

National History as Casus Belli:
The Politics of Memory and the Genocidal Dimensions of Russia's War
in Ukraine

By
Braedan Mandrusiak

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honours in Political
Science

Department of Political Science
University of Alberta

Supervisor: Greg Anderson

Abstract

On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized the full-scale invasion of Ukraine under the pretext of a “special military operation,” whose stated intention was to liberate the Ukrainian people from the oppression of a Western-backed fascist regime in Kyiv. To supplement the advancing Russian forces, the Kremlin drew upon fictitious renditions of Ukraine to the point of ubiquity, invoking collective memory to emphasize the country’s historical unity with Russia while denying the existence of an independent Ukrainian nation. Yet the lightning offensive promised to Russian forces would quickly collapse against the firm resistance of the Ukrainians, leading to a protracted war of attrition in which Russian tactics have taken on a distinctively genocidal quality against their alleged fraternal people. The following study seeks to investigate how, precisely, collective memory figures into the existential struggle at the heart of the Russia-Ukraine War. It ultimately finds that the genocidal dynamics visible in Russian wartime conduct are the result of mutually exclusive national histories, which were generated from divergent nation-building projects following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The memories articulated within these historical narratives have—it is argued—invested the war with existential significance, giving rise to an international environment in which Russia as a great imperial power cannot coexist peacefully alongside Ukraine as a politically independent nation-state.

Acknowledgments

The work that follows would not have been possible without a system to support me at each and every step, for which I am eternally grateful. To begin, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Greg Anderson, for his guidance during the research and writing process, as well as his unwavering investment in the thesis and uncompromising belief that the final product would live up to my own unreasonably high expectations, no matter the path I chose to get there. The hours of discussions, the detailed comments, and the words of encouragement made the thesis into something truly special, I believe, and I will never forget them as I journey onwards to law school and a professional career.

I would also like to thank my fellow colleagues from the honours cohort, who laughed, learned, and suffered alongside me to produce marvelous works, for which we should all be proud. Sharing this experience with others made the *ups* reach higher and the *downs* more bearable, and I hope that I made their days a little bit brighter as well. And sometimes, that light comes from knowing that we are all together in the trenches, each in our own way. Emerging on the other side is always better when you have people who lived your struggle. So thank you for the perseverance, the kindness, and the positivity, and for sticking together through the ups and the downs.

Finally, I would like to give an enormous thank you to my parents, my brothers, and my partner for your love and support throughout the arduous process of researching and writing the thesis. For accommodating my late nights spent writing, for listening to my hopes and ideas, as well as my worries and doubts, for supporting me unconditionally and without question, through my greatest triumphs and most frustrating setbacks, I am forever in your debt. I am truly blessed to have such amazing people in my life, and behind my writing is a story of your dedication, your care, and your patience, as well as your understanding, your interest, and of course, your very own inspiring ideas. Without you, the words that follow would never have made it onto the page, and the ideas we discussed at the dinner table, in the car, and over the phone would have remained just that: *ideas*. Thank you for bringing them to life, and for all you did to ensure the thesis saw the light of day.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Chapter I: Introduction: The Special Military Operation in Ukraine.....	5
Chapter II: Collective Memory and the Russia-Ukraine War	12
<i>Collected Memory, Collective Memory, and History.....</i>	12
<i>The Politics of Memory.....</i>	14
<i>Memory Politics During the Russia-Ukraine War.....</i>	20
Chapter III: The Case Study as a Method of Empirical Investigation	25
Chapter IV: The Struggle Over the History of Russia and Ukraine	29
<i>Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Era</i>	32
<i>Russian National History: The Paradigm of Eternal Unity.....</i>	33
<i>Ukrainian National History: The Paradigm of National Resistance.....</i>	42
Chapter V: Genocide in the Ashes of Empire	48
<i>The Discourse of “Denazification” as Evidence of Genocidal Intent.....</i>	51
Denial: Denying the Existence of the Ukrainian National Group	52
Dehumanization: “Cleansing” and “Erasing” the Ukrainian National Group	55
Destruction: “Liquidating” the Ukrainian National Group.....	58
<i>Genocidal Acts as Further Evidence of Intent to Destroy</i>	59
Article II (a): Killing Members of the Group	60
Article II (b): Causing Serious Bodily or Mental Harm to Members of the Group.....	62
Article II (c): Deliberately Inflicting on the Group Conditions of Life Calculated to Bring About Its Physical Destruction in Whole or in Part.....	64
Article II (d): Imposing Measures Intended to Prevent Births Within the Group	67
Article II (e): Forcibly Transferring Children of the Group to Another Group	68
Chapter VI: Conclusion.....	72
References	76

Chapter I

Introduction: The Special Military Operation in Ukraine

“As long as Ukraine retains its national unity, as long as its people continue to think of themselves as Ukrainians and to seek independence, so long Ukraine poses a serious threat to the very heart of Sovietism ... For the Ukrainian is not and has never been, a Russian. His culture, his temperament, his language, his religion—all are different.”

—Raphael Lemkin, 1953

On February 21, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a rather lengthy public address to the citizens of Russia. Its stated purpose was to offer an explanation of recent developments in the Donbas region and, more implicitly, to present a chronology of Russia’s historical efforts to resolve the so-called “Ukraine Question.” Seated between the Russian flag and coat of arms, Putin would begin his lecture with an official assessment of the conditions that gave rise to the formation of Ukraine:

So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia—by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought (Putin 2022a).

The speech that would follow soon devolved into a protracted lesson in Ukrainian history, saturated with the autocrat’s signature rhetorical tropes about Russia’s historical claim to Ukrainian territories as well as the threat posed to Moscow’s security by the alleged expansionist ambitions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The end result was a work of historical fiction so unbelievable that *ridicule* became the main reaction expressed by Ukrainians on social media, as local platforms were suddenly flooded with sarcastic posts and images of Vladimir Lenin as the country’s founding figure (Plokhyy 2023, 151). For Putin, however, that the supposed origins of Ukraine’s statehood and sovereignty could be tied to Lenin and the Bolsheviks meant that Russia—which considers itself the “state continuator” (*gosudarstvo-prodolzhatel’*) of the Soviet Union in international legal terms—had legitimate historical grounds to bring Ukraine under its control, including through the use of force (Mälksoo 2023, 477). Indeed, the address had been preceded by a televised assembly of the Russian Security Council (2022) in which members oversaw the de facto dissolution of the Minsk Agreements and engaged in a deeply choreographed debate that ended with a joint proposal that Putin recognize the “independence” of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics—territories in Eastern

Ukraine which Russian-backed paramilitary groups had taken in 2014 under the pretext of the local population's desire for secession, leading to the outbreak of the Donbas War.

In this context, Putin's fictional retelling of Ukrainian history functioned as an explanation not only to educate Russian citizens, but also the onlooking international community, of the rationale behind his decision to conclude the address with the formal recognition of the two puppet statelets in Ukraine's Donbas region (Putin 2022a). More alarming still was that the address came at a moment when between 150,000 and 190,000 Russian military personnel had been mobilized on the Ukrainian border, in Belarus, and in Ukraine's occupied Crimea region (Bowen 2022, 1). Immediately following his recognition of the People's Republics, Putin ordered a substantial detachment of these forces to enter into the Russian-controlled territories and perform "peacekeeping duties" in response to a forthcoming Ukrainian "blitzkrieg" in the Donbas alongside an alleged genocide of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, of which there exists no evidence (Putin 2022a; Roth and Borger 2022). For their part, Western and Ukrainian leaders pushed back against what was widely perceived as an excuse for military aggression; Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, for instance, signaled his country's readiness to stand against Russia should Putin seek to forcibly reclaim its fictional historical territories, stating that "[w]e are not afraid of anyone or anything. We don't owe anyone anything. And we won't give anything to anyone" (Associated Press 2022). Yet the rhetorical, economic, and diplomatic efforts made by Kyiv and its allies to dissuade the impending Russian military offensive would be in vain. While sorely lacking in international legitimacy as well as the element of surprise in the event of an armed advance, Putin would nevertheless launch Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, thereby delivering on his earlier threat that—in response to Kyiv's policy of decommunization following the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014—Moscow would "show what real decommunizations would mean for" the future of Ukrainian statehood (Putin 2022a).

In this light, Putin's fictional rendition of Ukrainian history served as a clear warning that the coming war between Russia and Ukraine would be an existential affair. As Russian troops entered Ukraine in the early morning from Belarus, Russia, Crimea, and the People's Republics, the fighting that ensued would take shape around mutually exclusive existential objectives: for the Ukrainians, the goal would be nothing less than to retain their "sovereign right to choose their own political fate in the world," whereas the Putin regime would seek to "deny this very right of Ukraine to sovereign conduct, if not to deny the existence of Ukrainians as a nation and the Ukrainian statehood as anything but a temporary geopolitical whim altogether" (Mälksoo 2022, 475). Likewise, the antagonistic relationship between Russian and Ukrainian nation-building pursuits took renewed precedence with the outbreak of the war. Under conditions of intense warfare, the Ukrainian people's historical struggle for independence, statehood, and national self-determination became pitted against Russian ambitions to validate its self-perceived status as a great power within the international system, especially through its attempted revival of direct colonial control over Ukrainian territories—its most important imperial holdings during

the Tsarist and Soviet eras. Critical junctures in the shared history of the belligerents have themselves become a discursive battleground in which dueling interpretations of the past struggle for hegemony, with both Moscow and Kyiv leveraging *memory*—or *how the past is remembered in the present*—as weapons for waging war.

This war over memory is not, however, a novel development in Russia-Ukraine relations; it is instead considered a consequence of the Soviet Union’s collapse, whose intensity has escalated in parallel with the deteriorating security situation between the two countries (Kasianov 2025; Yefremenko 2022). That a work of historical fiction had been used to advance foreign policy objectives in the days preceding the war was the rule rather than the exception when it came to Russo-Ukrainian memory politics. In this respect, it was far from the first time that Putin had weaponized memory to legitimize the pursuit of an aggressive foreign policy in Ukraine to the Russian public and sympathetic foreign onlookers, nor would it be the last. In this, Putin aligns himself with previous Russian leaders not only in regard to his *imperial* and *colonial* ambitions in Ukraine, but also through his strategic manipulation of memory to accomplish these ends (Plokhly 2015; Plokhly 2023). Nowhere would *historical negationism*—or the systemic distortion and denial of history for political ends—become more evident than on the morning of the invasion, when Putin delivered a second consequential address to describe the logic behind Moscow’s actions in Ukraine (Rousso 1991; Rousso 2006).

In it, he asserted that—in response to the choreographed demands of Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas for military intervention to stave off an impending Ukrainian offensive—Russian “peacekeepers” would engage in a “special military operation” in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter to protect the People’s Republics, as well as the ethnic Russians and Russian speakers who, in the president’s words, “have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime” since Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity in 2014 (Putin 2022b; TASS 2022).¹ This operation would, according to Putin, require the complete “demilitarization” and “denazification” of Ukraine, whose people were alleged to have been denied the right to self-determination by foreign powers since realizing their aspiration for statehood upon the foundation of the Soviet Union (Putin 2022b). Accordingly, Ukraine’s pro-Western government was identified as the alleged perpetrator of the “genocide” in the Donbas region and branded as an aggressive, far-right nationalist regime controlled by neo-Nazi elements that trace their ideological ties to Ukrainian fascism during the Second World War (Putin 2022b). Drawing upon a deeply distorted historical rendition of the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazism, Putin would subsequently declare that to protect Russian territories and the welfare

¹ Article 51 of the UN Charter states that: “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security” (United Nations 2022).

of its people from Ukrainian nationalists, Russia could not afford to make the mistake of “appeasing the aggressor” as it allegedly did in 1940 and early 1941 with the Third Reich (Putin 2022b). Instead, he established that Russian peacekeepers must take the initiative to “liberate” the oppressed peoples of Ukraine from their predatory regime, whose main supporters—the United States (US), NATO, and the European Union (EU)—have increasingly threatened Russian security imperatives with their shared ambition of eastward expansion (Putin 2022b). In sum, Russian and Ukrainian security interests were completely aligned in the eyes of Putin: that neither side should desire that Ukraine become an “anti-Moscow” fortress on Russia’s border as the nationalists in Kyiv and their handlers in Washington sought to achieve. For Putin, military force was therefore a means of last resort to be *welcomed* by Russians and Ukrainians alike, given their shared history and common security concerns.

Despite Putin’s attempt to devise a work of historical fiction that would unite Russians and Ukrainians under a common understanding of memory and security, the “special military operation” that immediately followed his address would nevertheless prove disastrous for Moscow. Believing themselves to be liberators, Russian troops would enter Ukrainian towns and cities expecting to be welcomed with flowers, fully committed to the notion that the locals had been overtaken by nationalist forces against their will. They were instead greeted by a civilian population with a strong national identity and civic tradition that vehemently opposed Russian occupation, and who would proceed to engage in a wide range of violent and nonviolent modes of resistance (McGlynn 2024; McGlynn 2026). Severely short on resources and promised a quick, decisive victory by Putin and regime officials, Russian military planners also failed to account for the resilience of the Ukrainian armed forces and the courage of its political leadership at both national and local levels (Plokhly 2023). Russia’s military leadership—who had originally planned “to invade Ukraine over a 10-day period and thereafter occupy the country to enable annexation by August 2022” (Zabrodskyi et al. 2022, 1)—would be quickly drawn into a grueling war of attrition resulting in approximately 1.2 million casualties and as many as 325,000 killed on the side of the aggressor between February 2022 and January 2026—an amount of losses not experienced by any great power in any war since the Second World War (Jones and McCabe 2026, 1-2). Correspondingly, anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine have soared to unprecedented levels, including within its southern and eastern regions, which hold the highest share of both ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the country (Hrushetskyi 2025). Quite ironically, the grand miscalculations of Putin’s “special military operation” succeeded in creating a hostile fortress at Moscow’s doorstep, pushing Kyiv and NATO member states closer than ever before, and landing Russia with the status of pariah on the international stage. Entirely beholden to his own fictional narrative of Russian and Ukrainian historical unity, “Putin [had become] the victim of his own delusions ... [while] his troops became victims of his propaganda efforts,” left completely unprepared “for a war in which the entire population would oppose the invading army and support its own armed forces” (Plokhly 2023, 163).

Yet these miscalculations—rooted in a deeply colonial perception of collective memory and security—would also give rise to disastrous consequences upon the battlefield and within Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia. As the lightning offensive promised to Russian forces collapsed against firm resistance from the Ukrainians, “the ‘liberation army’ [became] frightened, confused, and disoriented” as bullets, missiles, and protests greeted its every advance, rather than flowers, cheers, and celebrations (Plokhy 2023, 163). The conditions of warfighting and occupation responded in kind, coming to reflect a collective mindset of negationism among the Russian leadership and armed forces vis-à-vis the history of Ukraine. This would directly contribute to Moscow’s willing perpetration of the core crimes of international criminal law against soldiers and civilians alike, including its systematic attempts to erase the Ukrainian nation (Hook 2023). The mass atrocities carried out by Russian troops in Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, and Izium during the opening offensive of the invasion serve as damning evidence of this collective mindset, as well as the countless other crimes reported in occupied Ukrainian territories behind the frontlines. Consequently, Russia’s wartime conduct has taken on a distinctively *genocidal* quality in which modern tactics of undertaking genocide are combined with the weaponization of memory to legitimize the deployment of mass terror (Hook 2023, 6; Diamond 2022). As summarized by a prominent Russian propagandist in the state-sponsored article “What Should Russia do with Ukraine,” the notion of “denazification” is ultimately understood by the Putin regime as necessitating the “de-Ukrainianization”—or destruction—of the country of Ukraine as well as its claim to nationhood (Sergeytsev 2022).

That the “special military operation” would turn genocidal—seeking to erase Ukraine as a *nation*—clearly traces its roots most immediately to Putin’s works of historical fiction, which had been systematically presented to Russian citizens as the “historical truth” long before the full-scale invasion in 2022. Yet this understanding does little to explain why the Putin regime and Russian armed forces were so beholden to fictional narratives about Ukraine in the first place. While state-led indoctrination policies and the repression of alternative histories certainly factor into any explanation of the development of Russian negationism towards the history of Ukraine, they only comprise a portion of a much larger picture. The true scope of Russia’s denial of the Ukrainian nation and its distinctive history is much more profound, as is described at length by Raphael Lemkin—the originator of the genocide concept—in 1953 when diagnosing the identity politics of the Soviet Union:

[T]he classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification ... [is] the destruction of the Ukrainian nation ... As long as Ukraine retains its national unity, as long as its people continue to think of themselves as Ukrainians and to seek independence, so long Ukraine poses a serious threat to the very heart of Sovietism. It is no wonder that the Communist leaders have attached the greatest importance to the Russification of this independent member of their “Union of Republics,” [and] have determined to remake it to fit their pattern of one Russian nation. For the Ukrainian is not and

has never been, a Russian. His culture, his temperament, his language, his religion—all are different (Lemkin [1953] 2008, 262).

Lemkin maintains that this genocidal treatment of Ukraine is not limited to Soviet Russia; rather, he asserts that “the mass murder of peoples and nations ... has been a long-term characteristic ... of the internal policy of the Kremlin—one which [Soviet leadership] had ample precedent for in the operations of Tsarist Russia” (Lemkin [1953] 2008, 262). This ultimately suggests that the true origins of Russia’s genocidal conduct in the Russia-Ukraine War can be found in the shared—or *collective*—memory of the polity and its citizens, stretching well into the distant past. The inverse could also be said of the Ukrainians: that their existential struggle for statehood and national self-determination draws substantially upon collective memories of trauma and repression suffered at the hands of foreign powers, including those of Russia, to guide their resistance efforts in the present day. In light of Lemkin’s diagnosis of Russia’s negationist tendencies towards the Ukrainian nation and its distinctive history, the forthcoming study poses the following as its guiding research question: *How exactly has collective memory contributed to the genocidal dimensions at the heart of Russia’s war in Ukraine?*

In response to this question, the study first turns to the *memory-security nexus*: a conceptual lens that places collective memory into dialogue with *ontological security*, or the security of the self-perceived identity of the state. It suggests that at the centre of this nexus resides *national history*, or a simplified, linear narrative of past experiences belonging to a titular nation, to which the state seeks continuity. This continuity with the past is viewed as a necessity for any state-level political community, as national history is what gives *meaning* to its behaviour in the present and priorities in the future; put slightly differently, it determines “one’s nation’s place and role in world history,” or *national identity* (Kasianov 2025, 1). When national history is called into question, existential anxiety ensues within the state, either leading to its *politicization* or *securitization*. In accordance with the prevailing wisdom outlined in the literature, Eastern European countries have primarily taken the latter approach to stabilize their respective national histories and rehabilitate formerly repressed nationalisms following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This holds true of Russia and Ukraine, whose attempts to resolve the existential anxieties of post-Soviet transition through opposing nation-building projects fueled a security dilemma that resulted in the generation of mutually exclusive national histories (Kasianov 2025).

It is argued here that the Russia-Ukraine War reflects the bloody culmination of this dilemma, in which clashing national histories have entered into a veritable existential struggle on the battlefield, within occupied territories, and across discursive channels. This argument is prefaced through a methodical investigation of the precise *content* and *form* of these national histories upon Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022; that is, an examination of the main historical events that are mentioned within them, as well as the actors and circumstances involved (*content*), and the manner in which the link between the past and the present is established (*form*) (Hilmar 2025, 17). From there, the main purpose of the study is to determine

the extent to which these mutually exclusive national histories have invested the Russia-Ukraine War with genocidal significance. This is accomplished through a detailed evaluation of the ways in which national history has contributed to the genocidal quality of Russian wartime conduct, with specific reference to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In sum, the study finds that Moscow's genocidal tendencies in the war against Ukraine are rooted in the search for historical continuity with its great power status from the Tsarist and Soviet eras; that is, to validate its national history as a great imperial power by seeking to revive direct colonial control over Ukrainian territories and expunge from them any trace of Ukrainian national identity through a comprehensive genocidal program of "denazification." On the other hand, Kyiv's staunch commitment to armed resistance against the Russian invasion is rooted in its desire to maintain continuity with a national history defined by its past struggles for independence, statehood, and national self-determination against foreign powers—an endeavour that necessitates above all the preservation of Ukrainian nationhood. In this respect, the Russia-Ukraine War is found to be a *(post)colonial* and *genocidal struggle*, in which Ukraine as a politically independent nation-state and Russia as a great imperial power cannot coexist peacefully. This ultimately aligns with the findings of previous studies that examine the Russia-Ukraine War from postcolonial and international legal perspectives (Snyder 2022a; Snyder 2022b; Barkawi 2022; Diamond 2022; Hook 2023; Mälksoo 2023; Azarov et al. 2023).

Chapter II

Collective Memory and the Russia-Ukraine War

“Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.”

—George Orwell, 1949

Alongside other notable sociopolitical developments to emerge from the Russia-Ukraine War, the discursive struggle over contentious memories rooted in the shared history of the belligerents and the relationship between this struggle and the “conflict currently being fought among the cities, towns and villages of Ukraine” has already given rise to a wealth of literature from a wide range of academic disciplines, with studies varying greatly in terms of their theoretical foundations, research methods, and findings (Edwards 2022, 47). This interdisciplinarity is a fundamental feature of memory studies more generally, and as such, grounding this investigation within a particular subfield is a necessary step in setting the stage for a synthesis of the relevant literature about the “memory war” between Russia and Ukraine. Yet before this step is undertaken, an exposition of the concept of collective memory is in order. In this light, several core questions will guide the path of this exposition: What is memory? What is collective memory? And finally, how does collective memory differ from history?

Collected Memory, Collective Memory, and History

In the study to follow, *memory* is understood as “the process or faculty whereby events or impressions from the past are recollected and preserved,” or—more simply—how the past is remembered in the present (Bell 2006, 2). Yet like any other pertinent concept in the social sciences, memory is subjected to a remarkably high degree of contestability within the academic community, with scholars of memory regularly engaging in protracted disputes over its precise characteristics, empirical significance, and explanatory potential. According to Olick (1999), these conceptual uncertainties are the result of two competing understandings of memory that are diametrically opposed to one another yet whose distinction is rarely articulated in the literature, leading to many scholarly disagreements that are entirely preventable.

On the one hand, memory is viewed purely as an *individual-level phenomenon* where the process of remembrance is the sole responsibility of the individual agent and best explained using psychological and neurological theories and methods. Proponents of this position maintain that collective memory only emerges from the aggregation of individual memories from members of a group, and that while social frameworks still shape what individuals remember, it is only the individual who performs the act of remembrance, whether they do so alone or together (Olick 1999, 338). That collective memory develops solely from the aggregation of socially framed individual memories is a questionable assumption, according to Olick (1999,

341-342), given the irreducibility of certain patterns of sociation to the individual level, the importance of social institutions in shaping patterns of remembrance and forgetting, the role of present circumstances in altering images of the past, and the reality that there are simply other mnemonic technologies beyond the brain. Following the lead of Olick, what the aforementioned concept truly describes is *collected memory*, rather than collective memory.

On the other hand, when memory is treated as a *collective-level phenomenon sui generis*, patterns of remembrance and forgetting previously unaccounted for by collected memory are brought to light as socially-driven processes that are most effectively explained using methods and theory from sociology, cultural studies, and political science. This approach traces its roots to the Durkheimian tradition and especially to his student Maurice Halbwachs, who is widely considered the principal founder of the field of memory studies. While Halbwachs himself struggled to reconcile the tension between collected and collective memory, he nevertheless provided the blueprint for the latter's conceptual development by framing memory as "a matter of how minds work together in society, [and] how their operations are structured by social arrangements" (Olick 1999, 334; Halbwachs [1925] 1992, 38). Considered alongside his argument that "it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts," Halbwachs' framing of memory has not only given rise to the study of how memory emerges from and is sustained by social processes, but also how the past is negotiated, contested, and even fought over between different groups in society (Olick 1999, 334).

In this light, shared accounts of the past need not be accurate nor verifiable, and tend to be highly selective in nature. Irrespective of any historical veracity, then, *collective memory* can be understood as "the story that groups of people tell about themselves, linking past, present and future in a simplified narrative" shaped and reproduced in large through revisionism and purposeful amnesia, all in order to meet the group's identity-based needs and desires in the present (Bell 2006, 2). Accordingly, the social basis of collective remembrance and amnesia is most clearly visible in language, narrative, and dialogue, and these alongside other discursive forms help constitute and sustain "mnemonic communities" as well as shared social identities, while memories are themselves negotiated both within and between these communities at varying degrees of contestation depending upon the salience of the memory in question (Olick 1999, 342; Zerubavel 1996). Collective memory therefore "implies a past that is not only commonly shared but also *jointly* remembered (that is, 'co-memorated')," with the complex dynamics of mnemonic communities determining "not only what and who we remember but also when we remember it" (Zerubavel 1996, 294). These practices of commemoration are facilitated in turn by a wide array mnemonic technologies that permeate society through discursive channels, from linguistic and narrativized accounts of the past to symbolic objects, concepts, or even geographic locations—what Pierre Nora (1989) refers to as "sites of memory," or *lieux de mémoire*. As previously alluded to, it is this question of how the past is remembered, mobilized,

and contested during armed conflict that features so prominently in the following investigation into the Russia-Ukraine War.

Beyond Olick's distinction between collected and collective memory, there is an additional debate of no less significance that both scholars of memory and the broader public sphere continue to grapple with as memory becomes an increasingly salient sociopolitical phenomenon across the world: that is, how collective memory should be differentiated from history (Sierp 2021, 2-3). While Halbwachs suggested that this difference is rooted in the heightened relevance of collective memory for making sense of present circumstances, with history being relegated to the remembered past that is no longer an important part of social life (Olick 1999, 335), perhaps the most influential perspective on this dispute is put forth by Nora (1989), who argues instead that collective memory and history exist in a state of perpetual tension over how societies engage in practices of commemoration. More specifically, he maintains that *history* functions as a homogenizing, predatory social force that determines "how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past," whereas *memory*—which in its purest form refers to remembrance in a collective and unviolated manner—has become conquered and eradicated by mnemonic communities seeking to revise the past in service of the present, effectively transforming the individual's personal memories into a collection of "sifted and sorted historical traces" (Nora 1989, 8). History, therefore, should be understood as an expansive mosaic of crystallized memories that present a biographical narrative of a society's past, thereby bringing meaning to its present and direction to its future.

In this regard, Nora's conception of history not only implies that the question of whose memories are represented within the biographical narrative is determined by the ever-shifting distribution of power within and between social groups, but that collective memory can be further disaggregated into coherent typologies that include, for instance, national and cultural variants. This quest to establish a narrativized account of the historical past is treated somewhat similarly by Jan Assmann (1997, 8-9), who argues that memory—rather than history—is the force responsible for the construction of both individual and collective identity, and that because of this, the history of collective memory—or "mnemohistory"—is oftentimes the site of societal power struggles given that it is "concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered." Perhaps most importantly, the smothering of "authentic," unmediated memory in the perpetual struggle to determine whose history deserves representation reveals an intrinsically *political* element of collective memory—one that breathes novel significance into George Orwell's famous remark that "[w]ho controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell [1949] 2021, 133). That collective memory is routinely deployed and manipulated for political ends is itself the conceptual basis of a developing subfield of memory studies that is of particular import for the study of the Russia-Ukraine War: what has come to be termed *the politics of memory*.

The Politics of Memory

While the study of memory politics emerged in full as an interdisciplinary research subfield only after the end of the Cold War and the resultant wave of democratization that swept across the globe, scholars of nationalism had long since grappled with the significance of collective memory in *nation-building* and *national identity* (Sierp 2021, 3; Malinova 2021, 997). In their review of the literature, for instance, Zubrzycki and Woźny (2020, 177) identify two principal research concerns that have led scholars of nationalism to study collective memory: “the strategies deployed by states and nation-builders ... to create a collective national memory” and forge “a more or less unified national identity where it previously did not exist,” and the use of “commemorative practices as a means through which to solidify national identity and reaffirm national solidarity.” Put more simply, these scholars either preoccupy themselves with investigating the process of *founding* the nation or the practice of *maintaining* it.

Beginning with the former, it is well established in the literature that national memory and national identity are, in essence, the two central ideational pillars that underpin any successful nation-building exercise. More specifically, national memory provides the historical basis from which a cohesive national identity might be constructed (Sierp 2025, 1468). This aligns with the prevailing assumption in the social sciences that memory is a core constitutive element of identity, however national memory is particularly unique in that it has given rise to the *nation-state*: a distinctive form of political organization premised upon the logic of *nationalism*—“that the political and the national unit should be congruent”—and which necessitates especially intensive work to forge and maintain (Gellner 1983, 1). This is largely attributable to the tension between the state’s imperative to govern over diverse populations within its sovereign territory and the exclusionary nature of national memory, which provides the nation-state with legitimacy and naturalizes its existence by establishing the belief that the nation matters, and that the people should therefore care for the state (Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020, 177).² Under such conditions, national memory and official state memory are tightly interwoven and alternative interpretations of the past are discouraged or repressed, sometimes violently, in opposition to more tolerant forms of political organization in which the official memory accommodates a plurality of perspectives beyond that of a single prevailing nation. Yet regardless of whether a polity is determined to be a “nation-state” or otherwise, contestation over its official and national memories resides at the centre of what can be called the *praxis* of the politics of memory.

According to Malinova (2021, 997), the praxis of memory politics can be understood as the public activity of various social institutions and actors to promote specific interpretations of a

² The nation is understood here as a distinctive mode of sociocultural organization whose members share common traits (e.g., language, ethnicity, civic values and institutions) and are tied to a particular geographic territory, while its cohesion and purpose are derived from “a rich legacy of memories” and “present-day consent,” or “the desire to live together, [and] the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in undivided form” (Renan [1882] 1990, 19). The state, moreover, is defined as any “human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory,” in accordance with the classic Weberian tradition (Weber [1919] 2009, 78).

collective past and establish “appropriate sociocultural infrastructure of remembrance, school curricula, and, sometimes, special legislation” in service of their favoured conception of the nation-state. Importantly, this infrastructure presupposes the existence of a foundational historical narrative that details who the polity was, is and wants to be, with this narrative oftentimes being anchored in a national mythology or an origins of state myth (Subotić 2016, 612). More specifically, it serves as a coherent, self-authored story that draws upon a reservoir of collective national memories in order to provide the polity with a *national history* of itself, thereby bringing meaning to the present and direction to the future while constituting its members’ shared identity through its establishment, negotiation, contestation, and consolidation (Bachleitner 2021, 26). This self-authored history is elsewhere termed a *biographical self-narrative*, and is constructed through a highly selective remembrance of past traumas, trials and triumphs, while potentially contradictory or damaging memories are discredited, suppressed or erased, sometimes forcibly so (Mälksoo 2015). These narratives, moreover, are authored by those in positions of power and assumed by scholars of memory to be designed around the desire to further social or political objectives in the present (Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020, 177-178; Sierp 2025, 1468-1469).

Despite the significance that maintaining a national history holds for the polity’s legitimacy and sense of biographical continuity, it is nevertheless vigorously contested by alternative interpretations of the past put forth by competing mnemonic communities. Revisions to the *form* and *content* of the national memories that comprise national history are therefore reflective of the ever-shifting distribution of political power within the polity.³ Studying the praxis of memory politics could therefore be said to consist of the identification and analysis of the “strategies that political actors employ to make others remember in certain, specific ways and the effects of such mnemonic manipulations” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014, 7). This includes, for instance, comparative approaches that typologize mnemonic actors based upon their strategic orientation towards any particular *memory regime*, defined as “a set of cultural and institutional practices that are designated to publicly commemorate [or] remember a single event, a relatively clearly delineated and interrelated set of events, or a distinguishable past process” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014, 15-16). Although the struggle over the form and content of national history represents an integral arena where the past is negotiated, preserved or revised in service of the present, the politics of memory is far from limited to studying contestation *within* the polity, and in this regard, international relations scholars have increasingly attempted to make sense of the behaviour of states on the global stage using a combination of theoretical insights from memory studies and a wide range of other academic fields.

In addition to the wealth of literature produced by scholars of nationalism, the international relations approach to the politics of memory represents the second of two

³ “Content (*what*) refers to historical events that are mentioned, as well as the actors and circumstances involved. Form refers to the manner in which the link between the past and the present ... is established (*how*)” (Hilmar 2025, 17).

influential theoretical frameworks that seek to explain the behaviour of political communities by using the concept of collective memory. In this light, scholars of the international politics of memory investigate how collective memory is negotiated, contested, and fought over by state and non-state actors at the *interstate level*, while also taking into consideration how memory politics at the *national level* determines or is shaped by transnational and global mnemonic developments (Klymenko 2022, 2-3). Despite the relative novelty of the subfield, these scholars have engaged with an impressive range of topics, including traumatic memories in international relations, globalization and transnational memory, and interstate conflicts over memory.

In this regard, investigating how traumatic memories of horrendous events such as genocide, war, terrorism, or armed conflict become politically embedded, memorialized, and contested over time reflects a key focus in the literature not only because these events “pose a serious challenge to the understanding of communal belonging” and are therefore prioritized as integral elements of national identity, but also due to the significance of past traumas in giving shape to foreign policy (Klymenko 2022, 7). These traumas often come to form the backbone of the foundational narrative of the state and sometimes even serve as the historical basis to claims of national victimhood and righteousness. The role of trauma as a force of international cohesion or division varies greatly depending upon the context of focus, and the associated practice of “demanding, offering, or denying apologies and expressions of remorse for historical wrongs committed in recent or more distant pasts” is termed by Olick (2007) as “the politics of regret” (Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020, 180).

Furthermore, the unprecedented rise of *the politics of trauma* has additionally coincided with the deepening of globalization following the end of the Cold War and the parallel emergence of fledgling democracies around the globe, whose newfound freedoms meant the “unfreezing” of memories associated with the Second World War, communism, colonialism, and authoritarian crimes, as well as the politicization of a wide range of older, “historical” memories (Müller 2002, 6; Sierp 2025; Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020). The liberation of collective memory from the political constraints of the Cold War is also responsible for the rehabilitation of formerly repressed nationalisms of both ethnic and civic varieties, as well as the generation of new ones. The resurgence of *the politics of nationalism* in international relations lies at the heart of global disorder following the Cold War, especially with respect to the efforts of powerful countries (e.g., Russia, China, and Serbia) to forcibly realign state borders to encompass populations residing in supposedly historical territories on the basis of common national characteristics, including a shared national history. These efforts are generally described in the literature as *irredentism*, which refers to “a political and ideological movement aiming at unifying the nation by reclaiming lost populations and territories. Irredentist claims intend to liberate from foreign control areas which are believed to belong to the motherland because of ethnic or linguistic ties, for geographical or historical reasons, or due to a previous possession” (Palermo 2010). Indeed, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine reflects a paradigm case of pursuing an

imperial foreign policy under the irredentist pretext of reunification on the basis of supposedly shared national characteristics, including a common history.

When considered together, the liberation of collective memory from the logic of “friend-enemy thinking” associated with the Cold War and its transnational diffusion through the technologies of globalization have given rise to an international political environment saturated with intractable interstate disputes over sensitive, contentious memories rooted in shared historical experiences (Müller 2002, 6). These political disputes reflect the principal flashpoints in the praxis of international memory politics in the post-Cold War era and include several cases with the potential to induce truly global ramifications, such as that between China, South Korea, and Japan (Gustafsson 2014; Gustafsson 2020), or the memory war between Russia and Ukraine (Klymenko 2017; Mälksoo 2009). In this light, the most compelling and influential explanations of interstate disputes over how the past should be remembered reside at the intersection of memory studies, international relations, and security studies. More specifically, these disputes are envisioned through the conceptual lens of a *memory-security nexus* that places collective memory into dialogue with *ontological security*, or the security of the self-perceived identity of the state (Ejdus 2023, 32-33). Whereas physical security (“security-as-survival”) is linked to territorial integrity, human welfare and institutional stability, or the continuity of the “material body” of the state, ontological security (“security-as-being”) reflects a “basic need for predictability of social order, stable relationships with [significant] others, and continuity and integrity of the self” (Ejdus 2023, 32). At its heart resides the state’s need to sustain continuity with its previous self-concepts—or significant historical others—through the maintenance of a biographical self-narrative, itself composed of a mosaic of crystalized, narrativized memories of the past (Bachleitner 2021). When centred upon a titular nation, these self-concepts constitute the *national history* of the state, which gives meaning to its behaviour in the present and priorities in the future. National history is viewed as a political necessity given that it provides a healthy and continuous story of the state through the narrativization of national memory, which enables it “to ‘go on’ in [its] daily activities as [a] purposeful [agent]” without being debilitated by anxieties stemming from existential uncertainties (Ejdus 2023, 33, 36). In this regard, a core imperative of international relations is to continuously seek to validate national history—or to engage in “temporal security-seeking”—through corresponding behaviour in the present, as exercised in foreign policy (Bachleitner 2021).

It follows from this logic of international relations that national history is oftentimes placed into question, whether by a fundamental rupture between the contemporary self and a significant historical other or by the adverse behaviour of another state. As a result of this uncertainty, ontological insecurity ensues in the form of an existential anxiety that has the potential to “seriously disrupt and destabilize the [state’s sense of self] and hamper its agency as an actor in international affairs” (Mälksoo 2015, 224). To resolve these existential uncertainties, two potential responses are available to the state: to undertake either the *politicization* or

securitization of its national history (Mälksoo 2015).⁴ Whereas a policy of politicization opens up the mnemonic space for deliberation within and between states, thereby accommodating a plurality of perspectives within an emergent biographical self-narrative, the securitization of national history entails the undertaking of measures to make “certain historical remembrances secure by delegitimizing or outright criminalizing others,” as well as a foreign policy aimed at validating these remembrances using any means necessary, including coercion, violence, and in select instances, kinetic warfare (Mälksoo 2015, 221). In this regard, the securitization of national history seeks to transform collective memory into an existential security issue whose resolution requires the undertaking of extraordinary and otherwise rule-breaking measures (Khongreiw 2025, 2). State-led practices of mnemonic securitization oftentimes precipitate ontological, identity-based security dilemmas between states who hold contradictory or incompatible national memories rooted in a shared history, or more concerning still, entirely irreconcilable national histories (Mitzen 2006; Mälksoo 2015).

In accordance with the prevailing wisdom outlined in the literature, Eastern European countries have primarily undertaken mnemonic securitization initiatives to stabilize their respective national histories and rehabilitate formerly repressed nationalisms following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Mälksoo 2015). This holds true in the case of Russia and Ukraine, whose attempts to resolve the existential anxieties of post-Soviet transition resulted in an ontological security dilemma fueled by opposing nation-building projects, ultimately giving rise to mutually exclusive national histories (Kasianov 2025). In this light, the following study advances the argument that the Russia-Ukraine War reflects the bloody culmination of this dilemma, in which clashing national histories have entered into a veritable existential struggle on the battlefield, within occupied territories, and across discursive channels. It posits that, on the one hand, Moscow’s genocidal tendencies in the war against Ukraine are rooted in the search for historical continuity with its great power status from the Tsarist and Soviet eras; that is, to validate its national history as a great imperial power by seeking to revive direct colonial control over Ukrainian territories and expunge from them any trace of Ukrainian national identity through the undertaking of a comprehensive genocidal program of “denazification.” On the other hand, Kyiv’s staunch commitment to armed resistance against the Russian invasion is viewed as rooted in its desire to maintain continuity with a national history defined by its past struggles for independence, statehood, and national self-determination against foreign powers—an endeavour that necessitates above all the preservation of Ukrainian nationhood. In this respect, the Russia-Ukraine War is found to be a (post)colonial and genocidal struggle, in which Russia as a great

⁴ On the one hand, “politicization” is understood here as “the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics—making previously unpolitical matters political.” This means “moving something into the realm of public choice, thus presupposing the possibility to make collectively binding decisions on that matter” (Zürn 2019, 977-978). On the other hand, “securitization” is understood as “a discursive process by means of which an actor (1) claims that a referent object is existentially threatened, (2) demands the right to take extraordinary countermeasures to deal with ... that threat, and (3) convinces an audience that rule-breaking behavior to counter the threat is justified” (Munster 2012).

imperial power cannot coexist peacefully alongside Ukraine as a politically independent nation-state.

This argument is prefaced through a methodical investigation of the precise *content* and *form* of these national histories upon Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, consisting of the main historical events that are mentioned within them, as well as the actors and circumstances involved (*content*), and the manner in which the link between the past and the present is established (*form*) (Hilmar 2025, 17). The purpose of the study is to then determine the extent to which these incompatible national histories have invested the Russia-Ukraine War with genocidal significance. This is accomplished through a detailed evaluation of the ways in which national history has contributed to the genocidal quality of Russian wartime conduct, with specific reference to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In particular, the study examines precisely how the Russian state's program of "denazification" provides evidence of its genocidal intent, with explicit and regular references made to the integral role of Russian national history in informing wartime conduct towards the Ukrainian national group.

In sum, the need to engage with the memory-security nexus in its entire depth reflects a rather evident gap in the literature to date (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 6-8), and as such, the following study should be viewed as a first step towards bringing together the fragmented contributions of previous scholarship to address this issue. The end result is a timely study of the Russia-Ukraine War that sheds new light upon the relationship between collective memory and ontological security. While the study cannot claim that the significance of the memory-security nexus holds true in every single interstate dispute over how the past is remembered, it does indeed demonstrate that collective memory and ontological security are co-constitutive of one another under the genocidal conditions of kinetic warfare specific to the Russia-Ukraine War. Yet before this claim can be demonstrated in its entirety, it is essential to begin by first taking note of the extent of the literature regarding the politics of memory during the Russia-Ukraine War. Doing so not only helps to determine where exactly the study fits in alongside extant research about the war and how it aims to address the relevant gaps in the literature, but is also essential for locating the respective national histories of the belligerents. To this the study now turns.

Memory Politics During the Russia-Ukraine War

Given that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a relatively recent development whose lasting consequences remain an open question, academic studies investigating memory politics during the war are small in number and deeply fragmented in their research focus. This is not to say, however, that scholars of the war have failed to recognize its significance for the future of global politics and international order, as well as the role of collective memory in shaping wartime developments. Indeed, as described by Fetzer and Nikolovski (2025, 1) in their review of the literature, "[t]hat the Russo-Ukrainian [W]ar constitutes a major turning point in the transformation of twenty-first century international relations ... has become a commonplace

[assumption] in contemporary academic scholarship and policy analysis alike, regardless of otherwise radically diverging assessments about its causes and consequences.” Adhering to this assessment of the war’s undeniable significance, the scholars then demonstrate that its advent precipitated “a major transformation of the role of collective memory in international politics” by serving as what Erll (2011) has elsewhere termed a political “impact event” (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 1). Beginning from the very moment that Russian troops entered Ukrainian territories under Putin’s pretext of a “special military operation,” memory narratives flowed outwards from the war to the point of ubiquity, traveling across diverse borders and societies while profoundly altering existing debates in the academic community about the relationship between collective memory, history, and security.

This unprecedented transnationalization of memory is reflective of a broader paradigm shift in international relations away from the mnemo-political salience of moral remembrance—captured in Olick’s (2007) “politics of regret” or in Lind’s (2008) “sorry states,” in which the state actively pursues the politicization of memory in an attempt to openly navigate its existential anxieties and come to terms with dark and traumatic pasts—and towards a novel configuration of global memory politics rooted in the practice of mnemonic securitization (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 2). In general, this transition towards a more securitized configuration of international memory politics has meant a reduced global emphasis upon the maintenance of institutional practices responsible for “honouring victims, ‘healing’ past wounds, and ‘inoculating’ societies against [the] repetition” of mass atrocities and human rights abuses, whereas the usage of more affirmative and less self-critical narratives of the past to further nationalist agendas and legitimize aggressive foreign policies has correspondingly increased in traction around the world (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 2). While Russia’s invasion of Ukraine did not necessarily instigate this global trend, it has nevertheless served as the triggering event that both crystallized and accelerated its progression (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 2). Indeed, it is important to remember that kinetic warfare between Russia and Ukraine is not an entirely new development in international relations; rather, Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022 marked the culmination of an internationalized civil war in the Donbas region following Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity in 2014, in which pro-Russian paramilitary units fought alongside unmarked Russian forces (or “little green men”) to protect ethnic Russians and Russian speakers from an alleged genocide at the hands of Ukraine—of which there exists no evidence—and to establish the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (Batta 2024, 671-672; Shevchenko 2014). That the Russia-Ukraine War precipitated a largescale transition in global memory politics towards the practice of mnemonic securitization is ultimately reflective of—it is argued—the unique place that collective memory occupies in post-Soviet relations between Russia and Ukraine.

Widespread recognition of the Russia-Ukraine War as the main harbinger of the paradigm shift in global memory politics away from practices of moral remembrance has encouraged the pursuit of research that, generally speaking, seeks to address the following lines of inquiry: first,

how exactly has the war contributed to the rise of this new global memory paradigm, and second, how should the mnemonic contestation between Russia and Ukraine be understood? When approaching these interrelated inquiries, researchers have turned to studying the rise and proliferation of mnemonic narratives and discursive strategies specific to the war—or its mnemonic *content* and *form*, respectively—as well as the responses of conflict-adjacent actors to these developments. Yet wartime policies of mnemonic securitization figure into these analyses only implicitly, meaning that inquiries into national memory are largely sidelined as a result. This is especially surprising given the sheer number of historical precedents to Russo-Ukrainian mnemonic antagonisms during the wartime period, as well as the undeniable significance of mutually incompatible post-Soviet securitization policies in precipitating a downward spiral of existential anxiety leading up to the outbreak of war, first in 2014 and then again in 2022 (Plokhyy 2015; Kasianov 2025). Locating the respective national histories of the belligerents within the extant literature is therefore a necessity to substantiate the argument advanced in the following study, as doing so ensures a firm argumentative basis from which the existential struggle that underpins the Russia-Ukraine War might be evaluated.

Turning first to the national history of the aggressor, Russia's wartime policies of mnemonic securitization are widely recognized by scholars of the war as the driving force behind the ongoing revision of global memory politics. This is evident in the weaponization of collective memory by Putin and the Kremlin propaganda machine, whose works of historical fiction have become deeply integrated with “chauvinistic and militarized discourses associated with ‘imperial syndrome’ about the loss of [g]reat [p]ower status” and taken as reflective of its irridentist and revanchist foreign policy aspirations in Ukraine, or more specifically, its desire to revive direct colonial control over Ukraine's people and territories—a political arrangement with historical precedents in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 2). Russia's efforts to validate its national history as a great imperial power through the invasion, conquest, and subjugation of Ukraine also point to the significant historical others to which it seeks to re-establish continuity—namely, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the medieval proto-state of Kyivan Rus'. This search for meaning through historical continuity is visible, for instance, in the Kremlin's discursive strategy of “merging” the Russia-Ukraine War with the Soviet Union's distorted rendition of the Second World War, or the “Great Patriotic War,” as well as in its deliberate modification and intensification of the analogy to best compliment wartime developments, such as in the Siege of Mariupol (2022), the Bucha and Irpin Massacres (2022), and the Battle of Bakhmut (2022-2023) (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 2; Noordenbos and Khlevniuk 2025).

While Russia's national history is synthesized here from the findings of studies that approach the Russia-Ukraine War through the conceptual lens of postcolonialism, realists provide an alternative perspective that draws indirectly upon narrative templates shaped by deep, nationally embedded memories of ontological insecurity (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009). These memories of insecurity are then used to explain the rationale behind Russian security concerns

regarding the rapid eastward enlargement of NATO and the wave of democratic protests in post-Soviet states it pejoratively labeled as “colour revolutions”—both of which are viewed as a threat to the integrity of Moscow’s post-Soviet sphere of influence (Mearsheimer 2014; Mearsheimer 2022). Russia is therefore portrayed by realists as a deeply insecure state whose invasion of Ukraine stems at least partly from traumatic memories of losing political influence and territorial control over its “near abroad,” or the “states adjacent to [the Russian Federation] that were once part of the Soviet Union” (Safire 1994). Yet this perspective requires extremely careful treatment given that an ignorant, selective, or cursory application of its logic to the war could unintentionally legitimize Russia’s invasion as well as deny Ukraine’s historical agency and ongoing struggle to preserve its independence, statehood, and national self-determination (Mälksoo 2023, 472). Regardless of how its national history is framed, there is nevertheless a general consensus among scholars of the war that Russia is “an ontologically anxious state whose leadership appears obsessed with being a great power” and whose policy of mnemonic securitization has entailed the rehabilitation of an ethnic strain of nationalism that conceives of the Russian nation and state as imperial, and needs “to be continuously policed, defended and substantiated as such” (Mälksoo 2023, 471, 476). In this regard, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine “speaks of the denial of genuineness of the Ukrainian nation, culture, history and the state, on the one hand, and reveals the ontological void of the Russian nation, the fact that any politically meaningful Russian state identity is perceived to be viable only when linked to [a national history of] empire, on the other” (Mälksoo 2023, 476).

Although Russia’s violent campaign to resolve the existential anxieties resulting from its inability to validate its imperial national history has driven a global revision of memory politics that favours policies of mnemonic securitization, it has also generated firm resistance from Ukraine, the victim, whose defensive war has acquired meaning from its people’s historical efforts to preserve the Ukrainian nation and gain political independence from foreign powers. More specifically, the Ukrainian response has sought to maintain continuity with a national history rooted in past resistance efforts by deploying a range of mnemonic countermeasures such as historical analogies that emphasize victimhood, suffering, and heroism, especially with regard to Ukraine’s traumatic yet ambiguous experiences during the Soviet era and the Second World War. Wartime securitization policies in Ukraine have also encouraged a further distancing of Ukrainian historical narratives from Russian interpretations of sensitive, contentious events rooted in shared historical experiences, thereby transforming memory politics within Ukraine such that its praxis has become tightly linked to the process of “nation-building through societal mobilization, in this case toward the consolidation of historical accounts of Ukraine’s civic and democratic [national] identity” (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 3).

This process of cleansing Ukrainian history of Russian influence is identified elsewhere by Mälksoo (2023) as a “decolonizing moment” for memory politics in Ukraine. Indeed, mnemonic decolonization has become a leading countermeasure in the Ukrainian resistance against Russia’s attempt to validate its self-perceived status as a great power by re-establishing

continuity with its aforementioned imperial national history (Snyder 2022; Barkawi 2022). Ukraine's efforts to decolonize its collective memory from that of Russia are part of a broader wartime securitization policy of "de-Russification," or the complete removal of Russian influence from Ukrainian society, which is itself layered atop earlier "decommunization" agendas that followed the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. This situates the policy of mnemonic decolonization within an expansive campaign to securitize purportedly authentic Ukrainian historical narratives that are viewed as constitutive of its emergent national identity at the direct expense of the enduring legacies of Russian imperialism and colonialism in Ukraine (Terentyeva 2025). These emergent historical narratives have additionally been deployed to frame the war on the global stage. In this respect, Ukraine has entered into a competition of memory diplomacy with Russia to accumulate international legitimacy for the war, with each belligerent tailoring their mnemonic positions to best attract material and rhetorical support from a variety of state and non-state actors (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 3-5).

That the Russia-Ukraine War is viewed in the literature as a global impact event that has fundamentally altered the existing configuration of international mnemonic relations is ultimately reflective of a broader shift away from the liberal international order (LIO) following the Cold War (Erll 2011). This is especially evident in the significant overlap between Russia's revisionist policy of mnemonic securitization and the LIO challenger agendas of populist illiberalism in the West and postcolonialism in the Global South (Fetzer and Nikolovski 2025, 5). While these transnational linkages are increasingly becoming a mainstream focus for researchers of the war, the relationship between collective memory and ontological security remains strikingly understudied in comparison; in fact, a dedicated scholarly investigation of the memory-security nexus is almost entirely absent from the extant literature about the Russia-Ukraine War.

This rather substantial gap in the literature is formalized by Fetzer and Nikolovski (2025, 7), who write that while scholars have devoted significant resources to studying the mobilization of memories *of* war, they have hitherto said little about the mobilization of memory *for* war. Put differently, there is not only a distinct lack of scholarship that addresses how memory is deployed as an explicit tool for supporting kinetic warfare in the academic study of the Russia-Ukraine War, but also as a general program of scholarly inquiry. How then does collective memory interact with ontological security to give rise to the existential conditions that underpin kinetic warfare? What insights might be yielded from a targeted investigation of the memory-security nexus as configured during the Russia-Ukraine War? These questions will be explored in the following study through a dedicated scholarly investigation of how the mutually exclusive national histories of the belligerents have invested the Russia-Ukraine War with genocidal significance. Beforehand, however, the study provides a concise overview of its methodological approach in order to organize the subsequent investigation.

Chapter III

The Case Study as a Method of Empirical Investigation

“We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means ... The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.”

—Carl von Clausewitz, 1832

Case studies have long been used by social scientists as a distinctive methodology to investigate a wide range of political phenomena. Contrary to the misguided position that these approaches to investigative research are rather arbitrary and informal, effectively granting the “license to do whatever a researcher wishes to do with a chosen topic,” case-based studies are viewed here as adhering to well-structured and reliable methods of empirical investigation that necessitate a targeted focus upon a topic of interest with sociopolitical salience (Gerring 2006, 6). To investigate, analyze, and draw conclusions about the topic of interest, the researcher is required to select and then engage with a clearly delineated set of *cases*, in which each individual *case* is viewed as connoting “a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time” (Gerring 2006, 19). In this light, case-based approaches should be understood to comprise “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is—at least in part—to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)” (Gerring 2006, 20). It is therefore an essential step in the research process to develop and then advance an argument or hypothesis that seeks to illuminate the similarities or differences between the individual cases under investigation, as this not only enables the researcher to demonstrate the explanatory power of their subsequent line of argumentation, but it additionally allows for the generation of useful conclusions that might be further validated by future scholarship upon other, similar cases, whether or not they belong to the topic of interest. As such, cross-case applicability should be viewed as imperative for any effective argument given that its absence would mean the inability to arrive at valid and insightful inferences about the topic of interest, thereby limiting its applicability to future academic research as well as the realms of policymaking and politics.

The following investigation adheres to a case-based approach in two important respects. First, the investigation is a case study in that it seeks to shed light upon the relationship between *collective memory* and *ontological security* as made visible during the Russia-Ukraine War. More specifically, the Russia-Ukraine War is treated here as a singular case whose investigation is intended to begin the process of drawing attention to the significance of the *memory-security nexus* in shaping the mnemo-kinetic configuration of armed conflicts; that is, how *mnemonic*

warfare and *kinetic warfare* interact with and shape one another. This aligns the following study with an expansive body of literature that attempts to establish generalizable trends and generate novel insights about armed conflict and warfare. This literature traces its roots to Thucydides and *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, a classic text from which international relations scholars in the realist school of thought have, for instance, devised theories of great power transition and the causes of warfare (Allison 2014). While the analysis of kinetic warfare is not itself a central focus of the study, it is nevertheless essential to establish that engagement in interstate warfare is understood here as providing states with an alternative means for pursuing their interests in the international realm (Knight and Keating 2010, 121). This reflects the popular viewpoint first developed by Carl von Clausewitz ([1832] 2007), who presented warfare as an extreme means of pursuing foreign policy objectives with functional equivalence to diplomacy, given that both serve to advance a clearly identifiable political agenda.

With respect to the position of Clausewitz, it is the argument of this study that the political agendas underlying the Russia-Ukraine War are ultimately reducible to wartime policies of mnemonic securitization that seek to forcibly establish continuity with mutually exclusive national histories. The existential dimension of the war lies in the fact that the validation of either one of these national histories entails the complete destruction of the other, hence their irreconcilability as such. More specifically, the study argues that the validation of Russia's national history as a great imperial power is perceived by the Putin regime as necessitating the total "denazification"—or "de-Ukrainianization"—of Ukraine, whereas Ukraine's struggle to validate its national history as a distinctive nation forged through resistance to conquest and subjugation hinges upon the denial of Russian aspirations to seize control of Ukrainian territories and expunge from them the notion that Ukraine is not, never was, and never will be Russia. This is certainly not to suggest that the existential stakes are analogous for the belligerents; indeed, Ukraine faces the violent erasure of its newfound statehood, as well as its distinctive nationhood, culture, and history, whereas Russia is merely confronted with the possibility of losing control over the political fate of its supposedly fraternal people and failing to reclaim its alleged historical and civilizational right to great power status—the fulfillment of which is tied directly to the continued survival of the authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin and his ruling elite. This particular asymmetric dynamic is ultimately reflective of the *genocidal* quality of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and therefore necessitates a targeted focus upon its wartime conduct against the Ukrainian national group. In all, the main purpose of the study is to engage in a focused analysis of mnemonic securitization during the wartime period to determine how precisely national history has given meaning to the genocidal struggle at the heart of the Russia-Ukraine War, with special emphasis upon the genocidal characteristics of Russian wartime conduct against the Ukrainian national group, as made visible in its discourse and actions.

Second, this investigation is a case study in that it begins with a detailed evaluation of the precise content and form of Russian and Ukrainian national histories upon the outbreak of war in 2022. Doing so is not only essential for establishing that these national histories are indeed

incompatible in nature, but also for providing the necessary background to demonstrate precisely how collective memory gives rise to the genocidal struggle at the heart of the Russia-Ukraine War. Describing the prewar securitization process is therefore a critical prerequisite given that both countries faced similar challenges in “developing identities and tackling the politics of commemoration” upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, including within regions that already possessed relatively stable forms of local identity and entrenched cultural memories (Kasianov 2025, 1-3). Most importantly, that Russia and Ukraine responded to this problem by “adopting similar historical policy patterns and ... analogous discursive strategies (owing to shared Soviet heritage)” should not be taken as equivalence between the aggressor and the victim (Kasianov 2025, 4). Rather, political, intellectual, and cultural elites in Russia and Ukraine approached the task of post-Soviet nation-building from entirely *opposite perspectives*; while the political practice of mnemonic securitization is shared between the belligerents, its contents became mutually exclusive, owing to the consolidation of entirely different interpretations of national history, thereby facilitating the development of irreconcilable understandings of the “nation’s place and role in world history,” or national identity (Kasianov 2025, 1). Nor should the incompatibility of these national histories be taken to suggest that the Russia-Ukraine War was inevitable, or the result of historical determinism. Again, national history reflects the political agendas of the powerful and reconfigures according to the ever-shifting distribution of political power within and between states; in other words, it is the powerful who ultimately decide how exactly the past is used by the state to give meaning to the present and direction to the future. This dynamic is strikingly visible in historical relations between Russia and Ukraine, especially given that resistance—whether in the discursive realm, on the battlefield, or in occupied territories—is itself an expression of power.

In this light, the Russia-Ukraine War should be regarded as the topic of interest in addition to its status as the selected case in a broader investigation into the memory-security nexus under conditions of kinetic warfare. The following empirical investigation is therefore divided into two separate segments: a first segment that evaluates the respective national histories of Russia and Ukraine, followed by a second segment that reveals precisely how collective memory gives rise to genocidal dynamics in the particular case of the Russia-Ukraine War. The data used in both segments is derived from a wide variety of sources from before and during Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including: “materials from the governments of Ukraine and Russia, speeches, statements and publications of the [p]residents, members of governments, politicians, historians, academics, articles in the media, interviews,” historical artifacts, legal documents, sites of memory (i.e., *lieux de mémoire*), and sociological surveys (Latysh 2024, 198). For the first segment, the precise mnemonic content reflected in the national histories of the belligerents was determined by the observations of the researcher alongside the insights of previous studies of collective memory during the Russia-Ukraine War (Snyder 2010; Snyder 2018; Snyder 2022; Plokhly 2023; Kasianov 2024; Kasianov 2025). Both cases are evaluated according to the respective wartime positions of the belligerents as well as the post-Soviet historical developments that inform them, and when considered together, draw attention

to the mutually exclusive nature of Russian and Ukrainian national histories, as well as the vast reservoir of national memories that comprise them. For the second segment, the genocidal significance of these national histories is then assessed with regard to Russia's wartime conduct, as made visible in its discourse and actions. This examination is guided by a series of academic articles and legal reports that find reasonable grounds to believe that Russia harbours genocidal intent and is responsible for the incitement, commission, and escalation of genocide against the Ukrainian national group, and therefore employs an international legal perspective when investigating Russian discourse and actions during the wartime period (Hook 2023; Azarov et al. 2023). It ultimately finds that the irreconcilable nature of Russian and Ukrainian national histories invests the war with genocidal significance, wherein Ukraine's national identity is denied the right to exist by Russia's imperial identity; put slightly differently, the destruction of Ukraine as a distinctive nation is viewed by the Putin regime as a necessity to validate Russia's self-perceived status as a great imperial power within the international system.

To conclude, it is important to note that the use of the memory-security nexus to evaluate the Russia-Ukraine War is by no means an endorsement of the appropriateness of linking collective memory and ontological security in politics, regardless of the merits of doing so. Rather, the study acknowledges the political agendas that continue to motivate the articulation of instrumentalized, fictitious historical narratives during the Russia-Ukraine War. This is accomplished not by assessing and then dismissing them on the basis of their historical inaccuracy, but by examining the memory politics that underlie such narratives, locating what drives their articulation in the first place, and determining why they hold such discursive resonance in spite of their rather blatant inauthenticity. This speaks to the relevance of approaching mnemohistory—or the past as it is remembered—as the principal method of inquiring into collective memory, especially given that the past as it “actually” happened can be particularly difficult to decipher when dealing with complex and deeply revised histories like those of Ukraine and Russia (Rhodes 2023, 183-184). With the methodology firmly established, the study now turns to the empirical investigation of national history during the Russia-Ukraine War.

Chapter IV

The Struggle Over the History of Russia and Ukraine

*“Ukraine’s glory has not yet died, nor her freedom,
Upon us, my young brothers, fate shall yet smile.
Our enemies will perish, like dew in the morning sun,
And we too shall rule, brothers, in our own land.
Souls and bodies we’ll lay down, all for our freedom,
And we will show that we, brothers, are of the Cossack nation.”*

—National Anthem of Ukraine

The Orange Revolution of 2004-2005 not only marked a significant turning point in post-Soviet relations between Russia and Ukraine, but also ranks among Putin’s greatest miscalculations before the full-scale invasion of 2022. Beginning on November 22, 2004, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian protesters dressed in orange attire would gather in Kyiv’s Independence Square (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*), waving flags of the same colour in support of the pro-Western reformist presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko. The protesters not only took issue with Yushchenko’s defeat in a heavily rigged runoff election, which had elevated Viktor Yanukovych—the Kremlin’s preferred candidate and the handpicked successor of then outgoing president Leonid Kuchma—to the presidency, but also with the paternalistic efforts of Moscow to guide Ukrainian voters to the “correct” candidate.⁵ These efforts to “manage” the Ukrainian democratic process were viewed by the Kremlin as a necessity to ensure its continued influence over what it perceived to be a historically Russian polity and were based upon Russia’s own style of domestic politics, which had underwent a similar transition of power from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin at the turn of the millennium. Indeed, even Putin himself would travel to Ukraine and personally campaign on behalf of Yanukovych, including over state television; national polls had, after all, recently recognized the Russian president as the single most popular politician in the entirety of *Ukraine* (Dickinson 2024). In response to Yushchenko’s democratic, anti-corruption, and pro-Western platform, he would be subjected to persistent political harassment and negative press coverage by state-owned and Russian-backed media outlets, while narrowly escaping “an assassination attempt widely blamed on the Russian security services” (Mankoff 2022, 7). Alongside the rigged presidential election, these adverse conditions encouraged firm enough resistance from the protesters that the Ukrainian government was forced to arrange for a

⁵ “According to exit polls, pro-Western candidate Yushchenko received a commanding 52% of the popular vote. Moscow-backed Yanukovych received only 43%. But when the official results came in, Yanukovych had apparently won the run-off ... vote by 2.5%” (Bivings 2022).

second runoff election under international supervision, which Yushchenko would win comfortably (Mankoff 2022, 8).

As described by Person and McFaul (2022, 22-23), this “abrupt pivot to the West by Yushchenko and his allies left Putin facing the prospect that he had ‘lost’ a country on which he placed tremendous symbolic and strategic importance.” From the perspective of the Kremlin, Ukrainian lands and people remained central to Russian national history despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union—losing political control over the country was akin to losing its great power status, originally acquired through westward expansionism into Ukrainian territories following Moscow’s liberation from the Golden Horde in 1476 (Bordachev 2023; Plokhly 2015, 107). Dropping his conciliatory stance of the early 2000s, Putin would pivot sharply to a foreign policy of *historical negationism* towards Ukraine following the Orange Revolution. Thus began the Kremlin’s fascination with distorting, obscuring, and erasing Ukrainian history as a means of justifying its increasingly aggressive endeavours to return Kyiv to its “rightful place” within the Russian sphere of influence. As Ukraine began the search for a credible deterrent in response to rising fears of a potential Russian military intervention, Putin (2005) lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union, presenting it as “a major geopolitical disaster of the century” that left “tens of millions of ... co-citizens and compatriots ... outside Russian territory.” Later, while attending a 2008 NATO summit that promised to formally admit Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance, Putin reportedly denied Ukrainian statehood in conversation with then US President George W. Bush, before explaining in a subsequent speech that the country was originally the product of Soviet experimentation with a strain of nationalism artificially manufactured by foreign powers, and that its southern and eastern territories were historically and demographically Russian (Düben 2023, 3). Then, in a prelude to Russian military interventions in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, Putin would launch an invasion of Georgia under the pretext of a peace enforcement operation to protect Russian “citizens” in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from an alleged genocide at the hands of the pro-Western government in Tbilisi (German 2022).⁶

Yushchenko’s tenure, however, would fail not only to consolidate a truly cohesive Ukrainian national identity in a country still deeply divided between a pro-European, nationalist West and a pro-Russian, Soviet-nostalgic East, but also to bring about a modicum of stability to Ukraine’s shaky ontological foundations through his chosen policy of mnemonic securitization, which resulted in what Eastern European scholars refer to as “memory wars” between Ukrainian nationalists and Russophiles as well as the governments in Kyiv and Moscow (Mälksoo 2015;

⁶ Russian citizenship in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was the result of mass “passportization”—a deliberate foreign policy practice by Russia to further justify its protection of “secessionist entities in protracted territorial conflicts in the post-Soviet space” (Bescotti et al. 2022). In the case of Georgia, Russia began a policy of passportization in 2002 “and intensified it in the contested regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia ... By 2006 already 90% of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia held Russian passports” (Bescotti et al. 2022). A similar policy would later be adopted in 2019 to accommodate Ukrainians in the self-proclaimed separatist People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as in occupied Ukrainian territories following the full-scale invasion in 2022 (Bescotti et al. 2022; Hansler 2023).

Koposov 2017; Kasianov 2024; Kasianov 2025). Yet his pro-Russian successor Viktor Yanukovich would ironically succeed with the assistance of the Kremlin in advancing the consolidation of a civic-minded Ukrainian nationalism in early 2014, when protesters once again gathered in Kyiv's Independence Square to voice their opposition to their president's decision to pursue a "strategic partnership" with Russia in place of a planned Association Agreement with the EU (Walker 2022, 4-6). Confronted with escalating levels of violence from government security forces, the Ukrainian protesters would eventually prevail in forcing Yanukovich to rescind his commitments to the Kremlin and accept an EU-mediated peace pact, including a clause that mandated presidential elections before the end of the year (Walker 2022, 6). For the second time in a decade, Putin had lost Ukraine—alongside Russia's perceived claim to great power status—because of democratic regime change undertaken by a mnemonic community united around a shared history of national resistance to foreign subjugation (Person and McFaul 2022, 24).

The nation-building process that began with Ukraine's "Revolution of Dignity" would become further entrenched as a result of Putin's determination to ensure that Kyiv remained firmly in Russia's imperial orbit. Branding the revolution as an illegal Western-backed coup orchestrated by the US and executed by far-right, ultranationalist elements embedded within Ukrainian society, Putin would oversee the seizure and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula before turning his attention to the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine. Mobilizing the traumatic memories of the Second World War for domestic and foreign audiences alike, Putin attempted to legitimize Russia's active support of separatist paramilitary groups in the Donbas by claiming that the government in Kyiv had been captured undemocratically by a faction of Ukrainian Nazis, who sought to commit genocide against ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in historically Russian territories. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Putin vehemently denied Russian military involvement in the Donbas War until claiming in December 2015 that he "never said there were not people there who carried out certain tasks including in the military sphere" (Walker 2015).

Direct involvement aside, the Kremlin persistently framed the separatists as compatriots maliciously trapped within the arbitrary borders erected by the Soviet Union, who sought liberation from fascist persecution and "reunification" with their brethren under a single "all-Russian" nation, composed of Great, Little (Ukrainian), and White (Belarusian) Russians (Mankoff 2022, 2-3). Alongside the irridentist notion of establishing a "Greater Russia" (*Velikaya Rossiya*), numerous other memories of imperial rule over Ukraine would be leveraged to support the apparently righteous struggle of the separatists and delegitimize the Ukrainian state and nationhood, including the Kremlin's revival of the old imperial moniker of "Little Russia" (*Malorossyia*) and its failed attempt to establish an ahistorical rendering of the province of "New Russia" (*Novorossyia*)—a geographical territory in the northern Black Sea region that encompassed parts of southern Ukraine and Moldova, conquered by the Russian Empire under the rule of Catherine II in the last decades of the eighteenth century (Plokhyy 2023, 122).

Appropriated from the Tsarist and Soviet eras, these works of historical fiction would continue to proliferate and intensify up until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, upon which they would take on—it is argued—a distinctly genocidal quality, especially when considered alongside the defining features of Russian conduct on the front lines and occupation policies in captured Ukrainian territories.

Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Era

As summarized by Kasianov (2025, 1), that Russian and Ukrainian national histories would come into conflict resulted primarily from the pursuit of mutually exclusive nation-building agendas by political, intellectual, and cultural elites following the events of the Orange Revolution. More specifically, whereas the authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin sought to reclaim Russia's great power status by establishing continuity with its imperial predecessors, Ukraine instead attempted to sever Moscow's paternalistic authority over its political affairs by forcing a rupture with Russian (and Soviet) modes of remembering the past and forging continuity with previous struggles for national liberation, beginning this approach to nation-building in earnest upon the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (Kasianov 2024). While the presidential tenure of Viktor Yanukovich would seek to reverse this trend by aligning Kyiv with the preferred national memories of Moscow, the Revolution of Dignity would bring pro-Russian nation-building policies in Ukraine to a permanent end and mark the beginning of a renewed effort to establish a cohesive Ukrainian national identity. These efforts, moreover, would become paired with policies of decommunization and de-Russification following Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and military intervention in the Donbas region. In this respect, scholars of Eastern European politics oftentimes consider the political and military developments of 2014 as the true beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine (Snyder 2022a, Plokhly 2023).

It is difficult to understate the significance of *national memory* in facilitating the differential development of Russian and Ukrainian national histories. National memory is understood in the post-Soviet space as referring to “the dominant interpretation of a country's historical experience [as] articulated through state discourse and institutional practice,” given the persistent efforts of political powerholders to facilitate the nation-building process from the top downwards (Khongreiwo 2025, 4). As previously mentioned, national memory is essential for nation-building in that it forms a national history from which a cohesive national identity might be constructed (Sierp 2025, 1468); correspondingly, in Russo-Ukrainian relations following the Orange Revolution, national memories were thrust into a discursive battleground as mnemonic communities vied to consolidate their preferred interpretations of the nation's past and ultimately establish continuity with the national history they envisioned for the state. In this regard, post-Soviet nation-building practices in Russia and Ukraine adhered to the following logic from 2005 onwards: that consolidating national memory would give rise to a favourable conception of the state's national history, and that this would in turn cultivate a cohesive national identity—or a collective sense of belonging to the nation—whose legitimacy in the present and priorities in the future would derive from a selective understanding of past experiences (Marschelke 2023, 2455).

Given, however, that national memory as articulated by Russian and Ukrainian elites envisioned national histories that contrasted in their interpretation of who their nation had been in the past and who it should seek to become in the future, their differential development in the post-Soviet period devolved into a specific path-dependent process that is oftentimes described in the literature as an *ontological security dilemma* (Mitzen 2006; Mälksoo 2015; Yefremenko 2022). This process has unfolded through three interrelated stages, each reflecting a critical step in the development of truly irreconcilable national histories.

First, to resolve the existential anxieties that emerged upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, those in positions of power decided to return to the Soviet-era policy of *mnemonic securitization*; in this regard, national memory would be established in both countries “through centralized educational policy and imposition of dominant discourse, sometimes through ideological and administrative coercion, and legal regulation in the realm of memory, including suppressive measures” (Kasianov 2025, 3). Second, the securitization of national memory only became successful in generating a unified national history at the *domestic level* following intense bouts of ontological insecurity caused by the adverse behaviour of the other: for Russia, the consolidation of its imperial national history largely began in reaction to the Orange Revolution, whereas for Ukraine, a national history of resistance emerged during the Revolution of Dignity, was further cemented in response to Russian aggression, and ultimately consolidated as a direct result of the full-scale invasion in 2022. Third, a downward spiral of ontological insecurity ensued at the *interstate level* as a result of the securitization of mutually exclusive national memories, thereby investing the emergent national histories with existential significance that would later evolve into a genocidal struggle following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It could therefore be said that *domestic consolidation* and *interstate insecurity* are two sides of the same coin when it comes to the securitization of national memory in Russia and Ukraine: more specifically, that the pursuit of mutually exclusive nation-building projects *within* both states led to entirely irreconcilable interpretations of the past *between* them.

This downward spiral of mutual insecurity not only begs the question of which national memories became the priority of government-led policies to establish a favourable conception of national history, but also the ways in which this process gave rise to the mutually exclusive understandings of the nation that—it is argued—ultimately came to invest Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine with genocidal significance. It is therefore necessary to identify how Russian and Ukrainian political, intellectual, and cultural powerholders perceived their respective national histories at the outbreak of war, as doing so brings to light the true motives behind the pursuit of differential securitization policies vis-à-vis national memory and illuminates the mutually exclusive national identities that fuel the genocidal quality of Russian wartime discourse, battlefield conduct, and occupation policies during its war in Ukraine.

Russian National History: The Paradigm of Eternal Unity

On the one hand, Russian national history is envisioned by the country's ruling elite as a continuous narrative that emphasizes eternal victimhood and heroism, stretching from the establishment of the medieval protostate of Kyivan Rus' by Viking conquerors in the ninth century to the undertaking of the "special military operation" in 2022 (Snyder 2018a; Snyder 2018b; Bækken 2023, 16-18). According to this master narrative, a primordial Russian civilization was first conceived upon the baptism of Prince Vladimir the Great in 989, who then undertook the Christianization of the modern-day territories of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, thereby uniting them as a single political entity under a shared religion (Rhodes 2023, 182-184). In the eyes of the present-day Moscow elite, the baptism of "Saint Vladimir" marked the founding moment of a common Russian civilizational space—or a "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*)—that is reflected in the present by a shared belief in Eastern Orthodoxy under the Moscow Patriarchate (i.e., the Russian Orthodox Church), a community of language and culture that is distinctive from both Europe and Asia, and a vast reservoir of collective national memories that cover the Middle Ages, the Romanov Empire, and the Soviet Union (Orzechowski 2024, 26).

These shared civilizational characteristics have been taken as evidence of common belonging to a singular Russian nation, whose destiny—determined by religious mandate and historical experience—is to do "Great Things," understood by the Kremlin as "territorial conquests in the name of 'providing' protection to the conquered peoples" and a righteous struggle to oppose "the corrupting influence of globalist liberalism" as advanced by the West, which is viewed as posing an existential threat to Russia's traditional conservative values, including gender identity, family, faith and empire (Orzechowski 2024, 24-25). In this light, the Kremlin's maintenance of an imagined *Russkiy Mir*—or a civilizational sphere of influence—functions not simply as a strategy to restore political control over the post-Soviet space and validate Russia's self-perceived status as a great power, but "was [also] deliberately cultivated as a useful *casus belli* [to invade Ukraine] in the ultra-conservative and neo-imperialist circles that primarily influence Putin" (Rhodes 2023, 179). Indeed, reasserting political control over Ukrainian territories has long been perceived by Moscow's ruling elite as the key to establishing continuity with the imperial history and mythology of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Plokhly 2023, 4). Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine—as the second largest of the post-Soviet republics, besides Russia—has become the principal target of Moscow's civilizational reintegration efforts as carried out through a wide variety of carrots and sticks, from participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and an offer of formal accession into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to economic coercion, political interference, information warfare, and, following the Revolution of Dignity, military intervention from 2014 onwards (Plokhly 2023, 89-98). This imperial logic is encapsulated by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who remarked in 1994 that: "[i]t cannot be stressed strongly enough that without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire" (80).

While the Kremlin's imperial reinterpretation of Prince Vladimir's baptism has since become elevated to the foundational myth underpinning its discourse of Russo-Ukrainian historical unity in the post-Soviet period, the eventual downfall of Kyivan Rus' and with it the supposed civilizational purity of the Rus'ian people are equally important components of Russian national history. Indeed, the violent fragmentation of Rus'ian territories under Vladimir's successors, their eventual conquest by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and the gradual subjugation of the territories encompassing most of present-day Ukraine by Lithuania and Poland until the mid-seventeenth century resulted in divergent historical paths for the Orthodox East Slavs of Kyivan heritage, including the development of different languages, cultures, collective memories, and religious traditions (Düben 2023, 5). In its national history, these events are perceived by Russia as a great calamity in which the Russian people and territories were violently conquered and then forcibly partitioned between foreign powers, such that the common civilizational space of Kyivan Rus' came to be corrupted by a range of artificially generated identities that deviated from the ideal type originally set forth by Prince Vladimir. According to this account, the only true successor of the old Rus'ian tradition was the Grand Principedom of Moscow (i.e., Muscovy), whose divine mandate became to reunify the disparate East Slavic lands and peoples of the former Kyivan Rus' under a "Greater Russia" following its liberation from the Mongol Yoke in 1476 (Keleher and Layton 2022). First deployed as a rhetorical tool by Ivan (III) the Great to legitimize his dynastic claim to conquered Novgorodian territories in the late fifteenth century, this discourse of imperial expansionism would gain significant traction in Russian society and be invoked with regularity as a means of justifying an aggressive foreign policy that fused elements of irridentism and revanchism, ultimately resulting in Moscow's ascent to great power status upon the establishment of the Russian Empire in 1721 by Peter (I) the Great (Plokhy 4-8).

The narrative that fraternal peoples—or compatriots—who reside within historically Russian lands beyond the territorial jurisdiction of Moscow desire liberation from foreign control and reintegration under a common, ancestral body politic is not limited to the post-Soviet era, and is instead a pattern of collective remembrance that recurs throughout the country's national history. Likewise, reintegration efforts have historically entailed the forcible cleansing—or Russification—of local identities, which are habitually perceived by the Moscow elite as superimposed atop a primordial Rus'ian essence and cultivated with the sole intention of weakening the civilizational foundations of the Russian body politic. Modern-day Russian elites therefore envision their country's national history as an eternal cycle of victimhood at the hands expansionist foreign powers, who seek to capture historically Russian lands and poison the inhabitants with the generation of artificial, derivative identities, and that Moscow is divinely mandated to wage a righteous, heroic struggle to reunify these lands under a common political authority and return its inhabitants to a way of life consistent with their shared civilizational origins (Snyder 2018a; Plokhy 2023, 4-33). Indeed, this cycle would again repeat following an unprecedented era of expansion in which Muscovy virtually tripled in size between 1462 and 1533 (Ostrowski 2006, 213-214), as Ivan (IV) the Terrible—the first proclaimed "tsar of all

Russia”—would suffer a humiliating defeat in the Livonian War (1558-1583) to the newly established Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and allies Sweden and Denmark, thereby bringing Russian westward advances to an abrupt halt at a moment when most of the historical territories of Kyivan Rus’ remained under foreign occupation (Plokhy 2023, 6-7). Russia then plunged into an extended period of internal turmoil resulting from a debilitating succession crisis that peaked following the Polish occupation of Moscow in 1610, only to begin recovering upon the establishment of the Romanov Dynasty in 1613 (Madden 2022).

Later hailed in Soviet propaganda as the reunification of Ukraine with Russia, and whose tercentenary would be punctuated by the transfer of the Crimean Peninsula from Russian to Ukrainian control, the Pereiaslav Agreement of 1654 marked the beginning of Moscow’s renewed push to extend its political reach into territories it perceived as its historical birthright (Plokhy 2023, 7, 22).⁷ The original agreement, however, had been interpreted very differently by the signatories. On the one hand, the Cossacks—“freemen and runaway serfs who emerged by the late sixteenth century as a powerful military force on the lower Dnieper in the ‘no-man’s land’ between the Kingdom of Poland and the Crimean Khanate”—sought liberation from Polish rule, and entered the agreement with Muscovy under the assumption that they would receive military protection strictly in return for recognizing the tsar’s sovereignty (Plokhy 2023, 7-8). Muscovy, on the other hand, interpreted the agreement through the familiar lens of Russo-Ukrainian civilizational unity and, following military victory against Poland, gradually seized control of the Left Bank—or Ruthenian territories east of the Dnieper River—and pursued its reintegration into Russian civilization; in other words, the organized repression and assimilation of its inhabitants, under the guise of reunifying the long divided Orthodox lands of Kyivan Rus’ (Plokhy 2023, 7).

The “gathering of the Russian lands” would continue following Muscovy’s victory over Sweden in the Northern War, its subsequent transition to the Russian Empire under Peter I, and then further accelerate under the rule of Catherine (II) the Great. As tsarina, Catherine would oversee the expansion of Russian control over much of present-day Ukraine as a result of both successful military conquests during the Russo-Turkish Wars and the acquisition of Ruthenian territories on the Right Bank—or west of the Dnieper River—from the successive partitions of Poland, with the crucial exception of the province of Galicia, which was formally annexed by the Habsburg Empire from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772 (Plokhy 2023, 8-9). Importantly, Catherine’s reign included the establishment of the settler-colonial holding of *Novorossiia* (“New Russia”) across the Pontic steppe in present-day Ukraine, the memory of which the Kremlin manipulates with regularity to justify its military interventions into post-Soviet Ukrainian territories, including Putin’s declared annexation of the Donetsk, Luhansk,

⁷ As explained by Serhii Plokhy (2023, 22), this propaganda served as a pretext to accelerate recovery in Crimea following the Second World War, given that it was “proceeding more slowly than in other regions of the European USSR. This was due in part to Stalin’s forcible deportation of the peninsula’s indigenous population, the Crimean Tatars, who were accused of wartime collaboration with the Germans.”

Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts on September 30, 2022 (Putin 2022a). Yet these unprecedented territorial advances were soon challenged in the nineteenth century by the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe, especially through successive Polish uprisings in Russian-occupied territories and the development of a distinctly Ukrainian national consciousness inside the Ruthenian lands annexed by the Habsburgs upon the partitions of Poland (Plokhy 2023, 9).

In response to the national question being posed to the continued integrity of the “reunified” Catherinian empire, Russian elites responded by forging an imperial strain of nationalism based upon the tripartite formula of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality,” which would be imposed upon the empire’s many inhabitants through a highly centralized educational system (Plokhy 2023, 10). More specifically, the Russian Empire was presented by the contemporary ruling elite as a triune, all-Russian nation composed of Great Russians (Muscovites), Little Russians (Ukrainians), and White Russians (Belarusians), each of whom spoke different “dialects” of Russian, yet adhered to a common religion and traced their civilizational roots to the medieval polity of Kyivan Rus’, thereby signifying the need for eternal loyalty to the tsar of all Russia (Plokhy 2023, 12). Yet following the popular uprisings in February 1917 that brought the Romanov Dynasty to a permanent end, an emergent revolutionary Ukrainian parliament first proclaimed its desire for autonomy within a future Russian republic, which would later shift to the creation of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UPR) in the wake of the Bolshevik coup in October of that year (Plokhy 2023, 16). The protracted struggle that ensued during the First World War between the UPR and the Bolshevik Russians served to accelerate the development of a cohesive Ukrainian national identity that—according to the present-day Russian elite—had been purposefully generated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire to corrupt Galician Ukrainians with nationalist sentiments so that they might spread artificial narratives of national independence to their compatriots in the Russian Empire and thus undermine the civilizational integrity of the Russian body politic (Putin 2021). Nevertheless, the eventual Soviet victory over the UPR forced Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Russians into a compromise: that because “Ukrainian aspirations to independence were so strong, not only among Ukrainians in general but even among the Ukrainian Bolsheviks themselves ... [they required] a degree of autonomy and a status equal to that of Russia” within the emergent Soviet Union (Plokhy 2023, 16).

In this regard, the Bolsheviks were at first unwilling to continue the legacy of their imperial predecessors by forcibly suppressing expressions of Ukrainian nationalism, and sought instead to recognize and accommodate their claim nationhood in return for cooperation, resulting in a brief but critical period of cultural and intellectual growth in Soviet Ukraine that came to be known as the Red (and later “Executed”) Renaissance (Hryn 2005). This moment of national cultural flowering would, however, come to an abrupt end upon Joseph Stalin’s consolidation of power in 1929, who quickly reversed Lenin’s earlier policies vis-à-vis Ukrainian national identity by staging show trials and purging its intelligentsia, undertaking the mass deportation of the Ukrainian peasantry as part of his broader campaign of “dekulakization,” and enforcing a

brutal policy of agricultural collectivization under the pretext of the first Five-Year Plan, leading directly to widespread starvation and the deaths of approximately 4 million people in Soviet Ukraine between 1932 and 1934 (Hryn 2005; Snyder 2010, 21-58; Latysh 2024, 196-197). In the Russian national history, these interwar years have come to be viewed as a period of relative weakness due to the curtailment of the imperial brand of ethnic nationalism developed under the Russian Empire, despite Stalin's pursuit of internal colonialism in Soviet Ukraine; rather, Soviet leaders—especially Lenin and the Bolsheviks—are primarily held responsible for *failing* to adequately repress the supposedly artificial nationalism metastasizing within its historical territories, thereby setting the stage for the Kremlin's present-day difficulties with reintegrating the so-called “anti-Moscow” Ukraine into a “Greater Russia.” As put by Putin in 2016, Lenin's decision to accommodate regional nationalisms in the Soviet republics rather than repress them “planted an atomic bomb under the building that is called Russia which later exploded,” referring to the collapse of the Soviet Union 1991 (Stanglin 2016). Conversely, the Stalinist repressions that followed have been understood as an experience held in common across the Soviet Socialist Republics, including the famines in Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan, that are alleged to have resulted from widespread crop failure rather than collectivization policies (Putin 2020; Latysh 2024, 204).

This moment of weakness would be short-lived, however, as the outbreak of the Second World War placed a renewed emphasis upon maintaining the civilizational unity of the triune Russian nation by any means necessary. Already responsible for crushing the budding national movement within Soviet Ukraine, Stalin began the resurrection of an all-Russian nationalism by justifying the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 as the “liberation of fellow Ukrainians and Russians from Polish capitalist oppression” (Plokhly 2023, 19). The irridentist rhetoric of reunification had again returned to Russian politics, albeit in a more accommodating configuration, given that Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalisms were deployed by Stalin as *separate* discursive tools to legitimate the partition of Poland between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and later to “encourage patriotic resistance to the German invasion” and occupation of Soviet territories (Plokhly 2023, 19). The logic behind the mobilization of these non-Russian nationalisms was entirely strategic: like in the First World War, the promise of nationhood had become a weapon of war, and in this light, Stalin aimed to exploit these aspirations, first to expand westward, then to undermine Berlin's eastward advances, and finally to topple the Third Reich in its entirety. Yet the emergence of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN)—a radical-nationalist political party based primarily within the annexed regions of Eastern Galicia and Volhynia, and whose membership “collaborated first with Weimar, then with Nazi Germany, and then with Italian fascists, [while] professing political totalitarianism, single-party dictatorship, corporate state, and xenophobia”—not only posed a direct challenge to the Soviet war effort, but also greatly complicated Ukraine's wartime legacy in the years that followed (Kasianov 2024, 1236). Indeed, that the OUN as well as its partisan fraction, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), have together become the favoured historical analogy of the Kremlin for delegitimizing expressions of Ukrainian nationalism—that is, any organized effort to seek

political independence from the *Russkiy Mir*—following the Orange Revolution reflects the most recent articulation of the familiar imperial narrative that Ukrainian national identity is an artificial construct, and in this particular instance, was generated by the Third Reich and then cultivated in the postwar period by an American-led coalition of Western powers.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union would suffer an unprecedented amount of losses in the Second World War, especially following Adolf Hitler's authorization of Operation Barbarossa, which resulted in the deaths of between 26 and 27 million Soviet citizens, the majority being civilians (Harrison 2019). While Europe would come to grapple with the traumatic memories of the Holocaust following Germany's defeat, Stalin quickly moved to marginalize Jewish suffering in favour of that experienced by the "great Russian nation," which he then narrativized under the idealized memory of "the Great Patriotic War" (Snyder 2010, 333). Premised upon the notion that the war had begun in 1941 with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Stalin argued that Russians, rather than any other Soviet people, had simultaneously been the greatest victims and heroes of the existential struggle for the Fatherland against the scourge of Nazism. In Stalin's narrative, a common thread with Russia's imperial past remained: that elevating the wartime experiences of other nations, as well as those of the Jews, might create space for postwar nationalisms to develop without restraint, which would not only expose the gross tactical mismanagement and brutality of the Soviet war effort under Stalin's supervision, but also place the "Russian nation, and of course all of the other [Soviet] nations, [at risk of] cultural infection," especially from alternative interpretations of the war propagated by the capitalist West (Snyder 2010, 336). While the Great Patriotic War began to fade in its importance during the first two decades of the Cold War, it would be revived under Leonid Brezhnev as a cult that glorified victory, sacrifice, suffering, and heroism through the lens of Soviet Russian wartime experiences as originally articulated by Stalin, and whose commemoration entailed "an organized system of symbols and rituals ... [that] included a panoply of saints, sacred relics, and a rigid master-narrative of the war," all brought to its pinnacle during the Victory Day celebrations on May 9 (Tumarkin 2003, 598-601). The master narrative's plot proceeded as follows:

[That] collectivization and rapid industrialization under the first and second Five-year Plans prepared [the Soviet Union] for war, and despite an overpowering surprise attack by the Fascist Beast and its inhuman wartime practices, despite the loss of 20 million valiant martyrs to the Cause, [the] country, under the leadership of the Communist Party headed by Comrade Stalin, arose as one united front and expelled the enemy from [its] own territory and that of East Europe, thus saving Europe—and the world—from Fascist enslavement (Tumarkin 2003, 601).

While Brezhnev's cult of the Great Patriotic War faced significant challenges to its legitimacy during the momentary period of mnemonic politicization that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, it would once again be revived and consolidated in Russia under the leadership Vladimir Putin (Tumarkin 2003, 609-610). Drawing continuity between past and present through elaborate works of historical fiction, the Kremlin has sought to merge the Great Patriotic War

with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, claiming that ordinary Ukrainians desire liberation from a predatory government captured by neo-Nazi elements who glorify the legacy of the OUN and one of its leaders, Stepan Bandera, and that given the freedom to choose, they would much rather reintegrate with their fraternal people under a common body politic and return to their civilizational roots (Bækken 2023). According to this perspective, Lenin's "great mistake" of accommodating—rather than suppressing—the artificial nationalism externally imposed upon the "Malorussian" (Little Russian) peoples and territories resulted in its entrenchment within Ukrainian society, ultimately precipitating the downfall of the Soviet Union and the mutually exclusive nation-building projects that soon followed. Indeed, in 1991, Ukrainian nationalism would deal the final blow to both Soviet communism and Russia's claim to great power status through a referendum on formal independence in Soviet Ukraine, whose "turnout exceeded 84 percent of eligible voters, [with] more than 92 percent of them" choosing the route of independence, including in the Donbas (84 percent), Crimea (54 percent), and Sevastopol (57 percent) (Plokhly 2023, 2). Without the Ukrainian people and territories under its exclusive control, the Russian civilizational project entered a phase of intense ontological insecurity, ultimately forming the rationale behind the Putin regime's return to tsarist imperialism as a means of facilitating post-Soviet nation-building in Russia.

In sum, reintegrating Ukraine into the Russian body politic is viewed by Moscow's ruling elite as the road to securing continuity with its imperial predecessors and validating its self-perceived status as a great power within the international system. This perspective is informed by an imperial interpretation of national history that emphasizes a cyclical story of victimhood and heroism, in which Russia must time and again liberate its peoples and territories from foreign control and disinfect them of derivative identities that inhibit the reunification of Russian civilization. In the literature on collective memory, this cyclical form of remembrance is oftentimes referred to as a *narrative template*, understood here as a frame of reference in which the same basic storyline is persistently redeployed to bring meaning to present events and dictate the horizon of possible actions that might be pursued in response (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009, 380). In this regard, Russia's national history follows a very particular narrative template that the historian Timothy Snyder (2018a; 2018b) has elsewhere termed the *politics of eternity*, referring to its leadership's longstanding belief in an unchanging civilizational essence that inseparably binds the political destiny of Ukraine with that of Russia. More specifically, the politics of eternity:

[P]laces one nation at the centre of a cyclical story of victimhood. Time is no longer a line into the future, but a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past ... [W]ithin eternity, no one is responsible because we all know that the enemy is coming no matter what we do (Snyder 2018b, 8).

The Russia-Ukraine War therefore reflects the latest iteration of Moscow's politics of eternity, in which real-time events are "sucked into the memory grinder to become part of an 'eternal' Russian story" of endless threats and monumental victories, from the baptism of Prince

Vladimir to the grinding war of attrition in Eastern Ukraine (Bækken 2023, 16). Perhaps nowhere is this eternal cycle of victimhood and heroism more evident than in the “unity paradigm” articulated in striking detail by Vladimir Putin in his 2021 essay, titled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” (Mankoff 2022, 2). As the title suggests, Putin presents the thesis that Ukrainians and Russians—alongside Belarusians—form “a single large nation, a triune nation,” or a “Greater Russia,” and that each reflects the divided components of “one people – a single whole” (Putin 2021). He then supports this argument—taken straight from the imperial philosophy of the Russian Empire—through the appropriation of historical tropes from the Tsarist and Soviet eras, integrating them into a “sweeping (but extremely selective) account of Ukrainian history stretching back to the early Middle Ages” (Düben 2023, 3).

He begins by positing that the medieval state of Kyivan Rus’ imparted upon the Russians and Ukrainians a shared civilizational and political destiny. More specifically, this historical primordialism emphasizes “organic unity” based upon a shared Slavic-Orthodox civilizational core that bestows upon Moscow the historical mission to oversee the reunification of its fraternal peoples (Mankoff 2022, 1), which consists of re-establishing continuity with “the tradition of ancient Russian statehood” and the “gathering [of] Russian lands,” whether defined historically or demographically (Putin 2021). Moreover, Ukrainian nationalism—understood by Putin as any attempt by the Ukrainian people to exercise their autonomy in opposition to the principle of primordial unity—is viewed as an entirely artificial construct, cultivated maliciously by foreign powers at various moments across history to transform Ukraine into an “anti-Russian” fortress and weaken Moscow’s grip over its historical territories (Putin 2021). In this light, Kyiv’s pivot towards the West—whether it be accomplished through partnerships with NATO, the EU, or the US, as well as its adoption of liberal democratic values—is perceived as the latest rendition of an old story: that a foreign power has captured the government in Kyiv and installed a favourable ruling elite, whose political agenda is to subjugate the Ukrainian people and launch a genocidal policy of “de-Russification” to entrench the artificial differences between Russians and their Orthodox East Slavic brethren. According to this account, Moscow was *required* to undertake its “special military operation” precisely because the Ukrainian government had undertaken a “war against its own people” in the Donbas region, while the “Russophobic West” had sought to leverage the moment to “destroy and fracture Russia”—to “remove [it] from the global map ... [as] a geopolitical entity” (Lavrov 2022).

For Putin, Ukrainian political independence served as a *casus belli*—a decision supported by the Kremlin’s imperial perception of Russian national history. In this regard, “*denazification*” should be understood as an intensive effort to cleanse Ukraine of everything it means to be Ukrainian; in other words, the forcible erasure of the Ukrainian state and nationhood, resulting in its people being brought forcefully under the body politic of a common Russian civilization. This was aptly summarized by Vladislav Surkov, one of the principal ideological architects behind Putin’s thesis:

[T]here is no Ukraine. There is Ukrainian-ness. That is, a specific disorder of the mind ... [Ukraine is] a muddle instead of a state ... But there is no nation. There is only a brochure, “The Self-Styled Ukraine,” but there is no Ukraine (Düben 2020).

In this light, “denazification” is in truth a comprehensive policy of “de-Ukrainianization,” illuminating the genocidal significance invested within the “eternal unity paradigm” that encapsulates the Russian national history. In this history, an authentic Ukrainian nation cannot be allowed to exist, for if it ultimately did, Russia’s claim to great power status—beyond the relentless flaunting of its nuclear capabilities—would be no more.

Ukrainian National History: The Paradigm of National Resistance

Putin would conclude his 2021 essay on Russo-Ukrainian historical unity with the assertion that “what Ukraine will be ... is up to its citizens to decide” (Putin 2021). Later, on the day of the full-scale invasion, he offered the Ukrainian armed forces a thinly veiled ultimatum: that they lay down their weapons and accept the advancing Russian forces as liberators, or be wiped out alongside the neo-Nazi regime alleged to be illegally occupying the government in Kyiv (Putin 2022b). That Putin had believed the Ukrainians were also beholden to the eternal unity paradigm would soon become evident following the resounding failure of the initial offensive and the grueling war of attrition that subsequently developed along a battlefield stretching across southern and eastern Ukraine—the territories formerly associated with the imperial colony of “New Russia,” and populated by a comparatively high number of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers. These populations would be hit the hardest by the brutality of Russian warfighting tactics and occupation policies, despite Putin’s professed desire to save them from an alleged genocide at the hands of the Ukrainian government (Plokhly 2023, 176-197). In waging an existential war in Ukraine, Putin ironically succeeded in consolidating nationalism in eastern Ukraine and erecting a permanent anti-Russia fortress upon Moscow’s doorstep, thereby ensuring that Russo-Ukrainian historical unity remained an entirely fictional narrative whose discursive resonance was confined to the Russian Federation. Indeed, while regional support for Russo-Ukrainian historical unity had remained mixed in Ukraine up until the full-scale invasion of 2022, with a significant divide between the East and West, Ukrainians would categorically reject Putin’s thesis using both words and actions upon the full-scale invasion in 2022.⁸ This is further reflected in a nationwide public opinion survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), which recorded in September 2025 that an “absolute majority of populations in all regions—from 92 [percent] in the West to 80 [percent] in the East—have” developed a negative attitude towards Russia, with near-identical percentages being registered towards Russian citizens (Hrushetskyi 2025).

⁸ For instance, in a 2021 survey conducted by the sociological group Rating, approximately 60 percent of Eastern Ukrainians agreed with the “historical unity” thesis, whereas 70 percent of Western Ukrainians did not agree (Interfax-Ukraine 2021).

Ukraine's opposition to the eternal unity paradigm and the war waged in its name is best captured in the thesis of former president Leonid Kuchma, which he first presented in 2003 in the midst of his unsuccessful attempt to establish a Russian-style managed democracy, eventually resulting in the Orange Revolution (Plokhyy 2023, 61). As he would title his memoirs, Kuchma came to the understanding that *Ukraine is not Russia*, concluding that despite sharing a common origin story, "the Ukrainian people and the Russian people have followed different historic paths, and have different ethnic experiences and self-identifications ... [as well as] great difference in their culture and language" (Shkundin 2004). This perspective was similarly voiced by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a public address to the Russian citizenry only hours before the full-scale invasion, in which he emphasized that differences between Ukraine and Russia are "not a reason to be enemies" (Zelenskyy 2022). This ultimately reflects Ukraine's own narrative template of *national resistance*, which centres Ukrainian collective memories of subjugation, liberation, and most importantly, progress towards state and nationhood as the foundations that underpin its national history. In this regard, Ukrainian national history is envisioned by the country's ruling elite as a continuous narrative that emphasizes the struggle for national independence, punctuated by periods of repression and assimilation at the hands of foreign powers. Akin to the national history constructed by the post-Soviet ruling establishment in Russia, selective remembrance and collective amnesia function as integral elements in presenting an uninterrupted, positive image of the Ukrainian national experience that is so crucial for the maintenance of its people's shared national identity and claim to statehood. It is this reservoir of shared experiences, reflected in the present through a common mode of remembrance that affirms without question that the Ukrainian people do indeed constitute a distinctive national community, and are thus a protected group under the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

While the notion that Russia and Ukraine share Kyivan Rus' as a common cradle of their respective peoples is taken for granted in the Ukrainian national history (Kasianov 2025, 7), the narrative that follows seeks to elevate the differential historical development of Rus'ian lands upon the death of Prince Volodymyr (i.e., Prince Vladimir in Russian), especially between the Principality of Vladimir-Suzdal—later to become the Grand Principedom of Moscow—and the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, which became the Kingdom of Ruthenia in 1253 (Khongreiw 2025). Whereas Russian national history perceives the fragmentation of Kyivan Rus' as the destruction of its primordial civilizational purity, Ukrainian national history envisions this very same moment as the beginning of a struggle to gain and maintain its people's independence, especially following the partition of Galicia-Volhynia between Poland and Lithuania in the fourteenth century, later united under Polish control following the Union of Lublin in 1569 (Plokhyy 2023, 7). These different historical experiences would leave a lasting impact upon the respective identities of Ruthenians and Muscovites, with Russian and Ukrainian languages, cultures, and religions developing in relative isolation from one another (Düben 2023, 5). This is particularly evident in the unique convergence of Polish colonization, the Renaissance, and the Reformation upon Ruthenian territories (Snyder 2022b), which would eventually drive the

Cossacks under the leadership of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky to stage a bloody proto-national rebellion against Polish rule in 1648 in an attempt to “establish their political freedoms as a social estate and practice their Orthodox religion unhindered” (Plokhy 2023, 7). Indeed, upon the Pereiaslav Agreement of 1654, the Cossack political leadership and Orthodox elites were together required to revive the notion of a Slavic-Orthodox civilizational unity in a strategic appeal for Muscovite protection against the Poles, given that the Tsar Aleksei Romanov and the Russian Orthodox Church had come to regard the Ruthenians as a distinct people (Snyder 2022b; Plokhy 2023, 8, 67).

This arrangement would, however, result in Muscovy gradually extending its political control over the Cossack Hetmanate during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the pretext of reunifying historically Russian peoples and territories under a common body politic, effectively replacing the authority of Polish colonial power with its own (Snyder 2022b). This began in earnest with the seizure of the Left Bank in 1667 from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the subsequent establishment of Russian garrisons throughout Cossack Ukraine, and continued with persistent encroachments upon Cossack rights, freedoms, and political autonomy that eventually reduced the lands to a vassal state within the emergent Russian Empire (Plokhy 2023, 8; Düben 2023, 6). This included, for instance, Peter I’s abolition of “the office of hetman and [his placement of] the Cossack state ... under the jurisdiction of a Russian administrative body called the Little Russian Collegium” (Plokhy 2023, 9), while in 1775, Catherine II would then completely liquidate Cossack self-governance during her conquest of “New Russia,” formally integrating Ruthenian territories under the Russian Empire as colonial holdings (Düben 2023, 6). Throughout this period of increasing subjugation, Cossack uprisings occurred intermittently, reaching their pinnacle in 1708 with the revolt organized by Hetman Ivan Mazepa—a heroic figure in modern-day Ukraine, yet branded as a national traitor by Putin in his 2021 essay (Düben 2023, 6; Putin 2021). Even though the Cossack state would be forcibly crushed by Catherine II as part of her military campaign to “return what was torn away” (*Ottorzhennaia vozvratikh*) from the Russian people during the fragmentation, conquest, and partition of Kyivan Rus’, the memories of collective resistance that were generated in the anti-colonial revolts against Polish and then Russian rule would serve as the basis for the Ukrainian national movement in Galicia over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in the establishment of the UPR under the guidance of the revered historian and nation-builder Mykhailo Hrushevsky (Plokhy 2023, 9).

The nineteenth century in particular marked a crucial turning point in Ukrainian national history, in which an independence-oriented intelligentsia would emerge and facilitate the blossoming of a Ukrainian national consciousness within the Galician territories annexed by the Habsburg Empire during the partitions of Poland, and whose adherents located the nation within the language, culture, and collective memory of its people, emphasizing their capacity to persist despite extensive periods of colonial oppression (Lev and Vytanovych 1993). At the centre of this master narrative they placed the legacy of the Cossacks, who were perceived to embody the

essence of Ukraine's struggle for national independence against foreign powers; indeed, first written in 1862, the Ukrainian national anthem "speaks of a young people upon whom fate has yet to smile, but who will one day prove worthy of the 'Cossack nation'" (Snyder 2022b). These efforts to establish a national consciousness were not, however, limited to Ukrainians in Galicia, and the intelligentsia behind the movement maintained direct dialogue with their counterparts in the Russian Empire, even throughout the brutal repressions carried out during the latter half of the nineteenth century (Snyder 2022b; Plokhy 2023, 11). As implemented by the Russian imperial authorities, these repressions—especially the Valuev Circular of 1863 and the Ems Decree of 1876—sought to extinguish expressions of Ukrainian language and culture while actively accommodating the historical revisionism being written into the imperial education system under the guidance of Count Sergei Uvarov—the original author of the triune, all-Russian nationalism that would later be revived by the post-Soviet Russian ruling elite to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Remy 2007; Plokhy 2023, 10). Undertaken in the years following its defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and suppression of Polish uprisings in 1830 and 1863, the logic behind Moscow's repressions returned again to the eternal unity paradigm that permeates the course of Russian national history: that Ukrainian culture was an artificial construct entirely of Polish making, and that its development into a national self-concept reflected the subsequent manipulations of the Habsburg Empire, who intended to weaken the civilizational integrity of Greater Russia (Snyder 2022b; Plokhy 2023, 135-138). Yet these efforts would ultimately prove to be in vain as the Ukrainians would eventually achieve a first tumultuous period of statehood following the demise of the Romanov Dynasty, before falling under the control of the Russian Bolsheviks and becoming a founding member of the Soviet Union in 1922 (Markus and Stebelsky 1993).

Under the compromise arranged with Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, Ukrainian language and culture flourished to an unprecedented degree across the entire territory, while mnemonic tropes of resistance and solidarity became ingrained as the key elements of an emergent national history. In effect, the so-called "Ukrainian Question" was answered in the early Soviet years by an extensive Union-backed affirmative action programme, despite the fact that the Russian Bolsheviks retained *de facto* control over Soviet Ukraine through the Communist Party, which throughout its lifetime would remain "highly centralized, gradually turning the federal structure of the Soviet Union into a mere formality" (Plokhy 2023, 18). Nevertheless, Stalin—who had originally argued that Ukraine and other non-Russian polities under Soviet control be made into autonomous regions within a single Russian Federation, rather than the *de jure* independent republics selected by Lenin (Plokhy 2023, 18)—would then seek to crush Ukrainian nationalism through what is remembered in Ukraine's national history as a targeted campaign of mass repression, deportation, and agricultural collectivization, ultimately leading to the Holodomor—an event that Raphael Lemkin would later label as "the classic example of Soviet genocide" (Snyder 2010, 53). Following in the footsteps of previous Russian leaders, Stalin and his party cadre presented the famine as a plot of Ukrainian nationalists who—working alongside Polish rebels—sought to undermine the grain collection process and derail the

Soviet collectivization programme as a whole (Snyder 2010, 43). In the post-Soviet national history of Ukraine, the famine eventually came to be understood as a genocide on the basis that the Soviet policy of agricultural collectivization had been implemented to deliberately cause the destruction of the Ukrainian national group, while Stalin and his party cadre were identified as the perpetrators responsible for its undertaking.

Public remembrance of the events of the Second World War has long presented a quandary for the precise content to be inscribed into the Ukrainian national history, and remained a deeply contested issue within the domestic politics of post-Soviet Ukraine until Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. This not only speaks to the nature of Ukraine's entanglement within the war itself, in which Ukrainians would fight both alongside and against the Soviets and the Nazis, but also to the fact that several of the most costly battles and gravest atrocities took place upon present-day Ukrainian territories, including the Holocaust (Snyder 2010). Of particular note, however, is the way in which Ukraine's national history has come to remember the OUN and integrate its legacy within a broader narrative of national resistance, wherein the struggle to establish an independent Ukrainian nation-state takes precedence before all else. Following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, several prominent Ukrainian nationalist organizations and leading figures who carried out mass atrocities during the Second World War were progressively integrated into the country's national memory architecture as "the most persistent and committed fighters for the freedom of Ukraine," and whose "continuous fearless and uncompromising struggle resulted in a significant achievement: the independence of Ukraine in 1991" (Kasianov 2024, 1236). According to this heavily revised historical narrative, these organizations and individuals had "bravely fought against Nazi and Soviet (Russian) totalitarian regimes during World War II," while the atrocities they committed—including collaboration with the Nazis, the extermination of Jews, the ethnic cleansing of Poles, and the killings of civilian Ukrainians—are either denied outright, distorted to emphasize heroism and sacrifice (e.g., that the OUN and UPA were *devoted rescuers* of Jews), or presented as an unavoidable necessity on the path to national independence and statehood (Kasianov 2024, 1236-1237). In particular, the Ukrainian "national insurgency" overseen by OUN-B leader Stepan Bandera and UPA Supreme Commander Roman Shukhevych has become elevated as a valiant resistance effort against foreign occupation and perceived in Ukraine's national history as continuous with its longstanding struggle for independence in the face of colonial oppression, while the dark and traumatic memories associated with it are either obscured, distorted, or erased entirely (Katchanovski 2010, 3).

National memories of the Second World War have ultimately been at the forefront of top-down mnemonic securitization initiatives undertaken in post-Soviet Ukraine by the pro-independence governments that formed in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution in 2004-2005 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, alongside an associated national program to "decommunize" and "de-Russify" Ukrainian society, recognize the Holodomor as a genocide, and delegitimize positive interpretations of the legacy of the Soviet Union (Kasianov 2024). Notably, governmental efforts to integrate the OUN, UPA, and prominent figures such as Stepan

Bandera into a national history that adheres to a narrative template of resistance and then deploy these memories as a political mechanism to substantiate post-Soviet Ukraine's struggle for political independence, statehood, and national self-determination is entirely incompatible with the Great Patriotic War narrative, which made its return to Russian politics following Putin's ascension to the presidency at the turn of the millennium. Again, this speaks to a broader process that explains the differential trajectory of Russian and Ukrainian national histories: an ontological security dilemma, wherein the mutual securitization of incompatible memories has resulted in a downward spiral of insecurity, precipitating an interstate environment of existential anxiety that is conducive to the outbreak of kinetic warfare. Yet the question of how national history has contributed to the genocidal dimensions of Russia's war in Ukraine remains unanswered. The study now turns to address this question in its entirety through a detailed examination of the Russian state's wartime conduct—that is, the aggregation of its discourse and actions—according to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Chapter V

Genocide in the Ashes of Empire

“For the raids in Moscow. For shelling Leningrad. For Tikhvin and Stalingrad. Remember, and don’t forget. We can do it all again.”

—Unknown Soviet Soldier, 1945

On April 3, 2022, the state-owned Russian news agency *RIA Novosti* published an article titled “What Should Russia do with Ukraine,” where in plain, unambiguous language, the author presented the audience with “an explicit program for the complete elimination of the Ukrainian nation as such” (Snyder 2022). As a mainstream domestic news agency whose viewpoint is tightly aligned with the Kremlin, that the article was published only two days following the revelation that Russian troops had murdered hundreds of Ukrainians in Bucha reflected a sense of deliberate intent. In particular, the article engaged at length with the Kremlin’s assertion that the main purpose of the “special military operation” is the complete “denazification” of Ukraine by describing in vivid detail what the fulfillment of this objective actually necessitates, thereby providing a clear discursive justification for the recent wartime atrocities, which had included summary executions, mass torture and rape, alongside intercepted phone conversations between Russian soldiers wherein these actions were repeatedly described as “*zachistka*,” or the cleansing of so-called “Nazis” (Kyslytsya 2024, 1). The article describes these actions as a *necessity*, given that “Ukrainian Nazism” is understood to pose a greater threat to the continued existence of the Russian Federation than had the Nazism of Adolf Hitler’s Germany, and further posits that the overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian population has become terminally infected by this artificial ideology, whose “designer, source and sponsor” is the so-called “collective West” (Sergeytsev 2022). The article then continues, arguing that Ukraine is itself an artificial, anti-Russian construction devoid of its own “civilizational content, [and thus] a subordinate element of an ... alien civilization,” and that any attempt to establish a Ukrainian nation-state will inevitably lead to the generation of Nazism (Sergeytsev 2022). In this regard, the liquidation of Ukraine’s political leadership—or “debanderization”—is understood to be an entirely insufficient solution for cleansing Ukrainian society of its supposed predisposition towards Nazism; rather, the “denazification” imperative that underpins the Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine is proposed to inevitably entail “de-Ukrainianization,” or the complete liquidation of an allegedly “artificial ethnic identity” tied to “the territories of historical Little Russia and New Russia, begun by the Soviet authorities” (Sergeytsev 2022).

Only several weeks after the discovery of the Bucha Massacre, Putin explicitly endorsed this interpretation of the program of “denazification” by personally *rewarding* the perpetrators with a signed letter congratulating them for their “heroism and courage,” as well as awarding them with honorary “Guards” status for “protecting Russia’s sovereignty” (Ritchie et al. 2022).

Meanwhile, the Kremlin vigorously denied that Russian forces had perpetrated the massacre, instead pinning the blame upon the advancing Ukrainian units who had entered into Bucha following the Russian retreat and then allegedly invented a “fictional story” to accompany “a monstrous ... staged provocation by the Kiev [regime] ... to push its Western allies to provide heavy weapons to Ukraine” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2022). In tandem with the Kremlin’s response to the massacre, the abhorrent conduct of Russian troops in Bucha fits into a much broader pattern of atrocities perpetrated by the Russian armed forces, occupation authorities, and security services, as well as a wide array of other state and state-affiliated actors, from which international legal practitioners and scholars alike have inferred *genocidal intent* (Diamond 2022; Hook 2023; Azarov et al. 2023). Indeed, Timothy Snyder (2022) has identified the contents of the *RIA Novosti* article as constituting Russia’s “genocide handbook” for the war in Ukraine. According to Snyder, the genocidal logic of the handbook derives from its definition of “Nazi,” which in truth refers to any human being who self-identifies as a member of the Ukrainian nation; that is, any person “who wishes to assert his or her Ukrainian identity and supports Ukraine’s independence” (Azarov et al. 237). In this sense, the very notion of believing that Ukrainians exist as a separate people from Russia constitutes an expression of Nazism, thereby aligning with the eternal unity paradigm that permeates the Russian national history. As described by Snyder (2022), “a Nazi is a Ukrainian who refuses to admit being a Russian.” Likewise, Ukrainians must be made to suffer by virtue of being Ukrainian, and the sole pathway towards the redemption of their collective guilt is “denazification,” or the destruction of the Ukrainian state and nation as such (Snyder 2022).

That Ukrainian national identity is framed in Russian wartime discourse as equivalent to Nazism entails at least two crucial implications about how the Kremlin understands the “special military operation.” First, the notion of Ukrainian Nazism is assumed to be “amorphous and ambivalent” and hence disguises itself in the “desire for ‘independence’ and a ‘European’ (Western, pro-American) path of development (in reality – to degradation)” (Sergeytsev 2022). Indeed, the handbook readily admits that although there is no visible evidence of Nazism in Ukraine, this simply means that the absence of local resistance to the Ukrainian government—or the “Bandera” ruling elite—is to be expected (Sergeytsev 2022). While nevertheless serving as a useful discursive tactic, invoking the legacy of the OUN and UPA is therefore irrelevant to the Kremlin’s definition of Nazism in Ukraine, as are the actual crimes of the Nazis during interwar period and the Second World War (Snyder 2022). This aligns not only with the rehabilitation of the Great Patriotic War as the foundational myth of post-Soviet national identity in Russia, but also with the paradigm of eternal unity that structures Russian national history during the wartime period—that Ukrainians are in fact Russians, who must be forcibly returned to their civilizational roots through the process of “denazification.” It also explains the apparent absurdity behind Russian claims that “denazification” is required to be undertaken in a country wherein far-right parties and actors have performed astoundingly poorly in domestic politics, given that promoting the narrative template of eternal unity has been maintained as state policy in Russia for several centuries and come to acquire widespread discursive resonance across

Russian society over time (Kasianov 2024, 1249). Precisely because of this definition of Nazism, the Kremlin sees no contradiction in accusing Volodymyr Zelenskyy, for instance, of being a Nazi, irrespective of the fact that the Ukrainian president is Jewish and had family members who served in the Soviet Red Army and died in the Holocaust (Snyder 2022). In this respect, the Kremlin adheres to the genocidal understanding that “Nazis have to be Ukrainians and Ukrainians have to be Nazis,” and that because of this perceived logical equivalence, the “denazification” of Ukraine entails the complete subjugation and erasure of the Ukrainian national identity through its replacement with the imperial national identity of Russia—or the dual process of *de-Ukrainianization* and *Russification*.

Second, the notion that Ukrainian national identity is logically equivalent to the expression of Nazism means that Russia cannot be considered a fascist state no matter how closely its words and actions come to align with the principles of fascism during the war (Snyder 2022). The existential struggle against the resurgence of Nazism in Ukraine is therefore framed by the Kremlin as the continuation of an anti-fascist resistance effort that began with the Great Patriotic War for the Fatherland against the German Nazis, while widespread resistance from Ukrainian soldiers and civilians alike further reinforces the notion that the “denazification” imperative of the “special military operation” is an absolute necessity that must be carried out through any means necessary. This contributes to a disturbing pattern wherein the Kremlin persistently accuses the “Ukrainian Nazis” of committing or plotting atrocities against ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers in Ukraine—according to an alleged program consisting of *de-Russification* and *Ukrainianization* (“Nazification”)—to justify mass violence against expressions of Ukrainian national identity and create the impression that the Ukrainian government and armed forces are the serial perpetrators of crimes that Russia itself either intends to commit or has already committed in Ukraine (Hook 2023, 21-22).

This is accompanied by the rise of fascist rhetoric and symbolism across Russia, including the renewal and resurgence of the official wartime slogan, “We Can Do It Again,” which traces its origins to “a 1945 graffiti phrase left on the wall of the Reichstag by an unknown Soviet soldier” (Hook 2023, 17), reading: “[f]or the raids in Moscow. For shelling Leningrad. For Tikhvin and Stalingrad. Remember, and don’t forget. We can do it all again” (Efimov 2022). By putting an aggressive, negationist twist upon the post-Holocaust promise of “Never Again,” the slogan indicates that Russia intends to deploy violence against Ukraine at a magnitude reminiscent of “some of the darkest periods of [the country’s] twentieth-century history: the targeting of influential Ukrainians evokes routine purges of Ukraine’s cultural, religious, and political leaders under Joseph Stalin and other leaders; the willingness to weaponize food, as seen in Russia’s Black Sea blockade, evokes the 1930s Holodomor artificial famine; and modern nuclear threats evoke the 1980s Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and many other historical illusions” (Hook 2023, 17). The deliberate decision to combine modern genocidal tactics with the weaponization of collective memory for terror is taken as evidence by the Ukrainian government and NATO member states of an emergent state ideology of Russian fascism (“ruscism”), whose

deployment by the Kremlin is intended to frame the Ukrainian people as Nazis and justify the undertaking of battlefield tactics and occupation policies from which genocidal intent can be inferred (Hook 2023, 17;). Nevertheless, the Kremlin sees no contradiction in “implementing fascist policies in the name of denazification,” given that fascism can only ever belong to Ukraine and its Western sponsors (Snyder 2022).

In this light, it can be concluded that the genocidal program of “denazification” is in truth Moscow’s violent attempt to make the historical fiction of eternal unity between Russians and Ukrainians a reality. This conclusion aligns directly with Raphael Lemkin’s notion of genocide, which he first defined in the 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* as a two-step crime of an imperial-totalitarian character, necessitating both the “destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group ... [and] the imposition of the national pattern of the aggressor” (Lemkin 1944, 79). Importantly, Lemkin’s efforts were later translated into the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the “Genocide Convention”) in 1948, wherein under Article II, the crime of genocide came to consist of a “subjective element (*mens rea*), i.e., a special intent of the perpetrator to destroy one of the four protected groups (national, ethnic, racial, or religious) as such, in whole or in part; and [an] objective element (*actus reus*), i.e., particular genocidal acts through which the perpetrator achieves their aims” (Lachowski 2025, 43).

The remainder of the study aims to substantiate the aforementioned conclusion that the eternal unity paradigm has manifested in the Russian state’s wartime conduct—that is, the aggregation of its *discourse* and *actions*—as a program of “denazification,” or the destruction of the national pattern of the Ukrainian group (i.e., de-Ukrainianization) and the imposition of the national pattern of Russia (i.e., Russification), the aggressor, with representative examples from Russian state actors and affiliated entities. This is accomplished through an overview of Russia’s efforts to incite genocide through an explicit discourse of “denazification,” which consists of *denial*, *dehumanization*, and *destruction*, as well as documented evidence of actions in Ukraine that violate the five prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations 1948, 280). This overview ultimately corroborates the findings of other academic studies and international legal reports that Russia is indeed responsible for the commission of genocide against the Ukrainian national group, given that it has engaged in a pattern of conduct from which genocidal intent can be inferred (*mens rea*) and gravely violated *all five* of the prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention (*actus reus*). To this the study now turns.

The Discourse of “Denazification” as Evidence of Genocidal Intent

Academic studies and international legal reports have demonstrated that the special intent (*dolus specialis*) to destroy the Ukrainian nation as such can be inferred from the words and actions of the Russian state, as well as affiliated individuals and organizations that occupy positions of political power or influence. Under the International Law Commission's 2001 *Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts*, wrongful acts—including genocidal intent and the commission of genocide—are “attributed to the State when they are perpetrated by a person or entity who is (1) a State organ under State law (*de jure*) or that acts in ‘complete dependence’ on the State (*de facto*); (2) empowered by State law to exercise elements of governmental authority; or (3) acting on the instructions, or under direction or ‘effective control’ of State organs, as per settled jurisprudence” (Hook 2023, 14-15). In this light, the “conduct of the Russian armed forces and officials, as State organs, and persons and entities acting under their effective control, including State-owned media operators and officials or entities controlled by the Russian government within the self-proclaimed [people’s] ‘republics,’ are attributable to Russia” (Hook 2023, 15). Moreover, genocidal intent can manifest in (i) the *direct and explicit statements* of the perpetrators, as well as the *terms and ideology* created and propagated by the perpetrators, and might also be inferred from (ii) the *general context and the nature of the acts committed* by the perpetrators (Azarov et al. 2023, 240). Beginning with a focused examination of wartime rhetoric emanating from Russian state actors and affiliated entities, the study finds that Russia’s war in Ukraine is fueled by a comprehensive discourse of “denazification,” which explicitly calls for the destruction of the Ukrainian nation as such and is rooted in an imperial interpretation of Russian national history that outright denies Ukraine’s right to existence as an independent nation-state. Following the lead of the 2023 report, *The Russian Federation’s Escalating Commission of Genocide in Ukraine: A Legal Analysis*, the study identifies *three* overlapping avenues through which the discourse of “denazification” constitutes genocidal intent: *denial*, *dehumanization*, and *destruction*. In what follows, representative examples of each avenue are provided in order to illustrate how, precisely, collective memory has come to invest Russian wartime conduct with genocidal significance.

Denial: Denying the Existence of the Ukrainian National Group

In accordance with Russia’s official perception of its national history, state authorities and affiliated entities have been remarkably consistent in their denial that Ukraine exists as a distinctive national group. This widespread practice of *historical negationism* emanates most immediately from Putin himself, who remains “the unchallenged and highest authority in Russia” (Hook 2023, 22). As already established over the course of the study, Putin has repeatedly invoked the eternal unity paradigm—that Russians and Ukrainians are two parts of a single, all-Russian nation, and that Ukrainian territories are in fact historically Russian territories—to justify the undertaking of the program of “denazification” in Ukraine (Azarov et al. 2023, 243). Instances of Putin’s denial of the Ukrainian nation include his essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” “texts of his public speeches dated 21 and 24 February 2022, and transcripts of his press-conferences,” each of which gives “grounds to

assume that [his] rhetoric is evidence of the existence of the motive, goal and intent to destroy the Ukrainian nation at least in part, so as to have Ukraine under the undivided power of Russia, as it used to be in the former Soviet Union” (Azarov et al. 2023, 243).

With Putin at its centre, the discourse of historical negationism towards Ukraine has become ubiquitous among the Russian political establishment. For instance, Dmitry Medvedev—the former president (2008-2012) and prime minister of Russia (2012-2020), and Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation—persistently engages in historical negationism supplemented with bellicose, invective language, writing in a 2022 Telegram post that “the Ukrainian nation and its identity is one big fake, the phenomenon never existed in the history, and does not exist now” (Medvedev 2022; Azarov et al. 2023, 245). Elsewhere, he has claimed that “Ukrainian is not a language, but a surzhik” (Ukrainian-Russian pidgin language), that “Ukraine is not a country, but artificially collected territories,” and that the primary objective of the “special military operation” is to “change the bloody and full of false myths consciousness of a part of today’s Ukrainians” (Apt and Gienger 2026). The notion that Ukrainian national identity is an artificial construct authored by foreign powers figures prominently in Medvedev’s negationism, including his belief that “as soon as Western funding ends, Ukraine itself will end,” and that “Ukrainians are Russians, and Malorossia is part of Russia” (Apt and Gienger 2026). Elsewhere, in response to the former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma’s declaration that “Ukraine is not Russia,” Medvedev stated that this “concept must disappear for good. Ukraine is undoubtedly Russia” (Apt and Gienger 2026).

A similar viewpoint towards Ukraine has been expressed by Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. In parallel with other senior officials in the Kremlin, Lavrov has denied the existence of a distinctive Ukrainian nation while propagating rhetorical tropes that refer back to Russia’s imperial era. In an interview with the state-owned news agency *RIA Novosti* and *Rossiia 24 TV*, Lavrov explained that Russians and Ukrainians are “brothers forever,” and that “there are no artificial obstacles for [them] to live and communicate in the same language” (Lavrov 2023). He then continued, claiming that Russia and Ukraine occupy the very “same civilizational, historical space,” while “the process of destroying this ideology of brotherhood and unity began in Ukraine,” following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Lavrov 2023). Politicians in the Russian Federal Assembly subscribe to this exact same notion that balance must be restored to the eternal, civilizational unity of Russians and Ukrainians through a program of “denazification,” and continuously deny the Ukrainian nation’s right to existence whenever parliamentary discussion turns to the “special military operation.” For instance, State Duma Leader of the systemic opposition party “A Just Russia” Sergey Mironov explains that “[w]e [Russians] and the Ukrainians are one people, and all of Ukraine is ours, and they [the West] are trying to take it away from us” (Apt and Gienger 2026). According to Mironov, this is because “the ancient cities of Kievan Rus – Kiev and Chernigov ... [are] Russian in population, history and spirit,” meaning that “[a]ll of Ukraine is ours – it’s all the Russian world” (*Russkiy Mir*) and that “[i]f we have to, we’ll reach Lvov, like we reached Berlin

in 1945!” (Apt and Gienger 2026). Former member of the Russian Duma and film director Vladimir Bortko echoed the same position, stating that “[w]hen our Ukrainian, Malorussian friends are saying, ‘[w]e are a separate nation’ – what nation? From where? ... When they say, ‘We are a separate nation, we’re going to speak our language’ – It’s a dialect of Slavic languages,” thereby indicating that Russians and Ukrainians are “all the same people, [simply] speaking different dialects” (Apt and Gienger 2026). As summarized by Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin, “Russians and Ukrainians are one people. In this sense, all of Ukraine is ours” (Apt and Gienger 2026).

Closely implicated with the Kremlin and providing substantial support in the realm of military recruitment, the Russian Orthodox Church (i.e., the Moscow Patriarchate) has also adopted historical negationism while framing the “special military operation” as a “holy mission” to “gather the Russian lands” and purify the minds of Ukrainians, who are in truth Russians that have been corrupted with the false notion of national independence by the malign influence of the “collective West” (Ash 2026). This practice of religious negationism—tracing back to the baptism of Saint Vladimir and the Christianization of Kyivan Rus’—is summarized at length by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, in an interview with the state-owned news agency *TASS*:

The fact that despite our ties, [the Ukrainians have] succeeded in inciting this hatred, and to bring things to the point of an armed conflict shows that major forces were devoted to stupefying the Ukrainian people. But I believe that this intoxication is a short-term phenomenon, akin to anesthesia. A person wakes from a drug-induced sleep and starts to return to reality, which includes questioning visions he might have experienced under a drug-induced sleep. The same thing will happen. People will understand that this is an illusion, and in reality, this is a special operation by external forces directed at separating one people. I’m not afraid to say that all of us came out of Kyiv’s baptismal bath (Russian Media Monitor 2025).

Importantly, the outright negation of the Ukrainian nation and its distinctive history is not simply limited to the ruling elite and religious establishment inside of the Russian Federation. Rather, it has become the dominant viewpoint amongst various affiliated entities during the war, and invoked with ubiquity to describe the Ukrainian people. For instance, this viewpoint has become widely disseminated across Russian schools and universities, in parallel with militarized curricula which seek to indoctrinate students with “national and quasi-religious myths about the country’s messianic destiny, past imperial glory, and exceptional military history” (Vorobyov 2025). Indeed, an independent investigation during the 2024-2025 academic year found that approximately 12 percent of all academic hours in Russian schools were dedicated to promoting the Kremlin’s official narrative on the “special military operation,” including the widespread negation of Ukrainian history and the dissemination of the notion that Ukrainians are simply Russians who require “denazification” to return to their civilizational roots (Vorobiova 2025).

Given that questioning the Great Patriotic War narrative or the “special military operation”—which are understood by the Kremlin as constituting a singular, continuous existential struggle against Nazism—is protected by criminal and administrative legal sanctions, educators are obligated to promote state-sponsored propaganda about Ukrainian national identity, history, and statehood, thereby cultivating a genocidal disposition towards Ukraine within younger generations in the Russian Federation, including through the so-called “Conversations about Important Things” (Vorobiova 2025). As will later be addressed in further detail, these efforts extend into occupied Ukrainian territories, wherein Ukrainian children are assimilated en masse into Russian culture, instructed of the importance of the “special military operation,” and encouraged to view the defence of Russia’s “interests on the battlefield as their ‘civic duty,’” all organized under the occupation blueprint titled “State Cultural Policy Strategy until 2030,” originally adopted by the Russian government in 2024 (Vorobiova 2025).

Likewise, the publication of Russian educational and pedagogical textbooks require active screening by state authorities to ensure that readers are left with the impression that “Ukraine simply does not exist,” leading to an environment in which authors and publishing houses can “no longer ... talk about any kind of independence for Ukraine as a country” (Nesterova 2022). State-supported actors working in universities and other postsecondary institutions also function as powerful conduits for disseminating the Kremlin’s narrative of eternal unity to large audiences, thereby inoculating the next generation of Russian political and business elites against the notion that Ukraine exists as an independent nation-state. For instance, political scientist and associate professor at Moscow State University Sergey Karnaukhov explained that Ukraine supposedly descended into Nazism because “there’s no such country, there’s no such nation. There is no history of Ukraine. It does not exist and cannot exist because there is no such entity ... There is no historic predetermination, there is no culture, there is nothing” (Russian Media Monitor 2024a). Elsewhere, in an article published in the state-backed news outlet *Izvestia*, Oleg Karpovich, the Director of the Institute of Contemporary Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claimed that the only way to facilitate a Russo-Ukrainian rapprochement is to “erase from the minds of Ukrainians the traces of the joint efforts of the collective West and local collaborators to set the Slav brothers against each other,” and that in this regard, the “special military operation” is “liberating not only territories, but also minds that have been repeatedly poisoned by the Russophobic authorities of the country” (Apt and Gienger 2026). In all, negationism towards the Ukrainian nation and its distinctive history is ubiquitous in Russia, and functions as the core narrative in the discourse of “denazification.”

Dehumanization: “Cleansing” and “Erasing” the Ukrainian National Group

Dehumanizing rhetoric is used by perpetrators of genocide to sow feelings of hatred, scorn, and disgust among members of its own population, as well as to build domestic legitimacy and mobilize support for genocidal actions against the targeted group. As argued in her essay that compares the Holodomor to the Russia-Ukraine War, Anne Applebaum (2022) explains that

“while not every use of genocidal hate speech leads to genocide, all genocides have been preceded by genocidal hate speech.” Indeed, the dehumanization and humiliation of the Ukrainian national group resides at the very centre of the discourse of “denazification.” Most immediately, the decision to equate Ukrainian national identity with Nazism reflects a desire to dehumanize and delegitimize, given that the Nazi ideology directly resulted in “the most brutal and large-scale crimes in human history” (Azarov et al. 2023, 242). It also adheres to the eternal unity paradigm since the notion of “Nazism” as conceived by the Kremlin is in truth the revival of a longstanding Soviet trope that aimed to delegitimize what were then internal expressions of nationalism within its various republics, which traces back to the Stalinist era. Expressions of Ukrainian nationalism are thus framed in much the same light, wherein the desire exercise political independence is understood by the Russian state as posing an existential threat to the civilizational integrity of the *Russkiy Mir*, and therefore demands either the “cleansing” of the “artificially imposed” national identity behind it in order to oversee the forcible return of the Ukrainian people to their professed Russian heritage, or its complete “erasure” by physically removing or eliminating the Ukrainian national group and replacing them with Russians. The dehumanizing rhetoric of the Russian state thus corresponds to these perceived imperatives, sometimes articulated together, other times separately.

To provide some examples, *cleansing rhetoric*—or the notion that the Ukrainian people and territories must be cured from their dehumanized, “Nazified” state and returned to their civilizational roots as Russians—is ubiquitous amongst Russian state actors, including the ruling establishment, armed forces, and occupation officials. Summarizing this position with exceptional clarity in a choreographed debate on state television, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Pyotr Tolstoy explains that “[t]here is no way to negotiate with these people. They will devour everyone until we cleanse them out of the territory of the former Soviet Ukraine, and until people living in Ukraine come back home to Russia” (Russian Media Monitor 2024b). He then continued, drawing upon the eternal unity paradigm: “Let me remind you that during the last 300 years, Ukraine wasn’t an independent nation. All of Ukraine’s independence is just a legend that was made up by the Bolsheviks and by Ukrainian nationalists” (Russian Media Monitor 2024b). Most often, however, it is the cleansing of Nazism itself that is invoked as a means of dehumanizing and delegitimizing the Ukrainian national identity. For instance, in a 2022 televised interview of State Duma Deputy Aleksey Zhuravlyov, hosted by fellow State Duma Deputy Yevgeny Popov, the former outlined a potential framework to forcibly “re-educate” Ukrainians by “reinstalling their brains,” while those who refused to abandon their identity—or approximately 2 million “incurable” people—were to be “denazified,” which he readily admits as equivalent to their destruction (Hook 2023, 23). Elsewhere, the self-proclaimed “people’s governor” of the Donetsk region and leader of the separatist “New Russia Party” Pavel Gubarev filmed himself in 2022 announcing that:

[Ukrainians] are Russian people, possessed by the devil. We are coming to convince them, not to kill them. But if you don’t want us to change your minds,

then we will kill you. We will kill as many of you as we have to. We will kill 1 million or 5 million. We can exterminate all of you until you understand that you are possessed and you have to be cured. Zelensky is the main possessed one there, he is really the devil's spawn. He is the Hitler 2.0 with his rabid nationalism, with that rabid Russophobia ... [the Ukrainians] are bloody possessed Satanists from the standpoint of the Christian thought (Apt and Gienger 2026).

The merging of the discourse of “denazification” with religious rhetoric calling for the “de-Satanization” of the Ukrainian national group is not unique to Gubarev; indeed, such appeal to religion is widespread, and invests the “special military operation” with a sense of divine righteousness from the perspective of Russian state actors. Such rhetoric is especially evident, for instance, in the language of Ramzan Kadyrov, leader of the Chechen Republic and colonel general in the Russian military. On November 26, 2022, Kadyrov posted to Telegram that the purpose of the “special military operation” is the “complete destruction of the manifestations of Satanism: *shaitans* [devils or evil spirits], Bandera, Nazis.” He explained that these terms refer to the same evil entity, whose “essence is the lack of humanity, [of] moral principles,” and are therefore considered “Satanists” (Hook 2023, 24). Religious tropes that equate Ukrainian national identity with Satanism are also commonplace in the *rhetoric of erasure*, or the notion that “denazification” entails the physical removal or elimination of Ukrainians from historically Russian territories. A prominent example of this form of rhetoric is the language of Sergey Aksyonov, the Russian-installed head of the occupation authority in Crimea since October 9, 2014. Considering that Aksyonov holds a position of power over Ukrainian territory and citizens, there is added significance to his assertion that “it is not the Russian language that will disappear [from Ukrainian territories], but Ukraine” itself. Moreover, on October 21, 2022, he issued a call to action that can clearly be interpreted as direct and public incitement to commit genocide, a distinct crime under Article III (c) of the Genocide Convention: “Now it’s our turn to burn out the Nazi plague with a red-hot iron. And the best guarantee that it will never again crawl out of its rotten catches and will not strike minds and souls is the liquidation of Ukrainian statehood, which gave birth to Nazism” (Hook 2023, 24-25).

Beyond appeals to religious tropes, the rhetoric of erasure also makes frequent use of language that seeks to equate the Ukrainian national group to vermin, pests, parasites, and diseases, whether this be directed towards Ukraine’s statehood or citizens, soldiers and civilians alike, and to call for their excision or extermination. Among many other Russian state actors, Dmitry Medvedev has persistently described Ukrainians as pests and parasites, including “cockroaches,” “mongrels,” “nits,” and “tapeworms,” while depicting the country of Ukraine as a “cancerous neoplasm” whose very existence is believed to be “fatal for Ukrainians,” as well as an animal sick with rabies and in need of euthanasia (Apt and Gienger 2026). Aksyonov has also made use of this form of rhetoric by repeatedly referring to Ukraine as “Nazi vermin” and a “fascist reptile,” and claiming that the “special military operation” had been successful in

“cleansing the country from dirt and mold, which bred ... [f]rom aggressive parasites that poisoned the social body” (Apt and Gienger 2026). Furthermore, Aksyonov has aligned with others in the Russian political establishment—including Medvedev, Volodin, and Maria Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s official spokesperson—by consistently branding the Ukrainian government and armed forces as a terrorist organization, whose individual members are declared to “have no right to life” (Apt and Gienger 2026). Similar dehumanizing rhetoric has been articulated from various pundits and media personalities in Russia with links to the Kremlin, including by Putin’s former advisor Sergei Markov, who describes Ukraine as “the main test site in the world for creating an artificial society” wherein Western “political technologists” seek to forcibly change local identities and transform Ukrainians into “an army of zombies” at Russia’s doorstep, who lack the human right to have a mind of their own (Russian Media Monitor 2023a; Apt and Gienger 2026). Elsewhere, Russian television presenter Vladimir Solovyov has described the Russia-Ukraine War as akin to the “deworming of a cat. For the doctor, it’s a special operation. For the worms – it’s a war, and for the cat, it’s a cleansing” (Apt and Gienger 2026). The language of dehumanization is thus present throughout the Russian body politic, and has conditioned the Russian armed forces and occupation authorities to engage in genocidal actions against the Ukrainian people while simultaneously generating domestic support for the “special military operation” among Russian civilians.

Destruction: “Liquidating” the Ukrainian National Group

Finally, Russian state actors and affiliated entities have called for the outright destruction of the Ukrainian national group, while others have issued claims that the “special military operation” has succeeded in destroying the Ukrainian state or nationhood, at least in part. This rhetoric emanates from key actors within the Russian political establishment, including Dmitry Medvedev, who posted on Telegram that “while I’m alive, I will do everything to make them [the Ukrainian people] disappear” (Hook 2023, 23). Sergey Aksyonov has engaged in similar rhetoric, asserting in October 2023 that “the Nazi vermin will be destroyed – this time completely ... [s]o that not even ashes will remain from it” (Apt and Gienger 2026). Pavel Gubarev has even openly declared that Russia is attempting to commit genocide in Ukraine, admitting that Russians “can’t commit genocide to them all” after attaining victory on the battlefield, and must instead seek “to ‘re-educate’ them ... [in] concentration camps” (Apt and Gienger 2026). But for this outcome to proceed, Gubarev asserted that Russia “must win at any cost and kill as many people as necessary” (Apt and Gienger 2026). These specific demands have also been echoed by Karen Shakhnazarov, director general of the state-owned enterprise Mosfilm, who explained that the “Letter Z”—a symbol of support for the Russian war effort, oftentimes displayed by civilians—is in fact an explicit call for “concentration camps, re-education, [and] sterilization,” all of which the Russian state has carried out within occupied territories (Anderson 2022). Indeed, state media corporations and personalities have become a primary source of this rhetoric of destruction, with actors and publications maintaining the same degree of bellicosity as key figures within the Russian ruling establishment. In one particularly

telling instance wherein Ukrainian national identity is equated with Nazism, Dmitry Rogozin—a prominent senator representing the Russian-occupied portion of the Zaporizhzhia oblast, and the former deputy prime minister of Russia from 2011 to 2018—explained that:

In general, what has grown up in the place of Ukraine is an existential threat to the Russian people, Russian history, Russian language and Russian civilization. If we do not put an end to them [the “Nazis”], as, unfortunately, our grandfathers did not do away with them, we will have to die, but end up at an even greater cost to our grandchildren. So let’s get this over with. Once and forever. For our grandchildren (Apt and Gienger 2026).

In another explicit instance of incitement, Pavel Astakhov—the former Children’s Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation—simply exclaimed on Russian state television that “[t]hey [the Ukrainians] have to be destroyed and that’s it! Because [otherwise] it would be a compromise with the devil” (Apt and Gienger 2026). Anton Krasovsky, the former director of broadcasting for the state-owned international news agency *RT* (formerly *Russia Today*), issued a particularly inflammatory statement in 2022 by calling for both the drowning of Ukrainian children in the Tysa River and the gathering of Ukrainian children into huts to be burned, before asserting that Ukraine “is not supposed to exist at all” (Apt and Gienger 2026). When asked to elaborate upon his previous comments, Krasovsky later explained that he “didn’t say [that Ukrainian children] should be killed, just drowned and burned” (Russian Media Monitor 2023b). In all, this genocidal logic that “denazification” entails the destruction of the Ukrainian national group is summarized perhaps no better than by the Russian mercenary Igor Mangushev, while allegedly holding the skull of a Ukrainian soldier who died defending the Azovstal steel works in the southern port of Mariupol:

We are not at war with people of blood and flesh, we are at war with the idea, with the idea of Ukraine as an anti-Russian state. There can be no peace. We must de-Ukrainize Ukraine. We must return our Russian lands ... This is the tragedy of Ukrainian soldiers. We don’t care how many we have to kill them. If we were at war with people, we could make peace with them. But we are at war with the idea, so all bearers of an idea must be killed (Apt and Gienger 2026).

Genocidal Acts as Further Evidence of Intent to Destroy

Beyond its various manifestations in Russian wartime discourse, the program of “denazification” is also apparent in the actions of Russian state actors and affiliated entities during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Again, these actions are understood as providing evidence that the Russian state is responsible for the commission of genocide against the Ukrainian national group, given that it has engaged in a pattern of conduct—that is, *discourse* and *actions*—from which genocidal intent can be inferred (*mens rea*), and, as will be proven in what follows, gravely violated all five of the prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention (*actus reus*). In this light, the remainder of the study is dedicated to evaluating

Russian wartime actions according to the five prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations 1948, 280). In totality, these actions serve to further illustrate the aforementioned pattern of genocidal conduct by the Russian state in its war of aggression against Ukraine, and thus contribute to an understanding of precisely how collective memory—as represented through national history—has come to invest this conduct with genocidal significance.

Article II (a): Killing Members of the Group

As summarized in the 2023 report, *The Russian Federation’s Escalating Commission of Genocide in Ukraine: A Legal Analysis* (hereafter the *Genocide Report*), the Russian state has “directly participated in killing Ukrainian men, women, and children in a variety of ways, including summary executions, missile strikes, shelling, torture-induced deaths, targeting evacuation caravans, and killing by omission” (Hook 2023, 26). According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), total civilian casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) were recorded at approximately 55,600 between February 24, 2022, and December 31, 2025, including over 15,000 killed (HRMMU 2026, 4), with these numbers presumed to be significantly higher among experts of the war and expected to rise further as Russia continues its full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Hook 2023, 27). The data collected by the HRMMU also indicates that the year of 2025 marked the most deadly annual period for Ukrainian civilians since 2022, when the Kremlin originally launched its full-scale invasion; in all, at least 2,514 civilians were killed in 2025, which translates to a 20 percent increase compared to 2024 (2,088 killed) and a 27 percent increase from 2023 (1,974 killed) (HRMMU 2026, 1). This vastly exceeds the minimum criteria of “mass killing” established by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is understood to entail the killing of “at least 1,000 noncombatant civilians who are targeted as part of a specific group ... over a period of one year or less” by the deliberate actions of armed groups within the country in question (Early Warning Project 2026).

The *Genocide Report* further notes that the killing of Ukrainian civilians has “occurred in areas of vastly different control by Russian forces, ranging from consistent and simultaneous mass graves and executions discovered in areas of their physical occupation to mass missile attacks across Ukraine” (Hook 2023, 27). In Ukrainian territories seized by the advancing Russian army, Ukrainian civilians are executed by Russian soldiers under the pretext of *zachistka*—that is, the “cleansing” or “mopping up” of Nazis—whose brutal tactics mirror the terror unleashed upon civilians during the Chechen Wars in the 1990s and 2000s, such as in the Samashki and Novye Aldi Massacres (Regamey 2015; Estemirova 2022). The Bucha Massacre remains the paradigm case of undertaking mass killing as a means of furthering the program of “denazification” within occupied Ukrainian territories. As alluded to earlier, Russian troops

killed approximately 1,100 civilians in Bucha and its surrounding areas between February and March 2022, with summary executions oftentimes taking place after the completion of security checks that aimed to determine whether civilians identified as Ukrainian and were supportive of Ukraine's war effort (United Nations 2022). As noted by Matilda Bogner, the head of the UN HRMMU, "[a] mere text message, a piece of camouflage clothing, or a record of previous military service could have fatal consequences" (United Nations 2022). Others were executed by Russian soldiers while going about their daily routines, with their bodies either left where they lay or placed into mass graves (Biscontinini 2022; BBC News 2022). As aptly described by Lena Chychenina, who resided in Bucha during the first days of its occupation: when the "special military operation" began to falter, "nothing remained [for the occupying force] but to start solving the 'Ukrainian question.' They grasped very quickly that no one was about to present them with flowers. Obviously, that was the collapse of their speculation" that the Ukrainian people truly desired liberation from the alleged neo-Nazi government of Volodymyr Zelenskyy by their Orthodox East Slavic brethren (Plokhly 2023, 170).

It is absolutely essential to highlight that the Bucha Massacre is far from an isolated case when it comes to carrying out the program of "denazification" through the killing of civilians; indeed, the execution of Ukrainian civilians has been documented in a great many territories occupied by the Russian armed forces since the full-scale invasion first began, including (but not limited to) cases in Izium, Irpin, Mariupol, and Staryi Bykiv, "as well as smaller villages across the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions" (Hook 2023, 27). The liberation of territories in the Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts in the fall of 2022 by the Ukrainian armed forces additionally revealed evidence of summary executions, including the discovery of mass graves (Hook 2023, 28). Documented cases of civilian killings across occupied Ukrainian territories by Russian troops follow similar tactics to those deployed in Bucha, wherein residents are either executed on the spot or put through a "screening" process which sometimes entails forcible confinement within temporary detention centres, as well as widespread torture and rape, before victims are executed at close range with a gunshot to the head, while their hands are bound behind their backs (United Nations 2022; Hook 2023, 28).

In a similar light, the *Genocide Report* identifies Russia's prolonged, large-scale missile attacks, drone strikes, and shelling as pertaining to the prohibited acts covered in Article II (a) of the Genocide Convention. As of August 2025, Russia had launched upwards of "9,600 missiles of various types and nearly 14,000 attack drones" at Ukrainian territories, while "Russian aircraft have dropped over 33,000 guided bombs on Ukrainian cities" (Hrebinka 2025). Over 5,200 of these missiles—or 54 about percent—targeted residential neighbourhoods, hospitals, schools, markets, and other forms of civilian infrastructure, resulting in the deaths of at least 1,000 civilians and wounding more than 5,000 others (Hrebinka 2025). Russian missile and drone strikes against civilian targets have resulted in numerous deadly incidents, including in Mariupol, Dnipro, and Kramatorsk, and involve the frequent use of cluster munitions, which are specifically banned under the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions due to their indiscriminate

effects and the long-lasting danger that they pose to civilians (Human Rights Watch 2023, 1). In a particularly telling example of Russian forces implementing the program of “denazification” through the use of missiles and airstrikes, it is estimated that approximately 600 civilians were killed in the bombing of the Donetsk Regional Academic Drama Theater in Mariupol on March 16, 2022, despite the fact that the word “Children” was written across the building’s roof in the Russian language and confirmed to be visible from the sky (Hook 2023, 28). Finally, as observed in the *Genocide Report*, the Russian armed forces and occupation authorities have attempted to “dispose of bodies in ways that have hindered investigations” as part of a broader, systematic effort to cover up and obfuscate evidence of their crimes during the war (Hook 2023, 30). The full extent of Russian crimes committed in the name of “restoring” the eternal unity of Russians and Ukrainians through “denazification” can only be determined with any accuracy once investigators are able to access the Ukrainian territories presently occupied by Russia, yet there will forever be concerns about the withholding or destruction of evidence by the perpetrators (Hook 2023, 30).

Article II (b): Causing Serious Bodily or Mental Harm to Members of the Group

As alluded to in the preceding section, the execution of Ukrainian civilians is part of a broader wartime program of “denazification,” wherein Russian state forces and occupation authorities have systematically inflicted serious bodily and mental harm upon Ukrainians in order to expunge expressions of national identity (Hook 2023, 31). As noted in the *Genocide Report*, these efforts have included “widespread and systematic torture, unlawful detentions, rape, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and unlawful transfers of the protected group in all areas of Russian control” (Hook 2023, 31). For example, the Russian armed forces and security services have launched a brutal campaign of mass torture against Ukrainian civilians and soldiers alike, in which victims are selected simply on the basis of whether they identify as Ukrainian and are supportive of Ukraine’s war effort, while the subsequent torture acts are fittingly labeled as “denazification sessions” by the perpetrators themselves (Hook 2023, 33). These “sessions” have included waterboarding, electric shock torture, physical beatings, suffocation, sexual violence, rape, and mock executions, and are oftentimes administered in punishment for the victim’s failure to visibly relinquish their Ukrainian national identity and adopt that of Russia, such as through the memorization of pro-Russian songs, poems, and slogans (Hook 2023, 32). Indeed, a Ukrainian survivor described being beaten for “not remembering the lyrics of the anthem of the Russian Federation” and as a “punishment for speaking Ukrainian” (United Nations 2023, 11). In this light, an investigation conducted by international lawyers of the Mobile Justice Team concluded that Russian mass torture chambers were directly financed by the Russian state and operated by the Russian security services, the Russian prison service and local collaborators, in “a carefully thought-out and financed blueprint with a clear objective to eliminate Ukrainian national and cultural identity” (Koshiw 2023).

The efforts of Russian state actors to expunge Ukrainian national identity from occupied territories is further evinced in the assembly and distribution of “hit lists” by the Russian

intelligence services operating in Ukraine, which are reported to include the names of many prominent Ukrainians, including government officials, journalists, activists, veterans, religious leaders, and lawyers, as well as representatives of Ukrainian culture and intellectual thought, with explicit instructions for either their liquidation, suppression, or recruitment for purposes of collaboration (Hook 2023, 33; Zabrotskyi et al. 2022, 10-11). Russian troops and occupation authorities have also attempted to compile comprehensive lists of the Ukrainian population in captured territories through door-to-door sweeps and registrations at “filtration camps,” which are intended to serve as mass holding centres to confine, monitor, intimidate and “re-educate” Ukrainians as part of the Russian state’s implementation of the program of “denazification” (Zabrotskyi et al. 2022, 11). Given that door-to-door sweeps and forcible transfers to filtration camps or torture facilities disproportionately target those Ukrainians who openly express their national and cultural identity, especially “civil servants, including teachers and community leaders, former and retired Ukrainian soldiers and policemen, and ordinary civilians, including children, known for patriotic sentiments or suspected of any support of the Ukrainian state,” Ukrainian residents in occupied territories have undertaken a wide range of measures to conceal their identity from Russian authorities (Chovgan et al. 2022, 7). Such measures have included, for instance, the “cutting out of patches of skin with revealing tattoos or dissolving their skin with acid,” with Ukrainian citizens citing their fears of “death, rape, detention, and other mistreatment without concealing this signifier of their Ukrainian identity” (Hook 2023, 35). The *Genocide Report* further highlighted that these tattoos included simple expressions of Ukrainian national identity, such as “wheat sheaves” or “a map of Ukraine with the inscription ‘home’” (Hook 2023, 35).

In all, the Russian state’s persistent efforts to extinguish Ukrainian national identity has taken a significant toll upon the physical and mental health of Ukrainian citizens. Physically, Russia’s full-scale invasion has resulted in approximately 100,000 amputations among the Ukrainian population as of November 2024 (Allen 2024), while many others have suffered “war-related blindness, deafness, severe burns, and other lifelong injuries” (Hook 2023, 38). Mentally, Ukrainians have experienced substantial psychological harms due to the war, with approximately 70 percent of the total population suffering from mental health issues and chronic stress as of February 2026, alongside the widespread quality of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (14.4 percent), complex PTSD (8.9 percent), depression (44.2 percent), anxiety (23.1 percent), and significant loneliness (38.6 percent), as measured in an online survey of Ukrainian adults aged 18 to 79 in 2024 (Wang et al. 2024, 1). Moreover, as of December 2024, approximately 43 percent of Ukrainian children were suffering of psychosocial stress, including symptoms anxiety, fear, moodiness, difficulty concentrating and irritability, while nearly 10 million Ukrainians—including 1.4 million children—are estimated to be at risk of developing mental health conditions due to the war (Save the Children 2024). Similar to cases of sexual and gender-based violence, mental health issues are frequently underreported and can result in “long-term mental and physical effects, including suicides and compounding health challenges” (Hook 2023, 40). According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Ukraine’s birthrate has declined by

35 percent since 2021 while nearly a third of Ukrainian children have fled the country since the full-scale invasion began, thereby providing further evidence of the Russian state's intent to destroy the Ukrainian nation by inflicting genocidal conditions and preventing births within the group, as evinced in more detail upon examining the following prohibited actions under Article II of the Genocide Convention (UNICEF 2025a).

Article II (c): Deliberately Inflicting on the Group Conditions of Life Calculated to Bring About Its Physical Destruction in Whole or in Part

The Russian state has undertaken a variety of measures that deliberately aim to inflict upon the Ukrainian national group the conditions of life to bring about its physical destruction, at least in part. As described in the *Genocide Report*, previous legal interpretations of the term “conditions of life” have included “the denial of food, medical services, and other basic necessities, as well as the systematic expulsion of the targeted group from their homes” (Hook 2023, 41). In this light, the Russian armed forces have sought to bring about these conditions through an incessant, indiscriminate bombing campaign upon residential infrastructure, including civilian housing and apartment blocks, and critical infrastructure responsible for water, power and communication within Ukraine, as well as medical facilities, grain warehouses, port infrastructure, and aid distribution centres (Hook 2023, 41).

Numerous Ukrainian cities, towns, and villages have been decimated “due to explosive weapons with wide area effects, such as missiles and loitering munitions, short-range drones, artillery shelling, or aerial bombs” in what the UN has identified as a paradigm case of “domicide,” or the systematic destruction of civilian housing during armed conflict (United Nations 2026, 16). As of February 2026, upwards of 2.5 million housing units and 236,000 residential buildings have been destroyed or damaged by Russian strikes since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, which translates to approximately 13 percent of Ukraine's total housing stock (United Nations 2026, 16-17). Russian bombardments have additionally targeted critical energy infrastructure as a means of cutting off residents from electricity, natural gas, as well as water and heating systems, including during the winter months wherein Ukrainian civilians have been required to survive without stable access to heating, electricity, and water supplies at temperatures well below freezing (Johnson 2026)—a wartime tactic that Ukrainians have referred to as *Kholodomor* (“death by cold”), which explicitly evokes the national memory of the Holodomor (“death by hunger”) perpetrated by Joseph Stalin and Soviet authorities against the residents of Soviet Ukraine in the early 1930s (Hook 2023, 42-43). Russian State Duma Deputy Andrey Gurulyov summarized the purpose of these bombardments in 2022, asserting that the strikes against civilian infrastructure had made it “impossible to survive ... There is no heating, no water, no sewer, and no lights. You can't cook food, no place to store food, there is no way to transport the food ... All of this is quite effective. I suppose this should be continued. This will produce a very good effect” (Hook 2023, 43).

Alongside these aforementioned measures that aim to inflict upon the Ukrainian national group the conditions of life to bring about its physical destruction, the Russian armed forces have persistently attacked Ukraine's healthcare system, including its hospitals, medical infrastructure, and health care workers, thereby reducing access to essential medical services for Ukrainian civilians and soldiers across the country (Hook 2023, 46). After four years of war, the Ukrainian healthcare system has suffered a total of 2,591 attacks, resulting in damage or destruction 1,389 times and the deaths of 359 health workers (Insecurity Insight 2026, 1), while Russian forces have increasingly resorted to "double-tap" strikes—involving two successive attacks on the same location, with calculated delays ranging from a few minutes to several hours—to deliberately target emergency responders, such as rescue teams, medics, and police (TVP 2026). As alluded to earlier, these persistent attacks against the Ukrainian healthcare system have directly contributed to a sharply declining birthrate, especially repeated missile and drone strikes upon perinatal centres and maternity hospitals, which directly pertains to Article II (d) of the Genocide Convention, while Ukraine has additionally experienced a doubling in premature births due to excessive stress and rapidly worsening living standards that are expected to further degrade infant survivability rates across the country (Varenysia 2022; Hook 2023, 47).

Russian efforts to destroy critical infrastructure in Ukraine and bring about unlivable conditions for Ukrainian civilians are encapsulated in the undertaking of devastating military sieges of cities across Ukraine, including Mariupol, Kharkiv, Kherson, Chernihiv, Sumy, Bakhmut, Pokrovsk, and many others. A particularly telling example of the devastation wrought by the "denazification" program is the Siege of Mariupol in 2022, which lasted for nearly three months—or 85 days—as part of the initial Russian offensive and involved systematic, calculated attacks upon objects indispensable to the survival "of the civilian population, including energy, water, food and distribution points, and healthcare infrastructure" (Ochab 2024). The siege resulted in the mass exodus of approximately 400,000 residents due to the abhorrent conditions brought about by the Russian attackers (United Nations 2026, 17), as well as the deaths of over 8,000 Ukrainians—a figure that is likely much higher, given the access constraints in Russian-occupied territories (Farge 2024). Those civilians who stayed or were trapped in the city were exposed to freezing temperatures with very little to no access to electricity and heating, drinking water, and healthcare, all while experiencing severe shortages of food, resulting from the persistent bombardment of supermarkets and distribution centres, while Russian forces on the ground willfully impeded access to humanitarian aid and denied Ukrainians access to organized evacuation routes in an attempt to use the mass starvation of civilians as a method of warfare (Ochab 2024). These bombings additionally damaged or destroyed over 90 percent of healthcare facilities and residential homes in Mariupol, contributing to mass displacement, homelessness, and disease (Ochab 2024; United Nations 2026, 17).

Despite the devastating humanitarian crisis that resulted in Mariupol, Russian occupation authorities prioritized miniscule changes to Ukrainian language road signs, the removal of commemorative statues, including a granite monument depicting the Holodomor, and the seizure

of Ukrainian cultural artifacts, in a blatant attempt to destroy Ukrainian cultural heritage (Hook 2023, 45-46). Indeed, the “rebuilding” of Mariupol entailed its forced Russification, whereas the siege itself had been designed to erase any visible traces of Ukrainian national and cultural identity from the city, thereby reflecting the eternal unity paradigm at the heart of the program of “denazification.” Russification policies in Mariupol have included, for instance, the influx of Russian labourers, the imposition of Russian-language curricula in schools, the coercion of residents to obtain Russian passports and become citizens of the Russian Federation, the facilitation of travel to Russian territories, the replacement of the Ukrainian currency (the hryvnya) with the Russian ruble, the introduction of Russian pensions, and the establishment of a pro-Russian media environment (Shevchenko 2023). As concluded in the *Genocide Report*, this dual process of de-Ukrainianization and Russification—or the explicit policy of “denazification”—aligns precisely with the definition of genocide as originally envisioned in Raphael Lemkin’s work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, and is far from limited to the siege and “reconstruction” of Mariupol; rather, this practice of destroying and erasing the Ukrainian national identity through its replacement with the imperial national identity of Russia is reflective of a systematic, coordinated pattern of conduct found throughout Russian-occupied territories (Hook 2023, 45).

On the one hand, the destruction of Ukrainian cultural heritage reflects an integral part of the first phase of this program, wherein the Russian armed forces and occupation authorities have confiscated or destroyed historical and fiction literature deemed to express the Ukrainian national identity, targeted Ukrainian museums, historical monuments and places of worship during armed conflict, and damaged, destroyed, or looted a wide range of Ukrainian cultural artifacts (Azarov et al. 2023, 251). These efforts have simultaneously been reinforced by bombing campaigns that target the schooling system across Ukraine, which have resulted in significant disruptions to “the socialization and cultural transmission processes that undergird the reproduction of the Ukrainian national group” (Hook 2023, 47); indeed, a UNICEF report published in November 2025 established that 1,611 schools had been confirmed as damaged or destroyed since the full-scale invasion began, while numerous unverified incidents suggest the true number is much higher (UNICEF 2025b). On the other hand, Russification policies such as those undertaken by occupation authorities in the “reconstruction” of Mariupol have entailed actions including (but not limited to): the replacement of signs written in Ukrainian with Russian ones; sweeping bans on the use of the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian language books in education in favour of the Russian language and Russian books; the pressuring of schoolteachers to adhere “to the Russian education programme and remove such subjects as Ukrainian language, literature and history from school curricula” (Azarov et al. 2023, 251-252); the settlement of Russian teachers, doctors, labourers, and youth organizations into occupied territories advertised to Russian citizens as “New Russia” (*Novorossiia*) by state authorities; rapid industrial expansion to integrate occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian economy (Malenko et al. 2026); and the coercion of Ukrainian civilians in occupied territories to obtain Russian

citizenship and renounce their Ukrainian citizenship in return (Rzheutska and Sokolova-Stekh 2023).

Another clear example of the Russian state's effort to carry out its program of "denazification" in a manner that pertains to Article II (c) of the Genocide Convention is the deployment of a mass "filtration process" designed to suppress Ukrainian resistance and enforce loyalty amongst the remaining civilian population by rooting out any visible expression of Ukrainian national identity. During "filtration" operations, Russian occupation authorities assess the threat level of individual Ukrainians according to their degree of attachment to the Ukrainian national identity, with "non-threatening" or "less-threatening" individuals either issued documentation or forcibly deported to Russia, oftentimes to remote locations, whereas "most-threatening" individuals are detained or imprisoned in occupied territories at "filtration camps" or deported to Russian holding facilities and prisons (US Department of State 2022). As of 2023, forcible deportations of Ukrainian civilians from occupied territories into Russia were estimated to exceed 2 million, a large number of whom were Ukrainian children—a direct violation of Article II (e) of the Genocide Convention (Hook 2023, 48-49). Moreover, Russian filtration camps have themselves served as a primary site for collecting biometric and behavioural data as well as separating Ukrainians from their country and place of identity, all while entailing the routine administration of "denazification sessions" as part of a systematic effort to force detainees to renounce their national identity (Hook 2023, 49). According to the Yale School of Public Health (2022), these filtration camps directly threaten the welfare of Ukrainian detainees given that "[t]he conditions of confinement ... allegedly include insufficient sanitation, shortages of food and water, cramped conditions, and reported acts consistent with torture." As summarized in the *Genocide Report*, although the Ukrainian national group is experiencing "degrading forms of mental [and] physical harm ... [within] the context of multiple centuries of formalized *Russification* governmental policies dating back to the Russian Empire ... [f]orcible, often violent Russification has served as a key distinguishing feature of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and may serve as a motive for the acts of physical and biological destruction that are occurring against Ukrainians" (Hook 2023, 49).

Article II (d): Imposing Measures Intended to Prevent Births Within the Group

In addition to implementing measures that are intended to bring about the *physical destruction* of the Ukrainian national group, which pertains to paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) in Article II of the Genocide Convention, the Russian state has also sought to carry out its *biological destruction* through numerous actions that violate paragraphs (d) and (e) (Lachowski 2025, 43). Beginning with the former, the Russian armed forces and occupation authorities have systematically committed sexual and gender-based violence across all age groups in captured Ukrainian territories and inside the Russian Federation (United Nation 2023, 12). These acts have been committed against Ukrainian soldiers and civilians alike, and are generally found to occur in two main situations: during house searches and against victims that Russian authorities have confined (United Nations 2023, 12). Documented cases of rape against Ukrainian women

and girls are widespread throughout Russian-occupied territories, and constitute part of a broader military strategy that aims to discourage the victims from marrying, having children, or contemplating future relationships (Hook 2023, 50). Accordingly, Russian soldiers have been recorded carrying Viagra alongside packs of condoms, while witnesses assert that Russian commanders have ordered, suggested, or acquiesced to the undertaking of mass rape (Hook 2023, 51). These rapes are oftentimes committed under the pretext of *zachistka* and take place during door-to-door searches for visible expressions of Ukrainian national identity or support for Ukraine's war effort, wherein most of the victims are women alone at home (United Nations 2023, 12). Rape has also occurred with regularity during the so-called "denazification sessions" at Russian torture centres, alongside other extreme acts of brutality, including beatings and strangling (United Nations 2023, 12). In one particularly telling instance, a woman who was raped, tortured, and beaten over the course of ten days during the occupation of Izium was told by Russian soldiers that they planned to "beat the Ukrainian out of [her]" (Hook 2023, 51). In another case recorded during the occupation of Bucha, Russian soldiers systematically raped 25 girls and women confined in a basement after openly stating their intention to "rape them to the point where they wouldn't want sexual contact with any man, to prevent them from having Ukrainian children" (Limaye 2022).

There are also numerous recorded instances of Russian sexual and gender-based violence being committed against male civilians and prisoners of war, especially during unlawful confinement in occupied Ukrainian territories (United Nations 2023, 12). The UN Independent Inquiry has established a pattern of evidence indicating that sexual violence against men "amounting to torture, and the threat of such, have been important aspects of the torture exercised by Russian authorities, with methods including rape, electric shocks on genitals, traction on the penis using a rope, and emasculation" (United Nations 2023, 12). Sexual violence thus forms an integral part of Russian "denazification sessions," which aim to expunge expressions of Ukrainian identity through physical punishment, degrading treatment, and extreme humiliation, while certain forms of violence such as castration and emasculation explicitly aim to prevent the biological propagation of the Ukrainian national group. Indeed, the castration of Ukrainian military men captured during combat has become a widespread, systematic practice among Russian troops and occupation authorities, and is intentionally designed to prevent births within the Ukrainian national group. According to a psychologist working with Ukrainian soldiers who suffered castration while in captivity, her patients "told [her] that Russians performed castration procedures very skillfully, as if they knew how to do it" (Hook 2023, 52; Lamb 2023). Tellingly, her patients also explained that "[t]he Russians told them, '[w]e are doing this so you can't have kids'" (Hook 2023, 52; Lamb 2023).

Article II (e): Forcibly Transferring Children of the Group to Another Group

Finally, genocidal intent can be derived from the systematic practice of transferring large numbers of Ukrainian children into Russia or Russian-controlled territories (including Belarus) for purposes of forced Russification, which both violates Article II (e) of the Genocide

Convention and aligns with the original, imperial-totalitarian definition of genocide as advanced by Raphael Lemkin. As of April 2026, over 20,570 identities of Ukrainian children abducted by Russian state actors have been verified by Ukrainian officials (Rashevskaya 2026), while the total amount of Ukrainian children transferred into Russia or Russian-occupied territories was reported at over 700,000 in 2023 by Russia's Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, whereas "her Ukrainian counterpart, Daria Herasymchuk, estimates the true number to be between 200,000-300,000" (Ödebrink 2026, 2). These efforts to "relocate" and "re-educate" Ukrainian children mark a significant acceleration of an existing policy implemented by the Russian government during the annexation of Crimea and occupation of territories in the Donbas region in 2014, wherein Ukrainian children were abducted from occupied territories and then adopted into Russian families under the so-called "Trains of Hope" program (Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine 2023, 1). As outlined in the *Genocide Report*, transfers following the full-scale invasion occur according to four common pretexts articulated by the Russian government—adoptions and foster care, stays in so-called "recreation camps," alleged security reasons, and supposed medical care—and impact four categories of children: "children deemed orphans by the Russian state, unaccompanied children (i.e., those who have been separated from their parents, either due to non-war-related family circumstances or due to the war), children under the care of Ukrainian state institutions, and children with clear guardianship" (Hook 2023, 53-54). The Russian government has also undertaken measures to facilitate the process of adopting and assimilating transferred Ukrainian children, including through the alteration of its citizenship laws to grant federal authorities the ability to apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of the children without consent from the child nor the child's legal guardian (Hook 2023, 54).

Those children residing within occupied Ukrainian territories have become the primary targets of the Russian state's official policy of abduction, deportation, and indoctrination. In this light, occupation authorities in Ukraine have been documented searching for children in captured territories for purposes of abduction and deportation to "re-education" facilities or Russian adoptive families (Hook 2023, 56). This has forced Ukrainian residents to hide their children out of the fear that they will be abducted and deported, especially given that Russian authorities take deliberate steps to conceal the identities of transferred children or "make it otherwise challenging for them to be returned home" (Hook 2023, 53). As described by a Ukrainian orphanage director after Federal Security Service (FSB) agents and Russian soldiers entered his village to transfer away Ukrainian children, "we saw Russian propagandists saying that they need to take the orphans and give them to military schools, indoctrinate them and let them fight for Russia. It was the scariest thing so we started hiding children because we understood they would take them" (Waghorn 2022).

In many cases, however, Ukrainians are coerced into sending children of all four categories to "recreation camps" established across Russia and Russian controlled territories, which are explicitly designed to promote "cultural, historical, societal, and patriotic messages or ideas that serve the political interests of Russia and denigrate or deny Ukrainian identity" (Hook

2023, 55). These camps form a core component of a larger infrastructural network established across Russia and Russian-occupied territories that serves to advance the Russification and militarization of Ukrainian children, and which comprises a wide range of facilities, including cadet schools, military bases, medical facilities, religious sites, and universities, while the transferred children are exposed to programs that involve patriotic indoctrination, combat drills, paratrooper training, and drone assembly for the Russian armed forces (Cookman 2025). According to a 2025 report published by the Yale School of Public Health, children from Ukraine have been taken to at least 210 different locations in Russia and occupied Ukrainian territories, with re-education activities occurring at the majority of the locations identified, or at least 130 sites (62 percent) (Farrenkopf et al. 2025, 1). Moreover, the report identified that militarization programs have occurred at approximately 19 percent of locations, consisting of “combat training, ceremonial parades and drills, assembly of drones and other materiel, and education in military history,” and that the Russian government is directly responsible for managing at least 50 percent of the total locations, including 55 percent “of the locations where re-education activities occurred and 58 [percent] of locations where militarization of children from Ukraine occurred” (Farrenkopf et al. 2025, 2).

These locations exist under a broader national project titled “Youth and Children,” wherein the Russian Federation “plans to allocate nearly 1.8 trillion rubles from the federal budget ... [to] indoctrinating children—including Ukrainian children in occupied territories—to turn them into Russian patriots prepared both physically and mentally to fight for Russian imperial interests” (Rashevskaya 2026). In occupied Ukrainian territories, the Russian state claims that over 344,000 Ukrainian children are participating in the “Movement of the First,” a Soviet-era, state-sponsored youth organization and indoctrination mechanism “for children and young adults ages 6 to 25 that Russian President Vladimir Putin revived and that has become the largest such Russian youth organization” (Rashevskaya 2026). As of April 2026, approximately 44,000 Ukrainian children are also members of the “Youth Army” (Yunarmiya), which operates as “a state-controlled militarized youth organization that encourages aggression, cultivates hostile narratives, and prepares children for potential future participation in armed conflicts” (Rashevskaya 2026). Importantly, as Ukrainian children are forcibly exposed to pro-Russian narratives and assimilated into the Russian nation at re-education compounds, they are simultaneously pressured to renounce their Ukrainian identity. For instance, Russian occupation authorities have systematically denied Ukrainian children the ability to return home due to their “pro-Ukrainian views,” and established regulations within recreation camps that do not permit discussion about Ukraine nor the public expression of Ukrainian identity, including language and symbols (Hook 2023, 55-56; Hird 2025). In all, the state-led operation to systematically rob Ukrainian children of their identity, citizenship, and national group belonging while forcibly transforming them into pro-Russian militants offers further evidence of the genocidal intent that underpins the program of “denazification,” wherein the “Russian Federation does not simply seek to annex Ukrainian territory, but to erase a generation of Ukrainians in order to argue and demonstrate to the world

that the territories it has occupied from Ukraine are now irreversibly Russian” (Ödebrink 2026, 1).

Chapter VI

Conclusion

“‘We can do it again’— No. ‘Never again’— Yes.’”

—Moldovan President Maia Sandu, 2022

In the introduction to the study, it was made clear that collective memory functions as a powerful force that underlies the Russian state’s negationist tendencies towards the Ukrainian nation and its distinctive history, and informs the genocidal characteristics of its grueling war of attrition in Ukraine. Based upon the observations of Raphael Lemkin, it then posed the following as its guiding research question: *How exactly has collective memory contributed to the genocidal dimensions at the heart of Russia’s war in Ukraine?* Responding to this question first meant establishing an intuitive and pertinent conceptual framework to explain how *collective memory* translates into *kinetic warfare*—in this particular instance, understood as encompassing the genocidal *discourse* and *actions* of the Russian state. For this, the study turned to the notion of a *memory-security nexus*, or that collective memory and the identity-based needs of the state—as manifest in the imperative to sustain ontological security—are inextricably linked and thus co-constitutive of one another, and that preserving the memory architecture of the state can entail its transformation into a matter of national security that necessitates drastic, rule-breaking behaviour to counter existential threats, whether real or perceived. With reference to earlier studies that describe the gradual decline of bilateral relations between post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine as evidence of an identity-based, ontological security dilemma, the study posits that the Russian full-scale invasion marked the decisive moment at which the struggle over *national history*—understood as a linear, narrativized mode of representing the most significant past experiences of a titular nation, to which the state seeks continuity—became a truly existential affair, made visible upon the battlefield, within occupied territories, and across discursive channels, especially through the genocidal conduct of the Russian state.

To substantiate its argument, the study began with an investigation of the *content* and *form* of Russian and Ukrainian national histories at the outset of the full-scale invasion, thereby covering the main historical events that are mentioned within them, including the actors and circumstances involved, as well as the manner in which the link between the past and the present is established. Drawing upon the notion that the content and form of collective memory is determined by clearly identifiable political agendas in the present, the investigation reveals that Russia and Ukraine have come to hold mutually exclusive interpretations of national history. On the one hand, as the aggressor state, Russia’s genocidal tendencies in its war against Ukraine are rooted in the search for historical continuity with its great power status from the Tsarist and Soviet eras, which entails the validation of a national history wherein the Ukrainian territories are forcibly “reunified” with the Russian Federation and completely expunged of Ukraine’s

national identity through the program of “denazification.” Most importantly, this wartime program of “denazification” is derived straight from Russia’s national history, which is structured around a *narrative template* that emphasizes the eternal civilizational unity and shared political destiny of Russians and Ukrainians, stretching back to the medieval polity of Kyivan Rus’. On the other hand, Kyiv’s staunch commitment to armed resistance against the Russian invasion is rooted above all in its desire to preserve the Ukrainian nationhood and maintain its newfound political independence under a sovereign, democratic state in the post-Soviet era. In a similar light, this desire is derived from Ukraine’s national history, which is defined by its past struggles for independence, statehood, and national self-determination against foreign powers, and punctuated by periods of repression and assimilation, but also liberation and progress towards a politically independent Ukrainian nation-state.

From there, the study turned to addressing the question of how national history has contributed to the genocidal dimensions at the heart of Russia’s war in Ukraine. It did so through a detailed examination of the Russian state’s wartime *conduct*—that is, the aggregation of its *discourse* and *actions*—according to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the “Genocide Convention”). This was accomplished through a detailed overview of the Russian state’s efforts to incite genocide through an explicit discourse of “denazification,” consisting of *denial*, *dehumanization*, and *destruction*, and a focused investigation of its documented actions in Ukraine that violate the five prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention. In sum, the examination found that the genocidal program of “denazification” is in truth Moscow’s violent attempt to make the historical fiction of eternal civilizational unity between Russians and Ukrainians into a reality, and is therefore heavily implicated with Russia’s imperial understanding of its national history and the memory architecture that sustains it. These findings were also consistent with Raphael Lemkin’s notion of genocide, which he first defined in the 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* as a two-step crime of an imperial-totalitarian character, necessitating both the “destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group ... [and] the imposition of the national pattern of the aggressor” (Lemkin 1944, 79). The study concluded with the statement that the Russian state is indeed responsible for the commission of genocide against the Ukrainian national group, given that it has engaged in a pattern of conduct from which *genocidal intent* can be inferred (*mens rea*) and gravely violated *all five* of the prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention (*actus reus*).

In all, the Russia-Ukraine War is found to be a *(post)colonial* and *genocidal struggle*, wherein Ukraine as a politically independent nation-state and Russia as a great imperial power cannot coexist peacefully. Given that Russia is the unambiguous aggressor in the war against Ukraine, the study dedicated a substantial portion of its focus to illuminating precisely how Russian national history as interpreted through the eternal unity paradigm informs its pursuit of a genocidal program of “denazification” through both words and actions. In this light, future research must aim to further elucidate the relationship between the national history of Ukraine

and the precise characteristics of the country's efforts to resist the Russian full-scale invasion. Indeed, research of this type is absolutely essential since the Ukrainian armed resistance remains the primary obstacle to the implementation of the Russian state's desired program of "denazification," which entails the forcible "de-Ukrainization" and "Russification" of the Ukrainian people. In essence, the very existence of Ukraine's statehood and sovereignty, as well as its people's distinctive national identity, culture, and history rests upon continued resistance to the Russian invasion. Ensuring that Ukraine's story is documented and studied is a noble aim for future research, regardless of the outcome to the Russia-Ukraine War.

Moreover, the postcolonial dimension of the Russia-Ukraine War should not be overlooked in future research, especially when considering that Ukraine is a country whose peoples and territories have been subjected to colonization for much of its national history, including by the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and Nazi Germany. As described by Maria Mälksoo (2023, 473-474), the Russian state has historically adhered to a "dynastic" form of colonization in its Eastern European neighbourhood, wherein "local elites were assimilated into the imperial project and colonial relations were ethnicized," meaning that "local language and culture became a stigma, a sign of backwardness, 'blackness,' and inferiority vis-a-vis the superior Russophones who represented both wealth and power," which during the Soviet era, became equivalent to "a relative, largely fictitious wealth of the Soviet cities, and absolute, highly coercive power of the totalitarian state." Examining how Russian colonial practices in the war against Ukraine borrow from previous historical periods presents a worthwhile avenue for future research, with potential areas of focus including the revival of imperial-era language towards Ukraine, the coordinated, systematic attempt of the Russian security services to liquidate the Ukrainian political leadership and intelligentsia, or the forcible assimilation of Ukrainians into Russia's imperial identity through "re-education" and militarization programs. Conversely, the pursuit of further research that frames the Ukrainian war effort through the lens of postcolonial resistance, whether through an examination of the Ukrainian government's pursuit of decolonization through the promulgation of "memory laws" that align with its favoured interpretation of national history, the renaming of streets, cities, and monuments under the dual programs of "decommunization" and "de-Russification," or the invaluable role of Ukrainian civil society in countering the fictional historical narratives of the Kremlin and opening up the domestic space to facilitate political deliberation on contentious topics within the collective memory of the Ukrainian people, all stand to contribute quite significantly to the extant body of literature on the Russia-Ukraine War.

As a final note, it is well worth reiterating the conclusion that the Russian state is responsible for the commission of genocide against the Ukrainian national group, given that it has engaged in a pattern of conduct from which genocidal intent can be inferred and gravely violated all five of the prohibited acts under Article II of the Genocide Convention. In this light, the study ends by calling upon members of the international community to reflect upon whether they have adequately upheld their *responsibility to prevent genocide* under Article I of the

Genocide Convention, and to take the necessary actions to meet their prevention obligation should these efforts be considered insufficient (United Nations 1948, 280). In upholding the *raison d'être* of the Genocide Convention and its prevention mandate, the international community stands to deliver a clear message to Russia, the Ukrainian people, and observers of the war around the world, as affirmed by Moldovan President Maia Sandu: “‘We can do it again’ — No. ‘Never again’ — Yes” (Hook 2023, 57).

References

Chapter I:

- Associated Press. "President Zelenskyy Says 'We Are Not Afraid' as Putin Orders Troops to Eastern Ukraine." *PBS News*, February 21, 2022. Accessed February 12, 2026. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/president-zelenskyy-says-we-are-not-afraid-as-putin-orders-troops-to-eastern-ukraine>.
- Azarov, Denys, Dmytro Koval, Gaiane Nuridzhanian, and Volodymyr Venher. "Understanding Russia's Actions in Ukraine as the Crime of Genocide." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 21, no. 2 (2023): 233-264. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqad018>.
- Barkawi, Tarak. "War and Decolonization in Ukraine." *New Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (2022): 317-322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825X221132935>.
- Bowen, Andrew S. "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Issues and Aspects." *Congressional Research Service*, February 28, 2022. Accessed February 12, 2026. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IN/PDF/IN11872/IN11872.1.pdf.
- Diamond, Yonah. "An Independent Legal Analysis of the Russian Federation's Breaches of the Genocide Convention in Ukraine and the Duty to Prevent." *Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights*, May 2022. <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/English-Report.pdf>.
- Hilmar, Till. "Signifying the present in links to the past: Memory Organizations React to the February 24, 2022, Russian Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (2025): 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-025-00267-7>.
- Hook, Kristina. "The Russian Federation's Escalating Commission of Genocide in Ukraine: A Legal Analysis." *Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights*, July 2023. <https://www.raoulwallenbergcentre.org/images/reports/2023-07-26-Genocide-Ukraine-Report.pdf>.
- Hrushetskyi, Anton. "'We Can See Even Without Light That You Are...': The Attitude of Ukrainians Towards Russia and Russians." *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, October 24, 2025. Accessed March 27, 2026. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1564&page=1>.
- Jones, Seth G., and Riley McCabe. "Russia's Grinding War in Ukraine: Massive Losses and Tiny Gains for a Declining Power." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 27, 2026. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-grinding-war-ukraine>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "History Politics in the Russian-Ukrainian Relations, the 2000s-2022: Shared Past as a Casus Belli." *Nationalities Papers* (2025): 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2025.24>.
- Lemkin, Raphael. "Speech: 'Soviet Genocide in the Ukraine'." In *Holodomor: Reflections on the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine*. Ontario: Kashtan Press, 2008 (1953). https://education.holodomor.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/LEMKIN-UN-SPEECH-FULL%E2%80%9393Holodomor_PartIV_Friesens.pdf.

- Mäklsoo, Maria. "The Postcolonial Moment in Russia's War Against Ukraine." *Journal of Genocide Research* 25, no. 3-4 (2023): 471-481.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.
- McGlynn, Jade. "Crossing Thresholds: Ukrainian Resistance to Russian Occupation." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 18, 2024.
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/crossing-thresholds-ukrainian-resistance-russian-occupation>.
- McGlynn, Jade. "Thresholds of Survival: The Resistance in Occupied Ukraine." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 14, 2026.
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/thresholds-survival-resistance-occupied-ukraine>.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2023.
- Putin, Vladimir. "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." *President of Russia*, February 21, 2022a. Accessed February 10, 2026.
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.
- Putin, Vladimir. "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." *President of Russia*, February 24, 2022b. Accessed February 15, 2026.
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.
- Roth, Andrew, and Julian Borger. "Putin Orders Troops into Eastern Ukraine on 'Peacekeeping Duties'." *The Guardian*, February 21, 2022. Accessed February 12, 2026.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/ukraine-putin-decide-recognition-breakaway-states-today>.
- Rousso, Henry. *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Rousso, Henry. "The Political and Cultural Roots of Negationism in France." *South Central Review* 23, no. 1 (2006): 67-88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40039914>.
- Russian Security Council. "Security Council Meeting." *President of Russia*, February 21, 2022. Accessed February 11, 2026. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67825>.
- Sergeyev, Timofey. "What Should Russia do with Ukraine?" *RIA Novosti*, April 3, 2022. Accessed February 16, 2026. <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>.
- Snyder, Timothy. "Russia's Genocide Handbook: The Evidence of Atrocity and of Intent Mounts." *Substack*, April 8, 2022a. Accessed March 27, 2026.
<https://snyder.substack.com/p/russias-genocide-handbook>.
- Snyder, Timothy. "The War In Ukraine is a Colonial War." *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2022b. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war>.

- TASS. "Donetsk and Luhansk 'People's Republics' Appeal to Putin for Help 'Repelling' Ukraine." *Meduza*, February 23, 2022. Accessed February 15, 2026. <https://meduza.io/en/news/2022/02/24/donetsk-and-luhansk-people-s-republics-appeal-to-putin-for-help-repelling-ukraine>.
- United Nations. "United Nations Charter (1945)." *The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration*, March 15, 2022. Accessed February 15, 2026. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/united-nations-charter>.
- Yefremenko, Dmitry V. "Mnemonic Security Dilemma: Memory as Casus Belli." *Russia in Global Affairs* 20, no. 4 (2022): 142-164. <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2022-20-4-142-164>.
- Zabrodskyi, Mykhaylo, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V. Danylyuk and Nick Reynolds. "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting From Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2022." *Royal United Services Institute*, November 30, 2022. <https://static.rusi.org/359-SR-Ukraine-Preliminary-Lessons-Feb-July-2022-web-final.pdf>.
- Chapter II:*
- Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ualberta/detail.action?docID=3300742>.
- Bachleitner, Kathrin. "Ontological Security as Temporal Security? The Role of 'Significant Historical Others' In World Politics." *International Relations* 37, no. 1 (2021): 25-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178211045624>.
- Barkawi, Tarak. "War and Decolonization in Ukraine." *New Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (2022): 317-322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825X221132935>.
- Batta, Anna. "Roadblocks to Peace in Russia's War in Ukraine." *Orbis* 68, no. 4 (2024): 666-676. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2024.09.010>.
- Bell, Duncan. "Introduction." In *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230627482>.
- Bernhard, Michael, and Jan Kubik. "A Theory of the Politics of Memory." In *Twenty Years After Communism*. New York: Oxford Academic Books, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199375134.003.0002>.
- Edwards, Sam. "World War II Memory Weaponized: The US, UK and Ukrainian Memory Diplomacy." *Journal of Applied History* 4, no. 1-2 (2022): 46-57. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895893-bja10024>.
- Ejdus, Filip. "Ontological Security and the Politics of Memory in International Relations." In *Handbook on the Politics of Memory*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800372535.00009>.
- Erll, Astrid. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 4-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570>.

- Fetzer, Thomas, and Ivan Nikolovski. "The Russo-Ukrainian War and Memory Politics and International Relations." *Global Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2025): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksaf109>.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Gustafsson, Karl. "Memory Politics and Ontological Security in Sino-Japanese Relations." *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (2014): 71-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2013.852156>.
- Gustafsson, Karl. "Temporal Othering, De-Securitization and Apologies: Understanding Japanese Security Policy Change." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23, no. 3 (2020): 511-534. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-00168-y>.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 (1925).
- Hilmar, Till. "Signifying the present in links to the past: Memory Organizations React to the February 24, 2022, Russian Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (2025): 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-025-00267-7>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "History Politics in the Russian-Ukrainian Relations, the 2000s-2022: Shared Past as a Casus Belli." *Nationalities Papers* (2025): 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2025.24>.
- Klymenko, Lina. "Cutting the Umbilical Cord: The Narrative of the National Past and Future in Ukrainian De-Communization Policy." In *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986172>.
- Klymenko, Lina. "The International Politics of Memory." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2022): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.664>.
- Khongreiwo, Phungshok. "Contested Memory and Legacy in International Relations: The Case of Kievan Rus' in Defining Russo-Ukrainian Relations, 1989-2025." *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 7, no. 6 (2025): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i06.65017>.
- Lind, Jennifer. *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801462283>.
- Malinova, Olga. "Politics of Memory and Nationalism." *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 6 (2021): 997-1007. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.87>.
- Mälksoo, Maria. "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe." *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 653-680. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109345049>.
- Mälksoo, Maria. "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security." *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 221-237. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26292349>.

- Mälksoo, Maria. "The Postcolonial Moment in Russia's War Against Ukraine." *Journal of Genocide Research* 25, no. 3-4 (2023): 471-481.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.
- Mearsheimer, John J. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin." *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77-89.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483306>.
- Mearsheimer, John J. "The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War." *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 1, no. 21 (2022): 12-27.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48686693>.
- Mitzen, Jennifer. "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341-370.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. "Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory." In *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491580.001>.
- Munster, Rens van. "Securitization." *Oxford Bibliographies*, June 26, 2012. Accessed March 5, 2026. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0091.xml>.
- Noordenbos, Boris, and Daria Khlevniuk. "Unpacking 'Historical Analogies' in International Relations: Memory Politics in Pro-Kremlin Reporting on the Russian War Against Ukraine." *Global Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2025): 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksaf103>.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 1, no. 26 (1989): 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333-348. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370189>.
- Olick, Jeffery K. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203941478>.
- Orwell, George. *1984*. Seattle: Amazon Classics, 2021 (1949).
- Palermo, Francesco. "Irredentism." *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law*, October 2010. Accessed March 1, 2026.
<https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e838>.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation?" In *Nation & Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990 (1882).
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203388341>.

- Safire, William. "On Language; The Near Abroad." *The New York Times*, May 22, 1994. Accessed March 4, 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/22/magazine/on-language-the-near-abroad.html>.
- Shevchenko, Vitaly. "'Little Green Men' or 'Russian Invaders?'" *BBC News*, March 11, 2014. Accessed March 4, 2026. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.
- Sierp, Aline. "Memory Studies – Development, Debates and Directions." In *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung*. Springer Nature, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26593-9_42-1.
- Sierp, Aline. "The Politics of Memory: Between History, Identity and Conflict." *Government and Opposition* 60, no. 4 (2025): 1464-1483. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2025.10011>.
- Snyder, Timothy. "The War In Ukraine is a Colonial War." *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2022. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war>.
- Subotić, Jelena. "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (2016): 610-627. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26168124>.
- Terentyeva, Oleksandra. "The Right to Freedom: State-Driven Institutionalization of Decolonization Through Memory Politics in Ukraine (2022-2024)." *Global Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2025): 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksaf107>.
- Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation." In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London: Routledge, 2009 (1919). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203452196>.
- Wertsch, James V., and Zurab Karumidze. "Spinning the Past: Russian and Georgian Accounts of the War of August 2008." *Memory Studies* 2, no. 3 (2009): 377-391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698008337566>.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. "Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past." *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 1 (1996): 283-299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02393273>.
- Zubrzycki, Genevieve, and Anna Woźny. "The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46, no. 1 (2020): 175-194. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054808>.
- Zürn, Michael. "Politicization Compared: At National, European, and Global Levels." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 7 (2019): 977-995. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1619188>.

Chapter III:

- Allison, Graham. "The Thucydides Trap." In *The Next Great War? The Roots of World War I and the Risk of U.S.-China Conflict*. Cambridge: MIT Press Scholarship Online, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262028998.003.0006>.
- Azarov, Denys, Dmytro Koval, Gaiane Nuridzhanian, and Volodymyr Venher. "Understanding Russia's Actions in Ukraine as the Crime of Genocide." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 21, no. 2 (2023): 233-264. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqad018>.

- Bernhard, Michael, and Jan Kubik. "A Theory of the Politics of Memory." In *Twenty Years After Communism*. New York: Oxford Academic Books, 2014.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199375134.003.0002>.
- Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 (1832).
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ualberta/detail.action?docID=4964682>.
- Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ualberta/detail.action?docID=288451>.
- Hook, Kristina. "The Russian Federation's Escalating Commission of Genocide in Ukraine: A Legal Analysis." *Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights*, July 2023.
<https://www.raoulwallenbergcentre.org/images/reports/2023-07-26-Genocide-Ukraine-Report.pdf>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "Nationalist Memory Narratives and the Politics of History in Ukraine since the 1990s." *Nationalities papers* 52, no. 6 (2024): 1235-1254.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.10>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "History Politics in the Russian-Ukrainian Relations, the 2000s-2022: Shared Past as a Casus Belli." *Nationalities Papers* (2025): 1-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2025.24>.
- Knight, Andy W., and Tom Keating. "Conflict, Violence, and War in Global Politics." In *Global Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Latysh, Yurii. "The Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Memory Politics During the Russo-Ukrainian War." *Genocidas Ir Rezistencija* 2, no. 56 (2024): 196-217.
<https://doi.org/10.61903/GR.2024.212>.
- Milani, Tommaso M., John E. Richardson. "Discourses of Collective Remembering: Contestation, Politics, Affect." *Critical Discourse Studies* 20, no. 5 (2023): 459-476.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2090979>.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2023.
- Rhodes, Hilary. "The Lost Kingdom of St. Vladimir: Crusading Mentality, Medieval Memory, and the Russia-Ukraine War." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 54, no. 1 (2023): 177-196. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2023.a912676>.
- Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.
- Snyder, Timothy. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2018.
- Snyder, Timothy. "The War In Ukraine is a Colonial War." *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2022. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war>.

Chapter IV:

- Bækken, Håvard. "Merging the Great Patriotic War and Russian Warfare in Ukraine. A Case-Study of Russian Military Patriotic Clubs in 2022." *Political Research Exchange* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2023.2265135>.
- Bescotti, Elia, Fabian Burkhardt, Maryna Rabinovych, and Cindy Wittke. "Passportization: Russia's 'Humanitarian' Tool for Foreign Policy, Extra-Territorial Governance, and Military Intervention." *Global Citizenship Observatory*, March 25, 2022. Accessed March 13, 2026. <https://globalcit.eu/passportization-russias-humanitarian-tool-for-foreign-policy-extra-territorial-governance-and-military-intervention/>.
- Bivings, Liliane. "Explaining Ukraine: Ukraine's Orange Revolution." *The Kyiv Independent*, August 24, 2022. Accessed March 12, 2026. <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraines-orange-revolution/>.
- Bordachev, Timofei V. "Russian Foreign-Policy Culture and the Horde: A Hypothesis." *Russia in Global Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2023): 76-104. <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2023-21-2-76-104>.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew. "The Premature Partnership." *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994): 67-82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20045920.pdf>.
- Dickinson, Peter. "Putin's Ukraine Obsession Began 20 Years Ago with the Orange Revolution." *Atlantic Council*, November 26, 2024. Accessed March 12, 2026. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-ukraine-obsession-began-20-years-ago-with-the-orange-revolution/>.
- Düben, Björn A. "Revising History and 'Gathering the Russian Lands': Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian Nationhood." *LSE Public Policy Review* 3, no. 1 (2023): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.86>.
- German, Tracey. "What Did Russia Learn About the West from its Previous Military Maneuvers?" *King's College London*, February 25, 2022. Accessed March 13, 2026. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/what-did-russia-learn-about-the-west-from-its-previous-military-manoevres>.
- Hansler, Jennifer. "Russia Engaged in Extensive Effort to Force Ukrainians in Russian-Occupied Territories to Accept Russian Citizenship, Report Says." *CNN*, August 2, 2023. Accessed March 13, 2026. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/02/politics/russian-forced-passportization>.
- Harrison, Mark. "Counting the Soviet Union's War Dead: Still 26–27 Million." *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 6 (2019): 1036-1047. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26757422>.
- Hrushetskyi, Anton. "'We Can See Even Without Light That You Are...': The Attitude of Ukrainians Towards Russia and Russians." *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, October 24, 2025. Accessed March 14, 2026. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1564&page=1>.

- Hryn, Halyna. "The Executed Renaissance Paradigm Revisited." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27, no. 1-4 (2005): 67-96. <https://www.husj.harvard.edu/articles/the-executed-renaissance-paradigm-revisited>.
- Interfax-Ukraine. "Most Ukrainians Don't Support Putin's Statement That Russians and Ukrainians are One People." *Kyiv Post*, July 27, 2021. Accessed March 14, 2026. <https://archive.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/most-ukrainians-dont-support-putins-statement-that-russians-and-ukrainians-are-one-people.html>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "Nationalist Memory Narratives and the Politics of History in Ukraine since the 1990s." *Nationalities papers* 52, no. 6 (2024): 1235-1254. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.10>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "History Politics in the Russian-Ukrainian Relations, the 2000s-2022: Shared Past as a Casus Belli." *Nationalities Papers* (2025): 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2025.24>.
- Katchanovski, Ivan. "Terrorists or National Heroes? Politics of the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine." *Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies*, 2010. <https://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2010/Katchanovski.pdf>.
- Keleher, Edward P., and Donald L. Layton. "Golden Horde." *EBSCO*, 2022. Accessed March 17, 2026. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/golden-horde>.
- Khongreiwo, Phungshok. "Contested Memory and Legacy in International Relations: The Case of Kievan Rus' in Defining Russo-Ukrainian Relations, 1989-2025." *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 7, no. 6 (2025): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i06.65017>.
- Koposov, Nikolay. *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Latysh, Yurii. "The Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Memory Politics During the Russo-Ukrainian War." *Genocidas Ir Rezistencija* 2, no. 56 (2024): 196-217. <https://doi.org/10.61903/GR.2024.212>.
- Lavrov, Sergey V. "Russia had 'No Choice' But to Launch 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine, Lavrov Tells UN." *UN Affairs*, September 24, 2022. Accessed March 14, 2026. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1127881>.
- Lev, Vasyly, and Illia Vytanovych. "Populism, Western Ukrainian." *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, 1993. Accessed March 25, 2026. <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CO%5CPo%5CpopulismWesternUkrainian.htm>.
- Madden, Paul. "Russia's Time of Troubles." *EBSCO*, 2022. Accessed March 22, 2026. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/russias-time-troubles>.
- Mälksoo, Maria. "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security." *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 221-237. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26292349>.

- Mankoff, Jeffrey. "Russia's War in Ukraine: Identity, History, and Conflict." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, April 22, 2022. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>.
- Markus, Vasyl, and Ihor Stebelsky. "Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic." *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, 1993. Accessed March 25, 2026. <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainianSovietSocialistRepublic.htm>.
- Marschelke, Jan. "National Identity." In *Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy*. Springer Nature, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6519-1_324.
- Mitzen, Jennifer. "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>.
- Orzechowski, Marcin. "Russkiy Mir (Russian World): An Exemplification of All-Russian Nationalism. The Strategy of Neo-Imperial Expansionism of the Russian Federation in Regional and Global Dimensions." *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 53, no. 3 (2024): 21-33. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1281680>.
- Ostrowski, Donald. "The Growth of Muscovy (1462-1533)." In *The Cambridge History of Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521812276.010>.
- Person, Robert, and Michael McFaul. "What Putin Fears Most." *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 2 (2022): 18-27. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0015>.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2023.
- Putin, Vladimir. "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation." *President of Russia*, April 25, 2005. Accessed March 13, 2026. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>.
- Putin, Vladimir. "Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II." *The National Interest*, June 18, 2020. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>.
- Putin, Vladimir. "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." *President of Russia*, July 12, 2021. Accessed March 23, 2026. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.
- Putin, Vladimir. "Signing of Treaties on Accession of Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson Regions to Russia." *President of Russia*, September 30, 2022a. Accessed March 22, 2026. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>.

- Putin, Vladimir. "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." *President of Russia*, February 24, 2022b. Accessed March 24, 2026. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.
- Remy, Johannes. "The Valuev Circular and Censorship of Ukrainian Publications in the Russian Empire (1863-1876): Intention and Practice." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 49, no. 1-2 (2007): 87-110. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40871165>.
- Rhodes, Hilary. "The Lost Kingdom of St. Vladimir: Crusading Mentality, Medieval Memory, and the Russia-Ukraine War." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 54, no. 1 (2023): 177-196. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2023.a912676>.
- Shkundin, Mark. "Ukraine: Different from Russia." *Russia in Global Affairs*, April 13, 2004. Accessed March 14, 2026. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/ukraine-different-from-russia/>.
- Sierp, Aline. "The Politics of Memory: Between History, Identity and Conflict." *Government and Opposition* 60, no. 4 (2025): 1464-1483. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2025.10011>.
- Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.
- Snyder, Timothy. "Vladimir Putin's Politics of Eternity." *The Guardian*, March 16, 2018a. Accessed March 17, 2026. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/16/vladimir-putin-russia-politics-of-eternity-timothy-snyder>.
- Snyder, Timothy. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2018b.
- Snyder, Timothy. "The Frontline Interviews Timothy Snyder: Author, The Road to Unfreedom." *PBS Frontline*, September 26, 2022a. Accessed March 15, 2026. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/timothy-snyder/>.
- Snyder, Timothy. "The War In Ukraine is a Colonial War." *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2022b. Accessed January 27, 2026. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war>.
- Stanglin, Doug. "Vladimir Putin Blames Lenin for Soviet Collapse." *USA Today*, January 21, 2016. Accessed March 23, 2026. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/01/21/vladimir-putin-blames-lenin-soviet-collapse/79116132/>.
- Tumarkin, Nina. "The Great Patriotic War as Myth and Memory." *European Review* 11, no. 4 (2003): 595-611. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798703000504>.
- Walker, Nigel. "Conflict in Ukraine: A Timeline (2014 – Eve of 2022 Invasion)." *House of Commons Library*, August 22, 2023. Accessed March 13, 2026. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9476/CBP-9476.pdf>.
- Walker, Shawn. "Putin Admits Russian Military Presence in Ukraine for First Time." *The Guardian*, December 17, 2015. Accessed March 13, 2026.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/vladimir-putin-admits-russian-military-presence-ukraine>.

Wertsch, James V., and Zurab Karumidze. "Spinning the Past: Russian and Georgian Accounts of the War of August 2008." *Memory Studies* 2, no. 3 (2009): 377-391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698008337566>.

Yefremenko, Dmitry V. "Mnemonic Security Dilemma: Memory as Casus Belli." *Russia in Global Affairs* 20, no. 4 (2022): 142-164. <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2022-20-4-142-164>.

Zelenskyy, Volodymyr. "Full Translation: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Feb. 23 Speech." *Lawfare*, February 24, 2022. Accessed March 24, 2026. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/full-translation-ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelenskyys-feb-23-speech>.

Chapter V:

Allen, Nick. "Wounded by War, Ukrainians Living with Amputations Find New Purpose as Prosthetists, Advocates." *Direct Relief*, November 26, 2024. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/wounded-war-ukrainians-living-amputations-find-new-purpose-prosthetists-advocates>.

Anderson, Claire. "'There Will Be No Mercy' Putin Mouthpiece Warns of 'Concentration Camps, Sterilisation.'" *Daily Express*, May 5, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1605292/putin-news-russia-ukraine-war-concentration-camps-sterilisation-vn>.

Applebaum, Anne. "Ukraine and the Words that Lead to Mass Murder." *The Atlantic*, April 25, 2022. Accessed April 23, 2026. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/06/ukraine-mass-murder-hate-speech-soviet/629629/>.

Apt, Clara, and Viola Gienger. "Russia's Eliminationist Rhetoric Against Ukraine: A Collection." *Just Security*, February 24, 2026. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://www.justsecurity.org/81789/russias-eliminationist-rhetoric-against-ukraine-a-collection/>.

Ash, Lucy. "How the Russian Orthodox Church is Recruiting for the Ukraine War – and Alienating Believers." *Chatham House*, March 16, 2026. Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2026-03/how-russian-orthodox-church-recruiting-ukraine-war-and>.

Azarov, Denys, Dmytro Koval, Gaiane Nuridzhanian, and Volodymyr Venher. "Understanding Russia's Actions in Ukraine as the Crime of Genocide." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 21, no. 2 (2023): 233-264. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqad018>.

BBC News. "Bucha Killings: Satellite Image of Bodies Site Contradicts Russian Claims." *Reality Check and BBC Monitoring*, April 11, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.bbc.com/news/60981238>.

- Biscontini, Tyler. "Bucha Massacre." *EBSCO*, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/military-history-and-science/bucha-massacre>.
- Chovgan, Vadym, Mykhailo Romanov, Vasyi Melnychuk. "'Nine Circles of Hell': Places of Detention in Ukraine Under the Russian Occupation." *Dignity Publication Series on Torture and Organised Violence*, 2022. <https://dignity.dk/wp-content/uploads/42-Nine-circles-of-hell.pdf>.
- Cookman, Liz. "Russia has Network of 200 Camps for 'Brainwashing' Ukrainian Children – Report." *The Guardian*, September 16, 2025. Accessed April 27, 2026. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/sep/16/russia-has-network-of-200-camps-for-brainwashing-ukrainian-children-report>.
- Diamond, Yonah. "An Independent Legal Analysis of the Russian Federation's Breaches of the Genocide Convention in Ukraine and the Duty to Prevent." *Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights*, May 2022. <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/English-Report.pdf>.
- Early Warning Project. "Ongoing Mass Killing: Countries Currently Experiencing Mass Killing." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 2026. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/ongoing-mass-killing>.
- Efimov, Artem. "Who Came Up with the Slogan 'We Can Do It Again' and Why?" *Meduza*, May 9, 2022. Accessed April 19, 2026. <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/05/09/kto-i-zachem-pridumal-lozung-mozhem-povtorit>.
- Estemirova, Lana. "Putin's Terror Playbook: If You Want a Picture of Ukraine's Future, Look to My Home, Chechnya." *The Guardian*, April 13, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/13/russia-ukraine-chechnya-moscow-aggression-putin-victims>.
- Farge, Emma. "More Than 8,000 Killed During 2022 Mariupol Siege – Human Rights Watch." *Reuters*, February 8, 2024. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/more-than-8000-killed-during-2022-mariupol-siege-human-rights-watch-2024-02-08/>.
- Farrenkopf, Paige, Caitlin N. Howarth, and Nathaniel A. Raymond et al. "Ukraine's Stolen Children: Inside Russia's Network of Re-Education and Militarization." *Yale School of Public Health Humanitarian Research Lab*, September 16, 2025. <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/e6294def-3f80-4d71-9cc7-91f6af70a523>.
- Hird, Karolina. "Russian Occupation Update, June 26, 2025." *Institute for the Study of War*, June 26, 2025. <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-occupation-update-june-26-2025/>.
- Hook, Kristina. "The Russian Federation's Escalating Commission of Genocide in Ukraine: A Legal Analysis." *Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights*, July 2023. <https://www.raoulwallenbergcentre.org/images/reports/2023-07-26-Genocide-Ukraine-Report.pdf>.

- Hrebinka, Ostop. "Russia's Airborne Terror: How Many Missiles and Drones Have Hit Ukraine." *Frontliner*, August 11, 2025. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://frontliner.ua/en/official-data-how-many-missiles-russia-has-launched-at-ukraine/>.
- Human Rights Watch. "Cluster Munition Use in Russia-Ukraine War." *Human Rights Watch Background Briefing*, May 29, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/29/cluster-munition-use-russia-ukraine-war>.
- Insecurity Insight. "Ukraine's Health Care System Endures Over 2600 Attacks Four Years on from Russia's Full-Scale Invasion." *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, February 25, 2026. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraines-health-care-system-endures-over-2600-attacks-four-years-russias-full-scale-invasion>.
- Johnson, Daniel. "Ukraine: Families in 'Survival Mode' Amid Russian Strikes and Deadly Cold." *United Nations*, January 16, 2026. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166774>.
- Kasianov, Georgiy. "Nationalist Memory Narratives and the Politics of History in Ukraine since the 1990s." *Nationalities papers* 52, no. 6 (2024): 1235-1254. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.10>.
- Koshiw, Isobel. "Kherson Torture Centres Were Planned by Russian State, Say Lawyers." *The Guardian*, March 2, 2023. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/02/kherson-torture-centres-were-planned-by-russian-state-say-lawyers>.
- Kyslytsya, Sergiy. "Letter Dated 24 April 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General." *United Nations General Assembly: Seventy-Eighth Session*, April 24, 2024. <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/331>.
- Lachowski, Tomasz. "Historical Soviet and Contemporary Russian Criminal Acts Against Ukrainians Under the UN Genocide Convention of 1948." In *The Russian Ukrainian Conflict and War Crimes: Challenges for Documentation and International Prosecution*. New York: Routledge, 2025. <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.4324/9781003493785>.
- Lamb, Christina. "She Thought She was Unshockable, Then Two Castrated Ukrainian Soldiers Arrived." *The Times*, June 17, 2023. Accessed April 27, 2026. <https://www.thetimes.com/world/russia-ukraine-war/article/ukraine-soldiers-castrated-russia-war-0hflzhzlv>.
- Lavrov, Sergey V. "Interview of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov with RIA Novosti and Russia 24 TV on Current Foreign Policy Issues, Moscow, December 28, 2023." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, December 28, 2023. https://mid.ru/ru/press_service/minister_speeches/1923676/.
- Lemkin, Raphael. *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944. <https://www.lawandisrael.org/wp-content/uploads/Topics/Holocaust/Genocide/Lemkin-Axis-Rule-Genocide.pdf>.

- Limaye, Yogita. "Ukraine Conflict: 'Russian Soldiers Raped Me and Killed My Husband.'" *BBC News*, April 11, 2022. Accessed April 27, 2026. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61071243>.
- Malenko, Anastasiia, Filipp Lebedev, Gleb Stolyarov, Ryan McNeill, and Mari Saito. "Welcome to 'New Russia': How the Kremlin is Remaking Occupied Ukraine." *Reuters*, March 26, 2026. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/welcome-new-russia-how-kremlin-is-remaking-occupied-ukraine-2026-03-26/>.
- Medvedev, Dmitry. "On the Fakes and Real History." *Telegram Channel*, April 5, 2022. Accessed April 20, 2026. https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/34.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. "Statement by the Russian Federation on the False Allegations Against the Russian Federation Made by Ukraine to Cover-Up Its Own Violations of International Law and Military Crimes Against Civilian Population of Donbass as well as Kharkov, Kherson and Zaporozhye Regions." September 27, 2022. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1831500/.
- Nesterova, Elizaveta. "'Our Task is to Make it Appear as if Ukraine Simply Doesn't Exist.' Prosveshcheniye Publishing House is Removing References to Kyiv and Ukraine from its Textbooks." *Mediazona*, April 23, 2022. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://zona.media/article/2022/04/23/enlightenment>.
- Ochab, Ewelina U. "The Siege of Mariupol: Death, Starvation and Destruction." *Forbes*, June 14, 2024. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2024/06/14/the-siege-of-mariupol-death-starvation-and-destruction/>.
- Ödebrink, Carina. "Russian Abductions and Deportations of Ukrainian Children." *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly*, 2026. Accessed April 27, 2026. <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/ad-hoc-committees-and-working-groups/parliamentary-support-team-for-ukraine/5294-russian-abductions-and-deportations-of-ukrainian-children-by-carina-odebrink-eng/file>.
- Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. "Briefing Paper: Unlawful Transfer and Deportation of Ukrainian Children to Russia." *House of Commons*, November 6, 2023. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SDIR/Brief/BR12714329/br-external/OfficeOfThe%20ProsecutorGeneralOfUkraine-e.pdf>.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2023.
- Rashevskaya, Kateryna. "Ukrainian Children Under Russian Control: Why Tracing, Return, Reintegration, and Justice Must Be Addressed Together." *Just Security*, April 23, 2026. Accessed April 27, 2026. <https://www.justsecurity.org/136250/ukrainian-children-under-russian-control/>.
- Regamey, Anne le Huérou A. "Massacres of Civilians in Chechnya." *Sciences Po Mass Violence and Resistance Research Network*, March 9, 2015. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/massacres-civilians-chechnya.html>.

- Ritchie, Hannah, Masha Angelova, and Rob Picheta. "Putin Gives Honorary Title to Russian Brigade Accused of War Crimes in Bucha." *CNN*, April 19, 2022. Accessed April 18, 2026. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/19/europe/russia-bucha-brigade-honorary-title-putin-intl>.
- Russian Media Monitor. "State TV Claims Russia is Saving Ukraine from America's Occupation." *YouTube*, August 11, 2023a. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzhyFj9n4DM>.
- Russian Media Monitor. "RT's Former Director of Broadcasting Talks About Ukrainians." *YouTube*, May 22, 2023b. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQIfMBBu0s>.
- Russian Media Monitor. "Sergey Karnaukhov Claims Ukraine Does Not Exist." *YouTube*, July 25, 2024a. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE1Ygc0a9tw>.
- Russian Media Monitor. "State TV Pundits Clash About Russia's War in Ukraine." *YouTube*, January 15, 2024b. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYytjFFhLhw>.
- Russian Media Monitor. "Patriarch Kirill Says Ukrainians Have No Reason to Hate Russia." *YouTube*, January 7, 2025. Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyNNPsiGfXI>.
- Rzheutska, Lillia, and Hanna Sokolova-Stekh. "Russia Forces Occupied Ukrainians to Change Citizenship." *Deutsche Welle*, May 5, 2023. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-forces-occupied-ukrainians-to-change-citizenship/a-65522524>.
- Save the Children. "Ukraine: Mental Health Toll of War Leaves Children with Speech Defects, Twitching and Sleep Disorders." *Save the Children Fund*, December 9, 2024. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/2024/ukraine-mental-health-toll-war-leaves-children-speech-defects>.
- Sergeytsev, Timofey. "What Should Russia do with Ukraine?" *RIA Novosti*, April 3, 2022. Accessed February 16, 2026. <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>.
- Shevchenko, Vitaly. "Ukraine War: Life in Mariupol Under Russian Occupation." *BBC News*, March 12, 2023. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64887890>.
- Snyder, Timothy. "Russia's Genocide Handbook: The Evidence of Atrocity and of Intent Mounts." *Substack*, April 8, 2022. Accessed April 8, 2026. <https://snyder.substack.com/p/russias-genocide-handbook>.
- TVP. "Russia Increasing 'Double-Tap' Strikes Targeting Rescuers in Ukraine, Researcher Says." *TVP World*, February 6, 2026. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://tvppworld.com/91455315/report-russia-targeting-rescuers>.

- United Nations. “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” *United Nations — Treaty Series*, December 9, 1948. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>.
- United Nations. “UN Report Details Summary Executions of Civilians by Russian Troops in Northern Ukraine.” *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, December 7, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2026. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/un-report-details-summary-executions-civilians-russian-troops-northern>.
- United Nations. “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine.” *United Nations Human Rights Council*, March 15, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/node/3944114>.
- United Nations. “Domicide: Mass Destruction of Housing and Civilian Infrastructure in Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan and Ukraine.” *United Nations Human Rights Council*, February 26, 2026. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/43/Add.3>.
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). “Three Years of Full-Scale War for Ukraine’s Children.” *United Nations Children’s Fund Europe and Central Asia*, February 21, 2025a. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/stories/three-years-full-scale-war-ukraines-children>.
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). “More Than 340 Educational Facilities Damaged or Destroyed in Ukraine This Year.” *United Nations Children’s Fund Ukraine*, November 25, 2025b. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/press-releases/more-340-educational-facilities-damaged-or-destroyed-ukraine-year>.
- United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU). “Ukraine: The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict December 2025 Update.” *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, January 12, 2026. https://ukraine.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/Ukraine%20-%20protection%20of%20civilians%20in%20armed%20conflict%20%28December%2025%29_ENG.pdf.
- US Department of State. “Russia’s Filtration Operations and Forced Relocations.” *United States Government*, 2022. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://2021-2025.state.gov/russias-filtration-operations-and-forced-relocations/>.
- Varenysia, Inna. “On Ukraine’s Front Line, a Fight to Save Premature Babies.” *AP News*, August 22, 2022. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-health-world-news-donetsk-50ae42150e64960eda574dd7769e0212>.
- Vorobiova, Anastasiia. “The School Bell That Rings for War: How Russia is Weaponizing its Education System.” *Verfassungsblog*, September 3, 2025. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-school-bell-that-rings-for-war/>.
- Vorobyov, Niko. “‘Propaganda Lessons for Everyone’: Russia’s Wartime Curriculum Exposed.” *Al Jazeera*, February 26, 2025. Accessed April 24, 2026.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/26/propaganda-lessons-for-everyone-russias-wartime-curriculum-exposed>.

Waghorn, Dominic. “CCTV Shows Chilling Moment Russian FSB Agents and Soldiers Scour Ukrainian Orphanage for Children.” *Sky News*, December 22, 2022. Accessed April 27, 2026. <https://news.sky.com/story/cctv-shows-chilling-moment-russian-fsb-agents-and-soldiers-hunt-for-ukrainian-orphans-12772595>.

Yale School of Public Health. “Yale Researchers Identify 21 Sites in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine Used for Civilian Interrogation, Processing, and Detention.” August 25, 2022. Accessed April 26, 2026. <https://ysph.yale.edu/news-article/yale-researchers-identify-21-sites-in-donetsk-oblast-ukraine-used-for-civilian-interrogation-processing-and-detention/>.

Zabrotskyi, Mykhaylo, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V. Danylyuk and Nick Reynolds. “Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting From Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2022.” *Royal United Services Institute*, November 30, 2022. <https://static.rusi.org/359-SR-Ukraine-Preliminary-Lessons-Feb-July-2022-web-final.pdf>.

Chapter VI:

Hook, Kristina. “The Russian Federation’s Escalating Commission of Genocide in Ukraine: A Legal Analysis.” *Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights*, July 2023. <https://www.raoulwallenbergcentre.org/images/reports/2023-07-26-Genocide-Ukraine-Report.pdf>.

Lemkin, Raphael. *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944. <https://www.lawandisrael.org/wp-content/uploads/Topics/Holocaust/Genocide/Lemkin-Axis-Rule-Genocide.pdf>.

Mälksoo, Maria. “The Postcolonial Moment in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 25, no. 3-4 (2023): 471-481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.

United Nations. “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” *United Nations — Treaty Series*, December 9, 1948. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>.