The influence of historical memory on the formation of national identity: a response to the challenges of the Russian-Ukrainian war

Вплив історичної пам'яті на формування національної ідентичності: відповідь на виклики російсько-української війни

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Abstract

The Russian aggression against Ukraine influenced on the role of history in war and its use. The purpose of the article is to analyze the influence of historical memory on the formation of national identity in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. A number of scientific methods were used, including content analysis of professional scientific literature. Based on a strict approach to data collection (7 criteria for inclusion), 35 relevant sources from the selected issues were selected. Based on Microsoft Excel, the coding of the sources was carried out. In results it is highlighted the intimate relationship between society and individuals that shapes historical memory, as well as the impact of outside events on the formation of national memory. There are obstacles in the way of this process, chief among

Анотація

Російська агресія проти України вплинула на роль історії у війні та її використання. Мета статті – проаналізувати вплив історичної пам'яті на формування національної ідентичності в контексті російсько-української війни. Для вирішення поставленого завдання використано низку наукових методів, зокрема контент-аналіз фахової наукової літератури. На основі строго підходу до збору даних (7 критеріїв включення літератури) обрано 35 актуальних джерел із обраної проблематики. На основі Microsoft Excel здійснено тематичний аналіз та кодування обраних джерел. Ці етапи сприяли якісному підходу до реалізації дослідження. У результатах висвітлено тісні стосунки між суспільством та окремими людьми, які формують історичну

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them being the misuse of political power by those with low moral standards who attempt to manipulate history and specific facts for propaganda purposes (as the current Kremlin dictatorship does). There are many different ways that historical memory affects present Ukrainians' sense of national identity. In conclusions it is concluded, that Due to international interest in Ukraine's past, historical memory has also had an impact on international processes.

Keywords: historical memory, strategies of national unity, cultural narratives, restoration of historical truth, national identity.

пам'ять, а також вплив зовнішніх подій на формування національної пам'яті. На шляху цього процесу існують перешкоди, головною з яких є зловживання політичною владою особи з низькими моральними стандартами, які намагаються маніпулювати історією та конкретними фактами в пропагандистських цілях (як це робить нинішня кремлівська диктатура). Історична пам'ять різними способами впливає на почуття національної ідентичності нинішніх українців. У висновках зроблено висновок, що через міжнародний інтерес до минулого України історична пам'ять також мала вплив на міжнародні процеси.

Ключові слова: історична пам'ять, стратегії національної єдності, культурні наративи, відновлення історичної правди, національна ідентичність.

Introduction

Historical memory is a critical element of the formation of the national identity of any nation in the world. The close relationship between historical memory and national identity is a scientifically proven fact. In particular, many contemporary works raise the issue of this connection. Contemporary authors also emphasise the importance of historical policy and historical education in the system of shaping the values of the people. However, this issue remains an object of intensive research in the discourses of various interdisciplinary studies (history, sociology, political science, philosophy, cultural studies, etc.). Given the available works, this topic has been mostly studied in the context of global transformations and other wars. However, the Russian-Ukrainian war has brought this issue to the forefront, and it requires more study. In addition, its relevance is driven by the interest in national change in critical situations (including wars), which increases the value of national identity, the most essential feature of which has been and remains historical memory (Averianova & Voropaieva, 2020). At the same time, in the realities of Russian aggression, the study of historical memory has become particularly relevant. In particular, this issue is important in terms of actualising and rethinking historical events and symbols that have become a key element in resisting aggression and maintaining national unity.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has not only threatened the territorial integrity of the state, but also contributed to the need to strengthen the national consciousness of Ukrainians (Haran et al., 2019). Thus, this large-scale war has become an important driver for revising many historical narratives and has influenced the search for new ways to strengthen national identity. Besides, the study of historical memory is particularly important. The study of the role of historical memory in the formation of national identity in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war is also important in terms of analysing the main mechanisms of cultural resistance and preservation of national unity. At the same time, such research will require taking into account the existing limitations: the theoretical nature of many studies, taking into account certain criteria for the selection of literature, according to which certain scientific developments could be overlooked.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to study the impact of historical memory on the formation of national consciousness in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Thus, this paper will help to find out how certain historical events can influence the formation of modern Ukrainian society. The practical significance of this work consists in summarizing certain scientific experience in the interpretation of the influence of historical memory on the evolution of national identity, which can be useful when writing textbooks, generalizing monographs, reporter studies.

Literature Review

The issue of the impact of historical memory on the formation of national identity has attracted the attention of many scholars. At the same time, a number of contemporary studies have focused on analysing the

historical aspect of the formation of Ukrainian national identity. Contemporary works on the impact of war on national identity include those by Himka (2015) and Kasianov (2023). Kuzio (2018) describes how war contributes to redefining national identity and strengthening national unity. The author found that the war with Russia was an important stimulus for the formation of new national myths and new heroes. Smoor (2017) characterised the different narratives that explain the Ukrainian crisis. The author explored the issues of identity and regional diversity. This study is important because it describes the influence of different historical, cultural and political factors on the understanding of the war.

The researchers also singled out episodes of the outbreak of war from 2014 as a component of the post-colonial status of Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR. The authors described the main transformations in the system of national identity and political preferences of local residents. Sasse & Lackner (2018) described the impact of the war in Donbas on the formation of national identity of the region's residents. Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk (2017) identified the role of memory politics in contemporary Ukraine from a postcolonial perspective. The authors described the impact of historical memory on the formation of national identity and political legitimacy. They also identified the role of past narratives in shaping contemporary political discourses. Wood et al. (2015) identified the main causes and circumstances of Russia's war against Ukraine. In particular, the authors drew attention to historical, political and economic factors. In general, researchers consider the deployment of hostilities in Ukraine to be a planned action by the Russian regime, which, however, had accomplices among the local Ukrainian population, which did not come out of the post-Soviet paradigm.

Separately, it is worth pointing out the importance of research on the formation of historical science for Istrian politics and nation-building. Vushko (2017) described the role of historians in shaping the politics of memory in Ukraine during the war. The author identified the importance of historians using their work to influence political debate and identity formation. Wylegała (2017) described the complex management of the past in Ukraine through collective memory and public debate. Some researchers also consider the formation of historical politics as part of modern democratic values (Goshovska et al., 2022), but the role of professional historians in this process remains decisive. Thus, the authors characterized various theoretical aspects of historical memory and national identity formation. However, research gaps include an analysis of the conceptual understanding of historical memory, research trends in understanding its impact on nation-building processes in general. These issues determine the value of this study.

Methodology

The type of this study is qualitative. It involved the use of content analysis of contemporary literature on historical memory, historical politics, factors shaping national consciousness and specific issues of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, the method of content analysis has its limitations - first of all, we are talking about the importance of comparing the received research hypotheses with existing statements in other studies.

Data collection

First, the main scientific and metric databases were selected: Web of Science and Google Scholar. They were chosen because they contain peer-reviewed articles. In addition, Google Scholar has a user-friendly interface for searching for sources. Key words such as 'Russian-Ukrainian war', 'historical memory', 'historical education', 'historical policy', 'national consciousness', 'identity' were entered into these search databases. The works whose titles corresponded to the research topic were selected. The initial result of the found works was 1034. Initially, the sources that did not relate to the realities of Ukraine were excluded (this did not apply to fundamental theoretical studies).

Also, those results that contained little meaningful information were excluded: articles of up to 5 pages. This resulted in 578 results. After that, the range of sources was reduced, as only papers published in the last 10 years were taken into account. Also, as a result of a detailed analysis of the abstracts, we selected those sources that contained scientific value and information from which could be further used for further research. The main list of sources was reduced to 234 items. The following inclusion criteria were then applied to the selected sources:

1. Relevance: the study should provide valuable and relevant information.

2. The study provides information on the peculiarities of the formation of the concept of national consciousness.
3. The study provides a thorough review of the importance of historical memory.
4. The research described the factors in the formation of national consciousness.
5. The paper identified theoretical aspects of historical memory in the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war.
6. The research is written in English (or at least has an English-language abstract).
7. The work presents a clear and step-by-step course of research implementation.
8. The study has a detailed methodology.
9. Preference was given to articles published in peer-reviewed journals.

Thus, 35 items of scientific literature were selected using these criteria. Table 1 demonstrates all the stages and process of selecting materials for the study.

Table 1.
Stages and processes of selecting of the materials

S	Description	N
1	Selection of scientometric databases (Web of Science, Google Scholar)	N/A
2	Entering keywords ('Russian-Ukrainian war', 'historical memory', 'historical education', 'historical policy', 'national consciousness', 'identity') into databases	N/A
3	Initial result of the found works	1034
4	Elimination of sources that did not relate to the realities of Ukraine (except for fundamental theoretical studies) and articles up to 5 pages	578
5	Selection of papers published in the last 10 years and detailed analysis of abstracts	234
6	Application of the inclusion criteria:	N/A
6.1	Relevance of the study	-15
6.2	Information on the peculiarities of the formation of the concept of national consciousness	-56
6.3	A thorough review of the importance of historical memory	-34
6.4	Description of the key factors in the formation of national consciousness	-21
6.5	Identification of theoretical aspects of historical memory in the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war	-18
6.6	Availability of an English-language annotation or article written in English	-16
6.7	Clear and step-by-step implementation of the research	-21
6.8	Detailed methodology	-10
6.9	Preference for articles published in peer-reviewed journals	-8
7	Final list of selected sources	40

Source: Authors' development.

Thus, the collection of materials for the study involved the use of clear and strict inclusion criteria. This, in turn, resulted in 35 of the most relevant and scientifically valuable papers.

Data analysis

Microsoft Excel software was used to process and analyse the data. Data such as author, year of publication, concept of national consciousness/concept of historical memory, and main conclusions are entered in each table. This allowed for thematic analysis and, in some cases, coding. For the latter, the main themes for coding the texts were first identified: historical memory, national identity, war, historical politics, and national symbols. After collecting the data, the textual information was coded. This was done by assigning certain codes to text fragments in accordance with the previous themes. This was done manually without any special software. Once the coding was done, the authors of the article proceeded to the analysis. At the analysis stage, the main relationships between the categories were identified. The final stage was the interpretation of the results. Discourse analysis was also used for this purpose - a scientific method, the essence of which is to determine not only the opinions of scientists, but also the context in which they were created.

Results and Discussion

It is worth noting that there are differences in scientific views on how historical memory should be understood, what its theoretical and methodological foundations of functioning are. Some scholars

emphasise that the concept of historical memory is the ability of the human mind to preserve individual and collective experiences of human relationships, forming, on the basis of this synthesis, an idea of history as a whole and one's personal place in it (Kulyk, 2016). This implies that historical memory is an important link for social development and identification within society, both at the individual level of the community and the wider collective.

In such circumstances, historical memory (both individual and collective) is the result of a joint interaction between the individual and social environments. In the absence of such interaction, the phenomenon of historical memory disappears. At the same time, other researchers point out that historical memory is not only the concept of mass knowledge about the past, but also the process of understanding the past as a certain kind of heritage that turns into an instrumental value (Markovych & Maraieva, 2024). As soon as memory becomes an organic part of the system of searching for identities, questions of objectivity become secondary. In such circumstances, 'abuse of memory' is possible, i.e. the creation and use of memory as a mechanism of ideological warfare (Mälksoo, 2015).

The researchers emphasise that the politics of memory in such circumstances should be analysed not only as an epistemological concept, but also as an ethical concept (Prayogi, 2024). The third group of scholars points out that historical memory, as a national-political element, is the basis for the further formation of nationality and national identity (Klymenko, 2022; Pyrohovska et al., 2024). Given the commonality of images of the past, which are approximately equally shared by millions of citizens who identify themselves with the victories and defeats of their predecessors, with the presence of common heroes, certain sacred locations for national memory, certain common achievements of folk culture, etc., a unified view of history and its features is created.

Representatives of this group of researchers argue on the basis of theoretical studies that the historical memory of each individual nation is not a stable category, so each new challenge inevitably leads to a certain reaction, adjustment of this type of memory, which accordingly leads to certain changes in the consciousness and national identity of its bearers.

In fact, the emergence of crises on the historical path of development leads to an interest in history, which often tries to find answers to questions about the sources of existing challenges. Relevant in this particular context are the opinions of scholars that the experience of modern processes of nation-building points to the following process: counteracting the growth of crisis phenomena and overcoming them in terms of national identity is directly related to the actualisation of the development of historical memory, its consolidation and unifying properties (Barrington, 2022).

Any national projects generate requests for the creation of a projection in historical memory that would fulfil the mission of a national identity framework in difficult conditions. In addition, the state organism, along with the capabilities of intellectual and political elites, becomes the main subject for creating this kind of public demand, an important part of which is the creation of the nation's historical memory.

In such circumstances, historical memory becomes the basis for further formation of national consciousness (Arel, 2018). The interconnections between historical memory and national consciousness can be significantly traced on the basis of the pan-European experience, which is also relevant in the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Certain peculiarities of this process were manifested, first of all, in certain possibilities of sacralisation of historical traditions (the importance of religious components in historical consciousness), a characteristic combination of mythological and scientific components in the process of nation-building, the influence of mythological on the formation of the scientific historical sphere, excessive attention to understanding the distinctive features of historical development, especially the stages of the state component of such development (Hruzevskyi, 2023; Gai et al., 2024).

The increased attention to Ukraine's state development during the Russian aggression played a role. First of all, we are talking about the emphasis on the history of Rus and the Cossacks as an integral part of Ukraine's state development, and the emphasis on the liberation struggle after the fall of the Russian Empire. These periods are particularly important for the historical memory of Ukrainians, as they allow us to emphasise the development of the national idea that led to the restoration of independence in 1991 and further independent development.

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the historical memory of Ukrainians played an important role. It is worth agreeing with researchers who emphasise that part of the Ukrainian national idea is based on the historical past, which has prevented the spread of misinformation about the inferiority of Ukrainian history and its traditional statelessness. The specific impacts of historical memory can be summarised in Table 2.

Table 2.
Influences of historical memory on the national identity of Ukrainians (consequences of Russian aggression)

Effect	Description	Scientific literature
Increased role of national identity in the lives of Ukrainians	The Russian-Ukrainian war led to further consolidation of Ukrainian society around the defence of the ideas of sovereignty and Ukrainian independence. Given the peculiarities of modern social development, until 2022, some Ukrainian citizens identified themselves by their Soviet or even Russian identity. As a result of the war, the percentage of such citizens has decreased to a minimum. Accordingly, the popularity of Ukrainian statehood and its symbols has increased.	Budrytė (2018); Latysh (2023); Halytska-Didukh et al. (2023).
Interest in the historical past	The war has led to a certain reconsideration of the role and significance of historical events and figures of the Ukrainian past. Accordingly, public interest in studying the real-life heroes of Ukrainian history, in particular those who had long been banned from study by the Soviets, has increased. This interest in the past has also led to the promotion of historical truth and the holding of relevant events: research, documentaries and feature films, exhibitions, etc.	Nashyvochnikov (2023); Pakhomenko, Tryma and Francis (2018).
Changes in the meaning of history in educational and cultural initiatives	The introduction of an additional educational load aimed at emphasising the role of history was also a consequence of Russian aggression. Such processes have been gradually unfolding since 2014, when the Kremlin regime occupied the Crimean Peninsula and launched hybrid warfare, but have become much more relevant after 24 February 2022. Methodological developments have been made to new textbooks and curricula that address the issues of Ukrainian national self-determination. Similarly, cultural initiatives have also become more relevant, aimed not only at shaping historical memory among Ukrainians, but also at influencing the foreign lobby and its formation.	Lauer (2017); Blau (2020); Goshovska et al. (2022)
Psychological consequences	National memory has led to a strengthening of the processes of social cohesion, further creation of national identity and its markers.	Navalpotro, Andriichenko, Popova and Sytdykova (2023)
International role of historical memory	In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the demonstration of Ukraine's independent statehood led to the formation of a positive image of the state in the international arena, presenting Ukraine as a long-standing part of the European environment with strong democratic elements. This made it possible to counter Russian propaganda.	Krasnodemska and Chechelnytska (2022).

Source: Authors' development.

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of historical memory on the formation of national identity as a result of responding to the challenges of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It is demonstrated that understanding the impact of historical memory and its functioning during martial law has its own specifics (Kasianov, 2023). In particular, it is proposed to support the version of researchers that counteracting the growth of crisis phenomena and overcoming them in terms of national identity is directly related to the actualisation of the development of historical memory, its consolidation and unifying properties. History has become a convenient field for addressing the nation to demonstrate its independence and historical rights to development.

The study emphasizes how important it is to incorporate historical memory into school curricula in order to foster a more profound comprehension of the country's past. Diverse historical narratives that reflect

many locales, ethnic groups, and social experiences should be encouraged by public policies. By avoiding prejudices that might cause social divisions, this encourages critical thinking and assists students in forming a balanced perspective of history. A more inclusive, pluralistic society can be achieved by designing educational programs to promote contemplation on historical events and their relevance today.

The Russian aggression, as researchers rightly note, contributed to the interest of Ukrainians in their past (Arel, 2018). The findings also support the researchers' hypotheses that the development of Ukrainian historical memory has also attracted interest from European environments, as understanding Ukraine as an integral part of the European democratic world revives interest in its history in general (Kuo & Marwick, 2021). The findings also confirm the conclusions of other scholars, in particular that as a result of Russian aggression, Ukrainians have only begun to take a real interest in their past (Mieliekiestsev, 2022). Thus, the further impact of historical memory on nation-building still needs to be studied, as this dynamic process will only gain momentum.

The results also confirm the views of scholars on the problem of manipulation in the formation of national memory. Selected (partly fictionalised and glorified) problems from history can be used for political purposes of the present (Oleksiyenko et al., 2020). After all, the examples of the Nazi regime in Germany and the Fascist government in Italy show that the glorification of the past is part of the propaganda machine in the hands of totalitarian regimes (Dreyer, 2018).

A similar model existed in the Soviet Union, and propagandists in the Russian Federation work in the same way today. These results point to the seriousness of the moral and ethical challenge that is underestimated in research. For example, scholars emphasise the importance of researching true history, which will form the basis of historical memory, but do not explain what to do with deliberate manipulators who pursue unethical goals (Marzęda-Młynarska, 2023; Dreyer, 2020). Besides, the using of history as a tool in political games has become particularly widespread during the Russian-Ukrainian war. Besides, the Russian authorities' attempts to prove that independent Ukraine never existed directly point to special manipulations that can glorify one nation while denying the existence of other.

The proposed methodology, however, has certain limitations. First of all, the most up-to-date research in the field of historical memory formation was used (respectively, the literature published after 2014). This may lead to certain subjective assessments of the material, since this was the beginning of Russian aggression and, accordingly, the actualisation of the historical memory of Ukrainians. Φgainst this background, the 'pre-war' ideas about the formation of historical memory as a structural element of nation-building were left out. This limitation was deliberately made to emphasise the role of war in nation-building processes. One of the main limitations of content analysis is its dependence on the researcher's interpretation. Researchers may interpret the meaning of words, phrases, or content differently, which may lead to differences in results. At the same time, the stages of the formation of Ukrainian national memory before 2014 could be the subject of a separate study.

Conclusions

Therefore, the analysis of the impact of historical memory on the formation of national identity, as a result of the crisis challenge of the Russian-Ukrainian war, showed significant changes in Ukrainian society. The main focus was on the study of the concept of historical memory, which is part of the national life of our time. In particular, the study emphasised that historical memory is the result of close interaction between society and individuals: as a result of this interaction and the influence of external circumstances, national memory is formed. This process has its challenges, primarily related to the abuse of political elites, who, due to their low level of morality, will try to use history and certain facts for propaganda (as the current Kremlin regime does).

The impact of historical memory on the national consciousness of modern Ukrainians is characterised by multifaceted effects. In particular, there is a gradual increase in the role of national identity, as a result of which almost all Ukrainian citizens adhere to Ukrainian identity (for a long time there was a problem of citizens with Soviet or even Russian identity in Ukraine). Russian aggression (including information) has led to interest in the Ukrainian historical past. The Russian-Ukrainian War should be taught in historical education in a fair, multi-perspective manner, highlighting both Ukrainian resistance and global reactions to the conflict. By exposing pupils to a range of perspectives, such as those of troops, citizens, and foreign observers, this method would foster critical thinking. Avoiding one-dimensional narratives, educational

materials should critically analyze the war's causes, the geopolitical environment, and the human cost of the fight.

Educational and cultural initiatives have also changed, becoming more Ukraine-centric, focused on educating Ukrainians and emphasising the Ukrainian mentality. The role of historical memory has also had an impact on international processes, as interest in the Ukrainian past is also known abroad. To meet this demand, additional publications and research are being carried out, which indirectly affect Ukrainian historical memory as well.

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