

IDENTITY SEARCH: FROM DIVIDED TO PRO-EUROPEAN UKRAINIAN IDENTITY

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Abstract. *The article discusses a controversial issue of Ukrainian identity with a focus on its pro-European component as a factor in shaping consolidated identity and overcoming the “divided” identity. Based on interdisciplinary research on identity, Barthes' concept of mythologizing, and the approach to fields of memory from a narrative analysis perspective, the article reached the following findings. The narrative framework underlying the origins of pro-European identity among Ukrainians is presented through a schematic narrative template that combines structural elements of “affinity with European principles of state-building,” “Ukrainians' participation in the development of European history,” and “shared democratic values.” These elements are based on six associated narratives derived from the fields of Ukrainian memory and the contemporary narrative of their “common values” with the democratic world.*

Tools for demythologizing the narratives that underlie the divided identity of Ukrainians are schematized in a narrative template of causal connection between “chosen traumas” and “liberation struggle”, which integrates narrative plots, characters, and motifs of their actions into the structural components of Exposition, Complication, Resolution, Evaluation, and Code, and in the sequence of narrative functions: Deception, Villainy, Prohibition, Violation of Prohibition, Beginning of Resistance, Struggle, Persecution, Stigmatization, and Victory. At the linguo-pragmatic level, the consolidation of Ukrainian identity is achieved through strategies of value polarization of “us” versus “them”, discrediting the mythologemes of “kinship” and “care” in their modern rearticulation during the wartime, restoring inverted roles and role players, and positive-re-evaluation of Russian derogatory labels for Ukrainians.

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Introduction. Discussions about a divided or united Ukrainian identity, which became especially relevant in interdisciplinary studies at the turn of the XX and XXI centuries, take on a new dimension in light of the Russo-Ukrainian war, with a fresh perception of national identity as a factor of exceptional solidarity among Ukrainians. Obviously, there is an acceleration of the process of consolidating national identity, which displaces dual identity, consisting of “Central European” and “post-Soviet” identity (Himka, 2006, 483) – the result of regional divisions, linguistic differences, etc. In 2020, nearly 40% of Ukrainians were still searching for their national identity. However, in 2021, 62.6% had already embraced their complete national identity, and by 2022, this figure had risen to 79.7%. At the same time, 3.9% identified themselves ethnically (compared to 2.7% in 2021) and 1.4% - as citizens of the former USSR (compared to 2.8% in 2021) (Dembitskyi, 2023). However, as noted in the presentation of sociological monitoring, the formation of a civic nation does not eliminate the need to address the next important task at the national level – full European integration. This underscores the relevance of exploring the sources and means to strengthen the pro-European direction of Ukrainian national identity, which, according to monitoring, is still insignificant (1.6% of Ukrainians see themselves as citizens of Europe and 3.3% – citizens of the world) but tends to grow compared to 2021 (with indicators of 0.9 and 3.1, respectively) (op. cit).

The aim of the article is to trace the formation of pro-European Ukrainian identity by exploring the conflicting and integrative structural elements of national identity in the dynamics of their development and transformation within historical and social contexts. The research *objectives* are as follows: (a) to identify the origins of the “divided” identity among Ukrainians and specify the instruments of the contemporary Ukrainian discourse aimed at consolidating and unifying identity, (b) to determine the factors contributing to the formation of a comprehensive Ukrainian identity with a pro-European component. These stated goals define the two-component structure of the study.

The theoretical basis, materials, and methods. The article is based on research on (a) identities within various research paradigms, with an emphasis on a discursive approach, (b) the structure of narratives underlying ideologemes and mythologemes that shape identity, and (c) memory fields of a usable past (Brooks, 1918) underpinned by the idea of “expanding” the past from the present, selectively preserving events and facts from the past that hold symbolic significance in the present (Maines, 2001, 37).

The discursive approach focuses on the processes of identity formation, expression, and change in the social, political, and cultural contexts, defining identity as a discursive construct (Bamberg et al., 2011), which is transformed through the rearticulation of discourses (Hammack, 2008, 2) that create, maintain, and transform the values underlying identity. Different approaches to identity view it as a continuous (Cherrier-Murray, 2007), dynamic, and variable phenomenon, depending on global societal processes, history, discourse, and culture, as well as a narrative (Mikkonen et al. 2011) and symbolic-projective (Kravchenko et al., 2021; Mikkonen et al., 2011) phenomenon, constructed through language and symbols. The discursive approach is relevant due to the world-modelling properties of collective memory that affect the present and future (Huyssen, 2003, 6), including the formation of national identities (Smith, 1991, 9) based on shared “textual communities” in which the thinking and actions of collectives are “rooted” (Wertsch, 2002, 28).

In this context, the discursive approach correlates with the narrative perspective in the study of identities, with the representation of the historical, social, and political myths as texts – encoded mythological messages (William, 2000), the set of which forms myth spaces, “in which different myth communities are created and contested” (Bell, 2003). An important concept to consider is Smith's (2006, 335) theory on the significance of ethnic symbols, myths, values, and traditions in the formation and self-reproduction of nations, with subsequent adaptation of what nations consider their past through its repeated discovery, authentication, and appropriation of aspects (Smith, 2001, 83-85), which play a crucial role in shaping national identity.

The significance of symbolic and narrative codes in identity construction motivates the article's engagement with Roland Barthes' theory of political myth, which transforms history into ideology through the functioning of signs. Myth functions as a metalanguage and a secondary semiotic system, in which every sign becomes the signified of mythologeme or demythologeme, replacing the denotative meaning of events and phenomena (Barthes, 1973). In this vein, the article introduces the concepts of demythologization and identifies its tools in the Ukrainian identity-forming discourse to debunk Russian myths that underlie the pro-Russian component of Ukrainian identity.

The research material includes (a) the publications of the Public Educational Project “LIKBEZ. Historical Front” aimed at countering Russian propaganda and popularizing the history of Ukraine, “since it is precisely an adequate vision of the past that is the basis of Ukrainian identity” (Likbez, 2023), and (b) excerpts from academic historical discourse from the works of M. Hrushevskyi, Ya. Hrytsak, M. Kostomarov, I. Lysiak-Rudnytskyi, S. Plokhii, etc. (c) program

documents of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood (Saltovskiy, 2002), (d) contemporary media outlets that cover the contributions of Presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Petro Poroshenko to the consolidation and unification of Ukrainian identity, as well as President Zelensky's speeches before the parliaments of European states in 2022-2023.

The interdisciplinary **methods** of the project includes (a) a narrative analysis of memory fields related to the formation of Ukrainian identity based on the approach to collective memory as a text, (b) semiotic analysis (Barthes, 1973) aimed at explicating the mechanisms of demythologization of narratives underlying Ukrainian divided identity, and (c) the elements of critical discourse analysis to identify the markers of the Ukrainian identity construction at the ideational and linguo-pragmatic levels of discourse of the war period (Kravchenko, 2022).

Narrative analysis (Alker et al., 2001; Wertsch, 2008), as the primary method aimed at constructing schematic narrative patterns based on narratives of both “divided” identity and the pro-European component of Ukrainian identity, is conducted in several stages: Identification of key narratives related to divided identity and the pro-European aspect of Ukrainian identity; Extraction of key narrative elements, symbols, and themes, focusing on their role in shaping identity; Construction of schematic narrative templates that represent the underlying structure and recurring themes within the narratives; Interpretation and meaning-making by highlighting the significance of the constructed narrative patterns in the formation of identity, including its pro-European dimension. Representation of historical events in the form of a narrative is based on characters/roles and the motivations behind their actions, the sequence of functions (following Propp's (1968) framework), and the plot-structural components common to a set of narratives: Orientation – Complication – Evaluation – Resolution – Coda (Labov, 1972, 363-393).

Results and Discussion.

I. Schematic narrative templates “*the origin of the pro-European identity of Ukrainians*” integrates the totality of its associated narratives underlying three structural elements such as (a) the establishment of federalist principles and a republican system in the Ukrainian statehood, which prove inherent kinship with European principles of state building; (b) the Ukrainian history as a part of the history of Europe, with direct or indirect participation of “Ukrainians of all classes and cultures in the development of European history,” as pointed out by M. Drahomanov (Plokhii 2005, 156) and (c) the democratic values that underpin the pro-European component of Ukrainian identity.

The first structural element is based on (a) narratives about building a Ukrainian state based on European federalist principles of the Ukrainian statehood, from Vladimir Monomakh who formed by the middle of the 10th century a confederation of “city regions” united by Kyiv (East Slavic tribal unions with broad autonomy) – to Bohdan Khmelnytskyi. During the Ukrainian national liberation war of 1648-1654, he put forward his own program for building the Ukrainian Cossack state based on the principles of Ukrainian unity, with the new idea of Cossack statehood. As a precondition for full independence, he attempted to create autonomy for the Cossack region within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and later in a confederate union of two independent states under the rule of the Romanov dynasty (Kostomarov, 1928), (b) the projective narratives in the program documents of the Kyiv Community (Hromada) and Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood of the 1860s that envisage a voluntary federation of equal Slavic nations (Saltovskiy, 2002), which the Central Rada later tried to implement, (c) narratives of the Ukrainian community as a free association of people based on mutual agreement and principles of moral regulation, connected with the role of the “veche” – a popular assembly of all free residents of the city as the highest legislative and judicial authority and

the bearer of popular sovereignty (Kostomarov, 1861, 33-80), (d) the narratives related to the federalist concept of Ukrainian statehood during the period of the Central Rada (Lysiak-Rudnytskyi, 1994).

The second structural element “the European vector of the historical development of Ukraine” establishes conceptual and semantic relationships between the narratives (a) of the special role of the Varangians in the history of Ukraine (Plokhii, 2011, 296-297), supporting Hrushevskyi's idea of the Ukrainian people as a people of Western culture, “while the Great Russian, although Europeanized, is completely dominated by the oriental spirit and elements” (Hrushevskyi, 1918, 9); (b) of the crusades of the Ukrainian Cossacks against Islam, with a historiographical parallel between the European crusaders and the Cossacks. In the “Protestation” of 1621 by Job Boretsky, the Cossacks were presented as one of the oldest knightly orders in Europe (Boretskyi, 1988, 323), and (c) of Ukraine as a cultural border and a place of interaction between the worlds, first between the Eurasian steppes of nomads and settlements, then between the East and West (Plokhii, 2017; Hrytsak, 2022). It is important to note that the mythologeme of “border between worlds” is rooted in the memory field of the proto-Ukrainians, where it is manifested by the “plowed field” archetype as a symbol of the transformation of the chaos-associated steppe element into an “ordered” civilized space. It also relates to the legends about Boris and Hleb, who forged the first plow, chained the Serpent and plowed the Serpent's Walls – ancient earth fortifications on the border with the Wild Steppe (Plokhii, 2011, 92). The idea of “border between worlds” is projected in modern Ukrainian grand narrative as the ideologeme “Ukraine is the border between the world and its threatening aggressor”.

The third structural element establishes a causal relationship between the narratives that underlie the “democratic values” of the past and present of Ukrainians, which testify to their pro-European identity. They include (a) historical narratives evidencing the military democracy in the Zaporizhzhya Sich, (b) narratives from the creative heritage of the members of the Cyril and Methodius brotherhood (“Knyhy bytiia ukraïns'koho narodu”), who analyze the ethnonational identity of the Ukrainian people as based on values such as civic equality and freedom, democratic federalism, eradication of slavery and all forms of humiliation, brotherhood, respect for individuality, and self-respect, (c) a modern Ukrainian narrative promoting the European identity of Ukrainians.

In this context, it is important to highlight the contribution of those Ukrainian presidents who facilitated the development of modern Ukrainian society and statehood based on European values, political and organizational principles of closer alignment with Europe. The period of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency was significant for awakening national self-awareness and shaping the European dimension of Ukrainian identity. Yushchenko began to challenge the strongholds of the “russian world,” dismantle russian-soviet myths, and emphasize the importance of Ukraine's national historical past. The President played a significant role in raising awareness about the crimes of the moscow soviet regime in orchestrating the Holodomor in Ukraine in 1932-1933, both at the domestic and international levels. In 2007, a special government institution was established with the task of preserving and restoring national memory - the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. The topics of Baturyn, the Cossack era, the Trypillian culture, the reevaluation of the activities of the OUN-UPA, and a range of other important issues were brought to a broad societal level, awakening national consciousness.

An even more significant contribution to strengthening national identity and its pro-European direction was made by Petro Poroshenko during his presidency in Ukraine. On June 11, 2017, a visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens with the European Union came into effect. Significant preparatory

work for the visa-free regime with the EU had been done under previous presidents, but the final and most crucial decisions in many areas were implemented after 2014. In the first month of his presidency, Petro Poroshenko signed the Association Agreement with the European Union, a process that had been ongoing since the time of Viktor Yushchenko (Zanuda, Chervonenko, 2019).

The Association Agreement with the EU is a massive document with seven sections and over a thousand pages, which clearly regulates the gradual economic and political convergence of Ukraine with the European Union. Disputes surrounding the agreement were a catalyst for the start of the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv, which led to a complete change of government in Ukraine in February 2014 (Chervonenko, 2017), and to further fundamental transformations in the national identity of Ukrainians

During Petro Poroshenko's five years of presidency, the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) passed changes to the legislation that significantly promoted the use of the Ukrainian language on radio and television. During Poroshenko's presidency, Ukraine banned Russian social networks and practically all Russian television channels.

The pro-European direction of Ukrainian identity, based on shared values and narratives, was explicitly emphasized in President Zelensky's speeches before the parliaments of European countries in 2022-2023.

The common values underlying the historical narratives of democratic countries are voiced in President Zelensky's speeches before the Polish Sejm (brotherhood), the Bundestag (responsibility and reunification), the Baltic states (European values and shared suffering under communist regimes), the Portuguese parliament (fighting against dictatorship and allusions connecting the Carnation Revolution and the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity), and the National Assembly of France (liberty, equality, fraternity associated with the slogan of the French Revolution), with drawing a historical parallel between Mariupol and the ruins of Verdun during World War I. In his speech to the House of Commons, Zelensky emphasizes the connection between "freedom" and "heroism," specifically referring to "heroism in the name of freedom", by paraphrasing Churchill's words and adopting the syntactical peculiarities of his famous speech: "We shall not give up and shall not lose! We shall go the whole way. We shall fight in the seas, we shall fight in the air, we shall defend our land, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight in the woods, in the fields, on the beaches, in the cities and villages, in the streets, we shall fight in the hills". The value-based keywords of the address were "truth", "holy", "responsibility", "dignity", with historical parallels to the battle of the British for Britain against the Nazis (Zelenskyi, 2022). In his address to the Bundestag, Zelenskyi uses the Berlin Wall metaphor, symbolizing the reunification and conceptualized as the Wall between freedom and slavery that Zelensky, citing the President Reagan, calls to tear down.

II. *The ideational and linguo-pragmatic tools for constructing a pro-European identity.*

The events of 2014 and especially the Russian-Ukrainian war have dramatically changed Ukrainian identity due to anti-russian sentiments as a main consolidating element of Ukrainians. A significant part of the modern Ukrainian grand narrative includes tools for demythologization of narratives that underlie the divided identity of Ukrainians and are based on the mythological symbolic structures of the "usable" past, substantiating the imperial narrative in its narrative template "of kinship, forced separation, protection, the shared desire for unity, and common enemies".

Of particular importance in shaping the pro-russian component of the divided identity of Ukrainians are narratives of (a) a united Slavic-russian people, enshrined in the "Synopsis" of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra (1670s); (b) the "gathering of russian lands" (Liprandi, 1893), based on the

mythologeme of a common “ancient russian people” as the ancestor of the East Slavic peoples (which gave rise to the mythologeme of a “common russian nation” from the 1860s), which lived in the same old russian state but were “unfortunately divided” “through the Mongol-Tatar, Lithuanian, Polish” aggressors (Kogut 2004, 161-162), (c) the “common enemies” of Ukrainians and russians who have always fought together, (e) russia as the defender and liberator of Ukrainians, who have always sought to reunite with the russian people in a single state, underpinned by the mythologemes of “protection” and “reunification”, which manifested itself in sub-narratives of liberation from the oppression of landowners and capitalists, from Polish occupation, from the oppression of Romanian landlords, from the Nazis, (f) the disappearance of Ukrainians and Ukraine without an alliance with russia / USSR – in the face of the threat of external aggression, whether it be the Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire or the First and Second World Wars.

The debunking of such narratives and underlying mythologemes is one of the tools of modern Ukrainian counterpropaganda at its ideational level and is based on a two-component narrative template: “Chosen traumas” in causal connection with “Liberation struggle with russia/USSR”.

The narrative template integrates narrative plots, actors (Ukrainians/Ukraine as victims and hostages, russia as a villain-aggressor and oppressor; Ukrainians as heroes-fighters for freedom and national identity, russia as a villain-aggressor and oppressor) and motives for the actors’ actions (suppression and destruction of everything Ukrainian in narratives of trauma and struggle for the preservation and revival of national identity in narratives of “liberation struggle”).

The structural element of “Orientation” corresponds to the historical context of various homogeneous narratives, their spatial-temporal localization, and main actors. “Complication” is linked in all narratives to the “causal” component of the narrative scheme, while the “Resolution” forms a consequence. Depending on “Orientation” - the context of the unfolding narratives, the “Complication” relies on such culminating moments of the “trauma” narratives as: conscription after the liquidation of the Hetmanate institution, the forced unification of Ukrainian territories with the rest of russia, denationalization, turning Ukrainians into little russians, russification (Valuyev Circular and Ems Ukase), the Bolshevik occupation of Ukraine in 1922, the repressive soviet regime (the Red Terror, the Holodomor of 1932-1933, the famine of 1946-1947, deportations, the executed Renaissance, russification in the Soviet period, putin's war as the last attempt to destroy Ukraine and Ukrainian identity, based on the equating of the semantic scope of the mythologemes of denazification and deukrainization. The “Resolution” is manifested by the “liberation movement” of Ukrainians, the struggle of the Cossacks, the national liberation war for independent Ukraine under the leadership of Simon Petliura, 1917-1921, the peasant insurgent movement led by Nestor Makhno and Ataman Zeleny, 1918-1921, the movement of Ukrainian peasants against collectivization in 1930, the struggle of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army for independent Ukraine in 1942-50, the movement of the Sixties, the Ukrainian dissident movement, and the heroic struggle of Ukrainians in the ongoing russian-Ukrainian War. The Evaluation that unites the narratives in terms of values and meanings contributes, on the one hand, to the demythologization of russian narratives of kinship and protection, and on the other hand, to the formation of the ideologeme of Ukrainianism. Coda entails establishing a connection between the narratives and the present and future of Ukrainian identity based on the fundamental idea of continuity in Ukrainian nation-building, rooted in a spirit of freedom and democratic values.

All narratives are characterized by a sequence of such functions: Deception, Villainy, Prohibition, Violation of Prohibition, Beginning of Resistance, Struggle, Persecution, Stigmatization

(in a metaphorical sense - such as imprisonment, exile, execution, etc.). The final function of “Victory” in the narratives of struggle and liberation can be seen at an ideational level as transfiguration of the Hero actor. In this sense, achieving Victory is associated with the archetypal narrative motif of the Hero's journey (Campbell, 2008), for whom the “past” phase of trials, struggles, and overcoming is necessary for transformation and rebirth, possible only in opposition to the status that the Hero had in the past. In modern Ukrainian discourse that underlies development of the national identity, the function “Victory” is underpinned by narratives about the Revolution of Dignity, the consolidation of Ukrainians during the war, including based on a sense of unity with the democratic world, with the strengthening of the pro-European dimension of Ukrainian identity.

At a linguistic-pragmatic level, the consolidation of Ukrainian identity is achieved through the strategies of (a) value polarization of WE-THEY; (b) discrediting the mythologemes of “kinship” and “caring for the population of the occupied territories”, which involves the restoration of reversed roles and role actors. Specifically, the shift from the roles of “defender-victim” to “genocider-victim” is achieved through the activation, via mass media, of predicates denoting inhumane actions by the agent towards the population of the occupied territories: forced deportation, forced mobilization, filtration camps, slavery, as well as metaphors such as “cannon fodder” and “human shield”, which expose the mythologemes of “kinship” and “care” as signifiers with distorted meanings; (c) positive reevaluation of negative russian labels associated with derogatory terms for Ukrainians. In particular, designations such as “ukropy” and “ukry” are based on allusions to “ancient Ukrainians”, who, according to pseudo-historical research, lived in modern-day Germany, which has nothing to do with the ethnogenesis of the Ukrainian ethnicity. The meanings activated by this allusion indicate a lack of connection between ancient Ukrainians and Ukrainian territory, which implicitly reinforces the mythologeme of Ukrainians as a pseudonation. On the other hand, the internal form of the metaphor is based on the input space of “plant” (dill), which embodies a strategy of blatant dehumanization with the substitution of the living for the lifeless. At the same time, in Ukrainian counter-propaganda, the word “ukrop” is reinterpreted as an abbreviation of the phrase “Ukrainian opir” (Ukrainian resistance), transforming the negative connotation into a positive one and having a consolidating value for the self-awareness of Ukrainians.

Conclusions. Based on recurring themes and elements in the narratives, the motives of role-playing agents, the grouping of similar codes or themes to form broader categories or clusters, as well as contextualizing the narratives within their broader social, cultural, or historical context to understand the factors influencing their construction and interpretation, the article identified the origins of Ukrainians' pro-European identity in the structural components of “proximity to European principles of state-building,” “Ukrainians' involvement in the development of European history,” and “shared democratic values.” The demythologization of narratives underlying the divided identity of Ukrainians is based on Ukrainian narratives of “chosen traumas” and “liberation struggle,” integrated into a narrative template consisting of homogeneous narrative plots, characters, and motifs in the structural elements of Exposition, Complication, Resolution, Evaluation, and Codes, as well as in the sequence of narrative functions: Deception, Villainy, Prohibition, Violation of Prohibition, Onset of Resistance, Struggle, Persecution, Stigmatization, and Victory. At the linguo-pragmatic level, demythologization is achieved through strategies of value polarization, discrediting the mythologemes of “kinship” and “care” in their contemporary interpretation by restoring inverted roles. It is also accomplished through positive rearticulation of derogatory russian labels used to refer to Ukrainians.

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