobrovaty*“, i.e. self-organised armed units was especially stimulated by the manifest unpreparedness of Ukraine’s army in confronting anti-Maidan mobilisations and Russia’s aggression (Puglisi 2015; Minakov 2015; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016, 117-21; Umland 2020).

Throughout the spring of 2014, these groups took over exclusive functions of the state and replaced the government’s duties in the defence and internal security sectors, thereby performing a key role in securing fractions of Donetsk and Lugansk regions from undertaking secession. Effective strategies for subverting the state’s monopoly over the legitimate use of violence were accompanied by an extensive engagement in activities of counter-propaganda to Russian media strategy and of electoral surveillance during the Presidential elections (Puglisi 2015; Minakov 2015).

There emerges a situation of competitive cooperation between oligarchs, moderate opposition parties and irregular and semi-regular volunteer armed battalions, which earlier formed spontaneously and later under initiative of the new government (Minakov 2015; Umland 2019).

The gradual incorporation of these groups into semi-formal or formal structures hindered the opportunity for granting sufficient state control for a transparent transition of power (Ishchenko 2018).

Oligarchs indeed exploited these battalions’ organisation and mobilisation capacity to defend their interests while securing portions of Ukraine’s territory from secession.

Key to Igor Kolomoisky’s initial success was the fact that his financial giant, Privat Group, controlled partially or totally not less than 8 of 38 volunteer battalions; included, among others, the Dnipro and Dnipro-1, the Right Sector’s and Azov’s battalions (Minakov 2015). On March 2nd, Kolomoisky and Taruta were appointed regional governors of Dnepropetrovsk and Donetsk oblasts respectively to shore up Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (Kuzio 2016a). Unlike

Taruta, Kolomoisky managed to stabilise the situation in his region, to secure his business there and to expand his political and financial influence well beyond Dnepropetrovsk²² – key to his enterprise was the exploitation of irregular forces (Kononczuk 2015). His political decline too relates to the use and abuse of such groups: in April 2015 he was forced to resign for having allegedly used his volunteer forces to seize control of Ukraine's state-owned gas company (Narizhna 2015).

At the level of formal structures, the organisation, public exposure and normalisation of volunteer battalions grew since April 2014, when acting President Oleksandr Turchynov launched the so-called Anti-Terrorist Operation, or ATO (Umland 2019, 2020). As the confrontation in Donbass escalated, these units were equipped with heavier artillery and became a pillar of the transforming Ukrainian state (Ishchenko 2018; Umland 2019).

The new Minister of Internal Affairs and member of Yatsenyuk's newly-formed Popular Front, Arsen Avakov, contributed enormously in promoting and gradually formalising under the ministry's regional directories some of these groups, included ideologically-committed ones (Petik and Gorbach 2016; Umland 2019; 2020).

The most visible among the latter was the Azov battalion, which gained prominence due to its outspokenly manifested right-wing, antisemitic ideology: officially created in May 2014, it counted its top members among the two neo-Nazi conglomerates internal to *Pravy Sektor* and headed by Andriy Bilets'kiy, i.e. the Patriots of Ukraine and the Social-National Assembly – and had a strong base in the eastern city of Kharkov. Here, some of its members had cultivated mutually-beneficial ties with Avakov when he was acting Governor of the Regional State Administration under Yushchenko's Orange presidency, in 2005-2010 (Petik and Gorbach 2016; Mazepus et al. 2018, 20).

²² Kolomoisky successfully lobbied for the appointment of Ihor Palytsia as governor of Odessa oblast in May 2014; and had an influence in stabilising the chaotic situation in Kharkov oblast owing to his good relations with the mayor of Kharkov Gennady Kernes

Owing to his personal ties with Andriy Bilets'kiy, Avakov assigned prominent posts to members of both Azov and *Pravy Sektor* battalions (Petik and Gorbach 2016; Umland 2019). Similar initiatives were later replicated by the new Ukrainian National Guard, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the Ministry of Defence and individual politicians who started to actively support the creation of such units and to oversee, finance, or supervise their activity. Azov's military success contributed to its founders' full entry into national politics later in 2014: Bilets'kiy was in fact elected in the Rada - officially running as independent candidate, *de facto* receiving the backing of Yatsenyuk's Popular Front and of the Party's main sponsor, Igor Kolomoisky (Umland 2019).

Such dynamics have long term effects on Ukraine's political order. Owing to its effective organisational capacity in forming semi-autonomous and politically loyal armed units, Azov Regiment's extra-parliamentary power improved up to the point of permeating official law enforcement institutions and gaining a consolidated position within the civil society (Ishchenko 2018). At the same time, the battalion's close connection to Arsen Avakov guaranteed the armed group's loyalty to the authorities (Petik and Gorbach 2016).

These conditions account for the presence of radical groups across Ukraine being tolerated even after the active phase of intense confrontation; and is reflected in an increased permissiveness of Ukraine's society *vis à vis* the far right (Umland 2020; Golinkin 2019).

In the immediate context of Ukraine's crisis, these groups' exposure and ties to major oligarchs and political actors bolster the credibility of Russia's strategy of demonising the protest as driven by "fascists", thereby bolstering the mobilisation capacity of anti-Maidan uprisings.

4.3. *The reconstruction of national boundaries through contested history: impact on the outbreak of the secessionist conflict in Donbass*

4.3.1. *Embedded and interactional sources for the reconstruction of confrontational boundaries*

The quick expansion of *Svoboda's* rhetoric across mobilised masses has been associated to an initial fear of splitting the protest movement (Risch 2015; Kulyk 2014).

Observers contend that the primary goal of keeping diverse actors united prevented moderate protesters' and opposition leaders' open rejection of the contested glorification of Bandera and the OUN and UPA as predecessors of Ukraine's struggle for independence (Kulyk 2014, 99–101). Accordingly, moderate protesters' and opposition leaders' adoption of the OUN and *Svoboda* slogans, such as “*Glory to Ukraine! To the heroes glory!*”, would be detached of their original ethno-national exclusivity and be referred to myths of resistance only. By the same token, the symbolic meaning of ethno-national material pertaining to the history of OUN and UPA is contingently anchored to a reaffirmation of Ukraine's independence and sovereignty; and the proliferation of nationalism occurs in symbols and slogans, but less in the politicisation of ethnicity (Risch 2015).

In this perspective, the incompatibility between *Svoboda's* exclusivist agenda and other activists' and parties' could be smoothed on the basis of a boundary that moderate actors endorse and popularise by referring to its non-ethnic meaning only. Such conclusions emphasise the civic, inclusive nationalism of the Maidan (Kulyk 2014); and find an echo in observations over the “post-Maidan fluidity” of ethno-linguistic categories and markers that tend to be considered politically salient when studying Ukraine (Arel 2018; Kulyk 2018).

Contra these understandings, recent studies have observed that cognitive and ideological underpinnings account for Maidan protesters' simultaneous deployment of a rhetoric of civic and ethno-cultural, exclusive nationalism, with the latter being grounded in the discursive institutionalisation of the dichotomous

confrontation reproduced in the public space as a result of peculiar modes of electoral competition (Zhuravlev and Ishchenko 2020).

Drawing on this latter observation and on the processual and cognitive underpinnings of the boundary-making framework, the prioritisation and legitimation of more or less exclusivist definitions of the nation shall be understood as a contingent and discursively mediated struggle. The outcome is shaped by situational dynamics of political competition, co-optation and coordination and by shifts in the bargaining power of discrete actors, as well as by the discursive institutionalisation of identification modes that draw on embedded frames of political competition.

As reviewed above, interactions in the field empower minority but ideologically-committed radicals who claim to represent the interests of Ukraine's national group and aim at redrawing the landscape of societal divisions and the political order in which they are reproduced. Processes on the ground precipitate moderate elites' and patronal networks' opportunity to coordinate (Likhachev 2015; Onuch and Sasse 2016).

Elites' crisis of confidence entails the inability of advancing frames that might compete with radicals' for resisting regime repression. In this context, radicals' organisation and discipline also account for the quick mobilisation of ethno-cultural material and for the ideological socialisation of contested markers of history in the context of intense regime repression (Interview with Iryna Podolyak 2019)²³. The process diverges the centrifugal pressure across conventional political networks, because it is associated to a dilution of power at the face of empowered non-conventional groups and of radicalising trends across mobilised masses.

²³ Interview with Iryna Podolyak – December 2, 2019, Kiev. Currently Deputy Minister of Culture; previously Member of Parliament and member of the Committee on Culture and National Minority Issues (8th convocation, 2014-19, Party: Self-Reliance). Throughout Proshenko's Presidency she was one of the initiator of Ukraine's new Law on Language

In this context, consolidated practices of political competition over the national domain leverage on the public endorsement of contingently mobilised narratives and on moderate elites' activity of reconstructing the meaning and location of national boundaries.

During the Maidan, the process interacts relationally with exogenous drifts produced by Russia's strategy of mobilising competitive historical myths and symbols that are confrontational towards the ones firstly used by *Pravy Sektor* and *Svoboda* (Siddi 2017; Zhurzhenko 2015a).

Even before the ascent of *Pravy Sektor*, the Kremlin's attempts to draw Yanukovych closer contributed to the growth of negative attitudes towards Russia among liberal and Western-oriented protesters (Kulyk 2014). Russian media strategy of constructing an enemy image and portraying the protest as driven by *Banderovtsy* and fascists contributed in making of Bandera and Banderian "culture" a symbol of defence of state sovereignty and of resistance to Russia (Fedorenko 2015; Risch 2015; Osipian 2015). Supporters called themselves "banderovtsy" to counter the Kremlin propaganda over a "fascist Maidan" (Portnov 2016): the pejorative term – which was widely used by Yanukovych's networks in competition to Yushchenko - is accepted as a positive marker of self-identification. In this context, the contingent anti-Russianness of the protest movement is furtherly exacerbated by the outbreak of violence, but the renovated balance of power between radicals and moderate elites contribute in filling up dominant frames that are embedded in Ukraine's politics.

Frames of national history and the contested material they mediate provide conventional political actors with scheme for interpreting the context and reproduce diacritic understandings of social relationships, thereby impacting on preferred markers of national identity as well as on patterns of collective action. All pro-Maidan elites and political activists, whether ideologically committed or moderate and liberal oriented, assess pre-Orange Ukraine's nation-building efforts as inefficient: among nationalist-leaning respondents, the lack of an outspokenly national-oriented and operational state-led strategy in historical policy relates to the perpetration of a Soviet psychology that threatens national

sovereignty (Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019)²⁴. The missed revolutionary breakaway with the Soviet Union, i.e. the continuing rule of former nomenklatura members and the upgrading of the titular groups' dominant position through symbolic strategies of opposition rather than through consequentialist initiatives of reverse stigmatisation, is claimed to be instrumental to avoid a forced choice between democracy and authoritarianism. Nationalist-oriented political actors and activists claim that the Maidan provided the opportunity for fulfilling that revolutionary enterprise through an empowerment of Ukraine's (ethno-)national consciousness "from below" (Interviews with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019; Alyna Shpak 2019)²⁵.

Yushchenko's pertinent initiatives in the politics of history allow masses and opposition elites to relate radicals' frames to Ukraine's first attempt of equating *real* independence to a process of antagonistic alienation from Moscow. More crucially, Yushchenko's enterprise provides political legitimation to the ambiguous framing of the prioritisation of the western vector in foreign policy through references to integralist and ethno-nationalist interpretations of history (Interviews with Serhiy Kvit 2019; Iryna Podolyak 2019; Vadym Pozdniakov 2019; Iryna Bagalaj)²⁶.

²⁴ Interview with Serhiy Kvit - November 29, 2019, Kiev. Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine in 2014-2016; in the 90s he militated as activist in various nationalist groupings

²⁵ Interview with Voldymyr Vyatrovych - December 17, 2019, Kiev. Historian, Director of the Ukrainian Institute for National Remembrance (2014-2019).

Interview with Alyna Shpak - December 4, 2019, Kiev. Historian, Deputy Director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, 2014-2019. Likewise Vyatrovych, she has been long-time nationalist-leaning activists.

²⁶ Interview with Vadym Pozdniakov – December 14, 2019, Kharkov, Ukraine. Founder of Kharkov-based nationalist NGO "Svitanok" promoting Ukrainisation and active decommunization in Ukraine. During the Maidan he was an activist of Svoboda.

By the same token, the Party of Regions' campaign against the nationalism of the leader of the Orange Revolution is equated to an attempt of drawing Ukraine towards a Russia-like authoritarian system (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019; Interview with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019; Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019).

The actualisation of the myth of Bandera and of the symbols thus far associated to a liberation movement only in western regions generate the quickest levels of mobilisation across masses: in the context of radicalising trends, it is claimed to be *contingently* needed by one relatively moderate MP (Interview with Iryna Podolyak 2019). Lenin monuments become landmarks of Yanukovych's rule on neo-Soviet and pro-Russian political values; and are easily turned into markers of occupation (Interview with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019; Interview with Vadim Pozdniakov 2019): their fall across south-eastern Ukraine is associated to a victory over Russia's revanchism across territories that had historically been subject to Russia and to its political representatives who contributed in undermining Ukraine's sovereignty from within (Interviews with Serhiy Kvit 2019; Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019; Vadym Pozdniakov 2019).

The struggle for reconstructing national boundaries primarily rests on shifts in power differentials and is situationally stimulated by moderate and radical groups' contextual convergence on the overlapping interest of removing Yanukovych earlier and safeguarding Ukraine's territorial integrity from Russia's aggression later (Fedorenko 2015). Yet, far right groups' symbolic discourses for resisting Russia's aggression and the representation of Moscow's perennial threat to the ethnic Ukrainian nation can be popularised in light of embedded modes of political competition that reify the confrontation between Ukraine's two poles.

Interview with Iryna Bagalaj – December 11, 2019, Kharkov. Nationalist-leaning political activist based in Kharkov, for a short period after the Maidan she was associated to the party self-Reliance

4.3.2. *Convergence of frames, divergence of meaning: exclusivity of claim-making processes*

Shifts in collective actors' relative bargaining power and past patterns of political competition impact on the emergence of a new political order whose ideological foundation rests on renovated patterns of legitimacy, meaning and location of national divides. The processual struggle entails negotiation and contestation between and within relevant collective actors claiming to represent constituent groups.

Surveys conducted by Kiev's International Institute of Sociology signal that lowering levels of positive attitudes towards Russia across the general public would be modest until February 2014 and cascading soon afterwards (Paniotto 2020). The anti-Russianness of the protest movement was not extended to the general public until Russia's annexation of Crimea. In fact, as of February 2014, the general public, anti-Maidan protesters and pro-Maidan activists would share the idea of cultivating privileged inter-state relationships with Russia (KIIS 2014a).



Attitudes of Ukrainians towards Russia, KIIS agency (Paniotto 2020)

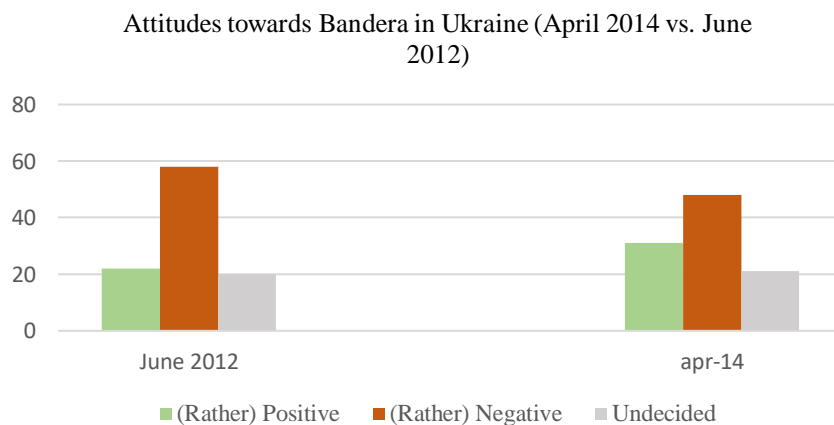
How would you like to see the relationship between Ukraine and Russia? (depending on attitude towards Maidan, 8-18 February 2014)

	Support Maidan	Do not support	Difficult to say	Ukraine in general
Relations should be the same as with other states – with closed borders, visas and customs houses.	26.0	6.6	7.6	14.7

	Support Maidan	Do not support	Difficult to say	Ukraine in general
Ukraine and Russia must be independent, but friendly states – with open borders, without visas and customs houses	66.9	69.2	62.1	68.0
Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state	2.3	21.4	8.6	12.5
Difficult to say/No answer	4.7	3.1	22.7	4.7

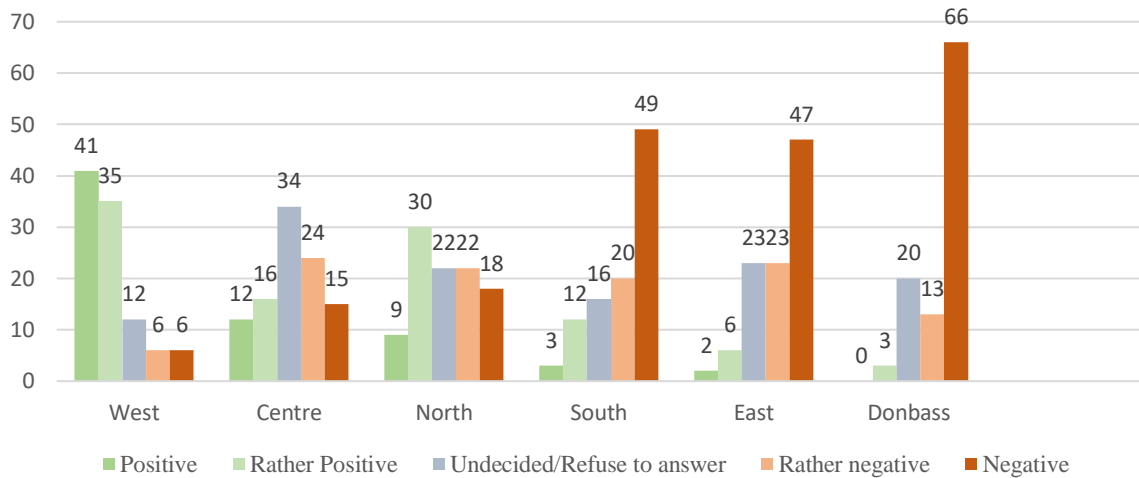
Attitudes towards inter-state relationships, February 2014 (KIIS 2014a)

In the spring of 2014, survey agencies register a sharp increase in the nationwide appreciation of Stepan Bandera, which however fails to extend to the absolute majority of the population and reproduces the polarisation across Ukraine’s two poles: in the south-east, the figure of Bandera is associated to ethnonational integralism and to a threat towards ethnic minorities (Rating Group Ukraine 2014; IFES 2014).

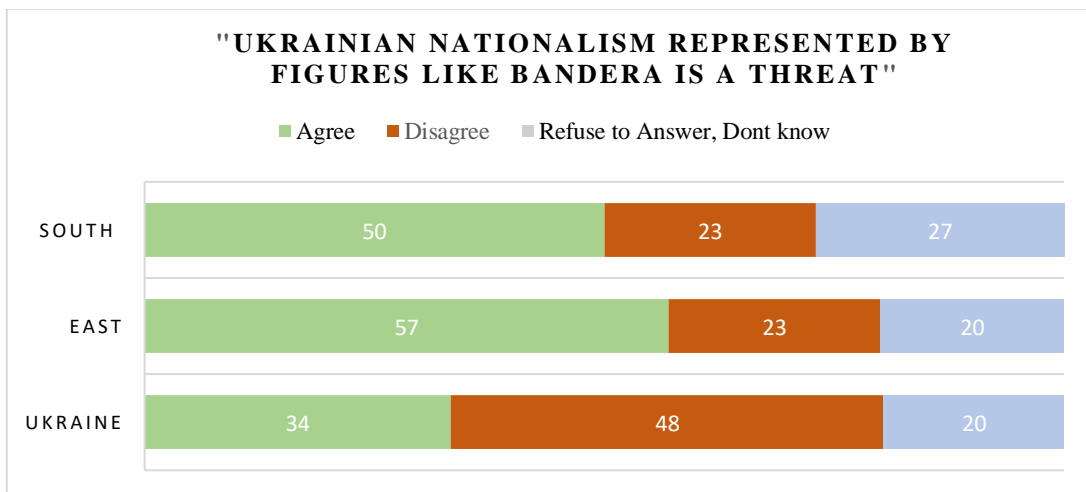


Attitudes towards Stepan Bandera (2012; 2014 Rating Group 2014)

Appreciation of Bandera (April 2014, Regional Distribution)



Attitudes towards Stepan Bandera (Rating Group Ukraine 2014)

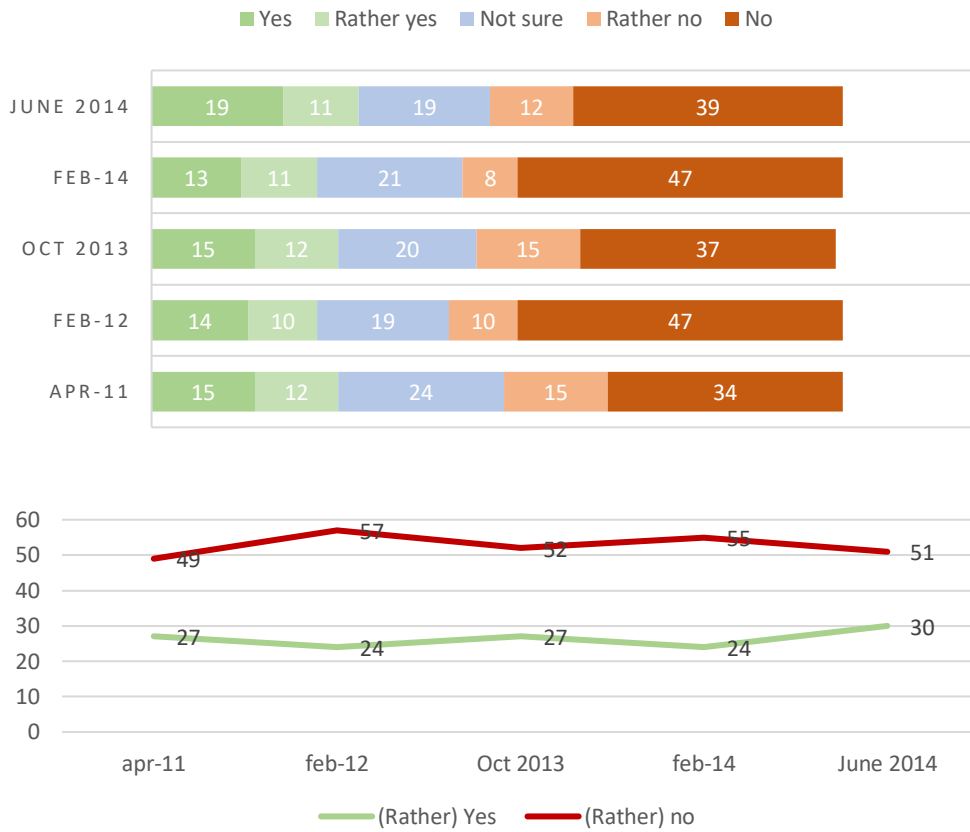


Ukrainian nationalism represented by figures like Bandera is a dangerous historical phenomena presenting a threat to non-ethnic Ukrainians (IFES 2014)

Similarly, the acknowledgment of OUN and UPA as fighters for Ukraine’s independence fails to catch the support of the majority and does not increase until June 2014 (Rating Group Ukraine 2015b)²⁷. By contrast, appreciation rates of Vladimir Putin are subverted negatively, thus signalling resentment towards the Russian leadership’s activity of destabilisation (Rating Group Ukraine 2014).

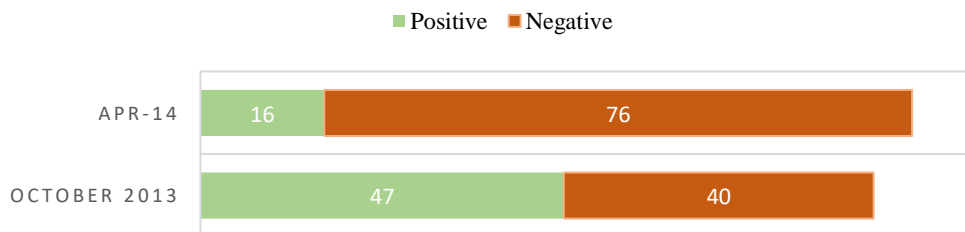
²⁷ By June the survey does not cover response from the population living in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions and in Crimea

DO YOU SUPPORT THE RECOGNITION OF OUN AND UPA AS FIGHTERS FOR INDEPENDENCE?



Recognition of OUN and UPA as fighters for independence (Rating Group Ukraine 2015b)

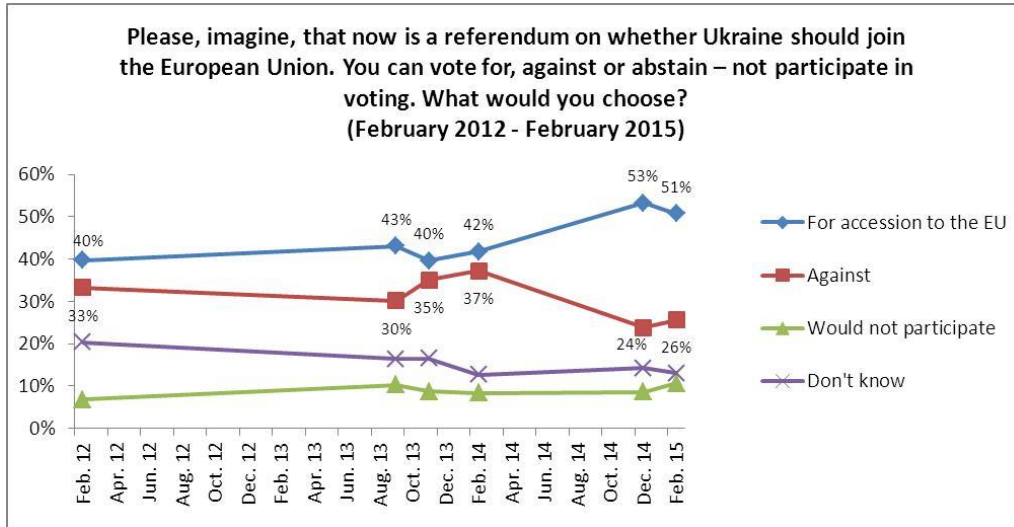
ATTITUDES OF UKRAINIANS TOWARDS PUTIN, APRIL 2014



Attitudes towards Vladimir Putin (Rating Group Ukraine 2014)

The modest increase of pro-European stances during the Revolution indicates that positive attitudes towards European integration might have been bolstered more by Russia’s aggression than by the Euromaidan (KIIS 2015a). In turn, the growing opposition to the EU during the Maidan signals polarisation over the

country's geopolitical orientation and might mirror a political expression of pro-Russian positions²⁸.



Attitudes towards European Integration (KIIS 2015a)

The data presented above suggest that Russia's intrusive and later openly aggressive policy interacts with radical groups' strategy of mobilising cultural material on which consensus was lacking, thereby thickening the political salience of national divides (Conversi 1995): the reversal of the power sharing agreement on February 22, and Russia's annexation of Crimea tip the dynamics of interaction and negotiation among relevant political actors who claim to represent the pro-Maidan movement and who compete with each other for representing the national community in the emerging political order.

The struggle for reconstructing national divides rests on the polarisation of regionally-distributed patterns of asymmetrical and partial consensus: conflictual understandings over the legitimacy, meaning and location of national boundaries reproduce the cemented competition between the "two Ukraines" (A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012). In this context, Moscow's strategy prompts negative attitudes towards the Kremlin but fails to stimulate a significant spread

²⁸ Negative trends were mostly registered in south-eastern regions

of positive attitudes towards contested interpretations of history, which remain divisive and minoritarian across society.

Disagreement over the location and meaning of national divides as defined by confrontational markers of history is heightened by discursive and symbolic practices through which different political actors of the composite pro-Maidan movement mobilise the same contested markers.

Ideologically-committed activists of *Svoboda* and *Pravy Sektor* deploy ethno-nationalist interpretations of history that consciously make positive reference to the exclusiveness and to the integralist meaning associated to those symbols, figures and rhetoric (Portnov 2016). The meaning attached by more institutionalised political actors to the same ethno-nationalist symbols is in turn related to discourses of state sovereignty, national unification and Europeanisation. Embedded sources of manipulation originate in Yushchenko's policies (A. L. Osipian and Osipian 2012): nationalist activists can present nation-building initiatives undertaken during the Orange presidency as the first attempted turn towards the ethno-national spirit of the nation (Interview with Vadym Pozdniakov 2019); post-Maidan elites upholding the national Maidan agenda refer to the same initiatives as the first endeavour of unifying Ukraine's national consciousness on European values of civic nationalism (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019; Interview with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019).

Pro-Maidan masses initially reproduce ethno-nationalist symbols and slogans uncritically (Umland 2013b) or through claims of loyalty to state sovereignty (Portnov 2016). By January, nationalist groups' competitive cooperation with moderate opposition parties renovates frames over Ukraine's return to Europe through patterns of anti-Russianness that refer explicitly to an integralist understanding of history (Kulyk 2014). The radicalisation of the protest movement contributes to the overlapping of ethno-national and political boundaries and to shifting the political spectrum rightward (Ishchenko 2018).

The further blurring of the ideological boundary separating far right parties and other political actors bolsters the legitimacy of positive reference to radical figures of the past across mobilised masses. Rather than attributing civic

meaning to integralist figures of history, the contingent and discursively mediated struggle reifies frames associated to zero-sum configurations of power relations between Ukraine's two poles, thereby prompting polarisation in a field which is already altered by violent interactions.

The discrepancy between ethno-national and political boundaries alters the symbolic and political meaning of national divides: in the largely anti-Maidan south-eastern constituencies, moderate and national oriented political actors' reliance on diacritic scripts associate to the breakup of the balance of interests between the west and east and to political, socio-economic and cultural threats (Petro 2015). South-eastern constituencies' exposure to the Party of Regions' competitive discourses on history earlier and to Russia's mobilisation of soviet myths of resistance of the 20th century later concurs to the securitisation of inter-group relations and to the reconstruction of more antagonistic boundaries (Osipian 2015). In this context, violent processes on the ground and shifting bargaining power positions across actors are key to debilitate patterns of legitimacy of the emerging political order across consistent fractions of the population. The decisive shift from passive rejection of the Maidan to active rebellion across the south-east and in particular in Crimea and Donbass was in fact stimulated by the violent removal of president Yanukovich: the latter event prompts new patterns of collective action across mobilised anti-Maidan masses (Petro 2015; Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016).

4.3.3. Social closure and violence: contested history and separatism in Donbass

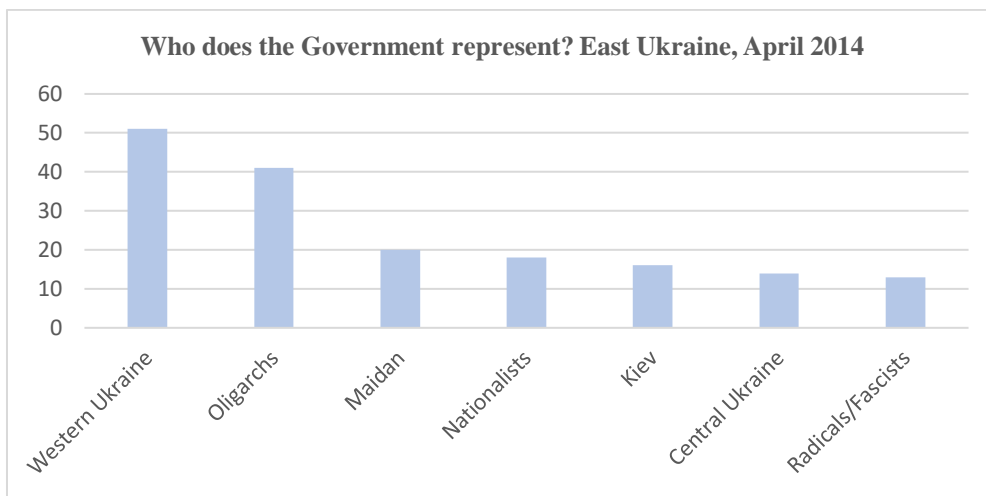
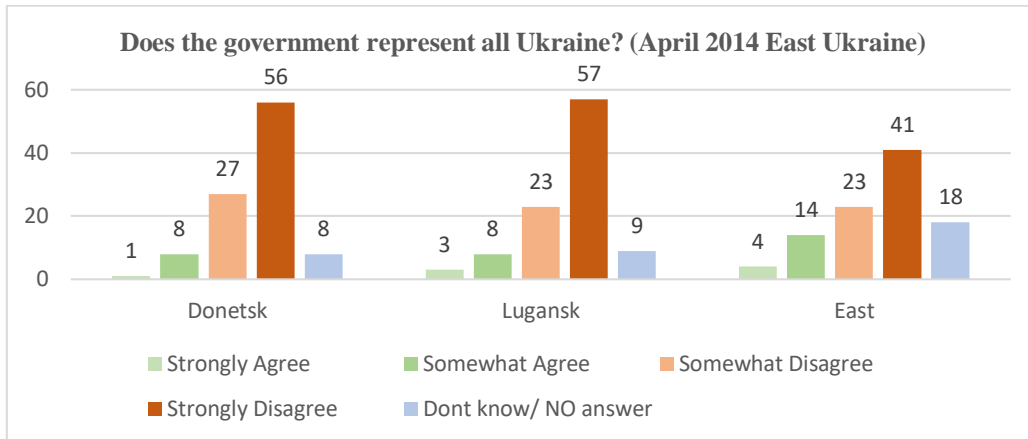
Room for violent confrontation across established boundaries stems from shifts in political alliances and in the relative bargaining power of empowered actors; it furtherly augments due to disagreement over the legitimacy and location of national divides. Across the south-east, exogenous and endogenous sources of radicalisation and the escalation of violence enhance the implications of the process of social closure implicit to the early initiatives of Turchynov's transitional government.

The failure to implement the power-sharing agreement in February 2014 and the violent regime change in Kiev correlate to central organisations' marginalising moves towards sections of south-eastern oblasts (Strasheim 2016): the quick repeal of the Law on minority languages of 2012 and the incorporation of far right representatives in Kiev's *ad interim* cabinet bolster the mobilisation capacity of radicalised anti-Maidan uprisings (Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016). In this context, Moscow's "humanitarian" strategy towards Russophones in Ukraine shifts towards an active support for pro-Russian protests that purposefully builds on the renovated mobilisation of soviet-like discourses of resistance against the newly-installed "fascist junta" (Gaufman 2015).

. The Kremlin's policy rests on the conscious construction of an enemy image and on an active representation in Russian-language media of the events of February as the precipitation of Ukraine's statehood. The confrontation reinforces the appeal of Moscow's previous attempts of equating the Euromaidan with *Pravy Sektor* (Osipian 2015, 118), it contributes in furtherly delegitimising the outcome of the protest and is preliminary to the seizure, occupation and eventual annexation of Crimea in March 2014 (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016, Wilson 2016).

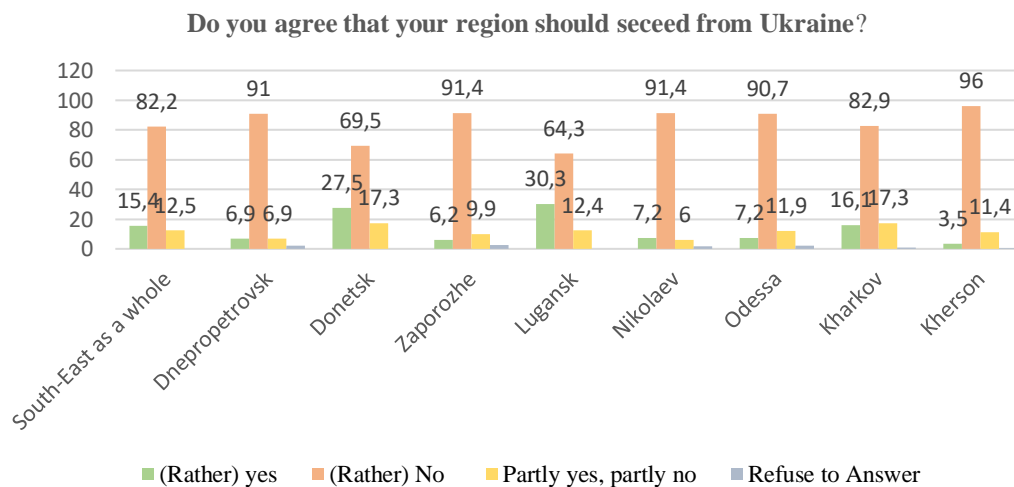
The effects of this policy shall be understood in interaction with domestic sources of radicalisation that stimulate new patterns of collective action across mobilised anti-Maidan masses over which local "pro-Russian" elites and patronal actors have limited control (McLees 2014; Kudelia 2014b).

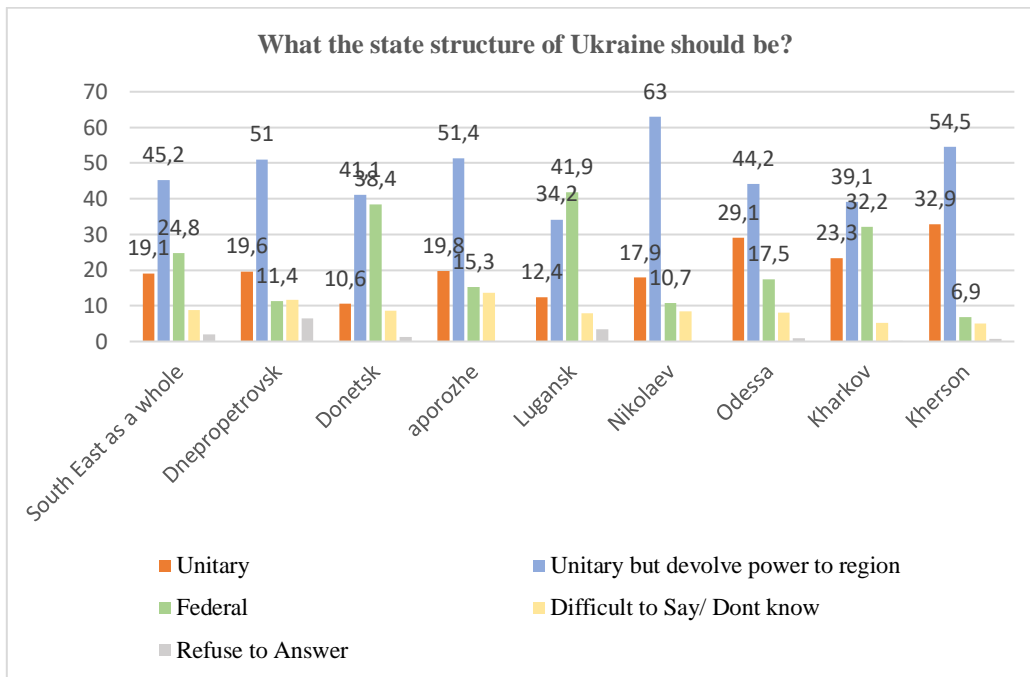
Surveys conducted by both Rating Group and IFES in April 2014 signal that in Eastern Ukraine in general and in Donbass in particular, low levels of legitimacy of new ruling political alliances are mostly anchored to the perception of having a government representing the interests of western Ukraine and oligarchs in central structures (IFES 2014).



Representativeness of the transitional government, eastern Ukraine (IFES 2014)

At the same time, by April 2014 levels of support for secessionism are low across the south-east in general and, to a lower extent, in Donbass; they contrast with high demands for regional autonomy and federalisation (KIIS 2014b).





Views on secessionism and preferences over state structures across the south-east, April 2014 (KIIS 2014b)

Particularly across Donbass residents, the violent regime change in Kiev feeds low government legitimacy and produces resentment for the perception of eastern Ukrainians' privileged status being suddenly reversed by cultural discrimination which initiates from the repeal of the law on language (Kudelia 2014b, Strasheim 2016): in this context, the ethnicised transitional government experiences objective difficulties in credibly committing to protect a powerful and newly subordinate “minority” group.

In turn, as of April 2014, the major concern of residents in Donbass and in the south east is with the deterioration of economic ties with Russia and with the exacerbation of violence: both outweigh those regarding strictly-meant identity issues (KIIS 2014b, see table below).

What makes you anxious the most?	South East	Donetsk	Lugansk
Raging of banditry in the country	43,1	51,5	29,8
Collapse of Ukrainian economy	39,2	44,3	42,7
Threat of civil war	31,7	40,6	28,5
Non-payment of salaries and pensions	24,6	32,4	28

Rupture of economic ties with Russia	19,7	26,7	36,2
Growth of radicalism and nationalism	19,1	22,5	26,6
The risk of losing job	18,6	24,5	20,3
Inattention of central authority to the problems of South-East of Ukraine	16,8	19,8	22,8
Threat of invasion of Russian aggressor	16,9	6,4	10,7
Growth of separatist moods	13,7	12,6	12,7
One-sided coverage of problems of the region and the country in Ukrainian media	8,2	11,9	7,2
Joining NATO	9,6	15,3	10,7
Imposition of one language	6,5	9,4	12,7

Major concerns across south-eastern oblasts, April 2014 (source: KIIS 2014b)

Against this background, the transitional government's and patronal actors' reliance on irregular troops, their support for their gradual incorporation into informal, semi-formal structures and the launch of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in April disattend completely the expectations of locals, whose main demands would include the disarmament of armed groups across the south-east (KIIS 2014b see tables below). In the context of escalating violence between far right and other armed battalions and the anti-Maidan protesters, the failure to implement the Geneva Statement of the 17th April, 2014 marks a shift in Russia's strategy towards the granting of practical support to violent protests and low-intensity conflict; with this move being preliminary to Moscow's engagement in full-scale war (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016, 125–27).

What do you expect the government to do?	South East	Donetsk	Lugansk
Disarmament and dissolution of illegal radical groups	37,8	46,5	33,5
Reestablishment of dialogue (economic and political) with Russia	23	29,7	28,5
Defining the clear perspective of economy of the South-East (support to enterprises in the region)	22,4	24,8	36
Establishment of permanent public dialog between the South-East and central government	19,5	18,6	20,1
Pre-term elections of the President of Ukraine	17,6	10,9	13,2
Dissociation of authorities from nationalist and radical rhetoric	16,3	21,5	22,1

Balanced cultural policy with regard to national peculiarities and mentality of citizens in the South-East	15,2	15,6	24,1
Early parliamentary elections	14,5	7,9	14,4
Distinguishing by central authority between positions and interests of ordinary citizens in the region and it's party-oligarchic elites	13,4	13,4	16,4
Federalization of Ukraine	11,8	19,1	21,6
Introduction of the second state language	11	17,1	17,1
Appointment of representatives of the South-East on ministerial positions	10,8	16,1	15,9
Creation of parliamentary coalition with participation of the Party of Regions	3,9	4,2	4

Perception of the transitional government and events across Ukraine's south-east, April 2014 (KIIS 2014b)

The analysis so far indicates that the strategic escalation of Russia's intrusive policy towards Ukraine produces its effect and precipitates Ukraine into war in light of the government's mismanagement of south-eastern political grievances: the latter is crucial to consolidating the legitimacy and rationality of a secessionist strategy across mobilised anti-Maidan masses. In the largely anti-Maidan region of Donbass, Russian media strategy of demonising the protest by inflating the "neo-Nazi threat" presented by Azov and other ideologically-committed battalions interact with nationalist groups' visibility (Kudelia 2014b) and with the circumstance that they were in fact involved in the most brutal episodes of violence against civilians – included the massacre in Odessa on May 2, 2014 (Katchanovski 2016; Loshkariov and Sushentsov 2016).

The shift from a situation of enmity to one of contingent cooperation across diversely institutionalised actors changes the implications attached to the process of social closure across the south-east: weak state legitimacy for shifts in the representativeness of central organisations is surpassed by fear for the growing importance of *banderovtsy* (Kudelia 2014b); the latter precipitates resentment for social closure into fear for existential threats across mobilised masses. In this context, the embedded mobilisation capacity of competitive narratives over Ukraine's experience of WWII impacts on the emotional and symbolic

values attached to the transitional government's legitimisation of nationalist groups in such a way to shape patterns of collective action (Petersen 2011).

On the one hand, the Party of Regions' deliberate creation of the image of the "fascist-banderite" threat for electoral purposes amplifies the impetus for mobilisation across south-eastern communities (Osipian 2015): pro-Russian rallies of March-April 2014 rely firmly on embedded ideological scripts, imagery, and slogans (Kudelia 2014b, 6). On the other hand, the mix of strategic action pursued by different agents, included the transitional government's and empowered battalions', maximises the antagonism and exclusivity of competitive markers of history and cascades into shifts in the structure of boundaries (Kuran 1998). The latter process is crucial to the generation and exacerbation of centrifugal tendencies across Russophones.

In such a scenario, regional elites' and powerful oligarchs' calls for evading the secessionist option hold little leverage (Kudelia 2014b; Giuliano 2015; Katchanovski 2016): in lack of credible guarantees for representation and protection in the emerging political order, the strategy of secessionism is endogenous to mobilised masses of Donetsk and Lugansk.

4.4. Conclusions

During the last stage of the Maidan, violence disrupts consolidated power balances in the field and in central organisations, while the opening of the political space renovates regime dynamics in a context of high risk of state fragmentation. Throughout the process, powerful patronal actors find an interest in manipulating contingently empowered actors while pursuing a self-interested access to the levers of power.

The alteration of the bargaining position of minority but ideologically-committed groups impacts on consolidated patronal modes of political competition and coordination, thereby contributing to shifting the acceptability of political alliances rightward and limiting room for reproducing a compromise-oriented configuration of power at the level of central structures.

In this context, the legitimacy and resonance of national frames grow: contested interpretations of history represent powerful mobilisation resources as well as cemented cognitive devices that reduce uncertainty at the threshold of action and become manipulative resources for all major actors engaged in the confrontation. The outcome is the polarisation of the competitive representation of the “two Ukraines”: the securitisation of relations with Russia and patriotic trends within mobilised masses hold a modicum of power in shaping elites' expectations as to which particular marker can maximise the opportunity to secure a dominant position in the emerging political order.

Contested narratives are popularised even if they do not hold legitimacy and consensus, are framed in terms of political culture and civic choice despite being anchored to ethno-nationalist myths.

The Kremlin's competitive mobilisation of soviet narratives exacerbates levels of asymmetrical and partial consensus across Ukraine's south-eastern territories. In Donbass, the strategy adds up to the Party of Regions' previous manipulation tactics, thereby dramatizing the symbolic and political meaning attached to national divides as defined by history.

Key to the outcome are the location of emerging political alliances and patterns of relative power disposal: oligarchs' contingent support for ideologically-committed groups for the sake of state survival runs parallel to the emergence of an existential threat across south eastern communities.

Contested frames of national history exacerbate the implications and meaning of the process of social closure undertaken by the transitional government and contribute in making of secessionism a rational strategy across anti-Maidan communities in Donbass

CHAPTER 5

THE IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTESTATION OF THE LAWS ON DECOMMUNIZATION: THE CASE OF THEIR RENEGOTIATION IN KHARKOV

The chapter looks at the implementation of the Decommunization Laws in the context of renovated patronal dynamics.

Ukraine's return to a divided executive constitution produces new patterns of political struggle: on the one hand, the shift to a condition of multiple-pyramid politics leads to political fragmentation, thereby augmenting competition among patronal networks as well as the leverage of local political machines (Fisun 2017; 2015). On the other hand, drastic changes to power configurations and political alliances hinder the power of regionalism and the opportunity for advancing effective opposition to contested nationalist policies at the level of central organisations (Way 2020; Shevel 2016b; Hale and Orttung 2016).

Against this background, the Decommunization package represents a strategy aimed at making of the nationalist claim-making process proper of the Maidan a pillar of state policy. Unprecedented degrees of power differentials in central organisations, and the securitisation of relations with Russia facilitate ruling elites' adoption of historical narratives that mandate normative inversion and reverse stigmatisation between the Soviet and Ukrainian categories of identification across south-eastern communities (Shevel 2016a). Nonetheless, state policies enjoy weak levels of support across the public at large (Kulyk 2019).

The major argument is that central elites respond to the pressure of an active section of the society rather than to the preferences of the wider public: this strategy, in turn, allows to perpetuate dysfunctional state-society relations and is instrumental to marginalise both political opponents and societal dissent and discontent for the government.

The ascent of ideologically-committed activists to pertinent executive posts account for high degrees of confrontation between competing political actors. Notwithstanding policy-makers' discourses over a civilisational choice that eludes exclusion on ethnic bases, implications on degrees of social closure are important and widen local actors' room for contestation.

Strategies of renegotiation of the Law on Decommunization in Kharkov, Ukraine's second largest city and a stronghold of pro-Russian sentiments, signal that blurred patterns of communal identification leverage greatly on local-elites' choice of resisting and manipulating state-led practices. The strategy of locally-elected bodies responds to opportunistic electoral calculations and produces intense levels of struggle among ideologically-motivated contestants, included policy-makers. Yet, there is hardly a questioning of the legitimacy of the new political order, which still allows for the incorporation of regionally-distributed rent-seeking interests into the system.

5.1. Object and objectives of the research and methods

5.1.1. The Decommunization Laws: institutionalising contestation at the level of state policy

The Decommunization Package consists of four Laws ratified by President Petro Poroshenko on 21st May 2015. On 9th April, the laws had been approved by Ukraine's Parliament in their first and final reading, without public or parliamentary debate. Political contestation followed soon afterwards and most vehemently involved Russia's Foreign Ministry (Ermolaeva 2015; Danilovich 2015), Ukraine's Communist party leaders (KPU 2021; 2015) former Party of Regions' members and the newly formed Opposition Bloc (Oppozitsionnyj Blok 2015). The corpus of laws provides a normative framework for the understanding of contested episodes of the twentieth century according to a nation-centric norm that distances Ukraine's history from Russia's through antagonistic references to the shared Soviet experience (Yurchuk 2017a).

The Laws were prepared under the auspices of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR), whose executive powers were revived soon after the Revolution. The directorship of Volodymyr Vyatrovych (2014-2019), an historian and political activist previously director of Lvov's "Centre for the Study of the Liberation Movement" dedicated to the history of UON and UPA, is key for making of the memory of contested events of WWII the central issue of Ukraine's active policy of history (Olszański 2017; Marples 2017).

The UINR presented the project as aimed at aligning Ukraine's legislation on history to a European framework of commemoration, with the reference to transnational practices being also aimed at legitimising the large executive powers of the Institute (Yurchuk 2017a).

The Law № 315-VIII "On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945" (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 2015c) introduces May 8th as the "Day of Memory and Reconciliation" to link Ukraine's memory policy to a European framework of remembrance (Yurchuk 2017a, 96–97). It also changes the naming of May 9th – under Yanukovich celebrated as the Day of the "Great Patriotic War" – into "Day of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1939-1945", thereby banning the use of Communist symbols during celebrations and sustaining the rehabilitation of the UPA activity (Olszański 2017, 26–29). In the words of UINR's then-Director "Celebrating the anniversary of the end of the war is no longer a reason for militarist propaganda but rather an opportunity to remember all the victims of those terrible years" (Vyatrovych 2018, 259).

The Law № 316-VIII "On access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of the Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917-1991" (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 2015a) mirrors other former socialist states' "return to Europe", first and foremost Poland's and the Baltic States'. Drawing on Yushchenko's previous attempt, it allows access to secreted documents and is presented as a cure for a society saturated with conflict (UINR 2015).

The discussion focuses on the two most controversial Laws.

The strictly meant Law on Decommunization is the Law № 317-VIII "On the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (Nazi) regimes, and

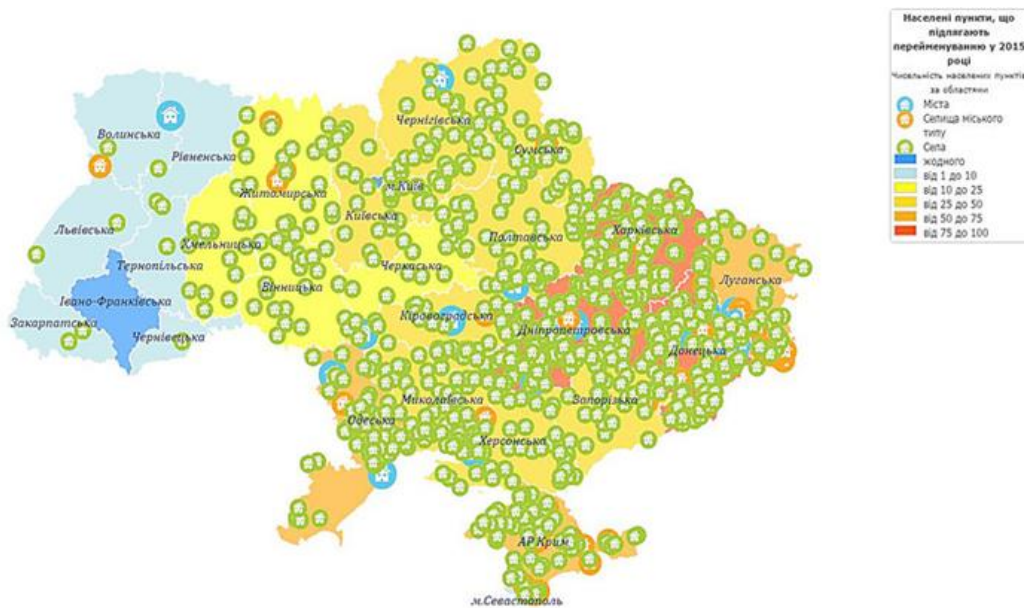
prohibition of propaganda of their symbols” (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 2015d; hereafter also referred to as "the Law on Decommunization" or "the Law"). The provision bans the use of symbols associated to the Communist ideology and establishes the mandatory removal and dismantlement of monuments as well as the renaming of administrative settlements (cities, villages, regions) and public places (e.g. streets, squares, parks) whose names contain references to the communist totalitarian regime (UINR 2014; 2016).

While the renaming of regions (Dnepropetrovsk and Kirovograd) was subject to constitutional reform, the renaming of cities, districts and public places mandates sub-national administrative units’ active engagement and encourages local communities’ participation. Local administrative bodies were given six months for organizing public meetings and submitting renaming proposals to the Verkhovna Rada; if unattended the deadline, the Parliament was to proceed on renaming settlements following recommendations of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR 2016).

Most of the 877 localities that required renaming by November 21st, 2015 were situated in Ukraine’s eastern and southern oblasts (UINR 2015).

Region	Cities to be renamed	Towns to be renamed	Villages to be renamed
Donetsk	10	27	62
Dnepropetrovsk	3	10	71
Kharkov	-	27	70
Crimea	1	11	54
Odessa	2	4	49
Lugansk	6	25	23

Regional distribution of settlements to be renamed (UINR 2015)



Settlements to be renamed in Ukraine (UINR 2015)

The Law is both the most ideological and practical. Its mandatory implementation was constantly supervised by the UINR and envisaged the mobilisation of symbolic and discursive resources, as well as considerable administrative, organisational and financial efforts related to the actual fulfilment of the provisions (Shevel 2016a; Gnatiuk 2018).

The Law № 314-VIII "On the Legal Status and Honouring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the Twentieth Century" (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy 2015b) establishes that the Soviet Union aggressed Ukraine's sovereignty and grants the status of "fighters for Ukraine's independence" to figures of various groupings, included the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). Drawing on Yushchenko's previous efforts, OUN and UPA's anti-Soviet activity is emphasised positively, while their collaboration with Nazis and involvement in the ethnic cleansing of Poles in the region of Volyn is overshadowed (Marples 2017; Rudling 2011). The rehabilitation of the OUN and UPA was a declared priority of the UINR; aiming at providing a "fairer assessment over their activity" and at cleaning up distortions incorporated in the soviet narrative (UINR 2015).

At home, the Law is contested because it draws on an integral form of ethno-nationalism which is confrontational towards consistent fractions of south-eastern oblasts' populations (Portnov 2016). Abroad, the Law triggers tensions with key EU partners, first and foremost Poland (Katchanovski 2015; Kononczuk 2018; Marples 2017).

The implementation of the law № 314-VIII is less resource-consuming, but partially overlaps with the one of the Law on Decommunization: while in the south-east renaming strategies did rarely aim at replacing Lenin with Bandera or other figures of integral nationalism, in central Ukraine new toponymies partially reflect the heroization of contested WWII organisations and leaders (Plokhii 2017; Gnatiuk 2018). Further, there was a timid migration of Bandera from the West to the Centre of the country, whereby new monuments were erected there after the Laws were approved (Kasianov 2019, chap 2 Sec 3).

Ruling elites' concerted approval of the Decommunization Package contrasts with domestic and international constraints (Kulyk 2019; Portnov 2016; 2017; Shevel 2016b).

Ukrainian and international organisations and human rights groups criticised the paradoxical practice of condemning the externally-abducted authoritarian legacy by resorting to means that weaken freedom of expression and establish legal prosecution on unclear bases (OSCE 2015; Kharkov Human Rights Protection Group 2015; Venice Commission 2015). The Law on Decommunization *de facto* paved the way to a ban on the three Communist parties of the country later in 2015 (Petro Simonenko 2015), a decision that was condemned by international observers (Amnesty International 2015)²⁹.

Ukrainian and Western experts expressed concerns, for the Laws inhibit freedom of conducting research in pertinent scientific fields (Marples 2015a). Most

²⁹ The Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) was officially banned on charges of separatism; the decision attracted much criticism since support for separatism and/or integration into the Russian Federation came from individual activists, and not from the Party leaders

importantly, the approval of the laws deepen domestic divisions: provisions included in the package enjoyed weak levels of public support and the mandatory implementation of the Law on Decommunization was opposed by the majority of the population (Kulyk 2019; Marples 2017; Shevel 2016b).

5.1.2. Research questions and rationale

The chapter seeks to answering the following questions: why do moderate elites agree upon inscribing radical interpretations of history into state structures and upon promoting a policy that might exacerbate societal divisions? What does contestation to the implementation of these policies signal within the system of patronal politics?

Drawing on the conceptual framework of the thesis, the chapter hypothesises that national identity defined along shared understandings of historical memory enables ruling elites' interest-oriented action, whereby it helps producing an assessment over the potential for competing networks and empowered actors to affect ruling networks' interests and the reproduction of the patronal system. A primary concern shall thus be with the relational struggle that underpins the process of legitimization of national boundaries as defined by the Laws and of inscription and imposition of their meaning into central organisations and across the field.

In exploring the issue, the chapter reflects on the impact new structures of power and political alliances hold over the decision to enforce boundaries that are framed in confrontation towards the preferences associated to consistent fractions of the population.

Observers have stressed that the war in Donbas and Russia's own mobilisation of history exacerbate the significance of historical narratives, thereby facilitating the acceptability of the Laws (Olszański 2017; Shevel 2016a). At the same time, research has found that the Laws did not enjoy the support of the majority of the population, nor were they identified a priority in the political agenda among pro-Maidan supporters (Kulyk 2019).

The chapter argues that the empowerment of ideologically-committed activists in executive positions aims at making of western regions' preferences in historical memory a pillar of state policy. In turn, the strategy of mobilising nationalist versions of history that are confrontational towards competitive Russia-promoted soviet narratives sustains the perpetration of rent-seeking relations, thereby dramatizing the relevance of markers of contested history for power relations.

The processual making of ethno-national boundaries implies that actors positioned at different levels of the administrative apparatus dispose of various resources and political motivations for resisting state-led policies (R. Isaacs and Polese 2016, 9–10). In the context of political opening of the patronal system, the renewed leverage of regional political machines makes of such processes an important indicator of regime dynamics (Fisun 2017).

Powerful situated actors may instrumentally mobilise local dissatisfaction with the legislation for contesting the legitimacy of the new political order, or they may compete with central authorities to fulfil their interests in that same political order.

5.1.3. Methodology and methods

The study preliminary traces major changes in institutions, power differentials and political alliances during the first year of Poroshenko's presidency and discerns the patronal underpinnings of the renovated political order. It thus reflects on changing degrees of consensus that may inform on ruling networks' motivations for undertaking a strategy that enjoys little support across the public.

The empirical investigation treats political discourses both as structures, i.e. as embedded socio-cultural resources; and as practices, i.e. as structures of meaning contingently exploited to express, enforce and institutionalise the reconstruction of national boundaries and their reproduction into stable patterns of social relationships (Weldes and Laffey 2004). The research draws on open-ended interviews carried out in Kiev and Kharkov in November and December

2019 and distinguishes structures and practices that enable the inscription of contested narratives at the state level and in sub-national organisations.

Central policy makers' strategy is analysed to detect patterns of competition across supporters over the meaning and location of national boundaries, and patterns of confrontation between supporters and opponents of the Laws. A primary concern is with the process of establishing and renegotiating the legitimacy and meaning of national divides.

Central level actors include MPs, policy-making actors and representatives of executive institutions, most of whom were engaged in the crafting, approval and implementation of the Laws. The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance is treated as a mnemonic warrior, i.e. an actor engaged in establishing one and only one historical truth, which is opposed to other wrong versions of history propelled by Russia's propaganda and its "fifth columns" (Bernhard and Kubik 2016, chap. 1; see also Kasianov 2019, Section Two)

Kharkov, Ukraine's second largest city, is selected as a case of study for it presents the following characteristics:

- i) It is traditionally associated to pro-Russian sentiments and experienced a concrete threat of falling under the control of separatists in 2014 (Blavatnik 2020; Piechal 2015; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018; Zhurzhenko 2016)
- ii) It is home to a regional political machine which has historically been prone to pursue compromise with ruling elites (Blavatnik 2020; Mazepus et al. 2018; 2021; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018)
- iii) It is home to ideologically-committed fringes associated to both sides of the national-political contention

Interviews with local political actors shed lights on patterns of strategic action for implementing and renegotiating the Law on Decommunization at the sub-national level of administration.

Open-ended interviews were carried out with actors that supported the implementation of the Laws, included local representatives of executive bodies (i.e. personnel from the president-appointed Regional State Administration,

hereafter also RSA), members of Kharkov's City Council, NGOs and activists from empowered civil society, with the latter including figures with diverse ideological commitment to nationalist versions of history.

Interviews with representatives of locally elected bodies (e.g. representatives from the majority of the Regional and City Councils), political activists, historians and technical personnel allow to detect discourses, strategies and motivation for local-level actors' activity of renegotiating and adjusting the contested legislation to local preferences.

5.2. *The reconstruction of boundaries through history: crafting and implementing state-led Decommunization*

5.2.1. *Ukraine's patronal politics after the Maidan*

After the Maidan Revolution, patronal mechanisms are still at work: the rules of the political game are about coordinating strategically to secure control over state resources. Informal norms of personal loyalty and clan membership govern the functioning of party structures and the forging of relations among central and regional political actors (Jarábik 2015; Konończuk 2015; Jarábik and Bila 2015; Minakov 2018, 229–37; Fisun 2015; 2017; Umland 2017; Hale and Orttung 2016).

Throughout Poroshenko's presidency, macro-structural features change:

- At the level of formal state structures, the restoration of Yushchenko's divided executive constitution formally reinforces the Parliament, *de facto* opens the political game and redistributes power across a variety of competing patronal networks (Jarábik 2015).

Likewise in 2005, an immediate outcome is heightened competition between the two executive posts: intense confrontation overrides the formal output of Prime Minister's check on presidential powers. President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk could compromise on issues connected to Western financial support but built on different agendas supported by competing political and civic groups and oligarch conglomerates (Minakov 2018, 230-32).

A business tycoon and top member of Ukraine's establishment, Petro Poroshenko was a popular symbol of the Revolution and was skilful in initially passing important reforms that met CSOs' and external partners' expectations. The finalisation of key international agreements – topped by the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in January 2017 – and an initial war against corruption bolstered Poroshenko's international prestige and won him legitimacy and cashflows from western actors (Umland 2017). His success abroad produces an information effect that gains him a privileged position for the coordination of temporarily displaced networks. Poroshenko was particularly sophisticated in “rebranding [...] the public image of Ukraine's post-Soviet oligarchic rule” (Umland 2017, 9): his contradictory balancing between the stabilisation of systematic corruption at home and international benevolence further stabilises his corrupt practices. The removal of Yatsenyuk from the premiership on April 14th, 2016 consolidates Poroshenko's position as focal point and his extended network's supremacy,

The underlying struggle between the two and their respective patronal networks is intense and affects the functioning of the judiciary and legislative branches, as both gradually fell under the control of the executive.

In the Parliament, each faction shared its own quota of MPs and controlled parliamentary committees, with such a system favouring the verticalization of self-interested political loyalty (Matsievskiy 2017). A collateral effect was the making of Rada into a vote-producing factory, with laws being approved under shortened procedure and with little discussion (Minakov 2018, 231-32).

The lack of divisions between political and oligarchic mechanisms impact on the quality of reforms, while Poroshenko's attempts of reintroducing a power vertical leads to intense struggle and to the partial reversal of initial developments. Such is evident in the gradual recentralisation trend that subverted the important reform on decentralisation (Minakov 2018, 235; Umland 2017), as well as in the re-emergence of rampant corruption. These developments adds up to inflation and falling wages to increase disappointment across the public, whose levels of misery was already sharp due to the socio-

economic hardship and the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Donbass (Jarábik 2015).

- At the level of political alliances, the collapse of the Donetsk clan leads to a collective repositioning of client-patron ties, the opening of the system produces a situation of pluralism that makes oligarchs' support for political networks non-monolithic (Fisun 2015)

Personality matters more than programmatic politics to gain the support of the oligarchs (Kuzio 2016a, 187) and networks' functioning responds to mechanisms of competitive self-interest and power accumulation. By April 2014, most oligarchs gathered around the "minor" oligarch Petro Poroshenko, whose political influence had grown throughout the Maidan due his open and concrete support to the protest movement (Kononczuk 2015).

In September 2014, the former Party of Regions' oligarchs and hardliners who had their business and political interests deeply embedded in Ukraine's eastern vector supported the creation of the Opposition Bloc (Kuzio 2015; Kudelia and Kuzio 2015). Rinat Akhmetov, Dmytro Firtash and his partner Yuriy Boyko were the main stakeholders of the project; a more detached support would come from Viktor Medvedchuk, i.e. Russia's main agent of influence in Ukrainian politics and a personal friend of Putin (Skorkin 2018).

Ukraine's party system remained permeated by structural fragility and dysfunctionality: political parties continued to serve personalistic interests of their owners, thus reifying the merging of the political wing with the corporate one. The relative diminishment in the financial resources of "traditional" super-rich oligarchs matches a proliferation of "minigarchs" who exploit the opening of the system to gain access to committees in the *Verkhovna Rada* (Jarábik and Bila 2015; Minakov 2018, 236–37). Power shifts rapidly and support is volatile: Igor Kolomoisky switched to the President's side after sponsoring Yatsenyuk (Konończuk 2015; Jarábik 2015), but remained constantly linked to the Prime Minister's newly formed Popular Front, even when Yatsenyuk was removed from the premiership in April 2016 (Matsievskiy 2017). The lack of structural adjustments to the mixed majoritarian system of parliamentary elections

hindered transparency and favoured the perpetration of clientelist practices (Fedorenko, Rybiy, and Umland 2016).

Six out of the twenty-nine parties that took part to the early parliamentary elections of 2014 gained representation in the *Rada*: i.e. Petro Poroshenko's Bloc, Yatsenyuk's Popular Front (*Narodnyi front*), Opposition Bloc (*Opozytsiynyi blok*), the Union 'Self-Reliance' (*Ob'ednannya 'Samopomich'*), Oleh Lyashko's Radical Party (*Radykal'na Partija*) and Yulia Tymoshenko's All-Ukrainian Union 'Fatherland' (*Bat'kivshchyna*): only the latter had gained previous experience in the legislative forum. For the first time since Ukraine's independence, the Communist Party failed to enter the Parliament. Also due to low turnouts in the south-east, the Opposition Bloc captured a mere 10% of preferences and gained only 43 seats in the *Verkhovna Rada*.



Electoral performance of the three main political parties, Parliamentary elections (2014)

The ruling coalition would be represented by the Bloc of Petro Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk's Popular Front, but their alliance was very fragile (Burilkov 2015). The Popular Front's nationalist elements would in fact outweigh the Party's official pro-European positions (Burilkov 2015; Petro 2014): Yatsenyuk's Party had in fact absorbed representatives of the far-right and ultranationalist Maidan forces into its structures.

In turn, even after the dismissal of Yatsenyuk from the Prime Ministership, the network of the Party continued to impact greatly on regime dynamics and could count on the constant backing of Igor Kolomoisky and on prominent members in central organisations, included the head of the Security and Defence Council Oleksandr Turchynov and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov (Matsievskiy 2017).

The pro-reform coalition that formed in the fall of 2014 (Radical Party, Self-Reliance and Fatherland) lacked cohesion, and room for systemic opposition was soon marginalised. In turn, the risk of anti-systemic opposition augmented and manifested itself locally along regionally distributed polarised preferences; i.e. Opposition Bloc and Communist Party in the East and radical right wing parties in the West (Minakov 2018, 233-34).

- The shift to a divided executive constitution produces a new configuration of power inequality among representatives of the two constituent groups in central organisations.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbass alter Ukraine's electoral geography, resulting in an outnumbering of the voting preferences of south-eastern regions, which remained underrepresented in post-Maidan central structures (Marples 2015b; Petro 2014).

On these grounds, the results of parliamentary elections have been discussed in terms of a relocation of Ukraine's ethno-national and political cleavages along a dichotomy of a "restricted" pro-Russian east and the pro-European west (Kulyk 2018; Kuzyk 2019; Shevel 2015). Others have linked the results to nationalist trends in western and central regions, whereby parties opposing the implementation of the Minsk-1 Agreement (Popular Front, Fatherland, and the Radical Party) scored relatively better than the ones displaying willingness to compromise on some form of autonomy for Donbass, i.e. Petro Poroshenko's Bloc and the Opposition Bloc (Petro 2014).

On the one hand, the lack of balance between parties mobilising traditional identity cleavages in central structures limits significantly the pervasiveness of regionalism. On the other hand, the leverage of local political machines grows

(Fisun 2017): Poroshenko's attempts to prevail over Yatsenyuk's network would in fact include informal arrangements with influential local networks, included many previously gravitating around the Party of Regions.

The shortage of south-eastern representativeness in central organisations explains the Opposition Bloc's inefficiency in countering contested initiatives of ethnic boundary-making in the *Rada* (Opposition Bloc 2015).

Kulyk, (2019, 7) contends that pro-Maidan parties:

“were driven toward pro-European and post-imperial emancipatory policies by both the external and internal dynamics, that is, by the interaction with foreign powers on the one hand and the orientation toward pro-Maidan constituencies on the other”

The government was in fact pressured domestically much more from the variegated, newly empowered civil society pushing for the expansion of the Maidan agenda than by the discredited anti-Maidan opposition, whose room for opposition was restricted at the sub-national level.

Against this background, Poroshenko's public support for Decommunization and other nationalist initiatives shall be understood in light of these pressures by including mechanisms of competition between the President's network and the one associated to the People's Front and Igor Kolomoisky.

5.2.2. *Shifts in patterns of consensus and room for contestation*

The provisions entailed in the Decommunization Laws aim at modifying the meaning and implications of the boundary separating Ukrainians from Russians through negative references to the shared soviet experience.

Policy-makers' activity of crafting and fixing the meaning of the Laws draw a strong symbolic division line between post-Maidan Ukraine and Putin's Russia (Portnov 2017) and link the process of Decommunization to war efforts against separatists backed by Moscow (Shevel 2016b).

Drawing on Wimmer's taxonomy (Wimmer 2013, 59-61), the Laws shall be distinguished as a strategy of transvaluation aimed at changing the hierarchical order between the Ukrainian national category and the Soviet supra-national one. The basic mechanism of opposition for redrawing the meaning and implications

of the national divide is surpassed by the one of confrontation and antagonism (Conversi 1995) – the process kicks off from Yushchenko’s previous efforts based on heroization of contested figures of the past and of instrumental national victimisation (Kasianov 2019; Marples 2007; Per A. Rudling 2011) and is partly stimulated by the war in Donbass, the securitisation of relations with Russia, and the contingent salience of national boundaries (Olszański 2017).

The exploitation of contested symbolic and discursive resources implies that central organisations aim at forcing reverse stigmatisation across communities that still identify at least partially with the Soviet Union; the latter being equated to Russia.

The configuration of political alliances and new patterns of power inequalities at the level of central organisations enable western and central Ukraine’s representatives to impose a strong consensus on the rejection of communism across south-eastern regions (Shevel 2016a).

Power differentials and the pro-European agreement in central organisations are partially reflected in the field, where there emerges confrontational modes of relating to Russia. By March 2015, only 30 percent of Ukrainians would not regard Russia negatively (Paniotto 2020). Such figures are consistent with growing patriotic sentiments across Ukraine (Rating Group Ukraine 2018) and with shifting geopolitical orientations. By the end of 2015, most research centres reported growing levels of support for closer relations with European supra-national projects, both with the EU and NATO, as well as decreasing support for integrating with the Russian-led Custom Union (Alexseev 2015; Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018).

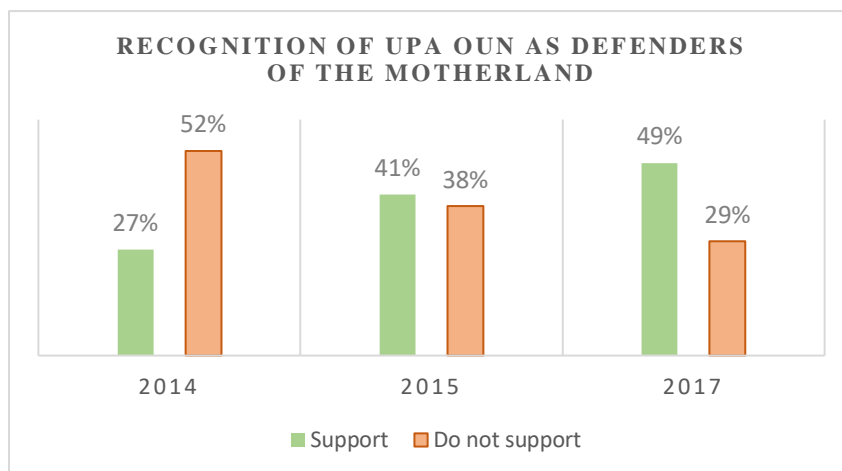
Surveys also signal a salient societal perception of the relationship between national identity and political values (Rating Group Ukraine 2016a): a positive correlation of rightist ideas with Ukrainian ethno-national identity was matched by a negative one between political leftism and attachments to Ukraine’s national identity (Mischenko 2017). The association of pro-Russian positions, Soviet nostalgia and distance from Ukraine’s national identity to left-wing political ideologies indicates a sharp overlapping between political and ethno-national

cleavages. Shifts in political attitudes are partially matched by renewed modes of self-identification (Kulyk 2018; Onuch, Hale, and Sasse 2018).

Importantly though, anti-Russian sentiments were found to be at least partially contingent to the active phase of the armed confrontation in Donbas: a more positive attitude towards Russia was gradually restored after the end of active hostilities (Paniotto 2020)³⁰.

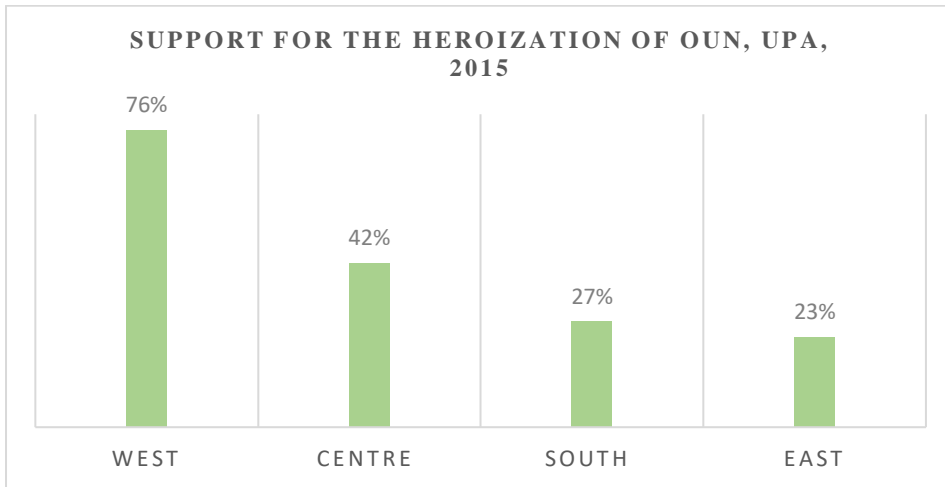
More crucially, the top-down implementation of contested politics of history and memory did not find the approval of the majority of the population.

The acknowledgement of the OUN and UPA as participants of the struggle for Ukraine's independence increased constantly between 2014 and 2017 (Rating Group Ukraine 2015b; 2017) and so did, to a minor extent, the positive evaluation of the figure of Bandera; but both remained contested in the south-east and not endorsed by the majority of the population nationwide (Rating Group Ukraine 2016a).



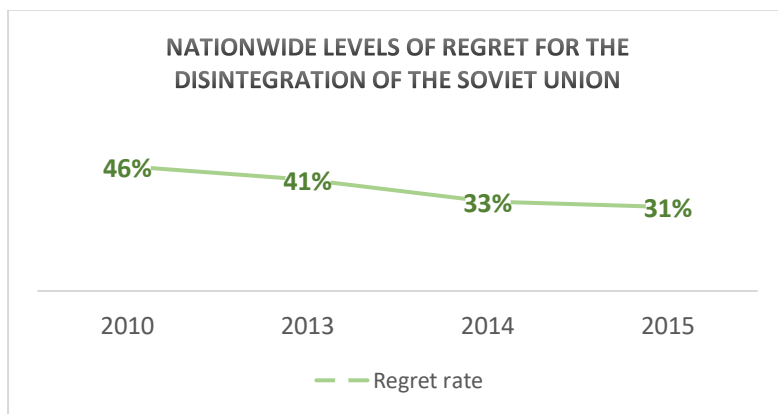
Nationwide support for the recognition of the OUN and UPA as defenders of the Motherland, 2014-2017 (Rating Group Ukraine, 2017)

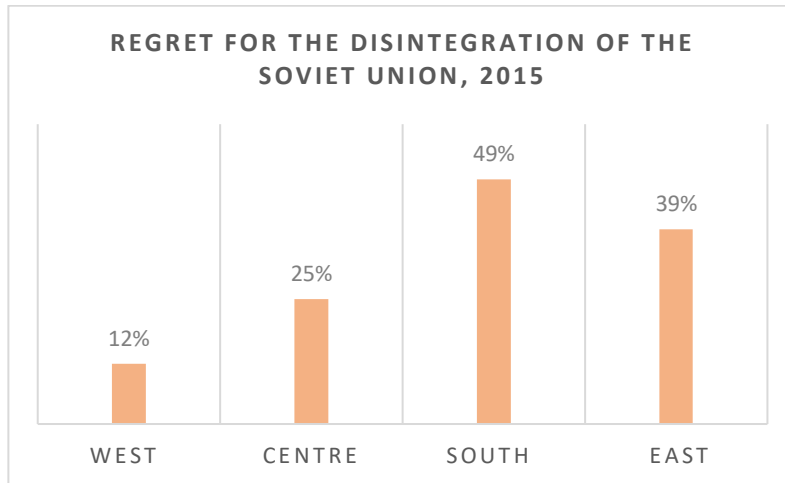
³⁰ In 2020, 50% of the respondents reports positive attitudes towards Russia. these results are particularly salient considering the fact that the survey does not include respondents from Crimea and from the portions of Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts that are not under the jurisdiction of Kiev's government



Regional distribution of support for the heroization of OUN and UPA in 2015 (Rating Group Ukraine 2015b)

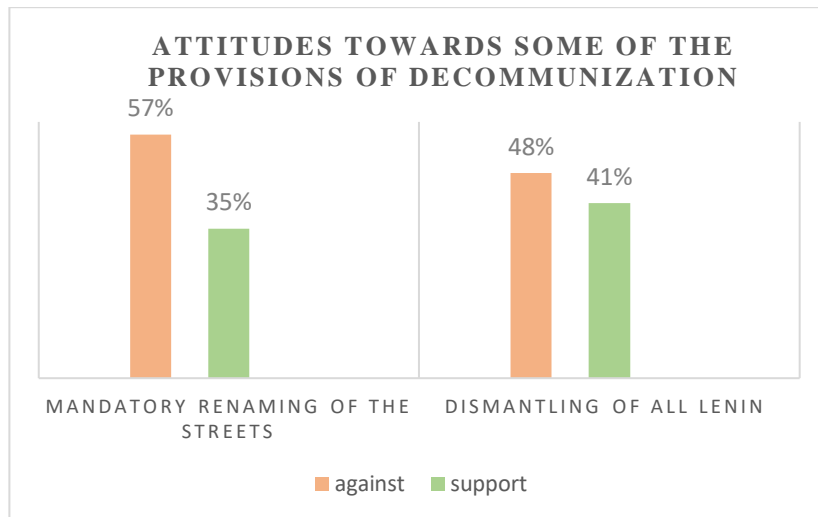
Relatedly, regret for the breakup of the Soviet Union decreases from a nationwide share of 46% in 2010 to 31% in 2015 (Rating Group Ukraine 2015a); but regional divergencies are sharp. Differences tend to be linked to political cleavages over Ukraine’s path in foreign policy, with those supporting accession to the Eurasian Custom Union regretting the most the disbandment of the USSR, and those supporting accession into the EU displaying lower degrees of regret (Rating Group Ukraine 2016b). Particularly in the south-east, disagreement with state-promoted narratives is still grounded in factors pertaining to ethnicity, language and political attitudes (Rating Group Ukraine 2015b; 2015a)

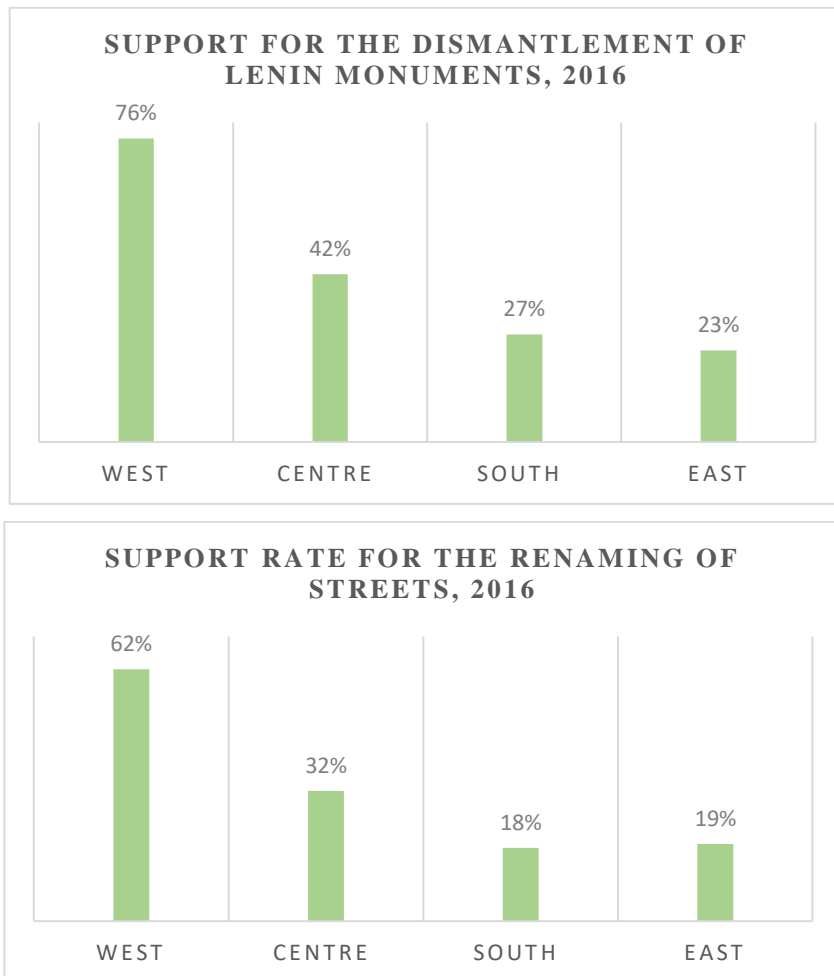




Regret for the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Rating Group 2015a)

As for the Law on Decommunization, by the end of October 2016, the mandatory renaming of streets and cities was opposed by the absolute majority of Ukrainians, and so was the dismantlement of Lenin monuments (Rating Group Ukraine 2016a). Regional cleavages are sharp and confirm the unpopularity of activists-led *Leninopad* during the Maidan across the south-east (Gaiday and Lyubarets 2016).





Attitudes towards provisions of Decommunization (Rating Group Ukraine 2016a)

Opposition to the Laws contrasts with the evidence that active resistance to their implementation has been sporadic (Marples 2017).

Observers have located reasons for the lack of conflict in central policy makers' ability to promote compromise and affirming Ukraine's pro-European political course through a reconciliation of western Ukraine's nationalist aspirations with liberal forces, with such an objective matching the majority of Ukrainians' preferences and interests (Plokhii 2017).

The relative lack of active confrontation has been also related to the growth of patriotic trends within the public opinion, to the inability to implement the Laws in the regions that display the highest levels of ideological opposition to the provisions, and to the crucial circumstance that motives for opposing the laws

are mostly non-ideological, but practical (Shevel 2016a)³¹. These factors would therefore explain the passive opposition of the majority of the population and the active support and opposition of ideologically-committed minorities standing on both sides of the political divides.

The discussion so far points to Ukrainian elites' misperception of public preferences (Kulyk 2019). Drawing on the conceptual framework of the thesis, more fundamental for dynamics of contestation is the Maidan government's imposition of ethno-national boundaries that aim at co-opting the public preferences through boundaries that are framed to overlap with political ones (Wimmer 2013).

As remarked by Ukraine's major mnemonic warrior, Volodymyr Vyatrovych:

“It is not Russians or the Russian-speaking Ukrainians [...], that are the basis for terrorism in Eastern Ukraine or the annexation of Crimea, but rather the Soviet people” (Vyatrovych 2018, 258).

The fact that the strategy for changing the location and meaning of national boundaries is aimed at inverting the order between an ethno-national and supra-national ideological category widen room for political contestation and ideological manipulation.

Instead of targeting the Russian State, the initiatives stigmatise the Soviet experience *as a whole*, thereby entering vividly the domain of the individual.

Further, the legitimacy of the state-promoted national identity is contested because it is associated to integralist interpretations of history that have long been represented as upholding the interests of one particular region and posing an existential threat in the other (Osipian 2015; Portnov 2016; 2017). Embedded and circumstantial frames, and the fluidity of the boundary differentiating

³¹ The mandatory application of the Law on Decommunization has been found to be unpopular for reasons related to financial efforts for renaming and deconstructing streets and monuments; to practical concerns over the requirements of changing documents, to the lack of effects of the Laws on (better) socio-economic status

Ukrainians from Russians additionally contribute in deepening disagreement over the location and meaning of the national divide as mandated by the Laws.

On these premises, we shall expect that partial degrees of consensus over the meaning and location of the boundary can be exploited at the central level by major supporters of the laws, with such a strategy being aimed at delegitimising political opponent and dissent. Further, room for sub-national renegotiation and contestation shall also augment and might be instrumental to exacerbate asymmetrical and/or partial levels of consensus, i.e. disagreement over the legitimacy and/or meaning of national divides and of the new social contract sustaining state society relations.

5.2.3. Legitimation of the Laws on Decommunization: the political struggle at the central level

Unlike the Orange Revolution, the Maidan came “from below”: power relations in the new political order are shaped by the ascent of activists and civil society actors to legislative and executive posts, particularly in the areas of education, culture and nationality policy.

Central organisations are thus made up of diverse actors displaying relative degrees of power disposal as well as of ideological attachment to national boundaries as defined by the Laws. In this context, the presence of ideologically-committed policy-makers is key for making of the western regional narrative a compulsory state policy operational in the field (Marples 2017).

Most opponents of the Laws - both political representatives and ideological and non-ideological activists - report the perception of having a relatively moderate President upgrading the preferences of the radical minority: in this perspective, Poroshenko’s support for Decommunization and other nationalist initiatives was out of ideological commitment and instead grounded in a strategic choice of consolidating his personal power vertical through the empowerment of the active part of the revolutionary movement, rather than the passive majority’s (Interview with Volodymyr Lytvyn 2019). Further, the initiative is perceived as forcing the blurring of a cleavage dividing past and present political ideologies and parties:

the process of Decommunization is associated to the stigmatisation of the paternalism proper of the Party of Regions, and by extension of social and welfare policies.

The context in which the Laws were approved was saturated with conflict and political confrontation.

The Laws were passed on the same day the President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski delivered a speech to the *Verkhovna Rada* in which he emphasised the willingness of strengthening bilateral cooperation (Kononczuk 2018); the circumstance is associated to a political provocation even among supporters of the Maidan agenda (Interview with Iryna Podolyak 2019).

The Decommunization Package was approved when the rating of its most fervent supporters, namely Petro Poroshenko's Bloc and the National Front, was at the lowest level since parliamentary elections (KIIS 2015b). Members of the opposition and representatives of the civil society who are not in principle against the implementation of a Decommunization plan locate the adoption of the Laws in the political willingness to marginalise dissatisfaction with the ruling coalition; in particular with its inability to design and implement effective socio-economic reforms (Interviews with Serhiy Chernov 2019; Yurii Pavlenko 2019; Evgeny Zakharov 2019)³². In a period of intense military confrontation, being

³² Interview with Serhiy Chernov – December 12, 2019, Kharkov. Member of Kharkov's Regional Council, Opposition Bloc. Previously elected in the same Council with the Party of Regions.

Interview with Yurii Pvlenko – December 20, 2019, Kiev. Since 2014 Pavlenko has been a Member of Parliament of the Opposition Bloc. Formerly a national-democrat political activist, supporter of the Orange Revolution and Minister for Family, Youth and Sport throughout most of Yushchenko's presidency. He was appointed children's ombudsman in 2011 by President Yanukovich. Throughout the 90s and 2000s, has been actively engaged in the positive development and promotion of Ukraine's national culture, particularly in the field of language. The interviewee reports reason for switching to the "loser's side" in the divisiveness and antagonism of the Maidan protest

against the alliance's initiatives would be equated to hindering Ukraine's struggle for independence and territorial sovereignty. On this view, the Laws are a "soviet-style" means to avoid a substantial war on corruption through pertinent reforms (Interview with Evgeny Zakharov 2019).

In such a context, room for reconciliation is limited, while dissent is marginalized on the base of accusations of representing Moscow's agents or a Russian "fifth column" (Interviews with Andrey Voytsekhovskiy 2019; Evgeny Zakharov 2019; Yurii Pavlenko 2019)³³.

Such accusations do not confine to members of the Opposition Bloc in the Parliament but instead permeate societal relations: any type of opposition to Decommunization and other contested nationalist initiatives is repressed by means varying from media censorship and legal prosecution to extra-legal repression and physical violence (Ishchenko 2018). Opposition to the Laws, whether coming from the Communist Party and the Opposition Bloc or from these Parties' electorate, is discredited as illegitimate on the grounds of being advanced by a Party "financed by Russia" and by people who identify with Russia and/or the Soviet Union (Interview with Serhyi Kvit 2019).

The practice of crafting and fixing the meaning of contested historical narratives in central institutions entails a struggle which is not only between pro-Maidan and the minority of anti-Maidan actors, but also between representatives of the composite pro-Maidan movement.

Iryna Podolyak reports being instrumentally attacked on social media by Volodymyr Vyatrovych for being "a Galician from Self-Reliance against the

movement and government towards fractions of the population who are "under the Russian influence".

Interview with Evgeny Zakharov – December 8, 2019, Kiev. Director of Kharkov Human Rights Group: founded during Perestroika, the Group is up to these days one of Ukraine's most important liberal national organisations

³³ Interview with Andrey Voytsekhovskiy – December 13, 2019, Kharkov. Journalist and political activist heading the Kharkov-based group "Protiv".

opening of the SBU archives” (Public post on Facebook 2015); these accusations being based on Podolyak’s reservation over methods for formulating the Laws and instrumentalization of the issues at stake, rather than on opposition to the Laws themselves (Interview with Iryna Podolyak 2019).

In conversation with the author both the then Director of the UINR, Volodymyr Vyatrovych, and the then Deputy Director, Alyna Shpak, emphasise their personal experience as political activists and their engagement in the protests against Yanukovych. The team that moves from the Maidan to executive posts propels to continue an anti-authoritarian revolution at the level of state structures (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019): the privileged access to governmental structures allows to advance an ideologically motivated programme of history policy in an institutionalised context, thus making it consequential for the general public.

The empowerment of mobilised civil society activists imply that these actors can rely on a web of local activists and CSOs that can be easily mobilised to force reluctant local authorities to comply with the fulfilment of the provisions, this notwithstanding the scarcity of official UINR representatives at the sub-national level. Further, this circumstance is also related to the impossibility of reversing Decommunization and other achievements of the Maidan under Zelensky’s presidency: such a move is equated to a return to Yanukovych-style politics and would thus be inevitably conducive to mobilisation and revolution (Interviews with Alyna Shpak 2019; Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019).

The UINR propels the idea that there exists only one version of history and the State has the right to ensure that everyone shares the same view of the past (Umland 2017; Yurchuk 2017a, 98). The declared objective of distancing Ukraine’s from Soviet past while promoting a *fair* version of national history implies that myths have to be debunked and Ukrainians’ national consciousness be cleaned-up of Russia’s manipulation (Zinchenko, Vyatrovych, and Maiorov 2018). The “anti-authoritarian” origins of the Laws and the war in Donbass allow mnemonic warriors to contend that the construction of democracy requires both a state-level, mandatory history policy (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019;

Serhiy Kvit 2019) and the option of opening legal prosecution against opponents (Interview with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019): this latter means being the major tool UINR resorts to in order to have non-compliant actors to fulfil the Laws (Marples 2017, 6).

On these grounds, Ukraine's independence shall be pursued systematically through active "pride" for Ukraine's peculiar cultural material, but especially for what puts it in opposition to Russia (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019): in the complete externalisation of sources of antagonism, changing legislation on history is doomed preconditional to changing institutions and peoples' mindset.

The radicalisation and securitisation of relations among groups located on the opposite side of the boundary are anchored to narratives on the War on Russia's propaganda (Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019), and thus relate to issues of state survival. The war in Donbass also justifies the use of coercive and centralised means of control over the Laws' implementation and sustains Vyatrovych's opposition to the option of compromising over local communities' preferences through local referenda: these latter means are branded as tools of political instrumentalization that opposition elites exploit for their self-pursuits while hindering Ukraine's sovereignty and national unification (Interview with Vyatrovych 2019; see also Marples 2017).

The lack of opportunity for dialogue is explicitly related to the charismatic figure of Volodymyr Vyatrovych; the "crafter" of the Laws is defined a mobilised nationalist historian who consciously pursues his personal propaganda at the level of executive organisations (Interview with Iryna Podolyak 2019); his leadership is associated to a punitive and exclusive stance towards large sections of the society, with such a circumstance hindering prospects of enhancing the appeal of important markers of national identification (Interview with Yurii Pavlenko 2019).

The option of legal prosecution entailed by the provisions limits the opportunity for conducting independent research and constructive dialogue and is widely perceived to limit freedom of expression (Interview with Evgeny Zakharov 2019; Marples 2015).

Most interviews confirm that the mobilisation of national identity defined by contested interpretations of history is a consolidated tool of the political struggle for marginalising and delegitimising opponents.

5.2.4. Structures and practices in use: normalising the exclusivity of Ukraine's civilisational choice

The confrontational and antagonistic stance towards Russia and towards the Soviet past is explicitly linked to the maintenance of territorial sovereignty and basic attributes of statehood (Shevel 2016b). To strengthen the legitimacy of this claim, elites draw on embedded structures of discourse and meaning associated to past institutional and interactional processes.

The Laws are in continuity with previous efforts that were either undertaken at the local level or severely limited in their implementation by the bargaining position of political actors claiming to represent south-eastern interests and by dense mechanisms of linkage and leverage with the Russian Federation.

First, the Laws bring to a conclusion the unstructured process of Decommunization initiated in Western Ukraine by locally-elected, (sub)regional bodies and CSOs in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union (Marples 2017; Kasianov 2019; Plokhii 2017). Relevant policy-makers present the provision as an adjustment to a process that had been carried out at the societal level unevenly and unsystematically (Gnatiuk 2018), due to the marginalisation of CSOs in the soviet-like power vertical reproduced under Kravchuk and even more under Kuchma. Emphasis is given to the democratic principle of participation envisaged by the renaming procedures, and to the enhanced regulatory activity which benefits of a centralised executive body tasked with the goal of overseeing the process on a non-discriminatory base (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019).

Second, the fulfilment of all the provisions entailed by the Laws allows to conclude independent Ukraine's primordial project of "national unification" undertaken by President Yushchenko (Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019) and that could not expand to a programme of Decommunization and condemnation of the

Soviet past due to societal and political constraints, the latter being located mostly in the Parliament (Interview with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019; Interviews with Serhiy Kvit 2019; Alyna Shpak 2019).

The Laws are also framed to be in continuity with disruptive processes initiated during the Maidan. The mandatory removal of monuments dedicated to communist leaders is presented in continuation with Leninopad: it represents a formal means that allows the State to advance adjustments in those territorial units that had escaped the process (Shevel 2016a), and is emphasized for being a regulatory tool that provides for democratic participation, de-escalation of violence, institutionalization of an otherwise chaotic process which could have been subject to vandalism and abuse (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019).

In the words of Volodymyr Vyatrovych, the Laws of 2015 represent Ukraine's third Decommunization after the unsystematic ones of 1991 and 2004, and apply the "nation's will" that had emerged during the Maidan (Interview with Volodymyr Vyatrovych 2019); with this stance contrasting with survey evidence over poor societal support for the provisions (Marples 2017, 4).

The crafting and fixing of the Laws into state institutions reproduce partial degrees of consensus across networks supporting the Maidan agenda.

The major difference between ideologically committed respondents and moderate ones is in fact related to the location and meaning of the boundary, as well as to the legitimacy of inscribing those meanings and locations in the form of operational top-down categories of social identity at the level of state organisations. In this context, the fact that the process of reverse stigmatisation is grounded in the inversion of one supra-national category with a national one enhances room for disagreement.

The Laws are therefore aimed at constructing a political identity which most pro-Maidan respondents present in continuation with the "civilisational choice" that had emerged during the Maidan, but that holds varying interpretations over whom or whether one shall be excluded, on what bases and by which means, and what the exclusion means in terms of access and representation in the power structures.

Moderate elites and CSOs acknowledge Ukraine's regional problem and emphasise the contingencies of enhanced confrontation with Russia that prompted the exploitation of ethno-nationalist rhetoric: in this perspective, the Ukraino-centric components of state-sponsored narratives shall be deflated and an opportunity for sub-national adjustments to the most unpopular and confrontational aspects of the process of Decommunization shall be discussed (Interviews with Iryna Podolyak 2019; Evgeny Zakharov 2019; Olena Goroshko 2019)³⁴. The empowerment of ideologically committed actors imposing western Ukraine's identity preferences on the south-east is recognized as a problem, especially in its mandatory top-down specifications that are maintained to abuse of tools of political prosecution rather than setting a programmatic agenda of nation-building.

Hard line supporters' motivation for undertaking the Laws are mostly anchored to the construction of a new national identity that demands a drastic breakaway from Russia and the Soviet Union: the laws are symbolically charged of bolstering Ukraine's return to Europe through references to ethno-national integralism in historical policy which *must be* confrontational due to Russia's aggression and perennial threat to Ukraine's independence. On these grounds, it is necessary to do away with the remaining of the *Homo sovieticus* in Ukraine's society, which had been reproduced under the presidency of Kravchuk, Kuchma and Yanukovich and whose remnants include frames and cognitive sentiments across the population that impinge on the development of statehood (Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019). The mandatory top-down process is thus legitimised by referring to the necessity of applying a "correction" across south-eastern constituencies that are still subject to the Soviet discourse (Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019); or to "spread a wave" from the west to the east (Interview with Alyna Shpak 2019). In this context, western regions' limited experience under the

³⁴ Interview with Olena Goroshko, November 19, 2019, Kiev. Elected Member of Kharkov City Council (2015-2020; Self-Reliance Party)

Soviet Union, their closer ties with Europe and exposure to different cultures are associated to civic superiority and to a “just” version of national consciousness. Oppositional political values and culture are identified as main markers that differentiate a European Ukraine from a despotic and Asian Russia: on these grounds, authorities advance the interpretation of a civic nationalism which is inclusive towards Russian-speakers and ethnic Russians who endorse Ukraine’s path to democracy (Interview with Serhiy Kvit 2019).

A crucial related point is the ambiguous equalisation of the patriotism which had emerged during the last stage of the Maidan with nationalism: the ideological foundation is rhetorically presented for being inclusive, this notwithstanding its links with diacritics which are cemented in practices of political competition.

The claim-making process for establishing and institutionalising central organisations’ preferred categories is in turn instrumental to patronal networks: the exposure of contingently empowered ideological actors in the public sphere is key to belittle political dissent and marginalise discontent for socio-economic results of the Revolution of Dignity: such a move sustains the reification of corrupted patronal practices anchored to self-interested access to the levers of power.

In the discursive reconstruction of national boundaries, power struggles come together with ideological processes of legitimation: the forging of a civic (political) national identity aims at establishing a new balance of power between competing political forces and at marginalising those traditionally associated with the promotion of soviet narratives in Ukraine’s national history. The practice is ideologically grounded across the public and political networks, it is tightened to the survival of the nation and is set to “fix” in state structures the exclusive principles of social closure discussed in the previous chapter.

5.3. *Relocating competition at the local level: the case of Kharkov*

5.3.1. *Patronal dynamics in a borderland city: Kharkov and the events of 2013-2014*

Regionally distributed patterns of disagreement over the legitimacy and the political meaning of national divides open room for local-level agents' contestation and renegotiation of the divisive provisions included in the package.

Along with other major south-eastern cities such as Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov witnessed a relatively intense struggle for the implementation of the Law on Decommunization.

The city has been historically exposed to episodes of "memory wars" (Zhurzhenko 2011; 2016).

Located approximately 30 km away from Ukraine's border with Russia, the capital of the historical *Sloboda* region displays a borderland culture: the peculiar mix of imperial, national, and local markers of identification contributed greatly to both Ukraine's national identity and to the Soviet mythology, the two being related to the city's academic and industrial legacy respectively (Kravchenko and Olynyk 2020; Zhurzhenko 2016).

Transnational economic interests in Russia and historically-embedded symbolic resources can be easily exploited by political entrepreneurs: already during Yushchenko's presidency, an intense competition broke out between the president-appointed Head of the Regional State Administration, Arsen Avakov, and the then city's mayor Mikhayl Dobkin³⁵. In that occasion, the official narrative of the *Holodomor* as a genocide had been successfully contested, renegotiated and modified by locally-elected political representatives (Zhurzhenko 2011).

³⁵ An influential member of the Party of Regions, Dobkin was the candidate of the Opposition Bloc at the Presidential elections in April 2014; he was later elected Member of Parliament of the Opposition Bloc (2014-2019)

Kharkov presents both influential pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian activist groups, a condition which is at least partially explained by the peculiar organisation of local patronal networks, which favours ideological pluralism (Zhurzhenko 2016, 107).

The city has historically been an important centre for liberal-democratic pro-Ukrainian forces such as *Rukh* and Kharkov Human Rights Group. At the same time, it has emerged as a hub of radical forces, included pro-Russian soviet nostalgic organisations (for example, *Oplot*) and Ukrainian radical nationalist groups, such as Bilet'skiy's Ukraine's Patriots (the nucleus of *Pravy Sektor* earlier and Azov battalion later), the latter being sponsored by Ukraine's minister of Internal Affairs, Kharkov-born Arsen Avakov (Mazepus et al. 2018, 16–23; see also previous chapter).

The central figure of the local patronal network would be Kharkov's mayor Gennady "Gepa" Kernes, a pragmatic and successful political and economic player with shadow business connections in both Russia and Ukraine (Mazepus et al. 2021).

Constantly in an enemy relationship with Arsen Avakov and formerly in a tandemly union with Mikhail Dobkin, Kernes took a separate road when reelected mayor in 2015 with a party associated to Igor Kolomoisky (*Vidrodzhennya*, i.e. Renaissance), instead of joining the newly formed Opposition Bloc (Khomenko 2020; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018; Mazepus et al. 2018; 2021).

Throughout his mayorship, Kernes was skilful in adjusting his political orientations to build good relations with all governments and presidents, having shifted comfortably from pro-Orange positions to Yanukovych's camp (Blavatnik 2020).

This talent proved crucial in 2014, when the city experienced a concrete risk of following Donetsk and Lugansk's path: during the Maidan, Kernes actively supported Yanukovych and sharply criticised the movement headed by "some aliens who will hang out portraits of Stepan Bandera" (cited in Khomenko 2020). Soon after the ouster of Yanukovych, Kernes allegedly met with Igor

Kolomoisky in Geneva and received reassurances on his future role in politics (Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018).

Tensions in Kharkov peaked soon afterwards. Pro-Russian forces' violent storming of the Regional State Administration on 1st March 2014 was followed in April by insurgents' attempt to establish a Kharkov People's Republic: the enterprise was violently repressed by Minister Avakov's special forces with the tacit accord of Kernes (Maloveryan 2014; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018). Pro-maidan activists' toppling of Lenin monument in September 2014 (Unian.ua 2014) marked the symbolic "victory" of the pro-Ukrainian movement over the separatist forces (Plokhii 2017)³⁶.



Kharkov oblast (Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018)

Throughout Poroshenko's presidency, Kernes displayed ambiguous positions between Kiev and Moscow, but managed to grant allegiance to the new political order while keeping untouched his high appreciation rate across his largely pro-Russian electorate. Key to the cementation of his rule was his charismatic leadership and the ability to strike a self-interested informal accord with Poroshenko. The latter's distortion of decentralisation reforms for the sake

³⁶ The event took place with the implicit approval of the Regional State Administration, it prompted opposition by the City Council and outraged the local communists

of reconstructing the power vertical was based on a set of informal rent-seeking agreements with local political elites from the former Party of Regions, included Kharkov's mayor (Mazepus et al. 2018; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018; Skorkin 2018).

Kernes' firm opposition to the implementation of the Decommunization package shall be understood in light of the instability and unpopularity associated to the initiative.

During the spring of 2014, Kharkov scored third after Donetsk and Lugansk in terms of support for separatism and accession into Russia's Custom Union (KIIS 2014b). Having survived the turbulent "Russian spring", the city emerged as a stronghold of the newly formed Opposition Bloc at the Parliamentary elections in October 2014. Tensions and the capillary presence of radical fringes from both sides of the confrontation contributed in making of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) the most powerful law enforcement agency (Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018; Petik and Gorbach 2016; Zhurzhenko 2015c).

Particularly during the first year of Poroshenko's presidency, support for the new political order was based on a very fragile consensus, and rested on a compromise that did never put aside pro-Russian sentiments (Blavatnik 2020; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2017; Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018; Zhurzhenko 2015b). By the beginning of 2015, Kernes' objective was the one of preventing the precipitation of his city into conflict while re-establishing his corrupt practice over Kharkov in a renewed context of competing pyramid politics (Gnatiuk 2018; Zhurzhenko 2015b).

5.3.2. From "imitation" to the Zhukov Affair: implementation and renegotiation of the Law on Decommunization

Gennady Kernes' strategy over the implementation of the Decommunization Package aimed at balancing between his self-interest of pragmatically compromising with Kiev while trying to appease his largely pro-Russian electorate (Shapovalova and Jarabik 2018). Key to the mayor's calculations were

the city's proximity to the secessionist area of the Donbass region and the approaching turn of local elections in October 2015.

Likewise other locally-elected bodies, Kharkov's City Council initially tried to avoid the unpopular move of implementing the Laws by simply ignoring their mandatory nature.

Such a stance was opposed by the activists of the "Toponymy Group": formed during the Summer 2015 and headed by the local historian, researcher and civic activist Mariya Takhtaulova, the group worked proactively on an extensive project of renaming and tried to raise the media attention on the issue (Interview with Iryna Bagalaj 2019)³⁷. In constant cooperation with the UINR, the Group's proposals had been broadly prepared according to a preliminary principle of "historical name"; i.e. of returning the name of the public place in use before the Soviet experience. If unavailable a previous naming, the second principle was the one of creating toponymic ensembles with adjacent places (Interview with Mariya Takhtaulova 2019)³⁸.

Under pressure of the Toponymy Group, Kernes created a "Working Group" attached to the "Toponymy Commission" of the City Council: counting members among historians, civil servants and university professors, the group was regarded by political activists and civil society members to uphold a conservative strategy reflecting the Council's preferences (Interviews with Mariya Takhtaulova 2019; Iryna Bagalaj 2019; Vadym Pozdniakov 2019)³⁹. In the words of the Head of the City Council's Working Group, Professor Kudelko,

³⁷ Interview with Iryna Bagalaj – December 11, 2019, Kharkov. Nationalist-leaning political activist based in Kharkov, for a short period after the Maidan she was associated to the party self-Reliance

³⁸ Interview with Mariya Takhtaulova -December 12, 2019, Kharkov. Since December 2019, Takhtaulova has been the Head of the Kharkov Department of the UINR

³⁹ Interview with Vadym Pozdniakov – December 14, 2019, Kharkov. Founder of Kharkov-based nationalist NGO "Svitanok" promoting Ukrainisation and active decommunization in Ukraine. During the Maidan he was an activist of Svoboda

the experts worked to comply with the prescription of the central executive without compromising Kharkov's identity (Interview with Serhiy Kudelko)⁴⁰.

The conservative position would reflect the majority of the population's preferences, the latter opposing the Law mostly for pragmatic reasons (Shevel 2016a). Accordingly, the declared objective would be the one of minimising inconveniences related to changing documents and investing local resources for something perceived unnecessary other than unpopular (Interview with Aleksey Khoroshkovaty 2019)⁴¹. At this regard, Kernes would constantly remind the public opinion that costs for renaming would have been borne by Kharkov City Council, and not be distributed among citizens (Kharkiv City Council 2015).

The major push for fulfilling the Laws arrived after the election of Self-Reliance representatives in Kharkov's City Council in October 2015, which allowed to advocate for the Toponymy Group's stances in the elected body⁴². Notably, City Council's Deputies of Petro Poroshenko's Bloc sided with Kernes and opposed the implementation of the Law due to their unpopularity, and officially resorting to concerns over the costs of the project (Interview with Taras Sitenko 2019)⁴³.

The City Council organised public meetings with the local community, but the situation became so tense that they had to be cancelled due to threats of riots across activists. Pro-Decommunization activists lament the ineffectiveness being grounded in the apathy of the general public and in the allegedly purposeful gathering of people holding the vision of the City Council, e.g. old people, school

⁴⁰ Interview with Professor Serhiy Kudelko, December 12, 2019, Kharkov. Historian, V. N. Karazin Kharkov National University

⁴¹ Interview with Aleksey Khoroshkovaty, December 13, 2019, Kharkov. Head of Kharkov City Council's Commission on Toponymy.

⁴² Deputies from Self-Reliance were the only ones supporting the implementation of the Law in Kharkov's City Council

⁴³ Interview with Taras Sitenko – December 13, 2019, Kharkov. Chairman of the *Samopomich* faction in Kharkov City Council.

teachers, civil servants (Interview with Mariya Takhtaulova 2019; Interview with Iryna Bagalaj 2019).

The City Council's final approval of a shortened list of renaming enacted a major discord regarding the fate of two city districts (the Frunze District and the Ordzhonikidze District) and of Dzerzhinsky Street. In both cases, the City Council resorted to the practice of "imitation": public places were formally re-dedicated to people with the same name (Noskov 2015)⁴⁴.

Activists from the working group resorted to lobbying on the Regional State Administration that according to the Law was supposed to approve or reject the City Council's proposal within three months from the submission before sharing the final proposal with the Rada (UINR 2014). Through cooperation with the RSA, local activists managed to have the districts renamed (Interviewee N 1, Kharkov RSA 2019)⁴⁵. The Head of the Regional State Administration and one of Poroshenko's closest collaborator (BBC News 2016), Igor Rainin, approved the renaming of 52 toponyms; the list included the replacing of Marshall Zhukov Avenue in Petro Grigorenko Avenue - a dissident member of the Soviet Army advocating for the defense of Crimean Tatars - and the renaming of three streets after the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred (Interfax 2019).

The process took longer than mandated by the law and ended in May 2016.

In May 2019 and in concomitance of the campaign for Parliamentary Elections the issue got back to the frontline. From his Facebook page, Gennady Kernes declared his intention of returning the name of Marshall Zhukov to

⁴⁴ For example, Felix Dzerzhinsky street was renamed after his brother Vladislav Dzherzhinsky, a doctor. The strategy of "imitation" had been advanced also in other contexts, notably in Dnepropetrovsk.

⁴⁵ Anonymous Interviewee N 1, Member of the RSA, Department of Mass Information – Office of Domestic Politics - December 11, 2019, Kharkov. The office was tasked with coordinating the Regional State Administration's Communication with activists and civil society actors participating to the provision over the renaming of streets and public places.

Grigorenko Avenue, owing to a “public mandate” of Kharkovites who had responded in high numbers to a local citizen’s petition launched on the website of Kharkov City Council on the eve of the celebration for May, 9. The petition was discussed and reviewed very quickly by the City Council which returned what it claimed to be the historical name of Zhukov Avenue.

The City Council’s decision was taken to court under the initiative of two representatives of Kharkov residents, a local political party (*Sokhyra*), the Party European Solidarity of Petro Poroshenko, Party Svoboda, and Kharkov-born MP and Azov leader Andriy Bilet’skiy. The Court’s first rejection of the City Council decision has been followed by several other attempts of the local body of returning to Zhukov’s name – all such attempts having failed.

The Law’s ambiguity in specifying the object of mandatory renaming allows local authorities to exploit their inherent shortcomings: not only Zhukov’s name was not included in the UINR original list of mandatory renaming, but the city authorities could present the initiative as in compliance with the Law mandating the celebration of the Victory over Nazism.

The “Zhukov affair” enacted an harsh personal-level struggle between Vyatrovych and Kernes, with the mayor directly attacking the Director of the UINR for disregarding Ukrainians’ view on identity issues (Gordon *Ukraina* 2019; *Ukrainska Pravda* 2019b; 2019a).

In the Rada, an MP from Odessa region, Nikolai Skorik (Opposition Bloc) appealed to Odessa City Council to draw on Kharkov’s example and turn an Avenue renamed after the Heavenly Hundreds to Marshal Zhukov (*Yuzhny Kur’ier* 2019).

Kharkov’s City Council enterprise of 2019 is mostly aimed at bringing to the forefront regional identity issues on the eve of the Parliamentary elections and in preparation of local elections of October 2020. Shortcomings in the national legislation on the politics of history can be used to raise the rating and/or to mobilize the electorate on contested identity issues before elections (Kutsenko 2020). Against this background, Kernes’ public contestation in 2019 would systematically aim at delegitimising the centralised executive powers of the

UINR, while at the same time deepening his good relationship with the ruling patronal networks.

The mayor had in fact publicly endorsed Petro Poroshenko's candidacy at the presidential elections of March/April 2019; and switched to the winner's side only when Zelensky was elected (Khomenko 2020).

These dynamics suggest that the competitive struggle is hardly an attempt to put under question the legitimacy of the new political order.

Local political dynamics of repositioning do not confine to the city's mayor.

The former RSA Governor and later deputy head of the Presidential Administration, Igor Rainin, is the major example of ideological twists among Kharkov's members of Petro Poroshenko's Bloc. Considered a major exponent of Poroshenko's enlarged financial group, Rainin initially emerged as one of the major supporter of the Maidan agenda: he successfully lobbied on the Regional Council to have the recognition of the Russian Federation as an aggressor approved, and later fervently supported the implementation of Decommunization in his region (BBC News 2016; Interfax 2019). In the late 2019, Rainin switched to the pr-Russian side and became the regional leader of the "Opposition platform – for life", a party that was formed in 2018 by Yuriy Boyko and Viktor Medvedchuk as a split from the Opposition Bloc and that had scored second at Parliamentary elections in May 2019 (Lennon 2019; Interfax 2019). In this case, transnational, personal business interests concur with obvious trends within the local electorate and prompt patronal networks' self-interested shifts across the opposite side of the political contestation.

5.3.3. Legitimising and renegotiating the Law on Decommunization:

competitive ideological norms and their links with power relations

Mobilised activists and NGOs were the major players on both sides of the confrontation.

As for the general public, all activists and main political actors report that there has been relatively low levels of participation and much apathy in public discussions on the issue. The major reasons for opposing the Laws were

pragmatic and utilitarian and prompted a position of conservatism linked to economic concerns over financial costs for the management and redistribution of costs for replacing plaques, as well as to a general detachment from bureaucratic adjustments required for replacing documents. The ideological aspect of the Law is thus a central issue for the active part of the society mostly.

Pro-Decommunization activists and political actors resort to narratives of purification from communism and from the remaining of the Russian Empire in Kharkov's cultural heritage (Interviews with Mariya Takhtaulova 2019; Iryna Bagalaj 2019; Interviewee N 1, Kharkov RSA 2019).

Equally emphasised are discourses over the securitisation of relations with Russia. At this regard, local activists and central executive representatives reproduce Kiev's discourse over Russia's fifth column and Moscow's propaganda: in this perspective, the local community is made up mostly of pensioners and unemployed who live in the past and are unable to grasp crucial links between the initiatives and the affirmation of Ukraine's independence (Interviewee N 1, Kharkov RSA 2019; Interviewee N 2, Kharkov RSA 2019)⁴⁶.

Locally-elected political actors contesting the legitimacy of the Laws present the Decommunization as a situational, non-democratic expression of the protest mood which had emerged across the active and ideologically-motivated participants of the Maidan. The provision is maintained to purposefully ignore Ukraine's regional diversity and multi-national identity (Interview with Serhiy Chernov 2019; Interview with Serhiy Kudelko 2019)⁴⁷: in this perspective, the opportunity for balancing competitive preferences in historical policy is

⁴⁶ Anonymous Interviewee N 2; member of the RSA, Department of Culture, December 13, 2019, Kharkov. The Department of Culture was tasked with the organisation, implementation and supervision of the provision that mandated the removal of statues and plaques commemorating figures and events associated to the Communist ideology

⁴⁷ Interview with Serhiy Chernov – December 12, 2019, Kharkov. Member of Kharkov's Regional Council, Opposition Bloc. Previously elected in the same Council with the Party of Regions.

deliberately avoided in order to reshape regional power balances in central structures in such a way to marginalise south-easterners' interests' representation. Local actors refer to a top-down imposition of reverse stigmatisation that ignores any concept of national identity and aims at Galicianising Kharkov and the east (Interview with Serhiy Chernov 2019); thereby reifying discourses that had been popularised by the Party of Regions under Yushchenko's presidency (Yurchuk 2011).

Respondents advocating for the conservative position of the general public resort to a strategy of discursive shift that emphasises the prestige and distinctiveness of Kharkov's local identity and a conscious switch from soviet supra-national commemoration practices to regional ones. Kharkov is claimed to have strengthened its position as an "independent, self-efficient city, with its own traditions, culture, heroes" (Interview with Serhiy Kudelko 2019): the boundary shift to the sub-national level of identification allows to avoid the Kiev-desired replacement of soviet names with western Ukrainian ones. By the same token, the discourse emphasises that Kharkov's nested identity is ineradicably part of the mosaic that makes up Ukraine as a multi-national, diverse state; and sets forward a prospect of reconciliation between Ukraine's two poles.

Ideologically-motivated political activists reify Russia's narratives over the violent fascist putsch in Kiev in February 2014 (Interviewee N 3, Pro-Russian activist in Kharkov 2019)⁴⁸; they lament a widespread diffusion of control tactics and oversurveillance from the part of the SBU (Interview with Andrey Lesik 2019)⁴⁹. Relatedly, the lack of active opposition from the general public is

⁴⁸ Anonymous Interviewee N 3, pro-Russian political activist – December 14, 2019, Kharkov.

⁴⁹ Interview with Andrey Lesik, December 14, 2019, Kharkov. In 2015, Lesik was elected member of Kharkov City Council with Renaissance, in 2016 he was denied the Party's membership for wearing the St. George ribbon. In 2017, he was arrested on

depicted as a reflection of the still salient fear for nationalist fringes whose disruptive activity during Kharkov's "Russian spring" associates to threat and harassment (Interviewee N 3, Pro-Russian activist in Kharkov 2019).

The legitimacy of the Law is contested by resorting to discourses over the President's conscious empowerment of radical nationalists' agenda that enhances the confrontation that had emerged during the Maidan (Interview with Serhiy Kudelko 2019; Serhiy Chernov 2019; Interviewee N 3, Pro-Russian activist in Kharkov 2019; Andrey Lesik 2019) One supporter of the Orange Revolution who dispraises pro-Russian positions and defines himself pro-democratic, underscores that his opposition to the Laws and to the Maidan mainly pertains to its political meaning of discrediting left-wing ideologies *in toto* and excluding the east while empowering and legitimising far-right ideologies (Interview with Andrey Voytsekhovskiy 2019).

The ideological underpinnings of the Laws are associated to antagonistic practices that stigmatise not only the Socialist ideology and the Soviet political experience, but life in the Soviet Union (Interview with Serhiy Chernov 2019)..

Regionally distributed preferences are still salient and there is an overlapping between ethno-national and political boundaries.

In this content, locally-elected representatives' emphasis on the discriminatory, exclusivist practices entailed by the Laws concur in minimising opportunities for agreeing upon a project of national reconciliation. The passive opposition of the local population can be manipulated and mobilised along identity scripts embedded in Ukraine's political competition. The engagement and visibility of ideologically-committed groups placed on both sides of the contestation enhances the exposure of local constituencies to the rhetoric of minority but ideologically committed members placed at the poles of the

charges of separatism and was deprived of his deputy mandate. Since 2018 - head of the Kharkov city organization of the political party "Opposition Platform - For Life". In 2020 he was elected at Kharkov's City Council

confrontation, and reinforces the mobilisation capacity of contested history during electoral contests.

5.4. Conclusions

After the Maidan Revolution, state-society relations remain governed by patronal mechanisms established among fluctuating networks but the divided executive constitution produces new dynamics of competition, both at the central level and at the level of centre-periphery relations.

On the one hand, patronal networks proliferate due to formal and informal power-sharing arrangements between the major Euromaidan players - thus contributing at least initially to institutionalise political pluralism (Fisun 2015). On the other hand, new configurations of power inequalities hinder the brokerage activity of pro-Russian political actors in central organisations, a circumstance that is visible in the passing of pro-Western legislation.

In this context, the Decommunization Laws are functional to elites' co-option of the public preferences: nationalist versions of history are imposed through strategies of reverse stigmatisation and means of categorisation that rely on contested symbolic and material resources. The policy results in augmented confrontation and antagonism towards Ukraine's soviet experience and towards fractions of its population.

The strategy is instrumental to move attention away from programmatic politics and to perpetrate the patronal system. Opposition to the Laws is delegitimised by resorting to threats to territorial integrity even when reasons for hostility are not clearly located in ideological motivations.

Such a strategy correlates to higher levels of struggle across and between ideologically-motivated actors, with these processes being reflected in the political engagement of an otherwise ideologically-detached public.

The partial renegotiation of the Law on Decommunization in Kharkov suggests that political networks may exploit the divisiveness and ambiguity of the law for electoral purposes even when opposition to the law is not grounded in ideology; thereby exacerbating the divisiveness of central organisations' strategy.

In Kharkov, elected politicians' practices of renegotiation aim at contesting the legitimacy of empowered executive institutions and their representatives, but do not question the foundations of the political order, which still allows to incorporate local patronal networks' interests into the system through mutually-beneficial informal arrangements.

CONCLUSIONS

Principles of legitimacy and power configuration jointly produce large-scale national-political identities: the latter emerge from the exchange relationships that people establish with each other and reflect contingent political pursuits. The resultant national identities are ideological rather than cultural and centred on more or less inclusive political principles of membership.

In multi-national soviet successor states, embedded and contingent components inform elites' selection of core values that are manipulated to advance competitive claims over the location and meaning of national divides. Circumstances pertaining to the relation and balance of power between self-interested and verticalized networks of clients are constituent part of the process that leads to the institutionalisation and imposition of dominant national categories across the field.

The application of this conceptual understanding to the empirical study of Ukraine allows to reflect on the following conclusions.

First, the potential for high levels of social closure of the nationally-defined political order partly originates in embedded components of Ukraine's Soviet legacy but its effects in the field are mostly shaped by contingent informal norms of political competition and power accumulation.

Early institutional research on Ukraine contends that in 1991 the conception of a civic state took over the ethnic one and allowed to pursue a nation-building policy carried out on behalf of Ukrainian citizens rather than of the Ukrainian nation (Chinn and Kaiser 1998,145-49).

The empirical evaluation of practices of national state consolidation points instead to policy makers' ambiguous but strategic choice of not specifying the components of the nation. In the field of historical policy, such a strategy would be pursued mainly by non-consequentialist means of categorisation and identification; the latter's implementation being *de facto* non-mandatory and devolved to the subnational level of administration. Drawing on the legitimacy of national principles of political organisation, this move allowed former

nomenklatura networks to hold on to power. Regionally-distributed networks could in turn resort to emphasising the contested symbolic and discursive components of the state-level strategy to mobilise regionally-distributed preferences for short-term, self-interested purposes.

These features contribute in exacerbating the significance of partial and asymmetrical levels of consensus: the lack of an agreed understanding over the legitimacy, location and meaning of national divides implies that the political salience of modes of identification can be emphasised up to a point of exacerbating the conflictual representation of Ukraine's two poles

The latter opportunity starts materialising after the Orange Revolution and is furtherly stimulated by the interaction of major endogenous and exogenous shifts to the State's macro-structural features. Changes in the constitutional design relocate patronal networks along a multiple-pyramid system of political competition and prompt shifts in the strategy of competing patronal networks who systematically exploit dissatisfaction with state-led initiatives to compete over the capturing of state power and resources.

Second, the diffusion and legitimation of nationalist parties' symbols and rhetoric during and immediately after the Maidan Revolution depend primarily on changes in political alliances and in the allocation of power and pertinent resources among actors claiming to represent constituent groups.

During the revolutionary phase, the strategic use of violence and ineffective regime repression temporarily empower radicals, thereby prompting traditional and poorly-coordinated political actors to renovate strategies of boundary-making. Against the background of radicalising trends, past practices of framing national identity along contested interpretations of history enable political actors' interest-oriented action.

In this context, the breakup of Yanukovich's vertical system and renovated mechanisms of international linkage and leverage limit patronal networks' opportunity for reproducing the condition of compromise that had emerged after the Orange Revolution.

The empirical analysis indicates that the selection of nationalist interpretations of history to modify principles of membership in the national group impact on the form of mobilisation and on the potential for conflict with the out-groups (Conversi 1999). Key to the precipitation of state legitimacy across the south-east are locally-grown political grievances: under unprecedented violent confrontation, the process of social closure associates to existential threats.

Third, the adoption of the Decommunization Laws in 2015 is key to overcome ruling elites' collective action problem as to which divide can ensure the co-option of influential fractions of the civil society and of fluctuating oligarchic networks. The approval of the contested legislation is thus part of the struggle for the consolidation of political alliances in a context of opening of the patronal system of politics. Ruling patronal networks accommodate ideologically committed groups, their support being needed to discredit both *pro-Russian* and pro-reform opposition, and to contain public discontent for poor results in the war on corruption and in socio-economic reforms.

Renegotiation and mobilisation strategies in Kharkov signal that regional constituencies' opposition to the Laws can be highly politicised by local patronal networks even when dissent is not grounded in identity concerns. At the same time, public contestation over the politics of history does not impede supposedly "pro-Russian" politicians to cultivate fruitful relationships maximisation with the ruling class.

Ukraine's case indicates that patrons' and clients' activity of pursuing their particularistic interests through the mobilisation of contested historical material is mostly driven by short-term cost-benefit calculations.

Notwithstanding levels of corruption, patronal networks still respond to an accountability mechanism towards the public: Poroshenko's support for the nationalist agenda of and growing trends of corruption were key to his drop in popularity and to his defeat at the presidential elections of 2019 (Colborne 2019; Sasse 2020).

The thesis sets to contribute to the literature on Ukraine as well as the one on clientelism, nationalism and defective state-building in contexts characterised by deceptive institutional structures.

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