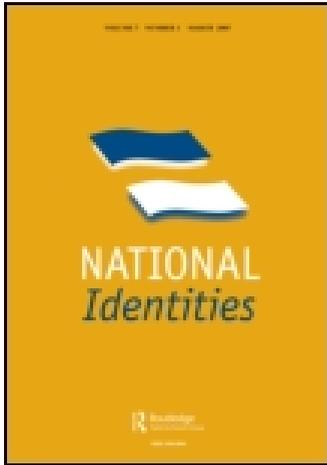


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The media, history and identity: competing narratives of the past in the Ukrainian popular press

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The article studies history-related texts in three popular newspapers as contributions to the construction of historical memory and national identity in post-Soviet Ukraine. After a quantitative thematic analysis of history pages in terms of their geographical and chronological priorities, I focus on representations on these and other pages of one crucial event of the past: World War Two. The analysis demonstrates that in Ukrainian media, the past in general and the last war in particular has been a subject of incessant but largely inconspicuous competition between the opposing versions of Ukraine's history which I call the Soviet and nationalist narratives.

Keywords: historical memory; national identity; banal nationalism; historical narrative; the media; Ukraine

Although the politics of memory has become a popular topic in post-communist studies, most works deal with a very limited number of sites where this politics is enacted. Scholars are primarily interested in history research and textbooks, although some have analyzed official speeches, commemorative ceremonies, monuments, museums, and the arts. Other avenues of memory receive little attention. This negligence is particularly regrettable in the case of the media, which in the contemporary world has become one of the main sources of most people's knowledge and beliefs about the past and thus one of the principal mechanisms of collective memory. It contrasts with the increasing interest in the media's contribution which is noticeable in research on the politics of memory in Western societies. This article is thus intended to contribute to bridging a gap between approaches to memory studies in the West and the (former) East. At the same time, it seeks to shift the focus of scholarly attention from the rather exceptional and/or clearly ideological texts scholars of media memories mostly focus on, to more routine and inconspicuous practices which constitute the bulk of the media's contribution to the (re)production of the audience's beliefs in general and historical memory in particular. Finally, I would like to go beyond the generally accepted centrality of national identity in established nation-states with which most research on the topic has dealt, and look at those situations where competing hierarchies of identities are embodied in different media outlets or even different

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products of the same outlet. In this respect, post-Soviet Ukraine is an ideal case to study.

History and national identity in the media

This article treats historical memory as a historical dimension of national identity, or rather of the composite cultural-civic identity which is distributed on a spectrum from the local to the global. Such treatment presupposes the understanding of national identity as a particular kind of collective identity, ‘an identity constituted at a given strategic level of a society’ (Schlesinger, 1987, pp. 259–260). In turn, each collective identity can vary in its *content*, that is, the prescribed meaning of the membership in the respective collectivity as well as in the degree of agreement over the content within the collectivity which some scholars call *contestation* (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2007). Furthermore, not only can individuals attach different meanings to their perceived belonging to a given collectivity but they also can identify with different collectivities. An individual’s identities as a member of different collectivities are, according to social psychologists, organized into a hierarchy of *salience*, both in a given situation and across a variety of situations (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Tajfel, 1982). The trans-situational salience of a certain identity is equivalent to what another strand in social psychology has called the *strength* of identity (or identification), a concept conceived of as including the awareness of the respective group membership, its evaluation and concomitant affect, all measurable by means of surveys (Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, & Williams, 1986).

The average salience or strength of an identity across the collectivity can be considered another dimension of identity variation, in addition to content and contestation.¹ Most social scientists have only dealt with either content or salience/strength, while some analyzed both dimensions (e.g. Shulman, 2002; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). I will pay attention to all three – salience, content, and contestation – although quantitative and qualitative analysis of discourses embodying different versions of one collective identity can thoroughly examine only the first two dimensions. My use of the term salience rather than strength has largely to do with a stronger comparative aspect implied in the former term, but it does not by any means implicate conspicuity of embodied identities.

National identity can be more or less salient vis-à-vis other collective identities for individuals and subgroups within a nation who, at the same time, can contest the identity’s content. On another level, the salience and content of national identity and the degree of its contestation vary across nations and change with time. The identification with a nation or another collectivity manifests itself, among other beliefs or feelings, in one’s relation to its past in general and specific events and people in particular. Historical memory thus belongs to the content of national or other collective identity. The historical dimension of identity content is structurally equivalent to the geographical one, namely the view of one’s collectivity as situated among and related to other nations (regional groups, supranational unions, etc.), with stronger connections to some of them than to others. The latter dimension can also include a stronger emphasis on certain places within the area inhabited by the nation/collectivity which thus appears to be of particular importance to its past and present.

Among institutions whose discourses contribute to the construction and maintenance of these two (and many other) dimensions of national identity, the media is

one of the most important. Similarly to being the primary source of most people's knowledge/beliefs about remote parts of the world and even many places in their own country, the media has become a crucial factor in moulding their knowledge/beliefs about remote and even rather recent periods of the past. Although not a primary producer of what gets socially accepted as historical knowledge, it largely mediates the communication of the academic producers with the general population and, unlike education, does so all the time for people of all ages. Moreover, in contrast to much of academic and educational writing, the media forges relationship with the past not only, or even not primarily, by promoting factual knowledge and 'intellectual understanding of cause and effect' but also/rather by reshaping imagination and empathy. More than facts and concepts, the very presence of bygone events in the 'imaginative landscape' and an 'empathetic relationship with the people of the past' instil in contemporary audiences a sense of belonging to certain diachronically perceived groups of people, most often national ones (Morris-Suzuki, 2005, p. 22). No less important, the cognitive and emotive effects of the media presentations of the past overshadow and thus render largely unnoticeable their ideological work, that is, a more or less implicit interpretation of the presented events and figures.

Many media products clearly engage with the past, manifesting the media's conscious assumption of the 'role of public historians' (Kitch, 2005, p. 5) which journalists, writers, and film directors increasingly win away from professional historians and other promoters of collective memory. These products include, in particular, fictional, documentary and hybrid 'docudrama' films on supposedly crucial historical events or the lives of outstanding personalities, commemoration in the various media of the anniversaries of prominent events and of personalities' birth or death, and the magazine selection of the most important events or figures of a certain period of the past. Such products often attract very large audiences and thus both arouse public interest in these events/figures and define their meanings for the audiences, which subsequent interpreters have to confirm, challenge, or otherwise take into account. Not surprisingly, it is these prominent products that have primarily attracted the attention of students of historical memory (Märthesheimer & Frenzel, 1979; Schwartz, 1997; Kitch, 2005). However, the media discourse also contributes to the production of memory through a variety of more routine and inconspicuous practices that scholars tend to overlook. For example, evaluative comments and background statements in news stories usually refer to some events and processes in the past, and even catchy qualifications of the reported events as 'the worst weather' or 'the largest fall in share prices' for a certain period imply both relevant timeframes and social entities to whose continuous existence current events are thereby related (Ha-Ilan, 2001).

It seems logical to treat these unceasing but unnoticed practices as part of the so-called *banal nationalism*, all the more so because it is known to be largely enacted in, and sustained by the media (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002). Although this phenomenon has attracted much scholarly attention, most studies have focused on the maintenance of the (inconspicuous) salience of national identity and ignored the historical, geographical, and other content thereof. It goes without saying that banal nationalism in general, and its media component in particular, ensures the reproduction of the prevalence of national identity in the hierarchy of citizens' identifications even as it is undermined by the processes of supra-national interaction and sub-national assertion. However, it is less clear just what kind of national

identity is being reproduced in discourses of the media and other relevant domains. Furthermore, most studies of banal nationalism presume its heavy dominance in the minds and efforts of the respective nation's elites. This presumption may be true for established nation-states with no influential nationalist activities at a sub-national level, although the primary salience of national identity does not preclude contestation of its content. In contrast, in emerging or internally divided societies the content or even the salience of national identity is actively discussed and contested in institutional and everyday discourses. It is true that such contestation makes the nationalism embodied in these discourses more noticeable and thus less banal but, even under these conditions, the media (re)production of national identity often remains inconspicuous due to the lack of recognition of, and interaction with, views of the nation other than the one embodied in the text or practise in question.

The unreflective and non-dialogical nature of many media representations of the nation can be related to their belonging to popular culture which has lately been conceptualized as the primary domain of banal nationalism, more important for the reproduction of national identity than 'the spectacular, the "traditional" and the official' mostly dealt with by earlier theorists and researchers (Edensor, 2002, p. 17). Representations produced in this domain are largely determined by economic considerations and aesthetic conventions which are not only very different from those valid in 'high' culture but also specific to a particular medium. On the one hand, publishers, filmmakers, and other media actors 'tend to produce works that they think will sell to a reasonably wide and affluent audience, and are therefore influenced by their preconceptions of what that audience knows and is interested in' (Morris-Suzuki, 2005, p. 17). At the same time, actual patterns of consumption are determined by media managers' decisions on the relative benefits of own production versus the use of available products from domestic and foreign suppliers, which leads to the dominance of globally tailored products in some genres, including those relevant to the representation of the past. On the other hand, each medium has its specific conventions of the representation of the world in general and historical topics in particular. For example, Lipsitz argued that contemporary electronic mass communications can 'provide meaningful connections to our own past and to the past of others' but 'do so only indirectly, constrained by the non-linear biases of the electronic media as well as by a commercial matrix hostile to the kinds of empathic inquiry and analysis basic to historical thinking' (Lipsitz, 2001, p. 5).

Each of these factors influences both the choice of topics and the manner of their presentation. While historians and media critics have paid primary attention to the perceived distortion and trivialization of historical processes in influential 'market-oriented narratives of history', particularly in Hollywood movies, no less important is the impact of the topic selection on 'our imaginative landscape of the past'. In the words of Morris-Suzuki (2005, p. 17), '[p]opular culture tends repeatedly to return to certain events and images, making particular parts of history familiar and vivid, while rendering others distant or unknown'. Not only does the media's selection shape the content of national history and identity by favouring some 'domestic' events and periods over others but it can also undermine the salience of national identification vis-à-vis its competitors by favoring events from other nation's past over those of one's 'own'.² On the one hand, the media can contribute to the democratization of national identity by 'featuring a range of class, ethnic and gendered characters' ignored or marginalized in official versions of the past

(Edensor, 2002, p. 142). On the other, it can erode this identity by facilitating audiences' knowledge of and empathy with events and people in other countries rather than one they live in. The latter effect can be particularly significant in newly founded states where the centrality of the national(ist) thinking is not yet ensured by other institutions.

The type of products analyzed in this article, namely history related articles in popular newspapers, combines overt preoccupation with the past, and compliance with the requirements of a specific medium of mass culture. Unlike opinion articles in quality papers or 'analytical' documentaries on television, these texts are intended not to analyze certain events or argue with other views thereof but to tell the readers a story on a topic about which they know little, or do not mind finding out more. In other words, the editors seek to 'infotain' the audience which they believe can be done, among other topics, by history, as demonstrated by the availability of such texts or even special pages allotted to them, in popular newspapers in many countries. In order to be both informative and entertaining, the texts should deal with relatively little-known events and/or aspects and present them in a rather concise and non-reflective manner. At the same time, newspaper articles differ from more 'non-linear' products of electronic media or popular music by a rather clear narrative structure which makes their version of the presented events and broader historical contexts more comprehensible to the audience, and, by the same token, to the analyst. The presented version can be analyzed in terms of specific representational techniques which media scholars have conceptualized as constituting a particular *framing* of the event (e.g. Entman, 1993). Each frame can be seen as an instance of a certain (*meta*)*narrative* of national history and identity offering a particular way of making sense of the past events and relating them with one another and with the present.³ Another important difference is that the much lower production costs of newspaper texts make it preferable to tailor them to the special needs of the respective audience as perceived by editors and journalists, rather than reproducing available texts from other outlets as radio and television often do with songs or series. Therefore, newspaper products more clearly reflect the preferences of producers and their views of the preferences of targeted consumers.

Last, but by no means least, the texts under analysis appear quite regularly and thus influence the readers' perception not only individually but also cumulatively. In particular, the topical priorities of such texts over considerable periods of time, which can be viewed as an instance of the media's 'agenda-setting' and quantified by means of thematic analysis (Protess & McCombs, 1991), influence the audience's imaginative landscapes and, therefore, national identity. This influence can make tabloid newspapers no less important public historians than those media outlets (such as history magazines) consciously structuring the nation's and the world's past. However, the tabloid contribution to the production of historical memory remains less visible which is exactly why it may be more effective.

Politics of memory in post-Soviet Ukraine

Contemporary Ukraine is a country with rather extreme 'diversity of memory' (Portnov, 2008), which is a prominent dimension of the very strong contestation of national identity. Different regional parts and political groups differ sharply in their images of the past and, accordingly, their views of the country's identity in the

present and future. In part, these differences reflect the dissimilar historical experiences of current Ukraine's regions, which belonged for many centuries to different polities and were incorporated into one state, (the Ukrainian republic within) the USSR as late as World War Two. While some eastern regions were part of Russian-dominated polities for more than three centuries, for westernmost provinces this term was less than five decades (Magocsi, 1996).⁴ Related to these experiences are different ethnolinguistic profiles of the regions, with a higher concentration of Russians in the east and south, where Russian has also become the first language of many ethnic Ukrainians and is thus the main public language, particularly in the cities, in sharp contrast to the west where there are few ethnic Russians and the Ukrainian language prevails. Not surprisingly, in the western provinces, which were incorporated into the USSR by military conquest and experienced a large-scale nationalist resistance in the 1940s, many people view the period of Ukraine's belonging to Russia and the USSR as one of foreign occupation. For their part, the residents of the south-east tend to see this period as one of common statehood of two kindred peoples which many would like to see restored.

This difference is perhaps most obvious in the attitudes towards the Ukrainian nationalist guerrilla movement of the 1940s and early 1950s, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrains'ka Povstans'ka Armiia, UPA), which fought against both the Nazis and the Soviets. While the westerners tend to see it as part of the national liberation struggle which is to be given credit for its contribution to the ultimate attainment of independence in 1991, most easterners adhere to the Soviet interpretation of the movement as collaboration with the Nazis, and thus a betrayal not only of the USSR but also of Ukraine itself. To be sure, the regions' memories are also internally heterogeneous, and a large number of people hold intermediate positions, particularly in the central parts of the country, having ambiguous historical experiences and ethnolinguistic profiles (Fond, 2008; Jilge, 2008).

No less important than these inherited differences are current policies which take them into account and, at the same time, perpetuate or even exacerbate them. The ruling elite largely originating in the former communist *nomenklatura* accepted some elements of the *anti-Soviet*, or *nationalist narrative* of Ukrainian history which portrays it as incessant independence struggle against foreign rulers. However, the regime cautiously refrained from its wholesale substitution for the *Soviet narrative* which presents the Ukrainian people as either happily united with the Russian one or, when the unity was violated, seeking to restore it. Instead, it combined the two versions of the national past in a number of practices such as the state calendar, commemoration ceremonies, monuments, toponymy, etc. On the other hand, the central government not only allowed regional authorities to pursue policies taking into account the respective population's preferences but also presented its own view of the past differently for different parts of the country. This opportunistic dealing with identity was particularly noticeable during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004). Given his power leverage, he could have imposed the common model throughout the country but instead he demonstrated his respect for regional preferences by attending commemoration ceremonies for anti-Soviet figures/events in the west and for Soviet ones in the east as well as speaking Ukrainian in the former case and Russian in the latter (Portnov, 2010).

The situation changed significantly after the Orange Revolution and the assumption of the presidency by Viktor Yushchenko in early 2005. The fierce

confrontation between political elites with different regional anchoring and the unprecedented mobilization of large parts of the population from the respective regions for the defence of their perceived interests and values enhanced the role of identity matters in public discourse. Moreover, as the new President clearly favoured the Ukrainian language and the anti-Soviet historical narrative, the Russian-speaking and/or Sovietophile population found their preferences rejected. This perception was particularly strong in the east and south, all the more so because it was prompted by regional elites who sought to mobilize their constituency for an electoral comeback. At the same time, Yushchenko turned out to be not nearly as powerful as Kuchma, particularly after a constitutional reform of 2006 considerably reduced his prerogatives. Therefore, the opposition was able to pursue its dissident policies in those regions where it controlled local councils. As far as collective memory is concerned, this manifested itself in monuments, street names, and official commemorations embodying the Soviet (or even the Russian imperial) narrative of Ukrainian history. Moreover, Yushchenko also found it hard to implement his agenda on the national level where he could only occasionally muster a majority of votes in the parliament to turn his initiatives into laws and where his decrees were often ignored even by the government. Last, but not least, public discourse reflected the plurality of positions, with that of the president far from dominant (Jilge, 2008; Simon, 2009).

Yushchenko's limited ability to make his version of historical memory a foundation of state policy has been clearly demonstrated by his attempts to increase public awareness and commemorative prominence of two events that are central to the Ukrainian nationalist narrative of the twentieth-century history: namely the Famine of 1932–1933 (*Holodomor*) and the resistance of the UPA in the 1940s. The treatment of these events as, respectively, the greatest tragedy and the most heroic struggle of the Ukraine's recent history runs counter to the accustomed Soviet interpretation and to the version of the past propagated in Russia since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000 (Hrynevych, 2005; Riabchuk, 2008). The attempted rehabilitation of the UPA was particularly unsuccessful. Although Yushchenko granted the army's leader, post mortem, the title of a 'hero of Ukraine,' his initiative to officially recognize the UPA as 'participants in the struggle for Ukraine's independence' was not supported by the parliament. The president's attempt at engaging both Soviet and nationalist veterans in the celebration of the Victory Day in the capital clearly failed and was given up. While his support facilitated the erection of monuments to the UPA's leaders or soldiers in western regions, this glorification was harshly criticized by the opposition and reciprocated by a monument to the 'victims of the UPA' in the southern city of Simferopol, far from the terrain of the army's activities (Jilge, 2008; Portnov, 2008).

The media played an important role in both presenting and shaping public opinion in general and the responses to the presidential initiatives in particular. To begin with, the largely respected freedom of speech in post-Orange Ukraine and the opposition's control of many print and electronic outlets ensured the expression of various ideological positions on a number of topics which the editors and/or owners considered important. Although far from being these people's main preoccupations, the past and its contemporary interpretations were dealt with in opinion articles, letters to the editor, talk shows, documentaries, and other genres, in particular when the respective issues became the topics of political controversies. However, all these

genres occupied rather little space in the Ukrainian media discourse which was primarily oriented toward entertainment and, therefore, usually avoided problematization of the presented 'facts' and discussions between the supporters of different views. Of greater importance for the formation of imaginative landscapes and interpretations of the present and the past were those texts which presented various events and phenomena with the apparent intention to inform and/or entertain the audience (Kulyk, 2010).

On television, these were first and foremost movies and series many of which portrayed certain periods of the Soviet or pre-Soviet past. Most movies and series broadcast at prime time were produced either by Russian companies or by Ukrainian ones which wanted to ensure broadcasting in both countries as they believed that the Ukrainian market alone could not make the production profitable. Accordingly, such products used the Russian language and embodied the Russian/Soviet narrative of history in which Ukrainians, if at all present, could only figure as part of a larger east Slavic entity, with Ukrainian nationalists portrayed as enemies. In contrast, the newspapers were largely free from economic pressure to use available texts from other outlets and could make their own products in accordance with the preferences of editors, owners and targeted audiences. Therefore, their texts embodied, in many cases implicitly, a variety of positions on history and identity which often differed from one article to the next but, cumulatively, distinguished particular outlets as supporters of one of the competing narratives (Kulyk, 2006, 2010). It is their contestation of the content of national identity and its salience vis-à-vis concurrent identifications that the following sections will analyze.

History pages in three tabloid newspapers

The three newspapers studied in this article are similar in their general orientation towards mass audiences and their many specific strategies to evoke the readers' interest (Kulyk, 2010). Founded in the late 1990s or early 2000s, they differ significantly from those newspapers which were established in the Soviet times as official outlets provided for by the state and later had to adapt to the conditions of political pluralism and market economy. From the very beginning, the new outlets adopted a lighter textual style, catchier layout, and more entertainment-oriented topics, as well as a larger amount of pages which provided for greater diversity of represented events and encouraged a more selective approach to reading. Against this common background, the newspapers differ from one another in their political orientation and/or targeted audience, which manifests itself in both the selection of topics and the manner of their presentation, notwithstanding the common avoidance of overtly biased discourse.

Segodnia (Today) was founded in 1997 as part of an effort by businessmen close to then President Kuchma to provide popular media support for his regime, and after the Orange Revolution of 2004 became one of the outlets controlled by the anti-Orange opposition and, accordingly, rather critical of Yushchenko's policies. Primarily targeted at big cities which enabled more effective distribution and whose more affluent residents were of greater interest to advertisers, this newspaper, due to its political orientation and the use of the Russian language, became particularly popular in the east-southern part of the country and in the capital (Huzhva, 2008). *Gazeta po-kievski (Kyiv Newspaper, GPK)* was established in 2003 as a local

newspaper for the capital and later became part of a chain of urban publications across the country. Accordingly, local topics were more prominent in this paper than in those nation-wide outlets with which it had to compete on the Kyiv market. During Yushchenko's presidency (2005–2009), it tried to keep distance from both the Orange and anti-Orange political forces but showed greater sympathy for the former, in accordance with prevailing moods in the capital. As for its use of Russian, this choice was hardly seen as partisan in the city where Russian is the first language of the majority of residents (Tykhyi, 2009). In contrast, *Hazeta po-ukraïns'ky* (*Ukrainian Newspaper*, HPU) took from the beginning (2005) a rather clearly pro-Orange position which was in accordance with the choice of Ukrainian as the language of publication. These choices made it much more appealing to residents of the west and centre than the east and south and of villages and towns than big cities (Ruban, 2008). While both *Segodnia* and HPU publish a number of regional versions in the respective places of their audiences' predominant concentration, here I will analyze those issues which were distributed in Kyiv, and contained special pages having to do with the capital.

In all three newspapers, history has been one of the topics the editors believe their audience is interested in, as demonstrated by special pages which appear several times a week and confirmed in the editors-in-chief's interviews with the author. In particular, the GPK editor Serhii Tykhyi argued that texts investigating into the (recent) past were advantageous to his newspaper both because they evoked sentiments of people who had lived in the times under discussion and because they allowed journalists to demonstrate a quality of writing and illustration their readers would not find on the internet, otherwise a strong competitor of the print media (Tykhyi, 2009). Although texts on historical topics could also be published in other parts of the paper, the explicit designation of certain pages as dealing with the past makes it possible to compare the images thereof that the editors presented to their respective audiences.

The formats of the pages were rather different. At the time under analysis, HPU and GPK devoted the whole page to one or two topics and did not always tie the stories to anniversaries of the events or the birth/death of the persons in question. *Segodnia*, in contrast, presented a set of four to six short texts on events which had happened in different years on the days of the current week (as well as on Orthodox holidays observed on these days). The latter strategy resulted in greater quantity and, at least in principle, variety of represented events as well as a more reserved style which made the authors' framing of the events less perceptible. Furthermore, while the stories told by *Segodnia* and HPU pertained to different kinds of events and persons from various periods of the past of different countries, the GPK page mostly dealt with the history of buildings and other constructions which stood or had stood in the city of Kyiv. Although this narrow focus was, according to the editor, partly determined by shortage of qualified authors capable of covering different topics and periods, it also corresponded to the cultivation of 'Kyivophilia' which he saw as an important feature of his newspaper (Tykhyi, 2009). These differences notwithstanding, all three pages were similar in that they sought to give the readers entertaining stories on events and persons they were or might become interested in. The authors thus preferred little-known topics and/or aspects and avoided a didactic style and explicit evaluations, while influencing the audience's imaginative landscapes,

attitudes and feelings by the selection of topics and subtle techniques of their presentation.

In order to compare the contents of history created by the cumulative effect of these pages over time, I analyze their topical hierarchies for a randomly chosen stretch of the Yushchenko period, namely the three first months of 2008. Before dealing with the temporal distribution of represented events, it is worth mentioning their spatial dimension, that is, the relation to different parts of the world whose history these pages implicitly presented as relevant to contemporary Ukrainian audiences. While all three newspapers told stories about events both in (what is now) Ukraine and elsewhere, the relative frequencies of texts about different countries differed very much (see Table 1). In HPU, more than half of the texts had to do with Ukraine, and of the rest about half pertained to the West, and a third to (non-Ukrainian parts of) the USSR. In contrast, *Segodnia* wrote about the West less frequently than about the USSR and Russia and, more important, texts related to Ukraine constituted on its history pages less than a third of the total. That is, an image of the past presented to the audience not only transcended the borders of Ukraine but also allocated the country a rather modest place which contrasted with the dominance of Ukraine-related texts in other parts of the newspaper (except for pages dealing with culture where Russian figures were more prominent). Accordingly, the place of Russia in the two outlets was also very different: HPU did not tell about that country at all (except when continuing stories that originated in the USSR), while *Segodnia* dealt with it in almost a quarter of its history texts.

The strategy of GPK differed radically from both of the above patterns. As a local newspaper, it focused on events in Kyiv and almost never addressed the history of other parts of the world or even other parts of Ukraine. That is, the history pages of this newspaper construed primarily not national identity but a local one. Therefore, it is only in purely geographical terms that the texts about Kyiv can be subsumed under the national category of Ukraine, which is why I present both the national and local categorization (in the two other newspapers, Ukraine-related events were usually not related to a particular part of the country). While the history pages of HPU can be considered as embodying the predominant pattern of the implicit reproduction of banal nationalism in popular media across the world, the rather marginal place of markedly Ukrainian events in the images of history presented by both *Segodnia* and GPK clearly runs counter to this nation-state pattern. In addition to different salience of national identity vis-à-vis local and transnational ones, the newspapers imbued that identity with different geographical content as the comparison between HPU and *Segodnia* demonstrates.

No less important, the images of the past presented in the three newspapers differed in their temporal distributions of Ukraine-related events, that is, in their

Table 1. The shares of texts on different countries on the history pages of HPU, *Segodnia* and GPK (in percentage of the total number of texts on these pages in January to March 2008).

	Ukraine (including Kyiv)	West	USSR + Russia	Other/not specified
HPU	52.1 (2.0)	24.5	16.3	7.1
Segodnia	30.7 (11.5)	27.9	35.6	5.8
GPK	89.7 (82.8)	6.9	3.4	0

preferences for different periods which thereby became crucial for the suggested content of national identity. As Table 2 indicates, in addition to writing rather little about Ukrainian history, *Segodnia* situated it in the times of the tsarist or Soviet regimes, that is, in the times of Ukraine's belonging to Russia which thus appeared as not only an integral but a key part of the national past and thus legitimized the very belonging. This effect was reinforced by the selection of represented people and aspects of their activity. The history pages of this newspaper never mentioned clearly anti-Russian or anti-Soviet figures, while those ambiguous in this respect were 'neutralized' by a focus on apparently non-ideological aspects, such as places of their residence or monuments to them (thus were represented, respectively, the classical Ukrainian poets Lesia Ukraïnka, and Taras Shevchenko). The combination of these strategies allowed the editors to avoid positively representing those ideological positions which they did not want the readers to perceive empathically.

Similarly, by focusing on the tsarist and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet history of Kyiv, the GPK pages made the city part of the East Slavic cultural and political space rather than of Ukraine which was mentioned there even less frequently than in *Segodnia*. Although the Soviet regime was sometimes presented in GPK as a destroyer of what the tsarist one built, more often it appeared to continue the constructive activities of the latter, such as when one text covered houses, bridges or cinemas built in the two periods. Against this background, the independent Ukrainian state was explicitly or implicitly presented as exploiting and further ruining the city's heritage. Almost never were the pre-tsarist or revolutionary periods of Ukraine's history subjects of the GPK stories. The main reason was perhaps that from these periods there remained few remarkable and, at the same time, not well-known constructions which was what these pages mostly dealt with. But then sometimes they told about people – not of these periods. Actually, several stories mentioned Kyivan people during the revolution and civil war of the early twentieth century but they appeared as victims of competing regimes and armies none of which the authors presented as worth identifying with.⁵

Once again, the landscape presented on the HPU pages was quite different. It is true that this newspaper told about Soviet times in almost half of its Ukraine-related materials, although some of the figures presented (even as internal to the system as the communist party leader Petro Shelest who was ousted in 1972 for alleged nationalist deviations) were portrayed not as functionaries of the Soviet regime but rather as victims of its fight against the Ukrainian nation. At the same time, HPU paid almost as much attention to those periods which had traditionally been

Table 2. The shares of texts on different periods of Ukrainian history on the history pages of HPU, *Segodnia* and GPK (in percentage of the total number of Ukraine-related texts on these pages in January to March 2008)

	Middle ages and Cossacks	Russian empire/Austria- Hungary	Independence struggle (1917 to 1950s)	Ukrainian SSR	Independence
HPU	8.0	12.0/4.0	32.0	44.0	0
Segodnia	0	57.3/0	0	43.7	0
GPK	1.9	53.8/0	0	32.7	11.5

associated with the struggle against the Russian/Soviet rule over Ukraine, namely the Independence War of 1917–1921 and the UPA activities in the 1940s and early 1950s. It also mentioned rather frequently the pre-tsarist (medieval and Cossack) periods which the nationalist narrative treated as those of Ukrainian statehood or independence struggle. Even in texts on the nineteenth century, this newspaper covered not only the Russian but also the Austro-Hungarian part of Ukraine (the latter was never dealt with in the *Segodnia* which thus erased memory of Ukraine's relation to any entity but Russia). Moreover, it presented primarily people with a clear Ukrainian national identity, thereby portraying this period as foreign rule over Ukraine rather than as a legitimate union between peoples.

In contrast to *Segodnia* and *GPK* which mostly relied on the Soviet narrative of Ukraine's history, *HPU* sought to replace it with the nationalist narrative featuring independence struggle against the Russian domination, even though its image of the national past retained many Soviet features. The paper's editor-in-chief Volodymyr Ruban explained the strategy of combining the new and the accustomed by, on the one hand, the need to balance different topics and tastes, and, on the other hand, the wish not only to 'follow the readers' but also sometimes to risk and 'go ahead' of them in the direction of ideological priorities of the editors, in the hope that most readers would understand and support the proposed changes (Ruban, 2008). However, most texts intended to establish a new ideological orientation were, in accordance with the tabloid format, just as entertaining and apparently neutral as those articles of the two other newspapers which contributed to the retention of the accustomed Soviet narrative.

Images of World War Two

Let us now focus on the presentations in these newspapers of one key event/period, World War Two, which, as argued above, has become a major site of contestation between the competing narratives of Ukraine's history. The narrowing of the topical field makes it possible, on the one hand, to go beyond the history pages and analyze all texts of the respective newspapers which include, even if in the margins, a representation of the war and, on the other hand, to supplement the examination of topical agenda setting by an analysis of different framings of this contested event. Although due to space limitations only the main findings of this analysis can be presented here, they provide an important addition to the above study of topical priorities.

Actually, it was only in *HPU* that war events were regularly thematized on the history pages where the war was mostly presented, in accordance with the nationalist narrative, as a time of Ukrainian independence struggle against both the German and Soviet regimes. During the first three months of 2008, the history pages presented two collections of texts on the war-time nationalist resistance and one on non-Ukrainian aspects of the war. In addition, references to events of that period could be found in some texts on domestic or foreign topics that were published on other pages. The adherence to the nationalist narrative was also reflected in the choice of name, namely World War Two rather than Great Patriotic War as it is called in the Soviet narrative which retains the Soviet usage. On a later occasion (8 May 2008), the journalists conducted a mini-survey on the appropriateness of the two names, the relevance of which was explained in an editorial introduction by

the inadequacy of the Soviet bipolar picture of the war: 'Previously, everything about 9 May was clear: ours and the Germans, the good and the evil, the white and the black. Now everything looks much more complicated. This also pertains to the very name of the tragic events' (To bula, 2008).

In accordance with this approach, the newspaper did not employ the widespread Soviet division of combatants into the antagonist categories of 'ours' versus 'the Germans'; the former were usually referred to as 'Soviet' and the latter sometimes called by a more particular name of 'Nazis'. In this vein, the battle of Stalingrad was referred to as 'bloody mash of the biggest battle of Second World War' and framed as a disastrous confrontation of the two armies and states, none of which the readers were encouraged to perceive as their 'own' (Horokhiv's'ka, 2008). Despite the apparent neutrality of this approach, the very problematization of the accustomed name and of the partisan portrayal of the war, together with the mostly positive representation of those aspects which were tabooed or discredited in the Soviet narrative, undermined that narrative and promoted the nationalist one.

The two other newspapers contributed to the historical narratives by texts dealing not with the war itself but with current representations of the war in political, cultural, and others discourses as well as with the lives of people presented against the background of the war. The former strategy was more often employed by *Segodnia*, whose texts, for instance, repeatedly referred without any problematization to evaluations of the UPA combatants as criminals. Such an opinion was expressed, among others, by a Russian actor starring in a new Russian movie on Soviet counter-intelligence activities during the war, who presented his supposedly apolitical view of the war and its current politicized portrayals. By allying with the accustomed Soviet interpretation of the war, he implicitly laid the blame for the distorting politicization of history only to the Ukrainian Orange leadership challenging that interpretation and not on the Russian authorities supporting it: 'I do not understand these arguments on who were real heroes, our [Soviet] partisans and SMERSH [counter-intelligence] people or the UPA combatants. The time will dot its i's and cross its t's, but politicians try to do it all ahead of time. And I hate politics' (L'vovski, 2008). Although the references to the war in this newspaper were occasional and usually not featured, they were always in accordance with the Soviet narrative (in particular, its preferred name for the war) which such matter-of-fact references helped sustain, all the more so because they were likely to be perceived as non-politicized.

While *Segodnia* only made such references to those statements which corresponded to the Soviet narrative, GPK also replicated opposite, nationalist expressions which appeared to be factual and thus not worth elaborating. For example, in a news story on the belated presentation of an order to a UPA colonel who had not received it at the time of the award because he was captured by the Soviets, the author briskly mentioned that the secret service had 'for three years moved him from one jail to another, tortured [him] seeking to find out about his connections to the UPA and [its] ammunition storages' (Polkovnik UPA, 2008). It is very unlikely that most readers of this popular newspaper knew such facts which had until recently remained taboo, but the editors did not deem it expedient to validate these statements by detailed stories like those dealing with events of the imperial or Soviet eras. Therefore, occasional references to some elements of the nationalist narrative hardly made the audience perceive it as equally credible to the Soviet one, given that the latter was supported by much more frequent non-problematized

references in this and other media outlets (including most texts on the lives of war survivors which usually encouraged an empathic rather than reserved perception).

Furthermore, the war was usually referred to with no particular name (just as ‘the war’ or by mentioning some of its attributes such as timing), probably in an attempt to avoid allying with either of the competing interpretations. In a rare instance of direct appeal to the readers, the editors overtly distanced themselves from the current controversy over the interpretation of the war and contrasted that supposedly detrimental endeavour with the unabated value of the victory and the bitterness of the (Soviet) veterans dying out: ‘Every year ever more participants in and witnesses to these events move there where they are no longer disturbed by arguments on who was greater villain, Hitler or Stalin or “scholarly discussions” on how that war should be called, Second World or Great Patriotic [War]. The winners are not to blame that the day of that Victory ever more separates [Ukrainians] now instead of uniting’ (Dorogie chitateli, 2008). By unequivocally rejecting overt attempts at revising the Soviet narrative, the editors implicitly validated it, albeit in a ‘humanized’ version. No wonder that whenever this newspaper did call the war by name, the name used was always the Soviet one.

The manner of commemoration of the war-related holidays and anniversaries confirms a difference between HPU and the two other outlets as well as their similarity to each other. The observance of holidays and commemorative days is an important means of the media influence on the historical memory of the audience as it implicitly presents a list and hierarchy of such days and thereby evaluates ideologies they embody. Since different groups of Ukrainian society live by different calendars corresponding to different historical narratives, the media can either choose between them or try to combine them. While those outlets supporting the Soviet version of history mostly ignore ‘anti-Soviet’ commemorative dates, those promoting the nationalist version also pay attention to Soviet holidays which are observed by large parts of their audiences. As far as World War Two is concerned, the main holidays of the two competing narratives are 9 May (Victory Day) and 14 October (UPA day).

In 2008, both *Segodnia* and GPK commemorated Victory Day in a number of texts dealing with both historical events (presented in relation to the life paths of Soviet veterans) and current celebrations. The former paper also mentioned the holiday on its history page, while the latter published a special congratulation from the editorial staff (quoted above), a type of observance reserved for the supposedly most important holidays. All these texts were in conformance with the Soviet narrative, even if generically adjusted to the perceived preferences of a mass audience. In contrast, HPU presented, in addition to two short reports on the celebration, the above-mentioned survey on the appropriate name of the war and two articles on the history page, one having to do with food and clothes of Soviet and German soldiers and the other with an episode of the UPA struggle. Not only did this newspaper pay attention to different participants in the war thereby transforming the day of one party’s victory into the day of the end of the confrontation, but it also demoted this day to the level of one of many memorable dates in the calendar by a modest scale of the observance. Such framing was much closer to the nationalist narrative than the Soviet one, even though it did not question the very perception of the end of the war as a victory, contrary to the nationalist interpretation thereof as replacing the Nazi oppression of Ukraine with the Soviet one.

The differences in attitudes towards 14 October mirrored those in the observance of 9 May. The UPA day was an important holiday for HPU which commemorated it in 2008 by two texts on the history page, thus equating the main holidays of the two narratives and, by the same token, undermining the one which had until recently been inviolable. For their part, neither *Segodnia* nor GPK wrote anything on the subject on that very day, while in the next issues both published reports on clashes between supporters of the UPA and their opponents. This strategy placed the UPA day into the context of current political confrontation rather than that of national history thus rejecting the UPA supporters' claims to historical truth.

Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates that in Ukrainian media, the past in general, and World War Two in particular, has been a subject of incessant but largely inconspicuous *contestation* between the Soviet and nationalist narratives. Different outlets proposed radically different *contents* of Ukrainian history and identity, in particular of Ukrainians' relation to Russia and the USSR as either that of brotherly cooperation and common struggle against enemies or imperial subjugation and independence-oriented resistance. Moreover, rather than unanimously supporting the prevalence of national identity vis-à-vis its sub- and supra-national alternatives, the media often undermined the *salience* of that identity. They did so either by promoting their audiences' knowledge of and empathy with events in other countries more actively than with Ukrainian ones or by treating events that had taken place on the territory of current Ukraine not as national but as particular to a certain locality or common to all parts of the Russian/Soviet entity. This clearly shows that the media is by no means doomed to reproduce banal nationalism but can also challenge and change it or, indeed, its underlying assumption regarding the collectivity to which the members of society/audience primarily belong.

Although many outlets do not want to fully embrace either of the competing narratives, they cannot be really neutral in an ideological competition. The failure to discuss certain events contributes to the maintenance of dominant views thereof, while the apparently equal treatment of the two narratives undermines the dominant one and, by the same token, legitimizes its alternatives. To be sure, it is harder to challenge established beliefs than support them, if only because challenging usually requires a more overtly ideological discourse which is not quite compatible with conventions of the popular media. This explains why Ukrainian tabloids promoting the nationalist historical narrative mostly used the same entertainment-oriented genres and topical aspects as those outlets supporting the Soviet version of history, that is, they told interesting stories about events and people rather than discussing interpretations thereof. In effect, the promoters of the alternative narrative *pretended* that it had already become quite acceptable for its audience and, at the same time, *made* it more acceptable by the non-problematized reliance on it in their seemingly non-ideological texts.

The effectiveness of this strategy was facilitated by ambivalent beliefs of a large share of readers which resulted from the two decades of coexistence in the public sphere of historical discourses embodying and sustaining the competing narratives (cf. Kulyk, 2006). At the same time, this ambivalence made it possible for supporters of the Soviet narrative to continue relying on its assumptions without discussing

alternative versions of the past or even admitting their very existence. The result of this non-dialogical interaction was determined by the relative intensities of discourses embodying the two narratives. Within the media, this meant a clear victory of the Soviet version, but then the nationalist one was (at least until the assumption of presidency by Victor Yanukovich in early 2010) supported by discourses of other influential domains, first and foremost education. Anthropological research on the practices of perception is necessary to shed light on how Ukrainian people make sense of these contradictory discourses.

Notes

1. I thus disagree with Abdelal et al. (2007) who argued that their framework for analyzing *collective* identities could not incorporate salience and intensity as characteristics of *individual* identities. I leave open the question of possible interaction between salience/strength and contestation, in particular a minimum degree of agreement over an identity's content that is necessary for it to be salient.
2. It is worth mentioning that the very notion of a certain event's belonging to the history of a particular nation is also a construct of various discourses, not least that of the media.
3. According to one definition, a metanarrative is 'a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience' (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 6).
4. Although the Crimean peninsula became part of Ukraine as late as 1954, it had belonged to the Russian empire and then the USSR since the end of the eighteenth century.
5. In one story, the experience of the German occupation of Kyiv in 1918 was presented as teaching 'our fellow-townsmen' a lesson that they should not 'set hopes on strong allies who would impose order' but rather themselves take care of it (Kal'nitskii, 2008). While clearly identifying the German rule as foreign, the story did not present any competing force as one Kyivans could rely on as 'their own'.

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